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# *The Illusion of Stability*

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1. Like all effective forms of psychotherapy, CAT is concerned with power relations and the impact of the abuse of power.
2. Unskilful power results in the experiences of invasion and abandonment leading to both hurt and harm.
3. Babies are born into fields of power-relations, fields within which they do their best to communicate relying on their innate skills.
4. The baby's potential encounters the positions manifest in those they encounter.
5. This is the matrix within which the infants' reactive roles are established as a means to relate to those who install proactive roles which insist by repetition.
6. Adaptation to the roles dominant in their environment is necessary for the babies' survival – yet it comes at some cost. The baby is not able to relativise the impact of what it is encountering by comparing and contrasting across space and time and so what is occurring takes on an absolute or total significance and becomes not only a part of a 'repertoire' of possible interpersonal positionings, but also a site of self-identification.
7. This is familiar territory in CAT where we work with early installation of reactive roles and their later development as pro-active roles. As we know, both these types of roles are performed and elicited in both conscious intentional and preconscious habitual ways.
8. When we develop patterns, procedures, self-states and habitual role pairings, and are able to make them work for us so as to have at least some of our needs met, we tend to want to maintain them – for they are ours and they are both what we do and how we are. We resist changing them because of their familiarity and the self-confirmation that this brings.
9. Very similar structures operate in the political, economic, legal and cultural domains where repetition compulsion maintains the sense of group identity and the patterns of leadership and authority which have become 'normal' even if rationally, emotionally or ethically unacceptable to many.

10. In order for a reformulation, a re-reading, a re-contextualisation to be acceptable it needs to be experienced as non-violent, as a gesture that will not overthrow the powers-that-be but will rather let them reconstitute themselves – just as when a totalitarian state is overthrown it appears that the entire population was previously part of the resistance. Distasteful as this may be, such an inclusive reformulation allows diverse beliefs and attitudes to have at least some chance of collaboration.
11. Forming the working alliance is a tricky business for the focus is on change – a change which may well impact one party much more than the other. Therefore it is vital that collaboration is based not just on an agreed focus, a target problem, but on a meeting, an encounter which by its very nature opens the possibility of a new beginning.
12. When we meet a patient for the first time we, hopefully, welcome them. Who welcomes them – well, who are we? Are we capable of a whole-hearted welcome? Who do we welcome? A patient who comes for treatment? A fellow human being? A potential that is as yet unawakened? And what is a welcome? – to well-come, to come well. It is well that you have come! It is good that you are here, here where there is space for all of you, not just your problems, your procedures, your pathology.
13. Thus we work with a four-stage structure: Reception, Reformulation, Recognition and Revision. Before we work on re-organising the patients' narrative we invite and allow them to show themselves as they are. Thus we avoid early diagrams and the retelling of a tale that has just been heard. Structural analysis has great power to explain but it also has power to alienate the complexity of a lived existence, putting it into exile as a new simpler story is installed on the throne of truth.
14. Our availability, our hospitality, the space of reception itself – these are qualities intrinsic to being. Although they can be developed by practice, they are not skills or tools but rather are the radiance of presence, the unfolding of that which is hidden by pre-occupation, foreclosure, self-definition. As the space of reception is revealed, the other is invited to relax the demand that they know who they are or show 'something' of themselves. With relaxation rather than effort, those who come in pain and confusion can start to experience their own space of reception, the opening within which the entire experiential field can show itself. Seeing and being seen is then the profound clarity of sky meeting sky rather than the insertion of a heuristic, the application of a model, the description of problem, the formulation of a way forward.
15. When we take constructs to be givens we take projections to be real. These fruits of our own creativity are cut off from their ground, our being, and become something 'out there', something which is valid because it exists in itself – and therefore has to be taken seriously. There is something to be worked on! Yet the root of most of the problems we encounter has been the blocking of play, of love, of contactful co-emergence. This is not something to be healed by working harder.
16. Wherever our attention goes, it is there that our energy flows. We attend to and invest in that which catches our eye, that which seems important. Our gestalt formation, our figure/ground attentional shifts, our editing and evaluation of 'what is occurring' is all mediated through our templates, our patterns, procedures, assumptions, beliefs and so on. This is normal, this is how it is – indeed it is. But perhaps only if we are trapped in these energy formations of our mind.
17. If we take our constructs to be establishing the truth about something out there, then we are deluded. If we take them to be gestures of creativity generated in the service of empathic relating – then that is rather different. If we experience the openness of our being, the immediacy of presence then reification is deconstructed and what is required comes to mind and to voice and to hand. For our being in the world with others, our co-becoming, is constellated by the very nature of awareness rather than effortfully constructed out of the various bits of theory and clinical engagement we have acquired over the years.

18. To be empty, to not know – and to be relaxed in that, undefended, unashamed of not knowing ‘what is going on’ – well, this is a fine way to begin. Trust is essential, vital – for it is itself the ease of being, the unartificial, uncontrived basic openness of the human situation. Without this there is a lot of busyness, shifting the furniture of transient events yet in such an involved way that the space of the room is not seen.
19. The equation between not knowing and stupidity sets us off in the wrong direction, for not knowing is not a dull state – although becoming anxious about not knowing something in particular can easily bring about a sub-optimal level of functioning. Not knowing or negative capability is the capacity to relax and open to, and be at ease with, what is unfolding. In this state one does not have to make sense of what is occurring for one sees the sense of it, the intrinsic value that is present prior to the action of evaluation and attribution.
20. Not knowing opens the way of aesthetic awareness, of immediate experience free of the confusion that arises with fusion. When we merge our attention with whatever event is there, whether it seems external or internal, we con-fuse ourselves. The space of clarity is collapsed and we become lost in the event. However, the intensity of this lostness generates a pseudo-clarity, the sense of there being a significance which needs further unpacking.
21. When we talk of self-states, ego states, reciprocal roles, procedures and so on, we make use of these concepts by merging with them, by employing them as if they referred to actually existing phenomena. Then we convert the patient to our way of thinking, infecting them with our vocabulary so that they start to be able to ‘recognise’ when they are in a particular ‘self-state’. Of course this can be helpful in terms of managing daily life. Insight can develop and with it the capacity to drop old patterns and activate new ones – to move from ‘maladaptive’ to ‘adaptive’ procedures.
22. Yet this does not always occur for there are many obstacles at work. There are outer circumstances such as temptation from habitually invested objects and family patterns which demand alignment if one is still to belong. And there are the inner circumstances of distraction, powerful habitual negative beliefs, identity built on maintenance of the status quo and so on. When these factors operate they can easily affirm the therapist’s belief that more effort must be made, by themselves and especially by the patient. The observing self and its consequent executive self are deemed necessary to develop as the new sites of ego identity and agency if the pull of past identification is to be resisted.
23. Yet only a narrow segment of human potential is being addressed here. Although we have the notion of scaffolding and the possibility of employing varied techniques from art therapy, drama therapy and so on, yet the focus on removing ‘road blocks’ implies the possibility of finding one’s way when this has occurred. But, who is it who finds their way? What is the nature of personhood – who is the addressee?
24. Existence, presence, being, is primal, the basis. It is mainly ignored for it is ungraspable by thought and cannot be caught in the semiotic web. Taking existence for granted, being is ignored and attention focuses on identify, on the construction of a self, part ‘private’, part ‘public’. The development of identity and agency is the means by which we hide our being from ourselves and others.
25. Our sense of being known is then equated with being known as this or that and through this the individual is located as a knowable entity which might well benefit from the self-knowledge that can arise in psychotherapy.
26. Being, however, is unknowable; it is revealed through not knowing. It is presence, not the presence of an essence but presence per se, pure presence – being as being present with whatever is occurring. Neither apart from nor fused with whatever occurs, presence is open, empty and quite other than whatever kind of sense we try to make of it.

27. No wonder it is ignored. Better then to focus on what can be grasped and appropriated: the fruits of reification, objectification and pattern formation.
28. We make sense of things by avoiding our senses, by reliance on ratiocination, mentation, thought proliferation and elaboration – by the generating of narratives which link ideas and events into patterns that can then be described, thought about and even, perhaps, changed.
29. Returning ourselves to the senses, opening to their naked, unmediated contact with their sense objects we find, sadly that they are indeed not naked but opaque, filtered, tinted by assumptions, projections and so on.
30. We could take this to be a sign that we live in an interpreted world because that is how the world is made, from the ceaseless interweaving of interpretations – or we could perhaps see the veiling of perception by conception as habitual yet not necessary. This latter turn turns us towards Husserl's cry of '*Return to the things themselves*'. That is to return to what appears rather than focusing on what we make of what appears. This way lies silence and clarity.
31. The implication of this for psychotherapy is that we revisit the psyche in psychotherapy and release her from the prison of cognitive dominance that she has been locked in. Psyche as soul is psyche as being – the very heart of the matter.
32. Collaboration is a matter of rhythm – as on a chain gang. If we hear no common music, we will dance merely to our own tune – and try to get others to do the same. Then we are again pursuing power over others rather than opening to the ever-fresh power or energy of synergy.
33. Being grounded in the moment without a model-driven agenda, yet with much learning and experience that can come to hand if called forth by the moment, we can use our therapeutic presence as a catalyst for change. Not adding something new, not recruiting others to our 'side' or 'team' but engaging in the deconstruction or removal of roadblocks so that lively conviviality in the shared space of becoming is available to all.