The Unseen Dance:
Subtle interactions and their implications for the therapeutic relationship

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Abstract

This thesis examines an aspect of embodied relationship that is recognised in
colloquial figures of speech but is not theorised, nor even much
acknowledged in the psychotherapeutic literature. It argues that when we
experience subtle sensations of extending towards another person, as we
might when our “heart goes out” to them, and of pulling away, as we might
when we “draw back”, this seemingly internal experience is sensed by the
other.

Using a phenomenological-hermeneutic methodology underpinned by
Merleau-Ponty, van Manen and Todres, exercises were used to bring such
experiences to the awareness of several cohorts of experienced and
inexperienced therapists attending a training course. Verbal and written
accounts of what was felt during the exercises, and of similar experiences
from more naturalistic settings, were collected along with the researchers’
own accounts. These accounts are discussed within the framework of a
Gadamerian conversation with a view to making explicit the implications for
Person-centred therapy with regard to practice, supervision and training.

The conversation speaks of the impact of these experiences upon whether
or not clients perceive therapists as authentic, unconditionally accepting and
empathic. Assumptions are uncovered and challenged, and an alternative
narrative emerges from a consideration of multiple contexts.

The conversation also speaks of an unseen dance of closeness and distance
that arises as each moves towards and away from the other. Conversation
(and silence) is inevitably accompanied and impacted by this dance, which
happens in the background of every interaction. The unseen dance impacts
not only the relationship, but also each person’s organismic state.
Acknowledgements

My brother, Ewen, to whose memory this thesis is dedicated, indirectly gave me some good advice when I was still a child. The advice was that if I wanted to write, I should wait until I had something to say. I have had something to say for some time now and a number of generous people have, in various ways, helped me to find my voice.

Pete Sanders helped me speak up by asking me to run a workshop in 1996. Those who attended that workshop affirmed that what I had to say was worth listening to. I want to thank them and all subsequent workshop participants. This thesis is a distillation of what I learned from you. Janet Tolan gave me my first opportunity to publish. I would like to thank her and Keith Tudor, Nick Totton, Pete Sanders, and Gill Wyatt for further opportunities to publish. Nick and Keith were particularly active in helping me find my voice, as were Sharadha Bain and Joan Armstrong.

My friends and family listened as I talked. I greatly appreciate the patience of those who didn’t understand what I was on about, and the interest of those who did. PhDs are notoriously consuming affairs. My family and friends have all been hugely understanding of the need for me to withdraw into PhD land. I enjoyed my time there enormously, but I’m really looking forward to returning to those who have waited for me so patiently. I particularly want to thank my mother, Marjorie, who has faithfully cheered me on; my sister Marsaili for her wisdom, guidance and generosity; and my partner, Ian, for giving up everything and coming with me.

Ian is perhaps the most aware of the ways in which I have been transformed. My supervisors, Professor Liz Bondi and Doctor John Harries were the alchemists who brought about this transformation. They worked their magic with wisdom, patience and much humour. I was an extremely quiet child when I was at school in Edinburgh. It seems fitting that I returned to Edinburgh in order to really find my voice. I am particularly grateful for the MTEM studentship that I was awarded by the University of Edinburgh, and for the opportunity to be among so many interesting and creative people.

Many people have contributed very directly to what I have to say and how I say it. I particularly want to thank those who provided me with data. I have been amazed and delighted at how well you spoke, and wrote, about a subject that is so difficult to speak about. Margaret Mellor, my wonderfully swift proofreader, made sure that I also spoke well. Lastly, I want to thank my examiners for each going out of their way to listen to what I have to say.
In memory of Ewen Cameron
1949–2011
Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed by me. The work is my own and I have acknowledged where I have used the work of others. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed

Rose Ann Cameron
January 2015
Chapter One: Introduction

In this thesis I seek to identify, articulate and theorise an aspect of encounter that is a recognisable aspect of relational experience, but is not delineated theoretically. The lack of a theoretical framework renders this aspect of relational experience difficult to articulate. Although one might be aware of it, we tend not to talk about it, or at least, not to talk about it in an exploratory or analytical manner. The lack of a theoretical framework with which to distinguish this substratum of relationship also hinders us in examining the meanings with which we imbue it and works to prevent us from recognising that we ascribe meanings from a particular position. The understandings that we both derive from, and impose upon, this aspect of relational experience therefore remain unexamined. Telling stories is one way of articulating that which has been hitherto unsymbolised. This chapter introduces my topic by narrating a number of encounters with the intention of beginning to identify my difficult-to-articulate topic and to explain how I became interested in this aspect of encounter and why I think it warrants close investigation. I then explain how this interest developed into a professional and then academic concern. The chapter ends with an outline of the chapters that follow.

How the questions originated

My curiosity about this aspect of encounter began nearly 30 years ago as I became aware that people I did not know, often homeless people, approached me with what seemed to be unusual frequency. I asked some of those living in the night shelter that I worked in at the time why they thought I was approached so often. Some said it was because I “looked Scottish”. Given that I lived in an English city with a high proportion of homeless Scots, and that members of minority groups sometimes overlook social divisions that would be barriers at home, this almost seemed like a viable theory until I noticed that I was also frequently approached in Scotland.

Others said that it was because I made eye contact. This was also the opinion of friends who had noticed that there was something odd going on. I tested this theory out. I was returning home from work one day when I
passed someone begging in the street. I had heard colleagues talking about this man – I’ll call him Frank – who was in the advanced stages of a degenerative disease, but we had never met. He was begging in what, for Britain, was an unusually dramatic manner. I read his ostentatious performance as a cocky, “I’m going to embarrass some money out of the privileged” parody, reckoned that this strategy was probably effective, and decided that, since we didn’t know each other, I’d take the opportunity to experiment with not making eye contact. I set my face to “blank”, kept a good distance from him and walked past. I was not comfortable doing so, but I carried on walking until I got to the bus station. I’d been sitting on a bus, waiting for it to leave, for a few minutes before Frank’s wheelchair came hurtling through the door, followed by Frank pulling himself along by his forearms. He showed the driver his bus pass, sat down in the seat in front of me, turned to me and said,

“Can you go and get me some chips?”

“No, the bus is about to leave.”

“Driver! How long before we leave?”

“Three or four minutes yet.”

“See?”

“Oh, alright then.”

I went to a nearby fast-food counter, bought him some chips and gave them to him with a blank, disengaged expression.

“There’s no vinegar on these …”

“Too bad. The bus is about to leave.”

“No it’s not. We’ve got a couple of minutes yet.”

“Oh … okay then.”

I had vinegar put on his chips, re-presented them with the same disengaged expression, and walked towards the back of the bus. “Where are you going?” he shouted after me, sounding genuinely bemused. The truth was that I was more than happy to fetch whatever he needed and, inwardly, I was completely charmed by his cheek. Maintaining my frosty-faced façade was becoming a real strain. I decided my experiment had reached its conclusion,
went back to my seat, apologised for my rudeness, and excused it on the
grounds that I was tired.

“You a student? Had a hard week at college?”

“No. I work.”

“Where?”

“Emm … the rehab on New Street …”

“Oh Gawd! … d’you know Scotch Jimmy?”

“I do! I’ve not seen him for a while. Is he around? Is he okay?”

“Yeah, he’s fine. I’ll tell him you were asking for him – what’s your
name?”

“Rose. What’s yours?”

“Frank. Hiya, Rose.”

“Hiya, Frank.”

Despite my façade of disinterest, Frank had every confidence that I would
not only help him out, but would be happy to chat with him for the rest of
the journey. He knew that I would be well disposed towards him. My
performance of disinterest was insincere and it was clearly unconvincing.
What is not clear is what gave me away.

It had occurred to me that being approached so often might have
something to do with my age, dress code, and possibly the fact that I’m a
woman. An incident that happened some time later disproved this theory. A
group of students had taken me out for lunch to mark the end of a course. I
left the restaurant a few minutes after they did, and was walking some
distance behind them. They were all women, all younger than I, all shared a
dress code that indicated a degree of political awareness and social
consciousness and, in my view, were all approachable-looking. I watched a
shabbily dressed man ignore them as they swerved to avoid him. He fixed
his eye on me from a distance, walked straight towards me, and said, “Can I
have a hug?”

I’m sure I do normally make eye contact and give other obvious signals
that I welcome contact. However the eye contact theory as well as
gender/age/dress code and the “looking Scottish” theories were all
disproven a few years later as I was having a cup of tea with a friend at a pavement café. My friend and I are both Scottish, both women, we’re roughly the same age and the dress code by which we denote our political sympathies is similar. We also look alike to the point of having been occasionally confused by our mothers as well as countless other people. My friend paused mid-conversation and looked over my shoulder. I turned, and standing behind me was a shabbily dressed (and very drunk) man. Like Frank, he was utterly confident that I would welcome the monologue he launched into the moment I turned round. My friend and I look, to the casual observer, pretty much the same, only she is more striking and was also facing the direction this man had been walking in, yet it was very definitely me he expected to talk to. My friend, who had seen this kind of thing happen before, resolved the question of whether I invite conversation by making eye contact by helpfully pointing out that, “you had your back to him, for God’s sake”. Homeless people are subjected to a great deal of passive – and active – hostility from the passers-by on whom they often depend for help to meet their most basic needs. Those who survive are experts in reading non-verbal cues, and I have no doubt that mine are being read. The puzzle is the nature of some of these cues, and the means by which they are observed.

My partner has heard me talk with great feeling about how soul-destroying it must be to live on the street and be routinely ignored (or worse) by passers-by. We were waiting at a bus stop one day and were joined by a shabbily dressed woman with many bags. My partner made a conversational remark to her about the frequency of buses. They exchanged a couple of innocuous remarks before she suddenly launched into a tirade of abuse against him. After she’d left he gave me a quizzical “where did I go wrong?” look.

“She was very drunk.”

“The guy you nearly collided with yesterday was monumentally drunk and the two of you were hugging within a split second.”

“Yeah. I dunno really – but I certainly wasn’t going to speak to her.”

Despite knowing that my partner had seen me effortlessly defuse similar – though much more fraught – situations, I had sat quietly by his side, looking
at the pavement, as he was roundly abused. I had known that it would be a bad idea to speak to this woman in the first place, and was certain that any effort on my part to intervene would only enrage her further.

On reflection, it seemed to me that my certainty in regard to not making contact with this woman, whom I’ll call Alice, might bear similarities to the certainty with which other homeless people have made contact with me – I “just knew”. The social scientist Bent Flyvberg (2001) draws on the work of Dreyfus and Dreyfus ([1986] 1988) to elucidate “thinking and behaviour that is rapid, intuitive, holistic, interpretative, and visual and which has no immediate similarity to the slow, analytical reasoning that characterizes rational problem-solving” (Flyvberg, 2001, p. 14). By “intuition” Dreyfus and Dreyfus do not mean “some kind of guesswork, irrationality, or supernatural inspiration” (Flyvberg, 2001, p. 19) but a rapid decision-making process that arises from experience:

No objective choice or conscious evaluation of appropriateness takes place, which is the case in selecting elements, rules and plans. The choice is simply made, and that much is clear phenomenologically speaking. And this seems to happen because the proficient performer has experienced similar situations earlier. Via spontaneous interpretation and intuitive judgment the memory of these situations generates plans corresponding to plans which have worked before. Similarly, memory of earlier situations releases expectations about actions, which correspond to those actions carried out in similar situations earlier. (Flyvberg, 2001, p. 16)

Such thinking and the decisions that derive from it “appear especially among those individuals who are either very proficient or experts in their fields” (Flyvberg (2001, p. 14). I would not claim to have the sort of expertise in reading non-verbal communication that is acquired while living on the street, but I have spent several years working with street drinkers and, as anyone who has worked with a volatile client group knows, one learns quickly.

I did indeed have prior experience of similar situations, but it was not clear to me what it was about Alice that told me it would be a bad idea to speak to her. I had very probably noticed something about her that hinted at the volcano of fury waiting to erupt, but had I been shown a photograph of the man I had hugged the day before (whom I will call Bill) I would have said that he looked angry (although in fact his fixed expression might just
have been that of someone making their way through a crowd while very drunk). Yet rather than feeling wary of him, I had reached out to steady him after we’d nearly collided. Perhaps misinterpreting my gesture, he stretched his arms out towards me and we fell into a brief embrace. When I thought back to watching Alice approach the bus stop, I noticed a feeling – a small, subtle feeling – of moving inwards, as if I had been extending into my environment and suddenly pulled myself back. It was this feeling of movement that told me that I ought to be cautious. In contrast, my reaching out to steady Bill had been a whole-hearted reaching out that went beyond reaching out to steady him with my hands.

While discussing the abilities of virtuoso chess players with Stuart Dreyfus, Flyvberg asks him “where in the body a chess player feels that a move is right, he told me, ‘in the whole body. In the pit of the stomach.’”. The small, subtle movements I felt away from Alice and towards Bill might be described as happening in the whole of my body. The movement away from Alice was concentrated not in the pit of my stomach, but in my solar plexus; the movement towards Bill was concentrated in my chest, yet both somehow involved the whole of me. Sensations of registering something and responding “in the whole body” happen in my other relationships too. I do not think that this is at all unusual. Dreyfus and Dreyfus understand intuition to be a property that we all use in everyday life when engaged in an activity in which one is well practised – riding a bicycle, for example. Being in relationship is everyone’s first activity in life and I would suggest that most people develop and use this kind of bodily intuition when relating to others.

But why was my intuitive reaction to Alice different from my reaction to Bill? I was reminded of Alice some time later when, on opening the door to a client, I felt myself shrink back. This time I was aware of what had provoked my reaction. I could feel the fury emanating from him before he had even stepped through the door. I wondered if I had felt, but not consciously registered, fury emanating from Alice. However, it transpired that my client was not furious, but terribly distressed. I had felt something emanate from him, and this what I had reacted to, but it seemed that it was not what I had assumed it to be. It is, of course, possible that I had “picked up” a fury that
my client was unaware of, but I began to wonder if there might be another
way of understanding why I had felt myself shrink back.

I have long observed myself “shrinking back”, or otherwise moving away
from, or towards, others. These sensations of movement often seem to
happen in reaction to something that seems to emanate from others, or to be
conspicuously absent. I do not always shrink back from someone from whom
something seems to emanate; sometimes I feel drawn towards them. I
wondered if those whom I earlier described approaching me with absolute
confidence that I would respond favourably might have been responding to
something that emanates from me. When I feel subtle movements towards
another, as I felt towards Bill, I feel as if I literally extend towards them, as if I
somehow move beyond the boundary of my skin. I wondered if my client
had, in his distress, been moving towards me in this way as I opened the
door and that it was this that I had taken to be fury emanating from him. It
struck me that if I can feel a client moving towards me in this way, clients are
likely to feel me moving towards them.

**How the questions developed into a professional and academic concern**

I tried to talk with colleagues about this sense of moving towards another, or
sensing another move towards oneself, but found it difficult to articulate.
Those colleagues who did anything other than look puzzled tended to say
that they understood what I was describing as projection, the defensive
mechanism by which one attributes one’s own denied feelings to another. I
knew that I was trying to articulate and inquire about something other than
projection or even projective identification (the defensive mechanism by
which one projects one’s denied feelings *into* another so that they actually do
feel one’s anger, sorrow, etc.). I wanted to tease out a distinction between
emotional content – fury, for example – and the sense of moving towards
another or being moved towards. I began searching the psychotherapeutic
literature for references to this almost physical sense of moving towards
another, or sensing another move towards oneself in this way. I do not
imagine that the sense of moving towards, or away from, is particularly
unusual.
With the exception of Stern’s (1985; 2010) work, such experiences do not seem to be much acknowledged in either the psychotherapeutic or any other literature. Eventually I found a passage in which Carl Rogers says that sometimes “it seems that my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other” (Rogers, 1979, p. 137; 1986, p. 129) – a passage, which was, at the time, not ubiquitously quoted as it is now. I was reminded of those periods of time in therapeutic work during which I feel as if I literally extend towards a client and am met somewhere in the physical space that lies between us. There is a qualitative change in the atmosphere, a vibrant stillness. I feel both intently focused and very relaxed. I feel very present and seem to be particularly well attuned; my client sometimes says that I look different, or that they feel different in a way they can’t articulate. I found myself, in response to a request for a training workshop, using this passage as a focus for the workshop.

Those participating in the workshop were from an ongoing professional training course and had opted to come to the workshop as a supplement to their core training. Those who had not chosen to attend were curious when rejoined by their course colleagues. I gathered that those who had attended were excited by the work we had done, but found it impossible to explain to the others. The course trainers told me that it was almost like having a cult within the course, in that those who had attended the workshop knew something that they couldn’t talk about. I too thought that the work we had done was exciting, and worthy of wider discussion. I began running the workshop regularly and, over time, developed a series of three interrelated workshops that explored the experience of moving towards and away from another, and of sensing another move towards and away from oneself.

I began trying to write about this subject in order to offer it as a topic for wider discussion. I was unsurprised to find that writing about the experiences with which I am concerned was even more difficult than talking about them, and greatly frustrated by the fact that academic literature is so difficult to access when one is working out with an academic institution. Nevertheless, I published a number of book chapters (Cameron, 2002a; 2002b; 2003b; 2004) and a journal article (Cameron, 2002c) on the subject. I remain somewhat dissatisfied with these publications and intend this thesis
to be a more focused, substantial, systematic and academically informed study. The research I undertook for this thesis enabled me to write about my elusive subject matter in a very different way. My previous work has relied somewhat heavily upon appeals to the reader’s experience, accounts of my own experience and generalised accounts of the experience of others. In this thesis I aim to enrich my prior understanding by eliciting the experience of others in actual encounters and specific contexts.

**Thesis outline**

I also adopt, in this thesis, a much more specific focus than in my previous work. I have, in several of my publications, been concerned with how a client’s feelings and even thoughts may be accessed in ways that are far from apparent. This is not a concern in this thesis. In this thesis, I delineate a very precise area of concern: how “moving” towards and away from another impacts relationship. The question of how relationship might be impacted as one “extends” towards another, or “draws back”, would seem to be of particular relevance to therapy, given the importance of the therapeutic relationship to outcome of therapy (Gaston, 1990; Horvath and Greenberg, 1986; Horvath and Symonds, 1991; Kivlinghan, 1990; Krupnick et al., 1996; Luborsky, 1994; Mallinckrodt, 1993; Orlinsky and Howard, 1986). This thesis seeks to draw out the implications for the therapeutic relationship as theorised by Rogers (1957; 1959). Whatever may have implications for practice is likely to also have implications for clinical supervision and therapist training. I have previously considered the implications for supervision only briefly (Cameron, 2004), and the implications for training not at all. In this thesis, I explicitly consider the implications for practice, supervision and training. This thesis, then, asks how extending towards another, drawing back or “moving” in some other way impacts relationship and what the implications for therapeutic practice, supervision and training might be.

The next chapter, Chapter Two, considers the theoretical basis on which the quality of the therapist’s presence might impact the therapeutic relationship. It examines the Person-centred literature concerned with the client’s perception in order to contextualise within Person-centred theory my
question as to how relationship might be impacted as one “extends” towards another, or “draws back”. Chapter Two examines any references made in the literature to a sense of extending and drawing back. It considers what is said about how “extending” and “drawing back” might impact the therapeutic encounter and what the implications might be for practice, supervision and training.

Having given the theoretical context to my inquiry, I explain, in Chapter Three, the methodology I used in addressing my question. In order to address the question of how relationship might be impacted as one “extends” towards another, or “draws back”, it will be necessary to identify more rigorously the kinds of experience to which such figures of speech refer. Chapter Three, which explicates the methodology I used, begins by explaining how I identified the experiences with which I am concerned in order that I might inquire about how they impact relationship. Chapter Three also lays out the philosophical basis for my methodology. I discuss the methods that I used in trying to identify the experiences in which I am interested and why I chose these methods. I then discuss what kinds of data I collected and how I generated and collected it; how I engaged with the accompanying ethical considerations and how I analysed my data.

I begin to put my methodology into practice in Chapter Four, “Finding the Words that Fit”, the first of the substantive chapters. In this chapter I identify the experiences I refer to as “extending” or “moving towards” and “drawing back” or “moving away” and identify the experience of being in the presence of someone who is “reaching out” and “drawing themselves back in”. I discuss the difficulty of language such experiences and examine some of the terms used in the literature. This chapter begins a consideration, continued through Chapters Five, Six and Seven, of how moving towards or away from another impacts relationship.

Chapter Five, “Meaning Making”, continues my consideration of how moving towards and away from another impacts relationship, and speaks to the literature, discussed in Chapter Two, on the client’s perception. It picks up my argument, begun in Chapter Two, that perception has a bodily basis. It acknowledges the narrative, commonplace both in everyday life and in
Psychotherapeutic theory, that subtle non-verbal signals enable us to know what another person is thinking or feeling and, without dismissing this narrative, offers an alternative narrative that I suggest has equal veracity. It also questions an assumption made in the literature that extending towards a client is necessarily beneficial and suggests that, outside the therapy room, the figures of speech that we use also suggest this narrative. In questioning the assumption that extending towards a client is necessarily beneficial, this chapter anticipates a discussion in Chapter Six of further ways in which others are impacted by our moving towards and away from them.

Whereas Chapter Five addressed how moving towards and away from another impacts their perception, Chapter Six explores how moving in such ways impacts other people more directly. In doing so, this chapter speaks to a gap in the Person-centred literature with regard to the significance of the body. This chapter posits the existence of an unseen dance that accompanies all conversation – and silence – as we move towards and away from each other, and explores how participating in this dance affects the dancers.

Chapter Seven, “‘Touching’ and Being ‘Touched’”, examines the intensity of experience that may arise when therapist and client move towards each other. I suggest that this intensity may involve both the erotic and the numinous. Experiences of the erotic and numinous in the therapy room are potentially embarrassing or otherwise difficult for practitioners to discuss. It is, for this reason, important that they are written about and so I examine what is said about the sexual and the spiritual in the literature. In its discussion of the erotic, this chapter differs somewhat from the preceding substantive chapters in that it uses the literature to speak to a gap in my data rather than the other way around. Chapter Eight, “Implications for Practice, Supervision and Training” summarises the implications for practice implicit in the preceding substantive chapters. It asks, given these implications for practice, what the implications for clinical supervision and training might be and discusses some ways in which these implications might be put into practice.
Chapter Two: Theoretical Background

In the previous chapter, I suggested, through the use of anecdotes, that we somehow sense when another is “open” and likely to be well disposed toward us. I speculated that we might do so by means of a “bodily intuition” that we experience in response to something that seems to emanate from others, or is conspicuously absent. This chapter begins by examining the theoretical reasons why something that might impact a client’s perception of their therapist’s attitudes towards them would be of importance in the therapeutic relationship as theorised by Rogers. This discussion centres on the sixth of Rogers’ (1957; 1959) necessary and sufficient conditions for therapeutic change: that the client perceives the therapist as genuinely empathic and unconditionally accepting. Having considered the theoretical significance of the sixth condition, I then examine the work of Barrett-Lennard (1962), van der Veen ([1961] 1970; 1967) and Toukmanian (2002) on client perception. I go on to suggest, in line with my introductory chapter, that the body is involved in perception and enrol Heidegger ([1927] 1962), Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 1962) and Todes (2001) in support of the notion of non-conceptual and bodily perception. I end this section by discussing what has been said about the role of the body in Person-centred theory.

Having speculated that “bodily intuitions” arise in response to something that seems to emanate from others, or be conspicuously absent, I go on, in the next section, “Identifying elusive emanations”, to examine any references in the literature to something that might be said to “emanate” from the therapist. I begin with a couple of quotations from Rogers, which lead me to the concept of presence and the related concept of Relational Depth (I will, unless quoting, use italics to indicate the use of a word, such as “presence”, that signifies a specific theoretical construct or constructs rather than more ordinary usage). I then look in some detail at Geller and Greenberg’s (2002, 2012) notion of “extending” as an aspect of presence.

This leads me to consider the challenge of putting bodily experience into words and to suggest that language creates concepts in the process of describing experience. I then return to look at some of the ways in which presence is theorised in relation to practice. I end by examining what Geller
and Greenberg (2012) say about “extending” in relation to supervision and training.

**The Sixth Condition**

Rogers published two seminal papers, one in 1957 and one in 1959, in which he formulated six conditions as, in 1959, necessary and, in 1957\(^1\), as both necessary and sufficient for therapeutic change\(^2\). There is some variation in the wording of these conditions, which I discuss as this chapter progresses, and which I put in parentheses below. The six conditions are, in summary:

1. that two persons are in (psychological) contact
2. that the first person, the client, is in a state of incongruence, being vulnerable or anxious
3. that the second person, the therapist, is congruent or integrated in the relationship
4. that the therapist is experiencing unconditional positive regard toward the client
5. that the therapist is experiencing an empathic understanding of the client’s internal frame of reference (and endeavours to communicate this experience to the client)
6. that the client perceives, at least to a minimal degree, conditions 4 and 5 (that the communication to the client of the therapist’s empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard is to a minimal degree achieved).

These six conditions, have, in much of the literature, been reduced to three “core conditions”: empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard. Tudor and Worrall (2006) argue against the use of the term “the core conditions” (which, they point out, was not used by Rogers) on the grounds that the term “perpetuates a reduced version of the approach and confirms a partial and insufficient view of Person-centred therapy” (p. 213). Tudor

\(^1\) The paper published in 1959 was written prior to the paper published in 1957 (Tudor and Worrall, 2006) and so I will, when referring to both papers, list the 1959 paper first.

\(^2\) See Tudor and Worrall (2006) for a discussion of the philosophical meanings of “necessary”, “sufficient” and “necessary and sufficient” and whether Rogers uses these terms in a specialised or more ordinary sense.
(2011) makes a particularly strong case in favour of all six conditions being essential to an understanding the integrity of Person-centred therapy as a relational therapy, a positioning that is, he says, implicit rather than explicit in Rogers’ original formulation. He argues that “the therapist’s communication of regard and empathy, and the client’s perception/experience of this, both develop as therapist and client experience and relate to and with each other” (p. 170). Understanding the client’s experience of the therapist’s acceptance and empathy in relational terms, he says, transforms practice and theory because the client’s perception is no longer “a one-dimensional, unidirectional, ‘one-person’ condition”. A co-creative, relational perspective, argues Tudor:

emphasizes the necessary dialogue between therapist and client about how the client experiences and perceives the therapist and, specifically, her or his acceptance and understanding. This is consistent with ideas about working with ruptures and repairs in the therapeutic relationship and reflects a ‘two-person psychology’ (p. 170).

The term “the core conditions”, still widely used, detracts, he says:

from the therapist’s focus on whether the client experiences his or her acceptance and empathy. Some might argue that the accepting empathic stance of the therapist incorporates complete focus on and with the client, which includes the client’s perception of the therapist’s experiencing of unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding towards the client and the client’s world. Empathy especially might be considered to include an integral check of the client’s experience/perception of the therapist. Whether or not I or others would agree with this definition or scope of empathy, the logic of this perspective would be to make the sixth condition redundant – and I think there is a value in the sixth condition being a client condition, and not something that is necessarily encompassed by a therapist condition or conditions. (p. 173)

The seeds of some of Rogers’ six therapeutic conditions can be discerned in Rogers’ (1942) early conception of “a newer psychotherapy” or “relationship therapy” (a term taken from Jessie Taft (1933), the characteristics of which were:

• warmth and responsiveness from the therapist
• permissiveness with regard to the expression of feeling
• certain limits in relation, for instance, to time spent together
• the client feels a freedom from pressure and coercion
• the client experiences an increased ability to respond genuinely (Tudor and Merry, 2002).
The first two, and perhaps the fourth, of these characteristics preempt the condition that Rogers comes to variously call warmth, acceptance, respect, prizing, non-possessive caring, love and unconditional positive regard. This condition becomes, in Rogers’ later conceptualisation, more relational in that the therapist feels permissive or accepting, and the client perceives this attitude. Rogers’ later inclusion of (psychological) contact\(^3\), and that the therapist experiences an empathic understanding that they endeavour to communicate, are also relationally oriented. The further inclusion of condition six should leave us in no doubt that Rogers wished to position his approach as a two-person, relational approach.

**Client perception or therapist communication?**

Differences in Rogers’ wording of condition six have led to a long-running debate as to whether the sixth condition is concerned with the client’s perception or the therapist’s communication. As the therapist is the active party in communicating, and the client in perceiving, this debate influences whether Person-centred therapy is positioned as a one-person or two-person therapy. Rogers does specify the therapist’s communication when listing the six conditions in the 1957 paper: “(t)he communication to the client of the therapist’s empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard is to a minimal degree achieved” (1990 edition, p. 221). However, in the same paper, he changes the wording in his later comments on this condition: “(t)he final condition as stated is that the client perceives, to a minimal degree, the acceptance and empathy which the therapist experiences for him” (1990 edition, p. 227). He then mentions communication again: “(u)nnless some communication of these attitudes has been achieved”, then “such attitudes do not exist in the relationship as far as the client is concerned, and the therapeutic process could not, by our hypothesis, be initiated” – but he goes on to say that: “(s)ince attitudes cannot be directly perceived, it might be somewhat more accurate to state that therapist behaviors and words are perceived by the client as meaning that to some degree the therapist accepts and understands him” (1990 edition, p. 227).

In the paper of 1959 the wording of condition six is: “that the client

\(^3\) See Cameron (2012a) for the argument that contact is necessarily reciprocal.
perceives, at least to a minimal degree, conditions 4 and 5, the unconditional positive regard of the therapist for him, and the empathic understanding of the therapist” (p. 213, italics in original). In this paper Rogers elaborates on his careful choice of words by saying that:

The point that is most likely to be misunderstood is the omission of any statement that the therapist communicates his empathic understanding and his unconditional positive regard for the client. Such a statement has been omitted only after much consideration, for these reasons. It is not enough for the therapist to communicate, since the communication must be received, as pointed out in condition 6, to be effective. It is not essential that the therapist intend such communication, since often it is by some casual remark, or involuntary facial expression, that the communication is actually achieved. (1959, p. 214)

Although the paper of 1959 was written before the 1957 paper, I think it can be assumed that Rogers had the opportunity to make final alterations before it went to press, thus confirming the 1959 statement, in which he so deliberately emphasises the client’s perception, as his later statement. All Rogers’ statements about unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding are, I think, crucial. The therapist must actually experience these attitudes in order to communicate them authentically, perhaps with “a casual remark or involuntary expression” and both genuine experiencing and communication are necessary for the client (unless their perception is very positively distorted) to perceive these attitudes.

**Congruence**

A further – and much later – change in the wording of condition six has given rise to another long-standing debate as to whether the therapist should explicitly communicate their congruence – which Rogers also referred to as “realness”, “authenticity” and “genuineness” – by articulating their own thoughts and feelings. In a paper of 1962 Rogers’ wording is:

*It is that when the client perceives, to a minimal degree, the genuineness of the counselor and the acceptance and empathy, which the counselor experiences for him, then development in the personality and change in behavior are predicted.* ([1962] 1973 edition, p. 96)

Mearns and Cooper (2005) argue that here Rogers expands the sixth condition to emphasise the communication of the therapist’s congruence. This, they say is “a dimension that is critical” (p. 36) to their conceptualisation of *Relational Depth*, a concept that I discuss later in this
chapter. Rogers does not actually say that the therapist needs to communicate their congruence, but rather emphasises the need for the therapist to be sensitive to the client’s perception. Tudor (2011), who along with Worrall (Tudor and Worrall, 2006) refers to congruence as the “quiet condition”, takes issue not only with Mearns and Cooper’s lumping together of empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence, but also with their assertion that the therapist communicates their genuineness. Tudor (2011) points out that the 1962 paper was written in the context of discussing education, and argues that Rogers emphasised the importance of communicating one’s emotional experience in relation to the Person-centred approach rather than Client-centred therapy⁴. However, Rogers does write about client work in this paper and it seems very clear that he considered articulation of the therapist’s own experience to be important in situations in which to remain silent would be paramount to pretence, and gives the example of a therapist feeling annoyance, boredom or dislike. He (tentatively) says that “it is preferable for the counselor to be real than to put up a façade of interest and concern and liking which he does not feel” ([1962] 1973, p. 92).

Tudor and Worrall (2006) do acknowledge the possibility of articulation in such circumstances and make a useful distinction between congruence that is “self-involving” or comes from the therapist’s experience of being in relationship with the client, and congruence that is “self-disclosing” and introduces information from the therapist’s own life outside the therapeutic relationship.

Again, it seems that what is important is that the client perceives the therapist as authentic and lacking in pretence rather than that the therapist makes a point of communicating their experience, particularly given that they are likely to communicate their experience through “some casual remark, or involuntary facial expression” (Rogers 1959). Rogers ([1962] 1973)

⁴ The term “Client-centred therapy” has generally been succeeded by “Person-centred therapy”, although some authors make a distinction between Client-centred therapy – Rogers’ theory as applied to the practice of therapy – and the Person-centred Approach – Rogers’ theory applied to other areas. I make this distinction here for the sake of clarity, but otherwise use the term “Person-centred therapy”.
makes clear the importance, in practice, of the client’s perception in writing that in:

*studies of clinic clients the correlation between the client’s perception of the conditions offered early in the relationship and the degree of change at the conclusion of the interviews is somewhat higher than that between the counselor’s perception of the conditions offered and the degree of change. The client’s perception is, in other words, the better predictor of change. (p. 100)*

**Research into the client’s perception**

Whether one understands authenticity as “the quiet condition” or as something that should be articulated, it is clear that what is important is that the client perceives the therapist as genuinely accepting and empathic (or, depending on one’s reading, as genuine, empathic and unconditionally accepting). This raises the question of what factors might impact the client’s perception. Wyatt and Sanders (2002) lament the paucity of research undertaken in relation to Rogers’ sixth condition and argue that in designing a relationship inventory intended to measure the client’s perception of the therapist’s empathic understanding, level of regard, unconditionality, congruence and willingness to be known, Barrett-Lennard (1962) alone recognised the significance of Rogers’ sixth condition and appreciated its place in research methodology. They suggest that had Barrett-Lennard’s inventory become the principal instrument of measurement in Person-centred research, client perception would have been placed at the centre of research and reflective practice instead of being:

*forever present as a topic that enjoys a passing (but important) mention, but is never really brought to the fore … the perception of the client never really has its day as the pivotal signifier that the relationship is therapeutic, rather than being assumed as such by the therapist or judged by outside observers. (p. 12)*

Barrett-Lennard ‘s inventory did not become widely used although van der Veen ([1961] 1970) used it along with the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory and Q-sort (Stephenson, 1953; Butler and Haigh, 1954) to undertake research into whether the client’s perception of “therapist-provided conditions” was an essential part of effective therapy with clients diagnosed with schizophrenia. He confirmed the importance of the sixth condition in relation to therapeutic outcome and found that clients who were more “psychologically adjusted” perceived “higher therapist conditions” (Wyatt and Sanders, 2002, p. 13). In an associated finding of 1967, van der
Veen found that, in clients diagnosed as schizophrenic, perception of “lower levels of the conditions” was also related to a “lower level of process” or “more rigid mode of experiencing” and, when commenting on these findings in 1970, that big differences between therapist and client in terms of age, background or social class also impacted the client’s perception of the therapist (van der Veen, 1970, p. 31, cited in Wyatt and Sanders, 2002, p. 15).

Rogers too says that:

I have learned, especially in working with more disturbed persons, that empathy can be perceived as a lack of involvement; that an unconditional regard on my part can be perceived as indifference; that warmth can be perceived as threatening closeness, and that real feelings of mine can be perceived as false. (Rogers, [1962] 1973, p. 96)

Rogers and van der Veen are both writing about “more disturbed” clients. Toukmanian (2002) is concerned with the impact that any client’s “perceptual-processing system” might have upon their perception of what the therapist offers. Like Tudor and Worrall (2006), Toukmanian (2002) points to the theoretical importance of the sixth condition and to its transactional nature. She further argues that Rogers neglects the implications of the sixth condition by positing a linear, causal link between the therapist’s facilitative attitudes and therapeutic outcome while paying very little attention to the client’s agency and to factors that might impinge upon the client’s perception. She is, she says, “inclined to believe that his attempt to capture complex, transactional phenomena in a theory that is of ‘the if–then variety’ is inconsistent with the general thrust of his humanistic perspective” (p. 117).

Toukmanian (2002) takes this argument into a review of the research literatures on the therapist’s relational attitudes and on clients’ experience of therapy. She concludes that clients’ perceptions of the therapist and the therapeutic relationship “exert considerable influence on how the therapy is construed and experienced” (p. 119) and that this, while recognising the client’s contribution to the therapeutic process, “also highlights the multi-faceted nature of the Rogerian conditions as being both intrapersonal as well as relational phenomena” (p. 120, italics in original). Toukmanian (2002) goes
on to consider what Rogers says about perception, awareness\textsuperscript{5} and subception\textsuperscript{6} and concludes that as:

\textit{all three concepts imply the involvement of inference, it would seem that the core phenomenon alluded to here is perception. In other words, what is perceived, symbolized in awareness, or subceived, is the meaning or the importance that a particular event has for the individual, which is the characteristic property of perception.} (p. 120, emphasis in original)

Toukmanian (2002) discusses client perception in terms of a cognitive “perceptual-processing model” that is based on three propositions. The first proposition is that perception is a cognitive schema-driven construction that, at any given moment, reflects our capability to detect, organise and give meaning to information on the basis of past transactions. The second is that we are capable of engaging in a variety of mental operations and ways of perceiving that are learned through experience, and the third is that our perceptions play a significant role in how we act and interact with our environment. Meanings regarding self and the world develop in a cognitive perceptual-processing system which consists of two interactive components: a structural component – a network of schemata or meaning structures – and an operational component – the particular mode of information processing we use in constructing an event. This model holds that using an “automated” or very rapid, pre-reflective and undiscriminating mode of processing hampers schematic development while a controlled, slow, reflective, and deliberate mode of processing leads to structural transformations and to an “increasing complexity of the network of schematic structures, resulting in fundamental changes in the way an event is perceived” (p. 122).

Toukmanian (2002) argues that her research (1996) demonstrates that “clients change their processing strategies in the manner and direction specified by the (cognitive perceptual-processing) model” (2002, p. 122) that she promotes. She concedes that the evidence she cites from her own work and that of others is not directly related to the client’s perception of the therapist’s relational attitudes, but it is, she says:

\textsuperscript{5} Rogers (sometimes) uses “perception” and “awareness” synonymously.

\textsuperscript{6} “Subception” is the term that Rogers (1959) uses to denote the organism’s capacity to “discriminate a stimulus and its meaning” outside awareness (p. 200).
consistent with the findings of past social psychological research on person perception which indicate that people’s level of cognitive complexity is strongly implicated in the processes by which they make judgments about self and others. (2002, p. 123)

Toukmanian’s (2002) model draws on the work of Kelly (1955) along with that of more recent cognitive psychologists. Although Rogers borrowed Kelly’s “helpful term” (Rogers, [1958] 1967, p. 132), personal constructs, he was critical of Kelly’s work as “intellectualized” psychotherapy (Rogers, 1956, cited in Tudor and Worrall, 2006, p. 56). Just as Toukmanian (2002) is inclined to believe that Rogers’ attempt to capture complex, transactional phenomena in a theory of “the if–then variety” is inconsistent with the general thrust of his humanistic perspective (and I don’t disagree with her), so am I inclined to think that her understanding of perception as a purely cognitive process works against the organismic bias in Rogers’ work. In seeking to explore how the “bodily intuition” described in the previous chapter might also impact the client’s perception, this thesis proceeds from the assumption that perception is not purely cognitive. The next section lays out the philosophical and theoretical foundation for this assumption.

Non-conceptual perception
In Being and Time, Heidegger ([1927] 1962) critiques the notion of mental representations, and offers instead a non-conceptual account of our “openness to the world” as we respond to unique situations (Dreyfus, 2005). Heidegger has us relating to the world. “Relating to” is a redundant concept for Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 1962). He takes Heidegger’s argument that we don’t relate to the world via concepts or the rules that derive from them, and develops it further by arguing that our way of being-in-the-world is via our bodies, and our materiality enmeshes us in, and entwines us with, the world. We get a “maximum grip” (Dreyfus, 2005) on the object of our engagement via our bodily sense of things, through our perceptual, rather than our conceptual abilities. Perception happens just outside the bounds of what our minds do – for instance, one moves around in order to find the best position from which to view a work of art, rather than cognitively working out the best vantage point (Dreyfus, 2005). Perception, for Merleau-Ponty, is not conceptual, but bodily, and utterly different from conceptual understanding,
thinking, believing or inferring. His pre-conceptual and pre-linguistic account of perception has us engaging with other people via intercorporeality or our bodily involvement with each other rather than working things out by thinking about them or using linguistic constructs (infectious yawning is an example of intercorporeality). We don’t have to use concepts to work out what another’s gestures mean, we respond immediately with our own gestures (Dreyfus, 2005).

Merleau-Ponty is primarily interested in visual perception (Dreyfus, 2005). Todes (2001), who builds on Merleau-Ponty’s work, is interested in the haptic and proprioceptive rather than the visual. Todes (2001) develops Merleau-Ponty’s work and uses the term “poise” to describe the non-conceptual, ongoing coping that we employ to deal with the things and people around us. He takes the distinction made by Merleau-Ponty between goal-oriented trying and the ongoing satisfaction of skillful interaction with that which inhabits our perceptual field to claim that the “continuing activity of ongoing coping gives us perceptual knowledge of the things with which we are coping” (Dreyfus, 2001, p. xviii). One becomes able to deal skillfully with a bicycle, for instance, by trying to stay balanced, falling off, and doing better next time, rather than through one’s understanding of it as a two-wheeled conveyance that relies upon complex mechanical force to stay upright. A bicycle is a two-wheeled conveyance that relies upon complex mechanical force to stay upright, but knowing this is not helpful in learning to cycle. My concern is with what might be called “relational poise” – I make the distinction between poise and relational poise to specify the bodily-based ways in which we interact with people rather than objects such as bicycles.

Merleau-Ponty’s ([1945] 1962) and Todes’ (2001) understandings of perception as a bodily process are very different from Toukmanian’s (2002) understanding of perception as a purely cognitive process and, I think, more in keeping with Rogers’ organismic psychology. Tudor and Worrall (2006) argue that:

while Rogers’ contribution to the development of self theory may be better known, we view his contribution to organismic theory and psychology as more significant in that it marks Person-centred psychology as one which consistently views the organism as a whole, and as the source of subjective experience. (p. 47)
Although the body is strongly implied by Rogers’ use of the term “organism”, there is debate as to the degree of importance the body is given in Person-centred theory. Fernald (2000) considers that the concept of organismic experiencing “is a, if not the, most important and fundamental concept in Rogers’ person-centered approach”. He argues that “Rogers’ emphasis on the body is evident” (p. 175) and that “Rogers’ primary intention as a counsellor was to facilitate the client’s being more in touch with his or her body” (p. 172). He cites Rogers referring to “the obvious physical concomitants”, that is, tears, muscular relaxation, sighing, etc., that are a feature of “moments when it appears that change actually occurs” (Rogers, 1961, p. 130, cited in Fernald, 2000. p. 174). Rogers ([1961] 1967) says that the moments during which “the incongruence between experience and awareness is vividly experienced as it disappears into congruence” (p. 148) “constitute a clear-cut physiological event, a substratum of the conscious life” (p. 150).

One might well understand the aim of Person-centred therapy as admitting bodily experience into awareness:

One of the fundamental directions taken by the process of therapy is the free experiencing of the actual sensory and visceral reactions of the organism without too much of an attempt to relate these experiences to the self. This is usually accompanied by the conviction that this material does not belong to, and cannot be organised into, the self. The end point of this process is that the client discovers that he can be his experience, with all of its variety and surface contradictions; that he can formulate himself out of his experience, instead of trying to impose a formulation of self upon his experience, denying to awareness those elements which do not fit. (Rogers, [1953] 1967, p. 80)

Schmid (1998), on the other hand, complains that in the Person-centred approach:

(a)part from Gendlin and his adherents, little attention has so far been given explicitly to physical processes. As a consequence, we have been working with an incomplete model of personhood because corporeality is an indispensable part of it. This does not just mean that we need to be aware of the physical correlates of psychological experiencing and to observe them in our practice; it signifies the need to do justice to man (sic) as a ‘body-psyche-mind unity’. (p. 86)

Gendlin ([1978] 1981) researched the process in which personal meaning arises as the client struggles to find the words to express “a bodily awareness of a situation or person or event” (1981, p. 32). His formulation of this
process into a series of steps (“Focusing”) split what was then known as the “non-directive” (later “Person-centred”) therapy community. Some followed Gendlin in overtly facilitating this process within clients while others objected to Focusing on the grounds that it generalises individual processes and is directed by the therapist. Michael McMillan (2004) provides an interesting comparison between Gendlin and Rogers’ approach to facilitating the symbolisation of experience (Cameron, 2012b). Gendlin’s (1962) description of golfers aiming “with the feel of the whole body” (p. 84) is reminiscent of Stuart Dreyfus’ (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, [1986] 1988) description, referred to in the previous chapter, of chess players sensing their next move with the whole of their body. Gendlin “reminds us of how the body is intimately implicated in what things mean in that we live meanings through bodily participation” (Todres, 2007, p. 3), yet neither he nor Rogers specifically thinks about the body as participating in interpersonal perception.

If, as the stories I recounted in the previous chapter suggest, one’s perception of others involves a “bodily intuition” in response to the quality of that other person’s presence, if a client might be impacted by something that they feel emanating from me, as I was impacted by something that I felt emanating from the client I assumed to be furious, then whatever emanates is of importance. The rest of this chapter examines the few references in Person-centred literature to what might be described as something that emanates from the therapist.

Identifying elusive emanations
Wyatt and Sanders (2002) argue that Rogers had “little appetite” (p. 16) for the development and elaboration of theory after his involvement in the beleaguered Wisconsin Project7 and that theory development effectively stopped in the early 1960s until after Rogers’ death in the mid-80s8. While it

7 The Wisconsin Project was a nine-year research project that ended in 1967 after considerable problems including data that went missing, research participants withdrawing and disagreements within the research team (Wyatt and Sanders, 2002).
8 Wyatt and Sanders (2002) acknowledge that some commentators make much of a couple of alterations made by Rogers (Rogers and Sanford, 1989) when asked to re-state his theory in the 1980s. Wyatt and Sanders give 1984 as the date that this happened, but no reference.
is true that Rogers spent the latter part of his career applying his theory to
fields other than therapy, rather than developing theory, it would, despite his
“if–then” formulation of the six conditions, be a mistake to assume that he
considered himself to have reached any definitive answers as to what makes
relationships helpful. In an interview with Michelle Baldwin towards the end
of his career, Rogers says that he was:

inclined to think that in my writing perhaps I have stressed too much the three
basic conditions (congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathic
understanding). Perhaps it is something around the edges of these conditions
that is really the most important element of therapy – when my self is very
clearly, obviously present. When I am working well, I know a lot of active
energy flows from me to the client. (Baldwin, 1987, p. 45).

Rogers is clearly struggling to articulate something more elusive than the
previously identified therapeutic conditions, as he is in another passage later
in the same interview:

I find that when I am closest to my inner, intuitive self, when I am somehow in
touch with the unknown in me, when perhaps I am in a slightly altered state of
consciousness, then whatever I do seems to be full of healing. Then, simply my
presence is releasing and helpful to the other. There is nothing I can do to force
this experience, but when I can relax and be close to the transcendent core of
me, then I may behave in strange and impulsive ways in the relationship, ways
which I cannot justify rationally, which have nothing to do with my thought
processes. But these strange behaviors turn out to be right, in some odd way: it
seems that my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the
other. Our relationship transcends itself and becomes a part of something
larger. Profound growth and healing and energy are present. (Baldwin, 1987,
p. 50)

“A lot of active energy flows from me to the client” and “it seems that my
inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other” would
serve as descriptions of the kind of experience I wish to identify and have
thus far described as something that seems to emanate. The second passage,
which Rogers uses – in its entirety – three times (Rogers, 1979, p. 137; 1986,
p. 129; Baldwin, 1987, p. 50) has generated a considerable amount of research
literature, and it is to this body of literature, as well as to the literature on
client perception, that I wish to contribute.

The paper written by Rogers and Sanford was published in 1989.
**Presence and Relational Depth**

The section in which the above quotation appears in the 1986 version is subtitled “One More Characteristic” and has led to speculation about a “fourth condition”\(^9\) (there have always been six!) and to the theorisation of *presence* and *Relational Depth*\(^{10}\). Some of the literature on *presence* speaks to the sense of extending towards another that I want to explore. The literature on *Relational Depth* does not differentiate this experience, but is of relevance later in this thesis, and so I begin this section by briefly discussing how the concepts of *presence* and *Relational Depth* relate to each other.

Mearns (2003), with reference to the above quotation from Rogers, says that “if Rogers and I are talking about the same experience then I would suggest that it might be referred to in mystical language or in terms of existing concepts” (p. 8). Using “existing concepts”, Mearns (1994) theorises *presence* as “as a blending together of the three core conditions” (p. 7).

Mearns and Cooper (2005) conceptualise *Relational Depth* as constructed by both therapist and client as each allows themselves to be impacted by the other and as a mutual offering and reception of the “core conditions” as the client both receives the therapist’s congruence, empathy and unconditional regard and, in doing so, offers the therapist an empathic acceptance of what they offer. It is, they say, “a state of profound contact and engagement between two people, in which each person is fully real with the Other, and able to understand and value the other’s experiences at a high level” (Mearns and Cooper, 2005, p. xii). In so far as one (presumably in the role of therapist) experiences genuine empathy and unconditional acceptance of the Other (who is presumably in the role of client) and experiences the Other as receiving one’s empathy and acceptance, *Relational Depth* is no different from Rogers’ third, fourth, fifth and sixth conditions. Cooper (2005) adjusts this concept of *Relational Depth* by adding some of the other therapeutic conditions. It is, he says, a:

\[9\] Geller and Greenberg (2002) attribute the term "fourth condition" to Thorne (1992), whose term is actually "this fourth quality" (p. 106).

\[10\] “Relational Depth” is capitalised by Mearns and Cooper (2005) and so I follow their lead. “Presence” is capitalised by some its theorists, but not by the theorists whose work I discuss in most depth and so I do not capitalise this term.
‘blending together of high degrees of the three core conditions of empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence’ [Mearns, 2003, p. 8] alongside the other Rogerian (1957) ‘conditions’ of ‘contact’ and ‘perception’. (Cooper, 2005, p. 4).

Cooper’s conceptualisation omits Rogers’ second condition, that “the first person, whom we shall term the client, is in a state of incongruence” (Rogers, 1959, p. 213, italics in the original). Indeed, the concept of Relational Depth precludes the second condition in that it requires the client to be “fully real”\(^\text{11}\). The concept of Relational Depth thus either overrides Rogers’ second condition as necessary for therapy or, if the client actually is “fully real”, renders Relational Depth something that cannot happen between therapist and client, or at least not until the client is able to be “fully real”, at which point they would presumably no longer be in need of therapy. Rogers, in dialogue with Buber, says that:

\[
\text{if the client comes to the point where he can experience what he is expressing, but also can experience my understanding of it, and reaction to it, and so on, then really therapy is just about over. (Anderson and Cissna, 1997, p. 39)}
\]

Mearns and Cooper (2005) do not position Relational Depth as something that can happen only towards the end of therapy, and so their requirement that the client be “fully real” is problematic. That the client must be “fully real” has perhaps also struck Relational Depth researchers as problematic. Cooper (2005), when defining Relational Depth in a research paper on the therapist’s experience of Relational Depth, says that “the Other is experienced as fully congruent and real” (p. 6, my italics), which is not necessarily the same as the Other actually being fully congruent and real. In a later definition of Relational Depth, Cooper, along with Knox et al. (2013) addresses the problematic idea that the client must be “fully congruent and real” further by changing the definition so that “the client is experienced as acknowledging one’s empathy, acceptance and congruence – either explicitly or implicitly – and is experienced as fully congruent in that moment” (p. 2, my italics). Some acknowledgement and discussion of these changes in wording would have been a welcome clarification. Given that it is theoretically possible (and likely) that a client accurately perceives the therapist’s attitudes towards

\(^{11}\) “Congruence”, the state of being aware of one’s flow of experience, is, for Rogers, synonymous with being "real".
them whilst being incongruent in other respects, I am left wondering why it remains important that the client is “fully congruent” or “fully real”, even for just a moment. Rogers (Rogers, [1962] 1973), writing of congruence, says that “(n)o one fully achieves this condition” (p. 90). He constantly emphasises the “good enough” (to borrow Winnicott’s phrase) nature of what the therapist offers the client and certainly does not suggest that it is realistic to expect a client (or therapist) to be “fully real”.

The concept of Relational Depth is built upon one particular understanding of presence. Geller and Greenberg’s (2002) research leads them to a different understanding of presence. They understand presence not as something that results from a blending together of certain conditions, but as “the foundation of the relationship conditions of empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard” (p. 85), and, in a later publication (2012), as a necessary precondition to these conditions. They understand the relationship conditions as arising from presence – “we see the relationship conditions as a way that being fully in the moment is communicated to clients” (p. 84) – rather than presence as arising from the therapeutic conditions. This is a quite different understanding from Mearns’ “blending together”, but this difference is unacknowledged by Cooper (2005) when introducing his research into therapists’ experience of Relational Depth. Citing Geller and Greenberg’s research on presence, he says that Relational Depth “can be conceptualised as a form of ‘co-presence’, a co-experiencing of the Person-centred ‘core conditions’”(p. 1). A “co-experiencing of the Person-centred “core conditions” corresponds to the definitions of presence as a “blending together” rather than Geller and Greenberg’s concept of presence as a foundation and necessary precondition. The difference between the two definitions of presence is also unacknowledged in Geller’s (2013) contribution to Relational Depth: New perspectives and developments (Knox et al., 2013), in which she argues that (her definition of) presence is the foundation of Relational Depth. Schmid’s (1998) understanding of presence offers a potential resolution to the discrepancy between Mearns’ and Geller and Greenberg’s positions. Schmid (1998) understands presence as the existential foundation or, borrowing Hegel’s term, an Aufhebung of the basic attitudes in that “they are preserved as well as being dissolved by being superseded and
transcended” (p. 85).

Mearns’ idea of presence as a “blending together” of congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathy does not take account of Rogers’ struggle to articulate something more elusive that might hover around the edges of his previously identified therapeutic conditions. Geller and Greenberg’s (2002) research, on the other hand, seeks to describe and expand on an understanding of therapeutic presence in order to “further elucidate this hidden but important quality in psychotherapy” (p. 73). They interviewed six therapists, all authors or proponents of the concept of presence, about their experience of being “in presence” during the therapeutic encounter. They do not provide the definition of presence given to those they interviewed – they say only that it was extracted from the literature. However, they do give their own (lengthy) definition of presence in a later publication (2012):

therapeutic presence is the state of having one’s whole self in the encounter with a client by being completely in the moment on a multiplicity of levels – physically, emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually. Therapeutic presence involves being in contact with one’s integrated and healthy self, while being open and responsive to what is poignant in the moment and immersed in it, with a larger sense of spaciousness and expansion of awareness and perception. This grounded, immersed, and expanded awareness occurs with the intention of being with and for the client, in the service of his or her healing process. The inner receptive state involves a complete openness to the client’s multidimensional world, including bodily and verbal expression, as well as openness to the therapist’s own bodily experience of the moment in order to access the knowledge, professional skill, and wisdom embodied within. Being fully present then allows for an attuned responsiveness that is based on a kinesthetic and emotional sensing of the other’s affect and experience as well as one’s own intuition and skill and the relationship between them. Therapeutic presence can also be viewed as a way that therapists monitor their own experience in therapy. Through an enhanced sensitivity to the client’s experience, therapists can use themselves and their attuned bodily awareness as tools in understanding and responding to the client as well as in sensing how their responses are facilitating the client’s therapeutic process and the therapeutic relationship. The therapist’s bodily sense of the client’s experience is a reflection of an inner synthesis of the client’s expressed and felt experience with the therapist’s own lived experience and his or her professional expertise. The therapist’s presence and consequent in-the-moment physical, emotional, and cognitive awareness are a reflection of the client’s multilevel expression and act as a receptor and guide to the process of therapy. (pp. 7–8)

Geller and Greenberg’s definition of presence speaks to the kind of “bodily intuition” I described in the previous chapter in that they refer to the therapist’s “own bodily experience of the moment”, their “kinesthetic
sensing”, “bodily awareness” and their “bodily sense” and “physical awareness”. Their initial research resulted in the development of a model of therapeutic presence in which they identify three domains that distill their data: “preparing the ground for presence”, “the process of presence”, and “the experience of presence”. They identify three subcategories within the process of therapeutic presence: “receptivity”, “inwardly attending” and “extending and contact”. “Extending and contact” is of particular relevance to the question of how the literature discusses something that might be said to emanate.

**Extending and contact**

Geller and Greenberg (2002) describe “extending and contact”, which involves “extending oneself and one’s boundaries to the client”, as “the act of emotionally, energetically and verbally reaching outwards to the client” (p. 79, italics in original). Extending “energetically” is a phrase I have also used (Cameron, 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; 2004), and although it is meaningful to some, it is problematic. As Totton (2007) observes, “‘energy’ in psychotherapy is a complex word, in William Empson’s sense: a nexus, a meeting point of several traditions and discourses in one term” (p. 395). Geller and Greenberg do not say what they mean by reaching out “energetically”, but do discuss “energy” in their later publication of 2012, and there they draw upon the traditions of China and India. I will return to the problematic idea of “energy” presently; before doing so I want to draw upon another piece of research on presence that refers to therapists “extending their boundaries” in order to elaborate upon what this phrase might mean.

Pemberton (1976) undertook training and interviews with five well-known therapists12, all “generally assumed to have powerful sense of presence” (p. 2), and who “can all be felt in a room” (p. 85). All of Pemberton’s research subjects said that “one thing essential to good therapy is that “therapists expand13 their boundaries to include the other” (p. 97),

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12 They were the Transactional Analysts Bob and Mary Goulding, the Gestaltists Erving and Miriam Polster and the Family Therapist Virginia Satir.

13 Pemberton uses “expand” and “extend” interchangeably.
and some of the sources he cites speak particularly clearly to what I have described as a feeling of moving towards or away from another, or as something that seems to emanate from others or be conspicuously absent. He cites Shepherd et al. (1972) describing presence as being “like an aura – it extends into the room and fills the space around the person” (Shepherd et al., 1972, pp. 70–1, cited in Pemberton, 1976, p. 21) and also an interview with the theatre director Jerzy Grotowski (Fumarol, 1969) in which Grotowski says that:

what I must do is create between him (the actor) and myself a field of creative communication. This is evident when we mutually go out toward each other, without a word or almost none, and, in any case without any conventional gesticulation that mimes fraternity. (Fumarol, 1969, pp. 172–7; Pemberton, 1976, p. 21)

Pemberton identifies three “forces” that, when activated can generate presence: “focusing”, “extending”, and “enfolding”. “While these forces do not guarantee presence”, he says, “they make it possible; and presence cannot occur unless such forces are activated. The forces are not cumulative; they occur in any order or simultaneously. Any one force can begin the process by which the others are activated (p. 4). Extending is the:

act of moving out; opening, enlarging and elongating boundaries. Extending involves manifesting oneself as one truly is at that moment. Extending requires a conscious and deliberate commitment of physical, psychological, and/or psychic movement of one’s boundaries outward. (pp. 4–5)

Enfolding is the:

act of taking in something that is exterior to oneself. Webster’s (1968) defines enfolding as, ‘to fold inward or toward one another (pp. 433), and the American College Dictionary (1964), ‘to clasp or embrace’ (p. 624)’. Enfolding is an active state of intuiting, perceiving, sensing, listening, and seeing another person, object or force as she/he/it truly is at that moment. Enfolding requires a conscious and deliberate commitment to take in the exterior elements’ state of being. (p. 5)

Focusing is the:

act of moving inward in order to fully be at one with oneself. Focusing connotes ‘centering oneself’, ‘getting it together’, ‘cleansing oneself’, ‘clearing one’s head’ and ceasing ‘internal dialogue’, ‘unfinished business’, ‘worry’, ‘hassle’. Focusing requires conscious and deliberate commitment to move inward, quiet oneself, and strive for self-relatedness. (p. 4)

Pemberton does not elaborate upon what he means by a “psychic movement of one’s boundaries outward” any more than Geller and
Greenberg elaborate upon what they mean by reaching out “energetically”. They do not use the term “energetically” when defining “extending” in their later publication of 2012, and thus risk forgoing the dimension of relational experience to which Grotowski speaks. Their definition of “extending” seems to be reduced to the verbal:

Extending is the act of expanding one’s boundaries to include the other and offering one’s internal self, images, intuitions, insights, understanding, or personal experience, depending on what is immediately relevant. (p. 105)

However, in an exercise that follows, they invite the reader to “practice being in silence with someone, yet being in direct contact with that person” (p. 106). Extending one’s boundaries and making contact with another cannot depend upon offering anything verbal if it can be done in silence. Geller and Greenberg are clearly struggling to identify a relational experience that goes beyond – and eludes – words.

**The challenge to language**
The philosopher Sheets-Johnstone (2009) writes that:

Bodily feelings are not easily or readily describable, especially when it comes to affectivity and movement. Neither can be adequately or properly described in static terms, which may indeed be why affectivity is commonly thought to be the province of poets and movement the province of the merely practical and thus rightly specified in purely objective terms. The idea that language names things and that its function is to name things gives precedence to stable items in the world, not to dynamic events experienced in a directly felt sense by sentient living bodies … language as a synchronistic ready-made clearly falters … It cannot give a name to something dynamic and be done with it in the sense of having done justice to the phenomenon, much less to one’s knowledge of the phenomenon … What is experientially felt both in an affective sense and in a kinesthetic sense clearly poses a challenge to language not only because such experiences are dynamic, but because language is not experienced in the first place. Indeed, we experience the world and ourselves in wordless ways before we come to language our experience whether for our own benefit or communicatively for others. (pp. 363–4)

It is certainly difficult to find the words for experience in which one has the sense that one is somehow extending. As noted above, Geller and Greenberg use the phrase extending “energetically” in their earlier research paper (2002), but do not use this term in their later book (2012). However, in this later publication, they do recommend that “(t)herapists must have an understanding of energy from different perspectives” (p. 151) and (very briefly) discuss “energy” as something that is:
discussed more often in Eastern traditions or in relation to somatic practices such as yoga, qigong, or tai chi. In tantric practices, it is understood that energy is a life force that can travel throughout the spine and the body. (p. 151)

Yoga, tai chi and qi’gong are Eastern traditions, and none of these practices is, in its original context, considered specifically a somatic practice because both the concept of qi’ (or chi), fundamental to Traditional Chinese Medicine and practices such as tai chi and qi’gong, and the concept of prana, fundamental to yoga, are non-dualist. However, the fact that both are non-dualist concepts with no ready translation into English does not render the two concepts homogeneous. Conflating different traditions as Geller and Greenberg do here seems to be common in the few instances in which “energy” is discussed in academic literature. I have done the same myself (Cameron, 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; 2004) although I now see this conflation as problematic. From a hermeneutic perspective, concepts are a linguistic interpretation rather than a description that is somehow faithful or neutral. Concepts are created within a context and, although they may bear similarities to concepts created in other contexts, they cannot be said to be the same. Language simultaneously describes what is there and creates what was not previously there in that it brings ways of understanding, ways of seeing the world, into being. The world becomes a different place as we name it into a new being.

**Presence as an inter- or an intra-personal phenomenon**

Much of the literature on presence tussles with the question of whether presence is a state of being within oneself, a one-person phenomenon, or relational – a two-person phenomenon. Cooper (2005) positions Geller and Greenberg’s concept of presence as a one-person phenomenon:

> the concept of presence, as defined and examined by Geller and Greenberg (2002) (and to some extent described by Rogers 1980), is construed primarily in terms of the therapist’s experiencing – both within themselves and towards their clients. (p. 5)

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14 Although a recent court ruling in the USA upheld the claim that yoga has a discrete history in the USA, where it often is reductively considered to be a form of physical exercise.

15 See Johnston and Barcan (2006) for a startling – but very conscious – conflation of a number of concepts from qi’ to Kelly Oliver’s (2001) concept of affective energy to the nineteenth-century Theosophists’ reconstruction of Tantric theory (Hammer, 2001) and Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of the body without organs.
He contrasts Geller and Greenberg's concept of *presence* with Mearns' concept of *Relational Depth*, which is construed "in terms of the *relationship* between therapist and client" and concludes that Geller and Greenberg's concept of *presence* is conceptually "somewhat distinct – though closely related – to the notions of an in depth therapeutic connection, which exist between therapist and client, rather than within the former" (p. 5, italics in original).

Although Geller and Greenberg do not enquire into the client’s experience of the therapist’s *presence*, their point is surely that the client will be impacted by the therapist’s *presence*. Having invited the reader to practise being in direct contact while sitting in silence with someone, Geller and Greenberg (2012) ask the reader to “notice how the other is or is not affected by your full presence being in contact with them, even in silence” (p. 106). If extending allows one to make contact in silence and without any “conventional gesticulation that mimes fraternity” (Pemberton, 1976, p. 85) and in a way that might be expected to affect the other, this surely raises questions as to whether *presence* is inherently relational, a two-person rather than a one-person experience.

Geller and Greenberg (2012) say that they:

*initially understood presence as intra-personal but have come to view presence as having a relational component: the therapist in relation to the client and to larger wisdom … relational therapeutic presence, then, is viewed as a triad of relationships; with self, with others, and with a larger sense of expansion or spirituality … this develops into a sense of relational copresence.* (p. 257)

Geller and Greenberg suggest how the other might be affected in a chapter on the intrinsic relational value of being present, in which they say that:

*a reciprocal relationship between the therapists’ felt and communicated presence – clients receiving and feeling therapists as present with them, and both people developing greater presence within and between them – allows for the development of relational presence, for an I–Thou encounter between the two and ultimately it is this mutual presence that leads to therapeutic change.* (p. 52)

Pemberton’s definition of “meeting” is similar:

*Meeting occurs in the space between people. Meeting entails more than awareness, experience, feelings, or a sense of the relationship; it occurs when each person’s presence occurs simultaneously. Meeting is being in relation. This moment of ‘knowing the totality’ of the self and the other is the goal of all intimate relations. Meeting exists in the realm of the paradoxical. One is in
relationship, yet beyond relationship. Each person is united with the other, but
clearly stands alone. At the moment of meeting through presence, one exists
fully alone in absolute relation with the other. (p. 6)

Meeting leads, says Pemberton, to healing. Pemberton (1976) and Geller and
Greenberg (2012), then, position mutual presence as the agent of therapeutic
change. Clearly something this important to practice will have implications
for supervision and training. The next section considers what Geller and
Greenberg say about extending in the context of training and supervision.

Supervision and training
In addressing the question of training, Geller and Greenberg (2012) are
cerned with the cultivation of presence, and do not differentiate extending
as an area of specific concern. Although they do not specifically address the
question of extending, they do discuss ways of cultivating a “sense of inner
expansion” (p. 120). “Expansion” is one of the descriptive categories within
the domain “the experience of process” rather than the “process of presence”
in which “extending” appears. In a chapter that elaborates upon their
research findings, Geller and Greenberg (2012) write that:

a sense of inner expansion, both on a bodily level and on the level of
consciousness, accompanies presence. Therapists interviewed described a sense
of spaciousness and even joy that is the backdrop to all felt experience. There is
immersion in the details of the suffering, accompanied by a larger sense of flow
and energy and calm. (p. 120)

and in 2002, that:

(t)he feeling of spaciousness within oneself is described as a bodily sense of
openness or expansion by therapists. While clearing a space is an active part of
preparing for an inviting in the experience of presence, once presence is
manifested, inner spaciousness becomes the essence of the experience itself.
(p. 81)

Although they describe a sense of inner expansion happening at a “bodily
level”, Geller and Greenberg (2012) otherwise tend to associate somatic
experience with receptivity to the client’s experience (as well as one’s own).
Receptivity “involves fully taking into one’s being, in a palpable and bodily
way, the experience of a session in a way that is kinesthetic, sensual,
physical, emotional and mental” (p. 95). Guidance of how to cultivate the
ability to expand appears not in the section entitled “Somatic approaches to
Cultivating Therapeutic Presence (The Body)”, but in the section entitled
“Expressive Arts, Creativity, and Nature in Cultivating Therapeutic Presence
opening to the creative realm and a deeper flow helps to connect to the third aspect of therapeutic presence, expansion. From this place of expansion our soul or spirit connects to a larger reality and sense of spaciousness that flows from the process of creativity as well as a connection to nature. (p. 219)

Geller and Greenberg (2012) compare Epstein’s (2007) “combination of focused attention and open, non discriminating awareness” that many artists find “essential for the creative process” (Epstein, 2007, p. 184, cited in Geller and Greenberg, 2012, p. 220) and Winnicott’s concept of formless attention, in support of their argument that “the artistic state of creative flow is similar to psychotherapists’ state of therapeutic presence” (p. 220). They recommend photography as a means of cultivating the ability “to see what is present in the moment from different angles and perspectives” (p. 220). Getting out into nature is recommended as an activity that “helps cultivate a larger expansiveness … the ocean helps one connect to the sense of expansion, as does the sky” (p. 221). Geller and Greenberg (2012) offer two (very similar) exercises intended help the reader cultivate a sense of expansion. Although framed in terms of expanding one’s attention, awareness or consciousness, they also speak to bodily experience in that an expansion of awareness is described as a state in which “thoughts and emotion of self and other are sensed on a subtle level where “the quality and experience are palpable and kinesthetically alive” (p. 120).

Geller and Greenberg (2012) do not elaborate upon whether the act of extending is related to experiencing a sense of expansion, but their implication, I think, is that the latter is result of the former. If this is the case, the exercises and practices they suggest in order to cultivate a sense of expansion can, be understood to relate to the ability to extend. They recommend an extraordinary number of practices from Mindfulness to therapeutic drumming as ways of cultivating presence. Their point is not that one should (or is likely to have the time to) practise all that they recommend, but that they are experiential ways of learning. “The main principle of experiential perspective”, they say:

is to check what is said and done with one’s own felt experiencing and allow what we say or do to emerge from out direct contact with out inner experience and wisdom. Experiencing is seen as full of information, richly detailed, intense, fluid, and having the capacity to differentiate meaning. (p. 207)
Geller and Greenberg (2012) do not have much to say about presence and supervision other than that in order for trainee therapists to “truly experience the fruits of presence” it is important that the supervisory relationship is “infused with presence” (p. 260), and that deep learning and wisdom can ensue when supervisors are committed to the value of presence in their own lives and practise being “fully in presence” with trainees\(^{16}\). They suggest, in an argument similar to their argument that therapist-presence engenders client-presence, that “although being in therapeutic presence may stem from the supervisor, this stance allows for an environment for therapeutic presence to emerge and for the trainee to feel open and safe in expressing the issues that need addressing” (p. 261) as well as helping cultivate presence in the supervisee. Geller and Greenberg suggest that in order to be in presence, the supervisor put aside preconceived plans and listen deeply to the trainee’s experience.

**This inquiry, contextualised**

Although a neglected condition (Sanders and Wyatt, 2002), condition six is the lynchpin of Person-centred theory. The therapeutic relationship – and the therapeutic process – ultimately depend upon how the client perceives the therapist. I have indicated the general paucity of Person-centred literature on client perception in general and the silence with regard to how a client may perceive a therapist who “reaches out” or “extends” or, indeed, who “shrinks back’ or otherwise withdraws. This thesis seeks to fill that silence by asking how moving towards or away from another impacts relationship and what the implications might be for practice, supervision and training.

Therapists’ experience of extending is patchily discussed in the literature. That therapists also withdraw is simply not acknowledged. Pemberton (1976) quotes very evocative descriptions and both he and Geller and Greenberg (2002) include extending in their definitions of presence. Both use tantalising terms. Pemberton says extending involves the “psychic movement of one’s boundaries outward”, and Geller and Greenberg write of reaching out “energetically”. Neither Pemberton nor Geller and Greenberg elaborate any

\(^{16}\) Geller and Greenberg specify trainees rather than supervisees, presumably because only those in training have regular supervision in the USA.
further on what they mean by these terms and, if taken literally, they sound a little odd. I have, in this chapter, acknowledged the difficulty of languaging lived, bodily experience and I aim, in this thesis, to engage in this struggle.

Pemberton and Geller and Greenberg are concerned only with the therapist’s experience of presence, as are other researchers into presence, such as Fraelich (1989). I am interested in how extending and withdrawing impacts the therapist, the client and the relationship between them. Geller and Greenberg (2012) and Pemberton (1976) assume that the therapist being “in presence”, which, by their definitions, involves extending, is necessarily beneficial to the client. It may seem counter-intuitive to question this, but I do think that there might be something to be gained from laying such an assumption aside and asking how extending might impact one’s presence in context. The client in Chapter One whom I mistakenly took to be furious was presumably extending when I felt something emanate from him. I was certainly affected by his “full presence”, but not in the way that Geller and Greenberg and Pemberton suggest. Geller and Greenberg, by means of an experiential exercise, address the question of how another might be affected by one’s “full presence being in contact with them” to the reader. I have used a similar exercise (Cameron, 2003b), but suggested that the reader ask their partner. In this thesis, I want to make some of those answers audible.

I am interested in whether these answers might differ depending upon the context. Presence is abstracted throughout the literature and treated as a quality that is homogeneous across different contexts. Mearns (1996), with reference to the passage in which Rogers says that simply his presence is releasing and helpful to the other, says that, “a year before his death Rogers wrote about what he called a quality of ‘presence’” (p. 306). Geller and Greenberg (2012) also say that “in his later writings, Rogers focused on a more central quality, which he called and has been understood by later Person-centred authors as presence” (p. 4). In my reading of the passage Rogers does not claim that there is a decontextualised quality called presence. He says when he is at his best, when he is closest to his inner, intuitive self, when he is somehow in touch with the unknown, when perhaps in a slightly altered state of consciousness, then whatever he does seems to be full of healing. Then, simply his presence is releasing and helpful to the other.
My reading of this passage, in the contexts in which it appears, is that it is descriptive rather than predictive: not “if–then”, but “when–then”. Rogers is not, in this passage, making the scientific prediction with which he is concerned in the earlier part of his career, but struggling to describe an elusive quality of his experience in some contexts. Although elusive, that which he seeks to describe is not abstract. Rogers situates his experience in time, and in space. He does not write about presence as a decontextualised, disembodied quality, but about his presence. He locates his presence in himself as situated in the context of some interactions. Experience belongs to the particular: there is always a context, a there-and-then-ness, or a here-and-now-ness to the experience. Several writers describe presence as “transcendental”. The context makes it clear that they intend the term’s spiritual connotations. However, the ontological context makes a double meaning evident in that they also understand presence to be transcendental in the philosophical sense: as a quality that transcends context. I do not aim to describe the abstract qualities of the experiences with which I am concerned, but to ask how moving towards and away from another impacts relationship in concrete, situated contexts.

The implications for practice that arise from the literature on presence and Relational Depth are, in short, that it is good to be in presence. There is much written about how therapists might cultivate the ability to be in presence and to engage at Relational Depth. I am concerned with only one aspect of presence: extension (and other ways of “moving”). As discussed above, Geller and Greenberg do not differentiate cultivating the ability to extend, although they do discuss cultivating the ability to expand. My interest is not in how therapists may cultivate the ability to extend and withdraw, but in how they might cultivate an awareness of when and how they extend and withdraw, and how this might impact relationship. Geller and Greenberg’s argument with regard to supervision is that the supervisor’s presence will help generate the supervisee’s presence. I do not assume that a supervisor’s extension will necessarily help generate a supervisee’ extension, or that either is inherently desirable.

There is much written about how trainees might learn to cultivate presence and the ability to engage at Relational Depth, but little about the practice of
training. My interest in regard to the implications of my research in relation to training is a little different in that I am interested in what trainers might do to facilitate trainees in becoming aware of how moving towards or away from a client might impact the trainee, the client and the therapeutic relationship.

**Conclusion**
The previous chapter gave an account of how I became interested in my topic and identified my research question as asking how extending towards another, drawing back or “moving” in some other way impacts relationship and what the implications for therapeutic practice, supervision and training might be. This chapter has contextualised my research question by looking at the theoretical reasons as to why one might ask such a question. I went on to examine what the literature says about extending and withdrawing and what the implications might be for practice, supervision and training, and, having done so, contextualised my aims within this literature. The next chapter explains how I went about meeting these aims.
Chapter Three: Methodology

In the last chapter, I suggested that perception is not necessarily cognitive. This chapter begins by developing the argument for non-cognitive perception by (briefly) following a particular strand of phenomenological thinking that runs from Husserl to Heidegger to Merleau-Ponty and Todes, and in doing so presents the philosophical basis for my ontological position. I then position myself in relation to the universalist/interpretativist debate within phenomenology. This section ends by positioning my method of data analysis as a Gadamerian conversation. Having established the philosophical foundation to my methodology, I turn to my research design. I explain how I tried to identify the phenomena in which I am interested in order to make my inquiry, to whom I made my inquiry and in what context. I discuss the kinds of data that I generated and how I collected this data before discussing ethical challenges inherent in the methods I used. I end by discussing how I selected the data that I use in the text and how I understand my text to arise from a Gadamerian conversation with those who participated in my research.

Why phenomenology? The philosophical principles underpinning this research

The non-conceptual account of perception discussed in Chapter Two can be seen as beginning with the radical break that Husserl ([1900] 2001; 1960; 1963), the father of modern phenomenology, makes from Kant and from Descartes’s empiricism in challenging the notion that we use mental representations of the world in order to interact with it17. As noted in Chapter Two, Heidegger ([1927] 1962) is also interested in how we can “get a grip” on the phenomena of the world without mental representation. He recovers from Aristotle the notion of phronesis, or practical wisdom, which matures in the process of interacting with the world and learning from the mistakes we make (Heidegger, [1927] 1962). Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 1962) has us coping with the world, rather than observing it (as Husserl does) or relating to it (as Heidegger does). Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 1962) does not follow Heidegger’s

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17 Wittgenstein also challenges this view.
interest in expertise (the basis of the Dreyfus and Dreyfus ([1986] 1988) model of learning briefly presented in the introductory chapter), but is instead interested in everyday skilful action and perception, in how one’s body draws one towards an optimal grip of a situation, although one has never been in quite that situation before and never will be in quite the same situation again, even if the only difference between one situation and another lies in what one learned the first time (Dreyfus, 2005).

Later Heidegger is very much concerned with language, which he understands as naming things into being (Dreyfus, 2008, online). Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, gives as account of perception that is not only pre-conceptual, but also pre-linguistic. He develops Husserl’s observation that consciousness is always conscious of something into an account of non-representational intentionality. As Dreyfus (2004) explains:

*to move one’s body is to aim at things through it; it is to allow oneself to respond to their call, which is made upon it independently of any representation. To distinguish this body-based intentionality from the representational intentionality studied by Husserl and Cognitive Science, Merleau-Ponty calls the body’s response to the affordances of the situation, motor intentionality. (pp. 15–16)*

Merleau-Ponty’s argument is that we “get an optimal grip” on the things of the world not by thinking about them or by using linguistic constructs, but via bodily responses that are prior to language and reflection. Merleau-Ponty, then, provides me with an ontological basis for identifying the sense of extending towards or withdrawing away from another, and the experience of sensing another doing so.

Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 1962) says that “(n)othing can be more difficult than to know precisely what we see” and that “perception hides itself from itself” (p. 58). However, we can, under certain conditions, become aware of our perceptual process. We are, for instance, generally aware of the objects in a room rather than the way in which light falls upon them, but we can become aware of the quality of light. The premise of the Impressionist project in European art was predicated on the idea that what we see is light falling upon an object; Monet’s haystacks are a ready example of how the same object looks very different in different lights. Merleau-Ponty’s argument is different. He argues that the process of perception brings about a whole, a
gestalt in which we make sense of what we see. The Post-Impressionist Cézanne’s genius, he says in a later essay, is that:

when the over-all composition of the picture is seen globally, perspectival distortions are no longer visible in their own right but rather contribute, as they do in natural vision, to the impression of an emerging order, of an object in the act of appearing, organizing itself before our eyes. ([1948] 1964, p. 14)

We do not see as a camera sees, but adjust what we see in order that it makes sense, that it looks “right”. Dreyfus (2005) illustrates this argument by pointing out that in a “selfie” photograph, one’s nose often seems extraordinarily large because it is nearest the lens. It is also usually the part of the face that is nearest a mirror, but (body dysmorphia apart) one does not perceive one’s nose as bizarrely large when looking in a mirror.

One is normally unaware of perceptual processes. I “just knew” that it would be a bad idea to speak to Alice, the woman who verbally abused my partner in Chapter One but could not say how I knew. “The task of radical reflection”, says Merleau-Ponty, “consists, paradoxically enough, in recovering the unreflective experience of the world” (Merleau-Ponty, [1945] 1962, p. 241, cited in Finlay, 2003, p. 105). My objective is to identify some of the non-cognitive ways in which we perceive someone who extends (or draws back) and to reflect upon the ways in which we do so. Before proceeding to discuss the practicalities of how I went about accessing the pre-reflective processes with which I am concerned, I want to position myself in relation to a fundamental debate within phenomenology.

**Hermeneutic phenomenology**

Fundamental to Husserlian phenomenology is the concept of phenomenological “bracketing”, otherwise known as *phenomenological reduction, or epoche* (from the Greek Sceptics’ notion of abstaining from belief), which involves putting various kinds of intellectual understanding to one side in order to focus instead on how phenomena are experienced, to be open to seeing the world afresh. In the *epoche* of the natural sciences, for example, the researcher puts aside scientific explanations and knowledge in order to return to subjective, pre-reflective experience. (Finlay, 2008). Despite Husserl’s rejection of the “intellectualist” project of trying to identify the rules that help us make sense of meaningless sense impressions (Dreyfus,
2005), his loyalty to the empiricist idiom of “transcendental idealism” (or looking for conditions of the possibility of knowledge, or of consciousness generally (Smith, 2013)), is clearly apparent in his notion of the *transcendental phenomenological reduction*. In this *epoche*, the researcher tries to take a “God’s eye view” (Landridge, 2007).

The idea that it is possible to transcend the systems of belief and understanding in which one is immersed by virtue of living in a particular place and time is rejected by Heidegger (1962) who argues that human beings are always spatially and temporally situated and cannot take a transcendent “God’s eye view.”18. We therefore, he argues, cannot clearly perceive “the things in themselves” by bracketing our own systems belief and understanding; we can only interpret from within those systems of belief and understanding – and interpret we must. Heidegger understands interpretation as constituting an inevitable and basic structure of our “being-in-the-world” (Finlay, 2011). One experiences something as something – we inevitably make some sort of sense of it. Whereas Husserl is interested in the essential character of a phenomenon, Heidegger is interested in how we construe that character, in how we interpret. Phenomenology that proceeds from Heidegger’s philosophy is known as hermeneutic phenomenology, hermeneutics originally being the art of interpreting Scripture, the term deriving from Hermes, messenger of the ancient Greek gods and interpreter of oracles.

Husserl attempts a description of pure experience that is innocent of preconception. Hermeneutic phenomenology, on the other hand, assumes that making sense of what we experience is intrinsic to our way of being in the world. The research discussed in the previous chapter that seeks to identify the essential characteristics of *presence* and *Relational Depth* derives methodologically from Husserl. My methodology derives from Heidegger in that I seek to understand how the phenomena I am interested in are implicitly understood in context, rather than as something that has universal

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18 Heidegger’s rejection of transcendentalism had precedent in Adolf Reinach’s argument that phenomenology should remain allied with a realist ontology, as in Husserl’s Logical Investigations. Roman Ingarden continued the resistance to Husserl’s turn to transcendental idealism (Smith, 2013).
characteristics whatever the context. Hermeneutic phenomenology also takes
the position that not only are we necessarily situated in a particular time and
place from which we cannot liberate our viewpoint, but that experience also
necessarily happens in a context and that our understanding is mediated by
context. Hermeneutic phenomenologists interpret experience and the
meaning things have for us by looking to our contextual relations to things in
the world (Smith, 2013). My inquiry – exploring how the way in which one
“moves” affects the quality of one’s presence in situated encounters –
assumes that when another person somehow senses that one has “reached
out” or “pulled away”, this will be meaningful to them and that the context
in which it happens will be implicated in the meaning that is made.

My quest to understand how the phenomena with which I am concerned
are understood in context – how we perceive someone who, for example,
extends – is predicated on the assumption that although the experiences with
which I am concerned might be difficult to articulate, and although they may
often happen outside conscious awareness and in this sense be pre-reflective
and unsymbolised, they are meaningful. It is difficult to say quite what made
me keep a distance from Alice before she launched into a tirade of abuse
against my partner or why I fell into a hug with Bill as I put my hands out to
steady him, but whatever I sensed, and however I sensed it, I understood it
in a particular way and this understanding guided my response to each.

The question of whether one can put one’s ways of understanding the
world to one side also impacts what one understands one’s data to show.
Those who follow Husserl attempt to identify the essence of the phenomena
they explore – as do the researchers who identify the essential characteristics
of presence and Relational Depth. This is essentially a part of the Modernist
project of identifying universal truths, and is criticised by hermeneutic
phenomenologists for attempting to transcend both the context in which the
phenomenon appears, and the context in which the researcher is situated.
Hermeneutic phenomenology bids me account for the ways in which I
impact, co-construct and interpret my data (Finlay, 2011). I approach my data
in the belief that not only will a research participant’s experience and
understanding of the phenomena be impacted by their context, but also that
my understanding of their understanding will be impacted by my context.
Much as I might try to understand another person’s experience from their point of view, I cannot entirely leave my own point of view behind. We inevitably stand in (perhaps only slightly) different places and see different horizons. My methodology derives from Heidegger in that I seek to understand how the phenomenon I am interested in is implicitly understood in context rather than as something that has universal characteristics whatever the context. I also recognise that my understanding of what I am told is subject to my own cultural and historical filters.

Gadamer’s philosophy of conversation as an attempt to understand rather than convince, and his concept of a *Horizontverschmelzung* (“fusion of horizons”) or a meeting of different perspectives, guided me in deciding to work with any data I might collect from others in the spirit of a conversation that is welcoming of both similarities and difference. As I will argue, Gadamer’s thinking is, in many ways, very much in tune with Rogers (or, at least, with my understanding of Rogers). Gadamer has been used within counselling and psychotherapy research as a resource in understanding what happens during therapeutic conversation (Eaton, 1998) but, perhaps surprisingly, not as a resource within Person-centred research. Some of the research literature in education and nursing studies draw upon Gadamer and others whose philosophy underlies my research design, and so I will refer to theses studies in discussing the principles that informed the way I generated and collected data.

**Research design**

My biggest challenge in asking how extending, drawing back or “moving” in some other way impacts relationship and what the implications for therapeutic practice, supervision and training might be, was to find some way of accessing or pointing to the largely pre-reflective and pre-linguistic experiences with which I am concerned. This section begins by discussing some of the literature on pre-reflective experience as an object of phenomenological research and accounts for my decision to use experiential exercises in order to point to the experiences with which I am concerned and so make them available for reflection. I then discuss how I generated

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19 Rogers (1951) makes a similar argument with regard to empathic understanding.
accounts of those experiences.

**The challenge of pointing to pre-linguistic experience**

Experiences that are largely pre-reflective and pre-linguistic are, by definition, difficult to identify. My own experience of the kinds of experience that I want to access is most readily available to me, and I have, in some of my previous attempts to write about this subject, used descriptions of my own embodied own experience (Cameron, 2013). Although I do include some descriptions of my own experience in this thesis I decided not to rely upon them. I do not know if, and to what degree, my experiences may be particular to me and whether there is any reason to imagine that my account may be recognisable or useful to others.

Paley (1998) identifies that what he calls the “incorrigibility principle”: the assumption implicit in much of the lived experience research in nursing studies that people’s experience and their accounts of it cannot be challenged, that their interpretations of the world cannot be “wrong, misguided, distorted, or lop-sided” (p. 821). The incorrigibility principle, he says, implies that the suggestion that the subjective might be in some way “incorrect” is tantamount to denying a person’s claim that they had a particular experience or that it was not as they described. Paley argues that the incorrigibility principle is based on a misunderstanding of Heidegger, and that it confuses two ideas. The first, which he considers “trivially true”, is that someone’s experience is inalienably their own and must therefore be what they say it is. The second, which he considers “straightforwardly false”, is that the interpretation built into the experience must be a faithful reflection of what the person’s world is actually like and that no-one else can say that the account of the world presupposed by their description of the experienced is flawed. He argues that the incorrigibility principle is untenable from a Heideggerian perspective, and that although Heidegger’s position is that we always and already have an understanding, such an understanding is not sacrosanct. Research that assumes the incorrigibility principle becomes, he says, “a code for a narrow band of subjectivity which is immune to external correction, alternative ways of construing” (p. 822). Had I relied upon my own experience, any account I might produce would have been restricted to
my experience and my ways of construing my experience. I decided to seek the experience of others, not with the assumption that their experiences might be in some way more true than my own, but that they might well be different – or similar – in ways that might yield useful understanding.

In seeking accounts of the experiences of others, my first concern was to identify or point to the experiences with which I am concerned in order that I might inquire about them. Phenomenological research often begins with a “brief unbiased statement or research question whose purpose is to specify the focus of investigation” (Spinelli, 2005, p. 136). This approach might be relatively unproblematic when it comes to a phenomenon that is symbolised in a generally agreed manner, such as bereavement. There will, of course, always be many perspectives and a range of experiences, but it seems safe to assume that those asked will easily understand that the question is about experiencing the death of someone with whom one has had a relationship of some kind. Experiences for which there is not a generally accepted symbolisation are less easily specified in an unbiased manner, as the history of research into Relational Depth illustrates. Cooper (2005) defines Relational Depth for his participants, as do Knox (2008) and Knox and Cooper (2010). Knox (2008) tries to ameliorate the tautological trap of researching the nature of something that they have already defined by “acknowledging that (respondents’) experiences might be very different from the definition given” (p. 183). McMillan and McLeod (2006) do not give their participants a definition so as to avoid “imposing a set of assumptions on informants concerning the nature of Relational Depth” (p. 280) and instead ask participants to describe their therapy relationships in general terms, to see whether descriptions of Relational Depth were spontaneously generated, and then follow this up by probing for specific aspects of Relational Depth that had been specified by Mearns and Cooper (2005).

The kind of experience I wish to explore is even less easily defined in an unbiased or, indeed, any other manner. Van Manen (2007), using the term “pathic” (which derives from pathos meaning suffering and also passion) to refer to “the general mood, sensibility, sensuality, and felt sense of being in the world”, acknowledges that “(m)uch research starts from the assumption that knowledge is cognitive and reflective and thus it already passes over
other, more pathetic forms of knowing that may actually constitute a major
dimension of our experience and practice” (p. 21). “The pathetic dimensions of
practice”, he says:

are pathetic precisely because they reside or resonate in the body, in our relations
with others, in the things of our world, and in our very actions. These are the
corporeal, relational, temporal, situational, and actional kinds of knowledge
that cannot necessarily be translated back or captured in conceptualizations
and theoretical representations. In other words, there are modes of knowing
that inhere so immediately in our lived practices – in our body, in our
relations, and in the things around us – that they seem invisible. (van Manen,
1997, p. 22)

“We have”, he says, “an implicit, felt understanding of ourselves in
situations even though it is difficult sometimes to put that understanding
into words” (p 21). Sheets-Johnstone (1990), who is also concerned with the
pre-reflective, the pre-symbolic, the bodily, identifies a “corporeal turn” in
philosophical thinking about language. The corporeal turn seeks to return us
to the bodily nature of experience from which, Sheets-Johnstone (2009)
arouses, language arises. Sheets-Johnstone, critical of the idea that concepts
are a purely linguistic creation, claims that “fundamental linguistic concepts
are grounded in elemental corporeal concepts forged in the course of
infancy”(p. 365), and that:

elemental spatial concepts such as near, far, open, close, inside, and outside are
contingent on kinetic/kinaesthetic experience; elemental qualitative concepts
such as smooth, sudden, intense, attenuated, and soft, are embodied in affective
experience. Affective/tactile-kinesthetic concepts are clearly not lexical
creations but the result of affective/tactile-aesthetic experience. (2009, p. 365)

Such experiences, she says:

are clearly not tied to static phenomena but to dynamic happenings and
experience. Indeed when concepts are regarded as strictly lexical creations –
coming pre-packaged with the language one speaks and reads – the challenge of
langauging affective/tactile-kinaesthetic experiences never surfaces and the
very possibility of the challenge is denied. (p. 364)

Sheets-Johnstone is particularly concerned with the challenge of
langauging dynamics. The idea that language names things, she says, gives
precedence to stable items and “not to dynamic events experienced in a
directly felt sense by sentient living bodies” (p. 363). Language falters in
producing a descriptive rendering of a dynamic phenomenon. “What is
experientially felt both in an affective sense and in a kinesthetic sense clearly
poses a challenge to language”:
not only because such experiences are dynamic, but because language is not
experience in the first place. Indeed, we experience the world and ourselves in
wordless ways before we come to language our experience whether for our own
benefit or communicatively for others. (Sheets-Johnstone, 2009, p. 364)

Sheets-Johnstone goes on to say that she is going to write about the
experience of being inside. My subject matter is even more difficult to
articulate. I cannot simply say that I want to ask about the sense of
movement one has while sensing oneself “reach out” to another, and the
experience and impact of perceiving such a reaching out, unless I use
inverted commas to indicate that I do not mean reaching out physically.
Even then my claim that there is a kind of “movement” that is not a physical
movement demands to be contextualised if it is to be at all meaningful.
Colloquial figures of speech such as “reaching out”, one’s “heart going out”,
and “shrinking back” mean different things in different contexts. Selecting
any experience as a research topic inevitably decontextualises it to some
degree, and the figures of speech I have used so far become ambiguous out
of context.

Todres (2007) also argues that there has been an overemphasis on
language and draws on Gendlin’s philosophical work to recover what he
calls a “minority voice in postmodern dialogue” that acknowledges the
involvement of the body. Gendlin, he says, “wants to remind us of how the
body is intimately implicated in what things mean in that we live meanings
through bodily participation in the world” (p. 33) and to draw our attention
to:

> a phase of knowing that is prior to symbolisation. Here, the intimate inhabiting
that the lived body experiences in its interactions with the world is the primary
source of knowing that makes language meaningful and possible. We often take
this level of knowing for granted. Although such knowing lends itself to
language, it is pre-reflective. (p. 33)

The idea that pre-reflective, pre-linguistic experience “looks for words”
(Todres, 2007) rather than “the commonly used metaphor of our being on a
raft, stuck with the concepts we have” which “implicitly denies the
possibility of inventing anew” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2009, p. 365) does raise the
challenge of languaging experience.

Whether research participants can accurately describe (or even know)
their experience is a concern in the interview literature (Stuart, 2013). I was
interested in what the experiences described meant to those involved in my research, rather than whether they were described in a way that might be said to be “accurate”, and did not expect such meanings to necessarily remain static. However, I was very much concerned with the question of whether I could describe the experiences with which I am concerned sufficiently well that those to whom I addressed my questions understood what it was that I was asking about. Judging from communications I have had from readers in response to my previous work, the ways in which I have chosen to render into language the experience of “extending” and “drawing back”, and of sensing another do so, speaks to the experience of some. However, I am aware that others have concluded that these kinds of experience are peculiar to me. I am quite sure that they are not. Although I am sure these kinds of experiences are not peculiar to me, I wonder if my own experience of them may be particular to me. Not only might my particular experience not speak to others, but the ways in which I describe my experience will not necessarily speak to others whose experience is somehow similar to mine. Finlay (2003) bids us “set aside the proposition that the imagery fully encompasses the phenomenon” (p. 107). Description always falls short of its object. Yet even phenomenological research that may be said to investigate experiences that are particularly difficult to put into words – such as Corazza’s (2006) research into “near-death experiences” that might be experienced at times other than being close to death – tends to rely on written descriptions or definitions in order to identify the phenomenon under investigation. As Knox (2008) acknowledges, others’ experiences might be very different from the definition used by the researcher.

When I run the training workshops briefly described in the first chapter, I identify the kind of experience with which I am concerned by using experiential exercises. Doing so frees me from the problem of trying to make my description of my own (possibly very particular) experience recognisable to others. These exercises enable me to point to the experiences with which I am concerned by provoking their occurrence in others. During the period in which I was conducting my research, I was asked by a counselling agency to run a one-day workshop as a continuing professional development opportunity for therapists and trainee therapists. I was also asked to run all
three workshops as an eight-week-long university course open to university students and therapists from outside the university. This course ran four times. I was also asked to run a morning’s session on another university course. The basic structure of all these courses consisted of experiential exercises, followed by discussion. I was granted permission from the University Ethics Committee to gather data from the one-day workshop and all of the university courses. I will say more about how I did so presently.

Before doing so, I must acknowledge that even when using experiential exercises, the problem of languaging experience remained in that I had to find a way of articulating that I wanted the participants to “extend” or “move” in some other way. As noted above, the figures of speech that I might use – “reach out”, “draw yourself back in”, etc. – mean different things in different contexts. One may reach out to another verbally or by means of overt behaviour as well as in the sense of feeling a movement towards another when one when one is not actually physically moving. Were I to ask research participants to “reach out”, or “open up” to another they might well assume that I was asking them to do so verbally. Colloquialisms such as “reach out” and “draw back” lose their ordinariness and accessibility in a non-colloquial register. I began with an exercise designed to invoke the experience of “reaching out” and “drawing back” and, in giving the verbal instructions, I was mindful of my tone of voice when using colloquial phrases in an academic and professional context.

I found myself “speaking” with my hands a lot. I also employed a means by which my body could “speak” more directly to the bodies of those with whom I was trying to communicate: I demonstrated what it was I wanted them to do. I did not demonstrate in order that they could see what I did, as there was nothing much to see, but so that they could feel what I did. Stuart (2013), writing about the intercorporality that arises as an Alexander\(^{20}\) teacher works with a pupil, refers to “the affective resonances felt between teacher and pupil when there is a co-ordinated flow of their somatosensory co-intentional activity” (p. 314), and writes of a:

\(^{20}\)The Alexander Technique was developed by F.M. Alexander in the 1890s as a means of relieving breathing problems and hoarseness after medical intervention and advice had failed (Stuart, 2013, p. 317).
“letting go” as teacher and pupil move more fully “into the moment,” which is to say, they become more aware of the pleniscient vitality of their experience as always co-livingly enkinaesthetically active. We might now say that the phrase more accurately describes the phenodynamical experience of the teacher–pupil anticipatory enkinaesthetic synrhythmic regulation. (p. 318)

In other words, the pupil’s body responds as the teacher adjusts their own body. My aim was not to help regulate posture, but to invoke a bodily recognition of the experience of, for instance, extending, and a recognition of the experience of sensing another person extend. Communication of what it was I was inviting those who participated in my research to do remained a challenge even with a combination of invoked experience, bodily demonstration, colloquial phrases and many hand gestures, but the data I collected suggests that I was able, in some instances at least, to communicate reasonably successfully.

**The research context**

Working in a training context in which participants are accustomed to conducting experiential exercises in dyads and asking for feedback enabled me to use a familiar formula in setting up exercises in which both people in each dyad took turns to be in the role of the person “moving” and to be the person perceiving and being impacted by another’s “movement”. Everyone had the opportunity to perceive another’s “movement” and to give and receive feedback on how one’s experience of another person is impacted by the ways in which they move. The exercises enable those performing them to inquire as to how they are being perceived as they, for instance, extend towards the other. They also enable the person providing this feedback to become aware, or more aware, of their process of perception. Merleau-Ponty’s ([1945] 1962) methodology in *The Phenomenology of Perception* follows Heidegger’s lead in describing what we experience while coping with the world rather than describing it from a detached stance. The workshop exercises enabled me to facilitate others in accessing real-time, personally engaged experience of the ways in which we “reach out”, “shrink back” or “move” in some other way, and of the experience of perceiving others doing so. We are, as Merleau-Ponty points out, normally aware of what we perceive – the objects that we see, for instance – but not of perception itself.

He uncovers the process of perception in two ways: he looks at instances
in which something interrupts the usual process of perception, and he slows the process down. The exercises I used slow down the process of perception. They enable the person giving feedback to pause at several stages in the process of perceiving and making sense of another’s “movement”. The exercises are therefore designed to facilitate both partners in accessing information about how extending, etc. impacts relationship. The person “reaching out” or “moving” in some other way is given feedback on how doing so impacts the quality of their presence as perceived by another. The person giving the feedback has an opportunity to observe how their own perceptual process works to impact the relationship.

Those attending the one-day workshop and the university course were all therapists or therapists in training and so interested in joining me in exploring what the implications of “moving” in various ways might be for the therapeutic relationship. Situating my research in a training context therefore enabled me to explore the potential implications for practice in the company of other therapists who were also interested in what we might discover. Some of the course content is specifically concerned with supervision, and considers how some of the implications for supervision might be addressed. Situating my research in the context of my training work also enabled me to implicitly consider implications for training. Using experiential exercises, and doing so in a training context, thus enabled me to identify to my research participants the experiences with which I am concerned. Furthermore, doing so enabled me to enter into conversation with a group of therapists and trainee therapists who were diverse, not only in terms of professional experience, but also in terms of nationality. The next section explains how we generated accounts and how I collected these accounts.

**Generating and collecting accounts**
The challenge of languaging experience was inherent in generating accounts of what was experienced. Phenomenological research tends to rely upon interviews and questionnaires\(^{21}\). Both methods potentially generate rich

\(^{21}\) Some also employ observation – clearly an inappropriate method for me in researching that which is not observable.
phenomenological description. Stuart (2013), for instance, uses the elicitation interview in which the participant is asked to focus on a particular experience and the interviewer guides the interviewee towards:

*a concrete evocation of a past situation ... the interviewer helps him to rediscover the spatio-temporal context of the experience (when, where, with whom?), and then with precision the visual, auditory, tactile and kinesthetic, olfactory and possibly gustatory sensations associated with the experience, until the past situation is ‘re-lived,’ to the point that it is more present than the interview situation.* (Petitmengin, 2006, p. 244f, cited in Stuart, 2013, p. 315)

I wanted to collect accounts of several experiences (being with someone who “extends”, who “pulls back”, and is “up”, “down” or is “beside themselves” etc). I imagine that interviewing a participant in such an intense manner about several experiences would have been exhausting for us both. I might have interviewed in a less intense manner, or even, like Geller and Greenberg (2002), interviewed for a general rather than a particular experience, but I was interested in particular experiences in particular contexts.

Langdridge (2007) emphasises that:

*no method provides the tools to find all answers to all questions (assuming we ever had the knowledge and insight to ask them), and it is important, therefore, not be too obsessed with methodology. There is a tendency in psychology, in particular, to think that by rigidly following a particular method, we will conduct good-quality (i.e. valid) research ... So, while it is important to be rigorous and systematic, this should not mean the unquestioning and rigid adoption of methods.* (p. 167)

Todres (2007) suggests that a phenomenological orientation towards lived experience “requires us to use accounts of experiences that may be gathered in different ways” (p. 27). Situating my research in the one-day workshop and university course enabled me to collect different kinds of data in different ways. I was able to gather data from many more people than I would have had the time or energy to interview, and I was able to generate data without having to ask those participating to do anything they would not anyway already be doing. The next section explains what kinds of accounts I generated, how I generated them and how I collected these accounts.
**Verbal accounts**

After each of the experiential exercises I use in the workshop, I invite the participants to re-form as a large group to discuss what they experienced during the exercise. The University Ethics Committee granted me permission to audio-record the one-day workshop. I earlier discussed the difficulties with which I was faced in language experience, and expected that those from whom I collected accounts might also experience difficulties in articulating what they had experienced. A transcript of the recording enabled me to capture the participants’ process of struggling to describe their experiences, a process that I anticipated might be lost in written accounts.

Todres (2007) and Sheets-Johnstone (2009) argue that the body must be allowed to speak if one is to language lived experience successfully. Sheets-Johnstone says that “(o)nly if the word resonates in some bodily felt ways, whether evoking incipient movement responses or kinetic/kinesthetic imagery does it rise to the challenge of language experience” (p. 367). For Todres (2007), who is also concerned with finding words that effect a bodily response, language and bodily experience “cannot simply be reduced to one another – both require one another as partners in a conversation, and both phases (embracing and languaging) constitute both limits and freedoms in this conversation – hopefully a productive tension” (pp. 33–4). “Sense-making”, says Todres:

> is not just a personal cognitive process but requires the participation of the ‘lived body’ as an authenticating or validating procedure. Such lived body participation is always ‘more than words can say’, and the experience of ‘sense-making’ involves an engagement with a kind of language that is bodily and sensorily involved. (p. 30)

Todres says that in identifying speaking as “special case of bodily interaction”, Gendlin highlights:

> the primacy of the body and its close relationship to language, Gendlin forges a continuity in which knowing is both an embodied and linguaged process. These components of knowing cannot be reduced to one another and are both required in the rhythm of closeness and distance that is required for meaningful knowing to occur. ‘Closeness’ refers to bodily-participative-knowing, while ‘distance’ refers to the language-formulating process. Knowledge is thus not just reasoned but recognised, and this involves an aesthetic dimension in which the intimacy of bodily responsiveness is implicated. (Todres, 2007, p. 34)

Audio-recording the one-day workshop enabled me to use this “special
case of bodily interaction”. My intention in recording the workshop participants’ accounts minutes after they had done the exercises was to ensure that they were close to their experience as they embarked upon the process of finding words that, to use Todres’ term, “work”. Todres positions research participants who engage in a struggle to find the words that work as co-researchers rather than informants. He says that he often finds that when words work for his co-researcher, they often work for him too, not only in deepening his understanding, but also in awakening something of the lived sense of what his co-researcher describes. He suggests a notion of “interembodiment as a possible component of ‘intersubjective validity’ and one which can accommodate both unique personal references as well as shared dimensions” (p. 30). Todres proposes that:

> When we talk to one another about the ways in which we have personally built meaningful knowledge that has both theoretical and practical implications, it often comes down to the experience of ‘sense-making’ and how this ‘sense-making’ can be carried into the ‘give and take’ of shared life. Such ‘sense-making’ appears to me an ongoing and progressive, though not linear, practice. (p. 30)

My intention in instituting a practice of returning to the large group to share and discuss what was experienced during the exercises was to allow for a communal process of sense making that incorporated difference as well as similarity.

Van Manen (2007) argues that professional practice depends on an attunement to the sense and sensuality of the body; personal presence; relational perceptiveness; and other aspects of knowledge that are, in part, pre-reflective, pre-theoretic and pre-linguistic. In the above sections, I discussed how I sought to bring “attentive awareness to the things of the world as we live them rather than as we conceptualize or theorize them” (van Manen, 2001, p. 460) by using experiential exercises and verbal accounts in an attempt to access the immediacy of experience and to honour the difficult process of languageing these experiences. However, my research questions call for reflection as well immediacy. In the following section I discuss how I also accessed accounts that had sufficient distance from the experience to allow for greater reflection and how, in generating these accounts, I encouraged a particular kind of reflection.
**Written accounts**

One of the limitations of working with verbal accounts collected in the context of a one-day workshop is that although I build in time for reflection and discussion of what the implications might be for the therapeutic relationship, such time is limited. As a trainer, I hope that once the workshop has ended, the participants will recognise the kind of experiences provoked by the exercises in their personal and professional lives and reflect further so as to enrich their personal and professional development. As a researcher, I wanted to access this reflection, but could not do so in this context without making considerable demands on those willing to help me do so. The opportunity to access such reflection without making unnecessary demands arose when I was asked to run my series of workshops as a university course. I initially sought permission from the University Ethics Committee to record group discussions during the university course. A later section on how I engaged with the ethical issues that arose in relation to data collection explains why I abandoned this idea. Instead, I sought (and was granted) permission to invite the students to volunteer their written assignments as data for my research.

I anticipated that there were two potential risks in relying upon verbal accounts of what was experienced during the exercises. The first risk is that trying to describe pre-linguistic experience is so difficult that what is described can seem so utterly peculiar as to be unrecognisable to anybody else (this, perhaps, is what has led some readers of my previous work to conclude that the experiences I describe are peculiar to me). The second risk is that drawing attention to these experiences in a training setting (or in psychotherapeutic literature) risks an unintended implication that these experiences are exclusive to the therapeutic relationship. I wanted the written accounts to offset these risks.

**Anecdotes**

Having attuned the students to the particular kind of experience in which I am interested through the use of experiential exercises, thus offsetting the risk of any description I might offer them being incomprehensible, I wanted to orientate their subsequent reflection to “that region of lived experience
where the phenomenon dwells in recognizable form” (van Manen, 2011). I wanted, as both a trainer and a researcher, to encourage the students to allow a bodily recognition of what they had experienced in class into their experience of various relationships, to the take the awareness they had gained through the exercises into their professional and personal lives and use it to reflect upon actual, situated encounters. As a trainer I hoped that this would prevent them from making overly simplistic theorisations on the basis of limited experience. As a researcher I hoped that accounts that contextualised the experiences with which I am concerned within various kinds of relationship might render them more widely recognisable in a variety of contexts – and might generate useful understanding about the significance of context.

Some of the written accounts my research generated were rich phenomenological descriptions of experiences and some were anecdotes concerning these experiences. In both cases the writer had time in which to reflect upon their experiences, and to reflect upon their choice of words. “The act of practice,” says van Manen (2007):

*depends on the sense and sensuality of the body, personal presence, relational perceptiveness, tact for knowing what to say and do in contingent situations, thoughtful routines and practices, and other aspects of knowledge that are in part prereflective, pre-theoretic, pre-linguistic. If we wish to further study and enhance such pathic dimensions of professional practice we need a language that can express and communicate these understandings. This language needs to remain oriented to the experiential or lived sensibility of the lifeworld. For example, experiential stories provide opportunities for evoking and reflecting on practice.* (p. 20)

Henrikkson and Tone (2009) also promote the evocative powers of a well-told story or anecdote in phenomenological writing:

*An anecdote speaks to us much in the same way as a good novel or a beautiful poem does. It evokes feelings of recognition, points to experiential possibilities that we have never encountered before, or leads to thoughts whose possibility we were not earlier aware of.* (p. 38)

In eliciting accounts of experiences that were evoked by the exercises, as well as those that were provoked, I hoped that the experiences would become more meaningful, not only to the students, but also to the eventual readers of this thesis. Anecdotes in phenomenological research can be understood, says van Manen (2007), not merely as illustrations to “butter up”
a difficult or boring text, but as a methodological device to make comprehensible something that otherwise eludes us. Such anecdotes are usually derived from the accounts of informants, but written by the researcher. The students who wrote assignments had considerable freedom to choose how to write and several offered wonderfully illustrative anecdotes. I saw no reason to try to tamper with what they had written. I also include some of my own anecdotes, and together they illustrate a range of experiences in different contexts.

I felt that it was important, in terms of managing my dual role as a trainer and researcher, that I elicited written anecdotes. Although swapping anecdotes is a common trope in social conversation, it would, I think, have become problematic had I actively encouraged it during group discussions on the course: unless particularly succinct, anecdotes can become wearing in a classroom. I anticipated that writing rather than speaking would give those who have contributed stories the opportunity to tell them well.

Nunkoosing (2005), writing about interviewing as a research method, identifies that all stories are likely to change over time and in their retelling. What becomes accessible through the process of the interview, he says, “is often a construction of experiences into words that is a product of the interview itself” (p. 702). A similar argument might be made in relation to the anecdotes, and even the phenomenological descriptions, that I collected. Although the exercises enabled me to point to the experiences with which I am concerned, they did so in particular ways and in a particular context. In designing the exercises and putting them together in a particular order, I “said” something. I raised possibilities, asked questions. Those attending the one-day workshop clearly made their contribution in the context of a conversation. Although the university students wrote their assignments alone, they did so in the context of elaborating upon what they had learned during the course, and so their assignments might also be said to have been written in the context of a conversation. Meaning, say Holstein and Gubrium (1997) is:

*not elicited merely by apt questioning, nor simply transported through respondent replies; it is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter. Respondents are not so much repositories of knowledge –*
treasuries of information awaiting excavation, so to speak – as they are constructors of knowledge in collaboration with interviewers. (p. 114, cited in Nunkoosing, 2005, p. 702)

The same is true of those with whom I worked, and whom, using Gadamer’s (1975) term, I thought of as “partners in conversation”. We found, though the use of experiential exercises, a way of speaking about experiences that are often pre-linguistic and pre-reflective. In doing so we constructed a way of understanding them as a non-verbal aspect of relationship. Our relationship, of course, consisted of the non-verbal as well as the verbal. The next section looks at some aspects of our relationship as embodied beings.

The embodied presence of the researcher

Finlay and Evans (2009) bid the phenomenological researcher take account of how the relationship between themselves and those with whom they conduct their research itself generates data. Drawing upon Hycner’s (1991) notion of a “between” in the therapeutic relationship, Finlay (2011) argues that the process of relationally oriented research can be understood to parallel the process of relationally oriented counselling/psychotherapy in that “research data does not ‘speak for itself’ but is born within the between of the researcher-co-researcher encounter where they intermingle in ‘pre-analytic participation’” (Finlay, p. 166).

Finlay (2006) is very much concerned with the research encounter as an embodied relationship and encourages the researcher to take note of bodily experience. Her encouragement to seek data in the embodied relationship between researcher and participant is particularly pertinent to a project whose topic is embodied relationship. However, my focus is somewhat different from that of Finlay, and Finlay and Evans, in that I am interested in the process, rather than the content, of the “between”. Finlay identifies “bodily empathy”, “embodied self-awareness” and “embodied intersubjectivity” as phenomena that happen in the “between”. All are concerned with emotional content, with how one person can “pick up” another’s emotional experience. Although I do not dispute that one might sense another person’s emotional experience with and within one’s own body (Cameron, 2002c), my focus is somewhat different from Finlay’s in that I am interested not in content, but in the processes by which extending and
moving in other ways impacts relationship.

I interacted with those attending the one-day workshop and the university course in multiple ways. I demonstrated the experiential exercises and on occasion the university students did an exercise with me rather than with each other. We also interacted in wordless ways by virtue of simply being in the same room, aware at some level of the quality of each other’s presence. This awareness underlay our interactions as we had group discussions, as the participants worked in dyads and as I worked with dyads and individuals. Some of the students write about their interactions with me and I respond by giving something of how I experienced the interaction. I discuss the ethical issues involved in doing so below, along with the other ethical issues inherent in my methods of data collection.

**Ethical challenges**

Clearly, my position as the trainer/tutor on both the one-day workshop and the university course introduced structural power imbalances in addition to those already inherent in the researcher–research participant relationship. One of my principal ethical concerns therefore was that those attending the one-day workshop and the university course might feel pressurised into contributing to my research. As Ferguson et al. (2004) point out, students may feel under pressure even if the teacher-researcher is not intending to apply pressure, and so “involuntarily” volunteer in order to remain in good standing with the teacher. Diamond and Reidpath (1992), cited in Loftin et al. (2011), emphasise the importance of recruiting students in an ethical manner. The different contexts of the university course and the counselling agency gave rise to different power relationships, posed different problems and required different procedures in order that I might recruit in an ethical manner.

**Recruiting and gathering data from the one-day workshop**

The counselling agency offered the one-day workshop as an opportunity for continuing professional development to therapists and therapists in training. Participation was entirely voluntary and there was no element of assessment involved. Most, if not all, the participants paid the agency an attendance fee and so the workshop did not have the seductive power of being free. The
agency was agreeable to my recording the workshop for research purposes and, following their agreement, I waived my fee in appreciation of their cooperation. The administrative process enabled me to make sure that it was clear in the advertising and promotional material that I would be audio-recording for research purposes. I provided potential participants with an information sheet (Appendix 1) and made opportunities for them to ask questions and raise concerns. Anyone who was not comfortable being recorded had the option to not attend, but to come to one of my workshops at a future date if they wanted to. I asked those participating to consent in writing to being recorded (Appendix 2). Once the workshop started I asked again if anyone had questions or concerns. I did not allow the voice recorders to disappear into either the physical or a metaphorical background as the workshop progressed so as to mitigate against the possibility of someone forgetting that they were being recorded. I sought individual written consent to using what those attending had said after the workshop ended (Appendix 3). Given the spontaneous nature of discussion and the tendency of therapy training to sometimes elicit sensitive material, I invited everyone to specify anything that they did not want me to use.

As those who attended the workshop were under no kind of obligation to be there, I might reasonably have taken their agreement to being recorded as implicit, but I double-checked before the workshop began that all present were willing to be recorded. Not only were they willing to be recorded, they took an active interest in the process of data collection. Much of the workshop consists of participants working privately in dyads. As they departed to do this for the first time, one participant asked if they should take the recording equipment with them. This possibility had not occurred to me. I checked the idea out with the rest of the group and nobody objected – which, of course, is not the same thing as everyone wholeheartedly consenting. Fortunately, I had not brought enough voice recorders for every dyad and so those who might have felt less comfortable with their private conversation being heard by me had a graceful means out if they wanted to take it. The number of recordings returned from work in dyads varied, perhaps suggesting that anyone who had a voice recorder but was not entirely comfortable recording a particular conversation chose not to do so.
I decided not to pursue the possibility of recording the next two workshops in the series. Participants often share very personal material in the second workshop, and I did not want to inhibit participants, nor to give them reason to regret sharing more than they had perhaps intended to. I invite participants in the third workshop, which focuses on supervision, to bring issues from their client work. Sharing client material in a training group that has made a confidentiality agreement is quite different from allowing that material to be used for research purposes. Asking participants (most of whom had only have known me for all of two weekends) to trust me to protect client confidentiality on their behalf seemed likely to have an inhibitory effect and to be an irresponsible thing to ask, especially of inexperienced therapists in training.

**Recruiting and gathering data from the university course**

Running the workshops as a university course brought a far greater possibility that potential participants might feel coerced into participating in my research and also a greater possibility that I might experience a conflict of roles. Polkinghorne (1991) and Munhall (1988) (cited in Grafanaki, 1996) point out that qualitative research designs are necessarily fluid and require choices to be made throughout the research process. I made some changes to my original research design as ethical issues came to light. As previously mentioned, I initially approached the University Ethics Committee for permission to ask the university students’ consent to audio-record group discussions. However, I applied much later than I ought to have done, and permission was denied on the grounds that the students were not aware from the outset that recording for research purposes was a possibility. The course had already begun by the time the Committee made this decision and it had by then become apparent to me that recording this particular group of students would be likely to inhibit discussion. Loftin et al. (2011) emphasise the importance of following ethical procedures and guidelines. Doing so is, in my view, a minimum requirement, but not always sufficient. As Grafanaki (1996) points out, it is impossible to predict all the possible risks and ethical dilemmas that might occur in the process of qualitative research. The process of applying for ethical approval engenders its own momentum, but I like to
think that, had I been granted permission to record the university course, I would have prioritised my responsibilities as a tutor over my desires as a researcher and not done so. Procedural ethical approval would not have rendered asking that particular cohort of students an appropriate, wise – or fair – decision.

I might easily have reapplied, in a more timely fashion, for permission to record class discussions in the later presentations of the university course, but decided not to do so. In addition to the structural power relationship between the students and me there were also multiple power relationships amongst the students. In addition to differences in terms of gender, age, social class, nationality and sexuality there were also some very big differences in terms of professional experience and academic status. The first cohort of university students contained quite a number who were also tutors on other courses and taught some of the people who, on my course, were fellow students. I know that at least some of the tutors felt inhibited in what they could share in the presence of their students and that they wondered if their presence was similarly inhibiting to their students. It seemed reasonable to assume that this was probably the case. Some of the assignment writers, for instance, wrote about finding what they had experienced during the exercises as “weird”, and, as such, academically dangerous. I discouraged tutors from attending subsequent presentations of the course.

However, even without the presence of tutors, it remained the case that there was often a vast difference in terms of professional experience among the students, some of whom had not yet begun working with clients and some of whom had been working for 30 or 40 years. A mixture of the professionally very experienced and the relatively inexperienced has almost always been a feature of my workshops, and outside an academic context the disparity in experience does not seem to adversely impact discussion. However, while running the university courses, I noticed, over time, that those with professional experience tended to speak much more than those without (who said that they found it useful to listen to those with experience). Adding the presence of audio-recorders to already numerous potentially inhibiting factors in the room seemed likely to inhibit discussion even further and so I did not pursue this as a possibility: I sought written
accounts instead.

Seeking written accounts engendered different ethical challenges. Although, like the one-day workshop, the university course was offered as a non-assessed professional development opportunity to therapists outside the university, most students undertook the course as part of their professional and/or academic training and all those writing assignments were doing so for academic credit. I was taken aback to discover from Loftin et al., (2011) that some teacher-researchers offer incentives such as “extra credit or bonus points” to students who participate in research. While I can imagine that participating in some kinds of research might be educational for the participants, and so justify incentives, this was not the case for my students. Although not offering any kind of incentive, I was, as the marker of the written assignments, in a position of considerable power and so thought carefully about how I might avoid bringing any unintentional pressure to bear – as Howe and Dougherty (1993) and Roberts et al. (2001) point out, most students are likely to find it difficult to decline a teacher’s request to participate in her research. The structural power relationship that I had as tutor to the assignment writers ended once their assignments had been returned I therefore decided to invite students to volunteer their assignments only after they had been marked, moderated and returned: their agreement, or lack thereof, could therefore have no bearing on their mark. My intentions were announced in the course handbook that each student received prior to the course beginning, and I made my request by email after the assignments had been returned. The information sheet (Appendix 4) and consent form (Appendix 5) pertaining to this course are appended. I was also given permission to make my request of students on another course, with whom I did a morning’s input. Their assignment was not set or marked by me but by tutors who would carry on working with them after they had chosen whether or not to opt into my research. The Ethics Committee asked that I assure the students that I would not tell their tutors who had or had not opted in. I thought this wise - I did not want students to worry that their tutor’s view of them might be affected by whether they participated in my research or not.

Those writing assignments, unlike those participating in the one-day
workshop, had time to reflect upon what they had written. I therefore did not ask them to specify anything that they did not want me to share. One person did raise a concern about a particular section of their assignment. I suggested that if they were in any way uncomfortable, they might prefer not to volunteer their work. Those students who did decide to volunteer their assignments often did so with an accompanying email expressing enthusiasm about participating, and a couple of students who were not writing assignments volunteered other pieces of writing. I felt assured that those students who volunteered did so because they felt my project worthwhile and not because they had felt pressurised, but I used a system of process consent (Munhall, 1988) to ensure that anyone who changed their mind about participating had the opportunity to withdraw should they wish to.

As mentioned earlier, I felt it particularly important to avoid bringing any unintentional pressure to bear and to ensure that those who volunteered assignments could change their minds as students in counselling and psychotherapy often include sensitive personal material in their academic assignments. This sharing of sensitive personal material raises ethical issues that are similar to, but not the same as those arising from phenomenological interviews or in using clinical material from therapeutic practice. Ethical issues that arise from these research methods are often subtle and hidden (Lipson, 1994). There is, for example, a potential for unresolved emotional issues or painful memories to be re-stimulated (Cowles, 1988; McLeod, 1994; Grafanaki,1996). This is of particular concern in interviewing as the interviewer’s questions, or even the quality of their attentive listening can lead interviewees to discuss (or suddenly becoming aware of) difficult issues that they then need help in addressing, or might even regret discussing. The assignment did not specifically invite the students to write about sensitive issues, but some did choose to write about how course material enabled them to resolve or make sense of personal and relational difficulties. As students of counselling and psychotherapy, they were in a very particular context in that it is expected that those undertaking a therapeutic training work through (or at least become aware of) unresolved issues. They are also expected to access therapeutic support. My research did not require them to take any additional
emotional or psychological risks.

**Anonymisation**

Loftin *et al.* (2011) point to the importance of teacher-researchers not disclosing to colleagues the identity of students who decline an invitation to participate in research or who decide to opt out. The inclusion of sensitive personal information in some of the assignments made it particularly important that I also refrain from disclosing who was participating and that I make every effort to conceal the identity of the assignment writers. Protecting the assignments writers’ identity was rather more complex than merely refraining from offering information about who was or was not participating. As Grafanaki (1996) points out, the more detailed the biographical information that is revealed, the more difficult it becomes, in a university community where people know each other, to keep participants’ identity hidden. This is particularly the case in counselling and psychotherapy, where staff often know a great deal of biographical information about students and students often know a great deal about each other’s lives and issues.

Smith (1992) recommends that where anonymity has been promised to research participants, details that might identify them must be altered. I initially felt uneasy with the idea of altering potentially identifying details, Etherington (1996) says that “the economical editing of the truth is always a dangerous project” (p. 343), and gives an account of a research participant who:

> told me that he had felt abused by a psychiatrist who had used him as a case-study. I asked him if there was any way in which I might abuse him. He answered:
>
> ‘You could abuse me by not taking my material seriously or, say, if your thesis was published and I got to read it and it wasn’t truthful, that you’d altered it or made judgments or inferences about what I’ve said in a way that wasn’t resonant with what was truthful for me or truthful to the way I’ve described it to you – that would be extremely abusive.’

(p. 342)

When I have participated in other people’s research I too have felt irritated (though not abused) by details that are inaccurate although this is because I have felt that I had not been listened to properly. Disguising potentially identifying details that are not essential to the personal truth that is being
expressed is motivated by a desire not to over-expose those who share their stories. However, as Etherington (2004a) points out, it is notoriously difficult to disguise the identity of those who share their personal stories because such stories highlight the uniqueness of a person’s life. Grafanaki (1996) concurs with Etherington in saying that the more detailed the biographical and background information that is revealed, the more difficult it becomes to keep people’s identity secret. Poulson (1998) refers to The London Centre for Psychotherapy’s material on publication and client confidentiality, which suggests that even well-disguised material may be recognisable. My biggest challenge in disguising the identities of those who volunteered their assignments lay in the possibility that academic staff or fellow students might recognise a detail that I might not recognise as potentially identifying. It is impossible to be totally sure exactly which details those may be in an environment where an “inside” reader potentially knows both mundane and intensely sensitive details, or is even familiar with a student’s writing style. To complicate matters further, when writing about work in dyads, some of the students wrote about each other. As well as changing names and sometimes gender, I have taken the precaution of omitting or altering details that I think potentially identify the author or someone they describe. Etherington (2004a) says that it is generally acknowledged that there are no right or wrong answers when it comes to the problem of disguising the identity of those who share their personal stories, but that one can remain “ethically mindful” and make the difficulties transparent “instead of producing sanitised versions of research that ignore the moral and ethical struggles” (p. 64).

There was another aspect of preserving confidentiality that was particularly compelling. “Narratives are never simply ‘ours’”, says Etherington (2004), “there are always others involved in our stories, who may not give consent and who may be recognisable even when the storytellers’ names have been changed.” (p. 64). In exploring how the phenomena I explore impacts therapeutic work, and how therapists might cultivate a greater awareness in order to inform their work, I implicitly invite accounts of work with clients. Those who volunteered their assignments were aware that what they had written might enter into public circulation.
Clients about whom they had written were not, and, unless approached by the person writing about them, had not had the opportunity to opt in or opt out of my research. There were a few instances in which I felt I could change enough details to ensure anonymity, but when writing about client work, I generally used accounts from my own practice that include no potentially identifying material and in which clients I had in mind whilst writing could not recognise themselves. It is, of course, extremely likely that, were they to read this thesis, those who spoke at the one-day workshop or volunteered their assignments would recognize their contributions. Although they agreed to my using their contributions in this thesis and any related publications, I would, if using a similar method of data collection in the future, return to those who had participated for approval of how I had selected and used their material.

In conclusion, then, there were potential conflicts of interest for me inherent in my dual role but there were also some instances in which my purposes as a researcher sat very well with my purposes as a tutor. I, for instance, encouraged the university students to take the embodied experience and subsequent insight gained during the experiential exercises into their other relationships. This sat well with my desire, discussed above, to collect accounts of encounters in context. Similarly, my question concerning the implications for the therapeutic relationship of the experiences we engaged with sat well with my role as a trainer of therapists.

**Ethical considerations in using my own relational experience**

This section discusses the use of material from my own experience and follows the above format of giving my rationale for using this kind of data and then discussing the ethical issues raised.

Adams (2008) concurs with Etherington (2004a) in saying that writing about oneself always implicates others. As discussed earlier, some of the students write about their encounters with me and I respond, in this text, by giving something of how I experienced the interaction. It is possible that these students may read this text or a related publication. How a research participant feels about what the researcher writes about them or their interaction is potentially an issue in many pieces of research, particularly
those that generate data from the research relationship. I have not, I think, written anything about my experience of an encounter between myself and a research participant that I did not, in essence, communicate at the time. Nothing that I have written about any of my partners in conversation or my interaction with them would (in theory at least) come as a surprise to them in the event of their reading this thesis.

I also discuss encounters that happened in the course of everyday social interactions – the encounters described in the introduction, for instance. Using such interactions in this thesis was not a consideration at the time. Seeking informed consent would have be possible in instances in which the other person was a friend with whom I was still in touch, and desirable in the few instances where the necessary details would render the incident recognisable to the other person. I sought, in those instances the verbal consent from my friend, and offered them the opportunity to read exactly what I had written. In doing so, I took a practical rather than procedural ethical stance (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004; Cannella and Lincoln, 2007). My view was that the ethical issue at stake here was that I treat the friendship with respect and did not violate their trust in me. To ask my friends to sign a consent form with regard to material that is neither sensitive nor about them, although it features them, would be to introduce into our friendship a discordant note of defensiveness on my part. However, I did not neglect procedural ethics in that I made the University Ethics Committee aware of my intentions in this regard and gained its approval. I employed disguise strategies in instances in which I refer to another person with whom it was either not possible or inappropriate to seek consent.

**Working with the data**

When analysing my data, I departed from the more usual phenomenological method of thematic analysis. I was not trying to distil the essential characteristics of an experience, but to gain some understanding of how a variety of experiences impact relationship in context, and so I wanted to retain the contexts rather than abstract from them. Although I did not think in terms of analysing for themes, the meta-information that I did retrieve from a consideration of differences and similarities across different contexts
might be said to bear some similarities to that elucidated by themes. Van Manen (1990) writes that:

(m)aking something of a text or of a lived experience by interpreting its meaning is more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure – grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of “seeing” meaning. Ultimately the concept of theme is rather irrelevant and may be considered simply a means to get at the notion we are addressing. (p. 79)

Themes do, as Langdridge (2007) points out, give control and order to research and writing, and clearly some control and order are necessary if the text is to be intelligible. However, Langdridge also points out that a thematic phrase only serves to point at, to allude to, or to hint at an aspect of the phenomenon. Rather than organising my data into themes, I chose instead to compare what was written about each exercise, or rather, the experience the exercise gave rise to. My intention in doing so was to retain the context in which the experiences were embedded in the hope that this would enable me to make sense of any significant differences in what was experienced.

My intention in comparing what was said about the experiences the exercises invoked and evoked was to enter into a conversation. Gadamer (2001), writes:

Hermeneutics is die Kunst der Verstaendigung – the art of understanding – of something or with someone … this ‘coming to an understanding’ of our practical situations and what we must do in them is not monological; rather, it has the character of a conversation. We are dealing with each other. Our human form of life has an ‘I–Thou’ character and an ‘I and we’ character, and also a ‘we and we’ character. In our practical affairs we depend on our ability to arrive at an understanding. And reaching an understanding happens in conversation, in a dialogue. (p. 79)

Such dialogue might be a conversation between a reader and a text or between or among people. Whatever the context of the dialogue, Gadamer understands the process of understanding to proceed in a circular fashion – one’s understanding changing as one engages with what is written or said, and one’s sense of the whole meaning changing as one assimilates what is heard or read, and then reads on or carries on listening; the hermeneutic circle becomes “the mutual interplay of learning from each other in coming to an understanding” (Gadamer and Hahn, 1997, pp. 403–4, cited in Orange, 2010, p. 118). Gadamer not only considers it impossible to step outside one’s own context, but undesirable. He uses the term Vorurteile or “prejudice” for
the prior or pre-understandings that we bring with us. The term does not have negative connotations and the reader or listener’s prejudices are intricately involved in the process of negotiating an understanding.

As well as communicating in a myriad of non-verbal ways during the workshop, my partners in conversation and I also interacted through language, both verbal and written. Our conversation was layered. We spoke to each other and some of the dialogue from the one-day workshop is transcribed in this text. The university students read some of my published work and discussed it in their assignments. I read their assignments and have reproduced excerpts in this thesis. They tried on the words that I found “worked” (Todres, 2007) and I tried on the words that they found found to work as we tried to come to an understanding.

Understanding is, for Gadamer, negotiated in dialogue rather than discovered or constructed. Schwandt (1999) explains the difference between understanding and knowledge by referring back to the German, in which:

> when we say that we understand what others are doing or saying, we are stating something quite different than that we know. To understand is literally to stand under, to grasp, to hear, get, catch, or comprehend the meaning of something. To know is to signal that one has engaged in conscious deliberation and can demonstrate, show, or clearly prove or support a claim … We express the difference between knowing and understanding in German with the questions, “Woher weist du das?” (“How do you know that?”) and “Wie verstehen Sie das?” (“What do you make of that?”). In life in general, and in qualitative inquiry as a particular kind of research pursuit, we are always engaged in trying to “make something of that”; we are always about the business of construing the meaning of something. (p. 452)

In making the reader (or listener) central to the process of coming to an understanding, Gadamer follows on from Schleiermacher, who initiated the emphasis on the importance of the reader’s understanding. Schleiermacher considered the importance of understanding as a necessary stage to interpretation, and to involve knowledge of the historical context of a text and the psychology of the author (Ramberg and Gjesdal, 2003; 2005, cited in Orange, 2010). Unlike Schleiermacher, Gadamer is not interested in the psychology of the author, but in the subject with which the author – or speaker – is concerned. For Gadamer, understanding is “not based on transposing oneself into another person … To understand what a person says is … to come to an understanding about the subject matter, not to get inside
another person and relive his experiences” (Gadamer, 1960/1991, p. 383, cited in Orange, 2010, p. 104). Orange (2010) sees Gadamer as discarding empathy. Gadamer might therefore be considered a curious choice as a methodological guide in a thesis that considers its subject matter in the context of a psychotherapeutic approach that relies so heavily on empathy. However, Gadamer’s objection is not to empathy per se, but to presumed empathy in the absence of dialogue, and in this he is actually close to, rather than distant from Rogers’ idea of empathic understanding. Both are writing against an intellectual background in which the psychoanalytic premise that one might discern hidden meanings via unconscious communication was highly influential. Gadamer and Rogers both promote the practice of listening, not in order to uncover hidden meanings, but in order to properly understand the other’s overt meaning. This “hermeneutics of trust” (Ricoeur ([1965] 1970) “requires a nonauthoritarianism and nonideological psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, prepared to welcome the other into conversation” (Orange, 2010, p. 107).

Gadamer’s (and Rogers’) understanding of understanding leads to a profoundly anti-authoritarian stance. In Person-centred therapy this non-authoritarian stance manifests as an active willingness to be corrected about one’s understanding of the client’s experience. Gadamer bids us seek, not an accurate interpretation, but a negotiated understanding – a “fusion of horizons” (Horizontverschmelzung). Such a fusion of horizons inevitably involves the understandings that arise from the temporal and spatial situatedness of both – or all – parties. Gadamer’s idea of negotiated understanding through dialogue demands a willingness to accept that one can only see the horizon from where one stands. A fusion of horizons can only occur if both – or all – listeners are willing to adjust current understanding in the light of further information. An ideal of a state of absolute correctness is an irrelevance in a theory in which truth arises out of relationship. Moments of Horizontverschmelzung when our horizons meet serve, as Orange (2010) puts it, “as place markers for continued dialogue” (p. 107). Rogers’ concept of empathy also acknowledges the impossibility of complete understanding (Rogers, 1951). Both are philosophies of “good enough for now”, and both celebrate the lack of control one has while
undertaking a joint venture such as understanding someone or understanding something. “The partners conversing are far less the leaders than the led”, says Gadamer. “No one knows in advance what will ‘come out’ of a conversation. Understanding or its failure is like an event that happens to us” (Gadamer, [1960; 1975] 2004, p. 401).

As will become evident, some of those who entered into conversation with me say a lot about their inner lives. I am not, in this thesis, concerned with the content of their experience and what that tells me about them, but rather in reaching a negotiated understanding of some of the processes that happen within them and within me – within us – and between us. However, the internal frames of reference of those whom I engage in conversation are not altogether irrelevant to this study. “We do not try to transpose ourselves into the author’s mind”, writes Gadamer, “we try to transpose ourselves into the perspective within which he has formed his views … we try to understand how what he is saying could be right” (Gadamer, 1960/1991, p. 292, cited in Orange, 2010). Rogers’ concept of internal frames of reference (I would argue) also implies some understanding of the temporal and spatial context in which that frame of reference comes into being. Some of my partners in conversation (to use Gadamer’s phrase) had experiences that were very different from my own. In trying to understand their experiences from their perspective and seeing how they “could be right”, I adjusted the pre-understanding I had formed on the basis of my own experience, thus engaging the hermeneutic circle as understood by Gadamer.

Todres (2007) summarises that to which I aspired in positioning qualitative research as an:

ongoing ‘conversation’ that seeks to share ‘good words’ and phrases that are evocative and that ‘carry understanding’ further. It is a community journey. Such embodied understanding is also a further invitation to experiencing in that it seeks to show and evoke the presence of a lived experience through words. Fresh sense making occurs as a bodily experienced recognition, and the one who understands further provides a temporary home for what is understood … In such embodied understandings, the language ‘works’ in ways that are open to that which is beyond formal boundaries, the unsaid life of the phenomenon. The qualitative researcher within this spirit is a mediator and facilitator who carries forward understandings distilled from informants’ accounts into a shared world. The task is to share understanding in a habitable way. So, to facilitate embodied understanding is to make understanding ‘habitable’ for others. This kind of qualitative research serves a communal,
cultural quest … In order for qualitative research to pursue embodied understanding, it requires procedures that show phenomena in both experientially evocative as well as structurally coherent ways. (p. 28)

I depart from Todres in that rather than carrying forward understandings distilled from my partners in conversation, I aim to bring our different experiences into a framework for reflecting upon the aspect of relationship with which I am concerned. Rather than obliterating differences by distilling the accounts of my partners in conversation, I will make space for the differences between accounts. “Reaching an understanding in conversation”, says Gadamer ([1960;1975] 2004), “presupposes that both partners are … trying to recognize the full value of what is alien and opposed to them” (p. 405). Using the process of translating from one language into another as a metaphor for understanding another person’s meaning, he suggests that “translating is like an especially laborious process of understanding, in which one views the distance between one’s own opinion and its contrary as ultimately unbridgeable” (p. 404). I did not want to conflate the experiences – or the words – of my partners in conversation with each other, or with my own. I endeavoured instead to create a framework for reflection that does not diminish difference, but does make some sense of differences.

**Data selection**

In selecting my data I looked for difference as well as similarity. Thirty-five people volunteered their assignments and I used material from 27 of these. As mentioned earlier, rather than looking for themes, I grouped together what was said or written about the experiences that arose from doing the exercises. Not everybody wrote about their experiences in detail. The excerpts that I selected are mainly passages that contain either rich phenomenological description or an account of a contextualised encounter. Some students provided more in the way of description or relational anecdotes than others and so I used more of their material. Their voices are therefore quite prominent in my text. A brief description of those participating is sometimes provided in qualitative research and doing so would place my partners in conversation in context. However, given the ethical issues related to anonymity that I discussed earlier, particularly the possibility that any detail could be potentially identifying, I do not give
descriptions of those who participated. Instead, where relevant, I indicate, in the text, any immediately pertinent information such as whether a participant was a workshop participant or university student and their country of origin. Having grouped together different accounts, I selected which accounts to use on the basis of difference and similarity. If several accounts made a similar point, I chose one of those accounts and looked for accounts that were different in a way that seemed as if it might be important. I consider those who contributed their words to be partners in conversation and so, as far as reasonable, make those words audible in their fullness, rather than condensing what is said.

Ten people attended the one-day workshop, and I quote from each of them at some point in the text. This workshop did not cover everything covered in the eight-week university course and so I use recorded data where appropriate.

**Writing as research**

“Writing and reading are,” says van Manen (1990) “the ways we sustain a conversational relation” (p. 110). Reading and writing helped me to enter into a conversational relation with my data. I read and reflected upon what my partners in conversation had said or written, and responded to this in the ways in which I selected excerpts and positioned them in relation to each other. Gadamer (1960; 1975) argues that our understanding of another’s written or spoken words is inevitably interpretative. However much I might try to understand and honour what my partners in conversation shared, I can offer only my own understanding of their understanding. Gadamer describes interpretation as a “highlighting”, and I, of course, highlight some aspects of what my partners in conversation say at the expense of others. Even if I had not selected some passages and omitted others, if I had somehow woven in everything that they said or wrote, my presentation of it would still be interpretive (and long!). The text I produced arose from a conversational interplay as my partners in conversation responded to what I had said while running the workshop and course, and to what I had written in some of my publications. They responded by speaking and, the university students, by writing. In producing the text that follows, I responded to what they said or wrote.
Conclusion
Although phenomenological research is often concerned with pre-reflective and pre-linguistic experience, there is a marked tendency to use already lenguaged definitions in order to identify those experiences. Aware that any definition or description of the kinds of experiences with which I am concerned might not render them recognisable to others, I chose to use experiential exercises in order to provoke such experiences in those with whom I discussed them. I am interested in how such experiences impact relationships of all kinds, but particularly concerned with drawing out the implications for therapeutic practice, supervision and training and so I chose to converse with others who also have a stake in identifying such implications. Although situating my research in the context of my training work suited many of my purposes very conveniently, it also gave rise to ethical issues arising from the power relationship inherent in such a context. My partners and I fell into conversation about the experiences these exercises invoked. We spoke to each other, and wrote to each other, and a text emerged that tries to give words to the silent ways in which we interact with those whom we encounter in various ways.

I align myself with hermeneutic phenomenology in so far as I assume the phenomena with which I am concerned to arrive in consciousness already interpreted, already making some kind of sense as we experience them. Hermeneutic phenomenology informed not only my ontological position, but also my epistemological approach in that I understood those who participated in my research to be making sense of their experiences, and I understand myself to be understanding their understanding through my own lens rather than being able to access it directly or “accurately”. I give this understanding in the chapters that follow.
Chapter Four: Finding the Words that Work

As discussed in Chapter Two, Geller and Greenberg do not elaborate upon what they mean by the term “extending”, other than to say that it is “the act of emotionally, energetically and verbally reaching outwards to the client” (2002, p. 79). I begin this chapter by giving an account of the exercise I used to identify the experience to which I refer when using terms such as “extending” or “moving towards” and the experience to which I refer when using terms such as “moving away from”, “drawing back in” and “withdrawing”. I then describe how I provoked the experience of sensing someone else extending and drawing back and give an excerpt of the conversation this gave rise to on the one-day workshop. I have previously written about this experience in terms of psychological contact and in this chapter critique my use of this term.

Having identified the experiences with which I am concerned, I turn to a discussion of how peculiar pre-reflective and pre-linguistic experience can seem when one brings it into awareness, and of how difficult such experiences are to describe. I consider instances in the literature that might (or might not) be understood as conceptualisations of the kinds of experience with which I am concerned. This returns me to Geller and Greenberg’s brief reference to “energy” as understood from the perspectives of yoga, tai chi and q’igong. The Chinese concept of qi’ and the yogic concept of prana are generally translated as “subtle energy”, and the systems through which they flow as the “subtle body”. I have previously used these terms when discussing that which one extends and draws back (Cameron, 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; 2004). I discuss the appropriateness of doing so in this chapter.

I had previously made attempts to find out whether these concepts are used in this way in India and China. I have been assured by a number of Indian friends that prana is not used to conceptualise the experience of extending and withdrawing or sensing someone else do so. The university course was attended by a substantial number of Chinese and Taiwanese students and so afforded me the opportunity to explore whether the concept of qi’ is used to think about these kinds of experience in everyday (as opposed to martial) relationships. I discuss what they and my other partners
in conversation say about finding the words that work for them. The chapter ends with a reminder that although the experiences discussed in it may be difficult to describe and conceptualise, they are not unusual.

**Extending and withdrawing**

I establish what it is that we will be working with by asking the participants to think of someone they really like; to imagine that person in another part of the room, and to just focus on them for a few moments. I give them a few moments to do this, then, in a casual, “this is just the end of the exercise” sort of voice, ask them to draw themselves back in. When I enquire if my asking them to “draw themselves back in” made sense there is nodding and murmurs that it did²². I go on to explain that whatever must have extended out in order to be “drawn back in” is what we’ll be working with. One might conceptualise this as a purely internal mental function such as attention, imagination or focus – the curious thing is that it is directly experienced by those in our company.

I ask for a volunteer to come and sit with me in the middle of the circle. Jess volunteers to do this. I ask her to simply notice what it is like to be in my presence while I do something and then do something different. I say that I tell her when I am going to start and when I change over. We sit. I look down for a few moments as I gather myself – and it feels as if I literally gather myself. Once I have gathered in whatever I had extended out towards the group, I begin. I look at Jess. She looks at me. She has my attention, but I stay on my own space. I am behind my own skin. After a while I tell her I am going to do something different. I relax. I feel as if I literally open. I allow a wave of something to surge out from me and extend towards her. I continue to extend towards her for a few moments before indicating that this part of the exercise is over.

I ask Jess if she had noticed a difference:

Jess: I wasn’t sure at first, and then I did. At first you were present in the room, but you were over there (she points to me). The second time I actually felt something coming over here (she points to

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²² Occasionally someone becomes unsure at this point and so we do another exercise that enables them to have a definite experience of feeling as if they extend out and then draw themselves back in.
herself), and my heartbeat changed.

Me: And did one feel better than the other?

Jess: At the beginning of the second bit I thought, “ohh, I’m not getting it”, then I thought, “oh, that’s better”.

Me: Better?

Jess: We were connecting.

When I began training to be a Person-centred therapist in the late 1980s “the core conditions” took precedence over the understanding of Rogers’ therapeutic conditions as an integrated gestalt. When I first heard the term “psychological contact”, I assumed that it referred to this subtle, yet distinct sense of connection that Jess refers to. I still think that it does – in practice. I have done the same exercise with supervisees who have been told by their trainers that they do not make psychological contact. The exercise has answered the trainees’ bewildered questions about what exactly it is they are supposed to be doing – and how – and has satisfied their tutors’ concerns. However, the theoretical definition of psychological contact is, arguably, less clear. Rogers does not write much about it – a paragraph in his paper of 1959 and four short paragraphs in his papers of 1957 – but what he does say seems to come from two different epistemological positions. In the paper of 1957 he says that:

*All that is intended by this first condition is that two people are to some degree in contact, that each makes some perceived difference to the field of the other. Probably it is sufficient if each makes some “subceived” difference, even though the individual may not be consciously aware of this impact.* (p. 221)

This definition implies that if two people are in some way impacted by each other’s presence they can be assumed to be in psychological contact, and goes a long way to meeting Rogers’ clearly positivist aim of finding out if it is possible “to state, in terms that are clearly definable and measurable, the psychological conditions that are both necessary and sufficient to bring about constructive personality change” (p. 219). However, he goes on to say that:

*it would be relatively easy to define this condition in operational terms and thus determine from a hard-boiled research point of view, whether the condition does or does not exist. The simplest method of determination involves simply the awareness of both client and therapist. If each is aware of being in*

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23 In the paper of 1959 he uses the term “contact” rather than “psychological contact”.
personal or psychological contact with the other, then this assumption is met.\textsuperscript{24} (p. 222)

Rogers assumes that “personal or psychological contact” will be a phrase that is meaningful to his reader. It is meaningful to me, but, for me, feeling that I am in “personal or psychological contact” is, like Jess’s sense of “connecting”, a much more subtle matter than the two people making some sort of perceived – or subceived – difference to each other. Jess and I had been making a perceived difference to each other all morning, but it was not until I “opened” and allowed something to flow towards her that either of us felt we were “connecting”. She experienced me as “present”, but “over there” and did not feel that we were “connecting” until I came “over here”. Being aware that one is in “personal or psychological contact” is surely a highly subjective experience that amounts to much more than making “some perceived difference”. In my reading, this operational definition does not belong to the positivist epistemology that Rogers sets out with. Whether one feels oneself to be in “personal or psychological contact” is, in my reading, a phenomenological question, and yields answers that do not lend themselves well to “hard-boiled” definition and measurement.

Perhaps Rogers is not trying to theorise this kind of “connecting”. He is, he says in his 1959 paper, merely trying to say that some minimal relationship must exist because the other conditions are meaningless without it. Other commentators (Ellingham, 2002; Tudor and Worrall, 2006) have used the theoretical definition about making some sort of perceived difference rather than the operational definition of whether or not one is aware of being in contact. Tudor and Worrall (2006) make the case that “Rogers argues simply that therapeutic change starts in and from the existence of relationship per se, rather than from any particular qualities of relationship” (p. 192), and use the metaphor of an electric current being either on or off to argue in favour of it being a binary phenomenon. In response to Mearns (1997) claiming that “the phenomenological reality of psychological contact to both clients and counsellors is that there are degrees

\textsuperscript{24} Because Rogers says that some subceived difference may be sufficient, there is a question as to whether awareness is necessary. I mention this to prevent it being distracting, but do not discuss it as it is not relevant to my argument.
of contact” (p. 17), they suggest that, “it is simpler, more elegant and more parsimonious to leave the notion as Rogers defined it, and agree instead degrees of empathic understanding, unconditional acceptance, communication and perception” (p. 192).

I have written about the sort of “connecting” that Jess experiences in terms of it being a level or degree of psychological contact25 (Cameron, 2002a; 2003a; 2003b; 2012b). I agree with Tudor and Worrall’s (2006) implication that the “emotional contact” I have written about (Cameron, 2003b) might be better construed as a degree of empathy, and addressed this in rewriting the chapter (Cameron, 2012b). However, the “connecting” that Jess speaks of, which I have previously called “subtle contact” (Cameron, 2003b; 2012b), cannot so easily be conceptualised as empathic understanding, nor as unconditional acceptance. My acceptance of Jess did not change in the few moments that we sat together. Nor did I “open out” because I suddenly experienced great empathic understanding as we sat in silence. If, with the notion of psychological contact, Rogers is conceptualising the experiential phenomenon that Jess calls “connecting”, I have some sympathy for Tudor and Worrall’s (2006) argument that one either does or does not experience oneself being in psychological contact. My reservation is that, like Jess, one does know when the connection happens – “ah, that’s better” – but that there are degrees of connecting and non-connecting that leave one “not sure”.

Unlike Tudor and Worrall, I am not quite certain how Rogers does define psychological contact, and whether it is an appropriate way of theorising the sense of connection Jess experiences. Wyatt (2007), cites a chapter in which I conceptualise the kind of “connecting” that Jess describes as psychological contact, as well as Whelton and Greenberg (2002) and O’Hara (personal communication, cited in Wyatt, 2007, p. 144), and draws upon Ellingham’s (2002) notion of organisms as “fields of activity”, to argue that a more relational conceptualisation of psychological contact is emerging in which:

(p)sychological contact now becomes a changing qualitative felt sense that results from any activity within the field of the client influenced by any

25 The others are “basic” contact, i.e. not ignoring someone; “cognitive contact” – cognitively understanding what is said. See Cameron (2003a); and “emotional contact” or emotional availability – Cameron (2003b).
activity within the field of the therapist … The atomism of the boundaried self is replaced by a self open to interpenetrative fields of influence. (pp. 144–5)

Wyatt’s conceptualisation of psychological contact is very much in keeping with the idea that we feel a qualitative difference when another person subtly extends or withdraws. Of course, this is hardly surprising given that Wyatt’s argument enrols my previous work. Clearly, there is debate about whether the notion of psychological contact is an appropriate means of conceptualising the “connecting” of which Jess speaks. However one may theorise “connecting”, I am certain that had I done the above exercise with Tudor, Worrall, or with Rogers himself, they, like Jess, would have felt a qualitative difference when I “extended”.

The other participants in the workshop felt a change when I extended. Those who witnessed me doing this exercise with Jess said:

Pat: I could see a change – how your heartbeat ch … your chest was moving differently … I got a sense somehow … I can’t explain it …

Jess: I think that’s one of the things about this … it’s very difficult to explain.

Mary: It’s invisible, but I could feel it coming over here – I could feel heat coming. It’s like a bubble that you send out. That’s the only way I can describe it. It’s unconscious.

Tania: I felt … I’ll call it “energy” because I don’t know what else to call it … I felt a heavier … I don’t know what you’d call it … you know when you walk into a room and you can feel the tension. It wasn’t tension, but it was something like that. I’d call it “thick”… I don’t know what to call it.

It is not unusual for participants to struggle to describe what they have sensed. A student from the university course, Neave, who had time to choose her words when writing as opposed to speaking about this demonstration, eloquently brings together many of the things that are typically said. She is writing about a demonstration in which I extended to begin with, and then withdrew:

we were given a demonstration of what the course was all about. The tutor and one of the students sat together in silence as the rest of us observed from a circle around them. After a while the tutor said that she was now going to do something different. I noticed a change immediately. I could feel that something was different. It was as if she had been giving off a feeling of love and warmth which had all of a sudden changed to icy coldness. However her facial expressions and body posture had remained the same. It was almost impossible to pinpoint what exactly had happened. It was as if the atmosphere in the entire
room changed. The sense of calm I had at the beginning of the demonstration had disappeared and was replaced with an air of feeling slightly on edge.

I do not know if Neave would have said that she felt herself to still be in psychological contact with me once the atmosphere in the room had changed from warmth to icy coldness, but she was clearly still very much impacted by my presence.

Neave’s difficulty in explaining or pinpointing exactly what had changed when I “drew myself back in” demonstrates just how out of the ordinary the ordinary can seem. Had I “drawn myself back in” while frowning and sounding annoyed, she would, I think, still have felt the change from warmth to icy coldness, as well as noticing my tone and expression, but would have been less likely to be aware of whatever was so difficult to pinpoint. My extension out and withdrawal back into myself seemed extraordinary because I separated them from other means of communication such as speech, tone, gesture and facial expression. However, sensing such differences in the quality of another’s presence is not extraordinary in the sense of being unusual. Like Neave, we feel another’s “warmth” and “coldness”. We feel other people come closer, or become more distant, as they sit stock-still before us.

My observation, and thesis, is that when we experience subtle sensations of “extending” towards another person, or of “drawing back in”, this seemingly “internal” experience is felt by the other as an almost tactile quality. The observation is obvious if considered from the position of being that other person – most people, in the course of their relationships and encounters, have experienced another person as “there” or as “somewhere else” regardless of their physical proximity. Feeling a change in the space between ourselves and another as they make subtle movements towards or away from us seems extraordinary not because it is unusual, but because we do not have a means of conceptualising the movement, nor our sensing of it.

However, as a thesis rather than an observation, the idea that we extend and withdraw in a way that can be directly perceived by another person is not commonplace, and might seem rather ridiculous. I am, after all, not referring to physical movement. Although I am not referring to physical movement, I have, thus far, conceptualised the experience of “extending”
and “drawing back in” as a sense of bodily movement, and suggested that the “bodily intuition” I described in Chapter Two happens in response to sensing another’s “extending” or “shrinking back”. When I “extend”, I feel myself moving forwards, I feel bigger, as if I take up more space. I feel myself moving backwards as I “shrink back” or “draw myself back in”. I feel something change as another person “withdraws” or “reaches out” – and so do my partners in conversation. One explanation might be that we are fantastically finely tuned to unconsciously processing the tiniest inflection of verbal and non-verbal communication (Schore, 2003) argues that this is the mechanism by which projective identification happens), or that our mirror neurons enable a neurological imitation of the other (Gallese, 2001). I do not dispute this, but I would add that it is not just visual and auditory information that we process. The view that we are interpreting visual and auditory clues below conscious awareness does not account for my subjective experience of feeling space suddenly opening up in front of me as I sense that the other person has suddenly “gone”. I feel another person’s distance or closeness as a quality in the space in front of me. I feel it in addition to what I see and hear.

My partners in conversation also describe their experience in visceral, sensory terms. The following is compilation of what was said in dyads and the large group following the exercise in which they take it in turns to extend:

Tania: At first I felt … in my mind it went all yellow, like warm and sunny, and towards the end it went blue and I really felt you pulling away and I felt the room go quite cold as well.
Molly: You felt the shift?
Tania: Yeah, at first it felt lovely and warm like the sun was right on my face.
Molly: When you said you felt that bit of cold at the end that must have been me removing myself away from you.
Tania: Yeah. I felt like you did it abruptly, stepped out of it.
Molly: Yeah. I literally did as well!
Tania: Did you?
Molly: Not on purpose, that was me coming back to myself. I didn’t mean to make it abrupt. It just was ‘cos I’d just come back to myself. That’s powerful – the abruptness you could feel. That’s mad, that.
Annie: There was such a feeling of warmth, and then it was gone. There was such a difference.
Lois: The first time I felt like there was a sea between us going back and forth. In the second one I felt like you were surrounding me and giving me a big hug.
Elaine: It felt like it come around me. It felt like warmth.
Sam: I feel as though you’ve sent it out because I feel it all around my shoulders. I feel as if there’s something there, all around my shoulders.

My partners in conversation use the metaphors of light, heat and touch in a way that speaks of actual sensory experience. “I felt like you were surrounding me and giving me a big hug” is a different use of simile to saying that receiving a greeting card, for instance, felt like receiving a big hug. Feeling as if there is something all around one’s shoulders, implies a physicality that touches and a physicality that perceives that touch. But there was no physical touch. Lois’s partner did not lean forwards, stretch her arms out and embrace her, yet Lois had an experience that she likens to being embraced.

Some partners in conversation are surprised by the embodied quality of their experience. The following excerpt was recorded while the two participants were working together rather than reporting back to the whole group, so I did not get the opportunity to ask where exactly Roshin felt what she felt, but what is clear is her surprise:

Roshin: I definitely feel like the first time you were going away and the second time you were sending out.
Jay: Yeah. (Inaudible) Weird, eh? (laughs)
Roshin: That’s really weird because the second time I could actually feel it in my … that’s really weird. I actually feel a bit weird.
Jay: You don’t expect it to …
Roshin: Yeah. It’s like you were possessing me (she laughs) but not in a bad way. It actually felt really like … and then really nice, really comforting. I felt really comfortable. In the first half I couldn’t see you. I couldn’t even see you in my mind’s eye … and I felt this black, space-type feeling. But then I actually felt like this … just come up through me. Really weird.

As Roshin’s unfinished sentences demonstrate, words elude her. Making one’s meaning clear in speaking about these kinds of experiences is dependent upon context, intonation, facial expression and gesture. Despite the irony of using physical movement to indicate that we were talking about something other than physical movement, both my co-researchers and I
“spoke” with our hands a lot during the course. Roshin and Jay’s exchange took place in a dyad so I do not know if she made a gesture when she said that “I actually felt like this … just come up through me”, but the gap suggests that she used a gesture that worked when words failed her.

Although we do not, in English at least, have non-colloquial terms for what I have variously termed “reaching out”, “extending” and “drawing one’s self in”, we do talk about this level of communication using colloquial – and sensuous, tactile, embodied – figures of speech. Neave wrote about the icy atmosphere in the room; practitioners talk about “the energy in the room”; we make references to its being “charged” or “thick”, and to “electricity” between people, to “vibes”. We talk about what it’s like to be inside those atmospheres – the “spark between us”, the “warmth”, the “coolness”; we speak of feeling “close” to someone, or experiencing them as “distant”. We may describe feeling as if we are enveloped, invaded, diminished or buoyed up by someone. We speak of our embodied experience of being an agent of emotional atmospheres: we “shrink” away from those we fear; we’re “moved”; we’re “beside ourselves”; we nearly “jump out of our skin”; our “heart goes out” to someone.

One’s heart may sink in dread, and if one then becomes frightened it might beat very fast. But the heart that sinks is different to the heart that beats. The heart that beats is a muscle. It stays in one place and is easily located. The heart that sinks and leaps and soars or goes out to another is more elusive – and more mobile. Neave describes the experience of extending:

Gradually, I began to feel something emanating from my chest region. It wouldn’t be accurate to say that this feeling was a tingling sensation; it felt more like a wave of something over my chest … a warm wave that radiated from the chest region …

The objective view of the body as a boundaried, biological entity insists that one’s heart cannot really “melt”, “go out” to another or “leap”, even though it really feels as if it does. The objective view also insists that we cannot feel another person’s heart “go out” as they “reach out” to us. However, like those at the workshop I recorded, Neave says that she felt something tangible when another of my partners in conversation “extended” towards her: “somehow it felt more than psychological availability. It was as
if I was enveloped by something, and I felt that this feeling/this quality was coming from the person that I was with.” Experiences such as feeling one’s “heart go out” to another or of “closing down” may seem very internal and private, but they are, certainly to a sensitive other, quite public. Sometimes it is obvious that somebody has “closed down” or “opened up” because they express it in their tone of voice or subtle changes in their posture, gesture, complexion or expression … and we sense something yet more subtle. It is difficult to say just what that more subtle thing is, but we notice a change.

The challenge of languaging bodily experience

The experiences described above are, I think, are not “weird” in the sense of being unusual, but perhaps are weird in the sense of being conceptually difficult. That we lack a commonly accepted means of conceptualising these subtle movements in others and ourselves has long struck me as extraordinary. Finlay (2006) uses the concept of the lived body in discussing a research participant describing the experience of “pulling herself in”:

Where once she had felt herself to be a ‘big’ person – in terms of both her presence and her personality – she was now made to feel ‘reduced’. In the process of being forced to reduce, she had become a different person. This is how she describes the process:

Kath: It was this kind of shift and change and the pulling in and the unsafeness of that environment which before had felt secure, clearly wasn’t. I was shaky. Lots of the sort of firm things that you believed in were now shaky. Does that make sense?

Linda: Yes, so, when you say ‘pulling in’ you pulled yourself into yourself

Kath: Yes, I withdrew …

Linda: It seems like your very way of being is kind of quite open [mmm, mmm] and direct … And here you’ve lost even your way of being.

Kath: … that really sums it up actually. I felt the person who left that college was not me. Or was a paler shade of me … I had to kind of slow down in a sense, not in speed sense but in a kinda closure sense … in a protective sense.

As Kath was speaking, I was very aware of her ‘big presence’. I had previously known Kath as a ‘big personality’ and as someone who physically embodied a big, attractive presence. Yet, in the course of our interview, she somehow started to ‘fade’ in front of my very eyes. (p. 26)

Finlay’s description of Kath, whom she’d known as having had a big “presence” and being “quite open”, starting to “‘fade’ in front of my very
eyes” is a description of sensory experience, as is Kath’s description of “pulling in”. The figures of speech we use – “reaching out”, being “distant”, feeling “warmth” – also speak to a sense of embodiment, or rather subtle embodiment. If I describe someone as “distant” when we met, I do not mean that they were physically far away. If I say that, while we spoke, someone “pulled away”, “closed down” and became “absent”, I do not mean to imply that they physically moved. Although the concept of the lived body enables descriptions that are supplementary to those allowed by the objective body, it does not provide a means of distinguishing between the sensations that go with reaching out with one’s arms, and the sensations that go with “reaching out” in the sense in which I intend it, or between the sensations that go with being hugged and being “hugged” in the way that Sam earlier describes as a feeling of something all around her shoulders. The sensations of “extending” towards another or “shrinking away” from them are embodied experiences, yet somehow not quite of the body.

I have previously (Cameron, 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; 2004) used the term “subtle body” in discussing such non-physical, yet bodily experienced “movements”. The term works well as a metaphor. However, it is also used in other contexts, and there conceptualised in particular ways. Building on Jung’s reclamation of Alchemical ideas, the Jungian analyst Schwartz-Salant (1998) says that the subtle body exists in a space in which inner and outer merge, “a strange area that is neither material nor spiritual, but mediating between them … this ‘intermediary’ domain of existence has long since left our conscious awareness” (p. 11). The subtle body can be “experienced imaginarily as a kind of energy field that extends outwards from our physical being. It is invisible to ordinary perceptions, but can be seen imaginally”. Two people, he says, “can become aware of a state in which their subtle bodies are interacting. This is often felt as a change in the quality of the space between them; it is experienced as energized and more material in nature (Schwartz-Salant, 1986, pp. 20–1). A change “in the quality of the space” echoes Neave’s description of the atmosphere in the room changing.

Schwartz-Salant’s concept of the subtle body further fits the kind of experiences that I want to discuss in that it transgresses the boundary erected between body and mind. I have, thus far, talked about “extending” and
“drawing back in” and sensing others do so as bodily experiences, but I could equally well conceptualise them as mental experiences. I feel myself extend and contract in response to where my attention lands. Sheldrake (2009), writing about the sense of being stared at, likens the mind to the *pseudopodia* or “false feet” sent out and retracted by amoebae. He argues that minds are not confined to skulls, and also that we really do sense when another person’s attention is upon us.

The *subtle body* as presented by Schwartz-Salant (1998), transgresses the conceptual dichotomies inherent in the polarites mind/body, material/non-material and inside/outside. It inhabits “a strange area that is neither material nor spiritual, but mediating between them”, and as an “area of imaginal discourse, which the ancient alchemists referred to as the *imaginatio*, that was not subject to notions of insides and outsides” (p. 11). Schwartz-Salant says that this intermediary domain of existence left our conscious awareness along with the practice of alchemy. The body–mind dichotomy that replaced it in philosophical thought does not easily accommodate experiences that transgress the boundaries between body and mind, material and immaterial, inner and outer, thus rendering Neave’s experience of me extending and withdrawing “almost impossible to pinpoint”.

Thus far, the term “subtle body” works very well indeed as a descriptor for my difficult-to-articulate subject matter. However, the term carries meanings from other contexts in which it is used. Jung takes the term “subtle body” from alchemy and uses it in his reframing of alchemy as a process of psychological and spiritual transformation. Schwartz-Salant develops Jung’s reworking of alchemy as a transformational process. He is specifically concerned with memories related to parental interaction that become crystallised into archetypal structures that might exist within the analysand, within the analyst, or that exist “in the space between”. Schwartz-Salant, then, is concerned with the content of the space between analyst and analysand, and, as he takes the concept of the “subtle body” to his reworking of the concept of the alchemical marriage, with the analysand’s psychic structures. This is quite different from the use I have previously made of the term “subtle body” as a descriptor of that which I extend towards another.
The term “subtle body” is also commonly used as a translation for the meridian system of traditional Chinese medicine and the yogic concept of the *sukshma-sharira*. *Qi*, which is often translated as “energy”, flows through the meridian system, and *prana*, also commonly translated as “energy”, through the *cakras* and *nādis* of the *sukshma-sharira*. As noted in Chapter Two, Geller and Greenberg (2002) do not, when describing “extending” as the action of reaching out “energetically” say what they mean by “energetically”, but they do use the term “energy” in their later publication of 2012, and in that context recommend that therapists develop an understanding of energy from the perspectives offered by yoga, *tai chi* and *qi’gong*. Like Geller and Greenberg, I have previously conflated these concepts (Cameron 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; 2004), despite understanding, through a long-term committed yoga practice and several lengthy dalliances with *qi’gong* and *tai chi*, that they are conceptually different.

*Prana* and *qi* are not, for me (or many others), merely abstract concepts, but refer to something that I experience phenomenologically. When I extend my “energy” in yoga practice, or extend my *qi* when practising *qi’gong* and *tai chi*, I feel as if I am extending the same “thing” (although both *qi* and *prana* are conceptualised as semi-material, and are therefore not quite “things”). This was also the case when extending *ki* during a brief flirtation with aikido. (The black belt with whom I practised *ki* exercises assured me that it was indeed *ki* that I was extending).

One moves *qi*, *ki* and *prana* through breath and intention. I used breath and intention in what feels to me to be the same way when I consciously “extended” towards my partners in conversation during the workshop and course. I had assumed, for a long time, that if China, Japan and India had concepts with which they could discuss the kind of “extending” with which I am concerned in this thesis, then they must surely do so. I had the following mutually perplexing conversation with a friend who had recently returned from studying *qi’gong* in China and who spoke Mandarin well. Our conversation began with my inviting him to do the exercise described at the

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26 Geller and Greenberg use both the “qi” and the “chi” spelling. Given that I discuss their argument further in Chapter Seven, I do the same so as not to cause unnecessary confusion.
beginning of this chapter in which one imagines someone agreeable in another part of the room and then “draws oneself back in”.

Me: Whatever you drew back in – would you call that “qi”?
Him: No, qi’ is an impersonal force.
Me: But surely it’s personal too?
Him: No, it’s completely impersonal.
Me: If you were practising and your partner used their qi’ to block you and you wanted to tell them so, what would you say?
Him: “You’re blocking me.”
Me: So you would talk about their qi’ in terms of self?
Him: What do you mean?
Me: You wouldn’t say “your qi’ is blocking me”, you’d say, “you’re blocking me”...

My friend looked thoughtful for a long while, before saying,

Yes. But it’s still an impersonal force. I know that sounds a bit contradictory.

The conversation left us both puzzled.

I used the exercise to ask friends of various nationalities how they would articulate in their first language the experience of extending and drawing themselves back in. All I seemed to discover was how difficult it can be to ask a simple question. I had great difficulty making my question understood. When I eventually started using the introductory exercise in which I ask someone to imagine somebody agreeable and then to draw themselves back in, I was puzzled by the answers. My Indian friends insisted, that prana is not used to conceptualise such experiences and, after much discussion, I learned that, despite many Indian languages being rich in concepts for different aspects of the self, there did not seem to be a commonly recognised way of formally conceptualising such experiences. I had similar conversations with Nigerian, Mongolian and Pakistani friends.

When a number of Taiwanese and Chinese students enrolled on the university course, I hoped that I could find a way to ask more clearly whether qi’ is used in this way. I knew that many of my Chinese friends, particularly those in higher education in Britain, fear being ridiculed if they were known to take so “unscientific” a concept as qi’ seriously and so I made a point of saying to the students with whom I was working that I would
welcome hearing about how the kinds of experience that arose from the exercises would be thought about in the students’ home countries, and that students were welcome to use concepts such as *qi*. Huian wrote, with regard to whatever she “extended” during the exercises:

I would suggest that it would be like the Chinese *qi* or ‘nei li’ or ‘nei gong’. They are the internal force within self. ‘Nei li’ or ‘Nei gong’ are based on the flow of *qi*. It is about the changes of meridians. It is believed that in the practice of *qi gong*, people may become more sensitive in feeling of the atmosphere around them. It is believed that the centre of where *qi* should base is around the stomach area. Therefore *qi* is not separate from our physical body. It can be moved in or out but never detached from us … The Neo-Confucianism believed this world is made up of two parts. A part of it can be seen, another cannot. And both parts are made of *qi*. ‘Qi’ has two ways of existence. One in solid form, the other scatters and disappears. However, disappearing do not mean it does not exist anymore, just cannot be seen by human eyes.

In ancient China, Wu-xia who have good ‘nei gong’ would have vibe with people or the surroundings. They have sensitive senses … I think a way of conceptualising the energy is like the old Chinese movies where they have drawn out things cannot be seen like ‘qi’ in different shapes and forms according to the appropriate interpretation should be made. For example, when a Wu-xia is exercising ‘qi’ audience would see something moving around his body or when he is fighting enemy, may be a drawing hand would be moving out from his physical hand towards and hit his enemy. Over the years, now less of these illustrations are needed. Usually if the same scene appears, the Wu-xia just need to do a hand movement and make the enemy chest have a bruise on the chest the audience would know what is happening.

I noticed that Huian was reminded of the practice of a martial art rather than ordinary relationships. Several more Chinese and Taiwanese students wrote about the concept of *qi*, but none said that the concept is used to discuss ordinary relationships.

Others did not mention it at all. Liou Sui uses the idea of a “bodily sense” rather than the concept *qi*: “I always have sharp bodily sense. I felt that my skin could sense other people’s energy and understand their condition”. She makes it clear that the ability to “sense other people’s energy and understand their condition” is not something that she has found to be commonly acknowledged:

I seldom acknowledged and talked this kind of bodily sense. I always turned down my body sense channel and used my intellectual channel when I was with others. It is because, in the past, not many people around me would mention this kind of sense. It made me wonder whether this kind of sense was just my imagination. I thus only talked about it as a joke, so people would not
think that I was crazy. Moreover, because bodily sense is so difficult to describe and prove, it seems to be “non-scientific” and should not be mentioned in a formal way.

Liou Sui did not use the concept of *qi*’ to think about “this kind of sense” and what it was that she sensed. She was worried about being ridiculed, but about being ridiculed on account of her experience, rather than the way she thought about it.

One cohort of the university course comprised around 50 per cent of Chinese and Taiwanese students. Keen to settle the question of whether the concept of *qi* is used in discussing, in everyday relationships, the sense of “extending” and “drawing back”, I initiated a discussion. The consensus was that the concept of *qi* could be used to conceptualise such experiences – but isn’t. I was brought to the awareness that I had been so sure that those whom I believed had the conceptual means to theorise the relational impact of “extending’ and “drawing back” must surely do so that I had been, until that moment, unable to hear that they don’t. I was left wondering whether some of the students who wrote about *qi*’ had perhaps heard my invitation to use the concept as a request rather than an invitation. Although unaware of it at the time, I think that I had been asking them to tell me what I expected to hear.

Several of the international students wrote about recognising the experiences of “extending” and “drawing themselves back in” and of sensing others do so, but none of them indicated that such experiences are, in their first languages, theorised or discussed using anything other than colloquial phrases equivalent to those used in English. One offered a colloquial phrase from her first language that indicates boredom and translated it as, “my spirit/soul is shrinking”. “Spirit or soul”, she says “does not have a religious meaning here”. She also offered a colloquial phrase for a relational dimension of soul shrinkage: “when two people have contractions against each other without an apparent reason they say ‘our souls/spirits are not compatible’”. That there are, in other languages, colloquial phrases that speak to the experience of “extending” and “shrinking” confirmed my expectation that the experience is shared. I was surprised to find that, as far as I can tell, it does not seem to be more fully theorised elsewhere.
I did not want to impose a way of thinking about whatever “extends” and “shrinks” or “withdraws” (despite there being a degree to which I was unwittingly asking to be told what I expected to hear). Ideally, I would have avoided using terms such as “energy” and “subtle body” when teaching. However, I was obliged to give the university students reading to accompany the experiential component of the course. I am not aware of anybody writing about this subject other than myself, and so compiling a reading list of sufficient length was a real problem. I found I had little choice other than to give them readings in which I had used terms such as “energy” and “subtle body”. It is, therefore, unsurprising that many of my partners in conversation used these terms in their assignments. Quite a number made it clear that these were terms that worked for them and were compatible with their world-view.

Before discussing the students’ responses to these terms further, I want to briefly summarise how they came into contemporary European usage. Most of the many popular writers and the few academic writers on the subject of the *subtle body* equate it with *qi* and *prana*, and also trace its journey from Western alchemy to the present. Hammer (2001) tells us that the concept has been thoroughly incorporated into many contemporary alternative health practices and New Age discourse via Theosophy, a school of mysticism founded by Helena Blavatsky. Other prominent figures included Charles Webster Leadbetter, Annie Besant and Rudolf Steiner, who was initially a Theosopist, but broke away from Theosophy to found Anthroposophy (Washington, 1993).

Blavatsky claimed that she was given her understanding of spiritual development by learned men in Tibet. The likelihood of this has been debated. If it is true, it does seem curious that the metaphysical philosophy Blavatsky brought back with her was not Buddhist, but Vedic. What is certain is that she and a number of other Theosophists spent several years in India. Hammer (2001) tells us that, in 1903, Leadbetter, elaborating on a few hints found in Blavatsky’s writing, proposed a theory of the human *aura*, and

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27 e.g. The Theosophist, Mead ([1920] 1991); the body psychotherapist, Pierrakos (1986; 1990)
that the understanding of the subtle body or aura and the “chakra”28 system, so prevalent in contemporary alternative health and New Age discourse, comes from Leadbetter’s work as revised by the American popular esoterist, Christopher Hills.

Despite the prevalence of the idea of a subtle body in various literatures, I did not find many instances of it being used to discuss how we subtly extend towards or move away from each other. One exception is Julie Henderson (1986; 1999a), a Somatic Psychotherapist influenced by several traditions, including the Reichian tradition, who discusses three energetic breaths – “expansion and contraction”, “diffusion and condensation” and “up and down”. I found Henderson’s work immensely helpful in developing some of the experiential exercises that I use. The healer Barbara Brennan (1987) (rather prescriptively) discusses how to respond to a client who extends or pulls away. The model she works with is very similar indeed to that of the post-Reichian, Pierrakos. Pierrakos writes a great deal about the subtle body and about relationship, but his interest is in how clients’ energetic structures express their psychopathology. The same is true of Mindell (2002). Post- and neo-Reichians, like the Jungians29 who discuss the concept of the subtle body, discuss it in intrapersonal terms, rather than interpersonal terms. While becoming interested in the subject of this thesis, I trained in Embodied Relational Therapy, a Reichian-based therapy developed by Totton and Edmondson ([1988] 2009). We did work experientially with sensing whether someone was extended or contracted, but only from the perspective of the therapist sensing whether the client was extended or contracted.

Most popular writers present the aura and chakras as terms that merely describe what they sense, usually visually, though some, such as Brennan (1987) claim perception through other sensory channels. Totton (2007) reminds us that it is important not to dismiss the claims of:

_a number of people, including some therapists, [who] have a direct perceptual experience of seeing energy in, around and between people, which for them is no less definite and actual than seeing the expression on someone’s face or the colour of their eyes (Cameron, 2002). Often this perception is in fact visual, as_

28 The term “chakra” is adapted from “cakra”, meaning wheel.
29 notably Schwartz-Salant (1986; 1998)
I have implied; sometimes it flows through other sensory channels. (p. 395)
Totton references my work with regard to a therapist attending a workshop, whom I’d quoted as saying, “(a)nd at this point (and this is the first time this has ever happened to me), I could see this outline around her, it was shimmering” (Cameron, 2002a, pp. 270-1). Sophia, who participated in the university course, also writes about seeing something:

After five minutes of extending toward my partner with the eyes open I started seeing something around my partner’s head and shoulders. It was like a dense white illumination contour that got thicker and brighter. I also saw it on the other person that I was not particularly extending to but which happened to be in my vision. I could not understand what it was, but at the same time I felt really excited. I thought it might be something I used to read about in books: the aura, that surrounds everybody, even plants, or things. During that particular extension exercise, I felt that my hands became very warm, almost like having some kind of energy that concentrated there. I did not understand why and how suddenly that happened. Was I expanding so much and thus such an expansion ended up with these senses and visions? Was I just imagining? Was it just an eye trick and a wishful illusion? Was it because I knew the person already and it was not hard for me to extend and feel genuine warmth, calmness, and acceptance? This visual experience was so interesting and new that later during the course when being in the large group, while listening to some people speaking, I was purposefully extending toward them. As I was doing that, I started seeing the thick white layer around these people and the place where I was concentrating on.

“Aura”, as it is used in contemporary New Age discourse, is a development of Leadbetter and Hill’s reconstruction of the sukshma-sharira or, as it is translated, “subtle body”. Whatever the word “aura” might mean for her, Sophia seems to have found that it “worked for her” when trying to describe a new experience.

Others were alienated by the idea of a subtle body. Astrid writes that:

The ideas introduced in the first session and the reading given afterwards, concerning the ‘subtle body’ sounded alarm bells in my head. The concept of an energetic body that moved beyond the boundary of the skin aroused my scepticism. Though what I had felt during the session was real, my inclination was to think in terms of the effect that the verbal cues had had. It was clear I had a naturalistic bias and that I initially felt disengaged as a result. The course was not what I had expected … I think that my skepticism was also another factor in not being able to give over completely to the process. Though I felt I could identify with the ideas of extension and contraction I could not accept them in their literal sense and this got in the way of the process. Though I still held back a little for personal reasons, by this time in the course I had put my skepticism aside. I had decided to focus on the phenomena, which felt real, and to use the terms given which captured it rather than think critically about whether these phenomena were real.
It is the experience of “extending” and “drawing back” – and our sense of others doing so – that I am interested in and so I was glad that Astrid was able to put her scepticism aside and “focus on the phenomena”. Tom, on the other hand, was so alienated by my use of terms such as “subtle body” and “energy” that he spent his entire assignment giving a Positivist explanation for his experiences rather than exploring how they impacted his experience of being in relationship.

Some of the language I used when talking and writing about experiences such as extending and sensing another do so worked for some of my partners in conversation, but did not work for others. We may experience and feel with the lived body, but perhaps tend to think about our bodily experience in terms of the objective body. The objective body reaches out its arms. Something else reaches out when I “extend”. It is difficult for me, as a bodied being, to think of moving without a body of some kind. Hearts that leap and sink need a space, a body, to sink and leap within. A leaping or sinking heart seems so physical, yet clearly does not involve an organ relocating itself. The term subtle body is congruent with the imagery we use in colloquial figures of speech and speaks to the quality of experience that is nearly, but not quite, physical. We feel the coolness and warmth of the air around us. We also feel coolness and warmth in the air that another has. Coolness and warmth need skin. Proximity needs physicality. We touch – and are touched by – something tangible, but not quite physical as it warms us like the heat of the sun on one’s face or something all around one’s shoulders. The idea of a subtle body works for me as a descriptor for such sensory phenomena.

However, I have some regrets about having used the terms “subtle body” and “energy” in so far as the various concepts to which they refer have sometimes threatened to obscure the phenomena I seek to bring under a spotlight. Words do not merely describe phenomena: they create ideas. And ideas fascinate. Harry, having done the exercise described at the beginning of this chapter, writes that “my first task in learning about the subtle body was to understand it because I knew that I would only be able to experience it if I believed in it”. Harry had just had the experience of “extending” towards someone and sensing her “extend” towards him, but was alienated from his
own experience by a term that I had suggested might help language that experience. The words that worked for me and have helped me bring an experience into fuller awareness obscured Harry’s awareness.

**Difficult to pinpoint, but not unfamiliar**

I have, so far, shown how odd the experience of being extended towards or drawn away from can seem when brought into focus. I have also considered, at some length, the difficulty of putting words to such experiences. This difficulty, and the seeming oddness of the experience, are not unrelated – words and the concepts to which they refer help us make sense of our experiences. I end this chapter with a reminder that the experiences that I and my partners in conversation have tried to describe are not unusual. Anabel gives an account of extending prior to the exercises described at the beginning of this chapter:

> I sat in the room, waiting for the other students to arrive; it was the beginning of the course, the first session. I felt calm and slightly anxious, aware of wondering who might arrive. I knew a couple of people from another course, who would be on this course. I sat and waited, I watched others arriving and was aware when a person I knew slightly better than the others, came into the room I reacted differently. It was a sense of movement within me, almost a part of me reaching out to nudge or connect with the other. The degree of movement was different for each person. Those I knew vaguely prompted a small movement, a sort of recognition; those I knew a little better resulted in a stronger movement. It felt like part of me located at my centre, definitely within me and it felt like a very real sense of movement and in this case outwards – towards the other, a movement to connect. I was also aware that this movement within could also be to retreat within, to pull back the feeling, making myself less available, not wanting to connect with others.

Many of those participating in the course and the workshop found the experiences that we focused upon surprising or even “weird”. Anabel’s account reminds us that they are actually a perfectly ordinary aspect of kinaesthetic experience.

**Conclusion**

The literature on *presence* and *Relational Depth*, discussed in the previous chapter, tussles with the question of whether *presence* is a state of being within oneself or relational – a one- or two-person phenomenon. Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 1962) argues that we are already and always immersed in and entwined with the world, that there is an inherent reciprocity: we see the
world and it sees us; we experience our relational environment and it experiences us. The data I present in this chapter suggests that if we are present – in any, or all, senses of the word – our presence is experienced by others. The state of being present in the world is a necessarily relational phenomenon, and it is, I would suggest, appropriate to think about qualities of presence rather than conceptualising presence as a binary phenomenon that is either on or off. One may be experienced as being fully present and available for “connecting”, to use Jess’s term, or, as Harry puts it, we might “tone it down”, as I did when beginning my demonstration with Jess, thus leaving her “not sure”. Jess sensed when I was “inside myself”, “behind my own skin”. She knew I was “present in the room”, but “over there”. And she sensed a difference when I came “over here”.

It is, within the confines of the concepts with which English equips us, difficult to say quite how Jess sensed my proximity and, given that I did not physically move, what exactly it was that she sensed as being “over there” and “over here”. Nearly all my partners in conversation quoted so far speak about, or struggle with, the difficulty of language such experience. I had long wondered whether it was easier in other languages. Geller and Greenberg use the term “energetically” and in doing so, refer to the concepts of qi’ and prana. Working with an international group of university students enabled me to explore, in a more contextualised and discursive manner than had been previously available to me, whether the concept of qi’ is used in discussing the experience of extending and withdrawing, and of sensing another do so. It seems (from my undoubtedly partial and provisional data) that it is not, and that although the experiences with which I am concerned are familiar, they are no more easily discussed than in English.

Liou Sui wrote about having been reluctant to mention such experiences “in a formal way”. It is, I think, important that we do find ways of discussing these experiences, both within the theoretical literature and in supervision and training. The next chapter goes some way towards explaining why, by further exploring the relational impact of being “over there” and “over here”.
Chapter Five: Meaning Making

The previous chapter introduced the idea that being “over there” and “over here” has a relational impact in so far as it determines whether or not one is experienced as available for “connecting”. This chapter continues my exploration of how being “over there” or “over here” impacts relationship and speaks to the literature on the sixth of Rogers’ therapeutic conditions in that it concerns how we perceive each other. I continue my discussion of perception as a bodily process, and argue that it is also an interpretative process.

The process of interpretation

I begin by returning to Harry’s account, begun in Chapter Four, of extending towards a classmate. In that chapter, I argued that the concept of the subtle body somehow obliterated Harry’s lived experience. He had previously given the following account of the exercise described in the Chapter Four:

In the first session I paired up with a good-looking girl to practice extending non-verbally. My attention was fully focused on her and I was smiling. It was such an intense extending that I feared that she might be able to judge what I was thinking which was her attractiveness. The feeling of intimacy was so strong for me that I had to tone it down, so that she would not be able to know about my intense feelings.

Harry writes more than once about finding it difficult to extend at will something he is not yet sure he believes in, yet his account betrays a familiarity with extending and with altering the intensity with which he extends. He has every confidence in his ability to “tone it down” when he wants to. His account also reveals his implicit beliefs prior to reading or discussion: he fears that his partner “might be able to judge what I was thinking”. The narrative that subtle bodily signals enable us to know what another person is thinking or feeling is commonplace both in everyday life and in psychotherapeutic theory, and has given rise to a wealth of literature on projective identification, embodied empathy and (rather less extensively) on telepathy. I do not dispute this narrative. However, there is another narrative that I think has equal veracity. This chapter presents this narrative.

Being primed to consciously notice that someone is extending towards us or pulling away is an artificial and unusual situation. Once the workshop
participants have assured themselves that they can sense their partners
making these subtle movements, I evoke a more naturalistic situation by
asking the workshop participants to extend and then pull away while
listening to their partner talk.

Molly: I didn’t even wait for Mary to say we were done – I just stopped
talking.
Me: You found you couldn’t talk while she was withdrawn?
Molly: Yeah. I just halted.
Mary: Immediately. As I withdrew from her she just stopped completely.
Molly: She looked like a stranger.
Tania: Sam noticed my behaviour was a bit more fidgety, and I was like,
“oh, what should I be talking about?” At the beginning I felt like
she was saying, ‘take as much time as you like, don’t talk if you
don’t want to …’
Me: Was she extended at that point?’
Tania: Yeah, she was extended first, and withdrawn second. When she
was withdrawn I felt uncomfortable, like I’m here to talk, but I
don’t feel like you really want to listen, you’re not really bothered
about what I’m talking about. But her face was the same. She
didn’t really do anything different. I think it was behind the eyes. I
felt, like I could have said I’m going to murder you and she
wouldn’t have reacted. It was like she was there but she didn’t
care – not that she was saying that …
Mary: I find that so interesting – the contrast between doing it in silence
and with talking. Initially when it was just the presence, I felt
drawn to connect when she withdrew, but when someone’s
talking and they shut off I feel like someone’s switched off the
telly.
Lois: I can feel what you’re talking about from the client’s side.
Sometimes I notice that my therapist’s gone, and I fill that gap
with wondering if he’s judging me. But you’ve just clarified that –
his just not psychologically present. I feel him when he comes
back, so I know that for a second he’s just not been there.
Jess: I’ve had that happen. I started a session with a particular client at
a time that wasn’t our usual time and I was watching the clock out
of the corner of my eye trying to work out how much longer we
had, and she suddenly said, “What’s the matter?” I wasn’t looking
at the clock. I think she felt my distraction rather than saw it.

Sensing someone extending and withdrawing while they are listening
generates recognition rather than the astonishment generated by the silent
version of the exercise discussed in the previous chapter. It is not uncommon
to sense a change in the quality of someone’s presence. However, the exercise
highlights not only the familiarity of sensing someone extend and withdraw,
but also the interpretative nature of perception. I drew upon Merleau-
Ponty’s ([1945] 1962) understanding of perception for a methodological purpose in Chapter Three. I want to invoke it again here for an analytical purpose. Merleau-Ponty’s point is that what appears in consciousness does so already making sense – perception is interpretative. The experience of sensing another extend or withdraw may (usually) be pre-linguistic and even pre-reflective, but it does not seem to be pre-interpretative. Tania says that she felt that her partner did not “really want to listen, you’re not really bothered about what I’m talking about”. Molly’s expresses her interpretation behaviourally – she stops talking the moment Mary withdraws. Both know that their partners are only “pulling away” because they are doing a workshop exercise, yet still “make something of it” (Spinelli, [1989] 2005). Tania is sufficiently convinced of Sam’s indifference to look for indications: “but her face was the same. She didn’t really do anything different”. Sam’s withdrawal in the context of a conversation is, for Tania, no longer a sensory event of yellows and blues as it was when she did the same exercise in silence, but an indication of Sam’s attitude towards her. Tania says, “it was like she was there but she didn’t care – not that she was saying that …”. Sam did not need to say anything – her absence, while “she was there” said it all as far as Tania was concerned. Yet Sam was (presumably) not suddenly uninterested in listening to Tania.

We do, of course, sense when another becomes distracted, as did Jess’s client, but I would suggest that, in some instances at least, what we sense is a change in their relative proximity. The meaning we attribute to this change might be in accord with what the other person is experiencing – or not. Aditi, one of the assignment writers, describes making a similar interpretation as a client:

I can remember an experience in my therapeutic relationship with my therapist. We were at last minutes of a session and I was talking and crying. It was an important moment for me because I was talking about one of my biggest concerns. Somehow, I felt that my therapist was not listening to me. He was there and he was looking at me but I could not continue to talk. He was distracting me. I felt a cold atmosphere between us and he was entirely absent. I thought about what was going on and what the problem was? Was it that much bad? I took all the feelings personal and it made me feel sick and nauseous. It was overwhelming for me. I was worried about my problem. I was not receiving unconditional positive regard on those moments. I was thinking that he was judging me because of my story. I really knew that something was
wrong but I could not realize what it was? Nevertheless, the session was over and I was packing my bag to leave. He started telling me that he is very hungry and he did not have the time to eat something before my arrival and I was his last client. He ate an apple while he was talking to me and ordered food afterwards. Suddenly, I realized that maybe his response was a result of his hunger.

Clients feel a change in the therapist’s relative proximity: Aditi felt a “cold atmosphere between us”. But she did not merely notice – she “made something of it”. She believed that she “was not receiving unconditional positive regard on those moments” and thought that her therapist was judging her.

Although some of the literature on presence acknowledges the sense one has of extending towards another, there is no acknowledgement in the literature that we also move away from each other. I have already suggested that we are always relatively extended or withdrawn, and that we might change our “position” for all manner of reasons. My point in relation to this in the last chapter was that doing so impacts whether or not one is experienced as being available for “connecting”. The point I want to make here is that it also impacts the other person’s perception of our attitude towards them. They interpret our relative extension or withdrawal. The rest of this chapter argues that this interpretation arises from bodily experience.

**Subtle boundaries**

Tania’s interpretation that Sam was not interested in listening to her can be usefully analysed as a process that begins with her feeling Sam withdraw. When she felt Molly withdraw in the silent version of this exercise, she said, “I really felt you pulling away and I felt the room go quite cold as well.” This sensory experience seems to get lost in the more naturalistic context of a conversation. When Sam withdraws during their conversation, Tania expresses an awareness not of sensory experience, but of her reaction, her discomfort. Her interpretation that Sam is no longer interested is based, I would suggest, upon this feeling of discomfort, rather than upon Sam’s withdrawal per se.

The language that I and my partners in conversation have used so far – “reaching out”, “extending”, “withdrawal”, “pulling away”, and other colloquial figures of speech, “my heart went out”, “drawing back” “pulling
away”, “the shutters went down” “he was behind a wall”, etc. – suggest that “extending” is relational and “withdrawing” unrelational. It took me quite a long time to realise – or rather to be able to have the thought – that not everyone welcomes being extended towards (I hope that, at least sometimes, I had an intuitive sense of this and moderated my extendedness accordingly). It seems that those of my partners in conversation who disliked being extended towards did not like to say so. I always emphasise, when inviting workshop or course participants to experience being extended towards and contracted away from, that the point of the exercise is not that they guess whether their partner is contracting or extending, but to notice their own response. The participants inevitably do try to guess what the other is doing and there is typically anxiety about “getting it wrong” despite my assurances that there is no “wrong”. Participants usually guess that when they felt more comfortable, their partner was extending. Those who discover, as some do, that they felt more comfortable when their partner pulled away generally assume that they have “got it wrong” or express a great deal of confusion. The tacit assumption that extension is a good thing and contraction bad seems to be widespread, even among those who, during the exercise, actually disliked being extended towards.

I suspect that some who dislike being extended towards fear that their response will be perceived as rejecting, or do not feel able to say that they do not like something that I, the tutor or workshop presenter, am doing. Huian helped with an initial demonstration of extending and contracting and said, at the time, that she did not experience anything when I extended. This had never happened before. I was puzzled. I thanked Huian and asked for another volunteer. My second volunteer felt met and warmly received when I extended towards her. However, Huian, in her assignment, revealed that she had felt something – she’d felt intruded upon:

The result was surprised that when my tutor did the same thing to both of us – first “extend”, then “contract” – we had different feelings toward her subtle body movement. In fact, it was the complete opposite. When she “extended” her subtle body, I felt intrude, whereas the other student felt warmth. And when she “contracted” her subtle body, I felt relief, calm and relax, whereas the other student felt unpleasant. Before demonstration I thought the idea of “extension” is good, and “contraction” is bad. Although most people in the room had similar feelings as the other student, our experiments showed different people
react differently towards subtle body “extension” and “contraction”.

Aditi too says that “my first assumption was that extending is a nice and caring behaviour but as I saw our classmates’ feelings I reconsidered my past experiences more carefully.” The language that we use – “reaching out”, “pulling away”, etc. – perhaps impacted expectations. The language of “reaching out”, “extending”, “moving closer” suggests, in the context of a therapeutic relationship in which warmth is valued, a desirable relationality, whereas “drawing back in”, “withdrawing” and “moving away” suggests an undesirable lack of engagement. In doing so, language can perhaps alienate us from our organismic valuing process (Rogers, 1959). We believe an experience should be pleasant, and find it difficult to acknowledge, perhaps to ourselves as well as to others, that we actually find it unpleasant.

I think it likely that my structural power as a tutor, as well as her own preconceived ideas about extension being good, and contraction bad, contributed to Huian’s reluctance to say how the experience really was for her. By the time she wrote the assignment I had made the point that not everyone welcomes being extended towards and so she implicitly had my permission to say that she had found it intrusive. Clients are in the less structurally powerful position within the therapeutic relationship. They too may be reluctant to say that they do not like the way the therapist is being. Even if they are not reluctant to speak up, they are likely to struggle to articulate what exactly it is that they do not like.

Having described how unsettled she was by “a cold atmosphere” between herself and her therapist, Aditi goes on to describe how she can also be unsettled by his “extending”:

Many times my therapist extended towards me. Sometimes, it helped me with providing the support and caring behaviour that I needed to overcome my pain or problem. But sometimes I really need more space for expressing myself and when he was extending too much in a non-verbal way, it distracted me a lot. I needed more space. I expected him to be neutral and give me enough space for sharing my story or expressing my feelings. I knew that his aim was not to distract me and he really wanted to be congruent and show his empathy but sometimes I did not need that. I needed a big room and empty space for showing all my feelings. It was hard for me to explain even to myself of what exactly I expected.
Not everybody welcomes being extended towards, or at least not all of the time. It is, I think, useful to make an analogy between personal space in the sense of the physical proximity with which one is comfortable and a more subtle boundary that is sensitive to the proximity that results from extension. Different people have different preferences or “subtle boundaries” – and these will not be consistent. Aditi writes about two romantic relationships. She writes about feeling invaded by a boyfriend:

he used to extend toward me all the time and was kind of pushy. He was extending a lot and I couldn’t bear it. When I was with him I was feeling that I cannot breath. I did not like the feeling. I felt so exhausted after our date … his energy was dominated me in a way that I felt like there was no space left for me to breathe. When I broke up with him, tried very hard to explain to him what the problem was, but could not because he always was very kind and had no clue that if there was any problem.

She also writes about another boyfriend who:

used to contract all the time. We went out for about 9 months. But our relationship did not go any further. Finally, we stopped dating. I did not know what the problem was on that time. But now I can say that both of us were so contracted all the time that we could not meet each other in any level … I waited all the time for his extension but he did not know how to do it.

Our preferences are complex and unpredictable - but important. What happens at this level can make or break a relationship. How someone interprets our subtle movements will be affected by a number of factors including their preferences in the moment as regards proximity. Although the sense of extending is acknowledged in the literature, the literature does not ask how a client may experience the therapist’s extending. Geller and Greenberg (2002; 2012), who regard extending as an aspect of presence, assume extending to be inherently desirable. Aditi’s accounts demonstrate that contraction is not necessarily experienced negatively, nor extension positively. It seems likely that many, like Aditi, would find it hard to explain what it was that they were finding objectionable. I suspect that clients like Jess’s client, who asked her what the matter was when she’d been trying to work out how much time they had left are the exception rather than the rule.

Those clients who do try to ask about a fluctuation in the quality of the therapist’s presence are likely to inadvertently obscure their question by asking in terms of the interpretation they have made. I did this a few sessions into my first experience of being a client. I felt my therapist pull away from
me. I stopped in puzzlement, “you’re angry with me ... I don’t understand why”. My therapist categorically assured me that he was not angry. I didn’t believe him. I had felt him close down. I had no interest in being persuaded to distrust my intuition or in working with an incongruent therapist. I stopped seeing him and found another therapist. As so often in therapy (and life), the same thing happened again. However, this interaction was very different because my new therapist acknowledged that he had withdrawn. Furthermore, he told me that he had done so because he felt worried, and not because he was angry. This was one of the most useful things he ever said to me because it enabled me to recognise the difference between feeling that someone has pulled away from me and imagining that I know why.

Had Aditi told her therapist that she thought he was “judging (her) because of (her) story”, I expect he might have simply said that he was not. I doubt that she would have believed him. And I imagine he would have been at a loss to understand why she felt judged. The subtle movements that we make as we get hungry, have an emotional response to what a client says, or are distracted, will be felt by our clients – and will mean something to them. An awareness of this alerts us to the possibility of misunderstanding taking seed. Rogers acknowledges that clients are somehow attuned to fleeting changes in the therapist and suggests that such changes are best acknowledged:

In using myself, I include my intuition and the essence of myself whatever that is. It is something very subtle...I know that in one demonstration interview, I suddenly was aware of something about the recording. I believe that I had not turned on the recorder or something like that. It was just a flash and then I was back with the client. In discussing it afterward, I said, “There was a moment when I was not really with you.” And he replied, “Yes, I knew that”. It is very evident when there is a break in the relationship like that. I did not express that concern because it had seemed irrelevant and yet, it was relevant. It would have been better had I said, “For a moment there, I was thinking about the machine and now I am back with you.” (Baldwin 1987, p. 46)

Rogers thinking about the tape recorder, and Jess trying to work out what time a session should end remind us that therapists may temporarily withdraw for all manner of reasons. We inevitably, when becoming interested or becoming distracted, move towards or away from the person we are with. Therapists might usefully be aware that their clients will sense even the slightest change. Their degree of proximity will or will not be
welcome, depending on the client’s preference in the moment.

This preference will form the basis of the client’s interpretation and determine their perception of the counsellor’s attitudes. A client who feels invaded and dominated is unlikely to experience the therapist as respectful. A client who experiences a therapist as unreachable, who experiences “a cold atmosphere”, is unlikely to feel warmly received or empathically understood. If the therapist’s overt behaviour belies what is happening at this subtle level in the relationship, if, for instance, they profess a confidence in the client’s ability to make trustworthy decisions for themselves whilst extending to a degree that the client finds oppressive and domineering, the therapist is unlikely to be experienced as being authentic. Similarly, a therapist who is experienced as too distant is unlikely to be perceived as warm, and may even be perceived as critical. Even if the client were to feel able to tell the therapist any of this, they would be likely to find it difficult to say just what the problem was.

One may – and will – move towards and away from a client for all manner of reasons. It is unrealistic to suggest that the quality of one’s presence should remain absolutely consistent, and I am not suggesting that this would necessarily be desirable. What I do want to argue is that it is desirable that we are aware that the subtle “internal” movements that we experience will also be felt by our client – and will mean something to them. The literature concerned with client perception, discussed in Chapter Two, focuses on the client’s stage of process, and in doing so runs the risk of forgetting that there are two people in the room and that each impacts the other. Husserl’s notion of intentionality, the idea that consciousness is always conscious of something, can be usefully applied in this context: the client is conscious of the therapist and so the therapist is implicated in the client’s perception. The client’s perception is, of course, partly determined by their own internal processes, but also impacted by how the therapist is. Even the most subtle movements made by the therapist impact the client’s perception.

I have, thus far, discussed extending and withdrawing as if they are simple towards and away-from movements. The next section elaborates upon the different qualities with which one may extend and withdraw and
demonstrates how seemingly slight differences in the way in which one “holds” oneself may impact the other’s experience and subsequent interpretation.

**Different ways of extending**
The way in which a client experiences and interprets one’s extendedness will depend upon their subtle boundaries in the moment, and also upon the particular way in which one extends or contracts. In the first few workshops that I ran, everyone who was aware of having a response – or, perhaps more accurately, those who chose to share their response – said that they felt warmly received, met, accepted when I extended and frightened or disquieted when I pulled myself back in. However, as the workshops progressed, the responses to my demonstration became more varied.

Occasionally someone would say that they lost all sense of me being there when I extended. The first time this happened I had been asked to give an impromptu workshop during a conference, and so the context was a little different. After much reflection, I realised that I had also been different. My “antennae” had been out at the conference, searching for people I knew, and so I had been more extended than usual before I had even begun the workshop. I concluded that when I had extended even further during the demonstration I’d effectively disappeared for the person who said that she’d lost all sense of me.

Something of this nature happened again recently. I was booked to run a workshop and had a bad head cold. I felt well enough to work, although I did feel a little “out of it”. During the demonstration, I extended towards my volunteer and then drew away from him. Everybody attending the workshop was sure that I had begun in a withdrawn state and then extended. They were surprised and puzzled when I later revealed that this was not so. They had sensed my absence when I’d extended and felt me arrive back in the room when I’d pulled myself back in. Whether or not another person experiences us as coming nearer to them when we extend depends upon where we are in the first place. I was feeling a “bit out of it”, as if I were hovering slightly above my body, not quite in full contact with the world. I have to emphasise the slightness of this feeling, but it was
enough to radically change the quality of my presence. I was not “in my body” when I extended towards the volunteer and I “overshot” him (and the rest of the group). Mae describes the experience of being overshot when I extended during my demonstration, “although she was expanding herself, I still could not perceive that as her energy did not meet mine. It went far away from me.” Huian also has the experience of being overshot when working with a partner and describes it in a particularly nuanced way:

> When I did the contraction exercise in pairs, I felt cold and distant when my partner contracted. When he was on the process of extending back to himself I felt his presence but then lost it again. I think he extended a bit too much to me so his energy has gone passed me. The different between the two ‘lost’ experiences was when he was contracting, I felt if I call upon him, no one would answer, but when he was extending, I felt that he would come to reach me if I called.

When I am in better health, the majority in any given workshop do not experience me as disappearing when I extend – but some do. How someone might experience me when I extend, and whether we “connect” or not presumably also depends upon how relatively extended or contracted they are. Those who experience me as extending to the point of disappearing when the majority experience me arriving feel that they “connect” with me when I contract.

One may also “overextend” in the sense of being too “full on”. Neave writes of a friend’s extension overpowering rather than overshooting her:

> I perceive a massive surge of energy from her, which is most likely well intended, however sometimes I perceive it as threatening and intrusive. I can feel quite disempowered by her presence. Consequently, I do not feel able to be in psychological contact with her. … While imaging this relationship as part of an exercise on this course, I felt as if I was being pushed by her.

The degree to which we extend affects whether another experiences us as “present”, “absent”, or, to use Aditi’s term, “pushy”. Their experience of us will depend partly upon the context of the interaction, their preferences in the moment as regards proximity and the degree to which they themselves are relatively extended or contracted.

**Different ways of withdrawing**
There are also different ways of contracting. In the demonstration described at the beginning of this chapter, Jess said that I was “over there” when I was
in a relatively contracted state. Later in the course I contract in a more
extreme way that I have, elsewhere (Cameron, 2002b), called “clenching”. I
pull in, then imagine I am pulling myself down from my head and up from
my feet. I stand in front of each course participant for a few seconds so that
everyone can get a sense of what it is like to be with someone who is
“clenching” in this way. Fokkina says that as I came round the room she “felt
an intense tightness in my chest, and an overall sense of being depressed and
even slightly nauseous”. Yvonne writes that:

The tutor demonstrated by walking around the room “clenched” and asked the
class for responses to how this made us feel. I deliberately avoided looking at
the tutor and as she drew nearer to me I began to feel a tightening in my
stomach, this feeling became more intense as she came closer and as she faced
me I said, “ok” and put my hand up to stop her. I felt like shouting at her to
stop, I did not like the feeling of intense tightness in my stomach.

Some of my partners in conversation focus on their experience of the
quality of my presence rather than their response to it:

   It wasn’t you.
   It was just this black shadow.
   I thought, “it’s the grim reaper …”
   It was like being with death.

A couple of co-researchers who work in hospices identified this as being the
state that people go into when they are dying. However, “clenching” is not
confined to the dying. One might, when full of life, “clench” or “curl into a
little ball inside” for all manner of reasons. Humiliation makes us feel
“small”, as does a lack of confidence. One might “clench” when anxious.

Neave writes that:

   When I am clenched my muscles tighten and I become as stiff as a board. I
almost feel physically smaller and I am rather disconnected. I always knew that
I was nervous and uncomfortable in (unfamiliar social) situations but since
beginning the course I have really been paying attention to what is going on
inside me and I now recognise that I either completely contract or go into a
clench when I am in these circumstances.

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30 My (limited) experience of being with those who are dying is that there is certainly a
quality of increasing distance, but I am not sure that this is necessarily or wholly accounted
for by a withdrawal into the body. Later in the course I invite co-researchers to experience
moving upwards. I have learnt to warn anyone who has, at any point in their lives, been
close to death that they may find this frightening and may choose not to do it. Those who
have chosen to do the exercise anyway say that they became frightened as they started to
“leave” their body and were reminded of the experience of nearly dying.
A therapist might “clench” because they are finding the session difficult in some way, because of something out-with the session – or simply because the room is cold. It seems that it does not much matter why one is contracted. I did not feel stressed, unhappy, humiliated, or indeed, cold when I clenched during the course. I contracted simply because I was demonstrating a point. What I did could, with some accuracy, be described as simply holding my breath – although this is not an entirely accurate description as I did it for quite a while without turning purple; it was more like the very “still” breathing one might employ when listening to an unfamiliar noise. I am not trying to describe an unusual experience. Many people hold their breath in this way when they are anxious, going through a difficult period, in pain, tired or just busy. “It wasn’t you”, “it was just this black shadow”, “I thought, ‘it’s the grim reaper’ …” and “it was like being with death” are, I think, quite startling responses to a state of being that may be very easily and frequently entered into.

Another way of contracting involves a collapsing “in and down” movement. The difference between this and “clenching” is subtle, yet perceptible. Huian says that:

_The curious part was I do not feel anything the moment she stepped in front of me when she demonstrate clenching but I felt scared, heart beating fast, wanted to cry when she was demonstrating collapsing._

One may also move upwards, or outwards, or both – we “float off”, nearly “jump out of skins”, are “beside ourselves”, etc. It is not my intention to create a typology of the ways in which we might move, or of the qualities our “stances” might embody, but to encourage an awareness that whatever we do, however one “holds” oneself, will be sensed by the other. Yolande was a little sceptical about this and so experimented with letting herself “float off” while sitting in silence next to a boyfriend during a train journey:

_Although I didn’t say anything about what I was doing and I didn’t expect him to react I was surprised! He reacted as if I were leaving from my seat, by trying to hold my hand and trying to “wake me up”. He even said “honey are you meditating?”_  

Yolande is particularly surprised because “this person does not believe in any kind of energy”. Even very slight “movements” are discernible to another. Carleen senses – and responds to – her partner making an internal
movement of a few inches:

At one point he moved his energy from his chest to his throat and I felt the
difference immediately and as he continued I began to feel very sad.

I imagine that, although they are difficult to put into words, none of the
different qualities of presence described so far are unfamiliar to the reader.
We “open up”. We silently resist. We “put barriers up”, and take them down.
We wonder how much time is left in a session. We get distracted, hungry,
cold. A client may wonder where we have gone when we feel “on top of the
world”, and also when we clench because we need to pee. They may feel
met, invaded, diminished or pushed around. Alyson writes that:

The experience of being pulled in, within my own head, resonated with my
everyday experience. I immediately defined it as my default position. I often
find myself in my own head, impervious to the world around me. When I am
walking from one place to another, I am often struck by the fact that I walked as
if I was blind, failing to take in the imagery around me. I think this is a
comforting position for me, as it allows me to stay within the comforts of my
own mind. I don’t have to put myself out in the world, even when I am
physically there. This kind of comfort could prove to be a hindrance if I am in a
counselling role. I think many people contract when they want to remove
themselves from the situation, however this certainly sends a message to the
person one is communicating with. In my listening triads, I often find myself
more contracted in the first few minutes, when I am allowing myself to relax
and connect. This comes through to my speaker, who has experienced a sense of
disconnection in those first few moments.

It is desirable that therapists cultivate an awareness of the ways in which
they move and reflect upon their possible impact. Cultivating an awareness
of the subtle movements that we make and their likely impact on the
therapeutic encounter is of great potential benefit in identifying,
understanding and untangling (some) relational difficulties. Such an
awareness is, of course, aspirational – consistent awareness of the subtle
movements we make is as difficult to cultivate as any other level of self-
awareness.

Conclusion
A relational reading of Person-centred therapy renders the client’s
perception of the therapist’s attitudes towards them as equally important, if
not more so, as the attitudes the therapist actually does hold. It is, as Rogers
(1962; 1973) says, important to be sensitive “not only to what is going on in
me, and sensitive to the flow of feelings in my client. I must also be sensitive
to the way he is receiving my communications” because, “empathy can be perceived as a lack of involvement … unconditional regard on my part can be perceived as indifference … warmth can be perceived as threatening closeness, and that real feelings of mine can be perceived as false” (p. 96).

The research into the sixth condition, discussed in Chapter Two, identifies the client’s perception as being impacted by socio-economic factors and by the client’s stage of process. I have argued that the client’s perception is also impacted by the ways in which the therapist extends and contracts. The therapist will inevitably position themselves in relation to their client and their degree of proximity will be felt by the client, who will “make something of it”. How we are understood is always an interpretative act on the part of the other. Rogers, in the above quotation, is writing about clients who are “particularly disturbed”. I suggest that any client, particularly disturbed or otherwise, might misinterpret our attitude towards them depending upon whether or not they welcome the ways in which we move towards and away from them.

The figures of speech that we use suggest that extending is contactful and “good” and withdrawing not contactful, and less desirable. I have argued that this is not true for everybody in all contexts. Whether we welcome being extended towards or not, and whether we organismically value being withdrawn from negatively or positively, is dependent upon context. Aditi’s accounts of her romantic relationships demonstrate that we might welcome being extended towards by one person, but find another person’s extension towards us oppressive. Her accounts of her therapy show that even with the same person, one might welcome being extended towards at some points in time but not at other times.

Aditi’s account of working with a hungry therapist speaks to the way in which one might interpret a bodily experienced feeling of the absence of the other as something other than that which is being experienced by the other. Aditi might well have been right in believing that her therapist was finding it difficult to listen properly, but it seems likely that, if this was the case, he was distracted by hunger rather than horrified by what he was hearing. In practice the actual reason for his withdrawal does not much matter.
therapeutically. It was Aditi’s interpretation of his attitude that created the potential for psychological damage rather than healing. Aditi was worried that her problem was too bad for him to listen to. She felt judged, unacceptable – and all because her therapist had neglected to make time to eat. Such perceptions are very often unspoken and, I would suggest, account for some of what Mearns (2003) calls the unspoken relationship.

Mearns’ unspoken relationship consists of a two-way “I think that you think” dynamic. If the interpretative process I have elucidated in this chapter may be considered to contribute to this unspoken relationship, I would suggest that there are reasons, other than the mutual timidity identified by Mearns, as to why it is unspoken. Not only can it be difficult to articulate the experience of feeling another person’s relative proximity but, in naturalistic settings, one is less likely to be simply aware of the bodily experience. Tania, in the previous chapter, gave an account of the experience of being extended towards and withdrawn from in silence and, in this chapter, of being extended towards and withdrawn from while talking and being listened to. The sensory experience of yellows and blues that she experienced while sitting in silence was no longer foregrounded in the more naturalistic setting of a conversation. The experience of being extended towards or withdrawn from may not only elude words, but also elude awareness.

We “extend”, “draw ourselves back in” and move, inwards, outwards, up, and down in a multitude of ways as we respond and react to what is happening within and around us. Although there are (a few) references to extending in the literature, it is discussed only as an aspect of presence. I suggest in Chapter Four that it is useful to think about there being different qualities to one’s presence depending upon whether one is relatively extended or withdrawn. In this chapter, I have shown that there is a multitude of ways in which one might move towards or away from another. I have also shown that other people are sensitive to very slight and subtle differences in one’s “stance” or “position” – and will almost inevitably “make something of it”. The interpretation the other makes will, in part, depend upon the specific quality of one’s extension or withdrawal.

There is no acknowledgement in the literature that we “extend” and
“withdraw” in various ways for all sorts of reasons and that this constitutes a stratum of the client’s experience of the therapist. A relational reading of Person-centred theory suggests that how the client experiences the therapist, whether they feel genuinely accepted and understood, is fundamental to the quality of the therapeutic relationship; the therapeutic process and therapeutic outcome. One cannot control how the other is impacted by the ways in which we move towards and away from them, nor the meaning they ascribe to it. But we can cultivate awareness that they will be impacted in some way and that this will mean something to them. Sensitivity to the way one is being received and understood may be greatly enhanced by paying attention to when and how one “moves” and the stance that one is holding in any given moment. The next chapter identifies some of the ways in which such awareness might be cultivated. It also examines further ways in which relationship – and the other person – are impacted by the ways in which we extend and withdraw.
Chapter Six: The *Unseen Dance*

Toukmanian (2002) conceptualises the client’s perception of the therapist as arising from purely cognitive processes. I suggested, in Chapter Five, that this understanding of perception is out of keeping with the organismic basis of Person-centred theory. Schmid (1998) complains that, despite this organismic understanding of human nature, and with the exception of Gendlin, the Person-centred approach neglects the significance of the body. I argued that there is a bodily basis to the ways in which others perceive us. This chapter argues that there are further ways in which we are impacted by our bodily involvement with each other, by what Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 1962) calls our *intercorporality*. It begins by following one of the assignment writers, Peter, as he uses a course exercise to identify how his counsellor’s extension towards him impacted their therapeutic work, how he learns that he can choose to alter his “stance” and how he takes this awareness into his other relationships. I then draw on other assignments and my own experience to consider how a client’s well-being may be very directly affected by what is happening as each “moves” and takes up a “position” in relation to the other in what I call the *unseen dance*. I end by exploring how easy it is to choose to move into and out of various stances.

**Noticing that one is dancing**

Peter begins by writing about a sense of being suffocated in relationship with his therapist:

*Although initial sessions went well with my counsellor I found myself, as the weeks progressed, struggling to organise my language to speak verbally. I found solace in communicating through art and indeed my experiences do tend to shape into colours and textures before they can conceptualise into language. We explored this within sessions but I was unaware that I was gradually dissociating to a point where I spent each hour in silence, no longer in the room with my counsellor. Finally I emailed him to say I would not be back, that I could no longer endure trying to talk, sitting in that room surrounded by a sense of suffocation.*

Although Peter left the therapy room, both psychologically and then physically, he did not leave therapy. After much negotiation, he and his therapist agreed to continue by email and:
settled into a process which has worked very well, although it intrigues us both as to why … What was it that had suffocated me, made me feel that my counsellor was intruding?

Peter participated on one of the university courses during this period of doing therapy by email. My demonstration of extending and drawing myself back in enabled him to make sense of his feeling of suffocation when in the physical presence of his therapist:

I would make this discovery during the course, in particular around expansion … it was revealed to me on the course via the tutor’s own demonstration of expanding and withdrawing subtle energy.

Peter’s perception of me changed radically as I “drew away” from him:

Suddenly I found my perception of the tutor easier to be with. I interpreted what I felt as liking her more. It wasn’t that I had disliked her before, but that I had felt unsettled by her. I felt overwhelmed and squeezed and found my breathing to be tight and effortful.

As I backed away, Peter felt relief. He much preferred it when I contracted, but rather than recognising this as a preference for what I was doing, he felt, in the space of a second or two, that he liked me more. This, perhaps, explicates the phenomenon of relational “chemistry” in which people feel a connection with or antipathy towards each other. Peter caught the moment in which the chemistry changed between us, and because he knew I was drawing away from him, he was then able to recognise that it was my relative proximity that he had disliked. He says that he had previously attributed his extreme discomfort to his perception of me as “as an authority figure I should be mindful of – indeed I have conditions of worth which have resulted in me viewing authority figures as dangerous, to be appeased at all costs.” The power imbalance inherent in our respective roles as tutor and student would certainly have impacted our relationship in many ways, but Peter was sensitive enough to his own experience to also catch something else:

When she withdrew I could meet her more easily, see her more clearly, be in her energy “field” more comfortably, almost as though she had reduced in size to a more manageable height and shape for me …

Until we did this exercise, I had no idea that Peter had felt so unsettled by me (or, rather, by my extendedness). He had told me that he was going through a period of intense anxiety and psychosomatic arousal, and when we acknowledged that he had difficulty breathing when he spoke to me I
had understood that this was due to what was happening in his inner life, and possibly to anxiety in being self-disclosing to a stranger who had the power to decide whether or not he was fit to do the course. I was aware that this was going to be a difficult conversation for him and I remember extending towards him as I listened. My intention – in so far as I had any conscious intention – was to be approachable, offer contact, to not be distant and intimidating.

When I withdrew, Peter found me markedly easier to be with despite my retaining all my structural power as a tutor. My extension towards Peter, and his response to it, constituted a power dynamic that was supplementary to our formal relations as tutor and student. He writes that he had:

*set up a barrier, a wall between me and others to protect me from being cared for or attended to too closely and I suspect, when someone successfully expands as the tutor did, that wall is breached.*

I had, by simply extending to make contact, inadvertently set up a dynamic in which Peter felt utterly disempowered – and I had no idea. Clearly, this is not desirable. My internal supervisor frowns. I protest that I didn’t know that I was transgressing a boundary – I didn’t feel a resistance in the space between us. It is interesting that Peter only “suspects” that I breached his wall. I suspect that, when it came to relating to me, there was no wall. I do not understand Peter’s wall to be a thing separate from him, but something he did – or made – with his “energy”. My understanding was that rather than pushing outwards to create a wall, Peter had fled inside. I felt an absence rather than a resistance in the space between us. He writes of me that:

*I also had a sense of threat that she may get too close. I sensed something about her energy being overwhelming and prepared myself for flight*

and that:

*as the tutor withdrew I felt myself begin to expand, to centre, to come back into my head, not having realised my energy had been situated around my chest.*

Peter recognises this flight in the face of another person’s extendedness as an unacknowledged hindrance in his therapy:

*This has me reflecting on past counselling experiences which I’ve fled from and indeed my current counselling which is no longer a face to face process as I find it too overwhelming. Do I cope less well face to face because the energy is too expanded, to encroaching? Does a counsellor in their desire to create a space*
that is containing inadvertently suffocate the client? If I think back to my
drawing of my perception of the face to face counselling experience (below) I
can now interpret it as my counsellor’s energy expanding all around me, in an
effort to contain and hold but sadly, trapping and suffocating me.

![Figure 1: Peter’s visual rendition of feeling too tightly held](image)

Developing an awareness of whether we have “extended”, “contracted” or
“moved” in some other way is so important because it inevitably impacts the
therapeutic relationship. A client feeling suffocated by the therapist’s
extendedness – or abandoned by their contraction – is clearly something that
needs to be worked with in some way. Peter discussed his reaction to being
extended towards with his therapist and they agreed that:

> he would expand out to meet me rather than to find me or hold me. I in return
> would expand out to meet this, if I could. I did. Today’s counselling experience
> was one of presence. That presence was a subtle force that ebbed and flowed
> between us. Today there was no dissociation, no withdrawal, simply a sense
> that the subtle energy between us was relating effectively, there was this
> mutual reading, this resonance and I find myself thinking of two magnets,
> positioned the right way so as to attract each other and combine, with a strong
> joining between them, as opposed to a pair of magnets, positioned incorrectly,
> thus knocking each other away. There was this sense of to-ing and fro-ing,
> dancing quietly back and forth, together (illustrated below).

![Figure 2: Peter’s visual rendition of him and his therapist dancing](image)
We respond to each other’s movements towards and away from us not just as meaning-making minds but as organisms – we respond bodily as well as cognitively. Our movements towards or away from, for instance, a client, invite – or compel – some subtle movement in response. We respond to their response, they to us, and so a dance of closeness and distance ensues. This unseen dance of approach and withdrawal is present in every therapeutic relationship and in every other kind of relationship or encounter.

It is, perhaps, unusual for a client to identify that they feel suffocated by a therapist’s extending (or rejected by their failure to do so). Certainly Peter was unable to do so prior to the course. The responsibility for creating a relationship that is therapeutic lies disproportionately with the therapist, and so it is desirable that therapists cultivate an awareness of the unseen dance, and consider how best to work with difficulties that arise within it. Adjusting one’s proximity, as Peter’s therapist did, to accommodate a client who feels overwhelmed (or abandoned) is one way of working with a mismatch in the degree of proximity that facilitates “connecting” for each person. I return to the possibilities and problems of doing so in Chapter Eight.

The subtle movements that one makes impact not only relationship, but also one’s own psychological state. The way in which we dance impacts how one feels “within oneself”. The rest of this chapter examines how assisting a client in becoming aware of how they dance may be helpful in restoring disruptions in a client’s ability to regulate their emotional state.

**Moving as an active process**

Peter’s experience of being with me changed as I “backed off”. His experience of being “in himself” also changed: “as the tutor withdrew I felt myself begin to expand, to centre, to come back into my head, not having realised my energy had been situated around my chest (clenched, prepared for fight/flight/freeze)”. Peter describes coming out of a “contracted” state as something that he witnesses in himself – he says that he felt himself expanding, rather than simply saying that he “expanded”. Peter’s expansion is not outside his awareness and he does not disown it – it is “himself” who expands – yet he is a witness to this process rather its active agent. He moves, in a process reminiscent of the first two stages of Rogers’ seven stages of
process (1958; 1967), from understanding his part in the unseen dance as something that I do to him, that results in his feeling “overwhelmed and squeezed”, to witnessing himself react: “I felt myself begin to expand”. I have, since the first exercise in which I invited my co-researchers to “draw themselves back in”, implied that such processes are active – something that we do rather than something that happens to us. I would suggest that Peter felt “overwhelmed and squeezed” not because he was a helpless victim of my overbearing presence, but because he had, in reaction to the expansive quality of my presence, clenched into a small space inside his chest. He had the same reaction when I “clenched”:

My experience of perceiving the tutor clenching was of someone tense and poised ready for fight or flight. My interpretation was of danger and in response I too clenched.

It is this kind of embodied recognition that, as a trainer, I seek to provoke. Peter experienced similar sensations of tightness in reaction\(^\text{31}\) to both my extending towards him and my withdrawing away from him as I clenched. The bodily memories provoked by this exercise enable Peter to recognise that the sensations of “clenching” are familiar to him, as is the feeling of being with someone who is clenched.

The sensation of my SE (subtle energy) clenching has helped me to realise that I also sense this with my siblings. Our ‘in-betweenness’ when the family get together has always been fraught with a discomfort that has been difficult to describe. I always get a sense of being watchful, careful, tense and ready for something. I realised that perhaps what I perceived was a room full of clenched energy.

Whether one symbolises the sensations as “clenching” or in some other way is of little consequence (Henderson (1986; 1999) uses the term “compression”). However, some kind of symbolisation is useful as it is this that makes the experience easier to admit to awareness. The symbolisation of an embodied experience as “clenching” (or “compression”, or whatever) enables one to think, say or write “I am clenching”. Without some kind of symbolisation, the experience, although intense, is elusive. The symbolisation, “clenching”, makes this bodily experience, that was

\(^{31}\) Peter uses the word “response”. I use will use “response” and “reaction” to make a distinction between a reaction that is automatic and possibly out of awareness and a response that is more considered.
previously “difficult to describe”, easier to hold in awareness and reflect upon. Having watched, or rather felt me clench and then unclench, and having consciously done so himself\textsuperscript{32}, Peter recognises that clenching is a movement he habitually makes, and that doing so impacts his personal relationships. He now knows that even if he clenches as an automatic reaction, he can choose whether or not to stay clenched. He decides to experiment with responding in a different way:

\begin{quote}
I resolved to start with my younger brother and change my clenched energy to something more relaxed and centred. To move it from my chest where it sat as a solid ball of ache and spread it upwards and outwards. The results were amazing. The sense in the room was of letting go a long breath out, having held it for an eternity. Physically we both relaxed …
\end{quote}

The \textit{unseen dance} is, like any other stratum of relationship, a co-creation, and as with any other stratum of relationship, what we choose to do (or not do) inevitably impacts the other. It matters not whether at some original point, or in any particular context, Peter clenched in reaction to his brother’s clench, or he to Peter’s. What does matter was that he was able to initiate change in the feeling between them on realising that the discomfort and the tension between them resulted, in part, from something the he had actively done. Unclenching provoked change in Peter, in his brother and in their interaction. We are active agents of “the energy in the room”. But we influence, rather than dictate it. Peter’s brother may have reacted to Peter’s extending in the same way that Peter reacted to me extending – he might have contracted even further, in which case the “energy in the room” would still have changed, but not in the same way. Unclenching also changed Peter’s experience of how he was “in himself”. He relaxed with his brother. He felt able to inhabit his own body more fully: he “came back to himself”.

The ways in which we “move”, and the “stances” we adopt have an intra-personal as well as an interpersonal impact. Sophia describes the process of being in and moving out of a clench in some more detail:

\begin{quote}
My first big experiential insight happened during the particular exercise of “contraction”. This time I was able to contract and really sense it. The feeling of it reminded me of something and made me understand that I have been having this experience very often. It was that feeling of dense energy inside my
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{32} As already noted, my co-researchers choose whether or not to actually do the exercises themselves or just watch.
chest or heart field which I have been calling ‘the stone’. It is always dark and feels heavy. I had it inside me for many years, I cultivated its growth. I did not know what it was. But now I suddenly understood what it is and why I had it. It was a big revelation to me. I understood that I was contracting myself from the world. It had been my constant habit and a way to escape from the surrounding world. I was always contracting in situations where I perceived the environment to be threatening, alien and painful. I was doing it for so long and now I understood that I was doing it! And I was the one responsible for it. Before I was just wondering why I am feeling like that and how could I get rid of this feeling? I came to understand that it might be a natural human reaction and many people might be feeling it sometimes. For me this feeling was often very strong. But now I came to a conscious awareness of it. From that day on I knew that I can control it, let it go, breathe it out.

Sophia’s account raises a number of questions. The next section begins by considering whether it is desirable to “control it” and whether this is the same as controlling, repressing or denying one’s feelings. The last section considers how easy it is to move out of a position one had settled into – “contraction”, for instance – just because one wants to.

**Moving and feeling**
The relationship between “movement” and emotion is complex. In the previous chapter, I was at pains to make a distinction between “movement” and emotion – contracting and feeling hostile for instance. The two are distinct, but the distinction can dissolve. This section discusses the complex relationship between how we “move” (or don’t “move”) and how we feel. I will use the term “feelings” to indicate organismic experience that is not necessarily symbolised, and the term “emotions” to indicate feelings that are clearly symbolised as a particular emotion such as joy or anger.

I originally designed the middle section of the course to help therapists develop a better awareness of how the therapeutic relationship is impacted by the way that they “move” and the “stances” that they settle into. The aim was to invite participants to “move” in different ways and adopt various “stances” in the hope that they would become better able to recognise how they “position” themselves in relation to clients, and how doing so might affect the client’s experience of the therapist. However, it quickly became apparent that the participants found the work to be of great relevance to their personal as well as their professional lives. Not only did they, like Peter, find the perspective I was offering a useful way of understanding their personal
relationships but, like Sophia, they found that moving in and out of different “stances” affected how they were “in themselves”. Several identified particular “stances” as having had a profound impact on their own psychological and physical well-being in the past. The atmosphere of stunned revelation among those who attended the first course remains a powerful memory for me many years on and encouraged me to attend to the intra-personal as well as the interpersonal significance of the “stances” that we adopt.

Before going further, I want to briefly make a distinction between the way I am theorising the subtle “movements” we make into “stances” and Gendlin’s ([1978] 1981) work on the felt sense. Gendlin also pays close attention to unsymbolised bodily sensations, and would be interested in helping Sophia symbolise the emotional content and meaning associated with “the stone”. Many other therapists – Gestaltists spring to mind – would also be interested in what “the stone” is “saying”. I, on the other hand, am making a distinction between “the stone” and the emotional content that it might accompany. Sophia writes that, “I was always contracting in situations where I perceived the environment to be threatening, alien and painful”, yet does not conflate the heavy sensation of “the stone” with emotional content: she describes it as a “feeling of dense energy inside my chest” rather than as sadness or pain. Anger, and the “rush” that might accompany it are not one and the same thing. Neave writes about feeling affection as a “rush of emotion”. One might also experience a rush of fear. “That sinking feeling” that might accompany both dread and disappointment is not identical to either. The subtle “movements” we make outwards, inwards, and up and down accompany, rather than being the same as, feelings and emotions.

However, too abrupt a distinction between the “movements” that we make, the “stances” that we settle into (being contracted, for instance, or extended), and what we feel denies the complexity of organismic experience. Sophia does not equate the “heavy”, “dark”, “dense” qualities of “the stone” with any particular emotion, but one might infer that it does not feel good. She goes on to say that having “breathed it out”, she feels “energy moving in me. I feel alive. I feel that everything is running inside of me and through me. I sense that I am expanding in all of the directions at the same time”. Again,
she does not conflate this sense of aliveness, expansion and freely moving energy with any particular emotion, but it is difficult to imagine that she does not prefer feeling alive to the dark weight of being clenched. “Stances” may be experienced as pleasant or unpleasant in themselves – and this is likely to affect how we feel. It seems safe to assume that feeling “alive” might predispose Sophia to feeling happier than she is with a stone inside her chest.

The “movements” that we make and the emotions that we feel intensify each other. I notice that when I settle into a contracted stance after contracting, for instance, in annoyance, I am very likely to eventually find myself furious rather than annoyed. Annoyance may be a useful and appropriate response to a particular situation. The energy (in the usual sense of the word) engendered by my annoyance moves me to act. Not allowing the energy to move me into action, holding my tongue – and, more importantly, holding my breath – keeps me in a contracted state. The intensity of emotion that builds in the locked-in pressure-cooker that a held “contraction” can be is likely to be out of all proportion to whatever has happened. “Movement” that settles into a “stance” prolongs and intensifies feelings.

I have another, more radical claim to make with regard to how we “move” and how we feel. The workshop exercises in which my co-researchers and I adopt various “stances” in order to become aware of whether they are familiar enabled me to notice that if, for instance, I contract, I start to feel anxious (or perhaps annoyed, or alienated) even if I was not feeling so previously. I invite my co-researchers to “move” and adopt different stances by doing so myself first, and giving a running commentary as I do so. When I demonstrate contraction, for instance, I do so by progressively pulling myself further and further in with each inhalation. I do exhale, but in a very quiet, still way that allows me to breathe out without extending out, rather like the way one might breathe when hiding. I pause with each inhalation and comment on how I am feeling, and whether any associations come to mind. So, for instance, I breathe myself in to about eight inches in front of my body. This is not my usual stance but it is not unfamiliar. The association that comes to mind is of being in a crowded lecture theatre and being careful not to intrude on anyone else’s space. It is okay, not uncomfortable, but very
much a temporary stance. I breathe in again. This time I am about an inch outside my skin. This is not comfortable. I feel as if I am wearing a shoe that is too tight and I feel the beginnings of anxiety. I breathe in again until I am an inch or two behind my skin. I feel wary, watchful. I pull myself in further. I have a strong sense of something needing to be released – and I feel upset. Finally I exhale freely and physically move around a little.

It seems that holding a stance actually gives rise to emotion as well as arising from emotion. This claim that moving into a stance gives rise to emotion is not without some precedent, albeit from research involving physical movement rather than the kind of non-physical “movement” I am discussing. It is laboratory rather than phenomenological research, but I give it, in part as a context for Henderson’s (1986; 1999) phenomenological experience as a research subject. The research Henderson was involved in was conducted by the experimental psychologists Ekman and Friesen (1976; 1978) and concerned the long-debated question of whether there are different patterns of autonomic nervous system activity for different emotions. In the process of developing a technique for measuring facial movement, Ekman and Friesen moved their own facial muscles to learn about how such movements related to changes in facial appearance. Both found themselves “experiencing strong physical sensations when they contracted muscles that produced facial configurations that resembled the universal facial expressions for certain emotions”. This led them to hypothesise that the “voluntary production of emotional facial configuration would produce emotion-specific patterns of autonomic activity” (Levenson et al., 1990, p. 364).34

33 The emotions they identify as universal across cultures are anger, fear, disgust, sadness, happiness and surprise.

34 Understanding how voluntary facial movement generates emotion-specific autonomic activity became an additional research question. Ekman and Friesen used two sets of experiments, one that involved asking subjects to “relive a past emotional experience”. The other involved directing the subject to change their facial expression, muscle by muscle. No emotion was mentioned by name in the facial movement experiments and subjects were not asked to feel or think about anything in particular. Subjects were initially able to see their own or an instructor’s face in some of the facial movement experiments, but not in the final trials. The researchers also tested for the possibility that the subjects recognised the emotion being portrayed by the facial movement instructions. They found that “voluntarily contracting facial muscles into emotional configurations produced patterned autonomic activation that
I was interested to learn that so many of those participating experienced some kind of emotional change when making a happy face, or a sad face, and
struck that a considerable number felt something other than happiness or sadness. However, I was even more interested in what Henderson (1999), in her account of participating in the research, adds:

As part of the protocol, each person was asked if they could feel what they wanted to feel simply by choosing to feel it ... When Paul (Ekman) asked me if I could feel what I chose to feel, I said yes. I know he didn’t believe me. So we started out with anger. Can you feel anger? He asked. Yes. Okay, do it. So I did. He came dashing in to put out the fire. Wait, wait, he said, we have to recalibrate the instruments, you’re off the scale! ... After that we did sadness, fear, disgust, and happiness … somewhere along the line Paul asked me if I could teach other people how to be able to feel what they chose to feel … after a few days I came back to him with six key words: movement, breath, sound, intention, consent and surrender. He organised a weekend workshop for some friends and we tried it out in practice. It worked. Since then, the observation that feeling states arise simultaneously with and as a direct expression of how we are moving (or not moving), how we are breathing (or not breathing), how we are allowing expressive sound (or suppressing it) has proved central to the way I work as a somaticist and psychotherapist … (p. 98)

Henderson is here using “move” in the usual sense of physical movement, but elsewhere discusses the movement of “energy”. The concept of an “energy” that can pulsate or be blocked is fundamental to the thinking of (nearly) all Body Psychotherapists who locate themselves somewhere within a Reichian tradition. However, many, if not most, would tend to understand an interruption in the pulsation of energy as caused by chronic muscular tension, and argue that this tension must be released either by massage, physical movement, or by working through, in relationship with the therapist, the psychological issues that caused (and cause) the tension. After collaborating with Ekman and Friesen, Henderson (1999, 2007) emphasises physical movement rather than “energetic” movement (in so far as they can be considered separately), and in doing so adopts a more conventionally
Bioenergetic perspective (if such a phrase is not too much of a contradiction in terms). Her earlier work (Henderson, 1986) is more concerned with moving one’s “energy” directly. This earlier strand of Henderson’s work has influenced my own: I see myself as facilitating awareness of how we “move” rather than how we physically move. My argument is that “moving” gives rise to a change in how one feels, just as physically moving may give rise to a change in how one feels. I doubt that Henderson would disagree with this.

Huian, in a description of how she felt after we experimented with contracting on the course, illustrates my hypothesis that one’s state of being is very much affected by moving into a stance:

At the end of the session of the contracting exercise I seemed fine. But when I left the room, walking in the shops and along the streets I felt tired and a bit funny inside. I did not put much notice to it until I got on the bus. When I was on the bus after a while, I started to feel dreadful, and wanted to crumble myself. I was on the phone but I felt so hard to talk, every word I said used up my whole energy. I feel like just spitting out a word is the most difficult thing to do in the world. I felt like I just wanted to hide myself in a corner. Eventually I could not answer the phone at all. I simply couldn’t even if I wanted to make some respond like just an ‘mm’ sound.”

Huian’s experience of holding a contraction is more complex than feeling, or ceasing to feel, a specific emotion. She feels “tired” and “a bit funny inside”, then “dreadful”, rather than sad or cross. Gendlin’s notion of the felt sense signifies Huian’s feeling tired and a bit funny inside but, rather than being interested in its content, I am interested in how moving into a stance brings about a change in one’s psychological state. Henderson’s collaboration with Eckman and Friesen led her to explore how one can fully embody – and also move out of – specific emotions. The psychological states with which I am concerned are more complex than discrete emotions. They involve discrete

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35 Clearly there is an ethical concern here. I am aware of the possibility that someone may become “stuck” in a stance as I understand happened to Huian here. I take great (though clearly sometimes insufficient) pains to ensure that this does not happen. We do various exercises to fully move out of whichever stance we have been adopting. At the end of the session, I ask each individual if they are experiencing themselves as being in what feels to them a normal state – and I have a good look at them to see if they seem to me to be some way different. Huian had assured me that she felt “okay” at the end of this exercise and I’m sure that, as her account claims, she did. I did notice a slight difference – she seemed more distant than usual – but by this point in the course, I had deduced that both focusing on her in the group and speaking to her individually was likely to cause her embarrassment and therefore further “contraction”. I accepted that there was nothing more I could do – or perhaps had the right to do.
emotions such as happiness or anger, but also thoughts and attitudes. They would include moods and organismic states such as panic or depression. I see myself as enabling those with whom I work to access and regulate psychological states and to access, or move out, of moods, rather than to access, or move out of, specific emotions.

I do not want to suggest that there is some correlation between adopting a specific stance and experiencing a specific state, for instance, that one will inevitably feel “dreadful” if contracted. The experience of adopting a stance is very individual. Astrid described a very different experience of the exercise in which we contracted:

In week three, in pairs we were asked to take it in turns to contract from one another. I chose to stand up as I did this whilst my partner remained seated. I was unsure that what I was doing was correct because I actually felt better after having attempted ‘contraction’. My partner remarked that I appeared ‘statuesque’ as I practised contracting. On the whole it made me feel very solid and stable. I remember leaving that week’s session feeling quite energised.

Nor is it the case that contracting always makes Huian feel dreadful and Astrid stable. Huian writes that, “I am a contracted person most of the time”. Astrid, on the other hand, writes about the familiarity of feeling “up out of my head’, a little above my body”. How one feels when one extends or contracts depends partly upon how relatively extended or contracted one was in the first place. Huian, who was presumably already relatively contracted, had a very extreme experience when she contracted even further:

When I started to contract, I was feeling okay, not so different from whom I am. However, as I contracted more and more, I started to feel something different going on within me. I felt unpleasant and hard to breath. I felt heart beating fast and started to get nervous. I started to have image of me being in a room, with walls beside me. It was dark and lonely. Then as I contracted further, it seemed that the walls started to move closer towards me. Eventually less and less space was available in the room. Until a point when I was so scared of being crashed by the walls they stopped. But I was stuck in a room that was so narrow that I did not feel like I have enough air to breathe in.

36 Moods are rarely, if ever, acknowledged in psychotherapeutic literature (Cameron, 2002c), and I wondered if I ought to use quotation marks when using the word. Doing so would have been an indication that I locate the concept of moods in a kind of naïve “folk psychology” rather different from serious psychotherapeutic discourse. I have chosen to eschew quotation marks in order to locate moods in an everyday, lived world in which issues that were so overwhelming, remarks that seemed so malicious and behaviour that was so infuriatingly incompetent can seem so very different depending on one’s mood.
Astrid was, presumably less contracted than Huian when she began the exercise, and perhaps even somewhat “up out of my head, a little above my body”. She writes that contracting left her feeling “very solid and stable”. One might say that she “got back into her body” or became “grounded” as she pulled herself inwards.

However, how one experiences a stance is not entirely dependent on whether adopting it takes one to an extreme or not. Stances are not things in themselves, but something that we do, and therefore cannot be separated from the person doing them. The experience of a stance varies from person to person. I identify with Astrid’s liking of being “up out of my head’, a little above my body”. It is a very creative stance for me too. However, I do not have quite the same experience as Astrid who says that “up out of my head, a little above my body … was not productive at all in terms of being able to write or take any form of action”. I find the opposite. It is in this stance that I access a state of “flow” similar to that described by Csikszentmihalyi (1991). Even this is not an undifferentiated state. I can be “a little above my body” in a very “narrow”, focused kind of way and zip though tasks at an exhilarating pace. Or I can be “a little above my head” in a more extended, somewhat unfocused kind of way. I drift rather than zip – I write until I get to the end of a thought, go to the kitchen to make a cup of tea and find myself making a cake. I drift back to my study while it’s in the oven, read what I’d written and have an idea I’ve not have before, and then another … and another, and somehow, in the midst of all this, I never (in this state) let the cake burn. I do not “drift off somewhere else”. I feel very present – I am involved with, rather than focused upon, whatever I am doing, as if a separation that I had never noticed before between who I am and what I am doing is no longer there.

However, if I “jump out of my skin” with fright and neglect to “breathe a sigh of relief” and so “get back into my body”, I become “ungrounded”, “all over the place”, “scatter-brained”. Before long I can feel really very frightened indeed. My sense is that I land in the same spot whether I “jump out of my skin” or “drift off”, but the impulse that propels me there renders the same stance a very different experience: it is the best, and the worst. Neave identifies that she has:
two ways of withdrawing also – forced and choice withdrawal... For example, I tend to go into a ‘forced withdrawal’ when I am in the presence of a friend of mine who I perceive to be very overpowering and domineering. I perceive a massive surge of energy from her, which is most likely well intended, however sometimes I perceive it as threatening and intrusive. I can feel quite disempowered by her presence. Consequently, I do not feel able to be in psychological contact with her. Her presence has often forced me to withdraw, and be less ‘present’ in interactions with her (Reid, 1996). While imaging this relationship as part of an exercise on this course, I felt as if I was being pushed by her. I needed to back away, to dodge her, and to try to avoid her. I retreated all of my energy back into myself and held it. I felt pushed back into myself – like a frightened child ... The other withdrawal is a choice withdrawal. When I first moved to Edinburgh, sitting around a table where people were laughing, joking and seemingly relaxed, I felt like someone who was wrapped up in barbed wire. Outwardly, I was contributing to the conversation via the commentary and laughter, yet any personal impulses, feelings, or reactions were kept hidden away. I was in a social situation where my experiences and ‘way of being’ were incongruent to my felt bodily organismic feeling (Rogers, 1980). This results in a physical and emotional feeling of tension and anxiety, which I perceived to be resulting from psychological disequilibrium and dissonance. I withdrew from this social situation energetically in an effort to ‘spare’ some of myself; in an effort to re-establish psychological equilibrium. I was not pushed into this space; I chose to go into this space for protective reasons. I made a conscious decision to withhold my whole self – my spirit. In this space, I had control. There is a stark contrast to both forms of withdrawal, with control being the variable factor.

I think Neave’s distinction very useful. Of course, it could be argued that she chooses to clench in response to the friend she finds overbearing and could choose to do otherwise. Although, I think this can be a useful way of understanding one’s process, I think doing so in this instance would be to miss the phenomenological point. The experience of choosing to quietly withdraw “in spirit” is quite different to finding oneself feeling “pushed.” Whether one conceives of oneself as an autonomous, free-willed actor or otherwise, most people have had experience of reacting so quickly that they effectively experience having no choice. One does, however, have a choice as to whether one remains in the stance one has adopted.

One might choose to move into a particular stance for the sort of self-protective reasons that Neave describes, or for other reasons. While demonstrating upward movement, I notice that, before I begin to move, I seem to be located in my chest. This position is very familiar indeed, and I identify with it strongly: it feels like “me”. This is my “centre”, the usual point from which I experience myself moving upwards or downwards.
Others, I believe, might locate their centre elsewhere. It’s hard to know whether this really is the case as such things are so rarely spoken about, but I often hear someone talking about “being in their belly” in a way that suggests that this might be the position they most strongly identify with. Practices such as qi’gong and the martial arts locate the practitioner’s centre in the *hara*, an energetic structure about four finger-widths below the navel. Practice generally begins with ensuring that one is indeed centred in one’s *hara*. I have found that doing so helps me be very aware of my physical being. I feel denser, more solid, more “grounded” – helpful if another student is going to attempt to hurl me across a *dojo*.

Being centred in the middle of my chest, on the other hand, seems to sensitise me to those with whom I am in relationship, which is therapeutically advantageous. It is easy, if practising a discipline that is concerned with where one is “centred”, to develop the idea that there is an ideal place in which to centre. This is, I think, a mistake. What – or where – is most appropriate depends on the context. As I demonstrate moving upwards, I move up from the centre of my chest to my upper chest. I feel an openness that is very pleasant and a strong desire to reach out. I feel energised, quite excited. I recognise this as the place that I teach from. I move upwards to my throat. This makes me feel as if I am about to do something – speak, perhaps. I feel on the verge, poised, just about to … I move up into my head. Again, this is familiar and (unsurprisingly), feels like a place I have occupied a great deal while writing this thesis. I notice that when I locate myself in my forehead, I feel subtly different. I realise, with some surprise, that this would be an excellent state in which to do my annual accounts, a task I do not usually enjoy. I try it and have the very welcome experience of finding a welcome satisfaction in creating columns and order.

Particular stances are not in themselves desirable or undesirable. Whether “contracting”, “clenching”, moving to “slightly above one’s head” is a good or bad choice depends entirely on the context. I might very usefully contract or “pull myself in” in order to focus enough to get through some paperwork, but this stance may cease to be appropriate when it is time to see a client. Were I to remain contracted with my client, they would probably experience me as more distant than usual and interpret this as a change in my feelings
towards them. Or I may float through to see a client after being “slightly above my head”, “spaced out”, “somewhere else”. If I don’t “come back down to earth” my client might be alarmed by my lack of solidity – or they might find my attention less intense and relax into a similar state. An awareness of whatever stance or position I might have adopted enables me to check out how this is with both myself and with others. If I find that I am being experienced as over-bearing or distant, or that I might have become “stuck” in a “place” from which the perspective is restrictive, I can choose to move into a different “place” “within myself”.

I have, so far, implied that one can simply move because one decides to do so, and that doing so can be done easily. The next section examines this implication.

**Symbolisation**

Bringing awareness to the sensations of “opening out”, “closing down” and “floating off”, etc. is largely about ascribing meaning to them. Experiences that are not given meaning tend to hover uncertainly in the background of one’s awareness – they are more easily held in awareness, and more memorable, if they have a recognisable meaning for us. This section is about how such sensations might be symbolised. Prior to doing the “contraction” exercise, Sophia had symbolised what I call “contracting” as an object, “the stone”, rather than an activity. She felt alienated from it – it was an “it” – an organismic experience that she did not admit into her self-concept. “It” was not “her”. It was also “not her” in the sense that she “didn’t do it”. Coming to understand “it” as something she does, rather than as something that she has, enables her to choose to do otherwise. Symbolising the “the stone” as something that she was doing, rather than as a thing, allows Sophia to admit it into her self-concept. “It” becomes “I”. Recognising that it is you (in every sense of the phrase) enables one to (for instance) unclench just because one wants to.

“Movements” and “stances”, (especially those in which we become “stuck”) are often experienced as something that happen to us – or at least I experience them in this way when I react. My “movements” are involuntary. They are reflexes. You tap my knee, I kick. You “get in my face”, I “jump out
of my skin”. It seems to happen to me, rather than being something that I do. However, awareness of this process enables me to be reflexive and creates the possibility of responding rather than continuing to react. Peter had a habitual reaction to the company of his siblings, but once he was aware of this he decided to do something else: he responded rather than reacted. He took responsibility for his part in the family “atmosphere”. Sophia accepted responsibility for “the stone”. Sophia and Peter will, of course, continue to clench in reaction to what is hurtful or fear-inducing, but they now have the conceptual means to “let go” of their reaction when appropriate, or to respond in a different way. If they pay attention to the discomfort of being chronically contracted they might allow the accompanying organismic urge to move out of it, if they perceive that it is safe to do so. Moving out of a stance enables one to either “move on” in the sense of returning to a less reactive state from which to respond afresh to whatever happens next, or to move into a state that is more conducive to whatever one is doing.

One’s “subtle proprioception”, the feeling of “where one is”, of where one’s “subtle body” is located in space and how this changes, is often not symbolised in awareness. In order to bring awareness to “where one is” – and it is this that enables us to move with awareness – one must be aware of something. If organismic experience remains unsymbolised, it remains an experience that happens to us, and one which, like Peter, we may witness, and be aware of, but do not recognise as something that we are doing, as well as something that is happening. Experience becomes more memorable when we do symbolise it: if we can have the thought that we have “jumped out of our skin” with fright, we might take more care in ensuring that we then breathe a sigh of relief and “get grounded”. If we can have the thought that we have “curled up into a wee ball inside”, we may be more inclined to later “open up” and “stand tall” again. If we are aware of having “floated off”, we are more likely to “come back down to earth” when doing so is helpful. Yolande writes about the importance of:

*the proper vocabulary to express feelings that I couldn’t express in other ways until today. This experience gave me food for thought and enabled me to explain ways that I have behaved in the past as a person and as a trainee psychologist.*
It matters how one symbolises the organismic experience of, for example, inwardly recoiling or of rushing upwards. If, like Sophia, one objectifies one’s movement, stance or position and understands it as a thing – a stone, for instance – one may become too alienated from one’s organismic experience to recognise an opportunity to change. It does not matter whether one symbolises the experience as being “out of your body”, as “in and up”, as “jumping out of one’s skin”, “up out of my head”, “a little above my body” or in some other way. What is important is that it is symbolised in some way so that it is more available to be held in awareness.

One person’s experience will not be the same as another’s, and their symbolisation may not be the same either. Peter identifies a feeling of suffocation as characteristic of his experience of “clenching”, while Sophia recognises “that feeling of dense energy inside my chest or heart field which I have been calling ‘the stone’” as characteristic of her experience. What matters is that the experience is admitted into one’s self-concept. Sophia writes that:

*This course helped me to be more self-aware of how I feel when I interact with people or even when I have a listening practice in university. At the beginning I might be still falling in the same habitual state of contraction and need to pull myself in, to separate from the world, but moments after I start to become aware of that and I breathe first. Later I notice that I become more relaxed, acceptant, and able to be in the moment. When I will face new or old situations where I tend to withdraw myself from or when I will interact with people around whom I tend to feel contracted it will be a constant challenge for me and good practice of using these experiences I have learned in the course to change my energetic behavioral pattern …*

Perhaps Sophia and Peter will both continue to symbolise their experience as “contracting”, or perhaps they will find other words. Whichever they choose, my hope is that when they experience similar sensations in the future, they will symbolise them in awareness as something that they are doing and that they can un-do, if they see fit.

**Awareness**

Cultivating awareness of how – and when – we move into “stances” and settle into “positions” is every bit as difficult as cultivating any other form of self-awareness. Developing awareness takes time. The course, at its longest, lasts for ten weeks. By the time they come to write their assignments, my co-
researchers have generally become aware of “stances” that that they have adopted in the past, but have not yet identified what will be important for them in cultivating awareness in the moment. I therefore draw more heavily on my own experience in this section, not in the spirit of a generalised “how to do”, but in the spirit of conversation.

Symbolisation is important for the reasons outlined above, but is not sufficient on its own – one must have some awareness of what is there to be symbolised. Such awareness may be of kinaesthetic or “proprioceptive”\(^{37}\), emotional or cognitive content. For instance, I know that I have a marked tendency to “jump out of my skin” when I feel unwelcome, intimidated and/or frightened. I first began to become aware of this by paying attention to a couple of distinct, and distinctly puzzling, sensations that I experienced during a difficult period in my life. I was in a new job. A couple of colleagues had made it clear that I was not welcome in the team and set about persuading me to leave. The work itself was occasionally dangerous and I had lost faith in their willingness to “watch my back”. I felt ostracised, frightened and bullied. Foucault (1980) claims that where there is power there is resistance, but it seemed that my ability to resist, or even recognise, in the moment, what was happening became faulty when I was actually in the presence of those who frightened me. Like so many other people who are bullied, I was perplexed as to why I became so compliant, why the outrageous demands that were made of me, and even some of the hurtful things that were said, seemed perfectly reasonable at the time. One day, on my journey home, I felt something suddenly dropping down into my body. I immediately felt radically different: my sense of self-worth and self-preservation came flooding back.

I made a complaint to, and then against the organisation I worked for, and eventually left. Despite ongoing therapy, I remained confused as to what had happened and why. I was concerned about the danger of finding myself in a similar situation in the future. Of course, I did, in the future find myself in a

\(^{37}\) I put “proprioceptive” in quotation marks as it normally refers to the sense of one’s physical body in space, but not “kinaesthetic” as that is sometimes used – by Body Psychotherapists, for instance – to denote where one is “in one’s body”. See Foster (2008) for a history of the distinctions made between kinaesthesia and proprioception.
similar situation. This time I was able to recognise more quickly the unpleasant feelings that told me I was being manipulated, but I still found myself unable to function well while it was actually happening. I raised this with my therapist, who asked how I “got back into adult”. I said I didn’t know. Then something happened. It felt as if something was pulled down over my head and I suddenly felt “like myself” again, back “in adult”. Neither of us understood what had happened, but the next time I was in the process of being manipulated I noticed a subtle rushing up sensation in my upper body. I knew, in the moment, that this indicated that I was “jumping out of my skin” and leaving through the top of my head. I caught myself on the way out and mentally pulled myself back down into my body.

Something changed in the person who’d been manipulating me and with whom I was in conversation at the time. She had been in the process of explaining why I was obliged to do something she wanted me to do. She suddenly changed the subject and whatever it was that she had wanted me to do was never mentioned again. Nor did she ever try to bully me again.

Consciously “getting back into my body” or “getting grounded” changed the way I felt, just as my whole psychological state changed when I experienced the sensation of something dropping back into my body and of something being pulled down over my head. Conceptualising and symbolising the sensation of rushing upwards as “jumping out of my skin” enabled me to pay better attention to when it happened subsequently, and to “catch myself” and “get back into my body” or “come back to myself” more quickly.

Many of the exercises we do on the course are designed to help those participating develop this kind of “proprioceptive” awareness. Yolande describes “how it feels to be ‘out of your body’ … and the difference between that and being embodied (in your body)” and says that:

I realized that numerous times in my life when I have felt fear, threat or shock I felt that I was jumping out of my body and trying to hide somewhere else. Whenever I was scared or felt very uncomfortable I was completely detuned and it took me hours to get back to normal. This had been happening until today.

“Detuned” seems to me an excellent way of articulating the feeling of being “out of touch with oneself” that for me, and it seems, for Yolande, is
characteristic of having “jumped out of one’s skin”. Peter and Sophia both identify a kinaesthetic sense of having “contracted”, but in quite different ways. Peter identifies a feeling of suffocation as characteristic of her experience of “contracting” while Sophia recognises “that feeling of dense energy inside my chest or heart field which I have been calling ‘the stone’”.

Identifying kinaesthetic and “proprioceptive” characteristics of moving, or having moved, into a stance can be as difficult as it is helpful. Despite years of trying to cultivate an awareness of “where I am” and whether I have adopted, or am in the process of moving into a stance, I do not always identify the “proprioceptive” and kinaesthetic signs. In such instances, identifying particular feelings or thoughts as characteristic of my having “jumped out of my skin” can (sometimes) alert me to what has happened and what I need to do. I know that if, for instance, I am experiencing panic I have almost certainly “jumped out of my skin”, and that “catching hold of myself” and pulling myself back down will render me more able to deal with whatever is happening. I may still feel frightened or unwelcome, but not panicked or “detuned”. Similarly, if I find myself making plans to escape a particular situation, I know that I can safely assume that I have already made an escape of a kind by “jumping out of my skin”.

Sometimes, the emotional and cognitive signs that I have moved into a stance and am holding a position are evident to me, but I do not know whether I have “jumped out of my skin”, or “clenched”, “collapsed” or perhaps “extended” so far that I have effectively abandoned myself. Something is “not right”, but I find it difficult to identify what it is that I have done. I have a sense that it would be helpful to be in another position, but I don’t know where I am. In such circumstances, I find it helpful to “move” around as I might move around physically to find a more comfortable position if I were physically uncomfortable. I notice, for instance, that I feel bad-tempered and wonder if I have become overly “contracted”. I extend, but feel rather unstable when I do so. I try “catching hold of myself” and pulling myself downwards. I don’t feel any different. I momentarily conclude that I am not holding a stance after all, and that it is simply the case that my bad temper is justified. Eventually I remember how bad I am at recognising that I have “collapsed”. “Collapsed” is a term that I borrowed
from Julie Henderson (1999; 1986, used in Cameron, 2002b) and actually does not work very well for me; I need to find a word that is a better “fit”. However, I do know that extending downwards to make a good, strong connection with the earth can alter my mood radically and instantly. I try it. It does.

Moving into a different stance and taking up a different position can be, like falling asleep, potentially very easy or very difficult. In order to get from the awareness that I could – and probably should – move, I have to be willing to abandon the idea that my bad temper is justified. I sometimes take a perverse (but, I suspect, not uncommon) satisfaction in wallowing in what seems like righteous ill temper. I can find it difficult to accept that I might just be in a bad mood. Again I suspect that this is not uncommon, and possibly even a defining characteristic of being in a bad mood. I do not find the same perverse satisfaction in being in a state of panic, but “catching hold of myself”, “getting a grip”, “peeling myself off the ceiling” and bringing myself “back down to earth” can feel counter-intuitive. Moving out of the defensive position that I have adopted may not be what I want to do, but experience has taught me that it is almost certainly a good idea.

**Actually “moving”**

“Moving” in this non-physical way is a very subtle thing. It is not enough to just think about it, even though it may be conceptualised as a movement of the mind as much as of the body. One needs to actually “move” (although one need not physically move). Once one has become aware that one might be stuck in a particular stance or position, and overcome any reluctance to move, doing so can be as easy as moving an arm or a leg – and as difficult to explain. The idea of “grounding” is useful in rendering the concept of moving more familiar. One goes through a process when “getting grounded”, “coming back down to earth” or “getting into one’s body”. There are things that we do, and things that seem to just happen. I notice that when I breathe slowly and deeply I move more clearly into my body. My perspective changes both in terms of where I experience myself to be situated – “where I am” – and in terms of my point of view – “how I see things”. My thinking becomes clearer. I feel calmer. Rather than taking long, deep
breaths, one might shift awareness to the feeling of resting on the seat one is sitting on. I notice that when I do this, my breathing becomes slower and deeper and I seem to sink into my body. Again, my perspective changes. Or one may, as I often do, mentally pull oneself “down and in”. I notice that when I do so my breathing slows down and deepens, I feel “in my body”, and my perspective changes. When I consciously move in this way, my intention and my breath are one. In order to “come back down through the top of my head”, I breathe “in and up” to “catch hold of myself” and then breathe myself down though my head, throat, chest, torso, legs and feet as I breathe out. There is a sensation of moving downwards, similar to the sensation of being in a moving lift.

I am suggesting that, as Rogers (1951) claims in proposition iii, “the organism is at all times a total organized system, in which alteration of any part may produce changes in any other part” (p. 487). If being “grounded” is a state in which one is “in one’s body”, one’s breath is not agitated, one can think clearly and feel calmer, then it matters not whether one actively changes the way one is breathing, brings one’s attention to one’s body, or consciously “moves”: changing one aspect produces change in the whole organism. It is advantageous to know what works fastest, and best, in an emergency. For me it is “moving”. Others that I have worked with find it easier to alter their breath, become aware of their body and surroundings or move physically. Others have other, more idiosyncratic ways of grounding. Astrid writes that I:

encouraged us to try and make roots in to the ground. I did not pay full attention to the exercise we were asked to engage in. Instead, I curled and uncurled my toes and shook myself a little mentally, getting myself grounded again. I felt better after this. Standing up and walking a little made me feel more normal.”

The ease with which one can move out of a stance depends upon the context. Sometimes the mere awareness that I am holding a particular

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38 The idea of this sense of movement as arising simply as result of paying attention to one’s chest moving, rather than thinking about something else, is inadequate here because the sense of movement is directional beyond physical movement of one’s ribcage expanding and contracting – and this is when intention matters. I can choose to breathe myself “back down” in order to “get grounded” or I can breathe myself “out” if I want to unclench. I can “pull myself in” as I inhale, and also “pull myself up”. 
position or having the intention to move is sufficient. However, if I have become ungrounded in a situation that I find frightening, it can take some determination to pull myself back down to earth. It has become easier with practice, as has remembering that I have the option to move. I have only rarely, since realising that I can move when I want to, found it just impossible. I have, so far, used instances in which my co-researchers found it easy to move. This was not the case in every circumstance. Huian, for instance, who described herself as “a contracted person most of the time” chose to extend to a degree that was unfamiliar to her and found it difficult, but worthwhile.

Our exercise was guided by our tutor to help us get started. I lay down and relaxed myself. I was feeling a bit heavy and started to extend my energy out of my body. I started being contracted because I was feeling down on that day. It was hard for me to extend at the beginning as I felt no matter how hard I tried there was not much space for me to extend. I was trapped in my skin, my physical body. I pushed very hard and used a lot of energy. Eventually I managed to push my energy go beyond my skin barrier. However, there was a second challenge. I felt I am more capable to extend using less energy, but it was still a hard work. This is because I felt there was no space for me to extend, as I know everyone is extending at the same time. I felt I need to squeeze through the space in order to extend further. My energy was started to extend from sideways into a dome shape. At last I managed to fill the room with my ‘energy’. I felt I had covered everyone in the room. Not only feeling everyone in the room but also I felt that I could touch the walls. I was satisfied because I had used a lot of energy and hard work to reach that point. I thought this was the furthest I can go, but since there was more time, I asked myself would I be able to go beyond the walls? So I tried. It seemed impossible as breaking the walls barrier was as difficult. It took me a while to break through. Then an image pops up in my head. It was an ocean of green field with a light blue sky. That place was beautiful and peaceful. There was no one but me. I had so many spaces I could extend that nobody and nothing was in my way. That place felt like heaven. I was excited and full of joy. As the extension went on, I was out in the ocean and then up into the sky and space. When I was out in the universe, I felt calm and relaxed. That feeling was great! I felt that all the happiness in the world was with me at that time. I tried to extend further out in the universe. I wanted to see how far I could extend. I wonder if there is a limit in extension. My experience told me that there is as I reached a point that I could not extend anymore but I can see, can feel, and I believe there is further I could go if I could go beyond my limit. I have enjoyed the journey – one that I have never imagined I could have. Through this amazing journey I have left all my burdens the moment I ‘stepped’ into that field, which has changed my days. It felt like that was a life changing process. I was more open-minded, unstressed, transformed. After this experience I have found that it is easier to cope with difficulties in life using ‘energy’ and possibly see things in a different angle.
Conclusion
In this chapter, I have argued that that relationship is impacted not only by the bodily based interpretations that we make on the basis of how we experience the other’s proximity, but that our intercorporeality gives rise to an unseen dance as we “move” towards and away from each other. This dance is beyond words and also beyond the movements we make as we walk into a room, sit down, shift around, smile, frown and gesticulate. It is a dance with which we are all familiar and which carries on, unnoticed, in the background of every interaction. Conversation (and silence) is always accompanied by this unseen dance. The dance moves that we make in response and reaction to each other impact not only the relationship, but each person’s organismic state. Peter’s perception of me changed when I withdrew away from him – and so did how he was “in himself”. Geller and Greenberg (2012) assume extension, as an aspect of presence, to be necessarily beneficial to the client in that the therapist’s presence encourages the client to become present. Peter, however, withdrew in the face of my extension towards him and also in the face of his therapist’s extension towards him, and it does not seem, from his account, that doing so was beneficial to him. However, he took the awareness he had gained from the course exercises into his family life and was able to affect a change in his relationship with his brother.

In this chapter, I asked how readily one might change one’s stance in, and with, conscious awareness. Sophia recognised the sensation of having a stone in her chest that, for her, accompanies being contracted. She found that she could “just let it go” with relative ease. She was, in her account, optimistic about “letting go” at any necessary point in the future. I think, on the basis of my own experience that her optimism is probably reasonably well founded. I identified and discussed three factors that seem helpful in “letting go”: symbolisation, awareness and actually moving. None of these is necessarily easy in itself, nor necessarily difficult. Like learning how to how to relax (from which, at times, it may be no different) moving out of a particular stance is an inherent organismic ability and one can choose to do so consciously just as one can choose to relax consciously.
Peter’s account raised the question of how a therapist might respond if they step on their partner’s toes during the *unseen dance*. Chapter Eight considers this and other questions relevant to reflective practice and supervision. The next chapter proceeds from Huian’s ecstatic account of extending and explores what happens when two people extend towards each other at the same time.
Chapter Seven: “Touching” and Being “Touched”

The previous chapter proposed that, when encountering each other, each person “moves” in response or reaction to the other, and an unseen dance arises as they do so. This chapter discusses the experience of intimacy that may arise from the dance as both people extend towards each other. Both the literature on presence and that on Relational Depth might be characterised as being concerned with experiences of intimacy, and so I examine the data I present in conversation with those literatures. I have, throughout this thesis, tried to keep a distinction between experience, which I take to be ultimately ineffable in that language can never quite do it justice, and the inevitably partial and provisional concepts constructed in order that experience may be better understood. I understand the concepts of presence as espoused by Geller and Greenberg (2012) and others, to differ from each other, and to differ from Mearns and Cooper’s (2005) concept of presence and Cooper’s (2005) concept of Relational Depth as “co-presence”, but I do note similarities in what is described in the literature on presence and in the literature on Relational Depth. I also note similarities with some descriptions of the experiences discussed in this chapter.

The chapter begins with the accounts given by those attending the one-day workshop immediately following an exercise in which both partners extend towards each other at the same time. My intention in beginning with this rather lengthy excerpt is to make the process of the conversation transparent, as I think it is of significance: the experiences some of my partners in conversation had were awkward to talk about in ways that go beyond linguistic difficulties. I then discuss some of the similarities in content between what my partners in conversation say and what is said in the literatures on presence and Relational Depth. My method of generating this data brings to light some aspects of relational intimacy that are, perhaps, surprising. I discuss these in conversation with the literature. In the latter part of the chapter I focus, in conversation with the literature, on potential aspects of relational intimacy that are, I think, often difficult to talk about in an academic or professional context.
Meeting
I ask the workshop participants to choose someone they feel comfortable with, to find a space to work in that feels private and comfortable, and, once they have settled with each other, to gently extend towards each other at the same time. I allow a generous amount of time so that they do not feel rushed and can relax into the experience. Everyone returns to the main meeting room once they have finished. They are much quieter than they were after returning from the previous exercises. There is a marked change in the atmosphere. I ask if they would like to share their experience of the last exercise. There is silence. Finally Pat says:

I was very content to just be there with her. It felt very natural, almost organic. In our discussion afterwards it confirmed something for me, something I had been aware of but couldn’t put a name on. It’s opened my awareness more; it’s given me something. It’s reaffirmed something for me. There was something I used to sense and feel. I used to talk about vibes, rather than energy … being here today has affirmed that it’s OK whereas before I sort of tried to brush it away or not deal with it because it’s … we talked about logic, didn’t we (to her partner). It’s a body experience. And I think I tried to dismiss it because it’s not logical. It’s not logic; it’s body sense. And I’ve always gone from my logic whereas now I’m now slipping into body awareness and I’m feeling very comfortable with that so I’m going with it. It doesn’t seem alien now that I’ve paid attention to it and given it meaning. They’re the messages I’ve been trying to send myself, but I didn’t have any language.

It is, I think, telling that in this, the first account that is shared with the group, Pat focuses on conceptual concerns as she traces her acceptance of experiences she’d previously dismissed as “not logical”. Pat’s experience in the exercise was of something she “had been aware of but couldn’t put a name on”. When she conceptualises it as “body sense”, her experience no longer seems “alien”; she has “given it meaning”. She talks about how she thinks about the experience rather than describing it.

Gillian and Tania speak next. Their account invites us a little further into what they actually experienced rather than how they thought about the experience:

Gillian: Presence. I suppose one of the natural things in trying to meet someone is to speak, and because we weren’t speaking it was the unspoken word. I needed to have my eyes closed. We discussed how to decide when to stop and decided to let it come to its own natural end.

Tania: That was interesting because about ten seconds after I opened my eyes she opened her eyes.
Gillian:  My heart coming up, just my heart beating slightly faster. A real awareness of a tingling in my face and in my feet – not uncomfortable, but a real awareness of a flow, a two-way flow going on. I’d not use the word energy – something passed between the two of us across the room. Also while sitting there my hands naturally turned over so that my palms were open towards her. Afterwards in the discussion Tania said my face was flushed.

Tania:  I sat there with my eyes closed because I wanted to be in my body. At one point I felt my hands wanting to face her because I’d been sitting like this and I felt closed. I felt a tingling sensation. It was mostly on my arms. I knew I was being met.

Gillian and Tania tell us what happened – they made gestures, discussed how to stop, closed their eyes. They let us know something of their felt experience in describing a sense of a two-way flow and physical sensations such as tingling. Whereas the workshop participants tended to describe emotions rather than sensations in the earlier part of the day, the reverse is the case when I invite descriptions of what it was like to extend towards each other. Although Tania speaks of knowing that she is being met, and Gillian of sensing something passing between them, they do not say how they felt towards each other.

Jess and Tara speak next. They also describe a sense of something moving between them and they say something of their emotional experience.

Jess:  The first thing I noticed was a physical thing – my face got really hot. The whole thing felt fine, then there were a couple of times when it felt completely peaceful, and in between those this sense of yes, a tide flowing back and forwards. I felt I had drifted outside it a couple of times. The clock was ticking. Sometimes I didn’t hear it and sometimes I did. But very peaceful when we were both in the same place and still at the same time.

Tara says:

Before we both went straight into it I felt the shift straight away in the energy in the room. We decided to close our eyes, and we felt … I felt like waves, like a tide going in and out. I felt like we were out–in, out–in. We’d meet. Then out–in, out–in. We’d meet again. Out–in, out–in. And then we met in a proper tranquil place. This final time it was very still, very settled. When I got there it felt like it was the place I was trying to get to. I felt appreciative that I don’t know Jess and had never met her before, [to Jess] – that is your name isn’t it? – that I’d never met her before and don’t know anything about her, and yet we’ve been able to get into this space. And I genuinely felt like this is safe. I had trust; this is safe, and that was the biggest thing really.
I ask about the feeling between them, and, with some hesitation, Tara says:

    I felt it as warmth. I closed my eyes and when I opened them I couldn’t believe the amount of time that had passed ... Hmm. I feel like I’ve just meditated. That’s the feeling. A sense of real peace. It’s quite wild that you can sit in front of a person and feel that.

Tara says little about how she felt towards Jess or the feeling between them, other than that she “felt it as warmth”. She is surprised by the feeling of peace that she has despite being in the silent presence of someone she barely knows: “It’s quite wild that you can sit in front of a person and feel that”.

Mary gives a greater sense of the emotional tone of her interaction with Gina:

Mary: Gina and I didn’t close our eyes. We sat opposite each other and we had a great connection with eye to eye contact. I almost felt her smiling through her eyes. Her presence was there. As it went on we wanted to talk to each other, to reach out to each other. We exchanged quite intimate details of our lives with each other. It was amazing how we could do that even though we’d never met before. Even though we’d never spoken before. It was fantastic.

I look at Gina. She is glowing.

I say: You look like a different woman now. You look ...
Tania: Alive ...
Me: Radiant.
Mary: Yeah ... this morning I was quite fidgety, but I was settled in this exercise. It was amazing, wasn’t it?
Gina: It was. I’m not a religious person, and I feel a bit daft saying this, but it felt like God was in the room. The sun was shining down on us. I felt so much love.

I say that I’d been wondering if anyone was going to use the word “love”. It is as if there is a collective sigh of relief. The stillness in the room breaks into animated talk and laughter. Gina continues:

    I felt so much love for Mary. I feel embarrassed ... It was like I was seeing myself, but the energy inside me, it was reflecting from me. Mary was mirroring it. We were bouncing off each other so much, weren’t we? And it was really free flowing. It did feel like God was in the room. [To Mary] There was a real connection between us, wasn’t there? [To the group] And before I said to her, “God is in the room”, I thought, “just trust yourself Gina, say what you’re feeling rather than over-analysing everything – just say it”.  

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Mary: Yeah. Marvellous … marvellous.

Some of the content of the above conversation is similar to that which appears in the literatures on presence and Relational Depth. Pat begins the conversation by saying that she felt "very content to just be there with her. It felt very natural, almost organic"; Geller and Greenberg (2002) identify “ease” as a characteristic of therapists’ experience of presence. Several of my partners in conversation speak of a flow, tide and waves. A sense of flow is much highlighted in the literatures on presence and Relational Depth. Pat talks of what she experiences as a “body sense” and Gillian uses the term “the unspoken word”; Mearns and Cooper (2005) use Stern’s (1985) term “meeting without words”. Tania talks of knowing that she is being met, and Mary says that Gina’s “presence was there” and that they had a “great connection”. Geller and Greenberg (2002) say that a sense of “connection” and “inclusion” is a characteristic of presence. Cooper’s (2005) respondents report a “closeness or intimacy with their clients” and Wiggins (2013) lists “both of us connected” in her Relational Depth Inventory.

Tara and Jess both speak of stillness, a defining characteristic of Relational Depth (Mearns and Cooper, 2005). Tara talks of being settled; Geller and Greenberg (2002) identify being centred, steady, and grounded as an aspect of the experience of presence. Tara talks of a sense of peace, of being “in a proper tranquil place”, as if she has just meditated; Geller and Greenberg (2002) and Cooper (2005) identify being immersed in the moment as a characteristic of presence and Relational Depth respectively. Tania described Gina as looking alive; Cooper (2005), of his respondents feeling alive, energized, stimulated; Geller and Greenberg’s (2002) respondents talk of “the energy inside me”. An altered sense of time, such as that of which Tara speaks, is characteristic of both presence and Relational Depth. Tara says that it is “quite wild that you can sit in front of a person and feel that”; Geller and Geller (2002), using more prosaic language, write of a lack of self-conscious awareness. My point is not that the experiences my partners in conversation describe are the “same” as those described by those who took part in the research on presence and Relational Depth – each is, I imagine, unique or particular in some way. Rather, the point I want to make is that my method
of generating data uncovers and challenges some of the assumptions about therapeutic intimacy made, or implied, in the literature. I examine these in the next three sections before discussing the rather tricky subject of love and spirituality in the therapy room.

**It is not about what is said**
Mearns and Cooper (2005) do acknowledge that “moments of intimacy and *Relational Depth* often occur without words” (p. 47) – and it is striking that all the encounters above identified as *Relational Depth* in Brown *et al.* (2013) happen in silence – yet Mearns and Cooper’s (2005) theorisation of *Relational Depth* depends upon a willingness of both therapist and client to share content, verbally:

> Just as *Relational Depth*, then, requires the therapist to let down her lace curtains and safely screens, so it requires this from the client too: to share with his therapist those things that are the most essential to his being. (p. 44)

Gina and Mary’s experience of intimacy did not arise from what was said, but rather their desire to talk and to share intimate details about their lives arose from the intimacy engendered by extending towards each other. Heightened intersubjective experience comes not from what is said, but the “energy” with which it is said – or with which nothing is said. Just as physical intimacy arises from physical closeness, so too the kind of intimacy described in this chapter depends upon how “closely” each “positions” themselves in relation to the other, and on whether this closeness is welcome. In gently extending towards another, and being open to the other’s extension, one invites and accepts an invitation to intimacy. Each must “open” to the other, but such openness need not be verbal.

Ralph’s experience of *Relational Depth* with a client who was unable to speak (Brown *et al.*, 2013) did not depend upon anything being said, or of ever having been said, but it did arise in the context of an already established and close relationship. The next section considers intimacy in the context of relationship.

**A pre-established relationship is not essential**
The research into *Relational Depth* draws data from therapeutic relationships. It would seem obvious that trust needs to be established before intimacy arises, and that intimacy can therefore only come about within an already
established relationship. Not all of the Relational Depth research draws on long-term therapeutic relationships, but it does all come from the context of an already existing relationship. My data, however, shows that intimacy does not arise only in the context of prior relationship. Gina remarks on the fact that she and Mary had not spoken before; Pat had to check that she’d got Jess’s name right. That a prior relationship is not necessary to the experience of therapeutic intimacy is perhaps the most counter-intuitive finding that my decision to use the one-day workshop as a research site brings to light.

An intimacy that arises out-with an established relationship is perhaps more readily familiar outside therapy. Anabel, one of the students on the university course, writes that:

I was sitting on a coach, travelling through Kerala; we were stopped at a cross roads, where an over laden bullock cart was crossing slowly in front of us, so we had to wait a moment. Thus far it was proving to be an interesting journey and I was just allowing my mind to wander, thoughts about how the people lived day to day in that area, watching men throwing their nets into the river, fishing for the food for that day, another part of the river, the women washing clothes, pounding onto stones, the hustle and bustle of life passing before me through the window of the coach; thinking about the differences in their lives and mine, the celebrations, the religion, the family life, wondering about the differences and similarities. Wondering if I, on a holiday that cost as much probably as this whole village’s annual income, if I was just a voyeur and if my life was any better or richer than theirs; I was in a open and reflective mood, if not directly to other people then certainly within myself. Sitting, looking, wandering, I sensed the presence of another and turned to look out of the window at my side, I cannot explain the sense of needing to turn only that some part of me other than my mind or feelings was guiding my movement; it was an irresistible force. And there I met the smiling gaze of a very elderly man, standing upright no more than 6 or 7 feet from me, leaning against a stall front, white dhoti, dark blue vest, mahogany skin, wrinkled and tough, he looked like he was made of old leather. Our eyes met and he smiled, his eyes twinkled and danced as I connected with his gaze; and as I did so, he raised his right hand and moving slowly he touched the space above his heart and then he extended this hand outwards towards me. A gesture of giving, from him to me and in that moment I felt a connection, his soul reaching out and touching mine, by passing and moving through the boundaries of my physical body and connecting with the essence of my being, I smiled back from the depths of my self, I felt connected in that moment, wordlessly yet in complete harmony; the cart completed its rickety traverse of the road and the coach moved forwards. The whole exchange took maybe less than a couple of seconds, but the sense of warmth and greeting, his face, the expansiveness of his soul, they remain with me now as if he is captured and part of him is residing with me.

That a sudden intimacy can arise between people whose “eyes meet across a room”, or between those who “click” with each other straight away, is
acknowledged in the realm of social relationships. The question of whether therapeutic intimacy occurs in completely new therapeutic relationships has not been asked, but, in theory, intimacy might very well arise if both therapist and client “extend” towards the other and “touch” in a manner that is welcomed. I have certainly been aware of what I might describe as a feeling of “clicking together” in very new therapeutic relationships. My use of a breastfeeding metaphor in describing this to my supervisor as feeling my client “latching on”, speaks to the non-verbal, instinctive, feeling qualities of an intimacy that establishes relationship rather than being established from a relationship.

Meeting is not dependent upon professional experience

In selecting experienced therapists, all of whom had a minimum of ten years’ experience as research participants, Geller and Greenberg (2002), and Pemberton (1976), who conducts his research with five world-renowned therapists and trainers, seem to assume that the ability to be therapeutically present (and therefore available for intimacy) is developmental. Their methods do not challenge this initial assumption and so, unsurprisingly, their findings do not contradict it either. The research into Relational Depth does not rely only upon very experienced therapists and so makes less of an assumption that being available for therapeutic intimacy is developmental. Of those studies into Relational Depth that specify whether the therapists who participated were relatively experienced or inexperienced, Cooper (2005) initially interviewed four experienced Person-centred therapists and trainers with an average of 14 years in practice, and then a further four therapists with an average of four years experience. Mearns and Cooper (2005) occasionally refer to relatively inexperienced therapists experiencing Relational Depth. Leung (2009), in a quantitative online survey, found that more experienced therapists report a greater frequency of Relational Depth (although the variance, at only 3%, seems minimal).

Tannen (2009) assumes that counsellors in training do have experiences of presence, and sets out to describe these experiences. However, in the course of trying to gather data, it becomes apparent that her participants find it easier to identify the experience of not being present. She finds that “being a trainee
counsellor is an inhibitory factor” with regard to being present because trainees feel uncertain and lack confidence. Her participants described not feeling ready to “let go of control and trust themselves”. Unsurprisingly, being evaluated contributed to the anxiety and uncertainty they felt. They spoke of coping by drawing on the skills that had helped them succeed in their academic life – priming themselves with information; relying on techniques and theory; and some of planning the therapy session in advance. Their confidence diminished even further as they found these skills unhelpful in establishing therapeutic relationships. Tannen found that her participants distanced from their feelings, distracted themselves and even “tuned out” and “drifted off” in order to contain39 their anxiety. Some tried to control their client and the therapeutic process. Tannen, like Geller and Greenberg (and Katz (2011) and McCollum and Gehart (2010)), recommends Mindfulness meditation as a means of cultivating the ability to be present.

I do not doubt that Mindfulness techniques are highly efficacious in facilitating the ability to be therapeutically present, but would suggest that simply relaxing might be equally helpful. Rogers (Rogers, 1979, 1986; Baldwin, 1987) says that the experience in which it seems that his spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other happens when he can relax. As I suggested in the previous chapter, one enters into a particular state of being as one moves into a particular “stance”; one also “moves” as one’s state changes. Relaxation both arises from, and requires, extension; extension both arises from, and requires, relaxation. In Chapter Four, for instance, I described how I gently extend towards my demonstration volunteer, Jess, by relaxing: “I feel as if I literally open. I allow a wave of something to surge out from me and extend towards her.” I “let go” and, in letting go, I relax further. Rogers says that there is nothing he can do to force the experience he describes. I would go a little further than this and suggest that effort, striving and trying too hard are utterly counterproductive. Worrying about “doing it wrong”, striving to “do it right” and the other pressures that bear upon trainees are not, as Tannen (2009) points out,

39 “Contain” is Tannen’s term. What she describes as containment might be understood by some (myself included) as defending against anxiety rather than containment.
conducive to being relaxed, present, extended and available. I have found, as a supervisor and trainer, that there very often comes a point at which it seems the most (or perhaps only) useful thing I can do is encourage a trainee or supervisee to relax in the therapeutic encounter.

With the exception of Jess, those who participated in the one-day workshop were either in training or relatively inexperienced. Being relaxed enough in the therapeutic encounter to extend does, of course, become easier with experience, but is not dependent upon experience. Extending towards another, and remaining “open” as they extend towards us, does not actually require any professional experience (or even any professional training). Rogers says that, “When I am working, I know that there is a lot of active energy flowing from me to the client, and I am now aware that it was probably present to some degree from the first” (Baldwin, 1987, p. 45, my italics). Therapeutic intimacy may be more likely to be facilitated by an experienced therapist, to arise in an established relationship and to be engendered by conversation, but may well arise simply because both people have, for whatever reason, extended towards each other and “met”.

**Connecting and disconnecting**

I have argued that intimacy may arise when two people extend towards each other and “meet”, and is not dependent upon what is said or upon the existence of a prior relationship or, in therapeutic relationships, professional experience. It is, instead, dependent upon whether both welcome being extended towards and wish to extend in response. Isla, one of the university students, writes that:

> during the most powerful moments of therapy, I have experienced a range of bodily felt senses, as a flow of nurturing energy coming from my therapist that gave me the impression that our contact was somehow filling the room with an electrically charged field. This intense sensation was giving me the feeling that I was channeling all my difficult materials towards my therapist and he was able to metabolize them by encircling them with his acceptance that could be literally sensed in the room. He was inviting me to meet him in a level unlike the one that we exist in our daily lives and I was reaching out to find him.

She had also, however, written that at the beginning of their relationship:

> The fact that I was so contracted meant that I wasn’t ready to make a transition to the other side so fast, but on the contrary I needed time. This proved to be accurate as during our first session my therapist, who is trained in
somatic-body therapy, approached me in a very direct, open and expanded manner, which I experienced not as warm and accepting but as threatening and scary ... my initial response during the first session, which I remember all so clearly, was to become closed.

The intimacy engendered by extending together will, of course, only be sustained for as long as both are comfortable. Harry’s partner found that “such intimacy was too much for her” and that “the encounter was so intense for my partner that she later told me she felt that she needed privacy, space, and a virtual boundary”. Alyson does not mention feeling uncomfortable but, nevertheless, found that she was just not able to maintain an extended stance:

In my most enlightening experience from class, I felt a deep connection with my partner. We were tasked with silently extending towards each other. We both chose to close our eyes, in an effort to avoid distractions. For roughly ten minutes, we sat in silence and focused on extending. Initially I felt very extended, and could see my partner clearly in my mind. This lasted for a few minutes, until very suddenly I became contracted. This suddenness was not unexpected, as I often find it difficult to stay extended. For the rest of the exercise, I remained contracted. I immediately lost the visual I had in my head of my partner. Most tellingly, I felt as if I was moving away from her. I had no visual, but I had the kinesthetic sense that I was very far away from her, and from the world around me. Upon reflecting with my partner, I was surprised to find out that she had noticed a disconnection around the same time that I had.

Maintaining a connection is, as another student, Chiu, says:

like dial phone call to them, both side can decide to maintain the channel or hang up in anytime, which the other one cannot choose but forced to suspend the connection.

As Gina and Mary’s account at the beginning of this chapter makes so clear, those who do choose to extend towards each other and who welcome the other’s extension, may find themselves having a surprisingly intense experience: “I’m not a religious person, and I feel a bit daft saying this”, says Gina, “but it felt like God was in the room” and that, “I felt so much love for Mary. I feel embarrassed”. Several of my partners in conversation say that they felt love for the person with whom they did this exercise, and Gina is not the only person to use spiritual language. The animation that returned to the room when I said I’d wondered if anyone was going to use the word “love” perhaps suggests that others might have felt trepidation in talking about aspects of the experience in a professional setting. Although “love” is a word much used by Person-centred practitioners, it is (with the exception of
Brian Thorne’s work) not much used in Person-centred literature. This is, perhaps, because of the association of love between adults with sexuality. The next two sections look at the erotic and the spiritual, both of which might arise when two people extend and welcome the other’s extension, and both of which are potentially difficult to talk about in a professional or academic setting. It is, I think, important that trainees and practitioners feel able to talk about experiences of the erotic and spiritual in therapy. The literatures that we use can make such conversations more or less difficult and so I consider what is said in the Person-centred literature as I consider the erotic and spiritual in the therapeutic relationship.

**The erotic**
The erotic, which Haule (1996) defines as “the energy of the interpersonal field when a sense of we-ness comes forcibly to presence” (p. 55), potentially arises when we extend towards each other and “touch” in some way. One of the assignment writers, Huian, says that, “I can only feel the ‘touch’ when two energies meet, otherwise only sense of warmth may be felt”. In describing the exercise in which she and another course member extend towards each other, she says:

> At first when I extended towards him, I felt warm. The blending colours of yellow, green, pink, light purple were appeared in my head. It was like in spring. I kept smiling a lot, feeling happy. Then when we met and our energies slayed with each other a bit longer, I started to want to hold back and contract a bit because I was shy to be in connection to him. As I was moving forth and back, I felt so sparkle was going on between us. It felt a bit of romance.

Huian moves back and forth as her shyness and desire to connect urge her. She does not panic and retreat. Nor is she carried away. She is able to relax into the experience without withdrawing or being overwhelmed:

> Once I have got used to his energy, colours in my head changes again. It was sky blue. I felt calm in his energy and I could relax. I felt that we were leaning on each other. It was comfortable and bring a slight coolness as if a breeze was blew in my heart. We held on that state long enough I had my first image of wanting to lean on his shoulder and rest. Then just before we end I felt we were dancing, he was turning me round on the dance floor.

Just as we can physically touch in many ways, so too can we “touch” each other in many ways. Huian and her partner lean against each other. They dance. A participant from a previous workshop, Cara, “wraps herself around” her partner. Their interaction is different, but has similar qualities of
tenderness and joyfulness:

... just amazing, totally amazing. We were together and as we met there was just this incredible joy ... we just couldn’t stop smiling. And really wanting to touch her — I just wanted to grab hold of her hands, and later I wanted to touch her face, but I found that my eyes kept going from her face to here [indicates her partner’s chest]. I kept looking at this part of her and I felt real warmth coming back to my chest and I really wanted to hold her. And then her face almost went really out of focus and I felt I was wrapping myself round her. And at this point (and this is the first time this has ever happened to me) I could see this outline around her; it was shimmering. And I wanted to look at all her body, not just her face and upper chest and it felt like, to me, that we were really, like, one thing at the end, like we just didn’t want to separate and it was wonderful. And I felt like I was connecting to a different person to the one I had been looking at all weekend. That I didn’t just meet this presentation ... that I really met her. And we both cried. (Cameron, 2002a, pp. 270–1)

Like Huian, Cara neither withdraws, nor becomes overwhelmed.

Nevertheless, such an experience is possibly more intense than one might usually expect – or want – in a therapeutic context. A client might experience a therapist’s “touch” as invasive and unwelcome, or as erotically charged and compelling – and vice versa.

It is, I think, significant that only one of my partners in conversation mentions romantic feelings and none of them mentions sexual feelings. This does not surprise me. As I will presently show in discussing Geller and Greenberg’s work, experienced therapists – even those who make major contributions to the literature – are sometimes clearly not comfortable acknowledging erotic charge in the therapy room. With the exception of Thorne’s (1991; 1998; 2002) work, which I discuss later in this chapter, erotic charge in the therapeutic relationship is dangerously under-acknowledged, under-discussed and under-theorised in the Person-centred literature. It is not mentioned at all in the literature on Relational Depth, although I gather from casual conversation at conferences that Relational Depth researchers have noted its occurrence. It is (minimally) acknowledged in the literature on presence. Pemberton (1976) quotes Rollo May (1973) saying that Paulus Tillich was “able to establish an “immediate basis of intimacy”, and that:

Everyone who knew him remarked on his capacity to attend completely to the other person. It gave one the pleasant sensation of being known (here the trite phrase does have a specific meaning) better, for that moment, than one knew oneself ... the presence of Paulus regularly brought a kind of joy, a mild ecstasy. The sexual analogy is not out of place: it was an experience of being penetrated, it was exciting, and you felt new sensations.
(Pemberton, 1976, p. 29)

Geller and Greenberg (2012) acknowledge the erotic in recounting an incident in which Geller was confused by feeling a “surge of energy” towards “someone” (it later becomes clear that this someone is a client) to whom she knew she felt no physical attraction. She “found it confusing” and felt “trepidation around it”:

(i)n speaking to her supervisor at the time, she discovered that part of it emerged from the flow of being fully in the moment with this open and vulnerable human being and an openness within that ensued. The confusing part was that by closing down this feeling, she knew she would have closed down the client. Yet to be open to it felt inappropriate and wrong. (p. 151)

Allowing an awareness of sexual feelings is, of course, not “wrong” – although acting on them would be.

Over time, Geller “experienced many other flow experiences in moments of relational therapeutic presence and realized it is not just emotional or sensory, it is energetic” (p. 151). They consider the following account from one of their interviewees: “an aliveness and it is very contactful … there is high excitement and it actually comes from my genitals right up. I mean it is a very full, flowing feeling, right, and it’s very interpersonal” as describing “the energy experienced from presence” (p. 151). They make a distinction between this energy and erotic countertransference, but do not say why they make this distinction, nor how they understand countertransference, a term whose meaning has changed over time and across different Psychodynamic orientations. The Psychodynamic concept of erotic countertransference is an important construct ethically in that it offers some distance from what is a potentially overwhelming experience. It enables the therapist who is experiencing sexual feelings towards a client to adopt a “third position” and understand those feelings as relevant to the therapeutic process. It would be helpful if such feelings were better theorised in Person-centred theory.

Geller and Greenberg’s (2012) conceptualisation of the erotic in therapy as “energetic” is intended to protect against unethical practice. They say that:

(1)therapists must have an understanding of energy from different perspectives, as well as a healthy relationship with themselves and their professional ethics, to avoid misusing or becoming distracted by this feeling when it emerges.
(p. 151)

As noted in Chapter Two, the energy that Geller and Greenberg discuss
should, they say, be understood from the perspectives provided by yoga, qigong and tai chi\textsuperscript{40}. They say little more about the perspectives offered by yoga, qigong and tai chi, other than to say that in tantric practices, energy is understood as a life force that can travel through the spine and can “be called sexual when it is directed towards another human being in a genital-based way” (p. 151). Geller and Greenberg’s argument is too briefly and vaguely made. They conflate concepts of “energy” from different traditions without saying much at all about what these concepts are, what they see as relevant similarities, or acknowledging that there are differences between them. The scant explanation they do give downplays the extraordinarily powerful, unusual nature of the kundalini\textsuperscript{41}, which is understood as a force that is “awakened” through particular yoga practices. The contemporary yogi, Gopi Krishna (1971) describes his awakening:

\begin{quote}
Suddenly, with a roar like a waterfall, I felt a stream of liquid light entering my brain through the spinal cord. Entirely unprepared for such a development, I was completely taken by surprise, but regained self-control instantaneously, I remained sitting in the same posture, keeping my mind on the point of concentration. The illumination grew brighter and brighter, the roaring louder. I experienced a rocking sensation and felt myself slipping outside of my body, entirely enveloped in a halo of light. It is impossible to describe the experience accurately. I felt the point of consciousness growing wider, spreading outward while the body, normally the immediate object of its perception, appeared to have receded into the distance until I became unconscious of it. I was now all consciousness without any outline, without any idea of a corporeal appendage, without any feeling or sensation coming from the senses, immersed in a sea of light simultaneously conscious and aware of every point, spread out, as it were, without any barrier or material obstruction. I was no longer myself, or to be more accurate, no longer as I knew myself to be, a small point of awareness confined to a body, but instead was a vast circle of consciousness in which the body was but a point, bathed in light and in a state of exaltation and happiness impossible to describe. (pp. 12–13)
\end{quote}

Krishna’s awakening came after many years of meditation practice. He attests, elsewhere in his account, to the destructive potential of awakening

\textsuperscript{40} Geller and Greenberg use both “qi” and “chi” as transliterations for the same concept.

\textsuperscript{41} White (1996) gives a detailed and scholarly account of how the concept of kundalini originates in early Tantrism. Procreative fluids (semen and uterine blood) came to be conceived as “power substances for the worship of, and ultimately the identification with, gods and goddesses whose boundless energy was often conceived of as sexual in nature” (p. 4) and later became “cleaned up” and aestheticised when internalised and incorporated into the concept of the suksma sarira or subtle body. The female nexus of energy became known as the kundalini, and this is the term generally used within various schools of yoga for a transformative energy that, under certain circumstances, moves up the spine.
the *kundalini* before one is adequately prepared (he went blind for a while). I think it would be reasonable to claim that the kind of experience that Krishna describes is somewhat different to the experiences most therapists and clients have in the therapy room, however powerful and transformative those experiences may be. Rogers says that “when, perhaps I am in a *slightly* different state of consciousness” (my italics). He does not suggest that he experiences anything as unusual as Krishna describes, and comparable accounts are not to be found in the Person-centred literature – including Geller and Greenberg’s work.

Because Geller and Greenberg’s argument is so briefly made, it runs the risk of being read as a defensive denial of sexuality in the therapy room along the lines of “this feeling may seem sexual, but it’s really an esoteric force”. Their point, however, is that one is less likely to transgress professional boundaries if one thinks of such surges of energy as manifestations not of sexual desire, but of an esoteric energy. If this argument helps to prevent sexual exploitation it is worthwhile – and would therefore have been worth making more fully.

In so far as I am suggesting that the erotic may arise when therapist and client “reach out” and “touch” each other in a manner that might be described as “energetic”, my argument is not entirely dissimilar to Geller and Greenberg’s. I would, however, make it rather differently. Their argument downplays the meaning that a therapist’s erotic feelings for a client may have. Haule’s (1996) distinction between the erotic, (“the energy of an interpersonal field when a sense of we-ness comes forcibly to presence”) and the sexual (“the impulse to embody that we-ness in a genital manner”) (p. 55) seems useful in avoiding Geller and Greenberg’s (2012) distancing and depersonalising of what is felt. The “sense of we-ness” is relational and, as such, personal. Geller feels “a surge of energy” towards a particular client. Surely the ethical point is that such a surge happens in a therapeutic context and is therefore implicated in the therapeutic process. Given that this surge of energy was “towards someone to whom she knew she felt no physical attraction”, there is no reason to imagine that it would be likely to occur outside that context. There is therapeutic relevance to the erotic when it appears in a therapeutic context; to act upon it for personal satisfaction.
would be exploitative.

Unfortunately, such exploitation is not as uncommon as one might hope (Rutter, 1989). Professional ethical prohibitions are possibly no more effective in controlling sexual behaviour than other prohibitions. A recognition that the erotic is a not-uncommon aspect of the therapeutic relationship and much more discussion in training and supervision of how it might be understood and worked with therapeutically would afford far greater protection to both clients and therapists. Thorne (1991; 1998; 2002) writes far more boldly about the erotic in therapy. The next section is concerned with the spiritual in therapy and concludes with a discussion of Thorne’s work on the spiritual and erotic.

**The spiritual**

Just as the erotic might make an unexpected appearance when one “reaches out” towards another and each welcomes the other’s “touch”, so too might the numinous. Gina says that she is “not a religious person”, yet feels the presence of God, even if she feels “a bit daft” saying so. Rogers too uses spiritual language in the passage in which he says that it seems as if his “inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other” – I give the passage again for ease of reference:

> When I am at my best, as a group facilitator or as a therapist, I discover another characteristic. I find that when I am closest to my inner, intuitive self, when I am somehow in touch with the unknown in me, when perhaps I am in a slightly altered state of consciousness, then whatever I do seems to be full of healing. Then, simply my presence is releasing and helpful to the other. There is nothing I can do to force this experience, but when I can relax and be close to the transcendental core of me, then I may behave in strange and impulsive ways in the relationship, ways which I cannot justify rationally, which have nothing to do with my thought processes. But these strange behaviours turn out to be right, in some odd way: it seems that my spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other. Our relationship transcends itself and becomes a part of something larger. Profound growth and healing and energy are present.
> (Rogers, 1979, p. 137; 1986, p. 129; Baldwin, 1987, p. 50)

The language Rogers used in this passage – “inner spirit”, “transcendental core of me” and the idea that the “relationship transcends itself and becomes a part of something larger” – is a considerable departure from his earlier work. One wonders if, on reading this passage, the word “daft” might not have been too far from the mind of some of Rogers’ commentators. “There
are certainly those”, says Thorne (1998), “who state, either publicly or privately, that such wildly grandiose claims are attributable to Rogers’ declining faculties or to a kind of folie de grandeur which sometimes afflicts great men as they approach death” (p. 86). Van Belle (1990) says:

Personally I find Rogers’ latest view rather esoteric and otherworldly. I wonder whether it is in essence the same thing as the world-avoiding fundamentalist view of his parents which he abandoned as a youth. If we can access the world he envisions only by eliminating the report of our senses I wonder whether I would want to live in it. Such an experience may be of this world, but I, for one, still prize the delight of slurping an ice cream cone, or the delight of my wife’s body against mine in bed. I prize the reality of such experiences, as well as the awareness that the one is not the other. (p. 55)

If, in saying that “it seems that my spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other”, Rogers is referring to the kind of experience that arises when one “reaches out” or “extends” in the way my partners in conversation describe, then I would argue that such an experience is not accessed by “eliminating the report of our senses”, but rather by being sensitive to one’s bodily senses. My partners in conversation describe their experience in very sensuous terms. Jess says that “the first thing I noticed was a physical thing – my face got really hot”. She and Tania both describe a sense of movement like “like waves, like a tide going in and out. I felt like we were out–in, out–in”. Gillian feels a two-way flow between herself and Tania and also experiences tingling in her face and feet. Gina is particularly very clear that her experience is both sensuous and spiritual. It is as if the sun is shining down. She can almost feel Mary’s smile. They are bouncing off each other. And she can feel the presence of God. The conceptual dichotomy between body and spirit employed by van Belle would seem unhelpful in approaching the kinds of experience described in this chapter.

Gina felt “a bit daft” saying that God was in the room. Discussing the presence of numinous in the therapy rooms can be, for some, as difficult as discussing the presence of the erotic. Permission or encouragement to discuss potentially awkward subjects arises, in part, from what is said in the literature. The next three sections explore what the Relational Depth researchers; Geller and Greenberg; and Thorne have to say about the spiritual in therapeutic relating.
Relational Depth

Mearns (1996) is presumably referring to van Belle when he says that “some readers” have taken the passage from Rogers as evidence of his “growing mysticism or even spirituality in the later years of his life” (p. 306). It really is abundantly clear that Rogers, who abandoned a theological training for psychology and who would brook no discussion of religion earlier in his career (Thorne, 1992), did become spiritually engaged in his later life. He tells Baldwin (who interviewed him in 1987) that in response to a group of young priests who were “trying to pin me to the wall, saying I must be religious”, he told them that ‘‘I am too religious to be religious,’ and that has quite a lot of meaning for me. I have my own definition of spirituality” (Baldwin, 1987, p. 35).

Mearns (1996) does not refer to the interview with Baldwin, nor acknowledge that Rogers (1979; 1986) elaborates upon the passage by saying that he is “compelled to believe that I, like many others, have underestimated the importance of this mystical, spiritual dimension” (p. 130; p. 138). Instead, Means writes – rather condescendingly – of:

*those who attribute the basis for such relating to “spiritual” or otherwise mystical aspects of our being. Perhaps we should regard it as a pity that we have to reserve such special labels for those instances where we manage to relate with another human being at depth.* (1996, p. 306)

Given that the concept of Relational Depth originates with Mearns, it is unsurprising that the early research into Relational Depth (Cooper, 2005; Knox and Cooper, 2010; McMillan and McLeod, 2011) does not mention spirituality at all. These papers conceptualise what the research participants describe as “a feeling of ‘flow’” (Cooper, 2005, p. 13) in terms of Csikszentmihalyi’s (2002) concept of flow, which Cooper understands as “a total, un-self-conscious involvement in an activity – that thousands of people have described in all walks of life. Here, too, individuals talk about feelings of immersion, heightened perceptual awareness, satisfaction and changes in their perception of time” (Cooper, 2005, p. 16).

“Flow”, or “being in the zone” (Bassi and Delle Fave, 2004; Kimiecik and Jackson, 2002; Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi, 1999) refers to absorption in an activity (such as listening) rather than to the palpable sense of what Gillian, in the one-day workshop describes as “a real awareness of a flow, a two-way
flow going on. I’d not use the word energy – something passed between the two of us across the room”. Cooper (2005), with reference to Laing, develops the idea of “co-flow” and it is that which leads him to the idea of “co-presence”, which is not only:

characterised by high levels of empathy, acceptance and genuineness towards clients; but also by feelings of aliveness, receptivity, satisfaction and immersion. At these times, therapists also experience their clients as very real, in touch with core aspects of themselves, and acknowledging the therapist’s acknowledgement in a reciprocal, bi-directional encounter. Such experiences would seem to have many similarities to the experience of presence or flow, but may be more accurately characterised as ‘co-presence’ or ‘co-flow’. (p. 18)

Cooper hints at something beyond a mutual offering of “the core conditions” in saying that Relational Depth is:

a moment in which both therapist and client are experiencing the ‘core conditions’ towards each other. More than that, what is being proposed here – and to some extent identified – are moments in which the client’s presence to the therapist’s presence, or the therapist’s flow in response to the client’s flow, creates a synergistic encounter that may not be reducible to the sum of its individual parts. (pp. 16–17)

Mearns and Cooper (2005) reference Schmid (2002b) in saying that the therapist is, during moments of Relational Depth, “in touch with something unexpected and enigmatic” and Levinas (1969) in saying that “something alien and ‘outside of oneself’ … always overflows the images and concepts that the therapist hold of it” (p. 41), but otherwise Mearns and Cooper imply that Relational Depth can be reduced to the sum of each individual experiencing “the core conditions” towards each other. They certainly avoid any suggestion that there may be a spiritual aspect to the experience.

More recently, the conceptualisation of Relational Depth in scrupulously non-spiritual terms seems to be changing. Knox and Cooper (2011) do not mention spirituality, but in a later paper Knox (2013) does note that some of her research participants describe their experiences as spiritual. McLeod (2013) and Wiggins (2013) also note that some their participants conceptualise their experiences as spiritual, and the volume in which these later papers appear (Knox et al., 2013) also contains a chapter by Rowan (2013) in which he argues that “working at Relational Depth is a spiritual activity” (p. 208). Mearns (1996) finishes his dismissive comment about some readers attributing “a growing mysticism or even spirituality” to later Rogers
by saying that his own view is that Rogers “would have been equally
interested in the theoretical and empirical exploration of the phenomenon he
observed” (p. 306). This sentiment is, perhaps, part of the background to
Rowan’s claim that (since the founding of the Journal of Transpersonal
Psychology and the Association for Transpersonal Psychology) the
transpersonal, which he defines as “that which genuinely goes beyond the
personal into the realm of the sacred, the numinous, the holy, the divine”,
has “been studied scientifically” (p. 209) and that the publication of a number
of recent books (his own among them) has “made the subject respectable and
well based” (p. 209). Rowan does not expand on what he means in saying
that the transpersonal has been studied scientifically. Given that the claim is
followed by his comment about the subject having become respectable and
well based, it is hard not read his claim about scientific investigation as
redolent of scientism.

Rowan seems to be arguing that one can use scientific methodologies to
bolster claims of the transcendent. He goes on to conflate a huge number of
very different theoretical concepts42 and says that “Mearns and Cooper
(2005) have done a marvellous job of naturalising all these ideas into a
Person-centred framework” (p. 215). The theorists Rowan draws upon may
describe experiences that are similar to those described in the Relational Depth
literature, but the conceptualisations are all very different from that of
Relational Depth, and different from each other. The conflation of different
concepts from different theoretical traditions as if they all merely point to the
same phenomena in a purely representational manner results in an argument
that lacks theoretical cohesion. The positioning of Relational Depth as a
spiritual activity seems to be something of an awkward add-on that is at

42 Rowan sets forth a hierarchy of “transpersonal consciousness” based on Wilber’s (2000)
work and while doing so conflates Maslow’s self-actualisation with Rogers’ fully functioning
person, “Perls’ self as opposed to self-image, Wades’s (1996) ‘authentic’ level of
consciousness, and the ‘real self’ of Winnicott, Laing, Janov and Johnson” (p. 209). Having
listed examples of the “existential level of consciousness”, he then conflates “the subtle, the
realm of the soul, the superconsciousness, the heart centre, the intuitive mind, the psychic
centre, the antaratma and so on” (p. 209) with the similarly conflated “Jungian archetype …
deities, nature spirits, standing stones, wells, trees, rivers and so on” (p. 209) as examples of
the realm of compassion. Rowan locates Relational Depth in this realm of compassion or
subtle level of consciousness, and this seems to be the essence of his argument that
Relational Depth is a spiritual activity.
odds with Mearns’ original intention to conceptualise the kind of relational experience under consideration in terms of “existing concepts” rather than in spiritual or mystical terms.

**Geller and Greenberg**

In contrast to the literature on *Relational Depth*, spirituality, in the form of spiritual practice, is present in Geller and Greenberg’s conceptualisation of *presence* from the beginning. In an echo of Tara saying, at the beginning of this chapter, that she feels like she’s just meditated, Geller and Greenberg (2002) say that:

> The majority of therapists interviewed discussed daily *meditation* as an important contribution to the development of therapeutic presence. A therapist described the experience of therapeutic presence itself as akin to a meditative state or being aware or mindful, which is a key aspect of *vipassana* or *mindfulness meditation* in Buddhism. (2002, p. 77, bold in the original)

Geller and Greenberg’s (2012) concept of *presence* is of relevance to my discussion of the emergence of the spiritual in embodied relationship in that although they initially understood *presence* as “a within-self variable, a grounded and open place within the therapist”, they later come to understand it as “a triad of relationships: with self, with others, and with a larger sense of expansion or spirituality” (p. 257). They theorise five levels of *presence*: physical, psychological, emotional, transpersonal and relational therapeutic *presence*. In *transpersonal presence*, they say:

> therapists recognize their body as a vessel for healing that is taking place in the depth of experience of the client yet is connected to a larger state of energy or support. The contact between the therapist and the client is felt on a deeper level by the therapist, where there is a palpable presence between the two people. As the deepening between therapist and client occurs, the therapist feels in contact with a larger sense of spirituality as well as a high-level sense of vitality and an enhanced perceptual experience in direct relationship with the client. Transpersonal presence can emerge in special presence moments or through deep intersubjective sharing. (p. 140–1)

*Relational therapeutic presence* occurs “when all of these levels are integrated and occurring simultaneously” (p. 141). They compare *relational therapeutic presence* to Stern’s (2004) “moment of meeting” in that Stern “highlights mutual presence and focuses on peak moments of this experience” (p. 20).

Geller and Greenberg (2012) quote Surrey (2005) in saying that “mindfulness practice cultivates an expansive awareness in the therapist,
which is implicitly or explicitly extended to the patient” (p. 96, cited in Geller and Greenberg, 2012, p. 13). They list the therapeutic benefits of mindful practices as facilitating the therapist’s attunement; deepening in-the-moment listening and sensing skills; as a tool to regulate their emotions and to model and support clients through “surrogacy affect regulation” and as cultivating empathy by reducing stress, increasing self-compassion and dis-identifying with one’s own subjective perception. They do not, in this context, mention extension or expandedness in the bodily experienced way in which I discuss it, and in which they discuss it elsewhere.

I have no argument with meditation, or other practice, as a means of cultivating the ability to be present, but I think Bazzano’s (2013) observation in a (favourable) review of Geller and Greenberg (2012) that, “being present and attentive is the very basic requirement for any practice, of any profession, any work or craft. There is nothing special or particularly ‘Buddhist’ or mystical about being present and attentive” (p. 179) is pertinent. Although one might well extend when paying attention, equally one might not. I, for instance often feel an unnerving distance from academic audiences. I do not experience anything emanating from them, whereas I can feel audiences of practitioners paying attention. I initially interpreted this distance as resulting from boredom. However, as it became clear to me that academic audiences generally pay very close attention indeed, I realised that the activity of really thinking about what is being said is not conducive to extension.

Geller and Greenberg’s (2002) definition of presence involves more than paying attention – it also involves extension. Mindfulness, the Buddhist meditation practice of Vipassana (in Pali) or lhakthong (in Tibetan), so successfully re-branded by psychologists and cognitive-behavioural therapists, does not guarantee that one will expand, although it might in its original context, or practised with its original context in mind. Klein (1997) says that:

_I have discovered that the practices I am familiar with, especially those from the Tibetan traditions, work much better if I consciously counter the modern, culturally normative sense of a strictly contained body, mind and self. Tibetan religious practices were typically enacted, after all, in a radiant, open landscape, in vast spaces dominated by bright air over turquoise rivers, with_
iridescent cobalt skies spanning the distance between darkly colorful rocks and snow peaks. Such grand expanses were vibrant not only with light, but with life as well. To the traditional Tibetan imagination, there is no such thing as dead space. There are no empty forests either. Everywhere there are beings, visible and invisible. Even in solitary pilgrimage across frozen and immobile vastness, one is never truly alone, nor, meditating in a cave high above the nearest village, is one confined to just a small space. Even inside caves or darkened temples one’s body resonates with the pulsating images of the dynamic arena one has traversed before entering. The imagination becomes steeped in a sense of space it cannot lose, and that space is always alive. (p. 141)

“Extending” is an inherent ability that needs no special practice in order to be cultivated, but a meditation practice that is inherently relational and in which the “imagination becomes steeped in a sense of space it cannot lose” certainly sounds as if it would be helpful in cultivating it as a more habitual state. The risk perhaps, in being habitually extended or expanded, would be that one might “overshoot” the person one is with. Unless trapped in a habitual state of contraction (as some people seem to be), one extends and withdraws in response to what is happening intra- and inter-personally without effort. The developmental effort is in cultivating an awareness of how and when one extends (or withdraws) and to consider the potential relational impact.

Thorne
Whereas Mearns and Cooper (2005) and Geller and Greenberg (2002; 2012) only briefly refer to the passage in which Rogers says that it seems his inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other, Thorne, in notes for an unpublished lecture of 1983, compares, point by point, an experience of what he later calls “tenderness” (1998) to the passage from Rogers’ about it being as if his inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other. He concludes by saying “I do not believe it at all fanciful to conclude that my wrestling with the concept of tenderness is an attempt to do battle with the same phenomena” (1983, pages unnumbered). Thorne and I read the passage from Rogers a little differently. Thorne says that, “Carl speaks of ‘inner spirit’ reaching out to ‘inner spirit’ while I speak of two persons giving themselves and each other permission to ‘risk being fully alive’”. I read, “it seems that my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other” as expressive of a bodily experienced
sense of reaching out. Thorne, however, by no means avoids the body. He says that, in his own interactions as a counsellor, the moments in which he believes the quality he calls tenderness is present have a sexual component. He also makes it abundantly clear throughout his work that he uses as his starting point “the hypothesis that for us humans spirituality and sexuality are intimately entwined” (2004, p. 12).

In an account of a therapeutic relationship with a client he calls Emma, Thorne (2002) says that the “experience of vibrant energy surging through me which warmed my heart and sent currents through the whole of my body” is difficult to describe “as anything other than powerful sexual energy which was in no way trapped in the genitals but irradiated my whole being” (p. 72). It is, he says, familiar to him in other settings, “not least in those ecstatic experiences which sometimes come to me unannounced on the hills of North Wales or in front of the Blessed Sacrament in cool Italian churches” (p. 73). Thorne conceives of this energy as “the healing energy by which I believe we are constantly surrounded” (p. 76) and uses “unashamedly mystical language” (p. 80) in his discussion. He says that had he not been enabled to be a channel of healing energy in his first few sessions with Emma, “I sense I would have floundered on the rocks of unbridled eroticism” (p. 76). Thorne, then understands the experience of being a channel for healing energy as ethically protective, rather than using the concept of energy to protect himself as suggested by Geller and Greenberg (2012). Thorne is not only unafraid of the erotic in the therapy room: he positively welcomes it.

Mearns (1996) says that, “(s)ome practitioners might be inclined to attribute the quality of interaction and communication to the spirituality of the two persons” (p. 309). Although Rowan (2013) considers Relational Depth a spiritual activity, he does not say whether the ability to access the subtle level of consciousness is dependent on either party having a prior spiritual life. Geller and Greenberg (2012) suggest that meditation is helpful in cultivating presence, but do not claim that it is essential. Thorne’s (2002) argument is that a relationship in which tenderness is present is one of the means through which the spiritual may be accessed. A sense of the numinous arises from relationship rather than being brought to the
relationship. Rogers too understands the spiritual to arise from relationship: “I would put it that the best of therapy sometimes leads to a dimension that is spiritual, rather than saying that the spiritual is having an impact on therapy” (Baldwin, 1987, p. 50). Gina says that she is “not a religious person”, yet the words she finds that “work” for her experience are that “God is in the room”. The numinous may become suddenly and unexpectedly present when two people extend towards each other at the same time. Such an appearance is as potentially unsettling as the sudden appearance of the erotic. It is, I would argue, in everybody’s interests to follow Thorne’s lead in discussing the erotic and the spiritual in the therapy room without embarrassment.

Although I concur with Thorne and Rogers with regard to the numinous arising from relationship, my understanding of how this happens is different. The next section elaborates upon this difference.

**Mutuality**

Thorne’s (2002) account of the conditions that enabled him to be a channel for healing energy bears some similarity to the argument made by Mearns and Cooper (2005) that *Relational Depth* occurs when both therapist and client offer “the core conditions” to each other. Emma made it clear that she understood and appreciated the extent of Thorne’s regard for her. Her regard for him, he says, “emboldened me to feel fully alive” (p. 76). “The ultimate test of the level of collaboration between my client and me in a therapeutic relationship”, says Thorne:

> is whether I can trust my client as much as I hope he or she will trust me. When that occurs I am free to be fully me, not with the purpose of having my own needs met but so that I am released to be a channel for the healing energy. (p. 76)

The idea that a qualitative difference occurs in the therapeutic relationship when there is mutuality in what the therapist and client offer each other is also present in Geller and Greenberg’s (2012) concept of *relational therapeutic presence*.

Rogers makes a similar argument in dialogue with Buber. He begins by asking Buber “whether your concept – or your experience – of what you have termed the I–Thou relationship is uh similar to what I see as the effective
moment in a therapeutic relationship” (Anderson and Cissna, 1997, p. 29). He goes on to say that he considers himself effective as a therapist when he is transparent in the relationship, accepting of the client’s experience and able to sense:

> with a good deal of clarity the way his experience seems to him, really uh viewing it from within him, and yet without uh losing my own personhood or separateness … if in addition to those things on my part, my client or the person with whom I am working um is able to sense something of those attitudes in me, the it seems to me there is a real experiential meeting of persons, in which each of us is changed. (Anderson and Cissna, p. 30)

Buber responds by pointing to the dissymmetry inherent in a relationship between one who seeks help and one who seeks to provide that help. Rogers responds by saying that “there is something um immediate, equal, a meeting of two persons on an equal basis – even though in the world of (Buber sighs) I–It, that could be seen as a very unequal relationship” (Anderson and Cissna, 1997, p. 45). Later in the dialogue Rogers says that:

> It seems to be that um the moments where, where persons are most likely to change, or I even think of it as the moments in which people do change, um, are the moments in which perhaps the relationship is experienced the same on both sides … I suspect that in those moments when, um, real change occurred that it would be because there had been a real meeting of persons in which um it was experienced the same on both sides. (p. 53)

Rogers’ claim that the therapeutic relationship can be “experienced the same on both sides” is, I think, problematic. I have no problem with the notion that the client’s sensing of the therapist’s empathic understanding and regard is what makes for effective therapy. Rogers comes back to making this point later in the dialogue.

> in the moments where real change takes place, then I wonder if it isn’t reciprocal in the sense that uh I am able to see this individual as he is in the moment and he really senses my understanding and acceptance of him. And that I think is what is reciprocal and is perhaps what produces change. (Anderson and Cissna, 1997, p. 62)

However, I think that conceptualising the client’s appreciation of the therapist’s empathic understanding and acceptance as the relationship being “experienced the same on both sides” or as Mearns and Cooper (2005) have it, a mutual offering of the “the core conditions”, is an overstatement. Equating feeling empathically understood with being empathically understanding is convoluted, as is the equation of feeling accepted with
being accepting. I do not doubt that therapeutic change happens when a
client senses a therapist’s understanding and acceptance – such acceptance
and understanding are, as I argued in Chapter Two, of little consequence
otherwise. I think that Rogers is trying to identify something more elusive in
talking about the relationship being experienced “the same on both sides”,
but cannot get past his formulation of the therapeutic conditions. He seems
to be still trying to identify something more elusive when he talks to Baldwin
about being “inclined to think that in my writing perhaps I have stressed too
much the three basic conditions” and that:

(\textit{p}erhaps it is something around the edges of these conditions that is really the
most important element of therapy – when my self is very clearly, obviously
present. When I am working well, I know a lot of active energy flows from me
to the client … In using myself, I include my intuition and the essence of
myself whatever that is. It is something very subtle. (Baldwin, 1987, p. 45)

Harry writes that when engaged in extending towards his partner as she
extended towards him that:

\textit{when we closed our eyes I also felt warmth and exchange of energy between us
in this transpersonal zone. This energy seemed to be coming towards me in
waves. I also leaned forward towards my partner as I sensed that our subtle
bodies were mingled with each other. At that moment I knew that we were
connected because our subtle bodies were resonating with each other. I felt we
were on the same frequency … If my partner was not extending at that time
then I would not have felt the energy coming towards me.}

I wonder if, in saying that the relationship is experienced as “being the same
on both sides”, whether Rogers is trying to articulate a similar sense of a
mutual engagement, a two-way flow of energy.

\section*{Conclusion}

In theorising \textit{relational therapeutic presence} and \textit{Relational Depth}, Geller and
Greenberg (2012) and Mearns and Cooper (2005) position therapeutic
intimacy as something that arises as the client responds to the therapist. Isla’s
account of reaching out to meet her therapist’s “flow of nurturing energy”
illustrates how a client might indeed reach out to receive what the therapist
offers. However, a client may also extend towards their therapist for any
number of other reasons. Many of those of my partners in conversation
whom I have quoted in this chapter extended towards each other purely
because they were doing a workshop or course exercise, yet several had very
intense experiences of intimacy. A client may “reach out” in desperation;
being relatively extended may be a habitual stance, or extending a habitual way of making contact. It might even, very easily, be the case that it is the therapist who responds to the client’s reaching out. Whoever might be responding to whom, if both people extend towards the other and welcome each other’s extension, some degree of intimacy is likely to arise.

In contrast to Mearns and Cooper’s (2005) theorisation of Relational Depth, neither person need necessarily be “fully real”, nor need they, as Thorne (2002) suggests, hold the other in high esteem or even know each other. Tara talks of her appreciation that she had never met Jess before and didn’t know anything about her, and yet “we’ve been able to get into this space”. Her account is reminiscent of a client who, towards the end of therapy, tells Rogers, “I don’t know a thing about you, and, yet, I have never known any one so well” (Baldwin, 1987, p. 45). It is not my intention to deny that clients are helped when they sense the therapist’s genuinely unconditional acceptance and empathic understanding, but rather to suggest that it is not the words alone that matter, nor the length of relationship or professional experience of the therapist, but whether each extends towards the other and welcomes the other’s extension towards them. I am not suggesting that one ought to deliberately extend in order to coax a client into reciprocating. Clients will extend, or not, if and when they choose to do so. Intimacy is not necessarily appropriate – or possible – for every client, and valuable work can, I think, happen in its absence. What I am suggesting is that a therapist who does not extend towards a client, when doing so might be welcome, closes down the possibility of intimacy.

The intimacy that is engendered when two people extend towards each other and “meet” can, as Gina and Mary’s account illustrates so vividly, give rise to love, and to the numinous. Huian’s says that she felt “a bit of romance” with her partner. With the exception of Thorne, who writes very explicitly of all three as one force, the literature tends to be shy of discussing love, the erotic and the spiritual in the therapeutic encounter. Geller and Greenberg (2012) write of love in the context of the spiritual, but not when writing of sexual feelings in therapy, which they depersonalise. Love, sexual feelings and spiritual experience are mentioned by some of the research participants in the Relational Depth literature, but not discussed by the
researchers. My data shows that experience of love, of the erotic and of the numinous can all arise rather unexpectedly when two people extend towards each other and welcome the other’s extension. Acknowledging this in the literature would go some way towards enhancing the possibility that such potentially disturbing experiences are discussed in training and supervision.

The next chapter discusses the implications of the unseen dance for practice, supervision and training.
Chapter Eight: Implications for Practice, Supervision and Training

I have argued that the client’s perception of the therapist’s attitudes towards them is the lynchpin of Person-centred practice and that if the client does not perceive the therapist as authentically empathic and unconditionally accepting, the therapeutic process is stymied. The literature concerned with client perception is sparse. It briefly mentions contextual factors, such as age and class, but otherwise focuses upon the client’s stage of process as the only factor determining how they perceive the therapist. In understanding the client’s perception as being determined only by their stage of process, the literature is in danger of forgetting that there are two people in the therapeutic relationship. Husserl’s notion of intentionality, can, I have argued, be usefully applied in this context in understanding that, as the client is conscious of the therapist, the therapist is implicated in the client’s perception. The client’s perception is, of course, partly determined by their own internal processes – but what the therapist does, what they say, how they are, their way of being also impact the client’s perception. Perception is a relational process.

Having foregrounded the importance of the client’s perception, I went on to look at a subtle and easily overlooked aspect of how one relates to others. I argued that when we extend towards another, or when we “draw back”, the other feels this non-physical “movement” towards or away from them. Such movements impact a client’s perception of their therapist. As discussed in Chapter Two, Toukmanian (2002) conceptualises perception as a cognitive process; Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 1962) conceives of perception as a bodily process. To at least include the body in our understanding of perception is, I think, more in keeping with Rogers’ concept of the person as an organism than Toukmanian’s position. When we “move” towards or away from a client, we impact their bodily experience just as we would if we physically took a step towards or away from them. Their bodily feeling determines whether they find this a pleasant or unpleasant experience, just as their bodily feeling would determine whether a physical step towards them was too close or a physical step away too distant. Huian made this
point well: “when she ‘extended’ her subtle body, I felt intrude, whereas the other student felt warmth. And when she ‘contracted’ her subtle body, I felt relief, calm and relax, whereas the other student felt unpleasant”. Huian’s feeling of being intruded upon, and her subsequent relief is a bodily, rather than a cognitive event, as is the other student’s feeling of warmth. Adjectives such as warmth and coolness, or, to use Neave’s phrase, “icy coldness”, frequently appear when my partners in conversation describe their experience of being extended towards or moved away from. The sensations described are as impactful as feeling the warmth of the sun or the coldness of an icy day. Tania and Molly’s exchange in Chapter Five illustrates this:

Tania: At first I felt … in my mind it went all yellow, like warm and sunny, and towards the end it went blue and I really felt you pulling away and I felt the room go quite cold as well.
Molly: You felt the shift?
Tania: Yeah, at first it felt lovely and warm like the sun was right on my face.
Molly: When you said you felt that bit of cold at the end that must have been me removing myself away from you.
Tania: Yeah. I felt like you did it abruptly, stepped out of it.

Although such experiences may be difficult to articulate and differentiate linguistically, they are experientially impactful.

The bodily event of feeling warmth when the therapist extends and coldness when they withdraw (or feeling intruded upon when they get too close and relief when they back off) forms the basis of the client’s interpretation of how the therapist moves in relation to them. A client who feels intruded upon is unlikely to perceive their therapist as respectful or accepting and a client who feels abandoned is equally unlikely to perceive the therapist as accepting. As Aditi says:

I felt a cold atmosphere between us and he was entirely absent. I thought about what was going on and what the problem was? Was it that much bad? I took all the feelings personal and it made me feel sick and nauseous. It was overwhelming for me. I was worried about my problem. I was not receiving unconditional positive regard on those moments. I was thinking that he was judging me because of my story.

Aditi specifies unconditional regard, but empathy is also implicated. A client is unlikely to feel empathically understood if they do not feel accepted and, indeed, Aditi feels judged rather than empathically understood. A therapist
may sense the client’s emotional experience very acutely and quite genuinely understand what this experience means in the client’s frame of reference, but if they have positioned themselves in a manner that the client finds unsettling, their empathy is unlikely to be perceived as such. If the therapist is too distant their accurate understanding may be experienced as so cold an observation that the client feels exposed, even accused, rather than empathically understood. If the therapist is too close, the client may well feel that they have no private space within the relationship and that they have been bullied into a confession. Empathy needs unconditional positive regard, and both depend upon the therapist positioning herself or himself at a distance that is comfortable for the client. The client’s experience of the therapist’s relative proximity is also the basis of their perception of the therapist as authentic. Verbal and gestural expressions of warmth from too great a distance are likely to be perceived as insincere. Therapeutic relationships that do not feel “right” to the client are unlikely to be as helpful as they might otherwise be.

Although their research is into the client’s experience of *Relational Depth* rather than the client’s perception of the therapist, McMillan and McLeod’s (2006) research produces a result that is interesting in relation to what I, in the introductory chapter called “bodily intuition”. They say that clients appear to be aware, from the start, of whether a therapist is “right” for them, and whether they will eventually be willing to “let go” and enter a relationship that is deeply facilitative. In describing the experience of “letting go”, one of their research participants describes it as “like a feeling of expansion but the boundaries disappear a wee bit and I can just ‘be’” (p. 10). This sounds to me very like a description of extending and being met in a manner that is welcome. McMillan and McLeod attribute the client’s ability to “let go” to the client’s readiness to engage and to their perception of their therapist as being available for engagement. I would suggest that how the therapist positions herself or himself in relation to the client at least in part determines whether the client knows from the start that this particular relationship is “right” for them and whether they become willing to “let go”. However, I would suggest that not “getting it right” from the outset does not necessarily doom the therapeutic relationship to being less helpful than it
could be.

Having summarised my findings and argument with regard to client perception, I want to further summarise the implications for practice by saying that my argument strongly suggests that it behoves the therapist to develop an awareness of how the ways in which they move, and the positions they adopt, impact the client’s perception of them. The next two sections discuss a couple of ways in which such awareness may be developed.

**Using kinaesthesia to feel the dance**

Reflecting on how one’s position might impact the client’s perception can be particularly helpful in providing a fresh perspective on that which is puzzling. Harry was at the very beginning of his professional training and therefore not yet working with clients. He describes how he used the idea that others respond or react to our “stance” to make sense of feedback he received from a classmate with whom he was practicing therapeutic listening on a basic training course.

> I used to feel afraid and under pressure as a listener due to external pressure to perform. In one particular session my talker said many times that it is really hard to describe why she is not comfortable with me and that she does not know the reasons behind it. There used to be many long pauses of uneasy silence between us. I now know exactly what she meant because I used to contract my subtle body in her presence due to many different factors. … If I would have been aware at that time about my contraction then it would have been more helpful.

Harry makes use of the understanding, gained through the experiential exercises, that his talker will sense and interpret his proximity. Her discomfort becomes understandable – he believes he “now know(s) exactly what she meant”, and elsewhere concludes that she had not felt accepted by him. Having rather ruefully commented that “if I would have been aware at that time about my contraction then it would have been more helpful”, he looks to the future and anticipates how extending towards a client in a different context might be equally problematic:

> I realize that as a counsellor if I extend too much towards a female client in [his home country], it might result in the client feeling contracted. In my culture a certain level of distance is assumed between the two genders. This distance is also assumed due to the usage of the medical model in clinical psychology in
Harry comes to a new understanding of his talker and of what the difficulty was between them. It is too late for him to bring this understanding to their relationship, but he extrapolates upon it, and does so with an appreciation of contextuality. He realises that although his classmate might have felt more comfortable had he not been so contracted, a female client in the country to which he will return and work is likely to feel uncomfortable if he does not keep a respectful distance.

In wondering about how the way in which her stance might have positioned her in relation to clients, Fiona, a very experienced therapist, also finds a perspective that is useful:

*I opened the door and the client ran at me, gave me a big hug and a kiss on the cheek. The next day a different client was leaving and turned and kissed me on the cheek. I hold clear and solid boundaries, I don’t touch clients as a rule (occasionally a hand on a shoulder or hand to comfort, otherwise no contact) and clients don’t touch me; ever. So, I wonder, why did 2 clients in the space of 24 hours feel it was OK to move so close into a more intimate place?*

Her first impulse is to understand what happened in terms of the clients’ difficulties:

*My initial reaction was to say it was the ‘unboundaried’ nature of these particular clients; they didn’t consider my boundaries and they wouldn’t with anyone else either.*

The way in which clients behave towards therapists is of course coloured by their previous relational experience, but it is also a response – or reaction – to how the therapist is: there are two people in the therapeutic relationship and each impacts the other in very subtle ways. Fiona continues by questioning her initial assumption:

*However, I didn’t ‘feel’ this was quite right and began to wonder if it might have been something about me that was different. Had I moved my boundaries? Was it something about me that created an ‘openness’ which the clients responded to? These incidents happened at around week two of the course when we were looking at extending ourselves out with the boundaries of our physical selves. I wondered if I had somehow moved my boundaries or otherwise indicated that something about me was different.*

Fiona wonders if she had “moved (her) boundaries” and I think this is a very good question. In my reading of “these incidents happened at around week two of the course when we were looking at extending ourselves … I
wondered if I had somehow moved my boundaries or otherwise indicated that something about me was different”, she implies that she had perhaps remained more extended than usual following the second week of the course. The second week ends with a long exercise (described by Huian at the end of Chapter Six) in which the participants experiment with becoming much more extended than usual. Most find this an extremely pleasant experience and it seems entirely possible that Fiona maintained a more-extended-than-usual stance in her working week. If that were the case, she could indeed be said to have “moved (her) boundaries” in the sense of extending further into the space around her. However, this is not the same as having “moved her boundaries” in the sense of having decided that something that was previously unwelcome – in this case being touched by a client – is now welcome.

Fiona’s question as to whether her clients were reading her “openness” as an invitation is reminiscent of my opening question as to why some homeless people approach me with such striking confidence. Unless I am in a particular hurry, or very preoccupied, I normally walk around in a relatively extended or open state and, like Fiona, I suspect that this is what is being read as a willingness to have contact. I was, in the instances I recounted in Chapter One, very happy to have contact. However, this is not always the case. Extension may be likened to a smile: it might not be intended as an invitation to contact, but that it might be read as such is unsurprising.

Fiona does not say how she worked with her clients’ misunderstanding that she would welcome a physical intimacy, but it would seem important to bear in mind, in such a situation, that clients do feel and make meaning of a therapist’s every “movement”. Fiona says that her clients “didn’t consider my boundaries and they wouldn’t with anyone else either”. It may have been the case, as I think Fiona goes on to suggest, that her clients’ insensitivity actually arose from a sensitivity to – but misinterpretation of – a more extended and “open” stance on her part. Acknowledging the possibility of such sensitivity when working with the fact that the kisses violated Fiona’s

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43 Geller and Geller (2012) offer their reader a very similar exercise as a means of cultivating the ability to expand.
boundaries would be to avoid the danger of negating the clients’ accurate perception that something about her was different.

Finlay (2003) differentiates between reflexivity and reflection as occupying opposite ends of a continuum between retrospectively thinking about something (reflection) and a more immediate, continuous and subjective self-awareness (reflexivity). Ideally both have a place in supervision. Much as I encourage reflexivity very strongly throughout the course, I am aware that cultivating an ongoing awareness of how one “dances” takes time and commitment and is somewhat aspirational. Retrospective reflection is also useful.

Some of my partners in conversation manage to pull the polarities of reflection and reflexivity together in looking back at the dance. Kinaesthetic retrospective reflection on the unseen dance invites the immediacy of a bodily memory. Sophia writes that:

This course helped me to be more self-aware of how I feel when I interact with people or even when I have a listening practice in university. At the beginning I might be still falling in the same habitual state of contraction and need to pull myself in, to separate from the world, but moments after I start to become aware of that and I breathe first. Later I notice that I become more relaxed, acceptant, and able to be in the moment.

Dawn used an awareness born of retrospective reflection to respond rather than react in the moment to a challenging interaction. She had not yet begun work with counselling and psychotherapy clients, and so writes about another professional context: her point is applicable to many kinds of helping relationships.

A patient (accompanied by her daughter) came to the memory clinic. She and her daughter openly sniggered and questioned what a psychologist could possibly do to help make the situation better. Normally, I would find myself contracting to such remarks but I made a conscious effort to stay extended to her. By doing so, I noticed a change in her demeanour. I had her attention and she was listening to me. There was something about her face and eyes, a change. I felt some of her sadness as she described how her falls had left her more dependent on her daughter. It felt like we were becoming more attuned to each other and in doing so, I had experienced her emotion viscerally.

Dawn’s reflexivity arises from a process of symbolising and reflecting upon her previous experience of adopting contracted and extended stances: she knows that “normally, I would find myself contracting to such remarks”, and is thus able to choose to respond by remaining extended. She makes a direct
connection between her conscious effort to remain extended and a change in
her patient’s demeanor. My understanding, and I think this is also Dawn’s
understanding, is that it meant something to the patient that Dawn did not
retreat in the face of her dismissiveness, that the patient was encouraged to
move further into the relationship. Were the patient a psychotherapy client, it
might be appropriate, at some point, to in some way address her
dismissiveness. My own preference is to make the effort to remain extended
as I offer potentially difficult feedback. I know that I myself find it much
easier to hear something difficult if I do not feel the other person pull away
from me, if we remain “connected”, and I continued to feel accepted in this
most subtle, but important way.

One may consciously use one’s kinaesthetic and proprioceptive senses in
order to access retrospective awareness by imagining being in the
relationship, session or moment that one wishes to explore and noticing
whether – and how – one changes stance or position. If, for instance, I
imagine being with my client Romaine, I notice that I extend towards him, as
I often do when working with clients. However, I sense myself stopping
short, as if I do not extend as far as I might usually do. I experience Romaine
as being relatively distant. I do not feel him extend towards me. My sense of
relational poise bids me extend towards him, but not too far.

I also imagine being with Marsha in our last session. This feels very
different. I feel myself extend, but I extend outwards as if I am creating a
containing, bowl-like structure for her to extend into. I seem to meet Louise
in yet another way. As I imagine being with her I have a strong sense of
extending towards her and encircling her. Louise seemed irritable in our last
session, and complained several times that I had not properly understood
her. I imagine being in that particular session and realise that I had not
extended towards her or encircled her, but had rather been “a little above my
head”, perhaps because I had not felt particularly well that day.

**Seeing the dance**
Rather than feeling the *dance* in retrospect, one might, as a reflective practice,
look at it. I find it easier to access my kinaesthetic channel (Mindell, 2002),
but appreciate that others may prefer another channel. As discussed in
Chapter Two, Schwartz-Salant’s (1998) conceptual use of the *subtle body* is different from my own use. This is also true of Reed (1996). Their concern is with psychic content rather than with the kind of *dance* that I describe arising as therapist and client move in reaction or response to each other. However, I and my partners in conversation chose as Gadamer (1960; 1975) urges, to converse with Schwartz-Salant and Reed, to listen, to learn, despite having somewhat different concerns.

Reed says that:

For many therapists, the coniunctio is more truly an interpersonal event between patient and therapist, which either partner can access by a special form of relational insight that is sensitive not to events within, as in insight, but to events between the self and another. Schwartz-Salant advocates imaginal sight as a channel of such knowing ... By respecting and attending to the spontaneous images and those felt, almost-images as a real domain of information, the therapist can, he proposes, directly apprehend the activities of the coniunctio, or the events taking place in the ‘in between’. (p. 86)

“In order to ‘see’ with the imagination”, says Reed:

it is important that we do not try to direct it. I emphasise in my training that this use of the imagination is not ‘visualisation’... rather the imagination is a receiver, which can be tuned to receive information about emotional events. (p. 87)

Reed uses his method of imaginal sight to access information about emotional content, whereas I suggest it as a means of looking at the *dance*.

Sophia writes that:

*The last memorable experience I had during the course was at the end of the course when we had to be in the presence of the partner and later draw what it felt like. No particular visual symbols or image came to my mind then. I just had the feeling that I am observing us from outside. I was feeling and almost seeing (or imagining) being surrounded by the yellow moving mass around me. It was rotating up and down. It felt to be dense but at the same time it was light. It was radiating warmth. When I focused on my pair I felt something hot in the area of solar plexus. In my forehead I felt like having a hole. I almost sensed that these two points are some kind of cords of yellow substance. That was all I felt and saw. Besides choosing the same colors to draw our pictures, it was surprising to hear that my pair felt something similar luminous, yellow and positive surrounding us.*

The imagination and the body do not, in an organismic theory, need to be kept away from each other. Sophia feels as much as she sees.

Imaginal sight can be used to bring both sides of the therapeutic interaction into awareness. When I think about how my relationship with
Romaine has been, I receive an image of him being behind glass. However, something happened in our last session. He was again circling around a difficult subject. I could feel a retreating and closing down on his part that I recognised from previous sessions spent in a silence that excluded me utterly. This time, just before he disappeared, I managed tell him that I was there to listen if he wanted to speak, but that I didn’t need him to speak. He gave me a small, but definitively appreciative glance, and some minutes later began to talk about the subject he had previously felt unable to broach. And something else happened too. There was a change in our relationship that might have resulted from what I said, but that went beyond words. I used imaginal sight to look at what happened in this moment and received what Reed calls a “felt, almost-image” of Romaine extending to meet me. I bring my last session with Louise to mind. I feel myself drift upwards, as I do when unwell, and wait for an image of Louise. This time I really feel the “felt, almost-image” as I sense Louise step into my “space” in search of me. I then think about my relationship with Marsha, curious about how she responds to the bowl-like shape that I adopt. I receive a “felt, almost-image” of her filling the room – and realise how small the bowl is.

As with other forms of awareness, it is usually wise to take some time to reflect before deciding how best to work with any insight gained. After reflection I feel it is sufficient to acknowledge with my supervisor that my relationship with Romaine underwent a qualitative change as he extended to meet me. It would not necessarily be unwise to raise this with Romaine, but I can see no good reason to do so in this particular context. On the other hand, it seems important that I acknowledge to Louise that the quality of my presence was different in our last session. I might also reflect in supervision on whether encircling her is really the most helpful way of being with her, and ask myself why I drifted upwards in our last session. I might find myself sensitised to hearing something about how Marsha feels received – or not. I suspect that she might feel much more fully received by me if I were to make the bowl bigger. As our next session begins, I pay attention to the quality of my presence. I sense that extending towards her would not be appropriate, but that she does need me to be extended. I let myself extend outwards, thus making the bowl bigger. I see Marsha visibly relax.
Using one’s kinaesthetic sense or Reed’s imaginal sight to reflect on the dance moves made during a particular encounter, session or relationship can, as it did for Harry and Fiona, bring a fresh perspective to understanding how a client might perceive the therapist. I used the insight gained from “looking” at my dances with Romaine, Marsha and Louise to generate material to take to supervision, acknowledge to a client that I had been more distant than usual in our previous session and to alter the quality of my presence with another. Understanding in retrospect is, of course, useful, but reflection of this kind can also lead to reflexivity in the moment, as it did for Dawn. Reflecting upon the unseen dance in the ways described in this section is something that a therapist might do in solitude, or in the company of a supervisor. Bringing the unseen dance to the attention of supervisees and encouraging this kind of reflection is a potentially helpful way of helping them develop an awareness of how the positions they adopt and the movements that they make impact the therapeutic relationship.

The unseen dance
I argued, in the preceding substantive chapters, that not only do the stances that we adopt, the movements that we make and the positions that we adopt in relation to the other impact their perception of us, they also implicate us in an unseen dance.

The previous chapter identified how the erotic might emerge into the therapy room when therapist and client reach out and “touch” each other. The previous chapter argued that the ethical pitfalls potentially arising with the arrival of the erotic might be more readily avoided if erotic charge in the therapeutic relationship were more discussed in the literature. This chapter discusses another ethical concern potentially arising from the unseen dance – the danger the therapist unintentionally overpowers their client.

Power and politics in the unseen dance
“As soon as I begin an interchange of looks with another person”, writes Shotter (2011), “and I sense them as looking toward me in a certain way (as they see me looking toward them in a particular way too), a little ethical and political world is created between us” (p. 1). I would suggest that ”a little ethical and political world” is created before looks are even exchanged.
Geller and Greenberg (2012) assume that the therapist’s extending will be beneficial to the therapeutic relationship and to the client. However, as Huian and Peter’s accounts in Chapter Six make clear, this may not necessarily be the case. Huian felt intruded upon when I extended and Peter felt overwhelmed. Harry felt threatened when I extended towards him: “I felt a wave of energy coming towards me and I wanted to cover my head with my hands and arms in order to protect me from this energy.” I had not intended to be intrusive, overwhelming, to “throw my weight around”, yet had made (at least) three people dreadfully uncomfortable – one might, perhaps say “dismembered” – by merely and, as I intended it, warmly extending towards them. Conversely, Yvonne, in Chapter Five, was so affected by my withdrawing into a “clench” that she wanted to shout at me to stop.

Whatever one’s intentions may be in other relationships, having this kind of impact in a therapeutic relationship that is intended to facilitate the client claiming their personal power (Rogers, 1978) is clearly undesirable. My point, as I made clear in Chapter Six, is not that others are hapless victims unable to respond in a way that restores their equanimity, but that one may co-create a potentially problematic power dynamic within the therapeutic relationship without intending to or even being aware of having done so, and that a client may, like Peter, who felt he was suffocating in the presence of his therapist, be unable to identify what is affecting them so powerfully. Reflecting upon the unseen dance, as suggested above, may render some clues as to the power dynamics that have arisen within this dance. It is, of course, not possible to know with any certainty how the quality of one’s presence affects another but if, for instance, when using imaginal sight, one “sees” the other retreating, one might consider changing what one does, initiating a conversation or whatever else might be appropriate in a specific context.

It is possible, and sometimes desirable to “move” to suit a client. Isla gave an example of this in Chapter Seven, which I repeat for ease of reference: 

*During our first session my therapist, who is trained in somatic-body therapy, approached me in a very direct, open and expanded manner, which I experienced not as warm and accepting but as threatening and scary. . . . my therapist understood that I initially needed a ‘softer’ approach in order to open up. Consequently, he moderated his attitude and became gentler, more careful.*
and in a sense more contracted in our sessions than he would normally be, since that was appropriate for my case.

The most ethical course of action in finding a point of contact that is comfortable for both people may be obvious or easily negotiated – or not. We all move and take up different stances and positions in reaction (or response) to what is happening around and within us. It is not possible to predict what might leave another feeling threatened, disempowered or otherwise adversely affected, nor can I, or would I wish to, make categorical recommendations as to whether and how one might adjust the quality of one’s presence. What I do want to do is to identify the unseen dance as an area of potential ethical concern and to encourage an inquiring and creative approach in addressing any such concerns that do arise.

As well as moving in various ways in response to what is happening within and around us, we also have particular stances that are habitual, comfortable and with which we identify. These stances are the subject of the next section, which considers therapists’ ethical obligation to maintain – or restore – their own well-being.

**Maintaining fitness to practise**

I generally feel most comfortable when I am really quite extended. When in relationship I generally extend towards the other person (unless I feel frightened, bored, annoyed or distracted) and when alone I take delight in letting myself relax outwards much further. After doing some of the experiential work on the course, and seeking feedback from her course colleagues, Yolande also identified with being “large”. She writes that:

> This kind of awareness explains a lot about me in relation to others. I became aware that as I am energetically large, I extend too much towards people and they receive this in several different ways. My presence might be threatening and unpleasant for people who need their personal space or those who don’t like getting so close. What is more, when I have a conversation I might “push into” the other person’s space and squeeze them energetically in order to get the information I want or just say my opinion. I started thinking about how I react as a daughter, as a partner and as a friend. I have certainly been a large presence in my relationships and this fact has caused me many difficulties in communication, aside from the positive aspects that come with it. I’ve heard numerous times the phrase “I need my space” or “you are being pushy” from several people but I often attribute it to stereotyped phrases of our times. I’ve never thought that these words might have a literal meaning of how people experience me. This raises a question about how I – as a future therapist – should behave energetically.
Yolande’s question as to how she should behave energetically as a therapist arises not from her realising that she has actively “extended” in a particular context, but from the realisation that she is “energetically large”. The question concerns how she is, rather than what she has done. The question is an important one that concerns Yolande’s ethical obligations towards her future clients and also her ethical obligation to attend to her own well-being. Clearly it would be undesirable if Yolande were to “push into’ the other person’s space and squeeze them energetically”. However, if, like me, Yolande feels uncomfortably constricted when contracted, doing so is likely – as I argued in Chapter Six – to have an undesirable impact on her own state of being. While she has an ethical obligation to give others “space”, she also has an ethical obligation to not distort herself. Although my general preference is, generally, to be quite extended, I can – and do – contract. In doing so, I can, quite quickly, become uncomfortable, as if I am wearing clothes are too tight. In working with this problem, I found that if I move back in a slightly different way – a “sitting back”, rather than a “pulling in”, a retraction rather than a contraction, I can give the other “space” without feeling unduly restricted.

**Assessing fitness to practise**

The question of how the therapist’s own state of being affects the therapeutic relationship also comes to the fore when a therapist’s fitness to practise is temporarily (or otherwise) in question. Stressful life events, ill health, exhaustion, etc. are likely to negatively impact our ability to work safely and effectively. In this section I am concerned with the way in which circumstances in one’s own life might lead one to adopt a particular stance or position that adversely impacts one’s ability to be therapeutically present.

Stressful life events and other factors in the therapist’s own life do potentially impact one’s ability to be therapeutically present, yet many therapists in such circumstances decide, after careful examination and supervisory consultation, to continue working. David, a very experienced therapist, writes that:

*I have to say that when the class came to consider the conditions of being energetically clenched or collapsed, I reached the point in the course which offered me, experientially, the greatest insight. We were invited to respond to*
Rose, the facilitator, as she turned her energies towards an alignment with clenching and then collapsing. This was a non-verbal presentation, but the energies were palpable. When Rose presented clenching, I had a sense of her defensiveness and protection portrayed through her body. This is a state I can relate to thus: there was a particular time in my life which was challenging and when I know that I moved in and out of clenching. I took this to my supervisor as a check that I continued to be competent to practice. I would say that at times I felt I was ‘steeling myself’. I could almost feel the cold light blue hardness of steel, as an attitude to bear the circumstances I was faced with. My supervisor and I explored the ways I worked with my energies so that, when I met with clients, I could bracket that response to one part of my life, in a way that would not interfere with that part of my life involving my presence with clients.

Metaphors such as “bracketing” are commonly used by counsellors and psychotherapists (as well as by Husserlian phenomenologists) to express the idea that one can put aside that which one might otherwise bring to the therapeutic (or research) encounter. However, little is written in the psychotherapeutic or supervision literature about how one might “bracket” one’s own current difficulties. David writes that he and his supervisor explored “the ways I worked with my energies”: it would have been interesting had he written in more detail about what he meant by this. He wrote the passage after he had taken the course and I am left wondering if he thought at the time about whatever he was doing as “work(ing) with his energies”, or whether his embodied recognition of the state I symbolised as “clenching” led him to re-conceptualise whatever it was that he did at the time.

In Chapter Six, I elaborated various means by which one might consciously move from one stance or position to another, but it is entirely possible to do so without employing any of the means I suggest. David writes that he “moved in and out of clenching” during the difficult period to which he refers and, in my reading, implies that by exploring the ways in which he “worked with (his) energies”, he was able to consciously move out of a clenched stance. I have spoken with several colleagues who, after telling me about the very difficult time they were having personally and how bad they felt, were at pains to assure me that they were able to “get themselves alright” in order to work with clients. I had no difficulty believing them. I think most people are able to, and do, adjust “where they are in themselves” when required.
Whether one thinks in terms of “getting oneself alright”, or “working with my energies”, “getting grounded”, “getting back into my body”, and whether one does so by consciously moving in the ways described in this thesis or by employing a catalytic activity such as listening to music or going for a walk is not important. What does matter is the awareness that our clients will feel a difference when we are “down” or “beside ourselves”; that we have some means of checking whether, in the particular circumstances we are in, we are able to move into a different “space” for the duration of the therapeutic hour; that we do so, and that we bear in mind that, when unwell, exhausted, or in the midst of turmoil, we might be more easily moved into a less appropriate stance by the challenges of the therapeutic encounter. Many therapists are well practised in moving from one stance or position to another and know how to “get themselves alright” to work with a client while living though a personally challenging period. I have, throughout this thesis, argued that it benefits therapeutic work to symbolise these processes in a manner that makes them available for reflection and discussion. In the next section I argue that doing so also benefits the therapist.

**The restorative – paying attention to how one is moved**

Merry (2004) positions supervision as a “collaborative enquiry dedicated to revealing what is hidden or only partially understood about counsellors’ relationships with clients, and about the counsellor themselves” (p. 190). This section explores some of the means by which one might reflect upon the *unseen dance* with the purpose of revealing something about what therapists do to themselves. Paying attention to how we move and the stances we adopt not only offers insight into how we might impact the therapeutic relationship but also addresses the restorative (Inksipp and Proctor, 1995) function of reflective practice and supervision. When the ways in which we move are outside awareness, one might be said to have “been moved”. The therapist’s ability to be moved, to respond with spontaneous feeling is, of course, vital to good therapy – and one of the aspects of the work that makes it so personally demanding. The *unseen dance* impacts the therapist as well as the client, and may leave us bent out of shape.

Reflecting on the ongoing impact of the therapeutic hour – noticing,
perhaps, that one is, for instance, very contracted after working with a particular client – may yield useful insight into the therapeutic relationship, therapeutic process or even into the client. However, there comes a point at which remaining contracted is no longer usefully about the therapy. We have our own lives to get back to, and our own well-being to attend to. One of the assignment writers, Babar, realises how affected she was by her unseen dance with a client,

*looking back to this scene again, it seems like I tried to reach out to her but it was inappropriate for her and she contracted, and then I became contracted. I remember that I felt “drawn in” all day, which was quite painful and stressful. It was like there was a huge heaviness on my shoulders.*

As well as contracting or extending in reaction or response to a client’s relative proximity, we also may adopt a position in reaction or response to what we hear. Yolande remembered that while with a client “several times I felt myself leaving my body because I had heard something strange, disappointing, unexpected or upsetting”. Not only did this leave her unable to “attend the session effectively”, but also “completely disorientated” and “completely detuned and it took me hours to get back to normal”.

One might in reaction or response, mimic what a client does, extending in harmony with them in a way that recalls Stern’s vitality effect (1985) or sliding into a collapsed stance as we attune to their despondency. Astrid describes unconsciously mimicking my clenched stance:

*Also in week five, I had a very intense reaction. We discussed clenching and collapsing. Due to the negative effects of these states, the tutor chose to demonstrate the states herself and stand before each of us in turn so we could describe our reaction. She shifted in to a clenched state, talking us through the process of moving her energy. Already, as she spoke, I began to feel different, and this continued to build as she came around the room. I felt an intense tightness in my chest.*

Finlay (2006) describes a similar process in a more naturalistic setting as she listens to the research participant I previously quoted her describing as “fading”. Finlay finds that, as she witnesses Kath fading:

*I could feel a strange sensation within myself, a sense of closing down, closing in, shrinking, trying to become smaller, trying to become a ‘paler’ version of myself. Slowly I was disappearing.* (p. 26)

Consciously or unconsciously mimicking another’s stance can, as Finlay goes on to suggest, greatly enhance one’s empathic understanding. However,
as I argued in Chapter Six, to change one’s stance is to change one’s whole state of being. Many therapists “take a few moments” before working with a client to “ground” themselves or otherwise “get into a space” that is conducive to therapy. It is, I would suggest, equally important to take a few moments after a session to ensure that one is “in a space” that is conducive to one’s own life. Checking, after a session has ended, that one is not continuing to hold a stance that was temporarily useful in the session is an important way in which therapists can care for themselves.

**Implications for training**

If, in moving towards and away from a client, one impacts how one is perceived and draws the client into an *unseen dance* that impacts the organismic state of both partners, developing an awareness of this, and the ways in which one moves, is as important an issue for training as it is for supervision. Trainers should, I would suggest, be mindful of the potential impact of the ways in which one moves when teaching theory, facilitating personal awareness and interacting with trainees (and each other), both in the sense of bearing in mind the kind of material presented in this thesis and in bearing mind their own stance as they teach. In discussing training and *Relational Depth*, Mearns (1997) and, in discussing training and *presence*, Geller and Greenberg (2012) focus upon what the trainee needs to do. I focus, in this section on what the trainer might do in order to facilitate trainees’ learning.

**Teaching theory**

The substance of this thesis comprises a theoretical perspective that can be usefully shared, as it was in the workshop and course from which I drew data, with therapists at any stage of their professional development. When discussing my use, as a researcher, of exercises in identifying the experiences of moving in various ways towards or away from another, and of sensing another do so, I have implied that exercises are an effective training strategy. I stand by this assertion, and I think that some of what has been said and written by my partners in conversation supports this assertion. I write, in Chapters Three and Four, about the challenge of rendering into language the kinds of experiences with which I am concerned. Even if a trainer were to
find forms of words that “fitted” for each individual in a training group, this, though possibly a miracle, would be a poor substitute for the embodied learning that comes with experiential work. A holistic, embodied, organismic understanding of what it feels like to be in the presence of someone who comes too close or is too distant is more profound than a purely intellectual understanding, as is the embodied experience of dancing in or out of synch with another.

Acknowledging that potentially overwhelming feelings may easily – and perhaps suddenly – arise when both partners in the dance extend towards each other and touch is, as I have already indicated, of ethical importance in preparing therapists for such a possibility. There is much concern in the literature as to how therapists might be trained to access experiences such as described by Rogers when he says that sometimes it seems that his inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other and that they become part of something larger. Thorne (1998) suggests that to set out to deliberately create such an experience of presence is preposterous, and that what is necessitated is “the willingness of the therapist to live out consistently and profoundly the philosophy that the Person-centred approach embraces. More particularly it requires the disciplined practices of self-exploration and self-acceptance” (p. 87). I do not deny that such a commitment may be helpful, but I would suggest that one might access a heightened state without any disciplined practice (and that one may indeed set out to invite such an experience). My partners in conversation accessed such a state rather easily by simply extending towards each other. Such intense experiences may take a therapist by surprise, regardless of their degree of professional experience. Both experienced and inexperienced therapists run the risk of being transported when dancing. It is vital, particularly during a slow dance, that the therapist “keep their feet on the ground” and do not allow themselves to be “carried away” – even when transported. I would suggest that the training issue – and continuing professional development issue – is not how we can train therapists to access such states, but in equipping therapists, inexperienced and otherwise, to respond to such experiences with wisdom. Such wisdom would, I suggest, include understanding what is happening as a part of the therapeutic
process, the ethical management of the therapist’s own feelings and the emotional ability to respond to clients’ feelings without fear.

**Facilitating self-awareness**
Developing the wisdom described above is closely linked to developing self-awareness. Developing self-awareness is a notoriously fraught aspect of training to be a therapist. Developing the ability to adopt different stances for the purposes of inviting an embodied recognition of the way in which one moves, however, require that one is relaxed. Rogers says that there is nothing he can do to force the experience in which it seems his inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other, but that when he can relax, then simply his presence is releasing and helpful to the other. Relaxing, as I have already observed, goes hand in hand with extending and invites the client’s presence (Geller and Greenberg, 2012) if the client welcomes being extended towards. I would agree with Rogers that there is nothing one can do to force the kind of experience he describes, but I would go further by claiming that any effort (as opposed to intention), any striving, anything that might result in one holding so focused a stance that one becomes contracted is utterly counter-productive. One cannot easily move if not relaxed. Effort, as Liou Sui explains in her account of being in my presence as I extended towards her, also dulls one’s sensitivity, as does “being in one’s head” as opposed to “being in one’s body”:

> I could not sense anything from her when I was trying hard to feel it, whereas I clearly sensed something when I was sitting back and waiting for something to come towards me. It seemed that when I was trying hard to feel, I was actually thinking hard. I used my thought to search the feelings on my body instead of feelings by my body. From this experience, I realised how the active thought could block the awareness of my bodily senses.

I perceived a difference in how relaxed those attending the one-day workshop seemed to be in comparison to many of the university students. The one-day workshop was held on a Saturday and entailed no assessment of any kind, whereas the university students were working in a more formal context and were being assessed. Many were also struggling to follow, in a language that was not their first language, a course about something that I found difficult to articulate without the liberal use of strange English figures of speech. Others, like Astrid, found that conceptual scepticism was a:
factor in not being able to give over completely to the process. Though I felt I could identify with the ideas of extension and contraction I could not accept them in their literal sense and this got in the way of the process.

Being relaxed is a necessary condition of being able to develop embodied self-awareness by moving in and out of different stances while doing the kinds of exercises I claim are helpful. This, in my view, means that the trainer has a responsibility to promote a relaxed atmosphere – and might have to work quite hard at persuading the trainees to not work hard.

Not making an effort to “move” is well worth it. As already illustrated by many of my partners in conversation, such as Peter, Huian and Sophia, becoming familiar with the ways in which one holds one’s energy is of potential personal as well as professional benefit. Sophia ended her excerpt about “the stone” by saying that all she will need to do in the future is just “let it go”. Her confidence in the ease with which she thinks she might do so might seems alarmingly naïve. However, my experience of witnessing long-term therapy clients “letting go” of a habitually contracted state suggests that she may well find that it remains this easy to “let it go” in the future. Chris writes of another student that:

In one of my class exercises with my partner, in which we were instructed to contract our energy, I witnessed my partner as she contracted her energy. As she talked about her experience, she had an epiphany, which was that she lives in this “posture”, hence she felt stuck in this state. Furthermore, she did not like it, as she felt confined, and limited, in this energetic position. I asked her if she wanted me to help her shift out of it, and she said yes. With only some breathing exercises, she was able to let go, and relax her energy, and extend a bit more. Since then, my partner has been in a much less contracted state in daily life, and has more flexibility in moving her energy in an appropriate response to the situation, rather than being stuck in just one “posture”. I know this about her because we have since become close friends.

As previously explained, most of the experiential exercises described in the previous chapters consist not only of temporarily adopting a particular stance in order to get a sense of one’s own individual experience of that stance, but also of asking for feedback with regard to what it is like for another to be in one’s presence while one is “floating off” for instance, or clenched, and thus potentially help develop awareness of one’s own embodied experience and also awareness of one’s impact on others. Yolande, for instance, writes of becoming aware that she has “certainly been a large presence in my relationships and this fact has caused me many difficulties in
communication, aside from the positive aspects that come with it” and that this realisation prompts her to consider how best to be when with clients.

**Embodied relational-centred teaching**

I discussed, in Chapter Three, how Finlay and Evans (2009), in setting forth their *relational-centred research*, encourage the researcher to develop an awareness of their embodied relationship with research participants. I would suggest that it is also useful for trainers to pay attention to, and work with their embodied relationship with trainees: trainers and trainees are also involved with each other in an *unseen dance*. I have, in Chapter Three, already discussed the merits of an embodied style of teaching in which I demonstrated with trainees and did exercises with them. Instead of repeating myself, I end with an account, from Inga, that seems nicely ironic:

Rose pulled in to demonstrate the change in the room. I remember suddenly feeling comfortable with making notes about the essay and not concentrating on class anymore because it felt like the tutor was not here anymore. Rose’s pulling in made her ‘disappear’ and as a result I felt comfortable to pull in too in order to get into my creative writing space. Also after doing the contracting ourselves, the whole class seemed to be quieter and less involved into the teaching process.
Conclusion

I begin this conclusion by revisiting the aims I set myself before summarising my findings and their implications for the practice of therapy, supervision and training. I then discuss implications that my research contributes in relation to the literature discussed in Chapter Two before going on to discuss the directions that I envisage might be profitably pursued in future research. I end with some reflections upon the political significance of my topic, methodology and findings.

I began this thesis by proposing the possibility of a “bodily intuition” with which one assesses whether another is open to contact. I speculated that such intuitions arise in response to something that seems to emanate from others or be conspicuously absent. I suggested that if those with whom I happened to be sharing a pavement could sense something about my openness to contact, then it was likely that therapy clients might also sense something about the quality of my presence. Having speculated that bodily intuitions arise in response to something that seems to emanate from others – or not – I examined any references in the literature to something that might be said to emanate from the therapist. I began with a quotation from Rogers that refers to “a lot of active energy” (Baldwin, 1987, p. 45) flowing from him to the client and to another in which he says it seems that that his inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other. The second quotation led me to the concept of presence and the related concept of Relational Depth. I looked in some detail at the notion of “extending” as an aspect of presence. The notion of extending is defined with the use of enigmatic phrases such as the “psychic movement of one’s boundaries outward” (Pemberton, 1976), and as reaching out “energetically” (Geller and Greenberg, 2002). I aimed to engage with the difficulty of languaging lived, bodily experience as I set about asking how relationship is impacted when one has the sense of somehow moving towards or away from another, and what the implications might be for therapeutic practice, supervision and training.

I identified the experiences with which I was concerned through the use of experiential exercises. These exercises enabled me to provoke the experiences with which I was concerned and to then invite my partners in conversation
to bring their experience to language. Gadamer ([1960; 1975] 2004) writes that:

_We say that we “conduct” a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies with the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never the one we wanted to conduct. Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation … conversation has a spirit of its own, and that the language in which it is conducted bears its own truth within it – i.e., that it allows something to “emerge” which henceforth exists._ (p. 401)

The conversation I fell into with those kind enough to contribute their voices to this research was the conversation I wanted to have – I was, after all, as tutor and researcher, in a position to decide what our conversation was about. Although there are few references to “reaching out”, “extending” and “enfolding” in the literature, there are so many other small, subtle movements that one might make that are not acknowledged. I wanted to discuss the relational impact of a range of such movements.

The conversation allowed something to emerge and claim existence. About half-way through the university course I asked whether the students recognised the experiences they had been having while doing the exercises. Around a third of the class raised their hands uncertainly, and only from the elbow. They flapped their hands hesitantly. Everybody looked disturbed by my question, and there were anxious glances around the room as they looked to see whether others were also raising their hands. Perhaps they were uncertain as to what it was I wanted to hear. Or perhaps they were genuinely unsure whether what we had been doing was familiar or not. I am, myself, not entirely sure whether I merely brought into awareness processes that usually happen out of awareness, or whether I have created something new by putting random sensations together and inviting them to mean something. Towards the end of the course I asked the same question again. This time virtually the whole class put their hands up. Confidently. And from the shoulder.

Had subconscious processes become conscious, or had we created something new in reaching an understanding? “We can no longer hold the view that, in the absence of immediate understanding, interpretative ideas are drawn, as needed out of a linguistic storeroom where they are lying ready”, says Gadamer ([1960; 1975] 2004), “Rather, language is the universal
medium in which understanding occurs. Understanding occurs in interpreting” (p. 407, italics in original). We entered into conversation about the words that might fit these experiences as we talked in class, as my partners in conversation read what I had written and as I read what they had written. We played with language in order to reach an understanding. We tried words on, discarded them, tried new ones. We tried foreign words, homeland words, colloquial terms and New Age words. Some words fitted well, others irritated, and with much gesticulation, demonstration and experimentation, we managed to find a way to understand each other.

We also arrived at new ways of understanding some of our bodily experiences. The linguistic turn raised the question of whether language brings phenomena into being. Whether I and my partners in conversation brought an already existing dance into awareness or whether we choreographed it into existence by giving meaning to random sensations and impressions speaks to this question, and to Sheets-Johnstone’s (2009) counter-claim that “we experience the world and ourselves in wordless ways before we come to language our experience” (p. 364). I have, in the way in which I have drawn upon the phenomenological literature concerned with language, and in the way in which I generated and presented my data, suggested that we brought an unseen dance into awareness.

Although the conversation I fell into was the conversation I wanted to have, it was not always the conversation I expected to have. We lived our entwinement with each other through our bodies and impacted each other in all kinds of ways without speaking. Our bodies spoke to each other – we reached out and withdrew, floated off, jumped out of our skins and shrank back. Our bodies felt the impact of another’s presence, and their absence. The other’s movements, closeness or distance meant something to us; we understood something by it.

We challenged our pre-understandings. We asked, in the course of reaching out, withdrawing, floating off and shrinking back, “how was that for you?” We answered that sometimes we felt the warmth of the sun, sometimes an icy coldness (and sometimes that it was all a bit weird). Sometimes we welcomed the other’s approach; sometimes we felt relief
when, to use Harry’s phrase, they “toned it down”. We said that moving towards or away from another impacts relationship because we feel how others move. Perception, as Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 1962) argues, begins with bodily experience.

We made something of what we felt. We felt met, abruptly left, hugged. Sometimes we thought the other aggressive. Perhaps sometimes they were feeling aggressive, or perhaps just paying close attention – but it was too much. We could see how, as Rogers says, empathy can be perceived as a lack of involvement; unconditional regard as indifference; warmth as threatening closeness; real feelings as false. We cannot take for granted that what we offer a client will be perceived in the way in which we experience it. Moving towards or away from another impacts relationship in ways that are hidden, in ways that made Harry want to cover his head to protect himself, Peter to leave the suffocating room. It is important, as Rogers says, to be sensitive not only to what is going on within oneself, and sensitive to the flow of feelings in one’s client, but also to the way in which one’s communications are being received.

One communicates bodily as well as verbally, and one’s bodily communication is more subtle and complex than generally acknowledged. The quality of another’s presence, whether they are extending towards us or floating off, means something to us. We may be quite wrong about what we think they think, but what we think they think is not just what we think – it arises from our bodily experience. We are, Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 1962) claims, entwined with each other’s bodies, and with the world. We are living, breathing, feeling, thinking – and dancing – organisms. The ways in which we move impact not only a client’s perception, but also how they are within themselves. As we danced our movements towards and away from each other, our feelings changed. Sophia breathed. Let go. Let the stone dissolve. David twirled Huian around on the dance floor. She felt a bit of romance. Gina and Mary sat in the presence of God.

The ways in which we move profoundly impact relationship – and the other person. We need to talk about this. We need to talk, in supervision, about the session in which we were too hungry to stay focused; about the
head cold that we had. It meant something to the other. We also need to talk about how we ourselves are impacted by the therapeutic relationship, about the client who somehow pushes into our space or by whom we feel hugged.

And we need to talk, as trainers, about what Gillian called the “unspoken words” that pass across the room; about our bodily awareness of each other, the warmth we feel, the sudden chill; what we think it means, and what we think our client might think it means. The conversation I fell into suggests that how a client is impacted by our proximity or distance, and what they may make of the position we take up in relation to them, is utterly dependent upon the context. Their perception of us depends upon their fluctuating preferences as regards proximity and the manner in which we move towards or away from them. Training therapists to cultivate more awareness of how the way in which they move towards or away from a client might impact the therapeutic relationship necessitates concrete rather than hypothetical situations. It requires trainers to be active in creating such situations – even if, as Inga pointed out in the previous chapter, this sometimes means creating a situation in which a class just stops listening! Knowing when to make a move, and what kind of movement might be most appropriate, is, as Dreyfus and Dreyfus ([1986] 1988) pointed out in the introductory chapter, dependent upon experience.

Theoretical implications
The research presented in this thesis has implications for theory as well as practice. I contextualised my inquiry within a reading of the sixth of Rogers’ therapeutic conditions that privileges the client’s perception. Despite its theoretical importance, the Person-centred literature is quiet on client perception in general, and silent with regard to how a client may perceive a therapist who extends towards or away from them. Geller and Greenberg (2002; 2012), whose definition of presence includes extending, assumes that the therapist’s presence is intrinsically beneficial to both therapeutic relationship and the client’s state of being. However, my partners in conversation did not always welcome being extended towards. Sometimes they felt squeezed, struggled to breathe. They challenged the assumption implicitly made in the literature that expanding, as an aspect of presence, is
necessarily beneficial to the therapeutic relationship and to the client.

This thesis has also challenged the theorisation of presence – and perception – as internal, one-person phenomena. Presence is an intersubjective phenomenon in so far as the quality of one’s presence – how one is being, what we are like, the “vibes” we are giving – is, in part, determined by the other’s experience and interpretation. The particular nature of a therapist’s embodiment; the degree to which they are “grounded” in a given moment; the extent to which they extend towards their client or are contained within their own skin impacts the client’s experience of the therapist. I may experience myself as fully present, and I may meet all of the criteria in the various definitions of presence, but if, in extending towards my client I “overshoot” them and they experience me as “not there”, I surely cannot be said to be present in any clinically meaningful sense of the word. Presence is negotiated. It is neither a one-person nor an absolute quality.

The way in which a client experiences the quality of the therapist’s presence impacts their perception of the therapist. The client’s perception is, of course, mediated by their own stage of process and other intrapersonal factors (van der Veen, [1961] 1970; 1967). However, there are always (at least) two people in the therapy room, and they are in relationship – they affect each other. The phenomenological concept of intentionality – the claim that consciousness is always conscious of something – reminds us clients are conscious of the therapist. Both people in the therapy room are likely to be paying very close attention to each other. Unless dissociated, the client who appears to be absorbed in telling their story is simultaneously aware of the slightest fluctuation in the space between herself or himself and the therapist. Perception is not, as Toukmanian (2002) would have it, a purely or even predominantly cognitive process. Clients feel when one is, for example, distracted by hunger, not because they also feel hungry (though that too might happen), but because they feel an alteration in the quality of one’s presence and, as Aditi pointed out so well, they make something of it. The client’s perception is an ongoing process that happens in response to the therapist. The client’s perception of the therapist is relational. In claiming so, this thesis supports and extends a reading of Person-centred therapy as a relational therapy.
The literature generally conceives of *presence* as a binary, there-or-not phenomenon. This thesis argues that it is more appropriate – and useful – to think of there being different qualities to one’s presence. The quality of one’s presence depends upon whether one is “grounded”, “all over the place”, “beside one’s self”, “reaching out”, or “behind a barrier” etc. Others sense changes in the quality of our presence as we sense ourselves moving towards and away from them. The quality of one’s presence fluctuates as one “floats off” while momentarily distracted by an insight. It alters as we settle, begin to focus, and in doing so, extend towards our client. It is likely to change in a way that is perceptible to our client as we notice that the therapeutic hour is coming to an end, or as we realise that we don’t know what the time is.

It is not, as Geller and Greenberg suggest in 2002, that one is either “in presence” or not “in presence”, or even, as they argue in 2012, simply that “presence is a state that we can experience at more or less different degrees of intensity” (Geller and Greenberg, 2012, p. 136), but rather that the quality of one’s presence fluctuates depending upon one’s “stance” and “position”. Whether simply being present is, to use Rogers’ phrase, “releasing and helpful” to the other depends upon its quality – and this is, in part, determined by the client’s perception. Presence is both relational and relative.

In this thesis, I sought to identify, articulate and theorise an aspect of encounter that is a recognisable aspect of relational experience, but not hitherto delineated. I distinguished this substratum of relationship and discussed in an exploratory and analytical manner, examining and challenging some the meanings with which we imbue it. I offered a narrative in which although we may sense how another moves, we do not necessarily know how they feel.

Whether (and how) a therapist extends towards a client or moves away from them in some way impacts not only the client’s perception of them as congruently empathic and accepting but also engages the client in an *unseen dance*. In identifying this *unseen dance* that arises as therapist and client move towards and away from each other, I have claimed that the quality of a therapist’s presence impacts rather more than their client’s perception – it
also impacts the quality of the therapeutic relationship. The quality of connection – and disconnection – changes as each person moves towards or away from the other. The concept of Relational Depth is as it is defined and explicated by its theorists and researchers (Mearns, 1996; Mearns and Cooper, 2005; Cooper, 2005; Knox et al., 2013). The experience of an unusually “deep” connection with another may arise without any of the prerequisites stated or implied by these researchers.

Chapter Seven explored the intensity of relationship that might arise as two people extend towards each other and welcome each other’s extension. The experiences recounted in that chapter challenge the idea implicit in the Relational Depth literature that the “deep” contact arises from what has been said over the course of a pre-existing relationship. It also challenges the implicit idea that the therapist’s ability to offer “deep” contact is developmental. A client and therapist may extend towards each other for all manner of reasons and find themselves having unexpected and powerful experiences. This can be unsettling, especially if it has an erotic tone. It is, I think, an ethical imperative that this be acknowledged and addressed in academic and training literature.

The unseen dance impacts not only the client’s perception of the therapist and the therapeutic relationship, but also directly impacts the client’s intrapersonal state – “how they are within themselves” – as they extend out to meet us, or shrink back. Extending out from a long-held contraction can, as Sophia’s account of “the stone” illustrates, be deeply liberating. “Profound growth and healing and energy” (Rogers, 1979, p. 137; 1986, p. 129; Baldwin, 1987, p. 50) may indeed arise when it is as if the therapist’s inner spirit had reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other, and much attention has been given in the literature to the passage in which Rogers says this. However, attention also needs to be paid to the possibility that a therapist’s reaching out may not be welcomed, that the clients’ spirit shrinks in response, and that well-intentioned as it might be, it is anti-therapeutic both in its effect on the therapeutic relationship and the client.
Further research

I have discussed the *unseen dance*, the ways in which we move towards and away from each other and how this impacts perception, relationship and one’s intrapersonal state in the particular context of Person-centred theory. Were the ways in which we move towards and away from each other to be discussed in the context of Gestalt or Psychodynamic theory (for instance) the *unseen dance* might look very different and have very different theoretical implications. I am aware of therapists of both these traditions acknowledging a drawing back or reaching out on the part of therapist or client in *practice*, but as far as I am aware they are not delineated theoretically or discussed theoretically. How, for instance, might the “position” a therapist adopts in relation to a client impact the transferential relationship? How might the ways in which a client “moves” affect how they make contact? Such discussions would, I think, be very much worth having – and worth listening to.

I have emphasised how the quality of the therapist’s presence, their particular manner of embodiment in a given moment, impacts the client’s perception, the therapeutic relationship and the client’s state of being. It is increasingly the case that therapy does not necessarily involve the presence of two (or more) people in a room together. The implications of an absence of embodied relationship in telephone and online therapy might be usefully considered. What happens when a client cannot feel a therapist’s movements towards or away from them? Or might they somehow sense what the therapist is doing despite not being in an embodied relationship? Although I did not ask such questions in this thesis, some of my raw data suggests that different qualities of presence can be sensed during telephone calls. Such questions are likely to be of increasing relevance as greater numbers of therapeutic dyads make use of different forms of technology.

This thesis has discussed the *unseen dance* in a variety of different kinds of relationship – therapeutic, educational, social and romantic – and I would claim that it gives rise to a stratum of communication and mutual impact that is present in every relationship and encounter. The ways in which we impact each other as we “reach out”, place ourselves “behind a wall”, “float off”, or
“live in our head” in relationships other than the therapeutic relationship would, I think, be a particularly rich seam of research. I have, in this thesis (rather briefly) touched upon educational and supervisory relationships. Further research into these kinds of relationships, along with the doctor–patient relationship and other kinds of helping relationship, would, I suspect, produce important implications for the theory and practice of many professions.

Researching how the unseen dance impacts familial and social relationships is also potentially profitable to a variety of professions and academic disciplines from social work to health visiting. Might, for instance, the failure of a parent to dance in synch with their child have implications for how we think about bonding with infants, disciplining toddlers and relating to adolescents? How does the unseen dance between parents impact family life? The ways in which unseen dances impact communal life are likely to also have implications for couple, family and group therapy, and there is great potential for examining not only the relationship between therapist and clients, but also between clients. This thesis has focused upon the unseen dance between two people, but there are, of course, even more complex dances that happen within groups. Exploring these dances and their inter- and intra-personal impact might inform not only individual, couple and family therapy, but also the relational dynamics within organisations and other groups. Conversations about the unseen dance could potentially inform academic and professional discussions about institutional bullying, professional development and leadership.

There is also useful research potential in examining whether enabling individuals other than therapists to become aware of their part in the unseen dance might benefit other kinds of relationships. I have facilitated some therapy clients to become aware of how the “stances” that they adopt impact their relationships and their own state of being. They have found it very useful indeed. Research into whether cultivating such awareness might be more generally helpful, and how it might be done and in what contexts, potentially speaks to not only therapeutic theory and practice, but also to the theory and practice of other professions, such as health visiting and youth work.
Final reflections

Finally, I want to position this study politically. When I re-entered academia after more than twenty years’ immersion in various professional therapeutic milieux, I felt like Dorothy realising that she wasn’t in Kansas any more. “I gradually began to realize that we had entered a different lifeworld”, writes Lees (2008) of his first experience of co-teaching on a course in which trainee therapists were undertaking a research project, “and that it was quite different to the clinical training lifeworld I was used to” (p. 4). Like Lees, I have been perturbed to discover that the lifeworlds inhabited by practitioners and academics are so different – and so separate. We go to different conferences, read different literatures, speak different languages and, to some extent, have different concerns.

Flyvberg’s (2001) account of how social science moulded itself on natural science enabled to me to finally make sense of papers I’d previously read in which authors’ ontological and epistemological positions had perplexed me and left me wondering in what way the research was supposed to be helpful to me as a practitioner. I was not alone in my perplexity. Morrow-Bradley and Elliott (1986) found that only 4% of practitioners in the USA find research useful because actual clients have a more complex mix of issues than carefully selected research participants, there is an overemphasis on statistical significance, which is of limited help when faced with an individual, and the results are not translated into a format that is useful to practitioners. McLeod (1999) suggests that counsellors and psychotherapists in Britain, where counselling and psychotherapy training is not research focused as it is in the USA, are likely to find research even less useful.

They also found that practitioners lack the training to understand research. This has been much recognised of late, and a number of accessible books published for practitioners that offer such training. However, the problem of irrelevance to clinical practice throws up the questions of whether practitioners will bother to learn, and why they should. The case that practitioners do not find reading research an accessible or useful part of their professional development can be over-made. I have found some research very helpful (Cameron, 2007; 2011), but often my experience as a
practitioner and particularly as a supervisor of other practitioners corroborates Marrow-Bradley and Elliott’s findings. “Therapists of all modalities”, writes Finlay (2011):

are increasingly exhorted to undertake research. We are pushed to be accountable, to provide evidence of our effectiveness and to draw on ‘evidence-based practice’ to improve the quality of our services. We may even be threatened with funding cuts and the withdrawal of our services if we fail to use and produce research. But research can seem remote from, even irrelevant to our practice. Dry language and impenetrable jargon can make academic journal articles confusing, even boring. Much research around seems to be carried out by post-graduate researchers far removed from everyday experiences of work with patients and clients. (p. 5)

If much of the research in counselling and psychotherapy is not useful to practitioners, this begs the question as to who this research is for. McLeod et al. (2010) observe that the increasing pressure on practitioners to do research is driven by “the demand for evidence-based practice, service evaluation and the political imperative to collect practice based evidence” (p. 3). Cooper (2011), with reference to making therapy accessible, argues, in a widely read professional journal, that commissioner-friendly research is a political, if not a moral, obligation. It is true that the National Health Service is free at the point of access, but it is not the only such access point: there are also access points within education and the voluntary sector. The church has also been pivotal in setting up and funding both counselling and psychotherapy services (particularly in Scotland (Bondi, 2013)), and many other people access therapy free of charge through their employers44.

Education and the voluntary sector are, at the time of writing, seeing massive cuts in funding. Such cuts in funding are frequently enrolled in the argument that counselling and therapy ought to be integrated into statutory healthcare provision. The desperation to stake out a place for counselling and psychotherapy within the Health Service has been intense in recent years, yet the Health Service is also financially compromised. Nevertheless, advice abounds on how to undertake the kind of research thought to be attractive to health service commissioners. While I am loath to object to the drive to put

44 Some therapists work together to do so, e.g. The Free Psychotherapy Network (Gordon, 2015).
counsellors and psychotherapist on a parity with other professionals within the National Health Service I find I cannot lend this project my whole-hearted support. The epistemological methods of medicine that we are told we must adopt if we want a space to be made for us in the Health Service and, increasingly, in order to secure funding in other services, are largely antithetical to the values of counselling and psychotherapy. There is, I think, a grave danger that we could distort ourselves so badly out of shape in our eagerness to be accepted in terms that are alien to us that we forget what shape we were.

The drive to provide an evidence base for therapeutic efficacy has led to the establishment of Practitioner Research Networks in which evidence gathered by individual practitioners is collated to be used in the project of creating an evidence base for practice in order to secure funding. This is, in some quarters, being encouraged at the expense of research that can inform practice. There ought, I think, be room for both. I have not set out to prove anything, but to offer a perspective that might resource other therapists in their practice. The research undertaken for this thesis was a collaboration among practitioners, and I have written the narrative I have derived from it as a practitioner writing to other practitioners: I hope that it proves to be practitioner-friendly.

“Practitioner research” is usually understood as “research carried out by practitioners for the purpose of advancing their own practice” (McLeod, 1999, p. 8). Although the reflection I engaged in as a practitioner and the reflexivity I employ as a researcher functioned in mutually beneficial manner, and so my practice and research enriched each other, this research was not primarily about, or in the service of, my own practice. I hope that it speaks to not only other therapists, but also offers a perspective that is useful outside the professional relationships.
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APPENDIX 1
Research Participation Information Sheet

Stories of the Heart

What Passes Between Us Workshop 28th May 2011

This is an invitation to participate in a research project. Please read this information carefully before you decide whether you would like to take part. It explains what the research is about and what it will involve.

What is the purpose of this research project?

The aim of this research is to explore a level of communication that we sometimes recognise in everyday conversation, but is only rarely acknowledged in academic literature. The overall purpose of the research is to find ways of articulating this level of communication so that it can be more easily held in awareness.

The research will initially be used in my PhD thesis. I believe that awareness of this level of communication is helpful in all relationships. I therefore plan to adapt the completed PhD for publication, and anticipate my readership being ordinary people in everyday relationships as well as therapists in professional therapeutic relationships. I will produce a short, accessible report of my findings for those who participate in the research, and anyone who wants to read the PhD or subsequent publications is welcome to do so.
What does participating involve?

Participating would involve taking part in the workshop What passes Between Us on May the 28th. The workshop will be audio-recorded and what is said may be used as data in my PhD and subsequent publications. I will ask you to sign a form agreeing to take part in a workshop that will be used as data in research.

Can you change your mind?

Yes, you are free to withdraw from the workshop at any point.

Confidentiality

Your name will not be used in the PhD or any subsequent publications, and any identifying details will be changed or omitted.

Data protection

I will be the only person who will have access to the recording and any transcript I make. I will store contact information separately from recordings. Any recordings will be completely removed from the recording device and stored electronically on a secure, password protected drive or encrypted folder. Anything that I transcribe will also be stored electronically on a secure, password protected drive or encrypted folder. Any hard copies that I make will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and shredded immediately after use.
The recording will be securely destroyed 5 years after the completion of my PhD and any personal computer or lap-tops I have used to access it will be disposed of securely by the University of Edinburgh.

**Concerns**

If you have concerns or complaints about the way this research is being conducted please raise these with me. If I do not answer your concern or complaint adequately you may contact Seamus Prior, Counselling and Psychotherapy Research Ethics Co-ordinator or Liz Bondi, PhD supervisor. Both can be reached at Counselling and Psychotherapy, School of Health in Social Science, The University of Edinburgh, Medical School, Teviot Place, Edinburgh, EH8 9AG

**Ethical approval**

This research project has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Edinburgh.

Thank-you for taking the time to read this. You can also contact me about this research at

R.A.Cameron-2@sms.ed.ac.uk

Or,

Rose Cameron, Counselling and Psychotherapy, Fourth Floor, Doorway 6, School of Health in Social Science, The University of Edinburgh, Medical School, Teviot Place, Edinburgh, EH8 9AG
APPENDIX 2
Stories of the Heart
Research participation consent form

Consent to making a recording of
‘What Passes Between Us’ 28\textsuperscript{th} May

Please print the name of the organisation:

____________________________________

Please initial the following statements

\textit{Please initial the statements below that are applicable to you}

\begin{align*}
\text{initials} & \\
\text{I confirm that I have read and understood the} & \\
\text{information sheet and have had the} & \\
\text{opportunity to ask questions.} & \\
\text{initials} & \\
\text{I agree to Rose Cameron recording this} & \\
\text{workshop.} & \\
\text{initials} & \\
\end{align*}

____________________________________ please print your name

____________________________________ researcher’s name

____________________________________ signature | date

____________________________________ signature | date
APPENDIX 3
Stories of the Heart Research participation consent form

Consent to using a recording Of ‘What Passes Between Us’ 28th May

Please print your name ____________________________

Please initial the following statements

Please initial the statements below that are applicable to you

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ____________________________

I agree to Rose Cameron recording this workshop and using short extracts or summaries of what I have said as anonymised data in her PhD research and subsequent publications. ____________________________

I agree to Rose Cameron using short extracts or summaries of what I have said with the following exceptions. ____________________________

_______________________________ please print your name

_______________________________ researcher’s name

_________________________ __________________ signature | date

_________________________ __________________ signature | date
Stories of the Heart: a narrative of relationship
Research Participation Information Sheet

Consent to using assignments

Rose Cameron Doctoral Student Counselling and Psychotherapy The School of Health in Social Science University of Edinburgh

This is an invitation to participate in a research project. Please read this information carefully before you decide whether you would like to take part. It explains what the research is about and what it will involve.

What is the purpose of this research project?

The aim of this research is to explore a level of communication that we sometimes recognise in everyday conversation, but is only rarely acknowledged in academic literature. The overall purpose of the research is to find ways of articulating this level of communication so that it can be more easily held in awareness.

The research will initially be used in my PhD thesis. I believe that awareness of this level of communication is helpful in all relationships. I therefore plan to adapt the completed PhD for publication, and anticipate my readership being ordinary people in everyday relationships as well as therapists in professional
therapeutic relationships. I will produce a short, accessible report of my findings for those who participate in the research, and anyone who wants to read the PhD or subsequent publications is welcome to do so.

**What does participating involve?**

Participating will involve giving me permission to quote or summarise short extracts from what you have written in your assignment for ‘What Passes Between Us’. If you are happy to do this please,

- email me an electronic copy of your assignment in Word for Windows

- sign the attached consent form. You can do this electronically and return it by email or print it out, sign by hand and post it to the address below

**Can you change your mind?**

Your contribution to the research project is entirely voluntary. You can change your mind and withdraw your agreement, or opt in, at any point up to (date a month from sending the email inviting them to take part).

**Confidentiality**

Your name will not be used in the PhD or any subsequent
publications, and any identifying details will be changed or omitted.

**Data protection**

I will be the only person who will have access to this copy of your assignment. It will be stored electronically on a secure password protected drive. Any hard copies that I make will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and shredded immediately after use.

Your assignment will be securely destroyed 5 years after the completion of my PhD and any personal computer or lap-tops I have used to access it will be disposed of securely by the University of Edinburgh.

**Concerns**

If you have concerns or complaints about the way this research is being conducted please raise these with me. If I do not answer your concern or complaint adequately you may contact Seamus Prior, Counselling and Psychotherapy Research Ethics Co-ordinator or Liz Bondi, PhD supervisor. Both can be reached at Counselling and Psychotherapy, School of Health in Social Science, The University of Edinburgh, Medical School, Teviot Place, Edinburgh, EH8 9AG
Ethical approval

This research project has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Edinburgh.

Thank-you for taking the time to read this. You can also contact me about this research at

R.A.Cameron-2@sms.ed.ac.uk

If you are posting your consent form, please send it to,

Rose Cameron, Counselling and Psychotherapy, Fourth Floor, Doorway 6, School of Health in Social Science, The University of Edinburgh, Medical School, Teviot Place, Edinburgh, EH8 9AG
APPENDIX 5
Stories of the Heart Research participation consent form

Consent to using assignments for *What Passes Between Us*

Please print your name _____________________________

Please initial the following statements

*Please initial the statements below that are applicable to you*

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions.  
initials 

I understand that participation is entirely voluntary.  
initials 

I understand that if I change my mind I can withdraw my consent.  
initials 

I agree to Rose Cameron using short extracts or summaries of what I have written in my course assignment as anonymised data in her PhD research and subsequent publications.  
initials 

______________________________ please print your name
______________________________ researcher’s name
_____________________________ _______________ signature | date
_____________________________ _______________ signature | date
APPENDIX 6

Book chapter:


Included with the publisher’s permission
8

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTACT – SUBTLE CONTACT

BY ROSE CAMERON

SUBTLE NON-VERBAL CONTACT

Paying attention to the more subtle, non-verbal aspects of how we make ourselves available for contact makes the difference between a rather mechanical and lifeless therapeutic relationship and one that shimmers with energy and involvement. It is difficult to say what exactly the non-verbal aspects of psychological contact are, but most readers will have experienced the difference between talking with someone who is really 'there' and someone who is 'not really there'. Both interactions might look and sound exactly the same, but there is a very real difference in quality: they feel different.

The non-verbal aspects of how we indicate our availability for psychological contact certainly involve our expression, posture and gestures, but they also involve something more elusive. When I run training workshops on this subject I demonstrate this by sitting in silence with a volunteer while the other workshop participants observe. Without moving or changing my expression, I shift my attention away from the whole group, relax, and allow myself to silently 'reach out' to the volunteer. I might equally say that I make myself 'available' to them, or even that I 'open' towards them. Then I 'pull myself back in'. The volunteer notices a change immediately, as do some of the observers.

1This is a thorough re-working of the chapter in the original edition of this book, and draws upon Rose's work towards a PhD at the University of Edinburgh.
EXERCISE

Ask a counselling colleague, or even a friend, to sit with you for a few minutes and just experience what it is like to be in your presence. Gather yourself together, then turn your attention to your partner and allow yourself to gently ‘reach out’ to them. Don’t do or say anything, just have the intention of making contact with them. When you feel you have done that for long enough tell them that you are going to do something different, then ‘draw yourself back in’ or ‘shut down’. You will probably find it harder to ‘draw yourself back in’ than you found it to ‘reach out’. You can ‘pull yourself in’ first and then ‘reach out’ if you find that easier. When you have finished give yourself a shake and return to your usual state.

Ask your partner to describe what it was like being with you while you did the above.

The volunteer I do this experiment with usually feels that we are in contact, or in better contact, when I ‘reach out’. Sometimes the volunteer notices a change in my eyes, and sometimes the observers notice a change in the rhythm of my breath, but the most obvious difference is in the emotional atmosphere. I invite the participants get into pairs and try the experiment for themselves. I suggest that once they have done so, they then try doing it with their eyes closed. They find that they can still sense a very distinct difference even when they can’t see anything. Sensing variations in someone’s availability for contact in this way is a very ordinary, every-day experience, although it can seem strange when it is isolated from other aspects of communication. We all notice changes in someone’s tone, expression, posture and gestures when they become bored or distracted. We also feel a change – the ‘vibe’ is different.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PERCEPTION AND INTERPRETATION

Words such as ‘vibes’ or emotional ‘atmosphere’ are often used in discussing this level of contact. We rarely talk about ‘vibes’ or ‘atmospheres’ without making a value judgement – we talk about ‘good vibes’, ‘bad vibes’, a ‘good atmosphere’ or a ‘bad atmosphere’. We usually imagine that we know what the other person is feeling. We are not necessarily right.

In the original version of this chapter I made rather too clear a distinction between this quality of contact, which I called ‘subtle contact’ and emotional availability, or ‘emotional contact’. The two are distinct. The volunteer who helps me with my demonstration usually experiences me as warm and interested when I ‘reach out’ and as uninterested and cold when I ‘pull myself back in’. In fact, my feelings,
emotional availability and degree of interest have not changed. I ‘reach out’ and ‘draw myself back in’ not because I am experiencing a strong emotion, but simply because I choose to.

However, it is unusual to ‘reach out’ or ‘draw oneself back in’ simply to demonstrate that one can. Although distinct, ‘subtle contact’ and ‘emotional contact’ are two inter-twined strands. In real life we usually do ‘reach out’, ‘open up’, ‘draw ourselves in’ or ‘close down’ because we are experiencing emotion. ‘Reaching out’ or ‘drawing back in’ are like smiling or frowning. They arise with emotion, but only the person experiencing that emotion knows exactly what it is. Smiling often indicates that someone is experiencing pleasure, but not always. We may also smile because we are uncomfortable, and frown when we are concerned. Similarly we may ‘reach out’ because we are very needy or ‘close down’ because we feel ill.

Those workshop participants who experience me as warm and interested when I ‘reach out’ and as cold and judgmental when I ‘draw myself in’ accurately perceive a change, but their interpretation of that change is a misinterpretation. This is not at all unusual. We all interpret the subtle fluctuations in the quality of each other’s presence, and we usually do so in terms of what we imagine the other person feels towards us. We sense the other person ‘shut down’ and conclude that they are bored, shocked, angry or dislike us. It is almost impossible not to take it personally.

For some people, particularly those of us who trust our intuition, it can also be almost impossible to accept that we might be wrong. We know we have sensed a change in the other, and we are right. But we do not know what has led to that change. The other person may well be angry or they may be distracted, tired, unwell or be a therapist whose internal ‘time’s running out’ alarm has just gone off. It is really helpful to develop an awareness that therapists and clients are particularly well attuned to such changes in the other, and in a constant process of interpreting (and misinterpreting) them. You may well be able to sense an emotional change in a client, but you do not necessarily know what that change is. Acknowledging and enquiring about such changes is usually helpful (if sometimes challenging); interpreting them – effectively telling your client what they feel – is as likely to result in your client feeling missed as received. Your clients will be at least as well attuned to these changes in you, but perhaps less likely to enquire about them.

Nobody likes to be misunderstood, and most of us are quick to correct such misunderstandings. It is important that therapists do not, in the process of correcting a misinterpretation, dismiss the client’s accurate perception that something has changed. Compare the following responses:

Client: You’re shocked. I didn’t think you would be.
Therapist: I’m not shocked.
Client: You are. I can feel it.
Therapist: Really, I’m not.

The client does not return, but does move on to a new therapist. Predictably the same thing happens to the client again, but this time the therapist manages to affirm the client’s reality whilst standing up for their own:
Client: You’re shocked. I didn’t think you would be.

Therapist: I’m not shocked. [Checks her own reaction] But I did withdraw. I feel frightened for you.

A client’s perception of the therapist’s relative distance or closeness – and more importantly, their interpretation of that closeness – will affect their perception of the therapist’s congruence. If the therapist is trying to convey acceptance, but the client is interpreting their relative distance as disapproval then whatever affirming things the therapist may say just won’t ‘feel right’ to the client – they will seem insincere.

**BOUNDARIES**

The interpretations we make at this level of contact depend very much on where our invisible boundaries are. In workshops, I am usually experienced as open and warm when I ‘reach out’ towards the volunteer, and as cold, uninterested and distant when I ‘pull myself back in’, but not always. Sometimes the volunteer (or an observer) experiences me as hostile and aggressive when I ‘reach out’. We all have our own (variable) boundaries at this level – a sense of what is too close or not close enough. I do not intend any hostility when I reach out but sometimes I inadvertently invade someone’s personal space. Respecting a client’s personal space – and indicating your availability for contact – are both more complex negotiations than the simple matter of how closely you position the chairs.

**EXERCISE**

Imagine you are with a new client who seems uncomfortable. What might you say in order to check out whether there is the right amount of psychological ‘space’ between you?

Hard, isn’t it? We do not have a commonly understood way of thinking about this level of contact, and it is rarely written about. Yet we do have a number of terms in ordinary, everyday speech that refer to it:

**Therapist:** I know that I can be a bit ‘full on’ for some people, a bit too ‘in your face’. I’m wondering how comfortable you’re feeling with me?

**Or:**

**Therapist:** Some people find me a bit distant. I’m wondering if you do?

The client may still find it difficult to answer even when a therapist finds the right way to ask. Then there is the question of how to respond if a client indicates that they are uncomfortable. It is possible to change what you are doing so that they feel more at ease with you. You can choose to ‘open out’ a little more. You can also
choose to ‘draw yourself back in’ a bit. However, I would caution you to be careful in how you do this. I find that holding a ‘drawn-in’ position quickly makes me feel as if I’m wearing a shoe that is too tight. I find that I can get out of my client’s space without adversely affecting my own comfort by mentally deciding to ‘sit back’. I do not disengage, but I do ‘back off’. The important thing is that I can feel myself return from ‘over there’ with the client to ‘back here’ in a way that is comfortable and sustainable.

You may not want to change what you are doing to suit your client, or it may be that the most therapeutically useful thing to do is to stay as you are and work with the client’s discomfort.

**Therapist:** I’m sorry you’re finding me distant – it’s not because I’m uninterested. I’m curious about what you’re maybe doing in response. I have a sense of you trying to ‘search me out’, as if your antennae...

**Client:** [laughs and indicates that indeed she is trying to ‘search out’ the therapist]

**Therapist:** Actually – and I mean this as feedback, not a criticism- I think that’s making me a bit uncomfortable. I feel kind of peered at.

**Client:** My husband says that!

**Therapist:** Really? Do you find him distant too?

**Client:** He retreats into himself.

**Therapist:** And you feel shut out?

**Client:** I feel alone when he’s like that. I can’t get through to him no matter what I do.

**Therapist:** You sound really sad. And frustrated. I have an image of you wanting to poke a hedgehog out of its curled-upness.

**Client:** Yeah. That doesn’t really work, does it?

**Therapist:** It sounds prickly...

**Client:** It is.

The relative closeness or distance between a client and therapist, and the degree to which the client welcomes it, affects what the client hears. A therapist can be exactly the same way with two different clients, say exactly the same thing, and be experienced in radically different ways. A client who is feeling invaded is likely to hear an empathic response very differently to a client who feels comfortably in contact, and a client who feel out of contact is likely to feel ‘missed’ even if the therapist’s empathic response is entirely accurate. In other words, condition six, that the client perceives the acceptance and empathy that the therapist experiences, very much depends upon the quality of the first condition, psychological contact. By Rogers’ definition we are still in contact if each person is still making some sort of a difference to the other’s experience, but the quality of the contact will be radically different – and that matters.

The degree to which the client feels in contact with the therapist affects not only what the client hears, but also the way in which they talk. Once workshop participants have experimented with ‘reaching out’ and ‘drawing back’ in silence, I suggest that they put this into a more realistic context by ‘reaching out’ and ‘drawing themselves back in’ while their partner talks about something non-emotive. The person...
who is talking feels met, received, accepted and understood when the degree of subtle contact is right for them, and talks easily. Many dry up or lose the thread of what they were talking about when the listener ‘draws themselves back in’. Occasionally someone feels that a pressure has been removed when the listener ‘draws themselves back in’, and talks more easily.

RETURNING TO INTUITION

Negotiating a comfortable distance between ourselves and the people we relate to is an everyday thing that normally happens out of awareness. We get it right much of the time and it isn’t an issue. However, mismatches and misunderstanding happen so it is really helpful to try to develop an awareness of your process at this level in order to reflect about its possible impact upon the therapeutic relationship. I have found that it is helpful to call on whatever ability it is that I (and most other people) have that enables us to get it right most of the time. I do this by asking myself to ‘do the most appropriate thing’ and then noticing what changes. This passive–receptive mode of asking myself, as opposed to actively trying to work it out or making a guess based on my knowledge of the person, seems to be the most helpful thing to do.

EXERCISE

Think about a client who, for no apparent reason, suddenly stopped coming. As you think about them notice whether you sense yourself ‘closing down’ or ‘opening out’. Imagine being in the last session you had with them, and again notice whether you ‘open out’ or ‘close down’. Now ask yourself to be in the way that would have been most appropriate. Do you ‘open out’ or ‘close down’? What do you think your client might have made of how you were, and how might this have impacted the relationship?

Developing an awareness of your own process at this level, and reflecting on its possible impact is a more realistic (and possibly a more helpful) aim than getting the distance between yourself and client ‘right’ at all times.

AVOIDING CONTACT

As well as ‘reaching out’ or ‘drawing yourself back in’, you might ‘jump out of your skin’, be ‘beside yourself’, ‘sink’ into the doldrums or be ‘all over the place’ etc. These are all ways of not being fully present. It may not be your intention to avoid contact, but you will be experienced as ‘not really there’. Your client will notice your relative absence, even if they don’t comment on it.
**EXERCISE**

Close your eyes and take a moment to notice where you are in relation to your body. Are you wholly inside your own skin, or is your attention reaching out beyond it? Are you floating around your head? In your belly? Have you collapsed?

Inhabit your body as wholly and completely as you are able.

Now think of an instance in a counselling relationship that was difficult for you. Notice what you do. Do you ‘close down’? ‘Jump out of your skin’? ‘Step to one side’? …

Return to inhabiting your body as fully as you can. Notice the changes that you sense – they will tell you something about where you have been. Tingles or shivers moving downwards, for instance, suggest that you came back down into your body, whereas a sense of opening out suggests that you have been closed up inside.

Open your eyes and give yourself a shake.

Were you really fully present in the session or moment that you were thinking of? What effect do you think the quality of your presence had on the therapeutic relationship?

**Self-care**

Many therapists take a moment to make sure that they are grounded and available for contact at the beginning of a session. It is also very useful to take a moment once the session has ended. This chapter has been mainly concerned with how a client may be impacted by what the therapist does, but it is important to attend to the ways in which you are affected by the interaction. There are three ways in which the therapist may be impacted at this subtle level of relationship:

- the therapist may get stuck in a response that they have had to a client and spend the rest of their day overly ‘drawn in’ or ‘all over the place’ and so on;
- the therapist may empathically resonate with the client’s state of collapse, or being beside themselves etc, and become stuck like that;
- the therapist may continue to ‘reach out’ to the client after the session has ended.

Some therapists develop habitual ways of bouncing back into their own shape after their last session, perhaps listening to a particular kind of music or doing some kind of exercise. Whether you like to jog or lie in a warm bath, it is important to find some way of letting go at the end of the day. It may also be helpful to do something between sessions in order to return to a neutral state before seeing the next client. Paying attention to your breathing is one of the quickest and most effective ways to do this.
CONCLUSION — THE DANCE

We ‘reach out’ or ‘take a step back’. Our client responds by ‘reaching out’ to meet us, or maintaining a safe distance. We respond to their response, they to ours, and so on. An invisible and inaudible level of relationship arises as we dance closely, then further away, then closer again. Rogers does not conceptualise psychological contact in this way, but would, I think, recognise this dance. He does write, latterly, about ‘reaching out’.

When I am at my best, as a group facilitator or as a therapist, I discover another characteristic … it seems that my spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other. Our relationship transcends itself and becomes a part of something larger. Profound growth and healing and energy are present.

(1980: 129)

Rogers observes that there is nothing he can do to force such an experience. I agree absolutely. The profound growth, healing and energy that he describes come into being only if the client welcomes our ‘touch’. These moments are co-created and therefore not wholly within the therapist’s control. However I do think that there is much we can do to make ourselves available for this quality of contact — and much we can do to respect the rights of clients who would not welcome it.

Developing a more continuous awareness of how fully present we are, of when we ‘reach out’ and ‘draw ourselves back in’, and increasing our sensitivity to how this impacts upon each relationship is as difficult as developing any other kind of self-awareness. It requires a quiet reflective space inside, and that can be difficult to find if you are at the stage of having to really concentrate to remain aware of your own process whilst also listening to your client and trying to sense their inner world. It might be useful to take a moment at the beginning of a session just to hold the intention of making contact in the most appropriate way with this particular client, and then to relax and trust that you will sense when your client welcomes your ‘touch’ or needs you to take a step back. Hopefully, using the exercises above will help you to reflect in retrospect and become increasingly able to catch a mis-step in real time.

FURTHER READING

APPENDIX 7

Journal article:
Included with the publisher’s permission
The Energy in the Room: Bodies Behaving Weirdly

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ABSTRACT This paper elaborates Totton’s claim that subtle energy throws into question our separateness as bodies. It examines embodied experience of “the energy in the room” and argues that, however such a quality of experience is theorised, understanding its dynamics is of importance to psychotherapists of different theoretical orientations. Copyright © 2013 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: energy; subtle energy; paranormal; telepathy

It used to be said that one should never, in polite company, talk about religion, sex or politics. Psychoanalysis is an arena outside ordinary social discourse and one in which different rules apply; yet it also has its own taboos – and, as most of the few writers on the subject point out, one such taboo is the paranormal. Nick Totton, whom this special issue honours, is one such writer, and has broken this taboo more than once (Totton, 2003a, 2007) and, as editor of Psychoanalysis and the Paranormal: Lands of Darkness (Totton, 2003c) has also encouraged others to do so, too.

Totton presented this book as a “sequel, update or response” to George Devereux’s (1974) publication of Psychoanalysis and the Occult, noting that the word “occult” had somewhat different connotations in 1953 than it does today. Psychoanalytic interest in the “occult” peaked in the late 1940s and 1950s and, as Totton (2003b, p. 4) observed: “Thereafter – silence.”

BIRDSONG AND SILENCE

Totton (ibid.) traced this ominous silence to an exchange in the International Journal of Psycho-Analysis between Jule Eisenbud (1955, 1957) and Charles Brenner (1957) about the frequency – or otherwise – with which worm-eating warblers visited New York’s Central Park. A client of Eisenbud had dreamt that he had seen a worm-eating warbler in Central Park and, on waking at 5 am, had gone to the park and – you guessed – seen a worm-eating warbler. Eisenbud (1955) had suggested that this was an example of psi or paranormal phenomena. In response,
Brenner (1957) wrote an article disputing the claim that worm-eating warblers were unheard of in Central Park at that particular time of year, thus dismissing the case as evidence of extrasensory perception. Eisenbud (1957), in turn, produced copious ornithological evidence to the contrary, and argued that, although actually the warbler was rare at that time of year, his point was that there was clearly a relationship between his client’s dream and what, for him, was a very unexpected sighting of the bird. Brenner, however, dismissed this by applying what he referred to as his own, “private rule of thumb in such matters: When a thing is impossible, it cannot be so . . . In my view the rule holds good for psi phenomena” (Brenner, 1987, p. 545). In his comment on these articles, Totton (2003b) observed somewhat wearily: “Just as the Church told Galileo, and Leibnitz told Newton, the thing is impossible and therefore need not be considered” (ibid., p. 6).

Brenner’s “private rule of thumb” is, of course, a widely held position that arises from the slippage of the positivist agenda from a position in which the appropriate object of science is to prove that which lends itself to proof, to the conviction that if something cannot be proven, then it cannot be. This latter position is as ideological as it is ontological – and has a great deal of institutional power on its side. As such it is a major component in the current phase of Western cultural imperialism, which denies the validity of other worldviews and dismisses them as “primitive” and/or “backward”. Those who subscribe to positivism as an ideology seek to impose it at home as well as abroad. Later, Brenner (1987), referring to his dismissal of Eisenbud, rather smugly took credit for ending the discussion once and for all: “there has not been another ESP article in a reputable psychoanalytic journal from that day to this” (p. 545). Although Totton (2003b) conceded that Brenner was more or less right in claiming this, Totton also suggested that the ensuing psychoanalytic silence on the paranormal was due to the shift in psychoanalysis after the Second World War “towards respectability and conventionality” (p. 7). “No matter how hard we try to establish it as a normal and conventional theory and practice, in the consulting room or in the academy,” said Totton (2007) in a later paper, “we know that at root it [psychotherapy] is uncanny and subversive; in part, because it is founded on paranormality” (p. 399). It is probably fair to say that this is not a commonly held view. It is certainly not a view that one often sees expressed in the literature.

Totton argued that many of the ideas fundamental to psychotherapy, including communicative countertransference, metabolising the patient’s difficult feelings, projective identification, and “the energy in the room”, are essentially paranormal concepts, and that by “Simply by using the terms repeatedly until they sound familiar, however, we have managed to convince ourselves that they represent a solved problem rather than an open mystery” (p. 393). Noting that much of the literature on telepathy concerns clients who appear to know the therapist’s thoughts, Totton suggested that our denial as to the inherently paranormal nature of what we do – and how we think about what we do – is a defence against “the intimate presence of the other” (p. 397). It protects us, he suggested, from having to acknowledge that we may sometimes be as transparent to our clients as they sometimes are to us and “threatens the comfortable power relations to which we can become accustomed. There is a politics of the paranormal” (p. 395).

Totton’s concern is not only with the power relations between therapist and client. He is concerned with the ecological as well as political (as far as the two can be separated) and, as such, also addresses the interconnection between the human and non-human:

Telepathy throws into question our separateness as minds; subtle energy, our separateness as bodies. But synchronicity throws into question our separateness as wills, as units of meaning and intention. It reveals
our actions as details in a much larger pattern, steps in a much larger dance, a dance in which we are partnered with the whole of existence. Paranormal events, especially synchronicities, very often involve nonhuman beings, animals, birds, insects. This in itself is I think deeply synchronous, a message regarding the connection and communion between ourselves and the other beings with whom we share this extraordinary existence. (p. 398)

Totton had telepathy stand in for other kinds of paranormality and so he did not discuss subtle energy and synchronicity in as much detail. In the rest of this paper I elaborate upon his rather startling – and, I think, accurate – claim that “subtle energy” throws into question our separateness as bodies.

ENERGY AND SUBTLE ENERGY

The term “energy” in psychotherapy is, as Tottton (ibid.) has observed, “a complex word, in William Empson’s (1951) sense: a nexus, a meeting point of several traditions and discourses in one term” (p. 395). It might be used to mean Freud’s “libidinal energy”, Reich’s “orgone”, Jung’s “archetypal energies”, or, as Totton has suggested, Stern’s “vitality effect”. The term “subtle energy”, with which is it sometimes used interchangeably, draws upon a different set of traditions, including alchemy, yoga, traditional Chinese medicine and theosophy. Any, none, or all of these discourses may be being held vaguely in mind when practitioners from particular psychotherapeutic traditions talk about “the energy in the room”. Totton observed that, when asked to say more about what they mean by this, many practitioners who use the term would say that it is a weak metaphor, while others would say that “there is an actual energy, or at any rate something which I can only experience as an energy” (ibid., p. 395).

I might well be one of the people Totton had in mind when writing this. I think that during the period in which I was fortunate enough to be in training and then supervision with Totton, I probably would have said that there is something which I can only experience as “an energy”. I have certainly used the concepts “subtle energy” and “subtle body” when and in writing about a stratum of the therapeutic relationship which I consider to be of great importance and to be in need of differentiation (Cameron, 2000, 2002a, 2002b, 2004). I now try to make a much clearer distinction between what I experience and the concepts that I might use to articulate my experience. This is not as easy as it may sound. I find myself increasingly in sympathy with the social constructionist position that all experience is inevitably interpreted. Nevertheless, I want to attempt a brief description of what I mean when I use the term “the energy in the room” in the hope that my description is recognisable to the reader. Having worked with “the energy in the room” while training with Totton I think I can say with some confidence that he would concur with my description.

I notice that at certain times, when I listen intently, I feel as though I extend towards my client, as if I transgress the boundary of my skin and reach into the space between us. I do not feel as though I leave the interior of my body, but that I stretch forwards from within myself. It is not effortful. I feel particularly alert and very at ease. Sometimes I have the sense that my client also extends towards me and that we meet in the space that would otherwise separate us. I feel “tuned in”. The session flows. We are both surprised on realising that the hour is up and remark that it has passed very quickly.
Such experiences are not unusual and similar descriptions appear in Pemberton’s (1976) research into “presence”, Geller and Greenberg’s (2002) research on the same subject, and Cooper’s (2005) research into “relational depth”. Geller and Greenberg’s results include two categories that are of particular interest to me. One is referred to as “extending and contact”, and the other “spaciousness”. Geller and Greenberg defined “extending and contact” as:

[a] process that therapists engage in during the process of presence that involves extending oneself and one’s boundaries to the client and meeting and contacting the client in a very immediate way. Extending is the act of emotionally, energetically and verbally reaching outwards to the client (p. 79, original emphasis)

They defined “spaciousness” within oneself as “a bodily sense of openness or expansion. . . . once presence is manifested, inner spaciousness becomes the essence of the experience itself” (p. 81). Cooper’s participants also described a sense of expansion and, in Pemberton’s research, two participants described receiving information through the pores of their skin. This all speaks to my own embodied experience and, I imagine, to the clinical experience of many therapists. In all three instances, the research has been carried out with very experienced therapists – for his doctoral research Pemberton interviewed Virginia Satir, and Miriam and Erving Polster, and at some length! The assumption that “presence” is the prerogative of experienced therapists was not examined and so is implicit in their results. My own research refutes this assumption.

My research has been carried out with therapists at all stages from the highly experienced to those at the very beginning of their training. It also differs from the previous research in that it begins with bodily experience. I began my research by “extending” towards a volunteer in a continuing professional development workshop while others observed. I felt as if I was flowing into the air towards her. Then I “pulled myself back in”. This felt like sucking myself back into my body. It was not a stomach-clenching, breath-holding tightening, but rather it seemed as if something in front of me whipped around and flowed back into my body through my nose.

The interesting thing is that, although these sensations of extending out and sucking myself back in seemingly happen within the quiet privacy of my own body and mind, what I did leaked out into the awareness of those present and, it seems, created the “energy in the room”. One of those observing reported that:

I noticed a change immediately. I could feel that something was different. It was as if she had been giving off a feeling of love and warmth which had all of a sudden changed to icy coldness. However, her facial expressions and body posture had remained the same. It was almost impossible to pinpoint what exactly had happened. It was as if the atmosphere in the entire room changed.

In this instance I “extended” and “sucked myself back in” because I wanted to demonstrate something. More usually I might find myself extending because I want to make contact with a client or because I am moved – and I might find that I have retreated back into myself because I am tired, distracted or feeling under par. I know that my client will notice, and I know that they will interpret it in some way. I also assume that they will respond by “moving” closer to me, or further away. A relationship of distance and closeness in the space between comes into being. I suggest that this “energetic relationship” is present in every relationship and every encounter. The research I have cited and my own research are informed by a humanistic perspective; nevertheless, this energetic relationship is also of concern to psychodynamic
practitioners in that it impacts the transference and countertransference. What we sense each other doing at this level inevitably reminds us of the energetic closeness and distance, invasion and abandonment that we experienced in early relationships.

When I experience subtle sensations of extending out towards or pulling away from a client I assume that they will sense this seemingly “internal” experience just as I sense their reaching towards me or pulling away. The knowledge that they sense what I do just as I sense what they do troubles the “comfortable power relations” to which I may have become accustomed every bit as much as telepathy. It is as potentially exposing of the therapist as well as the client. Although sudden surges towards another or abrupt withdrawals are most easily admitted into awareness, I assume that I must always be relatively extended towards, or drawn away from, a client. This is my contribution not only to the “energy in the room”, but also to what my client makes of me. My research suggests that we all, whether as therapist or client, interpret what we sense. Some will welcome the sense of being reached towards and interpret it positively. Others will find it intrusive and interpret it negatively. Similarly, some will interpret the experience of being withdrawn from negatively, while others will welcome it with relief. These interpretations impact what the client hears a therapist say, and what they feel able to say to the therapist.

This level of relationship and meaning-making is important. Conceptualising it in terms of “subtle energy” is problematic precisely because the term is a nexus of different traditions and discourses. The discourses on which it draws are different in the sense of being both various and, in a Western context, “alternative”. “Alternative” is, of course, by definition, alternative to the mainstream, to the ideas that are supported by powerful intellectual institutions that undertake a political act in condoning some models of reality and dismissing others. The ideas that the term “subtle energy” have signified, and, for some, continue to signify, have, since the Ancient Greeks, been caught in the cross-fire between mysticism and rationality, mysticism and religion, and mysticism and positivism. There is, as Totton (2002) has said:

no point trying to fudge this issue, or to pretend that believing in an unrecognised cosmic energy is a minor matter! The cold truth is that, rightly or wrongly, it places you firmly on the intellectual fringes, at any rate until science catches up with you. (p. 205)

In using the term “subtle energy”, Totton locates himself as alternative – and does so as a political act.

Although the discourses that the term “subtle energy” draws upon may be only vaguely understood by many of those who use the term, it is meaningful to many and speaks to a quality of experience that is both subtle and palpable. Whether one theorises this stratum of relationship in these or others terms, it does, as Totton (2007) has claimed, disrupt our sense of ourselves as separate bodies. This dissolution of embodied separation is political in that it disrupts the power relations to which we, as therapists, can become accustomed. It is also ecological in that it dissolves the distinction made between the inner and outer, thus positioning human beings within the greater environment.

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