

Transformative Moments: Short Stories from the Biodynamic Psychotherapy Room

With Dr Elya Steinberg

Beginning to Feel

I entered my room. I like my therapy room. It is large, spacious and painted in my favourite colours: dark aubergine, purple and lilac. It is not the exact shade of lilac I envisioned when describing it to the decorator, but I like it now; the touch of pinkish lilac makes me feel softer, warmer. A dash of green lawn hides beyond the azure curtains.

What did my client say yesterday? That it was the first time she had noticed that the walls of my room are pink. So many times she had been in this room – for how many years now? Over two years, almost every fortnight; over fifty sessions of at least one hour each. But still she hadn't noticed the pink walls, despite being artistic. In her work she employs a great deal of awareness regarding the nature of colour and the slight differences between shades.

Yet somehow she had been blind to the colour of my room, so painful was the content she brought into it. Her pain had previously blurred her colour vision and she had suddenly awakened to a new possibility that pink can exist in this room. What were the differences in the complex dynamic architecture of her human experiences which enabled her to suddenly see yesterday that the walls were pink? Might it connect with the naive idea that maybe there is some pink in her life beyond the darkness of her anguish, pain and her distorted intrusive thoughts. Like Picasso's pink period wherein a sense of hope and sociability imbued his life.

I felt positive, but was I creating the hope, building it around her? Covering us with a thin layer of expectation to protect our consciousness from the irritation of her intrusive thoughts? Thoughts which perhaps I could not deal with? The droplets of rain were playing a melody on the skylights of the room, creating every moment afresh. I liked the room but I did not like the weather in London, especially in September. Chill and darkness started to slither under my clothes and I turned the heating on. I got in touch with her terror.

It amuses me that, after a session, one sentence can stay with me, lingering in my mind. One sentence that I will study again and

again, until the real force of the situation materialises in the landscape of my body and mind and I can understand more deeply its profound meaning in my client's life. Not that I consider myself clever in these moments: just amused and a little confused. Maybe the deeper meaning was still too young to reveal itself fully, embraced in the waves of the new Jewish year.

Organic subcortical changes of the perception of stressful life situations is one of the most desirable outcomes we wish in psychotherapy. Those organic changes could stay with us for the rest of our life. Is it possible?

Another memory emerged in my mind, engaging with my previous thought about senses. It consolidated my theory regarding my clinical observations about the way the senses of my clients could sharpen themselves naturally and organically after a period of time in therapy. This could be a sign for organic subcortical changes of the perception of stressful life situation and transformative moment the emerging spontaneously from within the client.

This other memory was from a year ago, an experience with another client, a musician who played wind instruments in an orchestra. He said to me: "Until two years ago, before I started therapy, I used to hear mainly my own tune – that which I played with my own wind instrument. Then, after I began therapy, I started to hear the bass in a particular way that I had never been aware of before. However, last Friday I was driving in my car and listening as usual to Classic FM when I heard a symphony, a work of art by one of my favourite composers. But this time - to my own surprise - I heard all the instrument sounds light up together, from the explicit low frequency notes up to the explicit high frequency notes. I heard the composition of the music in an unequivocal way which I had never heard before, fully rich and resonating within my whole self. My emotions were clear, yet I was not emotional, as if life had revealed itself in a clarity which I had not possessed before then."

I thought greatly about that session. It somehow fitted with Porges' (2011) Polyvagal theory. According to Porges, the low frequency of the eardrum becomes attuned to and aware of the dangerous sounds of a creeping predator. Awakening to the dangerous complexity of the world, which one starts to understand profoundly when in therapy, brings with it the end of life's period of innocence. Sometimes the client's life has been painted its colour by sweet

pleasurable pain. Pleasure not due to masochistic characteristics in himself, but because he has at last begun to feel something.

Over the following five weeks I will continue to offer concepts and clinical applications of biodynamic psychotherapy in hopes of stimulating both interest in this process and collegial interactions with you. Please email your thoughts to Nancy@nancyeichhorn.com for posting on the SPT Magazine blog and SPT Magazine's Facebook page. If your post is accepted, she will also request a jpeg file headshot and brief bio to accompany your post.

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Reference:

Porges, S. W. (2011). *The Polyvagal theory: Neurophysiological foundation of emotions, attachment, communication and self-regulation*. NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.