

SUMMARY

The Instability of Being

I will begin with the statement: “Being is Unstable.” Perhaps you have noticed. The world and our lives are turbulent, always changing, requiring constant adjustments and adaptations to the environment, to other people, and indeed to the rolling turmoil inside ourselves.

In response to these conditions, we learn from birth that we must bring some kind of order and control into our lives, because we are forced as living organisms to transact with our environment – to bring in resources to maintain our health and to expel waste back into the environment. We must make distinctions between what sustains or harms our survival, between pleasure or pain.

Thus we construct a boundary, an adaptive shield, around us that we must monitor and at times defend. This boundary creates an inside and an outside, each of which yearns for, or fears, the other. As we know from the second law of thermodynamics, if we bring order to our internal system, we must expel disorder into the environment. Inevitably this means using other people and the environment to some degree as means to an end (our growth and survival), and for them to do the same to us. Thus interpersonal conflict arises, as each entity attempts to maintain its internal balance and security against the rough and tumble of a turbulent world, driven by its desires and fears.

We stabilize and bring order to our experience in a number of ways:

- Centering - establishes a foundation and frame of reference
- Repetition – simplifies and creates familiarity
- Stasis – reduces movement and change
- Prioritizing – orders things according to importance and power

- Separation – reducing complexity by dividing world into objects and subjects

But the most powerful means of bringing order relies on the human capacity for symbolic representation, that is, language, in which we identify and define “things” or objects, assign names to them, and establish a consensually agreed upon lexicon shared within the immediate group of which we are a part. In so doing, we construct a world consisting of objects and processes all linked through associations among them. Language facilitates communication, exploration, creativity, and learning (the acquisition of knowledge) that can be shared and preserved over each generation.

However, each representation involves a division or distinction made within experience, and just like the adaptive shield, these distinctions almost always serve to sustain or support the survival needs of a particular person or group, and thus are exercises of power emanating from one particular frame of reference. In order for the stabilizing effect to succeed, the awareness of the arbitrary and self-interested nature of these distinctions must be suppressed, allowing these representations to become equated with the experiences they represent, resulting in a comforting restriction of possibility and freedom by reducing the number of dimensions used to describe experience. When rigidly applied by the need for protection, this network of representations can strangle growth in individuals, who are not aware that they can question or revise this shield for their own health, leading to dysfunction and in some cases illness.

DvT is a method that helps individuals question the representations that they hold about themselves and the world, provide an open space for them to experiment with new representations, and give them an opportunity to make new choices, new distinctions, that are more flexible, have more dimensions, and demand less from the environment.

DvT accomplishes this by having the playor join the player in an imaginal play environment called the *playspace*, where a mutual agreement is established that their interactions will be pretend, that is, subject to the conditions of play, where the goal of survival is suspended. This allows for a special process in which the player's representations of themselves and their world will be re-framed as *playobjects*, that is, not real, to allow them to change, reverse, or reject them temporarily, without real consequence. The player then has the opportunity to reassess to what extent they desire to keep them, or to reshape them. In this process, the powers that established these representations – often historical, from family, culture, or society - are revealed, and the player has a chance to process the impact of these forces upon their life.

DvT is uniquely characterized by the active and full participation by the playor within the playspace with the player, which is required in order for the play of representations to proceed, as each representation is constructed out of a need to defend the person from some element in their environment, most often other people. The playor's participation allows for the important reversal and rearrangement of these representations in the physical behavior of both parties. Because play is a condition where behavior is not in the direct service of survival, the playspace becomes a safe-enough laboratory for this work to occur.

Over time, the aim of DvT is to help the player question and revise their representations and stabilizations of the world, in line with a more functional and sustainable state: to have enough stability to care for themselves without unnecessarily using others as tools in the service of their own interests. This is marked by moments in the play where both the playor and player make choices to open up their adaptive shields and make contact with each other's essential presence, without conditions. These moments, called *zo!*, are where the player experiences themselves in the presence of another as a unique presence in the

world, who does not need to justify their existence, and indeed where both parties can be in touch with the miracle, and mystery, of being here, without an experience of harm. These experiences go a long way toward bringing a feeling of existential confidence to the player that makes them less defensive and frightened in their fundamental Being, in themselves, and with others.