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The Impossible Profession — Part 3

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The third and concluding blog post in the series. Having explored what makes psychotherapy impossible and the role of enactment in both perpetuating and potentially transforming that impossibility, this part turns to what actually supports the sustainability of practice — not as a problem to be solved, but as a paradox to be inhabited.

KEY THEMES

- What actually supports sustainable practice
- The habitual position and its shadow
- Self-care as bodymind process, not technique
- The wounded healer archetype and sustainability
- Conclusion: inhabiting the impossible with grace

Sustainable Practice is Not Problem-Free Practice

Sustainable practice in an impossible profession is not practice which has solved the problem of the profession's impossibility. It is practice which has found a way to inhabit that impossibility — to live within the paradox rather than pretending it can be escaped.

The conditions which make practice sustainable are not primarily technical or organisational (though these matter). They are primarily relational and bodymind: the therapist's own capacity to process the emotional and somatic impact of the work; their ability to maintain a genuine and spacious relationship to their own woundedness; and the degree of flexibility and awareness they have around their habitual therapeutic position.

What clients experience as most therapeutic — and what tends to produce the most lasting change — is not the therapist's theoretical knowledge or technical skill, but the quality of the therapist's presence: their embodied aliveness, their genuine capacity for contact, their willingness to be affected while remaining themselves.

The Habitual Position Revisited

The therapist's habitual position — the characteristic way they inhabit the therapeutic space — is both the foundation of their effectiveness and the primary source of their blind spots. We develop our habitual position through the combination of personal history, training, and accumulated clinical experience. It becomes increasingly automatic, increasingly invisible to us.

The shadow of the habitual position is precisely the area where we are most likely to participate in enactment without knowing it — where our automatic relational patterns most closely match the client's, creating the specific kind of resonance which constitutes the unconscious re-enactment of their wounding. Sustainable practice requires developing not just awareness of the habitual position but a spacious and curious relationship to it — being able to observe it without being entirely identified with it.

This is ongoing work, not a destination. The therapist who believes they have arrived at a secure and stable habitual position which no longer needs examination is precisely the therapist who is most at risk of unconscious enactment.

Inhabiting the Impossible with Grace

The ideal I am reaching towards — which I call inhabiting the impossible profession with grace — is not effortless practice but practice which has made peace with its own difficulty. It is practice which can hold the paradoxes inherent in the therapeutic endeavour without collapsing them into false certainties or defensive positions.

This requires, above all, the capacity to remain genuinely curious — about the client, about the relationship, about one's own experience of the work, about what is happening in those charged moments when the working alliance tightens and the enactment looms. Curiosity is both the antidote to the impossible profession's anxiety and the quality which makes the work most alive.

The impossible profession is impossible because it requires the impossible: to be both wounded and healing, both subject and object, both genuinely present and professionally boundaried, both inside the enactment and outside it. Learning to inhabit this impossibility with increasing skill, awareness, and grace — without ever resolving the paradox — is what I understand as the development of a truly sustainable practice.

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