

# Introduction

I was asked to give a talk about how a constellator might want to think about boundaries for the SONT network in Holland recently. Having agreed the topic, many thoughts came to me that I hope might be useful for others who are concerned with developing an understanding of what constellation work needs, from us personally, and in terms of a framework of understanding that genuinely fits. I present them not as a continuous thread of argument, but more as different lights that can be shone on this huge and fascinating question.

Boundaries are central to this work, it is a huge topic – philosophically, psychologically, medically, scientifically, legally, spiritually, systemically...it could never be complete. The topic has no boundaries!

As you read what follows, you could just notice what is stirred in you by the things I say, what questions it raises.

## Paradox

Boundaries are essentially paradoxical, because we all know at some level that the whole cosmos is boundless and inter-connected. And we all act; we **MUST** act, as if the world is full of discrete things. We start boundless, grow a definition, tidy it up in therapy and then, if we are able, we shed it so we can rejoin the universe. So our lives are boundary journeys. Each system we identify with has different edges, permits and forbids differently assuring belonging and definition. That means our boundaries are constantly shifting – a necessary flexibility or we couldn't make it in life.

**All contact involves something crossing a boundary. We can't make contact without difference.** It's well known that couples that become too confluent lose their sexiness. Entangling identifications arise when we haven't established our different fates, when we haven't made contact. On the other hand **too much difference, too strong a boundary, isolates** – you can't make contact with a person wrapped too tightly.

**Systemic work looks at which boundaries support love and growth and peace and which ones burden us.** You could say the orders are natural boundaries. They establish what is and isn't possible, what the cost of certain actions are. This is no different from how we understand other boundaries like gravity or the electromagnetic field. So constellators could be said to be 'artists of the boundary' – opening some, closing others, in the service of soul. We use these natural constraints and openings and offer them to our clients to do with what they will.

## The Origins of Boundaries

**At conception (and in reality) our universe is boundless,** but by age two a child knows she is Dutch, that this is the right language, the right food, the right mother, the right way to move etc. In utero and during the first few years neural pathways are laid down that could be thought of as boundaries. Socialization establishes boundaries via identification and alienation, attraction, repulsion and avoidance. This lays down deep neural pathways of identity, reinforced by expectations and a mirroring society. It is a cultural thing, learning where I end and begin physically, and what I am entitled to .

**Systemically, boundaries are different and much more fluid.** We are all unconsciously in touch with the dead, with the rejected, and with the excluded. We secretly uphold the integrity of the whole; we are the component parts of something bigger.

So all of us have a shifting sense of boundaries – e.g. people who feel assertive at work, or on behalf of others, but not at home, or not for themselves. You could say that people who try to live the fates of others, put things right for others, follow others, are all confusing their boundaries.

In this work we use the idea of a **hidden symmetry** – moving from a blind sense of balance towards an enlightened one. In boundary terms it means we agree to be more alone, to be lonely even, and to feel the guilt of doing that. Since guilt and aloneness arise out of having boundaries and innocence comes when we have merged with the boundaries of another system, then the process of individuation and growth is always tough and always involves loss.

## Nevertheless, we are part of a boundless whole

**All wisdom traditions open up a unified field perspective.** There are dangers in that if you haven't yet developed a competent ego. Boundlessness is natural at the beginning and the end of life. At birth we make the journey to being souls on which anything can be imprinted, from being part of the bigger soul. Later, we can make more conscious moves to reconnect ourselves to the indivisible whole.

It all depends on our receiving apparatus. If we rely only our senses there are nothing but boundaries. If we add in the mind then boundaries dissolve. (I can have a tele-conversation with someone in the Gobi desert, so that time and space seem to be different.) Things are not just material and discrete. We are accepting of the fact that radio waves travel through prison walls. But these sensory and cognitive levels play many tricks on us. **Everything we can observe that looks bounded is actually a translation of bodily processes into binary codes of photons across cell membranes in neurons.** We actually manufacture everything – the mind, the body and the total universe. And everything that is created carries memory and experience – none is lost – it is always transferred. It is everywhere. We invent substance and continuity out of discontinuity and space. At a soul level the only thing that is real is presence.

So what do we understand about boundaries and how they are created and maintained?

## Anger

The most powerful boundary making capacity we have is anger, or the sentic form which we usually call anger, even though it is better to think of it more as a specific energy. The sentic form of anger is to create boundaries – up and down or pushing away – at primary level it is an intense and functional wave. It says 'stop, go away, no'. It supports survival and protects identity. At secondary level it prevents boundaries from opening unsupportedly – so we fight rather than acknowledge, reject someone rather than miss them, refuse a gift rather than dissolve into gratitude.

It's a biological necessity that other loyalties interfere with.

Then there are all the ways we get to lose or boundaries - impact of trauma and systemic requirements – Stockholm syndrome, incestuous hidden love and so on.

Trauma can wipe boundaries, mess up our integrating processes that allow for redrawing of boundaries – fragmentation instead. Trauma undermines resilience so that new experiences break things up. Under pressure of fear we identify with those on whom our survival depends. It creates a bond, even with rapists. This deep loyalty dissolves other boundaries, and can make us feel as if we are wind tunnels for everything that flows through. Having loved a parent at an

inappropriate level, we lose our capacity to discriminate with others. Having refused the love of others we create boundaries that weaken and starve us.

## Self as a boundary phenomenon

Gestalt has two ways of looking at identity – the personality that wants stability, likes to say what it is, wants to rely on fixed patterns so that there is less to predict. It's a verbal replica. We make it by saying yes, or no, to each experience – yes, I see this, I will let it change me, or no, that doesn't exist or doesn't matter. I separate myself from it. Changes only slowly, by massive injections of experiences that don't fit. Arises piecemeal through life. That's the working ego. And then there is the self, which is a process, not an entity – always in flux, co-created at the place where 'me' and 'not me' meet – which can be internal as well as external. Sometimes strong, sometimes quiet, sometimes forcefully active, sometimes yielding, sometimes including everything, and sometimes ignoring everything. Relating to the journey through our cycles of need, awareness, and achievement. Self ebbs and flows. At orgasm we merge, but then we may get dressed and leave! So there is always.....

## Movement between open and closed boundaries

This happens through the function of conscience, which create divides. There is the personal conscience, the family conscience, and the conscience of the Greater Whole. Each draws different boundaries.

Each creates a loyalty to 'us' so that 'the other' is not seen. It is overcome only by deep contact – looking the person in the eye, acknowledging their fate and our part in it.

## Children and limits

Children need the experience of boundlessness – total love and safety and bliss – and also of boundaries – they need to learn how to postpone gratification (for which they need a future they can agree to), to understand what's involved in belonging, in membership, and in the disciplines of learning. They have fierce but simple versions of justice and need to learn to include more in their calculations. For children even more than for adults, exclusion and abandonment are life threatening. Most schools run discipline matters with the tool of shame. Big boundary between home and school usually means that home wins out. How can a child agree to a different fate to their parents? That creates a boundary that can be unbearable. Teachers can support a bigger boundary – not just 'my friends', but also 'the whole class' or the whole school etc. Developing multiple memberships involves flexible boundary processes. Transfer from one system to another begins – what I can't sort out at home I bring to school. Knowing my place in school helps – that others have come before, that I take from them and pass on. Teachers remain teachers, not friends.

Then school witnesses and helps with children's process of getting disembedded from family and into the peer group. New boundaries. Whatever I identify with creates a boundary through conscience. Teacher authority crucial but must be fair and must make sense to children. Very permissive situations for children postpone certain sorts of learning and may fatally disrupt it – e.g. an infant whose sleep patterns are allowed to remain chaotic may never manage to establish them later.

Our school project took the orders and showed the teachers what kinds of ways they could use this perspective in helping children feel they belonged and that their loyalties were seen and respected. Time and space became concepts that filled with new possibilities.

## The boundaries created by fate

A big topic. Fate as karma, as everything that has happened and can't be changed. Not to be watered down by the fact that it is unbearable to see. Some fates are heavy and we can't interfere. But if we do, that brings new karma and we live with that too. We could think about how to relate to New Orleans – is it just their fate? It is my fate to be born into this family system, with these people who belong, and these who don't. It is my fate that the past impacted my parents in this way. For me to be the right person, so must everyone else be the right ones. No bargaining with fate ever strengthens people.

## AS CONSTELLATORS

### The orders of helping

These impose special demands to work in tune with soul and fate, not to pull for transference, to respect all, especially the rejected, a shift of identity which can't be defined by 'what I am against', but by 'what love requires'.

It is about doing the least. Not looking for completion but movement – so the gestalt remains open. It involves a high level of trust in the client to manage what they are given.

Therapy works with the relationship in the room as a resonating chamber – so we merge and take on transference energies, which we can then reflect on. We become the relevant other. We usurp the parent's role, which at times can inadvertently insult the parents and also undermines the capacity of the client to feel grown up enough to get on with life.

This way of working depends on us being seen as a helpful friend – transitory, impermanent, possibly wise, but mostly available to reveal what else is hidden in the field. We have to be detached enough to see and to report on what we see, rather than to build trust that pulls us into the conscience group of the family. Love equals seeing plus distance minus judgment.

### The 'orders' creating boundaries

Being in your right place is a bounded place – not messing with the fate of those that come before. It's bounded to surrender to the truth, to facts, to events, rather than letting the mind go anywhere. The family system is bounded – it doesn't include certain others, like dogs or great nieces.

### What interferes with being fearless as a facilitator?

We have many internal limiting pressures – rules from our culture, introjects created to keep us safe, uncontrolled reactions that interfere with our ability to 'see'. **We have to have peace with everyone in our systems so we don't exclude them in the systems of others.** We have to know our limits – aesthetically, medically, developmentally, neurologically, spiritually – in

terms of time, energy available. Goes against the narcissistic grain. We aren't trying to change the world but to take things back to a place of wholeness and clarity. Bounded permission – what does the soul want?

## When to stop a constellation

Several reasons. When the connection is poor. I can't reach the soul of the other. Their issue is shrouded by fog. They don't believe they have permission. There is blame rather than openness to the truth. There is insufficient information. The issue turns out to relate to someone in the system that isn't present with whom I have no contract. Movement has begun and that's enough – just to see is sometimes enough. When there is impetus you can turn it over to them again. When there isn't enough seriousness.

Important not to be shaming – to make it clear that little pieces of work are also fine, that a constellation isn't the only right outcome. That you will return to them later. That you calibrate the amount of the new that can be taken in.

## The unbounding impact of the work

Client who had bounded herself to keep away from mother. Constellation unbounded her and she became psychotic. She had no alternative means to create boundaries. After several years and episodes she did another constellation with another constellator and became psychotic again but recovered and felt different. The key sentence she learned was, 'I will learn to trust myself as I see you can't be there for me.' That's a boundary making learning.

## Personal issues

Some people are extra sensitive, can feel into the energies of the world and don't always know a useful place where they can rest in difference. Clairvoyance, channelling, mediums, sensitives, healers, seers. Perhaps they need to create extra boundaries through imaging etc. perhaps their ancestors can return them their identities when they are assuaged.

Others are too out of touch with field energies – their imaginations have become too disciplined. They need to re-somatise themselves.