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The Challenges for Psychotherapy in Today's World

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The British Journal of Psychotherapy Integration

Introduction

The British Journal of Psychotherapy Integration is the official journal of the United Kingdom Association for Psychotherapy Integration. It is published once a year.

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Tree Staunton
Bath Centre for Psychotherapy & Counselling

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The British Journal of Psychotherapy Integration is the official journal of the United Kingdom Association for Psychotherapy Integration.

It has provided the key British resource for the exploration of Integrative Practice and Research since 2004.

We are currently inviting articles on integrative theory, research and practice. Support and guidance is available for new authors.

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TStaunton@bcpc.org.uk

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Editorial

As Integrative Psychotherapists we are heavily influenced by a phenomenological view of reality: we are engaged in the active exploration of experience, drawing on awareness and presence. Being fully in the present, allows us to reflect on the past, and imagine the future.

In this issue we invite discussion on the challenges for psychotherapy in today's world, where reflectiveness is counter culture, and information overload fragments our experience of the present moment. How can we help others to find a sense of self in a digitalised, divided, war torn culture that is on the brink of ecological disaster? And what is our responsibility – or moral obligation - as therapists and as humans in the face of such overwhelming destruction? Never has there been such an urgent need for what Samuels called a 'therapeutic attitude to the world'.

Iona Fredenburgh and Leah Bijelic discuss developments in Mindell's Process oriented psychology. In their paper they describe the key features of the Processwork method and demonstrate how it has been developed as Worldwork, offering therapeutic attention to war torn conflict zones and divided communities of the world.

Sarah Victor draws on her previous work in the Environmental Agency, discusses parallel processes of flooding of the environment, and flooding of the psyche, and puts forward what, in her view, integrative psychotherapy has to offer in terms of 'managing the flood'.

Andrew Jamieson calls our attention to our increased longevity and asks what is the purpose of our extended lives? What can we contribute as elders? And what can Psychotherapy offer the elderly client who no longer looks forward to personal achievement or gain but stares death in the face? Can psychotherapy meet elders in this final stage of life, enabling them to offer their wisdom and insight to the collective?

Sue Wright asks how we can find meaning in the Age of Meaninglessness? She looks at the history and development of society that has led us to where we are now, and considers how we can find hope in the face of emptiness and meaninglessness in the current 'decontextualised world'. She asks what psychotherapy is able to offer in our search for meaning, and puts forward 'six factors that foster hope and the will to keep going despite life's difficulties'.

Kelvin Hall puts forward a case for integrating the other-than-human in our work. Writing about his experience of animal assisted therapy, he describes how it offers an immediacy which is often absent from modern life. He discusses the impact on individuals of 'animal intervention' in their lives, and illustrates his equine assisted therapy with a case study from clinical practice.

Sally Weintrobe's paper was presented as a talk at a Climate Psychology Alliance Conference earlier this year. In it she discusses how we deal with disavowal in ourselves, in the face of the daily conflicts of conscience presented by living in a neoliberal global economy. She explains how consumerism and advertising

appeal to our conflicting relationship to phantasy, allowing us to maintain an idealized view of ourselves. She suggests that climate change is a moral issue, and looks at the psychological barriers to facing it.

Keeping to the tradition I have included an example of student's final submission. Emma Smith's theoretical section is taken from her final dissertation for the Middlesex/ Metanoia MSc in Integrative psychotherapy.

There are two book reviews, relevant to the theme of this issue.

Tree Staunton (Editor).

Acknowledgements and Appreciations

Maria Gilbert

A new generation of trainers and practitioners has joined the organizing committee of UKAPI and a new editorial structure has been put in place for the *British Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*. As new people take up these roles with a fresh impetus to take this work forward, we take this opportunity to acknowledge and honour the pioneering work of Maria Gilbert. Her vision was key to the development of an association which would represent and promote integrative psychotherapy. Maria worked indefatigably to set up this professional network and forum collecting people around her, including us, to help and support her in bringing her vision into life.

She particularly focused on the development of the *British Journal of Psychotherapy Integration* which began in 2004. Over the next twelve years, she was the Editor of twenty-two editions of this journal. This was a huge task on top of all her other commitments and the journals are a testament to her relationships and her impressive power of persuasion across the integrative community.

We owe Maria a debt of gratitude for this and we wish the new generation well as they take UKAPI and The British Journal of Psychotherapy Integration onto the next chapter.

Katherine Murphy outgoing series editor
Cynthia Ransley outgoing
UKAPI General Secretary

May 2018

Iona Fredenburgh and Leah Bijelić

The world in here and out there: Processwork Facilitation as Therapy and as Worldwork

Abstract

This article offers perspectives from process oriented psychology or Processwork (Mindell, 2018) on working with issues in the current climate of 'austerity' where there is a widening gap between those who do and do not hold wealth and power. It offers ways to address the divisiveness and hopelessness present in our professional and personal lives. It describes some features of our social environment and the way they are expressed in individual psychology, resulting in complex dynamics of rank, power and privilege, and it upholds the value of bringing awareness to these and addressing them directly. The connection is made between what we marginalise in ourselves and what is marginalised socially and in the world. The paper introduces the concept of *deep democracy* - the inclusion of, and relationship between, all viewpoints and parts of a process.

Introduction

As therapists and as individuals, we come into contact with a wide range of clients and lifestyles. Whether we work and live in relatively privileged or marginal contexts, we generally recognise and have experiences of the ways in which current collective issues impact on psychological well-being. Climate change and environmental pollution, the benefits and dangers of fast-paced changes in digital communication, war and migration, and many other global and local issues, may bring a variety of responses from our clients and ourselves; from activism and potential burn-out, to desensitising and numbing, and everything in between.

How can our therapeutic awareness support us to engage creatively with the diversity within ourselves and our clients, between us and in the wider world? What role can psychotherapy play in supporting sustainable relationships between polarised parts of ourselves and our society? What are some of the challenges we face as practitioners?

Process Oriented Psychology

Processwork (also known as process oriented psychology) is an awareness practice developed by Arnold Mindell and his colleagues. Its roots include systems theory, Jungian psychology, information theory, Taoism, Shamanism, and quantum physics (Mindell was a physicist before training as a Jungian analyst). Processwork is applied in many fields including psychotherapy, clinical supervision, community and organisational development, conflict work and post-war reconciliation, with people in coma, altered and extreme states of consciousness, and in the creative arts.

From a Processwork perspective the issues of the world are present in the therapy room - in ourselves as practitioners, in our clients, and in the interaction between us. It is understood that through inner work - bringing awareness to our individual sensory experiences and unfolding them - our interventions can bring the depth of inclusivity and inter-relationship needed to facilitate outer conflicts and polarities. This innerwork involves noticing what disturbs us, whatever we identify as 'not me' or 'not-us', inhabiting it, amplifying it, and discovering it's essential quality. This offers a fluidity with polarisations, and the possibility of an 'elder' perspective which can warmly relate to the whole.

Inspired by these and other paradigms, some of the basic principles of Processwork can be briefly described as follows:

Following nature: life processes have self-organising attributes which tend towards wholeness. When we bring our awareness to the nature of this flow and work with the 'edges' that limit our identification ('not me' and 'not us') we discover a 'wu-wei' or 'not-doing' which allows us to align with that greater flow, rather than perceiving ourselves as solely responsible for 'making change happen.'

Unfolding disturbance: we are disturbed by experiences which are outside our identification: over our 'edges'. Bringing awareness to these and exploring our edges, can bring unexpected and creative evolution of processes. A body symptom experienced as a sharp pain, may be unfolded to discover a sharpness needed by someone attached only to the softly mothering aspect of their identity (this is not a substitute for medical attention). Someone troubled by a boss who is impervious to feedback, may discover an essence quality of self-assurance that is emergent in themselves but held back by their associated belief systems and history. These processes are not generic: each requires attention to unique and momentary signals, and an attitude of 'beginner's mind' to discover unknown and unintentional material.

Unfolding: is more than enlarging our perspective with understanding and empathy. It includes *shape-shifting* - shifting our perspective to embody the disturbing quality, amplifying it, discovering its essence, engaging with our edges to that experience. Amplification derives from the idea of *enantiodromia*: that when a process is amplified to its fullest expression, it naturally evolves, like the cyclic dynamic expressed in yin and yang. Mindell '*expanded upon the Jungian techniques of 'amplification' such as active imagination and dream interpretation, by adding methods for working directly with nonverbal, body-level experience*. '(JC Audergon, 2005 citing Mindell, 1988, p. 118).

Sensory-based awareness: in addition to cognitive understanding, processwork brings awareness to channels of perception, and aims to accurately unfold unintentional signals in the channels in which they appear: mainly proprioception, movement, auditory, visual - and the composite channels of relationship and the world (a world channel signal might be a synchronous loud shout outside a room where someone is at an edge to find their voice).

> Clients can find world channel phenomena emerging spontaneously from their experience and can with or without the help of a therapist, unfold the events in this channel. This theory does not prescribe how to act in the world or how to be politically correct or even socially aware. Rather, the theory and method allow unexpected and individual behavior to emerge from a client's signals, dreams and fantasies. By caring for and unfolding individual experiences in the world channel we learn more about our specific roles and contributions to global history.
>
> (Mindell, A.1996).

Double signals: a term referring to the simultaneous transmission of intentional and unintentional signals; I smile hello but lean slightly back, wanting to be friendly and marginalising my desire to be left alone just now. We tend to react to unintentional signals without necessarily realising what disturbs us, and often respond to them as if they are intentional. Misunderstandings and confusing miscommunications can easily escalate. Awareness can clarify and de-escalate the entanglement.

Edges: 'Edges, or belief systems, stem from personal, family, cultural, social and religious

norms and values. These define how we identify, and what we marginalise…. The edge structures our communication in double signals.' (J. C. Audergon, 2005, pp. 161—3).

Dimensions: Processwork distinguishes between *consensus reality* (experiences with a high degree of consensual agreement: "this is a chair" or "my hand is shaking"), *dreaming* experiences which are subjective and fluid ("I feel afraid, I perceive you as threatening, you remind me of a figure in my history"; at another moment I myself may become threatening), and *essence,* experiencing the perspective of the unified field, beyond the polarisations - the whole that is more than the sum of the parts, enabling an 'eldership' that can support all sides and the interaction between them.

Deep democracy: all voices and all parts and dimensions of a process are needed for its evolution, and their relationship with each other is needed. Conflict facilitation, for example, needs to address feelings connected with historic experiences; an unaddressed atmosphere of reluctant compliance in a meeting will undermine proposed outcomes. 'Deep democracy brings democracy to life in the moment as a living reality. In deep democracy, everyone *wins* in the sense of gaining more meaningful relationships and more sustainable resolutions.' (Mindell, 2008).

Rank dynamics: complex dynamics of power and influence need awareness. We will describe this in more detail below.

Fields and roles: *field theory* (Lewin,1946,1951) suggests things are patterned by the dynamic interaction of roles, which recruit us or 'dream us up' in ways that are both individually and collectively meaningful. Amy Mindell explains:

> It describes a field-like atmosphere permeating and influencing all levels of experience, including relationships, group interaction, and the entire world. Field theory postulates that it is impossible to separate what is happening to you from what is happening to me; that my feelings and thoughts are an integral part of my interactions no matter what I am doing or where I am.
>
> (Mindell, A,1996)

'Ghost' roles impact the field without anyone identifying with them, and inhabiting them with awareness can help the interaction evolve. If two people have a conflict in which each one identifies only with being hurt by the other, the 'hurter' role is uninhabited. When one or other can connect with the 'hurter' part of themselves, the interaction can evolve in different ways. The facilitator or therapist is part of the field, and experiences of transference and counter-transference can benefit from bringing awareness to the roles that are present. Roles that are part of the client's material emerge in the moment.

> Creative use of dreamed-up reactions depends on more than interpretation and self-disclosure; it requires dynamic participation in the total world of experience shared by therapist and client. This may be harder than it sounds. Just coming out with your reactions, we have found, is not always the most useful strategy. Creative use of dreaming up requires the cultivation of dual awareness, more an art than a science.
>
> (Goodbread,1997, p.120).

Processes are holographic and appear in different levels: their signals emerge intrapsychically, in relationship and in the wider world, and addressing any of these levels supports awareness in the other levels.

Innerwork: bringing awareness to the momentary or ongoing way in which processes are present in ourselves as facilitators and therapists, allows us to notice where we 'side' with one part or another, where we are limited by an identification, where we have an affect which signals an important part of the process which needs attention, and enables us to access unintentional experiences and perspectives which may contribute just what is needed to the context.

Dynamics of rank and power

Lack of awareness of dynamics of privilege and power is considered, from a Processwork perspective, to be a key factor in perpetuating conflict. Becoming aware of rank and power dynamics, of what has centrality and what

is marginalised, can have a transformative impact when facilitating conflicts. (See Dr. Robin DiAngelo (2015) on white centrality). Rank is relational, and can be both complex and fluid. It can impact on our physical and psychological wellbeing, on our ability to speak out and act, on the way we live and die. Processwork identifies different kinds of rank, both 'earned' and unearned:

1. **Social:** in a given social context, rank is bestowed (whether we agree with it or not) by our skin colour and ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical and mental wellbeing, class, education and age, etc.
2. **Psychological:** psychological resilience in the face of great difficulty, which may come from personal history.
3. **Spiritual:** A deep and sustaining sense of spiritual connection, community belonging, or meaning and purpose in life.
4. **Contextual:** dynamic and shifting hierarchies of power in families, friendship networks, workplaces and societies.

If we take an inventory of our different ranks, we discover how they intersect. If I have relatively high or low rank in several different ways, they have a combined impact.

> 'Many years ago, I began to use the term *intersectionality* to deal with the fact that many of our social justice problems like racism and sexism are often overlapping, creating multiple levels of social injustice.'
>
> (Kimberlé Crenshaw, 2016)

Our awareness can give us the ability to recognise and facilitate areas of both higher and lower rank, to recognise when unconscious rank is affecting the relationship. Unconsciousness about high rank can entangle us in guilt, paralysis, trying to be good, being defensive or patronising. See Kendall (2013, Ch 3 & 4) for an exposition of 'the implicit and explicit advantages and privileges that often go unnoticed' by those of us with white rank, and Ryde (2009, pp. 83—108) on the importance, for therapists, of addressing 'uncomfortable feelings such as guilt or shame'.

On the other hand, over-identification with victimhood when we have less rank, may stop us seeing the power that we do have, including the self-empowerment that comes from our psychological and spiritual rank. If we don't notice when we feel put down, we may internalise a punitive self-critic, or enact unconscious revenge. Identifying only with our low rank, considering ourselves beneath others, may result in us expressing our high rank in unconscious ways. We give 'double signals': our behaviour is incongruent, expressing both our identification with low rank and our unconscious high rank. This tends to be disturbing or irritating to other people: the double signal may not be registered consciously but the other person may nevertheless experience the incongruence.

Having high rank and using it without awareness can lead to abuse and provocation.

> Under stress, attack or great pressure, the force of low rank clouds our ability to stay mindful of our high-ranking role. On April 20, 2010, when the Deepwater Horizon offshore drilling platform exploded, claiming eleven lives and spewing over two hundred million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico, it caused massive environmental, economic and social destruction. Speaking shortly after the event, Tony Hayward, then-CEO of British Petroleum – the company responsible for the tragedy – caused uproar when he said that while the event disrupted the lives of residents near the Gulf, it was also taking a toll on his personal life.
>
> "I'd like my life back", he said, putting his discomfort on par with others, including those who had lost their lives or loved ones in the explosion.
>
> Hayward fell prey to the low-rank feelings right at the moment when he should have been most mindful of his high-ranking role. How could he have avoided this blunder? How can we stay mindful of high rank when the force of low rank is so great?
>
> (Diamond, 2016, p. 59).

Diamond describes the importance of the therapist's awareness of their rank in relation to the client, given the

multiple levels of dependency which can characterise the relationship:

> Using your rank to facilitate another's learning and growth… often involves a kind of intimacy. Therapist and client, coach and trainee, advisor and advisee, student and teacher - all engage in a powerful partnership of personal transformation, which involves more than the simple transmission of information and skills… This is such a tricky area, one that requires so much self-awareness on the part of the practitioner, that it is no wonder these professions are subject to ethics codes, which are strongly enforced.
>
> (Diamond, 2016, pp.187—188).

The world in us

Our rank as therapists increases the impact on the client of any unconscious bias or privilege we may have, and may make it difficult for the client to draw attention to that bias. Our 'edges' to certain experiences and identifications, pattern the therapeutic relationship. 'Everybody has edges' argues Joe Goodbread, 'no matter how long you've been in therapy or meditated.' (Goodbread,1997, p.119).

> *Strong edges touch on collective issues of great importance, not only for the individuals involved in them but for society as a whole. As members of society, we therapists, too, share the same strong edges with our clients…We may be … reticent to examine in ourselves that which we disavow, be it our own homosexuality, bizarre behaviour, unbridled aggression, or extreme states of consciousness." (ibid, p118)*

Our inner awareness, our presence in the world and our interaction with our clients are inextricably entwined. For example, if I have a client who identifies as non-binary gender, and I, identifying as male or female, struggle to remember to use their preferred pronoun e.g. 'they' rather than 'he' or 'she', my inner work can support my awareness not only of my personal process around this (e.g. what I marginalise in myself when I see the world in binary gender terms) but also awareness of the rank and privilege dynamics of gender in the wider world. A non-binary identity is a marginalised identity. If I perpetuate this marginalisation in the consulting room, I perpetuate the dynamics of rank in the world. One response may be to try not to do that - to try to remember the pronoun. However, curiosity about my own process including my feelings, attitudes, history and associations, learning the meaning of 'non binary' in my inner world, is more fruitful and more sustainable. It supports the relationship in the room, supports fuller contact with myself and takes one step in militating against marginalisation of that identity. Naming the dynamic in the room also allows us to relate to this process - a process that is happening in the wider field, in society - it brings an opportunity for dialogue between different perspectives and to surface the feelings and beliefs related to those perspectives.

It may be challenging to engage with aspects of ourselves that we have disavowed due to trauma, fear or lack of welcome in our families and social networks. There is an additional challenge when trying to recognise and engage with aspects that are marginalised by a whole culture. Where values and beliefs are shared by those around us, it can be difficult to recognise them as beliefs - they look like facts. We may recognise our cultural values and norms most when we engage cross-culturally.

Therapeutic skills in the world

Writing in 1996, Amy Mindell asserts that

> …psychotherapy has traditionally been oriented toward White individuals of European descent who have the luxury and privilege of studying and thinking about themselves. This explains why psychotherapy has for the most part not been sought after by people of other colors and cultures. A therapy that is able to work with world channel experiences (as well as dealing with small and large group social issues) may be more open to all types of people, especially those whose social lives are more pressing and immediate than the lives of people seeking traditional forms of inner work. This orientation may contribute to narrowing the gap between psychotherapy as we know it today, spiritual practices, social work, and politics.
>
> (Mindell, A.1996)

Our training and orientation as therapists, has a value beyond the therapy room and our close interactions. The wider world, communities and organisations of all kinds, are in need of facilitators whose skills, we would argue, include those developed in our training, experience and expertise as psychotherapists. We identify some of these as follows:

1. Tolerating the tension of conflictual material and exploring it rather than trying to fix an outcome
2. Engaging with feelings and the impact of history rather than excluding these from professional interactions
3. Developing skills to work with trauma
4. Bringing awareness to the complex dynamics of rank, power and privilege as they play out between us, rather than trying only to correct or ignore them
5. Unpacking the intransigence of polarised 'us' and 'them' perspectives, to discover both what we have in common, and how our diversity is needed for a deeply democratic and sustainable society.

Psychological dynamics and social division

We live in a time when large numbers of people feel hopeless or anxious about the future and impotent to affect our world, while others are increasingly motivated to take action - for example, the young people in the US rising up against the gun lobby. In an intensified polarisation, we can notice the extent to which we are targets for people with power to activate our fear, and persuade large numbers of us to go along with what they want. They appeal to our wish for justice, power, community, security and a sense of belonging, and may be especially effective in addressing social groups that experience marginalisation.

The *America First* movement and the growth in popularity of far-right parties across Europe may be seen to reflect a sense of alienation, insecurity and a turning inward - a prioritising of 'people like us' and rejection of 'others'. In her book *War Hotel: Psychological Dynamics in Violent Conflicts*, Arlene Audergon describes and illustrates the process whereby,

> …when we feel insecure, we look to outer leadership and authority for guidance and protection, and put our judgement in the hands of experts who we believe can weigh things up better than we can… the problem is not that we naturally seek leadership … the problem lies in our tendency to give over to authority without knowing it and without debate. *The emotional and psychological factors that influence our judgement as to where we place 'authority' are largely unconscious'* (italics ours).
>
> (Audergon, A. 2005, p.71).

Dehumanising and scapegoating

In a context of increasing social polarisation, there is a social role which encourages us to project our aggression and other unwanted impulses on to groups with less social power - to dehumanise and scapegoat minorities. In the period preceding the holocaust, Nazi propaganda portrayed Jews as an *infestation of rats*. In Rwanda, RTLM, a radio station with a significant role in the Rwandan genocide of 1994, began its genocide broadcasting with reference to Tutsis as *cockroaches that must be exterminated*. This was part of a move to normalise mass murder.

> In the UK in 2018, the term 'Islamic terrorist' used so commonly in the media, equates Islam with terrorism. This feeds any conscious or unconscious tendency to identify our non-Islamic selves as 'good' whilst projecting 'the bad' outside of ourselves. While we remain unconscious of the 'bad' within, we are susceptible to manipulation - we can be more easily incited to vilify and scapegoat marginalised groups within our communities (Audergon 2005, pp. 44-70). Many of us become overwhelmed, and step back. But when we allow ourselves to become desensitised to aggression and violence, or even to the smallest signals of marginalisation, and we remain uninvolved and indifferent, we contribute to it. If we can notice that we are losing sensitivity and choose instead to reflect, engage and respond, we contribute to a humanising process. Our personal response, in our hearts and in our communities, to oppression and human-rights

> violations and our refusal to toughen up or let it pass, contributes to the safety of all of us.
>
> (Audergon 2005 p.102).

Clarkson (2006) used the term 'Bystander' to describe someone who does not become involved when someone else needs help. She investigated the meaning of bystanding behaviour in ordinary life as well as in psychotherapeutic practice….

> It is about helping and not helping, giving and getting help, and some ways of thinking and acting in our increasingly complex moral world. Bystanding is seen as a major way in which people disempower themselves and others. It works at the juncture of the individual and the collective, the person and the group, the citizen and the state, the patient and the psychotherapist.
>
> (Clarkson, 2006 *back cover)*

Society and Individuals as 'city shadows'

What are the indicators of social wellbeing in the UK in 2018? In terms of mental health, there is evidence of increasing distress - as levels of self harm and suicide among young people increases, as does use of anti-depressants and deaths from street drugs in the UK1 (Guardian unlimited, 2018). In the period 2013--2017 there were also record levels of suicide among students, most of whom are aged under 25 years (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2017). 'It appears that how people cope with mental health problems is getting worse as the number of people who self-harm or have suicidal thoughts is increasing' (Mind, 2018).

Arnold Mindell writes about the way in which the most vulnerable or susceptible among us, express facets of the collective's unaddressed psychic life. Just as when a family is distressed, that distress may be channelled through one individual - the identified patient - Mindell describes

> The identified patient of the community who channels its repressed and unrealised psychology. This shadow is like the city's dream, portraying its neglected gods, the hopelessness it will not admit, its withdrawal from superficial communication, its suicidal tendencies, mania, addictions, murderous rage and hypersensitivity.
>
> (Mindell, 1991, p.162).

The field and deep democracy

> The field is 'patterned' by the tension between … essential roles such as tyranny and democracy, the persecutor and victim, the leader and follower… each part of the field… is required…and everyone is needed to represent the known as well as the unknown and unpopular roles in the field. (Mindell,1989, p.140).

In groups, organisations and communities, we are inevitably organised by the field as a whole. As Mindell says

> Groups ... put you into altered states of consciousness, make you feel things you did not want to, remind you of your fear, hatred, anger, ambition, pride, humiliation or greed. Groups can be terrifying. ... these altered states are not just problems but solutions as well. My suggestion is not to marginalise these problems because they are uncomfortable. Become lucid and conscious, embrace the problem, go down into it, get deeper, and explore the states and people who flirt with you, get to the sentient essence, and help everything transform.
>
> (Mindell, 2000, p.191)

1. The number of anti-depressants prescribed in England has doubled over the last decade (NHS prescribed record number of anti-depressants last year (Guardian online, 29 June 2017) and the number of deaths related to use of street drugs is at its highest level since comparable records began (in 1993; see (Statistics on Drug Misuse, 2018, NHS Digital). Between 2011-2014 there was a 68% increase in self harm among girls aged 13--16 (and no increase in boys of that age) the majority of whom live in deprived areas. Eighty three percent of those incidents were related to overdose. (Catherine Morgan et al. 2017). Those who self harm are also at a vastly increased risk of unnatural death, of death from suicide, or of acute alcohol or drug poisoning.

This expresses the concept of *deep democracy,* which as a methodology, surfaces voices that are central and those that are marginal and explores the relationship between them to bring awareness to the whole. This applies whether the system being explored is a country, a community, a family, a team or an individual.

> Awareness of the 'field' is different from knowledge of the parts of a system… The character of the field does not depend on stable and fixed parts, but on temporary roles and timespirits that flow within and outside the immediate boundaries of the system. Its important to respect the roles and see the hierarchies which exist, but the deeper dynamics of the group can be accessed only through the field, the feelings which bind and separate us (Mindell, A. 1995, p. 43).

Worldwork: psychotherapeutic skills in service of community dialogue

Processwork has developed, and continues to develop, ways of working with world issues, whether they appear in the internalised oppression of a client, relationship dynamics or larger organisational, group and community contexts.

In large multinational and multicultural gatherings, *worldwork* creates arenas where people can train in and practice engaging with diverse perspectives, attitudes and feelings, in order to discover inclusive and creative ways forward. When a group is in conflict, we know that holding the tension, and framing different feelings and perspectives, is more fruitful than simply looking for outcomes. We help a group to slow down at the point of disturbance - the 'hot spot' - and explore aspects that are driving conflict or distress and which can get ignored if people rush to avoid the discomfort at those points. This means paying attention to the history and feelings behind behaviour in the present interaction - aspects that are often overlooked in community or organisational interactions. This is *deep democracy* in group work - we attend not only to aspects that are rational or more concrete - *consensus reality* - but also to non rational experiences e.g. feelings, fears, beliefs, and projections - *dreaming experiences* - and to aspects that unify all of us -*sentient experiences.*

The following example comes from the Worldwork 2008 conference, *'Doorways to Diversity, Seeking a Home in the World; Processing conflicts around borders and boundaries in culturally diverse societies'* which took place in the Royal National Hotel in the centre of London in April 2008.

> It was an extraordinary, diverse, dynamic and transforming experience. Some 420 people gathered from 38 countries and nations. This large and diverse group created an exciting and creative atmosphere through which issues related to racism, colonialism, genocide, war, violence, trauma, gender, sexual orientation, economics, language, hope and hopelessness were worked on deeply. As well as processing the issues around our diverse personal and collective histories and present time, we also learned and practiced cutting edge methods of Worldwork facilitation including the principle and practice of 'deep democracy'.
>
> …There were also plenty of opportunities for engaging and networking with others as well as to observe, and take time for reflection and integration of the learning and experience. There was awareness for many of the participants on how we contribute to the polarisation of conflicts, and how we can contribute to conflict resolution and make a difference in our communities.
>
> …There were opportunities for each participant to have one to one meetings with a Worldwork staff member, for the purpose of exploring personal reactions and learning, and to explore how to specifically apply the learning in one's own organizational and community context. All participants also had access to a member of the 'heart team' who were Worldwork staff members on hand to provide emotional support throughout the conference.
>
> (IAPOP, 2018).

Mindell was among 70 facilitating staff members from around the world. The format of the conference included large group gatherings, theory and 'hot topic' sessions

with presentations and discussions, daily facilitated small groups which enabled people to go more deeply into the large group themes and practice skills together, and 'fishbowl' style interactions. Among the many themes,

> There were multi cultural sub groups who took the opportunity to work deeply together, including people from Greek and Turkish backgrounds working on long-standing conflicts ; South Africans and Australians working on the pain of the past and present, as well as extraordinary hope for the future. There was a powerful group of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered people working on issues of love, internalized and external oppression. On one of the days the group worked intensely on collective trauma through the channels of movement, sound and theatre (ibid).

Worldworld facilitation methods are also used in community meetings and forums. The following are examples from Croatia, Rwanda, and the UK.

Croatia and the Balkans

Just after the war in the Balkans, in 1996, Arlene Audergon and Lane Arye facilitated a forum for the first time in Osijek, coordinated by the International Rescue Committee. Udruga Mi, an NGO in Croatia, formed and developed close links with organisations throughout Croatia. Audergon and Arye worked in close cooperation with Udruga Mi and UNHCR. We facilitated forums twice a year supported by the UNHCR, Open Society, OTI, OSCE, the Threshold Foundation and Norwegian, Danish, British, Dutch, and Belgian embassies.

Each four day forum had approximately 80 people, from all sides of the war, and with their own war experience and trauma. Participants were from local NGOs local authorities, and international organisations, from a wide range of professions and activities all dealing with painful and volatile issues in their communities. In the forums these groups worked together on the conflicts and issues they met in the field. The forums were deeply emotional. Many hundreds of people attended these forums, and were touched in ways that impacted them personally and in their contributions and leadership in community.

(CFOR 2018a).

Milan Bijelić writes about his personal experience as a Croatian and a trainee process worker, participating in the first of a series of forums called *'Building of sustainable community in the aftermath of war'* in Croatia in 1998:

> *"A Croatian woman commented that when the Serb refugees return to Croatia, they should not walk around with their heads held high; they should walk with their heads down. I, and many others in the group understood her to mean that Serbs should be deferential. In that moment, people in the group reacted in different ways. They were commenting to one another, some were reacting, some were smiling from discomfort, someone started coughing, and others were talking with their neighbours in the circle. The facilitators … asked the group to slow down… a Serb said that he would like to talk to the woman … with the help of facilitators, because he "did not agree with what she said and hoped that she meant something else.' He indicated that he hoped that they would eventually understand one another."*

Bijelić wondered why the group would stay with the discomfort and give attention to this expression of ethnic intolerance which could result in a very heated situation. He describes his experience when the hot spot was facilitated:

> *"I experienced every question and response in my body. I had many physical symptoms – sweating, constrictions, and butterflies in my stomach. I also questioned their attitudes. I met my own hopelessness. I was experiencing the 'field' in my body and everything that was facilitated between the two of them had an impact on me. They achieved a temporary resolution by meeting one another as human beings, despite their different views about the recent violent conflict, and were supported to express something that had been so potent in the field but had, as yet, been unexpressed. I felt the relief in my body. I felt relieved not just by the temporary resolution but by the full expression of their views and their experiences as everything was carefully unfolded. The sense of relief that I felt also came from the facilitators' attitudes, as they were able*

to welcome the views and descriptions of the experiences of both the man and woman in the middle. All parts were welcomed, expression of different views and perspectives were welcomed."

(Milan Bijelić, personal communication, April 2016).

Rwanda

Arlene and Jean-Claude Audergon write:

In post-conflict zones, community wide trauma can easily fuel fresh rounds of violence. Our experience applying 'worldwork' methods in post-conflict zones is that with facilitation, communities have a profound capacity and resilience to be able to meet, and process history together, so as to not fall victim to repeating rounds of violence, but rather to find shared pathways forward for recovery and violence prevention.

(CFOR 2018b).

Through their worldwork organisation CFOR, the Audergons are currently implementing a three-year programme in Rwanda

Together with Innocent Musore of GER Global Initiatives for the Environment and Reconciliation in Rwanda, and in cooperation with the NURC, National Unity and Reconciliation Commission. The programme supports the ongoing work of reconciliation, violence prevention and community recovery, in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide.

*Innocent made contact with Arlene and Jean-Claude (*Audergon*), with a dream of making a contribution to his country and the Great Lakes region – asking if we might work with him to bring CFOR's programme of post-conflict recovery and violence prevention to Rwanda, and potentially to Burundi and the DRC. Innocent then came to the UK to take part in our Intensive course.*

The programme is now underway in Kigali. Participants include perpetrators and victims of violence, community members as well as those working within organisations to support recovery – all dealing with their own personal experience, the legacy of the genocide and the current needs of communities. Forum participants include youth and elders, local authorities, government and community groups.

(CFOR 2018b).

A one-hour film produced by the Audergons shows some of the interactions between survivors and perpetrators of the genocide during one of the forums (CFOR 2018c). We consider it to be a deeply moving testament to the courage, love and capacity of people traumatised by their history, to heal their relationships when the conditions for that healing are present.

UK

Here in the UK, forums facilitating relationships between groups of people in conflict have also taken place and continue to take place in different areas and communities. For example, In Brighton, a series of forums were held around the theme 'The Middle East in Us', and in Sheffield a group of processworkers has facilitated four forums over the last two years, as part of Sheffield's Festival of Debate, beginning with one focusing on 'Sheffield divided' immediately following the Brexit referendum when Sheffield voted 52% leave, 48% remain. We hope that these and other community-building initiatives will continue to contribute to community dialogues that de-escalate some of the polarisations and divides which increase in times of austerity and insecurity, and that more people will access facilitation trainings that help develop skill and expertise.

Conclusion

In this article, we have described a few ways in which three aspects of our practice can inform one another: *inner work; psychotherapeutic work*; and *facilitation of groups and communities*. Inner work helps us understand who we are as individuals, in relationship, and in society. Work with clients is served by our inner work and by our engagement in the wider world as both of these help us to develop awareness of dynamics of power and privilege, awareness of how people experience their social context, and help us to develop skills

in working with conflict - including inner conflict, conflict between two people, and conflict between opposing views in a group.

In the collective arena, 'deep democracy' differs from 'majority rule' and requires something different of us. Arnold Mindell recognises that…

> …what leads us is not one idea or the other. Our tensions, emotions and long-standing conflicts lead us. What leads us is the atmosphere between us and the underlying field that not only pulls and pushes us, but joins us ultimately to one another. What leads us is the voice, the idea, just on the outskirts of our awareness, that has not yet been heard. What leads us is the interplay between old and new, between that which dominates and that which is marginalised. History leads us. We need leaders who can facilitate this encounter, who welcome diversity, conflict and the feelings and dimension of our experience.
>
> (Mindell, 1993, pp. 148–160)

The therapeutic capacity to hold complexity and value it, is one of the skills needed in order to facilitate this encounter.

We have explored the central importance of the innerwork of the practitioner (as therapist, supervisor, facilitator), understanding that we are frequently 'activated' by the issues of the world around us, and that instead of putting this to one side or trying to correct it, we bring greater resolution and resilience to ourselves, our clients and our world by entering into it and engaging with the dynamic between its different parts, and including that innerwork as relevant and legitimate in supporting the client's process.

Social and physical sciences continue to develop understandings of the way in which inter-relationship and inter-connectedness operate in both human and other-than-human spheres. In our therapeutic roles, our expertise addresses subjective experiences - feelings, dreams, trauma, impact of history - and this dimension of awareness and facilitation is needed in the public domain, beyond the therapy room. We therefore advocate for therapists to consider the possibility of developing and engaging our skills in community interactions, where, at this time, such facilitation is needed, and can help bring creative outcomes to the local and global issues we face.

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Iona Fredenburgh is Co-Director of ProcessworkUK, and a member of the teaching faculty. She practises as a psychotherapist, supervisor, trainer and facilitator. Her longterm interests include the impact of marginalisation, and extreme and altered states including dementia, addictions and psychosis. A deep orientation to nature sustains her perspective and practice. Contact iona@processworkuk.org

Leah Bijelić is a processwork psychotherapist, supervisor and community facilitator living and working in Sheffield. She has a central interest in dynamics of power and privilege in society, in relationship and within ourselves. She is currently exploring the influence of the field in academic researchers' experience of vicarious trauma and burnout related to their topic of research. Contact leahbijelic@googlemail.com

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Sarah Victor

Managing the flood: an integrative psychotherapeutic approach to the environmental challenges of living in today's world

There is a tide in the affairs of men.
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life is
Bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures

Julius Caesar Act 4, Scene 3, 218-224.

Abstract

This article presents an integrative psychotherapeutic approach to understanding our primitive responses to the environmental challenges of living in today's world. The importance of developmental theoretical and clinical thinking, in understanding and managing primitive responses to environmental challenges, is highlighted. An integrative psychotherapeutic approach is proposed, based on a relational/developmental model. It is suggested that this approach can allow effective management of responses further enabling opportunity for active and creative reparation of the our world under current global environmental crises.

Introduction

I first worked with 'flooding' in my career with the Environment Agency (EA). The EA is a non-departmental public body, whose main responsibility is river and coastal flood resilience in England. The aims of the EA are to create better places for people and wildlife, and support sustainable development. My longest serving role was as a Sustainable Places Advisor. I was responsible for advising on sustainable development and the majority of my work involved preventing development in floodplain areas and reducing flood risk. In England flooding is one of the biggest natural disasters we face, with 5.2 million homes at risk of flooding (Boyd, 2018). Mental health impacts are thought to be among the most important adverse effects of flooding, especially for vulnerable individuals (Fewtrell & Kay 2008). The dangers of flooding are set to increase with population growth and the continued impact of climate change on weather conditions. It is critical that authorities, emergency services and communities work together to prepare for the challenges now and in the future and to deliver responsive long-term solutions that ensure the safety of properties, businesses and individuals alike. However, to overcome flooding, as any other environmental challenge, is usually to look to engineering solutions and behavioural modifications. By contrast a more sustainable route may be to look deep inside ourselves — to find ways to become more wholehearted, interconnected and conscious (Kerr & Key, 2012). Although my 13 year career with the EA came to an end in 2015, I remain passionate about the environment and

wish to attempt to work from this different angle of looking deep inside ourselves.

I still work with 'flooding', albeit in a different guise, in my work as a integrative psychotherapist. A large proportion of my practice involves working with clients with early relational trauma; these clients are 'flooded' with affect. Affect is the biological portion of an emotion (Nathanson, 1992). In such work I see the therapeutic relationship as a reservoir into which my client's conscious and unconscious affect can swell, be contained and made sense of in our work together. Unconscious processes emerging within the therapeutic relationship enable archaic deficits to be identified, and together my client and I work to achieve repair (Price, 2009). Repair leads to the regulation of affect — feelings are joined to experience and given meaning (O'Reilly-Knapp, 1996) and the flood subsides. By working together in this way, affect tolerance is improved and my clients' psyches become more integrated and resilient. In my experience, clients with early relational trauma come to therapy when they have been submerged by affect, being without the internal structures necessary to manage emotional flooding. When clients with early relational trauma have their defences breached they are less able to cope or seek proximity and support from healthy relationships. In this case the therapist-client relationship, can be used as a stepping stone to healthier relationships.

The world's ability to cope with the impact of humans 'flooding' it with pollutants is causing irreversible and, in many ways, catastrophic change. The environmental challenges faced as a result, are some of the most difficult and seemingly impossible problems we have ever confronted: climate change, deforestation, water scarcity, loss of biodiversity, pollution, waste management and public health issues. If we are not to '*lose our ventures*' (Shakespeare, 2001), we must better understand our psychological inner workings. As within, so without: the ways we live in the world are intrinsically tied to our inner emotional lives. From understanding our complex inner psychic landscapes the better we will be able to comprehend responses to the environmental challenges we face. The greater this understanding the more likely we will be able to manage our affairs. Integrative psychotherapy is both multifaceted and nonlinear in nature, making it an appropriate lens through which to illuminate complex human responses to environmental challenges. In addition, it has at its core a level of epistemological uncertainty that must be tolerated in order to do the work. This, if usefully transmitted, could help others sit with the unimaginableness of the environmental challenges faced, and stay afloat.

An integrative psychotherapeutic approach is distinguished by an ability to permit different conceptual models of human psychology to be intertwined into a cohesive unity, forming a structure through which our responses to environmental challenges can be explored. This differs from a more purist approach whereby a single model of human psychology is used, as is the case with cognitive, behavioural and social psychological approaches. An integrative approach offers a more flexible, open-minded, curious, and exploratory way of looking at the issues as it is able to hold more than one theoretical perspective at a time and welcomes ambiguities, contradictions and paradoxes (Shafer, 1976). It also 'cherishes contradictions as spurs to the creation of knowledge and as antidotes to the suffocating intellectual effects of a priori assumption of unity' (Schacht, 1984, p125). Although the theories underpinning an integrative approach can be widely differing in their philosophical presuppositions the synthesis permits a pluralistic framework. Concepts, strategies and specific interventions from a range of therapeutic orientations can be utilised. This is essential if we are to successfully navigate through the enormity of the environmental challenges upon us. We need to be equipped with facilitative, sustaining, adaptive and anticipatory learning in the face of such complex risks and uncertainties. Rather than relying on narrow and categorical knowledge, plural knowledges permit innovation and collaboration across disciplines which is vital for action on 'wicked problems' (Brown et al., 2011) where the issues involved are complex as is the case with environmental degradation. A further key value of an integrative psychotherapeutic approach is in the therapist's willingness to bring herself into the therapeutic relationship as a person, to weave the transferential reality with an I-Thou reality (Ben-Shahar, 2008). This way of being is essential as we all face the

global environmental crises together - we are all responsible for fixing the crises. As with working with clients with early relational trauma as therapists, we need to have insight into our own unconscious processes and to have resolved our own primitive issues sufficiently in order to work effectively with our clients', so that we can step into their world, sharing together in their experience (Price, 2016).

Please refrain from throwing the baby out with the flood water

The environmental challenges encountered mean significant losses, threats to, and changes in the environment. These impacts can cause severe anxiety which floods the psyche and overwhelms us. Global unpredictability stirs up unthinkable infantile terrors (Rustin, 2013). This anxiety is thought to come as a result of our being utterly dependent on the environment for survival, analogous to our utter dependence in infancy on our caregivers (Weintrobe, 2013). Our original state of total dependence is a fundamental postulate of Freudian theory (Lebovici, 1991) and central in the thinking of Object Relations theorists Winnicott (1945) and Balint (1968). Environmental challenges are understood to revive feelings of infantile dependence and the traumatic experiences of being abandoned in states of utter need (Rustin, 2013). Lehtonen & Valimaki (2013, p49) state that as 'reality of the dependence of man on nature … [becomes] more conscious … this awareness is followed by increasing anxiety and a sense of helplessness.' These feelings are encountered by those working with clients who have sustained relational trauma in early infancy due to inadequate care at the stage of total dependence. I postulate that formulations of these phenomena by authors in the tradition of working with the early stages of development offer useful and intelligible ways in which to understand feelings engendered by the environmental challenges of today. See for example Object Relations theorists Winnicott (1945, 1960, 1974) and Balint (1968), as well as other writers such as Van Sweden (1995), Borgogno & Vigna-Taglianti (2008), Adams (2009), Symington & Symington (1996), Erskine (2008), and Price (2007, 2009, 2014).

Knowledge afforded from working with those whose psychic suffering originates in the area of preverbal trauma (Borgogno & Vigna-Taglianti, 2008), in the area of the 'basic fault' (Balint, 1968), could give a map with which to navigate primitive anxieties engendered by environmental challenge. These anxieties are considered to be the biggest psychic barrier to facing and working with the environmental problems of today (Weintrobe, 2013; Mauss-Hanke, 2013). Developmental theory could help improve effectiveness in managing these problems, as it offers ways of thinking about how best to approach the task at hand. To date, this has been through fear and apocalyptic narratives and a mixture of persuasion, education and awareness, none of which have worked very well so far (Bichard, 2013). In regard to working with clients with primitive disorders, 'part of the therapeutic task is to provide a framework for understanding in which the chaos and anxiety can be explored and tolerated … [together with] … a holding environment to allow the experience and expression of these emotions' (Price, 2014, p79, p126). This is echoed by Van Sweden (1995) who emphasises the essentialness for the therapist 'to survive the expression of these primitive emotions without defensive interpreting or withdrawal' (p199). Through relationship, primitive intolerable feelings can be contained and processed. An approach to managing our responses to environmental challenges that takes into account the importance of our relational needs would therefore be beneficial. Such an approach provides relational connection and 'containment' (Bion, 1970), permitting expression of feelings both symbolically and bodily, and enabling thoughts to be integrated with feeling; leading to new understanding. The charity *Tipping Point* has been offering containment and opportunities to express emotion by engaging scientists and artists in the subject of climate change through compelling, rewarding and transformative experiences *(Gingold, 2016).* As stated by Randall:

> All kinds of things may form part of this containment – stories, friendship, artistic works, community projects, political leadership, for example – but they need to be underpinned by the acknowledgment of truth and the integration of feeling. It is this working through of difficult emotion that will bring

> the strength to make the personal, social and political changes that are needed (2013, p115)

Such thinking and the theoretical foundations on which it stands, if circulated more widely outside our own discipline, could permit integration of effective creative strategies for delicately navigating the inner landscapes of each of us, thereby facilitating further activity as opposed to inaction in regards to the environmental challenges we all face.

The ability to manage anxiety about environmental challenges will be dependent on our individual inner psychic landscapes, which themselves will be contingent on the structure of our minds as laid down in infancy. Hence if we have had a 'good-enough' (Winnicott, 1974) beginning, the ability to manage primitive anxieties engendered by environmental degradation will have some foundation. However if 'care is not good enough then the infant does not really come into existence, since there is no continuity of being; instead the personality becomes built on the basis of reactions to environmental impingement' (Winnicott, 1960, p156). Therefore further environmental challenges will compound anxieties and there will be less ability to cope. In addition, the more shaky the foundations the less likely we will be to look to others for buoyancy. This is because we have not internalised 'other' as safe to reach to, for support. Regardless of foundational stability, anxiety that is wordless needs to be given voice, recognised and relationally experienced. This is not easy as abject states cause us to 'flinch away, recoil and reject; it is the black hole, the abyss, the place in which all meaning collapses' (Adams, 2009, p7). Nevertheless, I consider that primitive anxieties need to be acknowledged as playing a pivotal role in what prevents us moving forward with braving the environmental problems before us (Rustin, 2013, Weintrobe, 2013). An integrative psychotherapeutic approach offers a framework for understanding and working with primitive anxieties. It is this primitive anxiety that 'needs to be recognised, shared and to become accepted as a valid aspect of the problem and to be taken into account in questions of how to deal with [all environmental challenges, including] climate change' (Lehtonen & Valimaki, 2013, p50). An integrative psychotherapeutic approach, based on a relational/developmental model offers understanding, and ways of working with, elemental early states and processes of psychic development (Price, 2014). This approach could open up new possibilities of managing our primitive anxiety aroused by environmental degradation.

An integrative psychotherapeutic approach has been shown to be of value in working with primitive anxieties as it supports living with non-linear, non-structured experience and values flexibility and reflexivity (Price, 2009). This is as opposed to more contemporary psychological approaches which tend to be more rigid and structured. Environmental challenges, rather than initiating the fight/flight/freeze response (as occurs in immediate danger situations), lead to primitive defences being enlisted to ward off primitive anxiety. This response is consistent with that in our fear of death which is defended against through progressive self-denial and addictive attachments (Firestone, 1993). If our awareness of our own mortality is increased our defences that shield us from having to directly face death begin to be eroded (Greenberg et al., 2004) and we have to work harder to escape 'death anxiety'. Attempts to escape death anxiety are thought to be at the core of neurotic conflict and manifest as dysphoria or behaviours that may camouflage and act as defence to the primitive anxiety that is aroused (Yalom, 1980). In the case of climate change, Janis Dickinson, a professor of neuroscience at Cornell University, suggests that it is the subconscious associations of climate change with death that are having the greatest effect, fueling the extreme polarization of deniers and believers, and driving the wider population toward status-driven high-carbon lifestyles (Marshall, 2015). Primitive anxiety caused by environmental challenges leads to a loss of proportionate, sensible thinking and may lead to an attack on further development of our capacity to think, be empathic and altruistic (Weintrobe, 2012). This is because these capacities come from the neo-cortex, in the pre-frontal area of the brain which only evolves when we feel protected and not tyrannised by the fear of death or environmental degradation. We must therefore find ways to manage our primitive anxiety through containment. It is only when we feel contained enough that we are able to let go of our defences and bring to the task at hand our full capabilities - among them those for independent and critical thought

(Mnguni, 2010). Containment not only comes by way of relationship with other humans but from our relationship to the environment itself: from plants, land, trees, rivers, earth, creatures. These natural entities allow us to slowly relax, and be held, helping to dissipate terror and allowing power and love to emerge (Kerr & Key, 2012). I therefore consider an approach which recognises our need for containment, from a myriad of sources, and offers ways to make anxiety tolerable so that we can usefully thinking about the challenges, is crucial.

Flood defences

Another important facet to managing responses to environmental challenges is paying attention to the ways we defend against the primitive anxieties that are aroused. Primitive defences include the use of splitting (Klein, 1987), dissociation (Kohut, 1971), projective identification (Klein, 1946), denial (A. Freud, 1937), and disavowal (Freud, 1938b). Each of these mechanisms enables isolation of aspects of the self from the rest of the personality in order to contain anxiety and maintain functionality. An in depth knowledge and understanding of developmental theory and primitive defences offers knowledge and insight into the ways that the psyche defends against anxiety. These defences need to be understood - fears addressed and affect managed in order 'not to be seduced by our wish to unplug' (Borgogno & Vigna-Taglianti, 2008, p315). Rather we need to allow feelings of safety which themselves mobilise more positive action. All of this is possible through relational connection as it offers a way of integrating dissociated experience. Feelings engendered by environmental challenge can be made sense of if engaged with relationally and developmentally. This also permits less reliance on defensive manoeuvres, revealing a pathway to a more realistic view of the world.

> 'As long as … primitive psychological mechanisms continue their blurring effects on our relationship with the environment, we will be invalidated and incapable of thinking in a mature way about the challenges imposed upon us'.
>
> (Lehtonen & Valimaki, 2013, p50).

> Pervasive infantile defences are considered to be at the bottom of even the most complex social processes - processes that on the surface appear innocent and rational (Mnguni, 2010).

We all need protective defences and devices against pain (Klein, 1987). However, problems arise when we lack opportunities to go back and connect to these unconscious feelings and aspects of self that have been split off. Loss, trauma, guilt, anxiety, despair and rage all appeared in the conversations and stories people shared with Rosemary Randall (2009a) in her work in the UK to engage the public in a series of locally-based *Carbon Conversations groups*. These groups are designed to offer a safe space for individuals to engage in a way that facilitates dropping defensiveness and giving containment to feelings aroused by the conversations, seeking to avoid blame and shaming. Opportunities to make deep emotional contact with feelings can allow a way forward. As articulated by Joanna Macy in an interview (Jamail, 2017) '*you can't do it alone … dangers coming down on us now are so humongous that it is really beyond an individual mind … to take it in*'.

Relationship is key: depending on someone is not, as implied in popular psychology, pathological. Our need to connect relationally is often depreciated or even pathologized - it needs to be normalised as an essential human need for relationship, that provides a sense of stability, reliability and dependability (Erskine & Trautmann, 1996). The frustration of not having our need for intimate connection met - not only with other people but also with plant-life, landscape, and the elements - is considered to be a major factor contributing to our cultural discontent, sense of impoverishment, and drive to consume (Hall, 2012). An understanding of this is necessary in the face of today's environmental challenges. Highlighting the psychological, largely unconscious aspects of responses to coping with environmental challenges 'can be of aid' in the effort of bringing people together and 'can increase social trust in the human community, enabling it to face and respond creatively to the unwelcome signs of the changes that are already visible' (Lehtonen & Valimaki, 2013, p51).

For those working to hold back the tide of the environmental challenges - for example: climate

scientists, environmental protection officers, those working in air quality, waste and water management, flood risk and the emergency services - seeing an increase in environmental degradation day in day out has led to an increase in feelings of sadness, alienation and at times confusion and emotional burnout from facing the enormity of the impacts and the loss that this represents (Mnguni, 2010). I, and others I know in the field, can relate to these feelings. Camille Parmesan, a professor at Plymouth University, with many accolades for her work on Climate Change - including the Nobel Peace prize she shares with Al Gore - is quoted as saying that she 'doesn't know of a single scientist that's not having an emotional reaction to what is being lost' and that 'it's gotten to be so depressing' (Thomas, 2014). Such reactions of grief, anger and anxiety have collectively been given the term 'pre-traumatic stress disorder' - feelings that result from preparing for the worst, before it actually happens (Coyle & Van Susteren, 2015). The cumulative impacts of this can indirectly be - in regards to post-traumatic stress disorder - 'known and felt in the havoc wreaked on social relationships and the devastating ruin of a baseline of well-being' (Fosha, 2003, p226). Now is the time for those whose jobs force them to confront such challenges, as articulated by psychosocial researcher and consultant Renee Lertzman, 'to come forward about the emotional struggle, or at the very least, for those in mental health research and support to start exploring climate change psychology with more fervor' (Stuttaford, 2014). Psychotherapeutic dialogue is not a substitute for action, but it is the wisest path to it.

Flood management

It is not only anxiety that is felt: rage can be experienced at the decisions that precipitated the challenges. Guilt and shame can be felt at our own complicity, and sorrow as we recognised the enormity of the losses. Although 'grieving for nature is generally frowned upon and ridiculed by many, it being 'safer to inhibit one's pain and grief and dismiss them as irrational instead, lest one be considered mad' (Mnguni, 2010, p126). We are nevertheless keenly aware of our impact on the planet and grappling with grief and despair in relation to the irreversible losses that have resulted from our actions - albeit not always consciously. Kevorikan (2012) has coined the term 'environmental grief' to name the feelings experienced as we witness and deal with the news of yet one more environmental disaster or yet one more habitat lost, mostly through human interactions and expansion into areas once wild. The need to process this grief like any other is necessary as 'when we mourn, it slowly gradually clears a path that frees up our emotional energy so that it can be used to pursue new possibilities and take positive action' (Davenport, 2017, p23). Weller speaks of the third gate of grief which:

> Opens when we register the losses of the world around us … It is good manners to respond with sorrow, outrage, and apology at these places touched by so much loss … When we open ourselves and take in the sorrows of the world, letting them penetrate … we are both overwhelmed by the grief of the world and, in some strange, alchemical way, reunited with the aching, simmering body of the planet … Our suffering is mutually entangled, the one with the other, as is our healing.
>
> (Weller 2015, p55).

It is partly because we were not taught to grieve that we suppress the heartbreak elicited by such losses (LeMay, 2016). Losses need to be faced on the pathway to discovery of solutions to the environmental challenges faced (Davenport, 2017). However, without relationships with those who appreciate how painful such grief is, who support us with empathy and forgiveness, we will be unable to work through these feelings and arrive at a place of 'knowing' that we have survived. It is this 'knowing' that we survived the feelings that enables inner change (Weintrobe, 2013, p37).

I consider that in order to face losses we must first safely manage our grief and distress. Collective uncried tears can be conceived of as being like a huge weight of water, pent up behind a flood defence wall. The wall, like a dissociative barrier, protects us against overwhelming affect. It is important not to try to break down the wall, as that could cause a sudden overwhelming flood of emotion. Instead it is better to manage the flood of emotion by allowing its release a little at a time. Each releasing of emotion offers us an opportunity

to learn to 'go with the flow of emotions and how to ride the waves of grief which come and go' (Rust, 2011, p158). This is possible relationally through empathic attunement, acceptance, safety and trust, together with feelings of being in connection with another (Erskine, 1996). I consider that an integrative psychotherapeutic approach offers a framework for understanding and working with grief and sorrow as it provides relational connection and containment for such experience.

Ego-supportive life jacket

I suggest that our capacity to manage responses to environmental challenges will be based on our ability to self-soothe, to tolerate strong affect, to be alone without anxiety, and to preserve the sense of self intact (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). These ego-supportive capacities allow for less reliance on more primitive defenses as described above, and permit self-efficacy. Our ability to action these capacities will be based on how well persons in our earliest childhood environment (our caregivers) whom we experience as 'selfobjects' (Kohut, 1971) provided for our basic psychological needs of soothing, support, aggrandising, and acknowledgement (Rowe & MacIsaac, 1989).

> A selfobject represents an experience of another person as part of the self, providing for these basic psychological [selfobject] needs.
>
> (Baylis, 2006, p71).

It is theorized that if our selfobject needs were not sufficiently met in childhood then they will remain unmet resulting in us having underdeveloped ego-supportive capacities (Livingston, 2001). This will hamper our ability to manage our responses in the face of environmental threat. I therefore propose that an integrative psychotherapeutic approach which supports relational interventions that facilitate selfobject needs being met sufficiently, thereby enhancing our ego-supportive capabilities, will be of benefit. Mastery of ego-supportive capacities increases self-efficacy and as improvement begins to be experienced, we may find that our endeavors at mastery become self-reinforcing as an attitude of greater optimism is engendered (Eagle, 2000).

An integrative psychotherapeutic approach also promotes authenticity in relationship and therapeutic growth (Thorne, 1992). This approach, founded on humanistic philosophy, values the human capacity for creativity, freedom to choose, and the authenticity and uniqueness of the individual. It offers opportunity for denied awareness of the self and defended aspects of anxiety to come forward and be contained. An integrative psychotherapeutic approach can provide a relational foundation of safety, trust, compassion, and empathy, which supports improvement in self-regulation in the face of environmental threat, freeing us up to respond in creative new ways. I suggest that an approach which promotes development of inner compassion, self-soothing abilities and good contact in relationship, would enhance our internal emotional regulatory functions, laying crucial groundwork for a more cohesive and robust collective self-system in the face of environmental threat.

In my view, an approach to the environmental challenges of today also needs to include a way of working with shame. Kaufman's approach, for example, includes building an interpersonal bridge through relationship, to enable a collaborative path towards self-discovery. This involves trust, respect and care, which together provides for personal growth and behavioural change (Kaufman, 1992). By actively approaching the shame feelings that result from our complicity in the generation of the environmental challenges we face, we can openly validate these feelings, enabling awareness and working-through. Non-verbal ways of working with shame are required - such as working with sensations, images, art forms and metaphors (Mackewn, 1997). This is crucial due to the primitive nature of shame which often presents as the client 'disappearing' and becoming wordless as early unprocessed trauma is touched upon which has been held in a form of unconscious implicit non-verbal emotional memory (Erskine, 2008, Bromberg, 2006). A further aspect of Kaufman's approach includes expanding awareness of the sources of shame. With those for whom shame features strongly, additional support in working through will be needed. We each need to come to terms with our level of personal responsibility for the generation of the environmental challenges. We

need to learn how to work with shame feelings in ourselves and find ways to feel shame without it becoming internalised and further defended against. As a defence strategy against shame, rage can be used to protect the self through contempt, perfectionism, striving for power and internal withdrawal. Rage is an effective response for reconstituting a damaged sense of self as it 'can help the shamed person regain some sense of agency and control' (Tangney and Dearing, 2002, p93). However, if not managed appropriately, the ability to face environmental challenges will be thwarted. Flooded with affect we are more likely to use contempt as a defensive manoeuvre against feelings of shame: 'Contempt justifies scapegoating and other aggressions' (Birchmore, 1997, p14).

It is only through accepting all parts of ourselves - including parts which have been disowned - that we have a chance of healing the splits within. The approach therefore needs to involve consideration of Kohut's selfobject needs in relation to the planet. The need to experience ourselves as a uniquely integrated part of the world, to have a sense of belonging to the world (so that our feelings and opinions are valid), and to feel competently interdependent. All of these needs promote self-cohesion and vitality - the results of which will be a relinquishment of old shameful identities to a new sense of identity. Through facilitated self-affirmation, we are able to become the primary source of our own caring, respect and valuing of ourselves, each other and the planet. Collectively we need to identify with each other and support one another on these themes as we each tell our stories. By having a place in which to 'flood' and, at the same time in which to see and develop empathy for ourselves, we have opportunity to understand feelings and make amends. This permits movement from contempt to sadness and grief which, although threatening at first, can be the beginning of the development of further empathy for ourselves and others. It is only through relational validation that we can begin to more fully appreciate that many efforts - including self-attacking - have been safety behaviours to try to protect ourselves and regulate emotions because we have felt unsafe with others and our external and internal worlds (Gilbert & Proctor, 2006).

Despair, hope and transformation

It is important to note that 'hope can be reached only through an immersion in prolonged and harrowing despair' (Cohen, 2014, p41). Randall (2013, p93) reports that one Carbon Conversations Group member articulated that they felt they were 'in a cycle of hope and despair and action and inaction'. I am reminded of chaos theory whereby complex systems are 'creative' only when they operate right at the edge of system disintegration (Lowe, 2000). When we are able to move away from the illusory stability of neurotic defensive behaviors, and not allow ourselves to disintegrate, then we are in the space of our creative potentials (Hartman & Zimberoff, 2001). An integrative psychotherapeutic approach which creates a secure holding environment, thereby offering containment within which people can navigate their emotional experience - to the edge of disintegration - enables each of us to find a place where we can observe our experience in the face of the environmental challenges and engage in creative action. Farber (2000) argues that hope and despair are forceful companions, each encouraging and supporting the claims and strategies of the other, and that although despair means literally the loss of hope, its movements are frantically directed toward hope, both equally having the potential to destroy and renew (Cohen, 2014). Hope and despair are believed to make up a dynamic dialectic underlying all human development, directing attention and shaping consciousness (Cohen, 2014). It is therefore vital that in facing the magnitude of the challenges, that we have a space into which we can manage despair by surrendering to it, accepting it, tolerating it, and containing it - by talking about it and mutually regulating one another's despair (Cohen, 2014). It is love of the other that is key: it helps one face reality, gives robustness to sit with anxieties and despair in the face of loss, and 'gives … strength to face damage we have caused, to others and to ourselves, and leads to our wish to repair it as best we can'(Weintrobe, 2013, p35).

Farber (2000) contends that on occasion despair itself offers the ideal condition of urgency to bring about change in therapeutic situations and that, when despair is neglected, meanings go unexplored and hope can be lost. In order to move toward hope of new opportunity in

facing environmental challenges we must let down defensive barriers and come into contact with the frozen parts of ourselves that have been 'split off' in order to ward off primitive anxieties. Winnicott (1947) introduced the term 'developmental dissociation' to describe the way in which the child liberates herself from primitive anxieties. However, such liberation brings with it the problem of split or dissociated parts of the self, displaced somewhere, with which one must resume contact. Letting go of our false self (Winnicott, 1960) in order to move towards the hope of a new opportunity for a transformational shift will require surrender which 'occurs within an emotional matrix, not an intellectual one' and 'involves letting go of the false self, implicitly allowing the true self to emerge' (Cohen, 2014, p42). The need to process denied and split-off feelings is essential to mobilize us toward change. An integrative psychotherapeutic approach, which facilitates affective experience and provides a space where despair can be explored, could enable the changes that are needed. As stated by Maroda in regard to her clinical experience, 'without intense affective experiences...there is no deep and permanent change' (2002, p26); therefore there needs to be more emphasis on facilitating affective experience, and the development of responsible techniques for doing so. An integrative psychotherapeutic approach favours affective experience over cognitive understanding.

Conclusion

An integrative psychotherapeutic approach, based on a relational/developmental model, offers a lens through which to illuminate primitive responses to the environmental challenges of today. Knowledge gained from this illumination allows for effective creative strategies to be conceived for managing responses so that we can be more available for active reparation of the planet. An integrative psychotherapeutic approach supports the enablement of a pathway to connection and engagement in activity through relationship, containment, ego-supportive techniques, working with shame and despair, together with the facilitation of affective experience.

The 'full sea' on which we are 'now afloat' offers us a motivational force. If we are not to 'lose our ventures' we must use this force and look deeper inside ourselves to overcome environmental challenges. I propose that an integrative psychotherapeutic approach would help to facilitate this.

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Sarah Victor is a UKCP registered Integrative Psychotherapist and Supervisor. She works using a developmental-relational approach and has a private practice in both Sutton Coldfield and Lichfeld, in the West Midlands. She has a keen interest in early relational trauma and is a trustee of a counselling charity. She worked for the Environment Agency for 13 years and has a honours degree in environmental science.

Contact: sarah@sarahvictor.co.uk

Website: www.sarahvictor.co.uk

Andrew Jamieson

Psychotherapy with an Ageing Population: Eldership and working with the Elderly client

Abstract

This paper considers questions facing the profession as a result of the shifting demographics of our society. It explores the issues raised for the profession – both clinically and practically – around meeting the needs of an ever growing elderly population. It posits that almost all psychotherapeutic literature deals with the emotional worlds of infants, children and young and middle-aged adults, and that our theory has excluded the psychological world of the elderly. The paper therefore considers the particular needs of this client group, raising key questions about how we approach psychic defences in the older client. The relative merits of a 'neurosis management' model as opposed to a 'cure through re-traumatisation' model are considered. The issues are viewed through the lenses of Freud, Jung, Kohut and Erikson and the more recent work of George Bouklas.

Introduction

Life expectancy has been steadily increasing over the last few decades. There are now 11.8 million people aged over 65 in the UK and the population over 75 is projected to double in the next 30 years. Nearly one in five people currently in the UK will live to see their 100th birthday. Indeed certain medical commentators have asserted that living amongst us now are a small number of children who will live to 200, given the exponential growth of medical technology in the years to come, and in particular the increasing sophistication of gene manipulation. The ethical challenges of this particular development will be immense.

What are we to make of this prolonged extension to the 'threescore years and 10' that used to be our allotted span? Can we find a use, purpose and meaning in this long period of years that medical technology and optimum health will increasingly provide us with?

Eldership

Only two species of mammal have a post-reproductive life that lasts longer than their reproductive life. The first of these is the killer whale or Orca. Pods of killer whales are often led by very old whales, predominantly females, whose long experience and deep intuitive knowledge allow them to search out the rich grounds of food necessary to keep the pods well fed. The other species of mammal that has a longer post-reproductive life compared to its reproductive span is Homo sapiens.

Studies carried out by teams of researchers from Exeter & York universities have identified a cadre of 'Granny' killer whales whose lives' natural selection has slowly extended to provide an innate ability to sniff out food supplies over vast oceanic distances. 'These Granny whales appear to be particularly good at pinpointing places to hunt salmon, the main sources of food for the pods of whales that they lead' (Croft, *Observer*, 15 January, 2017).

The Exeter and York researchers in recent years followed a particular elderly female off the North-West pacific coast of Canada, whom they named Granny J2. 'Granny J2 was the 'wise elder' of that killer whale clan. She had an amazing ability to call the other whales to her by vigorously slapping her tail on the water. Even from miles away the other whales would turn around and come immediately to Granny J2's side' (ibid).

So the evolutionary purpose of the killer whale's many years of extended life so far beyond the reproductive years seems clear. What of the killer whale's human equivalent? One of the very few psychologists who has asked the question – Why does human life extend so far beyond the childrearing years? – is Carl Jung.

Jung asked himself – "What evolutionary function do the latter years fulfil?" He finds this answer in the observation of primitive tribal cultures where old people are 'the guardians of the mysteries and laws of the culture and it is in these elders that the cultural heritage of the tribe is expressed and hopefully protected.' (Jung: 1933: 126). For Jung, if a culture is to maintain its deepest, profoundest roots, while moving forward to embrace the challenges of historical and technical change, it needs to find a balance between the energy, vigour and creativity of those in the ego-driven first half of life and the experience, dignity and wisdom of those in the second half of life. The young braves or warriors of the tribe, with all their zest and vigour, ultimately obey the rules of the elders of the tribe. This equilibrium provides a culture with the necessary healthy balance between audacity and prudence, impetuosity and foresight, energy and moderation.

In *Childhood and Society,* in a chapter entitled 'The Eight Ages of Man' Erik Erikson states that the first 7 stages of life are followed by a final phase he characterises as falling between the two poles that he describes as 'Ego Integrity' and 'Despair'.

Erikson describes Ego Integrity as follows:

> Only in him who in some way has taken care of things and people and has adapted himself to the triumphs and disappointments adherent to being, only in him may gradually ripen the fruit of the seven previous stages… It is the ego's proclivity for order and meaning. It is the acceptance of ones' one and only life cycle as something that had to be and that, by necessity, permitted no substitutions… The style of this truly individual integrity forged by the development of a maturing personal culture thus becomes the *patrimony or matrimony of the soul.* In such a final consolidation death loses its sting.
>
> (Erikson: Childhood and Society 1995: 241-242).

As far as his concept of *Despair* goes, Erikson suggests that the majority are faced with a final phase of life full of fear, anxiety, unsettling feelings of things left undone, regret for relationships untended and sterile, a sense of confusion and uncertainty as to what it has all meant. Erikson describes this state of mind as

> The lack or loss of this accrued ego integration is signified by a fear of death: the one and only life cycle is not accepted as the ultimate of life. Despair expresses the feeling that the time is now too short, for the attempt to start another life and to try out alternate roads to integrity. (Erikson / 1995: 242).

Erikson's 'Ego Integrity' with its inner poise, emotional equilibrium and spiritual equanimity has a long provenance. It first appears in the writing of Aristotle and then resurfaces in the work of Aquinas, Leibniz, Spinoza, Locke and Schopenhauer. In more recent times such writers as Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow have used the terms 'organismic self' and 'self-actualization' to describe this state of mind, latent in all human beings.

Carl Jung in particular, using the term 'Individuation', places this apex of development at the very core of his model of human experience. For Jung those on the path of individuation can move towards a developmental stage that he can perhaps call 'Eldership'. But for Jung, eldership can only be forged on what he calls 'the anvil of crisis'. The rite of passage that Jung and the post-Jungians have described as the 'Midlife Transition' is more widely referred to as the midlife crisis. Jung presents this almost like some Darwinian process of natural selection. Only those

who brave the challenges and turmoil of the midlife transition successfully have what is psychologically required for eldership. These battles with our inner demons have numerous parallels in Western mythology and literature. They appear in the Old Testament stories of Jonah & Job; Christ's 40 days and nights in the wilderness; Homer's description of Odysseus's ordeals; St. John of the Cross's Dark Night of the Soul; Dante's Divine Comedy, Goethe's story of Faust and Eliot's Four Quartets.

These archetypal stories have their parallels in our clinical practice. Our clients invariably come to us in a state of crisis. Crisis always provides an opportunity for development. This is the law of 'the double bind'. (Bateson / 1987: 126) If the crisis of the Double Bind can somehow be traversed and then transcended, the state of being we call eldership might be achieved.

In recent times the benign, redemptive impact of great elders such as Gandhi, Mandela and the Dalai Lama are plain to see. Then there is the interesting case of the veteran diplomat Adlai Stevenson's contribution to the management of the Cuban Missile crisis in 1963. The world stood on the brink of nuclear catastrophe. The military hawks in Kennedy's cabinet demanded a massive military strike, but the more measured wisdom of Stevenson eventually prevailed and the probability of Global Annihilation was averted. At this critical moment in history, the nearest we have come to species extinction, a kind of Natural Selection was working. The species is saved by the intervention of a wise Elder, mitigating the testosterone, adrenalized overreaction of the warrior class.

However, as admirable as these examples are, perhaps there is a danger of inflation here. The aspiration of 'Eldership' can perhaps become a kind of ego-trip.

In his great poem, the Four Quartets, T.S. Eliot sounds a warning note about eldership. In East Coker, like some vigilant supervisor, he writes, as if to protect us against this danger of inflation –

What is the value of the long looked forward to,
Long hoped for calm, the autumnal serenity
And the wisdom of age? Had they deceived us
Or deceived themselves, the quiet voiced elders,
Bequeathing us merely a receipt for deceit?
The serenity only a deliberate hebetude,
The wisdom only the knowledge of dead secrets,
Useless in the darkness into which they peered.
The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless.

(Eliot: 1959)

T.S. Eliot's words are often elusive. But here he is, unflinchingly clear. He insists that at the centre of all wisdom stands a core of humility.

One psychotherapeutic theorist who evokes this quality of humility is Heinz Kohut. Although he doesn't use the term 'humility', everything he says regarding the developmental task and its hoped for consequences exudes a sense of 'humility'. In his classic 1966 paper 'Forms & Transformations of Narcissism' he gives an account of the varieties of 'Narcissism' and its developmental line from childhood into adulthood. He does not denounce narcissism as either obnoxious or pathological. He sees it as a necessary ladder up which we are all destined to climb, but at some optimum moment if we are to progress, this ladder must be kicked away, if wisdom, a concept he places great value on, is to be attained.

At the centre of Kohut's notion of wisdom is the paramount, essential move from Narcissism to Empathy.

Kohut sees the final task of 'narcissistic libido' as stimulating the maturation process of the personality that ends the supremacy of narcissism which is finally transformed into a mature capacity for empathy. This seems to me to be similar to Eliot's notion of humility. Empathy must surely have as its central feature humility. Kohut then postulates that with empathy comes creativity, humour and finally an acceptance of life's transience.

Kohut believes that the greatest psychological achievement is the acceptance of our mortality. This accomplishment requires that we abandon our insistence upon omnipotence and accept our impermanence. Again, to achieve this a quality, humility is required. For Kohut this acceptance of life's transience can be facilitated by 'humour'.

He suggests that this humour is the embrace of the profundity of being with a lightness of touch. Deep seriousness is leavened by a vitalising humour. When present this humour contains a sense of quiet inner satisfaction tinged with an undeniable melancholy that differs from the defensive grandiosity of the narcissistic state.

So for Kohut wisdom is the letting go of narcissistic delusions resulting in a stable attitude towards life, the world and our inevitable mortality.

The writer Mario Jacoby in his *Individuation and Narcissism* (1990) suggests that Kohut's goals of narcissistic maturation may be seen as very similar to Jung's concept of individuation.

At the centre of the practice of psychotherapy is the premise that the therapeutic experience, if successful, can result in the emergence of a mature adult, whose example will hopefully be of benefit and sustenance to all those who encounter this source of empathy, liberated from a prior narcissism.

In a world that flirts with so much ecological damage, in a world with such economic and political instability, in a world led by Donald Trump, the need for the wisdom of eldership has never been greater.

Perhaps then as therapists our job is to help people move towards this self-realization, this individuation, to help them towards becoming the potential elders that our culture so urgently needs.

Working with the Elderly Client

For those in the later stages of life who don't achieve ego integrity, Erikson believes that the outlook can be bleak. By the time they reach their 60s & 70s, most individuals have built up a potent and effective set of defences that protect them from the emotional consequences of early trauma and their resulting psychological frailties. Through an elaborate construction built with the bricks of repression, denial, projection, displacement and regression (Anna Freud: *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense:*1968) an individual will for much of his or her life avoid the vulnerabilities that inevitable early trauma will have fashioned, embedding these vulnerabilities deep in the unconscious where they can simmer out of sight. Yet repression of emotional vulnerability dents our capacity for intimacy, and the need for intimacy grows exponentially as deepening old age triggers a combination of physical frailty and neural decline.

Erikson's point is that the developmental work that is achieved at an earlier stage of adulthood lances the sedentary impact of the defences, allowing a conscious acknowledgement of these emotional frailties. These frailties can now be integrated back into an overall conscious outlook, a process that, as we know, can reduce the impact of early trauma on adult development.

Those who have done this developmental work, will not therefore be ambushed in old age by emerging fears and anxieties that eroded defenses can no longer smother. For the adult who is developmentally attuned, these fractious psychic elements are familiar members of his or her inner cast of characters. For those whose defences are only now breached, late in life, these pernicious strangers are frighteningly intimidating.

How many of us have had new clients in their fifties, sixties and seventies, who have felt a distant uneasiness come closer and then swell up alarmingly, pushing them into the once unthinkable act of visiting a psychotherapist?

A key question is posed for the psychotherapist, when working with an elderly client. How do we regard these defenses? How important is their continued presence in terms of their ongoing resilience and future effectiveness? I shall never forget the words of my tutor when during my training I was talking about a client whom I described as 'over-defended'. He reminded me "To some degree we all need our defences. Without them life would be a very raw business".

These wise words have always remained with me. My own developing view is that the degree to which we facilitate the dropping of our elderly clients' defences depends on the full context of the client's inner resources and the psychological support of their surrounding emotional assets.

The significance of therapeutically facilitated 're-traumatisation' has been comprehensively laid out by Stolorow and Atwood in their *Contexts of Being* (1992: Chpt 4). But in the cases they discuss there is a presumption that the clients concerned are in their middle years with plenty of time and a range of psychological resources to redeem and restore the damage done to the full personality by their unconscious defensive strategies.

But what about the elderly client - less emotionally robust, less psychologically agile, and less well equipped to weather the storms and turmoil of re-traumatisation? How well will a 75 year old client fare when faced with the full terror of once dormant, but now stirring 'primitive agonies' of infantile trauma (Winnicott:1986a). Would not some form of 'neurosis management' or 'defence refurbishment' be a gentler, less draconian strategy? Does a 75 year old need to face forgotten childhood trauma with all its consequent upheavals in the last years of life?

This perhaps is asking one of the central, most contentious questions of our profession. Should psychotherapy be the gentler management of incurable neuroses avoiding the possibility of 're-traumatisation' or is it the inevitable quest towards 'cure' and the final healing of early trauma, through some re-experience and return to these forgotten emotional crises?

Of course the answer to this central question is *contextual*. Both approaches have their merit and application, depending on the temperament and overall emotional environment of the client. Inevitably the therapist will lean towards either the 'neurosis management' model or the 'cure through re-traumatisation' model. Yet this preference of the therapist should be laid to one side as the choice of approach should be ideally facilitated by the emerging guidance that arises from a client's unconscious.

The elderly client is more likely than younger clients to be dealing with issues of loneliness, more likely to be confronted with major health issues, more likely to be suffering from bereavement because of the loss of partners or close friends. He or she will not have the distraction of a busy professional life. Questions of meaning and purpose may be particularly troublesome. "Now that I have no job, now that my children don't need me, now that I myself need more support what is my purpose, what is my role, why am I here, what is the meaning of my life?" These questions become harder to answer in the last stages of life. Then of course there is the proximity of death hovering nearby.

With all these challenges the elderly patient is far less likely to withstand the rigours of going back to earlier emotional trauma. On the other hand the ameliorating presence of a kind, unchallenging, non-judgemental psychotherapist, with our repertoire of empathy, unconditional positive regard and attuned responsiveness may be of immense benefit. The psychotherapist becomes the 'soother' rather than the 'challenger', nursing and managing neurotic eruptions. He will also help shore up and amplify dented defences which will help the overall psychological comfort of these last years.

Yet there will be those elderly clients that see these last years as the final opportunity to put their inner life in order, to finally deal with issues and anxieties that they wish at last to resolve. They may wish to explore why certain relationships have failed or stagnated in the hope that some kind of final reconciliation might be achieved. For this group of elderly clients the task of going back to earliest childhood, with all its perturbations, may be a challenge they are prepared to consider, once the therapeutic alliance has been firmly established.

There are plenty of cases where elderly clients have used the support of a successful therapeutic relationship to explore and grapple with the tribulations of their past, where they can make fundamental changes to their approach to life and then redeem themselves and certain blighted key relationships. Such tasks can fill these last years with a tremendous sense of existential meaning and purpose.

Every aspect of our culture is having to embrace and adapt to momentous changes due to the shifting demographics of our society. Most of us will live a far longer life than our grandparents. Our notions of work and retirement will have to change. Health care provision will have to alter radically in response to the population explosion of the third age. Few aspects of

society and culture will escape the immense challenges that mass longevity will pose.

We, as psychotherapists, will have to change our horizons. Almost all psychotherapeutic literature deals with the emotional worlds of infants, children and young and middle-aged adults. Our theory has woefully excluded the psychological world of the elderly. Freud pronounced that anyone over the age of 50 was unsuitable for analysis. (Freud 1924: 258) He insisted that at this stage in life our capacity for emotional change was negligible, due to a kind of psychological ossification that he felt set in at some point in the middle years.

How wrong Freud was. We, this generation of psychotherapists, have a new challenge in front of us – to develop theories and opportunities for the elderly so they may also benefit from the blessings of psychotherapy. Within the elderly population lies much potential suffering. We have it in our power to tend and relieve this wretchedness, named by Erikson as *despair.*

Literature search

In my exploration into the limited literature regarding working with elderly clients, I have found a dearth of material written and published in England. From a UK source I would recommend Paul Terry's *Counselling and Psychotherapy with Older People* (2008) and Joy Schaverien's *The Dying Patient in Psychotherapy* (2002).

On the other hand, once my attention turned to American sources, my Amazon account secured half a dozen interesting books on the subject. Two particular books stood out. The first of these is *Psychotherapy of the Elderly Self* by Hyman Muslin, a keen advocate of Kohut. His book is a comprehensive primer of treatment advice for working with elderly clients.

However my major discovery was George Bouklas' book entitled *Psychotherapy with the Elderly: Becoming Methuselah's Echo*. This book, published in 1997, is, in my view, little short of a masterpiece. He has achieved an admirable clarity and yet has an expressive style which is a pleasure to read. The concepts and advice he provides offer a set of penetrating insights.

Because of this, I would now like to focus my attention on George Bouklas' thoughts.

In his introduction he writes:

> This book is about elderly people who have lost the path of self-development at some point in their lives, or who seem never to have found it. If there is one common feature capturing the essence of the group I've treated, it is that very few have lived a life of contemplation or self-examination. These people are fragmented, even shattered in their old age. When a patient comes to us after 7 or 8 decades of neglecting his integration needs, the task of therapy seems daunting.

With these thoughts in mind I shall now consider five of George Bouklas' key concepts:

Concept 1: The dangers of Therapeutic Ambition

His first and crucial guideline is to become aware of our therapeutic ambition. As soon as we want for the patient more than he wants for himself, we are setting the stage for patient resistances created by our own needs. If we feel pressured to conjure up quick results we will not succeed. George was treating an 89-year old woman for severe depression. She reluctantly agreed to see him but told him in the first session that she had no interest in talking. She also said that if George talked or expected her to talk she would leave. After a dozen silent sessions she asked George about her progress. He told her she was doing fine. She shook her head in disbelief and continued to sit silently and stoically through the next month.

After 5 weeks of silence she finally spoke and asked "I want your real opinion. How do you think I'm doing in this therapy?" George repeated that she was doing fine. "How can I be doing fine when I sit here and don't say a word, meeting after meeting?" George then asked her what he was doing wrong if she felt she was not doing enough in the therapy?

This exchange seemed to significantly relax her. There was much more eye contact, exchange of smiles, although still no verbal interchange. She appeared not to want dialogue. She just

seemed to want to sit quietly with George. His simple presence seemed to soothe her.

After 3 months she started a session by saying "I am only going to give you 2 more months to cure me and then I'm out". George responded by asking her where she got the idea that he wanted to cure her? Her jaw dropped. "What do you mean? You're not interested in curing me?" George asked her if that was what she wanted. "Of course I want to be cured!" she replied. "Why do you think I have sat here with you week after week? Because you're a fine conversationalist?"

Suddenly after 3 months, a dialogue began and together they explored the idea of a cure, what she wanted and how she saw George effecting a cure. Over the next few months she developed tender feelings for George and he for her. Her yearning for intimate contact had been reawakened and the healing process, until now unconscious, began to consciously develop. (Bouklas 1997: 12-15)

Concept 2: The Theory of Resonation

George repeatedly deploys what he calls 'Resonation'. He sees it as a step beyond empathy. Empathy with an added power of identification. He writes, "When we can be like the patient, the patient can be like us. For as we are resonating with the patient, he is resonating with us. By resonating with elements of the patient's damaged psychic make-up, the patient experiences an embrace of a part of himself that had been hated by himself and others, and the patient feels a kind of success". So by this mode of Resonation George believes that the client finds himself or herself in the therapist and their adaptive powers are increased. This quality of resonation is particularly important when dealing with clients close to death. (Bouklas 1997: 73-75)

In a nursing home where George worked there was a patient close to the end of his life. This patient's terror at the prospect of death was extreme. George writes of his encounter with this patient:

> He stared at me. Hope was aroused in him and he reached out to me. His face was frozen in a grimace. I let the feeling of his suffocating both of us overtake me and I met his stare. "I will let you take me with you", I thought. I gave him both my hands. In my gaze I let him know I would not frustrate him. He had fallen through a gate into the oceanic and I would fall too. Until that point he was pleading "Die with me!" When I answered, "I will experience dying with you", he became something new. His eyes softened. He was no longer death personified but a hungry infant. He gripped me firmly and I leant into him, letting him pull me in, letting him fuse with me. "Stay" he ordered. "I'll stay", I told him. "Stay" he moaned. "I'll stay with you. As long as you want." I allowed my own feelings to well up and allowed this fusing to take me over. I let him pour over me, climb into me, get me to surround him, use me to strengthen him.' (Bouklas 1997: 80-81).

This, for George, demonstrates the power of Resonation. In this way George substantially eased this man's terror at the prospect of his death. This seems to me to be psychotherapy of a very high order.

Concept 3: Eros v. Thanatos – the Therapist's acceptance of the concept of his own future Nothingness

George warns that old age almost always comes as a surprise. Illness is not so much a progressive breakdown of the time bound body as it is an *ambush*. George has observed that most people face the end of their life with a kind of naivety. The vast majority have *not* got to the point in their development where they can process the prospect of their death and the experience of dying. Most erect a seemingly un-scalable defence against it.

When the inevitable confrontation of the reality of death with the client's defences takes place, the therapist will find it a great challenge to resonate with the experience of dying. This is because of the therapist's innate desire to preserve his or her own sense of ego. George warns that the therapist will, like everyone else, grab at the ego as you would at a lifebelt when faced with the immensity of an open ocean. This is the inevitable tension between Eros and Thanatos, the Life Instinct versus the Death Instinct. But somehow the therapist has

to find a way of bridging this elemental force between Eros and Thanatos. With the guidance of a supervisor or therapist who has negotiated this psychic space, the fear and anxiety set up by the clash of Eros versus Thanatos loses its commanding presence. The immutable becomes protean. The unchangeable becomes pliant. Eros and Thanatos no longer stand in belligerent opposition, and they can become integrated into one whole. We come to understand that only life and death together can fulfil the wholeness of our being. This, for George, lies at the very centre of our work with the elderly, an acquaintance with and an acceptance of our own death, of our own pending nothingness.

As George insists, 'the true acceptance of embracing our soon to be experienced death is our closest friend. If it is not embraced and cherished, it is our worst enemy, to be feared.' (Bouklas 1997: 84-86). So for George the psychotherapist who has accepted the concept of his own future nothingness gives up the ego as a lifebelt and can now resonate with old or dying clients more effectively.

Concept 4 – Entropy

George states: 'Our challenge as therapists is to become more conscious of the action of entropy in every-day life. From now on let us make it the prime focus of contemplation in our middle age and beyond'.

The principle of entropy usually refers to the idea that everything in the universe eventually moves from order to disorder, and entropy is the measurement of that change. Entropy is therefore a lack of order or predictability, or an inevitable decline into disorder.

Entropy as a psychological principle found its way into Freud's theories after World War One. Up to that point he identified *Eros* and *Self-preservation* as our two basic instincts. But the mass carnage of World War One made Freud think again and in 1920 he published *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In this crucial work he introduced 'The Death Instinct'. For Freud the ultimate aim of Thanatos is to achieve the state that prevailed before life itself – the state of inanimacy or nothingness. Freud believed that this internal destroyer of life is always with us as part of our make-up, matched by the opposing Life Force Eros. Freud felt we can only survive our drive towards death by externalising the death instinct which produces an urge to destroy other beings or other suitable objects. This, for Freud, explained the irrational, brutal horror of the First World War.

Freud's death instinct is often seen today by psychotherapists as a historical anachronism, but in disregarding it we may be throwing out too much. By giving credence to the death instinct, we can gain a perspective on our own death, on species extinction, even on planetary destruction, seeing it as a natural rather than a horrific event. This is the law of entropy. Life surges up, death dissipates the surge, moment by moment. If we don't accept this principle there will be a whole side of our being that will have gone unrecognised, and suddenly as we near our end it will come crashing down upon us. The unpalatable fact of our dying will provoke defences that rob us of any gratification during our last years. As George says 'our role (as psychotherapists) is to embrace the resistance as it presents in the treatment relationship, in order to encourage the personal growth that will allow the patient access to fuller being. There is no educating people about the equal experiences of living and dying.' (Bouklas 1997:120)

George had a client called Harold who was increasingly anxious by the prospect of his own death. He cried at the sight of his aged, wrinkled face. What he sought to escape, George very slowly embraced, introducing the effect of entropy in subtle references to his own inevitable decline. George managed, by this means, to convey that he was growing old and moving towards death with Harold. After a time Harold began to take an interest in George's life and how he conducted it. He told George he'd never met such a calm and happy man. Soon Harold's mortal fears began to fade. It was as if the admiration Harold had for George's response to his entropic decline was a quality he could now find increasingly in himself. (Bouklas 1997: chapter 6)

Concept 5 – Methuselah as Narcissus: The move from Narcissism to Empathy and the Numinous

George states that each of his elderly clients brings to his or her therapy a necessary uniqueness. However, there are certain states of mind shared by most of these clients. He writes:

> In most cases elderly clients are not fully conscious of the meaning of their advanced age. They've experienced much over the years, but they cling to a perception of self at the early chapters of young adulthood. … The client sees his present life as a wicked assault of disease and deterioration on a basically healthy person in his mid-twenties. … In his mid-twenties he was able to escape the pain and suffering of his youth and he's going to hold on to that self forever, if he can. Methuselah is Narcissus in old age.
>
> (Bouklas 1997: 321)

George maintains that the elderly client is all too often unable to engage with the great issues of this last stage of life because the client has not addressed his or her spiritual needs sufficiently and does not find comfort in any guiding cosmology. As a result, he or she cannot review their lives and come to the conclusion that he or she has been given this precious gift of a full lifespan of consciousness.

So with the therapist in these last years clients have the chance to discover the sacred in themselves and their surroundings, to encounter the numinous (Otto: 1958), to grasp a consoling spirituality and to discover the depth of his or her soulfulness.

If the client has a religion or a spiritual practice this will be of benefit but if, as is likely, he or she has not led a contemplative life, the client will be unable to begin to contemplate along with a therapist. If this proves problematic, the therapist can explore with the client the resistance to contemplation, to help him or her access this new focus of being.

George writes:

> Methuselah did not contemplate. He did not go where the Buddha went. He feels his entropy as aggressive and destructive…yet his entropy is begging to be addressed in some way that will integrate rather than further fragment him (Bouklas 1997: 325)

Perhaps what George is hoping for is a sudden Kohutian move through Narcissistic Maturation into Empathy with the therapist and then onto an experience of Kohutian Wisdom, with its acceptance of Life's Transience?

Or using a Jungian model: with the time now so short, the Psyche pushes fiercely to deliver a sudden pulse of Individuation and '*the puer eternis*' becomes the '*senex*', with his or her grasp of the numinous and with it, an understanding of the extraordinary gift of seventy or eighty years of consciousness, that the cosmos has bequeathed.

This gathering sense of the feeling that these years have been a miraculous gift, now eases the sting of impending death. Perhaps now terror can be replaced by a sense of acceptance, gratitude and even celebration.

This description of five of George Bouklas' key concepts, when working with the elderly, is only a cursory glance at this writer's great work. I would urge anyone wishing to develop their insights into working with elderly clients to get this book.

Conclusion

When considering these issues for this paper, I wondered whether the whole exercise would be a dispiriting and demoralising process, particularly from the perspective of my 66 years. In fact the opposite has been the case. As a general rule I've found that life becomes noticeably more interesting and gratifying when I am faced with a challenge that takes me out of my immediate comfort zone, but is not too overwhelming. This kind of challenge gives me an extra shot of meaning - and for me the pursuit of meaning is one of the primary goals of psychotherapy. Perhaps this has been my own particular fear about old age – that the challenges of life will dry up and with it my life's meaning. My fear is that without meaning, all I shall be left with in old age is a long, arid wait for death.

How reassuring then to come across Kohut's statement in his 1966 paper *Forms and transformations of Narcissism:*

> Man's capacity to acknowledge the finiteness of his existence and to act in accordance with this painful discovery may well be his greatest psychological achievement.
>
> (Kohut 1966)

> Jung's proposition is equally reassuring: A human being would certainly not grow to be 70 or 80 if this longevity had no meaning for him or the species. The afternoon and evening of human life must also have a significance of its own and cannot be merely a pitiful appendage to life's morning. To find this meaning is the purpose of old age.
>
> (Jung 1960: 787)

Kohut and Jung are looking for a new state of mind that they feel individuals can achieve in the later stages of life. As Jung reminds us 'The serious problems in life are never fully solved. The meaning and purpose of a problem seem to lie not in its solution but in our working at it incessantly'. (Jung 1960: 771) What Jung is perhaps suggesting is that human beings don't solve problems but merely grow out of them. Through long consideration and by a process of unconscious osmosis the fierceness of an anxiety or fear is finally laid down. Possibly this process of shedding or letting go of our fear of death is the best we can hope for. Can we surrender, can we accept this most natural of processes?

Perhaps it is the final appearance of our infantile fear of abandonment, one last opportunity to lay this fear to rest. There stands old age, a stark condition of simplicity, shorn of life's previous responsibilities that gave us our identity. In all the acres of time we have in our later years, can we enter that space and say "I am nothing yet I am content in my nothingness. Can I find that I am everything within this nothing?"

In his 1904 paper *On Psychotherapy* Freud wrote:

> The age of patients is important in determining their fitness for psycho-analytic treatment. On one hand the elasticity of the mental processes on which the treatment depends, is as a rule lacking near or above the age of 50. Old people are no longer educable. The mass of material to be dealt with would prolong the duration of the treatment indefinitely. (Freud 1984: 258)

I think Freud was profoundly wrong. My experience of working with a handful of clients between the ages of 60 – 75 has convinced me this older client group are often ideally suited to the psychotherapeutic experience. They have the necessary introversion, the reflective capacity and the strong desire to understand issues and relationships that their unconscious belatedly wishes to resolve.

We must therefore find ways to encourage this group of individuals to see their last years as a great final adventure with its mix of challenges and satisfactions, its long vistas of memory and its spiritual opportunities. There is the possibility of a tremendous potential harvest to bring in at this stage of life. We as a profession, must fashion the tools that are suited to take this critical and important endeavour forward.

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Andrew Jamieson BSc., MA is a UKCP registered psychotherapist, lecturer and workshop leader. After a long Jungian

analysis he trained at the Bath Centre for Psychotherapy and Counselling and undertook and received an MA in Humanistic and Integrative psychotherapy at Middlesex University. Alongside his private practice he organises and facilitates quarterly Jungian workshops at the Littledown Farm Jungian Centre in Bath and lectures and writes articles on subjects ranging from Eldership to psychotherapy's interconnection with philosophy, music and literature. Contact details andrewwjamieson@hotmail.com

Sue Wright

Our Quest for Meaning and the Age of Meaninglessness

Abstract

As human beings we have always been driven to make meaning of our experiences and to find meaning and purpose in our lives. This paper explores the context in which we live today and in which our work as therapists is embedded – a world of extreme technological and social change, globalisation, decontextualisation and the fragmentation of social bonds and erosion of structures of meaning that supported us in the past. Citing writers from the fields of psychotherapy, neuroscience, history, theology and sociology, the paper considers the impact of this context on our sense of identity and our capacity for hope, vitality and joy. It also considers some of the ways that society and individuals manage emptiness and meaninglessness. The paper ends by posing the question how we can face existential meaninglessness yet still have *the courage to be*, emphasising the importance of fostering connection with ourselves and others.

"I don't see any meaning in it"..… "What are we here for?"… "Life has no meaning anymore"….. "But what am I trying to get better for?"

We often hear cries like this in our consulting rooms. We may even have uttered them ourselves. Sometimes an event precipitates a crisis of meaninglessness – a tragic death which leaves the survivor bereft of purpose – "I don't want to keep going without him"; or discovering something about a loved one which shatters the platform of beliefs that underpinned the person's world; or the collapse of a business or project to which they had devoted themselves for years. We also see people whose lives are persistently coloured by a sense of anguished ennui. I think of the many artists, poets and writers whose work emerges out of states of meaninglessness – the twentieth century existentialists in particular, but a characteristic that crosses centuries. In our own professional world, as in other helping professions, repeated encounters with human suffering can also call into question previous structures of meaning1. At the end of a difficult week, particularly one in which the backdrop is news of yet more horrific disasters somewhere in the world, I can't be alone now and then in asking, "Why am I doing this?" and "Does it make any difference?"

This article is part of a larger endeavour to reflect on the world I inhabit from the perspectives of both a psychotherapist and a historian, and more specifically here of one who can both observe and sometimes experience states of meaninglessness. Psychotherapy has embraced a far more *contextual turn* over the last thirty years, ushered in with people like Winnicott and Bowlby who emphasised the interpersonal environment, and expanded in narrative and feminist therapies which highlight the political and cultural stories which construct our family and individual narratives.

1. In Woodcock's survey of therapists working with extreme trauma all the therapists interviewed experienced low mood, sadness, anger and anxiety (2014).

More recently the therapeutic community has embraced a *transgenerational turn*, a sensitivity to the influence of histories predating our own and those of our parents. There is also far more stress on our relationship with our natural environment as illustrated in the work and writings of the ecopsychology movement. The last and hugely important contextual development to mention is the *relational turn* which has called us to spotlight our own context as much as that of our clients. As Kirkland Vaughans argued, 'what the clinician needs is not *cultural competence* in the patient's cultural background but an awareness of the assumptions underlying his own'. We need to 'reach beyond the immediate social milieu of our patients' and 'come to understand the present as well as the particular historical context from which both the analyst and the patient have come through' (2017, pp. 83, 84).

The historical context I want to explore is what the twentieth century theologian and existential philosopher Paul Tillich called the *age of meaninglessness* (1952, p. 47)[2]. Tillich was speaking about an absence of meaningful purpose in life. But the word *meaning* has two interpretations, and in what follows I invite you to also hold in mind the idea of sense-making, because when people slip into states of meaninglessness they are often struggling with both a lack of purpose and the impossibility of making sense of their situation now and in the past.

Living in a Decontextualised World[3].

We live in an age when increasing mobility has led to a permanently changing population and the extreme pace of change has fragmented social bonds. Along with this we have lost our sense of place and this, argued McGilchrist, 'threatens identity, whether personal or cultural over time' (2009, p. 390). It is a loss of a place 'not just where we are born and will die, but where our forefathers did, and our children's children will' and a disruption of continuities of time as 'the traditions that embody them are disrupted or discarded'. We risk erasing the past and what it means to us. In consequence the sense of belonging to a community and connectedness to others, which we know is fundamentally important for us as creatures dependent on attachments for survival, weakens radically (2009, p. 391).

To place this in a bigger context, from the seventeenth century onwards the rich symbols linking man's life cycle to heavenly cycles and highlighting the natural order of the universe, the planets and the gods were stripped away as scientific discoveries challenged longstanding beliefs and religion gave way to secularism. In the West the traditional calendar of religious and secular events that bound communities together and symbolised the social order, but also mediated differences of power, wealth, age and gender, was also steadily discarded. The festivities that survived were watered down and emptied of former meanings. The advance of capitalism played a part in this collapse of meaning. The rise of industrial, urbanised societies dislocated people even more from their traditional contexts and close-knit social networks.

Coming to the present era, the Digital Revolution has intensified the process of decontextualisation. Computers have speeded up processes to a staggering extent. Information can be processed in nanoseconds. 'Duration has been compressed to zero', and because we can now exchange and respond to information anywhere almost instantaneously and because

2. It should be stated that my own context and that of most of the writers cited is of living in the affluent west – white and middle class - and also a member of an increasingly global, multi-cultural world. People from different racial, religious and social backgrounds may have very different views about the existential anxieties of this age.
3. I am using the term decontextualisation here to capture how in the modern world the trend is for things to be separated from their natural, traditional and relational contexts, contexts which used to offer support. It speaks of fragmentation and a severing of ties and of abstract, impersonal structures around us rather than ones that individualise and connect. I have drawn on Giddens' use of the term in his study of modernisation and globalisation, but more broadly to capture fundamental psychological and interpersonal changes. In particular it is a concept that speaks of fragmentation and a severing of ties and of abstract, impersonal social structures rather than ones that individualise and connect.

the media is constantly intruding distant events into everyday consciousness, time and space have become separated and emptied yet further of meanings (Karsten, 2017, p. 325; Giddens, 1991, pp. 2, 5, 16). In consequence social relations, which in pre-modern times were essentially linked through place, have become *disembedded* (Giddens, 1991, p. 16). The new discourse in the twenty-first century is of *timeless time* and, as Giddens warned, ultimately this disruption of space and time destroys individual identity and creates a fragmented world of decontextualisation where things are separated from their context and people from the uniqueness of place (McGilchrist, 2009, p. 390).

Notwithstanding the advantages of modern technology, these trends have their costs. As Susan Greenfield pointed out, twenty-first century technologies are altering our lives in staggeringly fast and revolutionary ways. They are 'challenging the most basic compartments by which we have made sense of our environment and lived as individuals within it' (2008, p.12). As a neuroscientist she is particularly interested in how information, nano- and bio-technologies are blurring boundaries between the cyber and the real world and the body and outside. The boundaries which define the different temporal spaces within which we live and interact, such as those between night and day and the different seasons, have also become very blurred. As a result we are becoming increasingly disconnected from nature's rhythms and ever more decontextualised and estranged from the natural world around us, other people and our bodies. We also face the progressive loss of the *occasions* that used to punctuate life, mark transitions and hold important cultural and individual meanings. Lastly in our pursuit of immediacy we are losing touch with our embeddedness within the context of past, present and future, and I believe that all these trends are contributing to the age of meaninglessness.

The Loss of Structures of Meaning

There is a link between social decontextualisation because of scientific, technological, economic and religious developments and an inner severing of context, whether as a result of high-stimulus *now* experiences, dissociation or a neurological condition. The link is the loss of meaning and of structures that bind us. In Tillich's view anxiety about emptiness and the loss of meaning is one of three types of existential anxiety, the other two being of fate and death, or in other words of non-being, and of guilt and condemnation. Although all three can be present simultaneously, Tillich argued that each typified a period of history and were thought of and dealt with according to the narratives in which people understood their existence at the time.

The anxiety about fate and death typified the ancient world - a fear 'that our story is already written and we are merely passive players' (Inge, 2014, p. 183). It is about knowing the contingency of our temporal and spatial being, that of an individual existing in a specific time and a specific place and no other (Tillich, 1952, p. 44). The Middle Ages represent the age of judgement when man's predominant fear was that his actions and intentions were never good enough to appease a wrathful God. To deal with this and avoid hell and damnation people were preoccupied with saving their souls by doing good works, going on pilgrimages and paying for masses to be sung on their behalf. In the *age of meaninglessness* Tillich argued that our deepest anxiety is of emptiness, of the 'loss of a meaning which gives meaning to all other meanings' (ibid, 1952, p. 47). It is a state of doubt, despair, isolation and estrangement. This *spiritual* anxiety emerges when people lose touch with former spiritual beliefs or with traditions or activities that give meaning to everyday life. When structures of meaning are in place in society - structures that convey a sense of place and of continuity with past and future generations - individuals have a way of dealing with and overcoming their anxiety. They can participate in the institutions and ways of life of their culture. In periods of great change when systems of meaning disintegrate and there are conflicts between the old and the new, this method of assuaging anxiety is no longer adequate (ibid, 1952, p. 62).

Tillich's ideas about meaninglessness remind me of another mid-twentieth century writer Victor Frankl, who famously said 'man is ready and willing to shoulder any suffering as soon and as long as he can see a meaning in

it' (1959, p. 117). Having what I have termed an *ethic of meaning* (Wright, 2016, p. 194) was what enabled him to survive the unspeakable horrors of life in Auschwitz. He was keenly aware of the dire consequences for anyone who lost meaning and purpose and argued that,

> We needed to stop asking the meaning of life, and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned by life – daily and hourly. Our answer must consist, not in talk and meditation, but in right action and in right conduct. Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its questions and to fulfil the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual.
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> (Frankl, 1959, p. 85).

Frankl believed that man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life and commented on the *existential frustration* when our will to meaning is frustrated. In his psychiatric practice he heard many people complaining of a loss of purpose, people who 'have enough to live by but nothing to live for' and were 'haunted by the experience of inner emptiness, a void within themselves' (ibid, 1959, p. 142).

Tillich and Frankl are certainly not alone in raising questions about the meaning of existence and arguing that the erosion of old traditions which helped to bind people together and buttressed their behaviour has created an existential vacuum (Frankl, 1959, p. 142). Industrialisation and the collapse of the supportive networks of extended families and local communities in the wake of increased mobility have created a world in which nothing can be taken for granted. But are we still in an age of meaninglessness, or responding to it as the descendants of those who lived in such an age? Put another way, should this be seen as a state of mind - cultural and individual, specific to the post war and Cold War era, or linked with and intensifying in a decontextualised world?

It is understood that repeated trauma and loss can lead to a loss of sustaining beliefs and erode people's sense of meaning, purpose and hope (Herman, 1994, p. 121), and this was certainly the context in which Tillich and Frankl were writing. But the traumas of that age have not gone away. They still haunt the minds of survivors who are still alive and, through transgenerational transmission, the bodies of their children and grandchildren. Moreover trauma seems endemic in our society. For instance the Adverse Childhood Experiences survey revealed that of over 17,000 Americans questioned, 25% had experienced physical abuse, 28% of the women and 16% of the men some form of sexual abuse and 12% had witnessed domestic violence (Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 145). Even if we have not endured a traumatic event, we are brought face to face with horror through the media on a daily basis. We all face the awareness of tremendous forces of destruction – nature, climate change, industrial catastrophes and the brutality of mankind itself, and know that our loved ones, homes and possessions can be swiped away at a stroke. Our lives are fragile. Because of tremendous leaps in scientific knowledge we also have to face our insignificance as individuals, as a planet, even as a galaxy, in the context of *deep time* (Sacks, 1997, p. 258) - a universe that is billions of years old with millions of galaxies at vast distances from our own. And knowing of these things can evoke feelings of impotence and hopelessness.

Trauma survivors often speak of a state of despair and meaninglessness 'as they perceive a random and chaotic world, where nothing is predictable or safe' (Van der Hart et al., 1993, p. 23). But it could be argued that life in a world of relative affluence without too much stress and hardship can also sever us from meaning and lead to states of hopelessness. It is so easy these days for most of us to access food when and how we want it. We don't need to labour hard in the fields in order to grow the crops we need for our food. We don't have to know how to bake bread, or make pastry or skin and bone a fish before cooking it because we can buy ready-prepared meals to quickly assuage our hunger. Nor do we participate in any of the stages from rearing sheep, to spinning and weaving yarn, and knitting or sewing clothes. So the meaning behind these activities is lost and with it an ownership of the means of production and the feeling of satisfaction when we can enjoy the fruits of our labours. So divorced are we becoming from the processes of creation that we lose touch with the value of objects, and perhaps with ourselves as creative agents. And when we don't value things it's easy

to discard them – to chuck litter onto the street, bin excess food and abandon relationships as soon as something goes a bit wrong. "So what?" becomes a common attitude. The risk then is that we neglect and discard our rootedness in and belonging to the planet.

In the age of *affluenza*, of *homo consumens* and *homo accelerands* we are increasingly divorced from spiritual, communal and natural connections (James, 2014; Fromm, 1981; Karsten, 1917, p. 358). We feel less rooted to the earth and are losing *relational meanings* - the ties that bind us and foster social engagement and attachment. It is interesting that in the 1950s Frankl was already voicing concern about people who 'had enough to live by yet nothing to live for' (referenced earlier) and he observed how many experienced this *existential vacuum* as a state of boredom and dealt with it by seeking power or immediate pleasure, such as taking drugs to fill the void (Frankl, 1959, pp. 142, 111). Erich Fromm described this as a *consumptive frenzy* behind which lies an inner vacuity (Fromm, 1981). More recently Gabor Maté wrote about our increasingly addiction-prone society and argued that:

> many of us resemble the drug addict in our ineffectual efforts to fill in the spiritual black hole, the void at the centre, where we have lost touch with our souls, our spirit, with those sources of meaning and value that are not contingent and fleeting. Our consumerist, acquisition-, action- and image-mad culture only serves to deepen the hole, leaving us emptier than before…..the constant, intrusive and meaningless mind-whirl that characterizes the way so many of us experience our silent moments is, itself, a form of addiction – and it serves the same purpose
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> (Maté 2008, p. 259).

In similar vein McGilchrist commented that our high-stimulus society is a response to boredom and that we are caught in 'a vicious cycle between feelings of boredom, emptiness and restlessness, on the one hand, and gross stimulation and sensationalism on the other' (2009, p. 400). We anaesthetise ourselves with our behavioural or substance addictions and this helps to deal with stress and loneliness. We fill ourselves with something in order not to feel or reflect, and our consumer culture intensifies these patterns.

In a fascinating book on identity, contemporary society and the brain the neuroscientist Susan Greenfield argued that the balance this century is shifting in favour of having *easy fun*, meaning *letting ourselves go* and abandoning ourselves to the thrill of raw, immediate, strong, sensory experiences. Life can be lived in virtual and sensational ways, but can it be truly lived? Greenfield then played with some possible future scenarios. One is if we continue to spend so much time on screens and become increasingly hooked on the sensory-laden raw feelings generated by playing computer games or hedonistic pursuits. If dependent on activities that prioritise the action itself rather than its significance or outcomes, she suggested we could end up with 'yuk-wow' mentalities 'characterised by a premium on raw senses and momentary experience, as the chemical landscape of the brain is transformed into one where personalised brain connectivity is far less operational' (2008, pp. 201, 208). Our brains would be maximally receptive to incoming stimuli but with relatively less neuronal networking to assign any meaning. The emphasis would be more on sensation than cognition. We might thrive on fact-fielding activities, but be less equipped than our predecessors to place isolated events in a context. 'In short life would be more comfortable and more fun, but have less meaning' (ibid, 2008, pp. 279-80).

Given that we are meaning-seeking beings what impact might that have on our identity? Our being-in-the-world? Our relationships? Greenfield's argument is that the thrill of attaining an immediate and unambiguous goal can obliterate that 'valuable narrative of personal identity and with it the type of thinking that has a content, a real meaning'. Moreover, if current trends continue, we could end up witnessing the breakdown of 'the traditional compartments of life, and bringing with it a life that's relatively unchanging from one day to the next, a life lived out of the context of a sequential narrative: nothing less than the demise of a life story' (ibid, 2008, p. 281). This scenario evokes in me a sense of horror because having a life story, a sequential personalised narrative, is essential to our sense of self. We

are shaped by our memories. They provide a backbone to our existence. In the same way, the societies we live in are as much their history as their present, and a denial of tradition impoverishes both the present and the future.

Returning to Tillich's thesis on existential anxiety, in the ages of fate and judgement belief systems and the myths and stories associated with them helped people to make sense of disasters and loss. In the age of fate men made sense of forces beyond their control by referring to fate and recurrent cycles. They believed in an inherent logic to their world and its dramas. In the Middle Ages, in Judeo-Christian societies at least, man's relationship to his environment was thought of in terms of a complex symbolism reflecting the divine order of things, and the life of the individual as a linear journey towards judgement and eternal life. External events were frequently ascribed to the hand of God. But in this increasingly secular age we lack belief systems to buttress us and provide consoling answers to our existential questions. We have also lost touch with the communal rites of passage that supported people through major life transitions in earlier societies. Denise Inge argued that because we have lost 'a narrative of meaning, which for countless people over many generations was rooted in an overarching story of faith', instead of understanding ourselves and the transitions of our lives in terms of what holds them and us together increasingly

> …we understand ourselves and our transitions in terms of collapse….we understand the parameters of a marriage at its divorce rather than at its duration, and death as a finality rather than a gateway. Whereas a medieval worldview understood life by how it held together, we who have dissected the tadpole and the atom understand our world by how much it falls apart.
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> (Inge, 2014, pp. 171, 172).

The other salient feature of these older belief systems is that they included ways of dealing with whatever hands were dealt by fate or the gods – ways we might nowadays construe as superstitious. But they gave people a feeling of agency – something they *could* do, and agency contributes to resilience and a sense of purpose.

When thinking about the demise of a life story and a world that falls apart I remember people I have worked with whose childhoods were coloured by ongoing trauma - people for whom the past consists of fragments of memory that intrude but make no sense and who find it hard to envisage a future. For the survivor of extreme events there is often no sense of ongoingness, of a story that evolves. I also recall people who, as adults, learned of something that rocked their assumptive world – a *shattered absolutism* - and in one stroke destroyed the futures they had unquestioningly anticipated (Stolorow, 2007). I remember a woman looking forward to a contented retirement with her husband whose world was turned upside down when she learned that he had been unfaithful for years and now intended to move in with his mistress. I remember the man who had always trusted that he would inherit the family home – a trust that had offered him considerable security over the years – only to be told by his father, when he turned to him for help, that he had recently bequeathed everything to his new girlfriend. I also think of the wounded teenager whose beloved mother told her, "I never wanted you anyway".

How do you carry on after learning that someone you trusted implicitly had very different thoughts and feelings in mind? How do you recalibrate your identity and find meaning in an utterly different world? One thing I have observed is the stunned incredulity of people whose hitherto absolute truths have been shattered. For example, when talking about how her mother treated her from childhood onwards, Bree often sobbed like an inconsolable child. She would cry in anguish, "Why is she doing this? Why is she like this? Why would people treat me like this?" And in the face of such questions I would reflect back her shocked bewilderment, then say: "I don't know why your Mum was like that. But I do know you didn't deserve it". Other clients too have looked at me with incredulity and asked – "why do bad things keep happening to me?" "How can people be so evil?" "How can there be so much cruelty in the world?" Such expressions of outrage and disbelief hang in the air between therapist and client, leaving us as witnesses to the extremes of human suffering and often at a loss for words. They are moments, to quote Donna Orange, when all we can offer is 'our hope from empty hands' (2011, p. 63).

Another situation that comes to mind when thinking about the demise of a life story is of refugees who have been forced to flee their homes and countries, a situation millions faced in the twentieth century but which is a global problem today that we are all aware of. This exodus has wrenched people from the traditions into which their life story used to be woven and the structures within which they might have been able to talk about and make meaning of their experiences. These structures, as I said earlier, include rites of passage which provide support through major life transitions. Characteristically they consist of rituals that symbolise a journey of three phases. The first marks life as it was. This is followed by a period of abrupt separation from one's community, a liminal phase during which the participants engage in challenging tasks and rituals. Finally there is a period of re-entry when they are welcomed back into the community and their change of status, for instance from adolescent to adult, is marked and celebrated.

In writing about his work with refugees, Jeremy Woodcock described their enforced flight from their homelands as a simulacrum of a rite of passage, but 'not one that is held in a thoughtful and structured way within the social and cultural norms of the community' (2017). Not only is the liminal phase 'hugely extended, filled with anxiety and robbed of definition', but the incorporation rituals that are the key to any rite of passage are lacking. Even with much less ritualistic tone and texture than in some tribal cultures, we could argue that in the Western world the ceremonies and practices surrounding developmental transitions like marriage and death have also been robbed of definition. They have either been discarded or so stripped of their traditional symbolism that we have forgotten their deeper meanings. In consequence and returning to Inge's point, we risk losing what formerly held us together and are perhaps more in touch with fragmentation and things falling apart4. Fragmentation and meaningless – the two go hand in hand.

4. See Inge's fascinating discussion about burial practices in the past and in the contemporary world, (2014).

What are the implications for our work as psychotherapists?

We often see people who are trapped in despair and appear to have lost any sense of meaning, joy or vitality. I recall a teacher sobbing desperately as she described the difficulties faced by the children in her school and her sense of powerlessness to do anything to change things. Her tears intensified as she added to the list all the horrific things going on in the world. Looking at me bleakly she asked, "what's the point of all this? I'm not sure I want to live in a world like this". Trauma and unmet relational needs played a part in Melanie's distress and sensitivity to the suffering of others, and her anguished observations about the context she, or rather we, live in have been echoed by other people in my room. I can resonate with their concerns and feelings. In response to Melanie on that occasion I acknowledged her despair and lack of hope and shared how sometimes I too slip into despondency and despair. But then I spoke of the beliefs that contribute to and bolster my personal sense of meaning – for we all need sustaining beliefs and touchstones to anchor and comfort us.

I have written elsewhere about six factors that foster hope and the will to keep going despite life's difficulties (Wright, 2016). The foundations of these *dimensions of hope* are laid down within the matrix of our earliest attachment relationships, but also within those social structures of meaning which Tillich and Frankl appreciated were so important - the family routines and communal traditions that give us a sense of basic trust and the necessary security to engage in meaningful pursuits. What strikes me is that without these dimensions – and current trends challenge each of them - we are more at risk of personal meaninglessness and hence more likely to cling to *easy fun* or absolutist beliefs or to slip into loneliness and despair. The factors I listed are:

1. A sense of mastery and agency
2. Something that gives meaning to our experiences
3. Having a sense of purpose
4. A sense of future possibilities
5. Trust in others and the capacity for meaningful relationships
6. Faith in something greater than the self

To this list I want to add acceptance. It is one of the characteristics of resiliency and transformation after trauma identified by Wilson, meaning 'accepting the loss of invulnerability and that much of life is illusory; accepting one's smallness in the face of horrific experiences and the vastness of the universe, and accepting the continuity and discontinuity of life – in other words, change, loss and death' (2006, pp. 406–8). They are existential truths which the pursuit of easy fun is trying to avoid. Robert Langan pointed out that all of us, therapists and those we work with, face 'an idiosyncratic version of the same problem: how to live a life signifying something, however fleeting in the face of oblivion'. His own answer is beautifully expressed: that

> We rise and fall on waves of onflowing experience in which we can dare to meet, and to find significance through one another … The struts and frets of life matter, because they are the forms in which we find one another.
>
> (Langan, 2014, pp. 174, 175).

Salzberger-Wittenberg made a similar point: that we can manage frustrations, disappointments and losses better if we feel ourselves to be members of our community and the wider human family and 'held within the universe in its rhythm, its cycling ebb and flow, life, death and renewal'. Moreover, even if acknowledging our mortality causes us to feel 'helpless, infinitely small and unimportant', it can make us conscious that what we do or don't do makes a difference and that it is within our power 'to add to or diminish the fund of love, hope and joy in the world' (Salzberger-Wittenberg, 2013, pp. 13, 152). It is interesting that whilst contemplating our mortality both these writers are emphasising the bigger ongoing, cyclical context in which we are held as well as the kinship of people, and that both call us to recognise our existential insignificance and still to believe that we can contribute something worthwhile. It is what Tillich called *the courage to be* in the face of existential uncertainty and what I call an *ethic of meaning*. In the face of our smallness and all too human vulnerability we need to keep acknowledging that things matter – other people, the planet, our cultural heritage, the terrible things that happen and should not happen and that what we do matters. We need to have feelings about them.

Let me end with a small personal example of allowing people to matter and, I hope, adding to the fund of love and hope in the world that occurred whilst working on the final draft of this article. I had begun the day facing one of my own occasional struggles to find joy and meaning and, hard as I tried to work on this, I still felt weighed down. Then, as I walked through the early morning streets, a young man huddled in a shop doorway called out asking if I had any change to spare. My first less hospitable reaction was to give a hasty apology. But I turned back, dug in my purse then - I think more importantly - I asked where he had come from. The lad told me a little about his story and his wish to settle in this area. We talked about the local agency which supports homeless young people, then departed wishing each other well. Perhaps both of us were enriched by our short conversation? I certainly walked away feeling a sense of warmth, love and reconnection.

'Only connect' said E. M. Forster (1910). Although I cannot recall details about the book in question, those words have always stuck in my mind as emblematic of deeper truths. If we are to find meaning beyond the bare bones of existence we need something to live for. As Shabad said:

> the notion of a meaningful life that transcends the self is not merely an existential appendage that becomes relevant only after our basic needs are met and biological survival is secured … Living for something or someone other than oneself is fundamental to being human.
>
> (Shabad, 2001, pp. 38, 39).

Given my argument that the age of meaninglessness is typified by a severing of connections – between peoples, between people and place, between humans and nature, and intrapsychically a disconnection from ourselves and our emotions, we need to do all we can to foster connections. As therapists we need this if we are to survive repeated exposure to the immensity and intensity of human suffering and horror and avoid

slipping into despair and meaninglessness[5]. We also need to foster connection and engagement with our clients and if we can, through other forms of social engagement.

> Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect, and the beast and the monk, robbed of isolation that is life to either, will die.
>
> (Forster, 1910, p. 174).

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Sue Wright works privately as a psychotherapist, supervisor and trainer and has a particular specialism in working with the survivors of complex trauma. Her trainings in Integrative Psychotherapy, Psychodynamic work, Sensorimotor Psychotherapy, Dance Movement Therapy and the Feldenkrais Method all inform her work. Sue is also a writer and her book *Dancing Between Hope and Despair: Trauma, Attachment and the Therapeutic Relationship* was published by Palgrave in 2016. From the perspective of a historian and a psychotherapist she is currently researching and writing about the many faceted subject of time and how we relate to it.

Kelvin Hall

Coming Home to Eden: Animal-Assisted Therapy and the Present Moment

Abstract

This article looks at the phenomenon of animal-assisted therapy and attempts to explain why this can have such a powerful impact on a client. It suggests that the dialogic reciprocity with other-than human life often experienced in this context offers an immediacy and embodiment which is often absent from contemporary life. This is illustrated by an account of equine-assisted work with a client from clinical practice.

Various narratives of loss of intimacy with other-than-human life are examined. This loss is considered as a collective phenomenon, an ancestral trauma, and an individual biographical event. It is proposed that even if this is *not* a historical or biographical fact, the myth of loss is so culturally pervasive that the discovery of relational fluency with animals can be experienced as a restoration.

Introduction: Space and Time Reclaimed?

In considering the field of animal-assisted therapy, and asking wherein lies its particular power, I often seem to discover a zone which is separated from much of the contemporary world. This zone is characterized by relational immediacy, presence, embodiment, and an awareness of being part of an inter-active eco-system. This may be a *re*-discovery; perhaps the contribution of animals to therapeutic process is particularly valued because it promises to restore us to a world which the human species lost long ago, and for which we yearn. Many writers have given versions of a story in which the human race once lived in a state of mutual regard and understanding with the non-human world. Jerome Bernstein for one (2005, p. 20) argues that when it was written in the book of Genesis that God gave man 'dominion over every living thing that moveth upon the earth' this marked the split from that earlier state. He also talks about *'The Great Grief'* which many people carry, which is sparked by the loss of the Earth which we are witnessing today, but is compounded with the loss of connection that occurred in the past. There are echoes of this story in the writings of Abram (1996), Glendinning (1994), Totton (2011) and numerous others, including Jung. While the literal credibility of these narratives can easily be disputed, the intense resonance of the meeting between human and other during animal-assisted therapy may be better understood if viewed through their lens.

The Impact of Animal Intervention

A woman had suffered multiple bereavements and was "drowning in grief". A succession of encounters then occurred. In one, while on a walk, she came upon a group of several moles in the grass. They showed no fear and one of them allowed her to stroke it. Her dog, rather than try to chase the moles, sat down quietly and watched. In another, while she sat in her garden a young fox came through the garden hedge, sat with her, exchanging eye

contact for a prolonged period. The fox then stayed waiting while she went indoors to find a lump of cheese, received the cheese from her hand, and later, after a further stay, departed.

These are both examples of a kind of experience which is actually very widespread, in which some other life-form seems to respond sensitively and consolingly to human suffering. I have heard a number of poignant accounts of bereaved humans having visits from, or meetings with, wild animals, and would suggest that the phenomenon warrants a study in itself. Such events belong to a range of transactions arising spontaneously in daily life, which therapists are consciously inviting when they decide to welcome animals into the therapy space, or take therapy into the space inhabited by animals. Of course, there is no way of verifying objectively whether the moles and the fox were responding knowingly or intentionally to the human's condition. However, the profound sensitivity of animals to human mood is testified by a growing consensus, referred to below, and I hope to substantiate it in the course of this article. I will address more fully the question of what gives such moments their particular impact; and why they seem to induce such a powerful immersion in the *present moment,* so that they can seem more meaningful than a human response. In so doing I will also touch upon the way these encounters affect the human awareness of time.

The history of animals in therapy is actually a long one. According to Temple Grandin (2005, p. 58), Freud, in his later years, had his dog in the consulting room. As far as I know, we don't have much written from Freud about what this contributed, but we do have his unequivocal endorsement of the human-dog partnership:

> Affectionate without ambivalence, the simplicity of a life free from the almost unbearable conflicts of civilization, the beauty of existence complete in itself and yet, despite all divergences in organic development (there is) that feeling of intimate affinity, of an undisputed solidarity....a bond of friendship unites us both...
>
> (Freud, 1975, p. 434).

However, this subject remained marginal to the literature of therapy, and Arran Stibbe (2012) might see this as part of an overall cultural discourse which nullified the beinghood and relational subtlety of animals. Jane Goodall corroborates his stance in her description (2016) of academic attitudes in the sixties, when the idea of animals being capable of emotion would have met with ridicule. There were some notable exceptions to this in the therapy world, for instance child psychotherapist Boris Levinson (Sacks, 2008, p.503) and psychiatrist Harold Searles who wrote: 'The nonhuman environment, far from being of little or no account to human personality development, constitutes one of the most basically important ingredients of human psychological existence' (1960, p.6)

Now we seem to be seeing a major shift, marked by events such as the *Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness* (2012), in which an international group of cognitive neuroscientists and others signalled the end of the era of 'human exceptionalism' and drew attention to 'the structural and behavioural continuity between animals and people.'

The expansion of therapeutic approaches which include other-than-human interactions and emphasize non-verbal exchange, is indicated by the appearance of books such as Martin Jordan's *Nature and Therapy* (2015) and Buzzell and Chalquist's *Ecotherapy* (2009), among many other publications. The advent of equine-assisted therapy can be seen as part of this wave. Fundamental to the growing body of thought in the field of nature-based (and animal assisted) therapy is the experience of the living world around us as responding to, or reflecting, the psychological state or emotional condition of the human. At times, it seems that such encounters have greater power than the response of a human therapist. To illustrate this I offer the following narrative, which describes key incidents that took place during a long-term therapy in my own practice

Case Study

This was a therapy in which I aspired to integrate indoor and outdoor work, believing that each would enhance the other. I drafted

my first account of these events from memory some weeks after the therapy concluded. On completing a later draft I contacted my client, as we had agreed I might at the ending of therapy, and asked her if she was willing to read it, and inform me of any ways in which my account differs from her recollection or perception of the events. I then modified my narrative accordingly, and some of her comments are included

I would argue that this therapy was particularly 'successful', insofar as the client seemed to emerge with a number of very positive gains. I am wary of oversimplifying the way therapy works – it is often difficult to pinpoint in a precise way what has been gained, other than the client knowing themselves and the way they function more thoroughly. It seems likely, however, that the mutual satisfaction we have both had with the outcomes of this therapy are connected with the fact that much of the work happened in an outdoor setting with a major contribution from animals responding to the client's behaviour.

The client was a woman who had just turned forty. When she commenced therapy she identified issues in most areas of her life, and I shall outline these briefly. She said that she felt compelled to pursue relationships outside her marriage, which she would then become – in her own words – "obsessed by". In the marriage itself she repeatedly felt unmet, and felt that she was regarded by her husband as the 'problem'. Although she had a career as both an artist and an artisan, she often felt confused and frustrated about how her work was received by others. There was a history of feeling judged and unrecognized by her parents. I would also describe her as an adventurous, warm-hearted and creative person –an artist and craftswoman with blacksmithing skills, using wrought iron to create large sculptures – and with a strong and fit-looking physique.

We began our work indoors and certain features emerged very quickly. The experience of being listened to, and empathised with, touched her very deeply and she valued it highly. But this was accompanied by anxiety; about whether she was being properly understood, about whether she might be 'too much' for the therapist, about whether her feelings would upset or alienate the therapist, and also about whether she could get enough of what she needed within the constraints of a time-limited session. During an early phase of the work, a symptom of all this was her tendency to send e-mails between sessions, sometimes several paragraphs long. Often these would offer further explanation or amplification of comments made in session. Sometimes there were attempts to re-assure me that remarks were not meant as criticisms of myself. They arose from a desire to make sure that a question could be resolved, or that she could be fully understood, and worry that the other person might be troubled by what she said, or might misinterpret her intentions. All this indicated a busy internal dialogue which went on a lot of the time, and a deep unease.

I explored these features at length with her in sessions. Then, after several months, we began outdoor sessions in a meadow with horses. This stage of the work was prompted by her statement that she found her dog's behaviour "overwhelming" and I therefore suggested that work outdoors might enable us to explore very directly the way she inhabits physical space. Our work took place in a meadow about forty yards square containing three horses, and sometimes in a smaller enclosure within it, marked out by a single strand of fencing tape. Actually a horse could have run off or jumped over the fencing tape, if he felt alarmed by anything we did.

Very quickly we were touching on the same themes mentioned earlier, but in a much more physical way. My client's anxieties around communicating her needs, and about the effect of this on another, easily became aroused. Factors such as the horse's freedom to approach or withdraw in an instant gave this tension a very immediate edge. While embodied relational immediacy may be fundamental to any therapeutic relationship, contexts such as equine-assisted therapy are especially conducive to the realization of such immediacy.

I asked her to approach the horse across the meadow, noting any reactions from him as we did so. On being invited to make some sort of contact with the horse she went close enough to touch him. Initially the sense of being accepted was satisfying but then she felt that she wanted the horse to show more interest in her. I suggested that she used body language or physical pressure to ask the horse to move. This

could be by animating her body –for instance, light stamping of the feet or gesticulating with the hands, such as a 'pushing' gesture in the air at about eye level. Experimenting with these, she discovered that the horse would step away from her but simultaneously showed much more awareness of her presence when she exerted some pressure like this. This awareness might be indicated by keeping his head up, looking at her, showing signs of alertness such as cocking his ears towards her. At the same time, many of her habitual anxieties arose in the form of questions such as "How do I know that this is all right for him (the horse)?"

At times he resumed grazing. We explored whether it was permissible to request that his attention return to us. There were occasions when he walked or even ran off towards the gate in the corner of the field, which led out of it. We then confronted the choice of whether it was alright for her to ask him to come back into connection with us.

I urged her to place her attention on the dialogue and the space between, rather than the internal dialogue. I was modelling a different focus to that of trying to somehow 'make it right'. I was implying, rather, that as long as dialogue was taking place, that in itself was all right. The departure or withdrawal of the other was not, in itself, a catastrophe. A further principle emerged; sending away or asking the other to move out of one's space actually makes the other more aware of you. This can be followed by an invitation from either party to come closer. The mixture of the two seems to earn a high degree of engagement from horses, and I assume that much of this is applicable to humans too. As my client wrote:

> *"I could start to understand the back and forth of physical closeness to mean all manner of things.....but rarely (never?) that I had done something wrong, or that I was not wanted on a serious level (my natural fear). I could see by experimenting that a push away (something I found painfully difficult to do initially) was just part of ordinary communication."*

On another particularly memorable occasion the interaction was even subtler. We were discussing my client's desire to be 'seen' in relationship, and the way this had often been disappointed. She then went into the ring with the horse and stood by him as he grazed. She said that this induced a pleasant and agreeable sense of being accepted, but that what she really wanted was for the horse to lift up his head and look at her. I said to her, "Maybe just let yourself want that." Very soon after, he lifted up his head and looked at her. He then gently rubbed her front – her heart space – with his nose. We were both filled with the wonder of this moment. The horse then resumed grazing, and *they then went through the exact sequence again*. It is my perception, supported by subsequent discussions, that this offered the client a profound experience of being seen.

By contrast, on another occasion which we referred back to repeatedly, the same horse pushed her out of the way and trod on her foot. Startled, she asked me "Why did he do that?" and I replied, "I don't know but maybe he didn't feel you were really there..." and her instant reply was, "I wasn't," she wrote later:

> *"I had a distinct knowledge that I had left inhabiting myself, and had been so in awe of him and had focussed on him at the expense of my existence.....I made him much more than me suddenly, and then my value to him decreased – even disappeared....that focus on the other person at the expense of myself, is a feeling I knew well...which is why it was so helpful."*

Later we were discussing whether her dog would get over-excited in the unfamiliar presence of horses. This arose out of an enquiry into how far an individual can influence the world around them, or how far the world reflects an individual's state of mind or expectations. I suggested that she brought her dog to an equine session so we that could explore this experientially. The subsequent session was remarkable for two particular features. Firstly, before my client arrived, a strange unaccompanied dog, medium-sized with white and brown markings, appeared in the secluded meadow where I work. I had never seen it before, nor has that dog ever subsequently appeared at any other session. Before my client arrived, I was apprehensive about the mayhem which I could imagine might ensue, but was also fascinated by the synchronicity inherent in this sequence of events; the one time I suggest a client

brings a dog to a horse session is the one time an unexpected dog arrives on the scene. My decision was to let the strange dog stay, rather than attempt to drive it away. In due course, my client arrived, the two dogs did a little mock chasing but displayed no hostility, the horse showed some momentary mild irritation when the dogs were close to his feet, but everything remained composed enough, and after some time the strange dog left of their own accord.

The second memorable feature was that my client's dog did get kicked by the horse. We – humans, horse and dog - were jogging around the meadow and over a low jump, to see whether raised energy would lead to chaotic excitement (anxiety, confusion and danger to life and limb), or instead to increasing the confidence of each participant and the connection between them. At one moment, while the horse was going over the jump, the dog, following him, came very close to his heels and received a blow to the head. The lack of force and absence of agitation indicated that this wasn't intended to cause injury. In my experience the difference is very clear with horses (i.e. when they seriously mean to cause damage, they can do so). Neither party actually seemed distressed – the horse had protected his boundaries, the dog had learned where they were. This was simple, straightforward, clear. The client wrote of the incident:

> *"...it was a powerful lesson for me, and of course the dog. The horse showed him without malice, and very clearly with his kick where his boundaries were, and the dog understood and was then in a position to relate well to the horse in a very harmonious way....he had previously barked and jumped and gone for horses' feet when we encountered them –which obviously caused anxiety for everyone...it was a very clear illustration for me about boundaries, (which I was having a great deal of anxiety and confusion about) and how the horse was not the perpetrator of aggression and the dog a victim of that, but that there had simply been a dialogue where both creatures now knew more how to be with each other (which presumably was their mutual desire?) Almost instantly the dog lay down in the grass next to the horse where he stood, which was a total first, and very surprising for me."*

For the whole session, whenever we risked unleashing or summoning ungovernable energies, we found instead that we were in a place of dialogue and negotiation. This, I speculate, was supportive to my client as she embarked on a period of her life marked by several ventures into the unknown, getting to feel at home with potent forces (new relationships, creative projects, etc) which could be seen as volatile and unpredictable.

Another session, later in our work, offered even greater contrast, because on that occasion we actually 'did' very little. Part of the context which made this session significant was the apparent difficulty in managing a life-situation - work space, home space, income, relationship - which really worked for her. On the day in question, there had been some changes and she came in a fairly good mood. The sun was shining, there was a gentle breeze; it was as if gold was pouring down on us.

My client voiced her disinclination to say or to think too much. Now the three horses in the field came towards us, then two of them stood over us where we sat, sometimes standing with their hindquarters inches from our faces, sometimes standing with their necks and heads hovering over us. Mostly they were standing still. The feeling was of complete safety. If there was a challenge, it was to our ability to receive - and go on receiving - without inhibition, as gold continued to pour down upon us. In our future work we referred back to this session a number of times, as an instance of simplicity and fullness, and the toleration of these riches.

Eventually my client had an unexpected and numinous sense that it might be time to end our work together. This arose in response to a comment of mine about the tone and feel of her presence. I think I sensed a lack of urgency, an absence of any kind of neediness. A long search for suitable workspace for her large-scale sculptures ended when such a space became unexpectedly available. This had great significance, offering a home for her creativity and, in my perception, resonating with the validation of personal space in a very immediate way in the meadow with the horses. As if to confirm this, some time after our last session, she emailed to tell me how the bruising on her toe was finally fading away

on the day she moved into the barn – the new work space. Above all, she seemed to have developed trust in a kind of inner compass – I might describe it as heart-knowledge – which enabled her to make choices and decisions in a more intuitive but clearer way.

This felt like a particularly satisfactory conclusion. Although I am wary of claims for therapy outcomes which are too neat, and assume that life after therapy remains a mixture of joys, sorrows and unresolved questions, there seemed much to celebrate here and the outdoor sessions were a major ingredient. They were, she wrote, *"very dynamic and energized"* and had *"a 3-D quality...."* In those few concluding words my client, referring to the "3-D quality", seemed to confirm and encapsulate what I perceived as the heightened feel of those sessions. I felt motivated to attempt some explanation for this quality, which led me into the following explorations.

Further Exploration: Coming Home to the Present Moment

I inform new clients at first meeting that there is scope to have sessions outdoors and including encounters with horses, and say that as our process unfolds we will look out for signs as to whether this might be helpful. I also ask new clients whether there are other-than-human relationships in their histories or present circumstances. In this case the client's comments about difficulties in managing her dog meant that we were already discussing such topics as; communication of intention, non-verbal responses, claiming space, claiming attention, authority, and animal behaviour as a reflection of human mood. Such themes are often essential to equine-assisted work. I felt that the alliance was strong and would not be undermined by a change of frame, and this encouraged me to suggest outdoor sessions. Martin Jordan (2013 pp. 79, 80) suggests that in such cases the frame, no longer dependant on the therapy room, is now fundamentally provided by the therapist's awareness. He also comments that some people actually feel *safer* outdoors (ibid, p. 82). I recall sensing, during such sessions, that the dyad feels less of a 'weight'. When incidents arising out of the environment – the fall of a leaf, the gusting of wind, the approach of a horse – are treated as interventions, it feels as if the living world, as well as the therapist, is supporting the process. Simultaneously, however, the therapist is called on to be fully aware of these events on the periphery of the dyad, and this requires a different kind of awareness to that required indoors, as described in McMullan's comments on peripheral vision to which I refer later.

This also means that the attachment to the therapist may in some ways become less intense, as the client is not looking to the therapist alone for support and reflection. In other ways, it may become *more* deeply felt. The therapist may become, in a very experiential way, like a carer who conducts a child safely through risky encounters with the world. They may also be seen as inviting the client further into their personal world, particularly if the meeting with, say, the therapist's horse carried associations similar to a meeting with the therapist's human partner. A huge amount of exploration is possible on these themes, and for the moment I can only say that I consider that it is the therapist's task to be aware that such ramifications may arise and may need to be resolved.

We can use Kohut's theories of *selfobject function* to understand more clearly what is going on in such settings. The incident of the horse and dog reaching an accommodation over boundaries exemplifies *idealizing,* the process in which the self witnesses in another the behaviour which would enhance that self, fulfilling the need to be 'calmed and uplifted by the idealized imago' (Kohut 1984, p 23). Actually both the dog and the horse perform that function in different ways –as indeed does the therapist – coming to a crucial and potentially injurious point of tension and negotiating it to mutual satisfaction. The 'being seen' incident exemplifies a profound moment of *mirroring* (Kohut 2013, p.197), in which the self receives from another (the *selfobject*) an approval and appreciation which enables that self to come more fully into existence. The earlier story of the moles and the fox, with which I began this article, represents something similar. Indeed, the woman described herself as in a state of dissolution, her losses *'breaking her soul and her body.....so there was nothing*

left.... ....as if she had no place on the earth....no one...who needed her or recognized her." (1)

The animal encounters were decisive in enabling her to live again. Like our early life exchanges with others, these are essentially non-verbal. This, I suggest, is part of what makes them so impactful.

Daniel Stern (2004) has attempted the daunting task of coining a phraseology for non-verbal areas of relational experience. Although Stern is mainly writing about exchanges between humans, much of what he says is applicable to those I describe here. Because they are non-verbal, he argues persuasively, such exchanges are *nonconscious* (2004, p.242). He elucidates the transition between immediate experience - *the present moment* - and *lived story* - the point at which the human creates a narrative of the immediate and thus becomes conscious of it. In sustained dialogue with other-than-human life we hover continuously between the *non-conscious* and *lived story.* Experience in this area can seem pristine. We enter more fully into the present moment, less engaged in either a race against time to complete the tasks of our life, or a struggle to halt it by mulling over what has happened. This is often experienced as profoundly refreshing.

Another key phrase for Stern is *implicit relational knowing* (2004, p. 242). This describes communication without words, but in which the participants nevertheless know what is meant. An example between humans would be a warm and emphatic handshake at the end of a particularly meaningful therapy session. Such relational knowing, I suggest, resonates with pre-verbal, very vulnerable stages of development which we carry in our history and therefore also in some layer of our awareness. This enhances the powerful impact of particularly pure and meaningful moments which occur on the cusp of consciousness and, perhaps, re-unite us with that intensity of sensation so powerfully conveyed in Stern's celebrated passage (1995, p.176) describing an infant's engagement with sunbeams on a wall. Indeed, the woman visited by the fox wrote that *"every detail of the little fox delighted her and astonished her as if her eyes were seeing more than they could usually see, every hair on the fox's fur and every glistening speck of light on every hair."*

This immersion in interaction with the physical life around one – being present to it – is very different from, say, my immersion in the task of typing this article. The latter actually comes into conflict with the former as the cat rolls on my papers and starts to chase my pen around the desk. On this occasion I can enjoy the irony of being distracted from writing about the interventions of other creatures by the intervention of another creature.

Many autobiographical accounts prioritize other-than-human life as a major attachment in childhood. One woman (Moultrie, 2017) wrote that, after her mother abandoned the family home when she was seven:

> , *"....a wave of grief … engulfed the family. What remained constant was the presence of animals and the natural world. As light dimmed on human relationships, at least for a time, another world seemed to open up to me in a vivid way. My childhood days were spent with beloved family dogs, cat, goat, horses, and the ducks. I watched for hours the minnows in the pond, the resident swans in the meadow, and the field mice. My childhood was embedded in the natural world."*

Another, Ruth Tudor (2014) describes a childhood similarly populated by other-than-human companions. But, whereas in the previous account the other-than-human connection ameliorates the trauma, here it is the sudden loss of that connection which is a component of the trauma:

> *"My childhood had been visceral, earthy, embodied but life at boarding school was about achieving within mainstream culture and in order to survive I put away my ecological consciousness."*

She regained her intimacy with nature later, and she describes this graphically as *homecoming*, which can entail a coming literally to a beloved place, but is definitely a coming into a state of mind. The salient characteristic of this state of mind is the sense of being in a mutual exchange which while not verbal, is deeply dialogic.

This sense of *homecoming* is amplified and echoed in the words of individuals who have achieved a dialogic partnership with wild creatures. When conservationist Lawrence Anthony (2010, p.85) was struggling to earn the co-operation of a herd of traumatized and much feared of African Elephants, he had a break-through moment in a fraught confrontation with the matriarch of the herd. When he persistently held in mind his intention of conserving the life of the herd, she softened and touched him with her trunk. In trying to describe the mood that this stimulated in him he uses phrases such as *"I had never felt safer"*, and *"I was in a bubble of well-being"*.

It emerges from the accounts so far that the conditions conducive to this kind of encounter include a state of childhood openness, and a state of grief. Those who have become fluent in the 'language' of these meetings, such as Lawrence Anthony or Charlie Russell (O'Keefe, 2010, pp. 70-72) who mingles with wild bears, also describe particular modes of perception, and particular attitudes, which both enable such fluency and arise from it. Geoffrey McMullan (2013, p. 24) refers to *peripheral vision*, an awareness of what arises on the margins of sight, and which he says enables humans to become more aware of the responses of the natural life around them. This is the opposite of the highly focussed *tunnel vision* which characterizes the predator approaching prey, and also humans when they are being very goal-orientated or functioning in most workplaces today. As well as widening the range of perception, this invites the proximity of other creatures and immersion in the present moment. In a similar vein, equine therapy practitioners become very aware of the value of 'soft eyes' and acute awareness of contact boundaries over distance. The quivering of a horse's muscle, the lifting of a head, the flicking of a tail, can indicate that one's presence and manner is being registered by the horse thirty yards away (or indeed much further). The softening of human focus and posture often results in a relaxing of the horse's mood and a readiness to allow the human to come closer. The attitudes which emerge from such accounts, and which are conducive to fluency in this realm, include combining clarity of intention with non-attachment to outcome, and respect for the culture of the other. They can be considered to be major life lessons in themselves.

In his book *Discovering Nature Awareness,* Geoffrey McMullan (2013, p. 41) narrates the events which befell a young man who felt rejected by colleagues in his workplace, and antagonistic towards them. He then participated in a 'Nature Awareness' course, and began to get some sense of the difference between peripheral and tunnel vision. Then he was walking along a forest track with his guide, and wanted to get up close to a chaffinch on the ground some distance ahead. But when he got within twenty metres, the chaffinch flew further off. This happened several times, to his disappointment. His guide then asked him *"What has to change?"* and, drawing on earlier discussion, the client replied, *"Maybe I need to change how I'm feeling."* Suddenly," McMullan continues, *"I could see that his energy and indeed his whole posture began to change and..... this time the chaffinch let him get within five metres of it before flying away!"*

Such moments are familiar to many practitioners of equine-assisted therapy, who often witness horses accepting contact from a human once the latter has eased their breathing, or acknowledged an emotion, or altered a body-position, or modified an attitude. Experience of this extends or restores a relational sensibility much subtler than otherwise. Indeed, eventually the young man might have reached a state of composure such that the bird alighted on him. I have experienced this myself and others have reported similar incidents.

These animal responses are sometimes seen as more trustworthy and more authentic than human responses - with more purity and integrity. The animal is seen as freer and less conditioned by social role or the constraints of civilized behaviour, in contrast to the human. For example, a therapist's declarations of support, interest or validation may seem to arise partly from her/his investment in professional success. If someone has been harmed by human contact, animal contact can sometimes be more readily trusted. Paradoxically, the animal is also more 'dangerous' in the sense of its behaviour being unconstrained by social propriety, but this contributes to authenticity. The incident of the horse treading on my client's foot is one example.

Conclusion.

I realize that any of the varied versions of the narrative of collective loss, to which I referred at the start, are open to challenge. For instance, some hunter-gatherer peoples behave sadistically towards animals so the idea that Paleolithic human respected other life is far from incontestable. Yet people continue to re-tell this tale in various forms. I speculate, therefore, that many of us may carry a sense of some ancestral loss. Woodcock (2009) refers to nineteenth-century poet John Clare's suffering as the spread of enclosures in England drove many country dwellers from the land. Deprived of his free-roaming access to it, he also "lost his mind". This notion is re-enforced by persistent echoes in our culture (Eden, Narnia, the Golden Age) which have always suggested such an historical loss, the sorrow of which has persisted along with the longing for restitution. Ruth Tudor (2014) writes:

> *"This feeling of being very far from home – from who we deeply are – is a collective trauma. My personal loss of home at eleven resonates with rupture that is shared across the culture in which I live."*

Or perhaps the myth suffuses our culture so fully that, *whether or not there was a historical loss,* the experience of connection brings with it a glow of wonder which feels like the restoration of something long lost, of time reclaimed, and that in itself is to be treasured.

The work of integrating the other-than-human connection into therapy presents some further challenges:

1. Firstly, understanding the needs of other creatures which must be met if they are to have maximum aliveness, rather than just be aids to our betterment,
2. Secondly, achieving a model of fluent and accurate 'language' between therapist an animal companion, adequate to the overall welfare of all parties, human and animal, involved in the process.
3. Thirdly, avoiding collusion with clients for whom aversion to human intimacy indicates issues such as abuse by past carers, which no amount of other-than-human contact will completely resolve.

Each of these challenges deserves a treatise of its own, but there is also one more. By focussing on the sort of benevolent encounter I have mostly narrated here, we may be in danger of sweetening our vision of nature to the exclusion of more unsettling aspects. The woman referred to at the beginning had another encounter. In this one she came upon a hawk at the very moment its prey, a white dove, made its last fluttering. She saw that *under the hawk's claws was a bloody hole in the dove's breast. The woman was close but the hawk did not move.....she noticed that she did not shrink from the death of the dove or the violence of its death. She was inside the stillness of the hawk and inside the white feathers and red blood of the dove.....she felt, without thinking, that something had been made clear to her.*

This 'something' is also part of the picture. The harsh and terrible aspects of nature, and of life, challenge us towards a more profound integration. The encounter with the hawk, just as much as those softer encounters already recounted, enabled the woman to glimpse such an integration.

Notes and References

(1) 'The Moles and the Fox' is one of a number of autobiographical narratives which have been entrusted to me in the course of my ongoing research, for which I remain deeply grateful. The narrator is using the third person, having seen several other narratives which I had collected and written down as contemporary 'stories'. I have therefore put her own words into my text but in italics. I have found that asking people to narrate their own experiences in the third person (i.e. story mode) often produces an account which is both succinct and emotionally intense.

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Kelvin Hall has practiced as a psychotherapist for thirty years. His lifetime pursuit of the art of horsemanship led him to research the phenomena of human relationship to other-than-human life, on which he now writes and presents frequently. He has been a past Chair of Trustees and Chair of the Training Committee at Bath Centre for Psychotherapy and Counselling, and has received its Emeritus award. He has contributed chapters to two books on the theme of this article *Vital Signs: Psychological Responses to Ecological Crisis* (2011, London, Karnac) and *Storytelling for a Greener World* (2012, Stroud, Hawthorn Press). His most recent published piece is *Envoys of Earth: What Horses Tell Us Now (*Oct 2016) for the website of the Climate Psychology Alliance. He offers equine-assisted process as part of his practice. He has also been a

professional storyteller and is deeply immersed in the life of the Gloucestershire countryside.

email kelvinghall@yahoo.com

Sally Weintrobe

Climate Change: The Moral Dimension

This paper was presented at a Conference on Saturday 10th February 2018 organised by Climate Psychology Alliance (CPA) at Bath Centre for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

Staying with the Trouble-Being Open to the Other in a Climate of Resentment

This talk is about a troublesome bit of our human character: the *exception* in us[1]. One occasion I met up with my own exception was at the bus stop. It was raining, cold and windy, and I thought grumpily, "I wish I'd just taken the car!" Next, I imagined my grandchildren, now grownup, standing right next to me. I was in a bit of bad weather and they, in the future, were in extreme weather because of climate change. I heard petulance in my entitled belief I should not have to face any inconvenience. I felt ashamed, embarrassed and much less of a person than I felt I could be.

I believe I had emerged from a layer of disavowal[2] in which I could know but not really know, with empathy and feeling, what climate change would mean for others. In a state of disavowal, I had kept my grandchildren far enough away to avoid any touching, listening and meeting of eyes. Here, they were back close to me. In my imagination, they and I heard my petulant tone.

I have no difficulty imagining my grandchildren in the future, hopefully going to university, having relationships and children of their own. My blind spot was about the effects on them of climate change.

Undoing a layer of my disavowal, I experienced a crystallization of conscience. I saw more clearly a petulant, entitled resentful part of myself that was saying to my more caring part, "I will go along with your carbon reduction actions, but only if I'm not actually inconvenienced".

I am quite capable of petulant resentment. I recognised my inner refusenik – this 'brattish' entitled person - as me, but I also saw it was not essentially who I am and can be. I believe I had been influenced by culture. Neoliberal[3] culture through advertising, media, social group pressure and political propaganda relentlessly encourages the exception in us all. It invites us to believe we are special, it stimulates our greed and it encourages magical 'as if' solutions to life's problems. As Raymond

1. For a far-reaching psychological analysis of exceptions see Freud, S. (1916). Some Character-Types Met with in Psycho-Analytic Work. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works, 309-333
2. For a discussion of climate change disavowal see Weintrobe's and Hoggett's papers in Weintrobe (2012) Engaging with Climate Change. Routledge: London.
3. George Monbiot gives a clear succinct outline of neoliberalism. See: Monbiot, G. (2010). Neoliberalism – the ideology at the root of all our problems The Guardian 04/09/2016

Williams (1958)[4] so cogently argued, we are mostly unconscious of a culture's effects. People under the influence of neoliberal culture are in particular danger of suffering what Bion[5] called 'spiritual drift'. He meant moral drift but also loss of agency and creative thinking capacity.

Zigmunt Bauman (2014)[6] said the 'logic of living' the neoliberal global economy imposes on us conflicts with our basic moral sense. Ordinary daily activities become fraught with moral dilemmas: do I take the car or the bus? Do I buy those flown in fresh vegetables with a high carbon price tag? Do I eat that chicken knowing it spent a miserable life in an automated animal feedlot operation (neoliberalism's word for a large farm)? Do I buy that book online from a company that employs people on zero hours' contracts?

The neoliberal economy violates most peoples' sense of what is right and wrong many times a day and staying with this knowledge can leave us feeling dispirited and overburdened. Who wants to be worrying about the future of the climate system when fetching the grandchildren from school? Who wants to face the guilt – the ongoing miserable sense of dirty implication - that goes with living in an economic system based solely on maximizing profit?

While it is not possible to live without causing some damage, the neoliberal economy is causing such damage that if it continues it will make life on earth not sustainable. I suggest that to know this at a feeling level, especially knowing we are collectively implicated, is to suffer and to live with a sense of great moral injury[7]. Robert J. Lifton (2015)[8] argued that recently more people have begun to shift from an 'unformed' to a 'formed' awareness of climate change. Formed awareness is awareness that climate change is a moral issue. I would add that formed awareness is also awareness that neoliberalism is a deeply immoral system that we are all part of.

I will now look in more psychological detail at the exception in us.

An exception absolutely refuses to give up these cherished false beliefs:

Being an exception

1. I am entitled to believe I am an idealized version of myself
2. I am entitled to whatever I want
3. I am entitled to use omnipotent thinking to avoid psychic pain

The exception feels entitled to be it all, have it all and not feel guilty about this. My exception at the bus stop was objecting, 'I must have my comfort. Never mind the carbon'. I could avoid my guilt through using disavowal, a kind of omnipotent thinking.

Freud thought an exception is an ordinary 'refusenik' part of us that lurks in us all. We start out as her/his majesty the baby. Reaching the terrible twos, we demand the world sees things our way and obeys our commands. We struggle to accept our real position. Surely, we are entitled to the biggest slice of the pie? Psychoanalyst Murray[9] called this kind of entitlement 'narcissistic' to distinguish it from a healthy sense of entitlement to a fair share.

Let's explore further the three core beliefs that exceptions cling to:

4. Raymond Williams. (1958). Culture and Society: 1780 to 1950. Columbia University Press. New York.
5. Bion, W.R. (1948) 'Psychiatry at a time of crisis', British Journal of Medical Psychology, XXI,Part 2, 181-189.
6. Bauman, Z. (2013) Participant on Vetenskapens varld lot 23, stv (Swedish public broadcasting channel) aired 23.09.13. http:/www.svtplay.se/video/1480596/del-23
7. Soldiers are currently being diagnosed with moral injury as a consequence of participating in immoral wars. They too describe moments of crystallization of conscience, when they see that they are caught up in higher order military and political structures that makes it extremely difficult not to violate their moral code. See Puniewska, Maggie (2015). Healing a Wounded Sense of Morality. The Atlantic, JUL 3, 2015. http://www.theatlantic.com/author/maggie-puniewska
8. Lifton, R. J. (2014). The climate swerve. New York Times. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/24/opinion/sunday/the-climate-swerve.html?_r=2
9. Murray J (1964). Narcissism and the ego ideal. J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn. 12: 471-511

I am ideal

In reality, no one is ideal, and the world does not revolve round us.

I am entitled to idealized provision

This entitlement fans an avaricious form of greed[10]. The world and everyone and everything in it is eyed up as an asset to be stripped, only there to aggrandize the self.

'I want that, so I'll have it, regardless. I'm entitled' has becomes so ordinary in our culture that we do not notice our exception speaking when taking the bus not the car, or ordering an item from across the world online, or reaching for that fresh flown-in food item at the supermarket.

I am entitled to use omnipotent thinking.

Omnipotent thinking magically 'disappears' inner discomfort. Using magical thinking, we can restore a clear conscience and have no worries. As if.

Magical thinking is often accompanied by a feeling of triumph: I am superior to you. You have to suffer feelings that go with being a caring human being – like guilt and shame - whereas I can mobilize psychological mechanisms to make these feelings 'disappear'. I have a psychic wand at my disposal.

Taking seriously that there is an exception in us can sharpen our understanding of what Freud meant by reality. Reality is what stands in the way of the exception's sense of entitlement. Reality constrains, limits the exception. The exception wants to burst free of reality's bonds.

So far, I've talked about the ordinary exception in us. I now introduce a different sort of Exception. This Exception has seized power within the psyche. The mind is now in a state of moral deregulation. Care no longer has the power to rein it in.

Neoliberal ideology, currently the thinking of those in overall charge of the world economy is Exceptionalist in this sense. People in its grip tend to be:

1. Self-idealizing and superior – including morally superior
2. Feel entitled to whatever they want
3. Feel entitled to use omnipotent thinking to assuage their consciences

Exceptions (capital E to indicate the power shift) are arrogant, the term arrogance well capturing the inner psychological picture of a power grab by the self-idealizing, exaggeratedly entitled, 'exceptionalist' part. The caring part of the self is forced to live apart - in 'apart-heid' - within the psyche, kept far enough away to have no felt influence[11].

Rulers who are Exceptions are found throughout human history. I will give an example of one who lived three thousand years ago. This is psychoanalyst Karl Abraham's (1935)[12] account of Amenhotep IV, the Egyptian boy king who believed he was the Sun God Re. Many ancient rulers believed they were deities, but Amenhotep carried things further. He announced he was son of Re, ordered all signs of his real father's life to be obliterated and arranged to be buried near his mother[13]. Next, he announced that he was Re. As Re, he claimed he was the source of all radiance and light in his kingdom.

Abraham used this story to illustrate omnipotent thinking. As Re, Amenhotep IV was caught

10. See Weinrobe (2010) On runaway greed and climate change denial: a psychoanalytic perspective, Lionel Monteith Memorial Lecture, London: Lincoln Clinic and Centre for Psychotherapy, published in the Bulletin Annual of the British Psychoanalytical Society and on www.sallyweintrobe.com

11. For a discussion of this kind of dehumanizing splitting see Weintrobe, S. (2010). A dehumanising form of prejudice as part of a narcissistic pathological organisation. In Enduring Loss: Mourning, Depression and Narcissism through the Life Cycle. (eds) McGinley, E., and Varchevker, A., Karnac: London.

12. Abraham, K. (1935). Amenhotep IV (Ikhnaton) - A Psychoanalytic Contribution to the Understanding of his Personality. Psychoanal. Q., 4:537-569.

13. He ordered that her burial name show no trace of her ever having had any connection with his real father.

up in a phantasy that he, omni-potently, could create the whole world. The world he created was an 'as if' psychic retreat of fake reality. Abraham clearly illustrated the stages involved: divorce oneself from real objects through splitting them into idealized and denigrated parts; identify with the idealized part; recast the whole inner representational world to suit wishful hubristic phantasy, disavow damage caused. Self-idealizing omnipotent thought-action can rustle up an imaginary 'as if' pain free inner world[14] to live inside in an instant[15]. It can reshape the whole inner psychic landscape.

When people idealize themselves, damage does not feel real or weighty to them. They believe they can magically fix things that go wrong.

The 'what if' approach versus the 'as if' approach

Hanna Segal importantly distinguished two broad approaches to phantasy, the 'what if' and the 'as if' approach[16].

'What if' asks what if my phantasy were true? What would be the consequences? 'What if' type of thinking is the hall mark of the caring part of the self. For instance, what if I act as though I am superior and special, rules do not apply to me and I am entitled to whatever I want *and* not to feel bad about it? What would follow in the outside world and how would my way of being affect my inner moral equilibrium?

'As if' thinking proceeds 'as if' the phantasy is true. 'As if' thinking is the hall mark of Exceptions.

Segal saw the caring and the uncaring parts of the self as preoccupied with morality. The caring part is primarily concerned about the self's effects on the other. It wants to repair damage it causes, where it can, in genuine ways. To do this, it needs a truthful picture. For example, having undertaken 'what if' interrogatory work, it comes to the conclusion that, 'seeing myself as ideal, exaggeratedly entitled and an exception to ordinary inner moral checks, balances and struggles has harmed others around me and also harmed myself. It leaves me feeling guilty and ashamed. It leaves me in a de-idealized position, humbler, more aware of my needs, dependencies on others and feelings of love and gratitude towards them. It has led me to mourn my arrogant phantasy beliefs'. What we ordinarily think of as a moral position involves this sort of psychic repair work as well as practical repair work.

The uncaring part of the self is also concerned with damage and repair. However, its sees damage as anything that punctures its phantasy of being ideal and it 'repairs' the damage in 'as if' ways. They are designed to restore the wishful phantasy to what it was before the damage was noticed. Here, when moral imperfection is noticed in the self, all effort is directed to restoring the self-image as ideal. This is 'as if' morality, created through omnipotent thinking. Segal called this manic repair.

Here is an example of what Segal meant by a manic repair.

I readily blamed the oil industry and the neoliberal establishment for the climate crisis, while not sufficiently noticing my own sense of exaggerated entitlement and exceptionalism. The oil industry and the neoliberal establishment are majorly responsible, but was I using their culpability to project my own culpability by maintaining, 'I'm not to blame; it's the system'? If so, that would be a manic repair to rid myself of feeling burdened by guilt. Blocking felt awareness of – disavowing - my grandchildren's fate would help me sustain that position.

When caught up in manic 'as if' repairs, a person is not psychically available for genuine reality-based repairs.

14. Abraham was writing long before Steiner put forward his ideas on the psychic retreat from reality. See Steiner, J. (1993). Psychic Retreats. London: Routledge.
15. Wanting to 'feel special' is common and ordinary, and always involves some self-idealization. The degree to which we can get trapped in self-idealization may depend not only on individual personality but on our circumstances in life: how loved we are in reality and what in our environment keeps our omnipotence in check.
16. Segal, H. (1994). Phantasy and Reality. Int. J. Psycho-Anal., 75:395-401.

Neoliberal ideology

Neoliberal ideology, inspired by Hayek, popularized by writers like Ayn Rand and giving rise to free market economic theory, while it gradually gained influence after WW2, was still a relative outrider on the political fringe until the 1980s when it gathered support and was voted into power in Regan's USA and Thatcher's Britain.

Neoliberal ideology displays the hallmark traits of Exceptionalism: self-idealization (we are the ideal and our position is superior), exaggerated entitlement (man [sic] shall hold dominion and rules and laws do not apply to us), a drift to 'as if' omnipotent thinking and 'as if' moral quick fixes (we can ignore climate change as it is not quite real to us).

A self-idealizing, arrogating belief system is by no means unique to this ideology. As old as the human hills (we saw it with Amenhotep IV), it took on new force, scope and energy from the mid 18th century onwards with industrialization and colonialism. Industrialization encouraged a view of workers and nature as 'raw materials' to be exploited. Colonialism had bred a belief in superiority over other cultures, with splitting into superior/inferior based on prejudice used to justify the immorality of ruthless exploitation. The humanity and the entitlements of 'distanced others' were disavowed in 'as if' ways to quash moral qualms.

Neoliberals who came to power in the 1980s knew about climate change. The reality-based community asked what if we do nothing about it? Neoliberals embraced 'as if'. They acted 'as if' the problem of climate change could be addressed through extensive disavowal and manic repairs. That way neoliberal Exceptions could 'restore' their position to being ideal, exaggeratedly entitled and an exception to rules and laws, even the laws of physics.

It is beyond the 'broad-brush' scope of this talk more fully to argue the case that neoliberal ideology is an example of Exceptionalism. Just one illustration is neoliberal ideologue Ayn Rand's novel *Atlas Shrugged*[17] that vividly conveys Exceptionalism in its neoliberal form. Its main character Hank Rearden, defending himself in court, appears enraptured with his own superiority and superior creativity, wedded to the idea that he need follow no rules set by others. He argues with passion that only violent force used against him or incarceration will hold him back from doing whatever he wants to do. He is exaggeratedly entitled and believes he owes nothing to others whom he sees as expectant leeches wanting to suck from him and take from him what he alone created. He is not responsible to or for others, but it is clear he thinks they will be nourished by and benefit from his radiant creativity and largesse. Here he resembles the picture painted of Amenhotep IV who thought he was self-created and that his radiance trickled down and lit everyone up.

Rearden worships his individual freedom to the point of fetishizing it. This is freedom divorced from responsibility to or for others. He shocks with the revealing openness of his position, one normally kept hidden to respect moral probity. He presents himself as radiantly superior and he hides the ugly underbelly of what is required to maintain Exceptionalism.

It might be asked why a character like Rearden is so appealing? In the film version of the story, people in the courthouse start out listening in shocked silence but by the end they applaud him wildly. It goes beyond the scope of this talk to explore this, vital, question, except to say that Rearden appeals to the ordinary exception in us all. Which of us does not recognise a wish to be free of, untrammelled by, feelings of guilt and shame? Andre Green's view of Freud's death drive as the wish to achieve an inner place of quietude may well bear on why a position like Rearden's is so appealing. The inner quietude comes from using omnipotent thinking to rid the self of moral conflict and anxieties it generates. As if.

The idealized self sees itself as beneficent and all providing. Real people, the apparent recipients of this beneficence, are actually held in contempt, exploited and side-lined. One

17. Ayn Rand (1957). Atlas Shrugged. Plume Books. Published (2007) by Penguin Books: London.

version of this phantasy within neoliberal ideology is trickle-down economics, the idea that neoliberals' riches will trickle down. In reality, we have seen increasing trickle up in the neoliberal age, with, as Ha Joon Chang[18] pointed out, rules fixed so the ladder is drawn up behind those in the entitled in-crowd.

Under neoliberalism, environmental harm done has tended to be addressed through quick fix manic 'repairs'. This enabled a moral position to be maintained in 'as if' ways.

Neoliberal culture

A global economy run on neoliberal lines will exploit people, harm the planet and squander resources. This is because the Exceptions driving it are in a mindset disassociated from care and responsibility. For the new neoliberal economy to function, people would need to be deregulated morally so they would not mind so much that the way they now lived was immoral and harmful. The culture neoliberals put in place would offer people 'as if' narratives providing them with justifications to help them feel less guilty living in the new economy. It would appeal to the ordinary exception in them and attack their caring part that held the exception in check. It would also attack cultures of care that held the exception in check.

Neoliberal culture grew out of, and greatly extended, consumerist culture that began to take hold with mechanization in the early 1920s, with advertisers such as Bernays, Freud's nephew, exploiting to the hilt Freud's discovery of the power of phantasy. Bernays' marketing interventions aimed to boost wishful 'as if' quick fixes and undermine 'what if' thinking. He was particularly effective in ways he found to corrupt the caring part of the self to draw it into 'as if' omnipotent thinking.

Consumerism grew out of greater understanding of how to manipulate people's conflicting relationships to phantasy. It appealed to already existing self-idealizing tendencies in people. Advertising and marketing was so successful that by the 1960s US culture was being described as the 'me' culture[19].

During the neoliberal era, advertising, mass media and general group culture worked to achieve a shift in the moral centre of gravity. Neoliberal culture, being responsive to the times, developed its techniques of psychological persuasion. Advertising now reached ever more people, including children who had been protected from direct advertising until Regan deregulated advertising to children in 1981[20]. With the digital age came penetration of advertising into ever further areas of life.

Advertisers continued to repeatedly stimulate omnipotent identification with idealized figures (remember Amenhotep IV thinking he was the sun god). Branding under neo-liberalism became more sophisticated and as the damage caused by the neoliberal economy rose, 'greening' became prevalent and a part of branding. Greening - falsely suggesting the product was ecologically sustainable - was used to quell rising moral unease at buying the product. 'As if' fake perfect Eden-like worlds were offered to counter awareness that, as Pope Frances[21] put it, "we are turning our world into a pile of filth".

Neoliberal culture offers a collusive deal: move into a bubble-like psychic retreat from reality and you can do the shopping guilt free. You are an exception and as such entitled to have a nice day and not to feel any inner pain, especially guilt and shame.

Corporations spend vast sums crafting the hook to draw people into feeling entitled to employ omnipotent thinking to avoid feeling implicated in the damage. Feeling entitled in this way necessarily treats the caring reality oriented part of the self as not entitled, not

18. Ha-Joon Chang. (2007). Bad Samaritans: Guilty Secrets of rich nations and the threat to global prosperity. Random House: London

19. See for example Lasch, C. (1991). The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations. Norton: London and New York.

20. IRVIN MOLOTSKY (1988). Reagan Vetoes Bill Putting Limits On TV Programming for Children. New York Times

21. Pope Francis: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

worth it. That was the pain I believe I registered standing at the bus stop. I saw myself as worth more than the exaggeratedly entitled falsely 'worth it' position I found myself in. The caring part measures what to means to be 'worth it' on a different set of scales.

Neoliberal culture has relentlessly encouraged disavowal in the general population. The most serious example is disavowal that we are implicated in climate change. The subject tends to be dropped from conversations in the media, in social group discussions and in general culture, or if admitted, stripped of its urgency[22].

Walter Benjamin's depiction of Paul Klee's painting of Angelus Novelis vividly conveys our current historical moment. The angel of history turns away but is drawn to look fixedly at the past.

… he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet.[23].

I have argued that the *one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage* is the culturally driven upsurge in exceptionalism during the neoliberal era. We will only address climate change seriously when we break with neoliberalism. I believe that starts with the pain of seeing that we become morally deregulated when we collude with it. We need to take seriously the exception within us as well as the Exceptions currently running the economy.

Sally Weintrobe, psychoanalyst, writes and talks about disavowal of climate change. She is currently writing a book on neoliberal ideology and its culture of uncare that she sees as promoting this disavowal. She edited and contributed to *Engaging with Climate Change* (2012). Sally is a fellow of the British Psychoanalytic Society and a founding member of Climate Psychology Alliance.

http://www.sallyweintrobe.com

22. For a discussion of how this plays out in social conversations, see podcast by Weintrobe (2016): https://www.mixcloud.com/Resonance/frontier-psychoanalyst-ep-3-18-january-2016/
23. Walter Benjamin, "Thesis on the Philosophy of History," ninth thesis.

Emma Smith

My integrative model: theory of people and practice

Editor's note:

This material constitutes the theoretical section of a dissertation submitted for the degree of MSc in Integrative Psychotherapy (Metanoia Institute/Middlesex University). The student is required to give her own framework for integrative practice.

1. Introduction

In this opening section, I will tackle the theories, thinkers, philosophy and research findings, around which I structure my work as an integrative psychotherapist. I will begin by sketching out my therapeutic model, before going on to explore my view of human development and psychology in more detail and closing with the techniques I employ in the therapy room, based on my understanding of human nature and personality change. My sense of what it means to be human can never be more than an approximation of the complex lived experience of each individual. Therefore, although this chapter represents an attempt to delineate and define, I continue to regard adaptability and self-reflexivity as the corner stones of my working practice.

2. My Integrative Model: An overview

I work relationally, by which I mean that I believe human beings are instinctively relationship-seeking, formed through our relationships (particularly those in infancy), experience our ongoing sense of self and define our personalities within relationships (both inter-personal and intrapsychic) and that it is through relationships – particularly through a good therapeutic relationship - that we can reach new levels of self-awareness and create lasting affective and cognitive change.

In placing relationship-seeking at the heart of my understanding of human development and motivation, I draw on the pioneering work of the early Object Relations theorists, their emphasis on personality development in relation to primary care givers, and how defence mechanisms laid down in childhood can persist, out of context - and largely out of conscious awareness - into adult life. Among these early relational theorists, I pay particular attention to the writings of Winnicott (1990, 1964/1991, 1965/2006), Fairbairn (1954, 1986, 1994), and Guntrip (1961). In considering unconscious relational patterns, established in infancy and persisting into adulthood, I also hold in mind the work of Horney (1966), and her concepts of moving '*toward* people, *against* them or *away* from them' (1966: 43). And the 'character styles' devised by Johnson (1994).

I will often view clients through the lens of Bowlby's (and his followers') studies in child attachment (Bowlby, 1997) and am strongly influenced by the work of Stern (2000, 2004), Siegel (1999) and Schore (1994, 2012), their emphasis on the role of the parent-child relationship in affect regulation in early

infancy, and the potential to harness the sort of mirroring affect attunement' (Stern, 2004) or 'interactive regulation' (Schore, 2012), which is the currency of healthy infant development, to heal emotional damage in later life. Bringing relational theories up to date with current neuroscientific understanding, I believe a child's first relationship 'acts as a template' for 'all later emotional relationships' (Schore, 1994: 3) and forms part of the brain's neurobiological/ neurochemical structure so that: 'once a behaviour is learned and represented in the cortex, a similar situation can release this behaviour out of awareness' (Ginot, 2015: 11).

As well as the intimate relationship between parent and child, I see people as players in wider societal and cultural groups (Turner & Tajfel, 1986) with each group requiring 'more or less radical internal transformation of the persons who comprise it' (Laing, 1967: 82). I consider dynamics of power, not just in broader society, but also between therapist and client (DeVaris, 1994; Masson, 1989).

I draw from evolutionary psychology the fact that we are also subject to, and motivated by, basic evolutionary instincts and drives (indeed relationship-seeking is part of this): what Pinker calls 'the neural computations necessary to figure out how to get the rare and unpredictable things we need' (2002: 267) to survive. However, these operate largely outside the awareness of the conscious self, which is gripped by the more abstract 'dilemma of a meaning-seeking creature who is thrown into a universe that has no meaning.' (Yalom, 1980: 9). Yet, despite our pursuit of meaning in our lives, I tend to agree with Holmes that psychotherapy is, ultimately, a search for 'intimacy and autonomy' in human relationships (Holmes, 2001).

With this 'implicit intersubjective goal' (Boston Change Process Study Group, 2010: 14) in mind, I place the psychodynamic concepts of transference and counter- transference at the heart of my therapeutic practice, and pay close attention to the way the client's interactions with me provide a mirror onto their past and current relationships. I use psychoanalytic-style interpretations, but recognise that there are limitations to 'interventions that utilize mainly left brain conscious cognitive mechanisms to deal with […] involuntary nonconscious affective and interpersonal deficits.' (Schore, 2012: 11).

I believe in the importance of the Rogerian core conditions (Rogers, 1957) of 'empathy', 'congruence' and 'unconditional positive regard' (while sensing there must be inevitable pay off between the latter two concepts) in establishing a good working alliance. I incorporate the ideas and processes at the heart of the Gestalt school's concept of phenomenological enquiry and, as the therapeutic relationship develops beyond the early bonding phase, I turn increasingly to theories of *intersubjectivity* (Orange *et al*., 2009) and the work of Beebe and Lachmann, among others, on how therapist and client 'jointly construct dyadic modes of regulation that include patterns of both self- and interactive regulation.' (Beebe & Lachman, 2002: 14). It is through this authentic person-to-person interaction, that lasting change can occur.

However, I am also struck by the need for cognitive re-appraisal and narrative construction; to look back and make 'the emotional discovery of the truth about the unique history of our childhood' (Miller, 1997: 1). Even via the simple bringing to mind of past experiences, the brain alters memories and their stored affects through the 'constructive or reconstructive nature' of the memory retrieval process (Brown & Craik, 2000: 100).

In my practice, I aim to engage with the many facets of human experience, to empathically connect with clients, and to work within the relational dyad to bring about lasting change. In all my therapeutic endeavours, I am guided by ethical principles and aspire to work without prejudice, remaining sensitive to difference and using supervision as a space for professional self-reflection.

3. My theory of people and personality dynamics

Introduction: 'Self' knowledge and its limits

The complexity of our inner lives means that reaching a definitive understanding of human nature and personality dynamics is currently beyond the realm of possibility (may remain

so) and attempts, like Freud's, to devise a universal system of personality structure from personal observations and instinctive hunches, can only ever be pseudo-scientific, based as much on personal biography and societal context, as on universally observable phenomenon. My own theories will undoubtedly be bound up in my own personal experiences and motivations, and yet, scientific research increasingly shows how an individual personality - a way (or more accurately, ways) of 'being-in-the-world' (Heidegger, 1962) and in relationships - is formed from genetic inheritance and its interaction with the environment, beginning with, and perhaps most profoundly impacted by, the formative parent-infant relationship, out of which develops the child's implicit - largely unconscious - self. So, although my thinking has moved far beyond 'the mechanistic reifications of Freudian metapsychology' (Stolorow & Atwood, 2002: 2), it is my belief that neuroscientific research is beginning to add weight to Freud's emphasis on the power of unconscious processes, allowing for a reformulation of some of his ideas and grounding them in a modern, scientific model of development based on 'genomics, neural networks, and neural plasticity' (Pinker, 2002: 100).

From object relations and attachment to attunement and affect regulation: the significance of the first relationship

I work from the premise that, counter to Freud's 'drive theory' (Freud, 1991, 2005), and in the words of Fairbairn: '[…] libidinal pleasure is fundamentally just a sign-post to the object.' (Fairbairn, 1986: 76). (Instincts certainly exist and pleasure results from attaining a desired object, but pleasure is not the goal in itself.) And, in a very basic (although oversimplified) sense, with the right sort of 'facilitative environment', a baby's striving for relationship - motivated fundamentally by its need to survive and to retain emotional equilibrium - will be met by interactions with a 'good-enough mother' (or other parental figure), which will enable it to 'become himself or herself, really and truly' (Winnicott, 1965/2006: 24-25).

Drawing on Bowlby's ground-breaking work, I believe that 'the pattern of attachment a child is showing towards his mother figure is to a high degree the consequence of the pattern of mothering he is receiving.' (Bowlby, 1997: 345-6). A 'securely attached' infant (provided subsequent events/relationships are not overly traumatic), will develop a personality 'structured to operate in moderately controlled and resilient ways, and increasingly capable of continuing so despite adverse circumstances.' (Bowlby, 1997: 378).

In a view which anticipated the work of Siegel, Stern and Schore, Bowlby considered the importance of 'a mother's sensitivity to her baby's signals, and especially her ability to time her interventions in harmony with his rhythms.' (Bowlby, 1997: 346). I see the work of modern attachment theorists as a progression of Bowlby's work and place their understanding of child development at the heart of my work, paying particular attention to the significance of mother-child 'attunement', 'mutual affect-regulation' and 'shared affect states' (Stern, 2000) on the infant's neurobiological development. I work from the premise that it is through this microcosmic moment-by-moment relationship between parent and child - the 'interpersonal neurobiological mechanisms' (Schore, 2012: 1) or 'intersubjective matrix' (Stern, 2004: 77) - that the infant begins to develop its sense of self (a sense of how he/she is experienced and how he/she experiences him/herself). Even before a baby has properly developed the capacity for episodic and autobiographical memory, this early relational interaction lays down the pattern for future relating:

> The mother […] is thus the major source of the environmental stimulation that facilitates (or inhibits) the experience-dependent maturation of the child's developing biological (especially neurobiological) structures.
>
> (Schore, 1994: 7)

I concur with Schore's emphasis on the importance of the early-developing right brain, in forming a person's implicit self (the unconscious affective mechanisms) which underpin the left's brain's conscious, explicit self (Schore, 2012: 15). In this analysis, the right hemisphere is 'the master', the left 'the emissary' the latter believing itself superior

and in control, the former secretly pulling the strings behind the scenes (McGilchrist 2009).

Encoded relational patterns in the brain: reframing the unconscious

Stern encapsulates my sense of a sort of 'indelible imprint' (Schore, 1994: 3) on the infant's neurobiological/neurochemical make-up, in his notion of "representations of interactions that have been generalized" or RIGs (Stern, 2000). (Might this be the real cause of Freud's (2005) 'repetition compulsion'? 'Early experiences are addictive, not just because of their psychological salience but also because of their neurochemical concomitants.' (Mitchell, 2010: 114).)

However, rather than operating in relation to internal objects, which are introjected versions of objects/relationships in the outside world, I believe the activity of the brain and the strength of specific neural pathways are physically shaped by these early relationships to form 'nonverbal unconscious affective mechanisms' (Schore, 2012: 19) which underpin future relating. In a similar way, in his later work, Stern sidelines the term RIGs, preferring 'ways-of-being-with' (Stern, 2000: xv), moving away from the notion of internal representations, to emphasise the brain's mapping of 'patterned experience of self in interaction with another' (Stern, 2000: xv).

Building on these insights, I believe it is possible to reframe Freud's understanding of the unconscious, casting it in a new light and describing how early experiences, though beyond our conscious recall, are encoded in our neurobiology/neurochemistry and continue to influence conscious behaviour in later life. In this context the unconscious becomes 'a dynamic amalgam of synchronized processes and learned blueprints that repeat themselves, and less a hiding place for dynamically rejected experiences.' (Ginot, 2015: xxxvii). These unconscious 'blueprints' then become a form of shorthand, enabling the brain to respond quickly and out of awareness to familiar situations. They influence how people perceive reality and affect their sense of self, and self-with-other, by superimposing the original model onto each subsequent relationship. In a similar way, I regard dissociation less as a symptom of 'repression' (Freud, 1991), than one of the brain's automatic defences 'against re-experiencing relational trauma'. (Ginot, 2015: xx).

Losing yourself: when early relationships go awry

When early relationships are neglectful, abusive or insufficiently 'attuned', a child may grow into an adult who struggles to relate to people or to maintain a coherent sense of self. Schore describes how relational trauma or neglect in early life can lead to a 'deficit in affect regulation', imparting a greater risk of later psychopathology (Schore, 2012: 9). Roth and Sweatt (2011) show how severe maltreatment in childhood can affect the brain in such ways that it becomes more susceptible to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), borderline personality disorder, schizophrenia and major depression. (A traumatic event can, of course, have a profound effect on all individuals, however, Herman suggests pre-existing relational difficulties make people more likely to experience PTSD (Herman, 1992).)

As well as affecting the infant's capacity for future emotional self-regulation, a deficient environment - initially a deficient parent-child relationship - can lead to the adoption of defensive strategies (or, perhaps more accurately, the triggering of self-protective emotional/behavioural responses, which become codified in the brain's developing structure) to survive, maintain emotional equilibrium and relational connection.

In the more symbiotic realm of the 'nursing couple' (Winnicott, 1965/2006: 21) the infant will also mirror the mother's emotional states. Drawing on Kohut (in a way which resonates with my own experience), Schore describes how, through 'the empathic merger of the child's rudimentary psyche with the maternal selfobject's highly developed psychic organization, the child experiences the feeling states of the selfobject as if they were his or her own.' (2012: 57). (While still controversial (see Hickok, 2014), Gallese's (2006, 2008) and Iacoboni's (2007, 2008) research on 'mirror neurones' appears to show the brain's pre-reflexive empathic

response, in its propensity to respond to others by firing up the same neural networks.)

It could be that this empathic merger, or mirroring, rather than Fairbairn's more cognitive notion of 'internalizing bad objects' (Fairbairn, 1994), might explain why children hold aspects of a frustrating parental relationship, or a parent's depressive or emotionally dysregulated position, within themselves, or as part of a matrix of different felt 'self-states' (Bromberg, 2011). It is my sense that we all experience different 'self-states' and our sense of self is by no means entirely fixed, but that in a more disrupted early environment, some of these self-states may remain split off, or dissociated, rather than gradually coalescing into a more cohesive sense of self (Allen *et al*., 1999).

Personality types and reified patterns of relating

Based on my understanding of personality development, it seems plausible that specific types of parent-child relationships may interact with certain genetic predispositions to create certain personality styles and basic models of attachment.

In my work, I consider the results of infant observations (Ainsworth *et al*., 1978; Main & Solomon, 1986) which suggest four types of attachment behaviour in infants ('secure', 'avoidant', 'ambivalent', 'disorganised'), and which correspond roughly to four suggested adult styles (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Holmes, 2001).

Though less widely cited, I believe Horney's work on personality development, and her concepts of the "compliant", 'aggressive' and 'detached personality' (Horney, 1966: 48) - a process of moving 'towards', 'against' or 'away' from others, respectively - offers useful parallels with attachment theory. For Horney, a 'neurotic' – in my terminology, a person experiencing psychological conflict – is not flexible in which of these positions he/she adopts but will deny their natural inclinations and fight to maintain the preferred position, regardless of whether it is appropriate, and will be 'thrown into panic if he behaves otherwise.' (Horney, 1966: 46)

Horney describes how certain early relationships may lead an individual to construct an ideal self around their 'basic attitude', potentially leading to 'a sense of unreality - an accentuated expression of his permanent condition of being unreal to himself.' (Horney, 1966: 111). In a similar way, I also draw on Winnicott's (loosely drawn) concept of a 'false self', which has the double task of engaging with the world and hiding the real self (Winnicott, 1965/2006: 216), and see the similarity with Fairbairn's notion of the 'schizoid' personality, in which a person's sense of self is split off from others and may 'be carried to the point at which all emotional and physical contacts with other persons are renounced' (Fairbairn, 1986: 92-93).

In considering types of personality adaptations, I also turn to Johnson (1994), who explores how a child might respond to different parenting styles, leading to certain, categorisable, relational adaptations. It seems plausible that certain early relationships might interact with certain genetic propensities to produce identifiable, and to a certain extent predictable, personality constructions. For example, the narcissistic defence, whereby a grandiose self keeps unbearable feelings of vulnerability and shame at bay, may well result (as reflected by countless theorists and story tellers) when the parents 'need the child to be more than he is for self-fulfilment and idealize him, or need him to be less than he is and humiliate him, or both' (Johnson, 1994: 45).

Medical models of psychopathology

Within this relational model of psychopathology, I retain an awareness of the influence of heritability in mental illness (Hyman, 1999). I will also, on occasion, consult more medical diagnostic criteria (DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association, 2013); ICD-10 (World Health Organisation, 1992)) in considering my clients' presenting issues. I regard such psychiatric labels as useful for guiding expectations and grouping various mental health symptoms, which observation has suggested may present in conjunction. However, I will hold these labels lightly, regarding them, in most cases, as no more than a staging post in my journey towards a more nuanced understanding of the lived experience of each individual.

Dynamics of power and difference

Although a focus on the parent-infant dyad lies at the heart of my work, I am also aware that other relationships - with peers, siblings, broader society and cultural expectations – will be overlaid on this basic foundation during a person's lifetime (in some cases within more conscious awareness (Damasio, 2000)).

A client's life experiences and social interactions will differ depending on their gender, race, ethnic origin, sexuality, social class, economic status, age, appearance and whether or not they have any sort of disability or impairment. Each of these attributes or groupings will represent different things for, and provoke different responses in, others, which will also contribute to a person's character formation, relational patterns and sense of self (Pilgrim, 1997; Proctor, 2017). (Some groups are also more likely to come into contact with mental health services (Brown & Harris, 1978; Singh *et al*., 2007)). And a parent's membership of a particular group, and the status of that group within wider society, may (certainly will, in my estimation) also influence the sort of parenting their child receives, and so social groups also play a role in the very early formation of that child's implicit self (Dalal, 2006).

I aim to be aware of my own prejudices and to be attentive to these in the therapy room, exploring them where necessary, in supervision and/or personal therapy. I also keep in mind how, as a therapist, I might be seen (somewhat erroneously) to represent a 'healthy ordered life', while clients may feel themselves to be "'sickness and confusion" (Bannister, 1983: 139), a supposition, which may also play out in the power dynamics in the therapy room.

Existential anxieties

Although, as illustrated above, our behaviour is, to a large extent, governed by our genes and relational patterns laid down in childhood, this does not, I believe, reflect how it feels to be human. Thanks to the experience of consciousness, humans have a sense of freedom of thought and choice (we have little sense of being at all pre-programmed). And our brains are, to a certain extent, 'plastic' (with huge potential consequences for psychotherapy) and malleable: given the right circumstances, we can change how we interact with the world, and we can put our life into context, as set against the inevitability of our deaths. Our conscious minds are, it seems to me, propelled to search for meaning within what appears to be a meaningless world. This 'search for meaning' (Yalom, 1980), which is common to all people, can be thwarted or distorted if early relational dynamics did not allow the individual the freedom of conscious self-determination.

4. My method: theories, techniques

Outcome research: the empirical underpinnings of my relational approach

Before I elaborate on my integrative model, I will briefly consider some of the outcome research which informs my approach. One consistent finding, is that there appears to be no qualitative difference (at least in the context of a broad-brush meta-analysis) in outcomes between different schools (Luborsky *et al*., 1995; Wampold *et al*., 1997). Another significant, and apparently consistent finding, is that relationship factors (particularly the quality of the therapeutic alliance), are the most reliable predictor of positive therapeutic outcomes (Horvath & Symonds, 1991).

Researchers are now looking to define the components of an effective therapeutic relationship (Norcross, 2002). Challenging as this research is, some characteristics which are emerging as significant factors include: the ability to navigate and repair ruptures (Foreman & Marmar, 1985; Rhodes *et al*., 1994; Binder & Strupp, 1997), positive regard, congruence and empathy (Steering Committee, 2002). Another key research focus is into client variables (Clarkin & Levy, 2004) and client-therapist/model compatibility (Elkin *et al*., 1999). To my mind, this emphasis on the components of the relationship between client and therapist, mirrors recent research in child development and the neurobiology of relationships, which, in the way it has been taken up by Schore (2012), Beebe and Lachman (2002) and others, can potentially offer a point of connection between competing

approaches - or even the beginnings of a 'unifying paradigm', as proposed by the Boston Change Process Study Group (2010) - all of which is central to the emergence of my model.

The core conditions and the working alliance

Based on my clinical experience, my understanding of personality development, psychodynamics, and backed up by the outcome research discussed above, I place the therapeutic relationship at the core of my working practice and believe that a resilient and effective therapeutic relationship emerges following the early establishment of a good working alliance (Horvath & Symonds, 1991). In the early stages with a client, my focus will be on establishing this alliance, based on the Rogerian principles of 'empathy', 'congruence' and 'unconditional positive regard'. Through these 'core conditions' (Rogers, 1957), I believe it is possible to establish a bond of trust with the client, which will sustain the work during more difficult phases and through the critical (and potentially transformative) processes of rupture and repair, as the relationship develops and deepens (Safran, 1993). It is important not just to feel empathetic during these early phases, but also to communicate this empathy. Rogers (1975) wrote about how the therapist feels something of the client's intrapsychic experience and communicates this back to the client, using methods such as attentive listening, allowing the client space for reflection, reflecting back, summarising, paraphrasing, clarifying and checking, and generally demonstrating to the client that he/she is *present* (Rogers, 1967/2004), 'interested and invested' (Ehrenberg, 1992: 23) to understand, without being directive or judgemental.

Intersubjectivity: reciprocal mutual influence between therapist and client

Once a resilient alliance has been established, I increasingly focus on the therapeutic relationship as a more complex field of inter-relational experience and mutual influence: 'the interplaying of two subjective worlds' (Orange *et al*., 2009: 17). In this, the 'co-constructed' (Beebe & Lachmann, 2002) therapeutic relationship - much of which takes place outside, or on the edges of, conscious awareness - can mirror some of the aspects of the early developmental relationships outlined above. It is radically different from the traditional psychoanalytic notion of one separate mind acting to change another; the 'myth of neutrality' (Orange *et al*., 2009). Instead, the therapist's countertransference - conceptualised as the 'manifestation of the analyst's organizing activity' (Orange *et al*., 2009: 40), or more simply, the therapist's relational script - has an impact on shaping the transference (the patterns of relating, which the client superimposes onto each successive relational encounter).

Schore (1994, 2012) writes about the importance of 'the early maturing right brain hemisphere' in the formation of parent-child attachment relationships and affect regulation, and how this process is recapitulated in the 'communication and regulation of conscious and unconscious affects between patient and the psychobiologically attuned empathic clinician […]' (Schore, 2012: 13). I find the process of intersubjective attunement difficult to describe: it is instinctively felt, works often on a non-symbolic plane, which exists prior to language, and usually outside awareness. We can see it reflected in the mirroring relationship of parent and child, the matching of vocal tone, prosody and facial expressions to the client's emotional needs, the minute recalibrations to the moment-by-moment affective changes in the intersubjective encounter. Mearns and Cooper make an evocative analogy to a tuning fork, with 'the therapist's body and feelings resonating with the client's own physicality.' (Mearns & Cooper, 2005: 40). I believe the process of attunement also has a lot in common with the 'phenomenological method' which, in a similar way, involves taking in everything client and therapist are experiencing in the moment (choice of words, body language, voice, tone, emotional resonances), and paying close attention as the client gradually reveals him or herself (Woldt & Tolman, 2005; Mann, 2010).

Relating at depth: transformative affective moments

When client and therapist are particularly closely attuned, I have experienced how this can create special moments of

connection, which appear similar to what Buber (2004) called *I-Thou* moments:

> The Thou meets me through grace – it is not found by seeking. But my speaking of the primary word to it is an act of being, is indeed the act of my being.
>
> (Buber, 2004: 17)

In a more contemporary therapeutic context, Beebe and Lachmann (2002) write about 'supercharged moments' or 'heightened affective moments', while the Boston Change Process Study Group opt for 'now moments', for when there is a sense of authentic person-to-person connection: 'special moments' […] that altered their relationship with him or her *[the therapist]* and thereby their sense of themselves. […]' (Boston Change Process Study Group, 2010: 31).

As the client experiences subtly different relational responses to those which he/she had anticipated based on past experience – responses which do not match his/her unconscious templates, schemas or self-states – there will be an 'accumulation of many small changes in implicit relational knowing" and "these subtly shifting organizations, […] influence behaviour outside the treatment situation.' (Boston Change Process Study Group, 2010: 119)

The way in which patterns of 'implicit relational knowing' are recalibrated in the relationship between therapist and client is, in many ways, a modern re-imagining of Winnicott's 'holding environment' (Winnicott, 1990) and the reparative, or developmentally-needed relationship, in therapy. The client can begin to explore, or rather re-experience, troubling relational patterns and their affective components, but within the affect-regulating, mirroring attunement of the authentic therapeutic encounter, so that overwhelming or traumatic feelings 'can be regulated and integrated into the patient's emotional life.' (Schore, 2012: 91). Holmes (2001) writes about the therapy relationship as a 'secure base' within which the therapist can begin to challenge patterns and assumptions and 'create sufficient turbulence for new structures to emerge' (Holmes, 2001: 17). Guntrip's (1961) taking in of the 'good object' becomes a taking in of new, more positive, more reality-bound forms of 'implicit relational knowing', which are less bound up with 'bad objects' from the past.

The transference relationship and the transformative potential of enactments

As outlined above, the transference relationship is a demonstration of how we transpose our 'early interaction patterns' onto other relationships (Beebe & Lachmann, 2002). In my understanding of the concept, the client is not so much projecting past experiences onto the therapist, rather the client's unconscious relational patterns are activated in the therapeutic encounter so that, over time, the therapeutic relationship exists as both a here-and-now relationship and a microcosm of all the client's relationships in the outside world.

In this context, I regard therapeutic enactments as moments when a client's implicit emotional and relational patterns are revealed and become active in the therapeutic relationship, making 'the past alive in the present.' (Maroda, 1998: 530). Rather than being obstacles, enactments open up a pathway to access deeply traumatic experiences, which have been encoded in patterns of unconscious interacting. Handled well, this becomes a powerful moment of potential psychological change when the therapist's 'self-awareness of her own participation, followed by self-disclosure of her experience, promotes a conscious, verbally articulated encounter with the patient's unconscious relational styles, creating opportunities for enhanced mentalized affectivity and integration.' (Ginot, 2015: 76).

Beyond affect: language and cognition

At the heart of my model of integrative psychotherapy lie 'nonverbal affective mechanisms' (Schore, 2012: 1). However, these occur within the context of a relationship which is also verbal and cognitive. I do not believe it is possible to maintain deep, emotional contact at all times and other types of interactions are important in order to lay the groundwork for more intense, reciprocal, emotional meetings. In my therapeutic work, I will move between 'one-person', 'one-and-a-half person' and 'two-person interactions' (Stark, 2000) and believe, from

moment to moment, the 'primary therapeutic agent' may fluctuate between 'enhancement of knowledge, provision of experience, or engagement in relationship' (Stark, 2000: XV).

The verbal content is focused on past and present experience, as well as future-based imaginings, and will move increasingly towards the exploration of here-and-now relational dynamics as the intersubjective process develops and deepens. Interpretations (of the role of past experience on current behaviour, or of the dynamics at play in the here-and-now relationship between therapist and client, for example) may work initially on a more cognitive plane but, if well timed, can offer (or more powerfully confirm or reinforce) new/emerging, and potentially transformative, insights, helping the client to begin to mould a more coherent sense of self from various disintegrated, or alienated, self-states (Bromberg, 2011; Ginot, 2015). These cognitive insights may then be recalled during heightened affective moments, potentially creating a link between conscious and unconscious relational processes. Interventions designed to enhance 'mentalizing' capacity or 'mind-mindedness' (Bateman & Fonagy, 2012: 514) - in simple terms, helping clients to understand the explicit and implicit intentions of self and other - can also bring the client into a place of greater relational understanding and consistency, and offer a way to begin reflecting on our mutual impact within the room.

Reprocessing the past and building a coherent narrative

Echoing Miller (1997), I also hold to the cathartic power of reflecting on and reconstituting the past - discovering 'our own personal truth' (Miller, 1997: 1). A verbal interpretation, or empathic comprehension, of the origin or impact of a relational pattern, can provide relief for a client, a sense of being seen, of newfound self-comprehension, or compassion and, when that same relational pattern arises again, out of context, the client may be able to harness this insight to begin to illicit affective and behavioural change. Epstein (1994) argues that the brain is motivated to assimilate emotionally significant experiences into a coherent model of the world. A more coherent narrative for, and acceptance of the past, the ability to finally 'find the voice to express what had been unspeakable' (Bromberg, 2011: 133), can help to restore self-esteem, change self-concepts, and may alter a client's behaviour sufficiently that they are then able to engage more effectively in relationships within or beyond the therapy room, in which the deeper, more affective change, may then unfold. Even the mere recalling of memories, of putting an experience into words in a new context, will inevitably change them and, over time, may loosen their emotional hold (Schiller *et al*., 2010).

A note on trauma therapy

Within this relational model, I regard trauma (defined in DSM-V as 'exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence' (American Psychiatric Association, 2013)) as a particular type – or perhaps intensity – of affective experience, which can trigger specific reactions in the brain and leave clients with particular cognitive and effective challenges: '[…] one time intense stimulation of the amygdala *[the centre of the brain which is believed to register highly charged emotions]* will produce lasting changes in neuronal excitability and enduring behaviour changes in the direction of fight or flight.' (Van der Kolk, 1996: 295).

In working with clients suffering from post-traumatic stress, I will incorporate the work of Herman (1992) and her three-stage model of recovery; Rothschild's (2011) 'Somatic Trauma Therapy' and Van Der Kolk (2015), particularly his hypothesis that extreme levels of arousal may inhibit the proper functioning of the hippocampus, the area of the brain responsible for making sense of experiences and integrating them into our personal narrative/sense of self, something which may be achievable subsequently through carefully calibrated therapeutic encounters.

A note on brief therapy

Brief therapy can act as a powerful catalyst to change and growth (Eckert, 1993). However, in very short-term work, there may be little time to invoke lasting change in relational

and affective processes within the sessions and, in some addictive behaviours or anxiety conditions, an element of behaviour change, brought about by more cognitive and behavioural techniques, may be necessary before the client has the headspace for the more time-consuming relational change process. I hold in mind Lacan's (2007) admonition that this sort of intervention may only have the effect of shoring up, or strengthening, a client's defence mechanisms, rather than eliciting more positive change. However, this is something some clients - particularly those in a university counselling setting, for example, who just want to get through their examinations - may be temporarily fine with.

5. Conclusion

I am excited by some of the current neuroscientific research, which appears to add weight to psychodynamic concepts of human development, as well as to theories of psychological change. I remain, however, suspicious of anyone claiming to have figured the whole thing out because, ultimately, a client's needs are 'jointly discovered as the therapeutic process unfolds.' (Casement, 1990: 179). I cherish the notions of 'sloppiness' (Boston Change Process Study Group, 2010), and 'stumbling along and hanging in' (Bromberg, 2011), as essential parts of any therapeutic encounter, while also heeding the importance of believing in my model and holding firm to the transformative, intersubjective, 'sloppy' relationship between client and therapist, as the crucible for therapeutic change.

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Book Review by Dr Els van Ooijen, Nepenthe Consultancy.

Living Like Crazy

2nd edition, by Paul Gilbert, York.
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Paul Gilbert, the originator of Compassion Focussed Therapy, contends that the way we live today is crazy, as we are busy destroying the very planet on which our lives, indeed all life, depends. He points out that rather than paying attention to what makes for happy, peaceful and sustainable societies, we spend many billions on weapons, allow large corporations to plunder the earth's resources, and allow a predatory form of capitalism that results in increasing inequality between the haves and the have nots. This book is the result of Gilbert's investigations into how this situation has come about and what we might be able to do about it.

The problem, Gilbert argues, has arisen because our brains have not kept up with the enormous changes that have occurred since we were hunter-gatherers. In those days our main focus was survival and reproduction. This means that in today's context our 'archetypal minds' have to cope with a whole array of emotions and motives that originate in reproductive strategies, that are not only inappropriate, but also positively harmful in our modern world. One might expect that evolution would have kept pace with our changing context, but this is not the case. Not only is there no real need for evolutionary change as are our brains still 'good enough', but evolution is expressed through population groups rather than through individuals. So groups with a particular reproductive advantage would grow, whereas those without that advantage would eventually disappear (which may explain the extinction of other humanoids, such as homo erectus or the Neanderthals).

Gilbert argues that in hunter-gatherer societies the survival of the group would depend on cooperation and the sharing of food and resources. However, from the beginning of the agrarian revolution to the present day, there has been a battle between those who are socially minded and wish to share what is available, and those whose main purpose lies in the accumulation of personal wealth, status and resources. There is now a great deal of research available that suggests that our mental state is profoundly affected by the context within we live. So our current culture, in which strategies based on greed appear to have gained the upper hand, is literally 'driving us crazy.' Deep down we may all know this, but protect ourselves from this knowledge by denial and dissociation.

A related point is made by Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) whose research discovered that unequal societies, such as The United States and the U.K., do not just harm those at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy; the mental and physical health of those at the top is negatively affected too. So perhaps counter intuitively, greater equality was demonstrated to be more beneficial for everyone, not just for those at the top.

In the book Gilbert refers to the human brain as 'jerry-built', because as we evolved, its three parts (reptilian, mammalian and cortex) developed one after the other. As a

result we appear to have three brains instead of one, with each having its own purpose and strategies, which may conflict with the other parts. So from an evolutionary point of view the resulting archaic human behaviour that we exhibit today may be because of 'adaptive strategies' that were appropriate at the time, but that no longer serve us well.

Although Gilbert does not explicitly say so, there appears to be a clear analogy here with psychotherapy. People tend to come to therapy when they realise that something in their life is not working for them, but do not know why, nor what to do about it. So a large part of the therapeutic process may involve helping people to wake up and examine the adaptations they made early in their lives to whatever context they found themselves in at the time, but which are no longer helpful. Indeed these strategies may be very destructive and lead to the opposite of what the client actually wants. A similar point may be made about Homo Sapiens as a species. As explained above, through evolution we have developed certain adaptive strategies, some of which are no longer helpful to our current circumstances. There is therefore a need to become conscious of these adaptations, as well as an awareness of their consequences, so that we can become more skilful in dealing with each other and with the problems that we all face.

The main part of the book discusses in some detail how our archaic reproductive adaptions play out rather disastrously in our current context. Chapters are wide ranging and include: an in depth exploration of the development of our minds; discussions on religion; the human need for recognition; dynamics of power, leadership and powerlessness; as well as the development of cruelty and callousness. Gilbert robustly challenges the myths surrounding competition as a good thing and in a final chapter outlines how we may make profound changes in the way we live today. I was particularly struck by the author's message that the way we live now is not inevitable, as more compassion-focussed societies that functioned quite differently have existed in the past.

This very readable book is not aimed at therapists as such but can be read by anyone who is interested in how we got where we are and what could be done about it. It fits well with other recent works, such as *Sapiens* and *Homo Deus* by Yuval Noah Harari, and *The Master and his Emissary* by Ian McGilchrist.

I enjoyed reading the book, although it might benefit from more editing, as occasionally the mass of detail felt somewhat overwhelming. Nevertheless, this is an important work that deserves to be widely read. Its message is clear – the way we live now is crazy, indeed our society is crazy-making. However, the good news is that it does not have to be like this; we need to wake up to the craziness in ourselves and in our context, and realise that we have a choice, so that we can work together to create a more compassionate world. As Gilbert states, '..caring for ourselves, each other, our environments and the world we live in may be the most important archetypal potentials within us that we now desperately need to develop' (p443).

So the choice is clear: we can carry on as we are and face much misery and eventual extinction, or we can work to change the context!

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Book Review by Tree Staunton

Rebecca Solnit – Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibiities.

E-Book Solnit, R. (2015) (Hope in the Dark) Available at htpp://www.amazon.co.uk/kindlestore (Downloaded: 17 November June 2017).

'My own research was, I realized by its end, a small part of an enormous project going on among many disciplines—psychology, economics, neurobiology, sociology, anthropology, political science—to redefine human nature as something more communal, cooperative, and compassionate. This rescue of our reputations from the social darwinists and the Hobbesians is important, not to feel positive about ourselves but to recognize the radical possibilities that can be built on an alternative view of human nature'[1]

As a political activist, Rebecca Solnit is deeply psychological. She speaks directly to 'the inner life of the politics of the moment, to the emotions and perceptions that underlie our political positions and engagements.' (p 22)

As a writer she is creative and engaging, speaking directly to the imagination.

(In a recent web interview[2] she stated that we have all been silenced by 'deep cultural imperatives', and that there are 'reciprocal silences of men and women'. When the interviewer pressed her on how men are silenced, she answered that 'before you can commit violence against someone else you have to have killed off something within yourself, some of the empathy and connectedness that is inherent in undamaged human beings…' This will be recognized as the basic philosophical underpinning of psychotherapies, in particular Humanistic approaches).

Hope in the Dark began as an essay Solnit published on line about six weeks after the US launched its war on Iraq, written against the 'tremendous despair at the height of the Bush administration's powers and the outset of the Iraq war'. It immediately went viral. The book follows a history of activism and social change over the past five decades – from the fall of the Berlin Wall, to the worldwide marches against the war in Iraq. But it is not just a history, it is an outcry, a celebration, a powerful storytelling filled with metaphor and meaning.

One of the central premises of the book is that change is rarely straightforward. 'Sometimes it's as complex as chaos theory and as slow as evolution.' (p37). She weaves the stories in such a way as to demonstrate the Taoist principle that every action has a reaction, and that every thought, word and deed lays the groundwork for the next, and the next and the next. You can

1. Foreword to the third edition (2015) Grounds for Hope p 29
2. Democracy Now - What Makes her Hopeful in the Age of Trump (March 15, 2018) Her latest book The Mother of all Questions, an anthology of feminist essays, includes a new essay 'a short history of silence'.

fast forward a decade or a century, but if you study a thing carefully you may see where the seeds were laid. The book is full of examples of the indirectness yet connectedness of actions:

On his deathbed, Dante is told by God what the secret purpose of his life and work was. 'Dante, in wonderment, knew at last who and what he was and blessed the bitterness of his life.' One day in Auschwitz, the writer Primo Levi recited a canto of *Dante's Inferno* to a companion, and the poem about hell reached out from six hundred years before to roll back Levi's despair and his dehumanization. It was the canto about Ulysses, and though it ends tragically, it contains the lines 'You were not made to live like animals/But to pursue virtue and know the world,' which he recited and translated to the man walking with him. (p147)

Actions can be unseen except through being told as stories - in *The Angel of Alternate History* (Chpt 13) she says

> most environmental victories look like nothing happened; the land wasn't annexed by the army, the mine didn't open, the road didn't cut through, the factory didn't spew effluents that didn't give asthma to the children who didn't wheeze and panic and stay indoors on beautiful days. They are triumphs invisible except through storytelling (p150).

Solnit feels it is important to say what hope is *not*, quoting the Bulgarian writer Maria Popova who said *'Critical thinking without hope is cynicism, but hope without critical thinking is naivete.'* There is much critical thinking evidenced in this book, and much that aligns it with psychotherapeutic thinking.

One such premise is that the psyche swings between dualities – if I am right the other is wrong…..if I side with your enemy I must be your friend and therefore agree with your position entirely. Us and them. You have to take a position, and stick to it. If you waver or change you will lose and the other side will win. So stick to your guns! Polarisations are the basis of politics. They are also the default position of the primitive psyche. As therapists we recognize that polarization and oppositional, black and white thinking arise out of trauma states, where imagination is the casualty and thinking becomes narrow. Levine (1997) illustrates how 'victimhood' and subsequent PTSD can be avoided when subjects actively engage in self care and attempts to rescue self and other in traumatic situations. Solnit offers concrete examples of humanitarian successes in traumatic situations where ordinary people remained calm, resourceful, altruistic and creative - for example, the ordinary citizen rescues in Hurricane Katrina, where people who defied the authorities and went in fishing boats and rowing boats and all kinds of small craft to offer help and save lives.

A 'passionate joy' she says shines out from accounts by people who barely survived disaster. Self organizing returns 'as if by instinct' when the situation demands it. Rogers and Abraham would agree!

She invites us to let go of binaries and oppositions. Gender, for example, has she says 'been re-imagined as a spectrum of anatomies, affinities and attractions' (p170)

Contrary to the 'either/or' dynamic of traumatized thinking, she asserts that grief and hope can coexist, as evidenced by the positive movement Black Lives Matter. Despite the obvious trauma of bereavement, its founders' aim is to provide hope and inspiration to achieve transformation – 'rooted in grief and rage but pointed towards vision and dreams'.

Another psychotherapeutic principle Solnit echoes is that there is a spaciousness in uncertainty, which she says allows us room to act; it gives space to the imagination. 'When you recognize uncertainty, you recognize that you may be able to influence the outcomes…'

Do not be too certain: hope is *'an embrace of the unknown'*. (p 23)

In our work as therapists we are familiar with the notion that people tell themselves stories about who they are and how they must be, and that they can become attached to these stories. One of our tasks is to 'loosen' these attachments through dialogue and questioning. Solnit concurs:

> Stories trap us, stories free us, we live and die by stories, … What other

> stories can be told? How do people recognize that they have the power to be storytellers, not just listeners? (p 50)

I promise you will not regret reading Solnit. In inspiring hope and seeing possibility in each challenge, she reminds us that 'it is better to light a single candle than to curse the darkness.'[3] She alerts us to that which remains unprocessed in our psyches - the despair we are holding just beneath the surface, which we have not known how to deal with or where to place.

We may be breathing in a despair that is collective and that belongs to us all at this time and that leaves no room for hope. This small book reminds us of the hugely important understanding about the poles in the psyche whereby hope and despair can co exist– and whilst we must inhabit them both in order to restore a balance to the psyche, she asserts that 'hope is something you earn through study, through resisting the ease of despair..' (p 257)

It returns me to something that Joanna Macy taught us long ago – that in facing despair we reach empowerment.

References

Levine, P. (1997) *Waking the Tiger.* North Atlantic Books

Macy, J (1983) *Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age.* Philadelphia, New Society

3. These words have been attributed to Eleanor Roosevelt, Confucius, and several other people. The earliest appearance occurred in a 1907 collection titled "The Supreme Conquest and Other Sermons Preached in America" by William L. Watkinson. A sermon titled "The Invincible Strategy" downplayed the value of verbal attacks on undesirable behaviors and championed the importance of performing good works.

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