

# *OUTWRITE*

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We are very grateful to Michael Evans who has provided the artwork for this edition of *Outwrite*.

# Editorial

*Eternity is a long time,  
Especially towards the end.*

*Woody Allen*

A heaven in which everyone can have exactly what they want forever was constructed by the novelist Julian Barnes in 'A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters'. But everyone has the option to die off if they want to, and everyone takes the option, sooner or later. 'After a while, getting what you want all the time is very close to not getting what you want all the time.'

Philosophers and scientists study the passage of time, novelists and comedians play with it, and psychotherapists may ponder the meaning of time's passing in a practical way. It is a complicated equation that determines the duration of therapy, as complicated as the experiences that clients and therapists bring into therapy. But time is comfortingly elastic: the mother of one of us (CDG) has recently begun to read, for the first time, *Ulysses* — at the age of 97.

When we begin a new relationship-become a parent or make a new friend-we are unlikely to be consciously thinking, at that time of beginning, of the child's eventual departure from the home, or the likely course and duration of the friendship. But in the unconscious, we do begin to consider and prepare for the ending. And in therapy, both partners keep a latent eye on the finish, from the outset.

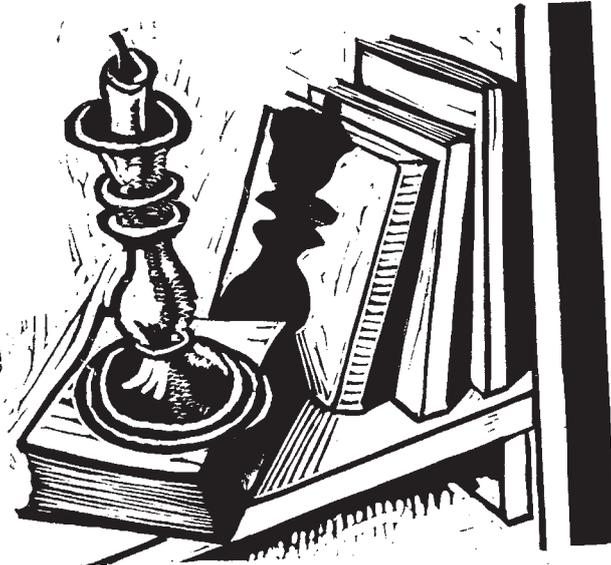
So, also, with editors- we two retire after working with four issues of the *Journal*, following a movement into our joint consciousness that now is the right time. Presumably, we saw it coming when we started. We consider the current issue of *Outwrite* an exceptionally inclusive one, embracing an exhilaratingly wide range of contributions, both from *Outfit* members and from friends of the organisation. We are happy to leave the *Journal* in good heart, as it was passed to us by the foundation editors, Rosemary Randall and Michael Evans.

David Ingleby was instrumental in the founding days of our Society, whilst Simon Blackburn is a Cambridge academic who knows of our work. Annie Hargrave brings us her thoughts about time spent running, in contrast to Isobel Urquhart, who writes about the time we spend in learning. Carol Naughton reflects on mankind's bipolar relationship with love and hate, Rosemary Randall ponders on the relationship between environmental change and psychotherapy, and this issue ends with an illuminating piece by Jill Shields on some aspects of time and space.

We are grateful to the many contributors whose creativity in *Outwrite* we have admired, and we depart with a thought from a song of Ian Dury:

'When we're torn from mortal coil  
We leave behind a counterfoil  
It's what we did and who we knew  
And that's what makes this story true.'

**Carol Dasgupta and Pat Tate**



## Rosemary Randall

# A New Climate for Psychotherapy?

*A version of this paper was first presented at the 'Trajectories' conference, Centre for Alternative Technology, May 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> 2005. It is also published in 'Psychology and Political International', issue 3:3, September 2005 and is reproduced here with the permission of the publisher and copyright holder John Wiley and Sons Ltd.*

This year finally saw implementation of the Kyoto protocol on climate change - or perhaps the remnants of it, as the United States has refused to ratify it and both China and India are designated developing countries and therefore not bound by its terms. Nonetheless its effects can be seen in an increasing amount of publicity for environmental issues as the demands of the treaty begin to affect daily life, however minimally. This may be an appropriate time to think about whether environmental issues should have any bearing on our practice as psychotherapists, and whether the theories that inform psychotherapy — in particular psychoanalysis — can have anything to contribute to debates about the environment. In this paper I pick up three possible areas of connection and then discuss their implications for the practice of psychotherapy.

### Climate Change and Environmental Degradation

Despite occasional maverick voices there is now general scientific agreement about the reality and seriousness of climate change as the reports of the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change make clear (Watson et al. 2001). There is also gathering anxiety about wider environmental degradation and its connection to world poverty. The long-held views of environmentalists are borne out by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, launched by Kofi Annan and published in April this year. This work by a panel of 1300 scientists from 95 countries, estimates that approximately 60 % of the world's 'ecosystem services', the natural products and processes which support life, are being used unsustainably (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005). The steps needed to mitigate these effects — in particular the reduction of carbon emissions - are major. They require big changes in patterns of economic activity and in the life-styles and behaviour of people in the developed nations. If no action is taken, the effects on both human and natural systems will be devastating and irreversible, effects which will be felt if not by

us, by others whom we love and care for — our children, grandchildren, families and friends. Although this information is commonly available and regularly makes headlines it has not been met by a wide public outcry. For the most part, people carry on as usual. If the news about climate change and environmental degradation makes them anxious and upset they do not show it. They continue to book foreign flights, leave their homes un-insulated, commute by car and purchase the latest fun gadget, regardless of how or where it was manufactured. When demands are made which remind people of the uncomfortable truths behind these actions of everyday life, many react with irritation, complaint or indignation. Newspapers carry stories of protest against recycling schemes (seen as inconvenient, smelly or hard work), of opposition to wind energy (seen as noisy, ugly, or inefficient) or of resistance to traffic management (seen as unfair, restrictive, authoritarian). Surveys of public opinion confirm extremely contradictory attitudes. Knowledge and concern about climate change is widespread but it is disconnected from the knowledge that changes in behaviour and aspiration are needed. A survey carried out for the WWF in 2001 (WWF 2001) found that nearly 90% of people were in favour of the government doing more to reduce the UK's global warming pollution, while a survey carried out by MORI for the industry pressure group 'Freedom to Fly' in the same year, ([www.mori.com/polls](http://www.mori.com/polls)) found that 76% of people thought that air travel should be allowed to grow to match rising consumer demand, that 80% of people thought it important for them to be able to choose to fly where and when they wanted and that 80% of people hoped to fly as often or more frequently in the future. A survey carried out for the BBC in 2004 found that although a majority of Britons accepted that human activity was responsible for climate change 43% didn't expect it to have much effect on them personally, and only a minority - just 37% - would agree to pay more for petrol (BBC 2004).

It is undeniable that macro political processes are involved here. The demands of an economic system based on continual growth, the self-perpetuation of power elites and the manipulation of information are clearly central to any discussion of the problems. It is also true that the questions are extremely complex. There are few universally agreed solutions and much debate. It is likely that many people feel ill-equipped to deal with the arguments and powerless to have any effect. Also involved however are psychological processes familiar to psychotherapists. This is also a story of anxiety, denial, splitting and projection, experienced and expressed at the social rather than at the individual level.

### **Anxiety, denial, splitting and projection**

When Freud first wrote about denial (or disavowal as it is sometimes translated) he identified it as a response to something in the external world which is experienced as traumatic. His example was the small boy's discovery that the little girl does not possess a penis (Freud 1923 and 1924). Although Klein later developed the concept in relation to the internal world (Klein 1946) it is this earlier notion of denial as a response to trauma that is most relevant here. "It can't be true," is a familiar reaction to any shock and an important protective mechanism which allows a horrific or distressing truth to be assimilated gradually. A temporary split occurs in the ego — what is known in one part of the mind is unknown in another, thus allowing ordinary life, in some form, to continue. If it is impossible — for whatever reason — to allow this gradual assimilation of the unwelcome truth, then the split becomes permanent and further splits are likely to follow as the original divisions become insufficient to contain the anxiety. Things which are connected are experienced as having nothing to do with one another. The problem itself is re-located to an area of experience which is deemed more manageable. The individual's own powers and abilities are projected into others who, it is hoped, will take care of the problem and can be criticised and attacked if they do not. To understand how this takes place at the collective level it is necessary to consider the development of a number of social phenomena that might not ordinarily be seen as connected.

### **Shopping, regulation and therapy**

Parallel to the environmental crisis are three other social movements which I think are worth considering as related phenomena: — the development of shopping as a leisure activity, the growth of a risk averse society and the development of psychotherapy, counselling and other forms of healing.

'Consumerism' has long been attacked by society's moral guardians as evidence of moral decline. Contemporary labels of disapproval such as the 'effluent society' and 'affluenza' replace older ones such as 'the throw-away society' and 'conspicuous consumption'. The long tradition of English puritanism can always be relied on to disapprove of anything enjoyable, dubbing it feckless and self-indulgent, and promising damnation in some form or another for those who succumb. It is not my purpose to join such voices, rather to look at the anxiety which may lie behind the contemporary drive to spend, acquire and consume. Consumer credit in March 2005 stood at £186.4 billion while government statistics show that retail sales have more than doubled since 1987. The lines of cars queuing to enter out of town supermarkets, near-riots when a new IKEA store opens and the throngs of people enjoying Sunday outings to shopping complexes suggest that shopping has become an essential part of social life rather than the means to an end. For many people it is now a key leisure activity. Repeated studies have shown that increased affluence does not bring happiness, the latest in a long line being that of Richard Layard whose popular book came out this year (Layard 2005). We continue to go shopping however. What might be going on here?

If, as I am suggesting, awareness of environmental degradation and its related social and political problems produces unbearable anxiety, then shopping brings relief. As well as being an inevitable and essential component of capital's constant search for new markets, it functions as the actual act of denial that anything is wrong. Shopping, with its cornucopia of delights, its visual, tactile and auditory appeals to the senses, its promises of enjoyment and pleasure says symbolically — 'All is well. This is what you are meant to be doing. This is the way to satisfy need.' There is collective comfort in the knowledge that everyone is doing the same thing. A sense of normality comes with the awareness of others engaged in similar pursuits and the overall experience provides a soothing protection from stories of war, destruction and pain. In Kleinian terms the market at the moment of purchase is an idealised breast, a huge part-object whose beneficence is never questioned. Just as the hungry infant does not ask how the breast has acquired the milk, so the traumatised public does not question how the market has acquired its goods, nor who or what may have been damaged in the process. Anxiety cannot be kept at bay however. It returns, intruding into the experience of shopping in a variety of forms. Shopping may develop a manic quality, having to be constantly repeated. Purchases quickly lose their capacity to soothe and new ones have to be sought. This is publicly validated in rapidly changing fashions, not just in

clothes but in interior design and in consumer 'durables' such as motor cars, fridges and washing machines. It is supported by television 'make-over' programmes offering transformational experiences via new furnishings, gardens or home improvements. The destructive side of such manic behaviour is split off and criticised in the public shaming of those whose lives collapse in response: television programmes explore compulsive shopping and ruinous credit card debt as individualised addictions alternately requiring treatment and moral condemnation.

Another way in which the anxiety returns is in periodic scares over safety and quality: salmonella in eggs, the pesticide alar in apples, VOCs in carpets, the dye sudan 1 in chilli powder. Reassurance is then offered that this was a 'one-off' event, a minimal risk or a problem that has now been contained. Such scares are rarely seen as part of a larger, connected problem. For some people the fear that harm may come through their purchases leads to the anxious pursuit of products that are guaranteed free from risk. Many such purchases embody the fearful hope that one can be exempt from the general, collective difficulties that threaten — a larger car to be better protected against a crash, or organic food to be safe from chemicals. The knowledge that the larger car is a greater threat to pedestrians and that the organic food has been flown from overseas at damaging cost to the environment then has to be denied and split off again.

Shopping thus expresses both the denial of anxiety and the periodic return of that anxiety as the defence fails to contain it. Further collective strategies of defence become necessary.

### **Risk-averse society**

Many commentators remark critically on the fact that we seem to have become a much more risk-averse society in the last twenty years. (Furedi 1997 and 2002, O'Neill 2002). The question 'What if something should go wrong?' dominates life in a way which it did not thirty years ago. There is clearly a fear of disaster and a desire to be protected from it. The response has been the development of systems of tight control over the work of certain sections of society, primarily professional people and public servants who have responsibility for public welfare. Teachers are told what they can teach and exactly how. Doctors are instructed in the correct protocols for examining any set of symptoms. Civil servants are asked to develop systems for monitoring, measuring and regulating themselves and others.

The obsessional nature of much of this activity is clear: systems, routines and rituals come to dominate large areas of working life in the public

sector just as they dominate the personal life of someone suffering from an obsessive-compulsive disorder. And like most obsessional routines these ones also run the risk of destroying the things they are trying to protect. The compulsive hand-washer who tries to remove all trace of bacteria ends by destroying her naturally protective skin. Monitoring a service becomes more important than actually delivering it and gradually the service itself disappears. From time to time complaints surface. Newspapers report that teachers have become afraid to take pupils on out-of-school trips, that the WI will no longer bake cakes and that doctors have to fill forms rather than talk to patients. The response from higher up, whether from senior managers or from government, is usually to blame the practitioner. The teacher is told not to be so cautious; the WI are told they have misinterpreted the rules; doctors are told to re-assess their priorities. This mirrors the way the patient will often be blamed. Her anxiety is seen as unrealistic, she is advised to control it and modify her behaviour.

The bigger question — what is the cause of all this anxiety? - is rarely asked. There is little discussion of why people have become so fearful and whether it is realistic to be frightened of these particular dangers. Some clues may be sought in where the anxiety is — and is not — focused. We appear to be most worried about public sector workers and others whose role is to help. Teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers, anyone involved with children and anyone in a public service find their work made increasingly difficult by a barrage of mistrust and regulation. At the same time regulation is either removed from the international stage or proves impossible to negotiate. Free trade and the liberalisation of markets are demanded by the big players on the international scene, demands which seem to lead inevitably to the destruction of local economies, disregard for the environment and no protection for the workforce. In the absence of international regulation, these things become costs which cannot be factored in if a company is to survive. Drawing up lists for how teachers should teach and doctors prescribe is a possible task. Regulating an out-of-control economic system which is wrecking the world's environment is much more difficult. The psychological solution is to displace the anxiety, and the obvious candidates are those who might be expected to look after us. It is thus no coincidence that perception of risk has moved to public servants and people in caring or parental roles who are unconsciously felt not to be doing enough to keep people safe. It is important to be clear that the mechanism is not one of conspiracy but of a collective, unconscious defence. Questions about the relative seriousness of the risks posed by people in public service and the risks

posed by the actions of multi-national companies cannot be asked: to do so would be to attack the defence. It should perhaps also be noted that when the right-wing press complain about a 'nanny state' and the government responds, it is almost always regulations relating to health and safety or protection of the environment that are being attacked rather than regulation relating to the actions of professionals. Thus the minister Ruth Kelly refuses to impose nutritional standards on school meals — to do so would bring her into conflict with the privatised market in school dinners. So we live with the paradox that those with the most personally responsible jobs are treated like dangerous and irresponsible children while the free-wheeling mavericks in charge of industry are deemed capable of behaving in an adult and far-sighted way.

The defences of denial, splitting and projection are extremely primitive ones. Freud was clear that they were the gateway to delusion - that they were an attempt at self-preservation that took an individual to the edge of madness and sometimes beyond. It is likely that the collective form of these defences described here will also have personal consequences.

### **The growth of the healing professions**

I turn now to the third social movement which I argue is connected — the growth of psychotherapy, counselling and all manner of other therapies. As a psychotherapist I obviously think that the work I do is valuable and necessary. That does not stop me asking however why this historical period finds it necessary to pay attention to psychological misery in this way. Why do individual needs feel so huge and so unmet? Why does individual distress seem to be more widespread and more acute? Why do so many people turn not just to the mainstream psychological therapies but to all manner of practices, from homeopathy to crystal healing, which promise health, happiness or salvation? One answer sometimes given is affluence. It is suggested that in the absence of material scarcity we can now afford to pay attention to other needs. Another suggests that the post-war generations lack moral fibre, are narcissistically self-indulgent and can't face hardship of any kind. A third suggests these things are a substitute for religion in a godless age while a fourth points to divorce, social fragmentation and the pressures and uncertainties of work.

There is probably truth in all of these positions. At a most general level one might expect to find that in a period of powerlessness and social upheaval

people would look for personal solace. The more hopeless and impotent people feel at a global level, the more likely they are to turn to those who can promise relief in some form or another. In previous generations religion has filled this place. This is what Marx meant when he referred to it as 'the opium of the people'.<sup>1</sup> In our own, less godly age, alternative forms of salvation are sought and therapy is one of them.

There seems to be more to it however. It is not simply that there is more interest in a psychological or spiritual life. Anecdotally psychotherapists talk of an increase in the severity of the problems they deal with. There seem to be more people who might be classified as 'borderline'; more people cutting and self-harming, feeling seriously suicidal, gripped by intractable eating disorders or hopeless addictions. Reports on student mental health (AUCC 1999 and Royal College of Psychiatrists 2003) support this view. The defences people are using seem to be more primitive and less compatible with day to day life.

If, as I have suggested above, social and political events are calling forth more primitive defences at a collective level, then it would not be surprising to find this echoed in work with individual patients. Is it possible that the greater need for psychotherapy services stems not from any simplistic relationship between social upheaval and mental distress but from processes of social and collective denial which both use and reinforce primitive defences in the population as a whole? Heightened awareness of these defences and their personal consequences then leads both to the need for therapy and reinforces the rationale for a risk-averse and regulatory society. People generally experience each other as less sane, less responsible and less trustworthy than previous generations did. It then becomes all the more necessary to feel that the guardians of society are checked on and regulated.

My suggestion is thus that we are dealing with three interlocking social movements whose disconnectedness has come to seem wholly normal. To connect them threatens the collective defence but may also bring relief if, as in therapy, it allows the real problem to be faced. It is perhaps not surprising that I write this at a time when some small moves towards protecting people from the effects of climate change are being made. As one thing shifts, so new thoughts become possible.

### **Infantilism and the environmental mother**

The second area of connection which I wish to

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<sup>1</sup> 'Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.' (Marx 1844)

discuss concerns perceptions and attitudes towards the environment. Throughout written history in the West, the environment has frequently been conceived of as maternal. Mother earth has been a popular catchphrase for centuries and in most religions the deities of harvest, fertility and life itself are generally female. (Ceres, Demeter, Gaia, Frig, Astarte for example.) Although this connection has been pursued with enthusiasm by ecofeminists, (see for example Griffin 1978 ) the conception of nature as female can create problems for both environmentalists and feminists. The equation of male oppression of women with the technocratic destruction of nature leaves little space for men to engage with environmental issues while the woman/nature identification opens the door to essentialist ideas of gender and sexuality which may valorise women but still confine them. These issues have been discussed widely elsewhere - see for example, Biehl 1991, Merchant 1995, Soper 1995 and Plumwood 1993. My purpose here is simply to examine whether a psychological exploration of the metaphor yields any insight into contemporary attitudes to the environmental crisis. Exactly what kind of mother, mother earth is, varies across time and cultures as do the representations of people's relation to her. She may be munificent, jealous, withholding, arbitrary or generous, while people appear as greedy, submissive, rapacious, fearful or supplicant, and adult or childlike in turn. She may be depicted as gloriously abundant or terrifyingly barren, fiercely protective or desperately damaged: these multiple images of motherhood and the maternal relation reflect different periods' relation to nature and the environment. Hidden in many contemporary attitudes towards environmental difficulties are attitudes towards the mother which are aggressively infantile or childlike. The emotions are consistent with the defences of denial, splitting and projection described above: envy, contempt, spite, greed and disdain. The position is frequently narcissistic. Beneath it — presumably — lie impotence and terror. The dynamic can be seen in some common phrases and attitudes.

*"I need..."*

If challenged on their actions in relation to the environment many people cite need as justification, for example:

- "I need to drive because of my work."
- "I'll have to fly abroad. I need a proper break and I need to be sure of getting some sunshine."
- "I need a 4x4 to carry my tools for work."
- "My children are overseas — if I'm going to see them, I'll have to fly."

In all these examples, desire or demand has been

translated into need. This is of course part of the inexorable push of capitalism towards increased consumption, where one generation's dreams and luxuries become another's taken for granted necessity. But — in the light of current knowledge — these things are also an individual choice and an individual sleight of hand and self-deception. Emotionally, the model is that of the three or four year old child who has learned the power of the phrase "I need" and who changes his demand from an expression of desire to one of necessity: "Mummy, I *need* another chocolate biscuit." "I *need* to watch television, *now*." As the child gets older his justifications become more sophisticated but the assumption remains: the mother has a never-ending supply of whatever is desired and is being mean in refusing it; she must be tricked into giving it up by an appeal to her maternal nature. In all these examples, there is a refusal to respond to the reality principle and a subsequent descent into a more childish relation to the environment around one. In the callous phrase, "The world can take it," one hears the voice of the infant who has not reached Winnicott's stage of concern. The phrase expresses both the belief that the mother's munificence is endless and the refusal to acknowledge that this munificent mother is the same person as the tired, depleted or unresponsive one. In relation to the environment it encapsulates the belief that one's actions have no effect, that environmental degradation bears no relation to consumption. The alternative would be the painful and uncomfortable emotions of the depressive position — grief, guilt, sorrow, regret and the hard work of adjustment to a reality that cannot supply all that is desired. It is perhaps not surprising that many people prefer to see the natural world as a withholding and unreasonable mother who can be cajoled or railed against, rather than as a damaged one who must be succoured and sustained.

*"Why should I...?"*

"Why should I? (Recycle/reduce consumption/ agree to a local wind turbine) "No-one else is."

This is the sibling's complaint. The assumption is that one is being unfairly treated. One's coevals are all rivals and someone else is getting privileges that one is not. Closely related are the sounds of other primary-school protests: "I don't want to. I don't like it. I can't be bothered. Do I have to?"

In this emotional dynamic the mother is seen as demanding something difficult while favouring somebody else. The underlying desire is to return to the position of the privileged infant, to be the baby of the family again. It carries in it the threat of the spoiling gesture, the wilful or defiant protest that will upset mother's plans. The mother may be seen

as mean, ungenerous and withholding or alternatively as controlling, invasive and demanding. In either case, the child's impulse is to resist, to assert that he or she is big enough to take his or her own decisions and find a way to outwit mother.

In a variation on this theme there is a more oedipal dynamic. The authority who demands change may be seen as the repressive father who is denying access to the desired mother, keeping her pleasures for himself. He can then be complained against or decried as incompetent. ("Bloody council. Bloody awkward boxes. Bet they don't do their recycling.")

### *Whistling in the dark*

A third type of infantile attitude lies behind statements like:

- "If it was really important, they'd have made us do something by now."
- "They'll find a technological answer."
- "What difference can I make?"
- "It's alarmist — these people like to frighten us."

All these phrases express the childlike assumption that there are adults in charge. The first phrase implies an indulgent mother who never carries out her threats. She may say, "No TV until you've tidied your room," but she doesn't mean it and doesn't have to be taken seriously. Because this mother always relents and gives way to the child's demand, the child never has to make judgments for herself about what is or is not necessary. Does my room need tidying? Is the world in a mess? Mum will sort it out.

The second phrase suggests that father will come to mother's aid — perhaps a new washing machine or some handy tranquillisers will do the job. Maybe some hydrogen fuel cells or a couple of nuclear power stations. In any event, it is not a matter for children.

The third phrase betrays the beginnings of fear. Rather than explore the possibilities of personal and political action it suggests a retreat to the position of the child who realises with horror that something big is happening in the adult world and that she is too small to affect it.

The final phrase suggests a further retreat as the frightened child tries to convince herself that the danger she faces is not real but a mean trick or a nasty dream. The characterisation is now of an abandoning and possibly monstrous mother. Indulgence — as it often does — has flipped into its opposite. This child is whistling in the dark.

### **Maturity and masculinity**

The flip-side of this attitude to the environment-mother is the equation of maturity (particularly masculine maturity) with the ability to dominate and exploit her. The desire is to escape her control and influence. The underlying fantasy is that she no longer matters and perhaps that she never did. Adulthood becomes equated with self-creation: through technological dominance and expertise man makes himself. When Margaret Thatcher said in 1986 "A man who beyond the age of 26, finds himself on a bus can count himself a failure,"<sup>2</sup> she laid down an ideological and cultural marker: a man without a car of his own is not truly a man. He can consider himself castrated. Her statement built on a twentieth century tradition of equating the power and speed of the internal combustion engine with sexual prowess but took it further so that the car, the most profligate contributor to climate change, becomes an essential part of masculine identity.

Masculine maturity in this articulation is sharply individualistic, harsh and self-seeking. It is identified with material success rather than emotional development. 'Realism' is seen in the self-interested acquisition of house, car, holidays and other advantages rather than in a thoughtful consideration of other people or of social and political conditions. Behind this lies contempt for the mother: it is a deeply narcissistic version of maturity which turns away from the real relationship to the natural world.

The position of women in this is little easier. Patriarchal attitudes have rarely valued feminine maturity in a real way, preferring either to idealise or denigrate it. And since actual motherhood is now something that must fit in with work, tucked into the spaces around a career, women are less likely to identify their own nurturing capacities symbolically with the natural environment. Thus they may come to share in the common contempt. They too may feel that the mature and realistic position is to be too busy or important to worry about environmental concerns. Their relationship to the environment-mother becomes as troubled as their male counterparts.

In all of these characterisations there is the loss of a loving and mutual maternal relation. Instead of being powerful but benign, mother earth has become a withholding, threatening and abandoning parent struggling with a spiteful, jealous and destructive child. What is missing is the sense of a relationship between an adult child and an adult mother, of the generational shift as

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<sup>2</sup> The remark is often quoted, most recently in a parliamentary debate in June 2004, but I cannot find its original source.

children become parents in their turn and discover in their own maturity the pleasures of respect and care between the generations. Instead, all seems infantile. The metaphors we live reflect the difficulties we find ourselves in.

### Repression and guilt in the environmental movement

My third area of connection concerns those who struggle to make the associations which I suggest society in general refuses. What happens to the people in the environmental movement who argue and campaign for change? What happens to the ordinary people who take up their challenge and try to live a more responsible life-style? Are they exempt from the characteristics I have described above? Do they display an enviable sanity and integration? The answer of course is no. As in any other section of the population, personal characteristics are an individual matter as well as a cultural one. What is interesting however is the way in which the threats of environmental destruction tend to affect these groups of people. Their personal experience of the issues is different and this is likely to encourage different psychological defences at the public and societal level. Repression, guilt and an over-developed super-ego seem to be the fate of those who become active.

People in this position have to repress the desires for unbridled consumption which they share with the rest of the population. Saying 'no' to some of the things which make modern life comfortable is not always easy and renunciation rarely leads to public support, let alone gratitude. As one person remarked, an irritated car driver is more likely to knock you off your bicycle than to thank you for reducing the nation's carbon emissions. It can be a lonely position and one effect of repression can be an emphasis on the moral high ground.

This moral framework is frequently expressed in the way environmental issues are written about publicly. They are presented as a question of ethics, not in the complex sense in which the philosophers of the environmental movement consider them (see for example Soper 1995) but as narrow questions of moral rectitude and self-sacrifice. It is to the credit of the environmental movement that a moralising tone is largely absent from their own writings. In the pages of *Clean Slate*, *The Ecologist*, *Ethical Consumer* and the like you are more likely to find rational argument and cheerful encouragement than moral exhortation. It is in the newspapers that the moral imperative rules. The expectation is that an ecologically sustainable life will be a difficult and worthy one, lacking in enjoyment or ordinary pleasures.

Typical of this tone are the recent (2004) articles by Leo Hickman in the Guardian newspaper, in which he described his attempt to live a less environmentally damaging life-style. They were subsequently drawn together as a book titled, (unsurprisingly) *A Good Life* (Hickman 2005). The titles of the articles introduce the moral tone — 'Do the right thing', 'How to be good', 'Mens sana in corpore sano', 'On the right track' and so on. In the introductory piece (January 24<sup>th</sup> 2004) Leo's expectations are clear — he expects to be found wanting and fears that he will suffer. "At times it seems that there are few highs and many lows - you always seem to feel guilty," he writes. He expects that life with the environmental auditors will be a "...drawn-out exercise in self-flagellation," which can only be protected against with a sense of humour. As the series develops he appears in turn anxious, irritable, guilty and occasionally evangelical. His language rarely deviates from that of the moral imperative: conscience and what he 'should' do is at its heart. What creates this moralising agenda? As I have suggested above it must result in part from the repression of desire. But it must also be a function of the relationship between a majority population which avoids or denies guilt and a minority into whom this same guilt can be evacuated. Society as a whole needs to do something with its guilt about environmental damage, and environmental activists provide a handy peg on which to hang a split-off collective conscience. Easily caricatured as earnest, bearded killjoys, collective guilt can be lodged in them and then attacked through mockery and satire. "Unsurprisingly, there were a lot of chaps with face fungus," quipped Simon Hoggart in his account of the Green Party's election manifesto (Guardian April 8<sup>th</sup> 2005) in a fairly typical example. Through ridicule, the worrying pressure of reality and the irritating presence of guilt are both neutralised and the status quo is resumed. Nothing to worry about. Business as usual.

The effects of this dynamic on activists are multiple and variable, as projected guilt interacts with individual psyches. One possibility is that of a collusive marriage: the negative stereotypes are accepted and embraced. The activist becomes a ferocious, moralising puritan, safe in the knowledge of her own salvation, ungiving and condemnatory of all who fail to reach her standards. The advice she gives becomes deliberately unpalatable, the practices she advocates become hair-shirt impossible extremes and it is clear that she takes satisfaction in others' failures. She finds like-minded people and together they separate themselves off from the rest of society and its desires. The secondary satisfactions of masochistic self-denial are embraced.

A second route is that of internalised guilt and burn-out. This is a familiar scenario to people working in the voluntary sector as well as in political movements. Enthusiasm and idealism give way to exhaustion and disillusion. The young person — it is often a young person — driven by an unexamined history of their own guilt takes on the burdens of the world. There is always too much to do and it seems impossible to say 'No'. The needs of the other — in this case the planet or mother earth — become paramount. The person's sense of agency and effectiveness diminish in the face of the enormity of the injury they are trying to heal. Driving themselves to do more, often in the face of opposition, indifference or hatred, they eventually collapse.

A third route carries an element of narcissistic protection. This is the route of what might be called environmental super-heroics. Taking on the role of eco-warrior — or identifying with it — offers some protection against the destructiveness of an over-active super-ego. In Michael Balint's terms these people might be seen as philobats, (Balint 1958) the thrill-seekers, restless champions of mother-earth. The importance of this route is not so much the actual heroics performed but their iconography and meaning for a wider audience. The activities of Greenpeace as detailed on their website through images and weblogs are a good example of this. (<http://weblog.greenpeace.org/>). There are images of abseiling activists, a Greenpeace rig tiny against a Russian oil tanker, a series of pictures of swimmers boarding a deep-sea bottom trawler. Weblogs detail hair-raising encounters with angry fishermen and armed attacks by loggers in the Amazon. There are even 'Eco-quest' games where you can play out the role of hero from the safety of your computer at home. Although the weblogs make clear that the reality of such trips is 99% hard campaigning work and 1% terrifying adventure they provide the possibility of an alternative identification for the activist at home. They allow people both to ease the sense of guilt that not enough is being done and to counter the sense of being shamed by public perceptions of the environmental movement. Like good news from the front during a war, these adventures keep up the morale of the population at home.

A fourth route is that of retreat. This is an old solution, as old certainly as the romantics and stretching back through Rousseau to classical ideas of an age of gold or biblical ones of the garden of Eden. In this solution the past is seen as a better country, a time when people were in harmony with the natural world. Culture is opposed to nature, technology is opposed to environment, the country is valued more highly than the city and the primitive or indigenous is often idealised. Here,

guilt is assuaged by the purity of one's own existence. Environmentalists who take this route exclusively run the risk of becoming isolated, pre-occupied with such matters as installing their own water supply or creating a self-sufficient food supply. At its extreme lie the paranoid fantasies of American survivalists and the nightmare of eco-fascism.

It is important to recognise that despite these negative possibilities as much sanity exists in the environmental movement as anywhere else in society. Important and creative work gets done, in research, in protection, in protest, in publicity and in demonstration by example. It is the nature of the work and its relation to the rest of society which makes particular psychological problems more common, particular collective defences more likely to be adopted. Some of them are common to other political groupings and other minorities. Some spring from the nexus of the way the relationships between culture and environment, technology and nature are lived at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Only as collective guilt is shared can it become less extreme, be less persecutory and destructive and be managed in more creative ways. This only becomes possible when the issues become truly mainstream and the possibility of reparative action on an appropriate scale starts to seem realistic. Pressure from below needs to be matched by leadership from above. There have been some hopeful signs in recent years, starting perhaps with the article by the government chief scientist Sir David King in February 2004 in which he argued that climate change was a greater threat to the world than international terrorism. (King 2004). Increased publicity for the issues and stronger statements from respected figures help to create a more comfortable climate for activists. As the arguments are taken more seriously, the projections onto activists are reduced and a bigger space is created for sanity and creativity. Although conscious levels of collective anxiety may be raised in the short term, if real action follows then there is a chance that both this and the collective guilt can be relieved.

#### Issues for practice

If there is any truth in the analysis in this paper then it might have some relevance to the ways in which environmentalists pursue their work in publicity and education and in their demands on themselves. My primary purpose in the last part of this paper however is to discuss whether there are any implications for the practice of psychotherapy. At one level it is a practical matter. Does one agree that there is an environmental crisis? Does one

agree that this has psychological manifestations? At another it is a philosophical/ethical question. How one approaches it depends on how one conceives of the relationship between humans and the natural material world, between 'culture' and 'nature'. Does one think of people as a part of the natural world or as separated from it by virtue of their intelligence and technological mastery? Is there any such thing as a 'natural' state, outside of society? Is it necessary to have a sense of divine immanence in nature or will an ethical economics and technology be sufficient? These and similar questions have been debated for a long time by environmental ethicists. Perhaps it is enough in this context simply to note that there is a tendency in contemporary society to behave as if people are not bound by the material world and to see it as endlessly manipulable. And to suggest that if, like me, you question this assumption, then the development of some kind of environmental-mindedness in relation to psychotherapy might be useful and appropriate.

Practically this might simply mean doing the responsible things that any household or small business might do — examining workplace use of environmental resources and trying to limit carbon emissions. Beyond this however there are matters specific to psychotherapy. Here it is necessary to think of psychotherapy as a cultural practice as well as a personal one and to allow a more coterminous idea of nature to penetrate our ideas about people, culture and society. If we can recognise that our everyday ideas and assumptions may be unconsciously governed by broader cultural movements then we can begin to ask questions about the relationship between environmental issues and personal life. We may become more alert to manifestations of anxiety or guilt about the environment. We may re-evaluate our views of destructive behaviour. We may explore despair about the future or longing for the past with a different slant.

To work in a sensitive and appropriate way with environmental difficulties in psychotherapy is not likely to be an easy matter. The cultural equations of masculine maturity with environmental mastery, of success with consumption, of environmental concern with puritanism, make it likely to be a hard task. How should one respond, for instance, to the young man who says proudly that he has passed his driving test and is acquiring his first car? Or to the young woman whose self-destructive impulse seems to be caught up in her activism? Does one analyse the narcissism in a patient's desires for environmentally damaging activities, or stay silent

because they mirror one's own actions? Does one notice the manifestations of denial in a patient's behaviour or ignore them because of the mutual discomfort such acknowledgment would bring? The answers to such conflicts must, as ever, start with the individual patient. But it is likely to be our environmental-mindedness which dictates whether or not we hear the hint of doubt in the boy's voice as he tells us about the car and allows us to wonder what he has done with his knowledge of its damaging consequences. A similar awareness might allow one to analyse the young woman's self-destructiveness while valuing her commitment and energy, perhaps enabling her to separate the two things and work more effectively in the campaigns she is involved in. Meanwhile, confronting our own fears, feelings and actions about environmental matters may free us up to a more comfortable awareness of our potential collusion with our patients' dilemmas and anxieties and bring a subtle but important re-emphasis to the work.

On the more positive side an awareness of social and cultural dynamics can of course make some aspects of psychotherapy easier. The hidden issue of eating disorders was only fore-grounded when feminists began to draw attention to the reification of women's bodies and suggest that there was something ideological in the nature of the masculine gaze and the feminine preoccupation with the female form. From that moment on it became possible to speak differently in psychotherapy about bulimia, anorexia and compulsive eating.

To date, environmental questions do not seem to have found their way into the mainstream of psychotherapeutic thinking.<sup>3</sup> This is perhaps not surprising. The overt connections of the political and the personal which feminism promoted quite clearly led towards political actions on the one hand and psychological re-evaluations on the other. The psychological implications of environmental issues have perhaps been less obvious. We are not talking about the oppression of one group of people by another, but of a damaged or dangerous relationship to the natural world. The consequences of this may not find their way into psychotherapeutic practice in quite such definite and concrete forms but if we stay 'environmentally-minded' we may spot their manifestations, either as new configurations of old problems or as intensifications of familiar patterns of defence. An awareness of the ways in which individual psychological problems interpenetrate the social and cultural world may make us both

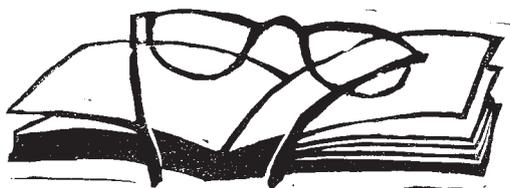
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<sup>3</sup> Where they have been explored it seems mainly to be in relation to 'ecopsychology', an approach influenced by 'deep ecology', ecofeminism, and Jungian ideas. See for example Prentice 2003 or Rust 2004.

better therapists and more responsible citizens. To some extent we all choose which social and cultural issues we attune ourselves to, which ones we treat like the air we breathe, and which ones we come to question. These differences are part of what make us unique as therapists, draw some patients to us and turn others away, get us labelled as conventional, radical, conservative or feminist and so on. In this paper I have suggested that the urgent issue of the age is, as the chief government scientist argued, climate change. As psychotherapists we may feel that we have little to contribute practically, but working as we do in the cultural soup of society we have a responsibility to understand and respond to the ways the issue works its way through the common and individual psyche and so respond, in the work, in ways which are not destructive either to the individual psyche or to the environment.

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Simon Blackburn

# Authenticity: Worth Faking?

*This is an abridged version of an article that first appeared in the Times Higher Education Supplement on August 16<sup>th</sup> 2005.*

Authenticity—who could be against it? Wholeness, integrity, truth, the natural, the self-sufficient, the real, the original, the rooted, all sound so appealing, compared to what is superficial, artificial, imposed, merely conventional, social, constructed, fragmented, self-estranged, false.

Yet I am sceptical about authenticity. Of course, in moments of disenchantment, there is consolation to be had imagining a real Me, a butterfly escaped from chrysalis of the social and the conventional. The everyday Me is repetitive, indecisive, confined by its role, bourgeois and cautious and prudent. The real Me is a very different kettle of fish, free, wild, romantic, courageous, creative. As Nietzsche puts it, the one is a camel, patiently bearing the social luggage placed upon it, but the other is a lion. But now the fantasy begins to dissolve. Why on earth should the real Me be a lion, or even a butterfly? Presumably it is more likely to be a human being, having grown in the way that human beings do, but lions and butterflies do not.

Walter Mitty thought that the real Walter Mitty was a Hollywood hero, fearlessly commanding great machines and great enterprises. He was wrong. The real Walter Mitty was Walter Mitty, hopelessly imagining being what he foolishly fancied a hero to be, as an escape from the humdrum way he actually lived. His fantasies, inevitably are no better than he is. His Hollywood blueprints of authenticity were themselves fakes. This may be obvious in Walter Mitty's case, but he is all of us, and if we escape his fantasies it will only be to fall victim to more insidious ones. Our imaginings may dwell on authentic country living, or authentic adventure, but be similarly infected by the fake and constructed scripts of the heritage industry or the travel brochure. Authentic country living means an Aga and New Zealand wine, while authentic adventure needs a guide and an insurance policy.

Many traditions in philosophy and psychology, from before Plato through Christianity to Freud, have insisted that the true self lies only at the end of a long quest, a hard process of analysis, discovery, and purification. I don't argue against processes of self-examination and self-improvement. What I question is whether such processes result in discovery of some authentic self which was there all along, or only the invention of a new way to act, a new script to follow, or a new persona to put on. The metaphor of being born again may be more accurate than it sounds, and of course there is never a guarantee that what is newly born is less self-deceived, less of a bore or an idiot, or in any admirable sense more authentic, than whoever started the process. It is not usually enviable to have friends and spouses who go in for self-improvement, or put a lot of store by realizing their true natures.

Strangely enough, authenticity was a particular watchword of existentialism. Yet the idea that 'existence precedes essence' is precisely the idea that there is no true or real Self, and certainly not one masked and only dimly visible under the grey paint of civilization. However Sartre only half-escaped the tyranny of the Real Self. Suspiciously, the authentic life turned out to be not only one lived in awareness of choice, but one in which the response to that awareness followed a definite direction: anarchic, bohemian, suffused with hatred of the bourgeoisie, sexually unconventional, and volubly left-wing. Just as the word 'faith' only retains its positive connotations when your faith coincides with mine—otherwise being dogmatism or lunacy—so the words 'commitment' and 'choice' only functioned to introduce ideals when they meant the same kind of commitments and choices as Sartre's own.

As a psychologist Sartre gave marvellous vignettes of persons trying to conceal their own complicity in events from themselves, such as the girl who lets

her hand become a 'thing' in order neither to encourage nor discourage the advances of the lover. But this too will have been an exercise of freedom, a sensible strategy admirably adapted to her circumstance. The only aspect worth calling bad faith would be any later disclaimer of knowledge of what she was doing. Sartre can also write of people who prefer not to think of some options as open to them. But he misleads us if he suggests that this is always a failing. It is the path of virtue to regard some options as closed. I live my life ignoring thieving and tightrope walking as live options, but far from this being a failing it is no doubt a matter of some relief to my wife and children. It is just not true that you should try every experience once, except incest and folk-dancing.

If Real Selves are fantasies, and Sartrean choice is not a specific value worth enjoining, then there is not much left to the notion of authenticity. What purposes does it serve? One function is to fill the vacuum left by the death of God. If values and norms have no source in the supernatural world, where else can they be grounded? Authentic commitment, self-legislation of values and ideals, are appealing substitutes for external authority and command. Obedience only to the dictates of the heart substitutes for the discredited authority of gods and their interpreters. Morality becomes no more than an exercise in integrity, a matter of truth to the inner determinations of the self. Tony Blair can excuse everything, in his own eyes, by vowing, hand on heart, that he acted in good faith, the ultimate piece of self-deception.

The literary critic Lionel Trilling cited Polonius's otherwise banal advice to his departing son Laertes as the first expression of this idea: 'To thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then to any man be false'. Fine words, but why should we believe them? Think instead the contradictory and fragmented self of modernism, the self-conscious self. What if Laertes's own self is insincere and insecure, irresolute and unknowing, New Labour all the way down? If this is how he is, and Laertes is true to his own self, he might give promises he cannot keep, begin undertakings he cannot follow through, use language which means nothing or implies what is not true, and say things about which he is self-deceived, and just because he would most like them to be true

Did Shakespeare then have some guarantee of the pure gold underneath the base alloys that make up the empirical self? Perhaps he was abetted by the rise of inner-light Protestantism, with conscience standing inside as an unmistakable voice which must be heard. To be deaf to it implies being

willfully deaf. A related idea of virtue as integrity, harmony or wholeness is of course at least as old as Plato. In Plato, however, the harmonious self is something to be worked for, an achievement only attainable by the wise and the just. These will be the select few whose natures have the gold within them from the beginning, but they will also need to have undergone the most extraordinary upbringing and rigid education. Nobody can become wise and just simply by listening to their deepest inner voice. Virtue is not the birthright of every man, or every man uncorrupted by insidious external influences. It took what Nietzsche saw as the sentimental, democratic, feminine touch of Christianity to add that. We think there must be an inner candle somewhere, however much the subject has tried to hide from its light. If they allowed themselves to look at their sins, we think, they would doubtless repent. Surely it cannot be baseness or fragmentation all the way down. But perhaps we are wrong, and perhaps it is.

We are afraid to let go of authenticity. If all the world's a stage, we think, you cannot expect sincerity from the world any more than you can expect it from actors in their professional roles. You should not expect fidelity or loyalty to a previous part, for the persona who breaks the promise is most likely not the persona who gave it. You should not expect the sentiment sincerely felt and voiced at one time to be an accurate indicator of the sentiment that will be just as sincerely felt and voiced at another. The selves it is appropriate or strategic to present at each moment are not linked by ties of identity. They make up only an agglomeration or a commonwealth, and any loyalties through time are at best the fortunate precipitate from favourable social circumstances. Even when faced with the most blatant chicanery or object disgrace, well, hey, we just need to draw a line under it and move on. Cheap intensity of expression and conviction at a moment substitute for wholeness of character. And people in general become New Labour, men without inner light, men without qualities. In fact, our world becomes a world of players, but it is a mistake, portentously christened the Fundamental Attribution Error in social psychology, to suppose that anybody actually has a character.

Naturally enough, we want to recoil from the ghastly picture of human life this offers. If this is the alternative, we think, then the pendulum had better swing back to real, true, inner selves. But as so often, the right way forward may be to reject both alternatives. We do not have to fantasize an inner John Wayne in order to escape New Labour. If we are ordinarily fortunate we have sufficient defences in the world's own processes of education, upbringing, and experience, the ones

that made us what we are. We do indeed have real selves. But they are not inner, and not overlaid and concealed by the contingent circumstances that in fact created them. They are our empirical selves, with their empirical constancies, sometimes our empirical contradictions, often our empirical complexities.

We can indeed wonder about possibilities of improvement, and dwell on ideals of virtue and excellence as aids to it. Even Plato allowed this function to the artists. We can undertake self-examination, although the term is often misplaced. For when we ask ourselves what we really want, or what we really believe about something, and

find the question hard, this is not because we cannot find ourselves or interpret what we find. The question is not answered by uncovering an inner, pre-formed self with an unambiguous desire or belief. It is answered by looking one more time at the choice or at the evidence, and deciding what to desire or what to believe. It is not navel-gazing that gives us such solutions, but thinking the thing through one more time, in engagement with the world. Here 'I do not know what *I think* about Peter Mandelson (say)' really means 'I do not know what *to think* about Peter Mandelson', and that would be answered, if it were worth answering, by further acquaintance not with one's inner self, but with that gentleman's doings.



## Carol Naughton

# Of Love and Hate

In the mid-eighties I heard someone at an Outfit meeting say that she thought one hadn't had a sufficient therapy until one's own sadistic tendencies had been encountered. I did not then reflect much on whether, in my therapy, I had grappled with my capacity for cruelty and destructiveness. I was probably more inclined to identify the dark side of the human condition in its social manifestations in the world, rather than in the individual heart. Many years later, I see it differently.

It doesn't require the flood of current information about abuse and torture in Iraq or Guantanamo Bay to remind us that an ordinary person may inflict emotional and physical pain on others, and may even derive perverse satisfaction from it. One does not need to belong to a powerful army to give oneself permission to behave destructively. At any given moment, there is a great deal of unresolved frustration, anger, fear, hatred and despair in our world. This becomes the driving force for our destructiveness, both in small and in big ways. In September 2004, in the aftermath of the events at Beslan, the rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks reminded us in 'Thought for the Day' that "the greatest weapon of mass destruction is the human heart."

One assumes that a child who bites and hurts another child is letting out some of the uncontainable feelings inside; that the children who lured a two-year old on to the railway line and killed him would not have done so if they had been well enough loved at home and in their society; that the soldier who abducted and murdered a Cambridge student and later killed himself was not in a state of well being.

Fortunately, there is also in our world much warmth, generosity of spirit, love, forgiveness, hope, desire for fairness and justice, compassion, and enjoyment of the worlds of nature and of people. Each of us has some part in both of these ways of being in the world, in what we may term the good and the bad.

Ian Suttie's work, *The Origins of Love and Hate*, is a good source of wider understanding of this polarity. Originally published in 1935, it was reissued by *Free Associations* in 1988 with an introduction by Dorothy Heard and a foreword by John Bowlby. Suttie allows us to remain optimistic about the human condition. He sees the infant's attachment to mother as fundamental, and hate as secondary, the result of separation-anxiety:

the love of mother is primal in so far as it is the *first formed and directed* emotional relationship. Hate, I regard not as a primal independent instinct... but as a development or intensification of separation-anxiety which in turn is *roused* by a threat against love. (p31).

Self-preserving love includes the child's need for company as well as for food. There is tenderness between the child and mother. Although there may be some measure of anxiety and separation from the beginning, the angry claims for love are made in order to re-establish the companionable relationship between child and mother. Suttie emphasises that hate is not a primal instinct, but that it enters into the picture once anxiety is experienced. In its turn, the therapeutic alliance established between patient and therapist has the aim of helping the patient to overcome anxiety and hate, and to learn how to manage the range of feelings experienced in belonging to the world - attachment and loss still playing a central part.

Suttie calls this process a "*social reconciliation at a primitive level of development*". The wounded child has been acceptable to the therapist and over time, the patient has learned to shed the grievances and face more openly the present world. The past is not denied or devalued in this work; neither is the adult world idealised. Suttie sees the love of the therapist for the patient as reparative and an essential part of the healing environment. The therapist:

re-plays the original role of the mother in becoming the starting-point of a broadening circle of anxiety-free relationships – that is to say of relationships where feelings need not be inhibited or repelled (this does not refer to conscious control) and where interest responses are equally free. (p213)

If the dark side of the patient has not been allowed expression, if the patient has not relaxed “ his defences against expressing his hate and so running a risk of being hated”, then the therapy will fail to release the patient from anxiety. Suttie sees the overcoming of resistance as effective because the patient, in learning to trust the therapist, is not afraid to hate.

Again and again we return to the notion of thwarted development, whereby the individual or group becomes trapped by resentment, hate, anger or bitterness, and takes it out on self and/or others. At times, there is not much accessible love and hope. Consciously or unconsciously, there are feelings of loss and abandonment.

In the work of psychotherapy we are intimately involved with each person’s shifting sense of self. We know that the person wants to be recognised, in silence as well as in words, in loneliness as well as in moments of light-heartedness, in hatred and in love. In the work of therapy we need to know from our own experience that the individual’s grief may expose hatred, anger and revengeful feelings. In knowing the extent of our own range of darkness and of light, in facing it, we may be more open to helping others understand their’s. A sense of humility about our frailty may help us have respect for our capacity to survive damage, and feel up to the work of helping others in their search for healing and well-being. We are all capable of damaging as well as of being damaged; we are capable of loving and of being loved.

One assumes that Adolf Hitler, in the height of his power, did not dwell on his own vulnerability or his harmful effect on others. He built an authoritarian superstructure and transformed the damaged self into an omnipotent tyrant, presumably not examining his own self-doubt, sadness or grief. He destroyed those he hated or feared and maniacally promoted a sub-world, eliminating where possible those who did not fit into his world. Ultimately he failed, but we are still, 60 years after his suicide, left with memories of the exterminating gas chambers, of the Final Solution. Hitler was not unique in wanting to eradicate that which he did not love. By dehumanising others, by imprisoning, torturing, killing them, he added much to the horror and suffering in the world. And we who come after

inherit not only the horror of Hitler but also the knowledge of the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Our capacity to move beyond the destructiveness that we do or that is done to us must, to a large extent, be based on the healing that takes place slowly as time goes by. Recently Prime Minister Tony Blair apologised for the harm done to the wrongly convicted Guildford Four and to their families. Similarly, in Dresden on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the British bombing of that city, a commemoration ceremony has sought to express sorrow and forgiveness.

Not only do we know about the destructiveness of our countries at war, we know too about our personal capacity for destructiveness. Each of us has to take responsibility for our individual presence in the world – we have a social stake as well as a personal one. There may be times when either personal or social issues predominate, but the world is in our keeping, just as we are in the world’s keeping. Every person who is hungry and dying in Sudan has as much right to food and life as each of us in well-fed Europe. Every seller of the *Big Issue*, reminding us of their need for a living wage and of their precarious hold on domestic stability, is as worthy of recognition and compassion as is a person in psychotherapy whose life is falling apart.

It is difficult to understand man’s inhumanity to man without trying to understand the struggle that goes on in the individual. And we cannot form a comprehensive understanding of the individual without knowing the context in which their life takes place; we are social beings.

Many therapists have been through the mill in their own lives and know from personal experience what goes on during a therapy, including lengthy swathes of neurotic suffering. The therapist has perhaps survived the dark night of the soul. Of course there are always going to be troubles ahead, given the normal course of a life – illness, sadness, loss, death and difficulties of people one loves. But eventually, one begins to trust in one’s ability to live alongside it all.

A good therapy provides a safe environment for the patient to shed his/her hatred of self, of others, of the world. If one experiences oneself as able to do wrong but remain lovable, one is admitted or readmitted into a fellowship of ambivalence. Not only can one love and be loved, one can also reject and be rejected by others. This admission carries with it moral responsibilities: we share the world and want it to be a good place for ourselves and for others.

David Ingleby

# The origins of critical psychiatry

*This article is based on an invited lecture given at the Royal College of Psychiatrists AGM in Edinburgh, June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2005*

## What is critical psychiatry?

To me 'critical psychiatry' means nothing more than the name implies: activities concerned with psychiatry from a critical point of view. It doesn't refer to a single, homogeneous body of thought to which anybody could claim the copyright. In the 1960's and 1970's, critical psychiatry flourished and comprised a wide range of viewpoints. Of course, it had existed in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century as well, the most influential example being perhaps Clifford Beers with his book *A Mind That Found Itself* (1908). Moreover, during the last decade or so another wave seems to have been building up, although it's hard to say at the moment how much impact this one will have.

The wave which started in the 1960's gathered momentum at a spectacular rate, but ebbed away just as rapidly in the 1970's. In 1980 I published a book on it (Ingleby, 1980/1981): unfortunately it took me and authors and publishers so long to get our act together that the movement had all but fizzled out by the time the book appeared. Fortunately, the book was reprinted last year (Ingleby, 2004). In this talk I will try and place the movement in context, describing its origins and the legacy it left behind.

## The place of R.D. Laing

It is almost unavoidable to place Laing at the centre of this movement, at any rate as far as Britain is concerned, although to my knowledge he didn't use the term critical psychiatry himself. (The label 'anti-psychiatry' was explicitly rejected by Laing, although many authors persist in using it to describe the movement of which he was a part.)

Laing's rapid rise to fame was followed by an

equally dramatic fall from grace: he became an alcoholic and was struck off the medical register. The title of a film made about him near the end of his life — *Did you used to be R.D. Laing?* — sums up his fate. By 1980, Laing's work had been completely written off by the psychiatric establishment and was not mentioned at all in textbooks. (One is reminded of the way Stalin used to retouch group photos to eliminate colleagues who had displeased him). In the past few years, however, there has been a veritable Laing revival, with a whole spate of books and articles (see, in particular, Crossley, 1998; Mullan, 1999; Miller, 2004; Raschid, 2005). There is even a Society for Laingian Studies, with a highly informative web-site (<http://laingsociety.org/>) All this attention is well deserved and long overdue.

The importance of Laing for the critical movement was that he had a voracious appetite for ideas and came up with just the right notions at the right moment — or so it seemed at the time. This is not to say he wasn't original: he simply had a unique gift for communicating his own and other people's ideas and applying them in novel ways. However, as his fame grew the sources tended to be lost sight of and he was increasingly portrayed, by himself and others, as a solitary pioneer.

## The agenda of critical psychiatry in the 1960's and 1970's

The main thrust of critical psychiatry at this time was directed against asylum psychiatry, in particular the Kraepelinian variety<sup>1</sup>. The main points of criticism are well-known — to sum up:

- The movement rejected the assumption that mental disorders were diseases, arguing that there was no plausible scientific basis for this belief.
- It regarded asylum psychiatry's method of

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<sup>1</sup> The German psychiatrist Emiel Kraepelin (1856-1926) is regarded by many as the 'father of modern psychiatry'.

- gathering data as inhumane and one-sided. Clinical presentations were a grotesque 'degradation ceremony'; Kraepelin's diagnostic terminology was a 'rhetoric of denigration'.
- This critique went hand in hand with a particular historical interpretation of psychiatry, inspired by Foucault's *Folie et déraison: histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (1961). In the Middle Ages, a 'dialogue with unreason' had been sustained, but European society became increasingly allergic to unreason and closed this dialogue down. Incarceration was above all *social exclusion* (out of sight is out of mind....)
  - Pinel was not an enlightened revolutionary and the medical model of insanity was not a humane breakthrough. It simply introduced a new way of banishing 'unreason'.

The alternatives proposed by Laing and his colleagues are equally well-known:

- Psychiatric categories are *labels for unacceptable forms of behaviour*.
- 'Psychopathology' can be seen as intelligible human reactions to situations.
- To learn about people we should use *hermeneutic* methods — listening, trying to understand the sense of behaviour from the point of view of the agents themselves. It may seem hard to believe, but this was a fairly revolutionary proposal in British psychiatry at the time. An Oxford behaviourist, B.A. Farrel, complained that Laing gave the impression of being in love with his patients. The implication was obvious: only someone blinded by love would be so foolish as to show respect or compassion for a schizophrenic! In *Critical Psychiatry* I argued that the heart of all this was a dispute about what constitutes *understanding*. Since the Enlightenment, two major traditions in European thought had existed side by side: positivistic and interpretative approaches, viewing human beings respectively as object or subject, and focusing on 'process' or 'praxis'. Critical psychiatry was arguing for a paradigm shift: we should try for a change to regard mental patients as subjects, to seek to understand their 'praxis' and to look for the 'human sense' of what they do or feel. I dubbed this a 'normalising' approach.
- The struggle against classical psychiatry was part of wider struggle against authoritarian, oppressive forms of power, which rested on unquestioned assumptions. These assumptions were enshrined in 'common sense', so that those who had 'lost touch with reality' had perhaps only come to their senses.

### What was the origin of these notions?

#### *The mental hygiene movement*

Although the link may not seem obvious, I think that the main factor which made it possible for these ideas to flourish was the mental hygiene movement. Established at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this was a reform movement which aimed to remedy the shortcomings of classical asylum psychiatry. It argued for a *continuum concept* of mental illness (along the lines of Freudian theory) instead of a rigid dichotomy between 'them' and 'us'. Secondly, it regarded social factors as important in causing illness and breakdown. Thirdly, it held that the mentally ill should be treated humanely and with dignity.

This movement paved the way for critical psychiatry, but it would of course be absurd to equate the two. For the hygienists, mental illness remains illness, not a label aimed at marginalising people. To call it an intelligible reaction to situations would be 'a bridge too far'. Secondly, social causes were seen as factors, but only as partial ones: individual predispositions were just as important, if not more so.

Nevertheless, the mental hygiene movement was one of the driving forces behind the transformation of mental health care in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and made a major contribution to the rise of ambulant service provisions (see Abma, 2004). Psychotherapy, rather than medicine, was the model for these interventions. This extension of the paradigm made possible the development of social theories of mental illness and non-medicalising versions of psychoanalysis. These innovations were not fully implemented until after the Second World War, when many new disciplines became involved in the field of mental health. A whole range of new approaches was propagated, including interpretative and sociological ones. In the 1960's, therefore, classical asylum psychiatry was already being pushed into the background.

#### *Hermeneutics and phenomenology*

Since Freud, professionals had been listening to patients and interpreting what they said, but this activity was mostly confined to 'up-market' neurotic patients. Laing was trained as an analyst in the somewhat eclectic British tradition, but he soon parted company with this profession. He extended psychoanalytic interpretation to the clientele of asylums: marginalized psychotics. Though Freud had regarded this as a waste of time, the Kleinian approach made it theoretically more viable. (Accordingly to Melanie Klein, viewing things from a 'paranoid-schizoid' perspective was a fundamental human disposition.)

A more important source of inspiration for Laing was phenomenology. He read avidly in continental philosophy and discovered Merleau-Ponty, Binswanger and Jaspers. Encouraged by his friend Joe Schorstein, he realised that there was a whole world out there where people talked about 'human experience' and 'intentionality'. Laing nearly went to study with Jaspers in the 1950's, but his employer (the British Army) put a stop to this plan.

The intellectual culture of the post-war British establishment, especially that of psychiatry, was notoriously insular and philistine. When I read philosophy at Cambridge in the 1960's, students were taught that continental philosophy was simply mumbo-jumbo which they could safely ignore. In the Netherlands, by contrast, critical psychiatry appealed to professionals because the psychiatric establishment was already partially converted to the cause. Social psychiatry and phenomenological approaches — the 'soft' side of German psychiatry — already had a firm foothold within the psychiatric establishment (Abma & Weijers, 2005). This is one reason why critical psychiatry was a much more successful movement in the Netherlands than in Britain (Ingleby, 1998).

#### *Sociology*

Another source of inspiration for critical psychiatry was American sociology. Starting with Talcott Parsons in the 1950's, American sociologists had discovered the topics of illness, health, and medical power. Most research started from a hermeneutic paradigm, using symbolic interactionism or ethnomethodology. (Erwin Goffman's work provides a particularly powerful example.) In addition, American family therapists introduced systems theory and a 'pragmatic' approach to communication. The roots of all these approaches can be found in elements of the European *Geisteswissenschaften* which had been transported across the Atlantic to the New World in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### *General social changes: the ideological climate*

The main driving force behind critical psychiatry was not a specific author, but a feeling that was in the air. The 1960's were a time of profound social change in the West. Traditional, taken-for-granted institutions were challenged, established authorities became targets of scorn and received wisdom was stood on its head. Almost everybody was affected in some way by this climate of social ferment. Critical psychiatry added its voice to other protest movements, presenting classical psychiatry as a kind of police force which enforced unwritten social rules and administered sanctions without judge or jury. Thus, it saw psychiatry as basically a social control mechanism. The reduction of deviant people's experience and actions to pathology, their

'reification' through the use of the positivist paradigm, served to invalidate and disempower individuals.

A core concept in the 1960's was 'liberation' and critical psychiatry aimed to liberate mental patients by restoring their humanity. It also emphasised the need to liberate 'normal' people too — not simply from external oppression, but from a state of *internal* alienation from their own feelings, thoughts and perceptions.

It is worth noting that the notion of patients' rights had also been central to the mental hygiene movement and that human-rights arguments were used frequently in the 1960's to challenge the social exclusion of the mentally ill. There was a wave of legal challenges to incarceration, especially in the USA. Perhaps, in the last analysis, this had to do with the fact that mental health care had gone 'up-market': asylum psychiatry was developed for social outcasts and the way it treated its clientele was not acceptable to middle-class citizens. (Clifford Beers, after all, was the Yale-educated scion of a wealthy family.)

I have tried to give a thumbnail sketch of the main ideas of critical psychiatry and the influences behind it. At the time, there were a lot of people inside the mental health professions who took these ideas very seriously. Notice that we are talking about 'mental health' here and not simply about psychiatry: what was playing itself out was to large extent a power-struggle *within* the mental health sector. From the 1950's onwards, ambulant services started their enormous expansion and asylum psychiatry lost its virtual monopoly of mental health service provision. Other disciplines crowded in to get a piece of the action. For the rivals of asylum psychiatry, the devastating critique which critical psychiatry mounted was music to their ears and grist to their mills.

Critical psychiatry was a world-wide phenomenon and in my book I tried to show the various ways in which it had taken shape in different countries, including Italian 'democratic psychiatry'; American sociological approaches and 'radical psychiatry'; and the peculiarly French approach, combining Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari and Lacan. In Britain, the therapeutic community movement had shown that there were other things you could do in a mental hospital besides turning people into zombies.

#### **Decline and fall**

As I said, by 1980 critical psychiatry in Britain had more or less fizzled out as a movement. What went wrong?

By the 1970's, the major figures in the movement had already given up trying to influence mental health policy. When I first met Laing in 1964 I got the impression that he very much wanted to be taken seriously by the British psychiatric establishment. The fact that his ideas were treated with such incomprehension and contempt was, I think, an enormous disappointment to him. After a few years of this, he gave up on his own profession and discovered a different mission. Or rather, the same mission transposed to a global arena — the struggle against alienation from oneself and against the social exclusion of those who dared to be different.

Thus, critical psychiatry adopted increasingly extreme standpoints during the 1970's and detached itself from the mainstream of progressive opinion within mental health. As Colin Jones (1998) has put it, the movement "constructed a heavily contrastive version of its opponent". This extreme message alienated moderates. Laing and his affiliates were not interested in forming a broad front for mental health reform: the movement split up into hardliners, softliners and mystics. The chance for an alliance was missed. This is in strong contrast to the situation in Italy, where Basaglia's 'democratic psychiatry' created a powerful coalition of doctors, nurses, writers, artists and politicians.

### Shortcomings of critical psychiatry

With the benefit of hindsight I think it is possible to see in what respects critical psychiatry in general, and Laing in particular, failed to present an effective analysis of the problems.

### Psychiatry instead of mental health

The target of critical psychiatry was a crudely reductionist organic approach and the construction of a rigid barrier between 'them' and 'us'. (Let us not forget that the first psychiatrists were called 'alienists'.) Methods of diagnosis and treatment were seen as *violence*. Yet this is the battle which the mental hygiene movement had fought and largely won: asylum psychiatry, as we have seen, was already on the retreat.

Modern mental health is much more than asylum psychiatry and it comprises many sectors, disciplines and paradigms. The 'continuum' approach has become the new orthodoxy. This is where the criticism needs to be focussed, for the 'continuum' approach has revealed itself to be a Trojan horse. Now that the 'Bible' of Psychiatry, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) is no longer tied to theoretical causes of illness, 'pathology' can be extended to cover every imaginable sort of human activity. You don't need to be very crazy to be 'in need of treatment'. At the moment, a fierce battle rages

between 'expansionists' and 'conservatives' over the inclusion of the so-called 'mild' disorders in the next edition of the DSM.

This is not so much social control as social *management*; 'violence' is not the appropriate term any more, because treatment is usually consensual. In his later works, Foucault makes a crucial distinction between 'repressive' and 'productive' power, and most of the mental health system falls into the latter category. Productive power *produces* its own reality. A population can avidly internalise psychiatric notions and discipline itself. Criticism of mental health therefore needs a broader focus and new theoretical tools.

### Overstated claims

An unfortunate habit which critical psychiatrists often took over from classical psychiatry was the *monocausal* approach. The origins of schizophrenia had to be *either* biological *or* social: they could not be both. The result was a sort of social reductionism and far-reaching claims which were all too easy to invalidate.

### Focus on schizophrenia

Given the preoccupation with asylum psychiatry, critical psychiatry's focus on schizophrenia was entirely understandable. Nevertheless, this is the hardest condition of all to make intelligible in common-sense terms and to relate to social factors. It is much easier, for example, to show links between depressive and anxiety disorders on the one hand, and factors such as poverty, unemployment, urbanisation and social exclusion on the other.

### The new Dark Ages

Social approaches to mental health began to stagnate after the 1970's. Sociological approaches were everywhere in retreat, and the more extreme claims of critical psychiatry were discredited. In Britain, at least, the movement seemed to have been swept away as if it had never happened. Within mental health services a gradual shift of power back to psychiatry began to occur. These changes took place against a background of recurrent financial crises. Demand for mental health services increased, but the oil crisis in 1972 plunged Western economies into recession. Mrs. Thatcher introduced 'Reaganomics' into Britain and the budget for health and social services was cut drastically.

This ushered in the era of Managed Care — a new bogey for professionals and patients alike. This new alliance of positivism and managerialism created strange bedfellows. Managed Care represents an attack on professional autonomy, whether the professional happens to be a phenomenologist or a brain surgeon.

During the same period, organic psychiatry made a spectacular come-back: once vilified, it now became prestigious — the 1990's were 'the decade of the brain'. Psychiatry entered into an alliance with the pharmaceutical industry and discovered an enormous market. David Healy was only slightly exaggerating when he wrote (2001): "Both psychiatry and anti-psychiatry were swept away and replaced by a new corporate psychiatry." This, in combination with managed care, has completely altered the landscape of mental health care — and defined a new agenda for critics.

### **A glimmer of light on the horizon**

However, history shows that movements in mental health are but swings of the pendulum. This one, moreover, would seem to be past its peak, as the following observations might suggest:

#### *Reaction against medicalisation.*

The medicalisation of deviance and distress seems to have got completely out of hand. In 2002 an entire issue of the BMJ (13 April) was devoted to this problem. Today, medicalisation does not even require an imputed disease as its basis: anything which is more than a couple of standard deviations from the norm is potentially a candidate for treatment. The backlash against excessive medicalisation is accompanied by a return to what I have called the 'normalising' approach. Frank Furedi (2003) is a hardliner in this respect.

The debate about 'traumatised refugees' is a case in point. Here, the target of critics is the *depoliticisation* of organised violence ('persecution, torture and rape are bad for your health') and its reduction to an *individual* level. The work of Derek Summerfield represents a sustained and eloquent challenge to this form of unwarranted medicalisation.

#### *Challenges to pharmaceutical industry*

Thanks to the activities in recent years of a few courageous 'whistle-blowers', public ignorance about the unethical and anti-social activities of the pharmaceutical industry has been dispelled. Perhaps the most disquieting of these revelations concerns the way in which even the publication of scientific research is manipulated in line with the interests of this immense and powerful industry. Partly as a result of this, the blind faith in chemical answers to human problems seems to be eroding.

#### *Questions about the concept of schizophrenia*

The notion that schizophrenia is a brain disease has been, as it were, the flagship of classical psychiatry: that is precisely why Laing chose to attack the notion. However, the search for a biochemical marker with a clear causal role still continues, and meanwhile the unitary nature of

the diagnosis is being challenged (e.g. Boyle, 2002; Blom, 2004). The 'hearing voices' movement has showed how unclear the dividing-line between normal and abnormal can be.

#### *More power to mental health service users*

The more flagrant forms of violence which were the target of anti-psychiatry are much less in evidence today. Indeed, the case for forcible treatment is again having to be argued: to the dismay of governments concerned with public order, psychiatrists have become reluctant to resume the role they previously had as 'mental police'.

Meanwhile, users of mental health services have acquired other kinds of power. In accordance with the principles of 'needs-driven care', they now have a much stronger voice in service provision than thirty years ago. More attention is paid to their satisfaction and their point of view — even if, all too often, this is only to improve their level of 'compliance' with treatment. The increased power of the 'consumer' of mental health care is one of the few benefits of the market-oriented approaches now in fashion. In spite of all these improvements, however, combating the social exclusion of mental patients remains an urgent priority.

#### *The challenge of multicultural mental health*

As I mentioned above, the theories used to regulate behaviour in modern societies have a self-fulfilling character: in Foucault's terms, they produce their own reality. It is hard to persuade people of the inadequacies of a diagnosis such as ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) when parents are queuing up to have their children treated and the children themselves use the term in their own playground slang. However, the influx of migrants into Western countries, as well as the export of mental health services to the developing world, bring mental health care into contact with populations that have not already internalised its basic concepts and working methods.

One response to this challenge is simply to try and assimilate the new users to the established system (e.g. by 'psycho-education'). Another, however, is to revise the basic assumptions of mental health care in such a way as to make them more appropriate and better matched to new populations.

Transcultural mental health care today thus places a strong emphasis on approaches which listen to the voice of users, as opposed to imposing pre-existing categories and concepts on them. These approaches have been largely pioneered within the discipline of medical anthropology. The essential continuity with the otherwise almost defunct tradition of phenomenological psychiatry is shown

by the fact that a forthcoming conference\* on phenomenology in psychiatry will be addressed by one of the doyens of transcultural psychiatry, Arthur Kleinman.

To sum up: in all these ways, we can see that the themes which critical psychiatry placed on the agenda forty years ago are once again coming to the fore within mental health care today. Perhaps this optimistic note is a good one on which to end.

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\* "Phenomenology and Psychiatry for the 21st Century", Institute of Psychiatry, London, 5-6 September 2005



## Annie Hargrave

# On Running the London Marathon April 2005

Emerging from the celebrations and the congratulations, from the blisters and the cramps, from the asking for sponsorship and the accounting for the money.....what?

Well, time and space in my life which had been dedicated to the training – delightful. Turning my face towards other projects both personal and work related – with great relish. And, yes, more running!

On the back of the finishers' tee shirt is the slogan: 'Never again! Until the next time.' 'It's what happens after marathons.'

I wish I had a pound for every time I've said it: 'Just the once.' My husband said: 'New York?' My boss said: 'Next up, New York!' I said: 'I'm crushing the very thought!' But the thought is undeniably NOT crushed.

But for now it's gentler, kinder, lazier. The summer and some gardening days.

Running the marathon is a sobering experience. You can't get away with it. You absolutely have to put in the work beforehand which includes ruthlessly realistic self assessment. You need to put yourself in the right place in the line-up of starters, which means you don't elevate yourself above your ability. If you do you will obstruct other people as they have to find their way past you. You will become discouraged to feel left behind as they stream past leaving you puffing and waddling in their wake. And you risk starting too quickly and running out of steam or injuring yourself. You risk scuppering yourself, in effect.

Any grandiose fantasies I had about myself running the marathon were wiped out at a stroke as I was overtaken by a plastic rhino. But it also means not under-estimating yourself. I often used to say; 'Well, I'm not a real athlete, of

course.' But I am an athlete! A s-l-o-w athlete, but an athlete none the less. However you tackle a marathon you have to have a level of fitness and a level of commitment to it which is frankly greater than the majority of your friends and neighbours. It can attract generous support and it can also attract envy.

I have grown. Both in level headedness about myself and in level headedness in accepting other people.

And enjoying the enthusiasm of loved ones and supporters! Their encouragement beforehand, their sponsorship money and their cheers and hugs after the event. They are real and you touch each other. But even when you're out there pounding out the miles entirely alone, their love has the power to transform what could be 'the loneliness of the long distance runner' into a nourishing solitude which I for my part find deeply enriching. I get physically and mentally tired but I am not depleted in my being at all.

I don't like it when the ex-elite athletes who commentate the great city runs describe those of us not in contention for prizes as 'fun runners'.

Training for the distance is: exciting, heart breaking, exhilarating, boring, gruelling and consuming. I would use the same adjectives about being in psychotherapy, actually. It takes a monastic sort of commitment to be out there whatever the weather. I have had to shorten a long run on several occasions because the high winds down by the river have defeated me. I have had to stop many times to remove the accumulation of mud which triples the weight of my running shoes. I've had footfuls of brown fen water, mud spattered up to my armpits. And then, getting my bum nettled as I crouch in the undergrowth to relieve the stomach cramps. Oh yes! This enterprise is not what I would call 'fun'.

So, why do I do it then?

Many of us who are charity runners have our own stories to tell. I began running in earnest after my son Tom died. He loved sports and was glad to know I was going to try and run the Great North Run, a half marathon, in his memory after his death.

Training for the Great North was at the core of my living in the season of harshest grief. I often had to stop to weep and afterwards, as I was able to compose myself, I would have to walk home as I had depleted my energy in grieving. It was the time in my day when I started to be able to generate motivation to begin to piece together the fragments of my shattered life. My grief was so visceral I needed to find healing in the body. Healing of the eyes, of the guts, of the breathing. Symbolising just didn't cut enough of the mustard.

Training for a run requires you, in all your different aspects, to come to terms with yourself. Before I could sustain a run I had to discern the rhythms of my body. Listening to my footfalls, time after time, thousands of times. Hearing my breathing, monitoring my heartbeat (I don't mean with fancy technology – although you can do that as well), attending to the moods of my being, when to slow down and when to speed up, when to go longer and when to leave it for another day. Getting into rhythms so that I could allow myself to dwell on the thoughts and feelings which emerged into consciousness. A sort of free-floating contemplativeness, which in other words is free association.

I took the advice of my spiritual advisors and also looked outside of myself. I don't mean just glancing. But observing deeply and engaging with what was not me. I felt the autumn sun, watched the fruiting of the blackberries and the sloes, and watched their decay as the days cooled and the mists and the rains changed into winter. The trees changed their colours and the bare trunks and branches became starker as the leaves fell. Their shapes were stunning against the winter-bright skies, some dramatic, some comical. I got to know the territories of the herons, always solitary. And the boundaries of the swan families, nearly always together. The adolescent groups, too young for mating next year and the adult pairs who would defend their territory even to an attack on the canoeists and rowers out in their boats. I noticed the rising and falling of the river, the interval between the rain and the level of the waters coming up. I was observing but I was also part of it. I was participating in the life of the river. I entered into the natural habitat of the towpath.

Actually, at that time I was running to stay alive.

I went back to work and I ran the Great North. It was wonderful! There is nothing quite like it, lining up with thousands of others, all different, all sharing the excitement and determination of going the distance.

I was alive. I had stayed alive. And now I wanted to be alive.

The marathon was scarcely in my consciousness at that time, although my family were all asking which year I was planning to do it so they could arrange their schedules to allow them to be present. 'No!' I said.

It's a bit like being resistant to an accurate interpretation. It's almost so exquisite, so excruciating, it's hard to bear.

When I realised they were right I asked myself the question: 'Why?' I was sure I didn't want to 'run for Tom' in the sense of holding on to him. I wanted to 'let him go' and let myself live my own authentic life. The fact that he had said to us all that he wanted each one of us to do just that came back into my thoughts again and again. I am forever thankful to him for his love for us, his generosity towards us in this way.

In Runners' World – yes I do buy the magazine for anoraks-in Runners' World I read the theory that middle aged people run to stave off ageing. Is that what I was doing? It may be part of it I suppose. But I came to a working formulation as I applied for a place in the marathon:

I ran the Great North to stay alive. I'll run the London because I *am* alive!

One of the things I learned during the time of Tom's illness was to take every opportunity. Seize the day! It wasn't that I didn't know it before, but I came to know it in my flesh and blood. I had achieved a good level of fitness and some experience. I could build on it to try the full marathon distance. I decided that analysing my motivation, understanding exactly what it was about didn't matter to me as much as going for it while I could.

Life, however, has a habit of going on happening. There was a wedding, a move, a death. All to be attended to as well as commitment to good work, a marriage to sustain, and stuff like doing the shopping, feeding the dog and putting the rubbish out on time.

So I wasn't ready until this year.

It was mid December I found out I had got a place. The London Marathon has 40,000 places. There are 90,000 applicants for 20,000 balloted places and the others are allocated to charities who distribute them as they see fit. I failed to get a place in the ballot. It was clear that the best chance I had was through Macmillan Cancer Relief for whom I'd run before and with whom I had a good fund raising record. It obviously retained the link with the early days when it was all about my grieving and reparation and redemption out of tragedy, but I was glad to find that it did feel different. Further on somehow. Fully sure of being alive. And also fully aware of the finite-ness of being alive. A seize-the-day moment. Macmillan did indeed give me a place.

Into training then! It wasn't just talk any more. I'd actually taken it on!

If you've never run you'd find it astonishing to discover the range of training schedules, technical aids, diet plans, spiritual advice, psychological strategies, stretching exercises and the forensic detail with which you can mug up on *all* the injuries you might sustain if you're not careful – and even if you are. There are magazines devoted to running shoes, for under-pronators and over-pronators, cushioned, gelled, with medial support, neutral, stability... I could go on! Negotiating my way through all this reminded me a bit of finding the way somewhere on the London Underground. When you are confident about what you're doing it becomes part of you. When you are finding it out you have to commit yourself and your ticket to the barrier and you descend beneath the surface. It's not so easy.

Whatever plan you follow you have to customise it to your individual ability and rhythms. You must have the discipline to stop when necessary as well as the determination to persevere. If you don't you're almost bound to get injured.

Training involves frequency and regularity. Some run every day. I ran three or four times a week. Most runs are between 30-45 minutes, concentrating on speed work, stride and form, tempo etc. And HILL WORK! In capital letters. I live at the top of the only hill in the fens! Great....

At the core of every marathon training is the Long Run. This is a weekly outing when the emphasis is on endurance, going longer, building the capacity to last the distance. It won't do to add distance too

quickly and it won't do to do just one or two long runs. It also helps you understand how to manage yourself. Your fluids, your bowels, keeping warm, keeping cool, what socks suit you. And it gives you the opportunity to develop your concentration, your ability to keep going without knowing whether and how you'll get there, to work on your staying power.

The Long Run is, for me, like the long, regular, hard work of psychotherapy. Not often highlighted by fanfares and fireworks, but the slow, scarcely noticeable shifts achieved in putting the work in. And, like psychotherapy, it has its struggles and discouragements. Days when it feels impossible. Days when you can't do it. Days when you just want to jack it in. Well, that's what my psychotherapy felt like anyway! And the Long Run is, par excellence, the leveller, the place where realism about oneself is crucial. To get it near enough right, to understand sufficiently what to go for – that's the key to liberating your potential. Being fully what you can be in the present. No regrets, no promises, just being fully alive today.

The day itself dawns and there's nothing left to do but run the marathon. I enjoyed it! The atmosphere, the camaraderie, swapping stories, the terrific crowds, the bands, the balloons, the whole carnival jamboree that the London Marathon has become. The last five miles were excruciatingly painful and I was overcome with exhaustion and weeping when I got over the finishing line.

I had run my marathon. And not just the distance by the Great Ouse and the Cam, not a 'lesser' marathon (!), but on the hallowed London ground of what has come to be regarded as the best marathon in the world. I have taken to my heart the fantasy that it's not just the distance that counts, but running *this* distance along *these* streets at *this* particular time. Where else could I line up alongside so many thousands of others in the same event as the best distance athletes in the world? No marathon anywhere attracts the quality of elite and championship fields that London does.

So, after the exhilaration and the pain, after being kissed and congratulated, I live with a new facet to my identity. I'm a London Marathon runner. I like it! It seems to make me both special and ordinary. Not omnipotently supreme special. Not ordinary meaning dull. But special in the sense of not confined to being only routine and mundane, and ordinary in the sense of never in line for glittering prizes, just having my share of the wonderful, creative potential of being a human being.

Isobel Urquhart

# Reflecting on my own learning

Recently, I have been reflecting on my training within the Outfit, and also examining my capacity to 'explain' it to myself in terms of how and what I learned. I find myself musing therefore on questions such as, 'What makes it easy to learn?', 'Why is it sometimes hard or even impossible to take some things in, see their relevance or remember them?' There must be thousands of these questions that we raise for ourselves both during and after our psychotherapy training. And there is, indeed, a vast body of writing dedicated to addressing many of them in great detail, psychoanalytic theory being but one, with its own particular ways of answering some of those questions. I have found some of that theory very useful - indeed, extremely powerful in examining what is hard to understand about the process, so much so that it has sometimes been quite hard for me to give due attention and public recognition to what was, until recently, my 'day job' (teaching student teachers about psychology and learning). And yet, in order to explain my psychotherapy learning to myself, I ask myself, isn't it a bit 'split' for me not to pay attention to what I think I know from psychology about learning?

The following is simply one very small part, therefore, of what psychology has to tell us about learning, and I offer it merely as a means for people to think about its possible usefulness in understanding the process of learning for themselves, and for groups learning together. So here it is.

In psychology, a great deal of research has gone into examining motivation as an aspect of learning. 'If we are highly motivated, we learn better and can recall information better and can apply our knowledge and skills and understanding more effectively in practical situations' is the general tenor of the argument. But then it gets complicated - what do we mean by motivation, are some kinds of motivation more effective than others, why

doesn't it always work out that way etc. As psychotherapists, we'd want to say, anyway, that we don't always really know what our 'real' motivation is, that our 'real' motivators are hidden in our unconscious drives, are conflicted, and that subsequently we experience ambivalence and resistance which censor our conscious awareness of our inadmissible pleasures and desires - to be the ones who know, or who experience a satisfying sense of 'competence', for example.

Obviously, it would seem on the surface of things that when we achieve admission into the Outfit we are highly motivated to become psychotherapists, and we are often quite eager to learn things that will help us in that aim. If we then find that it seems to be quite hard, actually, to do learning in our training, that can sometimes lead to self-blaming (as well as 'other' blaming!). "Here I am, all fired up to become a psychotherapist and yet the learning doesn't seem to be happening" - (in a way that I can recognise, anyway). And the next question can so easily be, "So what's wrong with me? Perhaps I'm not really as motivated as I thought I was? Perhaps I'm unworthy to become a psychotherapist if I haven't even got the motivation to learn!" And thus many unhappy hours and years can then be passed, futilely beating oneself up about this failing. Believe me, I've tried it! At the risk, then, of exposing my personality defects and finding it is 'just me, then', it is this kind of self-blaming within learning that I am focusing on here.

In 1984, a psychologist called Nicholls identified a distinction between two kinds of involvement in learning, and he coined a useful couple of phrases to describe them (Nicholls 1984). One kind of involvement he called "task-involvement" and the other he called "ego-involvement". People who are in the state of task-involvement see the goal of learning as gaining mastery of the task e.g. solving a problem or gaining better understanding. People

who are in the state of ego-involvement focus on being able to demonstrate to others and to themselves their high ability, or to conceal from those others their low ability (including, I would say - psychotherapeutically - those internalised 'others'). In this latter case, we might want to say to the psychologists that this description shows how one's disposition towards learning can become defensive and/or narcissistic. I don't think this is a matter of identifying oneself as one or the other. I am more inclined to think that our history of being learners, the nature of what we are trying to learn as well as the social and cultural aspects of the context in which we are trying to learn something, the level of physical and emotional support we have available might all converge to put us into either a task-oriented or ego-oriented mode.

While Nicholls and other psychologists like him focus entirely on individuals, it seems to me that, just as individuals can find themselves in these different states, so might groups of learners, be these classes of children or adults training to become psychotherapists. Might not a group sometimes find itself at times task-oriented (eager to master a theme or topic) and sometimes more ego-oriented (envious and defensive about goals of demonstrating and concealing ability levels within its membership)? I'd be interested to know how group psychotherapists conceptualise this fluctuation in motivation within the group.

Anyway, back to the psychologists. Ames analysed the requests he received as a university tutor for academic assistance from college-students (Ames 1984). He found that some students who asked for help tended to frame their request *and* the help they received as amounting to an evaluation of their abilities relative to the abilities of others. If they perceived their abilities as low compared to others, and were in the ego-involvement mode, they tended to perceive even just a *desire* to ask for help as a demonstration of their lack of ability. 'If I wasn't so stupid, I wouldn't need help.' They were therefore less likely to seek assistance, as the goal of the ego-involved state includes the wish to conceal low ability. On the other hand, students who were task-involved thought of assistance pragmatically as a way of achieving their desired goal to understand or gain mastery of a topic, and were thus more likely to ask for the help they needed.

Well, does it matter? Nicholls thought it did. In his studies, he found that if a person was task-involved, she made better judgements and had more positive emotions about learning. If the ego-involved person, on the other hand, thought that they were having to work harder than other

people, they judged their ability to be lower than others - because, for them, high ability meant one didn't have to work hard at something, or that one 'got it' without apparent effort. Cambridge student culture includes this myth - that Firsts are achieved by effortless genius. (They're not). Thus, simply *perceiving* the task as *difficult* might itself be taken by the ego-involved learner as an indication that they lack ability. Furthermore, ego-involved learning makes people feel guilty when they don't try hard, but ashamed (embarrassed) when they do try hard, so they cannot win (or, more significantly, learn) either way.

Task-involved learning, however, allows us to make fewer low-ability attributions for failure to our own individual make up. For example, we are less likely to explain failure to learn as a personal defect and we are less likely to call ourselves names that denigrate our efforts. When we are in task-involved learning mode we are also more likely to feel energised by learning - we take an interest and a pleasure in the task, and as a result, we not only do work harder but also with more optimism, because we believe that working harder will be effective, and, as a result, we do then learn better.

An important thing to remember, however, is that the power of this research is not simply - and simplistically- to sort learning behaviours of individuals into two kinds. Nor is it just about identifying our personal dispositions or tendencies in different learning contexts. It feels important to emphasise that we can take up *both* kinds of position, just as we oscillate throughout our lives between a paranoid-schizoid and depressive position. For my purposes here, thinking about this one very small account of psychological research is a useful way to examine whether the *conditions* of our learning are conducive to one or other of these orientations. Are there ways in which we set up the learning processes in our society that do or could help us to be task-involved or which amplify an ego-involvement? Here's what Nicholls and his colleague Jagacinski said about that in 1984 (Jagacinski and Nicholls 1984):

Conditions that increase ego involvement are likely to increase the number of students who feel incompetent and, thereby, to impair the growth of their competence. Increased task involvement on the other hand might enable more students to feel competent through learning as well as their potential allows.

The question then is, can we use this awareness to recognise what processes go on in our training that are conducive to task-involvement, and to recognise when the more defensive goals of ego-

involved learning are getting the better of us, individually and collectively? How do pairings, personal therapy, the nature and structure of Monday meetings, and other self-initiated learning activities help each of us through our training? Can we allow ourselves to orient to the task - how, indeed, do we conceptualise 'the task' in each of these conditions? Another way of thinking about learning in groups that I have found useful is to address the *affordances* of the group, including its setting, the topics and the individuals present on any particular occasion. Affordances refer to the potential activities that any given physical, social and cultural environment or tool (e.g. a laptop computer, language itself) implies. Thus, a kitchen has particular physical affordances as well as social and cultural values associated with it that allow certain activities more than others - we are likely to spend some of our time 'doing' cooking in it and may also have a sense of our identity within that environment that feels more - or less - tolerable and fulfilling. We can ask, therefore, whether the learning group affordances foster activities of task-oriented learning rather than ego-oriented defences against learning?

Paul Greenhalgh, in his wonderful book that comprehensively examines how hard learning is for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, coined the phrase 'the anxiety-risk ratio' as something that has to be understood from the learner's point of view, and to be managed by the teacher (Greenhalgh 1994). That is, for each learner, there is a balance to be struck between the inevitable anxiety that learning raises and the risks of exposure, shame, failure which, on their other surface, are the challenges and excitements of achievement, enlightenment, understanding and mastery. If anxiety is too high, the risks will be avoided, evaded, or denigrated. How could a learning group take a conscious look at what the anxiety-risk ratio might imply for them?

There are further aspects of learning that I want to consider. One is the relationship between speaking and learning, and the other is the significance of dependency. Sometimes, the question of learning has been formulated as whether one speaks or not in the group. Saying things out loud does help learning - it certainly helps children - but this is not to assert that saying is identical with learning. Nevertheless, we are instinctively inclined to worry that those who have not spoken in the group are excluded or to feel that they have been prevented from learning as a result. I'm not so sure about this as the sole explanation - but I'm interested in the group sense of guilt about it.

Saying things out loud gives thoughts an existence outside oneself. In psychology, the process of

turning thought into spoken utterance is understood to involve a process of cognitive organisation that itself is part of learning. Having to turn a thought into words that are said out loud requires you to 'do' something to your thought, and to orient your thought to the imagined interest/need of the listener. For the psychologist, therefore, doing something to your thinking makes it more available to consciousness, makes it more permanent in the memory, and makes what can feel like undigested introjections from others' knowledge into something internalised that feels more like one's own knowledge. Those who have read Patrick Casement's insightful analysis of the process of 'internalising the supervisor' (Casement 1985) will recognise what I mean here. But the risk of saying something in a group can be very high for some of us in some situations. And this is one of many times when the psychologist needs the psychotherapist. Imagining our listeners as benign or malevolent, eager to take in or too clever to tolerate our fumbling thoughts is a process imbued with emotion, threat, excitement - all closely related to our object-related inner world.

When I was in the student group, sometimes I thought of the one who speaks as the one who knows - or, in a more nuanced way, as the one who knows how to take what they need from the group. Sometimes, (again, perhaps 'just me') I felt hate and envy for people who spoke and imputed all sorts of shameful motivations to their contribution that emanated, more truthfully, from the black, sticky trail of horribleness in me. I found myself sometimes completely unable to understand a word of what was said, only realising later that this was a mixture of panic and envy that blocked any capacity I had to take something in. Panic that I wouldn't be able to understand and envy that someone was able to take a risk that I couldn't, or envy that they appeared to be fluent and knowledgeable and that all I could get from that was a sense of my own lack of fluency and knowledge. Long years of teaching psychology and watching children learn should have helped me understand this, but no, the black stickiness - ever repudiated and denied - prevailed more often than I would have liked.

However, what I do know and try to keep in mind from teaching and learning with children is that participation in learning with others may indeed involve quite lengthy periods of not knowing what to say and just looking on and observing others, often in a bit of a muddle. For instance, in a group of children doing something together - making a kite, playing a game in the home corner - you might have, crudely put, some vocal children with lots of ideas - 'we're robots, let's be robots, I'll be a robot and I'm coming to kill you' - and children

who join in and elaborate - 'I'm a robot too I've got a sword' - and children who just kind of hang out around the game, not saying much and standing apparently rather aimlessly near the play e.g. they may start quietly moving like a robot. Or, to use a less boisterous example, you might have two siblings, where the older girl is trying out her reading by sitting on the floor with a large picture book on her knees. Her young sister sits beside her. The older girl turns the pages with an air of confidence, 'saying', not reading, the story from her memories of having had it read to her. She is not displaying knowledge nor teaching her sister so much as trying out in play what she knows of the reading process. The little sister sits quietly beside her, not particularly 'listening to the story' though she might be, but absorbing big-sisterliness in all its apparent confidence and competence. Little sister is learning too, though she says nothing - and, importantly, *could* say nothing of the experience.

So what of us as learners? Are there times when we need to be able to tolerate that learning might be implicit, unsayable, and that there are times when we might need to sit, absorbing the activities of others, without this necessarily meaning that 'saying' is the only evidence of learning? Is it OK, furthermore, to become unintegrated as a learner, content for all the 'bits' to just be nonjoined-up bits, for a while, rather than to feel disintegrated, tumbling down through vasts of ignorance, isolation and helplessness? And how can we allow the first and prevent the second?

Whether we can speak or not about what we think in a group depends also on our histories as speakers: where and when we could speak, what we felt were acceptable things to say. While this crucially includes how our family and community value talk, our histories of speaking, specifically as learners, and thus of our histories of learning in schools, also matters very much to how we can go on learning. Sometimes, when I give talks to teachers about children's learning, I mention how nearly every adult I have met can remember, with passionate intensity, an occasion where they made a mistake or where the teacher was unfair or dismissive of their faltering attempts to understand something, or they felt shamed as learners. This is nearly always met with nods and rueful smiles from the audience. We bring these smouldering embers to our current learning in a kind of transference process. We may also bring the joy of learning that we have previously experienced, and long to recreate again in our present situation. What would it mean to the learning group if it were an environment in which these early experiences of learning were talked about?

When they join the Outfit, candidates often write

of their excitement about joining a group that is unusual in its student-led learning process. Why does this excite us so much and how does it relate to our best and worst experiences of learning? What exactly is that exciting promise about ourselves as learners that our student-led learning process seem to offer - a kindness and tolerance we did not experience from teachers and classmates? The challenge and excitement of the company of interested and committed learners? A place where for the first time we can be daring, embrace the unconventional and idiosyncratic? What, in sum, does it seem to afford us and how does this relate to our personal needs as learners? Do we need to allow time and space within the training to think about the meaning and nature of our idealism and narcissism about learning, the sublimation it can evoke, and the oscillation of paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions about ourselves as learners and the group as a learning environment? Would it be helpful for learners to explore these currents as building the necessary trust and safety of the group as a learning environment in which they feel they can think and learn effectively?

My final reflection on learning is on the place of dependency in learning. To learn we have to be in the position of not-knowing, and that, as psychoanalytic ideas make clear, is deeply troubling for us. Robert Pirsig imagined the learning point, the actual pinpoint of learning as it occurs, as the front of an old-fashioned Western steam engine, with a cow-catcher at the front (Pirsig 1974). All the rest of the engine and the carriages thundering behind are what we already know and have experienced. Learning is the moment where all of that confronts the new, the unknown. It's an exciting and dynamic image, very American in its energy and optimism, I think. How wonderful to have the huge strength and speed of that engine, encroaching on ignorance, mile upon mile across the Great Plains, without halt or hindrance, confronting the cold edge of the unknown with the heat of that insatiable epistemophilic desire to know. Except, sadly, although I love the idea, it isn't quite how I experience it sometimes.

In our state of not-knowing - not knowing 'enough' about psychotherapeutic ideas and theoretical understanding, not knowing enough about 'how to do it' in practice - we are obliged to depend on sources of knowledge, wisdom and understanding. This dependency itself can raise all sorts of nightmares. I was very struck, when reading Sogyal Rinpoche's book *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (Rinpoche 2002), by the veneration in which he held his teachers. Veneration and devotion to the person and wisdom of the teacher are not what teachers encourage in the West - we

encourage our learners to move away from and beyond us, to become autonomous, independent thinkers - and in a spirit of democracy, to see eventually that the teacher (whether a real person or an author or a thinker like Freud) is flawed and limited as are all humans. Perhaps our psychoanalytic traditions have helped in this apparently clear-sighted, independent gaze upon our teachers. There are many strengths to our own tradition, and weaknesses in the Tibetan way - refusal to think for oneself, a slavishness to tradition that is unquestioned and may descend into rituals that have lost their meaning. And veneration may conceal envy and hatred. Apparent veneration - thinking someone is very clever or very experienced, for example - may paralyse that person's own need to be stupid and muddled at times - since feeling stupid and muddled might be just the place where learning something new can happen.

And yet, I think there is a time when, as a learner, I may have to throw my trust upon something - my therapist or a particular way of thinking about psychotherapy and so on. Depending on my experiences of dependency and trusting in the past, this is going to be helpful in my personal growth (i.e. not slavishness) or very troubling. Sometimes I thought of us students as a kind of group of people lost in the woods - occasionally someone would seem to have a map. Other times, we all pointed in different directions, and had to make our own way - alone. But this, I think, is the nature of the process. It is also never-ending, graduation being but a marker on the way. But on the way, it is good to have fellow-travellers (not in the Maoist sense!) who will stumble along with you, in good fellowship, with kindness and encouragement, and who wish you well on your journey. I wondered about myself in the student group and whether there was any way in which I and the group could be more visibly and explicitly friendly to the learning struggles going on there: whether I could stop, for just a minute, worrying about my own defences and think instead about whether I could meet my co-learners authentically in a learning process. I wondered about whether it was just an unhelpful ideal to imagine the group as a place of *mutual* dependency that recognised how difficult that was. I could have contributed more, I know, to making it more often a place of welcome rather than the place of armed wariness it occasionally became. To turn the gaze away from my own fears about my learning to those of others might be

called a turn towards love. To love the learning - (i.e. that focus on 'task-involved learning' that is less about ego-protection which I talked about at the start) but also to love my co-learners and wish to further their development as well as my own seems to be the key. But as we know, this oscillating capacity to turn to a depressive awareness and understanding about our true nature, and the capacity then for reparation and love is also a never-ending struggle to achieve.

I end with a favourite poem written by a school child. I didn't know this little girl - I found her poem in some work a student handed in for an assignment. Whenever I read it, I want to hug the author, because she manages to be so clear-sighted but cheerfully good-humoured about our human predicament. What if we could all acknowledge as a matter of fact what the poem does - and then help each other on our learning way?

We are in the woods  
It's been raining for ages  
We have not got any hoods  
We have lost our maps with our pages.

Amadur Aziz, Year 6.

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Jill Shields

# Home, Sweet Home

When my granddaughter was a few weeks old I took her with her mother to visit my parents. It was her first trip in a car and she lay quietly in the baby seat, a small frown on her face until we arrived. Once there, she behaved beautifully, gazing around the room, taking everything in. And all the time with that characteristic little frown of concentration and alertness. She fell asleep on the way home and only woke as we took her out of the car. The little frown reappeared and, behind her mother with all the paraphernalia that a modern baby needs, we went up to the flat where she had been born. As we entered, I felt her relax in my arms and saw the frown disappear. She looked round with approval; we were home.

This was not the first time I had been made aware of a baby's surprisingly early sense of place. My own second child was inconsolable for the two weeks of our first holiday away with her when she was four months old. When we reached home she made me (no, don't ask how, I have no idea; I only know it was so) walk her through every room in the house so she could satisfy herself that all was as it should be.

In my work with students I come across young people who, as children, have travelled the world with their parents, or, more mundanely, moved several times within this country, from town to town, town to country, country to town. They will speak of different environments, different schools, different sets of friends. Often, they feel they have gained from these experiences; they can make themselves comfortable wherever they are, talk to strangers and create a social network without even having to think about it. But sometimes they don't. They are finding university hard to settle

into, it seems difficult to make friends, they don't feel at home here. If I ask them where, of all the different places they have lived, home is, they hesitate. Sometimes home is wherever their family is; place has no importance, and the difficulty of university is that their family is not here. It feels as if it is hard for them to feel comfortable in the world outside the family context. The family has stood in for a wider engagement with place and people when these changed too often, too soon to be digested. Sometimes the family itself seems to exist without a context; some students report families with virtually no social life or connection to friends or neighbourhood, even if they have lived in the same place all their lives. These individuals can also find life at university difficult to negotiate; too many other people, too much in the way of difference to deal with

Some of the frequent movers will mention somewhere they were living at some stage between five and ten. This seems to be particularly the case where the subsequent move or moves have been to very different environments; from northern council estate to southern rural sub-suburbia, from African bush to busy Midland town, London flat to Cumbrian hillside. There is a feeling here of having been ripped from Eden too soon, and the family not being strong enough to provide safety when away from that early environment. The general tone is nostalgic; since leaving it, the place they have lost has been invested with so much that it cannot be reproduced anywhere else. The loss is of both place and people; essentially it is of the right people in the right place (remember how difficult it is to recognise someone when you meet them out of context?)

Occasionally someone appears for whom neither place nor family have been stable enough to be internalised; a whirling spiral of places (countries, continents, schools, houses) and parental figures (stepfathers, stepmothers, grandmothers, uncles, family friends), none of which last long enough for roots to be struck, mental maps created, or relationships developed securely.

It is hard to disentangle the relative importance of place and people in these scenarios. The sense I get is of the importance of one being in inverse proportion to the other. That is, if someone is brought up by a family that is secure in itself and secure in whatever community it lives in, the question of "where" is relatively unproblematic; places are safe because people are safe. Equally, children from a family with the complicated dynamics created by illness, divorce, or death may find security in a consistent environment within which they move with ease from place to place and person to person; teachers, neighbours, the parents of school friends can all provide the necessary continuity so long as the young person does not have to change environment too frequently.

Thinking about all this I have become aware of my own unease with travel; on arrival at almost any holiday destination I wish not to be there. Luckily, it usually wears off within twenty-four hours. I've pinned this down to my horror at moving to France when I was six. Nothing had prepared me for leaving the school where I was very happy, for one where I could not even understand anything said to me, and where, even once I had learnt to speak French, I had to face my own difference (not to mention my personal responsibility for the fate of Jean D'Arc — this was a Catholic school). The relief of coming home! The consequent difficulty of accepting that things had changed in my absence and that my old friends, whom for two years I had looked forward to seeing again, now had new and more fascinating friends with whom I just didn't fit! But at least the place was the same; the familiar streets and parks and shops that meant "home", and in some ways still do.

When I lived in America I was as disconcerted by the physical differences in climate, contours, and urban landscape as by the absence of family and friends. I loved driving north from

San Francisco into Oregon where the hills were green not tawny brown, and the air soft and damp. I felt more at home there even though I knew no one.

A friend of mine was born in Belize and lived there until she was three. She retained no memory of the place. In her fifties she returned as a tourist, with her elderly mother who could take her to the house in which she had been born, the park where she played, the whole local neighbourhood. And while much of that remained unclear to memory, there was such a strong sense of familiarity that seemed to be composed of heat and humidity, strong light and birdsong, that she felt at home, and remembered being herself when she was two or so. So much so that she arranged to work there for VSO and stayed on several years beyond her two-year term.

As psychodynamic therapists we think very much in terms of relationships creating a web of security within which we grow and develop. We understand that people learn how to be people in their interactions with others, and by observing other people's interactions with each other. But as well as becoming aware of ourselves in relationship, we also know ourselves as existing in a place. Our physical sense of ourselves is rooted in the real experience of earth or pavement under our feet, sun and sky and clouds, hills or chimneystacks on the horizon. Children with very limited personal mobility find geometry difficult or impossible. Ordinary children learning to draw begin, once they are beyond the undifferentiated scribble of simply marking the paper (I am here), with a circle (a head, a person,) and take time to manage a cross (two people meeting?) then a square (I live in here, the world is outside) and finally — not usually before three and a half - the Oedipal triangle. Am I allowing my imagination to carry me too far, or is there some symbolic sense in this?

Can the place be as important as the people? One of the commonest themes of songs and poetry is nostalgia for a lost place; the Green, Green Hills Of Home, the House Where I was Born, even Dirty Old Town, all speak of somewhere lost in the past but still held in the heart. A geographer friend was describing some recent research on a child's developing geographical sense. From here in my mother's

arms, to under the table in this room and daddy next door. From our house in the garden on the street, to I go to school through the park. From I live in London and granny lives in Cambridge to this book belongs to me, 11 Smith Street, Anytown, England, Europe, The World, The Solar System, the Universe. Many years ago I read that children who walk to school settle more easily and learn more quickly than those who arrive out of the blue by car or bus. It makes sense; if you have walked the road you could, should Something Happen, find your own way home. There is a literal connection between home and school. One child of mine told me that when she was very little at school and feeling homesick, she would stand by the gate at playtime and imagine walking out, across the road, up the long street, turn left, turn

right and she could see the house. And feel the better for it

During the Persian Wars the Greek army was struck with a strange sickness, previously unknown. They called it "nostalgia", longing for home. Men died from it. Perhaps in our world of Easyjet and long haul holidays, we have forgotten the need to have a home to come back to.

*While I was writing this my daughter gave me Julie Myerson's Home: everyone who ever lived in our house (Harper Perennial) with the words "You'll like this Mum". She was right and it seemed strange that she should give it me just then.*



# Back issues

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