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O U T W R I T E

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Dorn Parkinson

Photographs:
Front cover photograph: Winter Tree © Brian Naughton
"Dedicated to my mother, Carol Naughton, with my love".

Back cover photograph: Rembrandt's Apples © Brian Naughton

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Editorial

''The personal is political'' is a phrase redolent of the early debates in the Women's Liberation Movement, at a time of the ferment of ideas and actions of the wider liberation and civil rights movements. The context in which the phrase was first used has relevance for us as psychotherapists.

Carol Hanisch, an American feminist, wrote it in an essay in 1969, replying to the criticisms of the women's consciousness-raising groups that they were "just therapy", and were not political. Instead, she said, "One of the first things we discover in these groups is that personal problems are political problems". That is, the experiences, feelings and possibilities of our personal lives are shaped not just by our individual preferences and backgrounds, but by the broader political and social settings. Finding the political within the personal, balancing individual responsibilities and the impact of social pressures — the inter- and the intra- psychic dance within each of us — are living issues for those working in psychotherapy.

In previous editions of Outwrite, the impact of wider social and political settings has been explored. In this edition, Ronald Speirs' article continues this questioning. Isobel Urquhart writes of the impact of psycho-analytic ideas on the wider world of children's education. Peter Lomas writes about the necessity for psychotherapists to "reclaim spontaneity" in our work, and considers the pressures on us. Caroline Nielson describes a resurgence of poetry writing in the final phase of her training with the Cambridge Society, with a different level of personal response to the images and events in the outer world. We are delighted to be able to publish the poems too and to intersperse them with Dorn Parkinson's original line drawings. Peter Lomas also contributes an interesting review of Robert Rodman's biography of Winnicott and describes the hope that a biography will show us "what it is like to be" that person.

Our thanks to all who have contributed to this edition of Outwrite; and to Brian Naughton for the cover photographs; to Carol Naughton for feedback and help with proof reading; to Elitian, the printers; and to the past editors, Carol Dasgupta, Pat Tate, Rosemary Randall and Michael Evans for encouragement and advice. We welcome contributions for the next edition.

Marie Pepper and Jenny Corrigall
December 2007

Isobel Urquhart

Susan Isaacs and the Malting House School, Cambridge 1924-29

I am interested in the ways in which the progressive education movement drew on psychoanalytical ideas. In this paper, I want to focus on a remarkable if short-lived progressive educational experiment, the Malting House School, which flourished here in Cambridge for five years— 1924-29. It was run by Susan Isaacs, who trained as a psychoanalyst and who later went on to run the influential Child Development courses at the Institute of Education in London. But first, let me introduce you to Geoffrey Pyke who founded Malting House School. Magnus Pyke was his cousin, for those of you who remember that rather eccentric TV presenter of scientific ideas.

Geoffrey Pyke

Geoffrey Pyke was described by Lord Zuckerman as "not a scientist, but a man of a vivid and uncontrollable imagination, and a totally uninhibited tongue". His career began in 1914 when, as a teenager at Cambridge University, he landed a foreign correspondent's job by using a false passport to sneak into wartime Germany. He persuaded the *Daily Chronicle* that he had a plan to go to Berlin to send back dispatches to the paper. He managed to get there safely, but was soon spotted by the German authorities who nearly shot him as a spy. He was sent to an internment camp, from which he managed to escape with another English inmate. The *Daily Chronicle* made him into a public hero; he wrote an extraordinary book of his exploits and gave lectures. During the Second World War, he became a government adviser, having persuaded Churchill that he should employ him because he was "a man who *thinks*". He is most famous for his invention of supercooled water, which led to the building of a ship of ice during the war, trialled in Canada. He had a kind of scattergun approach to ideas — some were brilliant, some were completely impractical. After the Second World War, he helped to organise the staffing of the NHS. He grew increasingly disillusioned about the future for the human race and one winter evening in 1948, aged 54, suffering from leukaemia, he shaved off his beard, swallowed a bottle of sleeping pills and said goodbye to a largely unappreciative world. One commentator wrote that his suicide was the only unoriginal thing he did.

Malting House School in Cambridge, England was founded by this wealthy eccentric, whose only son, David, was born in 1921. For this child, his father intended a childhood and an education free of trauma, which would be based on self-discovery and scientific enquiry. To this end, he instigated an experiment in education. The school was to be the antithesis of his own schooling at Wellington, where he was bullied (partly because he was Jewish, partly because his mother insisted on a special diet and different clothes from the other boys). At his school, the pupils were never to be punished or reprimanded, or forced to learn any particular subjects; they were to be encouraged to find things out for themselves.

Pyke's views on education were influenced by his contacts with Melanie Klein and with Piaget (at a time when Piaget was virtually unknown in England). With Cambridge professors and Fellows of the Royal Society among his supporters, Pyke set about financing such a school with his profits from some brilliant trading in futures markets. At one point, he controlled a quarter of the world's supply of tin, a time of fortune that ended in financial ruin in 1929. He lost so much money on the school that it was forced to close.

Before then, as a first step along the way, in the spring of 1924 he placed an advertisement in a number of journals.

Wanted
An Educated Young Woman with honours degree — preferably first class—or the equivalent, to conduct education of a small group of children aged two and a half to seven, as a piece of scientific work and research.

Previous educational experience is not considered a bar, but the advertisers hope to get in touch with a university graduate—or someone of equivalent intellectual standing—who has hitherto considered themselves too good for teaching and who has probably already engaged in another occupation.

A liberal salary—liberal as compared with research work or teaching—will be paid to a suitable applicant who will live out, have fixed hours and opportunities for a pleasant independent existence. An assistant will be provided if the work increases.

They wish to obtain the services of someone with certain personal qualifications for the work and a scientific attitude of mind towards it. Hence a training in any of the natural sciences is a distinct advantage.

Preference will be given to those who do not hold any form of religious belief but this is not by itself considered to be a substitute for other qualifications.

The advertisement was answered by Susan Isaacs, who went on to open the Malting House School in a spacious house beside the river Cam, in the centre of Cambridge, in the autumn of 1924. We know it as the house next to 26 Newnham Road. Recently it has been acquired by Darwin College. Isaacs remained there until the end of 1927, when she returned to London.

Susan Isaacs

Susan Isaacs (1885-1948) née Fairhurst, was born at Bradshaw Brow, Bolton. Susan Isaacs' own childhood may offer an insight into her fascination with psychoanalytic theory and its effort to understand child development. She was the seventh of nine children. Her brother died when she was seven months old; her mother became ill when Susan was four years old and died two years later. Isaacs recounted an anecdote to her biographer of the last time she saw her mother. Inadvertently the little girl had revealed, on one of her visits to see her dying mother, the growing closeness between her father and her mother's nurse (whom he subsequently married). Her mother was distraught at this revelation and Susan was removed from the room. She never saw her mother again and later had a difficult relationship with her father and stepmother. Pulled out of school at the age of fifteen by her father because she had confessed to becoming agnostic, she stayed at home with her stepmother (her father refusing to speak to her for two years), in which circumstances she continued to teach herself.
Finally she was able to train as a teacher and also gained a degree in philosophy from Manchester University in 1912. Following a period as a research student at the Psychological Laboratory, Cambridge, she became a lecturer at Darlington Training College, 1913-14 and then a lecturer in logic at Manchester University, 1914-15. Around 1920 Isaacs embarked on her first psychoanalysis with Flügel, and in 1922, she started her second with Joan Riviere. Pines (2004-7) suggests that this second analysis was in order for Isaacs to get personal experience and understanding of Melanie Klein's new ideas on infancy. She began her own practice in psychoanalysis in 1923, a year

before she took up the post at the Malting House School.

She married twice, firstly to William Brierley and secondly (in 1922) to Nathan Isaacs (1895—1966). With her second husband, who had himself briefly worked at the Malting House School, Susan Isaacs set about making a record of the school. In the first two years of the school's existence, she and her assistants amassed a vast quantity of observational and anecdotal notes of the children's activities. These notes are the basis for the two substantial volumes in which Isaacs documented the work of the Malting House School: *Intellectual Growth in Young Children* (1930), and *Social Development in Young Children (*1933). One of her assistants, Evelyn Lawrence, later became director of the National Froebel Foundation and, after Susan's death in 1948, Nathan's second wife.

In 1933 Isaacs became the first Head of the Child Development Department at the Institute of Education, University of London, where she established an advanced course in child development for teachers of young children. Between 1929 and 1940 she was also an 'agony aunt' under the pseudonym of Ursula Wise, replying to readers' problems in child care journals.

During the Second World War, Susan Isaacs worked with Bowlby who ran the programme to evacuate children from London. Betty Joseph remembers Susan Isaacs as an important influence on her during the war:

> When at one point we found we were being evacuated to Cambridge, a group of us asked whether we could have some lectures from Susan Isaacs since she was based there. The tutor agreed and managed to arrange it. Much to our horror, however, Susan Isaacs refused to talk about psychoanalysis. She said, 'before you talk psychoanalysis, you have to know something about development.' So she talked to us about the development of the infant and young child, which in fact was very helpful. So we got to know her a bit. Her books, particularly *Social Development in Young Children,* were prominent on the reading list. I don't know if people still read that — it's a very good book. (Joseph, 2002)

The work of Malting House School

Malting House Rules:
No punishment
Things should be put away
Nothing to be used as a weapon
Hostility allowed

Known in the town of Cambridge as "a pregenital brothel", the experiment of Malting House School was supported by ecologist A.G. Tansley and psychologist Jean Piaget amongst others for its copious and careful record of phenomena (Cameron, 2006). In the first term, there was a group of ten boys, ranging in age from two years eight months to four years ten months. In 1926–27, the age range was three years to ten years five months, and included girls, and in the last term covered by Isaacs' own records, there were twenty children in the group, ranging in age from two years seven months to eight years six months. Progeny of mainly university-educated parents, the children who were enrolled in the school over the three years of its existence had a mean IQ of 131. In the first year, the school was a day school only, but offered weekly boarding in its second year. Dudek describes the facilities:

> Each child had his or her own brightly painted bed sitting room, scaled to an appropriate size, with a lock on the door to encourage a sense of independence. As part of the educational curriculum, children were encouraged to cook, bake and make drinks, using the facilities provided… Beneath the observation gallery within the hall, climbing

> bars and swings provided for indoor physical activity… The gallery itself was strategically positioned to facilitate discrete viewing by numerous visiting academics engaged in research. There was direct access to a large garden with sandpits, water pools and the first 'jungle gym'. Beyond were trees and wilder shrubbery which provided the opportunity for children to lose themselves. A complete kit of tools including saws for wood cutting was provided as well as more conventional building blocks and craft equipment. (Dudek, 2000)

Drummond describes the children passing their days:

> moving freely between a large hall, plentifully equipped, with a gallery and a piano, four small rooms (one used largely as a science laboratory), and a large garden with animals, including, at different times, mice, rabbits, guinea-pigs, two cats and a dog, hen and chickens, snakes and salamanders, silkworms, a wormery, and a fresh water aquarium. There were two lawns, abundant fruit trees, real bricks for building, space for bonfires, a seesaw with hooks so that weights could be fitted underneath, and much more. Indoors, the provision was no less stimulating: small movable pulleys, which could be screwed in where desired; a full-sized lathe and woodworking equipment; Bunsen burners, with all the necessary trimmings of tripods, gauzes, flasks, and test tubes; modelling materials, textiles, paint, and writing materials; cupboards full of Montessori equipment; microscopes; and dissecting instruments. (Drummond, 2000)

In her first visit to the school, in preparation for the film she made of its activities (a film, sadly, lost), Mary Field wrote:

> The children were dissecting Susan Isaacs' cat which had just died… They all seemed to be enjoying themselves immensely, digging away at the carcass… Then there was the bonfire. It was supposed to be an exercise in free play but it got a bit out of hand. The fire spread and spread and reached the apple trees and then destroyed a very nice boat. (Dudek, 2000)

Learning from children: learning and feeling

> 14.7.25. The rabbit had died in the night. Dan found it and said, "It's dead—its tummy does not move up and down now." Paul said, "My daddy says that if we put it into water, it will get alive again." Mrs. I. said, "Shall we do so and see?" They put it into a bath of water. Some of them said, "It is alive." Duncan said, "If it floats, it's dead, and if it sinks, it's alive." It floated on the surface. One of them said, "It's alive because it's moving." This was a circular movement, due to the currents in the water. Mrs. I. therefore put in a small stick which also moved round and round, and they agreed that the stick was not alive. They then suggested that they should bury the rabbit, and all helped to dig a hole and bury it. (Isaacs, 1930)

"I myself happen to be interested in everything that little children do and feel" (Isaacs, 1930). Isaacs asserted the importance of looking with attention at everything that children do, and emphasised the prime responsibility of educators to learn from the children they teach. This emphasis on sustained, detailed, "scientific" empiricism and the relevance of children's own experience was a key aspect of both psychoanalysis and progressive education. As another progressive educationalist, Rudolf Steiner, put it:

> Where is that book to be found in which the teacher can read what teaching is? The children themselves are this book! We should not learn to teach out of any book other than the one standing before us and this is the children themselves. But in order to read in this book, we need to develop the widest possible interest in each individual child! (Steiner, 1924)

As Drummond writes:

> This uncompromising position is one of the reasons why Isaacs' thought remains so invigorating today. By being interested in everything, she developed a prodigious capacity to follow the growth of children's thinking and feeling, even when they went in unexpected and undesirable directions. Isaacs was simply not interested in the extent to which children's thought mirrored her own or the extent to which they made their faces fit the conventions of an arbitrary adult society. To see children as Isaacs saw them is to see them whole, vividly and dramatically, with all their strengths and weaknesses intact. The Malting House School teaches us the lesson of looking, with attention, at everything that children do (and think and feel) as they live and learn in our benevolent provisions for them. (Drummond, 2000)

Isaacs' belief was strengthened by an unshakeable conviction of the "desperate need of children to be understood" (Isaacs, 1933, p. 13) and of their equally burning desire to understand: "The thirst for understanding … springs from the child's deepest emotional needs …[it is] a veritable passion" (Isaacs, 1932, p. 113). We can see here the influence of Klein's emphasis on *Wissentrieb*, translated by Strachey as the "epistemophilic impulse" in children. Britton argues that this impulse should be thought of as on a par with love and hate, an impulse that is "complicated by and merged with love and hate but not derived from them" (Britton, 1998).

It is a view that is congruent with the constructivist developmental psychology of Piaget. For educationalists of the time, this was an unusually happy marriage of psychoanalysis with psychology. Piaget spent his lifetime investigating the development of thinking in the human organism and emphasised that children, from infancy, had to be actively engaged in constructing meaning based on their experience of their environment.

The Isaacs, both Susan and Nathan, were profoundly interested in Piaget's work while remaining critical of some of Piaget's findings. In particular, they agreed with the need to allow children to actively explore their environment without moral or physical hindrance, although for rather different reasons, initially. Critically, however, they wanted to challenge what they saw as the limitations of Piaget's earliest theoretical formulations as they existed in the 1920's. For example, Nathan Isaacs took issue publicly with the reported poor performance of young children in Piaget's tests of cognitive development which Piaget had argued were evidence for an "egocentric" way of thinking that meant very young children were simply unable to think of other perspectives, a kind of thinking that would develop as children matured. Isaacs drew on evidence from the activities of children at Malting House to argue that children's verbal thinking was much higher when "closely linked with children's own active experience and learning processes".

Isaacs was outspoken that some parts of the education process as it was then being practised could stifle this passion and crush children's strong, spontaneous and constant impulse towards learning. Only in the infant school, says Isaacs, "before children have been taught to separate learning from playing and knowledge from life, will you see the strength and spontaneity of the wish to know and understand" (Isaacs, 1932, p. 113). This act of seeing, she implies, is central to the work of the teacher. And this, argues Drummond, is what Isaacs has most to teach us today. The lesson to be learned from the Malting House School, and from every line that Isaacs wrote about it, is that the starting point for effective education is to attend, respectfully and systematically, to "everything that children do".

Isaacs put this belief into practice. She collected a mass of data from which she constructed a coherent account of the development of children's intellectual

and emotional powers. In *Intellectual Growth in Young Children* (1930), Isaacs describes children's powers of discovery, reason, and thought. In *The Children We Teach* (1932), a much shorter book, she emphasises the interconnectedness of affect and cognition. Isaacs' view was recollected by Gardner, who wrote: "no-one who studied with her would be tempted to forget that children cannot be really emotionally satisfied unless they can also learn, nor really learn unless their emotional needs are met" (Gardner, 1969, p. 149).

Isaacs and psychoanalytic theory

Isaacs' most substantial theoretical contribution came out of her reconciliation between observational psychology (that aligned itself to the scientific tradition of empirical observation) and her recognition of the role of powerful forces of love, fear and hate in the minds of very young children.

Susan Isaacs' whole theory of the education of young children was based upon her understanding of Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic theory, particularly her work with children. It is worth remembering that Isaacs' second analyst, Joan Riviere, was one of the most articulate supporters of Melanie Klein's views and took a prominent part in the Controversial Discussions between supporters of Anna Freud and Klein. Isaacs also contributed to these discussions. In a paper given in 1938 to the Education Section of the British Psychological Society, "Recent Advances in the Psychology of Young Children", Isaacs argued that psychoanalytic research was especially important in the study of children, because it is concerned above all with "the meaning of the child's experiences to himself" (Isaacs, 1948).

It is apparent from an examination of the earliest application of psychoanalytic theory to education that the idea that children could be freed from repression was enormously exciting to post First World War European society. This continued to be a theme throughout progressive education. For Isaacs, the conditions of relative freedom took the form of, first, "an all-round lessening of the degree of inhibition of children's impulses" (Isaacs, 1930). Her own shorthand description is that the conditions were "relatively free", but this phrase does nothing to convey the extraordinary qualities of this extraordinary school.

Some practical considerations, particularly for the children's safety, did set a number of limits on their behaviour. But by today's standards, there were very few limits, and by today's sensitivities, the limits were set in the most unlikely places. For example, Drummond describes how, in the garden at the Malting House School (part of which can still be seen from the room at the top of 26 Newnham Road), there were several garden sheds, one of which had a most enticing and accessible sloping roof: "The rule was not, no climbing, but a much more daring and child-friendly one: only one child on the roof at a time (implicitly an invitation to climb!)" (Drummond, 2000).

Drummond continues:

> There was virtually no constraint on the children's verbal expression, their intellectual impulses, their expressions of infantile sexuality, their excretory interests, their feelings (including anger and aggression), their views on everything that happened around them, and their questions. The outcome of this relative freedom of expression was, as Isaacs claims, a "greater dramatic vividness of their social and imaginative and intellectual life as a whole" (Isaacs, 1930). Indeed, to read Isaacs' own accounts of the daily activities of her children is to be immersed in the vivid, child's-eye perspective she was so committed to celebrating. (Drummond, 2000)

Apart from anything else, in comparison with today's primary classrooms, there

was no time wasted in the bureaucratic routines of primary school such as lining up, completion of registers, collecting lunch money —all the events that have been felicitously described as "evaporated time" (Campbell & Neill, 1994). The children were thus able to be more active, more curious, more creative, more exploratory, and more inventive than they could now be in any ordinary school. Writing in 1927, Evelyn Lawrence described the difference between Malting House children and children at other schools, where, by contrast, they were forced "to wear a mask of seemliness and respectability. … Here the children's crudities, the disorder of their emotions, their savagery even, are allowed to show. Fights and squabbles often occur" (Gardner, 1969, p. 65).

When Isaacs was writing *Social Development in Young Children*, she was advised to omit much of her material, because it was considered too shocking and likely to offend. But Isaacs took no notice: "I was not prepared to select only such behaviour as pleased me, or as fitted into the general convention as to what little children should feel and talk about" . So, for example, she reports Harry, not quite five, following her to the lavatory, peering through the frosted glass and shouting with glee: "I can see her! I can see her combinations!" (Isaacs, 1933, p. 140).

Phantasy

> The records in this volume show how often and how readily the most active interest in things slips over into the dramatic play of father, mother and child; but they also help to show that their deeper sources do not prevent these interests from leading on to real experience, and from crystallising out into forms of sustained enquiry, and delight in the actual process of discovery, which are at least anticipations of the genuine scientific spirit. The events of the real world are, indeed, often a joy to the child, as to us, just because they offer an escape from the pressure of phantasy. (Isaacs, 1930, pp 18-19)

Like Winnicott and Bowlby, Isaacs published widely in popular magazines and spoke frequently on the radio to spread ideas about the normality of anxiety, night terrors, behavioural manifestations of the unconscious at work, and the concept of child development being emotional and social as well as physical. Isaacs argued that even in a very young child complex emotions were at work: love/hate, gain/loss, power/ powerlessness.

Klein's view of unconscious phantasy was highlighted by Susan Isaacs in her 1943 paper to the British Psychoanalytical Society *Nature and Function of Phantasy:* "There is no impulse, no instinctual urge or response which is not experienced as unconscious phantasy" (Isaacs, 1952, p. 83).

Britton (1998) argues that the poetic imagination — as in Coleridge's idea of the primary imagination — closely resembles Isaac's concept of unconscious phantasy as being the mental expression of all sensation and instinct.

As a result of her views about the importance of children's phantasies, Isaacs also encouraged children to play. Play, as Klein and Isaacs understood it, was an instrument which children use to dramatise, represent, communicate and discharge their unconscious phantasies. Play permits children to work through and transform their anxiety and distress insofar as these are linked to phantasies, and to experience what Alvarez (1988) calls "anticipated identifications".

> 18.2.26. The children went into the garden. Priscilla wanted to pull a worm into halves, and said she would marry the boy who did. They all said they wanted to marry her. Dan eventually did pull the worm in halves. Frank then pulled the rest of it apart; they were very excited about this. (Isaacs, 1930, p 205)

Play was a means of learning to live in both the external and internal world, to learn about the world and adapt to reality, and express phantasy and deal with unconscious forces. The importance of play for learning was taken up by educationalists, and generations of teachers in training were thus encouraged to understand that the child's healthy emotional development was the goal to their work.

Mary Warnock, in reviewing the concept of imagination, argues for the importance of re-emphasising this quality in modern day thinking: "We have come by a long and circuitous route to the place where Wordsworth led us. Imagination is our means of interpreting the world, and it is also our means of forming images in the mind". She added: " It seems to me both plausible and convenient to give the name 'imagination' to what allows us to go beyond the barely sensory into the intellectual or thought imbued territory of perception" (Warnock, 1976, pp. 194-5).

Play, and its relation to the imagination, was and still is seen as vital for children's development as rational, expressive, and compassionate human beings (Drummond, 2000: p. 229). For example, the 2003 Government Green Paper *Every Child Matters*, states: "Practitioners working in the foundation stage tended to lack the confidence, knowledge and training to teach aspects like early literacy *through* play and they have been influenced by their fear of the assumed expectations of Office for Standards in Education inspectors" [my italics].

The criticisms Isaacs made in the 1920s, then, still seem relevant to today's primary schools:

> The time that is spent in formal work on the three Rs would be far better employed in allowing the children to pursue the activities they so much seek connected with the business of living – washing, cooking, cleaning, searching out facts about the way the home is kept going and the life of the town maintained… Today the school deliberately deadens [children's] interest in these things and idolatrises the formal tools of learning…There is an extraordinary disproportion between the time and trouble put into teaching children to read and write at far too early an age and our concern with the real use of these things to serve personal and social life. (Isaacs in Gardener, 1969, p. 66)

I end this article with Mary Jane Drummond's powerful argument for the importance of the imagination in modern childhood education. Her eloquence, and her evocation of Susan Isaacs' famous experiment in Cambridge, contrast vividly with the limited vision of "creativity" as it is expressed in current policy documents, and the constraints imposed on teaching in what is often a dull, unadventurous and over-prescribed curriculum and a cautious pedagogy in today's primary schools:

> When, in other contexts, I try to put together arguments to establish the centrality of the imagination in the process we call early childhood education, I am often struck by the confidence and clarity with which other writers from outside this particular professional community make their case. Mary Warnock, for example, has this to say: "I have come very strongly to believe that it is the cultivation of imagination which should be the chief aim of education, and in which our present systems of education most conspicuously fail, where they do fail . . . in education we have a duty to educate the imagination above all else" (Warnock, 1976, p. 9). The power to see into the life of things…is an essential component in the professional capacities of educators of young children. These educators need to be strong in the exercise of their professional imaginations, not indulging in wishful thinking or planning in ever more precise detail their desirable curriculum outcomes, but seeing "into the life of things," seeing into the full-blooded lives of the children for whose learning they have taken on responsibility. To strengthen this power …educators need

> to commit imaginative acts of their own… Tutors of the imagination [such as Isaacs] can help us to see more plainly, and more deeply... Isaacs wrote, in a late paper, in the context of children's lives, that learning depends on interest, and that interest is derived from desire, curiosity, and fear (Isaacs, 1952, p. 108). All these emotions are familiar to teachers too. They are all part of their most binding responsibilities: to learn more about children, teaching, and learning; to increase their understanding in the interests of children; to put that understanding to work for children. (Drummond, 2000)

This article is heavily indebted to a paper presented by Mary Jane Drummond in 2000.

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Peter Lomas

Reclaiming spontaneity

"I must absolutely have encouragement as much as crops rain"
Gerard Manley Hopkins

The early days of psychoanalysis were full of intensity and passion. And were very creative. This vitality continued and, following the Second World War, psychoanalysis in Britain went through a particularly fruitful period, since which the excitement and sense of adventure have dwindled. There are many possible reasons for this loss of vitality. Here I am concerned with the erosion of spontaneity as a consequence of the positivistic, watchful and controlling philosophy that dominates so many areas of life today including not only psychoanalysis, but all psychotherapy that confronts the deepest springs of human experience. In order to discuss this problem I will say something further about the kind of psychotherapy that is, I believe, most under threat.

There is a widespread acceptance among the profession that the personal relationship is central to psychotherapy. If this is so then a consideration of the nature of psychotherapy should begin with a discussion of the nature of a fruitful relationship. The desirable qualities in human relationships have been explored for millennia by philosophers, psychologists, poets and thinkers of many kinds. My limited aim is to set down some of the ideas that I personally have gleaned from experience and the teaching of those I admire, and is therefore a personal view.

When two people meet the experience is likely to be rich if there is enough justified trust for them to reveal their vitality. This means that both positive and negative feelings must be available to them even if they feel it unwise to express some of them openly. The positive feelings which are conducive to intimacy include love, curiosity, compassion, patience, dedication, courage and fun. It is crucial that we recognise that the other person is unique, irreducible and mysterious and, although we will have much in common with him we can only classify him in crude and often misleading terms; our best judgement is based on how we are affected by his presence. The relationship is likely to go better if we can give our full attention to him. We may be distracted by too many interruptions or by a hidden agenda. Most of all, perhaps, a failure of attention may come from our own personal limitations: we may be so narcissistic that our main purpose is to impress him with our wisdom or achievements, or so anxious that we cannot adequately attend to him. The conversation that is psychotherapy is, I believe, best when it contains those qualities that enrich intimate relationships in other situations such as friendship. The nature of the intimacy will be affected by the particular situation in which the two people meet. In psychotherapy they have met for a particular purpose — the healing of one of them. The task will enable the two to be more forthright with each other, albeit in different ways, than is usually permitted by the conventions of polite social behaviour.

The therapist can ask questions and make statements about the patient's personal life which would usually be considered

offensive, but reveal little of himself. The patient is encouraged to reveal everything of himself without the usual inhibitions — indeed to speak spontaneously about anything on earth without fear of reprisal — but questions will rarely be answered. The nature of the intimacy therefore is a skewed one. Nevertheless despite these rather peculiar limitations, a genuine closeness is often achieved. Spontaneity will impose itself on the conventional rules of practice and with it an increase of trust in and respect for each other.

A perennial and well-nigh impossible question is: "how does psychotherapy work?" I would say that it is likely to work if someone seeks help from another who is dedicated to bringing everything that is in him to giving that help. This is hardly a theory in the usual sense of the word. It is comparable to the ideas which constitute our philosophy of living, that which sees us through our daily lives.

In the past century or so there has been a proliferation of new theories which describe psychotherapy in precise ways usually based on the natural sciences. Each theory proposes a technique which replaces the ordinary ways of counselling described above. This work has enormously enriched our understanding of psychic turmoil and ways of approaching it, but fails in its effort to describe human behaviour in terms of a comprehensive system because such a system is quite inadequate to encompass the complexity of people and their relationships.

There is one body of thought, namely psychoanalysis, which far exceeds in value any other approach of this kind. Indeed, it offers an explanation of the vicissitudes of human nature that is so powerful that one is easily tempted to embrace it as the form in which psychotherapy should be considered. To do so is a perfectly honourable and in many ways wise course to take; most of the outstanding contributions to psychotherapy have been made by psychoanalysts. Moreover, a tight system of thought enables us to draw easily on the work of those who share the same view point. But there is a heavy price to be paid.

We all survive by a certain view of life without which we would be lost. It is often rough and ready, snatched from direct experience and current ideas of religion and science. But to rely on one circumscribed system of thought to guide all our moves in a relationship is to impose a serious limitation on our spontaneity. And this is true of psychoanalytic technique (Lomas, 2005).

Spontaneous life will strive and persist in the face of formidable obstacles. Plants will push their way through concrete; creativity and resistance did not disappear in communist Russia; and the emotion of a personal encounter will survive, to a varying degree, a constricting technique. Moreover, psychoanalysts are not stupid people. They intuitively know that their genuine warmth to the patient is healing. When I applied for training at the Institute of Psychoanalysis one interviewer asked me: "You do realise, don't you, that this isn't just a job? You have to give yourself to your patients". With absolute sincerity but complete ignorance I said "oh, yes, I do". I knew nothing then about the times when I would feel so useless I thought I wasn't fit to be a therapist, when I would be white and shaken after a session, nor did I understand the cost to my personal life and the loss to me at having to part with someone of whom I had grown fond. But my assessor did know; she clearly gave her heart to her patients. When, however, I later attended her seminars, there was little talk of the heart but much about Freudian technique. The consequence for me of this kind of teaching was a restriction on my spontaneity when I was in the consulting room from which it took a long time to recover.

Spontaneity is an ambiguous word and the Oxford English Dictionary gives several quite different meanings. It can be "without deep thought" implying a superficiality of response, a precipitate

action taking little account of the context; or it can mean "voluntary", "unconstrained", "of one's own accord, freely, willingly". I have chosen to take it in the second sense: a genuine expression of the self. Even if the action is quick rather than given after much deliberation, it is not necessarily one which fails to take into account the many considerations that are appropriate. Intuition can often be the best measure of things. Because spontaneity is generous with the self, it is a quality that is life-enhancing to others.

Virtue is traditionally associated with a struggle against the temptation of evil. It may therefore be thought that spontaneity, being a quick reaction, lacks morality. But it is often in spontaneity that we take the risk of showing our true colours before we have time to construct a spin. If we are good then our response will be good. If, however, we are ashamed of our action there may follow a period of hard and painful reflection. It entails courage to take this risk of exposure and it is generous.

If we turn to psychoanalysis for help in understanding the nature of spontaneity, we are faced with a confusion at the centre of psychoanalytic theory. Freud conceived the id as the power house of vitality whose narcissistic, wild and unrealistic aims are later tamed by the realism of the ego. Out of this conflict an actual person is somehow assumed to develop. This theory has been challenged within psychoanalysis from many points of view, of which the most intellectually satisfying is that of Rycroft (1968) who maintained that the unconscious is far from maladaptive and responds intelligently to the outer world. This view is similar to and to some extent based upon Langer's (1960) earlier concept of non-discursive symbolism, a mode of functioning that does not rely on words, operates instantaneously and imaginatively and is in contrast to conscious logical thinking. Freud's negative view of the unconscious continues, however, to persist, which is perhaps one reason why psychoanalysts tend to be distrustful of spontaneity, at least in their writings, and rarely use the word. Prejudice in favour of the logical, the scientific and the selfish gene is still with us.

Many of the important words used to describe the human experience elude precise definition. Spontaneity is one of these. Such words, however, have the advantage that they can describe the imprecision of daily living in a way that theory cannot but which convey a recognisable experience. In saying this I do not mean to dismiss the contribution of theory or to idealise ordinary language but to help restore the latter to its prime position in psychotherapeutic dialogue. If we write and speak in ordinary language not only are we using a more precise tool but we minimise the professional distance between therapist and patient. In consequence we are more likely to act in a genuinely human way, bringing the flesh and blood of ordinary living into an atmosphere that is often too stylised to allow spontaneity to flourish.

When we think about the quality of our therapy we consider many factors, including, for example, the accuracy of our interpretations. There is, however, a tendency to omit an essential factor: are the sessions as lively, spontaneous and authentic as we can possibly make them?

And when we teach do we ensure, as far as possible, that the students learn in an atmosphere in which there is sufficient trust, light-heartedness and tolerance to enable them spontaneously to reveal what they are like and what they desire? Sadly, in our present professional culture, this crucial component to learning is increasingly under threat.

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Caroline Nielson

Preface to the poems

The poems shared here were written between the summers of 2005 and 2007, during the final phase of my training with the Cambridge Society for Psychotherapy.

The resurgence of poetry-writing coincided with the conception of my graduation plans, over summer coffee-conversations with fellow students in Cambridge. There was a key moment when I seemed to lift my head up from textual study and began to notice the fragments of other lives milling around me; and as I started to pay attention, so the words came unbidden and I reached for my pen.

Over the course of those two years, I found myself surprised into writing in a new way: trying to capture, to play with, to make sense of what was both inside needing to be expressed and what was outside in the sensual, external world and needing to be processed. Writing poetry provided me with a visible and audible bridge to and fro. I was entranced and enraptured and pained at times by the shared poignancy and potency of life, as if I had never quite noticed properly before. My notebook began to fill with scribbled observations, and it was liberating to look then at what had attracted my eye and my ear: the gaze caught and held momentarily across chattering tables or in the privacy of the therapy room, snippets of conversation, flashes of colour and movement. The poems allowed me to pause and wonder about what I was noticing, and why.

Every poem here was born from a particular moment of heightened attention: an image, a sound, a feeling, and it was through the emergence of these poems that I then found a way of daylight-dreaming into authenticity that paralleled much of my work with patients. As I revelled in a newly sensuous world of sound and image and movement, the deadening anxiety that had inhibited my writing for something like 40 years, finally loosened. I sensed rhythm, alignment, connection between inner and outer, between a self and others. The force-flow of life crept and then clamoured. The poems would not stop and I discovered that they needed to be spoken aloud. Indeed, a prevailing focus in my work with patients throughout this time was to find ways of articulating and expressing, of communicating and connecting: "I need you to tell me, to show me how it is for you…help me to understand." "Where do you start from?" "How do you experience the world and yourself within it?" It seems to me that through poetry as through therapy, there is an attempt to give form and presence to what might never before have been able to be recognised or spoken about on a personal level.

I have graduated now and am still writing poetry. "P"' has become a favoured letter. The sliding from sibilance to the fun of the

plosive: that momentary holding of breath before the exuberant purposeful release of sound. I move from "psychoanalytic psychotherapist" to "poet" and "person" – and then back again! There is a renewed vigour in my work, a sense of meaning in giving shape and validity and holding a patient in their story, and offering a bridge back into belonging, into a life of their own. Meanwhile, I no longer need to be held so close by my accumulated library of books, by the thoughts and words of others. These poems offered me an alternative means of creativity and self-containment that remains fluid and shifting and current. I now choose to set them (and myself) free here, and wonder if maybe another reader will recognise something that speaks to them of the commonality of these all-too-human experiences: so that they, in turn, may then pass it on in their own unique way, and in their own good time.

November 2007

Poems

Premature

Sometimes a poem is just
Not yet ready to be written

Sometimes a grief is just
Not yet ready to be loosed

But grief when trammelled
Gnarls and knots the soul

Loss is the unwelcome partner
Without whom there is no dance

Lowering

Fresh from a hospital visit
She disgorges doctor's details
And weeps

And as I wait for her breathing
To slow
She moves her hand
And draws an imaginary cord
From her mid-riff
And proffers it into the space
Between us.

'That's what I feel…when
I look at my mother now.'

And I take hold of the end
She has offered me
And wrap it taut around my waist
And steady myself
As she lowers again
Into the loss that
Lies lurking
Trusting
That I won't let her drown.

Speechless

There's always a point
At which words fail,
He told her.

And she nodded at his wisdom
As she cleaned
comfort
And baked
blind
And knitted
knots
And scraped
barrels
And scrubbed
skins

And finally wondered
If there was anything
She might have missed?

As she smoothed the screaming sheets
Silent-flat again.

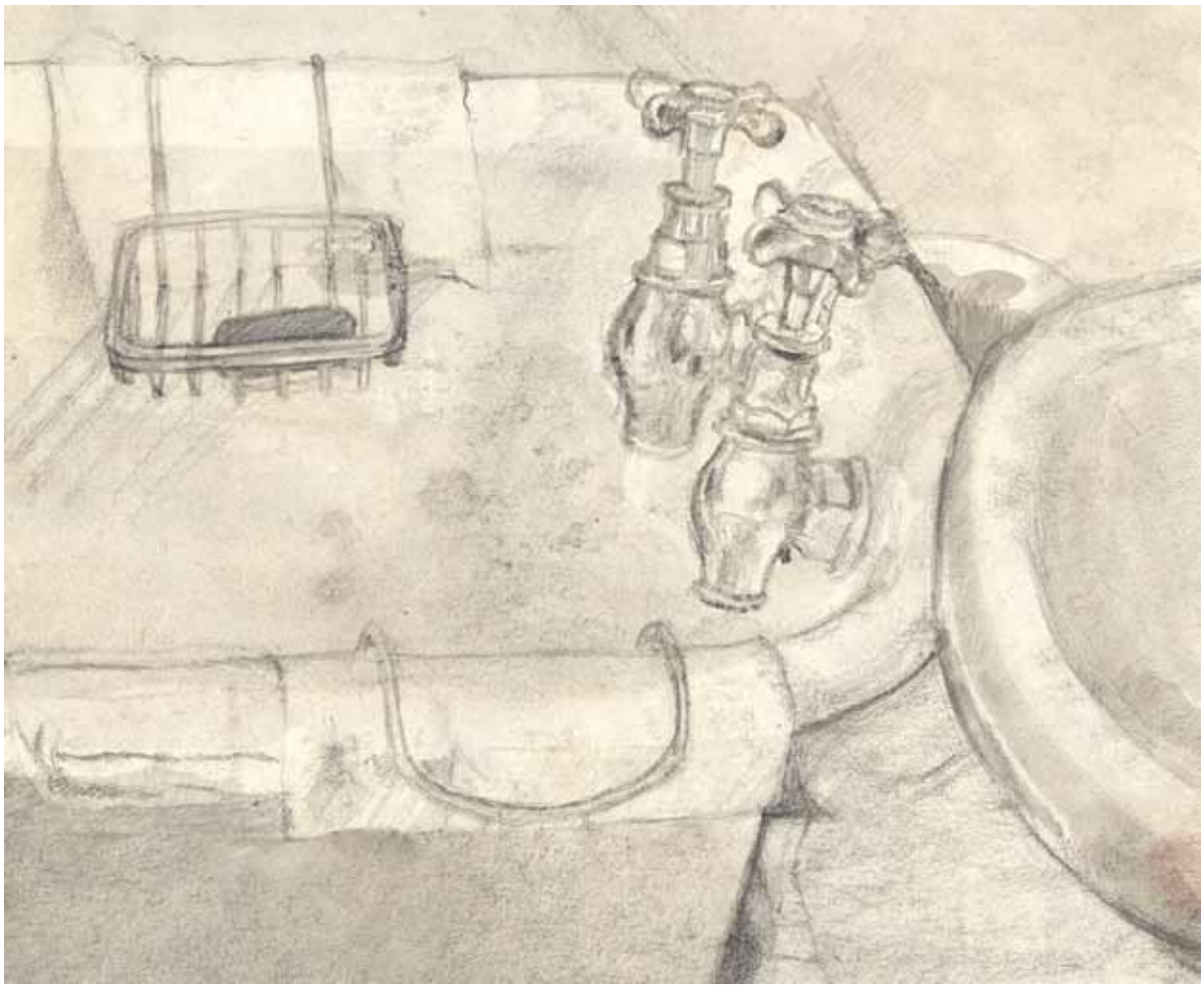
Plumbing the Shallows

Sometimes I wish my mind had
A tap
That I could turn off
And on again
At whim

Instead
It drips
Incessantly
Leaking words
Thoughts
Images

Reminding me
You can drown
In only ½" of water

If you've half a mind to.



Mirroring

She's years older than me
A different generation surely
Vein-swaddled legs
Modelling a mottled maturity

Yet I've just noticed that
Our shoes are the same
And as I glance surreptitiously
Beneath the table
She catches my eye
And smiles her recognition

Ah, the shared comforts
Of middle-age:
Flat shoes
Big knickers
Elasticated waists
Leaving our various selves
Ample room
For future expansion.

Titian Intersection

I bumbled blithely from behind
And bumped into a moment
Too intense for me
To comprehend.

Transfixed, I looked more closely
Edged nearer to see the brush strokes.
Someone alongside pointed out
Vermillion, crimson,
I remembered Christmas paint-box reds.

I scanned the canvas faces, searching
Were those tears on her face?
Who would ever know?
I started to talk in my head,
Finding words, a narrative,
A way in from the outside
To spell away her fear,
Her face, the horror, the realisation
And his gaze, manic, beyond
The trajectory of his upraised knife
And I realise amidst my baby-burbling
That I am about to recognise
Something too awful in that moment
And shamefully pull my gaze away.

Two little girls pass by,
One blonde, one dark,
Holding hands,
Glued in serious conversation
Held at adult waist-height
'He kills her…and she dies,
She's dead you know…
That means she was murdered.'

I glance across and find
My eye caught by
Another woman opposite
Together we look
At the two departing children and smile
Across the polished gallery floor.

'Dead',
Guess it sounds quite simple
When you put it like that.
Matter-of-fact, nothing to be done
But just get on
With looking and living

The adjustments of children
No need for therapy there
Then.

August 2005

Tongue-Tied

I ask for a cheesy bagel bar
And get given blueberry cheesecake.
What happened there then?
Did she simply mis-hear me?
Did I mumble incoherently?
Fail to speak out loud?

Last week it was tea.
I asked for skimmed milk
And watched aghast
And then bemused
As milk was warmed and frothed
And spooned carefully
To float on top
Of my organic Earl Grey.

What's going on here?
That's not what I asked for!
(Or is it?)

After all,
How many Cambridge café queues have I stood
In the hope of finding
Something of substance
To get my tongue round, to taste, to savour
To fill the in-between gastric space
Without ruining my appetite?

How many swallows has it taken
To make my graduation summer?
Waiting in line
And edging along the counter
In pursuit of the lip-snacking, flavour-tickling
Tongue-tingling, thumb-licking
Satisfaction
Of finding the right words finally
To say what I need
And ask for what I mean?

Pilgrimage

Hand-hewn slabs
Glint upright in the lowering sun.
Flowers laid for leave-taking
Mark the blood-line of
Life cut blooming.

The shutter blinks
To show for the record
That you got there
In the end
Unconventionally late maybe, but
In your own good time.

I know you could not have
Visited any sooner,
Needing to know first
That you would be safe to go,
Not lying on the inside looking out,
But standing apart,
Replete now in your own life
And loved enough,
At long last,
To risk looking back.

Life Infusion

Queuing for coffee,
Minding my own business
For a change,
A shock of colour, worn blithely
Blasts, bursts into view
And wraps itself
Around my peckish morning self,
Hugging me unexpectedly
Into bee-humming vibrancy.

An orange shawl
Succulent in honeyed sweetness
Delights my brain-buds,
Resonates, reverberates,
Ricochets playfully.

A fuschia-pink skirt
Tasselled with purple ripeness
Bruised from falling
Into my eager, outstretched eyes.

I blink, gulp, breathe greedily
Reeling from the sudden
Drunkenness of colour
And fall through my gaze
Into the summer-like brightness,
Swallowing deep
To feel thirst-quenched full
To the pit of my soul.

Lost and Found

If I can never be
Close enough to
Taste you again,
Then maybe I can
Still touch and

If I can never be
Close enough to
Touch you again,
Then maybe I can
Still see and

If I can never be
Close enough to
See you again,
Then maybe I can
Still hear and

If in the end I
Can not even be
Close enough to
Hear you again,
Then maybe I can

Tell myself that
Once upon my time,
I found such an
Intimation
Of life in you

That my whole world
Changed without
And within,
And was then
Forever

More.

June 2007

Ronald Speirs

Social and Political Responsibilities of Therapists

The Third David Clark Lecture, given in Cambridge on 20 June 2007

Note about Dr David Clark:
David Clark was born in 1920. He studied medicine at Cambridge and Edinburgh Universities and qualified in 1943. He quickly became a medical officer in the 6th Airborne Division and served in Germany, Sumatra and Palestine. His experiences increased his interest in psychiatry and he trained at the Royal Edinburgh and Maudsley Hospitals, before becoming medical superintendent at Fulbourn Hospital Cambridge in 1953. He remained there until his retirement in 1983, opening locked wards and establishing therapeutic communities where the new medications and group psychotherapy were used together in the psychiatric revolution. David Clark has published many articles and books about the hospital. In the 1970s he was a founder member of Cambridge Group Work whose present members three years ago established the annual Clark Lecture to commemorate his pioneering work.

Ronald Speirs was the Free Churches chaplain at Fulbourn Hospital from 1967 to 1981, while David Clark was the medical superintendent. During that time Ronald Speirs was a founder member of Cambridge Group Work and of the St Columba Group Therapy Centre. In 1990-91, along with Dr Tony Jewell, he undertook the pilot scheme in Cambridge for primary care counselling.

A shortened version of this lecture was published in the autumn 2007 issue of Transformations*, the journal of Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility.*

The thesis of this lecture is straightforward. It is that our patients are affected by the outside world and that we have to become more concerned about the conditions in which they live. So I am inviting you to consider the social and political responsibilities of the work we do.

I begin with two dramatic examples.

Samar Jabr is a psychiatrist working in Palestinian territory in Gaza and the West Bank. He writes that there are only15 psychiatrists for a population of 3.8 million, namely 3% of the staff they need. Each day he sees 40 to 60 patients with overwhelming stories, 10 times the number he saw in his training in Paris. He writes: "The ultimate solution for mental health in Palestine is in the hands of politicians, not psychiatrists. So until they do their job, we in the health professions continue to offer symptomatic treatment and palliative therapy – and sensitize the world to what is taking place in Palestine". His writing is part of the sensitizing.

And then interestingly he adds: "Resistance to the occupation and national solidarity are very important for our psychological health. Their practice can be a protective exercise against depression and despair". This means that patients are positively encouraged by their therapists to be politically active. Political action in Gaza will be very dangerous, and even more so in the last couple of weeks of violent chaos. Spare a thought for Samar

Jabr and his colleagues. I wonder as I wake up these mornings how I would cope were I working in Gaza or the West Bank.

The Palestinian scene resonates for me with James Hillman, an American psychoanalyst, and Michael Ventura, a writer, who together wrote a short book entitled *We've had a 100 years of psychotherapy and the world's getting worse* . In it they write: "You can't lead a sane life in an insane society. Function is going to clash with dysfunction ".
And again they write: "If therapy imagines its task to be helping people cope and not protest, adapt and not rebel, then therapy is collaborating with what the state wants – a docile plebs". But perhaps another factor here concerns our defences against all the pain and risk in the world – we retreat into personal therapy because there are so many anxieties and so much pain if we look honestly at the outside world. Samar Jabr shows the dangers of encouraging a committed and not a docile plebs. So, which do we choose: the high risks of political involvement as in Palestine, or neutrality and an individualistic docile community?

My second example is nearer our situation where political commitment carries less risk to one's own life. It's from Shirin Amani Azari who is an Iranian therapist working in London for the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture. She describes some of her clients and the horrors they have experienced before coming here; by her counselling she is trying to release them from their nightmarish traumas. Then she cries out from her professional experience about the cruelty of our system which gives them no hope for the future, no way of earning a living, no choice but waiting for a Home Office decision. She writes:

> The isolation reminds many of them of the imprisonment they have suffered in their homelands and they wait to be set free or to be persecuted. … It is almost impossible for a person who has experienced trauma abroad to mentally survive the system set up for them in this country. (Azari, 2006)

So her clinical exposure forces her to be political in campaigning for better conditions for asylum-seekers. Of course she is justifiably angry that the host country compounds the trauma of her patients. This is closer to the possibility for us of being engaged for our patients.

The head of therapy at the Medical Foundation is Dick Blackwell of the Group Analytic Association, who is speaking at a Cambridge Group Work seminar in the autumn. Maybe it is his exposure to the work of the Medical Foundation that makes him write: "The sublime state of therapeutic and political neutrality is always unrealistic whatever the client group. There are, no doubt, those who believe it is possible to be apolitical or politically neutral. I do not believe this is possible. … Psychotherapy is always a political activity". My question in this lecture is: "Do you agree?"

Our situations are fortunately not as desperate as those in my two examples. I use them to point up my thesis that we should not ignore the social environments in which our patients live. I am aware that we bring our own agendas to our counselling, and I know that mine is holistic, always combining the personal with the political. To explain this I have to chart some of my personal pilgrimage. I believe it to be relevant to who I am and how I behave, and how I counsel.

I was brought up in a Scottish home with a high level of social responsibility; my father did youth work in his leisure time, and for a time was a town councillor. So I inherited his view of duty towards the local community. Then in the 1939-45 War I was making ready in the Field Artillery to go to the Far East to tackle the Japanese in Burma when the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. In a horrible irony I have always felt that my life was saved by the bomb – a huge number of people died that the rest of us should go on living. So I spent 1946 rounding up the Japanese in Java and Sumatra – and not knowing that David Clark was at the

other end of Sumatra with the Parachute Regiment engaged in the same task! After graduating at Oxford in 1950 I was much exercised about what to do with my life; like so many of my contemporaries I wanted to make the world a safer and better place. How? Would I study for the Church or for social work? I chose the former and in the end moved to the latter! I did a year's research at Yale and was much impressed by the social activism of Martin Luther King and by those of my white fellow-students who went to sit with black Americans in the southern states at the backs of buses. My first job back in the UK was as assistant minister in Paisley Abbey near Glasgow, and two vivid images from there are still with me.

The first is the scene in the local psychiatric hospital (Dykebar) where I became part-time chaplain. It was a static long-stay place with only one unlocked ward. I was given two enormous keys marked M and F, and I proceeded from patient to patient trying pathetically to dispense some sort of comfort for their incarcerated predicament. This I call the sticking plaster method of psychiatric care. Quite often the patients angrily ripped off the plasters I offered them. I don't remember any rehabilitative care. My sticking plaster was minimally therapeutic. It was a bit like the kind of counselling which seeks to bring the patient to terms with his tough situation.

My second image from Paisley is a monthly task I was given. It was to visit about a dozen poor parishioners in quite miserable houses once a month and give each 10/- (i.e. 50p) from our charity fund. This sounds humiliating, but the situation was not without hope for there was a large programme of rehousing and I was involved in establishing a congregation and new social activities in the new housing area. The 10/- was admittedly another sticking plaster (often warmly welcomed), but we were also offering reconstruction and social improvement and these came from national and local political decisions.

At about this time I discovered the Iona Community founded by George McLeod. I have been an associate member ever since. One of our promises renewed annually reads: "We believe that work for justice, peace and an equitable society is a matter of extreme urgency". And this is defined as the finding of :"a full life for everyone with adequate physical, social and political opportunity". This combination of the personal and the socio-political is still with me. It shows for me the necessity of both sticking plaster and reconstructive surgery. For me the political derives from my exposure to personal individual need. Sticking plaster is important but not enough.

And so in 1961 we came to Cambridge to St Columba's Presbyterian Church, and in 1967 I became part-time Free Churches chaplain at Fulbourn. What a difference to Dykebar! There was only one locked ward; it was a hospital in transition from a static institution to a creative community; sticking plaster in the form of new drugs for mental hurt went with reconstruction and movement to new life in the outside world. Group therapy of different kinds emphasised personal autonomy as well as responsibility for others. Recently I have come across a moving example of what was going on.

A month ago a lady called Doreen Bacon sent me copies of booklets she has produced over the years. She was a long-stay patient for 18 years from 1954 until 1972. Every one of her booklets is dedicated to Dr David Clark, and I now join her in dedicating this lecture also to him for the amazing reconstruction he achieved for so many people. I am delighted that these lectures will go on recalling him and his work. Doreen is now in her 80s and living in Fulbourn Village. One of her booklets is called *To Bedlam and Back 1954 to 1972* and it is painful to read about hospital conditions in the 1950s. Its warm preface is rightly for David, but its post-script to my surprise is for me. It reads:

> While still living in the hospital in the early 70s I joined a therapy group run by the Free Church Chaplain for those proposing to move out into the community. One of the group had a phobia over long corridors, so we moved it to the St Columba Centre in Cambridge [recently started by Ross Mitchell, Bill Lintott and myself]. This was the only time I felt I was not being used as an experiment for drugs. It cost nothing and it worked. I will always be grateful to Ronald Speirs for leaving the ministry to work for Social Services and care for us in the community.

I find it touching that she recognised the worth of group therapy and even more that she realised the rationale of my changing jobs: it was to extend my impact on building restorative services in the community for those who had been mentally ill, via sheltered housing, group homes, day centres, sheltered work and so on, so that they could rejoin the ordinary human race.

In Social Services in the 80s we had a lot of influence with the County Council politicians (mainly Tory and Liberal Democrat) in getting funding for new projects across the whole county. I learned in practice what I already knew in theory: that it is the politicians who have the power to get new civilised services going. Those who had been incarcerated in asylums were now rejoining the human race, and David Clark's great vision was being realised. I have become vividly aware in putting down these biographical details how much I had become concerned about the difficulties and unfairness of the settings in which people live and not just about their individual distress and pain. I don't think that I had sufficiently recognised until putting this lecture together how much I have been affected and impressed by the thinking and example of the George McLeods and the David Clarks of this world. I realise too why I trained as a group therapist, for in groups we are dealing not just with internal family-created distortions, but also with social situations which affect us all from our school days and often show up in the therapy group. So therapy groups and therapeutic communities are about being an individual able to give and receive from others outside our immediate family.

When I retired from Social Services in 1991 I was free to take an active part in the Labour Party; and there I still am on the General Committee of the City Labour party with all my disappointments, frustrations and near resignations. And in the same year of 1990-91 with the help of Ross Mitchell and Tony Jewell I did the pilot scheme for appointing counsellors to GP practices. It was a success and now all but one City practice and seven practices in S Cambs have a counsellor. I still work in a South Cambridgeshire practice where in 16 years I have seen no fewer than 1450 patients. The rest of this talk is about my experience in hearing their stories and problems.

First, a little about GP counselling. Every need comes through the GP's door and so it is a fascinating place to be. But the demand is so great that counselling has to be short-term; one consequence is that the transference formation seems less vivid and less important than in longer-term and more intensive work. In fact the average number of sessions given to each patient is only 4 or 5. At my last count the types of presenting problems were very wide; roughly 30% were inter-personal difficulties; 30% were anxiety and stress; 30% were mild to moderate depressions; and the other 10% were adjustment to serious illness, habit disorders, etc.

I ask myself what model I am using and what I am trying to bring about. I think I visualise 4 stages. The stages are these:

Firstly, what goes on in the internal world of this person? With what kind of early-formed "template" does this patient view his world? I often find Freud's id, ego and super-ego a useful hypothesis and way of trying to help the real ego to emerge; or Melanie Klein's theories. Secondly, what have been the family relationships and how do they carry over into the present? Thirdly, often the presenting problems

concern work and its relationships.
I am interested to know if there are malfunctioning structures at work and also what may be the malfunctioning of the patient. But, fourthly, I want to know also if this person has got a "civic world", whether it is in the local pub, or with the neighbours in the street, or with a hobbies or sports club or with civic organisations?

If, for instance, the patient is depressed or paranoid, the outside world is likely to be too threatening to be approached. I guess my aim is get the patient more comfortable in his head, in his family, at work, and in civic society. This is quite difficult and I don't think that therapists give it much importance. In an article in 1986 I wrote about how seldom small groups discuss material from the outside political world. I asked: "Is it that our internal worlds and our immediate relationships are so pre-occupying that we have little energy for other concerns?" I'll be interested to hear how often those of you who conduct small groups find the emergence of community and political material.

Here is a quote making this last point from Paul Hoggett in the journal *Psychotherapy and Politics International*:

> Psychotherapy has so far focussed on love and work, but should it not properly be concerned for love, work and civics? … Is it sufficient to look for an enhanced capacity to love and be loved and/or to be creative in one's working life? Should we not also be looking for an enhanced capacity to engage ethically in the wider world? … The critical social thinking of patients can be left undeveloped; their reparative impulses focussed on the family and not extended to strangers. Our ambitions can be confined to producing happy individualists whose relational capacities have somehow become attenuated to the purely private sphere. (2007)

This quote rings bells for me. Is it true for you?
To examine some of the themes in my present work, I took 100 consecutive cases. I read through them all and picked out those which had overt socio/political content and then reviewed what this was and how I dealt with it. I reckon that 26 patients out of the 100 had problems deriving from poor facilities or unfairness in our society. I classify them as follows:

Housing Problems	3
Work Relations	9
Press Intrusion	1
Family Courts	1
Affected by Lack of Facilities:	
Home Care	1
Young People's Service.	1
CSA	3
Further Education	3
Prison After-care	2
Sheltered Work	1
NHS Psychotherapy	1

My immediate comment about this list is what is missing: there is nothing about the huge matter of global warming or about violence in our society. Yet within my practice's catchment area there have been three murders and one sexual assault on a seven year old in recent years.

In most of these cases I have two options. The first, and most important, is to encourage the patient to cope with the problem themselves, to take whatever action is necessary, with my contribution being to delineate the possible options. I try to remain aware of the power of the transference and how much the patient may want to please me or oppose me; this is why I try to suggest options and leave choices open. And sometimes I raise and discuss the effect of the transference.

My second course is to take the problem forward myself by making sure it is raised in the appropriate area, not least in Labour Party circles. Dick Blackwell puts my options clearly: "There is no clear guide-line how much advocacy the therapist should do because each individual case is different. Clients may have no one else to turn to, or they may be lapsing into an unnecessary dependence on the therapist". Let us take some examples from my case-load. Housing is often desperate with, say,

a separated wife with two children being accommodated by her parents, with a brother or sister still at home. Tensions run high. I would try to explore with the wife some of the family dynamics; but I would also point her in the various directions which may achieve re-housing and I'd elucidate for her the rules about housing and homelessness. And I would also raise in political circles the serious shortage of rented local authority and housing-association housing, making as much fuss as I can.

Another example: recently I found out that anyone in prison for less that 6 months gets no after-care. I made sure that even if my client gets no probation officer, he knows where to find alternative help. Without me he would probably not have known where to turn.

I could go on through all 26 cases, but my style through all is similar: make sure that the patients know how and where to find a solution, and how and where to take his/her cause to protest against injustice if a solution is not to be found. For myself I build up a kind of dossier of unfairnesses to put in the political realm, whether locally or nationally, when opportunities arise. I certainly find myself carrying vividly in my own mind the injustices which assail me in my counselling. The vast data of patients' problems in my head is ammunition for political interventions for the rest of my life!

I thought that I was a bit unusual in going beyond dealing with the internal and family worlds until I recently read Andrew Samuels' book *The Political Psyche*, published quite long ago in 1993. He sent out around 2000 survey forms to psychotherapists world-wide to ask them how they dealt with political material and whether or not they themselves were politically active.

The results, summarised below, may surprise you, as they did me.

Survey by Andrew Samuels in *The Political Psyche* (1993)

1) Survey Response:

	Returned	**Response %**
UK Psychotherapists	100	34%
World-wide	621	32%

NB UK psychotherapists were mostly graduates of the Westminster Pastoral Foundation, though forms were sent also to three other psychoanalytic groupings in the UK. World wide psychotherapists: surveys were sent to therapists in the USA, Russia, Brazil, Israel, etc.

2) Frequency of Themes with UK Psychotherapists:
Women: 86%; **Economics:** 54%; **Men:** 52%; **Natl. Pol**.: 32%; **Race**: 30%; **Intl. Pol**: 18%; **Envir**.: 16%; **Local Pol**.: 16%; **Nuclear**: 10%; **Violence**: 1%.

3)

Setting	**Themes more common in institutes**	**More in private**
UK Therapists	32	16
World-wide	13	12

4) How do you deal with political material?

	UK	**World wide**
Symbolic/intrapsychic:	82	71
Explore meaning:	42	34
Symbolic only:	28	15
Explore only:	15	7
Reality mentioned:	57	71
Reality only:	2	7

5) Do you discuss political material?

	Yes	No	More now	Less
UK Therapists	56	44	42	2
World-wide	54	44	37	12

6) Have you been/are you now politically active?

	Yes	No	Active now	Not now
UK Therapists	74	25	26	73
World-wide	63	36	31	67

Main issues: Nuclear, 3rd World, Social Affairs, Environment. Survey done in 1992/3

Here are my comments on Andrew Samuels' figures.

1) British psychotherapists are probably close to those at this lecture.
2) Note the high frequency of problems dealing with the status and role of women.
3) More patients are willing to raise political material in an institutional setting than in private therapy.
4) The number of references to the reality of political problems is gratifyingly high.
5) There is a surprising similarity between British and overseas therapists in their willingness to discuss political material.
6) Therapists seem to grow weary of political involvement!

So, I think I have established that dealing with the reality and consequences of socio-political matters is more respectable than I had supposed. But taking such matters into the political domain is uncomfortable and demands a lot of watchfulness for opportunities and patience, as anyone knows who has endured in the Labour Party through the Blair tenure. Here I have been much helped by my experience of small and median groups. I know from small groups that every contribution becomes part of the matrix and never disappears from the group. It has been my belonging in the small group of the local ward meeting and in the median group of the constituency party that has keep me enduring when I have profoundly disagreed with national policies like Iraq.

A vivid word to describe what I am opposing is "bystanding" and I am asking if it is too prevalent amongst therapists. The word is the title of one of Petruska Clarkson's books. Sadly she died last year after a vivid and outspoken life. Here are some quotes from her work:

> Social justice issues should not be seen as an add-on to any therapeutic relationship, but as an intrinsic and inextricable part. There is the satisfaction of expressing one's energy in the service of integrity and social responsibility rather than turning it into sleepless nights.
> The issue on which therapists are most likely to be morally culpable is that of bystanding, knowing that something is wrong but not getting involved for reasons of ideology. (Clarkson, 1996)

So my text for this talk is: "Down with bystanding!"

There are two local causes in which I think we may be guilty of bystanding. One is the serious gap between the service provided in GP surgeries for patients with mild to moderate difficulties and the more extensive service provided in the Psychological Treatment Service for those with moderate to severe disability. If you need more than the limited service given by GP counsellors where do you find it without paying? You can go to Lifecraft, if you are designated as having a mental illness, but there you find a service having

to appeal for funds and only just solvent. You can go to the Cogwheel Trust and there you will find a subsidised service supporting NHS patients by fund-raising to the tune of £24,000 per year. I find it painful and unfair to have to tell some not well-off patients that they need more than I can give but will have to pay around £35 per session for it. There is an urgent need for more free psychotherapy and counselling. I cannot bystand on this one.

A possible minor example of bystanding is amongst those of us who work as GP counsellors. There are about 25 of us. Yet when we have a meeting about our conditions of employment 6 or 7 people turn up. It may be that therapists find evening meetings hard to attend, but I wonder if some of us could be affected by our own ideology of neutrality and bystanding, even about the development of our own jobs.

I end on an optimistic note by saluting a local non-bystander, Rosemary Randall of the Cambridge Society for Psychotherapy. In 2005 she wrote an article, "A New Climate for Psychotherapy?", which I commend to you: it is about our defences against facing the anxieties caused by global warming. And now she is organising groups for citizens to discuss their responses to the climate crisis. This is a nice example of my theme that we need to provide both elastoplast for wounds but also reconstruction and prevention. Reconstruction and prevention are large tasks and each of us can act *only as we are able*. There are over 30 of us at this lecture; we contain a vast reservoir of knowledge of human and social problems revealed to us by our patients. My argument is that we cannot not act on this information as the occasion allows. The personal revelations we have been privileged to acquire from our patients must be the propellant or impetus for reconstructive activity in our wider society.

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Review

Winnicott: Life and Work by Robert Rodman (New York: Perseus 2003)

Reviewed by Peter Lomas

No psychoanalyst, not even Jacques Lacan or Melanie Klein, has had the impact on the psychotherapeutic scene as has Donald Winnicott. And deservedly so. It is therefore fitting that a biographer should emerge with the capability of doing justice to his subject. Robert Rodman's *Winnicott: Life and Work* is a labour of love. "My family", he writes, "have seen me through years and years of my preoccupation with this book and have put up with my silent absorption at the dinner table in front of the laptop every weekend since what seems like time immemorial".

Although Rodman does not quite have the felicity of style of Roazen (the leading historian of psychoanalysis) or Grosskurth (biographer of Melanie Klein) he writes good, clear prose and organises his vast material attractively and with admirable economy of words. It makes for an enjoyable and illuminating read. The book strikes a balance between a factual account and a presentation of Winnicott's ideas in the light of his life experience.

Winnicott grew up in an environment which he himself might have called facilitating. But the family structure was skewed. In his own words, he had too many mothers. His father, a patriarch who was prominent in the outer world, was a distant figure and the relationship between the two remained an awkward one into adult life — so much so that when Winnicott made the decision to study medicine he could not bring himself to tell his father and had to ask a friend to do so. Despite this problem Winnicott seems to have adapted well enough to life and, although no scholar, enjoyed his years at boarding school.

Once into paediatrics, Winnicott's immense drive, creativity and capacity for work showed itself. At the same time he entered a disastrous marriage which lasted many years but was never consummated. It is from the point when he entered training in psychoanalysis that the book becomes arresting. Rodman gives us fascinating details of Winnicott's relations with colleagues, in particular Anna Freud and Melanie Klein.

Having had to cope with too many women as a child, Winnicott now finds himself in a comparable situation. He falls under the influence of Klein, an influence that remained, although he never became a Kleinian. In return Klein conceived an admiration for Winnicott, insisting that he analyse her son Eric. Unfortunately she interfered with the analysis and it is perhaps unsurprising that it was not very successful. During this time the professional relationship between Winnicott, Klein and Marion Milner became very complicated. Confidentiality was not kept, and boundaries were crossed which not only contradicted psychoanalytic technique but betrayed common sense and common decency in a way that most of us would now regard as unethical.

Winnicott was a prodigious letter writer and much of the knowledge of these relationships is gleaned by Rodman from Winnicott's correspondence with colleagues. He had a habit of writing in response to presentations given at the fortnightly meetings. These letters are surprisingly forthright and blunt and must have caused much dismay at the breakfast table. There is no doubt that Winnicott had a genuine desire to promote the truth as he saw it but the bluntness may have been a reaction to the accusation of being too nice in his younger years, and to the extreme confidence he had in his own vision.

Winnicott gained immensely from Klein but gradually moved away from her theories and found his own voice. It is a measure of his diplomacy and personal attractiveness that he continued to stay friendly with her.

Rodman dates the crucial change to 1953-54 when Winnicott published his papers on aggression. His courage in finding his own way in such an unpropitious setting was no doubt helped by his second wife Clare Britton. Clare, whom I knew personally, was a warm, steady and engaging woman and she was devoted to Donald. Even she became involved in the general confusion between the protagonists of the drama. She went to Klein for training who late in the analysis declared her unanalysable and made it difficult for her to qualify. It may be, however, that Clare was resistant to Klein's particular interpretations. As Rodman puts it:

> No wonder the woman was confused, caught as she was in a difficult situation. Occasionally Winnicott would enquire about the analysis. Does she ever mention sex? No. Did she ever mention the Oedipus conflict? No. His wife recalled him then asserting, "That is because she knows nothing about it!" (2003)

The theory of the scientist is valid or not irrespective of the psyche of the author. And the same is true of psychotherapy. Psychotherapy is not, however, a science in the ordinary sense of the word; it is the outcome of a relationship between two people. We are therefore justified in taking a second look at the ideas of a psychotherapist in order to see whether any blind spots in his personality could have led him astray. May this be so in Winnicott's case?

To take one example: one of Winnicott's most influential and widely accepted ideas is that the infant believes that he has created the world he perceives. Winnicott had a powerful urge to convince those around him of the correctness of his own vision — hence the innumerable letters with this aim in mind. It may be that this narcissistic urge derived from his own experience and led him, as can so easily happen, to mistake a particular phenomenon for a universal state of mind.

Winnicott's ideas departed from orthodox psychoanalysis more than is commonly recognised and it is remarkable that he — the maestro of the tightrope — managed to stay in the Society. That he did so enabled him to reach a vast international readership. But there is a cost. In remaining loyal to psychoanalytic theory and language he missed the opportunity of finding a way to a new articulation which is so sorely needed.

Towards the end of the book Rodman records an endearing anecdote in which Winnicott, after five coronaries and a spell of intensive care for pneumonia, is discovered half way up a tree sawing off a branch. Whether or not this actually took place it is an apt description of a man who took risks and did not spare himself.

This fine biography tells us of Winnicott's life; what happened to him, how he acted, what he thought and what his aims were. I did not, however, come away feeling that I knew what it was like to be Winnicott. This may be all we can expect from a biography. If we wish to know more — and feel we have the right to know more—then we must turn to confessional autobiography and confessional poetry if this is available. Perhaps this is how it should be.

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