OUTWRITE

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Contents

Editorial

Welcome to *OUTWRITE* 2024. In this edition, some contributors have responded to a suggestion to consider how therapists respond to 'the media'. Our cover photo, for example, shows two therapists contemplating the sculpture of Eve, by August Rodin, where she shrinks in her nakedness from the gaze of the passing crowds in the shopping centre in Harlow. We are also very pleased to have a contribution from one of our distinguished associate members, **Jasna Levinger-Goy**, who has surveyed the growing impact of digitalisation on our lives, a topic that evokes widespread concerned interest in our profession. For example, some of our members also recently attended the launch of the new Standard Edition where Alessandra Lemma considered the impact of 'grief-bots' on the process of mourning. By coincidence, in a different consideration of 'the media', in a reflection on Shakespeare's play, *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, **Michael Evans** also finds themes of mourning and melancholia are explored through the contrasting responses to loss of Pericles and his long-lost daughter, Marina.

Continuing our theme of 'the media', **Pat Tate** asks the question – what happens when you change the medium, exploring the cycle of iterations of a story through a variety of different media treatments and linking the question these raise – whose story is it? – to the stories we hear and tell as therapists and to whom and in what form. We also include a hopeful quatrain reflecting on what it is to be a human – and a therapist – by Pat.

This year's edition also sees the first of what we hope will be a regular contribution from the Therapy Room Project, devised and pursued by **Elizabeth Moore** and **Rob Metcalfe**, two of our students who have been welcomed by members to photograph their rooms and talk to them about their work. **Deborah Meyler** also considers the qualities of the therapeutic space in her reflective piece prompted by the experience of helping a colleague to build a new therapy room.

Thanks are due to everyone who has contributed to the publication of issue 14, including the editorial and communications teams. It is hard to convey just how grateful and proud I have been to be the recipient of members' contributions, and how in awe I am of the range of talents and interests our publications reveal. Personally, this will be my last *OUTWRITE* as an editor but it has been the most rewarding experience for me, and nothing but pleasure to produce. Our recent archival project has enabled me to look back over the years of *OUTWRITES* and Newsletters, and to be reassured that the tradition of generous, open-minded, wide-ranging interest and expression in matters of relevance to us as psychotherapists continues in the present times too. Although our society is currently having to face up to difficult challenges, *OUTWRITE* and the Newsletters continue to show the best of us. Thank you, members.

Isobel Urquhart

Pat Tate

Thoughts in the Middle of the Night

How I am trapped by my limitations

How I cling to my flaws

How error is the order of the day

How love manages

Paula Rego. *Little Miss Muffet.* Graphite on Paper. 1989

Jasna Levinger-Goy

Digital Imprint on Our Lives: Tentative pointers for further exploration

Digitalisation is a defining characteristic of our time, affecting people of all generations. The impact of the digital world on individuals and society as a whole has fascinated me for some time now. I am by no means an expert in the field; rather I would consider myself an enthusiastic observer. So my intention here is to present some of my tentative views. Most of the digital aspects I reflect on are those I am familiar with either through personal experience or more often by proxy via those I am in touch with. This phenomenon is also quite present in our psychotherapeutic rooms.

Before delving any further, I feel the significant role of AI (particularly AGI i.e. Artificial General Intelligence), which is an integral part of the picture, ought to be mentioned. AI has been present in various forms for some time, but recent developments in its use remain a controversial and complex topic, so AI per se will not be dealt with here.

Although numerous positive effects of digitalisation as well as the significant advantages it offers are undeniable, my comments may sometimes appear negative, since negative effects usually loom larger and are more visible. However, overall I feel that in many cases digitalisation has brought about changes which are neither inherently good nor bad. Our everyday lives are undergoing a transformative process that is not always well-understood or easily explainable. Since these changes are here to stay, the best way to deal with them is to make an effort to understand and utilize them to the best of our abilities.

My earliest encounter with the world of digitalisation, quite some time ago, was both positive and exciting. I vividly recall the first time I realized that from the comfort of my home, I could access scholarly articles from around the world and even communicate with authors. Emerging internet opportunities made it possible. It promised a widened scope of scholarly insight and exchange of ideas.

But before I carry on, I would like to mention that on the whole, I am not a very active participant in the world of digitalisation. Being rather old-fashioned and private I do not take part in any form of social media and I benefit from the era of digitalisation only selectively and mostly by choice.

Social media is the most common and I would say most popular aspect of our current digital reality. I have learned about it mostly through my clients. What I find both fascinating and puzzling is the fact that it is quite common for social media users not to be aware of the fact that algorithms significantly influence and define their choices and perspectives. While cherishing the fantasy of global presence they mostly seem oblivious to the fact that algorithms can limit and narrow their 'world'. Thanks to algorithms their seemingly wide worldly insight is being transformed into a 'small village' experience. Users are grouped by the content that matches their common interests thus creating a 'totalitarian' digital village'[1]. This restricts free

thinking, encourages single-mindedness and favours conformity over individuality, and in some aspects resembles the behaviour within any totalitarian political system.

Social media has evolved with time and it reaches much further than personal exchanges of information, views and ideas. As Nasrine Malik points out: 'It is now a job, a place where users can get paid and become full-time 'content creators'. Virality of videos or tweets enhances users' ability to unlock monetisation and grow follower counts…'[2] Social influences and influencers (seemingly self-proclaimed arbiters of various aspects of social life) are more direct, immediate, personalised and focussed, more powerful and often unchallenged through social media. This phenomenon frequently poses the risks of indoctrination, radicalisation, and exposure to various conspiracy theories. It also helps spread 'fake news', a relatively new phenomenon with seriously concerning consequences. Life in a 'digital village' paradoxically may appear safe and secure, yet inadvertently it is accompanied by an unsettling and damaging sense of confusion and uncertainty. Also, while enabling staying in touch with many however far away they might be, social media could diminish direct interpersonal communication. That in turn, although offering width and variety, reduces the depth and strength of human connection. Social media impact, combined with various other contents such as news feeds etc., (often accessed via the phone present and active 24/7) can cause an increase in anxiety and isolation at best, and mental health issues and even a rise in suicide attempts at worst, apparently mostly among young people. This is a serious matter that calls for urgent solutions.

Not denying the fact that the 'digital village' has some advantages, I felt it necessary to point out the damaging effects first. However, it should be emphasised that social media certainly has some positive aspects. It is most apparent in the area of friendships. It creates a chance to foster friendships; it enables users to get and keep in touch with a huge number of people at the same time. It also provides a sense of community. Most advantages stem from the fact that we live increasingly hectic lifestyles where face-to-face interactions are challenging to maintain. Social media can help keep in touch with friends and can offer a sense of belonging and even safety and support. It also helps develop self-presentation and self-expression and encourages individuation.

Our time has also brought about a changed attitude towards trust. I am not sure whether it can be safely connected with the advent of digitalisation, but I am sure it is hard not to notice it. The attitude towards every form of authority, be it scientific, political, journalistic or any other form, has changed. The absence of trust in traditional established authorities has called for a replacement authority which has paved the way for many 'alternative' narratives and has often caused profound disbelief in anything that might appear 'official'. More often than not that 'authority' is found through digital sources such as social media. This can result in unchallenged trust and even dependence on unreliable or toxic sources or sources with malicious intentions. Social media users are often not aware of the echo chambers in which they are frequently trapped. The consequence of this might be the prevalence of social polarisation, division, intolerance, and aggression.

The significant role of algorithms is often unnoticed in another important aspect of life i.e. in forming relationships via dating apps. Online dating appears to be a technological variant of traditional matchmaking. 'Auntie So and So' is replaced by 'Aunty Algorithm'. It is probably a useful or sometimes the only way to find a partner due to the lifestyle in which personal

contact and face-to-face encounters have predominantly become less and less frequent. If people are working from home, shopping from home and even getting their entertainment from their sitting rooms this might be the only way to start any type of relationship. It is widely used by my clients, with various degrees of success.

Digitalisation has brought about yet another, maybe less radical yet significant, change. Online reading increasingly replaces books. The concept of a library is evolving. The aim seems to be getting as much information in as short a time as possible and as condensed as possible. The attention often seems to be directed towards brief, succinct information at the expense of depth and width. Also often text-based content is giving way to audio and video formats. Sitting with only one content for hours has all but disappeared and has frequently been replaced by 'second screening'[3] which appears to have become a way of being. Concentration and focus as a consequence have more often than not been victims. The ever-present 'smartphones' interfere or rather coexist with other activities. (Interestingly the advent of smartphones changed the use of phones; they are often least used as phones. Apparently, the common practice among the young is never to answer the call.) Several clients complained that they had spent time on their phones until the early hours of the morning which was detrimental since they had to work the following day. I am not sure one could refer to that as an addiction but it could be considered a rather unhealthy habit.

The notion of research has transformed too. A relatively new phenomenon referred to as 'Googling' is considered research even when it refers to Facebook following, watching TikTok videos or something of that ilk which can hardly be considered meaningful research. On the other hand, although reliance on search engines could sometimes be misleading, it does offer the possibility of accessing various serious scholarly and scientific sources. So the label 'Google intellectual' (which I heard used pejoratively) can be a somewhat unfair judgement. Yet the term 'Dr Google', again used pejoratively, I believe, is less misplaced, since the use of 'Dr Google' can be quite harmful. 'Googling' symptoms and resorting to self-diagnosis, for instance, can lead to hypochondria and/or misdiagnosis with sometimes serious consequences.

Another emerging and widespread phenomenon is online shopping. It has become a convenient alternative to in-store shopping even though this kind of shopping experience is often very different from the traditional one. For example, touch and smell are by default absent. It might be quick and easy, but it eliminates multiple aspects of in-store shopping, such as sensory experience and interaction with shopping assistants. Online shopping started growing exponentially during the COVID-19 pandemic and after that stopped growing but remains quite high. According to the Office for National Statistics internet sales as a percentage of total retail sales in January 2021 was as high as 37.8%. It gradually went down but in February 2024 it was still as high as 25.7%.[4]

Communication styles in general have also evolved, with text messages becoming shorter and more reliant on acronyms and emojis. Nuances and language sensitivity seem lost in favour of brevity and speed. By possibly gaining immediacy and practicality interlocutors sacrifice the richness language offers. Online communication, for instance, raises questions of loss of nuances of expression, loss of sensory engagement etc. all of which tend to impoverish human interaction. Digital communication unfortunately also often fosters rudeness, offensiveness, and aggression (not to mention sexting) since the 'digital shield' offers assumed protection. The absence of face-to-face interaction enables users to engage anonymously

in socially unacceptable behaviour. On the whole 'etiquette' in digital communication offers users a scope of 'acceptable' adverse behaviour such as ghosting, unfollowing, unfriending, blocking and others.

The most noticeable change in the digital era is that of the shift from face-to-face interaction to remote communication. Sometimes even during contact in close proximity, digital engagements get in the way i.e. people looking at their phones while sharing a meal. Even mothers looking after their children tend to pay as much attention to their phones as they do to their children. Likewise, sometimes phones are given to children instead of toys. One could say that the physical presence is often replaced by digital interaction which could be convenient, but at the same time, it could lead to isolation and loneliness.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought significant changes to our approach to education and work. Remote learning and working from home became the norm, facilitated by digital communication platforms. Schools as well as universities practised remote learning with varying degrees of success. (At about the same time the practice of digitalisation and datafication was introduced in schools[5] but that is too specialised a subject for this text.) While remote learning and working allowed for continuity in education and work during a challenging time, they also introduced some notable drawbacks.

For students, the lack of face-to-face interaction often led to feelings of loneliness and isolation. The absence of immediate, in-person contact had the potential to hinder the development of social skills. This subject has been frequently discussed in deliberating children's mental health issues. Social interaction which helps students develop communication skills, empathy, and teamwork abilities was mostly missing during the COVID-19 remote education period. Another widely talked about cause of children's mental health issues, not necessarily connected with the COVID-19 pandemic, is the presence of smartphones in children's lives. This digitally enabled children's 'companion' and 'tool' is a relatively new phenomenon. Unfortunately, smartphones also give children a chance to access age-inappropriate contents, which could be very damaging.

However, while 'Zoom classrooms' are mostly a thing of the past, working from home persisted. Working from home has been shown to have several advantages, such as increased flexibility, reduced commuting time and a better work-life balance for many individuals. Yet, it also comes with its own set of challenges. The quality of interaction can suffer when colleagues are not physically present. Creativity and productivity might also be impacted. (There is a possible negative effect on the country's economy but I am not competent to talk about that.)

Remote digital interaction is becoming more common, even in the fields like healthcare and psychotherapy. It works in some instances, but often face-to-face contact is more efficient. Shared physical space holds its significance. Interestingly my long-term clients who used to have face-to-face therapy with me refused to come back face-to-face. They claim to find online therapy equally effective, yet more convenient.

The ever-present digital existence raises privacy concerns. Digital devices track our movements, activities and habits; they intrude upon our daily presence. Most people do not pay much attention to it, but it could be quite unsettling if and when they do. Constant surveillance can cause a sense of helplessness, lack of agency and, obviously, loss of privacy. Yet, while we do not necessarily want our life to be public we still want to be a part of the world around us. That

poses a significant dilemma. Despite valuing privacy we make ourselves 'digitally visible'. We need to know what is going on in our immediate environment, as well as in the world. Hence we now seek news throughout the day (and sometimes at night). The current practice is very different from the previous way of accessing the news via chosen newspapers and radio and TV channels, maybe once or twice a day. Now the easy and permanent accessibility, often via our telephones, fosters a constant engagement with news as well as 'hunger' for more.

This demand for 24/7 news 'in the palm of one's hand' inevitably drives news reporters into overdrive. Consequently, they offer accounts of all sorts of events alongside genuine news. More often than not catastrophic news (of which unfortunately there are plenty) dominates our daily intake. Catastrophic news sells best, a newspaper reporter once told me, so sometimes the scope of the catastrophe is exaggerated. This constant barrage of news, especially those insisting on various threats to life, can hardly have a positive impact. Such news inadvertently produces fear, which in turn puts people in a fight/flight/freeze mode, unfortunately often characterised by a genuine inability to think clearly. The fact that most news is rendered through both audio and visual means makes the news more impressive. That can often cause discomfort, enforce feelings of helplessness and create a sense of insignificance. As a result that could contribute to the appearance of lethargy, hopelessness, or despair, I would say, most prominently in adults who joined the digital world later in life. (It seems that those born into the digital era are better equipped to navigate and cope with the digital world.) However, the fact is that threats to our lives do seem versatile and ever-present so they inevitably affect both young and old. They vary from health-related concerns to huge challenges like climate change, natural disasters, armed conflicts, as well as food shortages and economic pressures, the cost of living crisis etc. The threat of nuclear conflict also looms large. How to look into the future under such dire circumstances?

Childhood experiences are now also shaped by digitalisation, with gadgets sometimes replacing parental supervision. Debates rage over 'play-based childhood' versus 'phone-based childhood,'[6] but the effects on child development remain a subject of ongoing research. For both children and adults, playing games increasingly means online gaming, often with strangers. This again means the absence of direct contact, often resulting in a sense of isolation.

Digitalisation is present even in dealing with end-of-life matters. Along with the traditional physical tasks of tidying away after death, such as emptying drawers, clearing lofts etc., this process now also takes place online, a practice one could term 'digital tidying away.'[7] Admittedly both processes, the physical and digital one, can be very painful. However, there is an additional issue with digital clearing. Namely, the closure of various online accounts etc., is necessary in resolving the issue of persistence of digital legacies. If the accounts were not closed the deceased would remain a 'digital ghost'.

And finally, crime expanded and acquired a new aspect. Cybercrime is a new phenomenon which is on the rise, posing significant challenges for cybersecurity. It is so widespread that the National Crime Agency now has a portal offering advice and help. Recent security breaches in various sectors highlight the need for robust protection against cyberattacks, but that is the issue governments are apparently actively dealing with.

In conclusion, digitalisation has both positive and negative effects on our lives. It has brought about significant changes in our everyday lives;

in communication, information access and interpersonal relationships, among others. Consequently, there is a pressing need for more research and understanding of how these changes affect human development, human cognition, societal norms and security as well. The regulation of digital platforms, cybersecurity and alike remains critical as we navigate this evolving landscape. The rapid development of AI calls for a fast catching up.

Cambridge, 6 June 2024

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Pat Tate

Changing the Medium

Can there be any creative justification for moving a story and its characters from one medium to another? Such a course could well be seen as laziness, lack of imagination, or a desire to benefit unfairly from another's inspiration. However, we observe a constant flow of book into film, film into TV series, TV series into stage play: talent setting itself not to invent, but to replicate.

Admittedly, a run-of-the-mill book can become a Great Film (The Godfather), but there seem to be more instances of the Great Book losing its soul by being turned into a Bad Film (Lolita--twice).

That is the thesis. The antithesis is a 1979 low-budget film called The Warriors, described as a 'cult film', which I interpret to mean, 'Most people dislike it, a few people like it quite a lot.' Halliwell's calls it a 'slick exploitation movie—not satisfactory as a whole' and gives it one star, but The Radio Times Film Guide gives it four stars—'Very Good'. My own view is that the director, Walter Hill, has used the plot and setting of a really poor 1965 novel of the same title (by Sol Yurick) to make a vivid, engaging film story about an unfamiliar world—the world of New York City teen gangs.

The story line is that Cyrus, the powerful leader of an important gang, calls a midnight conference in a city park, asking for five delegates from each gang to attend, unarmed, to hear his proposals for working together. There will be an amnesty, to allow safe travel through each other's normally sacrosanct territories. Needless to say, the meeting ends badly, with the death of Cyrus, and the five delegates from The Warriors, a small, insignificant Coney Island gang, face the challenge of surviving a 30-mile night-time journey home through unfamiliar enemy territory—and without the amnesty.

Very exciting. But Sol Yurick did not invent this plot. The original author is the classical Greek historian Xenophon (ca. 430 to ca. 354 BC), student and friend of Socrates. Xenophon departed from Athens in 401 BC as part of an expedition of ten thousand Greek mercenaries, hired by the Persian prince Cyrus to come to Babylon and topple his ruling brother Artaxerxes. Unfortunately, Cyrus was killed in battle, and the hired Greeks then had to fight a desperate forced march of a thousand miles back through enemy territory, besieged on every hand, until they could reach the relative safety of an embarkation point—the coast of the Black Sea. Xenophon records that when they arrived there, the surviving soldiers fell to their knees and cried: 'Thalassa! Thalassa! : The sea! The sea!'

Xenophon's book Anabasis—'The March Upcountry' or 'Return to the Base' is a true history of remarkable adventures. Yurick's translation to Twentieth-century New York is clever, but Hill's film is much more than that, with a doomed romantic feel, a poetic quality in the fight scenes, and vivid visual imagery of the idiosyncratic identifying gang outfits, in a semi-deserted night-time city.

Walter Hill is a huge fan of comic books, and surprises us by bringing in yet another medium: from time to time, he freezes the action and encloses it within a comic book frame—a forced pause to reflect, and also a reminder that these protagonists fighting for their lives are only adolescents. The comic frames dissolve back into live action, and divide the film

into chapters, giving us a view of a different kind of reality.

So-- we see the history of an interesting linkage: a story presented three times over, in three different media formats. Now it is 2024, and we read in The Guardian (22.10.24) that Lin-Manuel Miranda, a super-fan of the film and creator of the stage play Hamilton, has just released what is referred to as 'a 'Jesus Christ Superstar-style' concept album entitled 'The Warriors'. Miranda was born in New York a year after the film came out, and first saw it on DVD aged 4; forty years later, he recalls the soundtrack and has expanded on it. He admits that a theatrical version would be 'enormous fun'. I don't think we will be surprised when it appears as a stage production.

There is a Warriors video game—Miranda plays it. There is a marathon run by fans, tracing the film gang's endangered route home through the city. What further change of medium should we expect? A ballet? A children's picture book? A synchronised swimming routine??

To whom does a story belong? To the person who lives it, the person who first writes it, the person who best writes it? When a patient tells us his story and we ponder it, perhaps write it up as an anonymised Case Study, or discuss it with a supervisor (who may include it in a book she is writing)—whose story is it? Currently, an author whose novel has won the Prix Goncourt, France's most prestigious literary award, is being taken to court, along with his wife, a therapist, by her patient, who alleges that the author used the patient's life story as basis for the prize-winning novel (Guardian, 21.11.24). These are not theoretical questions.

I have just booked the beach hut for my family's 2025 annual seaside holiday.--the last hut available, there was no choice. Beach huts usually have cute little names—'Sailor's Rest' or 'Sandy Cove'. This one's name is 'Thalassa'.

Notes on a Film to Revisit: NASHVILLE

Director Robert Altman timed the release of this 160-minute blockbuster film for 1976--the two-hundredth anniversary of the American experiment.

He beautifully and cleverly used the metaphor of country and western music to depict the state of the nation. This is a good time to revisit the film, as one of the many sub-plots has to do with a Presidential election campaign.

(I'm always glad if anybody wants to come and watch the DVD with me (popcorn supplied)—I can enjoy looking at it any number of times! – Pat)

Isobel Urquhart

'Peanut Butter on Toast': a Personal Reflection

Work No 3071: Peanut Butter on Toast (2018). Patinated bronze, gold. Martin Creed

I came across this work by Martin Creed recently. At first glance, there seems to be nothing much to notice or admire about making a representation of a piece of peanut butter and toast, something just so *ordinary*. What's the point of that? How could this be thought of as 'art'? What is the artist playing at, presenting this to us in an art gallery. Is he laughing at us? What would it mean to find the artist *is* laughing at us, peering earnestly at his artefact? How would I feel? Like many a casual gallery visitor, I wasn't sure. I certainly felt a bit earnest, gazing at the work, wondering how to 'receive' something meaningful from it.

> *You enter the room where I'm sitting. What are we then? And to each other? How ordinary we are. What are our eyes and minds doing, as we are looking and thinking at each other.*

As I looked on, *Peanut butter on toast* seems to be asking *me* all sorts of questions – what do you think of me, then? What do you think is the point of me? What do you think I'm supposed to be – do you think I'm… art?

I can feel your questions –you asking, how will I be with you, and you with me? what do you think of what I am? What can you see? Can you hear my questions of myself?

What is the point of it? There it sits, on its pedestal, challenging the accumulated jumble of received assumptions about art in my head. OK I'm a bit beyond thinking art is supposed to be – isn't it? - an immediate, felt apprehension of its … er, beauty? Its 'grandeur'? But isn't art meant to be … 'elevating'… in some way? Maybe? Have a useful *meaning*, anyway. Not so blooming *ordinary*.

And yet, not so ordinary. What are we to make of Creed's decision to elevate his breakfast by making it out of bronze and gold? *Peanut butter on toast,* the most humble of subjects, paradoxically crafted from materials commonly associated with high art: patinated bronze, gold leaf, that, historically, expressed reverence for the subject.

Creed, the artist, is also asking questions. Of us. To himself. About himself. About the history of art, the tradition of sculpting in which he endeavours to find his contemporary place. About what art does with the ordinary facts of our lives – the long Classical tradition that art lifted the ordinary, changed it into something so profoundly moving when we look at it, that lasted longer than crunching up your toast. Transformation, sublimation. Ars longa, vita brevis.

Of his bones are coral made; Those are pearls that were his eyes: Nothing of him that doth fade, But doth suffer a sea-change Into something rich and strange

Still from 'In Your Face : Interview: Martin Creed'[2]

'Call yourself an artist?'

A corollary to the question of whether something is art or not – and, if it is, what makes it so – is the question of whether the maker 'is' an artist, and, if they are, what are the grounds on which that claim or self-definition is understood. Faced with *Peanut Butter On Toast*, we are invited to wonder about what makes its maker an artist. As indeed Creed himself asks, with considerable discomfort.

In a remarkable video filmed by Show Studio, Martin Creed is interviewed by Carrie Scott, as part of a series called 'In Your Face'[1] The camera, true to the series title, pushes itself right up to Creed, forcing the viewer up close, too close, pushing our curiosity into the face speaking to us. The result is more than interrogative: it is uncomfortable to watch as Creed is filmed, in high contrast black and white, and in extreme close-up, on a blacked out background – every bristle on his face caught by the lights as he squirms and screws up his eyes and grimaces his way to a hesitant struggle to reply; as the camera holds him in place with nowhere to hide.

He struggles to find answers to questions to the invisible interviewer's voice, formal, emotionally neutral, but each question seems to be experienced by Creed, if not exactly as persecutory, certainly causing agonies of thought and efforts to explain, to say something true.

Sometimes he can be seen trying to please the interviewer, to placate her relentless inquiry, her search for the meaning of him . He strains to find a connection with what she seems to be asking for. Sometimes he seems lost in his own search for meaning. Perhaps because of the extreme close up, and because Creed is having to describe his inner self, with much agonising, with many hesitations and qualifications, watching the video reminded me powerfully of observing and listening to the discomforts of patient and therapist in our consulting spaces.

What do artists do all day?

The title of an occasional series about artists ironises the popular scepticism of the public as to whether being an artist is work. Is it serious? Is it play and should a grown person spend all day at play? Similarly, in the 'In your face' video, the interview begins by asking the 'what do you do' question.

> ➤ *Can you please begin by introducing yourself and what you do?*

Creed replies with extreme hesitancy, resisting what might be expected to be an obvious reply, like 'I paint' or 'I make things', and wanting to say something truthful but difficult to put into words. Perhaps hoping also to get beyond the John Bull bullying pragmatism of popular British views about art – hostility or, equally burdensome, idealisation of what the claim to be an artist might evoke. His answer, for me, is brutally, nakedly exposing. I wanted to cover him up, stand between him and the torturing camera. In his Glaswegian accent:

> ➤ *Ehhh my name is Martin Creed and I ehhhh ehhhh well… I don't know I c… I g… I ca… well…*

Perhaps more nakedly than the viewer might have expected, Creed's words expose the complexity of the impulse to make - that *Peanut Butter on Toast* (as one example of his playful, trickster, awkward, ambivalent work generally) is about all the suffering involved for him in being a human being and why making art is the only response he can find to it. Because, of course, *Peanut Butter on Toast* is indeed also and deliberately a joke. The most serious of jokes:

Rushes of words; pauses.

'I try to live my life in the world as … that I find myself in. And I try to… ffff….ehhh… I think I spend most of my time trying to… ehm… help myself to… ffff… feel better.. because most of the time I don't feel so good.'

The endeavour is endless of course, can never be achieved finally – like the 'divine discontent'

that Laplanche calls the exigency of 'the reality of the message'. It feels somehow reductive of this exigency to call it a coping mechanism merely, when Creed says that, constantly, daily, he tries to *find excitement and beautiful things and people* as some kind of answering to not feeling so good most of the time.

He can't, therefore, separate off the creating of art objects from what else he is 'doing all day.' He can't, therefore, satisfy our question about whether what he does can be called art – he's not sure himself what art actually is. Its meaning is elusive, like love or magic. But he is not trying to be clever – he's trying to be more simple, not less, because, as he says in the interview, sounding like a drowning man clinging to a spar, 'simplicity is something you can hold on to.' More ordinary. A word that is perhaps over

fetishised and elevated from its shopworn everydayness by us, Peter Lomas' successors, but continues, like *Peanut Butter on Toast*, to remind us that it is both nothing much and everything.

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Michael Evans

On Shakespeare's *PERICLES* Prince of Tyre and Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia'

Among the many characters in the play only Pericles and his daughter Marina stand out as complex characters who endure conflict. Marina is the true heroine of the play and provides a dramatic contrast to her father and is ultimately his saviour. Their dramatic reunion is the climax of the play. In my view the drama of *Pericles of Tyre* is as much a psychological Odyssey of endurance as it is a physical one and I will explore the play through these two characters as their story unfolds.

Pericles is a man of action whose story takes place in six city ports across the eastern Mediterranean: Antioch, Tyre, Tarsus, Pentapolis, Mytilene and Ephesus. There is a time lapse of perhaps 20 years from when his daughter is born until she becomes adult, so the drama does not follow the Aristotelian rule of unity of place, time and action. *Pericles* is constructed as a series of episodes which have more in common with Homer's *Odyssey* than with classical Greek drama. This presents difficulties for the theatre and may be part of the reason why the play is so little performed. It is unlikely that Shakespeare could have read Homer because there was no translation from ancient Greek available in his time as a playwright. George Chapman published his translation, so admired by John Keats, in 1614-15 well after Shakespeare had retired. But he could have had an idea of the Odyssey from Virgil's 'Aeneid', a Roman adaptation of Homer's epic.(2)

Like Odysseus, Pericles voyages around the Mediterranean and endures storms and shipwrecks. Both have many adventures in different lands as their story unfolds and at one point, very much like Odysseus, Pericles survives a shipwreck, is cast up on a beach, naked and exhausted in a strange land where he meets a Princess.

The story of Odysseus is held together by Homer as storyteller and Shakespeare similarly uses a narrator, John Gower, an imaginary recreation of a poet who lived about 200 years earlier than Shakespeare, and whose writings he partly draws upon as a source for the story of Pericles. Gower addresses the audience at intervals throughout the play and, in rather plodding rhyming couplets, makes essential links between the disparate episodes. But he is an integral part of the narrative, holding the play together as Pericles voyages from city to city.

Pericles has the characteristics of a tragic hero. He is noble, generous and concerned for the life of others, and he is brave as a hero should be, both in combat and in confronting power. But despite these qualities he is brought low by his weaknesses, not least his passivity, which means he is easily led by others. He is a melancholic who searches for love to lift his spirits. His character is similar to Hamlet in some respects and Shakespeare writes him soliloquies, but he has

little of Hamlet's wit or intelligence. Moreover the play is not a tragedy, because Pericles survives, and despite many disasters lives to be a happier, and certainly a wiser man.

In the first scene Pericles arrives at Antioch and is looking for a wife. He is naively impressed by, and ready to fall in love with, the daughter of King Antiochus. He is stunned by her beauty and courageously accepts the challenge of interpreting a riddle set by King Antiochus, which if interpreted correctly will win the hand of the Princess. If he fails, he will be executed. Pericles so much desires requited love he is willing to risk death to reach it. He reads and understands the meaning of the riddle that discloses that the King and his daughter are in an incestuous relationship, but he does not reveal it. He knows that there is a order for him to be killed by the despotic King who cannot risk the secret of his incest being disclosed to the world. Pericles manages to escape back to his own country, Tyre. The love that Pericles so desired was thus snatched away from him, and this theme of loss pervades the rest of the play.

In his paper 'Mourning and Melancholia' Freud describes the similarity and differences between the two moods. The symptoms of both are an overpowering sense of loss. In both states the subject withdraws from engagement with, and loses interest in, the world around them. The capacity to love is inhibited or absent. The mourner knows only too well what has been lost, and habitually suffers from repeatedly hallucinating the lost object as if still present and alive. But over time s/he generally faces up the reality that the lost person, (or country, or ideal) no longer exists. The state of mourning is socially acceptable because its causes are easily understood, whereas extreme melancholia is regarded as pathological.

What distinguishes the melancholic is that s/he does not know the cause of it because it is a response to a loss which is unconscious. The subject has identified with the forgotten lost object at an earlier date, and feeling forsaken, blames the self for that loss. As Freud puts it, 'the shadow of the object falls upon the ego'. Melancholia is typically accompanied by feelings of impoverishment, an excess of low self-esteem, worthlessness, and a tendency to self-reproach culminating in a delusional expectation of punishment leading to self-punishment. Freud describes how 'in mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty, in melancholia it is the ego itself.'

For Pericles the first scene of the play is a moment of trauma as the incestuous relationship between king Antioch, a father figure, and his daughter, a mother figure, is revealed by him. It is the equivalent of the Primal Scene. Freud refers to the primal scene as the sight of sexual intercourse between the parents, as observed, or fantasised by the child and interpreted as a scene of violence. For Pericles, in the psychological position of a child in his transference relation to the powerful King, the experience could be Oedipal. The love he offers to the daughter as mother has been usurped by the father figure.

Back in his own country, Tyre, Pericles asks himself in a soliloquy why his high spirits should turn to *'dull eyed melancholia'* and why he cannot respond with joy to the pleasures of the day. He has endured a traumatic experience in which his trusting nature has met with disillusionment. But this does not explain his melancholy disposition. It is not clear to him or to us that his melancholy is a reaction to the scene at Antioch, or if melancholia is his default position.

Pericles' supportive friend Lord Hellicanus persuades Pericles to take flight from his country to avoid the threat to his life by Antioch's

pursuing assassin and so Pericles sails to neighbouring Tarsus and with characteristic generosity and compassion brings shiploads of grain to relieve that Kingdom of famine. Its rulers, King Cleon and Queen Dioniza, express great gratitude, although later on they will turn out to be treacherous.

Fearing that King Antioch's assassin is still pursuing him, Pericles sails from Tarsus, but a fearful storm wrecks his ship and drowns his sailors. He alone is washed up, cold and near to death on the beach of a strange land which turns out to be Pentapolis. He rails against *'the angry stars of heaven'*. Where Odysseus in a similar situation is pursuing his destiny, Pericles resigns himself to fate, speaking very strangely of himself in the third person: *'Here to have death in peace is all he'll crave.'* – an expression of spiritless despair and a schizoid detachment from self, as if this predicament was happening to another person. But some kind fishermen help Pericles and he is led by them to the court of King Simonides where a jousting tournament is about to be arranged.

Pericles' repeated voyages, ostensibly to avoid King Antioch's assassin, could be interpreted as manic action to escape depression. His melancholy returns throughout his time at the court of King Simonides. Perhaps he fears the repeat of the same primal scene between that King and his daughter Princess Thaisa? She is clearly attracted to Pericles and chooses him as the man she desires above all the other Knights, and she is active in courting him. He, however, is passive throughout and shows no sign of being attracted to her. The King supports his daughter's wish to marry Pericles and so it is arranged. To close the engagement, and perhaps for reassurance, Thaisa finally asks Pericles if he loves her and he replies only with an oath: *'Even as my life blood that fosters it.'* Cool or what? There is no passion here. It is a noticeably one-sided

courtship. After he marries Thaisa she becomes pregnant but when he hears that King Antiochus and his daughter have been struck dead by the Gods as a punishment for their incest, they seek to return to his kingdom.

On the voyage a violent storm blows up and in the midst of it the nurse, with the new born baby in her arms, tells him that his wife has died in childbirth. Pericles takes the baby in his arms and rails against the Gods blaming them for his loss and wishing the storm would end. One of the sailors tells him that it will not abate until the ship is cleared of the dead and insists that the Queen's body must be thrown overboard. Pericles challenges him that this is just a sailor's superstition, but acquiesces without further protest. A chest is found and Queen Thaisa's corpse is placed in it with gold, jewels, and a letter that Pericles writes. It is sealed with caulk and cast into the sea.

In the next scene we jump to Ephesus, where Lord Cerimon lives near the coast. He is a practising physician who heals the sick by means of *'infusions of vegitives, in metals, stones'*. A chest is brought to him that was cast up onto the shore in the recent storm. On opening it, Cerimon discovers, of course, that it contains the body of Queen Thaisa, apparently dead but in perfect condition whereupon Cerimon miraculously brings her to life. Thaisa reads the letter that was placed in her chest and recognises Pericles' hand. Believing she will never see him again, she accepts Cerimon's suggestion to become a vestal priestess in the temple of Diana at Ephesus for the remainder of her life.

Meanwhile Pericles, who was on his way home to Tyre, realising that his newborn daughter needs immediate care, changes course for nearby Tarsus where he leaves her with King Cleon and Queen Dioniza whose country he had previously rescued from famine. They owe him and he trusts them.

Returning to Tyre, Pericles has now lost both his wife Thaisa, and his baby daughter, 'Marina', named by him because she was born at sea.

From then on, his default position of melancholia is combined with mourning. Later in the play the loss of his wife is compounded by the news that his daughter Marina is also dead, and this news leads to insanity.

In Tarsus Marina grows up to be accomplished in music and the arts and in embroidery for which she is always admired and praised. Her constant companion is Queen Dioniza's daughter Philoten who unsuccessfully competes with but is outshone by *'absolute Marina'*. The Queen, filled with envy, prepares to have Marina murdered and arranges for her servant Leonine to kill her.

As he is about to stab her some pirates appear, intervene, and drive Leonine away. They seize Marina as a prize and carry her off onto their ship. The pirate ship docks at the port of Myteline and Marina, still a virgin, is sold as a highly prized and expensive recruit to a brothel keeper in the City. Although put to work she is able to fend off all the clients by her arguments and her ability to appeal to their conscience. Lysimachus, the Governor of Myteline then arrives. Although he is offered Marina as a beautiful virgin, he, too, is impressed by her charisma, her eloquence and the evident purity of her character. He becomes ashamed of his conduct and hypocritically denies that he came to the brothel to satisfy his lust. Instead of taking advantage of her helpless position he gives her money. After his departure the Madame of the Brothel is furious with Marina because she has driven all her clients away and orders the Brothel pimp to rape Marina in order to take revenge and break her in. Once again, Marina keeps her cool, and has the presence of mind to plead with him and offers him the money given to her by Lysimachus to bribe him to arrange her escape. Thus, she escapes from the brothel to the safety of a gentile household where she will tutor their children in the arts.

Meanwhile after many years, Pericles sets sail once again to Tarsus to meet and bring home his now grown up daughter Marina from where he had left her as a baby. When he arrives, the wicked Queen Doniza tells him that Marina has died and shows him the tomb with this inscription to convince him. He is completely shocked and Gower tells us:

> *Pericles is by sorrow devoured,*
>
> *With sighs shot through, and biggest tears o'er-showered,*
>
> *Leaves Tarsus and again embarks. He swears*
>
> *Never to wash his face nor cut his hairs;*
>
> *He puts on sackcloth, and to sea.*

So Pericles believes he has lost his wife, Thaisa, and now his daughter Marina, the only love objects of his life, although we as audience know that both are alive and well. Pericles sets sail again and next arrives at Myteline. The Governor, Lysimachus, who we met at the brothel, wants to know about the foreign ship that has arrived at his port. He meets Hellicanus who tells him

> *Sir, our vessel is of Tyre, in it the King,*
>
> *A man who for this three months has not spoken*
>
> *To anyone, nor taken sustinence,*
>
> *But to prorogue his grief.*

In his grief, Pericles is reported as unwashed, barely eating sufficient food and liquid to keep alive, and is emaciated. He lies alone in his dark cabin, his clothes unchanged, not speaking, and refusing to see anyone. Lysimachus recommends Marina to Hellicanus as a woman of nobility and intelligence who might be the only person able to help overcome Pericles' isolation.
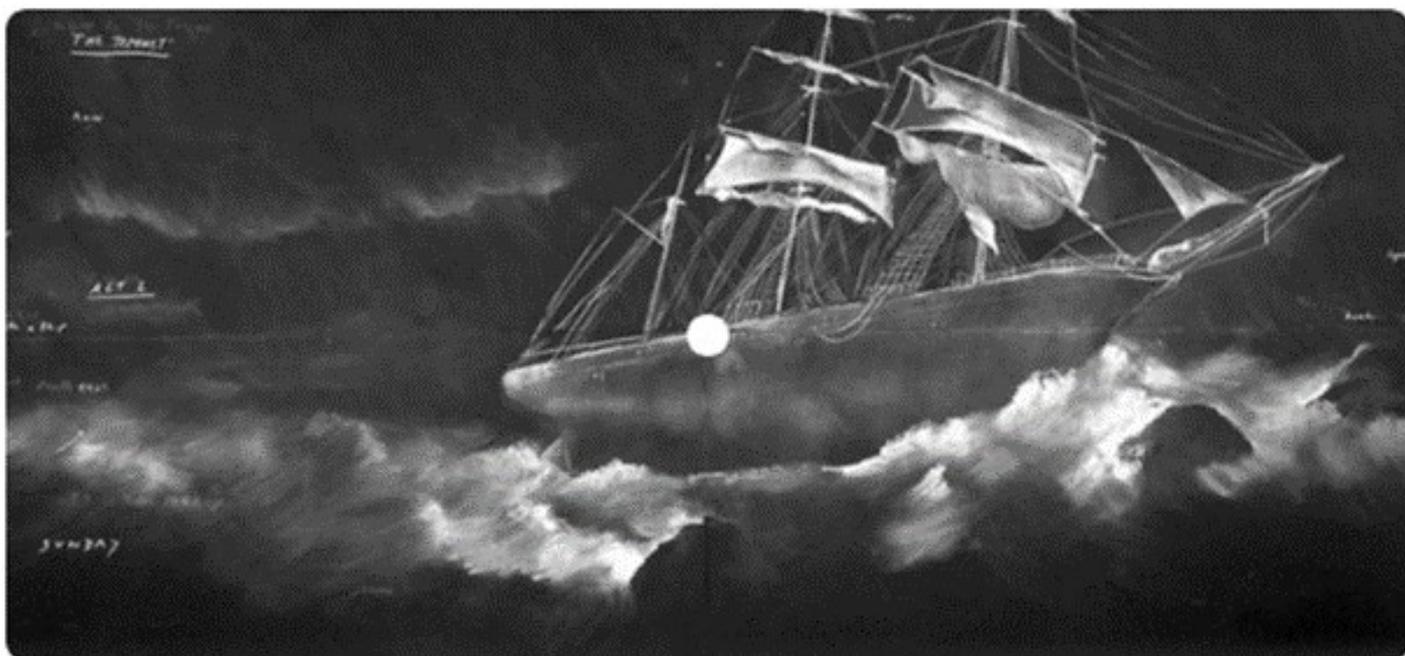
Tacita Dean. The Sea, with a Ship: afterwards an Island. Chalk on blackboard. 1999

There follows the meeting of father and daughter, a classic moment of anagnorisis and of intensely moving dramatic irony because we already know the identity of father and daughter, while they are strangers to each other. Marina enters the cabin alone. She sings to him, but this classic cure for melancholia does not work. It is only through language that he can be helped to find language. Marina adopts another strategy and tells Pericles that she was descended from royal ancestors and that, uprooted from her parents and the world, and bound in servitude, has suffered as he has suffered *'a grief equal to his, if both were justly weighed'*.

She speaks without histrionics or self-pity. It is simply a statement that she too has suffered and knows suffering. This is a challenge to the illusion which characterises melancholia, that only the sufferer has suffered and that no one else can understand. She stands before him with self-composure, her sanity and rationality intact. He must compare his own loss of morale and self-destructive reaction to loss, with her composure as a model of survival and equanimity. She begins to break through his resistance. Pericles begins to recognise the similarity in looks and bearing of Marina to his lost wife Thaisa, so he trusts her and begins to speak for the first time.

This is a moment of truth where he recognises that he has been 'womanish' in his reaction to suffering whereas she faced extreme vicissitudes and yet retained her integrity and presence of mind. In a society where men are supposed to be strong and women were regarded as the weaker vessel, Shakespeare subverts that prejudice. Pericles acknowledges his weakness in comparison to Marina's strength, and also acknowledges the feminine side of his nature. Perhaps Shakespeare is thinking that a man can have both a feminine identity, largely repressed, besides a male one.

Finally, when she tells him her name, Pericles realises that Marina is his long-lost daughter whom he had thought was dead. She similarly meets her father for the first time and overwhelmed with emotion they embrace. In this way, Pericles begins his return from the isolation of extreme melancholia towards sanity and humanity. He asks for fresh clothes, and, exhausted, needs sleep to help his recovery.

In a dream the Goddess Diana appears to him and insists that his happiness depends on sailing to Ephesus immediately. There, Pericles and Marina meet with Cerimon, the Doctor, who leads them to the Temple of Diana where Thaisa is discovered to be alive and well. Pericles and Thaisa recognise each other after many years in a scene reminiscent of Odysseus meeting Penelope. Marina and her mother Thaisa also discover each other for the first time, and all three are reunited. Pericles resolves to cut his hair (for the first time

in 14 years!) signalling the removal of the physical symptoms of his melancholia.

His belief that Marina was dead cannot be a mourning for the loss of her as an individual, because he did not know her, but it is mourning for a real loss nonetheless, a loss of a future and the consequent impossibility of hope. But Pericles' self-castigation is a characteristic of melancholia. His whole mental system, his psyche, has gone on strike. The symptoms of extreme melancholia or depression are sleeplessness, rigidity, a refusal to eat, loss of speech or willingness to respond, and a general decline in the instinct for survival, even leading to suicide. Since the late nineteenth century this has been defined in psychiatry as catatonia or mutism: in common parlance a form of insanity. Shakespeare's Pericles has the precise symptoms described by Freud, which psychiatry today labels as clinical psychosis and catatonia.

Shakespeare has explored differing forms of insanity in other characters – notably King Lear, Ophelia, and the Macbeths. Pericles' state of mind is not less extreme than theirs. Whereas they could at least speak of their fantasies and delusions, he is dumb, a man of action out of touch with his inner life. Because he cannot find the words for his self-destructive feelings, he expresses them through acting out extreme mental impoverishment. He is brought back to sanity by the compassion of his daughter Marina, a maternal figure who represents the recovery of the original lost object.

Deborah Meyler

Notes on the Therapeutic Space

I am helping to build a therapy room. A colleague and I are converting a forlorn and dilapidated garage into one. As skylights, we have used old windows that some workmen let us have. We found a piece of stained glass on Facebook marketplace, got hold of an old door, and then on eBay found some old cherry parquet flooring, the glue and dirt still attached. As I stacked up the old pieces of cherry wood in a pile this weekend, I realized that while I have been wondering about how to write on place, I have been helping to make a place.

To me, it is an important project. I want it to be made with real materials, rather than the simulacra of real materials. They ought to be somehow benevolent, and old, and also local, close at hand. Wood and bricks and glass that have been lying about in fenland sheds are being repurposed in this building. Everything is already there, in the world, ready to be made new.

That thought, that everything is already there, leads me to the topographic trope of Jung's 'temenos', the sanctuary or enchanted space protected from the world. The alchemical equivalent, the well-sealed vessel, or *vas bene clausum*, which Jung said was to 'protect what is within from the intrusion and admixture of what is without, as well as to prevent it from escaping'. Crucially, according to Jung, all that is necessary for change to happen, for transformation, is already within. This is surely true in the metaphoric sense, of the client who comes to therapy, but it is interesting to think of the therapy room, the place and ground of the therapy, as an enclosed sanctuary containing patient and therapist, where transformation can take place, and from which, for that hour, the profane or mundane world is kept at bay.

The therapy room is also the place that is returned to, in a way that has more than a hint of ceremony. There is an understanding that objects inside the therapy room are to be kept more or less the same, we keep the same chairs, light the same lamps. (If chairs are moved, my clients mostly put them back into the place they like.) It is seen as important by both parties to try to keep to the same time, on the same day, in a weekly cycle. The overt reason for this is the provision of a safe, containing space, but isn't it also a ritualistic space, where we can enact some version of the sacred, apart from the rest of the world and apart, in our cyclical return, from linear time?

I'm reminded of a poem by Thom Gunn, 'Baby Song', written from the perspective of the baby. Outside the safety of the room/womb that the baby experiences, there is the stormy world.

'Baby Song'

From the private ease of Mother's womb
I fall into the lighted room.

Why don't they simply put me back
Where it is warm and wet and black?

But one thing follows on another.
Things were different inside Mother.

Padded and jolly I would ride
The perfect comfort of her inside.

They tuck me in a rustling bed
--I lie there, raging, small, and red.

I may sleep soon, I may forget,
But I won't forget that I regret.

A rain of blood poured round her womb,
But all time roars outside this room.

(Thom Gunn)

Being in a different space from the habitual one for the therapy can be disconcerting for the client, and also fruitful. My room at Madingley Road wasn't available one day, so I showed my client to a different room; he said that he didn't mind at all. The room was small and cosy, crowded with things, with personality. There were several clocks, many pictures on the walls, beautiful fabrics on the chairs, colourful cushions. My client began to talk, and then petered out. 'It's very difficult to talk of myself when this room is so *present*', he said. I asked him to try anyway, and he began once more, and then looked beyond my shoulder at the wall and stopped short. Then he started laughing. 'Those are etchings of monkeys. Why are there monkeys in here?' He began a third time, and then stopped again. He said, 'I can't think straight! Do you know about the concept of non-places? It's an idea by a French philosopher called Augé. He says that something like the A14 is a non-place, or an airport – that's a classic non-place. It's meant to not have any meaning, it's meant to be something you just pass through. This room is saturated with meaning; it is the complete opposite of a non-place. Our usual room – that's just right.' This week I had to move our time, and he asked, with pretend misgiving, 'Will we be in the monkey room?'

There is something important about the deliberation with which a therapeutic space is made. The care that goes into it echoes, one hopes, the care that goes into the therapy itself. And if a space is a rented or borrowed one, almost a 'non-place', with the oddly alienating design of the supposedly neutral, it can still be changed into a place where something might happen that is going to matter. It is easy to do it with objects, colours, lighting. If nothing else, the room is likely to have two chairs that can be angled towards each other and distanced from each other in a particular way that encourages meeting, and discourages confrontation. But –

and is this a left-field thought? – if it can't be done with those, it can perhaps be done with one's mind and body.

There is a Jungian therapist, Birgit Heuer, who writes on the experience of the numinous in the consulting room. She talks of the importance of making her therapy room into a sacred space, praying in it and preparing it for the day each morning, asking for healing energy to fill it at the end of the working day. It is a holistic approach; she writes that the therapeutic boundaries – of the contract, the patient's times, confidentiality, the analyst's continuous ethical attitude, and the physical space – enable and contain the holiness of the work.

In reading her, I am torn between admiration and something like embarrassment. Do I agree with her, or is she a bit crazy, or both? I agree with her in believing that the therapeutic encounter is a sacred one between two people. She writes too that she does not divulge these beliefs or preparations to her patients: 'There is a tight boundary around the spiritual aspects of my approach, so that I never actively bring the spiritual dimension into the content of the work but am, of course, receptive to my patients' doing so.'

This belief, of course, is bound to privilege the relationship in therapy, but as I continued to read Heuer's chapter, I also began to feel constrained by the saintliness. Could you talk, in that room, where the numinous is apparently invoked daily, of your deepest, darkest desires? Of your resentments, or the things you had done which were small and petty, of how you weren't quite sorry about doing them, and you didn't know why?

I think the balance to be found is finer than that. The psychotherapy room isn't supposed to be a secular version of the confessional. It's a place where a client should be accorded the proper space to be real, and human, as well as safe, as

well as in a rose garden of mystical containment. Otherwise, there a real danger of the client feeling, even if it is not disclosed, a distaste at being engulfed in someone else's piety.

Holding the therapy sacred perhaps does not allow much room for the ordinary recounting of time, or, indeed, of spending much time with the profane, but it does move us away from the too-prevalent idea of a client being mentally ill. To quote Birgit Heuer again, 'A conceptual preoccupation with pathology and its manifestations gently fades as the Holy, or a clinical paradigm of grace, emerges in the reality of our consulting rooms.' But something that is much the same in purpose if not in theology might do just as well in bringing the therapy further away from the concept of the mentally ill. If we replace the religious phrasing of 'paradigm of grace' with Thomas Ogden's equally weighty phrase, 'shared reverie', then I think we get closer to the equal relationship, the two people in a room exploring together. With both Heuer and Ogden, we move away from the concept of lack or illness in the client. And with Ogden, we are allowed to have easier access to the ordinary subjects of conversation, to talk about films and books 'and the taste of chocolate', which in this context, 'allows a patient and analyst who have been unable to dream together to begin to be able to do so'.

The issue of in-person or online is sometimes brought up as very important, but I think that the kernel of the therapy, whatever it is, can inhere in the patient's room as well as that of the therapist. It isn't always the case: there were people in lockdown who were climbing into broom cupboards to get some privacy for therapy, or finding an empty tea-room or unoccupied office at work. When the time and place of an online meeting are chosen freely by the patient, however, then often that sense of safety similarly obtains. It is sometimes even safer, as the client could snap the laptop shut and be in the sanctuary of their own home,

without going through any painful leave-taking, It is thus the case that quite a lot of revelatory work went on between clients and therapists in lockdown, in cases where they were online in a safe space, and this has continued for some people since then. In speaking of lock-down and of the ceremonials we invent for therapy, I think of a patient who went out from home each week to speak to me on his phone from a particular tree in a London park, which worked without fail, except once, when he texted me saying, 'I can't do it; there are some people at my tree!'. We make ritual where we can.

In all this, I wonder what my position is. I say it is important to have a thoughtfully made therapy room, and then I exasperatingly say that if you don't have that, it might not matter. I say it's a good idea to create a space where thought and flights of fancy can happen, and that we should maybe take care not to let it be so 'neutral' that it is a non-place (the concept I've just learned from my client). Then we must guard against the space being so full of personality that the client can't dream their own world in it. It seems from this essay almost impossible to get it right, and yet, most therapeutic spaces serve very well. So what is the answer to the question of what the therapeutic space ought to be like?

For many years, I've been dipping into *The Poetics of Space* by Gaston Bachelard. In it he focuses on what he calls 'felicitous space', and writes about our first homes, the homes where we are born, in great arabesques of nostalgic prose. For him, 'When we dream of the house we were born in, in the utmost depths of reverie, we participate in this original warmth, in this well-tempered matter of the material paradise'. The book becomes almost a poem of winter, of sheltering with fires and glowing lamps whilst snow piles up and storms rage. It gives us a dream version of our first home, so that whilst we are inside the book, we too were born in houses with attics and cellars and

gleaming banisters, we too can return to that warm and safe beginning. That reality is often very different is not a part of his book; it is a book about the ability to dream. I think that we must have a dreamed safe space in which the client and therapist can dream together, and if the dream is brought closer with lamps and rugs, so much the better. If the accoutrements to the dreamed-of home are absent, we can still make that place into a therapeutic space by the entwined intention of client and therapist.

Elizabeth Moore and Robert Metcalfe

Therapy Room Project: Tim Kobin

'At Home where I Work'

Elizabeth Moore and Robert Metcalfe began to ask the question, 'How might therapists relate to their room, and to their work?' The project intrigued a number of students and members who then opened their therapy rooms to Elizabeth and Robert. This is the beginning of an ongoing series where, through conversation and image, perhaps we might get a glimpse of each other through the places in which we work.

"There are worn stones that bear witness and a crushed container that I found in the middle of road."

"I was thinking about how people enter the space here and how people enter therapy as well. In a way, they are both thresholds. I didn't want to create obstacles by any means, but to get to where I work you've got to go through the front gate which is left open, then you come to the second gate and it's closed but unlocked. After that, there's a door immediately to your right which is unlocked but closed. This door has glass in it to provide some sort of glimpse into my room, into where we will work together. It sounds complicated I know and possibly frightening but I wanted to acknowledge that coming to therapy is an act of bravery. Continuing to return to therapy is an act of perseverance. It reminds me of this with each entry and departure. Once inside, there is a little space to take off your coat and leave a bag. It is a small and intimate space and I wanted it to provide a moment to pause before entering the room in which we work together. A moment of breath. I wanted there to be a sense of a metaphor, of coming through something and then going into something. Whether it's a therapeutic space or whether it's an unconscious space, whether it's something else – like a journey perhaps? I didn't want people just walking in off the street struggling to find a focus of thought. Though of course, that happens in here as well. People enter in all manners regardless of planning."

"I wanted there to be an oblique entrance. Revealing something perhaps rather than seeing everything at once. Oblique thought and oblique approach to entry. And I think that's also how I think about my work too, that we might approach it together from so many angles of thought. Also I suppose, to take time to be allowed to take time."

It's being able to find ways to look at things obliquely, to find ways into something and circle around and then come back to see them as they are, perhaps? So the entry into the space where I work was very significant to me. All of that was quite conscious but so too was the thought that I wanted to provide a brief moment of privacy for those people working with me. Therapy is such an intimate activity that just a moment of respite at the beginning and at the end before leaving seemed important."

"Even with the space and time that I have tried to build into where I work, there is still the discomfort of beginning the session or the settling into the session. Each person has their own ritual to assist them finding their right moment, their own moment to begin. I suppose I wanted the room to help with this process as much as it can. I observe that each person I work with enters the space uniquely and occupies the space uniquely too. I like very much how every aspect can become the substance of the session, even if unspoken. Perhaps it seems orchestrated but it is consciously an effort to push back the everyday that might obscure for us something that could be useful. I suppose that I return to the idea of the oblique and that to see something we need to look at it slowly and carefully and observe or think about the looking; the process of thinking together."

"It's a series of choices around how we engage in communication and how the therapeutic relationships function and develop."

On therapeutic style and approach – "I don't think there's a right way. I don't think there is one way at all. We're in it together."

"Pat Tate once said, 'If you ask the question, you just get an answer'. I think that that's very useful. Someone I'm working with may not necessarily have immediate access to how they feel or even to their memory. It's not like I'm giving them access but I think of the nuances of processes of engagement, of listening, help us to find that access. It's never automatic and we might circle around it or even stumble up on it."

"I am fascinated by translation; thought into voice or thought into action and where the little slippages and mistakes can be considered and heard. I understand that perhaps the therapeutic hour may be the only time in the week where it might happen, where someone may take time to hear themselves. That moves into the day, the week. "It's very often a kind of sharing of unconscious connection and communication. So sometimes I get the sense that our imagination opens up space between us to allow, perhaps a reframing? Being together sometimes in silence in a sort of metaphoric, strange world where you might play and explore. Watching or returning to an idea, a thought, a resonance perhaps? It's serious play, and it's the kind of poetic understanding of language too. I really feel it's a very three dimensional, very spatial relationship. Inhabiting imagination, the unconscious and occupied in care. It's formative."

"I think about how in ordinary daily communication we all wait to interrupt each other. We can observe that in any social interaction. When we listen we're with someone, we're next to them and we generate something between us. For me, it's a very spatial relationship, founded in care. There's nowhere else really that that happens, where people can really hear themselves, and it's an amazing gift to witness the small and intimate acts of becoming."

"It's almost like-echo sensing how bats might understand where they are in their caves, 'where are you?' and 'who are you?' We're in the dark together, and we're just listening and trying to observe and explore something and find something together. I have thought about mistakes and how they sit inside of the work. I don't mind making a mistake because it assists us in the negative to locate something that might be useful. I've experienced these sometimes as ways of opening up imaginative space in the work and a claiming of something."

"Returning to the everyday qualities of the room, the colours and textures, I wanted something warm and comforting but not demanding. There were conscious decisions made about materials, decisions about how the room might be experienced. For example, I didn't want to sit in front of the canon of books, I didn't want to say 'here is knowledge'. I wanted the room to have a sense of something else; of enough space for the person I work with to be able to expand their sense of self and for them to have ownership perhaps, although that isn't always possible, of course"

"There are two art pieces in here, I didn't want anything representational. So there is a piece that's a pinhole camera image a photography student made. I just loved it. It's quite mysterious, it looks a bit like a Rorschach test but it's not. It's an image of transformation and movement within a frame. I liked this idea very much and particularly, the shadow qualities which define the object."

"It can feel a tiny bit subterranean in here and so light is important. Occasionally, it can feel as though I am underwater or certainly adrift. There are several people who bring a quality of being underwater through dreams and memory too. Not necessarily drowning, sometimes boundarylessness or something unknown. So perhaps the qualities of where I work are in constant play in my imagination and with the work?"

"I have selected objects in here that are about containment, things for me to remind myself of what happens in therapy. There are jars, seeds in pods, found stones that look like eggs lying in a nest. There are worn stones that bear witness and a crushed container that I found in the middle of road. One person asked about that once, 'what is that?' pointing at that gold thing over there. I silently passed it to them and then on examination, they said quietly 'oh, it's a crushed deodorant can.' I found this discovery very moving and I still wonder if it was about coming to the reality of something or about the wonder of imagination."

"When we don't have language, we try to find it. We struggle for it and try to grasp it, we try to articulate something that we don't have access to, or that we can't have access to yet, perhaps we may never have access. When we forget it's because it's important, we forget the most important ideas, they're gone." I try to think of here, where I work, as a container for this struggle, holding the space between us. All this takes time and happens very quietly I think."