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Psychological Intervention in Societal Conflict: The Work of the International Dialogue Initiative

M. Gerard Fromm, Ph.D.

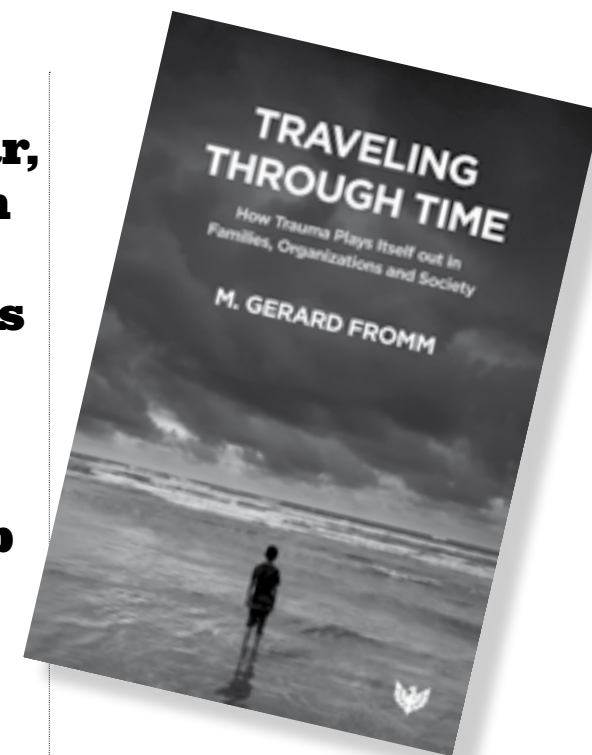
Several years ago, three International Dialogue Initiative colleagues – two from Israel and one from Palestine – met informally with a senior diplomat working with the Israel-Palestine negotiating team. At some point in the conversation, one colleague asked the official what happened when people on either side talked about their fears. This experienced diplomat seemed surprised. 'We don't speak of fear,' he said, later adding that he could see the potential usefulness of trying to address fear during negotiations, but that the team did not know how to do this. Not long after this, an experienced negotiator working in the Donbas contacted us to say that something was missing from his training, and he thought it was 'clinical'. He asked if we

could help him with that.

Powerful emotions, like fear, rage, humiliation and grief, and powerful defenses against these emotions, are at the heart of intractable group conflict (Volkan, Scholz and Fromm, 2023). These emotions derive from past societal trauma and become interwoven into large group identity. 'You did this to us' becomes hardened conviction, stripped of historical context and complexity. Large group anxiety amplifies these emotions and polarizes members into a good 'we' and a bad 'they'. Thinking is replaced by fantasies, grievances crowd out grief, leaders mobilize hatred for their own purposes, and people long to change what Volkan calls 'chosen trauma' into 'chosen glory'.

“Powerful emotions, like fear, rage, humiliation and grief, and powerful defenses against these emotions, are at the heart of intractable group conflict”

And so, a cycle of violence continues, illustrating Einstein's definition of insanity: doing the same thing and expecting a different outcome. This may



be why our mediator colleague thought something clinical was missing from his training. Embattled groups could indeed be said to be ‘ill’ with intense feelings and irrational reactions, even though the individual participants, of course, are not. Perhaps it is this ‘illness’ that needs clinical understanding, without which negotiations and other interventions can go terribly awry or simply lead to exhaustion and futility. Something before negotiations may be needed, something that prepares the ground and maximizes the chances for more realistic discussion of entrenched differences.

In his early clinical work, Freud made a critical discovery, which involved a complete reversal in his thinking. At first, he felt stymied by the fact that his patients super-imposed their past relationship histories onto him as their current doctor. Their more or less unconscious images of, and feelings toward, a man in authority mixed up current reality with the past reality of child and parent, and created problems. Hence Freud’s idea that the ‘transfer’ from past to present was a resistance to treatment. Then, the reversal and creative leap. He realized that this wall was actually a window: that it was this relationship dynamic, learned powerfully in childhood, that needed analysis, and that the patient’s transference was bringing this to life in the present. In a sense, it was now

right there in the room, to be understood together.

This kind of ‘time collapse’ can be an enormous problem in real life. Large groups under the sway of collective anxiety, confused leaders and the conviction that past trauma is happening again can be mobilized toward great destructiveness. But perhaps time collapse is also one way forward, because it offers the possibility of here-and-now *experiential learning*, which, like Freud’s transference work, is deeper, more alive, and more persuasive than ordinary conceptual learning. People in conflict inevitably and largely unconsciously bring their group’s past pain with them – a large group ‘transference’ so to speak. And no matter how intense the feelings might be, the fact that they come to a dialogue means they have some degree of hope that their troubles – and the traumatic histories behind them – will be acknowledged, contained, and understood. Managing this microcosm of both conflict and potential learning requires good-enough facilitation – one might say clinical handling – by neutral third parties.

Broadly speaking, this is what the IDI tries to do. In one way or another, it tries to restore a reflective space that has collapsed under the weight of unbearable pain. The idea of ‘reflective space’ may seem like a luxury in the face of such intensity, but it is as essential as breathing, as urgent as the

question: What is happening to me now? Trauma requires people to cut themselves off from pain, and, in doing so, from their capacity to feel and think. Healing from trauma means restoring these capacities (Fromm, 2022). Otherwise, functioning in the world is crippled, and trauma is transmitted to the next generation, often through unconscious enactments. This enacted fallout of trauma is not only a destructive form of catharsis; it is also a communication – sometimes even a task assignment – to the next generation. ‘Something horrible happened to my family, and it’s my job to do something about it,’ says the troubled young man in the midst of identity crisis. This is a common dynamic in the radicalization process.

In recent years, trauma studies have added a third experience as a potential cause of trauma. Besides sudden threat to life and sudden overwhelming loss, trauma may also be caused by moral injury, which has to do with a person’s witnessing or participating in actions – in high-stakes situations like combat – that violate one’s deepest sense of what’s right. Because those in authority tend to be implicated in these actions, a profound sense of betrayal by leadership is also part of moral injury. And so, to the list of traumatic feelings to be coped with is now added overwhelming, self-esteem devastating guilt and shame, the feeling of having done something

unforgivable. One common societal defense against these feelings is the ‘You made me do it’ mindset – projecting unbearable guilt into the Other and entrenching a victim identity.

In 2016, Barack Obama became the first sitting US President to visit the Hiroshima Peace Memorial. ‘Why do we come to this place?’ he asked. ‘To force ourselves to imagine the moment when the bomb fell... to feel the dread of children... (to) listen to a silent cry... Their souls speak to us’ (In: Fromm, 2022). This is the work of mourning – and of recovery from moral injury – that leaders can help societies achieve. Crucially, it includes the leader’s being willing to bear guilt and shame, associated with his own society’s aggression: Obama’s country dropped that bomb, no matter how justified or understandable that aggression might have been. This is what might be called ‘depressive position’ leadership, which, one could argue, is essential to societal maturation.

As the psychoanalyst and Holocaust survivor Dori Laub put it, and as Obama’s comments illustrate, recovery from trauma requires ‘testimony’ – the story of what happened – and an empathic ‘witness’, who can be there emotionally for that testimony. The restoration of reflective space – the space in which the story can be told, felt, and understood – happens simultaneously

between the traumatized person and the witness and *within* the traumatized person, who heretofore could not bear to tell themselves, and fully feel, their own story. And one thing that happens in this process is that parts of the story that can't be told in words make their entrance in other ways: through dreams, drawings, everyday objects linked to the trauma, or enactments: for example, the traumatized person's reacting as though the listener is the persecutor. These moments of 'immediacy', as the WWI psychiatrist Thomas Salmon describes them, are important to keep in mind in work with traumatized refugees.

Because societal trauma powerfully affects the groups that make up the society, overcoming it tends to involve group work. Some IDI work can be described as top-down, involving societal leadership, and some as bottom-up, involving citizens at the grass-roots level. Robi Friedman (In: Volkan et al, 2023) works with acute conflicts at the grass-roots level of disturbed communities. He 'sandwiches', to use his word, an extended discussion in a Large Group – which exposes the societal dynamics of projection and exclusion and challenges members to find their authentic voices – between two brief Small Group sessions, which feel more like an inclusive family, even for members in conflict. Related to this methodology are the *Voices*

after Auschwitz conferences, co-led by Regine Scholz, and the *Reflective Citizen* workshops co-led in Poland by Anna Zajenkowska, both IDI members.

Another methodology comes from the deeply 'Group Relations' informed work of Edward Shapiro, whose 2020 book, *Finding a Place to Stand: Developing Self-Reflective Institutions, Leaders and Citizens*, argues compellingly for the critical role institutions play in containing or exacerbating the anxieties of its members. Group Relations conferences are powerful learning opportunities about organizational dynamics, but they also capture what members have taken in of national anxiety, and show, in the microcosm of the conference, how large group identity plays out among members and staff. I remember vividly the demand for territory and security unconsciously enacted in a conference in Israel. But this demand – and this 'time collapse' – was not about the 'enemy Other' in any immediate sense. Rather it was about conflicting elements within Israeli identity. Groups who saw themselves as 'chosen' simply could not stay in the same room with groups who identified as 'vulnerable'. The opportunity within the conference was to bring this to light in a way that, at least potentially, could be held, lived through, and learned from.

To some degree in the top-down category

is Dr Volkan's groundbreaking 'Tree Model' of conflict intervention (In: Volkan et al, 2023). To summarise briefly, Dr Volkan and his interdisciplinary team work with enemy groups in a three-phase intervention: an *assessment* phase of learning about the trouble and identifying potential participants with some influence; an extended *dialogue* phase in which increasingly personal talking happens and group phenomena are worked with; and an *institutionalizing* phase in which the group's progress is applied to real-world change. Dr Volkan's work with Estonians and Russians, after the fall of the USSR, is beautifully described in the film *The Dragon's Egg*, and his writing, over decades, has elaborated core concepts like large-group identity, chosen trauma and societal regression.

Top-down intervention can also be directed toward political leadership. Lord John Alderdice, a psychiatrist and politician in Northern Ireland, was involved for many years in trying to find peaceful solutions to that country's Troubles. After the Good Friday agreement, he was elected the first Speaker of the new Assembly, and has consulted since then to leaders internationally, helping them consider whether and how the lessons of Northern Ireland might apply to their situations. His psychological perspective in these conversations includes an understanding

of the core traumatic experience of humiliation and the importance of a group's sacred values (In: Volkan et al, 2023).

In the world of organizational consulting, it is common practice for leaders of major companies to use leadership coaching to help them understand the dynamics of their systems and its effects on their workers and themselves. Lord Alderdice's work brings a related kind of psychological consultation to leaders in government, who feel, without fully realizing it, the emotional history of their people and the latent forces related to societal trauma. Indeed, dynamically-informed consultation for political leaders may be one extremely valuable area moving forward, because it would not only help leaders see the subtle trauma-related pressures operating within their societal systems, it would also help them see links between how they carry out their current roles and earlier role dynamics within their stressed families.

A victims' advocacy leader once told me about a tattoo on the shoulder of a young woman, whose father had been shot during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. It read: 'Bullets don't just travel through skin and bone. They travel through time' (Fromm, 2022). This captures the emotional legacy of societal trauma, the way that subsequent generations must deal with what happened to people they

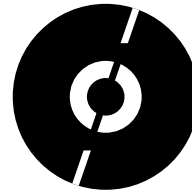
loved and are deeply connected to. This is the focus the IDI brings to its training workshops, which we did indeed begin in response to our mediator colleague's request. Each workshop includes the three basic elements of psychoanalytic training: lectures, case study and self-reflection groups, the latter extremely important for members' visceral understanding of large group identity in their own lives and in the lives of those they work with. A World War II general once commented that 'men learn from history that men learn nothing from history', a sentiment that can also be found in the trauma literature. The IDI's work challenges this idea by speaking and developing the learning that only trauma can teach.

Jerry Fromm is former president of the International Dialogue Initiative and of ISPSO. He directed the Erikson Institute at Austen Riggs for many years and is a Fellow of the American Board of Psychoanalysis.

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We welcome your ideas for articles, reviews and letters to the Editor. In particular we are looking for reviews of cultural events, books and films with psychoanalytic interest. If you would like to propose a topic for a longer article (up to 2,000 words), please contact Helen Morgan at helen.morgan@bpc.org.uk.

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Editorial

Bullets Travelling Through Time

Helen Morgan

This phrase, ‘bullets travel through time’, which Gerard Fromm refers to at the end of his article on psychological intervention in societal conflict is a striking summary of how century-old traumas persist and are re-enacted as we witness in the appalling events occurring in the world today. Knowing something about the trans-generational transmission of trauma as we do, it is especially hard to watch as yet another bullet or bomb or missile is set on its deadly trajectory far into the future causing generations of grief and, when the grieving fails, grievance. How these dynamics can express themselves within the group is explored by Carla Penna in her piece on crowd psychology, and Barry Richards discusses the particularity of paranoia in his article on conspiracism.

“Knowing something about the trans-generational transmission of trauma as we do, it is especially hard to watch as yet another bullet or bomb or missile is set on its deadly trajectory far into the future”

I suppose (I hope) that the counterpart of this phrase must also be true: that action rooted in kindness and peace has an equal longevity. From those working on the front line bringing medical skills or aid and comfort, to any contribution we might make back at home in the attempt to bring peace – perhaps even our struggles to think and talk about what is happening without demonising – we can only hope they too travel through time.

In our Autumn edition we included Glen Gossling’s interview with Isca Wittenberg whose remarkable capacity to turn her own tragedies into action on the behalf of others demonstrated how the long-term impact of bullets might be mitigated somewhat through empathy and concern. Hers was a remarkable life, so it is with sadness that we note her death on December 23rd, 2023 aged 100.

Some of this edition is focussed on celebrating achievements more internal to the BPC, including the awards presented at the recent BPC gathering to celebrate its 30th anniversary. A summary of the speech by Joscelyn Richards, the first chair of the (then) BCP, is included, as well as an interview with Jan McGregor-Hepburn as she steps down from her role of Registrar after many years. Her contribution to supporting and developing the profession is considerable and worthy of celebration. We also have some articles from those who received awards and others will be included in the summer edition of *New Associations*.

A major feature of our professional landscape for many years was WPF Therapy and the announcement of its closure sent shock waves through us all.

To mark this sad event, we have a rather fine article curated by Emmanuelle Smith. The loss and sadness for those many people who have been involved with the organisation over the years comes through clearly in the piece. It feels like a major part of the profession's jigsaw is now missing. We also note that major changes are going on at the Tavistock and Portman Trust – another weighty player in the field – and we intend to include something on developments there in either the summer or autumn edition. If you would be interested in discussing the possibility of contributing something on the subject, please do let me know at helen.morgan@bpc.org.uk.

“It feels like a major part of the profession’s jigsaw is now missing”

Regarding Editorial Board matters, we are very sorry that Nini Kerr has had to step down from the Board due to pressure of work following taking on a new project at her university. Nini's enthusiasm and energy as well as her considerable skills as an editor have

been greatly appreciated and we will miss her thoughtful contributions to the work of the Board. Following our advert for new members I am delighted to note that we have made two appointments: Lydia Prior and Usman Zafar. Lydia is a psychodynamic psychotherapist in private practice and an honorary therapist in the Fitzjohn's Team at the Tavistock. She has previously been a playwright, screenwriter and journalist, and her interests include feminism, arts and culture. Usman Zafar is a trainee in intercultural psychodynamic psychotherapy. He is an Honorary Psychotherapist at Camden Psychotherapy Unit and he works in a Mental Health crisis service in West London. He has a Masters in Psychosocial Studies from India and has previously worked in post-violence rehabilitation in Muslim neighbourhoods in Delhi. His interests include writing and thinking psychoanalytically about ethnic and racial differences, the political targeting of minorities and expressions of hatred and aggression. We welcome them both to the team.

Do you need a proofreader specialising in psychoanalytic writing?

As proofreader for *New Associations* and freelance editor in the field of psychoanalysis, I have significant experience in editing everything from magazine articles to books (*Dilys Daws*, *Quietly Subversive*) and papers for journals (*Journal of Child Psychotherapy/Infant Observation*). I can help with:

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Society

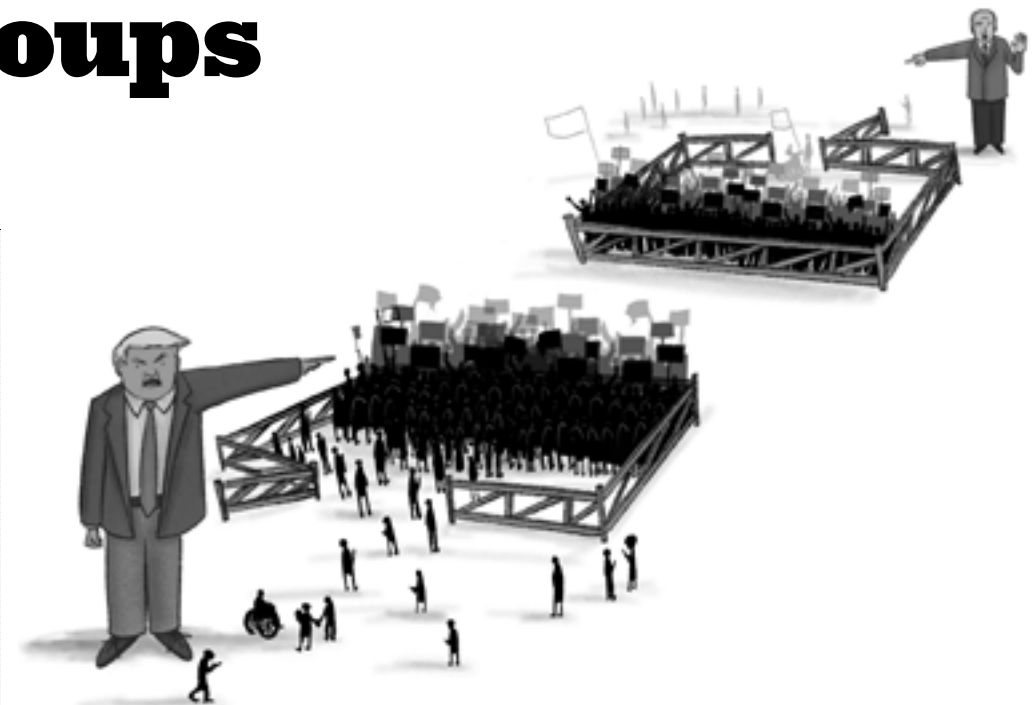
Contemporary Crowds and Social Identity Groups

Carla Penna

The idea of individual is intrinsic to the development of liberal democratic thought in modernity. However, the transformations the modern world went through led to a new concern: ‘the question of number’ (Reynié, 1988). Before the French Revolution, the ‘question of number’ was only an administrative problem related to the division of population masses, hygiene, or simply statistical evaluation. After the revolutionary upheaval, the ‘question of number’ entered the political scene once and for all; since then, politics has not been possible without taking the role of crowds into account. From then on, ‘numbers’ – that is, persons – were transformed into political subjects.

At the end of the nineteenth century, when transformations both socioeconomic (such as the development of the cities and the Industrial Revolution) and political

(such as anarchism and socialism) were taking place, the turbulent, unpredictable, violent behaviour of crowds drew the attention of French and Italian scholars interested in deciphering their psychology. The characterisation of crowds as irrational, savage, criminal, and pathological prevailed in the conservative thinking of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, the fear associated with the crowds was replaced by the need to find ways to govern them. What was feared in the nineteenth century, then, began to be manipulated, controlled, and disciplined by unscrupulous leaders in the twentieth. Freud’s *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921) was produced in this context, transforming the views that used to give importance to the hypnotic-suggestive features of crowds and replacing them with unconscious processes, identifications, libidinal ties, and ideal agencies.



Therefore, from a conservative perspective in the nineteenth century to an instrument of ideological manipulation in the twentieth century, the Freudian mass psychology model led to reflections on totalitarianism and forms of oppression. Research on crowd and mass psychology, more than reproducing the *Zeitgeist* of a historical period, reflects, represents and

embodies socially unconscious processes of persons and groups living at a certain time, enabling the production of new hypotheses about collective formations. One might wonder, therefore, what has been happening with crowds and masses in the twenty-first century.

This century brings uncertainty, renewing perspectives and fears about the ‘question

of number', which seems to be reverting persons – as political subjects – to numbers, as described in Mbembe's (2019) necropolitics. In line with this shift, contemporaneity is creating new forms of social existence that disregard human rights. Entire populations are subjected to inhuman living conditions in which death prevails over the right to live and exist. Mbembe's necropolitics reveals the creation of 'death worlds' and the subjugation of life to the power of death. Moreover, today, we observe the return of totalitarian thinking and the recrudescence of authoritarian leadership, which gives us the impression that we are again going through the same hardships experienced during the 1920s and the 1930s. These sufferings are also connected to the deconstruction of modern certainties and narratives and the exhaustion of the individualistic paradigm.

In parallel, the increase of extreme forms of psychosocial suffering, such as ethnic conflicts, racism, wars, and forced emigration have become a source of global concern, making us uncertain about so-called 'progress' in this century. These problems are triggering politics of resentment among marginalised groups and contributing to the proliferation of 'social category thinking and feeling' (Hopper, 2019) and discourses of identity. A social category is a collection of people who have at least one characteristic in common, easily becoming a receptacle of projections. Social

categories are the basis for various forms of social identity and, as such, are available for subgrouping and contragrouping disputes. The phenomenology of contemporary struggles for recognition has led to the proliferation of groups based on social identities. Through adhesive identifications, these collective formations have given current subjects – once helpless – protection, recognition, personal and social identities, and new ego ideals. These changes are leading people to engage in groups that favour identification and belongingness with ideals, ideologies and/or charismatic leaders. In this vein, it is necessary to investigate the nature of identification processes, as well as the role of regression, illusions, ideal instances, alienation, and ideology in social identity groups.

Identity can be defined psychologically and sociologically, bridging the intrapsychic and intersubjective realms. The identity of the post-modern subject is decentred, fragmented, fluid – acquiring, as crowds, a protean quality, sometimes referring simply to social category or roles. Today, identity has gained importance in connection to demands for recognition from excluded persons and/or groups and has become the basis of contemporary politics, as well as the driving force behind nationalism. Recognition forges identity, built through the social categories available in the social world. However, experiences

of nonrecognition or misrecognition of identities can inflict harm, and be a form of oppression to persons or groups. Therefore, recognition is vital to the development of human beings and the continuous creation of personal and social identity.

When discussing forms of planetary living in the early twenty-first century, Mbembe (2019) highlights the speed of the computational regime which extracts information and details about the individuals' intimate lives, aiming to predict their behaviour. The collection of personal data – 'datafication' – inserts contemporary crowds into a kind of invisible panopticon that silently controls information, opinions, emotions and intentions. In this way, the computational regime generates new modes of domination and perception of reality, facilitating the weaponization of identities and polarization between groups.

Additionally, in view of the technological revolution, people are too close to each other and highly exposed to others: 'This close proximity and exposure is experienced less and less as opportunity and possibility and more and more as heightened risk' (Mbembe, 2019, p. 8). Thus, for contemporary and mediated crowds, organised and/or polarised through social identity groups, 'the dialectics of entanglement and separation' (Mbembe,

2019) increases the concern with the *imagined similar other* and the fear of the *imagined different other*. These uncertainties and contradictions invade and confound the contemporary crowds entrapped by the ideologies, discourses and power relations typical of our time. However, at the core of contemporary crowds demonstrations in social movements and social identity claims, we identify an invaluable space for sharing the ideals and hopes that since ancient times have driven crowds' yearnings for a better life in society.

Carla Penna, PhD, is a psychoanalyst and group analyst in Brazil. In 2023, she published From Crowd Psychology to the Dynamics of Large Groups: Historical, Theoretical and Practical Considerations (Routledge).

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Society

Unconscious Drivers of Conspiracy

Barry Richards

In many countries around the world there are disturbing levels of support for conspiracy theories. That may not matter so much when political institutions and other authorities are able to provide reality-oriented governance, and their legitimacy is ultimately accepted by a large majority. When, however, there are already multiple crises of authority in a society, conspiracy theories may leave their parallel universe and crash noisily into our terrestrial life, intensifying social divisions and undermining democratic processes.

This has already happened in the USA, with the capture of the Republican Party by Trump and his use of ‘the steal’ conspiracist narrative. Britain is arguably less affected as yet, although here, as in many other countries during the Covid pandemic, resentment at the restrictions placed on us all (a feeling exacerbated of course by the evidence available in

the real world that some of our leaders were breaking the rules and lying) fed into paranoid theories about lockdowns, vaccines and the virus, threatening to derail public health measures.

“In many countries around the world there are disturbing levels of support for conspiracy theories”

Moreover, recent surveys offer alarming pictures of the strength of conspiracist thinking in the UK. For example, King’s College reports that 30-35% of the public agree ‘definitely or probably’ with each of seven theories, such as ‘The cost of living crisis is a government plot to control the



public’ (Policy Institute, 2023). Unherd Britain finds 38% (!) agreeing that ‘The world is controlled by a secretive elite’ (Sayers, 2023).

How can this be understood? If the ‘steal’ narrative were nothing more than a blatant instrumental lie, it would be easier to explain. However, it seems to be believed with passion by millions of Americans. This suggests it is supported by a deep

unconscious ‘knowledge’ that something vital has been stolen from ‘us’.

That sense of victimhood is also found in some forms of identity politics. It is a powerful force in contemporary society. It may originate purely as unconscious phantasy, or may also have some basis in early experience, but either way it is no more than a template for experience. The substantive details, of what has been

stolen, and by whom, need to be filled in. Thus the template may be used to frame and rationalise a dispute with a neighbour, or sibling, but we might expect – and this is where conspiracy theories come in – that typically it will focus on those who are in authority over us, who should be protecting us, since they have most opportunity to steal from or betray us: our leaders, guardians, experts, and so on. They are also the representatives, in adult life, of the parental figures who with their enormous presence and power were the primal objects of hatred in our early phantasies of being deprived or attacked by others. Much conspiracy theorising is therefore focussed on the major sources of societal authority and power – political, corporate, professional, etc. ‘Being stolen from’ is one of a number of underlying narratives which drive the theorising; being the victim of covert physical attack such as poisoning is another, as in some anti-vax protests. And so also is the scenario of being oppressively controlled, as in some responses to urban planning initiatives (see the King’s College survey again). Primitive phantasies of sadistic attack, suffocating control or cruel abandonment are recurrent in conspiracist discourse.

A common element in such scenarios is the sense of being deceived. This brings some narcissistic reward for the conspiracists, who can feel they have the independence

and sharpness of mind to question and see through the deception. Yet when the theory concerns some historical or remote event, the alleged deception may seem to be of little direct consequence for most people. Did the CIA kill JFK? Was the moon landing faked? Did the Duke of Edinburgh arrange to kill Princess Diana? What real difference does it make to our lives anyway? However, when as is now often the case, the theory posits a malign force targeting us all in the present, there is much more at stake. Typically, the conspirators are powerful people amongst us, and they are betraying us, exploiting our trust in the world as it is presented to us.

“‘Being stolen from’ is one of a number of underlying narratives which drive the theorising”

This sense of betrayal is existentially very disturbing, and is perhaps the most toxic element of conspiracism. It necessarily invokes paranoid-schizoid responses. In our self-defence, traitors have to be wiped out. And there is no greater betrayal than

when those with responsibilities for our well-being, the quasi-parental authorities of government and state, turn upon us. Did the CIA organise 9/11? Were the Covid lockdowns rehearsals for martial law? Was there a child abuse ring at the heart of Westminster? Britain’s precursor to the USA’s ‘Pizzagate’ theory reminds us that the most primitive and perverse material may be projectively deployed in the conspiracists’ search for evil authorities.

“This sense of betrayal is existentially very disturbing, and is perhaps the most toxic element of conspiracism”

As well as throwing light on the emotional meanings of conspiracy theories, and so offering tactical orientations for a saner, more ‘depressive’ politics seeking to neutralise them, psychoanalysis also has a strategic recommendation for counter-conspiracist work. This stems from its dual mission of pursuing the truth while retaining compassion and respect for those parts of the self which are not completely lost in delusion and defence. While there is a role for factual rebuttal, focusing purely

on the wrongness of the theory will likely add to polarisation. While many of us might scratch our heads at the conspiracist imagination and where it goes, we need to have more dialogue with the universal feelings and phantasies of betrayal which fuel the theories.

Barry Richards is Professor Emeritus of Political Psychology at Bournemouth University, UK. His most recent books are What Holds Us Together: Popular Culture and Social Cohesion (Karnac, 2018) and The Psychology of Politics (Routledge, 2019).

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Ukraine

Ukrainians: ‘heroes’ or ‘victims’?

Larysa Kozyr

Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the Heroes! –The national Ukrainian slogan you can hear everywhere.

Ukraine’s liberation struggle with Russia has been going on for over 300 years. The struggle is for the very existence of the Ukrainian nation and everyone who died in it and everyone who managed to survive becomes a Hero.

During this war Ukrainians are rethinking their own history by asking, ‘What is interesting about us as a nation, apart from the fact that we have been persecuted by Russians for over 300 years? Who are we as Ukrainians?’ Some are turning to psychotherapy to find answers and Ukrainian analysts have been thinking a lot about the very possibility of conducting analytical practice during the state of war.

Since 2014 I have lived and worked in Kyiv. I have also stayed here all this time and I continue to work, mostly online.

All the time I ask myself questions: Is my

psyche capable of being a safe place for my clients’ difficult, negative experiences and projections? To what extent is it possible for me to maintain the ability to think analytically under constant shelling and threats to life? Is it possible to call it psychotherapy when clients contact me from their cars, bathrooms, hiding places, storerooms, when a siren was sounding or when there is no electricity and we talk by candlelight?

“To what extent is it possible for me to maintain the ability to think analytically under constant shelling and threats to life?”

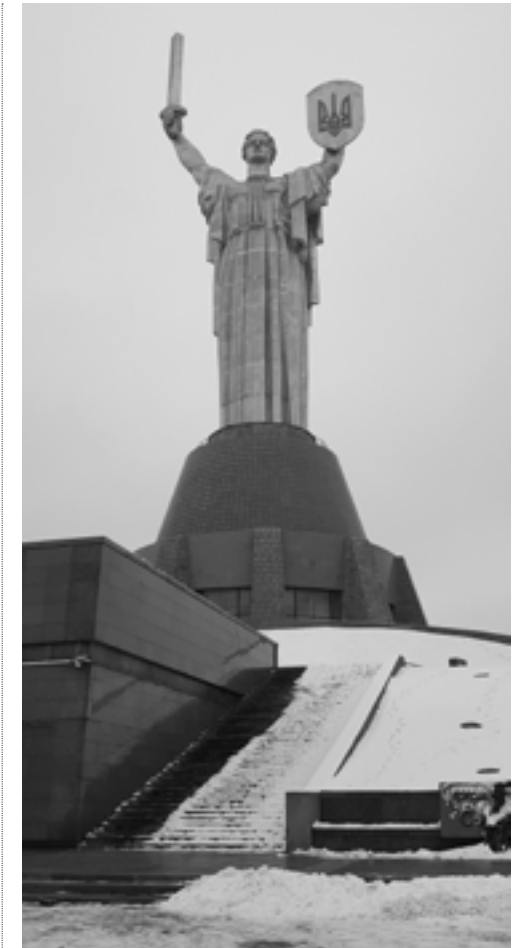
I remember a young woman, a volunteer, who was the last to arrive late at night.

There was no heating or electricity in my office. We met by candlelight. She said: ‘Here it is so cosy and calm. I can see your face a little bit and that’s all I need. Just seeing your face in the dark.’

I and many of my clients finally switched from speaking together in Russian to Ukrainian in the spring of 2022. I noticed how new associations emerged from the change of language. Many recall the stories of their grandparents who spoke Ukrainian, fairy tales, sayings and especially songs and lullabies.

Some of my clients left Ukraine and we continued therapy online. An important question for them was why I stayed in Ukraine when I could have left.

A woman who had lived abroad for several years asked me if I was mentally healthy, if I had anxiety attacks. Because if I work ‘under missiles’, I might infect her with my own anxiety or somehow harm her. She projected a hostile and aggressive part of herself onto me. She was angry and guilty because she was powerless to help her



Continues on page 12

family in Ukraine. She believed that there was no rational reason to stay in Ukraine and therefore she perceived my decision to stay as forced, as if I was a victim of circumstances.

Another client, who was on holiday abroad with her family in February 2022, remained there. She was full of guilt that she had to stay in a safe country for the sake of her family. She wanted to return alone to Ukraine to help others. My being in Ukraine seemed to help her keep in touch with the country and the suffering that Ukrainians were experiencing – ‘the whole of Ukraine was drowning in blood’. In her eyes, I was a hero, serving others, not myself. She also believed that I was staying for the sake of others, not by choice.

“Being a Victim means literally giving up, losing everything and dying. But what price do Ukrainians pay as Heroes?”

A student who was abroad saw me as a strong woman of steel, a monument to

the Motherland, who was not afraid of anything. I was unreachable and safe from enemy attack. She could neither be angry with me because I was a heroic figure in her imagination, nor could she bring feelings of vulnerability and anxiety about her life circumstances because I was ‘not tired and not afraid working and living in Kyiv’.

A hero or a victim? In both versions, I was not someone who decided my own fate, but a victim of collective duty or circumstances.

A 55-year-old man who had stayed in Ukraine turned to therapy immediately after the start of a full-scale invasion. He said: ‘I am not afraid of an external enemy. I know how to fight him. Please, teach me how to overcome the enemy that lives inside me and does not let me live.’

Some clients returned home to Kyiv and resumed their work with me. They immediately agreed to come to the office when they found out that I was here. It was ‘a secret agreement’ between two ‘Heroes’ to meet at a constant time and day despite the nightly shelling, lack of sleep, lack of electricity or inoperable public transport.

My teenage client had been taken abroad by his parents and was homesick for his hometown, where he had close friends. He did not want to establish contacts in the

country he had moved to. He asked me: ‘If I stay here, where no one needs me, who will I become? A victim or a monster? There are only two options.’ All the Heroes stayed in Ukraine.

Being a Victim means literally giving up, losing everything and dying. But what price do Ukrainians pay as Heroes? What sacrifices does everyone make on the heroic path? Do they not become Monsters themselves in relation to parts of their lives, their choices, or their personalities? What sacrifices does a Hero make to the Gods? An ordinary life, where there are simple joys, pleasures, their own meanings and the right to choose, a sense of security and comfort, simple every day actions and creativity.

I recall the phrases of my clients throughout 2022.

‘It’s impossible to have a coffee and a cake without thinking about whether it would be better to donate it to Army Force.’

‘It is impossible to go on holiday when many people in Ukraine cannot even afford a day off.’

‘It makes me angry that my children in Europe are laughing and having fun as if nothing has happened. And in Ukraine, children are dying or being left without parents.’

‘I can’t afford to dance, even though I love it, because it’s wrong while we are at war.’

‘I cry all the time and I don’t know if I will be able to laugh again.’

Gradually clients began to talk about the importance of revisiting ordinary desires or fears, despair and hope. Clients are gradually regaining the ability to fill the analytical space with images and symbols of the unconscious, fantasies, dreams, because they feel that this space is a place to create their own stories, both mundane and heroic. Stories that will be woven into the delicate lace of the history of the whole country and the world.

But both the therapist and the client have to be vigilant. Because around every corner, the shadow of the voracious gods of despair and guilt for the loss of the most precious things: their own home and their own history flashes. And the price they demand is too high. These are the sacrifices that have to be made every day to receive the gift of the right to live. To work, to love and to live – an ordinary human life. At home, on our land, in our country!

Larysa Kozyr is a psychologist, analytical psychologist and a child and adolescent psychoanalytic psychotherapist, living and working in Kyiv, Ukraine.

Society

Vagabondage

John Adlam and Christopher Scanlon

“The Illegal Migration Bill will change the law to make it unambiguously clear that, if you enter the UK illegally, you should not be able to remain here. ... You will no longer be able to frustrate removal attempts with late or spurious legal challenges or appeals, and once removed, you will have no right to re-entry, settlement or citizenship.” (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/illegal-migration-bill-factsheets/illegal-migration-bill-overarching-factsheet>)

Any State can construct a legislative framework to make it hard for unsettled populations to feel more settled; any State can declare any of its citizens to be Stateless, as the UK did in the case of Shamima Begum and in the Windrush scandal. But the State can no more make the flows of human mobility illegal than it can criminalise the migrations of flocks of birds. There is no such thing as illegal migration.

The Illegal Immigration Act offers a contemporaneous case example of a long

and violent tradition in the Global North of displacing out-groups with one set of legislation (or extra-judicial measures) and then criminalising those displaced with another set – to socially exclude those who are held to have disrespected Plato by not ‘knowing their proper place’.

“the State can no more make the flows of human mobility illegal than it can criminalise the migrations of flocks of birds”

One particular piece of name-calling runs, like rivers polluted by privatised water companies, through this psycho-social historical terrain: this is the term ‘vagabond’.

In its modern usage the word ‘vagabond’ as



in ‘a dishonest or unprincipled person’ has all but obliterated its original meaning of ‘a person who wanders from place to place without a home or job’. The dictionary (2005) tells us that ‘vagabond’ is also an adjective (‘having no settled home’) and, archaically, a verb (‘to wander about as or like a vagabond’). The etymology of the word may lie in the Latin ‘vagabundus’, meaning something like ‘tending to

wander’. Thus, the word ‘vagabond’ might signify a wanderer, or a drifter; a traveller, or a nomad.

In England the term’s malign connotations have dominated the discourse. The ‘Act for Punishment of Sturdy Vagabonds and Beggars’ was passed during the reign of Henry VIII and gradually evolved to form the bedrock of successive

Poor Laws. It stands as the legislative starting-point for three enduring trends. Firstly, the delegation or devolution of help for the destitute to parochial authorities, projecting responsibility for both cause and the remedy away from central government. Secondly, the outsourcing or privatisation of care of the destitute. The Parish authorities were not permitted to use municipal funds or to raise taxes to fund care; however, they were allowed to organise collections for the poor. (Intriguingly, individually targeted donations were also forbidden – a measure echoed in countless contemporary initiatives to deter ‘beggars’ by encouraging people to donate indirectly to charities rather than directly to their fellow human beings.) Thirdly, the criminalisation of vagabondage or vagrancy.

Here we need briefly to explore the idea of the ‘sturdy vagabond’. If, back in the day, you were accosted on the King’s highway, could not provide adequate proof of abode or occupation, and had a body in apparently good working order, you were a ‘sturdy vagabond’ and deemed an ‘enemy of the common weal’ – of decent hard-working families. The Vagrancy Act of 1824, which could get you a month’s imprisonment for having no fixed abode and a year for being a repeat offender, or ‘incorrigible rogue’, has still not been repealed.

When Ms Braverman provocatively proclaimed that rough sleeping was a ‘lifestyle choice’, or when Mr Sunak makes it his priority ‘to stop the boats’, although neither used the word ‘vagabond’, we can be in no doubt that the toxic attribution of the ‘sturdy vagabond’ is being projected onto a new generation of wanderers. If you are a modern ‘sturdy vagabond’, it’s a cold doorway, or (if the present government has its way) Hope House in Kigali, or a berth on the Bibby Stockholm for you.

In our recent book exploring our ‘Diogenes Paradigm’, we wrote that our concern was with

‘what it might be like to not have a place to belong – with the experience and the phenomenology of ‘vagabondage’ – of what it might feel like to have nowhere to go and no-one to turn to in order to feel ordinarily safe (or safe enough) or to find refuge or asylum.’ (Scanlon and Adlam 2022, p. 3)

We have rehearsed the Diogenes story before and return to it here briefly to note that the figure of Diogenes – in our conceptualisation, a brown-skinned man, an orphan of empire and colonisation; a displaced person, homeless, migrant; vagrant, a beggar of alms, a speaker of truth to power and a defacer of the political currency – would certainly be seen by the likes of Ms Braverman as a ‘sturdy

vagabond’ and, indeed, as an ‘extremist’.

“‘Vagabondage’ threatens ‘we-the-settled’ in that it makes us wonder just how ‘we’ came to identify as settled”

‘Vagabondage’ threatens ‘we-the-settled’ in that it makes us wonder just how ‘we’ came to identify as settled, how settled we really are and how safe we truly feel. We-the-settled have only ruled the Earth for 12,000 years. Before the Holocene Age (circa 10000 BC) there was essentially no such thing as human settledness: a wandering state of mind and way of being in the world formed the substrate of ‘human civilisation’, such as it has become. Diogenes unsettles us in turn when, by his ironic and parodic praxis, he thrusts back into our consciousness the disowned, ancestral migratory states of being which we have so long located in him and his raggedy sisters and brothers.

Now in the Anthropocene Age, once again human beings are on the move, in search of drier, higher, cooler, safer

ground to stand on. The figure of the migrant Diogenes illuminates and exposes the precarity of our settledness. Once again there is to be no room at the Inn, nor even a stable – as ‘we’ watch ‘them’ drown, imprison ‘them’ aboard hulk ships (in grim echo of the Middle Passage) or attempt to pack them off to Rwanda – rather than really to know something of the consequences of the violence and the global damage we have wrought.

John Adlam and Christopher Scanlon are Consultant Psychotherapists and independent psycho-socialist practitioners and researchers, living and working in South London. Together they have published a book and more than 25 co-written papers exploring the psycho-social interface between unhoused minds and inhospitable environments. They share a love of poetry and they play a mean game of chess. Their shared project is to go along with stuff as little as possible and to get out a whole lot more. They can be heckled or harangued at johnadlam44@gmail.com or c.scanlon@btinternet.com.

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Profession

WPF Therapy Closes Its Doors

Emmanuelle Smith

When WPF Therapy closed its doors for the last time on 31st July 2023, it was a great loss for many – for students on its well-respected training courses; for clients at its London Bridge and online clinics; for staff, who lost their jobs; and more widely, for our profession and all those who have been involved with WPF over the past 50-plus years.

I include myself here, since I qualified from WPF less than two years before its closure and am still contending with the reality that my psychotherapy training ‘home’, such as it was, is no longer. Although I will briefly evoke my own responses and experiences, I am conscious of the challenges surrounding ‘memorialising’ (Frosh, p.177). Who gets to do it and when? Whose story is WPF’s to tell? Who does or should care?

With all this in mind, I invited anyone who would like to talk to me about their feelings and responses to the news of WPF’s insolvency to do so. I tried to spread the word, posting a note on the noticeboard of our graduate organisation, the Foundation for Psychotherapy and Counselling (FPC), and sharing it widely among colleagues. As a result, I conducted 12 interviews, all of which were with either former WPF trainees, staff, or both. In addition, I spoke to Jonathan Isaac in his capacity as the secretary of FPC, which continues to exist and remains an institutional member of BPC, with WPF therapists who were BPC registrants continuing to be a part of the organisation. I also received six emails from people wanting to share some thoughts in writing. Finally, I had spontaneous conversations with friends and colleagues, particularly in the few weeks preceding and following the closure. Yet despite my perhaps manically defensive attempts at crowdsourcing, this



will inevitably be an incomplete, imperfect version of what happened and what WPF meant to people. I use brief unattributed quotes where either a participant has declined to be named, or where the quote is used to represent a theme that has re-occurred in several encounters.

“The analogy of a death, and in particular the death of a ‘brick mother’ came up in the interviews again and again”

The analogy of a death, and in particular the death of a ‘brick mother’ came up in the interviews again and again, and the WhatsApp messages I received around the time of the closure reminded me of collective responses faced with the news of a tragedy: ‘Have you heard?’, ‘I can’t believe it doesn’t exist anymore’, ‘It doesn’t feel real’, and so on. At the time, I was working as a psychotherapist in the NHS and knew that one of my colleagues had also trained at WPF, 10 years or so before me. Although we had never done so before, we instinctively reached out towards one another and arranged to meet in the communal kitchen for coffee and to talk.

To me it brought to mind distant cousins coming together to share memories about a lost elder. The conversations I went on to have in researching this article continued along the same lines – even when I was speaking with someone I didn’t know, someone who had trained 20 or 30 years before me, there was a sense of common language and understanding. The ‘brick mother’, or even grandmother, that we spoke of, although experienced differently, was one and the same.

Several of those I spoke to, particularly those that had been part of the organisation when it collapsed, shared an anger at the closure, and some wondered whether it could have been avoided had things been managed or run differently. Indeed, WPF Therapy, which was a registered charity, closed due to insolvency, and many people had questions about what had gone wrong. Andy Keefe, who graduated from WPF in 2006 and was a seminar leader at the time of the closure, told me he had to teach a class immediately after his students had been informed WPF would close: ‘They were shocked, upset and angry,’ he told me. ‘It became a group session – I just had to let them talk it through’.

For trainees, it was an uncertain, confusing and extremely stressful time. Within weeks, they had to set up private practices and hold the training clients they had been

seeing in the WPF Therapy clinic. Those who were not in their final year also had to decide whether to take up an offer from the British Psychotherapy Foundation to transfer onto a brand new psychodynamic training, an interesting but unknown proposition. I think back to the chaos of the pandemic and the temporary closure of the building in 2020 which happened in my second year of training, and how this must have felt so much worse than that for those directly involved.

Kate Trench, who became head of clinical training in 2022 and is also a WPF alumna, agreed that it was ‘undeniably stressful and worrying. For me, and other members of staff too. My responsibility was towards trainees and it struck me that my role was to try to contain the anxiety. The uncertainty was most challenging to contain. Complicated by the fact there was as much reason to be optimistic and hopeful about our future as to be cautious and concerned.’

Indeed, several people told me they had been excited and hopeful about the future, and about WPF’s plans to move to a new building and update the training pathway. ‘The tragedy was that economic circumstances meant we couldn’t make that next evolutionary step, that’s how I see it,’ said Kate Trench.

A few weeks before the closure was

announced, WPF Therapy launched an emergency fundraiser to try and tide the organisation over for a few months, as it tried to sell its building in London Bridge and move to new premises. Many alumni and current trainees contributed to this appeal, including one person who told me they asked for donations to the fundraiser in lieu of birthday presents. When the insolvency was confirmed, some people felt betrayed, and that they had donated in good faith and for nothing.

‘To me it felt as though somebody had bombed a worksite,’ said Anne Foster, who qualified from WPF in 2009. ‘I felt betrayed,’ she told me. ‘Many of my colleagues felt betrayed.’

Sam Downie, who was CEO, wrote to me about her gratitude to her team and the board: ‘I could not have asked for more, they were beyond impressive, just phenomenal in the absolute commitment they showed to doing the best for our beneficiaries and finding ways to make a horribly unforgiving financial process align with our charitable mission.’

Regardless of their thoughts about the intricacies of the closure itself, what most people wanted to tell me about was how important WPF was to them and to the psychotherapy world: what set it apart, its history and its ethos.

Westminster Pastoral Foundation, as it was then called, was founded in 1965 by William Kyle, a Methodist minister, to provide ‘counselling, pastoral care and training’ (Driver and Murdin, p.15). During the 1970s and ’80s, the focus shifted away from its ‘church’ origins to the provision of secular psychodynamic psychotherapy, counselling and training, while maintaining its aim to make therapy accessible and affordable. The organisation found a home in Kensington on the ‘lovely grounds’ of a convent, Maria Assumpta, where it remained until the move to London Bridge in 2008.

By all accounts, the Kensington site was perceived as idyllic. David Smart, who qualified in 2009, told me about the ‘beautiful garden and surroundings; pink and purple blossom in May; gardens tended all the way through the year; nuns; everyone smiling and nice and polite and quiet. Like an oasis off Kensington High Street. It was a “safe place to talk” – we had a commitment that people would be able to share their troubles, be treated seriously and with respect, and it did provide that help for a lot of people who probably wouldn’t otherwise have accessed psychotherapy or trained as psychotherapists.’ Andy Keefe agreed: ‘It was a lovely place to go, a space to think.’

The London Bridge building, in contrast, was reportedly mired with difficulties from

the beginning. The clinic and training were all housed in a windowless basement, which was the source of many discussions and interpretations over my five years there (who needs daylight anyway?). This is where I trained, and the only building I knew, and it was imbued with the memory of a fall from grace, compared with the ‘paradise lost’ of the Kensington site. The split between the two sites came up in several of the interviews, but it’s also something I experienced during my training, which sometimes left me wondering whether I had come along too late.

“Everyone I spoke to had something positive to say about their time at WPF”

Yet although the surroundings were far from edenic, in my experience the foundations and ethos of the organisation were still strong. And as trainees, we learnt how to create a safe, containing, psychic space for our clients, within the limitations of our physical environs.

Everyone I spoke to had at least something positive to say about their time at WPF,

and the quality and breadth of the psychodynamic qualification, which could lead to registration with BPC, UKCP (UK Council for Psychotherapy) and BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy).

ST, who graduated in 2016, told me: ‘I valued the range of theoretical voices I was introduced to through the seminars and different supervisors and the idea of finding my own voice. I valued learning to develop a reflective thinking space, to approach each patient as a new world, a new language to tune in to and these approaches have served me well in my own practice since.’

“The ‘pluralism’ of WPF’s training is something that came up again and again”

The ‘pluralism’ of WPF’s training is something that came up again and again, usually but not always as a strength. Anne Foster said: ‘I chose WPF because it was non ideological – there was some Jung, we didn’t become Freud or Klein fanatics. It was always psychodynamic, but with a range of ideas.’

David Smart said: ‘You inevitably come up

against different ideas, ways of looking at things, ways of working. It was also good and strong on making sure you’re in touch with the feeling aspect, you didn’t get away with just being intellectual.’ Indeed, participation in an experiential group was central to the training, which I personally found both extremely challenging and important to my development as a therapist.

Another thing that set WPF apart was its clinic, which provided affordable open-ended and fixed-term individual therapy, along with group therapy, delivered by closely supervised trainees and qualified therapists. This made it an attractive place to train, because it was an actual busy ‘workplace’, guaranteeing enough clients to fulfil the clinical hours required for qualification, along with in-house group supervision with a different supervisor each year. The high quality of the supervision is something that was mentioned to me several times, and that I also experienced first-hand.

But the psychodynamic training and clinic are only part of WPF’s story. Several interviewees were keen to tell me about WPF’s impact and lasting legacy, alongside their personal experiences. Chris Driver, who trained at WPF in 1978, worked there for 25 years, and along with Lesley Murdin wrote a detailed history of the institution (referenced below), told me: ‘WPF was

unique. It initiated so many new things over the decades, it was one of the first to run a supervision training, one of the first to offer psychodynamic, psychoanalytic and groups trainings that were also a university qualification, and initiated many clinical projects, for example for those with serious physical illness, and for older people....'

Indeed, as well as the psychodynamic training, over the years there were other courses including a psychoanalytic training, a group analytic training, various diplomas, and courses in different therapies such as CBT and DIT, along with a popular Saturday CPD programme. There were also a number of other organisations across the country that grew out of the WPF model, some of which are still in existence.

When I spoke to Jonathan Isaac of the FPC, he was keen to emphasise that it is only 'WPF Therapy Limited', the charity, that has closed, and not 'WPF'. And, although not necessarily in these words, this is something that was echoed by others, almost as though WPF is an intangible, immortal entity that lives on in the work of all those who were involved with it over the years, and that might yet still take on other forms.

Chris Driver added: 'There's a sense that a parent, or grandparent created all these wonderful things and has now passed on,

but a lot of the network still survives, and the legacy continues'.

There might be an element of denial at play (we are perhaps not through all our stages of grief) but I too quite like the idea that WPF lives on, at the very least as an object that has been identified with and internalised.

Emmanuelle Smith is a psychodynamic psychotherapist with experience of working in the NHS and private practice. Emmanuelle is on the New Associations editorial board and is Reviews Editor.

I want to extend my thanks to everyone who generously shared their time with me as I prepared to write this article. Whether or not direct quotes were included, it was all incredibly helpful.

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Profession

The BPC Awards 2023

BRITISH/ PSYCHOANALYTIC /COUNCIL AWARDS ——— 2023

The BPC were honoured and grateful to celebrate 30 years as the UK's leading professional association and accredited public register for psychoanalytic psychotherapy.

On Saturday 4 November they celebrated with current, past and future key people at the BPC, including current staff team and the Board of Trustees. The occasion provided the chance to look back over the last 30 years, from the beginnings of the organisation as the British Confederation of Psychotherapists, and think about what the next 30 years could hold.

In attendance were Board and committee members past and present, as well as other staff and volunteers that have been crucial to the BPC's growth over the years. The event celebrated some proud memories over music, drinks and nibbles, and toasted to another 30 years of ensuring safe psychoanalytic therapy is practiced and trained within the BPC's registrant community.

A particularly special moment of the celebration was distributing the BPC Awards, awards that celebrate outstanding individuals and organisations within the BPC's psychoanalytic community. BPC registrants were asked to nominate

colleagues they felt deserved celebrating in one of five categories.

Dr Jo Stubley and the **Tavistock Trauma Service** received the Award for **Innovative Excellence**. This was received at the ceremony on behalf of the team by Jo and Sara Scott, who runs the Non-recent child sexual abuse arm of the trauma service. The service works with adults with complex trauma using a variety of modalities and group interventions all held within a psychoanalytic frame.

It draws on the foundations of the original unit set up by Caroline Garland in the 1980s and has received support from excellent colleagues over the years including Linda Young, Maxine Dennis, Birgit Kleeberg and Mike Swinburne. It now has a small but dedicated team, including peer supporters, and wonderful honorary therapists and trainees who keep the service alive in difficult times.

The trauma service sees many adults who have experienced severe childhood traumas alongside complex trauma secondary to experiences such as asylum seekers, survivors of interpersonal domestic violence and many other forms

of cumulative and sustained trauma. The Innovative Excellence Award acknowledges ground-breaking work in the psychoanalytic field, especially innovative work that targets sections of the community that may traditionally find therapy hard to access. Innovation often arises from necessity, and the chronic underfunding of the health system, lack of access to longer term work in both voluntary and statutory systems and traumatised/traumatising nature of many of societal systems have been significant drivers for the service to adapt and create the Tavistock Model for complex trauma. This is described in *Complex Trauma: the Tavistock Model* edited by Jo Stubley and Linda Young. The service is also planning a two-year postgraduate course for therapists interested in specialising in trauma work.

Dr Frances Gillies received the **Award for Outstanding Professional Leadership**.

Dr Frances Gillies has led the British Psychoanalytic Foundation, a highly respected psychotherapy training school and BPC Member Institution, as CEO since 2022. The Outstanding Professional Leadership Award celebrates leaders

that have significantly developed their position of leadership and contributed to the psychoanalytic or psychodynamic psychotherapy profession.

In her speech Frances thanked her board of trustees saying that ‘without their bravery and support, we would not be in our current position where we are able to provide psychotherapy training to a wider and more diverse cohort of trainees and a greater number of low-fee therapy spaces. This award is for them and for the fantastic, hardworking and passionate team we have built over the last 18 months.’

Fakhry Davids received the **Bernard Ratigan Award for Psychoanalysis and Diversity**. This award acknowledges his meaningful contributions to diversity within the psychoanalytic profession from within BPAS as well as other groups such as Partners in Confronting Collective Atrocities (PCCA), the EPF’s Forum on Psychoanalysis and Cultural Identities, the Holmes Commission for Racial Equality in American Psychoanalysis and through his writings on internal racism, which have been credited with bringing psychoanalytic depth to the study of racism. This award celebrates individuals that have significantly improved or developed inclusivity in matters of diversity such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, class or disability in psychoanalysis.

Jane Johnson and **Helen Morgan** were the recipients of the **Diversity in Training Award**

for their substantial work in evolving a New Approach to Theory in the clinical trainings at the British Jungian Analytic Association. This award focuses on training and supervision that gives substantive and considered attention to thinking about diversity. The New Approach encourages the constructive critique of the theory and practice of analytical psychology and psychoanalysis as first developed in the early part of the twentieth century, and theory as it continues to evolve and inform contemporary clinical practice. This includes acknowledging and engaging with the colonial, heteronormative and gender-

biased roots of traditional psychoanalytic and Jungian analytic thinking.

Jan McGregor Hepburn

was awarded the **Lifetime Achievement Award**. Jan has contributed greatly to the profession and the BPC over her years as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist. Over the last 20 years she has supported the BPC in a multitude of roles: Registrar, Trustee and Chair of Professional Standards Committee. She has made the BPC what it is today, being part of the expansion project, personally overseeing a huge amount of accreditation and reaccreditation, and developing much of the BPC’s policy and guidance. All of the nominations she received from her professional peers noted not just her

achievements but her kind, supportive and no-nonsense approach. She is an absolute credit to the profession.

In her acceptance speech Jan expressed that she was thrilled to receive the award and very proud to be a part of the BPC and all that the Council has achieved in its 30 years of activity. New Associations caught up with Jan after receiving this award, you can read the interview in this issue.

Please join us in celebrating all of our brilliant and deserving awardees as well as the BPC’s 30 years of work, development and collaboration within the psychoanalytic profession.



Interview

A Conversation with Jan McGregor Hepburn



Niamh Downes spoke to Jan McGregor Hepburn as she finally steps down from The BPC Board. Jan was recently awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award from the BPC during its 30th anniversary celebrations for her years of work within the BPC.

Your work with the BPC has spanned many years and roles as well as highs and lows. Could you tell us about any highlights or challenges you've encountered during your time in regulation?

One challenge was when we began to realise that we have become really quite a significant regulator.¹ We didn't necessarily choose to be and at the time most of the BPC resources were still going into outward facing relationships and we had hardly any administrative backup to carry out these very serious regulatory functions, particularly registration. We had to face

up to the fact that we are, whether we like it or not, a heavy-duty regulator and that's where most of the money has to go. So that was a big challenge and I think we got through it.

It has all made me realise that what we had set out to do when we first started out, to hold onto the core values of psychoanalysis and the psychoanalytic way of working, and be respected for it, have been achieved. We carry considerable heft now, we're respected by many even though in terms of numbers we are tiny. But we have always had a lot of senior thinkers and clinicians as registrants.

The field of psychotherapy and counselling over the last 20 or 30 years has changed quite a lot. There're things that psychoanalysis has known about for years – like the therapeutic relationship, like the clinician needing to know about themselves – which have been borrowed, taken, incorporated into other modalities. Most people now know what a therapeutic

relationship is. Most people now know what the unconscious is, although they don't necessarily call it that. Everybody knows that clinicians need to be self-aware and reflective.

“We carry considerable heft now, we're respected by many even though in terms of numbers we are tiny”

From your years of experience and work in the psychoanalytic field, what do you see as the biggest challenge facing the BPC and the profession as a whole in the future?

1 There were government plans to regulate the profession via the (then) HPC. However, the coalition government under David Cameron decided not to go ahead with this. This left organisations such as the BCP having to manage the regulation of the profession ourselves.

In terms of public outward facing work, the problem is that what we have to say is not popular. We've entered the mainstream, yes. The notion of a Freudian slip or the Oedipus complex is now well known, but what we have to say is not popular. What we have to say is: if you want clinicians to work with complex cases, they need intensive training. If you want people to get better, you have to invest in long term treatment. Or if you want to get better, successful analysis takes ages and there's masses of evidence to show the long-term financial benefits. But we don't live in a culture which values the long-term. We know the effect of poor childcare and early deprivation throughout the whole of life. Prisons are full of people who've had a poor start in life. But to invest without any obvious, immediate gain is not the culture that we live in.

Politics is a dirty business and very short term. We've certainly had people who've had an analysis or personal therapy in high government, but they're very rare because you cannot afford to be self-reflective so the chances of us getting politicians on board don't seem to me that high. But you've just got to make the best of your corner of the world, haven't you? So that's what I'm busy doing. Analysis is painful for people. We don't offer a nice feeling solution. You have to delve deep and work out what's gone wrong. You can't bury it or it will

come out some other way. That's what we understand. But you know, that's not popular.

Knowledge is painful. The idea that you can avoid suffering is an illusion, your best hope is to work through it and then shoulder as much of other people's suffering as you can manage once you've done that.

“I think regulation provides a container and something much more secure”

From your unique perspective, what would you say is the importance of regulation within your profession?

Regulation is through accrediting and re-accrediting trainings, and it's supposed to support everybody. We have a very close and tight assessment process every five years. So that we're able to say we know what people do. We know that it's safe, we've got an evidence base to show that it's effective and we know that it's done properly. So the accreditations and re-accreditations very much rely on senior clinicians and a layperson and a trainee or a new recent graduate and a member

of the office staff who all bring different perspectives to look at the training, the postgraduate body and the organisation that contains them. I think regulation provides a container and something much more secure. The purpose of regulation is the protection of the public and the public aren't just the patients, the public are the registrants and trainees we qualify.

“I think regulation provides a container and something much more secure”

You have the unique perspective of witnessing the BPC become a regulator and also of being a registrant since being a registrant was possible. What is the most significant way the BPC has grown since its inception?

It's now an appropriately professional organisation, it's not over professionalised and we do things in a way that's congruent with our beliefs and culture. We think about things, we take other people's ideas into account. We try and understand dynamics if things are in the way. So, I think that's the way in which I've seen the

BPC grow. I believe in the BPC and I just wanted to leave it in a better state than I found it.

After the years of experience you've accrued, what makes work as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist worthwhile?

It is such a privilege being able to work with people at this depth. When it's over, they don't owe me anything, we've done it together. But it is very precious to see people's lives turn around and change. That they know whatever life throws at them now, they'll be OK. I remember once a patient came back to see me after she'd finished and instead of sitting in the chair just for a one-off session, which is what people would normally do, she got straight on the couch with this baby. And as I looked at them, both their feet were the same shape and it was so moving. And she said to the baby, “Here's the lady without whom you would not be here.”

Jan is a psychoanalytic psychotherapist based in The North East who has supported the BPC in a multitude of roles over the years: as Registrar, Trustee and Chair of Professional Standards.

Niamh Downes is the Co-editor of New Associations and the Communications Manager for the BPC.

Profession

30 years of the BPC

Joscelyn Richards

When I was invited to attend the celebration of the BPC's coming into formal existence 30 years ago, I found myself wondering whether it had changed beyond recognition. But no – the BPC (initially BCP, British Confederation of Psychotherapists) has continued to build on and develop its foundation. And, as originally hoped, it has been able to safeguard and represent to the public and to the government the rigorous standards for analysts and therapists and their member institutions in carrying out psychoanalytic and psychodynamic practice and training.

We continue to hold the view, to quote current registrar Sally Beeken, 'that our own personal therapy or analysis is the bedrock of our practice and the means by which our internal analytic frame is established'.

Understanding our beginnings can help to understand why and how, in 1993, 10 independent institutions linked together

to leave the UKCP (formerly UKSCP) and become what would later be named the British Psychoanalytic Council.

In the 1970s the government commissioned two reports – the Foster Report (1971) and the Sieghart Report (1979). Both recommended legislation to protect the public from incompetent or unscrupulous therapists. A recommendation was made to set up a Council for Psychotherapy to regulate the profession with the power to strike off practitioners for professional misconduct.

During the 1980s the British Association of Counsellors organised conferences at Rugby to discuss the issues raised by the reports. It was out of these meetings that in 1989 the UK Standing Conference in Psychotherapy (UKSCP) was established and in 1993 became the UKCP. Its aim was to be a container body for the many forms of therapy that existed.

In 1989, I was working full time in the NHS as a Consultant Clinical Psychologist and was a senior member of the British Association for Psychotherapists (now

BPF) and on the Council of the Association for Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy in the NHS (APP). I attended the newly formed UKSCP and represented the APP as one of two delegates to the analytic therapy section of the UKSCP.

The first time I went to a meeting I was struck by its size and by the fraught atmosphere – everyone seemed to be talking and arguing all at once. I said to a colleague that it felt like a family having an endless argument and she said that in a way it was a family. Understanding this explains the hurt and anger that some members of the UKSCP had towards those of us who began to think seriously of forming a new body specific to psychoanalytic psychotherapy.

“The first time I went to a meeting I was struck by its size and by the fraught



atmosphere – everyone seemed to be talking and arguing all at once”

There were 10 psychoanalytic organisations that initially tried to fit themselves into the structures of the UKSCP but came to realise that if they stayed, they would not have a voice to represent the carefully worked out standards for psychoanalytic psychotherapy to which they subscribed. Thus, with relief but some sadness and anxiety and after much discussion, we left the UKSCP and formed the BCP. We had

a difficult relationship with the UKSCP's board for some time but the organisations now have a mutual respect for one another.

I was involved in the formation and development of the BCP for 10 years. Anne Marie Sandler and I began as joint Chairs and when we were ready for the official launch, Anne Marie stood down and I was elected Chair. I remained in post for two terms until 2000 when Coline Covington took on the role. Sadly, as some of you may know, Coline died recently and unexpectedly.

In order to define the area that the 10 organisations occupied, each institution's documents had to be examined and those whom they trained had to be scrutinised. It was necessary to demonstrate the common ground that was thought to exist between these long-standing institutions. This investigation confirmed that a basis did exist for the proposed linking structure of the psychoanalytic psychotherapy organisations. The constitution was adopted and the BCP came into formal existence.

All this, inevitably, involved a huge amount of work. Andrew Elder, who gave the opening speech at the BCP's inauguration, congratulated us for managing to come together so well when it is known that psychotherapists are like cats and resist being herded! The two people who come

to mind as essential for ensuring all the appropriate processes took place are Fred Balfour from the BPAS and Lawrence Brown from the SAP – both sadly have passed away. Others who gave time and energy to the BCP project, such as Anne Marie, have also passed away.

Fred wrote the Constitution single-handedly. We sent it to a lawyer and when Fred, Lawrence and I visited him to see what changes may be needed he said he was astonished because it was so well written, comprehensive and well thought out. He couldn't believe it had been written by an analyst! Fred became the first Registrar and was outstanding at showing us how it was done – with clarity, thought and tact – especially in relation to organisations that wanted to explore joining.

Lawrence was in post for two terms as Honorary Secretary, and he too was outstanding. As well as serving on the Executive and Registration Committees, he took responsibility for organising and publishing the high-quality Register – a great achievement. Many people gave their time and energy to the establishment and development of the BCP and we can be grateful to them all but perhaps especially to Fred and Lawrence for ensuring that the BCP had solid foundations.

In addition I would like to mention Anna

Witham (BAP), who successfully took over the registrar role and Jonathan Sklar and Brian Martindale (BPAS) who were very supportive. And finally, Jan McGregor Hepburn, our registrar for the past 20 years – we have all been hugely lucky to have had Jan with her wonderful combination of warmth and firmness.

“Many people gave their time and energy to the establishment and development of the BCP and we can be grateful to them all”

I remain deeply grateful and honoured for the opportunities given to me as first Chair. I learnt about organisations and statutory and voluntary registration and worked with some wonderful colleagues. More importantly, it gave me the opportunity to share, influence and shape, with like-minded colleagues, the value, future and profession of psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic psychotherapy and psychodynamic psychotherapy in the UK.

I feel a bit like a mother hen in relation to the BPC and as such I want to say that

I am deeply grateful to the members of the current BPC Team for all the work they are doing and to all those other teams who have held office over the years and given so much of their time, commitment and energy to the BPC. I hope there are many who feel, as I did, that it would be an honour to serve your colleagues via the BPC and will want to give some of your time and energy to this important organisation.

This article is an edited version of a speech given at the BPC 30th anniversary event on 4th November 2023.

Joscelyn Richards is a Training and Supervising Analyst of the British Psychoanalytic Association. She played a major role in establishing the BPA and its training. She co-founded a psychoanalytic psychotherapy centre in the NHS in 1985 and was Consultant Clinical Psychologist there until her retirement from the NHS. In 2013 she received the BPC's Lifetime Achievement Award and in 2019 was made an Honorary Fellow of the BPA for distinguished service to the Association.

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Training

Training Exposures

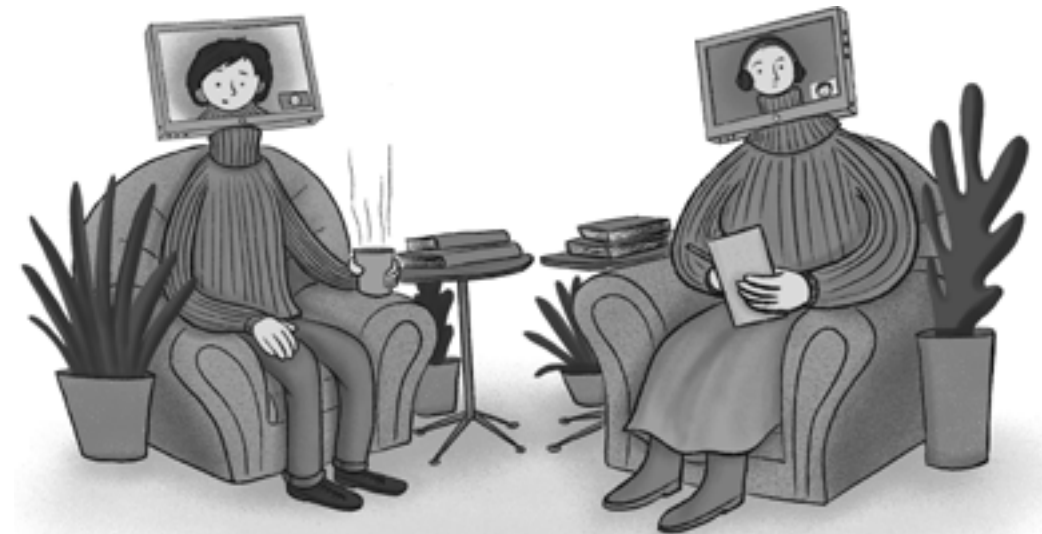
Fran Stedman

Could I have foretold that blend of elation and exasperation, the insecurities and susceptibilities, the joys and hopes, the raw exposure and vulnerability of my training? Absolutely not! But what I can tell you, as a fourth-year trainee, are some of the personal hurdles I have faced as a 50 something mother of two adult children who began her training during a global pandemic.

My training journey is not one carved out solely by me. It is unique and I need the guidance and support of both my peers and ‘elders’ in the field. My supervisors form part of that ‘elders’ cohort, intentionally chosen by me for their diverse ways of thinking – one follows the Kleinian approach, another the Contemporary Freudian, and the third a Phenomenological approach. And yes, it does get confusing. Indeed, although the plurality of approaches makes my supervision enriching, it can feel intimidatingly vulnerable at times,

highlighting how little I know and understand.

My first supervisor was a Kleinian, and I listened in awe as she effortlessly seemed to identify themes and show an acute understanding of my patient’s suffering just from my notes. This became the highlight of my week as I began to learn the skills of working with the unconscious; with transference, counter-transference and projective identification. One memorable example was when my patient failed to turn up, and I sat alone on the chair ‘thinking’ about her, and proceeded to have a supervision session on the absent patient. I accepted without questioning this approach; it was, after all, the only one I had yet been exposed to. During my second year I chose a supervisor with a more contemporary Freudian approach (think Winnicott, Bion, Green) who began to challenge some of my clinical assumptions and techniques – ‘Why was I putting words in my patient’s mouth?’. I started to think about how the concept of ‘drives’ might



be applicable to my patients. And later, with Phenomenology, I was encouraged to take a far more active role in the clinical situation, to challenge more readily, and to consider that we are dealing with both the mind *and* the body. At times I felt deflated and inadequate as ideas that I had worked with like ‘projective identification’ and ‘transference’ were challenged. But

this made me recognise that there was no one Truth, and grappling with these contradictory and at times confusing theories became an integral part of my growth as I struggled to find what type of an analyst I was becoming. I am currently leaning towards the Contemporary Freudian approach....well, for the moment anyway!

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“this made me recognise that there was no one Truth, and grappling with these contradictory and at times confusing theories became an integral part of my growth”

I started my clinical practice during my first year of training amid the Covid pandemic, necessitating me working online right from the start. I remember feeling frustrated since this was not the ‘work’ I had signed up for. There was a third in the room, a screen, a computer. I only saw what the patient wanted me to see, the frame they choose to show. Then seeing the same patients in-person a year later. They had feet, stomachs, backs of heads. What was real? Were they the same person? What did they think of me? Was I what they expected?

This situation impressed itself upon my own felt inadequacies, with doubts about whether I could actually analyse a person,

making me question whether I really had what it takes to be a therapist. It was only gradually, and towards the end of my second year, that this fallacy started to diminish. I cannot recall an event which precipitated this, but somehow my ‘inner analyst’ was coming out. I wonder whether part of this growth was being exposed to different ways of thinking, encouraging me to find my own way through it all.

Seminars and discussion groups were also online for the first year, and in-person for the latter half of the second year. My peer group seemed to work collaboratively and function cohesively online. But this seemed to disintegrate when we met in person. Tensions and challenges arose as our differences became more evident; some were very Freudian, some very Lacanian and others very relational. There were entanglements in how we communicated with each other, and a number of the cohort left by the time we reached our third year. The group did seem to settle after this, but it is a constant balance of managing the harmonies as well as the tensions.

Beneath the foundation of my clinical and theoretical training lies the invaluable space of personal analysis. This enables me to delve into my thoughts and unravel ideas and concepts, fostering a profound comprehension of my own psyche. This in turn helps me in addressing

countertransference issues that might hinder the efficacy of my work with my own patients. Personal analysis functions like the backbone of my training; necessary, sturdy, enlightening, supportive. But at times I seem to ‘slip a disc’ and it feels as though I am stuck and in pain, that raw exposure and vulnerability rearing its head again as I face unwelcomed parts of my own self – my biases and prejudices. I find myself having limited patience for those who cling to rigid dogma, whether it be in the realm of theoretical psychoanalysis or a therapy session. Yet I know this is because I have the lingering resonances of having liberated myself from the clutches of a fundamentalist religion.

“Personal analysis functions like the backbone of my training; necessary, sturdy, enlightening, supportive. But at times I seem to ‘slip a disc’ ”

Does training ever finish? I would argue not, yet this initial institutionally organised training is coming to an end

for me. It is a fraught stage which poses many more questions. What will it be like to fly this training nest, to cut down on my supervision, to not have weekly seminars? Will I manage financially? Will this training, on a multiplicity of levels, have been worth it? Moving forward I can but gird myself for that blend of elation and exasperation, the insecurities and susceptibilities, the joys and hopes, the raw exposure and vulnerability that awaits.

Having had a background in teaching Philosophy, Ethics and Psychology, Fran is currently a 4th-year trainee in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy, working in private practice and a low-cost clinic in central London.

Training

A New Approach to Teaching Theory

Jane Johnson and Helen Morgan

In our organisation, the British Jungian Analytic Association (BJAA), which is one of the three associations within the British Psychotherapy Foundation, we have been working for some years now on a re-examination of some of the more problematic areas of theory. Our aim has been to seek a position both collectively and individually which moves beyond adopting or adapting foundational theories in our teaching to one where both teachers and trainees are adept in active and constructive critique of what serves, and what no longer serves, as a foundation for modern psychotherapy practice. This is still very much work in progress but it is, we think, an experiment which is worth saying a little more about.

A few years ago, we came together out of a common concern around how little attention was given to the troubling aspects of the source texts used throughout the training; texts that are rooted in ideas that support white supremacy and assumptions about gender and sexuality; texts where references to ‘the primitive’,

the place of women, and attitudes towards homosexuality were experienced as painful and offensive by trainees, and teachers. We both found ourselves in the role of teachers of ‘issues of race in the consulting room’ for the BJAA and other BPC trainings. These, as with those concerning gender or sexuality, usually consisted of three or four isolated seminars, often at the end of the training.

“We didn’t always agree but what was being laid down was a crucial foundation of assumption that the texts were questionable”

A succession of discussions in a café in Finchley Road led to an invitation to BJAA colleagues to join us in forming small reading groups to consider troubling

Jungian and Freudian texts concerning race, sexuality and gender. These groups expanded into a second and then a third series. We didn’t always agree but what was being laid down was a crucial foundation of assumption that the texts were questionable and that it was our responsibility as practising analysts and teachers to take apart the problematic aspects, explore their roots and formulate our own positions.

From this work the decision was taken to entirely rethink the teaching of the theoretical part of our training, and a group of interested individuals established ourselves as the New Approach to Theory or NAT group. Proposals were worked out and put to the wider organisation and agreed. The approach would be psychosocial, offering an alternative to the traditional stance of much analytic theory that separates the developmental and the social. Issues of race, gender, class and sexuality would be woven throughout the curriculum over all four years of teaching. We hoped to offer a more joined up experience for trainees so that links

and connections as well as controversies could be explored, and to encourage a constructive critique of the theory and practice of psychoanalysis and analytical psychology. This would include teaching critical thinking.

“From this work the decision was taken to entirely rethink the teaching of the theoretical part of our training”

The theory programme moved to a Saturday with a focus on an agreed theme for each day, as part of a broader theme for each year and as part of a process over four years. There are four seminars in the day. The first explores the key foundational texts relating to the theoretical concepts being studied that day. The second takes up critiques and challenges, and the third

considers clinical applications. The fourth seminar is a facilitated reflective group.

“The gatherings are based on the recognition that we are a training group but also a learning community”

All those teaching across the training are committed to Review and Development meetings on a Saturday morning at the end of each term to discuss the work of the term with specific concerns about how the psychosocial, particularly matters relating to race, gender and sexuality, are kept to the forefront of our thinking in delivering a developmental Jungian training for psychotherapists and analysts. The development part of the teacher meeting is a space where all teachers and seminar leaders work together on their personal and collective responses and understanding in key areas. This has included Transgender Identities and Responding to Racism in the Teaching Setting. The gatherings are based on the recognition that we are a training group but also a learning community, and, whilst we can assume a certain knowledge and expertise in the theoretical concepts of

our tradition, we may well be beginners in our thinking about key social, political and cultural matters.

This new approach to teaching theory is only in its second year and we have much to learn and to change as we go along. It has involved a great deal of work and we have had to strip back and seriously examine our assumptions and ways of thinking. We don't know how far such changes will allow us to really address problems of racism, gender bias and assumptions of heteronormativity in ourselves, in our organisation or the wider profession. The forces that serve to perpetuate privilege are strong and we are well aware of how easy it is to slip back into passivity and torpor, so that a certain active aggression is required to stay awake. But so far, we have been doing what we can to stay alert to the urge to power as it shows itself in unequal binary divisions such as black/white, male/female, gay/straight, noticing when reflective thinking gets shut down in ourselves and in the trainee group and where the structuring of the programme might contribute to this. We work to be attentive to where the discomfort and pain of the marginalised may be held within individuals, in the groups and within the programme, for example, working to understand and explore instances where white teachers or trainees have not called out racism in other

white colleagues. It has been sobering to notice a dynamic within the programme where a space for reflection is both valued and questioned: while we were aware of the work that reflective group leaders were doing to contain difficult and painful feelings around racism, at the same time the purpose of the reflective group was being questioned.

But we do know that those participating as teachers and trainees relish working and learning together and there is an energy, ownership, and excitement about the new approach. There is also an optimism within the BJAA about the future of its training that has been missing for some time.

Jane and Helen are co-chairs of the group that delivers a psycho-social approach to teaching theory in BJAA clinical trainings and winners of the 2023 BPC award for Diversity in Training.

Jane Johnson is a psychotherapist and Jungian analyst in private practice. She is a senior member of the British Psychotherapy Foundation (BPF) and a training analyst for the British Jungian Analytic Association (BJAA).

Helen Morgan is a Fellow of the BPF and a training analyst and supervisor for the BJAA. Her book, The Work of Whiteness. A Psychoanalytic Perspective was published in 2021 by Routledge. She is also co-author with Fanny Brewster of the book Racial Identities published by Routledge in 2022.

Review

Pygmalion at the Old Vic

Ian Burns

‘I’m a good girl, I am’, Patsy Ferran’s Eliza Doolittle reminds us several times in the Old Vic’s revival of Shaw’s marvellous play. But good at, and for, what? Philosophically good, morally good, socially good? Eliza is about to hone her social skills and in so doing, to appreciate philosophical and moral goodness. Richard Jones’ production rattles through the issues in just 100 minutes. The first surprise, for me, came before curtain up. There were some unsold, or at least unfilled, seats.

Is Shaw now unfashionable? Losing his grip on theatrical imaginations? It cannot be his plot, with its reference to Ovid’s *Pygmalion* and *Galatea*, because we know that modern audiences respond to it in its cinematic adaptations, exemplified by *Educating Rita*, *Pretty Woman* and *Ex Machina*. The empty seats meant I was willing myself to enjoy the performances.

Shaw was a great satirist. He was born in the same year as Sigmund Freud, and this play was written in 1912, when Freud was busy establishing psychoanalysis as a science. Shaw’s original text invites

the audience to think about a number of psychoanalytic ideas including the Oedipus Complex, transference and narcissism.

“Shaw’s original text invites the audience to think about a number of psychoanalytic ideas”

Therein might lie the first difficulty with this production. Jones’ play merges the original play text with Shaw’s screenplay for the 1938 film. It won him an Oscar, and sets him apart as having been awarded both a Nobel and an Oscar, but unfortunately, this presentation fails to give us the best of the playwriting laureate, or the Oscar winning screenwriter.

Will Stuart’s composition and arrangements suggest something ominous and frenetic. Whilst it conveys the hectic work at Covent Garden in the opening



scene, and the time pressure of the experiment for Higgins to win his bet, it loses something when we think about the cadences of a ‘duchess’s’ speech. The rhythm of ‘how kind of you to let me come’ is lost in its intrusions. There is no duchess poise and patience. How will Eliza glide at a ball and acquit herself verbally with such manic intrusion to contend with?

Jones sets the play in an indeterminate period between the two World Wars. To this viewer, that diminished the class distinctions that Shaw wanted to unveil for their hypocrisies. In 1912 the idea of a man’s and, even more so, a woman’s place, was widely understood. The turmoil and tragedy of World War I realigned class and the place of women. As Shaw completed his masterpiece, Pankhurst’s suffragettes

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were turning more militant. 1912 saw an active window-smashing campaign. By placing the action in a later era, Jones has to answer a question that Shaw thought straightforward, ‘does a flower girl aspire to work in a florist’s shop, or to be taken for a duchess?’

However, the evening is lifted by the leading members of the cast. Ferran captures Eliza’s feistiness, her innocent romanticism combined with a practical approach to life without. She slips between the Lisson Grove flower girl to the imposter Hungarian princess, and all the steps in between, with charm and style. The delivery of ‘the new small talk’ in ‘it is my belief they done the old woman in’ is exquisite.

Carvel plays Higgins in manic, narcissistic mode. I wondered if he was still influenced by the last time he was at The Old Vic, when he was an extraordinary Trump in Mike Bartlett’s *The 47th*. He conveys the Higgins of tyranny as a teacher, and arrogance towards Freddy, who he cannot concede as a love rival, as well as the unintegrated child still in love with his mother: ‘Oh I can’t be bothered with young women. My idea of a loveable woman is somebody as like you as possible.’

Carvel gets the carelessness about other people’s feelings, as he boasts that whilst Pickering may impress Eliza for treating a

flower girl like a duchess, he thinks there is virtue in the way he does not treat a duchess with any more deference than a flower girl. We are left in little doubt that this is not about his warped sense of equality, but more a form of misogyny, and linked to his attachment to the unavailable mother.

“We are left in little doubt that this is not about his warped sense of equality, but more a form of misogyny, and linked to his attachment to the unavailable mother”

The tensions between Eliza and Henry, which I think of as a Shavian nod to Freud’s discovery of transference, are worked up to the final scenes when the slippers are thrown, and then feelings are confronted, the next day in Mrs Higgins’s home. Eliza teaches Higgins that manners are fundamental, not mere phonetics and enunciation. She reaches the end of the

play undermining class pretensions. We sold flowers at the market, not ourselves, she asserts.

Henry has already given a nod to Freud’s understanding of the unconscious and to repression – ‘Do any of us know what we are doing? If we did, would we ever do it?’

Freud’s (1910) view was that countertransference was inimical to the analytic treatment. It should be repressed. In *Pygmalion*, Higgins has repressed his sexual drive, but Eliza wakens it.

“She reaches the end of the play undermining class pretensions.”

Towards the end of the play, he notes how she has become indispensable, and he is acting out his need. Shaw, in my interpretation, pre-empted plenty of psychoanalytic literature of the past hundred years through Henry and Eliza, and Carvel and Ferran capture this in the ‘nearly-kiss’ moment in his mother’s drawing room.

In appreciating the brilliance of the leading actors, I must draw attention to the glorious cameo from Kieran Smith as Kapharty, the arriviste Continental phonetics champion and former

Higgins student. It is done with such comic lightness; obsequious and witty. Only Penny Layden’s Scottish tones of disapproval as Higgins’s suffering housekeeper, Mrs. Pearce, comes close.

The best lines in the play, however, are those given to Eliza’s father, Alfred. John Marquez does his best to amuse us with the contradictions and hypocrisies of middle-class morality, and with the hint of a Welshman’s accent when giving us the wonderful ‘I’m willing to tell you, I’m wanting to tell you, I’m waiting to tell you’ lines. However, I felt he seemed more comfortable, suited and booted to wed, with money in his pocket, than refusing Higgins’s £10 in favour of £5 when dressed as a dustman, because it would make him ‘feel prudent like; and then goodbye to happiness’. He misplaces Shaw’s understanding.

It remains the outstanding play written about the English and needed an Irishman to be sufficiently observant, much as it took an ostracised Viennese Jew to observe what might be the places to look for universal neuroses.

Ian Burns is a candidate at the BPA. He works as a psychodynamic psychotherapist at South London and Maudsley NHS Trust. His first career was in investment banking. He is a father of three.

Review

Reflections on the Abramovic Retrospective

Michaela Chamberlain

In the 255 years long existence of the Royal Academy, 2023 marked the first time there was a major exhibition by a female artist, suggesting that the academy had thought the art world had little to see from female artists before or that this retrospective of Marina Abramovic's work was an exception. Perhaps both.

“She has used her body to push boundaries around the definitions of what constitutes art”

Abramovic's impact on the art world is undeniable. She has used her body to push boundaries around the definitions of what constitutes art but more impressively, she has used her very being to interrogate

what it means to be human and to connect. The subtext to this is that she is a woman interrogating the fundamentals of relating and feeling, challenging the focus on male artists' experience.

The way in which her work has been curated at the Royal Academy means that upon entering the first room you are immediately immersed in the world of Marina Abramovic, with screens on either side of the room showing footage of her endurance piece *The Artist is Present*. In this work, for a total of nearly 700 hours, Abramovic performed the simple act for seven hours a day, six days a week of sitting behind a table, the seat opposite her available for anyone to come and sit with her. The artist made herself available to the person, by meeting their eye contact and staying with them for as long as they wished. The footage of the performance is compelling as the shift in emotion becomes palpable, some moved to tears, sobbing, some sharing laughter as the two meet in

the space. There is a force in the exchange that feels parallel to psychoanalysis, the lack of words emphasising the crucial power in that exchange of feeling when two people want to make themselves available to each other so that they can be seen.

“The artist made herself available to the person, by meeting their eye contact and staying with them for as long as they wished”

The full context of *The Artist is Present* is fully appreciated when seen as the antidote to her work exhibited in the second room. These two pieces together define the arc of

Abramovic's work.

In 1974, Abramovic's performance *Rhythm 0* lasted for eight hours. She stood motionless and expressionless in front of a long dining table. On the table, 72 individual items were carefully displayed including amongst other things, a feather, pieces of food, perfume, a knife, gun, and bullet. Over the table were the instructions:

“There are 72 objects on the table that one can use on me as desired... I am the object. During this period I take full responsibility.”

The table from *Rhythm 0* is carefully recreated at the exhibition, although everything on the table has been carefully tied down so it cannot be moved. Behind the table, stills from the performance are projected onto a large screen so that Abramovic's body dominates over the scene, almost recreating the last supper.

At the start of the piece, the audience was

bemused by Abramovic, making playful attempts to get a response from her, but as time progressed and without a reaction, the playfulness turned into aggression. The audience pushed the boundaries between themselves and the motionless artist, trying to get beyond her expressionless facade, literally getting into her by piercing and cutting her skin. As the unresponsiveness continued, the aggression and desire to get inside her, to get something more than an expressionless face intensified. She was stripped, laid out on a table and a knife was stabbed into the wood between her legs.

Abramovic was left physically and emotionally scarred by this experience (Guardian interview, 2010). At the end of the eight hours, she 'came to life' and started walking towards the audience, at which point they all ran away – perhaps in fear of retribution or wanting to run away from their own difficulties in reconciling their anger at a withholding woman with the thought that same woman may also have feelings of her own about how others make use of her.

In the same year as *Rhythm 0* was performed, similar research into human responsiveness and relating was taking place in the form of the 'Still Face Experiment'. Instead of adults experiencing the expressionless, unresponsive face of Abramovic, the clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst

Ed Tronick asked mothers to present an expressionless or 'still' face to their babies and observed what happened. The babies responded, in the same way as Abramovic's audience, initially greeting the lack of response with playfulness, trying to charm a reaction out of the mother in front of them. When this failed the baby tried harder to get a response by giving more exaggerated hand gestures, making louder noises but as the time progressed the baby became increasingly distressed, the baby's limbs started to flail around, turning his head sharply away from the still face and trying to move out of his seat in fear and despair until eventually collapsing into tears. All of this takes just a few minutes as against the six hours of Abramovic's performance.

The raw, uninhibited response of the baby gives a strong indication of the internal importance of the maternal gaze. In the absence of language, the gaze and responsiveness of the mother is essential in communicating to the baby that the mother is fully present, the baby is present in the mother's mind and gives the baby a sense of cohesion, containment and most importantly of being able to find herself in the mother's face.

Abramovic's performance reignites this early existential dilemma of needing to find oneself in the primary carer, the feelings of dependency, the need for a

response and the pain of not receiving it. As demonstrated by Abramovic and Tronick, the need for a responsive face is intrinsic to safety, relating and to a sense of existing – the opposite of not being acknowledged is accurately described in common usage as 'being ghosted', pointing to the feeling of being dead / nonexistence if one is not recognized by the other. The prototype for this recognition by the other has been for most people the gaze and attention of the mother as primary carer. As shown so vividly in the still face experiment the withdrawal of that gaze led to a complete unravelling and a turning away, as though that would stop the desire for the gaze to return. In the adult version of this experiment, Abramovic's onlookers end up expressing a desire to kill her.

“Abramovic's performance reignites this early existential dilemma of needing to find oneself in the primary carer”

The power of the female gaze in both these cases is apparent but what is also apparent is the desire/need to have a response. The

difficulty for the audience is not so much the lack of response but the uncontrollable need to get it. It would be interesting to know if Abramovic's performance would have had a different response had it been a man's face that remained so emotionless, if the desire for a paternal gaze would have been as powerful as the need for a maternal gaze and the annihilation felt when this was not received.

This retrospective asks many questions but is also a remarkable disquisition of what can happen when boundaries – physical, emotional, conscious and unconscious – are not controlled, and what can be created when a woman refuses to have boundaries placed on her and takes her place in her own terms.

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