

# Counselling in Scotland

AUTUMN 2005

A FAREWELL AND AN INVITATION

THINKING ALOUD BELIEF AND COUNSELLING

SETTING UP A COUNSELLING SERVICE IN FRANCE

BEYOND THE VEIL

TALKING SILENCE

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

POEM

THERAPISTS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

A STUDENT OF COUNSELLING

COUNSELLING RESEARCH DIALOGUE



**COSCA**  
Counselling & Psychotherapy  
in Scotland

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# A Farewell...

## and an Invitation

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**A**fter five years of editing the journal, Marilyn Nicholl and Jonathan Wood have decided to stand down from the editorial group. Their editorial work initiated a transition for COSCA: from Newsletter to Professional Journal, encompassing views from both Counselling and Psychotherapy worlds.

Over that time, they have worked to stimulate debate, to offer controversy, to stretch at the boundaries of the 'therapeutic intervention'; to look at the family and to highlight the neglected area of counselling for young people; to explore where philosophy meets with psychotherapy, where poetry, image and film touch in and inform our practice.

And now it is time again for change, time for a new team of editors and for COSCA's counselling community to take another step. It seems to us that the Journal now needs a fresh set of eyes and new enthusiasms to take it forward. The journal provides a wonderful

opportunity for the COSCA membership and beyond, to explore in print many of the issues that arise from the practice of counselling. It can be a testing ground for ideas and theories, a forum for debate, and a communication tool. The lobbying for articles in a community that finds it hard to commit to paper its reflections (is it that the knowledge of how meanings, not meaning, exist in relation to all we write or say, daunts us?) takes its toll and impacts on the energy we feel we can bring. However, that is the view at the end of a long period of editorship. When we began, it was very exciting to be given the opportunity to help re-form the journal. It is time for this excitement to be taken up by others. Those interested in this opportunity can contact Brian Magee at the COSCA office.

The challenge is to let go, to reflect and to express... We look forward to reading you.

Brian Magee, Marilyn Nicholl, Jonathan Wood.

# Thinking Aloud

## Belief and Counselling

Benedikte Uttenthal

I wonder if you were as disappointed as I was when the last two-day COSCA conference was cancelled. Under its gory title 'Blood on the Couch' was a promising array of speakers on belief. I felt immediately engaged, even relieved, when I saw the programme as I had been thinking that this is a topic that is long overdue for a thorough examination.

There is more than enough happening in the world outside our profession even as I write to prompt such thoughts – and there always have been murders and other atrocities committed under the justification of belief, but there is, alas, plenty that we are doing within our field which could do with examination. Yes, yes, I am accusing ourselves of committing minor atrocities under a justification of belief, and what is worse, of doing so, often without being aware of it.

Let me plunge in and ask you to consider a very common way in which we conduct counselling or psychotherapeutic training. If we go to an institute of higher education to study, say, philosophy or history, we spend several years studying the whole field and latest findings and commentaries. Only at post qualification stage or in the final year of study do we specialise in the form of a narrowly focused thesis – and we would be in trouble if the thesis did not make informed reference to the wider field. How is it we can permit ourselves in most cases of counselling/psychotherapeutic trainings to behave so differently? If we step back and consider what trainings are currently available in Scotland, I, for one, have a sense of something analogous to religious trainings. We have denominations within counselling. And with the denominations we have some tragically sectarian behaviour – we, who are meant to be emotionally literate.

So, we are up against something powerful and something that must be examined: the nature and purpose of belief. Its destructive dimension lends

urgency to the need to understand it. Let me turn to some greater authorities.

In Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1913) he argues that science and rationalism are part of a great movement away from seeing man as the centre of the universe – a movement away from an emotionally early narcissistic phase. We are developing and growing up as a species. He saw religion as a way of controlling the anxiety generated by our helplessness in the face of external dangers, internal impulses and death. Religious rituals are akin to obsessional rituals, which protect against the emergence of anxiety-provoking fantasies, desires and impulses. He offered the insight was that the origin of religion was in the inevitable desire and movement of sons to displace their fathers, but then as an expiation of the sin of patricide, ritually sacrificed and eaten – a theme found in many religious myths including Christianity.

If we look to other writers from the past, we see that already David Hume saw belief as an emotional condition, i.e. not part of rationality, while Descartes saw belief as a matter of will. Later on I will share with you some wonderful aperçus of Nietzsche but we are already moving into the realm of power and control – and not a realm where reason has much control. The underlying factor is again the powerful feeling of anxiety that we are always impelled to dissipate. Its lack of connection to our reasoning can be seen in its wordless state: a dog can believe that there is food in his bowl. Dictionary definitions offer us: "an opinion or conviction"; "confidence in a truth or existence of something not immediately susceptible to rigorous proof"; "confidence, faith, trust" – the latter words conjuring up something essential in human relationships. This brings us to another aspect of belief.

Maybe we are all familiar with the look of adoration that young babies can give their mothers. It sometimes occurs in the therapy room. A child needs to believe in its parents, both for safety and for identification. Without this formative belief we are lost souls.

Erik Erikson writes beautifully about this whole process in *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (1968) "The Life Cycle: Epigenesis of Identity" (p.136) and include insights into its negative aspects, an understanding of the destructive behaviour of fanaticism:

The counter part of intimacy is distantiation; the readiness to repudiate, isolate, and, if necessary, destroy those forces and people whose essence seems dangerous to one's own. Thus, the lasting consequence of the need for distantiation is the readiness to fortify one's territory of intimacy and solidarity and to view all outsiders with a fanatic "overvaluation of small differences" between the familiar and the foreign. Such prejudices can be utilised and exploited in politics and in war and secure the loyal self-sacrifice and the readiness to kill from the strongest and the best. A remnant of adolescent danger is to be found where intimate, competitive, and combative relations are experienced with and against the self same people. But as areas of adult responsibility are gradually delineated, as the competitive encounter, the erotic bond, and merciless enmity are differentiated from each other, they eventually become subject to that ethical sense which is the mark of the adult and which takes over from the ideological conviction of adolescence and the moralism of childhood

Belief begins to be recognisable as developmentally necessary, a foundation of identity and the ability to relate in a loving way - and firm beliefs as something appropriate to childhood. What happens to it in adulthood? We commonly seek refuge in religion because of external (societal) stressors and because

of internal stressors (incestuous desires, patricidal urges - being only two, and the most Freudian) and the burden of guilt that they bring. We seek solace in religion for our existential terrors – illness, suffering, competitiveness and death. And for religion we can substitute any belief that serves these purposes for us as individuals. We seek solace and purpose in science, which as we shall see has always been riddled with beliefs: we fight internecine wars in science or what ever subject we heavily identify with; we seek solace in psychotherapeutic belief systems and here too we fight internecine wars.

This wordless state is more than being illogical or irrational. It is a feeling, a need and perhaps even, intrinsic to our nervous system and developmentally necessary. But we are endangered when we are unable to be flexible and move away from this support when we should be functioning more independently emotionally and when it is no longer used appropriately as a support but as a defense – as a means of repelling the other, the new and the different. An ideology can be seen as a substitute family or parent figure who provides safety, meaning, purpose and identity for the believer.

Here is a chilling quotation from the wonderful Hungarian author Sandor Marai who is know in Britain for his translated novel *Embers* which was recently made into a film. This comes from his *Memoirs of Hungary 1944-1948* (pub. 1996). He is describing (p.26) an incident at a family party in Budapest, March 1944:

When I stated that we must accept responsibility for the consequences and break with the Germans, most of the guests agreed, though rather diffidently – but not the relative who had befriended the Nazis. He now flared up. Tipsy, he pounded the table and repeated the preachments of "holding out" and "loyalty to the alliance" appearing in editorials.

When I took issue with him, he gave a surprising reply.

“I am a National Socialist,” he shouted, “You” – he pointed to me – “can’t understand this because you are talented. But I am not, and that is why I need National Socialism.” “...Now it’s about us, the untalented,” he said, with strange self-confession, like the hero of Russian novel. “Our time has come!”

More has been written about belief in relation to politics and war, and even in relation to science than in relation to counselling beliefs and divisions within our professional field. It might be revealing to look at a few examples from those areas as analogous to our own position. One of the clearest and most sympathetic exponents is Karl Popper. Here are some of his ideas from the very approachable *All Life is Problem Solving* (1999).

Knowledge, he says, consists of conjectures or hypotheses that should be subject to constant revision. This is the best we have. Science is a quest for truth, but not certain truth. But some people want certain knowledge – they lack the courage to live without assurances, without certainty, without authority, without a leader. “Perhaps one could say that such people are still trapped in childhood.” The history of science is full of examples of scientists fighting not to recognise new discoveries. Our fear and longing for certainty and direction are the epistemological, biological and linguistic roots to our dangerous susceptibility to dogmas and ideologies. One of its roots is cowardice. We need to be brave not to believe. There is a failure of modesty in intellectuals (and politicians and most proponents of counselling theory!) in their certainty, the certainty that causes factions, conflicts and wars. It is also a fundamental error in relation to what we know about ‘truth’, i.e. its non-absolute nature. The need for knowledge, belief and mutual suggestion, he says, is “hidden in our evolutionary

biology”. We are, it seems, all too often unable to hold the uncertainty of the dialogue between our emotional needs and our rational understanding.

The role of belief in political argument is clearly exposed by Michael Oakshott in his wonderful political essays, *Rationalism in politics and other essays* (1991). The Marxist argument, or more or less any political argument, or political speech in particular, rest on a premise which is a belief, not a truth, then a proposed response with guessed at consequences. Yet it is presented as if it were a truth. It is of course a closed system, which requires belief and loyalty to enact. (Remember the speeches justifying the invasion of Iraq as a clear recent example where the reason, weapons of mass destruction, was no more than a belief.) Those who believe in these closed systems need the certainty and enjoy the control. The spirit of enquiry is lost; individual integrity is lost, and more sinisterly, if individual searches and opinions are not valued and even feared, the very physical integrity of the individual is lost. The group of believers do not care if the non-believer or apostate suffers. Individual feelings cease to count; the group activity and survival of the group dominates. As well as an overview of almost any government, this could also be an overview of the behaviour of Freud and his circle in relation to proponents of new psychological theories, and of some of us in relation to our colleagues or to the theories that we choose not to teach.

In considering belief, I am struck by how we are looking at a fundamental aspect of our existence. We move constantly between our need to be separate individuals, with a sense of the significance of our separate mental and emotional and sensory experiences and between our need to belong to a group in which to learn, share and express ourselves. There is always a potential of being stuck at one end of that spectrum. The need to hang on to

a belief in adulthood can be seen as an expression of an incomplete ability to be integral individuals. Some of us need too much the safety of a group and the childlike position of giving too much responsibility and directive powers to a leader, dead or alive. It seems to me that adult mental health is very much about the ability to move with graceful appropriateness between these two positions of individuality and group belonging – and survive or even thrive in the group without a fixed leadership.

Nietzsche defines and describes belief's characteristics in his brilliant aphorisms (*Human, All Too Human*, pub. Penguin Classics 1994). I offer them as a summary of the above reportage and as a warning about believing in anything too much – including in what I have written.

1. Belief is a strength, a power, not a truth.
2. Logical arguments always rest on beliefs.
3. Individual beliefs rest on a feeling of pleasure or pain in relation to the feeling subject. (That could be translated as: we believe in some thing because we like it. And I would go further, we believe in something because of our lust for power and control.)
4. Belief thrives on self-deception (i.e. on loss of individual integrity.) It is enough for others to believe for a man to believe it to be true.
5. Beliefs have blackmailing quality in that others have died for them in the past.
6. We inherit beliefs. They can be given, like e.g. nationality.  
And this wonderful image:
7. The overthrow of beliefs is not immediately followed by the overthrow of institutions; rather, the new beliefs live for a long time in the now desolate and eerie house of their predecessors, which they themselves preserve, because of the housing shortage. That makes me think of counselling trainings and of how they relate to their origins! And lastly:

8. A man of convictions is not a man of scientific thinking; he stands before us as a child, however grown up he might be otherwise.

I hope the relevance and analogies to counselling are clear. With what despair must we greet statements such as “all that is necessary and sufficient” in relation to a counselling theory or practise? With what despair do we greet, for one example, Freud's treatment of his innovative colleagues, whether Jung, Adler or Ferenczi? With what despair do we greet the separate, competing institutions and counselling diplomas and the lack of debate on integration? How many integrative diplomas are there in Scotland? When will we be mature enough to integrate what is best from all our theory and experience in the service of our clients, rather than using our profession to serve our own anxieties? As counsellors we need to respect beliefs as a necessary defense, but as with all defenses, the purpose of therapy is to bring them into awareness, then to increase flexibility with regard to their use, and in some cases, to support their abandonment. One would think this is stating the obvious, but this obvious can be readily lost in the facile political correctness of ‘respecting beliefs’ or in the anxiety provoked by ideological bullies. Ideally, should we not visit beliefs as bees do flowers, moving from hypothesis to hypothesis, examining them and matching them to wider experiences, incorporating the best of the new and discarding the worst of the old? In this continual process we as counsellors can make our own honey to feed and inspire others to do likewise.

# Setting up a Counselling Service in France

Susie Martin

This article is written by a Scot who did her counselling training in Scotland with the Peter Bowes Consultancy in the 1990s. She moved to Lyon with her husband, chaplain to the Lyon Anglican Church, in the autumn of 2000, where she set up a counselling service discrete from but under the umbrella of the Anglican Church. The following account details some of the challenges and satisfactions relating to this venture

When I arrived in Lyon in October 2000 I had not yet finished the Diploma in Counselling and Spiritual Development newly launched by the Peter Bowes Consultancy. It was therefore necessary to set up a managed context within which to acquire the practice hours necessary to complete the Diploma.

## Management Team

This was done by inviting three interested people from the Council of Lyon Anglican Church to form a management team to oversee the work of the counsellors. Their expertise includes management, human resources, charities, and the interface between counselling and the Christian Faith. This English-speaking church, the reason for our coming to France, had been expressing a desire for counselling facilities for several years previously; it therefore seemed appropriate to provide such a service under its aegis – and for the church members this is seen as an enlargement of the church's ministry. The Management Team meet four times a year. The church treasurer manages the Counselling Service finances as a separate section within the church accounts, and the auditor ascertains that the charitable status of the church is not compromised. Unfortunately this means the counsellors are not paid. Four years down the line, we are about to draw up a contract between the counsellors and the Church. This is not strictly-speaking a legal necessity, since the counsellors are

not “employees” of the Church.

## The Counsellors

Simultaneously, in late 2000, an English psychotherapist, self-employed within the French system offered her services; and a member of the pastoral group interested in counsellor training also agreed to join the counselling team with myself. The latter did not engage in counselling but was part of the peer supervision meetings, which we put in place early on.

## Supervision

The psychotherapist already had her own supervision as part of her professional practice. For myself, initially maintaining contact with my tutor and supervisor in Edinburgh, I decided to have supervision with the head of a Christian community 35 km out of Lyon, who, though not training in supervision, had a lifetime's experience of listening to people (as a priest), of working in a psychiatric hospital, and a good knowledge of psychology. I met together with him for about a year.

## Clients

To start with we had a handful of clients from the church – not bet practice, but we have become exceptionally attentive to boundaries and confidentiality, and that was where the need was. Quite soon other clients began to come from outside church circles, recommended by satisfied customers. And also in answer to a leaflet produce to advertise the LA Counselling Service and available the British Consulate, the Roman Catholic cathedral (where lots of tourists go), the Lyon Anglican Church, and for handing out. We also have an ongoing article/advert in “Les Anglophones” magazine, which is very productive of clients.



## Development

After a year with the priest supervisor, I indicated that, in order to work for COSCA accreditation, I would need someone trained in supervision. I found a general practitioner turned psychoanalyst, who has proved a very good supervisor for me, learning what I need as we go along and adjusting the supervision accordingly. Important to me is the fact that he is also a Christian.

## Accreditation

As regards accreditation: I greatly appreciated a meeting with Priya Sood at the COSCA office early last year; and for the time being, since no one in France would by any the wiser, have decided not to do COSCA accreditation as such but to work to those standards.

Our counsellor trained at MIND, Richmond Fellowship, and Paris Gestalt School is working for European accreditation, to be ahead of the game as France belatedly prepares to tighten its standards for psychotherapists. There is a French version of the Association of Christian Counsellors, but they do not take professionals! And, though we have considered it, LACCS is not yet an organisational member of the European Association for Counselling.

## On-going professional training

All donations given by clients go towards repayment of supervision expenses and on-going professional training for the counsellors (together with the other expenses of running the Service and now a vastly increased rent). As we come from various different countries and disciplines, it is not always easy to find suitable courses; each counsellor finds what suits her approach bet from a not very wide choice in Lyon, and occasionally further afield.

Over the past four years I have done a day course on eating disorders; a day course on How to Build Clients' Self Esteem. (I have found "Shame and the Origins of Self-Esteem" by Mario Jacoby to be very useful on this subject); a fifty hour course on adult psychopathology at the Catholic University in Lyon; day courses on Prevention of Suicide and Family Heritage and Personal Identity (transgenerational stuff) at the Institut des Sciences de la Famille; attended the European Conference for Counselling and Psychotherapy with COSCA in 2002; and an international congress in Lyon celebrating 25 years of the Institut pour la Formation et l'Application des Therapies de la Communication. But nowhere do I find practical courses using personal contract psychology and the psychodynamic approach; so I major on being an integrative counsellor!

## Personal Therapy

I am now having personal counselling weekly with a French psychologist who specialises in "le reve eveille analytique", analysis of "the awakened dream". This can mean working with actual dreams or bringing to light on the big screen any fleeting impressions, memories, etc. Either way, it fits well with the psychodynamic use of the unconscious. It is a good context too, in which to observe and experience the difference in attitude of the French system. I observe how my therapist interacts with me using a largely psychoanalytical approach, as well as benefiting from increased self-knowledge. Both areas gain feedback into my own counselling practice.

## Intercultural Issues

The whole atmosphere surrounding counselling in France is different. To start with, the word counsellor does not convey the same as in UK and US. Everyone, on the other hand, recognises the word "psy". There is a monthly magazine available in

ordinary newsagents called "Psychologies". My tutor did not seem to approve of this early on, but nor did he realise that, as well as featuring articles by well-known and well-respected psychologists, it taught me the French vocabulary and the general climate in France. French people are plugged in to the notion of psychologists, psychotherapists, psychoanalysts, psychiatrists, to be consulted on referral by a medical doctor.

Judging from clients who have previously consulted such professionals, they all tend to have a medical approach; some clients seem not to have appreciated the silent, blank wall that was presented to them. The offer, by contrast, of "counselling" by professionally qualified and trained counsellors expects more of the reflexive approach, where the counsellor will change as well as the client in the counselling process; and the importance of growth or healing through the relationship seems new to them.

Given this and other difference, it is not easy to integrate into the French system. Having said that, the LACCS finds itself in the same situation as many of its clients in being "between cultures" and forced to carve out its own way. This is especially true where our asylum seekers are concerned; we have not yet found an appropriate way to offer them counselling, lost as they often are in their personal identity and in lack of status.

Cross cultural knowledge and experience is very necessary in our counsellors. Happily, a new American counsellor is in process of joining the Team – undergoing our interview procedure and finding herself a supervisor – who has just returned from the States with a Masters in rehabilitation counselling.

The fourth member of the LACCS Team is a French "conseiller conjugale"; but unfortunately the big

need at the moment is for an English-speaking couples counsellor. There are thousands of anglophones in Lyon, and, though we counsellors are bilingual, it is primarily the anglophones we seek to help. Our psychotherapist is trained in couples counselling but only offer two hours per week to LACCS. Where will any of us others get training in couples counselling? Or when will a trained counsellor turn up?

These are the things we deal with all the time. The only other main detail of the jigsaw being that an ordained counsellor at the Anglican chaplaincy in Maison Lafitte, is compiling a list of all the counselling services provided by chaplaincies in the French part of the Diocese of Europe, with a view to creating a separate Association (charity) to be called Kairos; and as part of the network, too, there are counselling services associated with other chaplaincies in Europe, some of which are highly developed like Oasis in The Hague, and, more isolated, the English ACC accredited counsellor and supervisor in Freiburg.

In conclusion, I would like to pay tribute to the late Mary Gilmour from Jordanhill in Glasgow. She visited our diploma course as a consultant. I was struck by her blood red nails (very French!) and the fact that she had a counselling practice in France. Though I had very little opportunity to quiz her about this, I feel that LACCS is carrying on such work and that Mary would have been glad to hear of such a development.

# Beyond the Veil

## An examination of the therapy of Hannah

Mirabelle Maslin

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My novel – *Beyond the Veil* – was published in early 2004. As a member of COSCA I felt that other members might be interested in this book, and I forwarded a copy to the office. Having read it, Brian has now invited me to write an article about one particular thread of the story – the therapy of a young girl, Hannah.

Hannah first appears in the book when Ellen (a central character) finds her car boxed in at the car park. I remember very clearly how, as I wrote about Ellen finding she could not drive off for her meeting with a friend, I wanted to help her to think constructively about the situation. There is so much written about the prevalence of road rage these days, and I wanted a situation where a person may well feel angry, or at the very least frustrated, about not being able to drive away, but did not enact those feelings. Ellen certainly felt frustrated, but she succeeded in looking beyond her feelings – and she was glad she had, when the owner of the car proved to be a man with a thin girl in a wheelchair, who we later learn is Hannah.

Having created this girl, I decided that I wanted to know more about her, and it was because of this I conceived the idea that her father had been taking her to see someone he hoped would help with her condition. I became very deeply involved with her once she had been referred to Eva – another main character in the book. Eva is a qualified doctor, but is also a homeopath who is developing an interest in energy fields.

Hannah was not based on anyone I know or have known, although now I have been asked to write about my experience of her in my book a thought occurs to me . . . . . I think she may well portray the inner child in many of us – undernourished and misunderstood, living in a culture that outwardly portrays caring, but which cannot yet in daily life face deeper issues of emotional need. We are all “allowed”, and sometimes even encouraged, to have medical

conditions, and we are given a ready language about these. However, in the case of emotional needs we do not usually have a ready context in which we can express them, and a language for them is not so immediately accessible.

Eva becomes a therapist to Hannah in the truest sense of the word, i.e. “being with”. Eva is “with” Hannah in that she shows proper concern and sensitivity towards her, and with the permission of Hannah’s father, she involves her friends Ellen and Jane who engage in caring and intelligent thought about Hannah. From the outset Eva is alert to Hannah’s fragility. She makes no assumptions about her condition, and seeks only to make authentic contact with her.

Whenever I read the section where Hannah’s father reveals the circumstances of the death in infancy of Hannah’s twin sister, Dawn, I can do nothing but cry because I find it so deeply moving. Where the account came from I do not know. I have much experience of talking to families where there has been a cot death, but the death of Dawn is unlike any of those deaths. When I was writing, it was almost as if the story was being dictated to me – as if I was a channel for it. Astonishingly, about a year later, I met someone who is a sibling of twins born in a situation that was not dissimilar to the birth of Hannah and Dawn. She told me how one of the twins nearly died, and described some of the longer term effects on the family.

The reader can see how having suffered so much distress in her young life, and having had to undergo many medical examinations, Hannah is wary of connecting with Eva. She clings to her link with her surviving family member, her father, by living out the dependence of a child younger than her years. She is holding on to something familiar, afraid of her physical body growing ahead of her emotional development and stability. At the same time I believe she is trying to “protect” her father from his own personal grief.

Eva makes the first real link with Hannah by sharing something painful from her own life – something that intuitively she believes could be relevant to Hannah's. After that link is made, Hannah begins to allow herself to trust Eva's involvement in her situation.

In my view it is crucial that from the outset Eva had not plans to try to "cure" Hannah. Hannah was able to sense that there was not pressure on her, and she was gradually able to work out how to let her story unfold. Once that story had been shared with someone who could truly receive it – in an empathic and non-intrusive way – Hannah and her father were then able to make plans about how they would search for Hannah's mother, as they both knew they wanted and needed to know what had happened to her.

I was greatly affected by how Eva wrested with her own sense of attachment to her special walking stick, and how she was then able to offer to lend it to Hannah to take with her on her journey to Italy where her mother was buried. She knew that its greater purpose lay in helping Hannah in that way. In her innate wisdom, the child understood and accepted this.

I have been asked to write particularly about my experience of interweaving the therapy of Hannah into my novel, and I am aware that I have thus far only addressed that question in part. Something I have not yet mentioned is that Hannah gave me a context where I could demonstrate my unshakable belief that real communication and connection between people has healing potential in its own right. Medical checks and interventions have their place, as do certain therapeutic techniques, but the bedrock of well-being and love of being alive is founded in real communication and connection.

Quite early in the story spiral patterns appear in the diary of Ellen's friend, Jane, and these have a considerable significance throughout the book.

Strangely, a reader of *Beyond the Veil* visited Australia soon after reading the book. She brought back for me two cards bearing spiral forms, and she informed me she had learned that for Aborigines, spirals are symbols of connection and community.

I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to write this article as it has helped me to see the "Hannah" aspect that might exist in any of us. As a therapist I am committed to helping those who come to me. I seek to potentiate the process of trying to find a language for each specific example of emotional pain, and this is with the objective of bringing it into clear focus, so that the sufferer can make decisions about how to work with it. As a therapist I also have a responsibility to continue the journey of identifying my own pain in order to process it appropriately. I knew Dr Winifred Rushforth quite well, and I remember her laughing when people asked her how old she had been when she had finally sorted everything out within herself. Her response always left the enquirer in no doubt that in her view, however long she lived, the process would never be complete. She lived well into her nineties.

I would like to end with a quote from a paper I read recently on the philosophy of chiropractic, written by the medical anthropologist Dr Morinis, as I believe that what he says is correct for practitioners of any profession that exists to improve the health and well-being of persons seeking help:

A discrepancy between what one holds to be true and what one does must be squarely faced and resolved, if the practitioner is to be transformed from technician into healer.

Eva and her friends certainly attempted to live their lives in a way most likely to minimise any such discrepancy.

*Mirabelle Maslin* December 2004

# Talking Silence

Jonathan Wood

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I am not a great fan of noisy biblical language. Words like “power” and “glory” and “almighty” leave me cold. And the hollow echo chambers that many churches are, seem to lend themselves particularly to these kinds of words. Rather than filling me with awe and devotion they conjure up militaristic associations, the rant of the polemicist, the pointed finger jabbing home its message. I prefer quiet words, and more and more these days, no words at all in my prayerful moments.

It has been interesting therefore to explore for myself silence within the Christian tradition...and discover whether or not I mean the same by it as others. What leads those other silent meditators to say nothing, I wonder? Is it, for instance, a similar lack of certainty to mine – a lack of certainty about language’s ability to convey whatever my prayer might be, as much as to whom it is addressed?

I was born into a Christian culture. My ethical code is constructed in relation to this culture – from which punishment for wrong-doing is not absent but over which the higher injunction of forgiveness prevails. My year is constructed around Christian festivals whether or not I am in a church-going phase. Forever and ever, when snow more and more rarely piles up at my door during the winter months, I will recall certain carols, expect nativity scenes, and experience a dim excitement inside at the thought of new life – new things. Belief in what are called the mysteries of Christianity – the virgin birth, the miracles, the resurrection – has transmuted into a kind of intellectual debate. These things are symbols. Or maybe they really happened, concretely, and we understand less than we think we do. Or, and this is the one I most often resort to, these are Christian koans, unanswerable propositions which lead to enlightenment somehow should we trouble to reflect on them long and hard enough. (The mystery is retained in that “somehow”. However a koan is not a mystery. It is a device that offers the chance to break through our rationality to a more inclusive perception of life. For example

“What is the sound of one hand clapping?” Only an imaginative leap can satisfactorily reply. “How come the Virgin birth?” we might ask in this spirit.)

I am reluctant to seek elsewhere for my pointers. Conversion to another religion, whether Islam or Buddhism, Judaism or Humanism, while I am certain it has benefits – the benefit of choice for instance and the enthusiasm which often accompanies such self-determination – has not appealed. I read about other faiths, but believe that without complete cultural immersion, the answers I seek might just slip by me in un-integrated detail.

I was pleased to discover then in the Christian monastic tradition a history – a story – of silence to engage with. It is the beginning of this investigation – this search – that I want to write about. It is of course, open-ended, as the best silences are, not bounded round with reductive meaning. And it is ongoing.

The two members of monastic orders that I had heard of and who seemed to offer an entry point were Thomas Merton and Sister Wendy Beckett. A significant thing about both these people is that they were, or are, hermits within their orders – removed even further into aloneness and silent contemplation from the daily life of the monastery or nunnery. Ironically they are also the two that many people will know. By the time of his death, Thomas Merton has written about one hundred books. Sister Wendy has gone one better with her own TV series. The silence of these two, if not deafening, is certainly verbose.

So what – another paradox here – do they have to say about silence to us. Quite a lot, actually.

“The contemplative has nothing to tell you except to reassure you and say that if you dare to penetrate your own silence and risk the sharing of that solitude with the lonely other who seeks God through you, then you will truly recover the light and the capacity to understand what is beyond words and beyond explanations because it is too close to be explained.” (Merton, p.54)

This is interesting because what it suggests is that language – and therefore interpretation – requires a distance from the object to be able to operate. What is being talked about here – in the silence – is “the intimate union in the depths of your own heart, of God’s spirit and your own secret inmost self” which is “too close” to be explained. Prayers sent out on the wings of language it seems to me, are going in the wrong direction, away from the existing intimacy (if only we would recognise it). This is part of my gripe with bombastic, proclamatory Church language.

Now here’s Sister Wendy writing about painting.

“Silence is making-friends-with-time. It does not fight it or waste it; it refuses to run after it. Silence floats free with time, letting the pattern of moments unfold at its own pace. It is a way of becoming free, not only for the practical advantage of being able to “see” the beauty in what is grey, for example, but at a far deeper level. In silence, we break the hold time has on us and accept in practice that our true home is in eternity.” (p34)

My unsystematic research lurched next to accounts of the monastic life. I wanted to learn how silence was scheduled into the daily round and whether its practitioners thought they were doing what Merton thought he was. I found a book by Patrick Leigh Fermor the travel writer – “A Time To Keep Silence” – which consists of descriptions – as an outsider, a non-participant and non-believer – of three monasteries following three traditions which he visited. My favourite – for, I suspect, perverse reasons – is the account of the French Carthusians, a particularly harsh, silent order. Here the monks worked the land with the most rudimentary of implements, living on a diet of root vegetables. They reserved communication for their animals – a sort of pre-linguistic system of hoots and hollers. At all times – the heat of the summer, the winter freeze – they wore heavy habits and wooden sabots. For one of the brothers even this was not enough. Each morning he would fill his wooden clogs with a fresh

prescription of thorns.

To stay silent under such conditions makes my attempts at meditation seem limp and pale. First off, I start by choosing the comfy chair. Shoes full of thorns? What for? How could you concentrate? This I assume though is the point. Silence squeezed through the narrowest of gaps, that focus needed to over-ride continuous pain, is compacted energy, a searching, scouring laser-beam. It is the sublimation of a strong awareness of our bodily, worldly condition into spiritual ecstasy. At least, I hope so. Leigh Fermor concludes that the men at this monastery were happy. Root vegetables + clogs full of thorns + silence + hard manual labour = happiness. A tough equation.

Some years ago I travelled in India. At an archway leading into Rishikesh at the foot of the Himalayas – the Beatles had gone there some years before to learn meditation with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi – lay a man on a bed of nails. In fact, when I was there, he wasn’t. Just his bed of nails and a piece of cardboard with the following information written on it, in English. “Please do not disturb me. I have been meditating on the Infinite here” – although where is “here” in the vastness of Infinity – “for many years. Yes, the nails still hurt.” Rishikesh is a place that a lot of Western travellers pass through, so the message on the piece of cardboard is understandable. But the scene was curiously affecting and it has taken a long time for me to get a grasp on why.

The empty bed of nails – representing one man’s attempt to keep his focus on God – like the empty cross, also talks of the end to suffering of that attempt. It talks of silence and a sort of positive emptiness. This is its own reward. The Holy of Holies, in the temple, was an empty space. Not just that God couldn’t be represented, but that He wasn’t being reduced to all this incarnation – this language, these things, this life as we lead it. What He is we can’t encompass, nor should we try.

Listen to this from “The Cloud of Unknowing”.

“And so it is that where another man might tell you to withdraw all your powers and thought within yourself, and worship God there – and he would be saying what was absolutely right and true – I do not care to do so, because of my fear of a wrong and physical interpretation of what is said. But what I will say is this: See that in no sense you withdraw into yourself. And, briefly, I do not want you to be outside and above, behind or beside yourself either!

“‘Well,’ you will say, ‘where am I to be? Nowhere, according to you!’ And you will be quite right! ‘Nowhere’ is where I want you! Why, when you are ‘nowhere’ physically, you are ‘everywhere’ spiritually.” (p.142)

The silence is not there to get us a perspective on God. Not even to understand or know Him, but to experience Him as inseparable from us, so close as to be beyond description. “There is no God but the God within” was a radical cry during the religious struggles of the English Civil War, but even that can be too much description.

Now, whether or not you place yourself within the Christian tradition, or indeed any other, or even outwith all religious traditions, the counselling tradition, of necessity, must find ways to talk about silence – to theorise it, if you like. After all, the gaps between what is said, the silence between one therapeutic hour and the next, silence as avoidance, silence as communication, silence as depth experience is the non-identical twin to the talk of the talking therapies. The religious traditions I’ve encountered both theorise and create a practice of silence, and I think these can usefully inform and transform our counselling practice. But this is simply to indicate an adventure. Who knows where it will lead?

In my own experiments with silence, I still struggle with shutting myself up. The Promised Land the other side of that attempt flickers in and out of focus, and it crosses my mind that thorns in my clogs mightn’t be a bad idea. But then again.....

*Meditations on Silence*  
Dorling Kindersley 1995

Sister Wendy Beckett

*A Time To Keep Silence*  
John Murray 1957

Patrick Leigh Fermor

*Thomas Merton. Essential Writings*  
Thomas Merton

ORBIS Books 2000

*The Cloud of Unknowing* trans. Clifton Wolters  
Penguin 1978



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# Food for Thought

## Tsotsi: A tale of Crime and Redemption

Marilynn Nicholl

This film won the two top awards at the 2005 Edinburgh International Film Festival and has just won the People's Award at the Toronto Festival. And yet it is a film set in an African township, spoken in South African dialect with English subtitles. It is a film where director, Gavin Hood, employed black township actors in main parts, and where the score derives from traditional Kwaito music. To maintain the integrity of the film in this way, not to 'europeanize' it to appeal to the cultural motifs of Western Europe and America must have been a risk, but one which has paid off...

Having followed the progress of this film through the week of its debut here, I am truly relieved. For the film is one which reminds us of our humanity. Discernment and taste are still alive and well in our viewing community – it is not all 'The Business' (another Film Festival film and a sad sad expose of who we may be). Though dangerously close to it, we are not yet beyond the pale.

This film appears in the Western world at an opportune moment. There is a readiness, I feel, to look out towards the broader world community: to consider questions of humane world politics and global justice and to say enough.

Redemption, always a popular theme in the consulting room, is of course a universal theme going right back to the early traditions of story telling and film making. Set amidst the sprawling Johannesburg township of Soweto - where survival is the primary objective - TSOTSI traces six days in the life of an apparently ruthless young gang leader. Tsotsi himself has no name (the word means "thug" or "gangster" in the street language of South Africa's townships and ghettos). The identity of this young thug is slowly uncovered, when a young baby, whom he has inadvertently kidnapped in a stolen car, compels him to confront his own brutal development and to feel the consequences of his actions.

Joseph Campbell talks a great deal about the love which comes through 'the meeting of the eyes'. Here this meeting with the 'other' is the gaze, firstly, of this small being, Tsotsi's own potential for innocent living and for connection stares back at him in the face of the child. Later in the film it is the regard of a young woman, who he forces to nurse this baby, which helps him to recover his name, his lost identity. He comes again into existence and is faced with a reminder of who he could have been, had circumstances been more humane.

As one who has tried to highlight over my years with this journal the need to input therapeutic support to the very young, it feels fitting that as I depart as editor I recommend wholeheartedly to you this film. It demonstrates to us poignantly the ruthlessness which will develop in a society which has not looked after its young. Here in this country young people may lose their primary carers to the abyss of alcohol/drugs, or to that of divorce/separation, or to physical/mental illness. There in the African countries there will be those dangers too, but along with those the enormity of the threat from the HIV/Aids epidemic and the degradation wrought in families through racism, through poverty and through famine.

The hardening it breathes into the young who survive can be lethal.

Tsotsi is a 'psychological thriller' if you like. It is also a moral tale of what occurs when we fail in our duty to protect the young of our society. And when it fails them so desperately, society cannot but pay the price.

*"Tsotsi", Director Gavin Hood. Based on the book by Athol Fugard. "Tsotsi" may be on general release in Spring 2006.*



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*We are guilty of many errors and many faults  
But our worst crime is abandoning the children  
Neglecting the fountain of life  
Many things we need can wait  
The child cannot  
Right now is the time his bones are being formed  
His blood is being made  
And his senses are being developed  
To him we cannot answer 'tomorrow'  
His name is 'today'.  
(anon)*

# Therapists and Social Responsibility

David B Lingiah

In Mauritian Abroad the March issue writing under the title of Lost Direction I talked about a Mauritian friend of mine whom I have not seen for over 25 years. We had greeted each other. His first words to me were: "I've lost my way." I met him at the funeral of my friend Maurice Lim. Many Mauritian friends and others have come from far away places to pay their last respects to Maurice. Immediately I thought my friend coming from a long way had lost his bearing on the road and was late in arriving at the cremation ground. I asked him what exactly he meant. He said: "I've lost my way in life" in a low, depressing tone. I listened to his stories of pain, loss and family separation. I asked him to keep in touch; we exchanged telephone numbers. So far he has not got in touch; when I called him on several occasions there was always a dead sound.

Many of the clients I see are like my friend. I still feel I have a social responsibility towards that friend. This is the aspect I would like to explore somewhat generally here. In fact, Simon du Plock (1997) wrote about this very concern when he said: "therapists are used to working with people who feel they have lost their way and lack a sense of direction or purpose. It is at these times of existential crises that clients can work most creatively to establish their reason for living. In a society breaking away from the past, therapists have the opportunity to work together with clients toward a new set of ethical standards and goals".

Here was an opportunity for him to link up and open up to seek help, knowing my background. He failed to take it up; there was some form of conflict. In the words of du Plock (op.cit): "therapy is the necessary and obvious adjunct of the age. While we enjoy a love-hate relationship with it, it fulfils an important function- that of providing meaning." I could not resolve his personal feelings of lost but I could support him; there was not going to be a quick-fix solution, whether his phone was off or on:

work has to be done on his part. With him as with any other clients I was prepared, in the words of Brian Thorne (1997) "to commit[myself] to a deeper level of experiencing"(p.204). As a therapist, if I was suffering from burnout I would not be able to listen and make connections with my friend or anyone else for that matter. Burnout affects connection and relationship that therapists have with clients. Trust is likely to be disrupted; and respect for their dignity will be violated.

Making connections for our clients is part of our work, and working with making connections can be part of what we have to offer in social responsibility. There is profound truth in the Sioux Indian saying: "With all beings and all things we shall be as relatives."

Counsellors and therapists are human beings involved with the issues of humanity; we can express feelings and opinions. As the PSSR editorial(psychotherapists and counsellors for social responsibility) noted: "As people we all need the space to be passionate; as therapists, we definitely need a place where we can express our feelings without fear of judgement, and in the full and joyful awareness that people may not agree, and may even provoke a response." If people like my friend is not coping very well under the burden of family responsibility and are falling apart, then as therapists we have a moral responsibility to pay sufficient attention to their moral values, accountability, family and community responsibilities. If we continue to overemphasize individual self-fulfilments to the detriment of these other important responsibilities we are actually doing more harm than good. Because of his stories of pain, loss and family separation my friend should not be made to feel he is a failure; that has been his experience and consequently he kept himself to himself and became depressed. Counsellors should consciously influence clients to change their behaviour by pointing out their achievements in other areas. Therapy can be a powerful healing force when clients face moral

dilemmas around issues such as divorce, commitment to children, and honesty. They are beginning to move in other areas as well. For example, therapists are exploring the broader spectrum of social and political issues on the citizens. From the Redpepper archive one can see the direction therapists are taking: "What is being put forward is a whole new take on what we understand a citizen to be. There is a sort of politician within everyone. The struggle is to develop her or his political self-awareness, to move from preoccupation with personal growth issues to a sense of social responsibility, to develop the freedom to engage creatively and effectively in politics without losing a sense of self-respect, to understand how our political attitudes and commitments have been affected psychologically by family, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic and socio-economic factors."

Again, I quote: "Therapists have a chance to present a balanced view of human nature that, while not denying greed and competitiveness, also speaks with some authority about benevolence, altruism and our desire to make something happen on the basis of our need for connectedness with others...and one of the values of psychotherapy, derived from the struggles that are experienced in therapy itself, is that it is possible to gather together the strength to push through the despair barrier and struggle on." The despair barrier does not only affect clients but the mental health therapists too are affected.

Burnout is "a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with people in some capacity" (Maslach, 1986, p.61). In the name of social responsibility to themselves and to their clients self-care is advocated. Self-care consists of integrating one's mental, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being according to Porter (1995). It is one of the

primary methods of preventing and treating therapists burnout, noted Tracy Wityk (2002) of Calgary University in a paper titled "Burnout and Ethics of self-care for Therapists".

Self-care of the counsellors is mostly an issue of responsible caring, one of the main ethical principles in the Canadian Code of Ethics and Conduct. Therapists must evaluate how their own experiences, attitudes, culture, beliefs and stresses influence their interactions with others, and integrate this awareness into all efforts to benefit and not harm others. Self-awareness of how a therapist's own pressures, issues, and stress influence clients helps to improve the care of those clients. They must also seek appropriate help and/or discontinue scientific or professional activity for an appropriate period of time, if a physical or psychological condition reduces their ability to benefit and not harm others. One takes time for oneself only if conditions are negatively influencing one's professional performance.

Therapists should be aware of this proneness to burnout and learn about how to engage in self-care to prevent its negative consequences. They need to learn the importance of balancing their personal and professional lives. Actually they need to follow their own advice and engage in the same beneficial self-care activities that they suggest to their clients in order to maintain their personal and professional wellbeing. As Norcross (2000) advised, they should recognise the hazards of psychological practice and engage in self-care to deal effectively with such hazards; because, as Porter (op.cit) observed: "Martyrdom begets poor care of clients, not sainthood." Poor self-care can result in isolation, poor judgment, self-deception; self-care can protect clients from ethical violations resulting from therapist burnout. The self is an instrument of therapy that needs to be cared for. Many professional groups have developed programmes for

impaired professionals, but this is not yet the case in the field of psychology (Nathan, 1986). However, appreciating the rewards of being a therapist/psychologist is one healthy method of self-care. According to Norcross (op.cit) the psychology profession brings joy, meaning, growth, excitement and vitality to both the therapist and the client. Developing and using a strong support network is one component of self-care that is likely to help prevent and treat burnout. All counsellors/therapists/psychologists have a particular personal and professional responsibility vis-à-vis their clients and public at large in health promotion.

I had asked my friend to keep in touch. We had exchanged telephone numbers but did I manage to connect with him? Remember, we were attending a funeral ceremony of a mutual friend. One was dead; the other had lost his way in life.

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# A Student of Counselling

Anna McIndoe

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*One student's view of the beginning stages of counselling training. COSCA is keen to hear from other students of counselling and invite them to offer their perspectives.*

I have just spent the last two hours trawling the Internet looking for poems about 'endings'. Was it because I was postponing the inevitable end of the COSCA Certificate in Counselling course?

When I 'signed up' for this course last August I had could not have foreseen the journey it would take me on.

My first assessment back in October began with:

Carl Rogers says...

"If I can form a helping relationship to myself, if I can be sensitively aware of and acceptant toward my own feelings – then the likelihood is so great that I can form a helping relationship towards another."

The very first self-evaluation question we had to answer was: "why do you want to attend the course?" Good question! I came on the course because I believed it would help me in my profession as a depute head teacher where I have to help pupils, parents and staff. I thought that counselling was what I had been doing over the last thirty years – advising, offering support, giving opinions, generally believing that what I had to say would somehow fix things for people. Eight weeks later I now know that is not what a counselling approach is about. I learned very quickly that I knew very little about counselling skills and that I had a long way to go.

I found it interesting reading that again. Carl Roger's quote still remains uppermost in my mind – "If I can form a helping relationship to myself"... being aware and acceptant of my own feelings and of my 'self' have been the most difficult tasks during this Mount Everest of a learning curve. I believed

then that I had a long way to go, I can't fully appreciate how far I have come since those early 'beginnings' and yet I feel that I still have a long way to go. Not just in my use of counselling skills, but in learning about my self.

So what have I learned? How have I changed? Where do I go from here? Is pottery for beginners still an option?

Module one taught me the difference between formal counselling and using a counselling approach – an approach that I have hopefully learned to use more sensitively in my work place and in my personal life. And I discovered that not only would I have to learn and develop those skills I would also have to master the use of nonverbal skills.

Here I look at the skills involved in listening work, which form the core of the four modules. On reflection my first few attempts as a listener proved interesting! My observer's feedback showed that I enjoyed nothing better than a good blether and perhaps a wee gossip. I quickly realised that I would have to curb my habit of interrupting and that I was no longer the one responsible for filling the silences. Despite being reminded of these 'habits' I still find myself doing them – condition learning is a hard habit to break!

Johari's window helped me to look at my blind and hidden self and hopefully my unknown self's window has diminished slightly since those early days.

I considered that the verbal and non verbal skills at the core of the course (the essential qualities of empathy, warmth, genuiness, respect, positive regard and caring) lie also at the heart of human relationships.

Caring is defined in the course manual as a 'form of non possessive love'. Throughout the last nine

months, all the course members and our tutors have demonstrated caring in abundance. We've cried together, supported each other in triad work, worried about assessments and had a bloody good laugh as we worked on the sexuality unit! What was that laughter covering up?

Module two brought beginnings, middles and endings. The ways of being involved a progression from the beginnings phase showing empathy, acceptance, trust and being open to the middles with evidence of advanced empathy, listening to and using self and monitoring the speaker's use of the listener. In endings contracts and work done were to be reviewed, the possibility of future contact would be considered and finally goodbye had to be said.

During the second module I learned the importance of establishing boundaries and negotiating a contract in order to ensure a safe, trusting environment for both the Speaker and the Listener. I fully understood the need for confidentiality, keeping to an agreed time and good time keeping (especially after we were all severely reminded of our inability to keep to the recommended times!) It became clear why beginnings can last as long as six weeks while relationships are established, fears and anxieties are acknowledged and expectations are clarified – just as we were all experiencing together on the course.

Relationships on the course have gone through the phases. I believe (if I may so bold as to reflect my own feelings onto the other course members) that we all experienced the 'stuckness' during module two. We had all learned a great deal in module one, but by the end of module two we were all struggling to identify any progress we had made!

One of the hardest Saturday sessions occurred during module two, unit three – transitions – attachment, loss and re-adjustment. The depth of

emotions I experienced that day overwhelmed me. Not only was I deeply affected by my own feelings but also by the reactions of the rest of the group. I am still moved by my experience as I write about it and would like to be able to find an ending to it some time. My journey on the course became a bit rough that day.

Nevertheless the journey did continue bringing module two to an end by looking at professional values and responsibilities – values, which are crucial in forming any professional relationship and which I believe are sadly lacking in society today, include:

- Integrity, being true to ourselves and communicating with honesty and consistency
- Impartiality, being able to respond to the Speaker's attitudes, values and behaviour without undue bias or imposition of our own values. It is the basis of unconditional positive regard

And last but not least

- Respect, which involves valuing each Speaker (or fellow human being) as a unique individual with a unique way of being in the world, and is an individual response to the relationship with the Listener. It also implies the Listener's duty to help the Speaker recognise her independence and right to choose her own way to act even when the Speaker's views of right and wrong are very different from the Listener's

I've included these three definitions as I feel I have become more aware of their true meaning in the context of a supporting relationship.

By the end of module two my observer's feedback was becoming a little more encouraging. I was now able to:

- support the Speaker in reviewing and identifying work done and changes which had or had not been made throughout the session.
- I was able to invite the speaker to explore her feelings about ending module two.

• I was even able to get to the end of a listening session without ever interrupting (well hardly ever!)

There was hope for me yet. Half way through now, the journey continued into module three.

This brought different challenges, introducing participants to different theoretical perspectives in the psychosocial field.

Suddenly the course had taken a sharp theoretical turn.

After my initial concerns that I would never be able to follow this module I suddenly found myself being fascinated by the many approaches being used in counselling. After the introduction to the different approaches I was faced with identifying my own belief system about personality and human development.

I really appreciated being introduced to the Gestalt theory. I found the whole concept of it fascinating and mind numbing. Part of this assessment is to explore how different features from a certain psychosocial perspective has different personal meaning in my life, past and present and how it may support me in future development work. I think this is easily explained through the Gestalt approach. My participation in this course, my job, my family history, my social existence are constantly evolving and changing with all of these areas coming together to create the Gestalt that is me – I wouldn't be the 'form' without all of the background!

Towards the end of the module three journey came the dreaded transcript. The exercise, although long and laborious, was worth every minute. The group agreed that we learned more about ourselves through that exercise than we had since we started. I discovered that I had developed a speech impediment, I was STILL interrupting, my buttons

were being pushed from every angle because of my dislike of the subject being discussed and that deep down I'm a bit of a control freak. Pottery classes seemed the only option.

Module four – the final leg.

A deeper self awareness emerged for me through looking at and discussing conditions of worth, unconditional positive regard and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Our innate striving for self actualisation just wouldn't get anywhere without the basic physiological needs!

One of the most light-hearted units of the whole course was the Saturday we covered sexuality. I am grateful to M... for helping me to define my sexuality but I'm still trying to work out, along with N..., how to use it!

My journey is entering its 'endings' phase. How do I feel about that? A mixture of emotions – relief, excitement, anxiety about what I should do next but most of all a huge sadness – I feel emotional just typing that. This course has done many things for me. It has taught me more about counselling skills than I could have ever imagined existed. I've worked with a group of people who have been caring and supportive, funny and sad. I have been taught by three women who have been unstinting in their task of guiding us on our journey through the rough and the smooth. But most of all I've learned

a  
little  
more  
about  
me.

To Live in the Way of the Gestalt  
Precepts enunciated by Claudio Naranjo  
(from *Gestalt for Beginners*)

1. Live now. Concern yourself with the present before the past or the future
2. Live here. Devote yourself to what is present before what is absent.
3. Stop imagining things. Experiment with what is real.
4. Stop thinking unnecessary things. Instead, taste and look.
5. Express instead of manipulating, explaining, justifying or judging.
6. Surrender yourself to distress and pain in the same way that you surrender to pleasure. Do not limit your conscience.
7. Accept no 'you must' or 'you should' other than the ones that you impose on yourself. Do not adore any idol.
8. Accept being as you are.

Anna McIndoe completed her COSCA Certificate in Counselling Skills with GMG Associates (*counselling, training & development*) Inverclyde.



## Courses and groups in 2005

### Foundation course in Gestalt Therapy

This one-year course provides a thorough introduction to the principles and practice of Gestalt Therapy. The course is suitable for those interested in furthering their counselling training and who have a particular interest in Gestalt. It can also constitute the foundation year for those wishing to train as Gestalt psychotherapists. Apply by 15 July.

### Choice, change and creativity

This ongoing group provides a unique opportunity for you to develop your self-confidence and creativity at work and in your relationships. The group will be particularly of use to team members, managers and consultants who want to relate to others in more effective, satisfying and fruitful ways. It would form a suitable part of the 'Investors in People' initiative.

### Being and belonging

This ongoing group provides an opportunity for you to develop a greater understanding of and confidence in yourself and your relationships. We will focus on personal exploration and self-awareness using dialogue, body process, meditation, dreams, and artwork. The group will be useful for anyone interested in joining a personal development group, as a support in their personal lives or as a potential for professional development.

### Gestalt therapy group

This weekly group is an opportunity for you to look at yourself and your relationships with others in a safe and supportive setting.

#### For more information:

mail: 51 Lothian Road Edinburgh EH1 2DJ

tel/fax: 0131 228 3841

email: [egi@btconnect.com](mailto:egi@btconnect.com)

web: [www.edinburgh-gestalt-institute.co.uk](http://www.edinburgh-gestalt-institute.co.uk)



# Counselling

## Research Dialogue

Kaye Richards

25

BACP Attendance Report

COSCA'S (Counselling and Psychotherapy in Scotland)

Counselling Research Dialogue  
Social Inclusion, Research and Counselling  
Thursday 17 March 2005, Perth

By Kaye Richards  
British Association for Counselling and  
Psychotherapy

This event raised an important research and practice agenda in counselling – social inclusion. Even though the event was titled 'research dialogue' it very much emphasised the ways in which research is integral and informative to practice. Many of the presentations were about addressing the practical ways in which social inclusion could be achieved with a wide range of clients. It also linked this to the ways in which research and Higher Education could look towards investigating the range of theoretical and research agendas in tackling social inclusion. The client groups discussed included people with epilepsy, the deaf community, gay, lesbian and bi-sexual communities, transgender people, people with dementia, and young people of secondary school age. This range of client groups was obviously not inclusive to the full range of anti-discriminatory agendas. It does highlight, however, the needs of certain groups and it was encouraging to see certain groupings that are often omitted represented, for example people with dementia.

The key questions posed by the event included:

- How do we increase access to counselling for all sectors of society?
- How do we uncover what / who is under-represented?
- How do we provide social inclusive access

to counselling skills training?

- How can research enhance the inclusivity of counselling?
- How can we build a more research focused approach to our work?
- How does counselling in Scotland consider and respond to the high concentration of poverty and long-term employment?

The areas discussed featured a number of key theoretical, research and practice agendas in working towards to social inclusion.

Dr David Fryer, a community psychologist of the University of Stirling, provided a context to social inclusion and counselling in giving an overview of relevant perspectives of community psychology. In the main, he pointed out how societal arrangements are often precursors of psychological problems, and discussed the ways in which a community psychology perspective can offer a perspective that ensures individual change is linked with social action.

Alan Moir and Lena McMillian, of the Epilepsy Scotland Community Support Service, provided a perspective of how counselling skills are used to enhance the quality of work with people with epilepsy. This presentation was illustrative of the need to ensure that the continuum from counselling skills to actual counselling per se was considered within the social inclusion agenda. Their case example was illustrative of how community support services can make their practices more inclusive to the members of the community they are serving.

Professor John McLeod, of the University of Abertay Dundee, provided an overview of the developments of the Centre for Research in Counselling in Scotland, which BACP is one of its initial funders. John highlighted the need for increasing research capacity that had a distinctive

research tradition. He highlighted the need for this approach to be socially orientated and that research in counselling and psychotherapy needed to reconceptualise the problem of outcome research. After providing an overview of the development of this research initiative he then summarised its key elements. These elements included research being case based, the client providing the structure to tell the story, the client being an active agent, research being collaborative, focusing on the persons' world (i.e. the interaction between counselling and cultural resources) and it being longitudinal.

Mike Hough, of the Counselling Unit at Strathclyde University, gave an insightful account of the process he experienced of "edging other people's worlds" – in his case the world of people in the deaf community. Mike detailed the development of a Certificate in Counselling Skills for people with a hearing impairment that is being developed at Strathclyde University in partnership with the Scottish Council of Deafness. He reflected upon his experiences of developing this course and the ways in which his role as a trainer on such a course had evolved – he was not hearing impaired. His account provided, not only insight into what anti-discriminatory practice in this area might entail, but also how the professional practice of trainers and therapists needs to remain critical if as a profession we are to be responsive to agendas of social inclusion.

Craig Hutchinson, of Gays Men's Health in Edinburgh, discussed aspects of sexual orientation research and the issues of self-identity that impact upon people's experiences of sexual orientation. He highlighted how a lot of research does not adequately define what it is examining and, for example, often confuses sexual behaviour with sexual identity. Craig gave an overview of a research study, The Spitzer Study, which examined sexual re-orientation therapy. His critical analysis of

this research study highlights many of the biases that research processes can reinforce. For example, the research study states that sexual re-orientation does work, and yet the study only interviewed a sample of people motivated to want to change their sexual orientation. In conclusion, he pointed out that lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender people tend to have higher levels of suicide, anxiety and depression, and therapists do demonstrate prejudice towards such clients.

Angie Fee, of the The University of Edinburgh, provided a theoretical paper that examined the relationship between counselling and transgender identities. Her paper pointed out the ways in which people who are transgendered experience repeated prejudice as result of the 'hetero-normative framework' – that is gender is not accepted outside of the binary distinctions of 'man' / 'woman'. This rigid form of social classification related to gender leaves unexamined assumptions about how transgendered identities are formed and experienced. As she pointed out "we all have to work with being a man or a woman – its just transgendered people are more aware of this work". She went onto note how gender is a form of 'activity or performance' that we learn in how to be a 'man' or a 'woman' and we need to examine how counselling and psychotherapy can address the process of developing a 're-gendered world'.

Dot Weaks, of the University of Abertay Dundee, examined the concept of counselling for people with a diagnosis of early dementia. This presentation highlighted an often-underrepresented group and raised important issues into provisions and processes of counselling and psychotherapy. Her research points to the opportunities that counselling for people diagnosed with dementia can offer. These included: addressing the need for continuing with their previous life (before diagnosis); the need to explore 'horror' stories and fantasises of having

dementia; the need for understanding the changing role of relationships; the need to understand what is happening and process emotional responses to this diagnosis; and the need to address deep philosophical questions about the future – creating ‘safe uncertainty’. Her main conclusion was that impaired cognitive functioning should not exclude people with dementia from counselling, as there are many benefits.

Dr Liz Forbat, of the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships at the University of Edinburgh, presented an overview of a youth counselling service evaluation in Airidie, Scotland. Liz highlighted how young people are often a marginalised group, as they have limited access to counselling services and the services offered are rarely dedicated to the specific needs of children and young people. She discussed the framework for evaluating this new service and highlighted emerging debates. For example, the social ethics of the counselling profession and the ways in which the identity of schools and education are constructed as being ‘sites of discipline’ or ‘sites of care’, and how counselling can impact on such constructions.

## Conclusion

What is evident from the above contributions is that the event clearly mapped out a range of social inclusion issues and agendas. It also integrated the research and practice agenda effectively, recognising the ways in which theoretical understanding can lead to understanding more clearly the ways in which communities and society reinforce prejudice. The presentations also offered ways of challenging discrimination and paving the way forward for more active anti-discriminatory practices in counselling and psychotherapy.

Kaye Richards  
BACP Research Facilitator

23 March 2005

## Abernethy House

**At Abernethy House in South Edinburgh personal counselling is available for those who work in the field of therapy, as well as regular one-to-one supervision for practitioners.**

**Hourly Rates: Work with an experienced practitioner/lecturer/counselling trainer (COSCA accredited at Diploma level) Fees £45.00 - Personal Counselling £50.00 - Supervision**

### **Lecturing/Counselling Training:**

**Associates of Abernethy House are available to work on a consultancy basis.  
Fees for Consultancy Work upon application**

**Adjusted rates are offered by experienced practitioner(graduate with diploma in counselling) for students of counselling who are engaging in personal therapy.**

**For further details please telephone 0131 667 2526 E-mail: [abernethyhouse@ednet.co.uk](mailto:abernethyhouse@ednet.co.uk)  
[www.ednet.co.uk/~marilyn\\_nicholl/counselling](http://www.ednet.co.uk/~marilyn_nicholl/counselling)**

Abernethy House is in Mayfield Road, directly on the 42 and 24 bus routes and close to the 3, 31, 7, 8 Services. Easy access to free parking.

# Gazette

## 2005

**5 October**

COSCA AGM 10.30 – 12.30 Stirling

For further information: 01786 475 140  
marilyn@cosca.org.uk

**11 October**

COSCA Recognition Scheme Workshop  
Inverness

For further information: 01786 475 140  
kathy@cosca.org.uk

**13 October** COSCA Recognition Scheme  
Workshop

Glasgow

For further information: 01786 475 140  
kathy@cosca.org.uk

**17 October**

COSCA Corporate Affairs Group

Group overseeing membership applications  
Stirling

## November 2005

**7 November**

COSCA/APSA 2005 Conference

Salutation Hotel, Perth

For further information: 01786 475 140  
marilyn@cosca.org.uk

**18 November**

COSCA Counsellor/Psychotherapist

Accreditation Panel Meeting

Stirling

## December 2005

**2 December**

COSCA Course Validation Panel Meeting

Stirling

## 2006

**February**

Counsellors in the Workplace Networking  
Group

All welcome.

Edinburgh

Contact: 01738 562 005

admin@rowan-consultancy.co.uk

**31 March 2005**

Deadline for receipt of Applications for:

COSCA Trainer Accreditation

COSCA Counsellor/Psychotherapist

Accreditation

**17 May**

The Mary Kilborn Lecture

"The Humanity of the Counsellor"

Professor Dave Mearns

For further information: 0141 950 3211

Alison.mcallister@strath.ac.uk

**18 May**

Meeting at Relational Depth

Professor Dave Mearns

For further information: 0141 950 3211

Alison.mcallister@strath.ac.uk

## Vision and Purpose

As the professional body for counselling and psychotherapy in Scotland. COSCA seeks to advance all forms of counselling and psychotherapy and use of counselling skills by promoting best practice and through the delivery of a range of sustainable services.

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