## *Centre Profile*

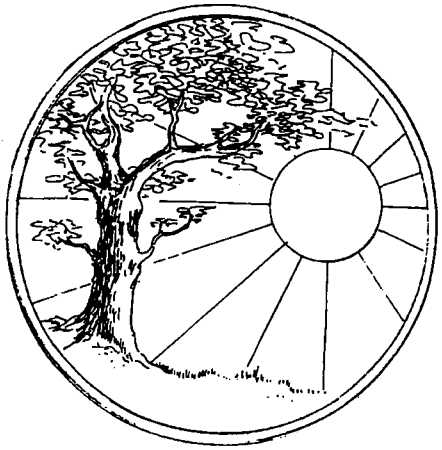
# *Eigenwelt*

# *Phenomenal Therapy*

*David Brazier*

We live in the phenomenal world. It is impossible to separate ourselves from the world around us. We do not exist independently of it. It does not appear independently of us. There is a constant interaction between ourselves and our world at both the physical and psychological levels which leaves no part of us untouched. Physically, every molecule of our bodies, every pulse of energy, every structural pattern, has its origin outside of the boundary of this present physical body. Most of our substance is replaced several times a year. Psychologically the flow of mental factors through our minds, the impulses which soothe or disturb our heart, are all functions of the world we perceive around us. And the world we do see is itself in large degree a function of the cultural patterns of perception which we have been educated to recognise.

Nonetheless, western civilisation has, to a large extent, been built upon a fiction of separation between people and their world, a fiction which no longer serves us very well. This fiction was articulated at



an early date by the notion that people have a soul. Concern with the soul and its salvation lies at the root of the more modern attempts at concern with the psyche and its therapy. The idea that we are set apart from the rest of 'creation' by a wide divide thus goes very deep in the history of psychology. Along with this idea of our separation from our world go a whole set of other ideas. These include the principle that the world is there for us to exploit,

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that only human satisfactions matter, that human needs are always paramount and so on. These ideas found expression in the Christian church but became so well established that they are still largely taken for granted by a population which is now not, or is only nominally, Christian. Technology has taken over where Christianity left off. One obvious result is that we are now threatened with ecological catastrophe.

In fact, with the decline of religion, this way of thinking has not ameliorated but has gone to a further extreme. It has become a high ideal of western culture that people should strive to become 'independent' and to get their own needs met. The theme song of our age is 'I did it my way.' This philosophy is expressed in economic competition, consumerism and a pervasive belief that each must look after themselves. The shopping malls are our cathedrals now. As a result, caring activities in which people are concerned for others have declined in status, work which exploits other people and the natural world is highly rewarded, and community spirit weakens in ways which will never be rectified by employing more police and building more prisons.

Therapy as we know it is a product of western culture. Most therapists and most clients share at least some of the aims set out above. They work toward independence, self-reliance and meeting one's own needs. If there are problems in a person's life, the first recourse is to find someone else to blame; in therapy, parents are a favourite choice. People who have been immersed in the therapy world and accept its principles tend to believe that they should think of their own needs more and of other people's needs less and that feelings are more important than the world around us which gives rise to them.

## *What is Phenomenology?*

Phenomenology was an approach pioneered by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl which was built upon a study of perception, that is, upon a study of the processes of experience by which we are inseparably involved in our 'life world'. The approach to therapy developed at Eigenwelt is also based upon this idea that the only point at which a firm footing for our lives can be found is at the point where self and world meet. The illusory gap between a person and their phenomenal world is the ground where psychopathology develops. Indeed, from this perspective, we could say that all forms of so-called neurosis have as their ultimate aim the restoration of psychological contact between a person and their world. We are part of nature and the symptoms we suffer are part of nature's attempt to heal herself.

First we experience and then we try to make sense of our experience and then the sense we have made of it affects the way we experience the next time and so on. If the sense we create separates us from our experience, it is as though a wound opens up, a tear in the fabric of existence, which separates us. The emphasis we find in our culture upon becoming ever more separate and insulated from the natural world makes us more and more prone to psychological trouble.

We do not experience passively, but are always trying to make sense of our world, which means that we are trying to understand what possibilities it contains.

Getting a more direct perception (intuition) is therefore a liberating (or peak) experience. Phenomenological approaches are not about repairing what has gone 'wrong' with a person but with realising the fullness of human potential.

Phenomenology has influenced many approaches to therapy in varying degrees. Generally it has been taken, however, as implying an extreme form of relativism. If everyone perceives the world differently, then one view is as good as another and there is no firm footing anywhere upon which one could find a sense of security. It is not that this view of phenomenology is wrong, so much as that it is one-sided. It is true that a centrally important part of phenomenological method is something called epoche (pronounced e-po-kay) which means putting aside all presuppositions so that one can see and hear phenomena clearly. Epoche is the origin of the central emphasis, in the work of Carl Rogers for instance, upon adopting an empathic approach. Husserl invented the method of epoche, however, not in order to open the door onto a chaotic universe in which each person invented their own reality, but rather in order that we may get closer to the truth.

Philosophy, with psychology on its coat-tails, has been bedeviled for a long time by swings between absolutism and relativism. Absolutism, which asserts that there is one truth only, leads to judgementalism. Relativism, which asserts that there is no truth, only view-points, leads to insecurity. There is a middle path offered by phenomenology. In this middle path, most of our effort goes into the attempt to clarify our own minds of bias in order to achieve, and to help our clients and others achieve, a direct perception of the phenomenal world, a world experienced not as one principle but as an open horizon beyond any dogmatic definition. In this approach, there is a true world, not mere relativism, and there is freedom, not absolutism. It is possible to have inner security without outer oppression.

## *How This Works as Therapy*

If the general diagnosis that it is alienation from our world which makes us suffer is correct, it follows that the therapist's attention will be focused at the points of most vivid contact between the client and their world. In this respect, phenomenological therapy does not differ from most person-centred humanistic approaches. Such methods as empathic reflection may be the most accurate way of homing in. A resonance will build up between therapist and client as the former becomes more and more attuned to the latter's experience.

All therapists study the consciousness of the client. The phenomenologist is particularly influenced by Husserl's dictum that consciousness is always consciousness of something. The phenomenological therapist is not attentive to feelings for their own sake. We are attentive to them because they betray the points at which enhanced involvement in life is possible. A therapist may identify that the client's consciousness of X gives rise to feelings A and B. If the therapist is genuinely 'non-directive', that is, if the epoche is operating fully, we will then see how X evolves into Y and then Z, each of which give rise to other mental factors which we could label C, D, E and so on. This is different from what many therapists in fact do. What

commonly happens is that the therapist turns the client's attention toward the feelings or other mental factors which have arisen. This introspective turn transforms A or B into the object of consciousness. The client now starts to have feelings about feelings, thoughts about thoughts and so on. To some extent this is an inevitable part of therapy, but it is not a primary aim of a phenomenological approach. The phenomenologist is more interested in the point of contact between client and client's world than with entering an introspective spiral.

Phenomenology suggests that things become real for us through our interaction with them, through our gaining a sense of their otherness. Things are real when they are other. At the same time, we feel most alive when we are involved. It is when we are led out into our world that we grow, not when we get into a self-conscious vortex. A phenomenological therapy, therefore, can, and at Eigenwelt does, make a good deal of use of arts and creative media. Art is a way of representing our world to ourselves and experientially exploring our involvement in it. We are not here talking about the kind of art in which an artist imposes their vision upon the materials, so much as an art in which the person is responsive to the life and nature of the medium being worked with. In this way we do not produce symbols and signs so much as foot-prints of a journey of unselfconscious steps. Many people find embarking upon this kind of art daunting because their school experience has made art into a highly self-conscious affair. Once one begins, however, one can soon become lost in the work and rediscover the springs of creativity.

One often hears it said that 'we cannot love others until we love ourselves'. From a phenomenological perspective this seems to turn the truth on its head. It is involvement with what is other than self which brings us to life and sanity. It is by loving others truly that we achieve peace in our hearts. Many people are lost in a kind of 'going through the motions of love' because of pressure of social convention or conditioning, but this is not real love and it does not help them to be at peace. Telling such a person to think of themselves more has only very temporary effect and ultimately offends something deep within them that knows where their real help lies. Advocating greater selfishness on the client's part can relieve the guilt that comes from their knowledge that what they are doing is really hollow anyway, but this is a very short-term expedient which can also have some unfortunate side effects both for the client and those they are related to.

Another means of enhancing contact and involvement is dialogue. Methods such as sculpting and psychodrama and some other expressive work can enable the client to investigate what the phenomena of their world are 'saying to them'. This can sometimes be akin to role reversal in psychodrama and sometimes to focusing in Gendlin's sense. Phenomenology provides a basis for an integration of methods which does not become an eclectic hotch-potch.

Like most therapies, the phenomenological approach is also much concerned with the client-therapist relationship. In the therapy situation, the therapist is a very significant part of the

world for the client. The relationship is thus an arena in which the client's alienation also becomes apparent. Over the course of therapy there are likely to be characteristic changes in the therapeutic relationship as the client experiences how perceptual habits affect and hinder the flow of dialogue.

## *Training the Therapist*

When we seriously try to enter and appreciate the perspective of another person, we inevitably come up against resistances in ourselves. It is the therapist's ego that gets in the way of the therapy. Training in therapy and personal growth are thus closely interrelated. Not just any kind of 'personal growth' will do, however. There are many currently popular approaches to growth work which are likely to make a person more rather than less self-absorbed. There are also others which contribute to the development of a kind of professional detachment which does not enhance contact with the client.

Trainee therapists find it useful to learn a variety of techniques which, as it were, can set the stage for a more real or spontaneous interaction. These are concerned with establishing trust and safety, amplifying or containing the material that comes to light, enhancing opportunities for creativity and so on. The essence of the therapy process, however, is not found primarily in an accumulation of techniques but in the transformation of the person of the therapist.

This transformation is not different in principle from that which the client also undertakes. In many approaches to therapy there is a basic contradiction between the demand that the therapist be self-denying while the client is self-absorbed. In the phenomenological approach, therapist and client are both engaged upon a path which leads to ever greater engagement, not with self, but with the phenomenal world.

## *Conclusions*

A therapy focused upon the life world of the client rather than upon self concepts is one built around principles of creativity, love and engagement rather than repair, adjustment and narcissism. This approach conceives of therapist and client as engaged upon essentially the same path. It provides a basis for the integration of a variety of techniques within a coherent set of principles, principles which are inherently pro-social, ecological and consistent with deeper spiritual directions. Eigenwelt is a forum for learning and experimentation in such an approach.

# *My Experience of the Eigenwelt Diploma*

*Mary Archibald*

Halfway through my Eigenwelt Diploma in Phenomenological Therapy, I hardly recognise myself from the woman who started it. I not only think and act differently, I look different! I joined the course knowing there was much personal growth work involved, but was quite unprepared for the depth, breadth, size of it all, and at times the spontaneity of change and growth.

I chose the course because the expectations were high, and it seemed if I could fulfil all of them I should end up being a good counsellor. I also chose it for its variety, the wide reading expectations, the use of art, psychodrama, dreamwork, counselling theory and practice, groupwork theory and practice and the spiritual dimension. Also its flexibility. Though I needed to complete a prescribed number of hours attendance, client practice, peer learning, personal development, theory papers, project, and case studies, I could fashion this as I wished which suited my way of life. I also liked the idea that each student could do it their way, and end up with a diploma. I have always believed that there are many different ways of doing things, and now realise that had I thought up this course for myself it couldn't have suited me better.

Reading back my journal which includes a record of my days through prose, drawings, poems, dreams, collage, notes, ideas, mandalas etc, I am reminded of the psychodrama, after which I painted my birth: an experience which left me seeing and hearing things as if for the first time, and led on for the next couple of months to other work around my birth and early childhood, through art and journal work, to freeing myself from the hold of my early life. Then the summer school, which sparked off months of shadow work, discovering what Sheldon Kopp meant when be said, 'This descent into the pit of his own soul is the journey of every pilgrim'. Knowing I had the support to make the journey, arriving at my destination knowing and accepting my 'other half', and in doing so, accepting others. Giving life to the words 'unconditional positive regard'.

Achieving a diploma in counselling was my ambition when I started the course. It is still my ambition, but I now see that simply as a bonus. I have discovered that it is the process that matters, and that process is enabling me to fulfil my vision of the way I would like to live my life.

I picture the course as a beautiful garden full of light and shadow, colour and contour, plants of all shapes and sizes and perfumes, insects, birds, animals, sunshine and rain, wind and snow. A place where there is always something new to see and learn, with work and leisure, and the chance to share it all with interesting people.

# *Eigenwelt: A History*

*Caroline Beech*

## *The Early Days*

Eigenwelt was born in 1982. Looking back now, from the vantage point of the mid-nineties, the early eighties were a time of many creative leaps. The idealism and experimentation of the late sixties, having lain dormant for a decade, seemed to re-emerge and find fruition and maturity in a large number of socially orientated ventures. A new emphasis on equality of opportunity, client-led services, and holistic approaches became widespread. Ideas which had once been considered radical became the new philosophy of a wide section of the helping and educating professions.

It was within, and as a part of, this movement, that Eigenwelt began to offer its particular approach to therapy. Its ideals were very much the ideals of that time, with its optimism about human potential, its belief in working with the whole person, and its rejection of the categorisation by role which was operating in many of the established helping services. Real growth occurred where people could encounter each other honestly and with awareness. Helpers and helped needed to find their common humanity. The struggle for authenticity broke through preconceptions.

Its founders were two therapists, David Brazier and Jenny Biancardi. Inspired particularly by the work of Dr Carl Rogers, they began to offer short courses, counselling and therapeutic groups from a centre in Morpeth, Northumberland. They also ran in-house training in organisations throughout the country. The Eigenwelt approach was, from the first, distinctive. Although the terms 'person-centred' and 'student-centred' were beginning to creep into the mission statements of many providers, these were, then as now, often misused or misunderstood. Counselling itself was relatively new in Britain. Eigenwelt's application of person-centred ideas, not only in what it taught but also in the way it offered training, challenged participants to look at the roots of their work with people, and their own attitudes and life experiences.

As Eigenwelt's reputation grew, many people across the country were to experience this new style of learning. It was a style that not only conveyed Rogers' approach, with its emphasis on providing the core conditions (empathy, congruence and positive regard), but also required course participants to consider their own learning process. Courses were rarely preplanned. Their content would be determined, within the parameters of the course's subject area, through a process of negotiation, which continued in parallel to other learning activities. The emphasis was on integrating theory, skills and personal growth. In order to improve levels of communication with others, people first needed to understand their own inner processes more fully, and face difficult areas in their own lives.

In these early days, some people were

becoming regular attenders at Eigenwelt courses. They began to ask whether some recognition could be given for the training which they were receiving. This student-led initiative was responded to through the setting up of the diploma programme, which is still in operation today.

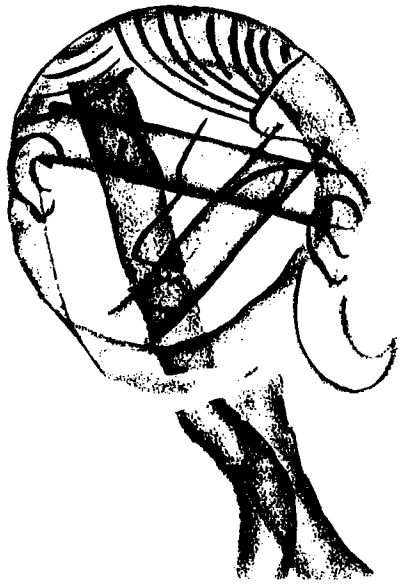
## *The Middle Years*

The diploma programme became the central focus of Eigenwelt's work. Over the years it has developed and changed, largely as a result of suggestions from students, but also in response to outside influences from the therapy world, which itself was developing and changing. It has always retained its focus on experiential learning, combined with a lengthy supervised practise requirement, personal therapy, and a theoretical component. In the early years the latter part of the requirements took the form of a dissertation.

Initially students were able to choose between diplomas in counselling and groupwork. Later an attempt was made to offer a diploma in child-centred studies, but this never fully developed and was later reincorporated into the counselling diploma. In later years a psychodrama diploma was added.

Students continued to attend short courses run in Morpeth and, increasingly, in other parts of the country. These courses were also open to the public, so participants included a mix of registered diploma students, professionals working in helping or educational fields, often sponsored by their employers, and other interested individuals. This mix, combined with the fact that diploma students did not attend every course, and were free to choose their own combinations of weekends, resulted in a particularly rich learning environment. Each weekend became an entity in itself. There was a constant cross-fertilisation of ideas. For students this repeated encountering of ideas with newcomers, often skilled in other forms of psychotherapy, sharing their experience, provided an ongoing challenge. For the newcomer, entering a group which already had some understanding of the subject and a willingness to share provided a much deeper experience than might otherwise have been possible.

Rogers remained the major influence on the programme. The centre's radical interpretation of his approach together with its unorthodox course structure put a heavy reliance upon the student's self-motivation and discipline. The simplicity of Rogers' message belied its stringency. The core conditions were seen not simply as skills which could be learned in a few hours of teaching, but as pointers towards



a way of interacting with others, which made ever greater demands on the skill and integrity of the counsellor. One might think one had mastered empathy, but there was always another, more complex, layer to be found. As empathy improved, one's awareness of one's own incongruences began to increase. Positive regard could all too easily become conditional — I want my client to feel happier, am I not accepting his misery? Becoming a counsellor involved becoming more of a person.

Eigenwelt courses equally made demands of more casual attenders, who found themselves required to participate at a level which few other courses at the time offered. At times too, the presence of regulars who 'knew the ropes' produced lively dynamics. Nevertheless, for many, attending an Eigenwelt course for the first time was a significant life step, and many returned to join the organisation as students.

As Eigenwelt grew, new staff joined. Course consultants were appointed and several part-time course tutors. Eigenwelt had become a lively learning community, with up to fifty active members at any one time. Students grew in confidence, and often shared in running events and discussing developments within the programme.

My own involvement with the programme began early in its life, and has spanned many of the roles which have been described. Initially, as a group-worker, I attended Eigenwelt courses in order to develop my skills in new directions. Feeling an instant affinity for the approach, I joined Eigenwelt as s student, and completed both diplomas. Whilst still a student, I became involved in running workshops as part of the programme, and when I completed, I became a tutor.

## *A Period of Change*

In its first eight years, Eigenwelt had grown to be a lively, well-respected organisation, with an active student group and an established reputation. Many thousands of people had had contact with its methods, and ways that had once seemed alternative and new were becoming more widely accepted. The person-centred approach was now being taught on many training courses, although rarely in such a radical form as Eigenwelt offered. Besides the quality of its training, however, many people saw Eigenwelt's success as resting on the personal charisma of Jenny and David, its founders.

Organisations are frequently established by people of vision and personality. Both Jenny and David had brought distinct personal qualities to Eigenwelt. Besides their therapeutic backgrounds, Jenny had long been interested in theatre, which she expressed through her work as a psychodramatist. She had an exuberance and an ability to get on with people that brought a warmth to the organisation. David, a quieter personality, brought a deep commitment to spirituality. Having spent some time as a Buddhist monk prior to joining Eigenwelt, he became increasingly interested in achieving a more spiritual approach to the work. He was also interested in the philosophical and intellectual underpinnings of the approach.

In 1990 Jenny Biancardi left Eigenwelt and set up a separate organisation offering psychodrama training. This move initiated a period of considerable uncertainty and change, and for a while it was unclear

what direction Eigenwelt would take. With David left as the only full-time course leader, suggestions for democratisation of the organisation were floated. A group of students and graduates were set up to look into the possibility that a committee of students might run the programme. In many ways this would have been the ultimate in person-centred organisation but to put such a plan into operation at that stage proved impractical.

So, in 1991, David and I set about consolidating the programme. It was not an easy time. Uncertainties had led to a drop in student numbers. At the same time the economic climate had reduced the training budgets of many former customers. Something drastic needed to be done.

It was with some sense of daring that we set about redesigning the programme. The basic structure was retained but, with the experience of the past to draw on, we were able to create some important changes. We introduced twice-yearly enrolment dates. Previously students had been free to enrol singly at any time. This created a peer group system for students, giving a much needed sense of belonging from the beginning. We also began to re-evaluate the programme's strengths. Eigenwelt had begun as an enterprise based on a vision of a different way of being. It had valued individuality, authenticity, and genuine encounter between people. Gradually it had begun to offer a programme that, although still distinctively person-centred, was often catering for the growing market of run-of-the-mill counselling courses. Now, we felt an urgency to rediscover the early sense of vision, and offer courses that reflected our particular strengths, both as an organisation, and as individuals. So, at a time when most courses were becoming more conformist, we reoriented the programme to include more unconventional topics and to give stronger emphasis to spirituality and the arts.

We also decided to use the ground floor of the house in Newcastle, which David and I now share with his mother and my children, as a course centre. This, together with home-cooked lunches, provided a welcoming atmosphere, which has become the hallmark of Eigenwelt today. The domestic surroundings can come as a surprise to newcomers, but they are generally appreciated. In many ways they summarise the emphasis that Eigenwelt places upon the integration of the personal and the professional.

A second crisis came for Eigenwelt in 1992, when a complaint was made to BAC about the organisation. This complaint, which related to events which had occurred in 1989, was taken up, and we found ourselves caught up in a lengthy and painful investigation. Initially we hoped that with open discussion and a willingness to learn from the experience, the matter could be resolved. However, it quickly became apparent that this was not to be the case. Having read the tone of reports from initial meetings, David and I decided that there was no hope of a fair hearing, and therefore decided to withdraw from BAC.

The withdrawal from BAC has left Eigenwelt in a position of some isolation in the therapy world. It has also, however allowed us to continue to work with integrity.

In many ways the issues which the

complaint raised for the organisation had already been addressed at the time when it was made, more than three years after the original events. Awareness of boundary issues had come to the fore in Eigenwelt, just as they had elsewhere. Practical changes were implemented. Supervision arrangements for students and staff were tightened. Students were required to seek personal therapy from people external to Eigenwelt. Issues of transference and counter-transference were raised and discussed frequently on courses. Students were required to accept and adhere to a code of ethics, initially of BAC, but more recently Eigenwelt's own internally developed code.

It would be hard to say that we had learned much as a direct result of the complaint. Certainly the events themselves had already provoked a great deal of soul-searching and real moves to improve practise within the organisation. The whole complaints procedure, however, raised deep questions for us about the compatibility of a therapeutic attitude with many of the more the judgemental aspects of the profession.

## *Eigenwelt Today*

Several years have elapsed since Eigenwelt adopted its present form. They have not been easy years, but they have seen a strengthening of the student body and a move towards a more integrated, though constantly evolving, programme. The course has included input from a number of visiting course leaders, and Morag Gardiner has joined the staff as a tutor.

Students now have a choice of four levels of qualification, in either groupwork or counselling. A staggered entry system also allows those with other therapy qualifications to join the programme at a more appropriate level. This position has been arrived at in response to the ever more demanding requirements of accrediting bodies, so that Eigenwelt students who wish to seek individual accreditation are able to meet the appropriate criteria. We ourselves have remained independent of such bodies, preferring to set our own standards in co-operation with our students.

These standards have become increasingly rigorous over the years. The practice element of the course remains central to the programme, and, as such, is directly supervised by tutors. This allows it to be an important tool in the integration of skill, knowledge, and personal growth. The academic element of the course has increased dramatically. Course attendance requirements have increased, and students now write a number of papers in place of the dissertation. These papers are expected to be of high quality, and go through an editorial process, being reviewed by peers or staff, and revised, until they reach a standard where they can be included in the *Eigenwelt Review*, an in-house journal circulated to all students and staff. This process is intended to mimic professional journals, and serves the function of increasing academic dialogue between students and staff.

The spirit of co-operation which such a process demands is central to Eigenwelt's ethos. Students and staff work together as learning partners, and initiatives are frequently taken by students. Peer learning time in which students meet together to discuss theory, practise skills, or share experiences or ideas is a large

element in the course requirements. Recently groups of students have organised weekend groups together for these purposes. Students are currently engaged in setting up their own professional society.

The orientation of the course has also broadened. Still holding the spirit of Rogers' ideas centrally, the Eigenwelt approach has rediscovered their European philosophical roots in phenomenology. This new dimension has allowed an integration of ideas from many different fields. Creative, spiritual and therapeutic aspects of life are brought together. Students are confronted with ideas from sources as widely differing as Freud, Shakespeare, and the Buddha. They are encouraged to read widely, and follow their own learning processes, in order to develop their own personal integration of theory and practice.

Students bring a richness to the course in their varied professional and life experiences. Many are already practising therapists when they enrol. Others are not. Many follow a spiritual path, or have an interest in some aspect of the arts. Whilst David and I provide a learning environment, and share our own interests and skills, we see the Eigenwelt process as being, above all, one of experimentation and shared learning. Courses still begin, for the most part, without a pre-planned programme. Generally participants now receive a paper or course pack which provides source material for the weekend course. Ideas are shared, and often the initiative for action work is taken by students. The phenomenological method encourages a freshness of approach that leads to constant re-evaluation and renewed attempts to understand what really happens in interactions.

So the Eigenwelt philosophy is still evolving. It is this ability to adapt that has kept it fresh through many changes. Times have not always been easy, but real growth is rarely achieved without struggle. The therapy world itself is in a state of flux, and many developments seem at odds with the principles on which Eigenwelt's approach is based. In many ways Eigenwelt's strength is that it does continue to provide an alternative voice. It is only by embracing diversity that we can discover our creativity.

As we look into the future, possibilities open up. Many of the students who joined Eigenwelt in the period of reorganisation are now nearing graduation. Their contribution in developing new projects offers new focuses for the approach. David and I are developing our own interests in the arts, Buddhism, communal living and ecology both within Eigenwelt and in a parallel project in France. David's writing is taking the ideas which are being developed at the centre to a wider audience.

So in the spirit of Eigenwelt, we are constantly seeking new sources of challenge and a wider cross-fertilisation of ideas. Eigenwelt continues to take a holistic view of what is therapeutic, and to offer an experience that is unique. It has retained its early freshness, but has emerged stronger in its maturity.

# *Eigenwelt and the British Association of Counselling (BAC) — a correspondence*

In her history of Eigenwelt, Caroline Beech mentions the centre's experience of the BAC's complaints procedure, as a result of which Eigenwelt withdrew from BAC membership. The *S&S* editors felt that, in the light of this complaint against Eigenwelt, it was important to allow both BAC and Eigenwelt to air their views, to acknowledge that issues around Eigenwelt's ethics have arisen and been processed, and so that our readers can perhaps learn from their experience.

## *Extract from the BAC journal* Counselling, *May 1993*

**EIGENWELT INTERSKILL**

A complaint was brought against the above organisational member of BAC, known under previous names of Morpeth Centre for Psychotherapy and Eigenwelt Studies, and was investigated and reported on under the 1992 Complaints Procedure. The organisation withdrew from membership on 7 January 1993 prior to the completion of the Procedure. Any re-application for membership will require the approval of the Management Committee of BAC under Article 5. of the Articles of Association. This report is made under paragraph 2.5 of the 1992 Complaints Procedure.

## *Statement from BAC, 9th August 1994*

The British Association for Counselling was founded in 1976 and its original Code of Ethics and Practice for Counsellors was formulated in 1984. (Revisions of the Code took place in 1990, 1992 and 1993, partly in response to the growing awareness of the possibility of power imbalances in counselling relationships.) The purpose is to establish and maintain standards for counsellors and inform and protect members of the public seeking and using their services.

A Code for Trainers was produced in 1985 and for Supervisors in 1988. Membership of BAC is conditional on accepting and abiding by the Codes and taking part in, and being subject to, the Complaints Procedure.

The complaints process is one of peer assessment and seeks clarification and grounds for resolution in the first instance, but may be followed by a formal adjudication and the imposition of sanctions which aim to be constructive and educative but can lead to termination of BAC membership. Those taking part are selected for their ability to be impartial and having specialist knowledge and expertise in the area under consideration. During the process as many as seven members have considered the matter. Strict confidentiality is maintained and no comment can be made on the material presented, apart from a report to the public if a breach is found.

The situation has been that members who decide not to comply with the complaints process terminated their own membership. This information is notified in the BAC journal and is accessible to the public. It has been that the notice referring to this kind of termination of membership does not indicate the nature of the complaint. However, it is proposed that changes be made so that complaints can continue to be pursued despite lapsing of membership, in order to protect and inform the public.

Membership of BAC is becoming an increasingly powerful tool of self-regulation. BAC encourages counsellors and counselling organisations to stay in membership, resolve problems and have recognition, via reporting of lifting of sanctions, that changes have been made. In this way, there is a demonstration of members' learning processes and the opportunity not to feel isolated.

## *Response from Eigenwelt, 15th August 1994*

While we accept that this statement represents BAC's official position, it does not represent what actually happens, at least as far as our experience goes. The procedure can hardly be described as peer assessment when one is brought in front of strangers in a courtroom atmosphere without even any of the normal safeguards which accompany genuine legal procedure being in operation. The phase of 'seeking clarification' is officiallly described as 'conciliation', but it is conducted under the condition that everything you say will be taken down and used in evidence, so can not really involve any give and take. We felt this was dishonest. Officially those taking part are impartial, but in our case the investigation of our private practice was made by a person who has published anti-private practice opinions. They are supposed to have specialist knowledge, but this was evidently lacking. Confidentiality is of the essence, but in our case it seemed impossible to maintain, and we know of worse cases. Boundaries are crucial, but BAC appear to have been outside their own time limits in making the investigation. There is a serious danger that procedures of this kind become simply a form of scapegoating conducted in a fashion distant from basic counselling values. BAC clearly wishes to establish itself in a position of power. Who will ensure this power is not abused?

## *Final Statement from BAC, 30th August 1994*

BAC cannot enter into discussion about the content and nature of any complaint. It respects unequivocally information relating to past and present members that emerges during the process.

The Complaints Procedure itself is drawn up by members and accepted by members at Annual General Meeting following widespread consultation and debate. Those in the process have opportunities to object to conciliators and adjudicators and there is a mechanism for appeal and review.

At all times BAC and its members are committed to working a system compatible with natural justice. This is the procedure accepted by BAC's membership of 11,000 individuals and 600 organisational members and it is because BAC is subject to scrutiny and direction by such a large and broad membership, with advice from outside its membership, that abuse of power is avoided. It is always regretted when members leave a process, thus losing some of the power of their own voice within BAC.

## *Final Response from Eigenwelt, 19 September 1994*

Whatever the merits of BAC's procedures on paper it is the inhumane way they are implemented that leaves one shocked. Conciliation needs to be handled in a sensitive and constructive way to stand any chance of healing rather than aggravating the situation. As counsellors we all know this, don't we? Yet we know that our experience is not unique, and others (both 'innocent' and 'guilty') who have been confronted by BAC 'conciliators' have found the experience equally harrowing. Our advice to anyone else facing this situation would be: take your solicitor with you. We have spoken to a number of people who have been through BAC investigations and have seen the damage caused. We would be interested to hear from others who have related experiences. The fact that BAC is a big organisation is no guarantee of its ability to act sensitively: rather the reverse.