

Conference Afterthoughts

Guy Gladstone

I have been asked to provide some background to the two workshops I gave at the AHP/AHPP Conference last year. For the benefit of those who neither read the publicity nor attended; for the benefit of those who read the publicity but avoided going to one or both of the workshops; and most of all for the benefit of those who attended the workshops but didn't really read the carefully worded publicity, I reproduce below the copy from the Conference programme.

'BUILDING BODY BOUNDARIES

Many therapies are complicated by and/or get stuck due to unresolved shock states. The stasis is organismic — movement, emotion, memory and orientation are all affected. Such shock states often originate through a violation of the person's body boundary. Here body psychotherapy offers possibilities for resolution and recovery that a psychodynamic approach cannot. The workshop is for practising therapists and consists of a mix of theory, case presentation and usable experiential exercises, with time for discussion.

KNOWING YOUR PLACE

Humanistic people are often suspicious and disapproving of competition and hierarchy. Evidence of such phenomena in groups may suffer a 'correct' suppression.

This workshop is for anyone prepared to risk a not-so-serious rolearena for exploring hidden structures, anti-social impulses and the shifting sands of personal rating, within a variety of playful or gruesome settings. Entirely experiential, it is thoroughly over the borderline, probably bad for your boundaries and certainly not a home group.'

Both workshops were intended to be provocative but in different ways. That a sizeable proportion of the Conference either consciously or unconsciously wished to be provoked was evident from the turnout —two dozen at the morning workshop and nearly four dozen at the afternoon workshop (I believe that was approaching half of the Conference participants). I must also say that my own behaviour in relation to the Conference was provocative. It had a 'now you see him, now you don't' quality, given that I arrived last thing at night on the Friday and disappeared as soon as the second workshop was over. However I was at pains to be clear with the organisers, in advance of accepting the invitation to present, that this would be the case. As a practitioner working hard at the coal face, I experience conferences as something of a busman's holiday. Thus I was not on site to informally process participants' workshop re-

Guy Gladstone is an analytical body psychotherapist drawing on bioenergetics, psychodrama and psychoanalysis. As a member for the last eleven years of the Open Centre in London, he has worked with ongoing and weekend groups for over 4000 hours.

actions with them. Rather unhumanistic maybe, though the assumption that one should offer follow-up could be questioned. This preamble gives some context.

Feedback to the Conference organisers included rave notices — 'very moving', 'valuable', 'learned a lot', 'more of him please', 'much needed', 'very satisfied and fun' and a less flattering mailbag, — 'was confused', 'disturbing', 'outrageous', 'acting out'. I've had to guess which refers to which workshop. However there was some sort of consensus among most of the critical responses that what they had experienced was nonetheless useful. The purpose of this article from here on is to try to shed some light on the upset side of the equation. Bad news has its fascinations. Through an exercise in self-justification I would hope to provoke more thought on themes that have professional, political and cultural implications. I will consider relevant issues under the main headings of 'Practitioner Transparency' and 'Punters' Expectations'.

Practitioner Transparency

Over the years, clients have told me of humanistic therapists who regularly spent much of the session literally talking about themselves. Some of course may do this less blatantly and all of us may do so at times inadvertently or else with therapeutic intent. Rather than risk abuse of clients' confidentiality, at a previous conference (British Institute of Integrative Psychotherapy) in a workshop on 'A Bioenergetic approach to working with Sexual Abuse', I used a real story from my own personal life concerning boundaries to provide a creative conundrum for participants to resolve professional issues

through. This year, again to preserve client confidentiality, I chose to use my own personal material to illustrate the process of working through shock issues. Please note, I restricted attendance at this workshop to practitioners. Some people appear to have been shaken not just by the painful nature of the material but *that I disclosed it at all*.

HP RIP

Here I will introduce the idea for AHP/AHPP of HP RIP. In this context I'm talking about (un)comfortable death through Remote Institutional Paralysis. The explanatory power of this notion rests on a perception that humanistic psychotherapy is busy burying itself in various ways, failing to tend to and renew its own roots, and compromising or even corrupting its original modalities. Bye bye third force in psychology. More on this later.

In relation to practitioner transparency, I would suggest that a parody of the psychoanalytical ideal of analytical neutrality is taking root; that the blank screen is being adopted as a pose on the outside, as opposed to sensitively attending to and interacting with the client's free association process through maintaining a state of evenly suspended free-floating attention on the inside, and intermittently moving out of this state to intervene judiciously. If no way can be found to integrate free-floating attention with humanistic action methods (in this instance authentic self-disclosure as a therapeutic tool), then indeed RIP humanistic psychotherapy in its encounter with psychodynamic models. To safe sex add safe therapy and lo we have a recipe for wooden bodies, practitioners and client in a schizoid coupling.

When Authority Deconstructs

Returning my argument to the Conference setting, a member of the Open Centre opened his centre and clearly some people were shocked and thrown off centre. Balance is a highly subjective matter. I had flouted a basic expectation that I was there to talk as if in a case conference about someone out there. Suddenly it was no longer possible to remain cosy and clever accomplices in the treatment of projected pain under the aegis of the workshop leader. Put another way, when authority deconstructs itself all its accomplices are suddenly exposed. My manoeuvre was a direct attack on the medical model. The medical model has reinserted itself into humanistic psychotherapy far more than most are prepared to admit and it's likely to get worse unless therapists start confronting this trend. Shock state material such as I personally presented in the morning workshop is always heavily defended against and assuming an air of medical distance from it with one's colleagues is a professional collusion.

Unsolicited Caretakers

Some responses to my personal revelation were truer, more human, humanistic even in the sense of being feelings-based. Perhaps for some of these participants, by being personally transparent I had become the workshop's client instead of its leader. It was a touching illusion that I myself needed or felt a need of maternal care at this point. My choice to reveal was considered, and comfortably within the limits of what I had already worked through in personal therapy. Of course my personal revelation also served to

warm people up for personal work in pairs with paper and pencil, an appropriately containing structure for a workshop on shock states, time limited to three hours. I'll discuss in the next session the response that this was insufficient provision, that I was not caring enough of participants. This is a corollary of the fantasy that I needed the workshop to take care of me. In all this some readers may detect an echo of the subversive premise of the communicative approach that every client tries to heal their therapist's unconscious difficulties as once they struggled to put their parents right.

Humanistic Values

Am I being ingenuous in restating the humanistic (and psychoanalytic) value that one's personal therapy is the *sine qua non* of capacity to help others? Why an undisguised report of this to a group of one's supposed peers should be a no-no beats me. I would have thought it rather an appropriate affirmation of several fundamental humanistic values: authenticity, role-flexibility and the fullest possible engagement with the deepest sources of personal resistance to change.

I will end this section by posing three questions concerning practitioner transparency that I suspect are inadequately addressed in humanistic psychotherapy trainings. Are you clear what part 'the real relation' (as described by Ralph Greenson in *The Technique and Practice of Psychoanalysis*) plays in your practice? Are you by temperament and/or neurosis happier to be an exhibitionist or an inhibitionist? (No prizes for guessing which the writer is. The question incidentally is a useful structure to introduce an

ongoing group preoccupied with problems of self-revelation.) And what kind of a culture are you modelling for your clients through your transparency or lack thereof?

Punters' Expectations

One mode of having a conference is the academic/medical. Speakers read papers from a platform, the officers lecture the other ranks who have a token right of reply in the usually limited question time. In the ensuing coffee break a democratic jabber breaks out and the architectural metaphor changes from drill hall to beehive. This is NOT the preferred mode of AHP/AHPP where something altogether more ambitious is attempted. *People come to have experiences.* My point is that much upset must stem from the covert or unconscious expectations of conference participants. One in particular concerns me here.

A Bit of Therapy

Punters (a punter, according to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, is a person who gambles or lays a bet, or, colloquially, a customer or client, particularly a prostitute's client) come believing they can do a bit of therapy with a workshop leader and be contained. Horseshit. This is to confuse therapeutic *experience* with therapeutic *process*. Containment by a therapist is only truly possible within ongoing work, where there is a continuity and regularity to the process. This is not the nature of the conference beast. The 2½ day time-frame and the residential setting reconstitute the customary boundaries of time and place, but in terms of therapy any resemblance to a working relationship ends there. Yet

the punters are avid for experiences and the organisers have promised.

Caveat Emptor

A conference operates on the supermarket principle with its parallel workshops and fickle sign-up process. Paradoxically this may be more disturbing for those participants who are in an ongoing therapy process and who unconsciously may be bringing an expectation of the same boundaries to the conference, given that therapists are present *en masse* and some are actually offering a semblance of therapy. In this situation *caveat emptor* must apply. Each participant can only take responsibility for their own therapeutic experience, gauge their own capacity for containment. Not surprisingly in the humanistic beanfest, not everyone has the skill to do this. It is much easier said than done. The opportunities for splitting from an ongoing therapeutic process with a constant figure are legion. I assume that the multiple figures of conference workshops are not an ongoing feature of most participants' personal therapy, even if the conference may mirror the structure of ongoing trainings where the same problem naturally appears. Unlike in a training conference, presenters rarely work as a team. Each competes in the supermarket of growth against the backdrop of the confused and confusing process of the whole conference. From the point of view of a conference 'name' the expectations are powerfully mobilised before you take the stage for your workshop.

Diverse Agendas

The agenda of workshop members are highly varied, there is only time to take

the temperature in a cursory fashion and the workshop leader is well advised to take control, keep it and bear the unanalysable transferences that are par for the course. The reason a participant is in the room with you may be that they were squeezed out of another workshop, couldn't find it, or deserted it when they realized X was present . . . Often the punter's motivation is desperate — 'this is my only chance to work with Y'. Bedlam. In days gone by conferences were also occasions for a fair amount of bedding, fantasised or attempted. That source of bedlam seems to have abated or I am too old to notice.

Maternal Humanistic Psychology

There is a further problem to humanistic conferences which the academic/medical conference deftly avoids. No talk of home groups there, though topic-centred discussion groups permit a degree of affiliation and differentiation when these are on the bill. Humanistic psychology, at least in Britain, is quite maternal in its overt emphasis on caring. This caring is not very business-like. After all feelings take time to be explored. When a therapist in role of workshop leader tacitly or explicitly says (as I did in the afternoon workshop, adopting a variety of ironic tones), 'I'm not interested in your feelings, deal with them yourself in whatever way you choose', grievance and jarred expectations are inevitable. Life is exactly like that most of the time for most people.

Checking Paternity

I'm arguing that the maternal caring model is linked to the generation of unrealistic expectations among conference

participants. Take this security away and I wonder whether another problem in making a conference a live experience-based meeting of colleagues won't then appear. This might take the form of a pull in the direction of the academic/medical conference with its paternalistic ethos. I can imagine participants expecting paper hand-outs, digests of the papers/workshops to be given. The psychoanalytic reference game of incestuous in-house cross-referencing is already creeping into humanistic psychology, the way well-paved by the more prolific spokesmen for the therapeutic literati. A compendious and compulsive literature of therapy now burdens humanistic trainings which are leaning over backwards to acquire academic respectability in the competition for intake, conferring degrees as a bonus inducement (indeed, I have the impression that new therapists are once again entering experiential groups outside of their trainings, informally reviving the vanishing apprenticeship model, a model which rests on the premise that becoming a therapist is a personally transmitted craft for which no amount of academic coursework can substitute). Since a conference is a place where the profession is gathered together as a body politic, it should be a place where such trends are critically questioned rather than passively reinforced. The purpose of a humanistic conference in these times needs re-thinking.

Situation Tests

I am interested in what happens in a disorienting situation as any large group gathering will be. It can be a useful exercise to be stranded without a map in such a gathering. Everything has to be looked

at afresh in order to orient in a disorienting situation. Provided it is not too great, the stress of being without home groups and a reading list, so to speak, could well be a creative stressor. Participants in 'Knowing Your Place', the afternoon workshop, were thrown into a sink or swim situation, a series of psycho-dramatic situation tests designed to put the current politics of the psychotherapy profession into question. Outside of the usually dyadic context of supervision, the chance to explore your reactions and responses to being adrift is rarely available. Experiential means of addressing professional political questions are in equally short supply. Perhaps there is an assumption that the collective is on course and that dissent or difficulty is merely a matter of individual deviation or pathology. Such assumptions are part of the intellectual armour of the authoritarian personality. The turnout at the recent founding conference of the Independent Therapist Network (see page 32) would suggest that the counter cultural elements of humanistic psychology are alive and well, giving the lie to the fear-driven assumptions that pull therapists into the UKCP.

Threatened Interests

The profession is currently engaged in a massive defence against anxieties associated with the pace of change in the wider market society. Threatened economic interests have given rise to largely endogenous political pressures. From the sidelines, investigation by the media, whose interest as always is mostly frivolous/scurrilous, obscures the depth of resistance to the educative potential of group and individual psychotherapy.

With the above perceptions in the back of my mind at the AHP/AHPP conference, I warmed up a group of forty plus through enactments of both pre-oedipal and oedipal strivings, to the recovery of the bad behaviour and irreverence necessary to begin the reversal of various abdications. The Therapy Act was debated in the House of Commons (the great Hall of Dartington set the scene nicely). Voyeurs were entertained by exhibitionists, as protagonists of various modalities publicly displayed what occurs in the privy closet of private practice. A number of newshounds then interviewed spokespersons for UKCP at Regents College (UKCP has proposed a levy on individual members to enable it to do PR for psychotherapy. Which psychotherapy? one might ask.) The finale was a series of intake interviews at an unidentified training institute. Here the organizing metaphor for each roleplayer was the exercise of/subversion of quality control over raw material required by the therapist factory.

Disturbing a Symbiosis

To return to the theme of upset expectations. For some it will be intolerable to be confronted with not knowing what's going on, to be returned to a common position of childhood as a (re)lived experience, as in a sustained transference process, but without the security of a therapeutic working alliance. Finding a voice for the inner child and speaking that part of one's person is the kindergarten phase of psychotherapy. Pitching oneself into a live roleplay in front of peers with a trickster of a group conductor is unnerving but potentially more grown-up and socially energising. If my workshop was disturbing,

it's worth asking why. 'Knowing Your Place' cannot be dismissed as 'abusive therapy' as no claim was made that any therapy was on offer. Why, I might ask, was anyone looking for therapy? Why weren't they finding it and getting it somewhere else, in the places where it could be available, where they would be entitled to expect it? I have a suspicion that the typical humanistic punter (if one can speak of such an entity) lives in, and is desirous of, a symbiosis and that 'Knowing Your Place' demanded a kind of differentiation that created pressure on or even temporarily broke up that symbiosis. Politically speaking, the professional who expects mothering and seeks to nestle symbiotically within a host organization is furthering the process of HP RIP. Such an individual is ill-prepared for creative conflict and under stress will regress to a pre-oedipal position.

Playing in Public

The essence of the modality I introduced to punters at the conference is the capacity to play with the inner world in public. In German this is known as 'Selbstdarstellung', loosely translated into 'self presentation' in English. In a future article for *Self & Society* I could elaborate on its communal origins and its revised political

applications. Here I want to emphasise its potential as one of several possible antidotes to HP RIP. If humanistic therapy is to retain and own its significant counter-cultural dimensions then practitioners need to consider whether the work they are doing is making the culture a place where bodily and emotional life, not to mention the unconscious, is dealt with more articulately, more honestly and more enjoyably. Otherwise why not emigrate?

Humanistic psychology has traditionally acted as an umbrella for playful spirits and its conferences in my view should safeguard creative ferment and challenges to its own and the wider culture. In a time of conformity and retrenchment, where many appear to be settling for the safe middle ground, or resorting to transpersonal levitation, conferences are a setting in which to be confronted with the one-off and the off-the-wall. Participants should go away thinking hard. I have outlined one of several possibilities for reinventing humanistic conferences as experiential events, liberating them from the stasis of maternal and paternalistic models. Together these as yet mostly unnamed possibilities for large scale gatherings offer a third way for the third force in psychology to renew itself.

Further Reading

Patrick Casement, *On Learning From The Patient*, Tavistock Publications, 1985

Ralph R Greenson, *The Technique and Practice of Psychoanalysis*, Hogarth Press, 1981

Richard Mowbray, *The Case Against Psychotherapy Registration*, Transmarginal Press, in press. Available soon from 36 Womersley Road, London N8 9AN.