

## CONFERENCE REPORTS

# *Fifth European Congress of Body Psychotherapy*

*Paddie Smith*

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I had forgotten the beauty of the South of France. My last visit there was in 1953. The conference was at Carry-le-Rouet, a village twenty-five minutes drive from Marseilles, in a holiday village belonging to a French union. We attended lectures in a lecture room atop a cliff, with a view of hazy islands, glittering blue sea and bright sunshine to soothe us when the words became stifling.

There were 27 countries represented. All the lectures were either in English or in French, with translations being given between sentences. German and Italian translations were also being given at the back of the hall — this was very distracting and gave a broken up, disjointed feel to the lectures.

In my view, the lectures were a call to us all to believe in ourselves as body psychotherapists, and to claim our background and knowledge of 70 years.

Alison Duguid's introductory lecture entitled: 'Body Psychotherapy: Frontier Science or Threatened Species' eventually came to the conclusion that body psychotherapy is a frontier science that already has plenty of information behind it.

She presented a view of the body-mind as circular in nature, with all levels contributing equally, rather than the pyramidal model where the mind controls

everything from above. She called for more research, and a need for cooperation between disciplines for a pooling of information.

On Friday and Saturday there were workshops to choose from. Ron Kurtz talked about 'the state of mind of the therapist'; Marjorie Rand about 'Body, Self and Soul' (Rosenberg's system of integrative body psychotherapy); Babette Rothschild on 'Defence, Resource and Choice'. There were workshops on psychodrama, Gestalt, the senses, focusing, 'tactile' stimulation, spirituality, breathing and more. A feast on offer — very difficult to choose. I attended Ron Kurtz's workshop. Ron spoke slowly, keeping his eyes closed most of the time, and helped us to focus on finding a deeper place within of 'not knowing'. We did an exercise in pairs in which one person asked questions, and the other answered from this place 'I don't know'. I was astonished that when asked the question 'Have you ever been a patient in a mental hospital?' I found it extraordinarily difficult to answer 'I don't know'; I really wanted to dissociate myself from being 'crazy'.

There were six main lectures. The first was 'The Freudian Perspective' by Lucas Carle, a Freudian who had become interested in working with the body, called for

a pooling of resources and knowledge from all schools of thought. He told how he had kept a mattress in his working room, hidden under the couch for fear of being discovered! He emphasised the importance of the relationship between therapist and patient, and said that psychoanalysis can help us understand transference and countertransference.

Next came a Jungian approach to body psychotherapy by Anne Fraisse called 'The Being and the Body'. She said that 'the touching of a patient makes high demands on the therapist'. She asked what the patient really needs, questioned whether touch is always relevant; she called for more research on the effect of touch, quoting Martin Buber: 'Only in the active human relationship is the human soul directly revealed.'

On Saturday Serge Ginger talked about Gestalt: 'The word is made flesh . . . and flesh becomes word.' A good, sound view of Gestalt as valuing synthesis rather than analysis. Nothing new there for me.

Luciano Rispoli's talk was entitled 'Body Psychotherapy — a Specific "Body-mind" Theory'. He talked about the holistic science that accepts complexity without giving up the attempt to understand and explain it, and attempts to apply this to the complexity of mind and body. He said that it was no good just attaching psychoanalytic theory to that of the body . . . Reich founded the basis for a new body-mind theory, and not enough has been written about the great innovative work that has been carried out in this field. The main move, he said, is from the concept of the body as pyramidal with 'the mind controlling everything from above' to the concept of a circular nature in

which all the psychocorporeal levels contribute in equal fashion to the complex organisation of the organism. His call in conclusion was to 'make permeable the frontiers of the various approaches in order to construct together a model which is broader and more complex, without giving up its own theoretical formulations'. I enjoyed this talk more than any, I think mainly because of the enthusiasm for finding a specific mind-body theory which is not reductionist and which acknowledges the complexity and the continuing evolution of the organism — and of all life.

David Boadella's paper, 'Quality Levels of Expression in Body Psychotherapy', was very dense. He talked of biosynthesis as working with 'a morphological view of man in combination with an understanding of the bipolar nature of life processes'. He listed five basic polarities of being, inside/outside, front/back, past/future, left/right and up/down, and said these need to be taken into account as a ground schema for working with clients. There is so much to his work that crosses all sorts of belief systems; he speaks of Jesus' teachings, of Buddhist Dharma, of Brahma Vihara, of Frank Lake and Matthew Fox. In his case history he talked of his client having past life experiences. I felt bewildered by the breadth of his vision, lost in as many winding lanes of thought, but interested to read more.

I missed the talk by Jerome Liss on the neurobiological perspective and the closing meeting, because of catching an earlier plane.

I enjoyed the comradeship, and the wonderful food and wine, and the beautiful perfumed flowers in the warmth of the night. I enjoyed dancing till late and walking back to my room to the sound of the

sea. I also enjoyed realising that I had learned a lot more than I realised at Chi-

ron and that only some of the ideas and concepts were new to me.

*This report first appeared in the newsletter of the Association of Chiron Psychotherapists*

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## 1995 Transpersonal Conference

John Rowan

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The Asilomar Conference Centre is on the Pacific coast, part of the Californian park system — hence no alcohol. It was designed by Julia Morgan in the early years of this century, but has been completely updated as far as facilities are concerned. It is laid out in a seemingly random distribution of wooden living quarters and meeting rooms and halls, with all the emphasis on curves and unexpected vistas. From some of the sites you can see the ocean.

The programme was entitled 'Imagination and the Arts: Gateways to the Soul', and there was an emphasis on art and poetry and music and dance and theatre. About 500 people came. At the end of the conference, when people were asked to put up their hands if they were first-time attenders, it looked as if getting on for half the people were there for the first time.

The first plenary session consisted of a piece of theatre presented by a men's group — interesting but a bit amateurish — followed by a poetry performance by David Whyte. This was absolutely riveting and spellbinding, and I was amazed I had not heard of him before.

An interesting idea for this conference was that before it began you had to sign up for one 'in-depth workshop' (2½ hours)

and one 'institute' (6 hours). This made a very good variation on the usual length of workshop, which was 1½ hours. One nice idea was that for each presentation there was a percentage figure given, to show how much of it was lecture, how much discussion and how much experiential.

My in-depth workshop was presented by Huston Smith, whose work I had known about for some time, and it was lovely to meet him. He had some very good things to say, as for example that both the absolute and the relative had an upside and a downside. For the absolute, the upside was transcendence and the ability to go beyond the accepted and the obvious; the downside was dogmatism and fanaticism. For the relative the upside was tolerance and open-mindedness; the downside was nihilism. He suggested that the conservative typically saw the upside of the absolute and the downside of the relative, whereas the liberal typically saw the downside of the absolute and the upside of the relative.

For my institute I went to a day on mask-making, which was fascinating and very good for me, though it was not quite what I expected, because it was all done with paper bags!

One of the most interesting sessions I