Development through Diversity

United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy Warwick University, September 1995

Alyss Thomas

This was designed as an interdenominational conference, with the opportunity to participate in talks and workshops in the company of practitioners from many different modalities. Themes much discussed were open-mindedness, plurality, multiplicity, diversity and the idea that practitioners' use of different therapeutic cultures and languages mask our shared intentions. I suppose that those practitioners who don't feel too hopeful about these possibilities, or who are comfortably settled in their own modalities and don't see anything to be gained from wandering into other neighbourhoods, wouldn't attend a conference under this title.

The theme and setting led to some interesting juxtapositions, both in lunch queues and in workshops. As a humanistic-integrative psychotherapist myself, I attended a workshop run by psychoanalysts (the couch variety) on 'Where in psychotherapy is the physical body?' In my ignorance, I had no idea this would mean 'Discussing patients with medical symptoms and interpreting the symptoms'. In my training and background the full range of both healthy and neurotic psychological and emotional processes are understood as being embodied. I was expecting something like 'What is communicated/felt/understood through the bodies of therapist and client'. I was so disoriented and disembodied I said nothing through the entire workshop.

My overall impression of the relationships being explored and developed throughout the conference was that everyone was trying hard to overcome their prejudices. The analysts were being tolerant and generous to the humanistic people (who are woolly and at best wickedly neglectful of the transference), because they have to put up with shared membership of UKCP. The humanistic people had decided it's now okay to have brains but that they could use them better than the analysts, who inhabit a different dimension known as inner space (only rarely in contact with the real world). Both found they had more in common with each other than with the cognitive-behavioural therapists and the hypnotherapists. I would have liked a forum in which these battles could be re-enacted at a more grass-roots level; all the discussions took place in a lecture theatre, or over meals. Workshops were the only venue where people met in groups with circular seating arrangements.

The beginning of the conference was dedicated to speakers representing each of the main modalities, introducing something of what their tradition and practice

was about. It felt as though some of the speakers were selling their wares quite hard; others demonstrated wit and integrity which brought about a real sense of shared experience. The keynote speech was given by Bernard Burgoyne, head of the Centre for Psychoanalysis at Middlesex University. The topic was Suffering and Knowledge. It was the kind of talk that makes you feel you belong to a noble and worthwhile cause, even if you are not quite sure why. The gist of it was that psychotherapy is a unique discipline in that it bridges some of the dangerous gaps that have been left between suffering and knowledge in many other disciplines, such as philosophy — because other disciplines do not take unconscious needs and intentions into account. Since Freud's accounts of the unconscious and repression, we can say that our problems are due, in varying degrees, to the fact that our explanations of reality are based on unreliable and defensive premises. Psychotherapy attempts to go directly to the nature of how we really are, and attempts to tolerate uncertainty in its search for more truthful versions of the truth. Thus its search for knowledge is always linked to the needs of the human heart. Bernard Burgoyne also talked about his ideas of the importance of psychotherapy gaining a foothold in the British universities in order to gain validation and enable funding for research.

The conference was well organised, with a well-presented conference pack and plenty of activities, although formalised opportunities to meet with practitioners from different backgrounds were limited.

Hilde Rapp

I took a deep breath in John Andrew-Miller's bodywork workshop and started to shake all over. I recognised that I was scared to move on from the cosiness of therapy organised as family groups, with their charismatic leaders, special codes and rituals, to the challenge of networking in a quantum society of responsible adults who practise open communication.

The awful realisation that I might be scared first began to dawn on me in the workshop David Jones did with Douglas Mathers. It was much more subversive than I first realised. It seemed innocent fun, to be invited to become aware of my idealisations of my own approach and to play creatively with my projections on to other schools of therapy, to draw cartoons and all that. It is one thing for a person to fall in love with ideas, even one's own, or to spurn other people's. It is quite another thing to find ways of ridiculing or vilifying not just ideas, or individual people, but whole schools of thought and practice. As we called up our shadows, we realised that at the level of the collective unconscious we are quite like so-called borderline clients, unpredictably switching between states in which we idealise, and states in which we denigrate the whole profession.

One minute we collude in maintaining the illusion that therapists as a breed are

just a little more omnipotent, just a little more wise, just a little more capable of unconditional positive regard, just a little more courageous in the face of the unknown and just a little more generous than your average accountant, lawyer, doctor, architect or any other professional. The next, we get in touch with our tyrannical inner child, who demands that therapists should be ideal parents, and so we see that therapists are just a little more unethical, a little more unprofessional, a little more exploitative, a little more abusive, a little more arrogant and aloof and a little more sadistic than your average academic, dentist, surveyor or midwife.

Anyone who has ever been to a symposium of psychotherapists will surely come to realise that collectively we don't yet know how to let go of our transferences on to our training bodies, our professional organisations, public institutions, and of course their charismatic founding parents. And yet this is what the invitation to integrate, to network and to compare and contrast our respective fruits of knowledge is asking us to consider! Sooner or later we come to the point of normalising charisma, and personalities give way to rules and regulations. Sociologists have known this for decades. How shall we ever agree on a shared transitional object to comfort us while we contemplate the outrageousness of the question: is psychotherapy a real profession?

Ethical Issues

No. 18: Allergic Reactions

There are two ways in which you can become involved in *S&S*'s Ethical Issues section. You can send us examples of issues which you would like aired, like Monica's story below (changing names and details as you feel appropriate to preserve confidentiality); and you can send us your thoughts about how the issues aired in people's stories in this and previous issues of the journal might be resolved. Please send your contributions to David Jones at the editorial address shown on the inside front cover.

Monica's Story

Over the years I have become quite an expert on allergies, as I have several food allergies myself and have read widely about the subject as well as talking with other people about their allergies. I am a counsellor working psychodynamically, and I have a client whose symptoms absolutely fit with a typical allergic response — possibly to food or environmental factors, and quite likely to the medication she is taking for depression. In addition to the symptoms she has, there is a history of asthma in her family, an indicator of predisposition to allergy.

I suspect that some of the problems she talks to me about so desperately might be