



Better the Devil You Know?

Putting Ritual Abuse in Context: The RAINS Conference 1996

Sandra Sunfire

The impetus behind the RAINS (Ritual Abuse Information Network and Support) conference was to put ritual abuse back on the agenda, following government-authorised research and Jean La Fontaine's negative report, and the formation of the 'false memory syndrome' lobby with its extensive media coverage and influence — the 'backlash'.

The conference was held in mid-September at Warwick University, attended by the 250 of us fortunate enough to get a place (it was oversubscribed). It was most heartening to find that the 'backlash' isn't working. As someone said, once something does become known you can't make it disappear again, and so it is with the reality of ritual abuse.

There was a wealth of information and experience, from this country, various states of North America, Norway, the Netherlands; independent psychotherapists, those trained in psychiatry,

psychology, social work and working with statutory and voluntary institutions; police, legal advisors, foster-carers, parents and survivors themselves.

The difficulties encountered in facing the reality of ritual abuse were addressed. Valerie Sinason presented the paper 'Tuning into discord: the problems for the therapeutic and societal struggle to hear the unbearable'. Valerie is involved in a one-year Department of Health-funded research project on allegations of satanic abuse with Dr Robert Hale, based at the Portman Clinic. Sheila Youngson, a consultant clinical psychologist working in the context of a multidisciplinary team, gave a more personal account of working with survivors in ritual abuse, 'The wish to help and the need not to know — the conflict for workers in ritual abuse'.

I haven't the space here to mention the many varied and excellent speakers and workshop facilitators. To my mind the out-

standing speaker, the woman who received a standing ovation and moved many of us to tears, was Caryn Stardancer, herself a survivor. Caryn is founder and executive director of Survivorship, based in the USA. She is part of a multi-self system and spoke to us on 'Ritual abuse, the exploitation of myth' in a clear and concise way, conceptualising the history and social context of ritual abuse.

I was also fortunate enough to attend Caryn's two-hour workshop 'Becoming conscious: self-deprogramming for survi-

vors', in which she successfully demystified mind control and its uses, clearly outlining in practical terms how it can be counteracted.

I came away enriched by my experience of the conference — new ideas, information for use in therapeutic relationships, more threads to the support network. I also believe that through our work with healing the consequences of ritual abuse we are working towards stopping such atrocities. I was honoured to be part of the first such conference in this country.

On the Controversy about Plural Selves

John Rowan

On the one hand it is obvious that people have subpersonalities. Both in literature and in everyday life we are all familiar with the internal conflicts which plague us, and which often emerge in the form 'part of me wants this, part of me wants that'. We all know about Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, and some of us have even read the more sophisticated *Steppenwolf* of Hermann Hesse.

On the other hand common sense, the law, and a great body of theory tells us that the self is a unity. If we are to be responsible for our actions there has to be one person

in charge, one person who can be rewarded for success or punished for crimes and misdemeanours. After all we only have one body, whatever illusions may be going on in our minds.

The argument gets polarised. Those who believe in plural selves generally believe in the existence of the unconscious, and of repression. They believe that people can have traumas early in their lives which are forgotten until later — perhaps when they get into therapy and have the opportunity and the encouragement to remember and deal with such unfinished

John Rowan is a psychotherapist and supervisor, the author of many books on humanistic psychology, and a regular contributor to Self & Society.