Creating Sanctuary: Toward an evolution of sane societies

Sandra Bloom
Routledge, 1997, £15.99

This book is important. It is an authoritative exploration of the causes and effects of trauma on us as individuals and as a society. It offers a model of respectful, democratic treatment in a therapeutic community known as the Sanctuary, which Sandra Bloom has directed for many years within the psychiatric system in America. The model offers alternative diagnostic pathways, and therefore treatment pathways, for many people whose condition was previously seen as only containable, and that mainly by medication. It takes into account the needs and difficulties of staff members working with severely traumatised individuals in a group setting. It offers a working model for short-term intensive in-patient work followed by community care.

Creating safety in environment and safety in relationship is the ground, and that safety is based on emotional honesty from all those involved, expressed in a way which is both open and non-harming. For many who come into contact with the Sanctuary, both staff and patients, this is their first experience of a saner society, and a huge learning process. It is not easy, and

demands self-awareness and a willingness to deal openly with conflict and difference.

Sandra Bloom is open about the difficulties she has confronted, about holding the safety and openness of the unit in the face of a lack of resources and understanding from outside organisations such as the insurance companies who fund people's stay. She is honest about some of the difficulties and the limits of the programme. Her book offers a down-to-earth, successful approach to the work which will be useful to most practitioners, and to those of us finding our way through our own history to heal the places where we have been hurt. But in addition she dares to reach beyond hopelessness about the enormity of the problems facing us as in Western society. She looks at the changes which need to take place in order to prevent a steady deterioration into violence and alienation.

In the final part of the book Bloom makes an inspiring and impassioned plea for changes in education, criminal policy and family support. A primary focus is on giving intensive support to the most damaged families, who are also likely to become the most damaging. The culture of blame is not a part of the solution, but part of the problem. Hurt people (and who among us has not been hurt?) hurt other people, she says. Our way of dissociating from that hurt can include blaming others for their difficulties, rather than helping them to find a constructive and positive way through them. The position of silent bystander, which so many of us take, is another symptom of our traumatisation, alienation from one another, and learned helplessness. If we take on board what she says, and much of it will resonate as well known in most of our hearts, there are wide implications for the way we could operate as a society.

This is a book which is both profoundly disturbing, and deeply optimistic. I have never sent a present to a prime minister before, but I have sent a copy of Sandra Bloom's book to ours. I hope he reads it and passes it on.

Maxine Linnell

Something Understood: Art therapy in cancer care

Camilla Connell
Wrexham Publications, 1998, £14.95

This beautifully produced and illustrated book contains copies of the work done by patients at the Royal Marsden Hospital, with the support of Camilla Connell, who has been art therapist there for many years. It also shows her deep understanding of cancer patients who suffer so much indignity, fear and pain, from both the illness and its treatment, although the treatment is of course meant to be helpful. I personally remain alive and well today as a testament both to successful treatment and to Camilla Connell's supportive and gently intuitive encouragement to paint while in a state of terror.

The cost of producing such a visually

high-quality book, where the paper invites touch and the colourful pictures are a delight, was met by various sponsoring organisations which recognise the beneficial and therapeutic effects of spontaneous painting during illness. It must have been very expensive to produce such good reproductions of so many paintings done by patients, both on the wards and in the therapy room. The book is one to savour, to enjoy the colours and read the often poignant text. It is inspiring to read the story of each patient's involvement in painting and what they said they appreciated about the process of producing their pictures.

Process is in fact what is examined throughout the book: the therapeutic process of learning to relate to things as they are, and adjusting to the new and often difficult circumstances, the medical interventions, the frightening machines, and the new questions about life and living, or dying, that suddenly become so important. Inner change is the theme of the artwork Camilla Connell has chosen, and she explains clearly the ways in which patients become involved and enthusiastic about their painting, and the different levels of effect that occur. There are striking pictures done by patients who have not touched a paintbrush for many years, who say they have enjoyed the colours and the distraction from invasive treatments.

Giving cancer patients enjoyment might seem somewhat bizarre to those who expect the ill and dying to be chiefly in need of commiseration, which in fact often serves to increase people's fear of what they are facing. In a long and interesting appendix here the hospital's psychiatrist and psychotherapist provides an analysis of art therapy, psychological support and cancer care, making links to Jung and religious enquiry, and the patient's search for meaning in life. He fully appreciates Camilla Connell's many years of work with the dying and the frightened, and the relationship of creativity to individuation. Contemplating death is scary, but making sense of existence through creative acts is a symbolic way of living well right until the end, as so many of the pictures and the artists' own comments reveal.

As a frightened patient in 1997, I was grateful to Camilla Connell for my time in her art therapy room, where we often sat in total silence, but where I also felt respect, concern and patience when I ranted on about the indignities I had to put up with. I am proud to have one of my paintings and a poem in this inspiring book, which I treasure. I hope that it will show the power of art to other therapists, and that other hospitals will introduce art therapy as an important adjunct to treatment. I can testify that it is not only a powerful antidote to the distress and fear of facing the great unknown, but also a way of producing a positive and hopeful attitude which may well contribute to recovery.

Vivienne Silver-Leigh

Person-centred Counselling Training

Dave Mearns
Sage, 1997, £13.99

I really wish I had had the opportunity to read this excellent book before we set up the diploma in person-centred counselling at Lewisham College in 1994. It is the first to have been written on the subject of person-centred counselling training and it combines a passionate commitment to the philosophy and therapeutic efficacy of the person-centred approach with a pragmatic and detailed account of how best to train future practitioners within the context of modern institutions, organisations and systems of accountability. It is an extremely honest and unpretentious work which raises as many questions as it provides answers, and it is enriched by lively illustrations and examples from Dave Mearns' own experience and that of his trainees.

Mearns stresses that the training of a person-centred counsellor should aim to develop the ability ' to meet a client at relational depth and work with whatever existential content she [*sic*] finds there', and he outlines how all the aspects of a course can work towards this ideal.

I found it reassuring that Mearns thought it not possible to transfer the relationship established in person-centred therapy to the trainer–trainee relationship, emphasising that as trainers we need to remember that course members are not clients. It is indeed important that the trainer make it explicit that confidentiality cannot be maintained and that a staff team will share knowledge of a trainee. He also reinforced my perceptions of the difficulties endemic in working with trainees who have been accustomed to an authoritarian spoon-feeding model of education and who therefore feel let down when they are expected to assume more responsibility for themselves. An ideal is for the trainer to be responsible 'to' rather than 'for' the trainee, and I feel my greatest sense of satisfaction when trainees demonstrate that they can move beyond the dependent stage and gain a sense of autonomy. Mearns also warns trainers that if we always accede to the demands made by our trainees it may well be at such cost to our physical and mental health as to render us dysfunctional.

He points out how important it is at the start of a course that trainers familiarise themselves with students' levels of expectations and particularly with their fears, asserting that if the level of fear is too high it can impede successful completion. He has learned that trainees often find assessment a menacing theme that colours all aspects of training. Refusing to accept Carl Rogers' rejection of summative assessment, he shows that it is in fact possible to combine a commitment to person-centred ideology with institutional requirements for validation and evidence.

On his own courses Mearns gives students absolute decision-making responsibility over whether or not they achieve

the diploma, and says he is heartened by the number of trainees who themselves recognise that they are unready (nine on one course). Such a choice certainly obviates the game-playing to which many trainees resort to hide their weaknesses, but I have not myself so far encountered a cohort of them ready to make it.

Mearns prioritises the training of the 'person' of the counsellor. He hopes that trainees will become aware of the 'lace curtains and safety nets' they have wrapped around themselves in the past and begin to learn how they can divest themselves of them. During the course he would like trainees to become aware of and understand their fears, and to experiment with fearless relating in different situations. Students need to experience that if they take risks their Selves will not be destroyed. He advocates training therapy as an integral part of the course and argues against using an external facilitator for the professional development groups. On balance, however, we ourselves prefer to use an external facilitator, though we ensure that students know this person is a part of the course team and will liaise with the tutors.

There is an excellent section on the large group meeting (or community), recognising its difficulties and that it can be rendered ineffective by high levels of fear, but also identifying how it can provide a unique forum for raising personal issues and for experimentation. Mearns stresses that staff are not there to manage it but to relate openly and congruently, and to initiate as well as to respond.

From the evidence of trainees, the qualities most praised in their trainers were reliability, trustworthiness and non-defensiveness. Whilst trainers need to value the course member as a person, they do also need to offer judgements and challenges. As a trainer I have experienced difficulties in achieving this balance. When I fall short or my attempts are misinterpreted I need to remember Mearns' identification of self-acceptance as a key trainer quality!

Mearns considers that two of the most important elements in the selection of trainees are firstly, that they should be ready to face their training in a relatively non-defensive way and, secondly, that the training is a manageable practicality. He thinks it essential that the group should be as heterogeneous as possible, since counsellors should not be culled from just one type of person, and trainees can learn a great deal from the experiences of their peers. A well-selected group will be diverse, motivated, realistic and experienced.

I totally endorse the view that no training can succeed without adequate actual experience of counselling. The only way to assess the efficacy of the theory is through practice. Supervision is another essential element in training and the choice of a supervisor who can effectively facilitate the learning is of the utmost importance. Mearns stresses that if difficulties arise the trainees need to confront the supervisor, not just complain on the course.

One of the best sections of the book was that on the theory component. It finally refutes allegations of other schools of therapy that there is a 'theory deficit' in the person-centred approach. Mearns men-

tions over 200 person-centred writers and is able to identify a number of interesting developments in the past 15 years, for example in the field of mental health. He stresses the importance of introducing students to the body of theory so that they can make their own informed choices later, and suggests that one interesting reason for many students' initial reluctance to engage with theory is that it might represent a potential dissonance with their own explicit and implicit values and beliefs. He himself has made a contribution by researching such areas as over-involvement and the power dynamics of the relationship.

As a trainer I was inspired by the energy, enthusiasm and rigour that Mearns applies to his training work, and found this book a fertile ground for both the validation and questioning of my own practice.

Val Simanowitz.

As a student I was privileged to watch a video in which Dave Mearns lectured to a group of students. He displayed a natural presence. I was impressed with his openness about himself and his efforts in the counselling relationship. His mistakes were confessed in a spirit of fun and true genuineness. His passion for the person-centred approach and the depth of his knowledge and understanding came alive. These qualities I found again between the covers of his book.

I read this work in the second year of my training. Some feelings stand out. The biggest one is that if I had read it prior to undertaking my diploma I might not have completed the application form. Those sceptics who claim that person-centred counsellors don't really do anything may have their beliefs dispelled if they dare to stick a nose in this book's direction.

The beauty of the book is that it puts into words those skills and passions that make up the approach. It also lays out clearly the crazy-paved path that leads one through the experience of gaining the required skills. Mearns says that the person-centred approach is about creating environments that enhance the experiencing of self. He clarifies opportunities for students to do this for themselves in training, without, obviously, attempting to dictate. He maintains a high degree of regard for students in training and for their innate wisdom. As a student myself, this encouraged me to believe in my competence and skills.

Mearns argues that the main strength of the person-centred training is personal development work. I gained new insight into developing the ability to really 'be' the core conditions rather than just 'doing' them. My own experience informs me that true acceptance, congruence and unconditional positive regard act as release to a tortured soul. This book will help to develop more counsellors who have what it takes.

Mearns make reference to a wide variety of other works and his work can be used as a mini-encyclopaedia of other people's contributions to the approach. For a will-

ing student intent on wider reading and research this is invaluable. He acknowledges the foundation of the approach within the work of Carl Rogers but is committed to highlighting the amount of work that has gone on to develop it in recent years. He questions the possibilities of expanding it and tells you where to look for guidance. This inspired me to think about how it may develop through the millennium. Mearns leaves room for a new generation to complete research and contribute to a school of being that is still being defined and refined.

Janine Cooper

Prayers of the Cosmos

translated by Neil Douglas-Klotz
Harper, 1994, £6.99, 90pp

A book to help us recover the divine in the everyday and to renew the inspiration of Christ's prayer, beatitudes and sayings by translating them from his native language, Aramaic. Aramaic is a language of rich word and sound play. 'God, the Father' becomes in Aramaic the One, the Source, the Birther, Light and Sound in everything that is. We can approach the Divine, according to this version, via the vibrations and release of our breathing; we can approach the Divine in each other by listening to the pulses of our hearts, and we can connect to the healing Divine in the Cosmos by aligning ourselves to our bone marrow and the white blood cells produced there. This Christ honours the wisdom of our bodies and our embodied relationship to the Divine, 'shine from the deepest place of our bodies', 'that the animal life in you/find its lover in the Cosmos'.

There are no words here for sin, purity or punishment, rather prayers for bread and insight, every day, for mistakes like knots to be untied, guilt to be released, rigidities to be softened and the confusions of deluding appearances to be overcome; and finally for our connection, now, to a life force, a divine 'I can', a song that beautifies all. There are Blessings for those who weep from frustrated desires; we, the confused and deluded, pulled apart at the seams, sticky, labelled immature, can receive fulfilment at a new level and savour the splendour of earth's fruits. Blessing to those with the audacity to feel abundant with life's wealth.

Christ in this translation desires compassion for the Self within, for the ones mysteriously drawn to live near us and for our enemies. We bring them back step by step into rhythm secretly within ourselves so that we can gain in understanding and forgiveness; a celebration of unity and interconnectedness like that in the great Buddhist meditation on kindliness. This is Christ revealed within which I feel loved and loving, here and now.

Dave Jones

Working and Surviving in Organisations

Sheila Dainow
Wiley, 1998, £18.99, 292pp.

Once again Sheila Dainow has produced a clear, authoritative book, full of gems, ideas, exercises and psychological understanding of groups and organisations; written, as always, in an easily accessible and familiar style that in no way belittles the richness of her experience and knowledge. Skilfully and delightfully she combines a core of idealism and a congruence to professed philosophies with an enviably practical pragmatism.

This latest work is very practice-oriented, as its subtitle *A trainer's guide to developing organisational skills* indicates. For those many of us who need to work in organisations, here is a realistic discussion of how best to survive such necessary, if often undesired settings. The book is divided into four useful sections. Part 1 introduces the reader to the culture and psychology of organisations and the issues of power and politics within them. We meet the power culture of 'The Wheel', the role culture of 'The Temple', the task culture of 'The Net' and the person culture of 'The Cluster'. Through Maslow's pyramidal map we are invited to investigate to what extent our needs are met or acknowledged within an organisational setting. The psychology of groups is explored through Eric Berne's transactional analysis model of the ego states and transactions. Also included are the neurotic views of individuals and of organisations: paranoid, compulsive, dramatic, depressive or schizoid. Finally there is a discussion of what exactly power is, how it is manifested and by whom, and the politics of organisations.

This is followed by a chapter on 'Working together' where Sheila Dainow assists readers, especially if they are managers or trainers, to look at ways of developing a team, describing Tuckman and Jenson's well-known life-cycle of group development, 'forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning'. She also details Schutz's description of the needs of the individual in a group, 'inclusion, control and affection'. As always there are lots of very helpful and useful exercises, making this a real resource book for trainers involved in group and work training sessions. Next comes a chapter on roles and responsibilities in teams, quoting Belbin's nine roles of 'chairperson, shaper, plant, monitor, implement, teamworker, completer, resource investigator and specialist'. An introduction to leadership roles and responsibilities follows, using Adair's three-function model of leadership and again the transactional analysis model, particularly examining the Parent ego state.

A very useful chapter on conflicts and clashes uses Jelf s study of group dynamics problems: dominance by a group member, elitism, boredom, confusion, hidden agendas and broken agreements. Sheila Dainow discusses ways of resolving such

problems through the perspectives of the Traditional, the Behavioural, the Interactionist and the Radical, and examines Thomas's five styles of conflict management: the competitive (a battle scenario); the collaborative (problem-solving together); the accommodating (acceding only one altruistic point of view); the compromising (a 50/50 approach) and lastly the avoiding (there's no problem!).

Part 2 ends with a chapter on 'Organising people' (people management) which includes the basic counselling skills of exploration and focusing, giving attention, responding, practising empathy, probing, making connections, challenging, summarising, self-disclosure, confrontation and goal-setting, followed by evaluation, appraisal and delegation skills and finally including a brief examination of coaching, training and counselling.

Part 3 is on staying healthy — stress issues, helped through breathing and relaxation techniques, body/massage movements and mindful assistances such as meditation and creative visualisation. Part 4 is entitled 'Into the future' — career life planning (masses of useful questionnaires), 'getting where you want to be' (the decision wheel and an introduction to force field analysis) and a chapter on 'What if things don't work out?' The chapter on 'Endings' discusses redundancy, how to survive it and preparing for retirement.

What a comprehensive book this is, clearly set out, with lots of exercises for participants and trainers, and written with a humbleness of style that offers readers a richness beyond price.

John Sivyer

Developing Gestalt Counselling

Jennifer Mackewn
Sage, 1997, £14.99, 262pp.

This is a book which grows on you. Published in Windy Dryden's series *Developing Counselling*, which is described as providing counsellors and trainees (such as me) with practical hints and guidelines on problems faced, it actually does something rather different and more ambitious. It is subtitled *A field theoretical and relational model of contemporary Gestalt counselling and psychotherapy* and it comes across not just as a (potentially very useful) handbook but, more specifically, as an attempt to present Gestalt theory and practice in integrative terms. Its message is thus essentially revisionist and, as the author recognises, it is designed for those with prior knowledge both of counselling and of Gestalt. There are eight pages of references, many to recent Gestalt papers and books.

The key phrase is 'field theory', and Jennifer Mackewn emphasises throughout that figure is seen against and related to background. This contextualising approach broadens the scope of traditional Gestalt notions and provides a wider basis

of application. For example (following Gordon Wheeler) she presents each of the standard 'interruptions to contact' — the Gestalt reformulation of the classic Freudian defence mechanisms — as a polar point on a continuum of behaviour, whose function in the individual's context (or style) is deserving of exploration. Even the phenomenon of shame, nicely described as 'pervasive and evasive' (don't I know it!), is presented as the polar opposite of support, with a context and function as well as a history to be considered. I find this particularly suggestive although I have yet to work it through.

Another broadening effect of the emphasis on the field is to draw emphasis back from the traditional Gestalt concentration on the 'here and now' so as to allow attention also to be paid to continuity, style, habit and even history. Along with the modern Gestalt emphasis on the dialogic character of the therapeutic process, this associates Mackewn's vision firmly with the humanistic belief in the establishment and unfolding of a person-to-person relationship as the real meat of counselling and therapy.

With acknowledgements to Gary Yontef, Mackewn recognises the importance of transference and counter-transference in the therapeutic relationship and, albeit briefly, provides suggestions and examples of ways of working with transferential processes within the Gestalt model. This is clearly another big step in her integrative programme. Also worth mentioning is her inclusion of diagnostic indications for and special methods of working with people with a fragile, borderline or narcissistic self-process (as she puts it). This material strikes me (with limited experience of this area) as sensible, practical and undogmatic — and a very useful plus.

Comparing this book with the classics of Gestalt, clearly the broadening of perspective makes for a certain loss of excitement. If I have one criticism it is the lack of any strong sense of the author's own personality and interests, even in the chapter on 'Opening to the transpersonal and caring for the soul'. But this is perhaps a small price to pay for what strikes me as a generally very successful attempt to situate Gestalt theory and practice in their (rightful) place in the central ground of person-to-person counselling and therapy. As such it earns its place on my shelf!

Martin Haddon

Counselling, Psychotherapy and the Law

Peter Jenkins
Sage, 1997, £15.99

This complements Tim Bond's earlier book *Standards and Ethics for Counselling in Action*. Peter Jenkins acknowledges that what he has written is 'not a law book in the usual sense, but a book about the law for therapists written by a therapist'. He was triggered to write *Counselling, Psychotherapy and the Law* by the litigious

climate which has increasingly surrounded therapy over the last decade. It has culminated in the USA with law suits against therapists involved with child abuse and the resulting claim that 'false memory syndrome' has destroyed many families. Jenkins notes that therapists, both in the USA and in Britain, are generally concerned about their vulnerability to accusation and litigation, and that they are not expert lawyers. He therefore attempts to combine theory with practice and to make his book as accessible as possible to any who face legal issues in connection with their work.

The text is set out to include the link between therapy and the law, professional negligence, confidentiality, the way courts work, complaints procedures and issues that may arise it, working with young people. For ease of access to topics, the main points are set out in summary boxes. The final chapter on statutory regulation of therapists is a 'must read' for all counsellors and psychotherapists in the current climate of greater rigour over eligibility for acceptance into the various therapy organisations.

Legal issues may not be the most exciting of subjects for some of us, but this book I believe to be essential reading for all students and practitioners of therapy.

Jen Popkin

Case Studies in Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling

Simon du Plock (ed)
Wiley, 1997, £12.99, 190pp.

Simon du Plock, who is an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society and head of MA programmes at Regent's College School of Psychotherapy and Counselling, maintains that the vast majority of texts for mental health practitioners which include case studies have a tendency to focus exclusively on the problem presented by the client. The end result is a case study in which the client has disappeared, to be replaced by a pathology. The typical case study describes the pathology, shows how experts view and treat it, and illustrates its course and causes. The aim of this collection which he has edited is to show how existential therapists engage with their clients' problems of living, rather than focusing purely on a pathology.

The book includes 12 studies from therapists who, while they may not all have trained as existential psychotherapists, are writing from that viewpoint. The examples are rich and varied. Men and women, old, young and middle aged, from a variety of cultures, all facing their own problems in living — one has brain damage, one is diagnosed HIV+, one has difficulty conceiving a baby, another is mourning the death of hers. There is also a description of working existentially with groups.

The Introduction is helpful, explaining

the basic assumptions held by existential psychotherapists. Here are those basic assumptions:

1 Human beings are'thrown' into the world in that they cannot choose where, how and to whom they are born. There are certain existential givens which humans cannot change or choose. However, by choosing our response we can create our own values and our own lives

2 We can only be understood in our context.

3 Existential therapists try to remain open to present experience, rather than engaging with their clients by talking about their theories of the past or aspirations for the future.

4 Existential therapists question the deterministic approach that the past causes the present, preferring to support clients in taking responsibility for their own choices.

5 The mind/body dichotomy is rejected in favour of working with the bodymind as a whole.

6 Life presents us with real choices and real problems to be solved. Our decisions can support or undermine us. This leads to guilt and anxiety, which is however not neurotic but appropriate to the situation.

The strength of this book is that the studies all work together to show how the relationship between a therapist and client can be healing in itself — the connection, Buber's 'I–Thou' relationship. Steve Ticktin's description of working with a young girl shows that what many adolescents hunger for is friendship rather than answers. The relationship supports his client to find her own answers.

Simon du Plock's description of the American 'innocent abroad' is also educational and touching, disclosing how even an experienced practitioner might have to work hard to overcome initial prejudices in order to make a meaningful connection with a 'privileged' exchange student.

A different example of tuning in is given by Zack Eleftheriadou, a therapist at NAFSIYAT who often finds herself working with people from cultures other than her own. She asks her clients to tell her their full names; many people living in foreign lands change or shorten their names to make them acceptable or pronounceable. By speaking their full name and hearing it spoken and pronounced correctly, the client may be able to release all sorts of other information and feelings.

Many of the accounts in this book are moving; one gets the impression of person after person struggling with their own existential 'givens' in their own way. A man diagnosed as HIV+ asks his therapist (Martin Milton), 'Am I tired because I'm HIV+ or because I think I should be tired?' The account which had the most profound effect on me was the last, by June Roberts. It is a highly ironic entry in this collection, because Roberts was psychoanalytically trained and taught to work developmentally. However, she writes this study as a therapist who is very aware of the existential approach. Roberts writes about her own doubts and worries very well. She quotes R.D. Laing: 'I am myself perplexed. But I have tried as best I can to convey the nature of my perplexity!'

The weakness of this book is that it

believes that these case studies are in some important respect different from those written by practitioners from other schools. I am sorry but I just could not see it. There were times in this book when the clients disappeared from view and became objectified in order to illustrate a point about existential givens. I wanted to know more about Leila (Eleftheriadou), Roberto (Milton) and Bernadette (Strasser). It was frustrating to find myself saying 'Just shut up about Sartre and Heidegger — what happened to your client?' A good case study conveys the theory without losing sight of the client.

I am reminded of some research that showed that experienced psychotherapists of different schools have more in common with each other than they do with their own trainees. 'Tuning in' is not uniquely existential. This is a good book to recommend to trainees of any school. It is clearly written, interesting and thought-provoking (it did seem to contain rather a lot of typos though). I shall copy June Roberts and leave the last word with R.D. Laing, from a documentary called 'Didn't you used to be Ronnie Laing?': 'Treatment is how we treat people!'

Jessica Woolliscroft