Therapy Beyond Modernity:

Deconstructing and Transcending Profession-Centred Therapy

Richard House.

Karnac, 2003. 330Pages £19.99 pb

Richard House has distinguished himself over the past decade as an ardent and intelligent critic of the direction that Psychotherapy and Counselling have been taking, as they have moved into the mainstream of social life in Britain. His targets in the past have included statutory registration, the increasing scientization of therapy (the emphasis on researchable results), the development of what he calls 'bureaucratic-mindedness' (the emphases on accountability and cost-effectiveness), amongst others.

Here, in this book, he trains his guns on the big quarry-the 'therapy' project itself, or as he calls it 'profession-centred therapy' or 'professionalised therapy.'

House sees professionalised therapy as essentially a 'modernist' project and he employs the favourite postmodernist intellectual scalpel of deconstuctionism (borrowed here from Professors Ian Parker and Nicolas Rose) to dissect what he sees as the endemic abusiveness and power-distortedness of professionalised or 'commodified' therapy. He does this in two ways: in the first half of the book he attempts an audacious deconstruction of what he sees as some of the sacred cows of 'professionalised therapy', namely the concepts of resistance, the importance given to boundaries, the 'frame', 'holding',the accent on client safety and its concomitant notion,client abuse ,before turning his attention to the perhaps even more sacrosanct notions of confidentiality and codes of ethics. At the same time he also carefully challenges a number of assumptions of training and around practitioner competence that are pretty well axiomatic now within the profession, eg the importance of theory per se and of 'the core theoretical model' in particular.

In the second half, he proceeds in his critique by offering three accounts of the dangers of 'therapy' written by ex-clients-Rosie Alexander, Ann France and more recently, Anna Sands. This section of the book carries the most emotional impact and is likely to prove uncomfortable reading for those not acquainted with this body of testimony.

Finally, after an interesting chapter on the maverick therapist-genius Georg Groddeck, House moves on to sketch his view of what a 'post-professionalised therapy' might look like and concludes with some hopes for the future. The book contains an excellent bibliography on the growing

body of literature that is challenging/ critical of therapy.

This is an important contribution to the debate about the direction that therapy as a profession is taking in its quest for social recognition, and it essentially poses the question of whether the costs are too high for the gains that are on offer. House's view is clearly a resounding 'Yes, they are.'

However it seems to me that in his cost-benefit analysis House, in this book, is seriously in danger of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. I don't think its possible now to get rid of the 'profession'without getting rid of 'therapy' itself. House clearly doesn't want to do that-he wants to save therapy from itself, but his attempt to do that-his creation of an idealised 'Post-Professional New Paradigm Therapy simply doesn't wash:it's pure pie-in-the-sky.

More importantly, House's methodology in his critique has a number of shortcomings:firstly, deconstruction is a dangerous tool, for it would easily be possible to turn this on to his critique of therapy by problematising his use of the polarities he frequently and crucially invokes -in a rather simplistic bad/good manner- of modern/postmodern; old paradigm/new paradigm. As Ken Wilber has pointed out, one can deconstruct anything one doesn't like.

Secondly, his use of the notion of a 'regime of truth' is a useful and enlightening one but it is by no means clear that such a 'regime' ipso facto functions merely as a profession-centred self-serving ideology, and yet House regularly makes this leap as if his case was made. In other words, House too often lapses into an 'assumptive ideology' of his own that is a kind of mirror opposite of the 'assumptive ideology'(of 'professionalised therapy') that he is challenging. This then leads to the position at the end of the book where House seems to want to legislate by intellectual fiat the disappearance of the traits of 'professionalised therapy' that he dislikes in favour of those that he personally prefers.

Thirdly, as House admits, he has not sought in this work to situate therapy within its socio-cultural context.

However by not so doing, his deconstructive approach to therapy is likely to prove nihilistic. As meaning only exists within a context, if the context within which therapy takes place-in this case the whole shared socio-cultural field -is removed, then of course the rituals of therapy (boundaries, confidentiality, the structure of the therapeutic conversation)are bound to appear meaningless, and then it is easy to smuggle in a motive that gives the experience some shape-namely the profession's agenda! In other words it is not possible to arrive at any kind of understanding of what 'therapy' is except by situating it in its socio-cultural context. It is unlikely that a deconstructive approach would be able to do justice to this task anyway as the tendency of deconstructive approaches.is towards flattening qualitative distinctions and in this process interior worlds are necessarily lost.

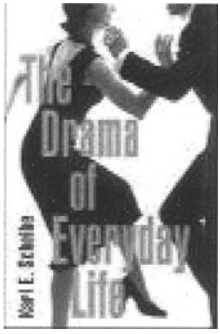
Finally, at many points I was unsure what House's target really is-is it a particular way of doing therapy (e.g the psychodynamic approach of the

rigid variety that France, Alexander, and Sands seem to have experienced), all of therapy in its professionalised form leaving perhaps only IPN practitioners, in a strange kind of reverse registration, as the only worthwhile therapists? Or is it the therapy project per se? It might have clarified this if House had given us more by way of his own experiences of therapy and of being a therapist as well as the personal story of his own progressive disenchantment with what he calls an 'implausible profession'.

Certainly I felt often that the characterisations of therapy offered, and the witnesses called, seemed strangely one-sided, as if for House, all the goodness had gone out of therapy as it has been squeezed in the grip of the professionalisation process over the past decade. There seemed to me to be no acknowledgement of the sensitivity and intellectual sophistication of the process-based approaches (Gestalt, Hakomi, Experiential, Primal, Person-Centred, Core approaches etc) nor of latter-day developments in Trauma theory, intersubjectivity and attachment approaches etc with their emphasis on the interpersonal, dialogue, attunement and self-disclosure, as well as the increasing attention and sensitivity to power and exclusion issues.

In sum then, though rather uneven and in places one-sided, this is a powerful and challenging book that deserves a wide audience and an engaged response. Its publication marks an attempt to begin to level up the woeful imbalance in the therapeutic literature, which has been, until recently, markedly written by therapists, for therapists, and stunningly ignoring of clients viewpoints especially when they run against the perceived therapeutic wisdom.

David Kalisch



The Drama of Everyday Life

Karl E. Scheibe

Harvard University Press 2002. $17.00pb

Everyday drama. Reviews editor emails me a list of books available to review. I select Scheibe's book by intuition, drawn by the title, but when it arrives it is not what I expected. For a short while, I consider whether I want to read it at all. I contemplate sending it back, pleading lack of expertise in drama. Meanwhile the sub-plot in my head queries whether I will learn anything useful for my work as a therapist, one of my

motivations for reviewing anyway. I try a few chapters, then become aware that the author has something to say which produces a major shift in my perception of what makes us do what we do. The curtain rises.

Karl Scheibe is Professor of Psychology at Weslyan University, US, and also a psychotherapist. His 'dramaturgical approach to psychology' has added new words to my vocabulary and stopped me in my tracks from stereotyped thinking. This is a powerful piece of philosophical writing, one in which he offers a radical alternative to the traditional teaching of psychology.

Scheibe has been teaching experiential classes with the title The Dramaturgical Approach to Psychology since 1979 at Weslyan University in the US. They are geographically and emotionally far away from most psychology courses in the UK, where students study the scientific approaches to human behaviour and the experiments to measure it.

The chapter entitled, 'Drama in the Classroom' is an intensely personal and detailed description of the way the courses evolved and how they are structured, influenced by the methods of Jacob Moreno, pioneer of psychodrama. For me this was the highlight of the book, where I finally understood Scheibe's ideas. The details he gives about practical creation of the classes are fascinating – covering what the students have to do, from the first rituals of removing their shoes before entering the classroom, to what snacks they eat, and the way an atmosphere of trust is created. He describes the interaction between himself and the students and exactly what they gain from this applied psychology course. They study the plays of Albee, Shaffer, and Shakespeare, and others for the source of the psychology material which they then bring to life on a stage set in the classroom. There is great enthusiasm for this innovative course, shown in the reports from the students themselves, who say they have gained much insight into human psychology. I suspect that if there are similar courses in UK, they are probably taught at drama schools rather than in psychology departments.

Drama and psychology meet together elsewhere in chapters headed 'Boredom, Fear and Greed,' 'Eating and Sex,' 'Gambling,' and, 'The Disappearance of Schizophrenia.' I particularly liked the descriptions of the drama which takes place in the casinos in Las Vegas, where the whole question of why people gamble is linked to the human need for uncertainty, enacting fantasies and hopes. The dramatic cycle which can be found behind all our endeavours becomes clear. The author considers that schizophrenia is an 'enveloping dramatic construction which is now losing its force.' He draws from the work of Laing, Sarbin and E. Goffman to conclude that removing the labels on the actors (patients) resulted in a decline in the number of these institutionalised patients during the twentieth century. The theatres (hospitals) of restraint, ECT and horror have been shut down in Connecticut.

In a wide range of everyday topics Scheibe finds psychological dramas. These are both abstract and concrete - chapters on seriousness, indifference, authenticity, and on teaching, gambling, cosmetics and costume, The author argues that we are always looking for action, making it happen, primarily to avoid the catastrophe of boredom. Everything becomes understandable in this paradigm. His ideas extend to, 'The Giving of Gifts,' a neat little essay on the way we use our natural gifts, how they are valued , compared, used and abused, and also how material gifts can produce emotions of envy, greed, jealousy, and the need of the giver to be appreciated.

The author puts the sociological setting in the foreground of the theatre, where relationships evolve like dancers following steps. The audience (readers) can watch how the author directs. Although I sometimes lost the plot in the variety of subjects he discusses, and the depth of the thinking, I applaud the ideas and admire the convictions and integrity of the author. There is much here to transform anyone interested in viewing life from a new perspective, or to inspire those working in the fields of drama, psychodrama, and psychology.

Vivienne Silver-Leigh

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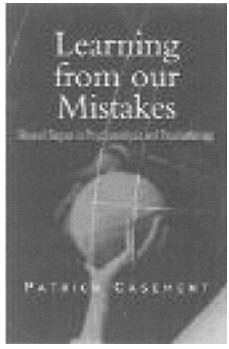
Learning From Our Mistakes:
Beyond Dogma in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy
Patrick Casement
Brunner-Routledge (2002), 150 pages £15.99



If, like me, the crusading title of this book and the status of the author as part of the Independent Group of the British Psycho-Analytical Society, leads you to hope for a frontal assault against the psycho-analytical establishment then you may be in for a disappointment. While the author thoughtfully, and with great precision, considers a number of contentious points within psychoanalysis, the heavy artillery is definitely not wheeled out. To an outsider (Gestalt Psychotherapy in my case), the main tenets of psycho-analysis are never questioned. The fundamental

question: how can you ever know what someone else is thinking or feeling better than they know themselves, is not addressed. My heart sank when I read the introduction to this book as the main concern seemed to be 'the manner in which interpretations are presented' (page 7) rather than questioning the entire enterprise itself. This is reiterated later (page 113) when the author statues 'it is be no means the case that... even an experienced analyst, always knows better than the patient'. The implication obviously being that they do most of the time!

However, this sinking feeling vanished as I read the main chapters of the book. These are characterised by great sensitivity to the client and a constant willingness to see things from a different perspective. The author is open to looking at his own mistakes, and presents a random non-groomed session in Chapter Three, a breath of fresh air among the many stale case studies on offer. Interpretations are made, but they are presented to the client in such a way that they can be discussed jointly rather than being delivered from on high (the author makes a persuasive plea for this kind of open style throughout the book). As he notes on page 88 'all of my clinical writing has been an attempt to show the importance of following the patient'. He defines dogmatic as mindlessly following theory and not putting enough importance on the individual whether it be in therapy or in supervision leading to indoctrination, with the client or trainee swallowing wholesale the interpretations of the analyst. This 'fosters compliance' rather than increasing creativity and spontaneity, the real objectives of analysis. The renewed emphasis on relationship rather than theory appears to be an important meeting point for different approaches in modern psychotherapy. Many of the points such as 'a sense of non-knowing' (page 28) and the emphasis on staying in the present could have been written by a modern Gestalt therapist.

So while the author is not against interpretation in itself he presents a clear case for a change in style, with the analyst being willing to own mistakes and avoid 'certainty of their own sureness' (page 3). As he points out in Chapters Two and Six, while we may want to aspire to perfection our mistakes are invaluable for the client. Indeed, the patient needs the therapist to make mistakes so the client can vent their anger on someone who will not be obliterated and will take responsibility for their own part in the enactment ('it was with me that he was angry and I had to accept all of this as meant for me' page 81) rather than ducking out of the scenario and blaming the counter-transference.

Nevertheless, Patrick Casement, like many psycho-analysts seems concerned with the style and elegance of his interventions. The aim seems to be towards neat, polished understanding that encapsulates the whole 'truth' of a patient's experience rather than a more gradual peeling away of the layers through a series of smaller moments of awareness. For instance, Chapter Seven re-visits a

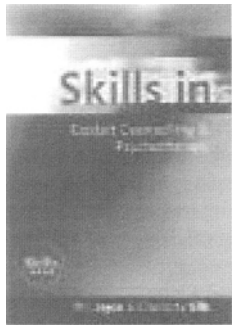
fascinating case study on the use of touch – in this case holding hands – in analysis (the original paper is usefully reprinted as an Appendix). The author's position is that he did not in this instance hold the patient's hand not because of the classical position against touch in psycho-analysis, but rather because he thought the patient was communicating to him that if he did hold her hand the true depths of the trauma would be avoided. He terms this 'daring to go where the patient unconsciously prompted me to go' (page 95). While I found this argument persuasive, if we think of the telling of the earlier trauma as an experiment, initially the patient could undertake it holding the therapist's hand and at a later date, when the patient feels more supported, she could attempt to revisit the trauma without the hand – in order to go deeper into the fear. Especially given the incredible frequency of sessions in analysis, why does everything have to be done the hard way right from the start?

This question is particularly pertinent as the book addresses the role of mistakes in therapy in general and the author makes a number of interesting points on this subject. He suggests in Chapter Nine that most analysts are 'impatient to remove a sense of strangeness, and the unease of not-knowing' (page 111). This can lead analysts to deflect away onto more familiar ground. Instead, Patrick Casement makes a plea for us all to step into the unknown with the client and to see what we can learn. It's a brave stance, and despite my initial sense of unease at the acceptance of some of the basic ideas of psycho-analysis with which I am uncomfortable, the lack of dogma in this approach means that many of the interpretations will be co-created by the analyst and the patient.

Although the book does not tear down the walls of psycho-analysis it makes the case for a re-framing of the relationship in such a way as to introduce greater equality. By embracing this approach hopefully no one will be told, as Hilary Mantel was by a psycho-analyst in the 1970s, that she suffered from the 'female complaint' of 'stress, caused by over ambition' apparently brought on by being a woman and going to university. The book is well written and each chapter is self contained so it can be dipped into at leisure. All technical terms are explained in footnotes making it very accessible to non-specialists. Despite my initial reservations, I thoroughly enjoyed reading the book and found his attention to detail and to the use of language fascinating and informative. I would recommend it to anyone interested in the modern stance of psycho-analysis from whatever discipline and indeed to all psychotherapists who would like to reflect on the role of mistakes in therapy.

Hilary Mantel
'Little Miss Neverwell'
London Review of Books, 23rd January 2003.

Skills in Gestalt Counselling and Psychotherapy



Phil Joyce and Charlotte Sills

Sage. 2001 London. 229pp. £16.99

It is over fifteen years since I did my partial gestalt training, and I have heard how things have moved on. It was good to find at the outset, a handbook about skills, which put them clearly in a context within the preface. The main 'skill' being 'offering a particular kind of relational contact' as the 'heart and soul of Gestalt'.

I have been concerned about views I have come across that gestalt is like a bolt on tool kit that other practitioners can use in bits. I have been wary of this myself, and over the years, did less and less 'gestalt' exercises in my work, increasingly just bringing that type of awareness into my sessions as a basic background. (For example, shifting into awareness work from time to time, as others also might do who are not trained in Gestalt)

How would I feel about this book if I were starting out training?

Well, this book was put on our reading list for Diploma students in Humanistic Counselling, and it has been snapped up by the students, quoted in essays, and drawn on by us for some exercises too. This is the sign of something both practical and inspiring, placing theory in a realistic and manageable context.

The introductory tone is chatty and practical without trivialising either the theory or how one might apply it.

Each section has checklists, examples, and overviews and recommended reading, which makes it a good main handbook for trainees. With the newer developed areas with which I was less familiar, I could take in a clear simplified map, without feeling patronised.

Each main theory is explored with case study examples, which are kept simple. This is probably a good thing; the complexities of awkward client situations and reactions are important to acknowledge, but better dealt with in live training and supervision. Inevitably at times the case vignettes lack the vitality that they have in the embodied session, and any book addressing body-oriented work will meet this problem.

It sets out brightly and briskly with some good practical stuff about interviews, assessment, money, and note taking which suggests how each practitioner might meet their personal way of working in with the necessary requirements and formalities. (As someone who has alternated between

religiously taking notes I would never read, and taking no notes at all because I am lucky to get away with a good auditory memory, this is nicely realistic.)

The authors set out a quite purist gestalt frame of reference for the assessments, reminding us that this is, indeed a holistic approach that doesn't just mean a bunch of techniques applied to a generic counselling style. They acknowledge the problem that I would take more seriously, of needing a shared language with referring agencies (DSM etc) but their focus will help a new practitioner keep to a gestalt contract as a 'world view'.

There is a strong emphasis on co-creation work with the client, which fits the politics of the gestalt model of re-empowerment. But as therapists, are we not also called upon as technical 'experts' to have suggestions and offerings of which the client may not yet be aware? This use of our bigger experience is described in practice in the section on experimenting, but not at the outset.

I wholeheartedly support the intent and political concern to rebalance power, and I also believe (as actually this book teaches) that counselling is a technical skill as well as an approach to human relationships. I wouldn't want to make a purely 'joint' decision with my plumber about a repair or replacement, until I had heard from her, what parts are available to mend something. The compromise is found in the spirit of mutual enquiry, which shifts the cartoon notion of gestalt (that bossy Perls telling people to do things) to one of basic non-intrusive optimism. However much we need to hear that, from the clients point of view, they are focussed on a problem, the struggle of maladptation and the risk of change is here clearly framed as creative adjustments, (southgate and randall et al) and the therapeutic space as opportunity to experiment.

It is good to see a whole chapter on unfinished business, (how to 'to identify the situation that could not be faced but not be left').

It ends with an interesting working approach to ethical dilemmas, and what feels like a more 'must cover this' section on specific issues, but some aspects are addressed more fully than just being tidied off into the AOB of counselling training. This is indicative of the grounding in real practice. In fact the whole of the last part of the book addresses practice issues. I enjoyed particularly the section on working with difference which was concerned with issues wider surely than its title (Counselling in a multi-cultural society)

My thanks to the authors for such a good summary.

Bee Springwood

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