The Story of Spectrum

Jenner Roth and **Terry Cooper**

SYNOPSIS

This personal article tells the story of Terry Cooper's and Jenner Roth's individual and shared journeys of evolution through Humanistic Psychology and the process of forming Spectrum, through their shared vision. Spectrum is a humanistic psychotherapy centre known for its tenacious pioneering spirit in the development of experiential approaches to therapy, standards of practice, ethics and continued professional development.

Our reflections on the past 45 years consist of three stories: Jenner's, Terry's and what we built together in the form of Spectrum. It is the nature of our work to share personal experiences and stories, and this is how we will respond to the questions we have been asked to address. We hope you enjoy it.

The modern therapies of the human potential movement and Humanistic Psychology had a massive impact on the field of psychotherapy and the health professions in the UK during the mid to late 1960s. This was a time of great social and political change in the world, which affected all layers of society. Hierarchies and power structures were challenged, and it was a humanizing and democratizing time.

The message of the new therapies shook the foundations of traditional psychotherapy. Everything was reviewed, redefined or reconstructed. In particular, the interpersonal relationship between therapist and client became more of a focus in therapeutic work.

There was a major shift away from the culture of expertism, over-pathologizing and the reductionistic role-bound approaches of the past. This shift offered a new vision of the therapeutic relationship, based upon co-operation, sharing and greater transparency within the therapist–client relationship.

The new therapies asserted that people had an in-built imperative to form themselves, to grow and to develop their potentialities. For a person to be well, the whole of a person's experience needed to be included as part of a therapeutic vision. For many, the emphasis of the work changed from viewing people as dysfunctional to looking for what was missing and needed to be grown by them.

In the early 1970s, Terry was working within a therapeutic culture which embodied a humanistic philosophy and he was also on the One Year Foundation Course at the Institute for Group Analysis (IGA). He remembers the intensity of feeling at the IGA when course participants questioned the lecturers and group therapists to find out how they felt about the arrival of the new therapies. There was much tension, comparison and debate.

One debate in particular that Terry remembers was about the issue of touch between therapist and client, in which one of the analytical psychotherapist lecturers said, suspiciously, 'We don't touch, after all you don't know where it will end'. This was clearly a criticism of the touchy-feely elements of the new therapies, but it also framed the polarized positions between the often unbounded experimentation of the new therapies and the somewhat rigid boundaries of the traditionalists. Terry's response to the discussion was that 'Physical contact ends when you decide to end it'.

This is an interesting story because it is the story of Spectrum's evolution over the past 40 years, the story of boundary making or, as we call it, patting butter: the importance of taking responsibility, the shaping and reshaping of our personal lives and the life of the organization in response to changing circumstances and new awarenesses.

It was in this atmosphere of change and reformation that Terry and Jenner met in 1972, at the Group Relations Training Association (GRTA) annual large group workshop in Southampton.

‘I contacted Quaesitor... That weekend changed the course of my life.

Jenner Roth born in St Paul, Minnesota, USA, in 1940. I first came to Humanistic Psychology through my own needs/longings/searching. I was in my late 20s, I was living in yet another country, I was pursuing yet another relationship, I was trying to find out who and what I would be when I grew up, I was waiting for the inevitable return of my paralysing depressions, I was lonely and lost and confused.

At university I had had a consultation about my depression with a psychiatrist, who told me I just had to learn to adjust. In the process of obtaining a legal abortion I had gone through a series of interviews with psychiatrists in France and Switzerland and six months of analysis to prove my case. None of these had touched or affected me personally. I always felt a specimen, a number on a grid. I, as a me, individual and with my own voice, was neither of interest nor of consequence to the proceedings, even though I was the reason and purpose for said proceedings. I found the analysis most bizarre. It was composed of hours of sitting with a friendly woman who listened to me and said nothing. Since I had understood my being analysed was for my benefit, I could not understand how saying nothing could help me. She must have had some thoughts, as she wrote copiously throughout the sessions. Because of a family situation I suddenly had to leave Paris, my job and the analysis. I left a phone message telling the analyst and she returned my call saying I must delay my departure and come to see her, as she had so much to tell me. I was astonished that after all these months and hours together with her silence, it was important for her to talk with me. Why now? It seemed a strange kind of blackmail. I knew that life was short and sweet and that things needed dealing with in the present. I didn’t delay my return and I never heard what she had to say.

Years went by and in an article in *TIME* magazine in a doctor’s office I read about a place in California called Esalen. A business executive reported participating in a sensitivity workshop where one of the experiences he had was of walking barefoot in the rain with other workshop participants and feeling the mud between his toes. He realised that he had not felt that since he was a child, although both his toes and the mud had always been available. I recognized instantly that I had also stopped feeling the mud between my toes and many, many other things for a very long time. It was a shocking revelation to me, and the why of it stayed with me as a question.

Two years later I was in London on the tube and saw an advertisement for a weekend event at the Inn on the Park, a kind of open house of sensitivity training and experiences which was linked to the work of Esalen and presented by an organization called Quaesitor. I contacted Quaesitor to find out about their work and signed up for a weekend workshop in their premises on Avenue Road. That weekend changed the course of my life. In one exercise we milled around the room with our eyes closed, feeling our way. I was astonished to find that everywhere I reached out I met the touch of other people reaching out. And I awoke from a life of isolation into a world peopled.

I knew this was the world I was meant and wanted to be in. I joined the world of the living. Rules, social conventions, educational, religious and family injunctions ceased to hold power over me in the same way. I found people, and for me, people were the answer.

There was huge relief and security in being with people who were interested in what was, who answered when spoken to, who talked about their feelings and thoughts and opinions, who validated reality, who included the body and senses in their view of life and the world, who were not afraid of anger or grief. This was the world of Humanistic Psychology that I entered and made my home.

I participated in many groups, conferences and events. I soaked up what I could. They were heady, golden days of excitement, disappointment, awkwardness, bliss. We seemed to be a band of pioneers in a new world. We tried exercises, confessions, new behaviours. We read everything we could lay our hands on. We wrote for ourselves, each other and the world. It seemed as though we had discovered a truly new world.

We were a part of the changing social parameters of the late 1960s and 1970s. We were extraordinarily self-obsessed, not, I believe, through narcissism, but in the faith that we were building a brave new world. We came from different backgrounds: journalism, psychiatry, accountancy, medicine, technology, engineering, social work and more, but we were peers in this endeavour helping each other, confronting each other, guiding and challenging and sharing our experience and knowledge.

People were responsible for their own undertakings. We were engaging in a brave new world. Yes, they were heady, golden days.

I think back on those days as the golden age of psychotherapy. There was so much excitement, curiosity and courage. We tried out just about everything and rejected loads of things, and adopted loads of things. We trusted ourselves and our peers and our clients. We made mistakes and we learned. We judged, we criticized, we proselytized, we adored, and we kept trying things out.

Then we grew up, time went on, and many of us decided to spend our lives supporting and living in and through Humanistic Psychology. We started to make groups, schools, practices, trainings, organizations and professional bodies. I participated in the creation of the course and organization, COGS, the Council of Groups Studies, at what was then the North London Polytechnic. I ran training courses in management, both public and in-house, and I was part of the facilitator team of the Group Relations Training Association (GRTA) annual large group residential training. I began to run groups specifically for women. I taught at the University of the New World in Switzerland and for Friends World College in Norfolk. I went to The Netherlands and for four years ran a humanistic growth centre called Center. With other European centres we sponsored innovative and exciting leaders in this new movement to come and teach and run groups in Europe and the UK – Schutz, Satir, Keleman, Pesso, Fromm, Boyden, Lowen, Pierrakos and many more. There was such energy and excitement in all of it. I began developing sexuality groups and the concept of long-term training groups during my time in The Netherlands. I visited Esalen, and other centres in the US, to invite leaders to come to Europe and teach and run groups. It was a time of enormous productivity.

Then we began to determine what others should and shouldn't do, and to place ourselves in judgment, to regulate: a period that is still shadowed and uncomfortable for me personally, and that I continue to wrestle in coming to terms with. I believe this was a response to a desire to be acknowledged for where we had come to by those from whom we had come.

'There was so much excitement, curiosity and courage'

Now we are in our second adult phase of life, looking back. And Humanistic Psychology is, I believe, alive, well and different, and I am so glad that I knew it from the beginning because some of that energy and faith are still in me, and still light me up while I work and when I consider the path I have chosen.

And when I work with people new to Humanistic Psychology or hear people talk about their own early experiences I think that the beginning feels the same for everyone; the sense of wonder and excitement and curiosity, the feeling of entering a brave new world is as true in 2014 as it was in 1968. So golden, heady days are still happening now.

I think Humanistic Psychology supports the belief that people can be self-directed, will choose to co-operate when they are listened to and respected, can learn, can heal insults and injustices, can lead lives of personal satisfaction, kindness, resolution, and can be creative and innovative. I think we are constantly offered choices of where to put our energy and our commitment, and I swim in the waters of a humanistic utopia of my own making. I am inside and out a Humanistic Psychology-ist, quietly and happily living my life.

Terry Cooper born in Southampton, UK, in 1950. Even though I teach and train, I am first and foremost a clinician. The hour-by hour work I do with people to solve problems and facilitate them to become better at how they live their lives in the fullest sense is my love and passion. I rarely tire of it and am always thankful for what I learn about myself, and the human values that are reinforced in me by the contact I have with my clients.

My entry into Humanistic Psychology was a serious

business. It was literally a life-and-death matter which began late 1969, when I entered treatment at Alpha House, a drug-free concept based therapeutic community in Portsmouth. I was nearly 20 but I had already lived a long and weary life of being in trouble from a young age, and I had spent time in several institutions. I began using amphetamines before I had reached my teens and eventually became addicted to opiates. I had come into the world with boundless excitement and by school age my excitement was becoming unmanageable and made school a living hell, both for others and for myself. My addiction spanned all of my teenage years and wore me down. I ended up an inadequate, lost and lonely shell of a person, and I have never forgotten what it felt like to be so empty.

My life had become the perfect storm. I was losing control and all the close shaves and near misses were massing into a feeling that something catastrophic was going to happen. My best friend Ian died from a drug overdose and this had a deep effect on me. I was facing a long prison sentence for breaking into a string of chemist shops with Ian in the South West and for possession of the drugs we had stolen. I had also been charged with actual bodily harm and car theft. My mind was in a state of resignation and I could see no way forward; I was lost.

The head of the drug squad in my home town of Southampton, whom I had known for many years, offered me an opportunity. He would not oppose bail if I agreed to go into treatment. I did go into treatment, and some months later when I attended the Southampton Crown Court for sentencing I was allowed to return and continue rehabilitation as an alternative to serving what would have been a seven-year prison sentence. I had accepted rehabilitation as a means of getting out of going to prison.

The first time I left the premises of Alpha was about three months into treatment. It was to visit a local dentist. I remember walking down the street accompanied by a staff member and this was the first time I realised I had changed. The world seemed very fast to me but what got my attention was how alive and well I felt. I could feel the breeze on my skin and was struck by how vibrant and colourful my view of the world was. This was the moment I committed myself to the programme for myself and not just to get out of going to prison.

I spent 18 months in phase one of treatment, which meant living full time in the community immersing myself in one-to-one and group therapy. I then spent another year living in the community and working outside while still attending groups, and then I spent some months living and working outside while still attending groups in the community. After three years I had graduated and weaned myself off the community.

I returned to Alpha as a junior staff member. My role was as a group worker, a new role designed for ex-addict staff. I had a vision of one day being the Director, and eventually I did become the first ex-addict director of Alpha House.

The power of Alpha House was in its practical approach to learning through relationships. It focused on the how of relationships, and it valued the personal work we did and how we related to others as a criterion for progressing through treatment. The value system was to talk the talk and walk the walk, and paid equal attention to how we felt and how we functioned.

It taught us the importance of boundary making in becoming an adult, and how to form congruence between personal needs and the demands of society. It existed for the sole purpose of learning about ourselves from ourselves, and in the process we learned a set of social skills for how to be in the world and how to relate to others. Unlike the world most of us live in, in Alpha we could stop time, and make time to learn from our mistakes.

Alpha gave me a practical methodology for how to influence my own experience, how to form life and not just be formed by it. It empowered me and challenged my victim mentality by showing me that responsibility could be a freedom, not a burden, and that it could open doors to a new life; and it showed me that I was capable. It saved my life. But more than this, it gave me concepts and practical tools that enabled me to continue building my life myself.

Alpha embodied and demonstrated all of the important values of Humanistic Psychology – the most important being to learn how to learn from our own experience, and how personal experience becomes the basis for self-knowing and living a self-directed life.

During my time as director of Alpha House I realised that I had got as far as I could go with my professional development within that culture, and that my journey of self–development had only just begun. I wanted to learn more, and this marked the end of a phase of my life. My time in therapeutic communities, for which I will be forever thankful, helped me to grow up, and taught me how to turn the unbridled abundant energy and appetite I had for life as a child into a powerful sense of self,

'Gerda Boysen opened the door for me... the importance of not splitting body and mind'

contained and ready for the world.

While I was still working at Alpha I began looking at what else was out there in the world of therapy and personal development. This bought me into contact with two areas of work: the world of the human potential movement in the form of Quaesitor, and various organizations which offered psychoanalytic-based psychotherapy. I did the One Year Foundation Course at the Institute for Group Analysis (IGA) and studied group dynamics at Southampton University. I also joined a two-year Gestalt training led by a psychiatrist who had trained in Gestalt in Canada, and I studied Psychosynthesis for three years with Diana Becchetti-Whitmore. As well as the trainings, I immersed myself in whatever weekend workshops appealed to me.

I learnt a lot about defence mechanisms, group process and group dynamics at the IGA, and also about psychoanalytic group theory. But it also affirmed for me that I was dedicated to an experiential approach to therapy, which worked with people's here-and-now experience and could include working with the past, the present and the future. I was always fascinated by how the past, present and future were connected rather than divided, and although I didn't know it then, I was looking for a therapeutic model and, more to the point, a methodology in which I could hold and work with all three orientations.

Fundamentally, this meant I was looking for a way of working that would not dwell on the past, but use the here-and-now experience of the past to help people end old behaviour patterns and form new ones.

Around the early to mid–1970s I met and worked with Gerda Boyeson, a Bio-Dynamic therapist. Gerda opened the door for me on the life of the body and the importance of not splitting body and mind, but seeing them as one. This came as a revelation to me and was the missing piece of the puzzle, in both my personal and professional life.

Through Quaesitor I met and worked with Al Pesso, the originator of what was then Psychomotor Therapy and Stanley Keleman, the originator of Formative Psychology. These two people had a massive impact on me. They both worked with the body in different ways, and they had both developed original approaches for interacting with the state of the body without splitting psychological, intellectual or somatic experience.

For me to experience wholeness, as an experience, a physical event, and not just a concept, was thrilling and a great relief. It spoke to me deeply, and was what I had been searching for.

Spectrum

Terry and Jenner met in 1972 in Southampton at the annual GRTA conference. It was a large week-long residential group of 150 participants and the focus was on large and small group process.

Jenner was part of the facilitator team and Terry was a participant in the small group that she and John Heron were facilitating. Probably the most obvious thing was their differences: Jenner was 32, Terry 22; Jenner grew up in the middle of an earth-bound culture of cattle and agrarian farming in North America, Terry in the thriving seaport of Southampton with his eyes on the sea. Jenner was university educated, came from an educated middle-class family; Terry was from a working-class family and left school at 14 to follow in the tradition of the men in his family, working in the docks, going to sea or steel erecting. He did all three.

What we both immediately recognized in each other was that we shared the same beliefs, values and passion about life and work. We both wanted a future working with people, we wanted to clarify rather than mystify teaching psychotherapy and to enhance people's life skills. We both felt that honesty was at the core of a successful and satisfying personal and professional life. We believed that congruence between what we say and what we do, between how we live and what we teach, was a key to people being well and contributing to a more healthy society.

All of these values were felt immediately we met, and by the end of the conference and after many hours of sharing our work histories, we had grown to know who

each other was, and both left having gained a warm and respected friend.

After the GRTA conference as colleagues, we worked together for a number of years in the UK and Europe in a variety of settings, before developing our relationship into a personal partnership and developing our work into an organization that would support and identify us and like-minded others.

It took many years of trial and error before we had formed clarity and substance in our work with regard to the list of values we have outlined. It is one thing having values, but applying them is an ongoing day-to-day effort. We have held these values over four decades and have learned a lot about people through the process. At this stage of our lives we hold them just as firmly, but perhaps with more compassion and understanding of how hard it is to express what we consider to be good adult and human values.

In London we worked at Quaesitor. Quaesitor was a conduit for everything new that was happening in the world of personal growth and development. It was also one of the first places in the UK to provide a wide range of themed programmes from which people could choose a therapeutic experience for themselves and take responsibility for their own development, a model which we fully supported. The director of Quaesitor at that time was a lovely man called David Blagden. With David's death in a sailing accident came the end of Quaesitor, and a new chapter began for us.

We organized a meeting with many of the Quaesitor leaders, and out of this meeting came the Human Potential Resources, a collective of eight leaders working together with a central administrator, using a wide range of approaches to personal development with the idea that we would cross-refer according to the needs of the clients.

We were not great at working together, and there were conflicts of personal style and clashes of therapeutic vision. After about a year of much discussion and debate, many of us wanted to run our own organizations. The name Human Potential Resources was given to the administrator Maureen Yeomans, who turned it into the *Human Potential Resources* Magazine.

HPR as a collective had served its purpose. It had provided a transitional home in which many of us clarified, defined and committed ourselves to what form our future work would take. Out of this group we formed Spectrum, and our good friends Helen Davies and Diana Becchetti-Whitmore created, respectively, the Minster Centre and the Psychosynthesis Trust.

The story of Spectrum over the past 40 years both tells and parallels that of humanistic psychotherapy in the UK, and for that reason we recount a potted history here.

The seven most important things about Spectrum are that it has evolved as a kind of pragmatically based utopian community, its teaching and therapeutic work are clinically based and individually oriented, and it is a democratic society. It is formative rather than regressive; management decisions are made by consensus in a staff group of practising therapists; the organization has developed organically; it has high ethical and professional standards of practice and behaviour; and it is a centre of humanistic psychotherapy.

You can see from the sequence of historical events we have outlined so far that naming the work we do as 'humanistic' came later in our work and out of our personal experiences, and what we discovered about ourselves through our clinical practice. Generally, consciousness follows experience, and this has always been our guiding principle. Experience has formed Spectrum throughout its life.

We founded Spectrum because we believed it was healthier for both client and therapist to be part of a community where relationships and work were open to discussion and support than to work and live in isolation. This meant that we invited and welcomed others who shared this view and benefited from it.

As well as using and understanding contemporary psychological theory, the foundation of our training and therapy is the clinical work we engage in with our peers and our clients. Our training is highly experiential, with emphasis on individual thinking and writing. Each trainee has been encouraged to develop and extend their own personal way of working and engaging within a professional framework of clear boundaries and ethics. We have pioneered both understanding and working with boundaries and the appropriate use of multiple-role situations as they occur in societies large and small that we are all part of; how to recognize them, how to define them, how to hold them, how to talk about them.

Spectrum is managed by a group of core staff practitioners who meet weekly or fortnightly and have agreed to decision making by consensus. This group is also engaged in self and peer assessment, has regular staff days to deal with personal and clinical issues and has an annual three-day retreat to review their work of

the past year and look ahead to the next year. There is also another group which includes all practitioners who work at Spectrum and who meet together three times a year to connect and look at clinical and practical issues of working together within the Spectrum practice.

Spectrum has been very fortunate in the support and learning it has had from outside, which have strengthened and stretched our work. Marty Fromm, an early clinical Gestaltist co-directed the Spectrum Miami Gestalt Training for 15 years; Robin Skynner, a family and couples therapy specialist and psychiatrist, taught and supervised staff for many years; and Stanley Keleman, the creator and developer of Formative Psychology at the Center for Energetic Studies in Berkeley, California, has been our teacher and mentor from the early days of Spectrum. Formative Psychology remains our main focus of professional study and theoretical frame of reference, and forms the basis of our therapeutic work.

In 1986 Spectrum formed a registered charity, the Spectrum Incest Intervention Project, to work with victims, families, and perpetrators of sexual abuse and help professionals develop their work in this field. The work included an independently funded research project to assess the value of short-term humanistic psychotherapy in the area of incestuous sexual abuse. (The full report can be found on our website.)

There were decisions along the way, especially in the early days when professional groups were developing, about where to focus our limited energy and resources. We made what was, for us, a difficult decision, to keep our eye on our own ball at that time in order to stabilize the foundation and development of Spectrum. We kept in touch both individually and collectively with what was going on in the larger world of psychotherapy, and in 1996, 20 years after we were established, we joined the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) as a member of the Humanistic and Integrative Section to engage with the ongoing task of being psychotherapists in Britain.

While the major thrust of our work is formative, we have used and incorporated almost all the branches of humanistic work in our teachings and from guest lecturers and trainers, especially to our continued professional development programme.

Spectrum is now nearing its 40th year. We have deepened and matured, and we believe the work we do will live on in better relationships for individuals, couples and families and in the workplace through the many generations of therapists and clients who have worked with us.

Since this piece is about reminiscings and reflections of the past five decades, we thought it might be fun to end by each of us choosing one thing to share with you, which we have learned and deeply valued over this time.

Jenner: Find out who you are and be true to it as best you can.

Terry: When you want to torque away from the things that threaten you, discipline yourself to engage with them, turn and face them.

Jenner and Terry welcome questions and can be contacted through the Spectrum website, at www.spectrumtherapy.co.uk

Jenner Roth: Jenner is a founder director of Spectrum and was instrumental in introducing Humanistic Psychology to Europe and Great Britain. In the 1970s Jenner developed the Spectrum sexuality programme for men and women and specialized in developing workshops and programmes for women. Jenner has a private practice at Spectrum and is the director of the Spectrum continuing professional development programme, as well as leading ongoing and residential relationship development workshops for couples.

Terry Cooper: Terry Cooper is a founder director of Spectrum. Since the early 1970s Terry has studied Formative Psychology with Stanley Keleman at the Center for Energetic Studies in Berkeley, California. Formative Psychology remains Terry's main focus of professional study and clinical work. As well as teaching Formative Psychology through workshops and classes, Terry has three areas of specialization: working with couples, working with men and working with dreams.