

CONFERENCE SYMPOSIUM

Psychotherapy and counselling: from cottage industry to factory production – can we survive, and do we want to?

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This article reports on a conference designed to explore whether something has gone seriously wrong with the psychological therapies. While through the state's Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme more people are having psychotherapy and counselling, is this through the psychological therapies becoming an industrial process requiring technicians? Is our work and training fundamentally changing with call centres, state regulation and manualization in addition to the overall ills of neoliberalism? In different ways William Morris, John Ruskin and Karl Marx saw the move from cottage industry to factory production as leading to a deterioration in working people's quality of life. Rather than the intrinsic pleasures of the work itself, instead money compensates for our working time, which leads to consumption as the external source of pleasure. Consideration is given as to whether this is also becoming increasingly true of the work of psychotherapists and counsellors, and increasingly inevitable for their working clients.

Keywords: critical; psychotherapy; counselling; Morris; Ruskin; Marx

This article is about the conference, with the above title, organised by two organizations that I chair: the Universities Psychotherapy and Counselling Association (UPCA) and the Research Centre for Therapeutic Education (RCTE), held at the University of Roehampton in November 2014. What follows is my introduction to the conference, followed by responses from three conference delegates. I provided the following conference brief:

Has something gone seriously wrong with the psychological therapies? Whilst it has been argued that, thanks to such initiatives as Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT), far more people are having psychotherapy and counselling than ever before, it has also been commented that the psychological therapies are becoming an industrial process requiring technicians. (Parry, 2008, 2011)

Is our work, and the way we are trained to do it, fundamentally changing with call centres, state regulation and manualization, in addition to the overall ills of neoliberalism? If this is the case, how can we be clearer as to what is happening to us? This conference aimed to explore what might be going wrong in the

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psychological therapies, with particular reference to the nature of our work, and indeed the way we see our clients'/patients' employment, through the perspectives of the socialist and textile designer William Morris, the educationalist and social thinker John Ruskin (both of whom were initially involved in the development of the place where the conference was held) and Karl Marx, the philosopher, economist and sociologist who, with his wife, was very much influenced by Ruskin. In different ways, all three thinkers saw the move from cottage industry to factory production as leading to a deterioration in working people's quality of life. Rather than the intrinsic pleasures of the work itself, instead money compensates for our working time, leading to consumption as the external source of pleasure. Is this also becoming increasingly true of psychotherapists and counsellors, and is this becoming increasingly inevitable for their clients and patients? The conference was designed to open up how we might see our own and others' work by reconsidering thinkers from the romantic and expressive traditions, as well as those brought to us through our call for papers.

The phrase 'from cottage industry to factory production' comes from Professor Glenys Parry (Parry, 2011; Parry, Blackmore, Beecroft, & Booth, 2010) who has for several years evaluated IAPT for the UK's Department of Health. Where Professor Parry presented this paper, others wrote of the need for 'professionals as technicians to deliver specific parts of the process and to drive down unit costs', and how we were moving 'from a cottage industry to factory-based production line, with equally disruptive effects for practitioners'.

In many ways, this 'From Cottage Industry to Factory Production' conference emerged from last year's UPCA conference on 'Critical Psychotherapy – If Not Now, When?' (see Loewenthal, 2013). Here we saw how the very nature of our therapeutic enterprise seems to be changing: rather than having a confidential space where our clients/patients can work through what is troubling them, we now have risk-assessed, pre- and post-evidenced, increasingly manualized meetings more aimed at taking clients' minds off their problems than at helping clients work through them. Is nothing else possible, given the level of our alienation in late capitalist/neoliberalist culture? Are we so alienated that we will never be able to return, as in my student days, to being able to speak of 'being alienated'?

Our professional bodies end up chasing the work. Our own attempts at Roehampton's Research Centre for Therapeutic Education with the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) to question the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) initially appeared to help lead to the new head of NICE wanting to change the reliance on Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs), but that hasn't happened. At this conference, Arthur Musgrave spoke of his experience of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) initially developing a new 'Ethical Framework' in a direction which he considered to be potentially changing what was the therapeutic enterprise, to a world of state-endorsed therapy. Attempts are being made to manualize approaches to try and make them RCT compatible, as for example with Dynamic Interpersonal Therapy. Is this an attempt to show that anything Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) can do, psychoanalysis can at least do as well?

RCTs are scientifically absurd for the psychological therapies, as anyone with a Grade C or above in Maths GCSE should surely, by definition, know! The nature of psychotherapeutic knowledge is different and should not be falsely measured. We are

of course not the only (mainly middle) classes affected by this audit culture: those such as teachers and doctors, as well as psychotherapists, have become increasingly forced into form-filling processes in what some term our New Public Management (Barzelay, 2001; Gruening, 2001). Here, one is no longer interested in what comes out of itself (Physis) but by systems created by new power regimes *where human relations are replaced by consumer relations*, backed up by a legal system where people are given rights (American style) rather than justice emerging from each situation. Hence, rather than criteria for success imposed by our New Public Management emerging, as previously, more from academics, psychological therapists, public servants or even from a profit motive, their power is based on the audit culture. Here, almost by definition, if these New Managerial classes were to find out that we were starting to make sense of their systems, they would have to change them! At the conference John Lees talked about his views on advent of the practitioner-manager.

Freud, though not always welcomed by humanists, did at least talk of those in management/governance, pedagogy/education and psychoanalysis/psychotherapy as being in ‘impossible professions’ – ‘impossible’ because we cannot predict outcomes – but now apparently we can, and with this comes a more deathly existence for us and our clients. This has already happened to psychiatry and psychology, and now it is happening to counselling and psychotherapy. Freud also seemed to imply that our mental health meant the ability to love and to work. Yet how can anyone bring up a family on the minimum wage? – even if you are so-called lucky enough to benefit from the increased use of food banks! (Is this all part of ‘we’re not in it all together’?)

My own initial research was on the involvement processes of people who work, and how, while work can be enhancing, it can also be detrimental to one’s well-being. There is a danger we can conspire so that if we work too much to forget our troubles, we can fall too much into the hands of those who, through encouraging our involvement, don’t want us to be aware of how we are being managed (Loewenthal, 2002). When I was carrying out this research, people were still talking about how work can be a ‘central life interest’, implying that that would be a good thing. Similarly, at the same time (around the 1970s), people still talked about going into, for example, nursing as ‘a calling’.

So how do we now see our work and the work of our clients? Is it still possible for us to really provide a confidential space where we can thoughtfully work to help our clients be clearer? (Saying that we will only need to break confidentiality if our clients do harm to themselves or others could mean just about anything nowadays!) Or, do we have to change the very nature of our therapeutic enterprise such that, in order to survive, we must carry out what the state wishes in terms of their policy regarding the ‘mental health’ of the nation – paradoxically in the name of protecting them? Conversely, can we help our clients/patients explore meaningful work for them without perversely taking the only sign of success, as I fear is too frequently the case, that our patients/clients train to become counsellors and psychotherapists like us?

Much came out of last year’s conference on critical psychotherapy. There was a special issue of the *European Journal of Psychotherapy and Counselling* (Loewenthal, 2014), which included an article by John Lees. In addition, along with several colleagues associated with the Research Centre for Therapeutic Education, I am contributing to a book that Lees is editing in response to Glenys Parry and other academics involved with the Savoy/IAPT/Department of Health ‘Mafioso’ (Lees, 2015). Again arising from the previous conference, Palgrave Macmillan approached

me to edit a book on *Critical Psychotherapy, Psychoanalysis and Counselling* (Loewenthal, 2015), which led to Michael Rustin sending me a paper that, in turn, very much influenced the 'From Cottage Industry to Factory Production' conference. (At the conference Mike Rustin spoke about neoliberalism.)

What struck me from what Rustin had written for the *Critical Psychotherapy* book is whether we can have sufficient intrinsic rewards from the changing nature of our work, or whether it is inevitable in capitalism, particularly when so many people have therapy – over one million a year, according to the *Guardian* (Chunn, 2013) – that the rewards from work are primarily extrinsic through spending the money that we have been paid for our labour (either physical or emotional) on consumption. So surely an important question is: 'Are there still alternatives?' Perhaps the answer is very close at hand. The conference was held at Whitelands College, University of Roehampton, whose foundations were very much influenced by John Ruskin, who, besides making girls wear flat-chested dresses and dance around maypoles, had some very valuable ideas regarding the potential nature of work. Aonghus Gordon from the Ruskin Mill Trust in Gloucestershire spoke about this at the conference. Another who was highly influenced by Ruskin was William Morris, whose workshops were nearby at Abbey Mills. Subsequently, Morris became influenced by Karl Marx, some of whose ideas were also considered at the conference.

As the Victoria and Albert Museum notes, in Britain the disastrous effects of industrial manufacture and unregulated trade had been recognized since about 1840, but it was not until the 1860s and 1870s that architects, designers and artists began to pioneer new approaches to design and the decorative arts (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2015). (Is there a way that we, as psychological therapists, can do the same?) These in turn led to the foundation of the Arts and Crafts Movement. The movement's two most influential figures were the theorist and critic John Ruskin and the designer, writer and activist William Morris. Ruskin examined the relationship between art, society and labour. Morris put Ruskin's philosophies into practice, placing great value on work, the joy of craftsmanship and the natural beauty of materials.

So what could we learn from Marx, Morris and Ruskin that might help us be more thoughtful about our own and others' work? In fact, consideration was given to advertising the conference more clearly in terms of the implications of Marx, Morris and Ruskin. However, we were concerned that late capitalism has been so successful in almost eradicating any form of radicalism that to even hint at the notion of ideology could be taken to imply deviant, probably communist, thinking – it seemed too great a risk! We are too well schooled, for example, in using the word 'modern' instead of 'capitalist' in a successful attempt to persuade the general population that there is a level playing field with everyone having an equal chance, whereas, as mentioned, in reality in this time of austerity for many, it should be clear that we are not 'all in it together'.

Can we both preserve the fundamental nature of our work as psychological therapists and our intrinsic satisfaction in doing this, as well as helping our clients have a more fulfilling life through their work? Or will this require change on our part? Do we, for example, need to question the extent to which our encouragement of individualism, albeit backed up by pseudo-science, is really more part of the problem than the solution? (How can we consider the common good?) Should we therefore train psychotherapists more in the social, the economic and the political?

Has the time come for us to neither go back into our previous shells, nor become an agent of the state, as is already far too much the case for psychiatry and psychology, but instead to take a different kind of action? If so, what might that action be? Could it be, as Hannah Arendt has written, that it is vital to separate ‘labour’ from ‘work’, and to take action regarding how, through work, we are in the world with others (1999)?

I have put these questions forward tentatively in sharing with you some recent thoughts on what I think our options are – and if we should want to take action, what this action might be. I would be interested in hearing what readers make of these questions. I hope we can all reconsider what is happening with our work, and how we might respond to this, and where, if we don’t do anything, we are likely to end up, in the light of what we learn from Ruskin, Morris, Marx and the many speakers at the conference, only some of whom I have named here. Indeed, what follows are how the thoughts of three of our RCTE students who were affected by the conference.

Disclaimer

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor



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CONFERENCE REPORTS

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Having worked for the NHS for the majority of my working life, attending the UPCA conference on ‘Psychotherapy and Counselling: From Cottage Industry to Factory Production – Can We Survive, Do We Want To?’ was a breath of fresh air. The day started with an introduction by **Del Loewenthal** (UPCA Chair), who gave his views on the modern trend of psychotherapy moving from individual practice to large, ‘mass-produced’ therapy, and set the stage for the speakers to come. Dr **John Lees** gave a fascinating talk about the advent of the manager-practitioner, a therapist more focused on quantifiable results than client benefit. **Arthur Musgrave** was next, speaking about the emergence of state-endorsed therapy and discussing BACP’s new, more restricted policies, including clients having the ability to contact a therapist’s supervisor if unhappy with their therapy. Professor **Michael Rustin** provided some balance to the day, not being a psychotherapist himself, but someone with experience in the field, in his talk about the future of psychotherapy in a neoliberal culture.

At this point the delegates split, and I listened to **Paul Atkinson** continue the discussion of neoliberalism in psychotherapy, followed by **Elizabeth Nicholl**’s open and honest talk about her own experiences within the psychiatric system, and how it led her to train as a psychotherapist. After lunch the delegates were again split and I listened to **Anthony Johnston** speak about the psychotherapeutic practice he works with moving to an IAPT service, and his ethical dilemma about this move. This was followed by **Jean Burke**’s discussion of courage in psychotherapeutic work, an interesting talk with a lot of meaning for the day. **Aonghus Gordon** was the last speaker, telling delegates about the Ruskin Mill Trust, a service that gives excluded