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## CONFERENCE REPORTS

Reviewed by Jamie de Carvalho

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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

young people a chance to engage in arts and crafts to build both confidence and skills. A plenary panel finished off the day, allowing delegates a chance to ask the main speakers questions related to the topics of the day.

I was left at the end of the day feeling invigorated, excited and wanting more. It felt amazing to be among a group of individuals who felt the same way as I did about the mental health system in Britain, and the use of talking therapies within it. I worked within that system for a number of years, and it eventually ground me down, arguably institutionalizing me as much as many of the service users we worked with. The emergence and increased popularity of IAPT initially felt like a change was possible, that the government acknowledged that those with ‘mental health problems’ (whatever that means) would benefit from talking about their problems, rather than just taking pills. It quickly became clear, however, that it meant mass-producing ‘psychotherapists’, giving all NHS staff a little bit of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) training to provide just enough therapy: just enough to say that they are ‘improving access to the psychological therapies’. Having worked in both in-patient services and in a community team, I can honestly say that I did not have the time to provide any meaningful, long-term ‘interventions’ (to use the CBT lingo). In the community I was lucky to get an hour with someone to use the training the NHS spent so much money in giving me.

Ultimately I became too disillusioned to continue in that system and with psychiatry in general, and I left the mental health trust in which I worked. After all, the mental health service is psychiatric in nature; CBT, IAPT and the factory-produced therapies that are being provided fit in with psychiatry’s view of problem–treatment–fix and the current ‘factory-produced’ therapy fits ‘nicely’ within this system. The conference felt almost revolutionary, and I felt like I was doing something wrong sitting there, being so used to speaking with people who believe what modern psychiatry has told them about our mental health and what can help them. I felt like I was part of an underground, anti-establishment organization, which says a great deal, given that one of the themes of the day could have been ‘give practitioners the time to practise meaningful, unrestricted psychotherapy’ – a wholly un-revolutionary prospect.

If I had one complaint, it was that there was so little time to have open discussions about the topics each speaker raised. The day felt rushed, and there was little time to process what was being discussed. However, the fact that there was a forum for these topics to be discussed at all felt like a triumph, and I wait excitedly to attend the next conference.

## **Stray dogs or belonging to the Emperor: commentary on the UPCA conference, 2014**

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In *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault quotes Borges’ fictitious taxonomy of ‘objects’, according to this ‘Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge’: