professionals in Mad Studies. My great hope is that, whatever our starting point and whatever our perspective in this venture, we pay close attention to Sedgwick's work in trying to make sense of what has gone before. Sedgwick was committed to leftist politics, but as he put it, he was also preoccupied with the 'victory of humanity'. He saw the way to achieve this as a 'socialized and organized' humanity. He ends *Psychopolitics* by saying that the achievement of this 'is the central problem of psychiatric care. It is also the central problem of social liberation' (p. 256).

This also holds true for those of us who see a way forward in Mad Studies, and should be at the forefront of our minds as we seek to take it forward. Mad Studies combines a concern with the political, the psychological and self-liberation. If it is to have an enduring importance and impact, it must stay true to, and stay engaged with, all three.

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Therapy at the still point

The art of Zen creativity: cultivating your artistic life, by John Daido Loori, New York, Ballantine Books, 2005, 272 pp., £12.69 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-345-46633-4

The biggest clue to this book is right here in the title – art is not presented as a tool in the box, a qualification or a profession. Rather, it is presented as a form of life itself. Art is the scene of our life, and the scene of our life is Art. It became obvious to me in reading this book that therapy is also the scene of our life, which is also the nature of Zen, and so I found myself unable to escape the phrase looping in my mind: zen-as-therapy-as-art, or any permutation of that phrase. The phrase, though, came sometime after I had experienced something of a delight in my body. Loori's book helped me to clarify a number of threads that I had been holding for some years, not only during my work as a therapist, but also threads of my life as a whole. In the spirit of Ludwig Wittgenstein, the ladders I had climbed suddenly fell away, presenting me with inevitable new ones – a perpetual climbing we cannot escape – or as Zen would have it, perpetual beginnings.

Loori presents his art in four parts. Part 1 charts his personal journey as a young photographer who became influenced by Minor White, a fellow photographer with an Eastern meditative approach to his work. Part 2 is a presentation of Zen as a creative process by engaging in a practice over and over again as a new way to see and create. For Loori, this puts us in touch with 'feedback' that we naturally experience but are sometimes too busy to notice. We might also call this feedback 'phenomena'. He describes for us how we might cultivate a 'creative feedback' which is a 'response to art that is experiential and intuitive, not critical' (p. 7). This feedback is further extended beyond art, and encompasses more what it is to be human and, therefore, I believe is a profound descriptor for therapy too.

Part 3 is an illustration of how the unique aesthetic of Zen 'points to basic truths about how to live freely and generously' (p. 7), while Part 4 brings us full circle and points to the creative and spiritual journey as one that is never over, 'with each step, with each breath, we start anew. This is the ineffable heart of Zen' (ibid.). We could also say that this is the ineffable heart of us – our process of becoming and the ever-elusive mystery that is ordinary humanness.

For Loori, 'The creative process, like a spiritual journey, is intuitive, non-linear, and experiential. It points us towards our essential nature, which is a reflection of the boundless creativity of the universe' (p. 1.) As a therapist in the Philosophical/ Humanistic tradition, this description fitted my practice very well, and was a welcome departure from the proliferation of more linear descriptions that now require me to rate and measure the naturalness and subtlety of human empathic tendencies.

The author's declaration that '[t]he emphasis of this book is on the creative process – not technical skill' (p. 8) is music to my heart at a time when the job market for therapists is dominated by cognitive, solution-focused, rational protocols and 'ship-'em-in' and 'ship-'em- out' approaches. There are no 'tools in the box' with Loori's Zen approach to art or, indeed, the Zen view of the human being. This book is about trust in a process and absolute faith in a practice. The book itself is a seamless work of art that took me on a journey whereby I surrendered to the pull to explore my own craft as a therapist in the realm of artistic process: seeing the poetry of the human unfold, as a work of art as client, me and the universe unfolded while inextricably bound together.

The text is beautifully illustrated and punctuated with stories of the Buddha, koans and poetic quotations that hit the body in experiential delight, ranging from Emerson, Thoreau, T.S. Eliot, Da Vinci and Einstein through to Picasso, Kafka, Rilke, Nelson Mandela and Leonard Cohen, that only serve to further drive Loori's point home. True to Zen style and matching the emphasis that the author sets out for the book, Loori writes from the heart: it is personal, descriptive, poetic and no less informative because of those qualities.

Part 1 opens with 'an old zen koan':

> How do you go straight ahead
> on a narrow mountain path which
> has ninety three curves? (p. 9)

I instantly experienced myself walking, slowly, my hands clasped behind me, with my head down watching where I placed my feet, one foot at a time as I walked the path. When the words came, as an after-thought, they went something like this – 'You follow

the path as it is and that will take you straight ahead; there is no crooked, there is no straight, there are your feet one in front of the other creating the path straight to where you want to go'.

Loori writes of the importance of the teacher, and tells us of his experience with his teacher Soen Roshi who was able to show how 'Zen arts live in a person. He awakened in me a hunger to study how this art worked on the human heart' (p. 32). I flipped this phrase on its head and heard myself say, 'The human heart lives in Zen art' – which led me to the question, 'Does the human heart live in therapy, and does therapy live in the human heart?' If I trust the process and have faith in my practice as a therapist who is primarily engaged as a witness, interlocutor and mirror to another person, as they are to me, then I guess my answer must be yes.

One of my favourite chapters in the book is Chapter 3, 'The Still Point', and as therapists we may learn a lot from the still point:

> Every creature on the face of the earth seems to know how to be quiet and still. A butterfly on a leaf, a cat in front of the fireplace, even a hummingbird comes to rest sometime. But humans are constantly on the go. We seem to have lost the ability just to be quiet, to simply be present in the stillness that is the basis of our existence. (p. 52)

This point is becoming ever more of a challenge in therapy too, it seems. I lose count of the amount of techniques, 'tools', approaches, protocols, exercises and systems there are available to therapists, and yet they may be hard to turn down because clients often want us to give them something to do also. There is an assumption that if there isn't anyone 'doing' something, then therapy is not being done, which assumes that stillness and silence is some sort of 'not doing'. Yet I am inclined to agree with Loori:

> The still point is at the heart of the creative process. In Zen we access it through zazen. The still point is like the eye of a hurricane, still, calm, even in the midst of chaos. It is not, as many believe, a void to retreat into, shutting out the world. To be still means to empty yourself from the incessant flow of thoughts and create a state of consciousness that is open and receptive. Stillness is very natural and uncomplicated. It's not esoteric in any way. Yet it's incredibly profound. (p. 52)

My own experience of Zen meditation is that it is a natural and, at the same time, a difficult process to be able to come to the still point, and yet when I do I am somehow able to open myself to something organic, intuitive, unstructured and unreflective, and as such my experience strips back the extras and allows truth to function. 'We don't know that we already are what we are trying to become' (p. 166) is a magnificent affirmation for trusting the process of becoming in therapy, and in life. In my own process of coming to the still point, I notice how the existential tensions that I hold come to the fore, allowing me to see them, acknowledge them and then let them go.

Chapter 13, 'Intimate Talk', made me weep, which is testament to the ideas and content of the chapter itself, as I opened myself to Loori's words and images, unavoidably experiencing their intimate touch.

> In Zen, the truth that precedes sound and the intuitive perception that follows a phrase is called intimate talk … we meet these expressions with a truth that is already present within us … not a matter that can be grasped by linear, rational, dualistic thinking, thinking that sets up polarities and oppositions: good against bad, heaven against earth, self against other, form against emptiness, speech against silence … intimacy is the place where opposites merge … ineffable reality – right here, right now. (p. 224)

This right here/right now experience of intimate talk may well be similar to what Allan Schore terms 'non-conscious affect' and 'affective resonance' which, he states, is primary to all explanation, but what seems astonishing is that these ground-breaking neuroscientific 'findings' that are apparently causing a paradigm shift (Schore, 2012) are ideas that have been around and documented for thousands of years in teachings of the Buddha, Zen and, latterly, Western philosophy. Perhaps science is catching up!

Loori states that '[i]n intimate talk, no communication whatsoever takes place' (p. 225), and that '[i]ntimacy is seeing with the ear and hearing with the eye' (p. 226) – a description of talk not as communication or transmission, even from teacher to student. According to the Buddha, the student already has what the teacher has, 'it just needs to be awakened … brought to life. Intimate talk brings things to life' (p. 226), rather like therapeutic work.

Unlike the term 'transpersonal' (a term I turn away from as it leans towards describing some kind of separate reality from the everyday, which is the opposite of what it attempts to do), I experience great resonance of inclusivity in Loori's text:

> In intimacy, there's no knowing, there's no reference system from which to know. There's no outside or inside. There's no thing that can be known or person that can know it. Not knowing fills the universe. There's no place to put this gigantic body. It contains everything … All of reality is always awake and transmitting the truth, pointing to the truth. (p. 226)

It seems to me that this sentiment is at risk of being forgotten in the therapy profession, but one which has also been asserted over and over again in the works of philosophers like Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty and Nietzsche who emphasize pointing and showing to illuminate the reality of our experience as a function of the truth: no thought records or 'mindful apps' required here – just open eyes and ears.

Perhaps Loori's final words in the book are also the place to begin:

> What's being offered in all the incredible teaching of Zen and the Zen arts is a simple process. If you walk away from this book thinking you understand Zen or creativity, then I have failed. If everything goes well, you will never understand it. On the other hand, if you can appreciate the process and are willing to engage it, you have a way to return to your inherent perfection, the intrinsic wisdom of your life. (p. 242)

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