nurturing space. I agree that this is a favourable way of conducting ourselves, and I lament that this reality seems far off.

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## In the land of Austeria

**Who needs the cuts? Myths of the economic crisis**, by Barry Kushner and Saville Kushner, London, Hesperus Press, 2013, 100 pp., £7.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1843913818

Reviewed by Paul Atkinson, Therapist

The UK Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, John McDonnell, recently reversed his pledge to support former Chancellor George Osborne's fiscal charter – a disingenuous commitment for all future governments to maintain a budget surplus in 'normal' economic times. In 2013, then Labour leader Ed Miliband and then Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls had committed the Labour Party to the low road of the coalition's austerity narrative – Labour's 'austerity-lite', with its tacit acceptance that it had 'overspent' and must now back dramatic cuts. McDonnell felt able to speak a truth that most professional economists had been expressing since the banking crisis of 2008: 'The deficit was not the cause of the economic crisis, but the result of the economic crisis' (McDonnell, 2015).

The narrative of austerity politics, as Barry and Saville Kushner so passionately expose, is an example of extraordinary success in the art of sick story-telling. There is no deficit crisis in the UK, or in any of the other dominant Western economies. It is simply a political story, a fairy tale of neoliberal ideology (Krugman, 2015).

Among the commentaries on the banking crisis and the politics of austerity, *Who Needs the Cuts?* has a particular clarity that makes for a riveting read. Barry Kushner launches with his own experience of a local project, a respite care centre for parents with disabled children, declared a 'necessary cut' in 2010 after years of campaigning

and planning. The flame of this insult to reason and the welfare of his community burns through the book.

The brothers began contacting politicians and the media to interrogate the logic and evidence for the mushrooming 'austerity' narrative, with its fear-laden story-telling of Labour overspending, catastrophic national debt and ballooning deficit, parallels with Greece and images of the brink of bankruptcy. The response was an unremitting reassertion of the sick tale. Austerity took up the mantra of Thatcher's turn to the neoliberal market in the 1980s – TINA: There Is No Austerity.

In four concise chapters of refreshingly plain English, the Kushners explain what the national debt and the deficit are, put both into historical and international context, explain how the bank debacle of 2008 happened, and how the financial and political establishment responded with the austerity narrative. The account is factual and, yes, there are statistics. But the numbers leaven the story-telling rather than the reverse. In a style of extended journalism, the authors quote their own exchanges with the editors of the BBC and the *Guardian* newspaper, and with commentators like Evan Davis. And they follow the trail of party political statements and the media stories feeding the mono-myth of austerity.

Along the way, surprising nuggets of information stand out. The fact that annual GDP figures are an estimate based on a quarterly survey by the Office for National Statistics of 46,000 businesses – representing only 1% of all business trading in the UK. Or that the national debt started in 1692 at £1m, provoking David Hume to declare in horror that either the nation must destroy public credit, or public credit will destroy the nation. The debt had risen to £77m by 1752 and stood at £780m in 1848, with no sign of bankruptcy. Or that UK banks create billions of pounds of new money electronically each year (£567,000,000,000 in 2007, for example) in the form of mortgages, business loans and credit cards.

In fact (as opposed to austerity propaganda), the national debt, as a percentage of GDP, was higher for 200 of the 300 years it has been in existence than it is currently. It has not been this low since the 1920s – we are in a low-debt period. As for the deficit – the annual gap between government income and spending – if you take the period 1982–2012, Conservative governments ran deficits in 16 of their 18 years in power. In the 13 years of Labour government that followed, only nine were in deficit. Under Conservative Chancellor George Osborne, the deficit has increased. Whichever way you look at post-2010 austerity, the story of national bankruptcy and Labour overspend is a 'big lie'.

As the Kushners' outrage captures, it is distressing and maddening to be living through a period of such blatant political bad faith. Politicians have always lied to win votes, but for anyone growing up in the decades before Margaret Thatcher, the yawning gap between neoliberal market rhetoric and the reality of growing inequality, poverty, the redistribution of wealth and resources into the hands of an individual and corporate elite, and the flagrant contempt for democratic process, is truly shocking.

As this book traces in its final chapters, austerity is a cover story for the deepening penetration of what we might abstractly call the hegemony of neoliberal corporate capitalism (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberal economic theory describes an ideal of maximizing the marketization and financialization of every aspect of human transaction,

alongside the reduction of the state to the bare bones of its primary function – policing the freedom of the market. In the real world, global markets are policed to protect the vested interests of corporate profit and individual wealth, at the expense of the economic, social and psychological security of the majority.

The evidence is all around us and accumulating rapidly. The National Health Service is being corralled into crisis after crisis to facilitate its deconstruction and privatization (Klein, 2008); social housing is being abolished; welfare benefits are being dramatically cut, and those most in need of society's support are being ruthlessly denigrated and punished; part-time, low-paid, unpaid and zero-hours contract employment has grown exponentially; trade unions and human rights are under attack, as are civil liberties and democratic processes. The country's mental health and state provision of mental health care are under serious threat.

Meanwhile, as we all now know, a massive redistribution of the GDP of this and many other countries into the offshore hands of wealthy corporate and individual elites has been underway for several decades.

So how, during the firestorm of its collapse, has financialized corporate capitalism managed to persuade us to take responsibility for the damage caused by its rapacity and to pay for its reinstatement? What has become of us when we are willing to allow the myth of austerity to sanction the most violent attack on social justice and collective responsibility since World War II? How can such a destructive lie be allowed to win the day?

As therapists, we must surely feel outraged at the emotional and social damage austerity policies are creating – for us all. We must surely be interested in the psychology of power and popular collusion with government policies that rationalize the plundering of our own resources and well-being. But perhaps, alongside our outrage and theoretical speculations, we might ask what we counsellors and psychotherapists have been up to politically over the last 30-odd years.

Why have we been so willing to sell our professional souls to the neoliberal project? Why have we colluded with state projects of short-term, instrumental psychological therapies and the decimation in the public sector of the relational therapies we respect? Are we prepared to acknowledge our own role in developing approaches to suffering and distress that separate individual emotional and spiritual life from its collective context of social, economic and political life? The mushrooming of antidepressant consumption and the growth of the counselling and psychotherapy industry, including Beck's introduction of the depression and anxiety inventories, are trends that both date from the 1970s, and have had a shared role in individualizing and pathologizing the postmodern human condition.

Do we see that we have been complicit in monetizing and marketing subjectivity and individual responsibility, as the personal growth, self-help, positive thinking and happiness industries? Do we take any responsibility for the shadow of therapy, as an ideology of individual shame and blame around failure to thrive, which ignores the dysfunctional and destructive machinery of neoliberal policies?

*Who Needs the Cuts?* punches above its weight. In a succinct volume, it lays out a contour map of George Osborne and Co.'s journey through the dystopian Narnia of Austeria. It would be funny in another dimension. But alas, the appalling damage to the social and psychological fabric of our society is all too real. We therapists do not have clean hands. We need to speak about what we see.

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## Grief, love, and joy

**A thousand years of joy: a film about Robert Bly**, by Haydn Reiss, DVD, 2015, 81 mins, $35

Reviewed by Nick Duffell, Psychotherapist

Robert Bly 'has reintroduced the notion that language is wealth', says the Devon-based storyteller Martin Shaw in this stunning crowd-funded documentary on the Minnesota poet and founder of the Mythopoetic Men's Movement. It premiered in London this August, introduced by the incomparable Mark Rylance, and it is indeed a rich feast for the viewer.

We follow this powerful octogenarian's beginnings as a dreamy farmer's son through naval service to political activist, denouncing the Vietnam and Iraq wars, championing the First Nations, valuing the environment via the Sierra Club, to reclusive poet. With his enthusiasm for the ecstatic tradition of Europe, South America and Persia, Bly made acceptable a new, grounded mysticism. Connected to snow and dust as elements of his childhood, as words known in the body, he combined Norwegian poetry, oriental music and the reverence of local place with the psychic depths enshrined in longings, the blessing of older men, Jungian therapy, gender perspectives and fairy tales.

Once upon a time, in time, then as now, as Bly might say, a certain farmer liked his drink too much and his foppish intellectual son too little. Over time, the son chose to love the father and celebrate the hunger men have for their fathers, surprising the feminists, who first couldn't believe that being *for* men meant not being *against* women. The early period of Bly's life is well documented, and features much strong commentary. 'Robert was very hungry [when] young, spent some times in isolation and spiritual poverty looking for what would feed him', says Gary Snyder, explaining why, even though not associated with the beat poets, Bly was a brother; his 'poetry was married to politics'.

His genius for translating and introducing other cultures to the Anglo-Saxon world has been a major gift. 'He gets it at the level of language, he gets it at the level of