

## RUDOLF STEINER THEME SYMPOSIUM



### Guest Editors' Introductions

## Guest Editorial, II: introduction to the theme issue

Unlike my guest co-editor of this theme issue John Lees, I don't have the identity of an anthroposophical psychotherapist, nor that of a biographical counsellor. I did practise as a counsellor (my preferred professional label) for nearly two decades until 2007, but my Steiner credentials are that in the late 1990s I trained over four years as a Steiner Waldorf class and Kindergarten teacher. Having worked as a Steiner early years teacher for a decade, doing a number of biography work weekend workshops (with Malcolm Daniels) and reading a great deal of Steiner's works (especially in the education and curative education/therapy fields), it is quite impossible not to experience the deeply healing ethos that Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) brought to every one of the diverse fields to which he gave his careful attention and insight. I remember as if yesterday my shock and awe at the insight – one of many – that Steiner brought to pedagogy, teaching and learning, with his extraordinary statement that the most important task for the teacher is to help children to *breathe healthily*. For Steiner, indeed, education and schooling at their best are seen as being an intrinsically *healing force* for the child – and often for the teacher, too. If only today's broken, overly materialistic education system were open to such profound wisdom.

In the History of Ideas, one of the most abiding mysteries of the previous century is just how one of its most inspired, original and wide-ranging thinkers and seers – Steiner – is so comparatively little recognized, or even known of, in the range of disparate fields on which he has had, and continues to have, such a profound influence. The author of over 30 books and the deliverer of over 6000 lectures in his lifetime, his full collected works amount to a staggering 350 volumes (at least eight times that of Freud's collected works), and his lasting legacy includes uniquely innovative impulses in fields as wide-ranging as education (see the world-renowned Waldorf school movement) and curative education and social therapy (see the Camphill Communities movement); biodynamic agriculture (precursor of organic agriculture); holistic (anthroposophical) medicine; architecture and design; the arts (eurythmy, painting, speech and drama); organizational consultancy; ethical banking and finance – and now, of course, counselling and psychotherapy.

The cultural and academic neglect of Steiner's vast corpus has been attributed by some to his quite unashamed esotericism and explicit engagement with 'the divine' through his discipline of 'spiritual science', which perhaps led – both in his own lifetime and since – to his being unjustly shunned by conventional academia. And this despite the fact that in his early, 'pre-esoteric' career, Steiner was a widely respected philosopher and scientist. Steiner was a relentless scourge of the one-sided materialism that prevailed in his day, and he brought a spiritually informed perspective to his worldview, which understood the human being as far more than a material, physical body. A natural clairvoyant from an early age, Steiner's so-called 'four-fold' view of the human being took account of the human being's non-material, subtle 'energy bodies' as well the sense-perceptible physical body.

Steiner had a thorough-going, and then quite unfashionable, *holistic* approach to human experience which was many decades ahead of its time, and which I think should easily qualify

him as an honorary 'proto' humanistic psychologist! And it is only now, when so-called 'new paradigm', post-modern epistemologies and cosmologies are thankfully beginning to undermine the *Zeitgeist* of late modernity, that Steiner's remarkable insights, which both incorporate yet also transcend 'modernity', are beginning to attract the rich attention they deserve. To give just one example, over a century ago Steiner was the leading international scholar of Goethe's much-neglected scientific works – and yet it is only in recent years (cf. Henri Bortoft's *The Wholeness of Nature*, Floris, 1996) that Goethe's scientific worldview is beginning to gain widespread recognition within the emerging paradigm of 'New Science'.

It will come as no surprise to those who know anything of Steiner's multi-faceted contribution that an approach to counselling grounded in his cosmology – biographical counselling – has recently achieved recognition in Britain through training accreditation via the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP). And this, added to the relatively recent founding of a global institution representing anthroposophical psychotherapy, suggests that within the professional therapy world, Steiner's enduring legacy and unique contribution to human healing can no longer be ignored – hence this special issue of *Self & Society*.

John Lees and I have accumulated so much fine material for this theme issue that we have had to divide it into two parts, with part II scheduled for inclusion in the winter 2017 issue of the journal. We are grateful to our 'deferred contributors' for their patience in waiting for their excellent articles to appear at the end of this year.

Now to the contributions to this, part I of the collection. First, we include two peer-reviewed papers co-written by guest co-editor John Lees, written with Henriette Dekkers-Appel and Caroline Barnes respectively. In their article 'Addressing Materialism and Illusionism in Anthroposophic Psychotherapy', **Henriette Dekkers-Appel** and **John Lees** consider current working conditions brought about by a materialistic mentality, focusing on the damaging impact of materialistic scientific management principles and the allied condition of what they term 'illusionism'. The authors maintain that policies based on neoliberal managed-care principles are inadequate, and indeed only exacerbate the problem since they are rooted in the same materialistic principles. They outline a therapeutic response based on anthroposophic psychotherapy and other socially and politically aware therapies.

Then, in 'The Man Who Did Not Wish to Come to Earth: A Case Study', **Caroline Barnes** and **John Lees** offer an anthroposophical therapy case study, illustrating the approach's body, soul and spirit principles, and showing how this approach views the human being in a holistic way, linking physical illnesses with psychological and social problems, and with the difficulties the spirit encounters in today's materialistic world. Present-day culture inhibits the human spirit from coming to the earth, and psychotherapy needs to be understood in the context of worldwide social and political events. On this view, they argue, healing oneself is healing the world.

In the first of two contributions on biographical counselling, **Margli Matthews** offers an authoritative overview, describing some fundamental approaches of biographical counselling, focusing particularly on serving the development of the I/Self and affirming the totality of human life as body, soul and spirit, and weaving in notions of karma and destiny. For Matthews, human biography deepens the counselling relationship, and awakens sensitivity to the meaning of our individual stories in the context of developing humanity.

Next, **Julia Dvinskaya** looks at working with anxiety in biographical counselling, locating anxiety in the wider evolution of consciousness as depicted in Steiner's cosmology, and thus bringing a wider context to the notion of anxiety, which Dvinskaya terms *supra-individual causes for anxiety*. The twentieth century has seen our inner worlds penetrated by forces previously existing outside of human awareness, generating confusing and frightening experiences that manifest as anxiety.

Then, in his prescient article on Love and Hate as soul phenomena, **David Tresemer** visits the theme of love and hate that recurs so often in the psychoanalytic field, but this time from the viewpoint of Rudolf Steiner's rich and distinctive take on these phenomena as a soul polarity with which to understand the human being.

Finally, in part I of a lengthy interview on the anthroposophical approach known as Psychophonetics, **Robin Steele** is interviewed by guest editor **Richard House**, demonstrating a profound understanding of, and insight into, the therapeutic process, and illustrating the extent to which anthroposophical thinking can contribute to therapy praxis. There exists some controversy around this approach in the UK, but as so often in the history of therapy, it's vital to separate out the intrinsic merits of an approach from the personalities associated with its development. It's difficult not to hear in Steele's highly impressive rendition of the holistic worldview underpinning Psychophonetics a possible vital new paradigm for counselling and psychotherapy.

John and I are delighted that we will be following this theme issue with part II in the winter issue of 2017, in which we look forward to deepening our engagement with the relevance and importance of Rudolf Steiner's work to modern counselling and psychotherapy. In the meantime, we would be delighted if readers would send in correspondence to the journal's editors offering their responses to the ideas and practices showcased in this, the first part of this theme collection.

## Notes on contributor



**Richard House**, PhD, formerly co-edited *Self & Society*, is a trained Steiner Waldorf Kindergarten and class teacher, and now works full time as a political and educational campaigner and consultant in Stroud, UK. A chartered psychologist, former university lecturer and author or editor of 12 books, his latest book is *Humanistic Psychology: Current Trends and Future Prospects* (co-edited with David Kalisch and Jennifer Maidman, Routledge, 2017).

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