

Editorial: method in our madness, or madness in our method? The many faces of psychotherapy

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Abstract *The Editorial notes that the papers in this issue pluralistically juxtapose at least two methodological insights in new ways, fulfilling the bridging, and growing edge, function of the Journal. Previous expressions of this are outlined, focusing especially on values and the grounds of knowledge in psychotherapy. The significances of the papers are then discussed: the affirmation of constructivism against objectivist use of field theory in Geoff Heath's review paper, 'A constructivist attempts to talk to the field'; Judy Ryde's subtle pluralistic exploration of working with difference in supervision, 'Supervising across difference'; Drs Perez-de-Albeniz's and Jeremy Holmes' paper, 'Meditation: concepts, effects and uses in therapy', which deploys the scientific tools of medical-neurological analysis and quantitative studies precisely upon something commonly assumed to be outside of such modes of enquiry, namely, meditation and meditation techniques; and Marion Minerbo's post-modern turn to psychoanalysis in "Post-modern" forms of subjectivity', which gives an intriguing post-modern slant upon the modes of enquiry of psychoanalysis, and is an important challenge to ordinary causalistic models of psychoanalytic interpretation, for symbolic choices within a world of public meanings create our identity. Finally, current political developments in the Journal with the European Association for Psychotherapy, and Taylor and Francis, Carfax Publishers are touched upon.*

But Jesus said, 'Someone touched me; for I perceive that power has gone forth from me'. (St. Luke's Gospel, Chapter 9, v. 46)

Introduction: the many faces of pluralism

This is a relatively short editorial to give briefly a context—the papers in this issue mainly speak for themselves. Some political developments regarding the Journal are touched upon at the end of this Editorial.

The variations of pluralism in psychotherapy are many. The power of the work expresses itself in unforeseen ways. This issue's papers bring pluralistic modes of enquiry to bear upon unusual juxtapositions of *method*. All of these papers juxtapose at least two methodological insights in new ways. In this way they all fulfil the *connecting* and *bridging* function which is the *raison d'être* of the *International Journal of Psychotherapy*. In many Editorials already, the shape and character of this Journal have been indicated. This character has been, and is, a character of being on the *edge*, the *growing edge*—and the edges are the boundary issues of psychotherapy. Admittedly, sometimes this character of exploring and pushing right up to the boundary has made the Editorials hard to follow.

Nevertheless, the background of some assumptions worth stating has come into view over the four years of the Journal's existence, such as:

1. the paradox and difficulty of *dialogue* in psychotherapy;
2. many forms of *circularity of assumption* in psychotherapy, both metapsychological causal and in respect of values;
3. the *parallelisms in psychotherapy and politics*, and the importance of history and historical parallels in psychotherapy;
4. the dangers of *fundamentalist elements* in psychotherapy;
5. the *difficulties and limitations of positive science approaches* in psychotherapy;
6. the consequent importance of *emerging spiritual frames* and assumptions in psychotherapy, which are anti-fundamentalist, but philosophically cutting edge, and participating in the saner elements in post-modernism; and
7. the consequent *pluralistic framework of dialogue* for mutual respect and tolerance in psychotherapy, which is at the heart of the Journal.

It is this last, pluralism, in particular which informs this issue, being particularly strong in Judy Ryde's paper. The philosophical element is prominent in Geoff Heath's paper, and the paradox that positive science approaches can sometimes support approaches which transcend it is illustrated by Perez-de-Albeniz's and Holmes' paper. Marion Minerbo brings an explicit post-modern slant to bear on her theme, whilst remaining clearly within a psychoanalytic frame.

Geoff Heath: constructivism versus the simplistic use of field theory

Geoff Heath's review paper, 'A constructivist attempts to talk to the field', is an affirmation of constructivism in psychotherapeutic thinking, brought to bear in the diagnostic analysis of a certain kind of fundamentalism and naive realism, combining objectivising, concretistic, and fideistic stances, in psychotherapy. It is a review of Arthur Roberts' article, 'The field talks back: an essay on constructivism and experience' (Roberts, 1999). Nietzsche says:

I never attack persons; I merely avail myself of the person as of a strong magnifying glass that allows one to make visible a general but creeping and elusive calamity. (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 688)

It is in something of this spirit that Heath tackles Roberts' paper—and in which we publish his review paper on it. It is not that Roberts' paper represents a temptation to which, in its strong form, huge numbers of people will succumb (though, as it is a well-written paper, some will). Rather, it makes manifest elements which are normally much more latent, and this is its merit; it enables the problem to be exposed.

Heath's critique, in brief, connects two basic points:

1. Roberts has taken one of the key elements in Gestalt psychotherapy, namely, field theory, which most essentially tends towards constructivism, and turned it into its opposite, something which is reified or objectified, the very opposite of its essential tendency, turned something which is participatory into something objective; and
2. he has done this in pursuance of a fundamentalist and dogmatic model, in which the remnants of an unavowed Christian belief stance can continue to be imposed on those being taught and receiving this approach.

This kind of objectivism is a far wider trend in psychotherapy, particularly when linked with its causalistic tendencies, than just in this brand of Gestalt. But here it is so very clear that we can pinpoint its character.

Judy Ryde on supervising across difference

Judy Ryde's paper, 'Supervising across difference', is a subtle exploration of working with difference in supervision. It is from a point of view which brings to bear a multilayered framework (Hawkins & Shohet, in press) for the process of supervision upon the issues of working with difference in it. It is, once more, effectively pluralistic, and this was what gradually dawned upon me as I took account of the paper.

This time 'pluralistic' is focused upon the sense of the *mutual recognition and working with differences of belief and values*. These may well be determined and generated by ethnic, gender, and sexual orientation issues, but the fundamental 'differences' make themselves felt in difference of belief and value. Thus, for instance, work with an uprooted emigrant Japanese business hostess will not focus upon 'liberation of women' issues—or at best indirectly—but rather work *within* her belief frame of self-valuation in terms of 'male achievement' models of value.

Countertransference and therapist reaction issues are addressed in the light of such recognitions—and of necessity this involves acceptance, therefore, of a *genuine non-imperialism* in our counselling or psychotherapy stance. On this assumption, a kind of imperialism can be covertly expressed even within the subtle, apparently innocuous, attempt to impose a Rogerian non-directive frame upon clients, who may well be appropriately calling for direction in a way natural within their cultural frame.

Physical evidence of the effects of meditation practice: perez-de-albeniz and holmes

Drs Perez-de-Albeniz's and Jeremy Holmes' paper, 'Meditation: concepts, effects and uses within therapy', deploys the scientific tools of medical-neurological analysis and quantitative studies precisely upon something commonly assumed to be outside of such modes of enquiry, namely, meditation and meditation techniques. It is a clear and basic survey and study of 75 research papers on these themes.

The paper clearly demonstrates:

1. that the effects of meditation processes include clearly and emphatically demonstrable physiological effects, bearing out what religious adepts have always claimed for it;
2. that the power of the process includes 'side effects' which may be harmful for the inexperienced and for those carrying much personal disturbance not yet worked with. Parallels with one-sided advocacy of psychoanalytic treatments are touched upon in this connection; 'handle with care' is the watchword, and this, after all, as with psychotherapy itself, indirectly demonstrates that here we are dealing with something powerful enough to do harm—and the Hippocratic injunction not to harm is strong in the minds of our authors, who are themselves medical practitioners;
3. various ways in which meditation may be conceptualised within various psychotherapy traditions; and
4. the implications for clinical practice. Here, as meditation can be a private technique, we might have hoped for comparison with the transference situation in relational psychodynamic approaches. However, the central claim of the paper is very important:

The evidence of meditative physical effects is consistent with increasing evidence of the biological impact of psychological interventions. It refutes convincingly the stereotypical criticism that talking therapies 'do nothing' or are 'just' placebo.

Marion minerbo's post-modern turn to psychoanalysis

Marion Minerbo's paper, '“Post-modern” forms of subjectivity', gives an intriguing post-

modern slant upon the modes of enquiry of psychoanalysis. It is an important challenge to ordinary causalistic models of psychoanalytic interpretation, such as Kleinian object relations based ones (but the same challenge will apply to any of them). She explores the world of a client who is driven by consumeristic preoccupations with advanced brand name products in clothing cosmetics, etc. This might seem to yield to standard narcissistic type explanations. Minerbo points out that, even if partly valid, this does not explain the *particular* choices and processes of someone beset by these preoccupations in our world.

She argues that, in a perspective that goes back at least to Husserl and Heidegger, to be preoccupied with consumerist goods is to make choices within a *public* world and a world structured, in Lacan's sense, by *language*. And this is *sui generis*. It is not to be reduced to the intrapsychic. Indeed it creates even the private intrapsychic as much as it is created by it. These symbolic choices within a world of public meanings *create* our identity. One of the key things the paper shows is how this makes possible a positive understanding of such types of choice as acts of self-creation. The last part of the paper draws out some of the theoretical and general implications of such recognitions.

From this perspective, we can say that the intrapsychic reverberations of our post-modern times can be summed up as 'I do, therefore I am'.

This paper therefore is one of the increasing number of contributions which straddle psychoanalysis, existentialism and phenomenology, and post-modernism. And it is a very clear and elegant statement within this genre.

Political developments with the journal

Discussions are currently in progress with the European Association for Psychotherapy, and Taylor and Francis, Carfax Publishers concerning the future of this Journal. At this point in time I cannot predict what the outcome of these will be; many factors will influence this. Clarification may well be available when we have reached the 9th European Association for Psychotherapy Congress at Dublin, 22–25 June 2000. Watch this space!

References

- HAWKINS, P. & SHOHET, R. (in press). *Supervision in the helping professions*. Open University Press.
 NIETZSCHE, F. (1968). *Ecce homo*, in W. KAUFMANN (Ed.) *The basic writings of Nietzsche*. New York/London: Random House.
 ROBERTS, A. (1999). The field talks back: an essay on constructivism and experience, *British Gestalt Journal*, 8, 35–46.

Résumé L'éditorial note le pluralisme des articles qui juxtaposent dans ce volume, au moins deux nouveaux aperçus méthodologiques, établissant ainsi la fonction et le rôle charnière grandissant de ce journal. Des expressions antérieures sont soulignées, avec l'accent mis surtout sur les valeurs et les fondations du savoir en psychothérapie. La signification des articles est ensuite discutée: les arguments utilisés par le constructivisme contre l'utilisation de la théorie de terrain dans un contexte objectiviste dans la revue faite par Geoff Heath 'Un constructiviste essaye de parler au champ'; l'exploration pluraliste subtile de Judy Ryle pour travailler avec la différence en supervision 'Supervision en travers de la différence'; l'article des Drs Jeremy Holmes et Perez-de-Albeniz sur: La méditation: concepts, effets et utilisation au sein de la thérapie', déploie les outils d'une analyse scientifique neurologico-médicale ainsi que d'études quantitatives, précisément sur quelque chose qui est supposé être en dehors de tels modes de recherche, nous parlons ici de la méditation et des techniques de méditation; la contribution post moderniste de Marion Minerbo se tourne vers la psychanalyse dans

'Formes de subjectivité post modernistes: reverberations intrapsychiques de notre société de consommation 'et nous offre une perspective intrigante post moderne sur les modes de recherche en psychanalyse et constitue un challenge important à l'utilisation habituelle des modèles de causalité pour l'interprétation psychanalytique, car le choix symbolique au sein d'un monde de significations publiques, est celui qui crée notre identité. Finalement nous mentionnons les développements politiques actuels entre le Journal et l'Association Européenne de Psychothérapie ainsi qu'avec Taylor et Francis, Carfax Publishers.

Zusammenfassung Der Leitartikel stellt fest, daß die Aufsätze dieser Ausgabe mindestens zwei methodologische Einsichten in neue Wege pluralistisch nebeneinanderstellen und dadurch die überbrückende Funktion dieses Journals erfüllen. Frühere Äußerungen werden umrissen mit verstärkter Konzentration auf Werte und Hintergründe von Kenntnissen in der Psychotherapie. Die Signifikanz dieser Beiträge wird nachfolgend diskutiert: die Versicherung von Konstruktivismus gegenüber objektivistischer Anwendung von Feldtheorie in Geoff Heaths Beitrag '*A Constructivist Attempts to Talk to The Field*'; Judy Rydes scharfsinnige pluralistische Untersuchung der Arbeit mit Unterschiedlichkeit in Supervision '*Supervision across difference*'; Dr. Jeremy Holmes und Perez-de-Albeniz Beitrag '*Meditation: Concepts, Effects and Uses within Therapy*', der die wissenschaftlichen Werkzeuge von medizinisch-neurologischer Analyse und quantitativer Studien einsetzt für etwas, was normalerweise als außerhalb normaler Befragungsmethoden angesehen wird, nämlich Meditation und meditative Techniken und Marion Minerbos postmoderne Wendung hin zu Psychoanalyse in '*Post-modern Forms of Subjectivity: Intrapsychic Reverberations form our Consumer Society*', der eine interessante, postmoderne Tendenz zu Befragungsmethoden der Psychoanalyse aufzeigt und eine wichtige Herausforderung für gewöhnliche, kausalistische Modelle der psychoanalytischen Interpretation bedeutet, da symbolische Auswahl innerhalb einer Vielzahl von öffentlichen Bedeutungen unsere Identität *kreieren*. Zum Schluß werden momentane politische Entwicklungen betreffend das Journal mit der *European Association for Psychotherapy and Taylor and Francis, Carfax Publishers* kurz angesprochen.