

Asylum

the magazine for democratic psychiatry

Spring 2014
Volume 21
Number 1
£4.00

Sales and subscriptions
Tel 01989 763900
www.pccs-books.co.uk

Information
Asylum Collective
www.asylumonline.net



**CREATIVE RESPONSES
TO DIFFICULT TIMES**



An international magazine for democratic psychiatry, psychology, and community development

Incorporating the Newsletter of Psychology Politics Resistance

the magazine for democratic psychiatry

Volume 21, Number 1, Spring 2014

ISSN 0955 2030

Send letters, comments & submissions (incl. articles, art work, poetry, images, etc.)

to: editors@asylumonline.net

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Special edition: Creative responses to difficult times Guest edited by Paul Atkinson and Janet Haney for the Alliance for Counselling and Psychotherapy

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Subscriptions (see below for rates):

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Cover Images:

Front: 'Big Small - Chase' by Helen Tyler (Sage Community Arts)

Back: 9 untitled drawings by John Joseph

Background photography by Nick Cash (Sage Community Arts)

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Asylum magazine is a forum for free debate, open to anyone with an interest in psychiatry or mental health. We especially welcome contributions from service users or ex-users (or survivors), carers, and frontline psychiatric or mental health workers (anonymously, if you wish). The magazine is not-for-profit and run by a collective of unpaid volunteers. Asylum Collective is open to anyone who wants to help produce and develop the magazine, working in a spirit of equality. Please contact us if you want to help.

The views expressed in the magazine are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of the Collective. Articles are accepted in good faith and every effort is made to ensure fairness and veracity.

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UK Individual £15.00 Overseas Individual £17.00
UK Organisation £26.00 Overseas Organisation £30.00

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UK Individuals £13.20 (inc VAT) Overseas Individuals £11.00
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EDITORIAL

Special edition: Creative responses to difficult times

Edited by Paul Atkinson and Janet Haney for the Alliance for Counselling and Psychotherapy

The idea of this issue of the magazine arose from a conference on the future of counselling and psychotherapy, organised by the Alliance for Counselling and Psychotherapy, and held in London in December 2012.

As members of the Alliance, we have been campaigning against the state's co-option of the psychological therapies as a healthcare profession. In our work around psychological life and its difficulties, we also want to prioritise the ordinary resources and creativity that people bring to the task of making meaning of their experience.

One speaker at the conference suggested seeing if we could produce a special issue for *Asylum*, so we contacted the collective and they accepted our offer to produce an edition around the broad idea of 'creativity'.

We then set about asking people – near and far, users and practitioners – if they would like to submit something that testified to their efforts at being-in-the-world. We invited them to use their particular talents to say something about their world-view.

As a result individuals and groups have contributed. Offerings include direct works of artistic creation, including original paintings by John Joseph and members of the Sage Arts project; poetry from Rob Cunliffe, Ros Kane and Kaz Reeves; a short play by Simon McCormack (which we have produced as a live recording and posted on the web); an original work of art from Scott Farlow, who also writes about his relationship with Franz Xaver Messerschmidt, an artist from the past; and, included in a longer piece reflecting on the central importance of music in her life, song lyrics from Jennifer Maidman.

Other contributors wrote about how they were using their own creativity to make spaces for others to use creatively – the Sage Arts project, the Bridge Collective and Start2. Stephen Gee writes about his experience of running a theatre project, Isobel Urquhart writes about art exhibitions in Sanatorium and Utopia; and Michel Syrett and Suzy

Johnston write about the experience of writing itself. Denis Postle gives us an article on what he calls 'the psyCommons'; this is part of a lifetime's work in which he argues for a re-visioning of psychological life as something to be held in common. We are also very grateful to Alex Widdowson (of Sage Arts) who volunteered to design this issue as a creative act reflecting his own appreciation of the overall project; and of course thanks to the Asylum Collective for letting us make this issue.

You will see that we wanted to extend the idea of creativity beyond the core notion of art and literature, so as to include the kinds of organisations that have been set up to support the creative endeavour. We have tried to reach a little beyond our own usual networks, and have made some new links with projects up and down the country. We don't pretend to present an objective survey of what's going on, and we're sure there are many more amazing projects and people out there who could bear witnessing and celebration.

We hope that this necessarily short selection of work will act as an inspiration and point of reference to sustain and inspire your own efforts, in spite of the difficult economic and ideological climate that currently prevails.

Paul Atkinson and Janet Haney

Creating a Community



In Summer 2006 a group of people met in the Quaker meeting house in Exeter, all of them involved in different ways in innovative, user-led projects that had been developing within Mind in Exeter and East Devon. It was a time of excitement and anticipation because we had arrived at the moment of recognition that our future lay in our own hands: the time had come for our aspirations to be realised to be an autonomous, collectively governed and run grass-roots community.

Seven years later a small group sit in a cosy, homely room in central Exeter, now the office of The Bridge Collective Community Interest Company, planning how to write this article. Some of us were present at the beginning, others have joined since. The Bridge Collective, now with its own premises, organisational structure, employees and public profile, is the child, still not fully grown, that was conceived at that event. The creative process that brought us here is one for which we had no template or instruction manual. Someone said, "If The Bridge Collective was a work of art, it would be one of those where you throw some tins of paint at a wall and see what happens."

So how does our experience of being the real-life Bridge Collective today match up to the dreams, hopes and fears we had seven years ago? And what have we learnt along the way?

Here are some of the thoughts we recorded in the months of planning before we finally registered as a company in April 2007:

Some of our strengths: democratic and revolutionary; strong belief and commitment; strength in numbers; people-power; we stick up for ourselves and respect and look after each other; the will to find solutions and ways of working together; we

already have some well established and respected projects.

Possible weaknesses: Will we stick together? Can we resolve internal conflict? What will happen if people in key roles become unwell? Do we know how to deal with the outside world – e.g. funders? Will we get bogged down in complications rather than taking one step at a time? How will we know that actions are authorised by the community? Will we have any money?

Opportunities we saw: to enhance personal recovery, gain confidence and a sense of purpose; something to put on a CV in future; greater public awareness of the talents of the participants; to change the world in a small way through our training; a new way of thinking within mental health services; to expand our activities; more freedom of choice where we work and play; it may be harder to find places, but more fun; to work with organisations to create awareness and better understandings; to be environmentally healthy and access funding, etc. through that.

Possible threats: our different way of thinking may not be understood, trusted and funded; losing sight of our primary goals through internal politics; legal requirements and work load; staff/service user them/us culture; theft or damage.

Looking back, much of it does seem to have echoed down through the years of the development of The Bridge.

We began our existence by negotiating a small grant from Devon County Council, which has continued but not grown. We supplement this with money earned from training and with occasional one-off grants for projects, but we have held out strongly for independence and against becoming a provider of commissioned services. Through this we have learnt that being a lean organisation can help creativity – like haiku poetry, which depends on finding a way to express an idea within tight constraints. (But please don't tell our funders that!)

We have also been learning to embrace messiness – that working out what to do when things aren't as we planned or expected can also be a source of creativity, once you decide not to give in to exasperation. In a world of business plans and SMART targets, we value flexibility, room for not getting

things right every time, for playing, and sometimes abandoning the original idea and finding we have created something else we didn't expect. And we do still struggle to find the structures that can facilitate this while retaining accountability and good communication.

And we are learning about both the power and the challenges of democracy when in a tight spot. When going through internal conflict – as inevitably we have done – it has both been deeply painful and hugely empowering to be in a place where talking about dissent and hurt has been the business of the whole community and not something to be dealt with quietly in a separate room by staff. We have learnt much and still have much to learn about how this can be a safe and healing process for a community, rather than a divisive one.



From the beginning, the idea of democracy was key in The Bridge, and the point of authority and decision-making has always been the monthly meeting that we now call The Bridge Community Meeting. Our legal structure entails that we have a formal membership who elect a number of directors, and these roles are important in The Bridge because they hold accountability for the principles of the company and for running it with integrity. However, involvement in The Bridge is much wider than formal membership of the company, and (except very occasionally for discussion of sensitive personal issues) the Community Meetings are completely

open, with most decisions arrived at by consensus.

One of our most valued points of reference is our Mission Statement, distilled by the Community Meeting from attempts over the years to communicate the essence of The Bridge:

“To be a company whose members are creating: a democratic community where people who have experiences, beliefs, and feelings that have sometimes been labelled as mental illness are welcomed and can talk about these experiences freely, safely and without judgement; a place to participate in friendship, support, learning, teaching, discussion, being active, and making a valid contribution both within the collective and the wider community.”

Here is a summary of the groups and activities around which our evolving community is currently formed:

The Greenwood Project gives access to the physical and mental health benefits of being in woodland and other outdoor environments. It also provides a chance to learn about traditional woodland crafts. We find that making meals and cooking on our own fire in a woodland clearing, telling stories and making music under the stars and making things by hand from natural materials we collect ourselves, all allow us to see and experience life in a new, healing way. It helps us to appreciate and fully value the natural world.

The Women’s Art Group sessions aim to give women some much-needed personal space every Monday morning, offering an opportunity to explore artistic ideas. The group has a real sense of community and a relaxed and creative atmosphere.

The Sharing Circle takes place at a seasonal turning point and has a theme that reflects both the cycle of the year in nature and the cycles of change in our lives. We meet in peaceful, natural settings and share simple food around a fire. Then, after a short silence, each person who wishes to is invited to speak, maybe to put something they have brought into the circle and talk about what it means to them. This is a chance to observe the turning of the seasons, to refresh our spirits, and to reflect on what is important to us. Speaking or silent participation are equally welcome.

The Discussion Group meets once a month as a space to share

different viewpoints, with no pressure to speak. We offer the following principles for our discussions: “Everyone brings to the space valid knowledge from their own background, all knowledge is partial and incomplete, all knowledge can be questioned (from – Open Spaces for Dialogue and Enquiry).

Rainbow Mind is an informal group for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people affected by mental health issues. We meet at The Bridge Collective once a month for a chat and a coffee in a safe friendly environment with like-minded people.

Underground Sound is a weekly music project primarily for people aged 18 to 30 who are experiencing or have experienced mental health difficulties, as well as their friends and other young people who have an interest in mental health issues. We have a range of musical instruments including guitars, electric drums, decks and various acoustic instruments, and a recording booth enabling us to produce good quality recordings. Within the project there are opportunities to benefit from being part of a group, learning new skills and being creative, using musical expression, developing and building upon existing talents, learning from others and forming friendships that extend outside of the project.

The Experts by Experience project works to establish the sharing of personal experiences, beliefs and feelings sometimes labelled as mental illness, as a powerful tool in the education and training of health and community workers and in the personal journeys of individuals. We aim to be a channel for everyone’s voice – wherever you are at, you can take



part. We use our direct experience to explore diverse approaches to mental health. We aim to create environments where conversations happen that encourage learning from each other and understanding each other better, and you don’t have to be a brilliant public speaker to have a voice. Time and again magic happens where someone understands a new point of view because they’ve learnt from someone else’s first-hand experience.

The Bridge Collective has an open day every Thursday – the doors are open for anyone to come and have a drink and chat with whoever is about. We have no referral process and people are free to come and go as they please anytime between 10am and 4pm.

In The Bridge Collective as a whole, time and again when maybe we are bogged down in messiness, someone – who may have been part of the community for years or may have walked in that day – says something that cuts through something difficult, and we see a new path to create and travel along together.

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www.bridgecollective.org.uk



Three poems by Rob Cunliffe

The first is about my experiences in an acute-care psychiatric unit, in Liverpool. I am very pleased to have it published here. I've been writing poetry on my own for the last eighteen months. I once performed 'Stoddart House' at The Brink – the 'dry' bar in Liverpool – but I'm mainly interested in tapping into my unconscious or creative process, and facilitating the emergence of more work. I've ummed and aahed about joining writers' groups, but not done so yet. The second poem – 'Le père sans merci' – more or less explains how I came to find myself in Stoddart House. By way of thanks for the support of the Asylum Manchester group, I thought I'd send a third poem, 'The House that "Dad" Built'. I wrote it during the three days since submitting the others, and having received feedback. I hope people enjoy it and may find it of interest or comfort in some way.

Stoddart House, Stoddart House – (Bird, Beast, Man, Mouse)

Sadness of a poignancy
That gripped the air by the throat
And banged its head against a long grey wall,
Would make its presence felt,
Descend upon us,
Envelop us entirely,
Take us over,
Until we were nothing other than it.

We were sadness and it was us.

And we would sit there, floored,
Dumbstruck,
Aghast.
Barely able to breathe,
Let alone speak.
Taking it all in,
Every moment.
Our sensoriums
Open to the four winds,
Utterly raw.
In a skinless nightmare.

Resistance was futile.
It wasn't even on the cards.

Despair, thick as cream,
Too thick for a pin to drop,
Pervaded every corner of every room.

In one room
A young man,
Two young men,
Both inconsolably depressed,
Took turns to sit
Hoods up, heads bent
Over a convector heater,
Conjoining it with their bodies.
For an hour or two,
In complete silence,
Taking the incessant noisy blasts
Of hot warm air
Full in the face,
Some spilling down their chests.
Melting the iceberg of their depression.
Feeling oh so cold
And wanting to be warm again.

Whatever the reason,
They seemed to be the better for it
Afterwards.

In another room,
The TV room,
Sat in comfy seats and sofas,
The heavily medicated.
Calmer now, more ensconced
Than they had been
A month or week ago.
The odd pleasantry,
The odd comment,
The odd arrangement –
So and so's going to the shop.
But the banter now was wafer-thin,
Pipes and whistles,
Dissipated in an instant.

And along the corridors
Marched all day long
And much of the night
The massed ranks
Of the insanely anxious,
Whose memories would not let them go
For an instant.
What they were living
And reliving and reliving
Only they knew
And no one else did.
Trying to walk out
The pain that had been driven into them
And was still lodged there
Of an eight-inch cold steel knife.

Or words to that effect.

And there were the tea-drinkers,
The cuppa soupers,
The cafeteriati,
The make-the-most-of-it brigade.
Their strong point
Conversation.
Their weak point
Just the same.
There's only so much talk
One can take,
Anyone can take,
Before falling silent again.
I'm just going to lie down
On my bed again for a while.

And then there were the jolly japers,
The didn't-give-a-fuckers,
The opportunists,
Die-hards, philanderers.
Could have been anywhere, really,
Made no difference,
All the same to them.
The party animals,
Never give uppers,
Whatever was going on
Or off,
They wanted to be in the frame.
Even in a locked ward,
Life can be a riot.
I'm Spartacus.
No, I'm Spartacus.
I'm Spartacus.
No, I'm Spartacus.
Until such times as
The depot injection kicks in,
Gasps,
And subduction reigns.

Stoddart House, Stoddart House,
Bird, beast, man, mouse.

Le père sans merci (Merciless Father)

I was my father's "_____".
He spoke to me as one.
He derided and devalued me
And he called me his son!!!

He brought me up, he brought me
down,
He turned me round the bend.
And when I bent, he broke my head
And watched the trickles run.

A box I lived in as a boy,
A hamster on a wheel,
The metal walls of padded cell
Were comforting to me.

A cage I lived in after this,
A cage no one could see.
A cold dark cage contained my rage
Till it was time for tea.

And tea-time came and down I went
Apologetically.
Sorry, boss, so sorry, boss,
Captain of Industry.

And money was no object, no,
No bauble on a tree.
Money counted more than Christ
And, Christ knows, more than me.

Seconds, thirds and less means more
Were terms drilled into me.
A world of failed emotions,
Of measurability.

Emotions, no, not here, not now,
Not ever, really.
That's just not how we do things
here
You're wrong, you know, you see.

And so I withered on the vine
Dumb, daft, dithering me.
Tell your Dad, you should be glad,
Yes, you damn well should be.

He's lost his rag, he's blown his top,
He's acting purplely.
I only tried to lend a hand,
Mistake ... I know ... sorry!

Almighty mug, you fool,
You fool.
Did you not ever see
That what you did
Was create a flid
That flid from tree to tree?

Did it never strike you
As you were striking me
That humankind
Means human, kind,
Not primitivity?

I got your goat,
You grabbed my throat,
Asphyxiating me.
And silence reigned,
You'd won again,
I wonder what's for tea?

And tea-time came around again,
Almighty misery.
Where tales were told
Of others' woes,
Weak spots and frailties.

And up from down this mire
Morass,
Shining for all to see,
Was our complacent,
Creaking crown,
Our foaming family tree.

As if from high,
As if, it were,
The world were there to see.
We cawed and crowed
And crowed and crawled.
Superiority.

The Master Race
Gave me chase.
Innate, fortunately,
Was my desire
Not to conspire
With this ignominy.

I'd heard of lands,
Far, far away
Where it was plain to see
That other ways
And other days
Lay ahead of me.

I was my father's "_____".
I was his whipping-boy.
I sat in stocks
But broke the locks
... Eventually.

The house that 'Dad' built

I've been living
In the house
Of my father's depression
All my life
Without knowing it
Most of the time

Walled up
In a bolt hole
I thought
Was of my own making
Under a roof
Designed to last
A lifetime

All my thought-gates
My postulates
Were pre-fabricated
Ready mixed
There long before
I came along

So I sat there
In the dark
Rigid
Transfixed
Soul-mate of Gollum
Wondering what on earth
Was going on?

I've been living
In the house
That Dad built
Longer than
I care to mention
Longer than
I can recall

Until one day
I found
An escape hatch
And made my way
Out into
The dazzling sunshine

And lay down
In the long grass
By a stream
Dazed
Breathed in
Dusted myself down
And cried until
I stopped crying

Then rested for a while
Smelled the coffee

And now it's time
To head back in there
To sit with him
Talk to him
See how he's doing

He's not going to like it
Of course
At first anyway ...

I don't think he thought
Any of us
Would make it
Out of here
Alive

Then Play On

by Jennifer Maidman

I realised I had a musical Father when I was about three. A large white grand piano, which was being given away by the local cinema, arrived at our house. It almost filled the front room. Dad sat down and played and I watched and listened, utterly spellbound. He said the magical sound he was making was called 'boogie woogie', and naturally I wanted to have a go. With my tiny hands I couldn't manage the whole thing, but Dad patiently showed me how to do the left hand bass part using two fingers, and I practised diligently until I had it mastered. I soon discovered that our house was full of instruments: there was a banjo, a violin, a harmonica, an accordion and a mandolin. Dad could make music on all of them, not always to a professional standard it must be said, but from 'When I'm Cleaning Windows' to 'Waltzing Matilda' to 'Good Vibrations', he approached everything with the same infectious enthusiasm. He was also a dab hand on the spoons. He and my Uncle Ralph clattering along to 'In München Steht ein Hofbräuhaus', after a couple of glasses of Auntie Brenda's home-made Sangria, could put a smile on anyone's face. (Ralph was a bit of a Germanophile, but that's another story.) As I grew up and my own relationship with music deepened, both my parents' support and encouragement was unshakeable. Dad had that old-fashioned attitude: 'If a thing's worth doing, it's worth doing well', but once he knew you were serious about something he was behind you all the way. He died suddenly four years ago and I still greatly miss him.

My Mum is also very musical, but was always drawn to song, poetry, literature and performance rather than playing an instrument. At 83, she can still hold an audience in the palm of her hand with one of her self-penned comedy monologues. I am, I suppose, a chip off both of the old blocks. I think I've inherited my Mum's love of the limelight to some extent but like my Dad I play several instruments, and I also write and produce.

I've been lucky enough to make a living doing the thing I love, making music, but I've also been personally involved with therapy and human condition work since the late-1970s. I became interested in the psy field largely because, despite enjoying success beyond my wildest dreams in the music field, I struggled for a long time to come to terms with my own identity. I spent many years in various therapies, not all of them helpful, unfortunately. I've been around long enough to remember the bad old days when gay, lesbian and trans people were routinely stigmatised and pathologised by psychiatrists and psychotherapists. Many LGBTQ people, myself included, internalised deeply damaging attitudes, perpetuated in part by members of the psy professions. Things have certainly improved since then, but it does seem extraordinary that 'gender identity disorder' has only just this year been removed from the psychiatrists' 'bible', *DSM-5*. Perhaps one day people who identify outside conventional binary sex and gender norms will be seen as merely having a different calling in life, as for instance they are in the Native American 'Two-Spirit' tradition. In the meantime the adoption by the *DSM-5* of 'gender dysphoria', a less pejorative term, is progress, I

suppose. But as is often the case, people on the ground seem to be years ahead of the mainstream psychiatric establishment. I recently took part in a cross-generational arts project with young LGBTQ people, all of whom are extremely savvy about their identities and their needs as service users, and many of whom now identify completely outside the traditional binary masculine/feminine model, as genderqueer or gender fluid. So come on you psychiatrists – keep up!

As well as being a singer and musician I also trained and practised as a humanistic counsellor, and I do find there is considerable overlap between the worlds of therapy and music. Therapy, when it works, is a profoundly creative process, and music and the creative arts in general have many therapeutic qualities, and not just in the domain of formally recognised 'arts therapies' (although those approaches can have enormous value in the right setting). Denis Postle has introduced the idea of a 'psyCommons' [see this issue] and I believe music, by its nature (and in particular popular song, the folk music of our time), also tends towards being a shared community resource, part of the 'commons'. A song can act as a 'container', spreading new ideas, offering solace or encouragement, giving voice to hopes, fears and dreams. And once it's out there it can become a common resource to be tapped into, an emotional touchstone which can be a source of inspiration, fellowship, resistance or whatever else a particular individual or community needs. Folk songs have always served this purpose, often giving voice to the inner lives of the oppressed and the marginalised, but during the twentieth century, mass media has created a far bigger platform from which writers can share their experience and challenge or subvert the dominant discourse.

The song 'Message in a Bottle' by the Police seems to both describe and embody the phenomenon of an individual being able to reach a vast audience. It starts with an apparently simple story about a castaway: 'I'll send an SOS to the world – I hope that someone gets my message in a bottle'. But by the last verse it's clear that the song is using the metaphor to paint a much bigger picture:

Walked out this morning,
I don't believe what I saw
Hundred billion bottles washed up on the shore
Seems I'm not alone at being alone
Hundred billion castaways, looking for a home.

In four lines, Sting hits the existential nail firmly on the head. In an alienated, market-driven, dog-eat-dog world, many of us are isolated and dying for our distress signal to be heard. We're all 'washed up on the shore'. What we share is our aloneness and our longing to be part of something bigger and more meaningful: therein lies our commonality. The record went to number one in several countries.

The right song at the right time can have extraordinary cultural resonance. Think of James Brown's 'Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud', or Tom Robinson's simultaneously defiant, yet deeply satirical 'Sing if You're Glad to be Gay'. A song can issue an intergenerational wake-up call (Dylan's 'Times They Are a Changing'), or be an expression of a utopian ideal (John Lennon's 'Imagine'); it can be an affirmation of personal empowerment in the face of adversity (Gloria Gaynor's 'I Will Survive') or a lament about the anger

and ambivalence of a struggling post-industrial community ('Shipbuilding' by Robert Wyatt).

For me, some of the most evocative and beautiful lines ever written are in James Taylor's 'Fire and Rain':

I've seen fire and I've seen rain,
I've seen sunny days that I thought would never end.
I've seen lonely times when I could not find a friend
But I always thought that I'd see you again.

This very personal piece of writing is all the more poignant if we know that in the 1960s James Taylor was committed to psychiatric institutions several times due to depression and substance addiction. He has apparently said that the fire signifies the electroshock therapy and the rain the cold showers. The person he expected to see again was Suzie Schnerr, another psychiatric inmate who committed suicide. Friends kept her death from Taylor for six months for fear of destabilising his recovery; thus the opening lines of the song 'Just yesterday morning they let me know you were gone – Suzanne the plans they made put an end to you'. Yet the musical setting transmutes all this tragedy into something beautiful, and Taylor's poetic genius creates a lyric so universal that we can all map our experience onto the words. We all have our own personal interpretation of 'fire and rain', 'sunny days' and 'lonely times' and we've all known the heartache of an unexpected loss.

It seems to me that, at their best, both music and therapy are trying to achieve more or less the same thing: to open up a kind of 'clearing' in the culture, if only for a moment – some room to experiment, a space within which more authentic, respectful and nourishing ways of being and of relating, both to ourselves and to each other, can at least be contemplated and maybe even have a chance to flourish.

In my personal musical journey I've been lucky enough to have been part of a number of very rewarding musical projects. I've always written words as well as music, not always necessarily for public consumption, but sometimes as a way to get a sense of the overall gestalt of something I'm struggling with, something I need to explain to myself but can't quite grasp en bloc without a bit of musical assistance. Below is a recent lyric, something I'm still working on. I'm not sure it's quite finished, but it seems relevant in this context so I thought I'd put it out there. It doesn't have the universality of a 'Fire and Rain' or an 'I Will Survive' (if only!) but when I performed it as part of the LGBTQ arts project mentioned earlier it did seem to have a lot of resonance for others who've had similar experiences.

Crossing the border (a song in progress)

Outside the window, the winter was wild
Hid under the blanket a troubled young child
A heart full of questions and a need to belong
Asking 'Is it my inside or outside that's wrong?'

Was it nature or nurture or destiny's plan?
As identity slipped through my fingers like sand
A little one lost in a strange foreign land

In my heart lived songs that could never be sung
Dreams – over before they'd begun
Born – such a long way from home

As I lay there alone

I would pray for release
I would dream of a place I'd be free to be
Where my soul could find peace
So I sent up a prayer
Please God take me there

Let this struggle be over and done
Let me dance, let me play in the sun
My body and spirit as one

I tried to be honest, I tried to be good
Though feeling misshapen and misunderstood
But the teachers and preachers and shrinks all agreed
This thing's a disgrace to their binary creed

But I was easily broken and easily led
And expert opinion played tricks with my head
Dissected, rejected, it left me for dead

But then love came
Rekindled a flame in my heart
There – deeply ingrained from the start
Still something was calling me home

As I lay there alone

I would pray for release
I would dream of a place I'd be free to be
Where my soul could find peace
So I sent up a prayer
Please God take me there
Let this madness be over and done
Let me dance, let me play in the sun
My body and spirit as one

Well you've all had your chance to discuss why I dance to this tune
From hormones to chromosomes to brainwaves controlled by the moon
Well thanks but I'll bid all your theories and queries adieu
'Cos they're all double-dutch, I've discovered this much to be true
I'm so tired of defending a wall that runs right through my soul
And as long as it's standing my spirit can never be whole
Now I've found my own voice
And it's time to rejoice
In the God given right to be free
So I'm crossing the border
No more 'gender disorder'

Just me

I am crossing the border

Jennifer Maidman sings and plays guitar, bass, piano and drums. She has been making music for over forty years, working with Joan Armatrading, Gerry Rafferty, David Sylvian, Robert Wyatt, The Proclaimers, Bonnie Raitt and Van Morrison, amongst others. She has written for Boy George and Sam Brown, and produced albums for Paul Brady, Murray Head, Linda McCartney, and her partner, trombonist Annie Whitehead. She played extensively with the original Penguin Cafe Orchestra, and with other original members recently formed 'The Orchestra that Fell to Earth'. With Sarah Jane Morris, she sings lead vocals with 'Soupsongs' and has recently been working with Terry Reid, Tony O'Malley and the poet Michael Horovitz. Jennifer has written for *Therapy Today* and *Self and Society*, which she co-edits. She trained as a humanistic counsellor at East Kent College and is a member of BACP and the 'Leonard Piper' group of the Independent Practitioners Network. She lives with her partner, by the sea in East Kent, and is currently planning an album of her own songs.

Getting It Down on Paper by Michel Syrett and Suzy Johnston

The relationship between mental illness and creative self-expression is close and well-established. Depictions of the highs and lows of bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and depression have occurred in visual art, dance, acting and sculpture. But the most common and accessible medium for self-expression remains the written word. Writing is open to everyone and its various forms have made an important contribution to our understanding of mental illness – and also to its treatment.

In 2010 there was a conference in Nottingham, 'Madness and Literature'. Organised by Nottingham University's Professor Paul Crawford in collaboration with the Arts and Humanities Research Council, it examined questions such as 'How does a study of authors who

write about their mental illness inform our understanding of the real-life conditions experienced by people?' and 'Can poetry aid psychotherapy?'

Dozens of papers were presented at panel discussions over the three days, from examinations of madness in Shakespearean tragedy (particularly dementia in 'King Lear'), to an exploration of the psycho-physiological influences in the writings of William Blake. However, you do not have to be Shakespeare or Blake to inform current thinking on mental illness. Anybody with a mental health condition can write about his or her experiences, and broaden the understanding of this condition among local GPs, psychiatrists, community psychiatric nurses and social workers.

Writing can take many forms, and these are

broadening all the time. Keeping a personal diary is a common therapy, and there has always been poetry, personal correspondence and short or long prose. With the impact of new technology, letter writing – always a middle class occupation – has increasingly been replaced by blogging, tweeting and exchanges in the social media, which attracts people from all backgrounds.

What purpose does all of this fulfil? Well, first and foremost, writing is a communication with one's own self. Keeping a personal diary, or 'journaling' as it is sometimes called, enables you to chart how your feelings, emotions, moods and perspectives shift over time and thus achieve a better understanding of how your changing mental health affects your daily decisions and your broader outlook on life.

Secondly, as we have already seen, personal accounts of mental illness can inform the thinking of your health-care team, avoiding misdiagnosis and the faulty prescription of medication and/or other treatments.

For example, a recent study found that 69% of people with bipolar disorder are initially misdiagnosed, and more than one-third remained misdiagnosed for ten years or more. The diaries of people's experiences of mental illness can help GPs and consultants identify key symptoms early enough to provide a more accurate diagnosis. Personal accounts can also provide people undergoing cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) with hard written evidence that will help to adjust overly dark or destructive perceptions of their lives.

Thirdly, personal writing can, if the author chooses, be published to a much wider audience, opening up new career or lifestyle avenues that can aid long-term recovery. Suzy Johnston has suffered from depression, anxiety and psychosis since she was a student. In her thirties, following several periods of in-patient care in local psychiatric wards, she wrote and personally published a series of books chronicling her experiences and treatment. These received widespread publicity.

As a result of the authority this gave her, she was recruited as a service-user researcher at the Department of Mental Health and Wellbeing at the University of Glasgow, where she is taking part in studies of how cognitive behavioural therapies can aid the treatment of psychosis.

Suzy is the first to stress the perils of adopting such a public way of using a talent for writing. As she comments:

'If I hadn't written this, you wouldn't be reading it. However, perhaps, in doing so, I have let a little piece of me spill onto the page? And there's the challenge. How do you write a book about your very own personal experience of having a chronic mental health condition and yet not let yourself feel either vulnerable or exposed, or both?

'There are people out there who have been kind enough to read my books and now think that they know me. Clearly, they don't. What they do know is what I felt ready to share on the written page, and been certain in my head that nothing that I write will ever come back to haunt me. The other stuff I either keep to myself or share only with those close to me. As a "mental illness perspective" author, that is the responsible thing to do.

'I write books (and songs) to help myself understand and compartmentalise the many varied and sometimes terrifying experiences that I found myself facing as I pass through life, and also to remind myself of the good in life too. It is my hope that these "reflections" will help others find peace and a sense of comradeship as well.

'My advice for anyone thinking of publishing similar experiences would be: Remember that once you publish something you lose control of many things: who reads it, what readers think about it, how people treat you afterwards and that, should you have any reservations about content, it's simply too late to do anything about it.

'Writing can be the most liberating, cathartic and rewarding experience. Just please tread carefully, because when you go to bed at night and close your eyes you have to be certain that you are 100% comfortable with what you've published. Because, if you're not, the written word can unintentionally become a diabolical form of psychological self-harm. So, please, take care.'

Aiming to have your work published is therefore something you should reflect on carefully. There is plenty of opportunity. Many mental health charities, including Mind and Bipolar UK, have magazines that accept both poetry and prose from their members. There is a growing portfolio of book titles from authors describing their experiences of mental health problems. There are even publishers, most notably Chipmunka, which specialise in publishing books by authors with mental health problems.

However, as Suzy Johnston stresses, putting yourself in the spotlight in this way can put you under pressure, creating expectations and obligations that you need to be sure you can fulfil.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that committing to paper or computer your experiences, thoughts and reflections about your mental health condition is, in itself, a therapeutic way of coming to terms with the condition and generating a better understanding of it among the people who support you. Get writing!

Michel and Suzy are married. Both suffer from depression, anxiety, and psychosis. Michel is an Honorary Fellow of the Spectrum Centre for Mental Health Research at Lancaster University. Suzy is a service-user researcher at the Department of Mental Health and Wellbeing at Glasgow University.

SAGE COMMUNITY ARTS

‘Creativity takes courage’
Henri Matisse

Some years ago, in an acute psychiatric unit I saw someone had written on the corridor wall next to the obligatory noticeboard: ‘A man knows he has no power when he cannot inhabit the walls he lives in’. I don’t know where this statement comes from but it remains potent for me, as I imagine it might for others who clocked it on the stark institutional wall. Who do the walls belong to within an institution? How do we inhabit our lives creatively within the structures we find ourselves in?

The idea for Sage Community Arts developed out of conversations with artists using mental health services who were driven to develop an independent creative service, with structures that would allow people to share their skills and experience with others.

Back to the issue of walls. Finding space in expensive West London is a real obstacle for a non-profit-making charity, and during our ten-year history we have worked with other organisations, exchanging skills from our membership in return for space. About a year ago, good fortune came our way and we were offered a large abandoned warehouse free of charge until the premises are sold. The sheer size of the building has offered us new possibilities, including being able to work on a much larger scale and inviting professional artists to work with



us and share their skills in exchange for space. They have introduced our membership to different mediums including animation, film, sculpture, and collage.

We are based in Brentford* – just up the road from the GlaxoSmithKline building and a stretch of other impressive buildings along the Great West Road that show the wealth of this country. Our warehouse is slightly dilapidated, but we figure that works in our favour as we don’t want anyone to buy it just yet, at least until we have a Plan B.

The project attempts to run along the lines of a democratic community where an individual’s involvement depends upon how much responsibility they feel able to take on. As a registered charity, some people have taken on Trustee responsibilities, others act as resident artist caretakers and key-holders and workshop facilitators, whilst others participate in the programme. These roles can change, so that someone could be in a position of leading or supervising a project but simply a participant in another activity.

We recognise the benefits and value of combining skills, and our membership includes people with a history of being diagnosed with a mental health illness and experience of using mental health support services, along with therapists, local artists, artists exiled from their country of origin, musicians, a retired accountant, a horticultural expert and a picture framer.

Recent cuts to services have meant that people who are outside family, social and occupational networks may not be able to find support in their community, particularly if they exist on a tight budget. As a response to this, we want to create more opportunities for people to be connected to others through art.

We are all volunteers but have been able to create some paid work through Arts Council England and local authority grants.

A Sage artist’s experience – Anonymous:

I have been using art throughout my life in different ways. I began as a musician in northern Iran, and at 7 years old I was already playing the violin. After my father’s death, when I was 17 years old, I became a teacher of Iranian literature in a primary school, and I started a choir. Influenced by communism, I joined the Tudeh Party, ‘the people’s party’, which opposed the Shah’s rule. My involvement cost me six years in prison. Whilst I was there a friend gave me a book on Impressionism. I took up painting and was able to sell my work to buy extra food. After leaving prison I joined a film company as an assistant cameraman, until I set up my own film company with my brother, eventually winning awards for best camerawork in an Iranian international festival. This was my life then. But the revolution forced me to leave everything and move with my family to London.

After so many ups and downs I had what you would call 'a breakdown'. I joined an art therapy class in a day centre, but I didn't want to analyse myself. I was asked so many questions and I felt too old for that. 'It is what it is' – that's my wisdom. But I was interested in other people in the group and I began to paint portraits of them. Another member told me about the arts collective Sage Arts.

I like it here because I have my own space and there's a good feeling – open, not oppressive. After leaving Iran I was led to a place of despair, but hospital for me was 100% worse than the Iranian prison. Someone with my history cannot tolerate a hierarchical or oppressive system. I had already escaped that, and what I needed was compassion and friendship, to give and receive. I found this connection through portraiture and through what I can offer from my experience to others.

My work is deep and thoughtful. It bears the deep scars of a childhood in which I attempted to integrate my faith in God, who I love, with the hypocrisy of the abusive behaviour shown to me by my Christian care-givers. Here lies an imaginary landscape, a bridge between two worlds, where I explore my own private mythological and inner world. Death and the ability to change or not to change are recurrent themes.

Back to the walls! We have exhibited our work in various venues across London and are currently exhibiting 100 artworks in the headquarters of the West London Mental Health Trust. Our intention is to support a dialogue between service-user artists and management by bringing our experience into the heart of the organisation.



Sage artist's experience – Samuel Toussaint:

I am, first of all, a human being, politically aware, and then an artist. I was brought up in a Christian working class family. By the age of 12 I was busking in the West End of London. By the age of 20 I was homeless. I have moved around the English countryside and been involved in the squatting, travelling and illegal rave scene. Throughout this time I have been involved with various theaters, community spaces, gatherings, art studios and other arts-related projects. I now live and work in London with a group of about 70 artists who go by the name of Sage Arts. I have also taught art and am a committed Christian involved in commissions for my local church.

If you would like to visit us or be involved you can contact us at Sagearts@hotmail.co.uk or visit our website www.sagearts.co.uk

Andrea Heath

On behalf of **Sage Community Arts**

* Since this article was written the project has moved to a new venue in West London.

Three Poems by Kaz Reeves

Last stand – one time friend

Like a rich woman
Surrounded by precious things
Yet each one hard to hand,
Dry to mouth,
Aching to a heart
Never able to be Steady
Always racing searching
Grasping to find the fallen
lostness of her life
She stands at the window

Where pretence once held her so
well
Pride that she could keep a good
face on it all
Fallen as the stroke of neural slip
Tracks her wasted life

they are all gone 'way away

Treasures piled everywhere
cannot
Distract the judgement
In their avoidance
However much she has paid is
never enough
They have already left
The last bus has gone and her car
Vandalised. She is too tired to
walk or bike
So stands here at the window at
the window

They always warned her
She didn't listen
She thought if I don't listen

It won't happen I'll manage.
Wrong.
they are all gone 'way, away

She is what they said she was
Not fair
They so right in making her all
She ever longed not to be

Gone
Hope of being different
Only now
She is the different horrid thing
They said she was
They always warned her
No-one will like you
With that face on

*If the wind changes you'll be
stuck*
She is.
Is she?

they are all gone 'way, away

come back
She's sorry

St Pancras International

Where does this grief go?
There is a place for every feeling
A destination, boarded clear
For hate ends in death
And love, life's full stop
Is the very beginning.

Sorrow raw, pukes out of place
And knocks the gob into screams
However silent
No off-mute switch works
Enough for you not to be
Disturbed

See the rushing people
Holding together all they have
Longing to reach safe haven
Or at least the means to go there
Rattling sounds arrive to comfort
There is a carriage for this journey

She sees none

The messiness she carries
Spills out anyway
Averted eyes embarrassed
Split luggage
Seen too much
Wounds that never heal

No home for this child
Pretending she is with someone
Not lost, just waiting
Watch out in case
The polis come!

She tires easily now

Each move a little less certain
Sure it was this halt that
Was to be safe space
She starts to drift to and fro
Occasionally pausing as if
Looking for someone

No place like home

Raw truth

It wasn't the irritation rubbing
Us up wrong
It was the thought, the ache
Of losing one another, that ooze of
fear,
Before she had hardly begun to heal
She had lost other loves, broke
contact,
Never present to them for long.
But to him,
To him she had revealed herself, in
the raw

Honouring that he felt the ache and
mess too
The shame of it, seeping through
every stitch she wore

She wasn't strong, all exposed to fear,
to cruddy smelly hide it away injury
If she lost him too that would be
too much

Touching the raw places
Shows how tender we all are
The balm of this Samaritan oil
The only healing she can feel
Reaching soft as mother's milk
beneath
What lies beneath her soul
A later construct: for now her body
knows enough,

She feels it wasn't long at all, the
centuries
passing in the slow movement of the
love coming and going but always
returning
Foretelling what can become
of the fallen on the road
she waits; will he return to pay the
bill
Never letting on it was a girl who fell
barely present in this shadowed
story
but healed enough to voice recovery.
Just popping in to see how, or should
we now say, who, you are?

The psyCommons by Denis Postle

Origins

I have long been active in the resistance to the state regulation of counselling and psychotherapy. I wrote and published well over 300,000 words on the *elphosis* website, plus a couple of books opposing what I saw as the capture of counselling, psychotherapy and psychology by the state (Postle 2007, 2012).

I was intermittently aware that, over a long period, sustaining dissidence can result in the unconscious absorption of the ethos and even the methods of what is being opposed – that we could come to mirror what offends us. And a devotion to critique can defend us from the awkward realities of devising and implementing a positive programme.

I made one or two half-hearted attempts to quit, but the momentum of the rush to regulate tended to pull me back. My 20-plus years of effective practice, framed in a rigorous form of civic accountability (Independent Practitioners Network) counted for nothing: the Health Professions Council was set on preventing people like me from practising.

However, as with any headlong political campaign, a pause is as good as a rest, and a couple of years back I woke up to a realisation that my vantage point on the psychological professions, some sectors of which are still seeking the endorsement of their expertise by the state, was from the outside. I had quit. A quite painful collapse of solidarity has followed.

I had long viewed UKCP, BPS, BACP, along with the RCP, as walled gardens of professionalised therapy, gated communities with a high entrance fee. But now this vision reversed direction: I saw those professions not as oases of nourishment and care but as deeply problematic. They now looked like enclosures – enclosures of a commons of ordinary wisdom and shared power that enables three-

quarters of the population to get through life without the help of the psy professions. I called this the psyCommons.

The psyCommons

In recent years confidence in the state and markets has looked increasingly misplaced. Whether at home, at work, or in local and national government, there have to be better ways of organising ourselves than those we presently struggle with. They seem daily more and more toxic, inequitable and unsustainable.

One promising option is to look beyond the market and the state, and to revive and revalue the idea of the commons – the atmosphere, the oceans, rivers, forests, seeds, the internet, and our genes – our common heritage, and one that comes with some well-understood commons-style governance.

The psyCommons, a self-sustaining feature of the human condition, is an addition to this list of commons.

I identified two human capacities in the psyCommons: **rapport** – the combination of eye contact, gaze, gesture and body language on which relationships ride; coupled with the phenomenon of **learning from experience** – how we change, survive, recover and flourish. Feedback from a colleague suggested I add **chat** – what we say to each other and to ourselves, and how we make sense of what is going on in our lives.

Between them, these three capacities generate the shared power and ordinary wisdom we need to be psysavvy, to be able to shape how, and with whom we share our lives.

The psyCommons initiative seeks to build a framework for the validation and promotion of ways in which we can all become more psysavvy. (That said, it is important to remember that in the UK something like 45 million people

appear to get through life without needing help from the psychological professions.)

In recent decades we have greatly benefited from better nutrition, better public health and a much more aware approach to bodily self-care. Tens of thousands are capable of running the twenty-six miles of a marathon, whilst more than twenty thousand cyclists recently passed the end of my street on the way to riding a hundred miles. Millions of others run a little, cycle a little, swim a little, dance a little. The body part of the bodymind is increasingly well taken care of. We are living longer.

However, becoming psysavvy doesn't yet receive any of the attention that we give to physical fitness. I argue that becoming psysavvy – psychologically savvy – is as important as paying attention to physical fitness.

But there are obstacles in the way.

Enclosures

As daily life unfolds, our psyCommons of ordinary wisdom and shared power meets innumerable influences that shape how we relate to each other and how we do or don't learn from experience. For example: religion, science, and capitalism.

While much of what was for centuries taken to be God-given – such as sin – has moved towards being seen as a human construction, the absolute truths of religion still have wide appeal. Science, despite the narrowness of its remit, continues to be perceived as a source of Truth rather than as simply a highly specialised form of learning from experience. Alongside, capitalism rewards monetary value and denigrates and ignores local 'use value': market fundamentalism dismisses the social damage it causes as 'externalities' and blinds us to alternatives.

Institutions like these certainly make contributions to

life, but they also tend to deform or distort the daily life of the psyCommons. As do the professions – the law, the military, academia and medicine. Each carries a portfolio of expertise about our ‘shoulds’ and ‘oughts’ and ‘have tos’.

Each of the foregoing creates and sustains the enclosure of the psyCommons. They define the territories of the psyCommons, patent them, copyright them, privatise them, academicise and bureaucratised them. They build fences, install gatekeepers, and charge for access.

The focus of this article is that part of the psyEnclosure which is owned and operated by the psychological professions. Those professions play a central part in the life of the psyCommons, and I believe they impoverish and demean it.

psyEnclosures

As religion’s grip on the psyCommons loosened, the grip of the medical profession replaced it: doctors began to develop psychological knowledge. Psychiatry, psychoanalysis and psychology built professional enclosures so as to promote and protect their knowledge and expertise.

Owned and operated by offshoots of Medicine, those psyEnclosures brought with them the medical ethos – ideas of illness, deficit, dysfunction, diagnosis and treatment. Unavoidable aspects of the human condition such as bereavement, anxiety, attraction, disappointment, resistance to oppression, and even sexual diversity, were seen as ‘illnesses’. The idea of ‘mental illness’ was born, and with it the mirror image, ‘mental health’.

Privileged access to countless meetings with clients enabled the psyprofessions to mine the psyCommons and to extract and process the raw material they found. This raw knowledge was then refined into a variety of expert systems for dealing with that ‘mental illness’ which the professions had discovered. Or had they created it?



The psyCommons, an introduction and definition:
<http://youtu.be/5lipKokm5-A>

All of this extraction and refining was (and still is) held in the tightly policed professional enclosures of psychiatry, psychology, psychotherapy and counselling. As occupations, they work hard to be as prestigious as the professions around them.

These psyprofessions claim exclusive ownership of the expert systems they have developed. In most countries they sought (and mainly succeeded) in having the state endorse their monopolistic possession and stewardship of this knowledge.

While there are undoubtedly lots of caring and generous practitioners, what matters is the downside of these psyprofessions. For they instil in the rest of the population a widespread belief

concerning the nature of difficulties of the human condition: that they constitute a dangerous territory, a wilderness full of mystery and threat – that monsters lurk and swamps can trap the unwary.

And so if anyone takes up residence in this psywilderness, or looks to be about to do so, the community resilience and resource of the psyCommons tends to evaporate. Most likely, ‘qualified’ or ‘expert’ help is sought by means of a referral to one or other of the gated communities of the psyprofessions.

This presumption of danger, and of the need for rescue, is very important. It generates a society-wide taboo about valuing and understanding the emotional and imaginal aspects of the human condition.



The psyCommons and Its Enclosures: Professionalized wisdom and the abuse of power: www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxuFnUuLqyc

Everyone knows that a diagnosis of ‘mental illness’ on a person’s medical record invokes a stigma which is almost impossible to erase. Unsurprisingly, difficulties with the human condition are commonly either concealed or denied.

And because of this, access to professional psyknowledge and expertise is usually the result of a crisis. In fact, it very often requires one. And the crisis is then often prolonged and consolidated by the treatment.

There are certainly exceptions, but the gaze of the professional psypractitioner – especially of those in the NHS and allied services – has been trained to see deficits, dysfunction, pathology and illness. ‘Evidence-based’ measurements of normalcy are likely

to be accompanied by diagnostic ‘category-fitting’, and too often this is followed by biochemical treatment of symptoms.

The psyprofessions tend to ensure that, as a client or a patient, anyone enters their enclosure as a supplicant. It is assumed that the person will passively accept the psyexpert’s gifts. Power-sharing is absent. Professional expertise rules.

This is not to deny the capabilities of any particular expert but to underline how, paradoxically, it contributes to the impoverishment of the psyCommons of ordinary wisdom and shared power.

Diffusion of knowledge back into the psyCommons is inhibited both by the legalised capture of knowledge about the human condition by the psyprofessions

and by the shame and secrecy due to such a contact with the psyEnclosure.

So long as we ensure that distress due to the human condition is seen as illness rather than as pointer to a need for community support, for personal re-evaluation, or for political change, to that extent we can expect to find dependency and despair.

And there is another downside to the enclosures by the psyprofessions. The provision of a psychological service by them can never match the amount and the cost of human condition distress that is likely to be manifest in this or any other psyCommons. Yet the professions who have built and who live in and off the psyEnclosures seem content to maintain this condition of scarcity. We can imagine why: it sustains their political and economic leverage.

psySavvy

Physical fitness – being savvy in knowledge and practice about the body – is increasingly commonplace. Complementing this achievement with a matched increase in psy-fitness – becoming savvy in knowledge and practice about the mind – is both timely and achievable.

By dissolving the psyEnclosures and taking back the psy knowledge – which came from us and which belongs to us – the psyCommons could become abundantly psy-savvy.

Let’s do it!

This is an edited version of the second of four forthcoming videos about the psyCommons. For more information, see the psyCommons blog: psyccommons.wordpress.com

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Does No One Remember A S Neill? by Ros Kane

When juvenile crime's on the rise
In public eyes
Lots of silly women, men
Pontificate and squeal
But does no one remember A S Neill?

The talk's all of discipline, punishment
Coming down heavy
Listen to their sudden zeal!
But why does no one remember A S Neill?

Fighting the child
Putting it in uniform
Knocking it into shape
Imposing the adult will were all anathema
To A S Neill

Being on the child's side
Joining in its anti-social deeds
So it wouldn't have to fight you
So the deeds lost their appeal
These were the methods of A S Neill

He liked, he understood kids
Let them decide some of the rules
Showed them by example
Not by preaching and prayers
At every meal
Such was the way of A S Neill

And it wasn't just Neill
Who freed kids from delinquency
Before him, Homer Lane
After him, David Wills,
Bob Mackenzie, Michael Duane
And others who've tried their hand
In many a land
paul
But these are pioneers,
Get crucified by the State
Or finish their days
In some out-of-the-way private school
Forgotten by nearly all

They wouldn't be bought out
And who was that innovator of old
Who was into turning the other cheek
And was killed for his rebellion
And whose teachings underpin – we are told
Our respected British church, state
And establishment?

The ones who spout about military treatment
Talk in a daze
They've never run a place
Or sat face to face
With kids who've had it hard
Not listened to their lives
Wondered about their worries
Or why they carry knives

If they only knew ... but their ways are of war
Macho to the core
I think they are frightened to feel
No wonder no one wants to remember
A S Neill.

Ros Kane is a psychotherapist who set up carefreekids.org so she could help children with emotional difficulties and give them a chance to find new ways to express their troubles and concerns. A converted minibus, parked in the playground, provides a mobile space where volunteers welcome children to play, draw, talk, and just be themselves while they express and work through their troubles. Some of the volunteers are training to become therapists, some are not, but all of them are able to be with the children without judging or guiding them. Ros started her project in the east London Borough of Waltham Forest, where she and her team now organise between 40 and 50 volunteers who visit 25 primary and secondary schools in the neighbourhood. In addition there are another 40-plus volunteers still in training with carefreekids. Regular study days are held by carefreekids, at the end of which volunteers might be surprised to find themselves joining in with a session of country dancing with music and steps drawn from the many cultures across the world. Buoyed up by the success of the project, Ros has developed a course – Parents of Tomorrow – for teenaged boys and girls, which helps them to think about what it is really like to become a parent, and to understand the emotional needs of babies and children. Her ambition is to get this course included in the National Curriculum.



Messerschmidt & Me by Scott Farlow

I have never met Franz Xaver Messerschmidt. But I feel like I have. He died in August 1783, a little over 185 years before I was born. Also, he was German and I am not. Messerschmidt grew up in Munich, whereas the hop gardens and orchards of Kent and Sussex were my playground. He trained as a sculptor in Graz before becoming assistant professor of sculpture at the Imperial Academy of Vienna, in 1769. I studied landscape architecture at Leeds and Manchester and, after a lengthy period of professional conformity, I now practise as an artist, making imaginative and participatory transformations of the public realm.

So, as an artist so apparently different from me, what is it about Messerschmidt that I identify with? Why does this progressive and cosmopolitan artist have such an appeal for me?

In 1771 he suffered 'confusion in the head', and sadly his expectations of being promoted to the Chair of Sculpture were dashed. After further career disappointments, Messerschmidt finally settled in Pressburg (now Bratislava) where he focused his considerable talent as a craftsman on the production of a series of extraordinary character heads of 'very strange aspect', and for which he is best known.

Like Messerschmidt, my life went less and less well as I moved further into my thirties. I always wanted to be an artist. However, the rules of convention and circumstance determined that the journey to fulfil my aspiration would be more complicated than a walk in the park. For twenty years and more I trudged through life reluctantly accepting my rather unremarkable wanderings. I became an increasingly unwilling participant in my own life and an uncomfortable occupant of my self.

The more I searched for a means of escape, the more entrenched I became in my own delusional existence. The more I felt stuck, the more isolated I became. I was an alcohol-addict. I was living a lie and the only way out was to immerse myself in an abstract state of otherness. Of course, ethanol-induced unconsciousness is not a sustainable, long-term or productive exit strategy. Indeed it is not a strategy at all but the cunning means by which I devolved responsibility for myself. Subconsciously I realised this, and eventually an innate act of self-preservation proved to be one of uncharacteristic and illuminating foresight. Five years ago I caught an early morning train to Aberdeen, and a week later I was admitted to a rehabilitation clinic.

Messerschmidt is said to have had hallucinations, and I had blackouts. So we both suffered from mental confusion, but by bringing many 'divergent elements into harmony' we were reborn as artists who were no longer strangers to ourselves. Ultimately, this proved to be liberating, and our instinctive response to disillusionment and previous disappointments was to make art that is true to ourselves. Like Messerschmidt, I now wear 'an unpretentious hat rather than a self-glorifying wig'. These days I get on with the business of staying clean and sober, and working as an artist. I am usually able to retain control of my conscious resources and avoid falling 'into incoherence, rambling or vacant embroidering'. In many ways, my connection with Messerschmidt is subtle, and it revolves around acceptance, humility and authenticity. By being cast out, we were both set free from oppression. Our work emerges as a layered response to both the experience of exile and a return to familiarity; an antidote to the past and a key driver of the present moment. It broadly engages with the

psychological and geographical hinterlands of the known and the unknown, and it is an expression of our true self. Our work is set against 'the background of the general history of style', or fashion, and confronts many personal issues and social contexts of our time. Ultimately it challenges expectations and preconceptions of us as human beings and artists, as well as those of the viewer and the participant.

I was recently invited by Hannah Hull to participate in an ART vs REHAB focus group entitled: "'The Other" and the Mental Health History of Art Practitioners'. Unlike Messerschmidt, my own mental health background is not explicit in my work, and the focus group was an unexpected catalyst for evaluating whether my past affects my creative motivation and process. For the first time I paused for a moment and thought more deeply about why I do what I do. My ponderings returned me to Messerschmidt and his experiences. I realised that although our lives are separated by nearly two centuries of transformation, and our work occupies distinctly different genres, we are, in many ways, nonetheless the same.

I have slowly realised that for me sobriety and creative practice are symbiotic. I am an outsider and I often work on the edges of places, with people who appear to exist on the margins. I ask people how they feel about where they live or if they feel that they 'fit in' and, in the same breath, I now recognise that I am actually asking the same questions of myself. Is my work, and significantly, where I choose to work, therefore a reflection of how I see myself? Do I identify with the social reality and geographical context of where I

work more deeply than I previously understood? Is my instinctive quest to create a meaningful platform for others also a subconscious means of enriching my own life? Is my practice a process of personal affirmation? Such is the paradox and I must gently – perhaps obviously – conclude that yes, these appear to be true. In which case, my practice is so much more about the state of my mind than I had ever appreciated. There is thus catharsis in my practice, a validation, and a visceral need to do what I do that I had not fully grasped. This is where my life becomes real or authentic for me.

In this sense, I also suspect that the distinctions between artists with mental health issues and those without are not as clear as might be expected. It is this fascinating and revealingly complex process of reflection that now occupies my thoughts, and I wonder if – ever conscious of the proximity of my insanity – my creative spirit keeps me sane. This common purpose is the paradigm.

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This article was written in response to ART vs REHAB, a critical catalyst for those working creatively in addiction, homelessness, criminal justice and mental health. For more information, please visit artvsrehab.com.

Names, a short play by Simon McCormack

This is a short absurdist sketch that explores the nature of creativity within a wider context of mental health in the workplace. It was provoked by the ART vs REHAB focus group, in which we discussed how the mental health history of a practitioner impacts on or informs delivery. I was inspired by the idea of addressing mental health problems and diagnoses without talking about mental health.

The main character in *Names* (Ringtone) is constrained creatively by a demand to fit in, in terms of producing 'scroll-friendly' copy, in subscribing to the office norm, and by the dictates of a profit-driven mobile phone company.

There is conflict driven by the economy of labels, an example of which is Music's 'Gypsy Fire' and Ringtone's 'Forgotten Paper Lantern of a Queer Colour' – a debate positioning the demand for easily accessible yet impoverished signifiers, favoured by Programming, against the artistic, independent and 'difficult to explain' relationship Ringtone has with sounds.

There is a necessity here. Sound – like the individual's experience of mental health problems – is a

thing in itself, experienced at a deeply personal level, yet we require words, common ground, in order to grow in understanding. *Names*, taking place in an isolated and constricted space and driven by a corporate need for quick results, is a sketch in which the right questions are never asked.

The debate may also move into the division of Inspired and Professional – there is a very delicate line to be walked between helping another to explore their own creative voice and directing someone to reproduce what you think their voice should sound like. This argument is touched on in *Names*.



An audio version of this play has been produced by Speech Acts (Janet & John Haney) especially for this issue of *Asylum* magazine. It can be found on the *Asylum* website:
<http://www.asylumonline.net/play/>

We would like to thank actors Derek Dempsey, for playing 'Ringtone'; Christopher Poke, for playing 'Programme'; and John Irvine, playing 'Music'. Thanks also for technical support and sounds from Ri Iyovwaye, Bid, and Denis Postle.

Lights Up. On stage we see three office workers. They are facing the audience, sitting at identical desks (small computer to the right-hand side, a phone on the left). The desks are separated by partitions. Behind them hangs a logo for Elephant Mobile Phones Ltd. The office worker to the left picks up phone and dials. The phone in the middle cubicle rings. The middle office worker picks up phone and answers.

Ringtone Hello. This is Ringtones.
Programme Hi. This is Head of Programming. I need to speak to the guy in charge of ringtones.
Ringtone He's on official business. Can I help?
Programme I hope so. Do you know anything about the new app range?
Ringtone Yeah. What's up?
Programme It's the labels?
Ringtone What about them?
Programme Well. They don't sound like the other labels.
Ringtone How do you mean?
Programme They're not user-friendly.
Ringtone Is this on the Inspired range?
Programme No. No. The Inspired range is perfect. The problem is with the Pro range.
Ringtone That's my range.
Programme Did you head it up?
Ringtone I guess so.
Programme I see. What do you think of sound four?
Ringtone Sound four? No, can't remember.
Programme Do you mind if I get the Music guy on conference?
Ringtone What's this about?
Programme Hold on.
The phone in the right-hand cubicle starts to ring. It is an up-tempo ringtone. The office worker is finishing something on the computer.
Programme Recognise that?
Ringtone Sounds like the Grooves Turbo. Classic tone. Office worker picks up phone.
Music Hello. This is Music.
Programme Hi Music. This is Programmes. I've got Ringtones on conference, ok?
Music Sure.
Programme Was that the Grooves Turbo ringtone?
Music Yup.
Programme Classic.
Music Sure is.
Programme Ringtone thinks it's a classic too.
Ringtone Huh? Yeah. One of the best.
Programme What makes it a classic? Music?
Music Tricky one boss. It could be the break-beat and that descending bass reverb. It's got that darkness moving into light flavour. Funny story – the bass is a recording of my cat snoring. Modulated, of course. Mad really. People seem to like it. I prefer the Grooves Smooth Latin though.
Ringtone Smooth Latin. It's a guilty pleasure.
Programme It's a triumph. It does what it says on the tin.
Music It's both smooth and Latin.
Programme Music, can you bring up sound four on the Pro range?
Music Just a mo.
We hear a double chime
Programme How would you label that, Music?
Music Hey, I just make the sounds.
Ringtone I think I see where this is going.
Programme Bear with me Ringtone. If you had to Music.

Music Oh, I don't know if I can.
Ringtone It's ok. Go ahead.
Music Well. It's an East European chord change. It's a rising tone. There's a bellow effect. Kind of accordion – kind of folksy. I don't know. I feel silly with labels, but, tentatively, Gypsy Fire.
Programme Yeah, I like that. Short, sharp, user-friendly yet descriptive. Now Ringtone, can you explain the journey you took, creatively even, from hearing that sound to naming it Forgotten Paper Lantern of a Queer Colour.
Ringtone It's difficult to explain.
Programme It's not the first time is it?
Music Guys? Am I needed here?
Programme Stay on the line Music. Ringtone here used to work on Themes. Do you remember the big headache last year?
Music The Precision Zen job.
Programme Ringtone? What was The Precision Zen job originally called?
Ringtone I don't really want to get in to this.
Programme He called it The Cum-face Lottery.
Music But it was just a sunflower theme.
Programme Yup.
Music Jesus.
Ringtone I get it, ok, I was finding things hard, but what's wrong with Forgotten Paper Lantern of a Queer Colour?
Music It's got a nice ring to it.
Programme It doesn't do the job.
Ringtone Can't we transcend the job?
Music We're not here to transcend Ringtone. It's in the contract. They ask for a two-tone call-waiting chime, I give them a two-tone call-waiting chime.
Programme Thanks Music. I think you hit the nail on the head.
Ringtone You want me to change it then.
Programme Yes. And while you're at it can you change Mottled Leaves Clinging to Autumn's Tapered Fingers, and The Sound of Two Contradictory Thoughts Being Held, and Daydream Rendered on a Shower Screen. Good God Ringtone – the world doesn't work this way. To hell with it, just change the lot.
Ringtone When do you want the new labels?
Programme Yesterday.
Music Ok then. Bye.
Programme Don't let me down Ringtone.
Ringtone No Sir. Bye.

All three replace phones and return to computer screens.

The End

This creative writing piece was written in response to ART vs REHAB, a critical catalyst for those working creatively within addiction, the criminal justice system, homelessness and mental health. For more information, please visit artvsrehab.com

Some Reflections on Theatre, Psychoanalysis and Verse as Medicine

by Stephen Gee

Studio Upstairs is an art and performance space. People attend once or twice a week for a whole day. They apply independently or are referred by CMHTs or social workers. It was founded in the 1980s by Douglas Gill and Claire Manson, who met on the Goldsmiths Art Psychotherapy course. Their aim was to create an open studio on therapeutic community lines, run by trained therapists. People who attend the Studio become members rather than service users. The therapists are called studio managers. From the outset this represented a deliberate linguistic challenge and helped all those involved with the life of the studio to think through prevailing assumptions in the structures of care in the social and mental health services. There were a number of influences on the ethos of the Studio: phenomenology, psychoanalysis and, following Foucault, an attention to how language can be used to preserve power relations that are often normalised as mere descriptions. The studio was heir to a tradition beginning with RD Laing, and to this day tries to keep alive an alternative to mainstream psychiatry and to the outcome culture so prevalent in the NHS.

I ran a performance group at the Studio for four years, in the early 2000s. My background was in theatre and I had just started a psychoanalytic training. Members came along each week for a day. Some people were regulars, others came and went. The day would start with movement and warm-up exercises, to get used to the space and to each other.

The whole group would work together, as well as in pairs and smaller groups, then perform to each other. We did a lot of improvisation as well as text work. There were often powerful moments in the improvisations, which we all knew could never be reproduced. As in an analytic session, these moments can be described, but the atmosphere, the currents of feeling and layers of meaning can never be fully represented.

To take the analogy with analysis further: what might be stirred up is contained, and the continuity of sessions ensures a certain safety and linkage between one session and the next. The same principle operates for a group. Theatre groups and companies can become rife with rivalries, personal vanities and love affairs. There's also the excitement and confidence that comes from working together. This was no less true of our

group. There's another important factor. The Studio Upstairs held the view that an important part of the therapeutic project was the interface with the public – art exhibitions and, in our case, public performances. The 'asylum' of the rehearsal space would on these occasions open itself to a receptive world outside.

At its best, theatre lends us all experiences of other worlds and states of feeling that we would otherwise not know about. It might be a wonder we'd never imagine or a terror we would take flight from. To avoid jealousy a person might shun intimate relationships altogether. I saw 'Othello' recently at the National Theatre, and witnessed the consequences of extreme jealousy played out in that great tragedy of Shakespeare. The production spared the audience none of the details: the madness that drives a man to kill, the terror of a woman being strangled. The murder of Desdemona was tawdry and horrific.

But, once let into such an experience, in what state do we leave it? How does theatre achieve such intensity and avoid inflicting fear and trauma on the audience? It can't be completely explained, but something in the nature of a great work of art offers a kind of protection. In Shakespeare it is the pacing of the story, the dramatic arc, and the poetry which can articulate horror and other intense emotional experiences in such a way that we leave the theatre elevated rather than depressed. A story similar to that of 'Othello' might appear in *The Sun*, and shut us up in terror and fear of the other. For some, it might become a lurid kind of pornography. Within the Shakespearian drama, we can enter into it and exit from it, moved and even healed.

The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan was a bit like Shakespeare in that, amidst the complexity and obscurity of his work, there were some useful proverbs and sayings for the psychoanalytic practitioner. One was: 'Resistance is always on the side of the analyst'. Put simply, if things are stuck between the analyst and patient, don't blame the patient. The analyst has the responsibility to loosen his own resistance to moving his mind elsewhere: to enter into the matter of the session from another place, and then find a way out of the mutual impasse.

In cases of psychosis, there is another saying adapted from Lacan: 'Metaphor is on the side of the analyst'. This is because, if someone is suffering from psychosis, it may be very difficult for him or her to make use of symbols and metaphors, so the analyst has to keep this in mind and not interpret his or her speech in ways that would either mystify or disturb. I can perhaps give some sense of how this worked in the group by giving two examples.

The first was a failure on my part to heed this dictum of Lacan's, with painful results. I had given one of the members of the performance group a single photocopied sheet of a short extract from Chekhov's play 'The Seagull'. It was the part of Nina, which she was to look over before the next rehearsal, the following week. This member had had some connections to the theatre in the past. The extract contained the lines: 'Why do you say you kissed the ground I trod on? I'm not fit to live. Oh, I'm so tired, I need a rest, a rest. I'm a seagull. No, that's wrong, I'm an actress.'

The next week we met and she was very distressed. An actor might refuse a part at certain times saying something like: 'This is too close to my experience (of loss or grief) at the moment. I don't want to do the part. I can't get enough distance from it in my own life to play it. I won't do it justice.' This member had a much more extreme reaction. She couldn't put the script on one side and say something like the above to me. She reproached me for having given her 'that sheet' the previous week. The 'sheet' and the words on it had become threatening and filled with foreboding. Part of the problem was perhaps taking the 'sheet' home. Had we kept it within the rehearsal space, her emotional reaction might have been recognised and contained.

Another problem here is the realism of the Chekhov text. We were safer with Shakespeare and verse. And the following examples serve to show how Shakespeare's verse can work to help people get a feel for metaphor where none can be drawn on in their own use of speech and language.

On the other hand, I can mention a successful use of theatre. One piece we used was the opening soliloquy in 'Richard the Third':

*'Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this sun of York.'*

There was one young man in the group whose conversation was fragmented though strangely poetic. It was, however, without the rhythm of ordinary sense which facilitates the transactions between people in daily

life. In Shakespeare's verse, rhythm is the key element. It is written in iambic pentameter, and it was this that gave this person a springboard. He memorised it easily and, whatever it meant to him, there was an evident enjoyment in his reciting of the lines. It buoyed him up. His way of speaking was momentarily transformed into a lilting coherence. The structure of the verse, the resounding assonances and rhyme lent him a kind of sense to play with.

As well as benefiting from the medicinal effects of Shakespeare, members of the group would sometimes write their own texts. To an extent, we all carry around private theatres, dramas we play out in our minds and enact unconsciously with our friends and partners. In a psychoanalysis another (the analyst) can enter into this world and help us to interpret some of the more obscure plots we get so painfully stuck in. For some members of the group, breakdown had led to a breach in their internal privacy. Uneasy containment may have become enforced through medication.

Hamlet famously proclaims that there's 'method' in his madness, and on occasion we witnessed 'madness' as creativity. One member gave me a sheet of paper with what might be described as a manifesto on it. It described his concerns about international conflict and his proposed solution. This consisted in a reform to the world financial system. The currencies of the world would be changed. There would be no more pounds sterling, no euros, no dollars, no yen, no roubles, no pesos, but all would be replaced by ... shirt buttons. I read this out as a kind of proclamation, while he moved restlessly around the space. The end of the performance was greeted with applause from the other members and he was delighted to have his views publicly aired in this way. Since the financial crash of 2008, my respect for his humorous diagnosis of the world's ills has grown.

Stephen Gee is a member of The Site for Contemporary Psychoanalysis, and has a private practice in South London.



‘THE SPIRIT OF UTOPIA’ & ‘SANATORIUM’

Who are we? Where are we going? What are we waiting for?

by Isobel Urquhart

‘The Spirit of Utopia’

Utopia, always a social critique of its times, has been all around us recently as we reflect on the various revolutions and mass protests that sprang up with such hopes for better ways of living, better models of society. 2011, said Zizek, was the year we fell to ‘dreaming dangerously’, when radicalism and emancipatory politics seemed to ignite across the entire globe. The young – and some not so young – took to the streets and the tents, certain that they would be the difference they wished for. But their euphoria was not to last. Remember the cluster of tents outside St Paul’s in London – its inhabitants talking, disputing, imagining, claiming ‘This is what democracy looks like’, and how their enthusiasm, their creative energy and their will to make a better society dropped out of the public eye, seemingly overwhelmed by incoherence, conflict and compromise? Remember how we watched with mounting excitement and dread as the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, and the protests in Greece and Spain, rose and fell, in pulses of emancipation and repression, euphoria and disappointment? Remember the mass protests of workers, students and sixth-formers, their kettled bitterness still in our ears:

*Hard to imagine blue plaques for us/
troublemakers and shit-starters/commemorated in
elegant white letters/anarchists and atheists, who
dreamed/of dismantling those grand houses/brick by
brick.**

Perhaps responding to these times, as its summer exhibition in 2013 the Whitechapel Gallery presented ‘The Spirit of Utopia’, in which artists known for their commitment to social change exhibited their reflections. According to Owen Hatherley, utopian art should be strange, inspiring and disturbing. It should disturb the comfortable world and society in which we often reside unquestioningly, while simultaneously unsettling our assumptions about the forms and purposes of art. Strange creatures should emerge from our dreaming imaginations which, in the light of the everyday, in equal measure appal and fascinate. Art can do this, and it often has. Sometimes this is by means of shock tactics, but also through more subtle subversions and provocations, for example by playing games with our usual expectations of how to be a visitor to an art gallery, or with what we think art ‘does’ for people.

It was the latter approach that was more prominent in the Whitechapel this summer where, according to its own publicity, the exhibition was ‘a remarkable series of installations and events [which] engage us in playful, provocative and creatively pragmatic models for social change’.

For some, however, the exhibits seemed a bit tame – merely curious rather than wildly strange. For them, the exhibits neither disturbed nor inspired: they amounted not to visions of Utopia but to something whimsical, even charming – but quite incapable of smashing or overthrowing economic systems or

oppressive governments. But perhaps these critics should have paid more attention to the title of the exhibition. Rather than the 'hard analysis of economy and state' that made at least one wonder where the Marxists were when you needed them, what was on offer was 'the spirit' of Utopia – something condensed or distilled, its essence preserved in the cautiously respectful white cube, its heady perfume faint but still evocative.

The spirit of Ernst Bloch

The title of the exhibition echoed the book of the same name, written by Ernst Bloch in 1917. His words introduce the exhibition: 'Who are we? Where are we going? What are we waiting for?' Thus, the show invited comparison between two historical moments, both emerging a decade or so into a new century. It contrasted modern utopian visions with that earlier epoch, when the artistic imagination was captured by what now seems a very different kind of optimism. That was when it seemed that, as Hobsbawm put it, '*political action was the way to improve the world*'. As the 20th century unfolded, however, with no marked improvement in the persistence of war, inequality, persecution and humanity's never-ending cruelty, the utopian imagination darkened and its proposals fell into discredit as unforgivably simplistic and naïve. On the other hand, the current triumphalism of the neoliberal capitalist world seems to have created a dystopic vision of greed and self-interest where we ravage the land we stand on and poison the air we breathe, and continue to find ourselves conflicted and unhappy within ourselves and with others.

Nevertheless, since the financial crisis of 2007–8 we have also witnessed extraordinary events as popular reaction responded to what, at least for a brief moment, appeared to be the busted flush of capitalism. New answers were demanded, and the utopian spirit seemed reborn in political revolution and mass civil protests, or in the occupations of Wall Street and St Paul's, with their euphoric slogans: 'This is what democracy looks like' and 'We are the 99 per cent'.

For the artists in the Whitechapel exhibition, social change seems to be conceived very differently. In contrast to the omnipotence of those universalist 'big theories' which characterised the 20th century, today's Utopia seems a quieter place, its optimism more modest, its vision more pragmatic. The exhibits have nothing of the early 20th century's sweeping call to 'erase all the traces', in a ground-zero approach to imagining a better world. In contrast, their human-scale exploration of the utopian stays close to the everydayness of possibility in people's lives in the world as it is – suggesting small repairs to our loss of connection to the earth, teasingly challenging our consumerist assumptions, or giving expression to the yearnings for a world in which people could better relate to themselves and to each other.

'Sanatorium'

If both art and politics are about imagining and making change, so is therapy. And so we come to 'Sanatorium', a work in which, using ideas drawn from therapy and politics, the Mexican artist Pedro Reyes explicitly links performance art with an intention to change the world. He has said of 'Sanatorium' that a certain kind of art, performing and playful, works on people as 'a warm-up phase that prepares us for change'.

In 'Sanatorium', Reyes creates a mock-up of a cool, turquoise green and white clinical setting. Six rooms each offer a different 'therapy', facilitated by volunteers ('therapists') in white lab coats. Challenging the pharmaceutical profiteering that lies at the heart of how we currently palliate our ills in modern urban society, 'Sanatorium' asks the question: How can we heal ourselves of our emotional ills by using the rituals and symbolism of traditions of healing and therapy to imagine alternative ways of dealing with what is missing from the lives we often feel forced to lead, and force others to lead, under the brutal economics of capitalism? Psychotherapy has often been criticised for its focus on adapting the individual to the very society that makes her ill. However, a core utopian influence on Reyes' creative expression is the inventor of psychodrama, Moreno. And he contends that: '*A truly therapeutic procedure should have as its objective nothing less than the whole of mankind.*'

With 'Sanatorium', Reyes invents a space in which people could join in a performance experiment in alternative ways, so as to connect with others and with one's self. Drawing on the educational ideas and participatory theatre workshops of Freire and Boal, Reyes prefers to say that to take part is to engage in an imaginative game that neither pathologises nor medicates our dis-ease with our lives. In the unconditionality of play, the activities in 'the Sanatorium' offer opportunities to be spontaneous and creative in ways similar to the 'spect-actor' of Boal's work: the spectator becomes an actor. It is the participants who actually make the artwork. They provide the material: their own stories, the questions and the discussions for the events. Until they are in action, 'the Sanatorium' is just a wooden construction. Just as in a Brechtian play, even though participants are aware of the set-up, that doesn't prevent it from doing the trick. Participants decide to believe temporarily, just as when people agree to play a fantasy game or share a joke.

Activities in 'the Sanatorium' ranged from reflectively curating a museum of your own lifetime by using a range of small objects; asking questions about life and living, and then rolling giant dice-

boulders that offer up for collective discussion oracular quotations from the various schools of wisdom of the world; a room where, in private, you can confront and exert physical revenge on a life-size dummy standing for someone who has harmed you; or uncovering the secrets of strangers, hidden in bottles.

If this fulfils the expectation that utopian art should be strange, disturbing and inspiring, it should be noted that visitors discovered how much easier it was than they supposed to play together spontaneously, to help each other, and to share their feelings. Over and again they reported an unfamiliar pleasure in finding themselves connecting with complete strangers, sometimes quite profoundly. When they were given the space and time, people could focus on an aspect of their lives that they felt they had not addressed: their love and concern for others, their need for a cathartic closure to anger or hurt, a chance to step outside their day-to-day living and reflect on where they had come from, where they were going, what mattered to them most.

By far the most popular of the individual therapies was the last room, the Museum of Hypothetical Lifetimes. This is where, by using small objects displayed on shelves in a model exhibition space, the individual curates aspects of their own (potential) lifetime. People said they found this restorative. They were intrigued about what emerged unconsciously, beyond their rationalised choices of items, and where to place them. They took photographs of their finished 'exhibition', to reflect upon later.

This need to spend time thinking about one's origins, about what had happened in one's life, about where one was going or wanted to go, is not unfamiliar to therapists. It seemed to tap into the same desire for making sense of one's self or life, a purpose that sometimes brings people into therapy, and is the colophon to the exhibition: Who am I? Where am I going? What am I waiting for? Certainly there seemed to be an eagerness that isn't answered in today's society to have this kind of space and time, and in which individuals might perhaps find their own utopian visions of how a life, and others' lives, might be better spent.

And so 'Sanatorium' seemed to enable the participants to recognise that there was something missing from everyday lives that are so busy, so brusque, so unable to take the time to notice what we're feeling or what our living is doing to our emotional and relational lives. By providing these brief and playful interludes, 'Sanatorium' allowed people to reflect on the disavowals that inure us most of the time to what hurts us – where we both know and don't know that we feel alienated from the earth and from each other; where we both know and forget about the vast numbers of people who suffer from depression, loneliness, anxiety and disappointment, disregarded and unattended; where we

both know and don't know how suppressed rage and frustration explodes from time to time in 'inexplicable' violent outbursts, riots or suicides.

The value of art

Is this all pointless daydreaming, a rather futile arty-farty activity? Should we be harder, more like the tough realists who come 'grinning into our paradise', as Brecht has it, knocking back our illusions, refusing us our soft fantasies?

For answer, we can turn to Lenin, who argued against the tough realists in his own party, and allowed that dreaming was essential. In *What Is To Be Done?*, he writes: '*... if man were completely deprived of the ability to dream in this way, if he could not from time to time run ahead and mentally conceive, in an entire and completed picture, the product to which his hands are only just beginning to lend shape, then I cannot at all imagine what stimulus there would be to induce man to undertake and complete extensive and strenuous work in the sphere of art, science, and practical endeavour The rift between dreams and reality causes no harm if only the person dreaming believes seriously in his dream, if he attentively observes life, compares his observations with his castles in the air, and if, generally speaking, he works conscientiously for the achievement of his fantasies. If there is some connection between dreams and life then all is well.*'

One critic commented wryly that 'The Spirit of Utopia' represented 'a vista of broken dreams'. However, returning to Bloch, we might argue that these dreams, tentative, charmingly comical or playful as they seem, can be understood as fragments of a utopian future, a hidden potential lying dormant in the present. Reyes imagines a future for 'Sanatorium' as a travelling roadshow, pitching up in a dusty town in Mexico, as it were, for people simply to come along and play a game of dreaming dangerously, in order to change the world they inhabit: asking the big questions, sharing fears and hopes, reflecting on what a life might be and mean – 'in order to work conscientiously for the achievement of those fantasies', as Lenin put it.

Our imaginations about what Utopia would be like are inextricably tied up with our commitment to how to bring about that better world, which is our politics. Those connections are what 'Sanatorium' hopes to leave its visitors with, and why the imaginative vision of Utopia, even when housed in the polite world of a private art gallery like the Whitechapel, is vital.

* Decca Muldowney: *The Bright Day is Done* <http://www.scribd.com/doc/173321725/The-Bright-Day-is-Done-Zine>

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“Art opens your eyes to different connections. It makes you see the world differently.” Start2 user

Keeping well in mind and body is something we all aspire to. Many studies suggest that having meaningful and active lives is the key to wellbeing and happiness. Harnessing natural creativity can be a powerful way to build these into our lives and enhance our sense of wellbeing, too. The more we learn about wellbeing, the more we understand that using our natural creativity is fundamental to a sense of wellness. Creative activities can build many transferable skills that cross over into daily life and help with self-management.

Start2 is an engaging online wellbeing resource that gives us tools to understand how we ourselves can boost and maintain positive mental health. This unique resource shows new ways to approach and take control of our lives, through learning to employ the instinctive creativity that we are all born with.

Start2 uses easy and enjoyable creative activities, mindfulness, Occupational Therapy exercises and imaginative physical health activities.

When talking about ‘creativity’ so many people say “I’m not artistic”, usually followed by “I can’t draw”. However, ‘being creative’ isn’t specifically about artistic ability but more to do with the wider ability to ask questions, make unusual connections and come up with imaginative approaches to problem solving. Quite simply, opening ourselves up to live life more creatively allows us to see things differently, and can benefit us in all areas of our life.

Creative activity challenges us to learn new things and build upon existing skills and knowledge. Studies show that creative activity can build self-esteem and confidence, concentration and focus. It stimulates curiosity in the world around us and helps with feelings of connection to our surroundings, and to other people. It offers the chance to express ourselves, explore our own identity, and develop new thinking skills that in turn build positive life skills. Research shows that creative activity can help with pain management and relaxation. By making creative and artistic activity a part of our regular routine we can strengthen, repair and revitalise ourselves, and build up resistance to old enemies, stress and anxiety. We can even help our immune systems! In a well-known study from the Behavioral Medicine Clinic, Harvard University researchers showed that when we take part in creative activity, it can slow heartbeat and reduce blood pressure. This may be due to the fact that expressive artistic activity releases neurochemicals, including endorphins, into the brain.

These neurochemicals assist deep concentration, slow down pulse and breathing, and boost the immune system through what is termed ‘The Relaxation Response’.¹

Another fascinating and very useful effect of creative activity is to heighten our problem-solving abilities. During some research with groups of women attending art workshops, occupational therapist Jennifer Creek showed that exercising creative muscles through arts activities actually stimulated problem-solving skills at the same time, probably because the brain becomes used to thinking in new ways and viewing situations from new angles.²

“Doing the activities has opened my mind. I notice things changing around me now.” Start2 user

Start2 has been developed by the arts and wellbeing team at Start, an award-winning NHS service, which is part of Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust. The Start method aids recovery and wellbeing through arts and gardening courses, with a unique emphasis on creativity. The courses encompass self-care techniques, and are designed to build on emotional resilience and insight into personal resources. This allows individuals to move on independently from the service, with resources that work for them in line with their aspirations and goals. Start2 is an extension of this service. It takes Start’s recovery model and shares it more widely as a free 24/7 online resource that anybody can use to benefit their wellbeing.

Start2 encourages users to regularly pursue creative activities to build on inner resources to enhance their wellbeing. Like many things, talking about making creative activity a regular part of life is easier said than done. Where to start? With this in mind, Start2 developed the Wellbeing Thermometer. This is a uniquely adapted version of the validated outcome measure, the Short Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS), and has been created with a clinical psychiatrist and psychologist. It is an interactive tool that provides us an easy way to navigate around the resource and, crucially, allows us to log, measure and understand patterns of our wellbeing. Alongside the Wellbeing Thermometer sits the Start2 Mentor, which offers guidance around wellbeing scores, gives advice and signposts us to a choice of three creative activities to suit us best. A Wellbeing Map shows all historical ‘Temperatures’, which can be an effective way of sharing and talking about our mental health with others, whether a friend, family member, carer or professional.

Start2 activities are categorised under the themes: ‘Lifestyle Coaching’, ‘Stress Busting’ and ‘Brain Boosting’, and give clear indications of what we can expect from that section. Each section is broken down further into particular wellbeing areas, for example,

'Relating to Others Confidently' and 'Be Active.' Under these there are a range of creative activities to choose from to benefit us in that area. Wellbeing benefits are clearly stated, offering practical examples of the benefits to our daily lives. Following completion of an activity we're encouraged to fill in a Reflective Diary, which allows us to further build a portfolio of activities to suit us. Activities can be repeated as many times as we would like – maintaining positive mental health and giving inspiration for creative projects, gifts or simple enjoyment.

Start2 is at the heart of innovation in use of digital technologies to open up self-care and reduce pressure on services. Start2 offers palatable and non-stigmatising resources to support wellbeing. Its presentation of everyday attention to wellbeing as desirable and normal is a big step forward in encouraging the public to engage with their mental health.

Being online, the Start2 resource has wide appeal and is used by individuals, in one-to-one and group settings. A broad variety of professionals and the public use the service worldwide.

People's ideas of what is relaxing and enjoyable varies, so the Start2 team have made sure there is a vast assortment of creative activities available to choose from, suitable for a wide age range. The Start2 resource houses exciting online interactive features, including:

- an animation generator
- e-cards
- virtual galleries and museums
- curator talks
- video and audio alongside step-by-step guidance and expert tips.

A user can explore over 100 evidence-based creative activities, together with insights into the particular wellbeing benefits embedded within them. There's something for everyone, with a range of creative writing, seasonal spotter guides, textiles, collage, paper craft, art appreciation, photography, drawing and painting and mood boosting activities. Non-interactive activities can be downloaded and printed to do away from the computer.

Users can register privately and for free, and enjoy their own private Ownzone. Here a person can set goals and track their progress, store animations, uploaded images, Media Album slideshows, Wellbeing Temperature and Reflective Diary archives and bookmark favourite activities. Whether people prefer to make use of Start2 online or offline, they can begin to build up a 'wellbeing journal' of activities which they enjoy and which they know to benefit them.

Start2 has been received positively by users with successful pilots by a number of professionals, professional services and service users, attracting

feedback as an accessible tool to benefit mental health. What some people say:

"I really enjoyed using Start2 and I would recommend it to anyone looking for something different. There is a variety of activities on offer ... I feel it has helped with my depression and anxiety as it gave me an outlet to be creative, as well as having interesting features." Service User, Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust

"It has been both personally very beneficial and professionally fascinating to explore the exercises and resources within Start2. I think this is a really valuable resource for helping people to explore and build on internal resources they may not have known they had, plus to engage with real world resources 'out there' which can enrich their lives and wellbeing. I have already begun to recommend Start2 to others and hope this is something that can become a dynamic and developing resource in the months and years ahead." A Clinical Psychologist

"Start2 is another therapeutic tool for patients struggling with mental wellbeing and I welcome the focus on positive activities. This is a great approach. It has inspired me to be more positive with people and start to think about wellbeing not just problems. Keep up the good work and get the arts out there." A GP

by Tamzin Forster

1 Benson, H & Klipper, M Z (2000) *The Relaxation Response*. Avon Books.

2 Creek, J (2001) Measuring the outcomes of a creative activity. *Mental Health Occupational Therapy* 6 (2) 18–20.

Start your own journey to live life more creatively here: www.start2.co.uk Join us: www.facebook.com/start2art Follow us: @start_2 Start2 is an online creative wellbeing service using evidence-based methods. The service offers to the public a range of expertly designed creative activities that have been proven to benefit mental and physical wellbeing.

Asylum News: AVATAR THERAPY FOR HEARING VOICES

Funded by the Wellcome Trust, an avatar system that enables people with schizophrenia to control the voice of their hallucinations is being developed by researchers at UCL. It is claimed that the computer-based system could provide quick and effective therapy that is far more successful than current pharmaceutical treatments, 'helping to reduce the frequency and severity of episodes of schizophrenia'.

A pilot study of this approach involved sixteen patients who had up to seven 30-minute sessions of therapy. Nearly all the patients reported an improvement in the frequency and severity of their voices. The avatar does not address the patients' voices directly, but the study found that there is improvement, as an overall effect of the therapy. After experiencing sixteen, thirteen and three-and-a-half years of auditory hallucinations, three of the patients stopped hearing voices completely.

The UCL team has now received a £1.3 million Translation Award from the Wellcome Trust to refine the system and conduct a larger scale, randomised study so as to evaluate this novel approach. It will be run at King's College London's Institute of Psychiatry.

The first stage in the therapy is for the patient to create a computer-based avatar. This is done by choosing the face and voice of the entity they believe is talking to them. The system then synchronises the avatar's lips with its speech, enabling a therapist to speak to the patient through the avatar, in real time. The therapist encourages the patient to oppose the voice, and gradually teaches him or her to take control of the hallucinations.

Julian Leff, Emeritus Professor in Mental Health Sciences at UCL, leads the project and developed this therapy. He says:

"Even though patients interact with the avatar as though it was a real person, because they have created it, they know that it cannot harm them, as opposed to the voices, which often threaten to kill or harm them and their family. As a result the therapy helps patients gain the confidence and courage to confront the avatar, and their persecutor.

"We record every therapy session on MP3 so that the patient essentially has a therapist in their pocket which they can listen to at any time when harassed by the voices. We've found that this helps them to recognise that the voices originate within their own mind and reinforces their control over the hallucinations."

The larger-scale study began enrolling patients in July 2013. The first results of this study are expected towards the end of 2015.

Professor Thomas Craig of King's College London's Institute of Psychiatry, who leads the bigger trial, says:

"Auditory hallucinations are a very distressing experience that can be extremely difficult to treat successfully, blighting patients' lives for many years. I am delighted to be leading the group that will carry out a rigorous randomised study of this intriguing new therapy with 142 people who have experienced distressing voices for many years.

"The beauty of the therapy is its simplicity and brevity. Most other psychological therapies for these conditions are costly and take many months to deliver. If we show that this treatment is effective, we expect it could be widely available in the UK within just a couple of years as the basic technology is well developed and many mental health professionals already have the basic therapy skills that are needed to deliver it."

Worldwide, schizophrenia is diagnosed for about 1 per cent of the population. The most common symptoms are delusions (false beliefs) and auditory hallucinations (hearing voices). People's lives are often devastated – their ability to concentrate is severely impaired and they find it impossible to work and to sustain social relationships. Even with the most effective anti-psychotic medication, around one in four of those diagnosed with schizophrenia continue to suffer from disabling persecutory auditory hallucinations.

Current guidelines from NICE recommend schizophrenia is treated using a combination of medication and talking therapies, such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). However, in the UK fewer than 10 per cent with a schizophrenia diagnosis have access to psychological therapy.

Ted Bianco, Director of Technology Transfer and at the time of reporting, Acting Director of the Wellcome Trust, said: "At a time when many companies have become wary about investing in drug discovery for mental health, we are delighted to be able to facilitate the evaluation of an alternative approach to treatment based on the fusion of a talking therapy with computer-assisted 'training'. In addition to the attraction that the intervention is not reliant on development of a new medication, the approach has the benefit of being directly testable in patients. Should the results of the trial prove encouraging, we expect there may be further applications of the basic strategy worth exploring in other areas of mental health."

Avatar therapy helps silence voices in schizophrenia.
UCL News 29 May 2013.

Letter to the Editor

Struggling for community: A letter in response to Meg Kelly's article criticising a PA house

It was with a mixture of sadness and dismay that I read Meg Kelly's article, 'Out of Sight', on her experience of living in a Philadelphia Association house (*Asylum* 20:3, pp. 17–19). Sadness that this was her experience of her time there, but dismay too, in that I simply did not recognise our houses in Meg's description.

I write, I should make clear, as someone who was drawn to the PA in part because of its houses. I was involved in setting up the Freegrove Road house in 1995, and have now worked there for 10 years. With the help of colleagues, I wrote a book, *An Uneasy Dwelling* (PCCS Books, 2010), because the houses are unique and deserve to be celebrated.

Treatment?

The central point of difference between us is the idea of treatment. Contrary to what Meg says, we are not involved in treatment; we have no treatment plans, no programme of activities such as cleaning, shopping or cooking, no timetables. Rules are kept to the minimum for the wellbeing and continuation of the house, beyond the time any resident is there: pay the rent, do not do violence to other residents or the house and, yes, come to the house meetings and go to your own therapy.

There is no treatment but there is what I would call 'a therapeutic work' of the house, and people coming have to engage with this.

The meetings are there to talk about anything and everything to do with the life of the house and the individuals in it. Without them, the community would not exist. It's a fantasy to think the community would somehow cohere or come together of its own accord, spontaneously, organically. Of course, people come together outside of the meetings, but there is a subtle dialectic between the two. They need each other.

The meetings are also a way of trying to ensure fair play. The houses, as with any other group of people, can give rise to a subtle, or even not so subtle bullying or struggle for power, or even just to the exclusion of certain people. The house meetings are places where everyone can, over time, find their voices, have their say. I have seen this happen time and time again.

Of course, if people are in a bad way or just need time away, no one is going to force them to come. But if people have a real problem with them, then maybe the house is not the right place. No one is trying to control anyone. This is the way we work. In the end, coming to one of our houses is a choice. No one would claim that it suited everyone.

Power

Meg talks of a 'stark imbalance of power' in the houses. Yes, there is a massive difference in the status of house therapist and that of house resident. But power? Power has to be power to do something, but in the case of our houses I'm not sure what this power amounts to. We, the house therapists, do not have the power to say who comes to the houses or who does not, nor do we have the power to order people to leave. (Meg says we 'vet' potential residents. We don't. We meet them to see if the house is a place they might benefit from, or if they are looking for something else altogether.) Power is something shared with residents, as it ought to be.

Where there *is* a huge imbalance is that the house therapists have massive *responsibilities* – for the wellbeing of all the residents, for the care of the house, and for its continuation. We are responsible, too, to the Philadelphia Association, as a charity which is in turn responsible to the Charity Commission. We do not operate in a vacuum. Meg speaks of a denial of the 'autonomy of community', but this is a misunderstanding of the status of the houses. They are not, and cannot be, autonomous. They exist because of the Philadelphia Association which brought them into being, and they have continued to exist because of that relationship. Residents, however long they may stay, and however much they make look after the house, are sooner or later going to be moving on.

Experience

The house therapists are not experts, and none of us would claim to be, but we do have *experience* and none of us would pretend that we don't. We have considerable experience of being with people who are disturbed and distressed, sometimes extremely so, and, over the years, we have come to have some idea of what may be helpful and unhelpful in engaging with them. Of course, residents have experience too, and, time and time again, we have seen individuals take up key roles, whether in periods of crisis, or over the longer term in a more daily way, when they have held the house together. Again, there is a subtle dialectic at work here. The houses would not survive without the active involvement and care of residents, but this needs the context of a bigger presence – the PA in the shape of the house therapists.

Psychiatry

I find it sad that Meg shows no awareness that the PA houses do not live in a vacuum. We live in a context that is not of our making, and this is particularly true of our relationship with psychiatry. The early PA houses in the 1960s and early 70s, came into existence as part of a movement that was questioning the assumptions of psychiatry. Now, biological psychiatry is dominant as never before and the range of psychiatric

intervention has expanded to an unprecedented scale. More and more people are diagnosed as having something wrong with them, and frightening numbers are on some sort of medication. Many people come to our houses with extensive psychiatric histories, 10 or even 20 years, and on medication. It would be irresponsible not to engage with psychiatric services. There is a lot of simplistic thinking around about medication, as though it's always bad and as though people should, somehow, just come off it. Real life is a lot more complicated.

There always seemed to me a complete abdication of care and responsibility involved in some of the more extreme anti-psychiatry positions, such as those of Thomas Szasz. When I was worried sick about someone who had left the house in a state of confusion and distress and who I considered to be in real danger of killing himself, I was relieved to get a call from the police saying they had arrested him in a train station. And, yes, when he threatened to break my jaw in the police station where I had gone to meet him, I was relieved that the police took him away.

Call this 'meshing with disciplinary institutions' if you want, but to me it is common sense. I have a right not to be assaulted, and the resident in this case was saved from ending up in prison.

Sometimes, sadly, solidarity is not enough.

Other voices

I said at the start I was saddened that Meg's experience had been as it was. But we also need to remember that many others who have passed through our houses have had very different experiences. They include people whose lives have been saved by the time they spent in our houses. More often people have been able to make significant changes to their ways of being in the world. When our colleague, Bruce Scott, contacted as many ex-residents as he could to talk to them about their experiences, this was overwhelmingly what he found. And, yes, sometimes people had had terrible struggles there – with other residents, with the house therapists – but they had, in the end, benefited.

A fantasy of permissiveness?

Meg doesn't make this explicit but I get a strong sense of something underlying her account, what a colleague calls 'a fantasy of permissiveness', the idea that everything is permitted, or should be. But we cannot in the houses permit chronic neglect, say, let alone serious damage to people; we cannot allow bills to accumulate; or endless nuisance to neighbours. *Everything* cannot be allowed and this, again, is why we have the structures in place that we do, that Meg so objects to – so that these things can be talked about. What are the limits

of tolerance, what can be permitted, what, above all, is helpful?

Meg starts her article with a quotation from Hugh Crawford, an important figure in the PA in the 1980s, especially around its houses: 'We propose merely not to silence the unspeakable'. But this did not mean that *anything* was permitted. This was the man, it should be remembered, who would, if he felt someone's presence or behaviour was unhelpful to the household, simply tell them to fuck off.

Fearless speech

Meg's account of her time in the house is clearly influenced by the thinking of the French philosopher, Michel Foucault. Personally, I don't have a lot of time for Foucault – his cavalier attitude to the facts of history, his endless repetitive mantras about power, the iron cage of social control he found everywhere he looked. But in 1983, the year before he died, Foucault gave a series of lectures in Berkeley on the subject of fearless speech – what the Greeks called *parrhesia*. This I do find valuable in thinking about what we do.

I am not concerned with the problem of 'the truth', Foucault said, but with the problem of the *truth-teller, or of truth-telling as an activity*, who is able to tell the truth, about what, with what consequences, and with what relations to power. The person who practises *parrhesia* has courage, is someone who takes a risk.

There is also implicit in the idea of *parrhesia*, the concept of duty: it is something we have to do. It's important also to say that *parrhesia* has nothing in common with being provocative just for the sake of it. It's not about being reckless, either.

To me this is part of what we are about in the houses, as we are in therapy. We try to make possible this truth-telling about the soul, and for us to be able to speak truthfully in our turn. We provide a space where people may come to speak fearlessly and where we, too, may speak fearlessly. We hold out an invitation to be truthful.

Paul Gordon

Asylum

the magazine for democratic psychiatry

Spring 2014
Volume 21
Number 1
£4.00

Sales and subscriptions

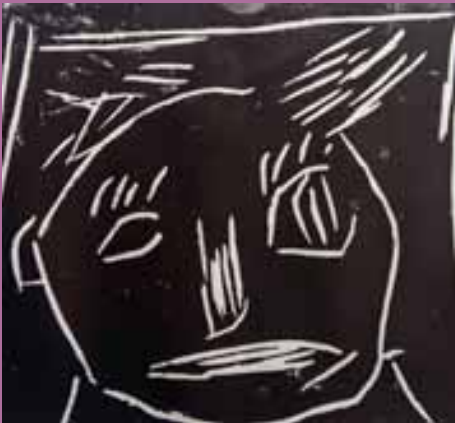
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