

Welcome, stranger

Spectre of the stranger: towards a phenomenology of hospitality

Manu Bazzano

Sussex Academic Press,

2012, 164pp, £16.95

ISBN 978-1845195380

Reviewed by Jeff Harrison



This book is not an easy read but, for readers who rise to its challenge, it should be both rich and rewarding. The very subtitle forewarns of its ambitions and scope: 'towards a phenomenology of hospitality'. Drawing on an impressive, if daunting, array of material and disciplines – Zen, political theory, psychology, philosophy – it is an argument for radical alterity, for the fundamental otherness of the other, and addresses the ethical repercussions of that stance.

The central theme is the need to resist the inclination to tame – ie make same – the other. Bazzano argues against our tendency to 'place' others – to assimilate them into our own epistemological models, philosophies and theories of relationship. This is not guaranteed in the relational fields of the intersubjective or the dialogic, which can all too readily bolster the sense of self, seeing the other only from one's own viewpoint.

Fluidity and plurality are valued beyond any such totalising perspective. As Bazzano argues, much humanistic psychotherapy has retreated to ideas of unity and depth and away from Rogers' original rebuttal of them and espousal of exteriority, of engagement with the world of others.

'I' emerges, then, through a creative encounter with the other in an 'intimate vertigo' (p56) of hospitality and friendship, and such a quality of contact can only happen if both parties are in the 'stream of living-and-dying' (p25), where a substantial self and secure, self-defensive knowledge have no place. Acting ethically is, therefore, a kind of creative rupture – a breaking open of heart and mind.

This book gives the theoretical background for such a vision. More impressively, in no small part thanks to the demands it makes of the reader, it also manages to give a real sense of what that rupture might feel like.

Because, at its heart, this is a book about difference and respect, it has much to offer those working in the field of psychotherapy. The prose is often dense, but also provocative and at times playful. While those familiar with the ideas of, say, Levinas would certainly have a head start, anyone willing to bracket their own preconceptions, in true phenomenological style, will find it valuable and potentially transformative. *Jeff Harrison is a practising psychotherapist*

Crossing cultures

Counseling across the cultural divide: the Clemmont E Vontress reader

Roy Moodley, Lawrence Epp and Humair Yusuf (eds)

PCCS Books, 2012, 380pp, £22

ISBN 978-1906254490

Reviewed by Divine Charura



Clemmont E Vontress has been a pioneer and scholar in the field of multiculturalism for over 40 years. This collection of introductory commentaries, Vontress's own writings and those of other leading practitioners and theorists in this arena,

provides an opportunity for the reader to explore the building blocks of his existential approach to working with cultural difference.

The first five chapters outline Vontress's personal perspective on cross-cultural counselling and discuss the factors that influence, interact with and impact on the counselling relationship in a cross-cultural context, such as racial barriers, age and social class.

The next four chapters are concerned with counselling in practice, specifically with African-Americans, and discuss Black psychology and how experiences such as racism and family/societal dynamics can impact on the client's way of being in the world and on the client-counsellor relationship.

UK readers working with other minority ethnic groups may find this section has limited application to a UK context. However the prolific and immensely useful exploration of the existential approach to cross-cultural counselling that follows in the next section (chapters 10 to 13) would be useful for counsellors working anywhere across the cultural divide. Given the complexity of existentialist philosophy, I found this section exceptionally informative, clear and easy to follow.

Chapters 14 to 16 explore Vontress's ideas about traditional healers and healing and their importance in the panorama of holistic healthcare.

The last section of this book (chapters 17 to 22) explores cross-cultural counselling internationally: in Canada, the UK, the Caribbean, Francophone-

Africa, the US and South Africa. Here authoritative voices discuss the application of Vontress's ideas in their own country and context.

While much of Vontress's writing is concerned with the US context and the experience of African-Americans, I have used this book when teaching on counselling modules in the UK, and have found it readily applicable in British and wider international arenas. It is an essential read for all counsellors for the light it throws on the interplay of culture and ethnicity as critical variables in therapeutic processes. *Divine Charura is a Senior Lecturer in Counselling and Psychotherapy at Leeds Metropolitan University*

Dealing with depression

Depressive illness: the curse of the strong

Tim Cantopher
Sheldon Press, 2012,
128pp, £7.99
ISBN 978-1847092359
Reviewed by Anne Gilbert



I was irritated by the title before the review copy of this book even arrived: it seemed to imply that depressive illness affects only 'the strong'. To my surprise and relief, I discovered that Cantopher defines 'the strong' as ordinary people who have worked too hard for too long, resulting in depressive illness. Indeed, he argues that some

of the people most vulnerable to depression are teachers, social workers and others working on the frontline of our public services.

Against my expectations, I found this a relevant, highly readable and sympathetically written self-help book, with its repeated message that it's not your fault if you become ill with depression.

Cantopher begins by differentiating depressive illness (clinical depression) from simply feeling depressed. He also clarifies his focus, which is on stress-related depression rather than depression in response to loss. The initial chapters explore the nature of the illness and who is most likely to experience it, and suggest models to explain why it develops.

I particularly enjoyed the middle section, chapters five, six and seven, with their clear and practical focus on what to do if you get ill, what helps in recovery and how to stay well. Chapter eight on medication and physical treatments (ie ECT) provides a lot of useful information but is strongly pro-medication – not everyone will agree with this perspective nor wish to follow its advice.

Chapter nine contains many practical ideas for staying well, including time management, relaxation skills and finding meaning in life. I found the coverage of psychotherapies somewhat limited in the models of therapy it explores and its explanations of how they work. However I welcomed the useful advice that, if you can change how you live your life, you probably won't get ill again but if you find you can't make those changes, you may benefit from psychotherapy.

Chapter 11 explores depressive illness as a political issue. It was refreshing to read this challenge to the way society treats people with depression.

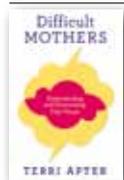
I welcomed the book's upbeat message that depression is not inescapable, that there are things you can do to recover and stay well. The language is somewhat dated and not always very inclusive but, that apart, many people suffering from depressive illness are likely to find this a helpful resource, as would many counsellors.

Anne Gilbert is a Gestalt psychotherapist

Troubles with mother

Difficult mothers: understanding and overcoming their power

Terri Apter
WW Norton, 2012, 256pp,
£16.99
ISBN 978-0393081022
Reviewed by Angela Cooper



Terri Apter has the gift of being able to write clearly about complicated subjects, and this book is no exception.

This means she can grapple with the complexities of neuroscientific and developmental processes without losing empathy with the 20 per cent among us who grow up with a 'difficult mother'. She is also excellent at exploring the challenges those with difficult mothers face – challenges that may seem incomprehensible to the other 80 per cent.

Rational advice may serve only to reinforce the sense of confusion and disappointment already experienced by a child of such a mother. Indeed, the book may help counsellors explore whether they lose empathic connection in this way.

The book explores the intergenerational aspect, using evidence from neuroscience and brain development to understand why cycles are repeated. This issue is especially relevant now, when the whole topic of intergenerational cycles is high on the economic and political agenda both here and in the US.

Apter then looks at how to overcome the effects of difficult parenting – listening, affirmation and reflection are important skills for the counsellor here. However she writes about maintaining a relationship with the mother as if this is an absolute and I wonder if some readers may disagree with this. Sometimes, too, her suggestions for changes may be hard for the person to achieve on their own; additional support may be needed. On the whole, though, these sections on practical strategies are good.

There is plenty of scope for Apter to develop and explore this subject further and I hope she will – in particular, I'd like to know more about the more complex personality types, especially borderline (or borderline as it is sometimes now called) personality types; the role of fathers; the effects of difficult mothers into adulthood, and about family dynamics later in life when parents die.

Apter can explain concepts such as 'mentalising', 'the orchid gene' and other neuroscientific and biological

terms succinctly and clearly. She has a gift for turning complex ideas from research into a digestible and nourishing form (I like the way she sometimes uses films to illustrate a point). But perhaps more than anything else, this book brings home the importance of right brain to right brain connection and interaction in the parental (and therapeutic) relationship. I would recommend this book to clients who have difficult mothers and also to counsellors to deepen their understanding of working in this important area.

Angela Cooper is a BACP senior accredited counsellor and supervisor

Straight talking

Sex, love and the dangers of intimacy: a guide to passionate relationships when the 'honeymoon' is over

Nick Duffell and Helena Løvendal-Duffell
Lone Arrow Press, 2012,
240pp, £15
ISBN 978-0953790425
Reviewed by Anne Power



This '10th anniversary issue' of a book that was first published in 2002 is addressed to people in heterosexual relationships who want to deepen their connection with their partner.

The authors, a married couple who also work together as couple therapists, have developed their

understanding through years of struggle in their own relationship and they write engagingly.

I found it a diligent book, in keeping with its exhortation to couples to work at their relationships – to take the opportunities offered to us when our partner holds up a mirror to parts of the self we would rather ignore. At times I felt I was reading a sermon; it is an aspirational and optimistic text that might appeal to readers who value new age spiritual approaches.

My main reservation about the book is that its approach is based on a potpourri of theories, used alongside each other but not actually integrated. Some readers may value this relaxed approach to theory but it made it harder for me to take in and apply the many excellent observations and conclusions. The authors are honest in not claiming originality; their model of 'couple fit' is largely built on unconscious processes, which have been written up more clearly elsewhere.

It does seem strange that, in revising their first edition, the authors have not included homosexual relationships. Perhaps the authors' particular take on gender difference precludes this: 'We see the differences between men and women as also being a spiritual issue' (p147). The vignettes of a fictional couple used throughout the book to illustrate the content, while vivid and coherent, are similarly deeply embedded in the authors' beliefs about gender. I also feel that their critique of traditional male/female relational patterns has major gaps. However their approach to sexual relationships is thoughtful and some couples may well find it useful.

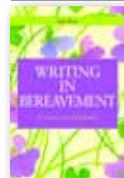
Despite these reservations, the personal style makes this book an accessible read and its underpinning understanding of couple dynamics is sound. Light on jargon, it would be completely accessible to clients who are unfamiliar with psychological theory. It could be useful to couples who are taking steps to deepen their understanding of what attracts them or why they fight. The content is also rich enough to be of interest to therapists training in couple work.

Anne Power is an attachment-based psychotherapist and supervisor

The power of words

Writing in bereavement: a creative handbook

Jane Moss
Jessica Kingsley Publishers,
2012, 264pp, £19.99
ISBN 978-1849052122
Reviewed by Kate Thompson



The power of writing to alleviate suffering over time, to enhance insight and growth and to offer a therapeutic experience is increasingly acknowledged. There is a growing body of evidence that attests to its merits.

This book is a useful addition to the literature and will be of great interest to therapeutic practitioners and creative writers alike (of course readers may be both/and as well as either/or). It is good to have a book dealing with the specific clinical application of writing

to loss and bereavement, a universal aspect of the human condition. The author is an experienced writer and a bereavement support worker.

The book offers a brief overview of the theories of grief and loss before turning to its primary focus: the different writing techniques and how they can be used in working with the bereaved.

We meet and follow the fictional Greenbank writing group as they work through exercises and their personal experiences of grief and loss, which adds a pleasing narrative unity to the book (and must have been fun to write). The fictional characters and their writing are supplemented by the author's experience and case examples drawn from real life and loss.

Readers who are not already familiar with the literature of therapeutic writing will find themselves gently guided through the principles and practices. The sample writing sessions in chapter 14 will be reassuring for those who are new to the experience of facilitation. Jane Moss explains: 'I always like to have a plan. Even if I depart from it, it serves as a rudder to steer a group' (p18). This is a useful reminder to even the most experienced of facilitators that a group will be reassured by the sense that 'someone has a plan and is in charge'.

The book, in common with others in this series, ends with a useful appendix of writing exercises and prompts, references and suggestions for further reading. *Kate Thompson is an existential psychotherapist, journal therapist and author of Therapeutic Journal Writing: an introduction for professionals*

Existential approaches

The existential counselling primer: a concise, accessible and comprehensive introduction

Mick Cooper
PCCS Books, 2012, 111pp,
£11.99
ISBN 978-1906254513
Reviewed by Els van Ooijen



This primer, the eighth in PCCS Books' 'Steps in Counselling' series, is aimed at students of psychotherapy and counselling. Its 10 brief chapters provide a clear and comprehensive introduction to the existential approach.

Chapter one provides an overview of the approach's origins in existential philosophy. Chapter two outlines some key existential therapies, such as the existential-humanistic therapy practised by Irvin Yalom, RD Laing's approach, and the British school of existential analysis. In chapter three we learn that existential therapy is non-pathologising and focused on helping people take responsibility for their lives by realising the choices open to them.

In chapter four Cooper discusses the nature of psychological distress, which is seen as a consequence of not facing up to reality and living inauthentically. The therapeutic process, change and therapeutic methods are discussed in chapters five, six and seven, followed by applications and research in chapters eight and nine.

As every individual is regarded as fundamentally unique, existential therapists focus on 'non-technical authentic relating' (p72). They do not therefore classify people into groups according to their problems. This approach does not lend itself readily to researching effectiveness. However, as the book reports, recent systematic reviews of 20 RCTs were positive, and there are also indications that the approach may help seriously ill people find meaning and hope. Cooper observes that existential therapists may have 'some tough choices to face' (p77) in the future if the approach is to survive in our evidence-based world.

The book is well written, easy to read and clearly set out. The last chapter offers a case study from the author's own practice, which helpfully gives the reader a good indication of what existential therapy can look like.

Els van Ooijen is a relational-integrative psychotherapist, counsellor and supervisor

Commercial concerns

The business of therapy: how to run a successful private practice

Pauline L Hodson
McGraw-Hill, 2012, 168pp,
£21.99
ISBN 978-0335245635
Reviewed by Mo Perkins



The book, as the title states, is about the business of private therapy practice, and grapples with the practical and commercial issues that are rarely addressed in therapy training courses. Hodson takes us smoothly and logically through the process of setting up and running a business: from the physical environment of the counselling room and finding our first clients through to managing endings and retirement. On the way she covers boundaries, making good use of support systems, maintaining your practice, deciding how much to charge and coping with paperwork.

The book seeks to bridge the gap between the theory underpinning clinical work and its application in a successful business. It is

addressed to students, the newly qualified and the more seasoned practitioner. Counsellors from a psychodynamic and psychoanalytical background will feel very at home with the contents. I found it a thoroughly enjoyable read; it actually made me laugh out loud on a couple of occasions. I found the anecdotes entertaining and well chosen; any therapist who has been in practice for a while will be able to identify with them.

However, while I believe most experienced therapists would enjoy this book, it would have benefitted from a sharper focus on maintaining and developing your business. Counsellors today need sound business sense and a robust business model if we are to survive and, more importantly, succeed in private practice. I would have appreciated more discussion about using transferable skills to develop income streams, marketing your therapy business, the art of business networking and discussion of the relative merits of niche versus generalist practice.

That said, this book is well written and demonstrates a wealth of experience and a passion for our profession. For that alone, it is well worth reading.

Mo Perkins is an integrative psychotherapist, supervisor and trainer and Director of Mosaic Counselling & Coaching

Visit www.bacp.co.uk/shop for great books at great prices!

Browse the BACP online bookshop for the full range of BACP publications including: training & legal resources, directories, research reviews, information sheets and more.

Now available: *Legal issues across counselling and psychotherapy settings: a guide to practice* – by Barbara Mitchels & Tim Bond.

bacp

British Association for
Counselling & Psychotherapy