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Malcolm Parlett, the Editor of the British Gestalt Journal writes in his Editorial Note:

'Then comes the most original, and arguably most important book review we have ever published. Vying with climate change, as the biggest world issue, are the relationships between groups, nations, cultures, religions, and differentiated patterns of thinking that exist within humanity. Talia Levine Bar-Yoseph has edited a crucial book, The Bridge- Dialogues Across Cultures, and here Marie-Anne Chidiac and Julianne Appel-Opper describe it and talk together about it. We join in as participants, privileged to be reading the emails that passed between them'. (British Gestalt Journal 2006 VOLUME 15, No.1, page 5)

YOU, ME, AND THE BOOK

A Review of 'The Bridge- Dialogues Across Cultures' edited by Talia Levine Bar-Yoseph

Julianne Appel-Opper and Marie-Anne Chidiac

Editor's Note: The book review that follows takes the form of an email correspondence between the two Gestalt practitioners we invited to review *The Bridge* for the BGJ, Marie-Anne Chidiac and Julianne Appel-Opper. The original emails have been re-worked in places, but the correspondence retains much of the freshness, candour, and informality of this form of communicating. The reviewers include a lot about the process of their collaborating, which – given that they come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and that the book is sub-titled 'Dialogues Across Cultures' – adds a significant extra dimension to their review. There have been other parallels and resonances with the book itself that have arisen around the final editing of this review. The book concludes with a 'Publisher's Note' in which the 'English editor' assigned to the book to collaborate with Talia Levine Bar-Yoseph writes about her task of editing chapters written by authors from many different nationalities: 'The greatest challenge with this manuscript involved looking at each author's chapter in terms of its overall proper English language structure while still allowing the heart of the author to resonate from the language of their native culture.' Some of the difficulties in completing the publishing process were 'directly linked to...native language orientations'. In the editing of this review for the BGJ we have encountered some of the same issues, and much has been learned in the process, not least by BGJ colleagues and myself. As Gordon Wheeler, one of the contributing authors of *The Bridge*, points out: '...the wonder is not that cross-cultural contact and communication are so often problematic and conflictual, but that they are possible at all'. (p32). Our thanks to Julianne and Marie-Anne for their persistence and honesty, and for ensuring that the learning from this remarkable book has penetrated the process of creating this review from start to finish.

'A Lebanese and a German'

Tuesday 10th January 06

Dear Julianne,

When Malcolm asked if I would like to review this new book on culture with you, I was both excited and anxious. On the one hand, I was thrilled at being invited to dialogue with you over a topic that I feel has brought us together in the past, both living in a culture other than our own. On the other hand, I was intensely aware of the wider field implications. Here we were, a Lebanese and a German, reviewing a book edited by an Israeli. My initial reaction was to worry about cultural sensitivities. How would this be received by the readers? Would every comment be blown out of proportion? Would we be able to be critical? etc.

As a Lebanese, I grew up during the war years understanding the potentially dangerous effects of highlighting difference. My introject had been that you only discuss difference within your own community, in a safe environment. Unfortunately this is still the norm in Lebanon and once again I realise how much this early creative adjustment is still with me.

Mackie Blanton in his *Foreword* to the book makes it clear that the book is not about clients from a different culture, but rather about how, as therapists from a mainstream culture, we need to look at ourselves and at our awareness of difference. I have found the book stimulating and very moving both in its content and in the personal accounts of the process of writing, which Talia describes as 'the book's soul' (p21). I am looking forward to this dialogue with you that at some level parallels the book's process because most of its chapters have been co-written.

I will be leaving in a few days for a week in South Africa but we will be able to continue our dialogue via email.

I look forward to reading you...☺

Mac

Wednesday 11th January 06

Dear Mac,

I have just read your first mail. Yes, a Lebanese and a German. We have met at various conferences over the years. I was so relieved when Malcolm told me that I would be dialoguing with you.

I needed to hear your voice so I phoned you earlier today. It was good talking to you, to prepare the ground of our project. I am glad that we agreed to focus our review on those chapters that have particularly impacted us. I dreamed a lot last night, waking up with all kinds of sentences that I would like to share with you in our dialogue. I stayed in bed, scared to be faced with them. I will finish the reading today and will e-mail you tomorrow.

Speak soon,

Julianne

Wednesday 11th January 06

Dear Julianne,

Yes, it did feel good to talk. Just as the book's contributors have given personal accounts of their joint and often cross-cultural writing process, our dialoguing through email also provides a transparent view of our writing together – two women from different cultures. I like the fact that we spoke about how our personal reactions and relating over this book, and our review of it, are two competing yet complementary figures in understanding what this book has to offer. It feels important to acknowledge this.

I feel curious about your dreams and the sentences you came up with. I've had a full day at work. I wish I could have had the day just to think and write. The book and our review were never far from my mind.

I'm off to take the plane tomorrow and look forward to your email.

Happy reading

Mac

Thursday 12th January 06

Dear Mac,

I wanted to ask you before: Why 'Mac' and not 'Marie-Anne'? Could I call you Marie-Anne? This name resonates with me. I have a very good friend, Marianne, who still lives in the small village where I grew up. I phoned her this morning before writing to you. Why do I ask now? Is it because I want to know who you are? Or is it so I can stay 'who I am'?

I have just finished the book. I have read every word and I am finding myself calm inside. I breathe. As I look at the book now I want to write about it.

The Book:

I received the book close to Christmas, unpacked it and looked at the colourful photograph on the front cover. I remember turning the book and looking at the photograph of Talia Levine Bar-Yoseph. I liked the way she looked back at me. I was curious; I opened the book and browsed through the acknowledgements, the table of contents; and I read: 'To my mother Ya'el who swims so naturally in the pool of difference'.

I started to read the book in a plane, up high in the air, between the UK and Germany, travelling between my worlds and shifting, changing grounds.

Talia, the following is for you: 'I want to thank you for this book, which is so special to you and now to me. In the acknowledgements you called it your "slow-to-mature baby". Giving birth is painful, and reading has been challenging and painful too at times. However, this book *had* to be written and I thank all the participants.'

I am calmer now that I have read the last chapter by Levine Bar-Yoseph and Nahi Alon: *Mind the Gap*. A few days earlier I had spotted the words: 'Eva, a Holocaust survivor' (p305) and I browsed through to see what was coming next. Oh, yes, the Second World War and the Holocaust crop up wherever I go. Oh, yes, I am German. I realised this a few weeks ago with a clarity that I have not had in all my years of living in the UK. I had just come back from a visit to Germany and my body was still moving in her German mode and it was okay. On this occasion I felt no need to adapt. I allowed myself to be different. It was as if I was starting to own my difference – my 'German-ness' – more and more. I have been carrying the introject that I should not be seen as different. I realise now that this baggage of having to adapt is a heavy weight to carry, even in my own culture. As a foreigner in a foreign country it is definitely too heavy.

I was born in 1959 in a small village in Germany, my first culture and my first world. I grew up in an atmosphere of war, embodied in both of my parents. I used to have dreams about tanks rolling through our village where we children lived and hid beneath the streets in our secret passageways. Only when I had shared these dreams in my therapy did I realise that I was also carrying my parents' past.

So far for now. Speak soon. Have a safe journey to South Africa,

Julianne

‘An inherent paradox in relating inter-culturally whilst totally retaining one’s identity’

Monday 16th January 06

Hello Julianne,

It is 28°C in South Africa and I have had a day to chill out and read our book (notice the 'our'! ☺). I have read what you have just sent me in your email and appreciate your providing me and the readers of this review with a glimpse of your culture and reality, the ground against which our dialogue about this book is emerging. I feel myself reacting at many levels to your experience of war and what you know about being different. I have no words of my own now but am trusting that these will emerge in our dialogue over this book. The honesty and bravery of the contributors in putting into words their personal experiences of difference, and also of working across often painful cultural divides, has touched me deeply.

I feel the need to approach our review of this book through our dialogue in an ordered way. I smile as I write this, knowing the common stereotypes around ‘German order’ and ‘Lebanese chaos’. It is interesting that in this instance, I am holding the ‘order’ polarity.

I need to say how much I am appreciating the book as a way of framing culture. I like the way it is structured. Its four sections speak to my sense of order, with the first section offering a theoretical discussion of culture within a Gestalt framework, followed by three separate sections tackling issues of culture at the social, interpersonal and therapeutic levels. Whilst relaxing into this rational framework, what is figure for me is how impossible it is to separate these levels. They do provide us, however, as therapists and human beings, with lenses through which we can view the complex ramifications of dialoguing across cultures.

You ask me why Mac and not Marie-Anne? Well, it is Marie-Anne in some contexts, particularly when I am speaking Arabic or I am back home in Lebanon. In her chapter *Introduction – Making a Difference*, Talia Levine Bar-Yoseph outlines the fundamentals of a respectful process of intercultural dialogue. It is, she writes, a meeting without preconceived outcomes, one in which all parties maintain their identity whilst allowing space for the other. This enables a new (and better) world to emerge in the between. I feel that there is an inherent paradox in relating inter-culturally whilst totally retaining one’s identity. Of course, we are changed by the other and by our environment; and in change, in the new, there is also loss. ‘Mac’ emerged as part of my new self and identity as I tried to find my way of being Lebanese while living in the UK. I realise that this nickname provided me with an easier way of integrating into a more western context at a time when coming from an Arabic country, the Lebanon, was not that acceptable, since many high-profile western individuals were still being held captive by militant groups in the Lebanon. Today, ‘Mac’ holds parts of who I am and have become in the years living in the UK.

Reading on, I found Talia’s section on ‘Losing Identity’ thought provoking. She highlights that in the past, the immigrants’ only choices in adapting to a new culture were either to keep their identity by remaining isolated from the majority culture or to merge with it at the cost of disowning their own cultural background. She argues that in today’s global village, there is increased geographical and technological connectedness between cultures, and between immigrants and their homeland. This makes it easier for immigrants to retain a sense of their original culture whilst living and adapting to their new environment. The advances of modern technology therefore support a new paradigm in which acculturation is not a result of coercion but of the desire to co-exist, whilst still maintaining and balancing two potentially different

cultures. Talia suggests that, in Gestalt terms, this new paradigm is about creating a middle ground between isolation and confluence. Although I resonate with this, I feel the need to point out that this 'balancing' is not always easy to achieve. How does one manage the tension that often exists between different cultural values? For example, we witness this tension in Europe today over the wearing of religious symbols and clothes in schools.

Finally, Talia leaves us with several interesting questions to ponder: how can we remain fundamentally who we are whilst at the same time shifting and growing? When does a culture become a new culture?

Bye for now,
Marie-Anne

'Two cultures rubbing against or colliding with each other'

Wednesday 18th January 06

Dear Woman,

I have just called you 'Woman' because I do not want to name you Mac. Why? Because I need to feel the other woman you are in your own culture. As I type this I feel anxious, wondering how much of your cultural ground you will want to share with me.

I recall our phone conversation before you took the plane to South Africa. You told me to 'keep writing from the heart and body'. Yes, I will try to do that. I will be true to myself, just as when I ask others to pronounce my name the 'right way', with the J like a German J. I need to hear my name like this.

Where my heart and body take me now is to Lynne Jacobs' chapter: *For Whites Only*. In this 'almost stream-of-consciousness article' (p 225), Jacobs puts herself out there. She shares her feelings around her 'Whiteness' as a female white psychotherapist living and working in Los Angeles, California, USA. I am touched by what I learn about Jacobs's world, her 'walk through the minefield of explorations in race relations' (p 226). Jacobs also shares her learning after her first draft was criticised as 'an agenda to win the understanding and approval of her Black colleagues and by doing so, to expiate her guilt' (p 210). Immediately, as I read of that criticism, I was flooded with anxiety. It struck me forcefully that the BGJ reader might criticise my text. Marie-Anne, this is my 3rd draft and I am still struggling. This text does something to me. I feel the anxiety again. So, for now I want to leave it as follows: I am a white German psychotherapist working in the UK. I am even more different as soon as I open my mouth, my German tongue trying to adapt to the English language. I have worked with Black trainees and supervisees and my 'Whiteness' became visible, too. Yet there was something like an overlap of our 'grounds', looking and sounding so different and feeling so 'un-English' at times. With Black trainees, my typical German directness and boldness was received with relief. I was like another outsider with whom it was easier to share racial experiences of "the English".

Today I phoned a German friend and colleague of mine who also lives in the UK. I shared my struggle about these issues with her and we shared our inter-cultural and inter-racial experiences, as we have done before. I said that I needed to own the ground I am coming from as I sit with a client or trainee or supervisee of a different race. I used the image of 'feeling naked', meaning that my racial and cultural identity is particularly obvious in this co-created field. I want to add a bit more here: in my German culture, the expression 'feeling naked' has two meanings. It may mean that you feel exposed and ashamed, you the only naked person and the others staring at you. However, I use the image of feeling naked in another sense: feeling and being naked in the

appropriate context – such as in a German sauna or the women's shower room at a German swimming pool – feels natural to me. In such a context, I do not feel exposed and ashamed. On the contrary, it is natural for me to be seen as I am.

Jacobs lets us experience her willingness to face the most challenging individual differences coming from her ground. For her this was around her 'Whiteness' as part of her awareness of the racial divide in the USA. For me, it is my 'German-ness' and my 'German-ness' in the UK. When I started to work for the National Health Service as an 'Older Age Psychologist and Psychotherapist', I used to introduce myself to clients as German and asked how they felt about that. It was as if I needed to check that it was okay for my clients to be faced with a German psychotherapist.

I smile as I remember one client responding that he liked the efficiency of the German electrical tools made by Krups and Miele. This man looked at me in the same light – he trusted me as an efficient therapist. And this enabled us to do some deep body-oriented work. He was referred to me with 'depression' and 'chronic back pain'. We came to understand more and more that from early days he had learnt not to really feel and express his sadness. His lower back was the place where all those feelings were held. In Germany I had previously worked with patients with a very similar diagnosis. Was there a difference in the way I worked there? Yes and no. At first, I was very unsure about the use of touch doing psychotherapy in England. (I am sad as I write this.) Unlike many of my German clients, I never touched this client: my hands did not shake his hands. There was no related moment of closeness or contact as the eyes took in each other. It was I who had to get used to that. I had a clear vision that his body was so used to holding himself apart. And, somehow, I wanted to respect that.

I recall another client, a woman. I read the referral saying 'depression' and stating that she had asked to be visited at home. At that time I was quite used to doing home visits because of the age of my clients. She had prepared tea for me in the living room. It felt like two cultures rubbing against or colliding with each other. On that day, I had a tight schedule and I had to leave in time to get to my next client. Looking back now I think that my swift exit must have been experienced as impolite. I felt that she looked at me as if I was an elephant in a porcelain shop or a barbarian without any manners. She cancelled the next appointment and I never saw her again.

There is still something in my ground, making me quite dizzy at times – the feeling that I should shut my German mouth because of the weight of German history with regard to the Holocaust and the Second World War. Even here, how will I be judged as a German talking about racial experiences? This is my personal minefield. It is one thing to be a German in Germany but to be a German in the UK? Sometimes I get tired of being stuck with stereotypes, and tired of trying to wipe them away. For example, films about the war with Nazi soldiers uttering phrases such as: 'Jawohl, Herr Oberfeldwebel!' bring back the past into my everyday life.

So far for now. I need to stop here. I feel like deleting the last lines but I will leave them for now.

I am sending my greetings to you all the way to South Africa,

Julianne

Saturday 21st January 06

Dear Julianne,

I feel appreciative of your leaving those last lines in. I also hear your fed-up-ness in walking through that minefield – I know it isn't easy!

You call me 'Woman'. Yes, I am a woman. I am Marie-Anne and also Mac. Who I am is, of course, context dependent. I also hear that you want to meet me as a woman in my own culture and I imagine this means my Lebanese-ness. Writing this, I realise that it is not possible for me

to separate my Lebanese part from the more international being who has lived in and experienced other countries and been changed by that too.

Yes, I want us both to write from the heart and body and be true to ourselves. For me, this includes an awareness of the context and the reader. Context and ground have coloured all of my history. You write of an image of being naked and I notice that for me, in this context, that is too exposing.

I experience my Lebanese culture most acutely when I am faced with something that challenges my sense of 'how things should be'. I remember being shocked, for example, at the drinking culture in the UK; how much this seemed to be a natural part of living here – and how most socialising takes place in the pub. At the risk of generalising, I find it hard to understand the distance that people in some English families keep from one another or the ease with which some people will criticise their own family members in public. It is fine for me to be privately critical of my family but I would be offended if anyone else was critical. I have come to understand that whatever shames my family, also shames me. At some level this may be at odds with a Gestalt sense of personal responsibility, and yet from a field theory perspective, my definition of self is linked with that of my family and where I come from. As Wheeler writes, 'Self is a culturally variable concept' (p 58).

In his very rich chapter on 'Culture, Self and Field', Gordon Wheeler puts forward a view of culture as thematic clusters of repeating patterns that arise developmentally and are passed on from one generation to the next. For Wheeler, culture is part of our biological development that is left incomplete at birth to allow for that essential adaptability to our environment. It is therefore natural, he writes, that culture is made up of those attitudes we are usually most unaware of, and that 'the deepest level of culture, then is reality itself: all those things that we take to be not cultural, but just "the way the world is"' (p 47).

You raise the issue of racial difference. It is not a difference I was aware of much while growing up. Religious difference was more figural and just as visible. What I have learnt, however, living in the UK, is how much the issue of skin colour is relevant in Europe and the US. Not surprisingly, given the ground of the experience: segregation and colonialism are relatively recent histories of racial oppression.

Mark McConville, in his chapter titled 'The Gift', insightfully describes how Well-Intending-Whites (WIWs) (p173) feel bewildered when a person of colour confronts them with the words: 'You wouldn't be saying or doing that if I were white...'. For many WIWs, McConville writes, the racial issue becomes suddenly very figural, when no offence was ever intended. The typical reaction is one of defensiveness and 'a perception of the offended other as overly sensitive' (p174). McConville invites us to look at how easy it is to focus too much on figure (the actual offence) and that when the ground of this figure (the history of racial oppression) is left unspoken and unnamed, 'it is figure which does, and indeed must, bear the weight of ground' (p177). McConville asks how he can 'dis-embed' from the ground into which he was born, in order to see it more clearly. In this chapter, which I think is essential reading for all, he engagingly and – for me, movingly – offers his wisdom.

As you know, I am now writing to you from South Africa. The issue of racial difference is very obvious here, even to the unaware observer. I met a woman today who spoke passionately of what it feels like to be a white South African and of the guilt of having (or not) been active during the apartheid era. I had a clear sense of the personal responsibility she felt, how much she was trying to make up for her own skin colour and for the oppression her race had committed.

In this stunningly beautiful country, the struggles of recent South African history are still visible, and yet they are able to talk about it openly. I am astounded and so impressed! The fighting stopped 15 years ago in the Lebanon, and yet we are still not able to talk about what happened...

and to really start to heal. South Africa has offered the world an immense gift in the model of 'Truth and Reconciliation'. I have learnt that, as difficult as it may be, the healing is first in the acknowledgement and the naming of oppression. So although I don't feel the guilt of the past in terms of making up for a history of racial oppression, I feel, as I describe myself as a 'white person', some responsibility for what happens in the world today.

I am moved to read how much you carry your history with you, Julianne, and the heaviness and shame of it. I too can relate to this. We both carry the weight of our ground and our communities. I am very aware that as a Lebanese, I hold the weight of the war crimes committed by my community as well as those committed against it. Today, these atrocities are barely beginning to surface and my fear is that in not naming and acknowledging, we may not forget or forgive! And the cycle will repeat itself.

Enough for now from me. I will return to experiencing myself in the South African culture....

Marie-Anne

'Being embodied in a culture we can feel the new and different vibrations'

Sunday 22nd January 06

Dear Marie-Anne,

I have just read your last lines and realise that war is here again, with me and with you. I feel sad as I sit down to continue our dialogue. I feel a bit responsible for taking you to this painful place. Where do you want to go next? I realise that I am reviewing this book in 'my order' and from the ground I am coming from. I want to look at the chapter 'Culture' by Philip Lichtenberg and then 'Culture and the Body' by Michael C. Clemmens and Arye Bursztyn. What about you? Where are you?

In his chapter, Lichtenberg applies very basic Gestalt concepts of contact and withdrawal to the theme of culture. 'How do individuals use seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and so forth in their everyday interactions?' (p 35) and 'How does culture regulate affect?' (p 36) are just two examples of questions I find intriguing and enriching. He adds: 'Every culture is based on meeting the needs of its members, so that every culture is in some sense right' (p 37).

I felt so lost when I first arrived here in the UK, in my new world. The contact felt so different. I remember how my German hands had to get used to not touching or being touched as part of my cultural 'hello' and 'good bye' rituals. In my old world, leaving without shaking hands would have meant that a rupture in communication and relationship had occurred. Now, my culture was not 'right' any more. I felt at times like 'a stranger in a strange world' (Appel-Opper, 2006).

At first, the chapter on 'Culture and Body' (by Clemmens and Bursztyn) somehow did not feel right for me. Having read it again, I see that the authors want to 'share their research experiences' in order 'to heighten practitioners' interest in the relationship between body and culture' (p 203) and to 'offer some skills and guidelines in attending to the cultural aspects of bodily experience' (p 204).

The authors share examples of their own embodied culture, which is in the flesh, filled with living and moving memories. As a dancer, Bursztyn describes performing a dance which incorporated the four qualities of his identity as an Israeli man. Writing this, I can imagine Bursztyn as an Israeli soldier – as I saw them when I lived in Israel – and also I see the young image of Israeli identity: spinning, running, a real handful, like some of the children with whom my son went to nursery.

Clemmens and Bursztyn share some of their experiences visiting other cultures. Bursztyn received comments in Tokyo from his dance colleagues there that his alertness and self-

guardedness was interpreted as his 'walking like a bully', 'ready to strike back' (p 209). Clemmens tried to 'blend in' in a shop in Arizona, sensing himself physically bigger and louder than the Navajo customers. I think we can all list situations like these, in which our body tries to make sense of another different world. And as inter-cultural therapists we need to stay with our sensations. With the senses we really tune in to the other's cultural embodiment. Clemmens and Bursztyn liken this process to a Tibetan bowl: being embodied in a culture we can feel the new and different vibrations.

Of the four fascinating case examples I want to focus on the one in which Clemmens works with Raj, a first generation Indian man, who comes to therapy complaining of headaches. To me, it is as if two lived bodies communicate with each other and make sense of each other, which leads to Clemmens sharing his client's sensation and his headache.

Now at the end of my review of this chapter, I am so glad that I have gained access to its richness. It's as if I needed time to tune in to the different rhythm, style, language and melody of Clemmens and Bursztyn co-writing and dialoguing this text. I also wonder if my process mirrors some of the processes we as practitioners have to go through in our inter-cultural work.

I have also learnt something about my own practice. This chapter brought me to an awareness of how I stay with sensations. Now I can make sense of how I absorb the work of Merleau-Ponty and Hermann Schmitz. They provide me with words and images to describe my sensations. For example Schmitz writes about 'milieus' and 'atmospheres' in the body: 'The felt perception is not a reception of signals but a lived body communication and incorporation.' (Schmitz, 1989, *my translation*).

I will stop here. I am tired. I am sending it off to you now. Good Night,
Julianne

Monday 23rd January 06

Dear Julianne,

I got back yesterday to the UK. Maximum temperature here is around 5°C. Too cold for me!

I read that you are taking responsibility in our dialogue, for having arrived at a place of discussing our experience of war, conflict and oppression. As exposing as it sometimes feels, I wonder how we could possibly avoid this, as it is alive in the ground of both of our histories and experience. In dialoguing over culture we are also attending to difference, our experience of difference, its causes and consequences. And war, conflict, and oppression are the realities around difference in the world today.

So, to answer your questions of how and where I am, I feel grounded and energised by our dialogue. I feel at some level we are mirroring the journey of many of the contributors to this book who through their own (often painful) experiences of difference, have delved deep into themselves to offer us a greater sense of awareness of culture. And with this awareness, for me, comes a real sense of social responsibility. In section 2 of this book entitled 'Bridging of Social Phenomena', many of the contributors share their experiences of working with culture and difference at a social and community level. I would like to share some of these articles that have impacted me.

At first, the title of Geoff Warburton's and James Kuykendall's chapter 'HIV and Culture' begged the question: What does the HIV virus have to do with culture? Having read the honest and powerful article by these two veterans of the fight for the rights of people with HIV, I am so appreciative of having it included in this book. The authors remind us that 'what is not allowed within the culture is projected on to others' (p 88) and that even though a greater awareness of HIV is achieved today, it is still seen as a minority disease and that cultural shame is still transferred onto HIV sufferers. What impacted me most in Warburton's and Kuykendall's article

was their invitation to hold onto our compassion when faced with these difficult cultural beliefs and introjects. To understand how they serve us in our need for connection, stability and identity; viewing these structures themselves as creative adjustments for survival. The two authors write passionately of the need to apply the concept of creative indifference on a social and cultural level while holding the paradoxical stance of wanting a culture that respects diversity, and also 'not being invested in changing the world to this belief' (p 93). So by owning our own shame and not forcing or shaming others, we can create the conditions for the 'We' to emerge rather than the 'I and them'. They write: 'I as an individual am powerless; we as a community may have a chance' (p 96). I feel myself engage with this community way of thinking as it offers an alternative to the individualistic paradigm of rebelling against our cultural introjects, a way that often leads to isolation. I am thinking too about Arabic culture where most support systems are based on community and where collective identity is given precedence over the self (Dwairy & Van Sickel, 1996). In such a culture, rebellion would mean being rejected from the supportive fabric of the family and society and this may be too steep a step for most clients.

I am excited at how much the Gestalt approach has to offer cultures based on strong community traditions. In their chapter 'An Experiment in Community', Nigel Copsey and Talia Levine Bar-Yoseph describe how a combination of a phenomenological approach, dialogic relationship, and field theory has allowed them to re-examine the way mental health services were offered in multi-ethnic, multi-religious communities in the East End of London. They invite us to consider how cultural belief systems, including religious values, may have a significant impact on the perceptions of health and illness. They write about how the use of language itself holds so many assumptions, and that the terms 'counselling' and 'client' are in many cultures associated with madness and being cut off. I smile writing this as I recall recently talking about Gestalt to a colleague in Arabic and using the word 'boundary' – and noticing the defensive connotation it held for her. This for me also brings up the important issue of the underlying assumptions around behaviour in cross-cultural diagnosis. The DSM-IV framework (2000) is based largely on a white, middle class, western approach to mental health and its sensitivity to cultural issues remains questionable (Andary *et. al*, 2003).

Yes, cross-cultural dialogue is not always easy. That is why I feel grateful for individuals such as Sa'ed Tali and Oshrat Mizrahi Shapira who, in their chapter 'Coexistence in the Holy Land', show us what it is to work and attempt to bridge difference in a context that many would think of as the front-line of cultural conflict. The authors, a Jewish Arab and a Palestinian Israeli, co-facilitate a Palestinian-Israeli dialogue group in the Theatre department of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. What is most figural for me in this article is the willingness of the participants and their readiness to dialogue within a supportive and safe frame created by the co-facilitators. What if this willingness is not there? What if the complexity of the conflict is such that fear and suspicion are too present for the participants to be truly dialogic? What then? This, I feel, is more typical in situations of conflict.

I feel greedy writing this, wanting even more from this book. In his article 'Culture, Self and Field', Wheeler suggests that a key aspect of a Gestalt multicultural model of culture, contact, and conflict is the need to attend to 'additional supports' (p 59) required by the field as a way of creating the right conditions for dialogue. Whilst accepting the theoretical aspect of the argument and acknowledging that I may find more answers in the study of negotiating techniques, I feel a need to mobilise and be more specific. In most conflict situations, these 'right conditions' for dialogue are not attainable. Yes, 'it is easier to be generous in conditions of abundance' (Denham-Vaughan, *Personal Communication* 2006) but how is it exactly that we can have dialogue in less than ideal conditions of safety and trust? Can Gestalt support us in doing that?

Well, enough for now. I look forward to your email. Mac

Tuesday 24th January 06

Dear Marie-Anne,

I haven't finished yet. I do not want to leave the text like this. I will have to work another night shift. I thought I'd send the text as it is now. I realise that I am giving myself a hard time.

From the minute I sat down there was a shift. I feel I am alone. I know that it is my turn now and we agreed on the phone that I was to write about Anna Kubesch's chapter. I want to give up. I cannot do this. I feel like a fish being asked to climb a tree. What are my 'right conditions' for a dialogue across cultures and across pain? How can I do this? Now I know what I want to do. I want to do it on my own: I want to talk directly to Anna Kubesch, the author of 'In the Shadow of the Holocaust'.

Dear Anna, 'Grüß Gott', as you say in Austria. I want to thank you for breaking your silence and for your bravery in approaching the shadow of the Holocaust within yourself and in the work with your clients. I am coming from 'the other side', a German born into another atmosphere of silence. The Second World War and the days of the Nazi terror seemed like a time of non-existing in our family. As a girl, I did not ask about that time. I felt no need to find out what had happened. I joined the adults in trying to get on with their life as if the horror had not happened. And at the same time the horror was there, passed on to me.

I sit here and cry. I am so sorry about the history. I feel ashamed. I used to work with German non-Jewish clients who were trying to come to terms with their experiences of the Second World War. I heard stories of horror being held in the body, not spoken about until the body started to be in pain. From my own therapy I learnt how much my body was filled with the terror and horror of my parents, of the people of our village, of the field I was born into. I have never worked with a Holocaust survivor, I am not sure I could do it. And yet, the more I have opened 'my door to the horror of the Second World War', the less I am haunted by my dreams. I wish you well in your journey, building inner bridges between the 'Austrian-ness' and the 'Jewish-ness' inside you.

I need to stop here and rest. Love

Julianne

'Creating the conditions for a safe dialogue'

Tuesday 24th January 06

Dear Julianne,

I was moved by your last email. We have spoken on the phone. I am aware of how difficult writing about this has been for you. You spoke about printing my email out to have something to look at, and I wonder if, before reading what I wrote, you were already with Anna Kubesch. Perhaps you had already turned away from our dialogue to better support yourself in building a bridge with Anna, to speak to her. I feel I am witnessing something changing for you and want to be respectful of that.

I recall our initial conversations about writing this review together and our anxiety at what might emerge from our dialogue. We contracted that during the writing process, and for the first draft, it would only be 'You, Me and the Book' – as if some sort of supportive safety net were cast over us both (and the book). We were creating the conditions for a safe dialogue, and I hope this is how it feels for you now.

With Love

Marie-Anne

Wednesday 25th January 06

Dear Marie-Anne,

Thanks for your mail and your phone call. It is good to feel your support. I am glad that we agreed to meet up. I look forward to seeing you later.

The next chapter I want to focus on is 'Russian Mothers and Daughters' by Vera Kishinevsky and Iris Fodor. It is about mothers and daughters from Russia and the impact on their body image of their acculturation into America. The symbols of how women's bodies are viewed in both cultures is captured beautifully by the authors in the comparison to the long limbed, generously breasted, and extremely thin American Barbie doll and the round, fertile, and grounded Matryoshka, (or Russian nested dolls).

At the same time, it is also about the journey of the two female authors integrating their Russian and Jewish heritage. Kishinevsky writes that she used to view culture as an 'ethnographic unity of looks, clothes, food and other visible and easily identifiable attributes' (p 102). In their Gestalt perspective of acculturation, Kishinevsky and Fodor acknowledge how moving from one culture to another becomes a 'disruption of magnitude' (Parlett, 1997).

I love the way Kishinevsky and Fodor portray 'culture as the very air we breathe and the water we drink (p 105). This metaphor captures so much what a change of culture incorporates. From my own experience, I know that a new and different culture that we live in does not stay out there, it gets under our skin. Living in a different culture means becoming bi-cultural, two cultures meeting inside. This forced me into an ongoing process of finding a new way of being, a new identity. I smile as I type this, reminded of your nickname Mac.

I remember driving to Germany. Looking in the mirror after having crossed the borders, I felt and looked more 'right'. Even after all these years, I still feel that. In the first years of living in the UK, I needed to go back to Germany at least three times a year. My body hungered for the kind of contact she was once used to. Going into a restaurant and feeling the looks of the other people, felt like a pleasant shower of warm light. I felt seen and part of 'my world'.

I will stop here. See you later,
Julianne

'Finding and not finding the universal language'

Thursday 26th January 06

Dear Julianne,

It was good to meet you face to face and talk about the ways this book has challenged us. After you left, I re-read 'The Universal Language', by Anne Teachworth and Lenny Ravich. This is an account of Anne's initial Gestalt workshops in Israel, her awareness of difference and her experiences in working therapeutically in a culture so different to her own. Anne's candour in recounting her experience was captivating, as was her desire to bridge the cultural gap. Reading this chapter, it felt like she was walking on eggs, careful and tentative in her awareness of difference. I imagine that many of us can relate to this feeling of caution and desire not to offend in an environment where the value system is so unknown to us. Despite this, Anne Teachworth was able to connect through her being and own experience, finding a 'universal language': that of presence, and being with each other, which do not need words.

The Palestinian conflict and struggle is part of my ground too. And so I did cringe at some of the references that, to me, felt dismissive of the reality of the conflict for the Palestinians. Lenny would show Anne around, commenting that 'This was where Israelis often go to get stoned' (p 251). At another time, Anne reflected on the danger of living in Israel, citing her translator's

reputation for throwing Molotov cocktails out of his bullet-proof Mercedes to keep Arabs away from his car. I would hope that, in her later visits, Anne was able to look more into the phenomenological experience of all occupants of that land. I feel my irritation at the facility and inadequacy of words, realising that, however unintentionally, these authors did not for me find the 'universal language'.

Words and language hold a world of meaning. From the title of their chapter 'Mind the Gap', I somehow expected Talia Levine Bar-Yoseph and Nahi Alon to write about some cultural experience in the UK. These words evoke for me the thought of the London underground. I remember my amusement and surprise when I first heard the short announcement asking passengers to 'mind the gap between the platform and the train' when they got out at the station. I was amused by what felt like extreme politeness, and surprised that, in this (for me!) precise and careful British culture, somehow the trains were too narrow or the platforms too large!

I'm sure there is an explanation. There always is. The fact remains that I did not expect to read in this chapter about the impact of the Holocaust on the Germans and Israelis. As I write I feel torn between doing a 'good review' of this chapter and staying with what it evokes in me. I want to write what a stimulating and unusual case study it offers of the work of two therapists working simultaneously with a Holocaust survivor. It highlights how essential it is in cross-cultural work to accept (however difficult this may be) that the other's view of reality is as valid as one's own – really to stay with a phenomenological approach. Both authors show the need in a cross-cultural context for the therapist respectfully to learn the other's world in order to create a common ground and find a 'mutual language...without losing sight of one's own culture and therapeutic stance'. (p 302).

I felt engaged by Talia's ability and courage in addressing, as Lichtenberg puts it, 'the special adaptations of contact functions' (p 35) in her own Israeli culture. She writes of the investment of her country in remembering and maintaining the victim position and that for her community, a 'common survival mechanism consists of holding onto feelings as they were at the end of the Second World War.' (p 297). Understanding, as a creative adjustment, the collective need of the Jewish people in Israel always to remind themselves to 'stay on guard', enables me to maintain my compassion for the situation today. The authors, moving to the middle ground, invite me to join them there. They might not know it but we are building bridges across our cultures.

What I was mainly impacted by was the personal journey of the authors in this chapter, and how the realisation of one's own stuckness with regard to difference often lies dormant. The weight of cultural and social introjects is huge. I am touched by Talia's generosity and spirit; it is from the ground of the war and the Holocaust that the figure of this book arose.

Enough for now, I would like to hear from you.

Marie-Anne

Thursday 26th January 06

Dear Marie-Anne,

I loved our time together yesterday. I am such a contact person and having to talk to a PC screen is hard for me. We were sitting together as two women coming from two worlds, trying to create a good ground. I remember that I came up with the image, that at the end of our meeting I had the feeling of our standing together on a bridge, side by side, next to you.

I am touched that you want to hear from me, and that you let me see and hear about you and where you come from. You called me 'my friend' yesterday and I feel like your friend. I clearly hear that for you the authors of the chapter 'The Universal Language' did not include your world. I welcome the view of your reality.

We write about universal language. English is not my first language, nor is it yours. I remember how weird I used to feel speaking English. Was that really me talking? Though not my 'mother's tongue', my English is quite fluent. However, I have to acknowledge that I could never ever, even after another 50 years of living in the UK, speak English in the same easy way as I speak German. (See Appel-Opper 2006).

We all have a deep hunger for contact, including words or not. In the chapter 'It's Greek to Me' Edna Manielevitch and Levine Bar-Yoseph remind us of the power of our need to make contact. The authors are 'stripped of the linguistic common ground' (p 188) as they train Greek-speaking trainees in Greece with the help of a translator. In this complex field the 'genuine will to be in contact' (p 187), together with dialogue and the phenomenological stance, do build bridges between cultures.

I am aware that we are nearly at the end of our dialogue. I feel relieved and sad about this.

There is one more chapter that I want to talk about: 'Psyche and Culture' by Lolita Sapriel and Dennis Palumbo. I have just mentioned our need for contact, but we also have a need to make sense, with our senses, of the other and of the field. If we need the other to find and speak our sense, what kind of sense, what kind of meaning do we find with another coming from another culture?

Sapriel and Palumbo focus on how culture gets into our psyche and our Self, how culture structures our meaning-making. Both authors combine Gestalt therapy, especially field theory, with relational psychoanalytical thinking. This text is so rich. It is also a theoretical ground I feel at home in. The authors point out that meaning is always co-created. Our culture forms our deeper assumptions and beliefs. Therefore, we all hold a unique set of unconscious cultural organizing principles or fixed gestalten. What still sounds rather theoretical is then filled with 'lived experience'; I am stealing this wonderful expression from the chapter 'Culture and the Body' (p 204). The authors' multi-cultural experiences lead to different, sometimes opposite cultural organizing assumptions within themselves.

Sapriel tells us about her upbringing in Egypt as a Sephardic Jew, bilingual in French and Arabic. Her family emigrated to the USA when she was 7 years old. From the way in which Sapriel shares her history we can see how the conflicting cultural fixed gestalten happen and wait for integration. The potpourri of her cultural and personal experiences leads to the organising principle of a requirement of 'self-lessness'. Her clinical vignette offers a flavour of how similar organising principles challenge the therapist and the client in their 'dance of mutual regulation'.

Palumbo grew up in the 'Eisenhower 50s' as a third-generation Italian American. Unlike Sapriel's, his family tried to adapt to the American culture, so that the Italian lifestyle was mainly lived in the house. Again, we get a good flavour of all the different assumptions and beliefs leading to an 'amalgam of organising principles' and to a conflict between succeeding at a high level and rebelling against it. The clinical vignette shows us that a seemingly similar culture may not always be the perfect match for therapist and client. In this case, 'Italian mothers are not just Jewish mothers who can cook'.

I will stop here, Marie-Anne. I need a break and a good meal.

Julianne

'Dialoguing with you around culture and reading this book has been a cultural experience in itself'

Saturday 28th January 06

Dear Julianne,

I feel we have experienced in our dialogue the range and full impact of this book. Dialoguing with you around culture and reading this book has been a cultural experience in itself. And I feel I have been changed by it.

In her introduction Talia points out that the book itself is a way of building bridges because of the wide diversity of co-authors from differing nationalities and religions. And amidst this wealth of difference, I feel even greedier in saying: What of the vast African continent? Or the increasingly influential Asia? The Indian or Arab worlds? This limitation cannot be placed at the editor's door. She has successfully pooled contributions from mostly Jewish and Western sources, which have traditionally been where Gestalt has emerged from and has matured. I am hopeful that, with the wealth and richness Gestalt has to offer in building cultural bridges, the rest of the world will one day be included. As it is, I am thankful for this book, which makes a valuable contribution to the understanding of culture and the richness of the Gestalt approach in building 'Bridges across Cultures'.

Finally, Julianne, what an amazing, exciting, sometimes painful journey it has been, writing this with you. Yes, we met on that bridge even when the sides of the bridge sometimes felt a little steep. Thank you for teaching me more about myself.

As they say in Lebanon مع السلامة (Go in peace)

Marie-Anne

Saturday 28th January 06

Dear Marie-Anne,

I am touched by what you say, my friend. I want to thank you for your encouragement, respect and support for me to participate in this dialogue in a way that was right for me. And I wanted to be respectful, so that you could do it in a way that was right for you too.

This book has been like a medicine. What a journey and what a process taking these pills has been. Will we, will I, be able to let go of the text? I think so. I have joined the authors of this book. I no longer want to shut up. I am here now, visible and audible.

What I have missed in this book are writers from continental Europe: France, Poland and Germany. At the same time, I honour the fact that this book is Talia's book from her world and I thank her again.

Dear Reader, I want you to take this medicine. Read this book. It is definitely worth the side effects.

With love. Take care.

Julianne

Acknowledgement

I want to thank my husband and my son for putting up with me disappearing so much in these last weeks. I wish to thank friends and colleagues who supported me during this journey, especially Sabine Bird as another German living and working in the UK. (J.A-O.)

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