'WITH ALL THEIR TENDERNESS INTACT'

THE ARTS, OTHERNESS, AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Malcolm Learmonth.

Warfare and the resistance to killing.

Political violence is ultimately expressed by war.

It is against human nature to kill other humans. This may seem a surprising statement. But consider the following:

'The average musket fire from a Napoleonic regiment firing at an exposed enemy regiment at an average range of thirty yards, would usually result in hitting *only one or two men per minute!* Such fire fights "dragged on until exhaustion set in or nightfall put an end to hostilities. Casualties mounted because the contest went on so long, not because the fire was particularly deadly."....

'The fire of the Napoleonic era soldier was incredibly ineffective. This does not represent a failure on the part of the weaponry. An experiment in the late 1700s in which an infantry battalion fired smoothbore muskets at a target one hundred feet long by six feet high, representing an enemy unit, resulted in 60 percent hits at 75 yards. This represented the potential killing power of such a unit'.

The reality, reported by an eye witness to a battle in 1863, was different.

"It seems strange . . . that a company of men can fire volley after volley at a like number of men at a distance not over fifteen steps and not cause a single casualty. Yet such was the fact in this instance." (Grossman, 1996, p10/11. Slightly condensed and paraphrased.)

Lt. Colonel David Grossman's book 'On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society' leaves no doubt of the enormous resistance to killing, even in war. The official historian of American forces in Europe in the Second World War, Brigadier General S. L.A. Marshall, concluded that:

'the average and healthy individual.. has such an inner and usually unrealised resistance towards killing a fellow man that he will not of his own volition take life if it is possible to turn away from that responsibility... *At that vital point, he becomes a conscientious objector'* (quoted Grossman, 1996, p1, my emphasis.)

In the trenches of the First Word War, an officer reported:

'the only way he could stop his men from firing in the air was to draw his sword and walk down the trench "beating the men on the backsides and as I got their attention, telling them to fire low"' (Grossman 1996, p12.)

While in New Guinea people 'took the feathers off the backs of their arrows, and it was only with these inaccurate and useless weapons that they fought their wars' (Grossman 1996, p12)

Grossman's explanation is seems obvious, once pointed out. 'Fight or flight' are poor second best options when the conflict is *with ones' own species*. Most conflicts are resolved by posturing or submission. The evolutionary survival value is obvious. In Scottish Clan warfare, the real purpose of which was cattle stealing, it's been said that the casualty rate was comparable with American football. There were rules.

Even the history of the killing technologies confirms that there funbction is mainly to frighten:

'The longbow would still have been in use in the Napoleonic Wars if the raw mathematics of killing effectiveness was all that mattered, since both the longbow's firing rate and its accuracy were *much* greater than that of a smooth bore musket. But a frightened man, thinking with his mid brain and going 'ploink, ploink, ploink' with a bow doesn't stand a chance against an equally frightened man going 'BANG! BANG! with a musket' (Grossman 1996, p9.).

People don't like to kill, but prefer to terrify when a conflict has escalated to the level where the only apparent silotion is to 'win' it.

Frozen Terror.

Trauma, Meaning, and Coping.

Much of the distress and disturbance therapists encounter is traumatic in origin. Trauma cpould be desribed as Frozen Terror. The fact that Frozen Terror *does* often

underly mental health problems indicates that is, from an evolutionary perspective, an abnormal event. If it were normal, then we would have far more effective inbuilt coping strategies. War and killing seem to be right on the edge of the stress tolerance limits for human beings. Collectively, it may be that political violence is the manifestation of stress tolerance limits in, and between, societies.

Politically, socially and psychologically, what an experience is held to **mean** has a spectacular impact on how damaging or otherwise it is.

'At some level every psychologically healthy human being who has engaged in or supported killing activities believes that his action was 'wrong' and 'bad', and he must spend years rationalising and defending his actions..... When (returning Vietnam soldiers) were publicly insulted and humiliated these acts...' (being spat on and called 'murderer' was common) 'became the confirmation of their deepest fears' (Grossman 1996 p341).

There are deep biologically driven reasons for an shame driven inhibition about murder.

'Shame... socialises. Shame is one element that stops us from behaving in ways that might hurt us, our families and our communities. It may, in fact, be the emotion that underlies the formation of a conscience'. (Rothschild, 2000 p63.)

Shame is a 'disappointment in the self' experienced when 'a person's behaviour threatened not only himself, but his whole group'. (Rothschild p 63). This is not 'guilt', the awareness of a 'bad' *act*: it is an awareness of a bad *self*.

Surviving the guilt implicit in violence is dependent on personal and reinforcing social beliefs in the validity of the cause: what it 'means'. Just some of the contrasting meanings that can be attributed in contexts of political violence are: Murderer/ Warrior, Terrorist/ Freedom Fighter, Oppression/ Law and Order, Free Market/ Exploitation, Liberation/ Occupation.

In the Second World War the British Army experimented with 'hate training' to try and make soldiers more effective killers.

'Some of the best students.... Became depressed, thought of themselves as killers and lost all interest in soldiering or fighting. Hate training produced guilt; whereas, as Main (the psychiatrist involved) later said, 'if you have a positive cause to fight for, an ideal, then you make a good soldier, not a killer' (Shephard, 2002, p233.)

(This didn't stop the US military in the 1960s getting recruits chanting: 'I wanna RAPE, KILL, PILLAGE 'n' BURN an' EAT dead BABIES'. Grossman's account of his own training. p308)

Meaningful and validated suffering is bearable when meaningless and invalidated suffering is not, whether it is the suffering of victim or perpetrator of violence.

‘The political dimension of suffering after torture is an example where therapy which focusses on some “core syndrome” is not able to address the real needs of the victim. Many people undergo torture because of their political convictions. It has been found that if these convictions are ignored during therapy, such people have difficulty making sense of their experiences'. (Bracken, Giller and Summerfield, 1995).

Approaching politically and socially induced trauma from an individual, westernised, psychotherapy angle can present real pitfalls. It can be of ‘doubtful relevance to societies holding different core assumptions about the nature of self and illness’ (Bracken, Giller and Summerfield, 1995).

The arts on the other hand, are part of the ritual, social, and religious practise of all cultures. Ellen Dissanyake, amongst others, has pointed out that the arts are used particularly intensively around stressful transitions, including war. (Dissanyake, 1995). Processes of ritual, reparation, rehearsal, reasserting mastery and making meaningful are familiar to arts therapists. These qualities may belong more to the arts than to our particular psychotherapy frame for understanding and applying them.

The arts and ambivalence.

Alongside a sensitivity to the relativity of meaning we have growing ‘hard’ information about the biology of trauma. (See Rothschild’s lucid account). While a concept like

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) cannot have a universal validity, it does seem to describe an observable set of reactions. A UNICEF psycho social survey of children who had survived the ethnic violence, siege and bombardment of Mostar between 1992 and 1995, found that 53% of them believed that 'life is not worth living', (i.e., perhaps, fundamental meaning structures had been destroyed?), and that 71% 'had terrifying dreams'. (Raymond and Raymond, 2000, p 32). The same writers publish powerful images made by these children, and believe that the 'opportunity to express themselves through drawings, writings, role playing and discussion... will begin a healing process' (p 23).

Evolution has equipped us with three crisis responses: fight, flight or freeze. (This omits the posture/ submission stage that Grossman identifies because this occurs *before* the final crisis stage). In the brain, the amygdala is responsible for highly charged emotional states, and the hippocampus for memory and processing. In PTSD 'the brain persists in responding as if under stress/ trauma/ threat... Even if the traumatic events has ended -perhaps years ago.... It is a vicious cycle, first set in motion in the interests of survival, but, but enduring as an impairment'. (Rothschild, 2000, p47). In effect, the event is 'frozen' in the amygdala.

This 'splitting off' is familiar to therapists. I have been told by several survivors of rape and violence that they had 'watched' what was happening 'from the ceiling', or from 'on top of the wardrobe'.

These ‘frozen’ experiences are prone to be re stimulated by cues triggering the emotional brain into recognition. An ex- soldier I knew threw himself flat on the pavement when a car backfired. A cat of mine was frightened of closing doors, having presumably been slammed in one. The survival value of fear conditioning is obvious, but so is the capacity to be disabling. Many mental health problems seem to involved similar experiencing ‘out of time’, and many therapeutic benefits rise from re-establishing presence in the here-and-now. The physicality of art making helps us do this.

Daniel Goleman, in ‘Emotional Intelligence’ argues that survival level responses, (‘emotional hi- jacking’), are at the root of much human violence and distress. His proposition that ‘emotional intelligence’ is a teachable skill, where hippocampus and cortical functioning can gradually desensitise an emotion driven amygdala reaction is a profoundly optimistic one. 'People can recover from the most dire emotional imprinting- ... The emotional circuitry can be re-educated’ (Goleman, 1996, p208). His evidence for this amounts to a rationale for much therapy practice.

He observes that children often seem to make better recoveries from trauma than adults, and identifies play as a key element. Arts therapists have often argued that art functions for adults as play functions for children, and that children themselves do not differentiate between the two.

‘These (re enactment) games, played over and over again, let children relive a trauma safely.. . This allows two avenues for healing: on the one hand, the memory repeats in context of low anxiety, de sensitising it and allowing a non-traumatised set

of responses to become linked with it. Another route to healing is that, in their minds, children can magically give the tragedy another, better outcome... Boosting their a sense of mastery over that traumatic memory of helplessness' (Goleman, 1996, p 208.)

Goleman makes the connection with art making specific:

'One way to get at the picture frozen in the amgydala.... is through art. The emotional brain is highly attuned to symbolic meanings (and).. to the messages of metaphor story, myth, and the arts.' (Goleman, 1996, p209)

In the case of children in political conflict situations, it has even been argued that when political violence has a damaging effect on children's mental health it is because it has been able to 'prevent, intrude upon and distort the healing function of play' (Cairns, 1996, p85.)

'Trauma Culture'.

In his history 'A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists, 1914- 1994' Ben Shephard argues that there was cultural swing from denial to overcompensation which resulted in an inflation of the post Vietnam war trauma statistics. A 1983 survey

'Finally reported that in 1988, 15 years after the last American combatant left Vietnam, 479,000 of the 3.14 million who had served there still had PTSD, and

almost a million people in all had suffered 'full blown' PTSD. Yet of those, *only 300,000 had actually been in combat.*' (Shepherd, 2002, p392, my emphasis).

There were even published guides like a 1993 'Post traumatic stress disorder: how to apply for 100% total disability'.

'Tell them about the symptoms you've read about... Let the tears start to come if you are able.....' Quite simply, there would be powerful motivations to be 'diagnosed a hero suffering from a war trauma and be given three thousand dollars a month' (Shepherd, 2002, p395). (Or to sue for compensation in other situations.)

By the 1990s two of the key figures who had succeeding in getting PTSD recognised in the DSM manual were having second thoughts about the usefulness of the label. 'The original concept of PTSD was a rich one derived from broad based research on combat, civilian catastrophes and natural disasters, conducted by many of the pioneers of psychiatry who were interested in studying mind /body relationships.... Somehow it became difficult to distil their wisdom into diagnostic criteria. We live in a world that places a high premium on standardisation and objectivity; *subtlety and complexity are imperilled in that world*'. (Nancy Andreason, quoted Shephard, 2002, p 391, my emphasis). Perhaps 'wisdom' is seldom 'distilled into diagnostic criteria'. One of Andreason's colleague in the establishment of PTSD suggests why: it is '*the psychological meaning* of the life event which produced changes' (my emphasis), (Mardi Horrowitz, quoted Shephard 2002 p 391). 'To every complex problem there is a simple solution, and its wrong'....

Resilience.

Therapy practice fills me with wonder, not at how easily damaged people are, but at how amazingly resilient, creative, and resourceful and creative we are. Therapy's emphasis on ‘damage’ has created the conditions for the ‘anti therapy' backlash that I believe we are now seeing, in the attacks on 'trauma culture’ and in many other areas. A medicalised model of ‘treatment' of ‘damage’ has become perceived as disempowering, if not downright patronising, about how people live, suffer, make meaning, and survive. We need to consider the factors of resilience as of equal, if not of greater importance, than those of damage. Art Therapy in particular has a strong case that working creatively is innately to work with the *un*damaged resourcefulness that makes and remakes meaning.

The factors of resilience are also complex and subtle. ‘To the uninformed adult it must seem inevitable that every child who is exposed to political violence will suffer serious psychological consequences, serious enough to warrant specialist help. What the empirical evidence suggests is that such suffering is not inevitable *Even if the children are exposed to exactly the same incident’* (my emphasis, Cairns, 1996 p 67). What differentiates ‘coping’ from ‘not coping’ with the potential traumas of political violence?

There seem to be areas of agreement about this.

- Immediate attachment networks offer profound mitigation. There is evidence from the second world war suggesting that evacuation of children was sometimes more psychologically damaging than living a city being bombed was. (Bodman,

1944, q Cairns, p41. John Bowlby's early work on attachment theory points in the same direction). Even to have *had* secure attachments and lost them 'is both a source of sadness, and also a source of psychological strength' (Cairns, 1996, p64).

- Socially cohesive attribution of meaning This might include a shared political or religious or group perspective.
- Social Support. A study of Iraqi asylum seekers in London showed that social isolation has a greater correlation with depression than having been tortured. (Summerfield, 2000 p 233)
- Peer groups and validation. After the Falklands war it was a deliberate choice to bring troops home by sea, (slowly and together), not by airlift (fast, but with no adjustment period or support). (Grossman, p273)

In short, 'Community cohesiveness and political solidarity determine to a large extent how the traumas of war are experienced and coped with' (Bracken, Giller and Summerfield, 1995).

Causes.

If meaning is key to surviving the trauma of political violence, it is equally key to what causes it.

'Political violence' has been defined as ' acts of an intergroup nature which are seen on both sides, or on one side, to constitute violent behaviour carried out in order to influence power relations between two sets of participants' (Cairns, 1996, p11). Political violence happens between groups and it revolves around power.

‘The individual is not a killer: but the group is ’ (Grossman, 1996, p 149). What makes groups killers? There is powerful evidence that inequalities are a key issue. Writing in the British Medical Journal in 2002, Frances Stewart is unequivocal.

‘There is consistent evidence of sharp horizontal inequalities' (defined as 'resentments inspired by group differences’) ‘between groups in conflict. Group inequalities in political access are invariably observed- hence the resort to violence rather than seeking to resolve differences through political negotiation. Group inequalities in economic dimensions are common, though not always large. Horizontal inequalities are most likely to lead to conflict where they are substantial, consistent, and increasing over time.’ (Stewart 2002, p343). The group differences may be drawn along lines of cultural, geographical, religious or class lines. But these differences ‘only become worth fighting for.. if there are other important differences between groups particularly in the distribution and exercise of political and economic power’. (Stewart, 2002, p343). Stewart identifies inequalities across political participation, economic power, assets, employment and incomes, and social access as factors in every recent occurrence of political violence, from Burundi to Northern Ireland.

This includes political violence perpetrated defending political and economic power, as well as seeking access to it.

Everyone involved in political violence believes themselves to be a ‘freedom fighter’, (even when defending an unequal privilege, and defining the opposition as

'terrorist'). There is an integrity to this violence, even if it is sometimes a perverted integrity.

The enabling and disabling of killing.

If the conditions of severe, ongoing, group inequalities in political and economic power are met, there are still major inhibitions to be overcome to produce killing. Dave Grossman has produced a formula. It looks like this.

The probability of a Personal Kill is determined by the psychological leverage acting on that person in a particular circumstance. This can be broken down as:

Demands of Authority: The intensity of the demand for killing. (remember that British Officer in the Trenches with his sword) X The perceived legitimacy of the authority (remember the appalling experiments by Milgram on how much apparent pain people were prepared to inflict on other people if a man in a white coat with a clipboard told them to. See Grossman, p 142, for an account.) X The Proximity of the obedience demanding authority (There are many records of troops ceasing fire as soon as the officer was out of sight) X Respect for the obedience demanding authority (A respected leader versus a disliked one).

Group Absolution. Intensity of support for killing X Number in immediate group X identification with the killing group X Proximity of the killing group.

Total Distance from Victim: Physical distance from victim. (It is far easier to kill by missile than to kill by bayonet) X Cultural distance from victim (which is why propaganda always endeavours to emphasise the social/ cultural/ racial *otherness* of the opposition: it is far easier to kill a slope eyed gook than teenage boy) X Moral distance from victim (the otherness needs to include a definition of the other as 'bad' in relation to our 'good', so we can kill an *evil* slope eyed gook. This has been called 'manufactured contempt' (Grossman, p256) X mechanical distance from victim (the technological means to kill from a distance). Its worth noting at this point that the ultimate human capacity to define the opposition as 'other' is to disqualify them as people at all, and define them as animals or even 'things'. This level produces the worst atrocities of all.)

Target attractiveness of victim: Relevance of victim (e.g. aiming for the one with the machine gun who is most likely to fire back) X Relevance of available strategies (e.g. is remaining unseen an option?) X payoff in killers gain (staying alive, status) + payoff in victims loss (e.g. shooting an officer to break up an opposition attack)

Aggressive predisposition of killer: Training and conditioning of the killer X Past experiences of the killer (e.g. he's seen his best friend killed) X Individual temperament of the killer. (Summarised from Grossman, 1996, p341).

Grossman is a former US army ranger and paratrooper who taught psychology at West Point. He knows what he is talking about. (He also illustrates beautifully, if inadvertently, how meaning making alters beliefs about history. Within two paragraphs, he claims that the Vietcong 'blatantly used atrocity as a policy' while the

US ‘visited impotent, futile bombings upon the North’ without apparently making a connection. p 207). The US military has been able to dramatically increase its ‘kill rates’ by understanding the formula. In the Second World War, only 15- 20% of combat infantry were willing to fire their rifles with lethal intent. In Korea it was about 50%. In Vietnam it was 90%. This in spite of:

‘..a force within man that will cause men to rebel against killing even at the risk of their own lives. That force has existed in man throughout recorded history, and military history can be interpreted as a record of society’s attempts to force its members to overcome their resistance in order to kill more effectively in battle’ (Grossman 1996, p207).

He parallels the experience of having killed with Kubler Ross’s model bereavement, with its identification of five (not necessarily sequential) phases of dying and bereavement: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. (Grossman p263). The parallel between the trauma of killing and loss is fascinating. (Loss of a ‘good self’?). He sees PTSD as the result of a failure of the rationalisation and acceptance process, which is largely socially determined.

These insights have much to say to us about the psychology of surviving a violence that is against our nature, and perhaps of even greater importance, what the factors are involved in its prevention. Reversing every step of Grossman’s formula for killing would reduce the likelihood of violence. Reversing the factors that Stewart identifies as setting the political and social preconditions could do the same. It is comforting to notice that both formulae imply that human beings have fundamental aversions to

both oppression and killing, and paradoxical that these inhibitions meet head on the field of political violence.

The healing arts have a role, not just in working with traumatised victims of violence on a personal level, but in the ritual and ceremonial that can contain and heal collective wounds. (Think of the impact of the Vietnam Wall. There is fascinating work exploring how warrior cultures have used ceremonial to prevent PTSD in returning warriors: Grossman 1996 p332).

I want to end with three vignettes of the arts functioning as catalysts for making meaning in conflicted situations. None of these are specifically ‘art therapy'. But each of them, in different ways, may be insights into the way that the arts themselves are a therapy, not just in our conventional western understanding of 'psychotherapy', but as a healing of the ‘body politic’. In all of them, a conceptual sculpture, a community choir, and a poem, the arts are serving to erode the perception of alien otherness on which killing depends, and functioning as bridges back from the place of ‘them’ to a place of ‘us’.

The Invisible Monument.

This extract is from an essay by James Young in ‘After Auschwitz: Responses to the Holocaust in Contemporary Art’. Jochen Gerz is a German conceptual artist. He invited his students to take part in a ‘clandestine memory project’

‘Under the cover of night, eight students would steal into the great cobblestone square leading to the Saarbrucken *Schloss,* former home of the Gestapo... Carrying book bags laden with cobblestones.. the students would spread themselves across the square, sit in pairs, swill beer, and yell at each other in raucous voices, pretending to have a party. All the while, in fact, they would stealthily pry loose some seventy cobblestones from the square and replace them with the similarly sized stones they had brought along, each embedded underneath with a nail so that they could be located later with a metal detector.... Meanwhile, other members of the class had been assigned to research the names and locations of every former Jewish cemetery in Germany, over 2000 of them, now abandoned or vanished. When their classmates returned from the beer-party, their bags heavy with cobblestones, all set to work engraving the names of missing Jewish cemeteries on the stones, one by one. The night after they finished, the memory-guerrillas returned the stones to their original places, each inscribed and dated. But .... the stones were replaced face down, leaving no trace of the entire operation. The memorial would be invisible, itself only a memory, out of sight and therefore, Gerz hoped, *in mind.*’

Gerz then made the project public, provoking a storm of debate.

‘As visitors flocked to the square looking for the seventy stones out of over 8000, they too began to wonder 'where they stood' vis-a-vis the memorial. Were they standing on it/ in it? Was it really there at all? On searching for memory, Gerz hoped, they would realise that such memory was already in them. This would he an

interior memorial: as the only standing forms in the square, the visitors would become the memorials for which they searched.'

Ultimately the local parliament:

'voted the memorial into public existence. Indeed, they even voted to rename the plaza "Square of the Invisible Monument', its name becoming the only visible sign of the memorial itself. Whether or not the operation had ever really taken place, the power of suggestion had already planted the memorial where it would do the most good: not in the centre of town, but in the centre of the public's mind, in effect, Jochen Gerz's *'2146 Stones: A Monument against Racism'* returns the burden of memory to those who come looking for it.' (Bohm- Duchen, ed. 1995, p80/ 81).

The Conductor's Tears Fuse with Those of the Choir and the Audience

The speaker is Kostis Kyranides, Greek Cypriot psychotherapist and psychologist, who has been involved for many years with attempts at collective healing across a fragmented community. One of these was organising a choir to sing in the barbed wire no mans land marking the frontier between Greek and Turkish enclaves. His theme is how weeping as a shared experience restores humanity over alienation, and gives this account of the mixed community choir's visit to London in 2000.

'Members of the choir had the chance to live together for almost a week. In Cyprus we can only meet for a few hours, always in the Buffer Zone and usually after having to face various difficulties and obstacles. . . . The other important element was the

warm reception we had by the Cypriot organisations who invited us and the overall climate in the relations of Turkish and Greek Cypriots here . . . something we can only visualise or dream of in Cyprus ... Now imagine about 60 singers and musicians standing on a stage of a hall full of your compatriots, not knowing who is who, them also not knowing who is who among the choir members ... . . Listening to their clapping and applause, my heart and voice was getting warmer and my spirit higher. The face of our conductor was getting brighter, her eyes shining . . . until we started a sad song lamenting the death of the beloved one . . Her eyes got red and then tears flowed to her cheeks, despite her effort to withhold them. I found my voice being choked by a wave of crying, I could already see some women wiping their eyes and a man close to me getting pale . . The voices were no longer coming out smoothly ... I found myself wondering whether to continue suppressing my crying, until I felt that the whole audience was moved and touched in a similar way. Their powerful applause finally liberated me from my dilemma, so I let myself free to cry together with so many choir members and so many people from the audience. In the meantime the lights fell in the direction of the audience and I could see many people holding hands and smiling to each other, and to us, of course....' (Champernowne Trust, p12).

Revenge.

This poem by Luis Enrique Mejia Godoy was based on the words of Tomas Borge. Borge was a Sandanista guerilla in El Salvador's nightmare of civil war. In the course of this he himself was tortured, and his wife raped and murdered. He became the Sandanista Minister of the Interior.

My revenge will be your children's right to schooling and flowers.

My personal revenge will be this song, bursting for you with no more fears.

My personal revenge will be to make you see the goodness in my people's eyes

Implacable in combat always, generous and firm in victory.

My personal revenge will be to greet you 'Good Morning' in streets with no beggars,

When instead of locking you inside they say 'Don't look so sad!'

When you, the torturer, daren't lift your head.

My personal revenge will be to give you these hands you once ill treated

With all their tenderness intact.

(Haywood, Ed).

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