

The 'Divided Self': A very personal account

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I was only 12 years old in 1960, and still being 'educated' in an English boys-only preparatory school, when R.D. Laing's seminal book *The Divided Self* was first published, so it is not surprising that I was unaware of it for quite a long while. However, I was – even in those innocent times – aware (and yet not aware) that my own Self was already quite seriously divided.

Maybe the 'split' had begun, when, at just 5 months, my 3-year old sister Caroline died suddenly, probably from diphtheria. The shock, grief (and possibly even blame) became the 'elephant in the room' and her name and presence was not mentioned in the family for another 15 years. Or, maybe, the division happened when we – as a family – moved from London to Australia in early 1949, and a nanny started to look after me. My second sister, Jessica, was born in Australia, when I was 2 years and 2 days old. We returned to the UK in 1951 and, after 6-9 months, were sent out to Singapore for about two and a half years, with six months leave somewhere in the middle of that. So I had two lives: one was 'out there' in the sun and warmth, with a wonderful colonial lifestyle, and the other was 'back here' *home* in the UK.

So, maybe, when we – as a family – were (supposedly) happy to be coming 'home' again, from Singapore, coming back to mid-1950s to Britain, which – having spent most of my childhood in a privileged existence (separated from real life) – actually felt more like being in a prison camp; or maybe the separation happened a bit later when, at 9 years, for a whole year, every weekday lunch-time, I was subjected at the dinner table in my boys-only preparatory school, not only to the 'horrors' of 1950s British institutional cooking (boiled onions, swede, semolina, sardines on toast and tapioca), but also to the irrationalities of the headmaster's wife (she was later committed to an asylum and the headmaster sold the school and emigrated to New Zealand with his 3 children); or maybe it was that – at last – the nannies and au pairs were all gone and I realized that I was not going to get the love that I still needed from my mother – so I started biting my fingernails, and stealing money from her purse; or may the schism of my existential reality became increasingly distant from consensual reality because I was already then, at age 10-11, being 'prepared' for the supposed benefits of an English 'public' school education.

Relatively brainwashed as I was, by books like Kipling's *Stalky & Co*; by boy's war comics (full of the 'brave British Tommy' killing the 'dirty Nazis', over and over again); by

the ‘jolly’ public school stories in comics like *The Eagle*; by Enid Blyton’s books, *The Castle of Adventure*, *The Valley of Adventure*, etc.; and all wrapped up in English middle-class values, I did not actually realise the full horrors of that particular abusive ‘private-public’ school existence until – much later – when I was watching Lindsay Anderson’s 1968 savage film satire on public schools, “*if ...*” (with Malcolm McDowell)¹. Only then did I realize that someone was actually portraying something of my own existence, my experience, my reality: somebody else had experienced something of the same thing: so maybe, I was not so alone, not so insane after all. I had also read Kipling’s *The Light that Failed*, which portrayed the miseries of his separation from his parents in India, and the brutal reception he received in England, but that didn’t really apply to me, as my parents didn’t (really) send me away.

My housemaster at the public school was pompous, somewhat unsure of himself, full of silly mannerisms, and yet was totally supported by the institution. I didn’t fully realise it at the time, I just ‘knew’ he was an idiot: and yet he had ‘power’ (was *in loco parentis*) over me. Later, much later, when I was more than 60, I heard that the headmaster of the school at the time met my sister and had asked after me, and then said, “*It was probably a mistake to have put him in X’s house; and it was probably a grave mistake even to have made X a housemaster.*” Vindication at last: a bitter-sweet pill, oh so very late.

For the first time, I was seriously unhappy (yet I was at one of the ‘best schools in the country’), my ‘brain-washing’ was incomplete and there was obviously something ‘wrong’ with me, as I was beginning to fail academically and ultimately behaving so badly that I was sent to see a psychiatrist in London, twice a week, for about 2 years. I was told, at the time, that there were two possibilities: the ‘other’ psychiatrist apparently used LSD, but my mother didn’t like the sound of that (she was a Christian Scientist), so I never experienced it. Ah, well. It might have been R.D. Laing. The psychiatrist I was sent to, also in Wimpole Street, didn’t help much, but at least he attempted to be honest and to treat me as a person, as did one of the school chaplains.

Yet, when I saw the film, 20 years dropped away, and my reality was suddenly in the process of not being denied, or obfuscated, or rationalized, or confused, or ignored, or pathologized; in that film, it was just being portrayed – admittedly as something quite definitely out of the ordinary. But to me, it *was* my reality, I was entranced: as I could have so easily – and I nearly did – break all the school rules, rebel, and do something like what they did in the film ... only I got found out, and got expelled instead.

¹ Lindsay Anderson produced and directed the film “if...” in 1968, which was a satire on English public school life. It depicted a savage insurrection by some of the pupils, featuring Malcolm McDowell in his first screen role. It won the Palme d’Or at the 1969 Cannes Film Festival: and it was given an ‘X’ certificate.

And so, then, I had had to cope with another schism, the shame of exclusion, the loss of all self-esteem, and it took several long bitter years to realise that perhaps – just perhaps – I had done the only thing that I could have possibly done, which was to save myself, my ‘soul’ and get out myself (thrown) of ‘the System’. So, maybe – just maybe – the problem was possibly more to do with ‘Them’, and not ‘Me’: and the anger began to stir and so thus I became (somewhat) radicalised. I didn’t realise till much later that I was also very angry, at both my mother and my father: they had bought the ‘lie’ and had ultimately condemned me, instead of helping me. Seeing the film, some of the shame around my expulsion faded then: and a small division, or split, started to heal.

In the late 1960’s, when I ended up at the Oxford Polytechnic, nominally studying for an Economics degree, but actually helping to run the new Student’s Union; forming reciprocal relationships with the University of Bratislava (during the ‘Prague Spring’ of 1968); having a fairly promiscuous sex life; working in the Oxford Playhouse; driving an old vintage Riley motor car, and having a small motorbike; with friends going off to Paris for the student riots in May; and we went to open-air, free pop concerts in Hyde Park in that July & August – with Pink Floyd, Tyrannosaurus Rex, Jethro Tull, Traffic, Fairport Convention and Fleetwood Mac; hippies and ‘flower power’ were also rife in California; with news about the Chicago riots (sparked by the assassination of Martin Luther King); and so forth – we (all) felt then that we were (maybe) on a rising tidal wave of universal liberation – things were really coming together – of course, until the 1970s happened. The ‘Divided Self’ that had temporarily been re-united with all this activity of ‘youth’, political power, protest and the chance of freedom, then reverted, but the memories of the good feelings remained.

Fortified by all this, but not being able to continue my course as I had ‘flunked’ out, I got a job teaching mathematics in (would you believe it) a boys-only preparatory school 20 miles to the north of Oxford: it was something that I could ‘do’. I still had no real sense of self; I was a pretty arrogant prig; and I also felt pretty empty inside. I didn’t really know what was doing.

Luckily, magically, I met someone, who also didn’t know what she was doing, but she had a much stronger sense of self. She was a Durham miner’s daughter (almost), who had got to university and then had a passionate but disastrous affair with her married tutor. We started going ‘out’. By this time, it was the early 1970s, and through her, I ‘discovered’ the work of A.S. Neill (founder of *Summerhill*) A year later, she was pregnant and – to my shame – I then rejected her, but she persisted, and I realised that, in fact, she loved (or needed) me,

and so I was able to love her. We got married: me at 23, and she at 21. Six months later, we had a son.

Soon, as a new father, and needing to support a family, I managed to pull together the ruins of an Economics degree and eventually get a Postgraduate Certificate of Education. I was following a vocation into teaching and, having moved to Newcastle, and having just qualified, and starting my first teaching job, my father suddenly died. This was not a total disaster, as we had now been quite distant for several years, and he had not attended my wedding a few years earlier, but he did enjoy having his first grandchild. He also left me some money in his will, which helped us to buy our first house.

Having just bought the house in Newcastle, and having just had a second child, we then moved a few months later, in my probationary year, and I became a fairly radical schoolteacher, in rural Suffolk – with Summerhill school just around the corner. I had already been ‘indoctrinated’ into the field of radical education, not only by the work of A.S. Neill, Homer Lane, John Holt (author of *How Children Learn* and *How Children Fail*), Ivan Illich, and several others, into the perception that what was ‘right’ was not necessarily the same as what was ‘common’ or ‘normal’ or ‘established’. Summerhill didn’t work out for our eldest, and eventually we ‘de-schooled’ him, and I helped produce a pamphlet for *Education Otherwise*² entitled, ‘*The only interruption in my education was when I went to school*’. I soon started having (neo-Reichian) psychotherapy to try to understand why I was essentially – existentially – still unhappy, fairly friendless, and feeling empty, and I also felt increasingly ineffectual in my chosen profession, in my marriage, and even sometimes distant from my (now) three children.

This was also the time of the rise of Feminism in the UK – which I naturally supported intellectually, even though I didn’t like the effects it was having on me – and so my reading now included *Spare Rib*³ and, later, *Achilles’ Heel*⁴, Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer, and many others, and I had long discussions into the night with my partner, and sometimes her brother, who also lived with us. So, now, not only was I totally ‘fucked up’ (being a white, upper-class, arrogant man), but so was society, having been dominated by such men for about the last 6,000 years. What hope could ever emerge out of such deep divisions as these? Could we turn things over and develop a less harmful culture? Could we get back to

² “Education is compulsory, school is not”. Education Otherwise supports education for children (between the ages of 5 and 16) at home, which is legal in the UK: www.education-otherwise.net

³ Spare Rib was a second-wave UK feminist magazine that started in 1972, W.H. Smith refused to stock it at the time, but it sold 20,000 copies a month. It ceased publication in 1993.

⁴ Achilles Heel was an anti-sexist magazine, produced between 1978 and 1999, coming out of the radical Red Therapy collective in London.

the land? Or live in a community? We investigated some: Lifespan⁵, etc. Teaching had palled, and I was now gardening.

Eventually, in 1979, I left (or was asked to leave) the family – another division of the self – and started training in a neo-Reichian, body-oriented psychotherapy, in London, with people like Gerda Boyesen, David Boadella, John Pierrakos, Eva Reich, Jim Healey, Jack Lee Rosenberg, and others. This was, perhaps, the first time in my adult life (since those heady adolescent days in Oxford) that I felt that I had somewhat ‘arrived’, that I was being more accepted, that I was ‘home’ – even though I had just separated from my wife and 3 children – because I was getting more into my body, and there were others who thought, and saw the world, somewhat similarly to myself. It was still pretty superficial, even though the therapy was quite deep. I was – perhaps for the first time – really learning how to ‘feel’ my self.

Living in a squat in north London, going to the Boyesen Centre⁶ almost every day, earning money at a crap job delivering meat to Pizza Hut restaurants across London, doing up old houses, and moving furniture for people (in order to keep myself), and entering into new relationships (some of them somewhat intimate) all took (or divided) me away from my old self into a (slightly better) ‘new’ self.

I was now in fairly intensive therapy, which was also very body-oriented, and I was beginning to discover deeper and more profound aspects of myself – some not quite so nice: especially when I was facing my Shadow? Some surges of anger, some rage, a lot of pain and jealousy, all emerged and wove themselves into a wider sense of ‘being’, with occasional feelings of a new (emerging) self. I was now reading the Boyesens’ work (which was almost unreadable) and about some of Reich’s work, mainly as described by Boadella, in, *In the Wake of Reich*, and *Wilhelm Reich: The evolution of his work*.

A few nights after a profound somatic (body-oriented) weekend-workshop experience with David Boadella, during which I had ‘gone through’ a lot of pain and tension in my diaphragm, which had been preventing me feeling the lower half of my body properly, I had the most profound, orgasmic, sexual experience of my life. Floating in space, trying to reconnect with my body, I experienced another form of a divided self – an ecstatic, almost transcendental form.

⁵ Lifespan Community (aka The Townhead Collective) was made up of a number of residents, children, dogs, chickens, etc. situated in 19 old railway workers cottages, situated in between Sheffield and Holmfirth, in the middle of the bleak Yorkshire moors.

⁶ The Gerda Boyesen Centre for Biodynamic Psychology & Psychotherapy was, at that time (1979), situated in Acton Park. It much later transmogrified into the London School of Biodynamic Psychology: www.lsbp.org.uk

Unfortunately, this was not to last, as a few moments later, the police broke into the squat, in order to arrest a tramp (living on the top floor) who had just killed someone else in a drunken fight outside a pub. I / we were all shocked – I was perhaps the more so, having been dislocated from this transcendent experience to the ‘violence’ of the police raid. The next few days were surreal: I felt as if I was in an alien, horrific, landscape – something akin to nightmares, like the holocaust and Babi-Yar. I later read D.M. Thomas’ *The White Hotel*,⁷ which captured something of both the ecstasy and the horror that I was feeling then. We – I – anyone were absolutely not ‘allowed’ to feel such ecstasy: the existential forces (police, church, state, etc.) that ‘control’ the world do not ‘permit’ that and had therefore stepped in to prevent it. I was traumatised, almost psychotic, and somewhat paranoid – the sudden switch from ecstasy to horror had been too great. My therapist of the moment taught me an ‘auric’ protective device that I have used a lot subsequently, for myself, as well as for others (clients)

This was also the time when the film, *The War Game*⁸, a grippingly realistic portrayal of the aftermath of a nuclear explosion, was shown locally and I was now having nightmares of trying to get across London to rescue my children, if they were still alive, with all this devastation and radiation and the bridges all being destroyed.

I had had other deep – and divided – experiences in the ‘Boyesen’ type of body-oriented psychotherapy that was in existence at that time: seeing my life as a part of the Akashic record; reliving experiences in the womb; experiencing my birth pangs; feeling the deep despair at being left for a few moments (of eternity) to cry in my pram or cot; and re-experiencing the void that the death of my elder sister had left in my/our family existence. These sorts of experiences, or insights, or events, or regressions – call them what you will – just happened; I experienced them; this was (supposed to be) what happened in therapy; I tried to accept them and integrate them a little; and then another one came along. There was no real systematic attempt made (by my therapists) to ‘integrate’ all these experiences – there was simply a (rather blind) “trust in the process”.

Looking back, it gave me a lot of amazing experiences outside of the ‘normal’ self: experiences that I have later, possibly, managed to integrate over many years and with many

⁷ Thomas, D.M. (1981) *The White Hotel*. London: Gollancz. It won the 1981 Cheltenham Prize for literature and depicted erotic fantasies and (supposedly) Jungian / Freudian case-histories, which then turned into a harrowing depiction of the Babi Yar episode of the Holocaust. Babi Yar was a ravine outside of Kiev where there was a massacre of (about) 33,000 Russian Jews in late September 1941, in “the largest single massacre in the history of the Holocaust” as well as other massacres at the same site of Soviet POWs, communists, gypsies, Ukrainian nationalists and civilian hostages, totalling perhaps 100,000-150,000 people in all.

⁸ *The War Game* was a 1965 TV documentary style drama depicting the effects of a nuclear war on Britain. It was withdrawn from TV transmission as “the effect of the film has been judged by the BBC to be too horrifying for the medium of broadcasting”. Whilst it won the 1966 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature, it remained un-shown in Britain until the 1980s.

other experiences. Anyway, my existential horizons – internal, as well as external – were expanding.

It was not until about 1981 that I first really started to read in more depth about people both within and around the radical ‘People, not Psychiatry’ movement: people like R.D. Laing, Mike Barnett, Thomas Szasz, David Cooper, Jenny James, Morton Schatzman, Joseph Berke, and several others, as well as more of Reich’s work: Michel Foucault came later. All this started to make a sort of sense, jigsawing in with my own experiences – and now, as I was beginning to emerge as a fledgling psychotherapist, I had oh, so very high hopes – which I realised was another division: a separation from being ‘ordinary’.

If we could really understand people properly, and be genuine with them, then what seems now like their ‘madness’ becomes much more logical and even relatively ‘sane’ and their ‘madness’ would (hopefully) disappear. In the relatively free and radical atmosphere of the early 1980s, *Sanity & Madness in the Family*, was followed by *The Politics of Experience*, and then the sublime book of *Knots*; I was also reading Thomas Szasz (*The Myth of Mental Illness*); David Cooper (*The Language of Madness*); Michael Barnett (*People, Not Psychiatry*); Aldous Huxley’s *The Doors of Perception*; Ken Kesey (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*); and (slightly later) Jenny James (*They Call Us The Screamers*), who, in the 1970s, founded the radical Primal (Scream) commune, Atlantis, near Burtonport, Ireland. Doris Lessing’s *The Four-Gated City*, *Shikasta*, and the other *Canopus in Argos* books also formed part of my lexiconography – I had read her books, *The Golden Notebook* and *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* a bit earlier. Her work also seemed, like Laing’s, to point to other realities, sets of experiences, perceptions, that we could (possibly) all experience, once we got out of the ‘trap’ of the Divided Self.

Here were people, from many different and varied perspectives and backgrounds, who seemed to be able to see behind (and occasionally even go beyond) the veils of illusion, the bullshit of the UK class system, the politicians’ pomposities and lies, the psychiatric diagnoses, and the societal obfuscation that surrounded us all, like a miasma, like an anaesthetic, or like a suffocating cotton wool blanket. It was frightening and attractive!

After my initial training, and then a period of time (about 15 months) actually running the Boyesen Centre as its administrator, and, whilst doing a post-graduate course, a Diploma in Psychology, I started working with people coming out from mental hospitals, with delinquent teenagers, with people with agoraphobia, addictions, and borderline personality disorders. New areas of ‘division’ were opening up. Having lived a relatively sheltered, upper middle-class life to date, I began to realize that many, many others lived very different

existences, in very different environments, with totally alien (to me) parameters, and with phenomenologies way beyond my dreams, or nightmares.

Eventually, with a new partner (who I met when on a holiday to a New Age community: Findhorn⁹) and eventually a 4th child, the closure of the Greater London Council, and the increasing insanity of city life in the mid-1980s, the only way forward seemed to be to ‘get out’, and so we went and joined this New Age community in north-east Scotland, and I thought then that I was settling down a little as I was approaching my 40th year.

The Findhorn Foundation – both an educational establishment (a little like a college campus) and a spiritual community, running workshops (like at Esalen) – was founded by Eileen & Peter Caddy in 1962. I had visited it in 1981 and met someone living there, who now seemed to want to ‘be’ with me, and who even came down to London to live with me. We had a child together in 1983, and then decided to move back up there in 1986. By this time, the ‘community’ consisted of about 120 ‘members’ of the Findhorn Foundation and about 40 people strongly connected but living outside in the wider community. This was a New Age community, situated in the unlikely environment of lying in between an RAF Air Force base and a traditional Scottish fishing village in north-east (rural) Scotland on the south side of the Moray Firth.

I soon realised that Scotland, at that time, was still an ‘occupied’ country: having been occupied by the “bluddy Sassenachs” for about 250 years (since the battle of Culloden, just up the road, in 1746) And – besides the RAF base and Gordonstoun School (also just up the road), here I was, another ‘invader’ – both part of a (strange) New Age community and English! There was even a local preacher who declaimed from his pulpit that we were ‘of the anti-Christ’: another local dignitary (and retired bank director) persecuted us, at the Findhorn Foundation, through the offices of the local newspaper and reporting us to the Charity Commissioners – ‘knowing’ that there must be something ‘wrong’ about us, as we were different. Yet more divisions!

The main ‘principle’ of the ‘spiritual’ community at that time was to try to bring more ‘spirit’ (or spirituality – though there was no real definition of this) into people’s ordinary everyday life: gardening, cooking, cleaning toilets, building eco-houses, running a caravan park, meditating and attuning together, and even into decision-making meetings, etc. Eileen Caddy had got direct guidance from the “still small voice within” and another founding member, Dorothy McLean, had made contact with the nature spirits, or ‘devas’, who (seemingly) guide every living thing, including the plants.

⁹ The Findhorn Foundation: www.findhorn.org

Sitting in a garden of one of the caravans one summer's afternoon, watching my 3-year old daughter play with a friend, I noticed that the television aerial of the caravan was held up by two pieces of wood tacked together. The angle that these two bits of wood made exactly mirrored the shape of a branch of the tree under which I was sitting and so a thought idly occurred to me that 'nature' made a better job of it than we 'humans' did. Then a leaf fell from the branch and into my head came the thought, "*I think about where every leaf falls.*"

I jolted awake, wondering who this "I" was. Being ensconced in the environment at Findhorn, it was (perhaps) not a question of my going crazy, but possibly some sort of a message from the Landscape Angel, or the Findhorn Deva, or some such 'being'. This was a reasonably isolated event, for a while, but then I started getting 'transmissions' from the Landscape Angel, even when on the top of a London bus, and later the Computer Deva, when working on Apple computers.

That winter, I had gone back down to London to do a 5-month work project with long-term psychiatric patients being rehabilitated out of Shenley Hospital, into the 'community' of Camden and Brent; some of whom had been institutionalized for 40 years, and so had to be re-educated into how to use supermarkets, modern phone systems, washing machines, etc. The 40-year stay in psychiatric hospital did not (surprisingly) prevent a 'remission' of their original symptoms as they re-emerged, still mostly heavily medicated, into modern late 20th century London. It was as if their psychic 'symptoms' had just been deep frozen by their isolation from real life, and the process of re-introduction into living in the community, mostly into group houses with people they had known for several years, with regular attendance at the Day Centre where I worked, was enough to trigger some of their original symptoms: hearing voices and the like. We had some good chats about this. I was also working hard on editing David Boadella's new book, *Lifestreams*, having put some of my experience into editing a couple of issues of the Boyesen Centre journals, *Journal of Biodynamic Psychology*, and 'reading' Arnold Mindell's early work, prior to publication, for Routledge.

Back up in the Foundation, in the summer of 1987, in quite an altered state as I had just given up smoking again, I was working one evening on an Apple computer and I started to get a series of transmissions from the 'Computer Deva'; a whole mess of poems; and other thoughts and writings came streaming in. By this time, I had signed up for a 12-week educational programme within the Foundation called 'Orientation' – towards possibly becoming a 'member'; however, it felt more like a "Dis-orientation" towards a somewhat

more spiritual “Re-orientation” – but to what sort of spirit? Anyway, I hardly knew whether I was coming or going.

My sense of my Self was – once again – splitting, being divided, and re-forming, almost on a day-to-day and week-to-week basis. Whilst I was never certifiably psychotic – I was definitely inhabiting ‘altered states of consciousness’ – and things were definitely ‘changing’, on all sorts of different levels: my relationship ended; my work changed; my sense of my self softened and opened; I became (slightly) more content and (somewhat) less needy; my perception of myself and others became (gradually) more accepting. The whole atmosphere of the Findhorn Foundation was very ‘nice’ – we later coined a phrase, “the tyranny of niceness” – another split from authenticity. Integration of these weird and wonderful spaces also took quite a lot of time, which luckily I had, now living alone, and without a television or radio.

At about the same time, I ‘came across’ or was ‘guided to’ – because that is how we ‘believed’ things worked – the work of Stanislav Grof, with his ideas about Spiritual Emergence processes and Spiritual Emergencies. His theories, and his experiences of working with people in so-called ‘altered states’ of consciousness, which he developed when living at the (sort of elder sister) community of Esalen (having previously worked with LSD), now directly connected with my own experiences of working at Findhorn, also with people in crisis, who were not necessarily psychotic, but there was definitely something ‘else’ happening with them, to them, or in them.

One female guest walked downstairs to breakfast half-naked; another came into someone’s bungalow, with a hammer and nails, and asked them to help her to be crucified; a third gave up taking their Lithium five days before she arrived; another was gently going crazy, and I had been called in, and then – suddenly – he ran out, got in his car, drove out towards Inverness on the main road, and then turned his car at right-angles to the oncoming traffic (luckily no-one was killed, and luckily he was quite wealthy so he could pay for the other person’s damage to their car); an elderly long-term resident developed Alzheimer’s, then left the nursing home she had just entered, walked 14 miles through to Elgin in the rain, and was found in a curry restaurant, having just consumed a third meal and having no money with her (she had left the other two restaurants without paying); this was just a few examples from the first years, and, acting as part therapist, part crisis prevention, and part ‘come and help me/us to deal with the loonies’ person, I had to arrange virtually everything for all these people, in order to sort out their ‘stuff’, get them a bit better, and then (mostly) get them to go home safely. The Foundation was not a residential community for people with mental health

issues, or in crisis, like Kingsley Hall, or the Arbours Association¹⁰, or Lothlorian¹¹, and it was not the Foundation, or the guest programmes, that were ‘causing’ them to go crazy; it was a relatively ‘safe’ place to go crazy in. Perhaps they ‘needed’ to go crazy, to explore other (denied) aspects of themselves.

And, as I was now the (sort of) resident psychotherapist at the Findhorn Foundation, I was beginning to work regularly with such people in these community circumstances, sometimes getting called out in the middle of the night, or having to drive across Scotland to pick someone up, and these ideas of the Grofs’ (and Laing et al.) gave me some theoretical concepts (‘grounding’) for what I was doing anyway, fairly intuitively, and a useful ‘label’ for the spiritual community, so they were not discriminated against – too much: *“Oh, he / she is just having a ‘Spiritual Emergency’”*.

I had already known about the work of the Arbours Association, and so – now that I was working in this area, relatively unsupported – I began to get some supervision from Joseph Berke, a colleague of Laing’s, on my regular trips to London. He gave me some very useful concepts.

I also came into contact with the Spiritual Emergence Network (SEN) in the States, and, in 1990, I was invited by one of the early SEN co-ordinators, Jeneane Prevatt, to present at a SEN conference in Monterey, California, along with Stan Grof and Arnie Mindell, whose work I was already familiar with. Whilst there seemed to be energy then for founding some sort of a Spiritual Emergence community or centre in California, being very much alone in Scotland, I had started to develop a somewhat different model, of building a ‘micro-community’ around the person in crisis, utilizing and shaping the resources that they had around them, or ‘drew’ to them. So, anyway, that is what I presented. I also started up a prototype of the SEN in the UK, and all this SEN work, and the handbook, or manual, that I wrote for people at the Foundation, later developed into my second book.¹²

This was also my first trip to the US of A, and it was – in many ways – a revelation. America had been such a magic ‘icon’ for so long, that the opportunity to go there (I had previously turned down an opportunity to help run a Mind-Body-Spirit conference in Los

¹⁰ The Arbours Association: provides a residential community setting for people with mental health issues in North London: set up by Joseph Berke and Morton Schatzman in the 1970s, who had both worked with Laing, after Kingsley Hall closed. For more information: www.arboursassociation.org

¹¹ Lothlorian Therapeutic Community (Rokpa Trust), in Dumfriesshire, South-West Scotland, founded in 1974, is a residential therapeutic community for people with mental health issues. Since 1989, it has been run by the Rokpa Trust, and international charity founded by the Tibetan Buddhist Community, Samye Ling. For more information: www.lothlorian.tc

¹² Young, C. (2011) *First Contacts with People in Crisis and Spiritual Emergencies*. Bloomington, AuthorHouse Books.

Angeles) So, I spent a month travelling up and down the West Coast; from San Francisco up to Seattle and Portland, and then way down to Santa Cruz, Monterey, Big Sur and – of course – Esalen.¹³ I saw mountains and redwoods, and also how some very nice people had despoiled a fantastic country. I also encountered how some of the ‘old ways’ were still very alive, when I visited La Push, a Quileute tribal village on the edge of the Olympic Peninsular and met one of the tribal elders, David Forlines. He had initiated a ‘Paddle to Seattle’ a couple of years earlier and had carved the first ocean-going canoe that the tribe had had for a long time. We might seem a long way from the work of R.D. Laing here, but the traditional peoples of North America were also very “divided selves” – disinherited, disadvantaged, riven with alcoholism, and totally denied their heritage. I learnt a lot from him in just one autumn evening, after a small potlatch. Unfortunately, he died soon afterwards.

In the years to come, Stan Grof was to come to Findhorn a couple of times to teach his Holotropic Breathwork technique, but it was not so suitable for the community and I also had serious personal reservations about how the technique was structured, because it was necessary to help several people to integrate after their ‘way out’ experiences: one person, who had been trekking in Afghanistan and had seen a ‘Mujahedeen’ village bombed by the Russians, relived that experience, in the workshop, and then needed quite a lot of help to integrate it after the workshop leaders had departed. His spiritual ‘life-path’ developed into helping to build and set-up medical centres in very remote Nepalese villages.

Army Mindell and others from his way of working (Process Oriented Psychotherapy) also came, and his Process Work began to be used individually, and to help build ‘community’, and is now quite well established there.

Throughout the 1990’s, whilst still at Findhorn, I was travelling monthly to London to keep in contact with my 3 children there. I was meeting people from the Arbours Association and the Philadelphia Association regularly, but in a very different environment – in committee, as I was (additionally) working hard in the field of the ‘politics’ of psychotherapy (psychotherapy as an emerging independent profession in the UK and in Europe) So there I was, sitting with these people, with others from the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the British Psychological Association, whilst also being at Findhorn, and being a ‘fringe’ psychotherapist from a New Age community. Surreal, or what!

¹³ Esalen Institute: an educational workshop centre and community, founded in 1962, on 27 acres of land on the Big Sur coast of California, south of Monterey, and dedicated to exploring one’s ‘human potential’: known also for its fabulous hot springs, baths and massage facilities. More than 300,000 international visitors have come during its 50 years of existence.

Later political work occurred particularly when I was helping to consolidate the ‘field’ of Body Psychotherapy within Europe. Body Psychotherapy was trying to heal the mind-body split that had plagued society long before Descartes declared in his eponymous statement, “*I think, therefore I am*”. Thankfully, others are now also coming to the conclusion that the mind-body split is just another aspect of the ‘Divided Self’. This is a process that has been going on for thousands of years, but it also has a severe implication for individuals, as Laing commented:

When I look at my body from the outside, it is still there, but it may have disappeared years ago as a real alive experience from within. As we become numb, we are numbed to our own numbness. The less we care, the less we care about caring less. We stiffen, harden, shrivel, become bent, but can't bend, twist, run, hop, dance and sing, walk, sleep, even. We lapse painlessly into the complacent ease of bodily vacuity. We may have to think about it before we realize how unfamiliar this most intimate of all our feelings may be. (R.D. Laing, in a forward to A. Balaskas, *BodyLife*, Whitefriars Press, 1977)

But Body Psychotherapy itself was also still being plagued by the many divisions (separate modalities) within itself – Orgonomy, Bioenergetics, Biodynamic Psychology, Character Analytic Vegetotherapy, Hakomi, Lomi, Unitive Psychotherapy, Biodynamic Analysis, Rubinfeld Synergy, Pessio-Boyden Motor System, etc. etc. and so on – another aspect of all the splits, factions and divisions that can be used to separate ourselves from ‘the other’.

Within the European Association of Body Psychotherapy (EABP), we developed a Forum of Body Psychotherapy Organisations, as well as re-building the professional association for individual Body Psychotherapists in many different European countries. This helped to consolidate the ‘field’. We also formed links to the newly-formed USABP (a sister organization for Body Psychotherapists in the USA) and other links with other Body Psychotherapy organizations across the world. There were also splits and divisions within EABP: the southern ‘Latin’ countries didn’t like the way that the ‘Germanic’ or northern countries wanted to organise things, and there were similar criticisms in reverse about the overly ‘laid-back’ and ‘chaotic’ way of doing things whenever we went south – though the food and weather was usually much better.

As the 1990s proceeded, and we wanted to develop training standards, many of the individual practitioners and the training schools didn’t like the implications that (perhaps) they weren’t doing things ‘good enough’. Some countries benefitted from developing a national association of Body Psychotherapy; people in some other countries resisted. And yet, we all had to move forward together and develop Body Psychotherapy from being a ‘fringe’ or ‘flakey’ therapy, to being a more mainstream and professional psychotherapy. There were

also divisions between those who followed the ‘craft’ of psychotherapy and those who supported the requirements that psychotherapy needed to become more and more ‘scientific’. These are seemingly very disparate paradigms, but – as any craftsman knows – we also have to be very aware of the underlying science of our craft.

In 1996, I met, and a couple of years later married, my soul-mate, my ‘Besherta’¹⁴, Laura, who was also a Jewish, and American, (and a ‘princess’), and so I suddenly had to confront some of these inner prejudices much closer to home (I was quite ‘Yank-o-phobic’ on a day-to-day, moment-to-moment basis).

We carry so many ‘divisions’ within ourselves between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’, often mainly unconscious, that we then ‘use’ these divisions to create an ‘identity’ for ourselves: something that we are ‘not’. But this is a seriously false identity, often based on outdated prejudices, so this is not who we really are: we have become much more like ‘this’, or ‘that’, or (not) ‘the other’. It is very hard to sift through all this labyrinthine developments, follow ‘red threads’, and perhaps eventually find a few little pieces of our true Self.

As the 1990’s ended, I was living with (married to) someone from a very different culture – and even though we spoke a similar language, and even though we were in a similar profession (she was a Ph.D. Clinical Psychologist and Body Psychotherapist) – there were some serious divisions. It was not all rosy; she was suffering from quite severe depression, due mainly to culture shock (having moved from Houston, Texas to a very small, cliquy, New Age community on the edge of a Scottish fishing village) After 5 years, the honeymoon – and her sabbatical - was over, enough was enough, and she decided to move to Edinburgh to take up ‘proper’ professional work again. I was thankfully ‘allowed’ to come with her.

A month after we moved, tragedy struck my extended family. My ex-wife had had another child about 3 years after we had separated; her 2nd husband had then died of cancer about 6 years later, at the age of 34, leaving her as a widow with 4 children. We had long gotten over the fact that I was the wrong husband who had died, and were – and still are – good friends. Her youngest child, now aged 20, having travelled around the world, was well started at London University and doing brilliantly. Tragically, he climbed a tree after an all-night party at the end of his first year, and fell onto a concrete path. They turned the machines off just as I arrived at the hospital later that afternoon. I had been present at his home birth (looking after the other 3 children), and now at his death: he was not my child, but I was some sort of surrogate father. His death – especially coming after Alex, his father’s death 13 years earlier – affected the whole family very deeply. Death is, after all, the Great Divide. It took

¹⁴ Besherta: a Jewish word meaning “soul mate” or “the other half of my soul”.

months, nay years, for some of us to emerge into a different way of being, though one never really gets over the sudden and untimely death of someone so very close. It also had (weirdly) a somewhat binding effect on the family, as well.

Having worked as a (private) psychotherapist in a New Age (hippy) community for about 17 years, I now suddenly found myself in my own form of ‘culture shock’; working in the Scottish National Health Service (NHS), in departments of Clinical Psychology, wearing a suit and tie, and seeing people in areas of Scotland that felt similar to the land of Mordor – 20 years after the fall of the ‘Dark Tower’¹⁵. The land was now green (20 years after the closure of the coal mines under Margaret Thatcher), but the people were still devastated by their industrial past. Violence, sectarianism and alcoholism had been rife: there were many other ‘shadow-like’ aspects emerging in the aftermath: and very few resources to deal with them. Many of these previously, very active and alive mining villages, situated around a pit-head, now had more car washes than garages, a very high rate of unemployment, and perhaps only one bus a day to the nearest town. We were also seeing an increasing number of immigrants; many of them intelligent, educated, professional people in their own country, but now – because of wars, or regime changes – condemned to living as an ‘alien’ (non-person), existing in a high-rise flat, with stairways smelling of urine, with no work, no self-respect, in a country with a different language, and with a large amount of social discrimination: thus obviously quite depressed. Divisions and more divisions! The actual social environment seemed to be creating problem after problem for all these individuals, despite their origins.

I started to work at a deeper, better and much more professional level: I was seeing more and more clients – I was receiving an average of 2 new referrals a week – and I was (again) beginning to form my own methodology. This later developed into my first proper book.¹⁶ I was also writing more. I was beginning to do some research, as I was checking exactly how my clients were improving (according to external measures like CORE) and was interested whether some information and a short counselling session might help people reduce their blood pressure. I was attending interdisciplinary professional seminars and conferences. I was travelling (nearly every other weekend) to meetings, seminars and conferences in UK, Europe and internationally. The early 2000’s were a very productive time, but I was also increasingly extending – and depleting – myself. All my activity was (again) going into the periphery, and I was (again) not paying anything like enough attention to the centre, my self.

¹⁵ The ‘Dark Tower’: Barad-dûr – from J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*.

¹⁶ Young, C. (2009) *Help Yourself Towards Mental Health*. London: Karnac Books.

I had done this once previously, when I had developed undiagnosed chronic hypertension at the age of 45, which laid me up – off work – for about 18 months. I had also worked too hard and fast, in order to be properly appreciated, and had a couple of accidents to my right hand: ‘doing’ too much? I had tried to slow down and find a new way of ‘being’, but always fell back into the old workaholic patterns. It was all happening again, and, this time, my alcohol consumption was also now on the increase (my father had been pretty alcoholic as well) A period of working at weekends in a pub helped my finances on a week-by-week basis, but this really didn’t help matters with respect to the alcohol.

Eventually, in 2006, we tried to buy a house outside Edinburgh, and then it fell through at the last moment, and – having given notice – we then had to move house to somewhere much more expensive. My finances were now getting very stretched again. I tried working (as well) as a night-time taxi driver, in between jobs in departments of Clinical Psychology: the splits were getting deeper. I got a useful contract to try to clarify an ethics case that helped pay for a new lap-top computer, but then got into financial difficulties again when we eventually managed to buy a house, in 2007, which proved to have one room’s whole floor needing renewing. At the same time, having just got my eldest daughter to start paying me back some of the capital I had lent her, four years earlier, she defaulted on the payments and I was back in financial chaos.

I had just been elected to a high position in one UK professional association (seeking recognition and acclaim perhaps for what I ‘did’ rather than who I was, which entailed me travelling down to London much more often than was good for me, having very little time and money to spend on the new house that we had just moved into, making a serious administrative ‘mistake’ with another association, and I generally managed to get myself into a total profession mess: another crisis. There was also an unconnected ethical ‘complaint’.

I was ‘dismissed’ from one professional association, and had to resign from another. I went back into therapy and increased my supervision. The ensuing professional ethics ‘processes’, dealing with the complaint, caused me to enter into a two-year ‘shadow-land’ of seeming disgrace, whilst also trying to earn enough money to keep everything going, and to keep sufficient self-esteem to hold my head up and myself functioning professionally. It meant going through the ethics hearing, which largely exonerated me; protesting about the process of dismissal; appealing against the association’s decision to expel me; first to them (which took a year) and then to a superior body (which took nearly another year); and eventually going through a whole day of protracted mediation, from which I eventually emerged free and clear – eventually, it was like coming out of a long, dark tunnel.

The external shells of my life had seemingly been in ruins and I was really struggling to keep myself together. I was back in fairly intensive therapy; I was working 65 hours a week, feeling terrible about myself, with virtually no money; my marriage was rocky; and I was in despair and wondering whether it was all worth it. There were several moments of suicidal ideation – and yet (ironically) my actual clinical psychotherapy work was never better. Looking back on things – and having just watched the film, *The Help* – I now realise that sometimes you have to get yourself fired from the ‘system’ in order to be truly free.

Approaching my 60th birthday, whilst limping along the ‘Chemin St Jacques’ in France towards Spain (where it turns into the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostella) with horrendously painful blisters on my feet, I learnt that my 89-year old mother had become seriously ill, and so I just managed to catch trains (2 in one day) and planes (3 in the next day) to get to her hospital bedside just about 45 minutes before she died, unconscious, but I was holding her hand. I also had a week left of my holiday to help sort out her funeral arrangements. The aftermath of this was strange: it was strange not having any of the elder generation above us; it was strange her not being there; I had had a very strange relationship with her, all mixed up between anger and need, love and money, and not really having had enough of either; and now there was quite a lot of money, but no chance of ever receiving the love that I had needed so much from her. My own therapy turned – at last – more into looking at how to give this sort of love, and nurturing, to myself: simple, obvious, elusive, and so, so difficult.

Slowly, things started to come together. Now, I was eventually back in professional registration; publishing a lot of articles; I had become the editor of a professional journal and on the board of another; and I had re-built something of my marriage; and I had also become a grandfather. I was now acknowledging an almost life-long depression and some quite dysfunctional relationships with family, women, sex, money, power, work, etc. And I was also experiencing moments of mindfulness and some genuinely ‘good’ feelings about myself. I felt much more integrated, and I was also not blaming myself so much. There were even moments: fleeting glimpses of what? – Numinous moments; connections with ... other things; elevated pleasure; quiet transcendence. Nothing very dramatic, but somehow very satisfying! I was also making new friends again. At long last, my Divided Self and issues in my outside world more and more came together, unified (somewhat) once again. This is where I am happy now – and there is a way to go yet.

Laing wrote (in the Forward to the 1965 Pelican edition of *The Divided Self*):

“Our civilisation represses not only ‘the instincts’, not only sexuality, but any form of transcendence. Among one-dimensional men, it is not surprising that

someone with an insistence experience of other dimensions, that he cannot entirely deny or forget, will run the risk either of being destroyed by the others, or of betraying what he knows.

In the context of our pervasive madness that we call normality, sanity, freedom, all our frames of reference are ambiguous and equivocal. A man who prefers to be dead rather than Red is normal. A man who says he has lost his soul is mad. A man who says that men are machines may be a great scientist. A man who has he is a machine is 'depersonalised' in psychiatric jargon. A man who says Negroes are in an inferior race may be widely respected. A man who says his whiteness is a form of cancer is certifiable.

A little girl of seventeen in a mental hospital told me she was terrified because of the Atom Bomb was inside her. That is a delusion. The statesmen of the world who boast and threaten that they have Doomsday weapons are far more dangerous, and far more estranged from 'reality' than many of the people on whom the label 'psychotic' is affixed."

Laing ends this Forward: "*This [book] was the work of an old young man. If I am older, I am now also younger.*" I can echo many and much of what I read in Laing's work: in *The Divided Self*, in *The Self and Others*, in *Sanity, Madness and the Family*, in the sublime *Knots*, in *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise*, in ... no matter: his writings live on. I never met him – to my regret. Yet he has had a phenomenal – and has been a phenomenological – influence on my life.