

establishing an equilibrium between the demands and intentions of self-regulation and environment, adding its newly found results to the human tradition.<sup>5</sup>

Mental illness is the inability to stabilise and/or integrate one's own pattern of behaviour into a social framework, leading to a breakdown of (different and multiple) layers of 'symbolic formation', while the balance between cultural interaction and the emergence of inner preformed pattern is continuously (or constantly) changed towards the latter.

Clinical psychiatry is entitled to move on from Szasz's and Shorter's outdated theories, yet it is well advised to strengthen its focus on semiotic and symbolic research. This may direct us towards a 'science of meaning' (saliency), beyond a mere biological function and to integrate these important sources of knowledge into the regular discourse of our discipline.

- 1 Szasz T. The myth of mental illness: 50 years later. *Psychiatrist* 2011; **35**: 179–82.
- 2 Shorter E. Still tilting at windmills. Commentary on . . . The myth of mental illness. *Psychiatrist* 2011; **35**: 183–4.
- 3 Head H. Disorders of symbolic thinking and expression. *Br J Psychol* 1921; **XI**: 179–93.
- 4 Cassirer E. The psychopathology of symbolic thinking. In *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. Volume Three: The Phenomenology of Knowledge*. Yale University Press, 1957.
- 5 Andersch N. Symbolic form and Gestalt: Ernst Cassirer's contribution to a 'matrix of mental formation'. *Gestalt Theory* 2007; **29**: 279–93.

**Norbert J. H. Andersch**, consultant psychiatrist and neurologist, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, London, UK, email: [norbert.andersch@slam.nhs.uk](mailto:norbert.andersch@slam.nhs.uk)

doi: 10.1192/pb.35.10.395

## Correction

The NHS, the private sector and the future (letter). *The Psychiatrist* 2011; **35**: 354. The last line of this letter is inaccurate: the Winterbourne Hospital is owned and operated by BMI Healthcare and is a completely separate organisation

that has no connection to the care home owned by Castlebeck called The Winterbourne View. We apologise for this error.

doi: 10.1192/pb.35.10.396