

Alix Pirani

## Self Renewal and the British AHP

It's the final moment of the conference. I am standing in the shabby Lounge of the Engineering Building of University College. In the dim background engineers and mechanics are researching away in colourless rooms and the London Friday evening rush hour drones on. I am surrounded by over 150 people whose warmth and energy has grown over the past few days into a dynamic glowing presence which we can now hold together for a while, and then take away with us, according to our capacity.

I've chosen to read, as a final offering, D H Lawrence's poem *Shadows* - probably his last poem, written about the time I was born, in which he reasserts with intense loving steadiness his belief in self-renewal and his faith in the unending life-process. And I myself am trembling from head to foot, visibly, I have support, from Caroline at my side, and from my 'audience', to find the strength in my voice that the poem wants of me. The poem and its rhythms supports me and helps me breathe with it, and I am carried along with its process. It is my own self-renewal, because I have found a place where I can allow myself to feel, show and live through a deep fear of failure, a fear that I will lose my breath and die as I hold down my life-energy, a fear that has lain behind all my performing and relating to people since I was first struggling to be born. That I am in touch with that at all, that this renewal is possible, I owe to the intelligence and skill and love and energy of thinkers and therapists and writers and and people that I've found in my life - especially since I first found the AHP at their Global Village conference five years ago.

...The whole process we have been through, the British AHP Committee, organising this conference, has been our self-renewal - from the early days a year ago when a small group of people who for a long time had found it hard really to get together or get anything very solid together took the risk of initiating this project and trusting it would succeed, in spite of the mistrust between them. Not surprisingly, few people trusted us, or had confidence in the conference, for a long time. Then, when it looked real, the response, the energy that it attracted to itself was enormous and, to us, exhilarating and invigorating. And it didn't matter that the doubters didn't turn up. We had a fund of energy to draw on in the creativity of the group - and that was unceasing.

...The British AHP has been essentially British - composed chiefly of British members and committee members, unlike most of the growth centres here. It has been depressed in a characteristically national way: dogged by the suppression of life-energy that the British middle-class environment reinforces, as it did in me from my birth onwards. We have had to find our own way of struggling through that. The growth movement here, the AHP, is invigorated by American energy, by European energy, by Eastern energies. We need those. But we can be ourselves, and aware of what we uniquely are, of what our British energy potential is inside us. It is an individual commitment and a wider group commitment - a cultural one. That's why I wanted to

read from D H Lawrence: because his work is one of the places where a uniquely British energy is at its most vibrant. It kept me alive and breathing for years before I found the growth movement.

...The Conference began with a Huxley: his father and grandfather were closely associated with the intellectual tradition that is embodied in University College. And the college was a characteristically British academic structure for us: solid, amusedly if uneasily tolerant, controlling, but somewhere genuinely interested. The sort of hosts the British have always been - and that is what draws foreign energies to us; our receivingness and our groundedness are positive strengths.

Perhaps from a sense of what was missing in that rationalist tradition Francis Huxley turned to anthropology and therapy. Yet alongside that elitist tradition was another that lay in the working classes, and for generations British working-class energy has been suppressed by all kinds of control. But it's undeniably there - and emerging everywhere; not only neurotically, but in positive creative ways also that need validation and nourishment. The split between the classes, between thinking and feeling traditions, mind and body, between traditionalists and progressives, 'them and us', can be healed, as we heal the split in ourselves. John Rowan's model for a training in therapy, which he introduced at one of the conference sessions, seems to me to offer just that.

D H Lawrence was the son of a coal-mining father and a middle-class-oriented mother. His struggle, his intelligence, his response to the life in all people and all the nature, his creativity, his faith in the phoenix and the constant renewal of life, can be ours.

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Jim Scott

## **The Social Relevance of Humanistic Psychology**

This surely needs to be the subject of the next European Conference. Unless it is tackled, and soon, I believe Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi will be proved right in implying Humanistic Psychology 'pacifies the alienated and neutralizes the angry' (Humanistic Psychology: Progressive or Reactionary? Self and Society April 1977). The danger then is that HP will go the way of Mystical Scene, Flower Power and others who might like to think they are still alive and kicking.

I may be jaundiced. In one way, let us hope I am. In another, acting too soon is a lot better than too late.

Benjamin B-H (please excuse the progressive abbreviations) throws down a very serious challenge and it must be answered, either by refutation or by a course of action. Even if you have read his article, I think it helps to precis his main points: