

AHP Conference Reports

Julian Nangle

The highlight of the conference for me was the Conversation with John Rowan on the Saturday evening. It was good, very good, but I got extremely angry when, at the point he was about to illustrate the use of visualisation in therapy (exactly what I am developing at present in my own practice) somebody piped up 'But hang on John, I'm still standing up with my arms stretched out from the last exercise you gave us. Aren't we going to debrief on that exercise first?' I screamed inwardly. If we, as therapists, can't handle a little transpersonal experience facilitated by one of the masters of the genre what hope is there for us as therapists? This very act he was about to do, show us what he does in therapy with visualisation, was why I came to this conference wasn't it? Oh my God, he's listening to her, he's giving the floor to others who feel the same. The moment was gone — we never got it back. This was my lowest moment at the conference but I quickly recuperated and spoke a few words to my new-found hero.

Saturday was Guy Gladstone Day for me. I liked the subject matter he was dealing in: *Bridging the Splits and The Drama of Dreams*. The Bioenergetics used in the first workshop was a real awakening for me and I learnt something about myself which I shall always treasure. Now that's the sign of a good workshop! The second suffered only from being too popular. I felt that to spend two and a half hours on the material of two people out of twenty

left the eighteen of us whose dreams were not used feeling a little side-lined. This said, I experienced the workshop as a fascinating lesson in methodology, a new way of moving people through possibly tricky material by the clever technique of once-removing it into the realms of drama, but so much less intensely than the Gestalt model demands.

Sunday I rose bright and early and went for a walk around the lake. The sun was shining for the third day running and the high spot of my walk was to observe, beneath the dappled light of a bending beech by the lakeside, a basking trout of enormous proportions.

Sunday had started well and continued well. I moved into the library early, to get the atmosphere of the place before surrendering myself to the mercy of John Button's *Creative Ways with Anger and Frustration* workshop. I walked in to a magnificent spectacle of John in balloon trousers hand-and-body wrestling with Queenie. This was indeed a sight to behold, not to mention the accompanying sighs and grunts. Anybody listening to what was going on in the library without stepping in to take a look might have misunderstood what actually was going on. It lasted some ten minutes. I imagine Queenie and John will remember it forever! I certainly shall. The workshop itself was superb. I recommend to anyone, fearful or fearless, that given the opportunity they allow themselves into a workshop facilitated by

John Button. He has that remarkable quality of being able to give sustained individual qualitative attention to a group. This is by no means an easy thing to do nor something one can be trained to do. It is a gift, and John has it.

The grand finale was a return to the circle dance theme which had preceded

the disco dancing the night before. John started singing that he was a tree and like lemmings we all followed him. What is it about that man? We sang a beautiful song of Universal Peace, the words to which I cannot remember. I would love to see them printed in *S&S* along with other songs sung over the weekend.

Alyss Thomas

The essential fragrance I took away from Petruska Clarkson's talk, after she had fazed us with complimentary colour postcards of fractals from the Mandelbrot and Julia sets, was about how 'creativity happens at far-from equilibrium conditions'. She said that 'evolving wholes go through extreme chaos' and we need to learn to tolerate and celebrate the abyss we all fall into from time to time, because only by going right into it can we become whole. Seen in this way, disintegration and chaos in one's life is creative and essential. Clarkson also threw a few spanners in the works of our cosy assumptions about how psychotherapy and the therapeutic relationship work: in fact we do not know. Since then someone gave me a shareware fractals programme and I have been trying to understand chaos and creativity on my computer screen.

I enjoyed . . .

. . . meeting Allegra Taylor, the healer and writer of *I Fly Out with Bright Feathers*, and I discovered in her healing workshop

that I am a natural healer and have been doing it all my life without realising it. When people have talked about this in the past I didn't know what they meant. It is simply a matter of tuning in to a particular feeling of energy around the heart chakra, and purposefully directing it. Almost anyone can do it, with some guidance.

. . . a psychodrama workshop in the ballroom at Gaunts House facilitated by Guy Gladstone where I rediscovered the depth and richness of my own and others' family and ancestral traditions, and how important it is to re-member our connections with these ancient wholes.

. . . the way John Button facilitated large groups and events in a thoroughly-at-ease humanistic way, with great skill, in his extraordinary velvet trousers.

. . . lying on a single bed in a girls' dorm with one of the *S&S* editors, appreciating fruit cake and the rebellious feeling of missing home groups.

. . . meeting people I've heard about in journals but who are real and human.

James MacKenzie

The conference seemed to be unobtrusively but carefully organised to pack in good things, the usual theme talk, workshops, evening disco, and new things such as the Dances of Universal Peace, the stalls of second-hand and new books, and yet never seemed rushed. There was time to concentrate, time to relax, time to dawdle. My home group worked beautifully to sort out feelings left over by the workshops, and to try out the changes one could make. Everything seemed to work so well that it left me with one anxiety — could this standard be kept up next year?

The obverse of all these good things was that perhaps a certain grit in the oyster was missing. There was a certain introversion. It seemed to me that the conference worked well because all the organisers and workshop leaders worked well with each other, but it is sometimes also challenging to put together different viewpoints. Did the conference sample all the currents within AHP? Did it challenge the boundaries of humanistic psychology,

seeing where they can extend, where it would benefit from neighbouring approaches, where those approaches would benefit from the humanistic concept? Perhaps this is an idea for another time.

One further thing has struck me. I looked through the lists of participants of the several conferences I have been to, and noticed how many of the names have changed. Does this mean the conferences have been successful in introducing people to humanistic psychology, and they then go off and do their own particular things? Or does it mean that people lose interest, or that practitioners think they can find other meeting places to promote their activities in and to refresh themselves at?

I wonder how we can do even more to make this unique meeting place of practitioners and interested lay people work for both sets of interests. I think it does and will work for both so long as it is a place of warmth and refreshment, open to all who care for its aims.

Ruth Finer

People are arriving! It's all happening; my estimates for lunch are accurate; everything fine so far. Shame — one of the lift arrangements didn't work out; I wonder what went wrong? Shall I go to a workshop or stay around to register people who arrive mid-afternoon? No, I want something for myself. Which workshop shall I go to?

Clay and paper and paint and sunshine; Fran's gentle facilitation; the others

intent on their pieces and time for fun too; a feeling of gladness to be here and goodwill to all. So pleased I chose a workshop where I could access parts of myself without mediation from my intellect.

More people arrived; get them booked in. Wonder about leaving registration to others — will they do it properly (*i.e.* do it the way I want them to)? Most people arrived by supper-time, that's a relief.

Petruska's session: 'No, John,' I said,

'I'm not going to tell you my intimate sexual recollections' — but I did, more or less. Challenging, stimulating, fun, thought-provoking, and a good way of meeting a few different people.

John's games: good ice-breakers. Too much ooing and aahing? Home groups: do I want one? On balance, yes. What does it mean that Marolyn and I draw matching cards and are in the same group?

Wonderful drumming session, feeling the differences between doing my own thing and being in concert with others, and just doing what I feel like doing. Very therapeutic.

Sitting around chatting and drinking tea after most people have gone to bed, waiting for a planned late arriver; am going with my propensity to take responsibility to the hilt: won't feel completed until I know he's arrived and settled.

Saturday: notice disproportionate ratio of men to women in John's *Anger and Frustration* workshop, and wish more women owned their difficulties around it. Smug me. Simple exercises about parental patterns of expression of anger get straight to the heart of it, and straight to my heart. Unexpected tears. Feel unevenly matched with my partner in one exercise, stronger; try to provoke her — hope I didn't wound her with my words. She is slow to arouse.

In touch with my healing energy in Allegra Taylor's workshop. I'd like to do more of this, find ways of channelling it.

Wish I'd finished reading John Rowan's book by now, before his session on the transpersonal, not that it affects my appreciation. Surprised to experience myself as a windmill.

Sunday: David's Money workshop — get more than I bargained for; some powerful things happening here, another example of getting out what you put in. Also influenced by the group dynamics. Some old memories stirred by other people's accounts of their childhood experiences, and am moved by the more recent events and feelings recounted.

I've been complimented by several people on my calmness. It's no effort for me to be calm — I had thought it came with knowing what I'm doing and feeling safe and in control. Learning now, though, that it doesn't just go with the role, it's part of me. Aware of being in touch with my power on a number of occasions during the weekend, perhaps evoked initially by conferring power on myself by being Administrator (the capital letter is significant), but subsequently accessing my personal power in a number of different situations, in workshops and in my home group.

What more could I ask for?