

Early Days in the AHP

John Rowan

I don't know where I saw the advertisement, but it looked interesting. A group where psychology would be explored in an experiential way. It all sounded very new and interesting, and it didn't cost much. So I made my way to the Foresters' Hall in Kentish Town, and paid my money, and went in. It was a large group, about fifty people, led by Anne Elphick and Hans Lobstein. It was 1970.

It was an enlivening experience, and I met an interesting man named Caron Kent, author of a book called *The Puzzled Body*, which was one of the early books saying that body and mind were a unity. I picked up a green leaflet about the Association for Humanistic Psychology. Up to that point I had thought that the thing was run by the British Humanist Association, which was quite popular at the time. This is one of the classic mistakes, which took me some time to sort out. There are still many people who have not sorted it out, and who refer to humanistic practitioners as humanists. There are in fact some crucial differences, perhaps the most obvious of which are (a) the BHA is purely intellectual, and has no great use for the body at all, and (b) the BHA has no use for spirituality, which is quite important in the AHP.

At that time I was involved with radical psychology, and was one of the people

producing a magazine called *Red Rat*, which was critical of academic psychology as practised at the time. In May 1970 several leaders from the Esalen Institute visited London and put on two big experiential events at the Inn on the Park. *Red Rat* contacted them, and made a case that the prices for this Mayfair event were quite high, and excluded ordinary people who might be interested. So they agreed to put on an extra event in Paddington, priced at five shillings, so that such people could come and sample the goods. I met and spoke to several of the Esalen people, and liked them very much. They had a good energy. And two or three of them I bumped into again from time to time over the years, especially Jackie Doyle, Will Schutz and Helen Stephens.

Jackie Doyle came back to Britain in 1971 and helped to put on an event in connection with the British Psychological Society conference at Exeter. Ever since then there has been a good AHP presence in the West Country. Later, as Jacqueline Larcombe Doyle, she became President of the AHP in the USA.

In 1972 the AHP again participated in the BPS Conference, but this time officially, not as a fringe event. I was also involved in a fringe event organised by *Red Rat*, called 'Beyond Ethics', which featured a 32-page pamphlet on some of the

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ethical issues in psychology. Sidney Jourard (an AHP member and American Professor) gave a talk on 'Psychology for control, and for liberation of humans' as part of the main conference, and it raised many of the same points. This was marvellous, and confirmed my opinion that humanistic psychology and radical psychology were compatible.

Later that year came the first issue of *Humpty Dumpty*, a radical psychology magazine which took the place of *Red Rat*, which had come to the end of its life with the departure of some of the founders. It was much better produced, but shared the policy of *Red Rat* of having pseudonyms for the contributors: mine was O. Void. About then, too, some of us produced a large pamphlet called *Rat, Myth and Magic*, which was highly critical of psychology as then being taught, and social psychology in particular.

Also that year John Wren-Lewis, the first Chair of the AHP in Britain, left for the United States (with his wife, Ann Faraday), and I became Chair in his place. In the same year I led my first group, at a centre called Kaleidoscope, with the theme of Creativity. I also joined my first men's group, which met in South London at the home of Angela Hamblin, a feminist who also saw some merit in humanistic psychology. This was the beginning of my long involvement with the anti-sexist men's movement, which still continues today through my work with *Achilles Heel* magazine.

In March 1973 appeared the first issue of *Self & Society*, with an article and a book review from me. Over the next few months I wrote so many book reviews for this journal that it became quite embarrass-

ing, and Vivian Milroy and I decided that I would use pseudonyms from time to time. Over the next few years I became James Crippledini (a fair-minded group leader), O. Void (a highly critical reader), Brian Rainbow (who always liked the books he reviewed), Jean Starry (a French existential androgyne) and Lucy Biko, who wrote about racism.

At about this time I initiated the University Circus — a five-hour experiential event which a few of us took round various universities up and down the country. It gave a taster of what humanistic psychology was all about, and enabled us to distribute leaflets and books. We usually managed to persuade the university library to take *Self & Society* after the event. I can't remember who the people were who took part in these events: the names of Tricia Scott, Helen Davis, Richard Stevens and John Heron come to mind, but I am not sure of the others. I really enjoyed these trips, and must have done more than a dozen of them. I still think this was some of the best publicity we ever did.

Some time during this period we had a real disagreement with the AHP in the USA. Carmi Harari had the title of Member for Foreign Affairs (or some such) and visited us from time to time, keeping us in touch with the international movement generally. He kept on conveying the message that they wanted us to become a properly constituted Chapter and pay \$200 a year for the privilege. We resisted this, and in the end a compromise was reached, by which we changed our logo to include a B for Britain. So we stopped being the AHP and became instead the AHP(B). But we never paid the money. We

really valued our independence, though we did always try to keep in line with the philosophy which we shared. I went to conferences across the water, in Montreal, Princeton, Snowmass, Toronto, Stanford and Vermont, and tried to carry the flag

for Britain and what we were doing over here.

These were exciting days. The membership of the AHP was growing all the time, and we really seemed to be getting somewhere.

Not the AHP

Hans Lobstein

It is 25 years since the AHP started in Britain. At a conference of the Institute of Social Psychiatry in St John's Wood in October 1968 there was an optional evening gathering where some people from America came to tell us about the AHP. They were very persuasive. They sat on a platform and asked the rest of us in a large hall to stand in groups of 5 or 6. 'Bloody hell', I thought, 'why should I do what I am told?', and I didn't. I stood by myself on the margin. But one of the groups, short of a member, beckoned and persuaded me to join them.

Later I stood in the loo next to John Osborn (I wonder whatever happened to him?). For some reason, perhaps he had noticed my innate rebelliousness, he asked me to join the fledgling committee.

We met later. John Rowan and Anne Elphick were there, and some of the Americans. We decided to hold a one-day encounter group workshop which would be conducted by the Americans. Anne Elphick and I offered to find and book a hall and do the rest of the organising. We had a lovely time, lots of eager and curious people. We did many trust exercises and encounter games. It went so well that the

committee decided to hold another one soon afterwards and again Anne and I did the organising and the Americans were to conduct it on the day.

Only, they didn't turn up. We had some 60 or 70 people in a large hall eagerly waiting for something to happen and only Anne and myself from the committee. We just had to carry on and do what we had seen them do on the previous occasion. Anne was an accomplished teacher and I had a diploma in adult education, and that helped. We just carried on as best we could and it worked.

Then another four-hour committee meeting, but it seemed that Anne and I were the only ones who were keen to carry on, most of the Americans had gone home. We decided we could do without the committee and without four-hour meetings leading nowhere. We set up our own organisation and instead of charging two shillings and sixpence we decided on ten shillings and made a small profit each time we ran one of the workshops. They became very popular and we had various appearances on TV, radio and the press. The AHP in the meantime went into hibernation for a year or two, for all I know.

Early Memories

Roslyn Langdon

As an AHP(B) member of sixteen years duration, I would like to congratulate *Self & Society* on its 21st birthday, and I hope to see it continue for another 21 years.

I joined the AHP(B) in 1977 through John Rowan; we were in the same primal integration training group at the Churchill Centre at the time. This was the first primal training in London, run by the American therapist William Swartley, who sadly died soon after. He had an inoperable cancer, and knew he was dying. Our group process was thus influenced by moving dramatically into past-life experiences, including a time together in 18th-century Scotland.

At the end of January 1978, I drove down to West Dean College in Sussex for my first AHP(B) conference. On the first day John suddenly asked me to take a workshop, as the leader hadn't turned up. Some fifteen minutes later I was introducing Reichian breathing and massage to a

surprisingly accepting group. Later that weekend I found an unexpected link with my past career as an actress — I remet Vivian Milroy. Vivian, founder and then editor of *Self & Society*, had been a producer at the BBC, and had cast me in a TV production of Lottie Reinegar's shadow puppets. I, together with Joan Sims and Kenneth Connor, supplied the voices to a number of characters. We provided all the sound effects too, and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. Now here we were, some twenty years on, in a very different world, or was it? I have always seen a similarity in the process of acting and therapy. Only the motivation is different. The actor needs to connect with emotional feelings from the past relevant to the emotional life of the character he is playing. The client in therapy needs to connect with past feelings to help explain and resolve present behavioural patterns. Both use similar means for different ends.

