Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind

Theodore Roszak, Mary E. Gomes and Allen D. Kanner
Sierra Club Books, distributed by Random House, 1995, £14.95

In a recent national survey, only one in ten people wanted to live in a city. The rural dream, the cottage in the country or by the sea where we shall retire and do all those things which we do not seem able to do in the city, including not doing anything, is a national fantasy.

But is it a dream based on an illusion of the rural idyll, or is it pointing to a more central reality, that we have lost touch with our earth, with our day-to-day responses to the weather and the seasons? And if we have lost touch, does that also connect into the loss of a central spiritual context within which our lives can take meaning, and within which we can identify ourselves with more than what we do, or the objects which we consume?

This seems to be the challenge which the ecopsychologists are throwing out to those of us working in the field, (a delightful term in this context). Has our psychology become limited to a minute examination of human relationship to human, omitting the relationship which is also essential to our health, the relationship to other beings and to the earth? And is not recreating this relationship, by becoming aware of its importance and the depth of our grief at its loss, also the way forward into the healing of the earth itself, and therefore a central human responsibility at this critical time in our history?

During my own last few years of living in the city, I found it increasingly difficult to mobilise myself to leave, to go out for walks, for weekends and for holidays. Eventually I had to recognise that this was a way of defending myself from the pain I experienced on re-entering, and a way of maintaining the desensitising processes I had created to enable me to live in a place where I felt increasingly alienated, and yet curiously unable to name and place the context of the alienation. I pathologised my own experience, procrastinated and made myself futile promises that I would go when . . . Somewhere I knew 'when' would be a hard place to locate, and when a family crisis occurred it opened a window. When was now. All my fears about losing practice, identity, friends and the stimulus of city life were subsumed in what became a clarity that we must go.

I am not of course saying that we must all leave the city to find ourselves. All we would do is recreate the city in the country! But the work which is being done to bring the city closer to experiences of relating to the earth, creating cycle paths on disused railway tracks, opening city farms and developing a softer, less consumerised way of living, is vital in reconnecting us to what we have lost.

I am finding that the process is also opening windows on my practice and my work which were unexpected. I notice that I am able to give more weight and

value to those clients who experience a similar nameless sense of loss, to the pain they may experience at our pointless destruction of the earth. I am less likely to personalise it. It is less easy to sit in a room with a client and focus on our relationship, and more essential to reach out into the world, be out of the room, and take the learning and awareness which have been found into other more open contexts. Those contexts are not only ecological in the narrower sense, but extend to the political, creative and educational.

James Hillman, having prodded the profession with his 1992 book *We've had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy and the World's Getting Worse*, moved on last year in his lecture to the Dartington Conference to suggest that this indeed was the movement which needed to happen, and which he began to see happening around him. Psychology needed to extend beyond looking 'in'. And curiously, paradoxically, I have found that a certain kind of looking in leads naturally out: that attention to the expanding flow of awareness within each of us leads us into a closer and kinder relationship to our earth, to spirituality, and to our own creativity. That alongside the personal growth which this attention allows, a correspondingly expanded field of relationship develops relatively naturally and effortlessly.

Of course, there are ways of stimulating and awakening this aspect of our awareness. In *Ecopsychology*, an American collection of writings about the links between ecology and psychology and the growth of an overlapping area, practitioners write of wilderness experiences, where people are taken out into the American wilderness to rediscover their relationship to the earth. There is also writing about visualisation experiences in the therapy room, where an inner journey is used to lead us out. But I was curious that, in a book which is so rich in original and challenging thinking, this practical section seemed to me to be relatively thin. Perhaps that is partly because I live in the British context, where on our tiny island there is no wilderness, and hardly anywhere where cars cannot be seen or heard, even if only faintly in the distance. But also the richness seems to evolve in group experiences, where the field is already expanded beyond the purely personal. And I think the book would have benefited from addressing the work being done in this country by groups like the Karuna Institute to expand and loosen the boundaries of the psychotherapeutic relationship, connecting it increasingly closely with spiritual practice and the spiritual path.

It is nevertheless very exciting to see people working in this area, offering new models of human development and change, bringing fresh air to the sometimes stale world within the walls of the therapy room, and challenge too to ecologists who lack a spiritual and psychological perspective in their understanding. It could also have some small effect on the well-being of our planet.

Maxine Linnell

Speculations After Freud: Psychoanalysis, Philosophy and Culture

Sonu Shamdasani and Michael Münchow (eds)
Routledge, 1994, £37.50 hb £12.99 pb, 227pp.

I chose this book to review because I was aware of the philosophical origins of much of psychotherapy, and was interested in the possibilities of an encounter between philosophers and psychotherapists. Having read it I'm now not so sure. It is a difficult book, especially for someone (like myself) with no formal training in philosophy. It draws heavily upon some particularly difficult philosophers such as Hegel and Heidegger, as well as abstruse psychoanalytic writers like Jacques Lacan.

Of the papers that I could take something from, the one by James Hillman is perhaps most humanistic in its perspective. He criticises psychotherapy for its excessive concentration on the 'self', isolated from its relationships with others. In fact he claims that by denying its social and political context, and focusing exclusively on an intense relationship between two people, psychotherapy creates problems for itself: problems of sexual transgression, boredom and compulsive work (similar ideas have been advanced by Andrew Samuels in his recent book *The Political Psyche*).

It is this emphasis on relationships that is missing from most of the rest of the book. Cornelius Castoriades, who has a long history of radical engagement, and whose paper makes much of the autonomy of the patient, remains an orthodox Freudian, for whom the most important human task is the renunciation of one's own 'nuclear, primitive desires'. William Richardson's piece on the meaning of silence, which unlike most of the papers actually uses some case material, says little about the importance of silence as part of human relationships. Charles Scott's vision of the dissolution of the Foucaultian self in therapy doesn't seem to involve any confrontation with, and transformation through, others.

The book makes little attempt to bring philosophical ideas into contact with problems of daily life. If philosophy withdraws from this relationship and retreats into abstraction, then it can easily become another defence.

Mark Alexander

Counselling and Therapy with Refugees: Psychological Problems of Victims of War, Torture and Repression

Guus van der Veer
Wiley, 1992, £14.95, 245pp.

This is a rich, comprehensive study by a Dutch psychotherapist who has worked since 1985 in the Social Psychiatric Service for Refugees in Amsterdam, drawing on his experience with refugees and immigrants from Latin America, the Middle and Far East and African countries. There is plenty of interesting case material and quotations from other therapists covering the special problems of children and adolescents, and of adults who have experienced persecution, prison and frequent torture and seen the death of friends and relatives. He also relates these to their cultural background and mental health.

Van der Veer focuses on psychiatric classification, the psychodynamic approach, family therapy, learning, theory and the cognitive approach and their respective contributions to understanding and work in this field. In addition there is a chapter on psychotropic medication by Victor Vladar Rivero and one by Mia Groenenberg on female victims of sexual violence from different cultural backgrounds and the implications for the woman's relationships and social acceptance in her society.

The helplessness which is such a feature of the mental states of victims of repression, war, and especially of torture, combined with depression, anxiety, nightmares, flashbacks, outburst of aggression, feelings of self-blame and inadequacy, are similar to the symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome, but refugees have the extra stress of being uprooted from their culture and support system as well as the problems associated with learning a new language and adapting to a different life style. Many come from hot countries where social life takes place out of doors. Anxiety about relatives left behind, fears of 'madness' and uncertainty about resident's permits all increase the stress.

Obviously there is a great need for skilled therapeutic help and support for the increasing numbers of people escaping from repressive regimes. I wonder too, how much counselling is made available in this country, where government hostility to immigrants is rife — especially as trained interpreters are necessary, and working through an interpreter is far from simple.

The effects of traumatisation and uprooting are examined in relation to underlying personality structure and inner conflicts, together with defence mechanisms and coping strategies, which may break down, with consequent damage to the personality structure. Many are unable to remember or talk about the

traumas they have suffered; some appear to go through stages of adjustment similar to bereavement. The author also draws some parallels with studies of survivors of concentration camps. Many show symptoms of 'learned helplessness' and a poor 'self-image' as a result of their experience of victimisation.

The author emphasises the importance of a diagnostic appraisal with an awareness that the patient may be suffering from any mental disorder: that more serious symptoms such as nightmares and flashbacks may be hidden by complaints like headaches, alcohol abuse or forgetfulness. A full family history is helpful in understanding the background relationships and communication patterns and customs, but diagnostic hypotheses which do not generate therapeutic interventions are useless, simply blaming the victim.

Usually there are plenty of social problems to be overcome: finances, housing, employment or studies, difficulties with the language, relationships and authorities. Many refugees come from cultures in which counselling and therapy are not available, so seeking help often produces fears of dependency, or at least ambivalence, and often fears of mental illness and institutionalisation.

The author is helpful in all these areas and discusses treatment aimed at limited goals, as well as catharsis, emotional reintegration and behavioural changes, always starting with supportive techniques, including instruction in breathing and relaxation. Special attention is focused on the risk of suicide, the problems of refugee children, adolescents and on working with the victims of sexual violence — not forgetting the problem of 'burn-out' for the therapist.

This an excellent book, full of useful material, especially in appraising different theoretical styles of therapy.

Betty Gould

Counselling in Medical Settings

Patricia East
Open University Press, 1995, £10.99

This book is part of a series, *Counselling in Context*, which examines the history and development of professional counsellors in GP practices and in hospitals. The days of lady almoners in general hospitals and psychiatric social workers in mental hospitals and clinics have long since passed and are hardly mentioned. Indeed the picture is now largely one of social workers confined to practical help and assessment of needs within the 'Care in the Community' programme.

Patricia East doesn't gloss over the isolation of counsellors within medical settings and inter-professional rivalries; indeed she quotes research which highlights counsellors' preference for working alone; the need for on-going supervision

and research into the efficacy of counselling, the selection of suitable clients and the desirability of professional cooperation, especially in the area of mental health problems. There is no mention of group work or of family therapy, which is a pity, since both have many advantages in work with those with special needs, such as cases of drug or alcohol dependency or of infertility, parents of disabled children and families of patients deemed 'mentally ill' or abused.

Nevertheless, the book contains much useful information about the role of BAC training in understanding various symptoms, diagnoses and treatments, especially drugs and their side effects, which will be helpful to anyone working in this field, where the volume of government publications affecting NHS policy is already overwhelming. This is despite the rapid expansion in the employment of counsellors and growing public recognition of their value, not least amongst GPs who appreciate being able to pass on to a counsellor their more difficult or demanding patients.

Betty Gould

The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis

Jacques Lacan, translated by Alan Sheridon and reprinted with an introduction by David Macey
Penguin Books, 1994, £8.99

These lectures were first published in 1975 and are a transcript of one of several seminars given in Paris in the 1960s. The seminars were very popular and gave Lacan some stability in his otherwise turbulent life, providing him with contacts outside the analytic community, wherein he was the centre of much controversy. Indeed he was eventually expelled from the International Association of Psychoanalysis and formed his own association in France.

One does not find in these pages the usual obsession with breasts and penis-envy, nor the depersonalising concept of 'object relations' common to the more orthodox schools of psychoanalysis. However, humanistic psychologists and therapists will need to wade through vast chunks of skilful and impressive semantics to find any mention of feelings or even of body-language, although there is a section devoted to the Gaze as Object Petit A (the 'split' between the Eye and the Gaze in the Transference!). Eventually love is actually mentioned on page 253, but only as the 'transference effect' and an essential part of narcissism. 'To love is, essentially, to wish to be loved.' Well, yes, but... The book is a fascinating read, an intellectual journey; it's just that somehow it doesn't seem to have much to do with human beings living in the stress of the real world of anger, frustration, rage and fear — and hope, love and despair.

Betty Gould

The Listening Reader: Fiction and Poetry for Counsellors and Psychotherapists

Ben Knights
Jessica Kingsley, 1995, 166pp

Listen, I've just read a book full of quotes. The quotes of the English linguists are full of convoluted sentences and compound words, as if translated directly from the German, and they argue what Wittgenstein, who is not quoted and who sounds like a German, argued: that language is necessarily public and shared. (Now there is a convoluted sentence!) Some of the poems and stories in this book are quoted in full; this is justified by Ben Knights' commentaries on them, which are both sensitive and insightful. Anyone who likes poetry will delight in his selection — I loved 'Anger', by Stevie Smith.

His main thesis is that therapists could approach their clients the way literary critics approach their texts. Just as the disjointed syntax of a poem confounds our grammatical expectations and makes us sit up and listen for its meaning and feelings, so the acting out, verbal slips and metaphors embedded in a client's talk can alert therapists to unconscious material. He points out how dreams pun and joke with us and involve us in symbols and myths, and how when we recount our experiences in the therapy room there can be as many characters, as much drama, plot and authority involved as in any novel. However, the therapy room is not the reading room; we do not read our clients like a book, I hope.

I like it when literary experts enter the world of psychology rather than the reverse (at least T.S. Eliot is given a rest). They remind us of the general truth that we, with our poetry, dreams and stories, will confound any psychological generalisation we care to make about ourselves.

Dave Jones

The Therapeutic Relationship

Petruska Clarkson
Whurr, 1995, £17.50

All of us at one time or another can become aware on reading certain books that these are tomes for which we've unconsciously been longing. Though such a feeling of identification or recognition usually occurs with novels, I have also experienced it with non-fiction books like Scott Peck's *The Road Less Travelled* and Robert Johnson's *The Psychology of Romantic Love*, and now, in a different, but also similar way, with *The Therapeutic Relationship*. After reading Petruska Clark-

son's excellently well annotated book I experienced a wonderful sensation of pleasure and relief that someone of such eminence is writing so clearly and forthrightly about the client/therapist relationship.

My hunch is that many integrationists — those that do not subscribe to any one theory or style of therapy, but instead see the therapeutic relationship as of central importance — will feel the same as I do. For here, boldly set out in clear, direct language, Clarkson rightfully, if scarily, puts the therapeutic relationship between client and therapist at the centre of attention. For her, there is no more 'talking about it', or being clever, in some superior analytical way, about the usually very intimate relationship that develops between client and therapist. Instead she gets right on into this labyrinthine world of relationship, a deeply emotional psychological world where, lacking maps and guides, many a seafarer/therapist has been shipwrecked. And she doesn't duck the problematic, confusing and upsetting experience of finding such relationships viewed, often after they have ended, as harmful and distressing, or even as abusive and exploitative — not only by clients, but in many cases by therapists, too.

In introducing her five relational model of the psychotherapeutic endeavour, Clarkson offers a helpful 'map' with which to explore this world where healing and destruction, love and anger are entwined in a dance that might easily one day bring grateful satisfaction and appreciation, the next bitterness and hatred and a wish from the client to do the therapist harm. This of course is the stuff of Melanie Klein, but Clarkson doesn't so much discuss it analytically the way Klein did, often in dense and difficult language, as actually traverse the terrain in understandable and forthright words of illumination.

The five relational model comprises the working alliance; the I-thou relationship; the transferential/countertransferential relationship; the reparative/developmentally needed relationship; and the transpersonal relationship. She goes on to write of the pitfalls, the anxieties about harming another in this work, and the potential for change that lies, creatively and dangerously, within these five relationships. These themes are then elaborated in the following chapters.

This is not only a book of its time, but also one that will I am sure come to be regarded as seminal, if not a classic. It draws together years of experience and thinking, both Clarkson's own and those of countless other psychological investigators and thinkers. From what I have heard, it has been long awaited and needed by many in the therapeutic community, and brings our craft nearer to the professional fold.

It is also a very human book. 'Messily' as Clarkson says, she gathers together thoughts, experiences, anecdotes and case cameos and poems. Such an emphasis on open-endedness, incompleteness and uncertainty about how to end something (the text? the relationship?) that of course in reality has no end, should not be con-

fused with lack of clarity or obscurity. The book, with its emphasis always upon practical application, is both lucid and inspirational. And so rich with observations and interesting experiences.

It will certainly be a core text for the various training courses with which this author is involved. I commend it to all therapists, counsellors, students and trainers.

John Sivyer

Inside Out: A Guide to Self-management of Manic Depression

David Guinness
The Manic Depression Fellowship, 8-10 High Street, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey KT1 1EY, 1995, £2.00 plus 50p postage, 31pp.

This is a well-produced and well-written booklet, which should be generally helpful to those subject to the extreme mood swings of the manic-depressive position. It explains that self-management is not a cure, but can lead in time to increased self-reliance with less dependence on a GP or psychiatrist. The indications are that people who self-manage have less frequent and severe mood swings, more tolerance to stress, have stable relationships, more self-confidence, fewer hospital visits and are more able to hold down a job.

Both short and long term self-management are dealt with, and there are many useful devices offered in the booklet. It recommends co-counselling, among other things.

Manic depression is normally described from an outside viewpoint. The title *Inside Out* was chosen to emphasise that it can also be viewed and managed from the inside. This booklet has been formally approved by the Department of Health (who funded it) and the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

John Rowan

Participation in Human Inquiry

Peter Reason (ed.)
Sage, 1994, £12.95, 220pp.

If you are at all interested in humanistic approaches to research, whatever they may be called, this is an essential book to have. It follows up the original book *Human Inquiry* (ed. Reason & Rowan, Wiley, 1981) and the second one *Human Inquiry*

in Action (ed. Reason, Sage, 1988). This one is divided into two parts: theoretical, written by Peter Reason; and examples, written by people involved in specific projects.

The examples are fascinating, all six of them, and run the gamut of possible setups in a very helpful way. Hilary Traylen writes about her work with health visitors; Elizabeth Whitmore tells of her experience in working with expectant mothers on a housing estate; John Cosier and Sara Glennie deal with a complex programme all about child protection: Moira de Venney-Tiernan, Annette Goldband, Lyn Rackham and Nancy Reilly give details of their attempts to deal with Alternative Routes to Qualification for youth workers (now changed to Accessible Routes to Qualification); Lesley Treleaven in Australia writes on staff development for women from a feminist standpoint; and Lesley Archer and Dorothy Whitaker on developing a culture of learning for social workers. There is a final chapter by Peter Reason drawing together threads from all six of these research projects, and admitting to some of their weaknesses.

I think the weakest part of the book is in the theory at the beginning. The rest is democratic in the extreme, and one chapter in particular inveighs against 'them long professor words'. But the theory section (four whole chapters of it) is full of such words. Take a sentence like this: 'Rather than define future participation as one form of consciousness, I find it more helpful to see it as a range of possible moments within a dialectic, emerging from the contradiction of original participation and unconscious participation.' All I am saying really is that there is a bit of a mismatch between the first four chapters and the rest of the book.

John Rowan

Doing Counselling Research

John McLeod
Sage, 1994, £10.95, 216pp.

As the author makes clear, this book is equally relevant to doing psychotherapy research. He also admits at once that practitioners do not on the whole find research of much use to them. So what is the point of such a book? He suggests that there are five main reasons for knowing about research: (1) gaining a wider perspective; (2) accountability; (3) developing new ideas and approaches; (4) applications of counselling in new areas; and (5) personal and professional development. And he says that 'research is important for counsellors in establishing the legitimacy of the profession'. He defines research as 'a systematic process of critical inquiry leading to valid propositions and conclusions that are communicated to interested others'.

There are good chapters here on read-

ing the literature, managing the research process, using quantitative methods, using rating scales and qualitative methods, single case studies, outcome and process in research, ethical questions and so forth.

The book ends with a sensitive discussion of the issues, and it is clear from this that all is not well with research as practised at present. Even practitioners who have carried out research projects themselves say that they find ongoing experience with clients, supervision, the experience of being a client and practical books all more useful to them than research. This casts a great deal of doubt on projects such as the manualisation of practice.

Even more fundamentally, McLeod asks what would happen if all the goals of research were attained? 'If a form of psychological intervention ever existed that could meet these criteria, it would represent a technology for shaping human behaviour that would inevitably be used to further political objectives. No authoritarian state could resist this temptation.' But is such an outcome even imaginable? What would it be like to live in a world where there was a cure for anxiety and guilt? These are good questions.

This is a book which I would recommend to any course which deals with research. It is up to date and sophisticated, and a good guide for the student.

John Rowan

Family Outing: A Guide for Parents of Gays, Lesbians and Bisexuals

Joy Dickens
Peter Owen, 1995, £12.95, 128pp.

This is a helpful book for anyone involved with the problems which may emerge when parents discover or are told that their children are homosexual. It is full of quotes and narratives which yield a very clear picture of the variations in reaction which can result. It urges children to come out, and parents to understand and support. It recommends such organisations as Parents' Friend and PASTELS (Partners' and Spouses' Telephone Support).

It is good on the standard reactions (what is the cause, etc.) and on how to change them. But it still repeats the old figure of ten per cent of men being gay, even though several different large surveys now have confirmed that the figure is closer to one or two per cent.

The strength of the book lies in its carefully edited collection of letters. These are often touching and moving, and would be genuinely helpful and informative to someone who is still struggling with the fact that one of their children is homosexual. Religious problems are specifically

dealt with. There is a chapter on HIV/AIDS.

My favourite quote from this book is by Thomas Crum: 'Instead of seeing the rug pulled from under us, we can learn to dance on the shifting carpet.' There are three pages of useful contacts and three pages of further reading. Recommended.

John Rowan

Recovering the Self: Morality and Social Theory

Victor J. Seidler
Routledge, 1994, £13.99, 235pp.

This is an academic work in the tradition of Marxist scholarship. In the preface the author says: 'In *Recovering the Self* I am still concerned with exploring the difficulties of sustaining a full enough notion of the self to be able to acknowledge our emotional and somatic life within western Marxism, as well as . . . of sustaining a moral voice within different traditions of social theory.' He pays a good deal of attention to feminism as a complementary social criticism, and from it he derives certain criticisms of orthodox Marxism: 'Similarly, since both market capitalism and socialism have traditionally identified progress with science, technology and the domination of nature, they unwittingly suppress any acknowledgement of needs for a particular relationship with nature or with our inner emotional selves. This has had important, largely unexplored, implications for an insensitivity to self in our inherited moral and political visions.'

He also pays attention to ecology, and sees in it critiques and issues which have to be understood if we are to deal with the current world in any adequate way: 'The challenges which feminism and ecology have made to modernity have gone largely unrecognised in discussions around post-modernity. Both movements challenge the ways we think, feel and relate as men, not only to women and nature, but also to ourselves. They offer different visions of what is involved in recovering the self.' But it has taken him so long to get to this point that there is not much space to discuss its implications.

All that we get in the end is a rather nice-sounding but not very helpful injunction to mend our ways: 'If we are to learn from feminism and ecology in the remaking of social theory, we must learn to listen to others as well as ourselves. As we recover the self we must learn to respect the integrity of our emotional, somatic and spiritual lives. We must he careful not to legislate for others, but to listen and help them grow in their own lives, before we rush on leaving important questions behind.' These are the last words in the book.

Personally, I don't find it inspiring or very deep. I was disappointed in this book.

John Rowan

Freedom to Learn (3rd edition)

Carl Rogers and H. Jerome Freiberg
Merrill, 1994, £17.95, 406pp.

This fully updated book is a must-read for anyone involved in humanistic education or training. *Freedom to Learn* first came out in 1969, and was one of the most exciting books to appear in that exciting time. It was updated by Rogers himself in 1983 as *Freedom to Learn for the Eighties*. This edition has been updated by Freiberg, with the full support and help of the Rogers family. Almost half the book is new material.

Anyone who thinks that humanistic approaches in education are on the way out, or that children nowadays are too difficult to handle in humanistic ways, or that humanistic tuition is soft and too accommodating, had better read this book quickly. Anyone who wants encouragement in applying humanistic ideas in education had better read this book now.

If I have a criticism it is simply that the whole thing is very American, but if we can set this on one side, the achievement here is immense and very valuable to anyone interested in these matters.

John Rowan