

Old Saybrook I and II: *The Visioning and ReVisioning of*

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Have you ever wished you could have been there at the birth of humanistic psychology? DO you *wish* you could have participated in the meetings that took place in the 1950s? Would you like to have been there in the early 1960s when the new *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* was launched., when the new American Association for Humanistic Psychology was formed?

In this article I would like to take you back in time to one of the "beginnings" of humanistic psychology, a conference now called Old Saybrook I. Then I would like to fast forward" you to the present day and to Old Saybrook II, a current effort to "revision" humanistic Psychology for our times.

Travel back in time to the weekend of November 28-30, 1964, to the little New England town of Old Saybrook, Connecticut. There at the Saybrook Inn, a resort hotel and spa, the new American Association for Humanistic Psychology was holding its "First Invitational Conference on Humanistic Psychology." Abe Maslow was there. So was Cad Rogers, Rollo May, Charlotte Bühler, Clark Moustakas, Floyd Matson, James Bugental, Miles Vich, Robert Knapp, and a host of other luminaries including Henry Murray, Gordon Allport, George Kelly, Gardner Murphy, Robert White, Rene Dubos, Norma Rosenquist, Alvin Lasko, Victor Butterfield, E. J. Shoben, Roman Tratch, and others. Indeed, the list of those who met that weekend, first on the campus of Wesleyan University and then at the Saybrook Inn, sounds like a roll call of giants (or maybe angels) of American psychology.

A, year earlier James Bugental, president of AAHP, had appointed Robert Knapp of Wesleyan University in Connecticut to chair a 'Theory Committee.' Robert, in turn, had persuaded the president of Wesleyan to

use funds from the Hazen Foundation to sponsor an invitational conference on humanistic psychology. The invitations went out, people responded, and this is how "Old Saybrook" came about. Henry Murray gave the keynote address. Rogers, Maslow, Dubos, Kelly, May, and Shoben presented papers. Charlotte Bühler chaired a summarizing panel. Subsequently, six papers from the conference were published - one by Dubos in *The American Scientist* (March, 1965) and the others, with an introduction by James Bugental, in the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* (Fall, 1965).

That small conference in Old Saybrook, Connecticut, helped clarify the vision and set the course of the field in America. Within a few years this movement would become a major 'third force' in American psychology. It would spawn various humanistic organizations, provide a penetrating critique of reductionistic science, create an array of new approaches to counselling and psychotherapy, and articulate new research methodologies and 'ways of

knowing' in the search for knowledge. Maslow would become president of the American Psychological Association; Rogers would receive two of APA's most prestigious awards -one for his contributions to science and the other for his contributions to practice.

While humanistic psychology seemed to be making inroads into the academic and professional community, the humanistic vision was moving out into the streets of America. Its values and ideals became part of the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s. The human potential movement was born and spread through our society in the form of encounter groups, growth centres, body therapies, communes, alternative life styles, and new spiritualities. The humanistic voice echoed in the issues of the day - women's liberation, civil rights, the Vietnam War.

Some scholars in the movement became concerned that humanistic psychology was being pre-empted by the counterculture and, as a result, its message was not being heard or taken seriously in the research centres and halls of academia. Indeed, from a historical perspective it seems that mainstream American psychology, after only a brief humanistic pause in the 1960s, went merrily on its positivistic and reductionistic way.

Today, many scholars, including Eugene Taylor of Saybrook Graduate School, believe humanistic psychology failed to realize its historical promise and that it now has little or no voice in the scholarly discourse of our day. Yet Taylor, a professional historian and William James scholar, believes the humanistic perspective is still cogent and that it is needed in psychology even more today than it was in the '60s.

This is where Old Saybrook II comes in. First and foremost, Old Saybrook II is a *scholarly* endeavour to sort out the past thirty-five years of the humanistic movement in America and to rekindle the vision of psychology that was articulated in 1964. The Old Saybrook II scholars realize that the rekindled vision must reflect our times. It must address the scholarly and intellectual issues of our day, and it must have both the substance and the flavour of the twenty-first century. The humanistic vision must be poured from the old wineskins of 1964 into the new wineskins of the third millennium. In short, the task of Old Saybrook II is to 'revision' humanistic psychology for our times. As the official description of the project puts it:

The present Old Saybrook II Project is designed to ask again some of the key questions addressed at Old Saybrook in light of the great cultural transformations now upon us. In particular, it is to look again at the interface between psychology, the humanities, spirituality and the social sciences at the beginning of what many describe as an era of postmodernity or transmodernity.

A central question is: how does the vision of psychology articulated at Old Saybrook, which boldly asserted both the plenitude and subtleties of Human Being, now reaffirm itself in an era of information and communication technology, which includes as its symptoms a globalising economy, an acute awareness of environmental crises, managed health care, and the rampant industrialization of mental health and human services?

The Old Saybrook II Project will explore what aspects of Humanistic Psychology

theory and praxis need to be deconstructed and reconstructed in the light of new social structures and cultural realities, and will ask what service a reinvigorated and reframed person-centred psychology can offer to a world in the process of reinventing itself.

As Old Saybrook II takes on this formidable task, the work will not be accomplished on a long weekend at a small inn in Connecticut. Rather, old Saybrook II is an on-line, onsite, electronic, cyberspace, real space, virtual, actual, interorganisational humanistic thing that sprawls across the continent and literally around the world. Old Saybrook II got underway in 1997 and it will not culminate until the year 2000 and beyond. Its dialogue will take place on web pages, emails, faxes, and telephones. While some of its discourses and documents will appear in traditional journals such as the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* and the *Humanistic Psychologist*, their natural habitat will be the worldwide internet and other electronic media, available for everyone to see and comment on. Welcome to the third millennium and to the humanistic psychology of the future!

Old Saybrook II refuses to fit into traditional organizational diagrams. It is a living, breathing, dynamic entity that spreads out in many directions. There is a Steering Committee consisting of Mike Arons, Maureen O'Hara, and Art Warmoth. The late Rudy Melone was also a member of that group. The Steering Committee is part of a planning council that includes Chip Baggett (representing AHP), Tom Greening, John Olesnavage (representing NPAA), Skip Robinson, and Eugene Taylor. This group gives coherence to Old Saybrook II, like the

body of an octopus when the tentacles are reaching and waving in all directions. This group, in turn, is supported by an extensive Advisory Network of on-line consultants consisting primarily of members of the co-sponsoring organization.

Old Saybrook II is also a network of collaborating humanistic organizations. Cosponsors currently include the Association for Humanistic Psychology (AHP), Division 32 of the American Psychological Association (APA), the National Psychology Advisory Association (NPAA), and the consortium for Diversified Psychology Programs (CDPP), as well as the Saybrook Graduate School, Sonoma State University, and the State University of West Georgia. Other schools with a focus on humanistic and transpersonal psychology are being invited to join the process.

According to Mike Arons, topics are already emerging as the Old Saybrook II discourse gets underway. One developing dialogue has to do with 'Ethics and the Humanistic Model.' Another is centred on the development of a 'Humanistic Practice Model.' Still another focuses on the question 'Is Humanistic Psychology Obsolete?' But perhaps the question that has generated the most interest to date has to do with 'Self, Multiple Selves, and the Illusion of Separate Selfhood.' As Mike Arons pointed out, this question did not even exist at the time of Old Saybrook I when humanistic theory spoke quite freely, and perhaps a little naively, about the self. But since 1964 we have seen the rise of postmodernism with its emphasis on multiple selves and transpersonal psychology and eastern approaches with their emphasis on the illusion of separate selfhood. Obviously, from a theoretical

perspective, this is a significant issue that must be addressed and sorted out. No doubt, other important theoretical, philosophical, and practical issues will emerge as the discourse continues.

Currently, all collaborating organizations are being asked to select from one to three of their members to join the ongoing Old Saybrook discourse and then later to represent their organizations at a major gathering to be held at the University of West Georgia in year 2000. These representatives will become central to the Old Saybrook project because they will articulate their organization's unique perspective and help identify those issues in humanistic thought that merit 'millennium status.' According to Art Warmoth, these representatives will become 'virtual architects' of Old Saybrook II as they dialogue online over the coming months, pinpointing the issues and themes relevant to the re-visioning of humanistic psychology for the twenty-first century.

This interorganisational dialogue will culminate when all these representatives meet on May 11-14, 2000, at the State University of West Georgia for an 'interorganisational convocation.' This event is being organized by a committee at West Georgia, chaired by faculty member Eric Dodson, with the support of the Planning Council and Advisory Network. This historic event has been provisionally named 'Humanistic Psychology: Coming Home to the Third Millennium.' The meeting is being conceptualised metaphorically as a family 'homecoming.' Each humanistic organization will bring its own 'covered dish,' meaning its own unique vision of humanistic psychology. Continuing the metaphor, there will be a 'fellowship dinner' at which representatives from each organization will share their vision,

tell their tales, laugh, celebrate, and interact with others. The conference will also have plenary sessions that are open to the public, allowing anyone who wishes to do so an opportunity to give input, ask questions, and become involved in the 're-visioning' of humanistic psychology.

Old Saybrook II is history in the making. If we were not there at the beginning of humanistic psychology, we now have an opportunity to be part of this historic effort to 're-vision' humanistic psychology as we face the twenty-first century. When the history of humanistic psychology in America is written, Old Saybrook II will be a major part of that history. Hopefully, the history books will say that Old Saybrook II became the rallying point, the place where the humanistic vision was renewed, the moment in history when humanistic psychology got a second chance to realize its original promise.

Mike Arons, one of our wise mentors who has a perspective born of many years of scholarly thought, of visioning and re-visioning, reminds us of our eternal task:

The humanistic vision is the space we must always return to as the starting point, this ultimately irreducible wholeness and diversity of human being. What is the good human life? No other psychology can answer this question.

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