

Once upon a time in the land of dreams

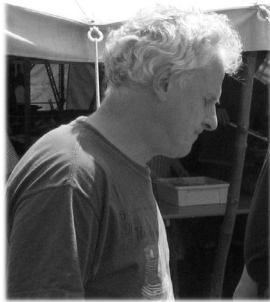
(Ogdens Nut Gone Flake – Small Faces 1968)

Guy Gladstone

Proposed in AHPB's publicity as 'A holistic celebration of inner and outer experience, drawing upon modern perspectives in contemporary psychology and therapy: together with the sense of community, freedom, contact, exploration and excitement that epitomised the early days of the humanistic movement', it was the second half of this proposal that moved me to offer two workshops and is the focus of my report. 'How can I remember to keep it all together' sang Happiness Stan in that nostalgic psychedelic album that is recalled in the title.

For a start I was curious as to who would show up as participants after eight years of no AHPB festivals/conferences. My impression of damage from the splitting of AHPP from AHPB in 2003, occasioned by the former's suction into the exclusive aggrandisement of UKCP professionalisation, the latter being discarded as somehow flakey, inferior and perhaps too countercultural to be deemed clinical (or even ethical), needed testing. Had the split consolidated or had it healed? Let the figures speak. Using the contacts list provided by AHPB and AHPP's online directory, examination revealed that there were 93 participants. AHPP members were conspicuous by their relative absence. A mere five. Of these, five practise as counsellors (three AHPP accredited), two practise as psychotherapists and one practises as an Organisation Development consultant (AHPP

accredited). To cap it all not a single AHPP accredited psychotherapist was present as a participant. On the strength of these figures I pronounce the divorce between professionalised humanistic psychotherapy and humanistic psychology as now complete. The sociology of the event bears witness to the estrangement. The trend that Richard Mowbray warned of twelve years ago in *The Case Against Psychotherapy Registration*, presciently subtitled 'A Conservation Issue for The Human Potential Movement' has become concrete. In this context readers may recall that scarcely five years ago some AHPP members were objecting to having to subscribe to this very journal, the only vehicle in print for the ongoing public representation of the broad spectrum of Humanistic Psychology. It looks as though humanistic psychotherapists have migrated from the land of



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humanistic psychology. AHPP correspondingly becomes an empty brand or a flag of convenience, only remotely connected with the movement that gives it its name. Alternatively one could go oh so postmodern and say identity doesn't matter. In recent conversation an AHPP member linked this oblivioning, I think rightly, to the guilt that immigrants can feel over deserting the home country. Perhaps AHPB members would like to offer AHPP members some therapy to help them attend next year.

From another perspective, as far as we know, 42 of the participants were AHPB members, the remaining 51 being non-members, suggesting that the event struck a good balance between renewal and outreach. A newcomer spoke of 'knowing it's something I really like and not knowing what it is'. Someone else remarked, 'good energy, I'm going to dive in soon'. The participant gender balance was 70 women and 23 men, reversed at the presenter level with seven men and two women. All three keynote

speakers were male - this needs attention next time.

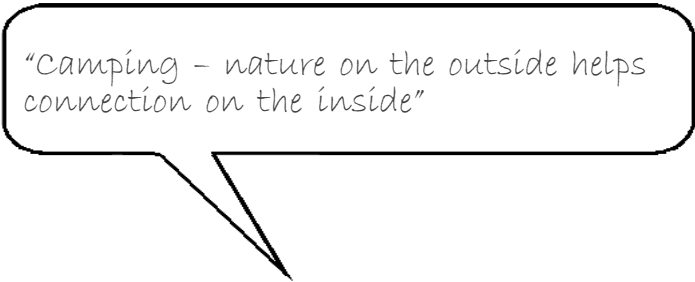
Thank goodness for the mud - as someone remarked to me, literally in passing, 'a levelling experience: the great ones of humanistic psychology flailing about in the mud'. It was a recurring challenge to keep one's balance, traversing the Green and Away site in the wake of the rain that flooded the adjoining River Teme. Each night was an ecotherapy session, most tents being shared with a fascinating array of species of slug. Bodies, nature and community were foreground at this conference.

My Bioenergetics workshop took place in the open air, bounded at the back by a huge Leylandii hedge, which screened the activity from the main site, while participants faced a ploughed field. Two dozen people got grounded, opened up their voices and explored their bodies as source, container and expressive medium for their sensations and emotions. Celebrating the enlivening edge between the voluntary and the involuntary has become countercultural in this anxious time of arse-covering and control-freakery. Running like Red Indians, speedwalking and bicycling each others legs while lying on the grass to get grounded. Leaping apes, howling dogs and human seesaws to build and hold the charge of excitement. Sighs, snarls and shudders to explore the register of emotional tones. With a good measure of embodied buffoonery as befits a festival.

Whereas Bioenergetics is active bodywork, Pulsing, my offering on the second day, is passive bodywork, at least for the receiver. Fifteen pairs of people were introduced to some basics of a procedure combining touch and movement. Bales of straw in the main marquee served as massage tables. My intention here was to provide a reminder of the vital place of respectful touch in the therapeutic pantheon that is humanistic psychology.

The success of the festival hinged in a good measure on the warmth, generosity and attentiveness (excuse the pun) of its volunteer hosts, 'Green and Away'. It was enhanced by the exuberant, wry and contactful concert delivered on Saturday night by 'Seize the Day', a large and radical band of ecofolkrockers who turn up at direct action events. Their lyrics connected the conference with wider social movements resisting war and environmental destruction, conveying a sense of emergency and an emerging cooperative spirit (returning from the early days?), recapitulating the themes of the two main presentations from earlier in the day. Nick Totton conceptualised the bodily unconscious as 'wild

mind' and spoke of how, given a chance, wilderness will always return. Perhaps humanistic psychology is itself a phenomenon of the social wilderness. For all the rationalizing talk of it now only having a low profile because it has permeated the mainstream, it's also possible that its spirit, vitality and coherence has atrophied in this very process of integration. Is there hope for its more uncompromised return? Forty years on from the matrix of a more naive sixties optimism which accompanied the first flourishings of humanistic psychology, Brian Thorne recontextualised Carl Rogers through a sombre vision of massive existential and ecological crisis. He described a feeling of personal liberation that came through declining to renew his annual BACP accreditation after 24 years (unable to collude further with the BACP's reproduction of surveillance culture) and through reference to hardly known figures (voices from the wilderness?) gave some pointers to the hope that is needed. Both he and Nick Totton, spoke with heart, took on the bigger picture, weaving therapy, politics and spirituality together in the best humanistic whole person socially conscious tradition. 'My name is Stan. I'm on a quest. I'm looking for the other half of the moon.....'



"Camping - nature on the outside helps connection on the inside"