

***Mind Gymnasium***, an e-book by Denis Postle

Reviewed by Manu Bazzano

### ***Not just Mind Fluff***

Denis Postle's *Mind Gymnasium* is an engaging compendium of humanistic practice and theory freely available as a free e-book on the web (<http://www.mind-gymnasium.com/>). Ambitious in scope yet succinct in content, it presents the reader with no less than twenty-nine downloadable chapters with titles such as *Client Guide*, *Conflict*, *Cultures of Cooperation*, *Personal Development*, *Living Together*, *The Psycho-Social Field*, *Self-Assessment and Learning how to Learn*.

Nimble skirting the treacherous line of self-help and electronic recipe manual which is characteristic of analogous ventures, the book egregiously avoids turning the depth of humanistic thought and the resourcefulness of its applications into yet another wisdom-while-u-wait set of formulas encased in shiny gadgetry. *Mind Gymnasium* will inform and engage any remaining Luddite out there; it will also seduce the twitchy mouse-wielding surfer into depths of wisdom unheard of among techies.

The themes Postle tackle in this book vary, at first perhaps to the point of meandering, but with hindsight the reader uncovers a thread and indeed a method in the seeming randomness. Postle's enterprise is motivated by the need to affirm a multi-faceted paradigm shift in the field of psychology and personal development – a shift which, in tune with the formulation of Thomas Kuhn, he sees manifested as 'people adopt[ing] new methods and look[ing] in new places'. A buoyant tone, adopted throughout, carries the book along nicely, revealing an unshakeable trust in human beings and their ability to move towards emancipation rather than voluntary servitude – a welcome tonic in conservative/reductionist times where the field of mental health has become subservient to the needs of 'the market'.

The ethos of the book is that of honouring difference and contradicting an attitude that Postle aptly calls 'monoculture of the mind'. He stresses this point in the chapter *Bringing about Change*, an introduction to Michael Kirton's Adaptation/Innovation theory where you can find where you are in the spectrum, as it were, whether you'll be more likely, for example, to prefer to delegate routine tasks. Passages like these made me wonder if *Mind Gymnasium* is the humanistic response to an irremediably technologised self-help culture. At times Postle's 'optimistic view of humanity', of 'our mind's capacity for self-direction and co-operation' makes me want to reach for the nonsense detector and join

Rollo May's pointed concerns about the naivety of some sectors of Humanistic Psychology. The author himself is aware of this danger as he admits being 'tempted to think that talk about new paradigms is ... mind fluff, a denial of the ... complexities of history'. But then you wouldn't go to *Mind Gymnasium* to learn about the blood, sweat & tears of personal and collective history but to find encouragement instead, alongside useful and interesting information. You would read it in order to be tickled into further exploration and study. Postle's optimism is contagious: it affected my computer which refused time and again to download the chapter on *Conflict*. The same happened to the computer at the British Library. The proverbial lay person could be forgiven for concluding that Humanistic Psychology just doesn't do conflict.

In *Cultures of Cooperation* the new paradigm at the heart of the book is spelled out in more concrete terms as 'breaking away from ... needing to have experts, bosses, gurus, leaders...'

There are good, informative chapters on the work of John Heron, of cognitive neurobiologist Damasio and of pioneering neuro-psychoanalyst Allan Schore, the latter a key figure, unassumingly spelling nothing less than the end of the 'cognitive turn' in psychology and a radical reframing of Bowlby's attachment theory.

*Living Together*, the chapter on relationships, movingly stresses the importance of 'small celebrations' in the life of a couple, while *Letting the Heart Sing* introduces Postle's own work – years of experience and commitment exuding an enviable and rare synthesis of seriousness and light-heartedness.

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**Regulation in Action: The Health Professions Council Fitness to Practise Hearing of Dr Malcolm Cross – Analysis, History, and Comment by Janet Haney, Karnac 2012, 179 pp, £9.49, 978-1-85575-777-6**

Reviewed by Colin Feltham

Janet Haney is a Lacanian analyst and sociologist here investigating a case called by the Health Professions Council against a counselling psychologist, Dr Malcolm Cross in 2010. The HPC has its origins in the Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine of 1959, becoming the HPC in 2001. Even 53 years ago many of the now familiar objections to state regulation were made explicit. Haney summarises some of the relevant history of the HPC before going on to map out the closely observed shenanigans of the hearing. She gives an eyewitness account of, and wry commentary on, the personnel, roles, procedures, costs and carry-on that somehow comes across as both objective and comedic. Janet Haney is also a researcher, an HPC Watchdog website contributor, and an amateur actor, and her writing in this book conveys an acute sense of absurd drama.

The case against Malcolm Cross is based on events (alleged drunkenness, silly sexual banter, etc.) at a private pre-accreditation dinner of HPC and professional colleagues,

nothing to do with clinical propriety. It is not always clear exactly what the charge is – bringing the profession into disrepute? Haney reports on the proceedings in detail, which include testimonies of those present at the dinner, cross-examination, clarification, quasi-precedents, and so on. Behind the flimsy legalistic case one can detect organisational anxieties, interpersonal tensions and differing perceptions of events. It takes five hours within the two-day hearing for the Panel to reach a decision, which was that there was no misconduct.

In the final chapter of the book Janet Haney offers some lessons and opinions. She mentions Chris Atkins' film *Taking Liberties* as well as certain human rights cases as relevant here. Various other HPC cases are trawled through. She states bluntly that 'the HPC is a castle in the air, generated by an idea without genuine substance' (p.147) that is 'deliberately adversarial' (p.149). For all the astonishing failure of cases of fitness to practise, the costs involved are staggeringly high. Cases regarding the CPD requirement and its potential transgressions are briefly discussed. The book ends with a section on the attempted capture of the counselling and psychotherapy field via the HPC's Professional Liaison Group (PLG) from 2008. Events culminate in a High Court challenge to the HPC and the now celebrated abandonment of HPC plans to regulate counselling and psychotherapy. Haney condemns the 'crowd of others' (non-practitioners) who have postured opportunistically with 'a simulacrum of expertise' (p.170).

*Regulation in Action* can almost be read as an amusing novel of Pharisaic farce with Swiftian and Kafkaesque motifs and echoes of Monty Python. The masterly accomplishment of the book is to put the HPC itself on trial and to find it (in this instance, if not others) bureaucentric, wasteful, pompous, dehumanising, abusive. But it can also be read on several other levels. We can all get drunk and act embarrassingly 'silly' at times, requiring from others a sense of proportion and, if necessary, forgiveness. Woe betide you, however, if your minor social transgression coincides with over-eager organisational vigilance and punitiveness. Representatives of HPC-like organisations *can* be seen here as *intending* benignly to protect public safety and collegial confidence, however farcical in its execution. And of course, we humans can all be regarded as too often universally folly-like in our behaviour.

For moral seriousness and impact, Haney's text sits alongside others like Ian Parker's and Denis Postle's impassioned critiques of regulation, and deserves to be studied both as a caution against professionalisation and an indictment of malevolent social forces. As Max Travers' foreword emphasises, we are living through an era of stubborn and insane audit-mindedness. Read it too alongside Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism* and let us continue to analyse, understand and expose the collusion of business, government, academia and the professions in casting the shadow of false consciousness over us all.

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