

# The '50 Years of Humanistic Psychology' Conference: A Review

Reviewed by **Nick Totton**

A conference to mark 50 years of Humanistic Psychology (HP) needs to be a bit special; and this one was. Whether by luck or good planning, the conference organisers booked two keynote presenters who, in effect, bookend the whole range of contemporary HP. Mick 'The Facts are Friendly' Cooper argued that humanistic therapists need to embrace evidence-based practice in order to 'influence decision makers' to approve the employment of humanistic techniques, and their practitioners, primarily in the National Health Service; while Maureen O'Hara panned back the camera to point out, as if we didn't know, that we are experiencing a planetary crisis or ensemble of crises, and that Humanistic Psychology both can and should try to do something about this. A meaty difference.

However, the two keynoters were on much too friendly terms to have a proper argument; and attendees didn't have enough opportunity to get deeply into the issues. The timetable was crammed with good stuff, so that although there was an attempt to provide group discussion time it was shoehorned into cramped spaces – there was a serious proposal to hold a final plenary in ten minutes! Of course it went on longer, so that I had to leave for my train; but I doubt that it went on long enough to make serious inroads into the issues raised.

This is a shame, and of course a feature of almost all conferences: a choice has to be made between self-generated exploration and prepared material, and there is generally a strong, and understandable, preference for the latter: we've paid for it and we deserve it. The material provided on this occasion was generally excellent: both

keynoters were very good at what they do. I had heard Mick Cooper's presentation before; but Maureen O'Hara's passionate and eloquent talk on the state of the world and what we might do about it blew me away, reinstating the founding concerns of HP in a very natural way. There was also an impressive range of workshops on offer, on a number of interesting themes, and from 'friends' as well as practitioners of HP; I attended three, two of which I really enjoyed, the other not so much, which in my experience is a good average!

As always, though, the most valuable stuff happened in the breaks: meeting old friends, making new connections. There were two clear constituencies present, I felt: veterans of the humanistic movement, reminiscing nostalgically about the days when 'we had festivals rather than conferences', and everyone was naked together in the mud bath (I exaggerate, but only slightly); and a younger generation who seemed often to be torn between the regulated, evidence-based model they have been fed and the wildness of the oldies. The younger generation was strongly represented, which is an achievement in itself at a time when organisations like AHP tend to have an ageing membership; and I met a number of very impressive younger practitioners, as well as marking my score card with some older 'names' I hadn't previously encountered, and re-meeting a lot of friends. I have to say that perhaps the best of many good moments was the Saturday evening social, which sadly a lot of people didn't attend: wonderful music from The Orchestra Who Fell To Earth, great conversations, even some dancing! 🎵