Book Reviews

Edited by **Manu Bazzano**, Book Reviews Editor

Anti Self-Help

Rewriting the Rules: An Integrative Guide to Love, Sex and Relationships

By: Meg Barker
Routledge, Hove, 2013, 208pp
ISBN-13: 978-0415517638
Reviewed by: Suzanne Keys

Meg Barker clearly has a lot of experience in the field of love, sex and relationships, and this book is full of priceless nuggets of insight into the complexities and uncertainties of intimate relationships in contemporary Western culture. Her particular focus, as the title suggests, is laying bare unwritten rules and offering an exploration of why and how we might want to rewrite these rules. In fact each chapter has the same structure, which helps to navigate the book: What are the rules? Why question the rules? Alternative Rules. Beyond Rules? Embracing Uncertainty. Her map of the field is very clearly drawn out into ten chapters covering different aspects of relationships: yourself, attraction, love, sex, gender, monogamy, conflict, break-up, commitment, and a final chapter with practical advice, suggestions and warnings about how to go about rewriting your rules.

At the beginning and end she makes it clear that this is an anti-self-help book, as she isn't wanting people to think there's anything wrong with them that needs fixing, nor that she is giving the key to everlasting and perfect happiness in relationships, nor providing fixed answers to some of the questions she raises. However, when I was thinking of where this book would go in a bookshop, I realised it would most usefully go in the self-help section. It offers information and advice in a jargon-free, friendly style, including many references from popular Western culture which non-therapists and non-psychologists may find accessible. There are questions to ask yourself and also useful diagrams simplifying complex ideas. As a therapist, I would have liked her experience and theories as a psychologist to come through more explicitly, although they are clearly there in the richness and density of her thinking around these different aspects of relationships. There is very little direct reference, for example, to what she has learnt from her work with clients in this area, although when thinking of to whom this book would appeal, I did imagine therapists recommending it to individual clients and couples to read.

I also think it is a useful resource for counselling or psychology trainers and trainees. As a trainer, I found certain sections really helpful in terms of thinking about how to tackle explorations of gender and sexuality with trainees – not only helping to facilitate their own unexplored regions but also their openness to the diversity of clients' experiences. In short, this is a very helpful resource in extending counsellor internal congruence, as well as their capacity for empathy and unconditional positive regard.

One of the common paths running throughout the book is the importance of self-reflection and self-care in terms of an enquiring, curious, compassionate, non-judgemental gaze at one's own needs, desires, behaviours and assumptions when looking at this potentially painful, disturbing and hidden territory. One of the key messages of the book is to 'communicate, communicate, communicate': without that, the unwritten rules remain hidden, and hence very powerful and potentially destructive. This book itself is a communication of how freeing it can be to not judge oneself as 'abnormal', 'unnatural' and 'bad', but to be open and honest about what one's actual experience is, and to realise where some of the 'norms' come from and how many people actually find themselves outside them. The author gives many examples of how much seemingly uncharted territory has actually been explored and named by people and communities who do not identify as mainstream.

Another common path is Barker's belief that as persons we are plural and continually in process: when considering all these areas of relating, nothing is fixed and there are myriad possibilities. In response to her insistence on freedom and choice, I do have questions about how free some of us really are to rewrite the rules. I am thinking particularly of the young people I work with from South Asian cultures where the rules

are very clearly written and where rewriting them can cost lives. So this book is really from an individualist rather than a collectivist cultural perspective. For the young people I work with, following their freedom can mean losing a fundamental part of themselves as a 'we' rather than an 'I'. Their choices are understood very much from this 'we' perspective, and would be constructed very differently from some of the choices outlined in this book.

Another critique of the book is that I would have found it easier to read if the text had been broken down more and there had been more subheadings. It has been written quite densely and it was sometimes hard to appreciate more fully what was being offered. Barker says she wants the book to be used to dip into, to work with and to return to at different times when different aspects of relationships are most salient. In order to be used like this, it would need more signposting along the way. The first page says it is a 'friendly guide through the complicated – often contradictory – rules of love'; and although the tone and style are 'friendly' throughout this wasn't matched by the formatting. This is a shame in terms of accessing the gems that are there, which seemed, at times, more like buried treasure – hard to find but definitely worth searching and digging for. S

An Art and a Craft

The Talking Cure: Wittgenstein on Language as Bewitchment and Clarity

By: John Heaton
Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2013, 248pp
ISBN-13: 978-1137326430
Reviewed by: Julie Webb, MA, MBACP Counsellor/Lecturer

For someone like me, a counsellor in the humanistic tradition, who fights hard against the call for scientific evidence of the success or failure of talking cures, John Heaton's book is a welcome relief espousing the virtues of radical scepticism. Understanding, ourselves and one another, and communicating that understanding is an art and a craft through the medium of language: an act of the human being as an artist in a lived context, not a scientific entity encountering the world according to a set of theoretical rules.

'Therapy is a craft and ought not to be understood as the mastery of a set of theories' (p. 7) is the theme of Heaton's book, and he uses the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein to eruditely make his point. More than that, he juxtaposes the confusion and muddle of Freudian interpretations and cognitive scientism to illuminate more brightly the perspicuity of Wittgenstein's philosophical conceptual poetry. The light is cast on language meaning and use, truth and truthfulness, reason and causes, elucidation, consciousness, self and identity, talking and writing and therefore, implicitly, ethics.

What's the buzzword here? Language pretty much, and when we become confused about ourselves and our thoughts and emotions, and the language we use in context to describe them, then we can easily fall into depression and despair. It sounds simple, and on the one hand it is; and on the other hand, as the years it has taken me to understand the work of Wittgenstein demonstrate, clearly it is also a complex matter to describe. Equally, of course, that statement may also demonstrate my lack of ingenuity. Perspicuous representation (or, as I call it, perspicuous description) is the aim, achieved by the method of an activity of clarification. Or, as therapy would have it: we are going to talk to each other in truthfulness, in the context of the fabric of our lives, in the hope of clarity.

When we find that form of words that describes our situation accurately, light bulbs go on and pennies drop: the problem is solved. Except that Wittgenstein would say there was no problem in that sense. Nothing will have changed; we have merely gained clarity of the situation, and from there we have the means to doubt and the opportunity to create anew. The role of the therapist (and the task of the philosopher) is engaged in an activity of clarification with the client: an action Heaton describes that

> must be spontaneous and not the application of a theory or technique... spontaneous action allows the subject to unfold out of itself the richness of meaning. For what is specific to the subject is precisely its ability to elude its own grasp, which is why reflection is called for rather than theory. (p. 210)

It is important to note that Heaton does not deny the value of theory, its relevance and usefulness. What he argues against is a dogmatic following of theory and its application by the 'expert' as a means of fixing a fellow human being to their experience of crisis. The text challenges us as therapists (perhaps just as humans) to let the dogmatic ladder of theory that we have climbed fall away – even push it away as an act of humility and openness to the context of the stranger in crisis,

with a willingness to be creative enough to be of assistance by being open to doubt and chance.

Heaton's work here attunes to my own desire for Philosophy, and in particular Wittgenstein, to become part of the curriculum in the training of therapists, but not as another theory, more as a creative light that illuminates perspicuity in the describing of our situation in therapy and in life. This is a challenge, as philosophical texts have a reputation for being difficult, dense and very large. Not so here. Wittgenstein asserted that language should not be technical, particularly in Philosophy: it is an activity of clarification, and so language should be kept 'homely'. The author achieves this with gusto. Throughout I sense Heaton's urge to show us his workings in this valuable creation with crafted vignettes woven in, and in contrast to his dynamic little sketch *Wittgenstein and Psychoanalysis* (Icon Books, 2000), this book is a detailed picture. A complete painting? It couldn't possibly be. As he and Wittgenstein would argue, there is always more to be shown, and more to be said from within the fabric of our lived lives, and so the picture is always changing. The picture created here is a perspicuous vision, eruditely crafted for counsellors, psychotherapists, psychiatrists, psychologists, trainees, and indeed anyone interested in human beings and what it is to describe the predicament we find ourselves in.

As I read the text I frequently wanted to expound its virtues from the rooftops. When I had digested the last delicious word, I wished to dwell in silence.

Here, I have attended to the former, now I attend to the latter. S

On Sexual Self-esteem

LoveSex: An Integrative Model for Sexual Education

By: Cabby Laffy
Karnac, London, 2013, 224pp
ISBN: 978-1780491554
Reviewed by: Juliet Carter, Psychotherapist and Alexander Technique practitioner

This book provides an excellent resource for professionals in the field of psychosexual therapy and education. It offers a sound approach which focuses on sexual health and how each of us as sexual beings can develop greater self-awareness and choice in expressing our sexuality, rather than on sexual dysfunctions often defined around sexual acts.

It is divided into four sections, based on a four-part integrative model that looks at how the mind, brain, body and emotions function and interact to provide our own individual experience of sexuality. The book will arguably be of most use as a resource for therapists and practitioners to draw from in working with people on psychosexual issues.

Though the author's approach is solution- rather than problem-focused, she nonetheless offers a view on where we go awry. In our culture, she argues, we do not have a good relationship with our sexuality. Nearly all of us have experienced a general level of shaming and a clear lack of celebration about sexuality. From an early age, we are discouraged from talking about sexuality and from valuing our emotional and sexual needs. Our varied experiences of being sexual become channelled into a limited notion of sex as an act, most often of heterosexual intercourse, and other expressions become marginalised. At the same time, we live in a seemingly liberated sexual environment, with sexuality and sexual images widely displayed. Pornography may have played a role in challenging our cultural shame about sex, and in some ways we are more open in talking about sex and our needs and desires. But, asks the author, have we flipped the coin to merely the opposite – shamelessness, rather than conscious sexual self-expression?

The underlying problem is that instead of being in

relationship with our sexuality, we learn to objectify it. 'In our culture, we think and talk about sex as something we do, rather than sexuality being something that we have and being sexual as something we are.' Our focus is on sex as an act, on 'doing sex' and 'looking sexy', rather than on our subjective experience of sexuality and how we want to express this.

Overall, says the author, we are not at peace with the sexual aspect of our humanity. This manifests in numerous problems, including an attack on our bodies (for example, through diet and beauty regimes), the normalisation of depersonalised sex and sexual violence, and in the hijacking of our need for the erotic by commercial interests. In this light, the author's central question is pertinent: How can we take our power back in order to make more conscious, healthy choices about our sex lives?

The author uses the phrase 'sexual self-esteem', and a central theme of the book is to explore what a positive 'sexual self-esteem' would look like if we were to celebrate and value our sexuality more explicitly. For Laffy, 'Good sexual self-esteem flows from acting in ways that leaves a person feeling proud, knowing that their sexual life is enhancing their physical, mental and emotional well-being'. In short, it is not what we do but how we feel about it that is the basis of a healthy relationship with our sexuality. An interesting analogy with food is put forward – we all have our different tastes and preferences; what matters is that we find these nutritious and satisfying.

The book offers a great deal of practical guidance in this process towards more positive sexual self-esteem. It is structured around a four-part model to help explore the interplay between our biological urges and our social conditioning, our bodies and our feelings, to help us answer questions about what a healthy sexual diet could look like.

Each section provides relevant, up-to-date information, including explanations of useful aspects of theory from different psychological approaches and neuroscience, as well as a series of self-discovery exercises to support individual exploration.

The section titled 'Mind' explores our socio-cultural and personal beliefs, values and attitudes about sex and sexuality, how these have been influenced by religion, shame, and a cultural exploitation of sexuality, as well as what we learnt as children, and how these in turn have an impact on our experience of sexuality.

The section titled 'Body' describes our sexual anatomy in detail, including not just the genitals but other vital bodily systems. It explains the various stages of the sexual arousal process, distinguishing this from our reproductive functioning to support our giving value to all sexual behaviours we might express (not just sex itself).

The section titled 'Brain' outlines the role of neuro-chemicals in sexual functioning, and describes the difference between the survival and socialising brain circuits. It looks at how our history of previous sexual experiences plays a part in every new sexual experience we have.

The section titled 'Emotion' discusses the range of feelings we can have about our sexuality. In particular it looks at the impact of trauma on our bodies and hearts, and the issue of shame. Other shadow issues related to sexuality such as sex addiction and sexual violence are discussed. It offers reflections on safer sex as being not just about avoiding pregnancy and infection, but physical and emotional safety also.

LoveSex provides a useful resource for therapists and practitioners, with accessible, clearly written information and theoretical nuggets, as well as a useful series of self-discovery exercises to pick and choose from in clinical work and other settings. What the book is perhaps lacking is some case-illustrations that would offer further insight into the lived experience of individuals' sexuality, in both its conscious/positive and 'pathological' aspects. As a result, I found *LoveSex* to be a bit drier and lacking in life than the promise of its title – but I have no doubt this is a book that will indeed come to life for those who actively engage with its content and exercises.

Can You Say 'Shibboleth'?

A Psychotherapy for the People: Towards a Progressive Psychoanalysis

By: Lewis Aron and Karen Starr
Routledge, Hove, 2013, 442pp
ISBN: 978-0-415-52999-0
Reviewed by: John Rowan

I was excited to read the first chapter of this book. It is full of unfamiliar phrases like, 'In this book we argue for a progressive and humanistic vision of psychoanalysis'. The authors speak of 'psychoanalysis as a social and humanistic enterprise'. They say:

> We have often felt that the bickering among psychoanalysts about what 'counts' as psychoanalysis, what theory, how many times per week, whether or not the couch is used, what school of thought is included or excluded, is nothing more than rearranging the chairs on the Titanic as the ship is sinking. Ours is not one more effort to shift the chairs. We believe the ship needs to turn in a very different direction.

They go on to speak of 'the dialectics of marginality', and say 'we believe there should be a continuing dialectic between coherence and diversification. And they point out how much our present social situation echoes and parallels the situation already perceived by Erich Fromm 40-odd years ago:

> Contemporary psychoanalysis is passing through a crisis which superficially manifests itself in a certain decrease in the number of students applying for training in psychoanalytic institutes, and also in the number of patients who seek help from the psychoanalyst. Competing therapies have emerged in recent years which claim to have better therapeutic results and to require much less time and hence, of course, much less money. The psychoanalyst, who ten years ago was considered by the urban middle class to have the answer to its mental anguish, is now put on the defensive by psychotherapeutic competitors and is losing his therapeutic monopoly.
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> (Fromm, 1970: 12)

Also in this chapter, the authors identify themselves as affiliated with the New York Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis. Their apologia runs like this:

> Psychoanalysis is a depth psychology. Despite the claims of managed care, people still want to be listened to in depth and always will. That's why there will always be patients who want and need an analytical approach and why there will always be therapists who want to learn it.

These are bold words indeed. But the second chapter is hardly less challenging. It fully adopts the necessity of adopting a dialectical point of view in order to do justice to a relational approach. And it situates psychoanalysis in the landscape of the latest thinking. We get subheadings like, 'Paradox in Relational Psychoanalysis', 'Postmodernism, Feminism and Deconstruction', and so on. This is exactly the philosophical position I was urging in my book *Ordinary Ecstasy* (3rd edition), and it is done in a very sophisticated way which really moves things on.

The third chapter, which is much shorter, is a highly politicised discussion of guilt and shame, where they point out that historically, psychoanalysis was prone to align guilt with psychoanalysis and masculinity, and shame with psychotherapy and femininity. These authors argue for a much more dialectical treatment of both, where such prejudices are lost.

There are two chapters about war – an extraordinary study, which is quite horrific in parts, and a real eye-opener. First we get 'Psychoanalysts in Uniform' (mainly about World War 1) and then 'Psychoanalysis as War Hero' (mainly about World War 2), which tell a truly daunting story about co-optation by the military. And then an even more amazing chapter entitled 'Psychoanalysis as Holocaust Survivor', which is mainly about the highly significant Jewish contribution to the survival and growth of psychoanalysis in America, with many setbacks and vicissitudes.

Then we come to a chapter entitled 'Psychoanalysis versus Psychotherapy', full of the in-fighting which has damaged psychoanalysis so much. Most of us nowadays are convinced that psychoanalysis is just one form of psychotherapy, but the wordy battles reported here rejected any suspicion of such an idea. Psychotherapy was seen as feminine and inferior, psychoanalysis as masculine and superior, for many years. Psychoanalysis was seen as truly scientific, and everything else as lesser and feebler.

> Within the psychoanalytic enterprise, a rigid hierarchy of disciplines was soon established with institute-trained psychoanalysts, a small and select group of psychiatrists, at the top. Beneath this elite group were the 'dynamic' or 'psychoanalytic' psychiatrists, who were partially trained in, or at least considered knowledgeable about, psychoanalysis. This larger group of physicians was followed by a much larger group, the social workers, who abandoning their traditional guidance and case-oriented helping roles, adopted the non-intervening, nondirective,

> cathartic model that was being touted as psychoanalytic. Operationally, to a large extent the social workers did the clinical work, generally in institutional settings, under the supervision of psychoanalytic psychiatrists, who themselves had been taught, supervised, and treated by the elite psychoanalysts. (Oremland, 1991)

This I found a truly shocking chapter, full of prejudice and narrow views.

Then we return to the big historical charge, with 'Charcot and Bernheim: origins of intrapsychic and relational models of mind'; 'Women on the couch: genital stimulation and the birth of psychoanalysis'; 'Freud's anti-Semitic surround'; 'The right to pass: psychoanalysis' Jewish identity'; 'Universalizing the Jewish problem'; "Freud, Ferenczi and Schreber: Wandering Jews'; and 'Ethics, universalism and the "Jewish Science"'. What is extraordinary, as can be seen from these chapter headings, is the emphasis on Jewishness, which is examined from every angle as being the major clue to Freud himself, and to psychoanalysis as such. The authors are themselves Jews, and this may partly account for such an emphasis, but one cannot help feeling that they have let it go too far.

The last two chapters are entitled 'What is psychoanalysis? Can you say 'shibboleth'?' and 'Monsters, ghosts and undecidables'. And here they firmly come down on the side of a relational approach. This is to be the final rescuer of the psychoanalytic enterprise.

This book, in spite of its messianic pretensions, is really extraordinarily narrow. It speaks of psychoanalysis, for psychoanalysis, and to psychoanalysts. Even narrower than this, however, it speaks particularly to Jewish psychoanalysts. The amount of material here on Judaic traditions and issues is really quite overwhelming. You would never know that the world of psychotherapy is much wider than this. There is always the thought that it is only psychoanalysis that deals with fundamental psychological matters – all other approaches, including psychoanalytically-oriented psychotherapy, are aimed at superficial improvements and 'corrective emotional experiences'.

The writers of this book have obviously never considered such authors as Carl Rogers, Rollo May, Alvin Mahrer, Stanislav Grof, Jacob Moreno, R.D. Laing, Eugene Gendlin, Emmy van Deurzen, Roberto Assagioli, A.H. Almaas, Allen Greenberg, Arnold Mindell, Virginia Satir, Ernesto Spinelli, Gary Yontef, Irvin Yalom, or the rest of the deep-digging humanistic psychotherapists who do such wide-ranging work throughout the world. All such are committed, I would say, to the deep, patient uncovering of fundamental issues, and the resulting transformation of the person, that these authors claim only to be found in psychoanalysis. ❺

Not in a Glasgow Pub

The Tribes of the Person-Centred Nation: An Introduction to the Schools of Therapy Related to the Person-centred Approach, 2nd edn

Edited by: Pete Sanders
PCCS Books, Ross-on-Wye, 2012, 251pp
ISBN: 978-1-906254-551
Reviewed by: Manu Bazzano

One day, during a weekend residential training in person-centred psychotherapy, I felt deeply moved by what a facilitator had said in response to a dilemma I was wrestling with at the time. I thanked her for the ability to listen so empathically. Her response was: 'It's not me. It's the power of the person-centred approach.' I felt puzzled and disappointed: it wasn't *her* responding to *me*, person to person. Instead it was this semi-mystical thing, 'the power of the PCA'.

On another occasion in the same training, I casually asked during group process why there was no room in the building dedicated to Freud. Every room in the large middle-class suburban house that was our school bore the name of a psychological pioneer – Rogers, Klein, Jung, Maslow, Perls, but no Freud. 'Sure we can do that – the tutor promptly retorted to the general hilarity – we can give him the toilet.' I was mystified: in my naivety, I had thought an acknowledgement of Freud, the very first pioneer, would be obvious. What I didn't know at the time was that alongside valuable therapeutic theory and practice, I was being schooled in the way of tribalism, of what Richard Worsley, in one of the best chapters in this book, aptly calls 'ghetto mentality'. This is not to say that parochialism is a person-centred specialty: too many times in meetings with fellow supervisors and tutors I heard colleagues from other orientations disparaging person-centred therapy (PCT) as superficial, implicitly bolstering the superiority of their own tribe.

The term 'tribes' in the title of this book is indicative – perhaps both deliberate nod at the radical genuineness of the noble savage in touch with inherent human goodness as well as unwitting admission of the dangers of endogamy latent in all tribes. The term 'nation' is

equally problematic: for one thing, a nation is an *imagined community* (Anderson, 1982), a fiction that helps to prop up a wobbly identity. More crucially, a nation has borders; it inevitably leaves out of its walled domain anything considered 'alien'.

What does this book leave out? With the exception of a couple of pages in Tony Merry's excellent chapter on classical client-centred therapy, there is no discussion of two intrinsically related and essential tenets of PCT: *the organism* and the *actualising tendency.* These key metaphors are found in Rogers, and are best articulated in contemporary literature by Tudor and Worrall (2006), two authors among the many conspicuous absences from this book.

Once the key metaphors are abandoned, we end up clutching at the rafts of any available theory. Keith Tudor and Mike Worrall have demonstrated how the central tenet of person-centred therapy, the 'organism', is not exclusively linked to the good-old days of client-centred therapy but can be creatively (and coherently) linked to (among others) Whitehead's process philosophy. Personally I believe that without holding the notion of the organism firmly in the background, PCT becomes just another shiny item in the ever-expanding superstore of cosmetic psychologies. Equally absent in this overwhelming male collection are the seminal writings of Gillian Proctor, Suzanne Keys, Elizabeth Freire, Katija Chandler, Margaret Warner, Jo Hilton and Dagmar Edwards, to name but a few. There is no mention of Colin Lago and his ground-breaking work in the trans-cultural domain, or of Ivan Ellingham's far-reaching philosophical insights.

So sweeping has the term 'person-centred' become in recent years that it may soon join the ranks of that other fashionable term, 'mindfulness' (Brazier, 2014). The problem with any overused word is that it becomes meaningless. With Carl Rogers' theory of personality being almost unanimously (and erroneously) perceived as paper-thin, person-centred therapy is unceremoniously relegated, in most training courses, to the 'secondary' role of establishing a good working alliance, before either heavy-weight theorising, 'in-depth' probing of the 'real', 'originary' causes of distress (or, conversely, the philistine pragmatism of solution-focused reprogramming) is introduced, courtesy of other theoretical orientations.

If readers take this collection of essays assembled by Pete Sanders as in any way representative of the person-centred approach, than it would seem that the prevailing prejudice (of person-centred therapy having little theoretical substance) affects person-centred therapists as well, for every contributor here impatiently swerves from the key metaphors of the approach.

As a collection of interesting and thought-provoking articles, this book works a treat, with Robert Elliott providing a very informative and stimulating introduction to Emotion Focused Therapy, Campbell Purton doing something similar for Focusing, and Mick Cooper proposing parallels between aspects of PCT and existential psychotherapy (including Ronnie Laing's remark that Rogers wouldn't survive for more than two minutes in a Glasgow pub). Trainees and tutors in the humanistic field will find plenty of useful material.

As a map of PCT, the book is interesting, for it reflects the paradox of the institutional version of the approach. What is the paradox? Simply put, wanting your (radical) cake and eating it, i.e. maintaining cutting-edge credibility whilst patching up a wobbly theoretical foundation through a generic and, to this reader, conservative appeal to 'pluralism', professionalisation and half-digested theories borrowed from other orientations.

The self-appointed 'schools of therapy related to the PCA' (as the subtitle has it) seem to represent at first a rich multiplicity. In reality, they read as a patchwork of vaguely compatible views held together by a broad appreciation of the work of Carl Rogers. Some of the 'recent developments' (pp. 187–232) – particularly Pre-Therapy (the truly impressive work initiated by Gary Prouty and summarised here by Sanders) – add something genuinely new and ground-breaking which builds on the tenets of PCT. Other developments liberally rely on Object Relations, Christian religiosity, and rebranded forms of behaviourism whilst wanting to hold on to the umbilical Rogerian cord.

The person-centred tradition is a living and changing entity, as Worsley states in his chapter on 'Integrative PCT' (pp 161–86). But a living entity possesses an organismic continuum that is sadly lacking in some of the 'tribal' expressions championed in this volume.

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