Book Reviews

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

The Beach beneath the Street

The Future of Humanistic Psychology

Edited by: Richard House, David Kalisch and Jennifer Maidman
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Reviewed by: Manu Bazzano

Everything becomes reified, yet everything starts disintegrating

(Henri Lefebvre)

This book is an open house event with its editors as unconditional hosts inviting a wide group of artistes and fellow travellers to the merry proceedings. I felt gratefully entertained, inspired and at times bamboozled. Before wandering through the rooms of the Humanistic Party, the visitor is greeted by Andrew Samuels, who sombrely reminds us that 'aggression, lust and other difficult emotions' are routinely overlooked by humanistic practitioners who are also 'at sea when confronted by promiscuity and infidelity in their clinical work, and tend to be rather conventional (and hence inadvertently condemning) in response' (p. xii). These 'shadow' aspects find expression covertly: going from the extreme of neglecting a 'highly professional persona or set of personae' to doing 'research, work out more theory and seek professional acceptance', and wanting 'the prizes it sees others as having' (pp. x–xi).

To illustrate his vital point Samuels resorts to a (Jungian and Aristotelian) (mis)reading of enantiodromía, the Heraclitean term literally meaning 'the running course of opposite', aka the tendency for things to turn into their opposite, concluding, with a touch of melodrama: 'Enantiodromías lead to totalizing outcomes' (p. xi). This conjures up the image of an over-empathic therapist turning almost overnight into the grey eminence of the therapy world. Yet in its original meaning, enantiodromía speaks of the fundamental unity of the movement taking place out of isolated polarities. It speaks of hidden harmony ('divine nourishing force' in Heraclitus's words). There is no third element here, as in the Aristotelian and Jungian versions, playing the referee, compensating and mediating between opposites and, even more crucially, judging and evaluating the shadow elements. What we find instead is a fundamental trust, or objectless faith, in the process of becoming.

Heraclitus (and later Nietzsche) put his faith in the totality of the opposites. One repercussion may be that there never was inherent purity in Humanistic Psychology to begin with. It also means that a movement towards articulation, informed expression and theorization is possible and necessary as part of an ongoing, holistic process favouring the heart one moment, the intellect the next, fluctuating between visibility and invisibility, at times working in the undergrowth, other times attempting fuller exposure – all of the above, without any obligation whatsoever to join the conservative chorus of apparatchiks.

Yet Samuels's foreword touches a sore point and one that invites reflection, a point echoed in a different context by Dina Glouberman:

> Much of what we are known for in Humanistic Psychology has now seemingly been accepted in the mainstream. This is our success as visionaries, and also our challenge. But if we look closely at some of the areas where we have been pioneers, we will see that the ideas may have been adopted, but the application has narrowed so that they no longer represent the original vision. (p. 127)

Even more worryingly, Humanistic Psychology has given birth, like hippy parents, to an ultra-square progeny, to a new breed of neo-conservatives – writers and practitioners who whilst formally upholding humanistic principles, show

unambiguous signs of having, in a perverse Foucauldian twist, fallen prey to the entrapments of power. It's easy to spot the neo-cons: they will eulogize RCTs, revamp psychopathology, and colonize any space left for real debate at conferences and meetings with streams of data and blanket use of PowerPoint. The assumptions behind the words and deeds of the neo-cons appear to be that progress can be measured by how often state, government and governing bodies adopt a humanistic lingo. What is truly mind-boggling is that some of its most vociferous exponents claim to be inspired and to have theoretical affinities with that true person of no status who was Carl Rogers.

Isn't it great, I remember reading a few years back, that the European Council had the word 'person-centred' in one of his statements? I have witnessed a parallel of this phenomenon with the mindfulness movement. I remember reading an interview in a Buddhist magazine with people in the Pentagon. Wasn't it amazing, the journalist mused, that these people practise meditation? But surely one of the positive effects of intelligent meditation practice (as opposed to mere solipsistic concentration and relaxation) is that the person meditating slowly begins to question the very notion of war, the raison d'être of the military and of a department of defence, rather than dropping bombs mindfully.

A similar point has been recorded in these very same pages by Andy Rogers (2014). He reported on Jacqui Dillon, who quoted from civil rights activist Audre Lorde: 'The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.' (p. 59) A more philosophically attuned and philosophically astute humanistic practice is not aimed at recognizing the friendliness of facts but instead is geared at questioning in a fundamental way the very notion of 'facts' – the very nature of data-driven, literally-minded, target-oriented, evidence-based 'facts'.

What is more inimical to Humanistic Psychology than the rather crude viewpoint, such as the one expounded by Windy Dryden in his chapter (pp. 119–24) – of one-sidedly waving the finger at humanistic in the name of 'engaging with reality' (p. 123) which the author sees as 'play[ing] politics, carry out research that is acceptable to NICE so that it becomes a part of the therapeutic establishment as conceived by the government'? (ibid.). Answer: a power-hungry bureaucrat who has mastered the egalitarian and compassionate idiom of Humanistic Psychology. What is worse than a corporate ravenous disregard for ecology? Answer: a company that adopts environmentalism as an ornamental badge for their faux green credentials.

We live in deeply conservative times where the values of Humanistic Psychology, upheld by the majority of contributors to this book, are vital. We live at the time of faux greens, humanistic neo-cons, and essentialist re-writing of gender, culture, ethnicity and class – all in the name of biology, neuroscientism and professionalization. But in order to be effective, Humanistic Psychology needs to undo itself, clarify its metaphors and ontological scope and see through them. It needs to become groundless. Groundlessness has a long and fierce philosophical tradition, which goes way beyond the counter-culture, back to Heraclitus, the first psychologist/philosopher: its name is the counter-tradition. Humanistic Psychology has not decided whether it belongs to the tradition or the counter-tradition. The dominant ontologies behind all three forces of psychology are firmly entrenched in the tradition, and this constitutes their weakness. Humanistic Psychology is an exception because it has a history of flirting with the counter-tradition without ever making the leap into groundlessness. It still believes in the outmoded metaphysics of 'human nature' – something which will shine in all its beauty and glory if left untainted and unconditioned, or restored to itself by 'growth' and 'development'. It believes that if we dig long enough underneath the ugliness of asphalt and concrete, we'll find a beach, a prairie, a musical Eden. It believes there is a soul (variously apprehended and longed for), a more or less pure inner core to us humans.

From these fundamental errors stem key misapprehensions such as the twist from self-actualization to actualization of self: the former standing for the autonomous ability of an organism to regulate and enhance itself; the latter bolstering the development and 'growth' of a fictional construct, the self, whose propped-up existence constitutes the root of the problem. If what develops and grows (becomes spiritual, actualized and transpersonal) is this very same construct, the end result will be that uniquely humanistic paradox: the actualized self, the spiritual self, the very pinnacle of narcissism (hierarchical geometries and pyramids, from Maslow to Wilber to Rowan abound in Humanistic Psychology, and so does the fixation with 'peaks', beyond and above the tremendous unacknowledged mystery of everyday existence). There is one possible label for a psychological/therapeutic practice that would positively exploit the counter-tradition: a psychology of becoming.

That very same name Lois Holzman (pp. 29–42) gives

to her own practice, one that is refreshingly informed by Marx, by activism, social engagement, and by performance, which she describes as a new ontology:

> We all have the capacity to play as children do, to do what we do not yet know how to do, to be who we are and other than who we are at the same time. The babbling baby, the actor on the stage, the student in a school play, the researcher singing her data, and all of us – are capable of creating new performances of ourselves continuously, if we choose to. In this way, performance is a new ontology, a new understanding of how development happens – through the social-cultural activity of people together creating new possibilities and new options for how to be in, relate to, understand and change the world, which, of course, includes ourselves.
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> Mainstream psychology is designed as the study of product – the isolated individual at different points in time. It is incapable of seeing, let alone understanding, process. In this way, mainstream psychology contributes mightily to alienation, i.e. relating to the products of production severed from their producers and from the process of their production, that is, as commodities. (Holzman, p. 36)

Much is to be gained by re-imagining the past (which is what some of the contributors do), particularly at a time when a new generation of trainees, coming of age in our dark, evidence-based times, may be stirred by learning that once upon a time, doing therapy could mean opening the doors of perception, being socially and politically engaged, even question the very nature of our bewildering human predicament.

The editors write:

> In terms of age, all three of us editors are part of that idealistic generation which now finds itself taking stock and asking – despite the inequality, the wars, the fundamentalism, the rampant capitalism, the terrorism, the political corruption, and the other ills which continue to plague the human race – to what extent might those of us who have been drawn to humanistic ideas have succeeded in sowing the seeds of the humanistic dream? And is that dream still valid in current cultural historical circumstances, or do we need a new one (or, at the very least, a realistically updated one)? (p. 18)

A feeling of nostalgia does colour the entire book, but this is not a bad thing: *algia* is pain and *nostos* homecoming: a longing to return home can mean aspiration to revisit old haunts, and redefine what was valuable and what needs to be discarded.

It may also cause us to see with our own eyes that home itself has gone, that we are left homeless under a big sky – which might be another way of saying what the editors very perceptively state in their editorial conclusion:

> Many, if not most critical humanists are... instinctively drawn to... deconstructionist ideas, and are also open to having the 'shadow' side of our humanist ontologies and epistemologies subjected to a critical deconstructionist 'gaze'. (p. 172)

In revisiting our own root metaphors, we might discover that we did rely on half-digested ontologies, and that we failed to work through metaphysical assumptions.

Humanistic Psychology shares a fault with psychoanalysis and CBT: it too relies on a metaphysical view of the human being: softer and kinder than psychoanalytic determinism and behavioural reprogramming, but as clunky in its blind atomistic faith in the human self, in 'growth' ('growth is for vegetables', James Hillman was fond of saying, not for humans), 'self-actualization' and the idea of 'human potential'. Even when it ventures into the so-called transpersonal, this is still as an appendix of this atomistic belief as a safari of acquisition in the exotic land of all things 'spiritual'. Before one ventures into the wider sphere (in which we are embedded), the self needs to be studied and dis-assembled, awakened to existential recognition.

A cultural movement needs new metaphors/images/words. This is what Humanistic Psychology, as evidenced in this book, patently lacks. Its metaphors hark back to the 1960s counter-culture, with its mix of half-cooked unreconstructed metaphysics and wisdom-while-u-wait rosy platitudes.

'Psychology (and psychologies) of becoming' might be one way of re-imagining the terrain occupied at present by Humanistic Psychology. The latter term has become too diffuse (at times, conversely, too dogmatically entrenched), with some of its key ideas engulfed and co-opted by the mainstream.

The hosts may have indulged in promiscuous inclusiveness – a sign of a generosity as well as disinclination to do what editors are called to do, i.e. unrepentantly cross out repetitions, incongruities and views that are remote if not downright hostile from the book's ethos. Yet I feel their inclusiveness paid off in the end. Andy Rogers's chapter alone is worth buying the book for. I was so engrossed in reading how he articulates the living paradox that is contemporary person-centred therapy that I missed my tube station on the way to work. I didn't care, it was well worth it:

> Just because we keep saying something is 'revolutionary' does not make it so. The battleground has shifted. The

wars between Humanistic Psychology, behaviourism and psychoanalysis have been superseded, if not transcended. The immediate pressures facing the therapy field have opened up fault lines through the traditional schools (even the non-school of 'pluralism') to such an extent that there is increasingly as much difference within as between them.

We see these divisions in the politics of our professions, most obviously in the uniting for common purpose that, in Britain, brought together psychoanalysts and humanistic counsellors – among others – to fight state regulation of the psychological therapies by the Health Professions Council. In the midst of that fierce debate, with Rogers' incendiary lament about 'certified charlatans' hovering nearby throughout, it was hard for some to see the implications for the wider scene, that the disagreements were not just about the proposed policy, but about the very meaning of therapy and, beyond that, human experience itself. It was startling and liberating to discover that the issue did not re-ignite feuds between the schools but revealed fundamental differences within, and commonalities between, them. When the environment becomes noxious enough, more meaningful differences emerge to transcend the competitive skirmishes of more comfortable times. (Rogers, p. 67)

References

Rogers, A. (2014) 'Conference Reports: PCCS Books Anniversary Conference', *Self & Society*, (41) 2: 58–60

Rhythmic Ways

Deep Equality: Living in the Flow of Natural Rhythms

By: Jocelyn Chaplin
O Books, Alersford, Hants, 2008, 150pp
ISBN-13: 978-1846940965
Reviewed by: Beatrice Millar, person-centred therapist

This would make a great companion book to *The Spirit Level* (Wilkinson and Picket 2009), which attracted a great deal of attention, and was much discussed both in the mainstream media as well as by those involved in therapy and politics, self and society. It provided indisputable evidence, in the form of research and statistics, that inequality is damaging to individuals and societies. *Deep Equality* preceded it, coming out in 2008, and is a wonderfully different and engaging exploration of the same 'truth', which ranges far and wide over terrains not often seen as adjacent.

Jocelyn Chaplin is offering us a myriad of ways of thinking about and experiencing the deep equalizing patterns that underlie the whole of life. She starts by looking at the prevalence and destructive impact of hierarchies as deeply ingrained stuctures in our being, our tendency to see everything in terms higher or lower. Her thesis is that there is an alternative that we can discover and cultivate, which she pithily names Era – Equalising Rhythmic Attunement – and, of course, the feminine of Eros. Era is a new way of describing the endless balancing forces of the Universe, the Yin and Yang, or more colloquially speaking 'going with the flow', which are recognized in so many philosophical and spiritual traditions.

She is concerned with the divide and hostility that seem to exist between left-wing politics and spirituality, even now, when the modernist project has been transcended (and included) in so many areas of thought and knowledge. Amongst the many threads she is weaving together to create this unique tapestry of ideas is that this divide is really not necessary or helpful. She explores rebellion – the different stages of rebellion, and the way love and compassion for the oppressed are seen by some as just part of being human, but for many are the very cornerstones of both spirituality and revolution. She is clearly familiar with philosophical and revolutionary writings, and refers to many great minds who have also examined these issues.

She sees the significance of rhythm and flow in contemporary forms of protest, which often include drumming and dancing and, increasingly, attempts to subvert the hierarchy through playful, colourful stances such as those adopted by the Clown Army or Code Pink. This book not only preceded the publication of *The Spirit Level* but also the Occupy movement, which in many ways was a practical manifestation of some of the ideas championed in this book – reaching for a more democratic, more equalizing, holistic form of protest.

There is a great celebration of the joy and excitement of experiencing the rhythmic flow of life which is, in itself, a rebellion against rigid hierarchical structures. She cites Carnival, both around the world and the renowned Carnival in Notting Hill, and Rave culture as examples of the

communal joy, the connectedness, the ecstasy that can be experienced when this desire and capacity for liberation through rhythm, dance and flow can be expressed. I would include in this the ever-growing 5Rhythm Dance community. She refers to the Rave against the Grave in Jerusalem in 2002, and highlights that this could really be a route to change, that this does threaten the status quo – hence the Criminal Justice Bill of 1994, which specifically limits the playing of 'repetitive beats'.

The cycles and rhythms of Nature are seen as core to this way of living, and the author is optimistic that pagan understandings, which she describes as essentially attunement to the rhythms of Nature, are entering into the mainstream and having an impact on young people through creations such as Harry Potter and Buffy the Vampire Slayer. She looks at various forms of New Age spirituality, which at its best is democratizing spirituality, honouring the rhythms of the sun and the moon, dispensing with the need for conduits, priest, pharisees between human and spirit. This has always already existed in the mystical dimensions of all religions, but has not been generally accessible the way it has become in the past couple of decades, with religions having become so hidebound in hierarchy that they have very little resonance for many seekers today.

She suggests that rhythmic ways of thinking, feeling and living are a direct challenge to the gross consumerism and pursuit of endless growth, both economic and personal, that leads to so much dissatisfaction, inequality and pain. She examines the crucial significance of rhythm and flow to current scientific theories, such as String theory, and shares her own powerful experiences and connection with the Goddess Rhea. The scope of her knowledge and references is impresssive.

What is really special about this book is the way it moves through the connecting up of really powerful ideas and areas of knowlege into expression and action. For Jocelyn, these are not just ideas to be thought about, written about, discussed: she is offering a path to psychological and societal liberation. She makes profound ideas very accessible, writes clearly and vividly, and illustrates her ideas with examples of her work as a therapist with clients, and with photographs of her own paintings of rhythms, carnival, flow, the goddess, rebellion, dance. She shares generously from her own experiences of living and loving and for those of us drawn to transformation, to putting Spirit into Action, to making the ideal real, however you want to describe it. She offers 'Things do Do' at the end of each chapter: Exploring Freedom through Balancing Inner Opposites, Becoming Aware of your History of Rebelling, a Training in the Mysteries of the Flow, Recognising the Other.

I found this book stimulating, affirming provocative and inspiring, and believe it would be of interest to anyone who is interested in equality, freedom, and personal and sociopolitical change. S

Reference

Wilkinson, R. and Pickett, K. (2010) *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*, Harmondsworth: Penguin

Poetry Review

Reviewed by **Brian Thorne**