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## A bid for freedom: the actualizing tendency updated

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### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to reformulate the actualizing tendency as ‘a bid for freedom’ – the expression used by Alfred North Whitehead to describe life itself. It redefines the actualizing tendency as a *naturalistic* rather than *onto-theological* notion that puts embodied experience at the center of person-centered therapy and includes the animal-human continuum implicit in the life of the organism. It critiques the idea of ‘self-actualization’ in the light of notions such as the ‘emergent phenomenon’ and ‘subjectivities without subjects’. Corroborated by sketches of clinical work, this paper points toward a re-naturalization of human experience.

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### Une offre de liberté: la tendance actualisante mise à jour.

Cet article vise à formuler la tendance actualisante comme ‘offre de liberté’ – expression utilisée par Alfred North Whitehead pour décrire la vie elle-même. Il replace la tendance actualisante comme étant une notion naturaliste, plutôt que comme une notion onto-théologique, qui situe l’expérience incarnée au point central de la thérapie centrée sur la personne et qui comprend le continuum animal-homme comme implicite dans la vie de l’organisme. L’article critique l’idée de l’auto-actualisation à la lumière de notions telles que ‘phénomène émergent’ et ‘subjectivité sans sujets’. Corroboré de segments de travail clinique, cet article va dans le sens d’une re-naturalisation de l’expérience humaine.

### Ein Angebot zu Freiheit: ein Update der Aktualisierungstendenz

Mit diesem Artikel ist beabsichtigt, die Aktualisierungstendenz neu zu formulieren, und zwar als ‘ein Angebot zu Freiheit’ – der Begriff, den Alfred North Whitehead verwendet, um das Leben selbst zu beschreiben. Es definiert die Aktualisierungstendenz neu mehr als eine naturalistische statt als onto-theologische Idee, welche das körperliche Erleben ins Zentrum Personzentrierter Therapie stellt und die das tierisch-menschliche Kontinuum einschließt, welches im Leben des Organismus implizit ist. Er kritisiert den Gedanken von ‘Selbstaktualisierung’ im Licht von Ideen wie ‘auftauchendes Phänomen’ und ‘Subjektivität ohne Subjekt’. Bestätigt durch Skizzen klinische Arbeit weist dieser Artikel auf eine Re-Naturalisierung menschlicher Erfahrung.

## Una apuesta por la Libertad: la Tendencia Actualizante actualizada

Este trabajo pretende reformular la tendencia actualizante como 'una apuesta por la libertad' - la expresión utilizada por Alfred North Whitehead para describir la vida misma. Se redefine la tendencia actualizante como una noción naturalista más que onto-teológica, que coloca la experiencia encarnada en el centro de la terapia centrada en la persona e incluye el continuum animal-humano implícito en la vida del organismo. Critica la idea de «auto-actualización» a la luz de nociones como el «fenómeno emergente» y las «subjetividades sin sujetos». Corroborado por bocetos de trabajo clínico, este artículo apunta hacia una re-naturalización de la experiencia humana.

## Uma promessa de Liberdade: a Tendência Atualizante revista

Este artigo pretende reformular a Tendência Atualizante enquanto «promessa de liberdade» - expressão usada por Alfred North Whitehead para descrever a própria vida. Redefine-se a Tendência Atualizante enquanto noção naturalista, em vez de onto-teológica, que coloca a experiência corporal no centro da Terapia Centrada na Pessoa e que inclui o contínuo entre o humano e o animal que está implícito na vida do organismo. A ideia de «auto-atualização» é criticada à luz de conceitos tais como: «fenómeno emergente» e «subjetividades desprovidas de sujeito». Com a corroboração de trechos provenientes da clínica, este artigo aponta para uma re-naturalização da experiência humana.

## Introduction

This essay is driven by naive questions – naive because the answers seem obvious at first. But obvious answers are often ready made. To the question: 'When speaking of the actualizing tendency, *who* or *what* actualizes?' many of us will reply: 'The person' or, 'the organism'. And if asked: 'What is it meant by tendency?' many will say, 'The result of inherent qualities, a natural outcome, something that is likely to happen'.

When the meaning of key notions such as the actualizing tendency is assumed and imparted from teacher to student, from one generation of practitioners to the next *without* re-description or critical appraisal, these notions become stale. And when a therapeutic/philosophical approach is comprised of a set of stale notions, it will most likely be demoted from the rank of living *culture* to that of *acculturation*: what was once a vibrant doctrine becomes indoctrination. Perhaps one can find inspiration from considering a key notion that comes from Phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1989). A central method of enquiry, later applied to the psychotherapeutic endeavor, is that of *description*. The counselor helps the client describe his experience, and is herself engaged in describing phenomena as they emerge in the therapy room. Description aids clarification, exploration, insight. But at times description is effectively re-description: this is particularly true when a familiar belief or response in the client's way of being-in-the-

world is for the first time perceived in a new light. Similarly with culture (science, art – even religion): every epoch either discards or describes *anew* a particular tenet. In this sense, a paradigm shift is partly an act of re-description. And we keep a tradition such as person-centered therapy (PCT) dynamically alive by re-describing its key principles.

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The present essay is divided in two parts: in the first part, we will discuss ‘actualizing’. In the second, much shorter section, we will have a brief look at the notions of ‘tendency’ and ‘emergent phenomena’. The first part is animated by the question: ‘*Who or what actualizes?*’ – a question that leads us to explore the notions of personhood and organism. To actualize is to turn something into action or deed, to make something latent manifest: here the act or deed is everything. This investigation evokes naturalistic modes of thought attuned to the *organismic* character of person-centered psychology. What actualizes is the organism or, one could say, our living body, something that is an integral part of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1989). This is, admittedly, a *bio-centric* yet nonreductive view of the human; its exploration will take us, via a brief clinical illustration, to investigate the *animal* in the human. Could PCT be aligned to a *feral philosophy*? What is feral philosophy and how can it benefit PCT?

The second part of the essay explores *tendency*, a notion rich in meaning that is central to PCT and one that decenters personhood and the exaggerated importance given to it in PCT at the expense of the ‘emergent phenomenon’ (Moreira, 2012, p. 52).

## Part 1: Actualizing

### *On becoming a river*

For Rogers (1959), the actualizing tendency is a ‘motivational construct’, involving ‘development toward the differentiation of organs and functions, expansion and enhancement through reproduction’ (Rogers, 1963, p. 18). A few years earlier, he had written:

The organism has one basic tendency and striving – to actualize, maintain, and enhance the experiencing organism” (Rogers, 1951, p. 487).

There is continuity between Rogers’ earlier and later definitions of the actualizing tendency. Later definitions appear to allow for the inclusion of a wider, ecological sphere (Cornelius-White & Kriz, 2008) that goes beyond the notion of a mere motivational construct. What remained constant, however, is Rogers’ twofold emphasis on the *organism’s* actualization and on the (dynamic, process-like) *tendency* of actualization. Although this would be obvious to most person-centered practitioners, in the wider world of therapy actualization has come to mean something quite different. And this in turn has in my view muddied the waters within the person-centered world. There has been, in other words, a shift in humanistic psychology *from self-actualization to actualization of the self* (Bazzano, 2012) and it will be useful to consider how a notion that in the intentions of its originator (Goldstein, 1995) emphasized the organism’s capacity for *autonomous* organization (or *self-organization*) ended up instead *reifying* (i.e. turning into a ‘thing’), with Maslow (1962), the ‘actualized *self*’, i.e. a person who has all the 15 characteristics

listed by Maslow, such as, among others, spontaneity, humor, creativity, deep friendship (with a few people only), 'peak experiences', need for privacy, and high moral standards. And for those who are eager to actualize, Maslow (1997) also charted a list of behaviors that lead to actualization. Regardless of how one reads Maslow's meticulous list of characteristics to be found in 'self-actualizers' (whether or not this list is seen as impractical, reasonable, prescriptive, or culturally biased) what matters here is that actualization in this case is no longer an open-ended *tendency* within an organism but something that can be clearly identified in a self-actualized *person*. It presents us with a particular human prototype whose self is no longer an ever-changing construct increasingly aligned with the *organism* but instead with the picture of one who has 'arrived'. This notion is problematic, I believe, because founded on a *substantive*, unitary notion of self that is the essence of bourgeois ideology. I remember being taken aback a few months ago when, during a brief stint as visiting tutor in a humanistic counseling school, I noticed in the entrance to the building a photo of British tycoon Richard Branson above an 'inspirational' quote of his about achievement and success. I was equally puzzled when I heard, on a cold and rainy November morning, the speech of the newly elected US President Donald Trump who several times mentioned the actualization of the *great potential* that now awaited every American (CNN, 2016). In the light of this context, could one say that the notion of the 'self-actualizer' is none other than an *ante litteram* prototype of *homo neo-liberalis*? The more or less cooperative, solvent individual has successfully climbed up the slippery pole of hierarchical needs and stands as inspiring exemplar. Like Maslow, Rogers was not immune to the temptation of describing a desirable human prototype; he did write after all of the 'persons of tomorrow' (Rogers, 1980, p. 351). Interestingly though, the chief attribute here is 'closeness to, and a caring for, elemental nature' (ibid) as well as being 'ecologically minded, [getting] their pleasure from an alliance with the forces of nature' (Rogers, 1980, p. 351). This is more Taoist than Confucian: simply put, expressing keener interest in human interdependence with other beings than in ways to achieve material success in society.

What is questionable about the actualized *person* is not the actualizing, but the person. This is because to be a 'person' in Rogers' sense is to be "a fluid process, not a fixed static entity, a flowing river of change, not a block of solid material; a continually changing constellation of potentialities, not a fixed quantity of traits" (Rogers, 1961, p. 122). Actualization is a *tendency* (an important notion discussed below), an ongoing process, not a 'finished product' identifiable in any one person who has all the requisites. The more open and fluid the person becomes, through different stages of process, the more congruent (i.e. aligned, matching) she will be with her organism, with the cluster of activities and processes incessantly emerging, intersecting, interacting within it. The more congruent a person becomes, the more acute her recognition of how 'necessarily insufficient' (Rank, 1932, p. 222) human consciousness is in grasping the multilayered nature of experience. With the fixity of a static notion of self beginning to relax, two more things come under scrutiny: (a) the belief in a preexisting, self-existing agent *behind* one's deeds; (b) the notion of 'me' as unified entity.

### **No doer behind the deed**

'The philosophy of organism is the inversion of Kant's philosophy ... For Kant, the world emerges from the subject; for the philosophy of the organism, the subject emerges from the world' (Whitehead, 1978, p. 88).

The modern version – of a consistent, self-existing subject – began with Descartes and was corroborated further by nineteenth century bourgeois morality. The latter required of us to participate in the taboo dictated by civil society by inhibiting our organismic experiencing (Nietzsche, 1996a). It is this inhibition or implosion of 'natural, elemental forces' that contributes to the emerging of our 'inner life' (Bazzano, 2016, p. 11). In a well-known passage of his *Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche questions the existence of an indifferent substratum, of a separate presence behind our actions, concluding:

'There is no "being" behind the deed, its effect and what becomes of it; *the doer is invented as an afterthought* – the doing is *everything*' (Nietzsche, 1996a, pp. 25–26, original italics).

And here lies the main difference between an *onto-theological* and a *naturalistic* understanding of organismic experience. The former focuses on *intentionality*, the latter investigates *expression*. The former assumes the presence of a being (*onto*) behind becoming (a static self instead of a flowing river of change) which in turn derives from that of a Creator (*Theos*). The latter clarifies intention through action: '[T]here is no way to confirm the certainty of one's real purpose except *in* the deed actually performed ... The deed *alone* can show one who one is' (Pippin, 2006, p. 381).

### **On becoming animal**

When the notion of a unified, consistent self or identity begins to crumble, the result is *multiplicity* (Deleuze, 1966; Rud, 2009), a central tenet in philosophies of immanence to which PCT in my view belongs (Bazzano, 2012, 2013; Rud, 2009). A multiplicity is a composite structure that does not refer to a preexisting unity. Multiplicities do not belong to a totality that has splintered, nor can they be apprehended as manifestations or expressions of a transcendent whole.

The above may sound rather abstract but there is a direct and tangible way in which multiplicity manifests in humans: via the animal *within* human experience. Before we discuss the meaning and implications of this statement, let me offer a brief clinical interlude.

### **Of pets and cockroaches**

There are times when Gina, a woman in her early thirties, sees her desire for orderliness in her home as problematic. This is because the odd argument would flare up with some regularity with her new boyfriend who has a more casual attitude to this. Sure, he can be a bit messy at times, she says, but on the whole he is cooperative, does his bit with the housework even though it doesn't come naturally to him. Recently she began to wonder whether she is being a little too strict and even, in her words, 'obsessive' about it. True, she does like to live in a clean, tidy place but feels that sometimes this desire takes over and makes her tense, particularly at weekends when

they are supposed to relax and spend time with one another. The other week – five months into our work together – she recounted a dream set in Naples in the home where she grew up. She had woken up that morning with a warm summery feeling; her dream was luminous, she said, full of light and of joyous, indefinite noises. Later, on the way to our session, the atmosphere of the dream still with her, she remembered an episode from childhood. One summer day – she might have been six or so – her mother told her in a serious voice that it was important that she and her brother, with whom she shared a room, kept their space really tidy. No sweet crumbs on the floor, she had said, otherwise cockroaches would show up from nowhere. It must have been from then on, she now wondered aloud, sitting across the room, that she developed a fear – no, not fear, *terror* – of cockroaches. And she also wondered whether there may be a connection of sorts: was her obsession with tidiness connected to the terror of cockroaches? Now, conventionally roaches are not pretty or cuddly as pets are, but did they *stand for* something, she speculated, i.e. disease, disorder, contamination? She had understood her mother's injunction as the law, as the necessary entry into the civilized community, in this case her family. She found it curious though that her brother didn't develop the same obsession with tidiness or, for that matter, a similarly intense fear of cockroaches. In fact, she added, her brother could be a bit of a slob – she smiled as she said this, adding 'my brother can be really messy, *gloriously* messy, messy big time'. She laughed out loud, her affection, even admiration for her brother palpable. As for her, Gina, she understood the law, she accepted the law. Every sensible person would, wouldn't they? Even though, well, it could make a person boring and conventional. In any case, she was deep down OK with it, it was after all her ticket to the civilized world; no place for cockroaches there, none at all. I nodded, noting aloud the good things earned by her acceptance of the law: a sense of stability, order, and a clear space around her where she could work and study for her literature degree. Then I asked her hesitantly if there was, well, something she had *lost* by, as it were, shutting the door on cockroaches – or rather, I rephrased, was there something if anything to which she was denying access to? Don't think so, she said, perhaps defensively. In her early and mid-twenties she certainly had *invited* chaos, disorder, instability. This brought our dialog toward transgression. Had she being transgressive then, she wondered, and asked herself what this word transgression meant to her, a desire to trespass, to encroach (*encroach* mmh she said pausing briefly), to ignore boundaries, to, for example, reach out and kiss someone I happen to be talking to, she said, like I want to do sometime at work? To feel their mouth and face and tongue and sweat; a conscious but crazy decision I never take, she said, of course I don't, I mean, it would be totally nuts, right? Though I savor the feeling of what could be, of what could feel like. But the rest, the drugs she had taken then, the occasional blackout, not much of a taboo breaking that really, if this is what this is all about, she said, taboo and the law, breaking the taboo by transgressing and so forth. She moved on to talk about Kafka's (2009) novella *Metamorphosis*. I mentioned Clarice Lispector's *The Passion according to G. H.* (Lispector, 2014). We both felt that something important was being processed and explored. We were tiptoeing around a chasm, the literary references drifting in and out of our conversation providing us not with diversion but with larger historical echoes, confirmation and amplification of her experience, reflected here in the counseling room, the reverberation of something so hard to put into words.



### **Multiplicities: configurations without a self**

One important thing emerging from a reflection on the above example is that awareness of organismic multiplicity often dawns on our clients as inconsistency, inner conflict, and *dilemma* (a 'twofold proposition') between, for instance, organism and self-concept, or instinct and civility. What I suggest here is that this either/or, dualistic battle, typical of the western tradition is only the threshold of the larger province of *multiplicity*. Outside the western tradition, already in the 2nd century B.C., the Indian philosopher Nagarjuna (Nagarjuna & Hopkins, 2007) spoke of *tetralemma* (an affirmation with *four* possibilities). The western *counter-tradition* (Bazzano & Webb, 2016) too has been consistently pre-disposed in favor of multiplicity.

Understanding multiplicity is crucial to the PCA if we are to be truly independent of psychoanalysis and its 'ultimate aim [of] reduc[ing] the infinite multiplicity of unconscious affects to the logical unity of a signifier' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 27). For instance, when treating the 'Wolf-Man', Freud reduced 'the phantasmatic wolves haunting the patient ... to a single one, the Oedipus Wolf ... [But] who is ignorant of the fact that wolves travel in packs?' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, *ibid*). A bolder acceptance of the as-yet-unexplored potential of an organismic psychology such as PCT (Tudor & Worrall, 2006) may help unshackle the approach from the compulsion to unity to which both psychoanalysis and humanistic psychotherapy on the whole are prone to. Accepting, even revering the animal within the human is opening the organism to configurations without a self, without unity, without a ground. This in turn provides us with the possibility of creating a valid alternative to the Cartesian *cogito* (*I think*).

As it stands, the notion of *person*, however congruent and fully-functioning, is a dead ringer for Descartes 'thinking thing' (*res cogitans*). In order to become truly 'fully-functioning', the notion of person needs to become fully-defunct. In order to become truly congruent (i.e. aligned with the organism), I need to forgo my sense of false unitary identity and make space for multiplicity. On the path to multiplicity, relationality and intersubjectivity are only steps on the way, and entirely reliant on a Cartesian notion of self: one self relating to another, within a largely Oedipal and/or object-relational frame dictated by familialism, i.e. the excessive attention given by psychotherapy to the family at the expense of history, the world and the social environment (Bazzano, 2016).

### **Congruence, not authenticity**

The fundamental change in emphasis suggested here, from self to organism, does not imply neglect of a person's *singularity*. As humans, we insist on our uniqueness; this is a celebration of our particularity and clearly something to be respected and cherished in therapy. It is also a burden; individuality brings with it a painful feeling of separation from nature. One way out of this impasse is giving greater emphasis on individual *responsibility* (Levinas, 2001); another, from thinking of the self as a locus of *irreplaceability* (Derrida & Nancy, 1991). Both suggestions escape, it seems to me, the fallacy of *subjectivism*, i.e. to the tendency, rife in person-centered thinking, to attribute a universal value to singularity. Why is the latter stance problematic? Essentially, for two reasons: (a) universalized singularity is the



singularity of the winner, of the hegemonic culture and is prone to overlook difference and otherness; (b) by stressing singularity we remain within a narcissistic frame.

Our ongoing quest for authenticity and self-actualization contains strong narcissistic traces (Sennett, 2012; Trilling, 1972), fostered by an obsession with self-improvement, in turn born out of puritanical shame, a sort of Calvinistic titanic struggle against oneself. This search is 'self-defeating ... [because] it turns people inwards in an impossible quest' (Sennett, 2012, p. 195). In this sense, a clear differentiation is needed between authenticity and congruence. The former is a wild goose chase within the labyrinth of narcissism; the latter fosters greater alignment with a multiple organism. The former reinforces the solidity of a hypothetical, *nominal* construct; the latter aligns this construct with an inherently *mundane* (Moreira, 2016), ecological organism. Equally important is the parallel differentiation between self-actualization (actualization of the self) and actualization *tout court*. The former reinforces the solidity of a hypothetical, *nominal* construct; the latter aligns this construct with an inherently *mundane* (Moreira, 2016), ecological organism.

### **Transcendental, not transcendent**

The essentially *organismic* nature of PCT can be instrumental in disentangling psychotherapeutic practice from some of the errors and platitudes typical of much humanistic psychology, including existential phenomenological therapy and transpersonal psychotherapy. Congruence, understood as the alignment of the self with the organism, gestures toward the *naturalization of the human* – toward *homo natura*. In my understanding, it does not point, either to a transcendent state, or a 'self-actualization' divorced from bodily and organismic experiencing, or to, the Heideggerian unveiling of a pre-existing truth and the subsequent the emergence of a 'true, authentic self'. It remains focused on the *organism*. But what is the organism? This question is raised by trainees often and inevitably provokes lively discussion. 'Is it the body'? I am frequently asked, to which I find myself responding 'Yes – but what *is* the body'? The explanations of biology are certainly helpful but alone do not account for the felt sense, for the inner experience of embodiment, both pointers of a body/mind continuum that is crucial in a therapeutic practice working outside the body/bind division. Organismic experience is thus rooted in the body. The human body *partakes* of the environment, i.e. it coexists with other beings, animals included and this co-existence, as we shall see, is *interdependent*. Not only do we live alongside animals and other beings. They also live *within* us. This rather eccentric-sounding claim is the fruit of decades of thought and research. *Feral philosophy* – a recent philosophical development which I will briefly discuss below – may provide us with useful pointers in our practice as person-centered therapists.

### **Training without taming: PCT and feral philosophy**

According to Nietzsche (1996b), as humans we have placed ourselves in a false order of rank in relation to other animals and nature. In other words, we are neither better nor superior to other beings that co-inhabit the natural world. Once this fundamental

error is redressed, the meaning of actualization also changes: it is no longer the actualization of a human construct, the 'self' (with its own history of division between mind and body) but instead the full recognition of the human/animal body, i.e. of a body that is different from but that exists in a *continuum* with animals. Thus understood, actualization is a translation of humankind into nature. An essential step in this process is the retrieving or *the animal within the human*. This calls for redemption (rather than customary rejection) of animal *physis*, a very important move if we are truly to overcome Cartesian dualism. It calls for the understanding and the appreciation of our animal/human body and its inherent intelligence. It also calls for a change of perspective that questions our stereotypical placing of animals as either brutal or docile. Why is this important? Because 'animality without humanity may be blind but *humanity without animality may be empty*' (Acampora, 2003, p. 6, emphasis added). There are *more* than just two states of the animal – tame or wild. There is also the *liminally feral*, 'positioned between the extremes of pure domesticity and raw wilderness' (Acampora, 2003, *ibid*). Could retrieving the liminally feral domain be an important aspect of actualization? And if so, how can it be achieved? The answer from feral philosophy is: through training and cultivation.

Training is by definition difficult and painful (and at times joyful and exhilarating) but it is not *taming*. We train, learn and teach in order to agonistically overcome (further, update, re-describe) a living tradition. Could psychotherapy training be re-fashioned then as the building of a cultural home that is not tediously tame but allows incursion into the wilderness? The inspiration here is Nietzsche and the crucial difference he makes between *culture* and *civilization*. The first is cultivation, freedom from moralizing; the second is taming, a morality of repression (Lemm, 2009). The first *fosters* organismic awareness and greater freedom; the second is a process of indoctrination into the herd-culture of stale, received knowledge.

The animal presence in the human evoked here is not merely symbolic but directly intertwined with the life of the organism. It is an attempt to leave behind anthropocentrism, the fixation that sees the human (anthropos) at the center of nature. It is an attempt at decentering the human subject, the person, an entity that can no longer be thought of as the ground upon which the wider political dimension rests. If PCT is to present a valid alternative to the Cartesian dualism many of us in our approach decry, it needs to move away from anthropocentrism. One of the ways to do this is via a re-evaluation of the animal within the human–animal continuum. A widening of the notion of actualization implies going beyond the categorical separation between the human and the animal. In this liminal domain human creativity is no longer (Freudian) sublimation of instinct but integral to it. Furthermore, as sketched above, the more-than-human is not *outside*: the human body is an animal body; animality is immanent to human life. An example of this is the discovery of the gut brain axis (Massumi, 2014), i.e. the biochemical signaling taking place between the gastrointestinal tract and its gut flora on the one hand, and the nervous system on the other. Another example coming from genetic tests on bacteria tellingly reveals an entangled web of life:

Genetic tests on bacteria, plants and animals increasingly reveal that different species crossbreed more than originally thought, meaning that instead of genes simply being passed down individual branches of the tree of life, they are also transferred between

species on different evolutionary paths. The result is a messier and more tangled 'web of life'. Microbes swap genetic material so promiscuously it can be hard to tell one type from another, but animals regularly crossbreed too – as do plants – and the offspring can be fertile ... 'The tree of life is being politely buried,' said Michael Rose ... 'What's less accepted is that our whole fundamental view of biology needs to change' (Sample, 2009, Internet file).

## A bid for freedom

Life, Alfred North Whitehead writes, is 'a bid for freedom on the part of organisms, a bid for a certain independence and individuality ... with self-interests and activities not to be understood purely in terms of environmental obligations' (Whitehead, 1978, p. 104). In the same passage, Whitehead adds: 'Life means novelty' (ibid). But this novelty 'has no predefined frame' (Massumi, 2014, p. 95), i.e. it does not create an artificial division: 'there is no absolute gap between "living" and "non-living"' (Whitehead, 1978, p. 102).

Although embedded within a 'biocentric tradition' that found expression in many 'thinkers, writers, and artists' who do not, for instance imitate the animal but are present 'with their animality speaking' (Lemm, 2009, p. 2) – think of Melville's *Moby Dick*, of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, of Lispector's *The Passion according to G. H* – biocentrism is here understood non-reductively and definitely not aligned to positivism. This is because we do not yet know, when speaking of the living body, of incarnate existence embedded in the physical world, what this living body is, what the physical world of 'matter' really is. To complicate things further, here are Deleuze and Guattari:

If everything is alive, it is not because everything is organic or organized but, on the contrary, because the organism is a diversion of life (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 499).

Here I would like to invite the reader to consider one more, seemingly paradoxical, step: even though the focus here is on the organism, life itself is not *within* the organism: 'Life lurks in the interstices' (Whitehead, 1978, p. 105). As part of a *transformative* rather than formative *tendency* (Rud, 2016), life surfaces in *tendencies* and *emergent phenomena*.

## Tendencies and emergent phenomena

We speak of an actualizing *tendency*. But what is a 'tendency'? The word derives from the Medieval Latin *tendentia*, which means *inclination*, *leaning*, which draws in turn from *tendens*: stretching, as well as aiming. It describes movement, a directional process that gestures toward a potential goal in space and time. Tendencies – and the actualizing tendency in particular – are unknown. Actualization takes place in the (ever-present) future and without the need for a 'self'. The latter is delayed, suspended or is at best (in the words of English anthropologist Alfred Gell), *distributed personhood* (Gell, 1998).

A tendency points indirectly toward a future and perhaps another state of being. It is *dynamic* and cannot be reduced to a 'thing'. A quote from Alfred North Whitehead may provide us with a useful link between the actualizing tendency and the notion of future potential. I quote it in full:

'It is evident that the future certainly is something for the present. The most familiar habits of mankind witness to this fact. Legal contracts, social understandings of every type, ambitions, anxieties, railway time-tables, are futile gestures of consciousness apart from the fact that the present bears in its own realized constitution relationships to a future beyond itself. Cut away the future, and the present collapses, emptied of its proper content. Immediate existence requires the insertion of the future in the crannies of the present' (Whitehead, 1933, p. 191)

The last sentence is particularly striking. The *insertion* of a future – even though unknown and unknowable – is essential to our life in the present and confirms the notion of life as process and of the human organism as a continual work in progress rather than a static 'self'.

In contemporary thought, 'tendencies are neither *substantive* nor *quantifiable*' (Massumi, 2014, p. 32). In other words, they do not express a *static* being that *stands under (sub-stans)* them nor are they reducible to a measurable 'thing'.

More importantly, they constitute 'subjectivities-without-a-subject: sheer doings, with no doer behind them – with nothing behind them but their own forward momentum' (Massumi, *ibid*, p. 46). In this way, a tendency comes into being, can be registered and phenomenologically described as it emerges in the therapy room. But it does not directly pertain or *belong* to the self of the client or the self of the therapist.

Similarly with the 'emergent phenomenon', a notion introduced in the person-centered world by Virginia Moreira, who inscribes her understanding within a 'humanistic-phenomenological psychotherapy' that she sees as 'continuation of Carl Rogers's experiential phase ... [and that] focuses on the human being' (Moreira, 2012, p. 48).

She focuses on a particular moment in the development of Rogers's practice that goes from focus on the individual to the common field inhabited by client and therapist, the latter 'departing from the person-centered attitude, where the inner portion of the client was the object of his attention' (Moreira, 2012, p. 52). This led in her view to an elaboration beyond the person, beyond interior/exterior, 'transcending the idea of working with a defined center, which keeps person-centered psychotherapy "stuck" and stops it from working with the emergent phenomenon' (Moreira, *ibid*, p. 52). According to Moreira:

'In order for the psychotherapy model left to us by Carl Rogers to assume all of its phenomenological potential, present in his experiential phase, it must cease the search for an internal man/woman – the person as center – moving towards a therapy of the emergent phenomenon' (Moreira, 2012, p. 56).

Despite being in my opinion still framed within the confines of anthropomorphism, I see Moreira's proposition as a wonderful step forward in the direction of a necessary anthropological phenomenology that would greatly benefit PCT. It is in this spirit, I believe, that Moreira pertinently calls for a 'mundane actualizing tendency' one that abandons 'its metaphysical features which appeared in previous studies of Rogers's psychotherapy' (*ibid*, p. 56). This is in turn attuned to the critique that other practitioners have made of the formative tendency (Rogers, 1980) as a metaphysical notion (Bazzano, 2012).

## Conclusion

Contemporary thought helps us redefine the crucial notion of the actualizing tendency on two points:

- (A) Actualization is not actualization of the self but actualization of the human organism, i.e. of an organism inscribed within an animal-human continuum and is as such part of wider, interdependent link with nature.
- (B) As a *tendency*, actualization is a dynamic process rather than a static entity. As such, it cannot be measured or quantified, nor can it be easily aligned with any overarching metaphysical notion.

Promoting discussion on this central tenet of PCT (which this paper aimed to do) can help differentiate the approach from other therapeutic orientations and elaborate further our distinctive contributions as practitioners.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributor

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