

# Beauty and the Cyborg

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*Abstract* Person-centred therapy (PCT) is stuck between the beautiful soul syndrome ('Beauty') and a mechanized view of therapy ('Cyborg'). Enthused by a sense of its own purity and stirred by Christian narratives of love (often divine *Agape* rather than subversive and relational *Eros*), it wants to be effective in a world that it perceives as tainted. As the self-appointed conscience of the therapy world, PCT strives to maintain this self role by defending its principled ethos. At the same time, concerned about becoming irrelevant in a fast-moving world and wishing to be more effectual, it embraces neoliberalism and its bag of algorithms, data and market-driven ethics. Often separate, Beauty and the Cyborg are at times joined together in an unholy alliance within PCT. After examining both manifestations, this chapter charts a way out, drawing insights from organismic psychology, the roots of PCT and from literature.

## Introduction

From its inception as client-centered therapy, PCT has been affected by the *beautiful soul syndrome* and an unspoken sense of moral superiority over other orientations. Like Jiminy Cricket in *Pinocchio*, we person-centred therapists can be relied upon to give voice to the conscience of the profession and – also like Jiminy Cricket – for producing little effect other than the comfort of hearing noble-sounding words spoken with conviction and a pleasant rhetorical flourish. Among the various noble words gaining currency in person-centred literature, *love* is becoming dominant. It shows up in person-centred literature in secular garb and in full theological regalia. Talking about love will illustrate some of the traits of the beautiful soul syndrome that afflicts the PCA.

The eagerness of some person-centred practitioners to see the approach accepted by the Powers prompted them to adopt wholesale the language, modality and worldview of the

latter. This is when Beauty turns into the *Cyborg* – in science fiction, a creature that is part human, part machine. Patent examples of this phenomenon can be observed in sectors of academia, from psychology journals to the teaching of PCT in universities and therapy institutes to the style and content of presentations of person-centred-related ideas at international conferences and symposia. Within these scenarios, very little distinguishes PCT from other branches of academic psychology except for its humane vocabulary that cheerily reminds us, as in a nature documentary watched on a computer screen, of the existence of trees in a real forest.

I believe both stances have value: Beauty and the Cyborg have something important to tell us about our current predicament as person-centred therapists navigating the complexity of a neoliberal landscape. Hence, rather than straightforward disapproval of either the naivety of Beauty or the frostiness of the Cyborg, this chapter maps out a *third route* that capitalizes on both while appealing to the key principle of the *organism* (Goldstein, 1995; Rogers, 1961). PCT, understood as an *organismic psychology* (Tudor & Worrall, 2006; Tudor, 2010) has a great deal to contribute to current debate provided it can *expand* on the notion of the organism and include the non-human – both within and without the human.

### **Person-centred, Human-centred, Self-centred.**

PCT is stuck. Not only is it trapped within its vague notion of *person* hence oblivious to new *emergent phenomena* (Moreira, 2012, 2016) that ~~e~~–renew existence and re-establish exhilarating complicities with a dynamic world of becoming outside the narrow confines of personhood. It is also stuck with its notion of *presence*, (mis)understood metaphysically as the attribute of a spiritually-gifted therapist rather than, as Rud (2015) has been at pains to explain for some time, as “mutually constituted” (p. 5), as belonging, I would add, to the neutral dimension of *affect* (Massumi, 2000; Jameson, 2014). Above all, PCT is stuck within

its own incurable anthropomorphism – not only applied to animals but, crucially, to ourselves as humans, and which results in lofty denial of our human existence *in a continuum with animals*. Despite its emphasis on the organism, PCT has failed to question, alongside the majority of therapeutic philosophies, what Massumi calls

our image of ourselves as humanly standing apart from other animals; our inveterate vanity regarding our assumed species identity, based on the specious grounds of our sole proprietorship of language, thought, and creativity’ (Massumi, 2014, p. 3).

The vanity of anthropocentrism (a.k.a. human-centredness) and human *exceptionalism* is at the heart of PCT, and seriously hinders the development of its potential as a progressive and credible alternative to the spiritual poverty of neoliberal and neopositivist psychology that is all the rage today. But in order to let go of its tight grip on anthropocentrism, PCT would need to either think *outside* the frame of Christian theology and morality, or find new ways to re-vision these.

How can PCT be free of human-centredness, given that its roots are partly found in Christian theology, i.e. in a worldview that sees man and woman as the ‘crown’ of ‘creation’? Interwoven with human-centredness are our own inveterate self-centredness and the sense of identity gained from substantiating a dynamic cluster of beliefs and practices collected over the years as precious stones. If for instance I happen to be a reputable person-centred practitioner, writer and tutor who has built over years a sense of personal and professional identity on the foundation of a handful of principles; if I have managed, thanks to my personal qualities of friendliness and political shrewdness to construct a solid alliance with of group of equally reputable PCT practitioners; if we have together succeeded in influencing what publications are to be acquired by the next batch of trainees, who will deliver the keynote address to the next conference and so forth, then bingo! We have established a tradition that from that point on we endeavour to *preserve* and *defend* against perceivable threats. It *has* to be preserved, i.e. kept *static*, despite the fact that the philosophy we profess

speaks of the *self* – let alone the approach – as ““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).

The tradition has to be defended because it constitutes my/our article of faith; to challenge it would be blasphemous. And even though the philosophy I profess has *encounter* at its core (Rogers, 1970), even though I pay lip service to open dialogue and honest conflict, the truth is that it really frightens me when my beliefs are questioned.

Contemporary ethics and philosophy as well as various strands within therapy practices inspired by phenomenology and post-phenomenology tell us that a different perspective is possible. This view presupposes a movement towards *infinity* rather than *totality* (Levinas, 1999); it is *rhizomatic* rather than *arboreal* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Deleuze, 1995). This view is a counter-traditional (Bazzano & Webb, 2016); it points towards an *outside* that is transformative *and* thoroughly immanent (i.e. *remaining within* this world), rather than transcendent (ie. *climbing over* it).

What would it mean to adapt some of the above ideas to PCT? It would help it shed some of *its inherent positivism* – already present in Rogers. What does ‘positivism’ mean here? It is a way of thought that recognizes only what can be measured and verified. Applied to psychology, this means relying on a theory that recognizes only the presumed objectivity of science and the reliability of facts. Even more crucially: positivism champions the *reduction of experiencing to the self*, the geometric or shorthand translation of what is unknown and ineffable to the conscious and the quantifiable.

The link Deleuze makes (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002) between the *diagram* i.e. the “fixed set of relations that determine the world” (Barber, 2014, p. 47) and the *outside* (i.e. what is within the world but forever expanding beyond our reach) echoes the one made by Rogers (1951) between *self-concept* and *organism*. With a crucial difference: while for Deleuze (2008) “the

diagram stems from the outside but the outside does not merge with any diagram, and continues instead to *draw new ones*” (p. 89, emphasis added), Rogers, and person-centred therapists after him, truly believe that psychotherapy itself is “a process whereby man *becomes* his organism – without self deception, without distortion” (Rogers, 1961, p. 111, emphasis added). This is a thoroughly positivist statement.

It is not my intention to berate the *positivity* of positivism. There are, however political implications that need to be examined, for the updated version of positivism, namely neopositivism, is now the ideology of neoliberalism. What is neoliberalism? Blind obedience to the market; in the therapy world, the commodification of (human) experiencing by a host of strategies: New Public Management, evidence-based practice, managed care, randomized control trials, and the generalized ‘managerialism’. It is a concerted effort to turn therapy – a living practice dealing with living subjects – into a *commodity*, to destroy its *raison d’être*, limit its creativity and bring about a “quasi-colonization of the therapy experience” (House, 2016, p. 251).

### **A Comic Faith**

It is crucial to reflect as to whether we wish to align PCT to the forces of neoliberalism or rekindle instead its emancipatory flame. The first port of call for some PCT practitioners at this juncture is to appeal to religion, spirituality, or narratives that similarly champion the ineffable, and the immeasurable. But this move too ~~tend~~-bypasses experiencing – this time in the service of transcendence rather than in the name of a Logos subservient to the market and corporate power. Both positivism and transcendent spiritualism violate experiencing and prevaricate psyche. Whether secular or religious, both share what Donna Haraway calls “a comic faith in technofixes”, the silly idea that technology “will somehow come to the rescue

of its naughty but very clever children, or what amounts to the same thing, God will come to the rescue of his disobedient but ever hopeful children” (Haraway, 2016a, p. 3).

In this spirit, a re-visioning of organismic psychology will have to outwit the customary traps of religion, of Christian morality, as well as the dangers inherent within a secularized, mechanized, market-driven view of psychotherapy. This is because both transcendent spiritualism and rational materialism share metaphysical views of experiencing instead of an attitude of *re-spect* (i.e., looking again, taking a second, attentive glance). But the latter can only be done through *suspending* religious /theological beliefs and by equally *foreswearing* (Merleau-Ponty, 1964) scientific assumptions.

There is a wealth of inspiration and encouragement found within the *counter-tradition* and its wide array of emancipatory and transformative narratives. These are dynamically alive within contemporary philosophical, ethico-political and psychological practices but have strangely failed to reach the seemingly conservative, globally parochial world of PCT. The influence the above practices can exert on PCT would be akin to a tidal wave of progressive innovation that, if allowed, could bring PCT at the forefront of contemporary spiritual and politically emancipatory discourse, let alone at the cutting edge of ‘mental health’.

To be fair, a handful of person-centred writers have consistently alluded over the years to this counter-traditional trove of perspectives and innovative methodologies, endeavouring, to little or no avail, to open up the discussion within the person-centred international community (e.g. Rud, 2009, 2016; Moreira, 2012, 2016; Tudor & Worrall, 2006; Vaidya, 2016; Webb, 2016; Clark, 2016; Ellingham, Lee, 2017; Bazzano, 2013a, 2013b, 2014, among others). The lack of response may be due in part to the fact that innovative, substantial and far-reaching ideas (unlike, say, academic formulas routinely cooked up in psychology departments) take a long time to be understood and absorbed, particularly when they happen to belong to the counter-tradition. Unlike tonal variations on long-established themes within the Canon,

counter-traditional ideas upset the status quo and are for that reason often met with strong resistance and even hostility.

### **The Beautiful Soul**

A systematic definition of the beautiful soul (*die schöne Seele*) is found in Hegel who was keen, in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807/1997), to assess a stance he saw as typical of Romanticism, and best epitomized by Schiller. For Hegel, the beautiful soul

lacks force to externalize itself and endure existence. It does not want to stain the radiance of its pure consciousness by deciding to do anything particular. It keeps its heart pure by fleeing from contact with actuality and preserving its impotence. Its activity consists in yearning, and it is like a shapeless vapour fading into nothingness (pp. 575-576).

Critique of the beautiful soul syndrome has been used after Hegel as a way to justify lack of moral compass or ethical commitment. Despite this criticism, this notion is valuable for two reasons: (a) it describes a familiar stance within liberal, progressive and, one could say, post-Romantic thought (b) it can help us reflect on the recent rise of bigotry, racism and nativism on a global scale. Not many had predicted Donald Trump's victory, or Brexit, or the success of the far right in Europe and elsewhere. Could those who were shocked by these events and meekly trusting in the benign unfolding of the transformative tendency bear some of the traits of Hegel's beautiful soul? I certainly noticed these in myself. For instance, I presented a reading of hospitality (Bazzano, 2012) inspired by radical ethics, which strenuously defends the idea of *open borders* in relation to the influx of migrants and refugees. I still hold this position wholeheartedly – at its core, a critique of identity and of the violence it engenders; I've also been aware more recently of how easy it is to adopt a noble-sounding stance without confronting the social and political realities firsthand. I similarly advocated the notion of therapy as *unconditional hospitality* (Bazzano, 2015), aware of the insurmountable difficulties of upholding it. But it is one thing to have an aspiration (in this case, to be a good

enough host and momentarily bracket my own self-centred agenda). It is quite another to say that positive change in the client happens *because of* my wonderful qualities of presence and love. Too many times I find myself marking case studies where the entire emphasis is self-congratulation, i.e. the ability of the person-centred counsellor-in-training to radiate love and presence and be the primary *cause* of positive change in the client. This is not due to a misunderstanding of person-centred theory in one or two trainees, but the faithful and consistent outcome of the culture of self-congratulation we have created in current person-centred trainings. If this comes as a surprise to some readers, they might have not noticed **that** how this very same stance is rife among person-centred tutors. Here is an example.

I once heard a colleague address a class of trainee counsellors on the subject of deep relatedness in therapy. The heart of his argument was that good therapy is all about establishing deep relational links. Partly to demonstrate his point, he proceeded to read a poem a client had written to him to express how much the sessions had benefited her. The participants nodded and sighed in expressive agreement and, during the more lyrical passages, you could almost hear them hum and purr in unison. Part of me was eager to join the feel-good wave that by this point enveloped the room but found to my disappointment that I couldn't. Maybe I had got out the wrong side of bed that morning, or plain and simple disbelief had the best of me. Soon it began to dawn on me: the client's poem was punctuated by the frequent use of the pronoun *you*. Addressed to the therapist, the poem was above all else *a glorification of the therapist himself*. How great, how skilful, how sensitive he had been in working with her and facilitating such depth of relating! As soon as I realized this, I wanted to throw up, cry out in disbelief or noisily and self-righteously disrupt what, to my cynical gaze, now looked like a deplorable charade. Mercifully, I did none of the above but managed to maintain a dignified bearing until the end. The afore-mentioned scenario is perplexing. It would not merit consideration if not for the fact that the above stance, promoted and

uncritically accepted, has become mainstream within PCT trainings and practice. The uncritical way in which this formulaic ‘depth’ of relating has fast become expedient staple in some PCT training courses could give us pause for thought. Among other things, this perspective is problematic because almost entirely embedded (as in the above example) within a narcissistic frame. This charge seems unfounded and counter-intuitive at first. How could an emphasis on love and relating be entrenched within the confines of narcissism? Surely, a shift of attention towards a depth or relating must represent a welcome shift from the Cartesian self, from Freud’s psychic apparatus, from the individualistic notion of the human self that myopically disregarded basic patterns of early attachment and of human relating, let alone the truth of our being-in-the-world.

What’s more, the luminous examples of Buber, Levinas and others gave impetus to an ethics that centred on the fundamental notion of human encounter and provided inspiration to the specificity of the therapeutic encounter. How can the Philosophy of the Meeting put forward by these thinkers be deemed narcissistic? And yet, the first thinker to fully articulate a similar argument – namely, that *I-Thou encounter is inscribed within a narcissistic frame* – was Levinas, one of the leading lights of the philosophy of the meeting. He took great pains to distance himself from Buber’s thought: and in the 1980s wondered whether clothing the naked and feeding the hungry would bring one closer to the other than the rarefied relatedness promoted by Buber (Levinas 1987/2008). This was long before Buber’s *I-Thou* (Buber, 2004) morphed into the Sentimental Doctrine whose recitation is now mandatory in person-centred trainings. This once inspiring memento of the formidable challenges inherent in human encounter, poised as it was against its *functional* counterpart (*I-it*), has now become in my view an insipid formula, a given – a gimmick. It is assumed that I-Thou modes of being can be fabricated with a little effort, goodwill, and the mastering of a handful of skills; that behind its formulation lies the all-encompassing and comforting worldview of universal relatedness;

and that various half-baked, duly measured and routinely if superficially researched formulas made in its wake are coherently aligned with it. But is it really so? Isn't Buber's 'I-Thou' instead a rare occurrence –*accident* rather than the outcome of the noble effort made by therapists affected by the beautiful soul syndrome?

What is forgotten when we hurriedly summon a thinker such as Levinas to decorate an ideology of love and relatedness is that his is a *philosophy of separation* where there is great respect for Descartes' formal structures. There are many good reasons for pointing the finger at Descartes as initiator of the body/mind divide, but fashionable *tout court* dismissal neglects a crucial element, clarified by Levinas: the notion of separation is crucial in generating, in the third Cartesian meditation, a relation between the *res cogitans* (the mind, the “thinking thing”) and the infinity of God, thought beyond thought, thought as inextinguishable longing (Descartes, 1996). Levinas utilizes the formal categories of Descartes which alone allow the self to dare the thought of infinity through *desire*, which is the name Levinas gives to the thought that dares to think infinity. Not need, which speaks of hope of satisfaction; *not love, which wants union*. It is instead the desire of what the subject does not need – or, the realized love of desire which has remained desire.

### **Some Kinds of Love**

Love ... is *the equivocal* par excellence (Levinas, 1999, p. 255, emphasis in the original).

A clear way in which the beautiful soul syndrome manifests within PCT is through the championing of the notion of love. Several person-centred practitioners openly speak of the important role love plays in therapy (Thorne, 2005; Schmid, 2016; Keys, 2017). In some cases, the championing of love comes with a welcome call for socio-political activism along customary allusions to theology. There have been attempts to build a “theory of love” (Keys, 2017 p. 35) as well as a “framework for love in therapy” (p. 37) that catalogues and classifies

several dimensions of loving. Taking a step that boldly embraces the difficulties of accepting love in therapy, Keys writes:

Maybe the strength of our feelings frightens us off talking about love, or maybe we don't want to enter into the unknown in the relationship, where we feel vulnerable and not in control. Maybe there are now so many counterfeit forms of love that it is too difficult to talk about it without misunderstanding. However, *avoiding love won't make counselling safer ...* [but] can lead to unethical and unprofessional practice. It is time to reclaim love as central to the counselling encounter (Keys, 2017, p. 35, emphasis added).

We cannot avoid this important dimension of experiencing and relating, and the above passage conveys in no uncertain terms the heart within the more 'clinical' notion of UPR. It also presents us with a stance emblematic of the beautiful soul, but one that is *updated*. The person-centred practitioner affected by the beautiful soul syndrome is not the ineffectual and poetic soul of Romantic lore, dissipating his/her life's energies in drowsy pre-Raphaelite semi-slumber. No. The post-Romantic beautiful soul is not happy pining away for the triumph of love in a world that elects white supremacists, bigots and racists as its leaders. The more active, socially-engaged beautiful soul wants love to be acknowledged in a world that only recognizes what can be measured and quantified. So it rolls up its sleeves, measuring and quantifying the dimensions of love, building a "taxonomy of loving in therapy ... based on Rogers's conditions for therapeutic change" (ibid, p. 35). As we shall see, this is where the Cyborg steps in.

Central to this taxonomy of love, equipped with its own obligatory grid, is the Biblical notion of *Agape*, or divine love, defined by Gillian Rose as "transcendental in the medieval sense: it precedes the division of being into categories; while Eros is within categorical thinking" or, in other words, "all speaking of God will slip inevitable but illegitimately into *anthropomorphic* and *anthropocentric* terms" (Rose, 1992, p. 168, emphasis added).

Discussing the Swedish theologian Andres Nygren, Rose makes an irreconcilable distinction between Agape and Eros. Person-centred writers (Schmid, 2016; Keys, 2017) present Agape as part of a taxonomy that smoothly includes Eros alongside other manifestations of love such as Storge and Philia. However, unlike Eros, Agape (divine love) is *beyond representation*. To represent it “would be to confer on it the spurious status and authority of Eros” (Rose, 1992, p. 168). The central element in Agape is *faith*; it is not “a question of working one’s way up but of something offered which comes down” (ibid). The fundamental difference here is that:

*Eros starts with the assumption of the Divine origin and worth of the soul; Agape, on the other end, starts with the conviction of one’s own lack of worth* (Rose, 1992, p. 168, italics in the original).

Eros is, in Plato’s sense, *acquisitive* – in contemporary parlance: relational, desirous of self-actualizing and at all times wanting an *object* which can be either elevated or less so. Because of these characteristics, the fitting tutelary numen of the therapeutic encounter is Eros. Agape, on the other hand (as John’s and Paul’s Gospels present it), is unstructured and free, unbound by any object and/or objective, including objects such as therapeutic healing, self-acceptance or objectives such as positive change. It appears *ex nihilo*, i.e., out of the blue. It does not need nor care for right conditions, be they core or hardcore. It is *creative*, and, I suggest, self-generative and probably allied with the notion of *grace*; most of all, “Agape is the initiator of the fellowship with God” (Nygren, 1982, p. 80).

In the 1930s, Nygren (1982) drew a stark and convincing distinction between Eros and Agape, presenting them as incongruous and irreconcilable to one another and as such, difficult to be marshalled into an all-encompassing and neatly drawn taxonomy. In their effort to bring Agape within the therapeutic frame, some person-centred writers reproduce the same positivist craving discussed earlier in relation, namely the notion, rife in PCT, that the human self can become one fine day, with the help of a fine, loving therapist, become wholly aligned

to, or congruent with the organism. They also conveniently evade the thorny dimension normally addressed by work on transference and counter-transference. It is, in short, a case of *spiritual bypass*.

Another problem that arises with presenting Eros and Agape as *compatible* (alongside Storge and Philia, which I will not discuss here) is that we neglect the centrality of Agape as divine love and makes the latter pliable to a therapeutic articulation that conveniently forgets its source. This is a familiar move in the history of person-centred literature: Kierkegaard, Buber, Levinas have ‘inspired’ PCT but only in neutered form. Either their powerful religious messages have been duly secularized, or the more controversial elements suitably taken out. For instance: suspension of the ethical and anti-conformist celebration of individuation in Kierkegaard; I-Thou as pure accident rather than endeavour in Buber; primacy of separation over relatedness in Levinas.

Why are our person-centred champions of love not giving it to us straight? What could the implications be of stating more frankly that they see divine love as central in therapy? It would mean to align it to the Christianity of John’s and Paul’s Gospels, to the Augustinian theology of Luther. It would mean to own the fact that one aligns with a politically dominant Christian frame; it would mean accepting Christianity’s claims as universal rather than culturally specific; it would mean reading other mytho-religious or secularist narratives that challenge the Judaeo-Christian worldview entirely within the frame of the latter. But it is precisely from this source, a selected, culturally dominant Judaeo-Christian frame that Keys (2017) weaves in psychological, transpersonal, physical and political intersections.

Here is an example: at the (so-called) “transpersonal” level, Christian Agape manifests, the author says, as “Buddha nature” or as the person “divinity within” (p. 35). Alas, Buddha-nature is neither transpersonal nor does it represent our divinity within. It can be seen as such only if one *ignores the sheer otherness* of the Buddha’s teachings in relation to Judaeo-

Christian perspectives and inscribes them entirely within a more familiar and comfortable Judaeo-Christian frame of reference. In this way, aspects collected inside Keys' taxonomy are made to fit the presumed universality of Christianity. What began as an appealing emancipatory stance ushers in a dominant narrative that engulfs and neuters a rich plurality of other mythic and secularist accounts. I'm thinking not only of Dharma teachings but also of the myriad heretical positions *within* Christianity that are bypassed by the universalizing centrality of Agape, particularly when the latter is conceived reductively.

This particular move – wanting the ineffable and the transcendental to become quantified and measurable is the positivist move *par excellence*. In PCT, it also represents the shift from Beauty to the Cyborg: the overriding need to quantify, measure, catalogue and fit into a geometrical grid what is ineffable.

### **Love and 'the Powers'**

To be clear: I'm championing the *primacy of Eros* in the therapeutic endeavour. This also implies giving primacy to *subversion*, an aspect of love that is glossed over by a more pious emphasis on Agape. In traditions such as Sufism (Attar, 2017), love is “a profoundly irrational and asocial – even antisocial – force” (Creswell, 2017, p. 26). Even when inspired by the divine, it gestures towards the shedding of outward shows of piety in favour of an appreciation of the deeper mysteries of existence. No taxonomy is found here, but great, inspiring and moving poetry. What a pity that when speaking about something so subtle and elusive such as love, person-centred therapists feel compelled to use grids and frameworks instead of art and poetry.

In the retelling of Koranic tales found in the Persian poet Farid ud-Din Attar's *Conference of Birds* (Attar, 2017) poetry is found aplenty, alongside wonderfully subversive interpretations of religious tales. Here is a famous example, summarized by Robyn Creswell:

Satan's refusal to bow before Adam as the rest of the angels do, a story that appears in several passages of the Koran, is not evidence of Satan's pride, as it is understood in traditional interpretations, but rather of his overpowering love for God, which did not permit him to bow to anyone else ... Attar goes further, saying that God's curse of Satan is to be prized, since any form of divine attention, even in the form of a curse, must be counted a blessing (2017, pp. 25-26).

Within Christian theology too, there are subversive readings of love that are at variance with current person-centred championing of divine love. I'm referring in particular to John Howard Yoder (1994) and his convincing case for *immanent theology*. In expounding a way of thinking that thrillingly reminds me of Benjamin, Debord, Deleuze and Agamben, he affirms the fundamental fact that there are *no predetermined rules of possibility*. This is a radical political stance that breaks with what he variously calls the *given*, the *structure* and the *Powers*. For Yoder (1994), the Powers have their own method of consistency or self-maintenance. Their main reason for existing is self-preservation and they allege that "patterns or regularities that transcend or precede or condition the individual phenomena we can immediately perceive" (p. 38). Institutions, whether religious or psychotherapeutic, are geared above all towards their own self-protection *at the expense* of individuals and of the dynamic reality around them. They do so by establishing rules. The latter, however, are not "separate from individuals", Yoder writes.

The Powers, by providing social, political and economic structure, also produce individuals that are capable of responding to them, that are *complicit* with the possibilities they express (1994, p. 68, emphasis added).

The task, when faced with this situation, is to actively *challenge* the Powers in order to renew the stagnant waters and create anew the conditions for actualization. *This* is an example of

(subversive) love. This act comes from the *outside* of the Powers. It is a revolt against the status quo and those carefully built identities and professional careers within the structures and the Powers, and as such it is met with resistance. For Yoder, the name Jesus gives to this revolt is *love*, but it is a love that comes down from the universal throne of Agape and adopts a *minority* position, in the sense of Deleuze's *minoritarian ethics* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). This position is not dutiful or sanctimonious; it does not seek the approval of governments and corporations or any of the dominant half-baked ideologies that serve them, but declares its autonomy and opposition. This act of peaceful revolt is a radical act of love, an act "with no promise of effectiveness" (Yoder, cited in Barber p. 124).

[With Jesus] effectiveness and success were sacrificed for the sake of love [and] this sacrifice was turned by God into a victory which vindicated to the utmost the apparent impotence of love (Yoder, 2003, pp. 56-57).

The Powers deal with *majoritarian* consensus; majority "implies a constant ... serving as a standard measure by which to evaluate it ... [It] assumes a state of power and domination, not the other way around. It assumes the standard measure (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 105). Within PCT, the majoritarian position is not that of the greatest number but the one assumed by a handful of practitioners who yearn for the Powers' approval and are keen to align themselves with the Establishment's illusory claims of universality. Yoder again:

'Establishment' does not mean the [numerical] majority; it means the [numerical] minority who are in dominant social roles and claim the authority to speak for everyone (Yoder, 1997, p. 3).

## **Technofixes**

I am no Luddite. I am excited by the science of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and its challenge of boundaries: between humans and animals; between humans, animals and machines; between the physical and the non-physical. There is an undeniable step forward constituted by

symbiogenesis, co-evolution, bioethics and biopolitics (Haraway, 2016b). This is not fanciful ‘post-modern’ thinking but something corroborated by genetics tests on plants, animals and bacteria. It is becoming increasingly clear that different species crossbreed more than it was once thought, that genes are not only being passed down individual branches of the tree of life, but also transmitted between species on different paths of evolution. For evolutionary biologist Michael Rose, “the tree of life is being politely buried” but “what’s less accepted is that our whole fundamental view of biology needs to change ... biology is vastly more complex than we thought.” (ScienceAndReligion.com, 2012).

Similarly, for biologist Michael Syvanen (ibid 2012) the tree of life “is not a tree any more, it’s a different topology entirely. It is clear that the Darwinian tree is no longer an adequate description of how evolution in general works”.

I believe this rich contamination is to be wholeheartedly welcome. It substantiates the counter-traditional view of an entangled, self-generating web of life constantly engendering new assemblages, new concepts and new emancipatory possibilities.

‘Emancipatory’ remains the key word here. It is not a matter of whether one defends the divine, the human or the machine or whether any of the above is preferable to the other. The question is *evaluative*: we need to establish whether the assemblages found in a particular cluster are animated by *active* or *reactive* forces, whether it favours greater freedom and solidarity, foster a deeper sense of justice, wisdom and compassion, *or* whether they continue to serve the old masters in new corporate garb. As I see it, the type of technoscience currently embraced by mainstream PCT does not open new frontiers, nor does it move past human exceptionalism or foster creative entanglement between the human, the animal and the machine. It is, instead, of the more reactive kind. It serves static forces of (self) preservation. It is part of a conservative project within PCT that is keen to use the master’s tool in the foolish hope of dismantling the master’s house. I have [explored](#) elsewhere (Bazzano, 2016)

how this fundamentally reactive project obeys the dictates of neoliberalism and strives to align the approach to the most conservative trends within philosophy of science and politics and how it has uncritically embraced highly questionable stances such as positive psychology and psychopathology.

The above represents the least interesting and more crushingly dull aspect of the PCT Cyborg, and perhaps a sign that the latter, despite its tremendous potential, is been at present occupied by reactive forces.

I witnessed some of this firsthand in my four-year plus stint as editor of a person-centred international Journal which as a lot of other literature in the humanities is driven by software programs such as *ScholarOne* providing “comprehensive workflow management” (<https://clarivate.com/products/scholarone>) and representing one of the signs among others of the triumph of managerialism. Of course, a program like ScholarOne can be extremely useful in “lowering infrastructure costs” (ibid). Owing to the managerial turn in therapy and thanks to impressive levels of automation and customization that software such as these offer, it is also possible nowadays to be an editor of a person-centred journal with very little human input such as thinking critically and thoroughly. Overawed by gadgetry, data and the obsession to measure and quantify, the whole managerial computerization of therapy is at present geared towards greater control of experiencing and human experiencing in particular. This is because *control* – in person-centred term, perpetuated by a narrow self-concept over a dynamically changing organism – is one of the main preoccupations of the neoliberal project. More specifically, this is about predicting the behaviour, controlling the acquiring choices of a regiment of customers. I like to believe that it is possible to direct the Cyborg in the direction of liberation, solidarity and compassion instead of manipulation, although this has not happened yet in mainstream PCT.

## **Empathic manipulators**

Historically, the behavioural sciences have been at the forefront of the subtle and not-so-subtle work of manipulation perfected by neoliberalism, designed to, according to the moral philosopher Tamsin Shaw, to: “determine the news we read, the products we buy, the cultural and intellectual spheres we inhabit, and the human networks, online and in real life, of which we are a part” (Shaw, 2017, p. 62). She goes on to say:

Aspects of human societies that were formerly guided by habit and tradition, or spontaneity and whim, are now increasingly the intended or unintended consequences of decisions made on the basis of scientific theories of the human mind and human well-being (ibid).

Governments and private corporations use the behavioural sciences not in order to convince us consciously by appealing to reason. Instead, they effectively “change behavior by appealing to our nonrational motivations, our emotional triggers and unconscious biases” (Shaw, 2017, *ibid*). Great effort has been employed in recent years by psychologists to construct a methodical understanding of our nonrational motivations. The reason for doing this is that in this way “they would have the power to influence the smallest aspects of our lives and the largest aspects of our societies” (*ibid*). The pioneering work of Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky is one of the most consistent examples of this, having provided the basis for this new kind of behavioural science and recently made available to the layperson (Kahneman, 2012). The behavioural sciences are still the favourite top tool of manipulation utilized by neoliberalism as these present a dependable pedigree. Kahneman had divided the functions of the human mind in two: System One, “which is fast and automatic” and includes “instincts, emotions, innate skills shared with animals, as well as learned associations and skills”; and System Two, which is “slow and deliberative and allows us to correct for the errors made by System One” (Shaw, 2017, p. 62).

In 1955, when he was only twenty-one years old, Kahneman devised personality tests for the Israeli army. Anticipating of some fifty years methodologies employed in the CIA's torture programs and devised by Positive Psychology (a great favourite among some person-centred practitioners), Kahneman discovered that

optimal accuracy could be attained by devising tests that removed, as far as possible, the gut feelings of the tester. The testers were employing "System One" intuitions that skewed their judgment and could be avoided if tests were devised and implemented in ways that disallowed any role for individual judgment and bias (Shaw, 2017, p. 62).

Because of the thorny political implications that this summons, any move from Beauty to the Cyborg in PCT is fraught with serious difficulties. There are worrying signs that aspects of PCT can be used in favour of a more empathic and even loving manipulation of consumers and the fostering of narratives of violence and aggression such as the one deployed overtly and covertly by Positive Psychology. The embracing of Positive Psychology by PCT practitioners who see a continuum between the two approaches (e.g. Joseph, 2015 among others) is a case in point. Several other examples can be found elsewhere (e.g. Bazzano, 2016), but the crucial point here is that in our effort to make PCT more relevant to our contemporary world we should not forgo some fundamental ethical and political position and priorities and again decide whose side we want the approach to be on – whether in the service of solidarity and emancipation or coercion and manipulation.

### **Necessarily Insufficient**

Were one to look for them, antidotes to neoliberalism and its cultural hegemony are found at the dawn of PCT. In June 1936, Rogers attended a three-day workshop conducted by Otto Rank on his new post-Freudian form of psychotherapy" (Kramer, 1995, p. 263). Unfortunately there is no transcript of this workshop, but in all probability it drew on Rank's *Will Therapy* (Rank, 1978) which was first published in English in July of that same year.

Encountering Rank “contributed decisively to what Rogers came to call client-centered therapy. ‘I became infected with Rankian ideas’, Rogers said” (Kramer, 1995, *ibid*).

Rank exerted a pivotal influence on the work of Rogers; some of Rank’s central notions present rich and inspiring connections to PCT. Above all, Rank’s view of scientific psychology as *necessarily insufficient* (Rank, 1932) in explaining and dealing with human experience provides a powerful counterpoint to neopositivism. The latter is only the late manifestation of a tendency that has plagued the therapy world from its inception. Rank wrote:

The main trouble with the scientific approach to human nature is not so much that it has to neglect the personal, so-called subjective element, but that it has to *deny* it in order to maintain the scientific attitude (1996, p. 221).

Psychoanalysis itself, despite its early championing of the unconscious (albeit in a reified form), had stooped to the coercive demand for scientific proof:

In interpreting the human element scientifically, psychoanalysis had to deny it and so defeated its own scientific ideal, becoming unscientific by denying the most essential aspect of the personality (*ibid*, pp 221-22).

That very same tendency is found within PCT. All one needs to do is to substitute ‘unconscious’ for ‘organismic experiencing’.

It is my view that a *battle* needs to be fought in order to retrieve the soul of PCT, a battle between *incompatible* worldviews. One assumes that psychology can measure, check and control human experience; the other recognizes that psychology and psychotherapy are *necessarily insufficient* in comprehending human experience. Both Beauty and the Cyborg in their own very different ways espouse the first stance, despite Beauty’s talk of love or maybe *because* of it. Rather than an impasse, the recognition explicit in the second stance is a fertile ground for creativity in our practice. This battle has been going on for a long time within the world of therapy, as Rank testifies:

So the battle is really on – not between different schools of psychoanalysis but between two worldviews, which have been in conflict with one another since the dawn of science with the early Greeks ... This conflict will not be lessened until we admit that science has proved to be a complete failure in the field of psychology, i.e., in the betterment of human nature and in the achievement of human happiness towards which all mental hygiene is ultimately striving. The result of scientific psychology can be summed up today as the recognition that it is necessarily insufficient to explain human nature, far less to make the individual happier. The error lies in the scientific glorification of consciousness, of intellectual knowledge, which even psychoanalysis worships as its highest god – although it calls itself a psychology of the *unconscious*. But this means only an attempt to rationalize the unconscious and to intellectualize it scientifically (Rank, 1932, p 222).

In the same book Rank argues that in therapy

... we find ourselves directly face to face with experience, which is neither scientifically nor technically controllable, indeed hardly comprehensible while it is being enacted (Rank, 1932, p 242).

Alongside Ferenczi, Rank understood experience (*Erlebnis*) as the “strange consciousness of living” (Kramer, 1995, 224n), as something one can live and breathe but not understand, let alone compute (Ferenczi and Rank, 1924). What this means is that the living moment, the present of our incarnate existence, is fundamentally *unknowable* and strange. For some of us, having to live with this strangeness is intolerable, the possibility of responding creatively to the challenge posed by our existence may feel remote, thus we may react with *neurosis* (in Rank’s language) or *incongruence* (in Rogers’ language). Rank wrote:

My extensive experience and study (both theoretical and therapeutic) have led me to the conviction that the scientific side to human behavior and personality problems is not only insufficient but leaves out the most essential part: namely, *the human side* – the characteristic of which is just that it can’t be measured and checked and controlled (Rank, 1996, p. 221).

## **Beastly Love**

In one of Angela Carter's terse and stylish rewriting of fairy tales and legends (Carter, 1979), she twice reworks *Beauty and the Beast*, this famous story of redemption through love. In the original story, as in its conventional countless versions, the Beast is transfigured into a beautiful prince because of the tears of love Beauty sheds over his wounded body.

Carter's version, titled *The Tiger's Bride*, ends very differently and the ending comes as a revelation and a shock on the very last words of the tale, when the tiger embraces her and she is delighted to find that when her skin is licked off a beautiful fur is found underneath. Rather than the organism being incorporated into the self-concept or the unconscious into the conscious, this represents the opposite movement: *where it is, I shall be*. No longer enclosed within of its own preciousness and worthiness, the beautiful soul opens itself to the fullness of organismic experiencing, an immanent domain of more expansive, unruly and thoroughly unquantifiable experiencing. For the first time, the ineffectual beautiful soul is capable to attend to *presence* – incarnate and alive, more akin to Caravaggio's men and women than the spiritless, moralizing benevolence of theologians.

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