

Editorial

This year is the fortieth anniversary of that baseline year for radical politics, 1968. Partly because the '68 generation' has reached a certain age and attained positions of influence, the anniversary is being very thoroughly treated in the media; the classic black-and-white photos, exhilarating and agonizing by turn, are being reproduced and retransmitted like viral memes of revolution. But are there any hosts available for infection or are these dead memes being used for purposes of immunization?

One of the striking things about looking back on the 1960s and 1970s is the realization that so many of our beliefs at the time turn out to have been false *then*, but to be coming true *now*. The extent and effectiveness of surveillance was much exaggerated in 1968 but hardly could be exaggerated in 2008. The American Empire was a myth in 1968 but not far from (shambolic though still deadly) reality in 2008. Kidnapping and torture by US agencies was actual but underground in 1968; in 2008 it is official policy. And, of course, in 1968 news of environmental disaster was, though present, comparatively marginal by the standards of 2008.

In a strange irony, then, our complaints were accurately prophetic but our aspirations currently seem far off beam. All of the *lifestyle* goals, the ones that make no real difference to capitalism, have been achieved – no one cares any longer how we wear our hair – but all of the meaningful goals relating to power and social justice have been abandoned or twisted out of shape. The French have a word for it: recuperation, a sea-change through which what was once serious emerges as trivial, what was confrontational becomes decorative, and Che Guevara is a fashion label.

It is often forgotten or not understood what an important role therapy and counselling played in the radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Reich, of course, was a sort of guiding genius but much more for his views on sexuality than for his therapy as such. However there was a powerful synergistic relationship between radical therapy and radical politics, with each inspiring, informing and deepening the other. In the USA, groups like the Berkeley Radical Psychiatry Centre and the Chicago-based Changes group in the USA looked for ways to work directly in and with oppressed communities, and to make connections between individual experience and social relations that would radicalize and empower their clients (Totton, 2000, 25–9, 68–9).

In the UK, the main emphasis was on the Radical Psychiatry movement and the work of RD Laing and David Cooper; and in both countries (there is no space here to consider the rest of the world, but see Totton, 2000) there were several initiatives to support and maintain the political energy of activists through self-help therapy (Ernst and Goodison, 1981). Erwin and Miriam Polster gave a very clear account of psychotherapy as a liberated zone and a seed bed of social change: 'we live a two-world existence, straddling the atmosphere of the encounter group and the world in which we live our everyday lives' (Polster and Polster, 1974, 25).

Many key humanistic figures – with an element of bandwagon jumping – produced writings during this period that strongly echoed and supported the radical movements on society. Carl Rogers published *Carl Rogers on Personal Power: Inner Strength and Its Revolutionary Impact* (1978), arguing that the core conditions of person-centred counselling were intrinsically ‘a challenging political statement’ (1978, 9). The Polsters (1974) took a similar position about Gestalt, relating it to the ‘loosening up of poisonous taboos’ in society; and of course Perls Hefferline and Goodman (1973, e.g. 400–1) had already made powerful statements of opposition to conventional values in the 1950s. As for Transactional Analysis, Carl Steiner, a leading figure in its development, was also central in the Berkeley scene and on the journal *Issues In Radical Therapy* (Wyckoff, 1976) and later published the classic *The Other Side of Power* (Steiner, 1981).

With the ebbing of the radical tide in the 1980s and subsequently, humanistic therapy entered the conventional mainstream, at least relative to its earlier positions. Like ex-radicals in every walk of life, veteran therapists tend either to dislike being reminded of their earlier beliefs, or to treat them as relics of a colourful youth. There are of course many honourable exceptions: Carl Steiner, for example, continues to fight his corner; Andrew Samuels is an example close to home; and there is a younger generation of Rogerians, in particular, who have taken up the political implications of humanistic therapy (Procter, Cooper and Sanders, 2006). Anyone who wants to find out the current state of politicized therapy only needs to read the back issues of this journal.

Looking back, it seems to me that the failure of the countercultural movement was a failure to genuinely bring psychotherapy and politics together – to create a revolutionary way of living, feeling, being, which did not simply paper over neurosis (or in some cases psychosis). Much of the anniversary coverage, from both left and right, seems to focus on the criticism that 1968’s revolutionary movements were unprofessional; which is of course entirely true – few activists had any real idea what a successful revolution entailed – but this is also their saving grace. Professional revolutions turn into historic disasters: people who study how to seize power are people who want to hold onto it. The only revolution worth having is the unprofessional kind; but so far, unfortunately, it has seldom succeeded. If it ever does succeed, it will be because it is conducted by sane human beings; and where are they to arise if not through psychotherapy?

Half of this issue of PPI consists of responses to and commentary on the recent collection of papers *The Politics of Psychotherapy: New Perspectives* (Totton, 2006), put together by PPI’s new deputy editor Alexandra Chalfont. I am excited by some of the new thinking expressed in these responses and I also valued the opportunity to think again myself about the book and to put it in the context of my own political history, which in many ways began in 1968. Also included are papers by John Rowan (a veteran of the 1960s) on gender issues in the politics of psychotherapy; by Sheila Spong, also on gender issues, in this case feminist therapy; and by Raman Kapur on the concept of reparation as applied to Northern Ireland. I know nothing of the latter two writers’ relationship with 1968, if any! But they have both written for PPI before, and we are very glad to have them back. We hope that you enjoy this rich and stimulating issue. In a future issue, we hope to publish papers from the London conference ‘Psychotherapy and Liberation: Anniversary of May 68’, which will take place at the beginning of May 2008.

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