

# Making a Difference: How Humanistic Practice Makes a Critical Difference to Humanity's Future

MAUREEN O'HARA, National University, La Jolla, California, USA

**ABSTRACT** *It's no news to anyone who reads a newspaper, watches TV or peruses the Internet that there is no shortage of bad news. This article proposes that the world can be better and that humanistic psychotherapy and other social practices aimed at human growth and existential freedom have a role to play in creating a sustainable humane future. Carl Rogers' work was based on the observation that, given the right conditions, all human beings have within them vast resources with which to face their threats and transform their circumstances. Other humanistic practices provide us with transformational approaches to providing these conditions and are the basis of social innovation in concrete actions for human betterment across the world. Some examples of humanistic practices at social and political scales conducted by the International Futures Forum and others are described, and some suggestions about steps to take to engage in undertaking transformative emancipatory action are offered. Copyright © 2016 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

**Key words:** humanistic practice; globalization; futures thinking; consciousness; International Futures Forum

## CONVERSATION AND CONTEXT

John: Hello everyone and welcome to the final hour of the conference. Maureen, thank you so much for being willing to bring yourself to the last space in the conference, in which we've been all around the world, starting in New Zealand (see Fay, 2016) and finishing on the west coast of America. Perhaps we can start off by hearing about what has brought you to this topic?

Maureen: Yes. Some people will already know this but I started out in England as a biologist; I saw biology really as a way to improve the world. I was working on stem cell research on the development of vertebrate limbs. We were trying to discover what drove a small group of undifferentiated cells to become a whole organism. I went to America and promptly got very sick and was expected to die. In the middle of this medical crisis I experienced an existential crisis raising questions of intimacy, purpose, and meaning. I gave up my biological research and made a transition to psychology. Completely by fortune managed to hook up with Carl Rogers! I wrote to him describing my interest in a humanistic approach to psychosexual development, not really

\*Correspondence to: Maureen O'Hara Ph.D., Department of Psychology, National University, La Jolla, California 92037, USA.

E-mail: mohara@nu.edu

expecting him to respond but he did and he became my doctoral dissertation advisor. That was 1971 and I worked closely with him as a student and then as a colleague, really right until his death. What drew me to Rogers' work and to humanistic psychology was his basic proposition of a growth vector present in the universe that moved towards complexity and self-organization. Rogers' observation that under certain enabling conditions, namely warmth, unconditional acceptance, empathic listening, congruence or authenticity organisms, including human beings move in the direction of growth and healing resonated with my earlier interest in embryology and self-organizing organisms and my own buoyant humanism. Rogers did not accept the notion based on the Second Law of Thermodynamics that the universe was moving inevitably towards chaos and disorder but proposed that at least within certain circumstances moved towards complexity and greater order. In psychological practice this meant that people self-healed, societies moved towards higher levels of order and life moved towards higher levels of evolution. As a biologist this view appealed to my sense of how living systems seemed to work – not as machines, but as growing beings. We worked together all over the world; we co-facilitated groups; and we wrote together (Bowen, O'Hara, Rogers, & Wood, 1979; Rogers, 1979; Rogers, Wood, O'Hara, & Fonseca, 1983), so I was very close to him, but the parallel theme in this story is that I was always very interested in the social dimensions of what we were doing. As a feminist I was recognizing that a lot of psychology was based on male subjects, which was fine for understanding men's reality but was not a good guide to the psychology of women. It was a short step from there to realizing that not only was the psychological literature biased in favour of male subjects it was even more biased in favour of white Anglo Saxon middle class subjects. The realization moved me into wanting to know more about cross-cultural realities. As I widened my view finder it became obvious that all psychology theory and practice is local. The way we understand the world moulds who we feel we are; how we think we are; how we construe the world; and how we imagine each other to be. So that got me really interested in the question of the relationship between culture and psychology, that is, the dynamical interplay between the external environment, the social conditions, the cultural, ethnic, religious, and historical conditions, and how people experience their inner life. So my career in humanistic psychology has been about looking at the effect of the big picture on the internal life and the effect of the internal life on the big picture – and that's what I'm still doing and it is why I became involved with futurist thinking, as did Carl. We were both members of the World Future Society ([www.wfs.org](http://www.wfs.org)) and interested in how we might expect mentality and consciousness to change as societies change. So that took me into the whole question of futurist thinking. I became a member of the International Futures Forum (IFF), which is based in Scotland, but which also has a branch here in California.

John: So this conversation is really the nub of your work.

Maureen: Yes it is.

## **CULTURE AND THE CRISIS**

John: And you see that cultures are changing dramatically now that we're in such a time of crisis and transition?

Maureen: Yes. If you look at what many people from many disciplines – economics, the

environment, population, health, education – are saying, it's that we're on the edge of a potential collapse. Similarly, the problems of energy, water, disease, resource limitations are all potentially catastrophic.

It is my proposition that we must think about ourselves as therapists and our work as healers in this larger context and focus on how we can make an impact on psychological health and well-being in a world turning itself upside down. Therapy stripped of context turns in on itself and becomes ineffective. Client-centred researchers (Duncan, Miller, Wampold, & Hubble, 2010) have reported that the direct effects of treatment by therapists contributes only 17% of outcomes of psychotherapy while contextual/environmental factors contribute 83%. Treatment plays a relative small effect compared to the huge effect culture has on people's mental health and wellness. If we fail to consider how cultural forces influence our clients' lives and how our profession influences the wider culture, we are working in the dark.

So what's going on?

As we know, there is rampant globalization of the world which is more or less generated by the West and pretty much resented by everyone else. Everywhere decolonization movements are rejecting Western thought as a basis for understanding. Here are just some of the challenges we are facing in the global context that have psychological impacts:

- Depletion of resources and accelerating climate change (Steer, 2013).
- Population explosion, particularly of young people in underdeveloped societies.
- Technology that is developing so fast that you can't really keep up with it (Hooper, 2015).
- Urbanization on a massive scale – there are already three megacities of over thirty million people (Tokyo, Shanghai, and Jakarta), and more and more people are living in slums.
- A global mental health crisis (De Silva & Roland, 2014).
- Pandemics.
- The West is ageing; the rest of the world is very young (Akkoc, 2015).
- Financial crises in the European Union, and the USA.
- Massive migration all over the world, and this is not just a European problem – where people from vastly different cultures are migrating into areas that have absolutely no way of understanding their world view or preparation and resources to care for them.
- Increasing fundamentalism and religious fervour.
- Increasing human trafficking – for sex and drugs, labour and children.
- Wealth inequity in almost all of the developed world where the middle class is disappearing between the super wealthy on the one hand and the destitute on the other.

The world is changing faster than our minds are. People everywhere are trying to make sense of the world with an inherited psychology that was largely developed in another time, in another older and simpler world that changed only slowly.

## EDUCATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS

In addition to working with people individually my interest is in how psychotherapy or counselling, or the other kinds of human centred work that many of us do, can make an impact on these contextual issues – because, if all we do is work in individual psychotherapy, then

83% of what affects how people feel, affects their psychological functioning, is not going to be addressed.

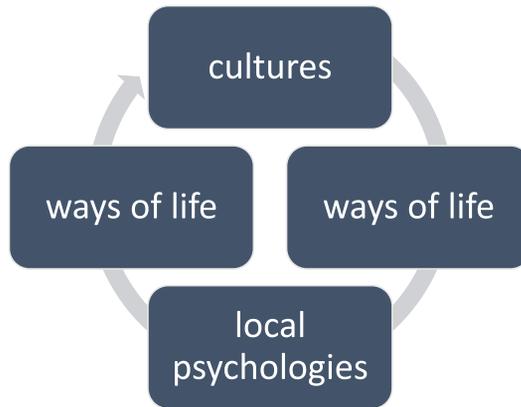
This more externally focused work started for me when I was working in Brazil in the early 1980s. I was running a person-centred gestalt training programme and we were fortunate enough to have Paulo Freire, the radical educator, join us for a day. At some point during the day he said: "You know, you've got to ask yourselves some very serious questions about what it is you think you're doing". Reiterating what he wrote in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity, or it becomes the practice of freedom the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of the world (Freire, 1972).

After the session, I talked with him about what I perceived as some of the similarities between his and Carl's work. He said to me kindly but firmly: "Maureen you claim your approach is about consciousness but I ask you, consciousness about what?" (O'Hara, 1989). What he meant was, are we really looking at the world the way it really is or are we trying to develop a psychology which in a sense is abstracted from and separate from the world in which we all have to live?

So, it is important for psychotherapists who want to make a difference at a cultural level to understand consciousness as a cultural as well as an individual phenomenon and engage with the concrete realities of our confusing times. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has referred to this historical era as an, "interregnum" (Bauman, 2010): a time after one rule has ended but before another has been established. In our case we are in a time after the dominant industrial paradigm no longer functions as it once did and is now toxic but before a new more sustainable way of life has consolidated. We live in a world that is staggeringly complex and rapidly changing. Core assumptions are challenged, certainties are evaporating and confusion is the dominant situation for many. The experience that circumstances and priorities are adrift makes it difficult for individuals to have the time or even the frames of reference to organize their lives, especially under conditions of extreme ambiguity. The conditions of life are so incoherent and often so contradictory that to succeed in one area often means to fail in another. And it's important to remember that human evolution isn't yet finished. We are not the last word in the evolution of consciousness. We have been evolving into the persons we are now for over 150,000 years; our consciousness has been gradually changing from the mentality of hunter gatherers to what we find in today's diverse societies. But until now the pace at which that consciousness has evolved was really rather slow. We changed over generations so we had the illusion of permanence. Now change happens very quickly, within a single lifetime, even over a few years. On the internet you see changing frames, changing images, and changing paradigms all the time – and they're all going on without very much in the way of organization. The illusion of permanence has been replaced by a sense of instability and novelty. I'll come back to this in a minute because I think this is where the hope is.

So I'm interested in how psychologists can help with us navigate this: how can we bring what we know to this story. Psychologists are probably not going to add much to the economic theory of this, and (sadly) neither are we going to bring much in the way of revolutionary organization to this. Nevertheless, we do have some ideas, some techniques, and some ways of being with each other that I think can be a real positive part of the process of ensuring a sustainable future. As I see it, cultures produce ways of life, and those ways of life produce distinct psychologies, and



**Figure 1** Psychology-culture synergy.

those psychologies in turn produce ways of life (Figure 1). Thus, every culture produces its own consciousness, and cultural norms that either sustain business as usual or effect cultural change through acts of imagination and creative action.

Western civilization produces a modal consciousness that is adapted to life in an industrial society, where resources are regarded as limitless and all problems have a technical fix (see Table 1). However, this consciousness is no longer adequate for the kinds of problems that we’re trying to deal with, precisely because they are so interconnected, complex, and intractable, so much so that they have been referred to as “wicked problems” (Churchman, 1967). A wicked problem can’t be fixed and trying to do so usually makes things worse. What we must do with these kinds of challenges is learn how to live within them and seeking new levels of understanding to navigate through. There is a famous quotation attributed to Einstein: “No problem can be

Table 1. Comparing Psychologies

Western industrial consciousness	Non-industrial consciousness
Dualistic – Bifurcating	Holistic
Rational	Concerned with networks
Quantitative	Intuitive/extrarational
Focused	Wide angle
Exclusive – sees differences	Inclusive – sees similarities
Clear fixed boundaries	Fluid boundaries
Atomistic	Relational
Particular (sees the parts)	Integral (sees patterns of the whole)
Individualistic or self-centered	Community/group centered
Analytical	Synthetic
Sees uniqueness	Sees connections
Objectifies “nature”	Part of nature
Secular	Spiritual
Suspicious of ritual	Embraces ritual

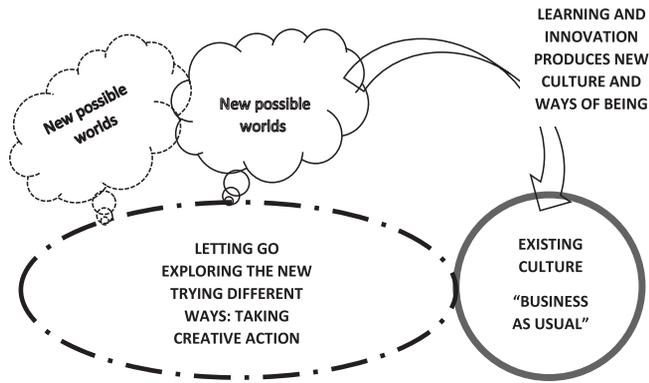
solved from the same level of consciousness that created it". As it is, the dominant Western consciousness though bringing material well-being to many of the world's people, including dramatically extending life expectancy and health, has brought us to the brink of catastrophe. If Einstein is right we need a different (level of) consciousness to resolve or get through this unprecedented level of challenge.

## DIVERSITY IN CONSCIOUSNESS

The good news is that there are other forms of consciousness available. You (John) mentioned beginning this event with a contribution from New Zealand. The people participating from New Zealand talked about other kinds of consciousness, which are more holistic, intuitive, in tune to "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) and more connected (see Table 1). When boundaries are more fluid, people are more relational, empathic, integral, and holistic; they're more group- and community-centred; and focus more on synthesis than analysis and are in touch with sacredness in life. In other words, throughout our history human beings have evolved diverse kinds of consciousness adaptive to specific life circumstances. I'm part of a project of the American Psychological Association Division of Humanistic Psychology the Indigenous Psychologies Task Force (<http://www.apadivisions.org/division-32/leadership/task-forces/indigenous/index.aspx>) whose goal is to establish a line of inquiry that explores psychologies (broadly) that are indigenous to specific cultural settings. The project provides a counter to Western hegemony in psychology and aims to ensure that indigenous philosophies and concepts are used in global discourse. To date people from 85 countries and various cultures within them are involved. We have indigenous Afghanis, Alaskans, American Chinese, Canadian First Nations Peoples, mainland Chinese, Korean, Māori, South Asian Indians and Pakistanis, and various indigenous European, Middle Eastern, and sub-Saharan African peoples. In a sense, together we are grappling with how to deal with the dominance of Western consciousness and frames of reference, at the same time reclaiming previously suppressed or marginalized ways of understanding the world. It seems likely that some aspects of these diverse psychologies may be better suited than Western consciousness to the kind of complexity we are all dealing with today. Whilst everyone is born with the potential to develop any form of consciousness, the danger is that as globalization continues it is the dominant Western world view that increasingly defines what leaders think important in the socialization of children, in education, in psychotherapy and so on. This leaves out a great deal of what is on the right hand side of Table 1. From conversation in the indigenous psychologies group, my sense is that what we are looking for – and, arguably, what the world needs – is a synergistic merging of these older ways of knowing and being, *together with* the Western scientific world-view. It is doubtful that we are going to get out of this mess without some pretty fancy footwork in terms of advances in technology. However, this obviously won't be sustainable if we don't know how to employ it in ways that are intuitive, relational and fluid which are respectful of human dignity and diversity. In my view the person of the future must have both kinds of capacities to thrive in the new world and to address its unprecedented challenges. We must grow into an expanded consciousness which incorporates Western capacities and those from cultures across the world.

So, the next question is how do we get there?

In Figure 2, "business as usual" represents the conventional way(s) of the world: it's the "ways things are"; it's how narratives are framed in the newspaper, on the internet and on the TV, it's the customary way we take action when we have a problem. We get results, and we apply those results



**Figure 2** Changing culture while still embedded in it.

to the world as we find it. We may fix the problem but we haven't changed our view of the problem – or the world. This is the “business as usual” loop which in ordinary times works well. But as circumstances change and results become less effective we try harder, go around the loop faster and faster and expect to get a different outcome. An example would be the way new schemes are proposed to fix failing school or health systems. Lots of money spent, lots of change and stress but problems remain. As the wicked problems mount our efforts become less and less effective because most of the problems that people are dealing with are a result of “business as usual” ways of thinking. The techno-industrial view was a radical innovation in the 17th century, but in the 21st it's become a liability, a neurosis even.

Drawing on our psychological and psychotherapeutic knowledge we know what happens when somebody decides to stop repeating the same old patterns. They have to be willing to let go; they have to be willing to launch themselves into the unknown; and as therapists we work with them on increasing their awareness, on facing facts and reality, and on imagining a possible and different world. Once the imagination is in flow, once we're facing a new, different reality, then we can take creative action that creates multiple versions of the world. Now it's no longer business as usual, it's all kinds of things: it's art; it's innovation; it's expression of difference; it's diversity; it's acceptance; and it's dancing with difference. It's acting in the world in a different way, and reflecting on that, and in that cycle we create a new culture. But the first step in changing the paradigm and creating that new culture is giving up on business as usual; giving up on expecting that if we keep on doing the same old things we'll get a different result.

I would say that the humanistic approach in psychotherapy and in mental health emerged in the 1950s and 1960s with this kind of leap away from business as usual – medication, psychoanalysis and behaviourism. And I would also argue that the current mania for cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) suggests that business as usual is still here, using the same cause and effect logic within the dominant Western paradigm. The pioneers of what was referred to as “third force” and “fourth force” humanistic and transpersonal psychology recognized that mechanistic paradigms were no longer adequate for dealing with the complexity of the human condition in the 20th century. So, arguing about whether CBT is as effective as various humanistic psychologies (and especially person-centred psychology) is in my view pointless. It is arguing across paradigms – one framed in the “business as usual” consciousness and the other in an emerging consciousness which expands the field to integrate objectivism and material reductionism with qualitative epistemologies that put human subjective experience at the centre of its inquiry.

John: I'm just thinking that this is such a good example of the differences of the different paradigms as they are currently displayed in psychology, counselling, and psychotherapy.

Maureen: Yes, well, I personally believe that the reason that CBT is so popular with governments and with people in power is that it doesn't ask you to change the system. It just asks you to keep on making the existing system work better.

Compare this to what Maslow and Rogers knew and did. Maslow talked about the need for a new kind of person – a self-actualized person (Maslow, 1971), and Rogers described what a “person of tomorrow” looked like (Rogers, 1969). The concept of *person* is a centrally important one in humanistic psychology: we don't want to be, or to be treated like, slaves; we don't like to be treated like machinery or robots; we're persons. The concept of personhood, which gives dignity and significance to individual human beings developed over a long time. Not until the 19th century was the practice of slavery, i.e. treating human beings not as persons but as property, abolished in Europe and the USA, and, even today though banned by the *United Nations Declaration of Human Rights* (United Nations, 1948), is still practiced. The United Nations estimates of up to 30 million people are currently subject to forced labour (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2012) including mining, fishing, sex trafficking and inhumane treatment around the world. Much of it rationalized by denying that certain people, in particular women and girls, racial minorities and people afflicted by disabilities of various kinds are not persons and so have no right to freedom, dignity and self-determination. What makes humanistic psychology such a potentially powerful social force in the 21st century is that it insists that above all we are *persons*. We're not a collection of symptoms, we're not “schizophrenics”, we're not “divorcees”, we're not “deportees”, we are not “refugees” or “prisoners” or “elderly”; regardless of our circumstances human beings exist as persons, as beings for themselves. If we are to create a future that nurtures persons and the communities that support them we are called, I propose, to the role of cultural leadership.

## CULTURAL LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

Maureen: To illustrate what I mean by this I want now to turn to the work I have been doing with the International Futures Forum in Scotland and California. A couple of years ago I co-wrote a book that Graham Leicester entitled *Dancing on the Edge* (2012). In that work we ask the question that if we really are on the edge of a transformation from an old culture to a new culture, with all the disruption and uncertainty that entails, how can we prevent ourselves from becoming overwhelmed and learn to thrive in such an incoherent context? Can we in fact learn to dance on that edge – not control it, not master it, not to become black belts of being on the edge, but how do we learn to dance on the edge? In our research we have explored the kinds of persons who can dance on the edge. We have also looked at the kind of organizations, logic, and political systems that are needed to support those persons. If we're going to develop new capacities to live in the new world, a very complex and potentially dangerous world we will need not only new capacities but new systems of support for these new kinds of persons. We can't do social evolution by ourselves. We have to have relationships and institutions; we have to have systems; we have to have organizations that will support us at the edge.

An example of organizational support for transformative action is the IFF's work with the city of Falkirk in Scotland which at the time we entered their story was dealing with a potential

catastrophe (Leicester & O'Hara, 2009). A lot of the city's employment revenue came from a British Petroleum (BP) oil refinery. The city had been informed in 2000 of BP's intention to close down the refinery in 10 years' time. This was a potential catastrophe for the region. The local council had gone through their strategic planning and they'd done their five-year plan. They asked us to come in and look at the plan. It was like most such plans, very competent, but not very ambitious. There was no real life in it; in short, it's the same old worldview. So we said, "What would happen if you didn't feel like you had to be stuck in the old worldview?" Well, my goodness, it only took a short time before people's imagination came alive and ideas just started pouring out. So the leadership team decided to start asking the same question of other local people: children, the police force, businesses, and so on. What was really interesting was that the children created a project called "My future's in Falkirk". They wanted to believe that living in Falkirk was a good thing and that they shouldn't just get their education then leave. So this project of "My future's in Falkirk" was driven very much on behalf of and with the young people. They asked the young people to tell them the stories that made them excited. One story that emerged was the story of these mythic creatures called kelpies which are seahorses which come out of the ocean, sometimes to capture sailors and sometimes to save sailors from drowning. So, out of what originally was a very conventional five-year plan came this much more imaginative project to create an ecopark, which is now a magnificent park, called the Helix Park. It is ecologically self-sustaining and it links the five communities of Falkirk. It's called the Helix Park to represent DNA and includes two 30 metre high stainless steel kelpies (see [www.thehelix.co.uk/](http://www.thehelix.co.uk/)). Out of this potential mess came this amazing, imaginative, inspirational, mythic expression of human aspiration.

Another example of this type of work is the GalGael project, in Glasgow ([www.galgael.org/](http://www.galgael.org/)), which is a project for teenagers who had been in trouble with drugs and alcohol. Some local carpenters who had been laid off from their own jobs decided to create this project, which involves them teaching the teenage boys how to build boats in the same style as the boats which were made in the area 900 years ago. So here they are restoring their culture, restoring their connection to history, and restoring their capacity to do something, with the final "exam" involving a voyage out on the Firth of Clyde in their boat.

A third example of humanistic psychology helping to create a new culture is a restorative justice project led by Dominic Barter in Brazil and elsewhere. Dominic bases his practice on the non-violent communication work of Marshall Rosenberg). Children who have committed crimes engage in a process of restorative dialogue in which they and their parents meet with the people that they've hurt, the parents of the people that they've hurt, the police, and social workers. Everybody is encouraged to listen to everybody's story, trying to empathize with what happened recently and what happened in the past that brought them to this place. Gradually through these conversations people start to recognize that there's a victim in all of us and there's a perpetrator in all of us (see [www.restorativecircles.org](http://www.restorativecircles.org)).

IFF practice is person-centred, though not explicitly so. We focus on empathy, we focus on listening, and we focus on trusting that the community itself has the capacity to resolve its problems. We trust the human connections. We trust human creativity. This does not involve experts coming in and giving advice on how to do it. This is people engaging in creative conversations with citizens who care about their problem whatever it is. Our job is to be a co-creator, a partner that cheers them on and supports them when they feel overwhelmed or tempted to go for the business as usual approach.

IFF is not the only transformative innovation initiative, of course. Similar projects are occurring all over the world. I've got a bookshelf full of examples – in India, Africa, Taiwan, and Vietnam – and the success of these projects is not dependent on better technology or even a better organizational chart. It depends on creating the enabling conditions that support persons to do what persons naturally do which is to help each other and to solve the problems that face them. Just to give you a bit more hope, the book *Blessed Unrest* (Hawken, 2007) catalogues over a million examples of small organizations that are involved with human transformation. I did an informal word sort of the mission statements listed for over 35,000 small organizations dedicated to human issues such as violence prevention, maternal health, peasant empowerment, indigenous rights. The most common words included: awareness, participation, empathy, empowerment, authenticity, listening, dialogue, and mutual respect. This is territory people trained as therapists know a lot about. We know how to help people develop these qualities. We know how to create the conditions and organize groups in which people can learn these skills. We know how to facilitate interpersonal processes where people may disagree with each other respectfully, where they can be authentic, where they can be empathic.

During my own “dancing at the edge” I have come to realize that these skills are not simply technologies— things that you do in order to do something else. These are ways of being one practice to be a human being in a world that's sometimes very scary, where we can't understand everything and we can't control everything. This is how to be a *person* who is not exploitative and who is not part of the problem, but persons who can have a decent life themselves and also help in the transformation toward a sustainable and just world.

So here are some points for what we might refer to as “unusual business”!

1. Take a small move that shakes up the status quo a little and see what happens. You don't have to know where the end point is in order to get started. Just take a step – and if that looks like it worked, take another.
2. Keep whole persons central; don't settle for business as usual. This is very important if you work in healthcare or education where increasingly people asked to become little cogs in machines implementing such strategies as “Lean Management”, or “Six Sigma”; and all of these methods that are meant to make us more efficient but almost all of which are making us less human.
3. Be congruent. Do your own transformative work.
4. Identify a problem you would like to tackle that you think you have something to contribute to. Then find some companions, two or three maybe, and offer each other commitment, not just in what you do but in the way you do it, and how you do it. If you don't want to set up something yourself you can join a group that you admire, that you cherish, and think is doing good work.
5. Do research, because right now research is dominated by the old scientific paradigm where 80% of what it means to be fully human is not even in the conversation. So do your research and publish it if you can.
6. Keep the faith. That's basically what keeps me from getting too dark, keeps me hopeful, and sometimes keeps me dancing and singing, thinking: “I know thousands, maybe millions of people worldwide who know what I know and feel what I feel”.
7. Pay attention to small acts of cultural leadership and point them out.
8. Keep your eyes on the bigger picture and the longer horizon. Evolution works slowly but in our view, in the direction of greater capacity.

I think that there is reason to be optimistic about global transformation but I don't think that we're going to bring this about only working in the counselling office. I think we have to get out into those other places where help and encouragement are called for. We learn how to be a person of tomorrow by doing the kind of work that a person of tomorrow is needed for – taking risks, nudging the system, listening and learning as we go. We don't begin as an expert who then goes out to practice their expertise. We act, take feedback, run into problems, contradictions, disappointments and frustrations and annoyances but gradually working through these reversals transforms both us and the work we are doing. In our work we call people who are doing these small projects all over the world “fireflies”. One firefly might light up a small area but many together create a brighter landscape. Transformation to a new culture will be the result of millions of us doing what we can as persons and not just adjuncts to machines or armies. If we can keep faith in the person and in human possibilities, then I think there's every reasonable, plausible, defensible reason to hope.

## CONCLUSION

John: That's a really beautiful place to finish, Maureen, to keep the hope alive in your work. You make contact with how hard things are and how much transformation is needed, but you also keep your hope alive too. I really appreciate that.

Maureen: I keep having to remind myself that evolution isn't over yet, we've a ways to go and we've no idea where we're going, but we know that this is not the end of the line. My sense is that we can become more fully human, but if we don't resist some of these dehumanizing systems that we're now creating we might take a step back which would be really sad.

It's very tempting to collaborate with the existing system and rationalize it by saying you can do more if you're on the inside. I've done that, I've been a president of the university, and I really did think that from the inside of the university I would have a longer lever to pull, but it turns out that that's not what happens. What happens is you become socialized to that system and you then begin to find that you're either an annoying squeaky wheel whom nobody likes or you're helping a system keep on doing better something that it shouldn't be doing at all. I think lots of people are in that situation where we find ourselves complicit with keeping these toxic systems. Some people have to work in those systems and I have tremendous compassion and empathy for them, but to try to create the consciousness for the future and the institutions built on that consciousness, we need new kinds of schools, new kinds of healthcare, and new kinds of programmes for kids. I'm really taken with the global phenomenon of transformational festivals where people create temporary cities for a week or so; in a sense, they're learning or rehearsing how to be in the world in a different way. In an encounter group it's the same thing; you're rehearsing how to be different, learning things that you can use at home or at work. So I think there's a lot of opportunities for learning how to be different.

John: So even if we have to live in that system, we can find and create places where we and others can have another experience.

Maureen: Yes, that's exactly what we can do. One of our IFF colleagues in Ireland runs meetings called “civic conversations”; essentially they are simply a conversation about something that

people in Northern Ireland want to talk about. He creates a setting where they can talk about it in safety, where they can be listened to. You never know what kind of impact you can have through this type of conversation. Just think of Carl Rogers' video of groups of Catholics and Protestants meeting to talk, and the impact of the subsequent documentary *The Steel Shutter* (McGaw, 1973). This video is still being used to open up dialogue about the "Troubles". We also have to find different ways to organize, and I don't mean to create another non-governmental organization that may have a transformative goal operates in the old way. The internet gives us a new opportunity to connect up a global subculture of people interested in a new way of being. Transformative voices keep getting drowned out by the official voices, the media, and the politicians. They keep talking as if the world hasn't changed, but they're wrong and we need to start speaking up politically and publicly. As Paul Hawken put it in the subtitle of *Blessed Unrest*: "the largest social movement in history is restoring grace, justice and beauty to the world and it's a movement that we don't even recognize as a movement" (Hawken, 2007).

John: Maureen, thank you so much for coming in and being part of our conference. You've given us so much to think about both realistically about where we are and hopefully in terms of how impactful our energy can be.

Maureen: Thanks, it's been great for me.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to acknowledge with gratitude the support and assistance of Professor Keith Tudor, and of Auckland University of Technology, Aotearoa New Zealand in providing resources in the form of additional research and editorial support in the preparation of the manuscript of this article.

## REFERENCES

- Akkoc, R. (2015, 30 April). *How the world's population is changing in 7 maps and charts*. Retrieved 30 April, 2016, from: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/11730676/How-the-worlds-population-is-changing-in-7-maps-and-charts.html>
- Bauman, Z. (2010). *Letters from the liquid modern world*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Bowen, M. V., O'Hara, M., Rogers, C. R., & Wood, J. K. (1979). Learnings in large groups: Implications for the future. *Education*, 100, 108–116.
- Churchman, C. W. (1967). Guest editorial. *Management Science*, 14(4), B141–B142.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996). *Creativity: Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial.
- De Silva, M., & Roland, J. (2014, 25 May). *Mental health for sustainable development. All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global Health*. Retrieved 25 May, 2016, from [http://www.basicneeds.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/APPG\\_Mental-Health\\_Report.pdf](http://www.basicneeds.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/APPG_Mental-Health_Report.pdf)
- Duncan, B. L., Miller, S. D., Wampold, B. E., & Hubble, M. A. (2010). *The heart and soul of change: Delivering what works in therapy* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Fay, J. (2016). Psychotherapy and Global Transformation. *Psychotherapy and Politics International* 14(2), 76–83.
- Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Herder & Herder.
- Hawken, P. (2007). *Blessed unrest: How the largest movement in history is restoring grace, justice, and beauty to the world*. New York, NY: Penguin.

- Hooper, C. (2015, 24 May). *Is technology evolving faster than our ability to adapt?* Retrieved 24 May, 2016, from <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/technology-evolving-faster-than-our-ability-adapt-chris-hooper>
- International Labour Office. (2012). *ILO global estimate of forced labour: results and methodology International Labour Office, Special Action Programme to Combat Forced Labour (SAP-FL)*. Geneva: ILO.
- Leicester, G., & O'Hara, M. (2009). *Ten things to do in a conceptual emergency*. London, UK: Triarchy Press.
- Maslow, A. H. (1971). *The farther reaches of human nature*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- McGaw, W. H. (Director) (1973). *The steel shutter* [Film]. La Jolla, CA: Center for Studies of the Person.
- O'Hara, M. (1989). Person-centered approach as conscientização: The works of Carl Rogers and Paulo Freire. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 29, 11–35.
- Rogers, C., Wood, J. K., O'Hara, M. M., & Fonseca, A. H. L. D. (Eds) (1983). *Em busca da vida* [In search of the life force]. São Paulo, Brazil: Summus.
- Rogers, C. R. (1969). *The person of tomorrow (Commencement Address)*. Sonoma State College Pamphlet, Sonoma, California, USA.
- Rogers, C. R. (1979). The foundations of the person-centered approach. *Education*, 100, 98–107.
- Steer, A. (2013). *Resource depletion, climate change, and economic growth*. Global Citizen Foundation. Retrieved from [http://www.gcf.ch/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/GCF\\_-Steer-Summary\\_6-28-13.pdf](http://www.gcf.ch/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/GCF_-Steer-Summary_6-28-13.pdf).



**Maureen O'Hara** is Professor of Psychology at National University in La Jolla, California and is the Chief Executive Officer of the International Futures Forum-United States. Born in the UK she was trained as a biologist before moving to the USA and changing fields to psychology. She worked closely with Carl Rogers for the last 20 years of his life, co-facilitating large group encounters internationally and focusing on social change. A focus of her recent work is social and cultural change and the relationship between such social conditions as poverty, terrorism, racism and intolerance, climate change, and the war on mental health. Her books include (with Graham Leicester) *10 Things to Do in a Conceptual Emergency* (Triarchy Press, 2009) and (also with Graham Leicester) *Dancing at the Edge: Competence, Culture and Organizations for the 21st century* (Triarchy Press, 2012) and (as co-editor with Mick Cooper, Peter Schmid and Art Bohart) the *Handbook of Person-Centered Psychotherapy and Counselling* (Palgrave, 2013). She lives in California with her husband Robert Lucas.