

# Australasian Personal Construct Newsletter

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Inside....

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## Reflections on the 17<sup>th</sup> International Congress on PCP in Brisbane

This congress was held at the Bardon Conference Centre on the slopes of Mt Cootha in Brisbane in July. It was a relatively small gathering, which meant that we were able to meet most delegates, and I certainly had some interesting discussions and great social contacts with quite a few of the participants. Because the conference was held out of town, there were lots of opportunities to follow up with speakers and other delegates and to make or renew contacts with others who use PCP approaches to their work

The social and cultural segments of the program allowed us to make connections with other delegates in a different context and enjoy some of the extra-curricular delights of Brisbane. I went on the tour of the Gallery of Modern Art (thanks Miriam!) which was extremely interesting and had the additional bonus of giving us access to good coffee, one of the deprivations of the Bardon Centre. The creative construing evening was hilarious, verging on the surreal at times, culminating in belly-dancing which was endlessly prepared for but never actually happened. Bob Neimeyer was beautifully decorated for belly-dancing but probably shouldn't give up his day job. Our a cappella choral presentation based on the Ghostbusters theme ("Who ya gonna call? George Kelly!") probably needed more work. When we added to these some rather more polished creativity involving

guitar, singing, poetry, story-telling and magic, we ended up with a literally unforgettable occasion.

I must say that I generally avoid general psychology conferences because I find I am not really interested in such a lot of the program. With this one I was constantly frustrated because I wanted to go to just about every paper. There were a wide variety of PCP topics presented together with the fascinating connections between “mainstream” PCP and other theoretical and clinical, organizational, political and sports areas. This certainly justified the congress theme: PCP - A Theory with Infinite Possibilities. I’m looking forward to contacting people for copies of some of the papers that I had to miss, and to follow up on some of the fascinating detail that wasn’t able to be fully explored in the sessions. For me, sessions by practitioners demonstrated the variety of ways in which PCP has informed their thinking and practice and has been integrated into their unique individual approaches. Sessions by academics illustrated some of the evidence base for PCP work and some ways in which we can measure and understand PCP-related concepts in our professional work. Since returning home I have been inspired to more actively use PCP approaches in my work and to take opportunities to train colleagues in some of the concepts and methods that PCP offers.

The conference was attended by several inspirational keynote speakers from Europe (Joern Scheer), UK (Trevor Butt and David Winter) and USA (Bob Neimeyer). Bob Neimeyer will be well known to many Australian practitioners who work in the area of grief and loss counseling. I had been told that these visionary figures, and indeed most participants at PCP conferences were friendly and approachable and such indeed was the case - and I’d add generous, encouraging and funny to the list of constructs. All-in-all a very worthwhile and enjoyable conference, and a credit to the organizing committee: Richard Bell, Paula Eustace, Heather Foster, Bob Green, Miriam Stein, Barbara Tooth, Beverly Walker and Bill Warren.

Peter Prisgrove

## Denny Hinkle - Alive and Well

*The following article recently appeared in Constructive Interventionist, the News Magazine of the Centre for Personal Construct Psychology at the University of Hertfords’ School of Psychology. It is reprinted here by permission of the joint editor of CI, Faye Fransella.*

## Choice, or Wu Wei?

Greetings, all! After decades of silence, I was rediscovered by whom I call the “Queen of Constructs”, Fay Fransella, for which I am most grateful. Why did I vanish from PCP? When I don't deeply understand another, I feel lonely—that universal human condition of separation. Deep empathy, knowing and being known, is the end of loneliness, and that is probably why I became a psychotherapist rather than an academic researcher.

Therapy gave me a far more intimate knowledge of others than formal research. Kelly once told me that he felt quite privileged to be a therapist, because "I can sit beside the stream of human souls and listen to their wondrous songs, songs they have never revealed to another human being. This is the wonder of people, and I know you, too, know that wonder." I couldn't tell George that I had discovered this wonder at age twelve when I first knew love.

I knew from my personal relationships that to know another is to understand the deep structure of their actions. I have never doubted the symbolic nature of most human behavior. One of my favorite movies is *Paris, Texas*, in which everything in that film is symbolic - even the title. It was Sartre who commented that a single gesture implies a worldview. For me that meant that a construct implies a hierarchy of constructs up to the Way of Life constructs that modulate our very lives. I once intended to measure those constructs - probably hedonism, prudence, ethics, and aesthetics. I hope someone did.

Autobiography is always a significant reflection on experience. George Kelly often said that what is important is not so much the events of our lives, but our reflections on them - the examined life. When he returned from traveling around the world after suffering a heart attack at age 57, he said that the very best part of his travels happened after he returned home and reflected on them. He expressed frustration with the multitudes of people who live unexamined lives. Reflection is a way to precipitate ourselves into new meaning and significance, to construct our narratives. I once asked Kelly what he thought the purpose of life was. He looked at me with a look of irritation that I didn't already know the answer and said rather forcefully, "To be on with it, of course!" His was a conception of life as a structure in the process of change - being and becoming were the same.

Understanding the transformative power of reflection, I wrote a detailed intimate autobiography of my life published in 2000—*Burning Point*<sup>1</sup>. In it is a detailed reflection on a lifetime of reconstructions in my long journey toward authenticity. It is one of the most intimate autobiographies in print, not for the prudish. It describes in detail the experiences that facilitated change, the turning points, my core constructs, and the processes of change itself. Writing it gave me a deep liberating understanding of the major themes of my life and of the profound significance of various relationships in my life, George Kelly being a major one. Kelly often said, "The truth of your human relationships is the most important truth you will ever know."

The Choice Corollary makes reconstruction seem so deliberate and rational, but when I looked at the significant turning points I described in *Burning Point*, what I found was choiceless awareness, a non-interfering receptiveness, Wu Wei. Here is an excerpt from it.

"I remember when I was fourteen watching Keith, he was sixteen, on the diving boards one sleepy afternoon. Keith climbed to the high dive, paused at the end of the board, looked around, saw me, waved, and called my name--I felt self-

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<sup>1</sup> Hinkle, D. (2000) *Burning Point* New Mexico: Alamo Square Press

conscious--and then leaped gracefully skyward, completed a perfect jack knife, and disappeared with hardly a ripple on the surface of the water. His laughing face, ringed with wet golden curls, appeared at the side of the pool next to me. "Did you see that? Did you see me, Denny?" he asked with pride. As he got out of the pool and walked toward me, I felt the familiar surge of warm emotions again. He stood there tanned and relaxed, dazzlingly bright in the light of the noon sun, and framed by the blue of the sky. He moved slightly, and a drop of water on his bronzed shoulder caught the sun's light and blazed like a diamond. Slowly, it meandered down his body as if in a caress. As I watched this glinting rainbow drop descend across his smooth tanned skin, I suddenly understood what he was feeling where it touched him; I felt the flow of what Keith was feeling! He moved his fingers to that drop, indicating his awareness of it. The revelation of this moment for me was the realization of the inner reality of another person. I suddenly understood the experiencing of another, and with this realization, the boundaries of separation disappeared. There was no loneliness, only oneness. I believe it was the beauty of this moment of empathy that led to my eventual decision to be a psychologist."

My brain listened to the muses and gave me gifts of insight! It was the wonderful magic of my brain, not me! I was merely the observer and reporter. This same actionless action, non-interfering receptiveness gave me the ideas for the methodologies I developed. The same was true when I wrote *Burning Point*. The book seemed to write itself. It poured out of me in ninety days! That is true! I just listened and reported the ideas and words as they came. There was some editing, but not much. I first started practicing this awareness without action, Vipassana, or Insight, Meditation when I was eighteen. One must learn to listen to the muses—and the hideous monsters of our brains! You can't have one without the other! Be fully open; go with the flow; be on with life!

Kelly often told me that what was important about a person is his questions, not his answers. So, is it choice or Wu Wei? Choice? Wu Wei? Both? Maybe neither!

### What's happening internationally, right now, in PCP?

Joern Scheer provides a PCP News Blog at

<http://www.pcp-net.de/info/news.html>

It is updated frequently (not something that every website can boast) and covers journal contents, meetings, training events, other constructivist blogs and probably anything that stirs the pulse of enthusiastic constructivists.

The PCP News Blog was formerly known as the Internet-ional PCP Newsletter, and thus we loose a seriously bad pun.

Send Joern information about your events and get them on the international stage (and make him very happy).

Dennis N. Hinkle

## Narralizer

*Sounds like a device for instant weight loss, doesn't it? However, such is not the case!  
Read on...*

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We would also like to introduce you to our recent book in qualitative research:

"Multiple Case Narrative: A Qualitative Approach to Studying Multiple Populations", written by Dr. Asher Shkedi and published by John Benjamins Publishing Company.

You can view and order the book from the John Benjamins Publishing Company website

Best regards,  
The Narralizer team

*The website reports that the main figure in the company that developed this software is Asher Shkedi, PhD, head of the Department of Teacher Education at the School of Education of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His current areas of research and teaching are qualitative research, curriculum development and teacher education. He has written a large number of articles, mostly using qualitative research methodology, and has authored or edited several books. His last major works were "Words of Meaning: Qualitative Research -- Theory and Practice" (Ramot-Tel Aviv University Press, 2003) and "Multiple Case Narrative: A Qualitative Approach to Studying Multiple Populations" (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2005).*

*If anyone tries out the free trial version, let us know how it goes! (Ed)*