

## Challenging Orthodoxy

David Furlong

### THE SCIENCE OF SPIRIT POSSESSION (2nd Edition)

Dr Terence Palmer (SMN)

Cambridge Scholars, 375 pp., £52.99, h/b, (20% discount for Members) ISBN 978-1-4438-6810-5

This book, based on Palmer's Ph.D. thesis, is a scholarly and authoritative exploration into a little understood area of human experience. Palmer sets out his stall in the Introduction where he states:

'The purpose of this book is to demonstrate that, contrary to popular belief in academic circles and in the collective conscious of institutionalised mechanistic science, there is a scientific framework that can, and does, accommodate the phenomena of spirit possession in all forms and diversity' (Palmer, 2014:39).

To accept the concept that individuals can be influenced and affected, both mentally and physically, by spirit entities, leading to psychological illness, first necessitates that there is adequate scientific evidence for the continuation of consciousness beyond the death of the physical body. To support his thesis Palmer draws heavily on the work of the now little known nineteenth century researcher, Frederic Myers (1843-1901), who was one of the founders for the Society for Psychical Research. 'Myers' primary objective was to pursue scientific evidence that Man has a soul and his conscious personality survives bodily death,' states Palmer (2014:30). It is clear that Myers' exploration into these fields was limited by the understanding of his time and, although his posthumous book *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903) was well received by some of his followers, his ideas on the unconscious or 'subliminal' self, gained no acceptance within psychology or the scientific establishment. Drawing on Myer's concepts, Palmer brings us back to the central task of true scientific enquiry, which should be the open-minded exploration of all phenomena, of which perceived 'spirit-possession' is an example.

Utilising a wide variety of sources, both ancient and modern, Palmer lays the foundation for an understanding of 'spirit possession' that strongly supports the notions that separate disembodied spirit entities can access and influence the minds of individuals and, on occasions, take up residence within the psyche. This in turn can give rise to a range of psychological conditions such as schizophrenia, 'hearing voices' and similar mental health problems. We are informed how obvious cases of possession were tackled in past-times through traditional exorcisms and how

modern spirit-release therapists now approach these situations through hypnotic regression techniques, where the intrusive entity or entities are communicated with, helped and then released. Palmer also suggests methodologies for further research into this field, which is sadly ignored by the medical establishment that broadly prefers to see such conditions as stemming from neurological disorders that can best be treated by medication.

Because the book sets out to challenge the current orthodox position on the causes of mental problems, which it does more than adequately, it is full of scientific terminology and jargon that make it a potentially difficult read for the lay person and this is my main criticism of this book. However, for those interested in, or working with mental and psychological health, where a possible cause could be spirit intrusion in one form or another, it should be a must to have on the bookshelf.

*David Furlong is Director of the Spirit Release Forum and author of **Illuminating the Shadow**.*

## ecology-futures studies

### Designing Regenerative Cultures



Daniel Christian Wahl

## Ecological Activism

David Lorimer

### DESIGNING REGENERATIVE CULTURES

Daniel Christian Wahl

Triarchy Press, 2016, 287 pp., £20, p/b – ISBN 978-1-909470-77-4

I am not surprised that this seminal book has been so enthusiastically endorsed by the likes of Fritjof Capra, Hazel Henderson, Joanna Macy and David Orr. If you only read one environmental book this year, this should be it. Daniel has a background in biology, holistic science, natural design and sustainability, and is

also a colleague from the International Futures Forum. His experience and study have enabled him to pull together many disciplines and strands and convert these into a readable and practical narrative with which the reader can engage deeply. One of the most interesting features of the book is the number of questions – over 250 – and the injunction that we should live these questions rather than impose answers that do not do justice to the complexity of our overall situation. The four main elements, illustrated on the cover, are transformative innovation, biologically inspired design, living systems thinking, and health and resilience.

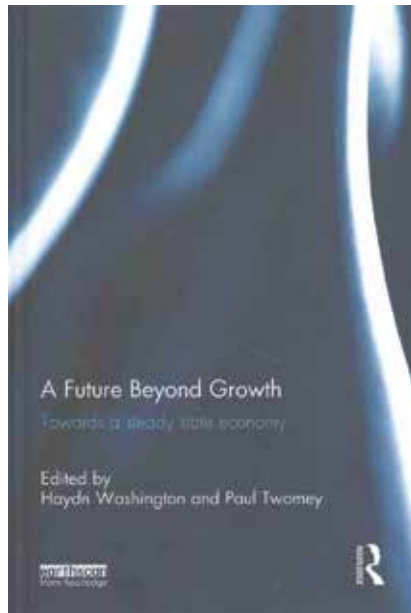
In his introduction, David Orr reminds readers that cultures are not designed from the top down, but grow organically from the bottom up, starting on a small scale as a seed initiative. On this journey, we need to begin by changing our perception of and therefore our relationship with Nature, no longer standing apart but realising that we are integral to life and co-creators of the future. All chapters also take the form of questions, with a number of subsections. We need to move from a perception and narrative of separation to what Thich Nhat Hanh calls interbeing based on relationality, cooperation and collaboration rather than rivalry and competition. Gregory Bateson is quoted as saying that 'the major problems in the world are the result of the difference between how nature works and the way people think.' Readers will emphatically agree with this statement once they have read this book as they will very clearly understand that our current economic system is structurally unsustainable, depending as it does on continuous extraction of natural resources to turn them into economic assets while externalising the ecological and social costs. (p. 210)

A key transformative theme is that of health. As pioneers like Sir Albert Howard demonstrated, the health of the soil is primary, because on it depend successively the health of plants, animals and humans. A healthy ecosystem is a resilient one, and Daniel shows how regenerative agriculture can turn depleted soil as a source of carbon to healthy soil as a carbon sink. Nothing could be more important than this kind of regenerative agriculture, as supported by a major 2013 UNCTAD report, given the impact of agriculture on ecosystems. Our own degenerative diseases are a major drain on government 'health' systems around the world, and much of this could be prevented by changes in diet - but these are unlikely to happen on a sufficient scale owing to our current agricultural and food systems. Fundamental change, as Naomi Klein also observes, will require social mass movements using all the communication power of the Internet.

We can also learn a great deal from indigenous perspectives, which Daniel sums up as a perspective where 'the world is alive and meaningful and our relationship with the rest of life is one of participation, communion and co-creation.' (p. 159) He also points out that their modes of communication involve deep listening and close community. They are no strangers to what we now call biomimicry, which poses the critical question of how humanity as a whole can become a life-enhancing presence on Earth. There is in fact much more progress in this field of applied technology than most readers will be aware of, and of which Daniel gives some interesting examples.

The design element in the title is a very important one as an enabler of cultural transformation, which will also entail a transformation of thinking through the educational system. I remember David Orr making the point in a book on eco-literacy that clever university graduates trained in old thinking are a hazard to the planet. In this respect, it is encouraging that the Scottish curriculum has as a central preoccupation learning for sustainability. Design or praxis can provide a meeting point for theory and practice, which also constitutes a learning journey with adaptive feedback. We also need to instil a biocentric ethic based on ecosystem health, including ourselves, with the adoption of ecological public health. All this involves developing new forms of literacy within the system and introducing systems thinking more generally - I only came across systems thinking through my own reading and research.

Daniel makes it very clear that regenerative cultures are rooted in cooperation. Although our crises demand a collaborative response, we are currently enmeshed in short-term and competitive systems that have resulted in a cumulative ecological overshoot. In his final chapter, Daniel gives many potential avenues for progress involving redesigning economics based on ecology, creating regenerative and circular economies, shifting from quantitative to qualitative growth, and co-creating regenerative enterprises. Consistently with his own advice, Daniel has been active in Majorca, using the very processes and questions set out in this book. I am sure he is right that we need to start on a local and small-scale, and indeed a great deal is already going on although under- or unreported. He takes to heart - and we can too - the practice of the activist May East who, after her morning meditation, consciously chooses where to put her attention that day, and which conversations and projects she will activate through the power of her attention. We can all ask ourselves how we can be the change we want to see in the world and work with others in nurturing the seeds of a new and life-enhancing culture. In this



respect, Daniel has written an essential handbook.

### **Towards a Steady State Economy**

*David Lorimer*

### **A FUTURE BEYOND GROWTH**

**Edited by Haydn Washington and Paul Twomey**

Earthscan 2016, 256 pp., £29.99, p/b.

This book is both radical and fundamental, and is essential reading for those who want to consider in more depth the potential evolution of the global economy beyond growth and towards a steady state. William Rees sums up the importance of this evidence-based briefing by asking whether our political leaders can rise above collective denial, defy entrenched economic elites and return to serving humanity's collective interest and survival with dignity. The idea of a steady-state economy was pioneered by Herman Daly in the 1970s and must represent the eventual planetary system since the current business as usual is quite unsustainable, as any informed person already knows. The initial chapter reminds us of some 20th century figures, where human population multiplied by four, industrial pollution by 40, CO2 emissions by 17, fish catches by 35, mining ores and minerals by 27, as well as the destruction of one quarter of coral reefs, one third of mangroves and half of all wetlands. This situation continues, with our current ecological footprint equivalent to 1.5 Earths and the prospect of two-thirds of life being extinct by 2100.

In our techno-bubble, we forget our ultimate dependence on nature and ecosystem services, and that the economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of ecology. Haydn Washington identifies the key drivers of unsustainability as ecological ignorance, worldview

and ideologies, overpopulation, overconsumption, the myth of endless growth and denial of our predicament. This is exacerbated by a number of 'stupid beliefs' such as that endless growth is somehow possible, that population growth is not a problem and that technology can solve everything. The five sections deal with population, throughput and consumerism, key aspects of a steady-state economy, ethics and policy for change. We deceive ourselves if we think that these ecological realities can be evaded through intelligence and technology. The total pressure of human consumption on natural systems is excessive, and is the direct product of population and per capita consumption.

Population is discussed not only in terms of numbers of people, but also numbers of cars and other products - sometimes, as with biofuels, cars and people are in direct competition. And although there is a demographic transition going on with declining birth rates in many parts of the world, the human population is still increasing by about 80 million a year - around 220,000 every day. The decline in numbers is more than made up for by a corresponding increase in consumption. Robert Engelman proposes nine population strategies to stop short of 9 billion, with a particular emphasis on universal access to contraception, education and empowerment of women, ending policies rewarding parents for having more than two children, and integrating teaching about population, environment and development relationships into school curricula.

Eileen Crist contributes a particularly vigorous essay in criticising the wishful thinking implied in the rhetoric that we can double food production without further damage to biodiversity just through careful planning and management. She reminds the reader that the current volume of industrial agriculture, aquaculture and fishing constitute a mounting planet-wide disaster and that saying that we need to grow more food without further ecological destruction is not going to stop hungry and acquisitive people taking what they need - 'clearing more forests and grasslands, moving up slopes, overgrazing pasture and range lands, decimating sea creatures, replacing mangrove forests with shrimp operations, or killing for cash or food.' The assumption here is that the current damage inflicted by our food system is in fact acceptable.

Crist maintains that industrial food production is the most ecologically devastating enterprise on earth and that we need to consider the wisdom of limitations and humility (agricultural uses 70% of our water). It is startling to learn that cropland already uses a portion of the planet the size of South America, while land for grazing farm animals eats up an area the size of Africa. This means