

## Projects Achieved and Unachieved

- and two big questions

Some things I have done in my life I regard as achievements. I feel a sense of pride in them.

Other things have been unachieved. I had energy for them, I worked at them, sometimes a lot. Some still seem to me now (as at the time) quite good. Had I persisted, would some of them have got off the ground, as a finished piece? Over these I feel a sense of regret. I assume this must be true for many people.

So there are two big issues here, two big questions.

When, in practice, do you persist? When do you let go?

And: how to handle that sense of regret.

As to the first question, generally speaking I would say: Persist. OK, take a rest. Show it around (but with care - ideas are not copyright). Get some feedback. Get a new perspective. Work on something else for a while. (I'm talking to myself really - to me back then when I didn't persist).

And yet - sometimes surely it is best to let go. A project doesn't run, so don't use all that creative energy pushing what won't move, whether because of something inside or because it just doesn't meet an outside response. And one's energy, my energy (try to keep it in the first or second person singular...) - my energy moves on.

I learned rather late that there are two aspects to any creative endeavour. There's the creating. And there's the delivering in the world. Useful to be able to have both those energies going. It's a reason for having a manager or an agent, if you can establish a good relationship with one. But that awareness, of those two aspects, I believe needs to be held by anyone creating anything.

So to the second big question, the regret.

What I would like is to enjoy the satisfaction that comes from the achievements; and to accept, calmly and simply, that many things did not come to fruition and I do not need to engage in a sense of regret. But this does not seem to come naturally.

- Just to be clear, my own regrets actually (this may well not be true for everyone) are I think entirely for things I have failed to achieve, not for things (bad?) I have done.

I don't mind the pride. But I have got fed up with the regret: at the many things not achieved, projects started, sometimes felt very committed to, sometimes still feel they would have been good and valuable, and then they have not come to fruition. I look back on my life and sometimes get sort of taken over by those many failures.

I want to honour those projects, I don't want them to weigh me down with a sense of failure. Or, put another way: how can I embrace the failures? What did I learn from the work? What enjoyment did I get? How has that experience enriched my life? Or just been a part of my life, to acknowledge, to breathe with?

I have been helped in this by my friend Larry Butler, drawing on his connection with Buddhism and with mindfulness. He referred me to some useful sources.

There is Oliver Burkeman, who writes a column in the Guardian on Saturdays, and comes up with a good maxim: go for 'process', not outcome. And in his book *The Antidote* he gives importance to embracing failure. The book as a whole is a stand against a prevailing attitude known as 'positive thinking', how it has invaded much of our culture and how we think about our lives largely in terms of strategies for 'success'.

Indeed one could say that this attitude informs (or at least it is a source of empowerment for) the competitive, commercial market ideology which has recently destroyed many lives and which acts against the co-operative side of human nature. And which was of course picked up and propagated (via Hayek) by Thatcher and Reagan, and then not counteracted by what I consider as a treacherous Blairite politics.

There is a paradox here: from the Reformation on (and before, in ancient Greece in the movement known as Stoicism) and then through the Enlightenment to our present valuing of Human Rights,

one could say that the quality of self-determination and the ability to shape one's life has progressed. Freedom, 'Uhuru'. Yet there is this paradox that shines clear and inescapable in the American Constitution: some 'Inalienable Rights' were embodied therein, but then totally denied to Black and Native Americans. And there is the American Dream, and 'you create your life'.

But it remains, I believe, a paradox. Because a lot of the energy for the 'growth movement' of the 70s came from the USA. It has a positive side. I do think we have progressed in what can be valued in 'self-determination'. I write about this, both the progress and the limitations, in some of the items in the sections 'History and Design of Courses', and 'Performance Group. travels and Growth Movement', especially in the article 'Who Am I Responsible For?'.

One problem in our world today is the progress of digital technology. Of course there are benefits and conveniences. But I sit in the bus and at least half my fellow passengers are clicking away at their little screens. And there is the huge flood of television programmes and interesting radio discussions. We live with a partial illusion that we are a part of all this, active, that we contribute to something in the world outside. Even the game or the puzzle can distract - I occasionally get addicted to Sudoku for a short while. Fortunately I am soon able to be mindful of what I am doing - and what I am avoiding. I have written a poem about this, 'Puzzles Are Easy', it's in 'Poems'.

And returning to mindfulness - attention to one's breathing, one's surroundings, one's physical state, and, importantly in relation to the issue of failure, one's mental state - awareness of these aspects of one's being: this is mindfulness. It can lead to a calm acceptance of what is, and in Buddhist practice can lead on to a greater empathy with other people and consideration for them.

Mindfulness has now entered Western thought - and not just on the fringes. There is now a 'Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy', recognised by the NHS; and in Oxford, a Mindfulness Centre, a University department. (link <<http://oxfordmindfulness.org/about-mindfulness/>> ) There are many other useful links, there are several Buddhist centres in London and in other UK cities; and look up Maitreyabandhu.

The first thing I wrote when I stopped being a doctor was a play about the holocaust (see section 'Wales' in Gallery). I sent it to the Royal Court and had a highly enthusiastic letter back from a reader - also it was taken up by a director friend, George Mully, who sent it to Peggy Ramsay, one of London's best agents, who took me on as showing talent. The play never got anywhere. Reading it now I find it wordy and not very interesting. It's one of the things I've thrown out. But I am able to embrace that failure writing it was an important experience.

Same about the second thing I wrote - a 'dialogue', sort of attempting a Socratic style: about criminal responsibility - called 'Some Slippery Slopes'. Three-characters: Quester, the questioner; Justin, the lawyer; and Prophysor, the psychiatrist (- I had been one at Fulbourn and in Cambridge). It stemmed from a correspondence in the Guardian started by me following a lecture by Baroness Wootton of Abinger - with responses by Norman St John-Stevas, Richard Sparks and others, and one by Lady Wootton. Having letters to the press is fun - many of them I am keeping! But the dialogue itself (can't remember whether I actually submitted it to anyone for publication) seems to me now just to rehearse all those arguments about the sources of morality, about punishment-or-rehabilitation, justice, the function of the law, the concept of diminished responsibility and so on. All fascinating stuff and constantly raising its head, great philosophical problems, sometimes topics at the Forum of European Philosophy. But I've thrown it out. Once I'd got my head round it I had no difficulty moving my hand with it to the recycling bin!

Another thing I wrote, in the period after the Poly Management Studies Course and the S-W London College course in Counselling Skills had folded ('Emergence' and 'The British Experience' in the section 'History and Design of Courses' pretty much give accounts of their history) was a massive tome:

it was called 'Minds And Bodies', and I thought I would give you the privilege and pleasure of reading the first three paragraphs of the 'proposal' to this huge work, which a few friends managed to read!

MINDS AND BODIES - A study of their integration in our time: in  
you and me, our society and our global eco-system

by Tom Osborn.

What it's about

This book uses the image of the separation between mind and body, and the move towards their integration at the present time, to look at three areas: therapy and the growth movement; political activism; and the ecology movement. So it looks at the integration of mind and body as representing a basic process common to a social change-activity affecting all three of these areas. In the 'new therapies' and the growth movement, this move towards integration affects individuals and their interaction, with the emphasis on emotional expression and being in touch with the self-regulating needs of the body, as part of a total mind-body organism. In politics, society is seen as having an accumulating, controlling mind-class and a producing, exploited body-class, with political activism being motivated by an impulse again towards a total mind-body (or classless) organism. And in ecology, the global eco-system is seen as an organism with human beings the controlling mind and nature the exploited body, with the ecology movement attempting to restore a state of integration and balance.

The people engaged in each of these three areas of change-activity tend to ignore and often to dismiss activity in the other two areas. Therapists and group-leaders think society is made up of individuals and social change will only take place through individuals changing. Political activists think individuals are made by their social context and their place in a social structure. And ecologists think that getting our relationship with the environment right is primary, and by implication that individuals and political relationships are determined by ecological necessity. One impulse behind this book is to show that exclusive activity in one of these areas won't work: that the basic process common to all of them, understandable in terms of the mind-body image, must be followed in all three.

Another impulse behind this book is the desire for a more reciprocal form of relationship: relationship with individuals, in political organisation and with nature. That's to say, its position on therapy and ecology is that in them, as well as in politics, we need to move towards a conscious political reciprocity and equality of power. It is to give weight to this impulse that the term 'politocal philosophy' appears on the title page.

Quite heavy stuff. And long - runs to 130,000 words! But actually I find it still fascinating to read. A few of the other people who read it did too. Of its time perhaps? I think with this one if I had persisted it might have found a publisher. And this one I'm keeping, all that energy - at the bottom of my filing cabinet as I did this just before I had my first Amstrad. So I don't have a digital copy, nuisance.

I wrote a novel. I called it 'Nothing Less Will Do', it's about two boys, brothers, who leave home (and school) early and go to live in a communal house in a squatted street. It's set in London (it draws on my experiences in St Agnes Place - see item in Performance Group, Travels and Growth Movement). It's about them learning about life, really, in this setting, meetings, politics and sex. I read it a few days ago and found it quite compelling! I'm not throwing that one away.

I wrote a performance piece for the circus. It's called 'Tarzan And The Banker's Daughter'. I wrote this 20 years ago. Reading it now I think it could be fun. At the time I had a connection with Julia Bardsley in Leicester and Gaia Shaw did some designs - but there was a major problem - the license to use the character Tarzan in a theatre/circus presentation required an advance payment of \$100,000! We didn't pursue it after that. Pity because the concept somehow seems especially apt in our time! I've kept it for fun, if anyone wants to read it or can think of a future which changes that name but keeps the sense, then get in touch!

I cooked up some TV programme ideas. One I called 'Practising', a number of people with different skills demonstrating their practising routines. I actually collected several, a skateboarder, a violinist, a survivor of a cerebral accident relearning to talk - a few more, can't seem to find the notes, which is probably just as well as I don't have to make a decision about whether to throw them out! I did make a demo-tape, which included the above three, and some BBC set-up in Bristol was interested but eventually turned it down. Some friend in the business told me later it's best not to make a demo tape[e but just present the idea and try for a commission.

Another was for a series based in a genetics research laboratory where there was a connection between the research that the different people were doing and their own personality and character. I wrote one or two episodes, but this was not taken up.

Another was for a fun documentary on 'Tall Women and Short Men'. I have a personal view on this as I am short (not pathologically, just the lower end of normal) and one of my girl-friends was some 6 inches taller than me. It was never a problem for us - once while on holiday in Germany a guy working on some scaffolding on a building-site shouted down at us: 'Zwanzig Centimeters kürzer', which made us laugh. Of course several of the women I have been in relationship with have been an inch or two taller than me. Anyway, again this was not taken up.

I still think all those three were good ideas. Don't know why they didn't run, and not sure what in my mindful mood I make of them now. Except: yes, when I think of them now I do so with some enjoyment, they were fun. I haven't chucked the papers out yet, maybe I will, maybe I won't.

I have written two feature films. The first was a biopic of Frieda Lawrence, D H's wife. She was a fascinating woman, I spent many months, probably a good year, researching her and her aristocratic family and her relationship with her miner's-son-writer. It was fascinating and I actually wrote several versions (by now the computer and the floppy disc were commonplace, memory stick followed soon). A producer was interested and we got as far as making some casting contacts - but we didn't succeed in getting finance and eventually my energy ran out for this one. Speaking on the mindful dimension, I would say it was greatly interesting and energising to work on. And it taught me a lot about film-making ( - probably not enough!) I am sad now that it never made a production. I still think that would be interesting too.

The other feature is about a woman who learns a martial art to protect herself from an abusive husband - whom she's left but still loves. My belief in this one remains quite strong, I think it could work, I think it has something to say and I think the step-by-step learning of a martial art (she learns from an old friend who's an expert) would be very engaging. That hasn't got anywhere so far, but I plan to do a rewrite and have another go.

Speaking mindfully, I am practising 'process' rather than 'outcome'. And I can honestly say that actually, it feels good.

Well, I thought so. Found some other titles, notes, bits of script. Digital Guru, Switch, Breeze ... Oh dear, this process is getting boring. Come on bin, come on clear decks...