

Book Reviews

Daniel Heller-Roazen

The Inner Touch: Archaeology of a Sensation

Zone Books, 2007, 300 pp. \$33.00/£19.95 (hbk)

ISBN: 9781890951764

Reviewed by Clare McNiven

‘Living’, Aristotle explains, ‘is said in many ways’.¹ The word has a range of meanings. Life can be said to belong to living things through the principle of nutrition, but animals can be regarded as living through the principle of sensation. In Hoffman’s lyrical nineteenth-century novel, *Lebensansichten des Katers Murr* (the autobiography of cat Murr), the feline narrator is poised in empty night. He is driven by hunger and he feels life. There are few more efficient examples of grass roots stoicism than when Murr writes ‘cannot possibly resist ... I ate the herring!’.² It is with a natural stealth, appropriate to his species, that our articulate tomcat finds his way into the preface of Daniel Heller-Roazen’s latest book. In *The Inner Touch* Heller-Roazen grapples with the ‘I’ who ‘ate the herring’ and exposes it to a comprehensive measure of philosophical scrutiny. From Aristotle’s doctrine of the animal soul to Merleau-Ponty’s embodiment, he chooses to select and present only the very best, most influential, thinking on the nature of life as experienced through the senses. Never one to forget that his audience are themselves sentient, Heller-Roazen attends to each thesis, fusing literary talent with poetic philosophy, to form images that seem to infiltrate the senses as well as the intellect.

In *De Anima*, Aristotle broods over three weaknesses in the account of the role and nature of senses. If we have only the five senses, he wonders, how do we account for notions of rest, figure, magnitude, number and unity? Moreover, how do we account for those moments when we manage complex sensations — seemingly at once able to

identify, for example, that a thing is bright and also sweet? And finally, recognising that the individual sense cannot acknowledge its own absence, to what can we attribute the sense that we are sensing anything in the first place? The great philosopher conceives a unity in the soul by which it senses everything. Reigning as the dominant sense organ, 'for the most part simultaneous with touch', this rudimentary consciousness need not be clever but has to be perceptive; it need not be consistent but must be continuous. With a few master brush strokes, it is presented, not only as the solution to all three problems but the very key to animal life. The Stagirite (Aristotle) thus embedded the notion of a master sense with its many connotations into the philosophic psyche. Like a gentle archeologist, Heller-Roazen, traces this invented notion through the convoluted history of philosophy, recording its influences and its mutations. It is from the evolving concept of this master sense, this named and unnamed king, this common sense, this inner touch, that the book takes its title.

In the twilight of the sixteenth century, Tommaso Campanella labels all perception as a tactile act. To sense, he argues, is to be affected and to discern that we have undergone change. Coming in contact with a source of heat, for example, the perceiving body is warmed: 'transmuted in part, and not entirely'.³ There is perception and mutation everywhere, in plants as they turn towards the sun, in water as it flows, in a man bitten by a rabid dog or by a tiny flea, in the heart and in the pulse beat. 'It is necessary to state', he persists, 'that the world is an extremely sensitive animal'.⁴ Heller-Roazen reveals the beautiful layers of this living thing. On every page he writes of animals and authors, of mice and men: Al Farabi, Avicenna and Albertus; Leibniz and Locke; Cabanis and Chrysippus. The pinna guard crab making its home inside the pinna shell, acting as sentinel; the dog sniffing at the fork in the road, hoping to find its master; hedgehogs, whales and moles. The mongrel, struck on the head with a stick, illustrates the continuum of perpetual perception; Rousseau, stunned by encountering a great dane in the park, perceives everything filled with his light existence; perceives but cannot perceive himself.

As the book draws to a close, the Princeton professor turns his perceptive eye on the deepest stratum of the 'inner touch' as it encompasses the perception by which we perceive ourselves: the sense of the co-existence of us and our bodies. He investigates, with elegant psychological, and medical reference, the impact of loss and disturbance of this faculty: what it means for a young woman to sense that she does not exist or for a veteran to feel an itch in an amputated limb.

Daniel Heller-Roazen's humanity and engaging modesty illumines every chapter of his book but, fluent in several languages, his exceptional erudition is no less apparent. 'Those whose touch is delicate', writes Thomas Aquinas in his comment on Aristotle's classic treatise, 'are so much the nobler in nature and the more intelligent'.⁵ This finely crafted book, his third, bears the hallmarks of a subtle imagination, discreet wisdom and an extremely sensitive touch.

References

(Taken from *The Inner Touch*)

1. Aristotle, *De somno et vigilia* 2.455a12-21
2. Hoffman, *Lebensansichten des Katers Murr*, pp. 51 and 56
3. Campanella, *Epilogo mango*, p. 367
4. Campanella, *Metafisica* bk. 6 ch. 7
5. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima* sec 483

Ruth Richards (Ed.)

Everyday Creativity and New Views of Human Nature
American Psychological Association, Washington DC, 2007,
349+xiii pp. ISBN: 9780979212574

Richard Elfin Jones

Music and the Numinous
Rodopi, New York, 2007, 122 pp.
ISBN: 9789042022898; ISSN: 1573-2193

Reviewed by Jo Edwards

Everyday Creativity makes interesting reading, but for me largely because its approach seems so flawed that I have to ask why trends in thought go so badly wrong. The issues addressed are important and there is legitimacy to criticisms made in the book of conventional, biological, even 'masculine', thinking; in some ways I strongly sympathise. Nevertheless, the approach seems naïve: little more than wishful thinking. The project involves a certain amount of self-contradiction too, for I found little original and meaningful here, which is how the authors define creativity. Moreover, writing a recipe for more originality seems inherently problematic.

What I do find are questions. Why is insight into how we view ourselves and our world currently at a low ebb, compared to some post-enlightenment thinking? Why is there so much division and shifting fashion? Why so many reinventions of wheels? Some of the contributors claim that we enjoy a new enlightened period of 'integrated' thought. I sense more of a muddled magpie's nest here.

The volume comprises thirteen essays, opened and closed by Ruth Richards. Many of the authors clearly work with Richards and share her viewpoint. Some topics are quirky, for example ‘teletherapy’ (watching telly to feel better), or why three people started painting when they were ill. The central thesis is that ‘creativity’ is a feature of everyone’s daily life. It is defined as anything with originality/novelty and either meaning or fitness for purpose; or, later, as any decision, or indeed any cause of change by a ‘self’. With a definition this open, the thesis becomes such a platitude that one assumes it reflects some socio-political agenda. Reading through, that agenda becomes clear, especially in the essay by Riane Eisler. The call is to reject the cold ‘biological’ paradigm and to reclaim a place for things like love and creativity, noting that these are often considered feminine concerns. Switching to a theory of mankind based on creativity will solve the world’s problems.

Yes, love and creativity deserve to be back on the agenda. However, as a (?creative) male maverick, capable of enthrallment by both Maria Callas and Pablo Casals, I cannot see that this need have anything to do with gender (which is what Eisler implies), being human, or even mammalian. The most apparently devoted caring beings are asexual insects. All adaptive behaviour was once novel. The way to restore a place for love and creativity is to find how they can be made to fit in with the reliable, testable ideas we already have (i.e. science) not to lapse into unfettered intuition.

What is so disappointing is that *Everyday Creativity* is mostly full of polemic and buzz-words in the absence of anything more substantial. Page after page announces a new vision based on systems theory, chaos theory, quantum theory or fractals, with no illustration (beyond the self-evident) of how these theories might actually help. Arguably, the *Origin of Species*, too, is mostly polemic, with little firm data. But Darwin’s book did contain a hugely creative idea: natural selection will occur by default and provides a firm basis on which to account for somatic evolution. In contrast Richards’s volume confuses genetic and behavioural evolution and gives us nothing new.

But it is not unreasonable for people to want to write books like this. Some neurobiologists have indeed appeared to deny love and creativity, their message being that there is only ion flux and neurotransmitter diffusion. And that’s bunkum because love *does* exist. The problem may, I think, lie in the fact that people generally do not realise that science requires and uses *two* accounts of the world. One relates to actualities, which boil down to experiences. The other relates to what we tend to call processes: the unfolding of rules governing the

occurrence of actualities. What few, other than physicists, realise is that the process account is not a progression of actuality, but something quite different, a progression of potentiality, *which cannot ultimately be described in the same language as actuality*. We need two complementary ways of describing one world. Since 1925 this has been explicit in physics but is not new. In fact it is implicit in Zeno's paradox. We all know that processes are never red, but tend to forget that the same principle applies to all actualities: spaciousness, duration, movement — the lot. Most of the time we can fudge things. For really interesting questions, however, we come unstuck.

Words like love and creativity *conflate* these two descriptions. This conflation is rife in the social sciences, but also, if in different ways, in biomedical science. 'Loving' is an actuality, but is also used to imply certain processes. The actuality has no meaning in the language of processes and vice versa, even if everyday language seems to allow it. Creativity might seem to deal with processes, but it subtly requires a concept with meaning only as an actuality: that of agent or self (strangely allowed in chapter 9 to 'extend beyond the individual person'). These are close to the sense of free will or purpose. Such ideas have no meaning in terms of what we know of processes — they are useless for describing the progression of the potentialities that determine the world's events.

This might seem a bleak analysis, with love and agency having no place in the way the world moves forward. But that is not quite the message. Love and creativity as actualities must be associated in some way with the progression of certain potentialities: with the laws of physics. It is just that the association does not need to involve a direct functional correspondence that reflects our sense of the causal roles of these ideas. The sense of being creative goes with certain internal processes, but how and why it does so is not something we can grasp by intuition. It needs long, hard scientific study.

And conceivably, although love, purpose, and agency have no recognisable place in classical physics, they might just relate to aspects of modern physics, in which traditional concepts of space, time and causality break down. Aspects like telicity and 'desire' might even have a place. However, it remains doubtful that a sense of agency relates to the local existence in the brain of a valid example of that concept, any more than a sense of red is associated with redness in the brain.

The crux is that love and creativity are not extra sources of causality *supplementary* to biophysics; they are simply *complementary* descriptions of the same world that science's rules of potentiality describe

another way. You cannot replace survival of the fittest with a sense of creative agency. The words belong to different accounts. The processes associated with the actualities of these ideas are already part of Darwin's theory. We cannot 'choose' to escape destiny by 'being creative'.

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In contrast to *Everyday Creativity*, Richard Elfin Jones's *Music and the Numinous* tries to meet process and actuality head on, drawing on their most famous modern commentator: Alfred North Whitehead. Moreover, there is considerable charm to this personal essay on the transcendental nature of music. I think many people will find it entertaining.

What I am less sure about is whether Jones's analysis breaks through the main problem with Whitehead's approach: how to make it a usable tool rather than just an elegant viewpoint. Jones's working example of a Bach prelude seems to take the right track. He illustrates how musical actuality 'prehends' the raw physical aspect of the sounds, abstract relations that shape the music and a higher aesthetic, and for Jones, numinous, aspect beyond conception. But the relation between the processes of vibrations and the actuality of harmony is glossed over. In a sense Bach gives only a formula for a finger-based process. Yet the process gives us a musical actuality, and for those lucky enough to read scores the music comes straight from the page with no vibrations! To be truly productive a theory of music has somehow to tackle these mysteries. I fear that in some ways, like Richards's volume, Jones's is a romantic approach to an important problem that does not quite get to grips with practicalities.

I am reminded of Jonathan Miller (the ex-neurologist and successful stage director) rebuking his host at a medical dinner for implying that artistic activities like directing operas were just what doctors were rather good at in their spare time. Miller pointed out, as I remember, that directing operas, like being a neurologist, consists mostly of hard slog, detail, and knowing when you got it right and when you did not. The goal of linking the actualities of our experience to the processes that underpin our lives, which both these volumes try to address, is a worthy and fascinating one. However, I suspect it needs a more painstaking approach, with detailed support from both biophysics and metaphysics.

But I would not want to appear wholly negative. At least these contributions address issues that some others are too blinkered to touch. If

the different sorts of description of the world were to be clearly separated, progress of the sort adumbrated in these books could be made.

Stephen E. Braude

The Gold Leaf Lady and other parapsychological investigations

The University of Chicago Press, 2007, 202 pp.

ISBN: 9780226071527

Reviewed by Chris Nunn

You might well ask why your review editor should have written about this lady. I'm no expert on parapsychology and knew of Stephen Braude only as author of a book on multiple personality (*First Person Plural*) that I had admired for its good sense. I originally approached two parapsychologists about reviewing this new work. The first had already been nabbed by another journal; the second didn't reply to my emails. I got fed up with composing begging letters. Meanwhile the publishers had sent us another copy. Maybe this was a synchronistic hint that I should read it myself — anyway it looked intriguing.

Before offering no doubt naive views on the book, I should perhaps describe my own 'psi' preconceptions — given that opinion on the subject is so often polarised. The statistical evidence that weak 'psi' effects occur is now stronger than the rather similarly based evidence that antidepressant drugs, for instance, can cure depression. Since I often prescribed antidepressants, believing in their efficacy, it would be dishonest to deny the probable reality of 'psi'. Of course it is often claimed that there is a vital difference of principle in that people can explain, they say, how antidepressants work, whereas no-one has a clue how 'psi' could occur. But it's worth remembering that, after 40 years of research, stories about precisely how antidepressants cure still involve a lot of hand-waving. Despite my basically pro-psi stance, however, the aura of tackiness and self-deception that surrounds the whole field had put me off taking any great interest in it.

Stephen Braude, on the other hand, has never been so pusillanimous. He has been an active 'psi' researcher for many years, often, so he tells us, enduring opprobrium from academic colleagues (he's a philosophy professor) in consequence. This book is not about statistics; he goes for the big effects, arguing that they actually provide better evidence for the reality of 'psi' than endless card guessing protocols, or whatever. And he's surely right about this. The old aphorism is true that, if a drug is *really* effective, elaborate statistics are not needed for proof. Similarly, one incontrovertible example of large

scale psychokinesis, for instance, should be enough to establish the reality of 'psi'. So he gives us a selection of case histories, which are of two sorts: some describe putative examples of 'psi', mainly psychokinesis; others detail shenanigans that some psi enthusiasts and debunkers have got up to. The debunkers come across as the more dishonest and hypocritical from these accounts, for their misrepresentations are generally cloaked in a mask of virtue.

The eponymous Gold Leaf Lady ('Katie') is a hick from the sticks, now in her fifties; almost illiterate because she had to drop out of school to look after her Mother who had developed a 'psychogenic paralysis'. It's a sadly common type of story. But then, after marrying her second husband and moving to Florida, Katie displayed rare talents. The most unusual was to apparently exude flecks of brass foil (they have been collected and analysed) from her skin; she also showed a range of clairvoyant talents, plus an alleged ability to write quatrains in archaic French in the style of Nostradamus. Braude thinks the 'gold' leaf provides the best evidence of 'psi' since deception seems to have been fairly convincingly ruled out, while magicians, when consulted, said they doubted they could replicate the phenomenon. He suggests it should be regarded as an example of psychokinetic 'apportation', rather than some ectoplasm-like phenomenon.

Another description is of Ted Serios, the ex-elevator operator who could cause images to appear on polaroid film and who was investigated rigorously by a number of people including Braude. This case appears fraud-proof and is also remarkable for the widely trumpeted claim that psi debunker and CSICOP stalwart The Amazing Randi had 'easily' duplicated Serios' images — a claim that was repeated by Martin Gardner among others. In fact, says Braude, Randi always ducked out of trying to produce images in the tightly controlled settings used in the Serios investigations. The one time he did try, under looser conditions during a television show, he failed.

And that's basically it, evidence wise. Not all that much to show, one may think, for nearly a lifetime in the field. 'Big psi' seems almost, but not quite, as elusive as Bigfoot. Apart from the final chapter, the remaining case histories describe historical examples (Braude thinks that D.D. Home and Eusapia Palladino produced 'genuine' phenomena, though Palladino was also at times fraudulent), or examples of relatively recent fraud and/or self deception, along with their associated tantrums and hissy fits. There are also some thoughts on confusions surrounding the concept of synchronicity and the difficulties of 'psi' research.

The final chapter is mainly about the current Mrs Braude, an astrologer. She has developed her own methods, dependent on exactly calculating to within a minute or so relevant ‘times of birth’, which enable her to make remarkably accurate forecasts, especially sporting ones. At least the Braudes have put their money where their mouth is and placed bets (allegedly with good resultant profit) on the basis of her forecasts. But the astrological claim did rather exceed my personal boggle threshold. After all, apart from anything else, births are usually quite prolonged and messy affairs so what could a ‘precise’ time of birth possibly mean? Braude himself wonders whether his wife may not be using astrological paraphernalia to focus an unconscious talent for clairvoyance.

I enjoyed the book for its fascinating anecdotes and discussion of issues that they raise, though I’m not sure that it has strengthened my belief in the reality of ‘psi’. One would probably need to personally encounter and test a Gold Leaf Lady for that to occur. It can certainly be recommended, however, to anyone thinking about entering the ‘psi’ arena, for it gives a clear impression of the heat to be found in that particular kitchen. One has to admire Braude for having endured it so long with no apparent impairment of his enthusiasm or integrity.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Mention here neither implies nor precludes subsequent review

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