

## REVIEW ESSAY

### Three Works on Ivan Illich

Reviewed by **Richard House**

**David Cayley with Ivan Illich, *Ivan Illich in Conversation*, House of Anansi Press, Toronto, Canada, 1992, 304pp, ISBN-13: 978-0887845246, price (paperback) \$21.95**

**David Cayley, *Ivan Illich: An Intellectual Journey*, Penn State University Press, University Park, Pennsylvania, 2021, 560 pp, ISBN-13: 978-0271088129, index, price (hardback) \$44.95**

**Lee Hoinacki & Carl Mitcham (eds), *The Challenges of Ivan Illich: A Collective Reflection*, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 2002, 268 pp, ISBN-13: 978-0791454220, index, price (paperback) \$32.95**

We can only live changes: we cannot think our way to humanity. Every one of us, every group, must become the model of that which we desire to create.

The most important service to the world and to others consist[s] in turning one's own heart.

I'm interested in the history of the shaping of Western thought.

My work is an attempt to accept with great sadness the fact of Western culture.... The institutionalization [of tradition] is the root of an evil deeper than any evil I could have known.

Ivan Illich

*Anecdote: A friend of Ivan Illich's mother once said to her: 'Why did you not have seven sons instead of one Ivan? It would be so much simpler for the world.'*

## The Man in Summary

The subject of this extended review essay is the great, highly influential Catholic priest, historian, teacher, social critic – and self-styled ‘pamphleteer’ – Ivan Illich. Few would dispute that Illich was one of the outstanding thinkers of his or of any other time in human history. If one knows one’s way around Google Scholar and Sci-Hub, searching on ‘Ivan Illich’ takes one down an enormous rabbit-hole, from which fans and admirers of the great man might be in danger of never re-emerging. However, much as I would have liked to spend a year or two exploring the aforementioned inviting labyrinth, of necessity I’ve had to pop out to write this review article for a final *Self & Society* symposium, which I feel truly honoured to have assembled.

As I wrote in the journal in May 2021 when first announcing, and calling for, contributions to this symposium:

[2021] is 95 years since the birth of arguably the greatest ‘radical humanist’ of the twentieth century, Ivan Illich; and [2022 will see] the 20-year anniversary of his death. *Self & Society* [intends to] publish a special theme issue on Illich’s manifold critical contributions to modern culture – including many themes that are of central relevance to Humanistic Psychology: medicine, education, community, development, technocratic modernity, the spiritual dimension, and so on. There could scarcely be a more appropriate way to celebrate our journal’s [50 years of existence] than to revisit Illich’s much-neglected yet massively prescient insights into the modern human predicament. Hosting a special theme issue on Illich will also go some way to making up for our arguably negligent past in not giving more prominence to Illich’s vital humanistic contributions; for previously, *Self & Society* has inexplicably given comparatively little attention to Illich’s work, which fact is itself extraordinary, given the depth, power and sheer range of his many seminal contributions and

provocations, and their direct relevance to the core concerns of Humanistic Psychology.

Ivan Illich was born in Vienna in September 1926 and died in December 2002. He grew up in Europe, and academically he studied theology, philosophy, history and the natural sciences. Between 1942 and 1946, he studied at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, and was awarded a doctorate from the University of Salzburg with a dissertation on historian Arnold Toynbee. Arriving in New York in 1951 as a newly ordained Catholic priest, in the 1950s he worked as a parish priest amongst Puerto Ricans in the Hell’s Kitchen section of New York City, and then in 1956 moved to Puerto Rico as the vice rector of the Catholic University of Puerto Rico.

During the 1960s Illich founded two centres for cross-cultural communication, first in Puerto Rico and then in Cuernavaca, Mexico. Between 1961 to 1976, he led the training center in Cuernavaca, whose intention was to train missionaries for service in Latin America, conducting language and cultural courses from an anti-imperialist viewpoint, some for missionaries. However, Illich and the centre fell into conflict with American bishops and with the Vatican, with Illich characterising the Roman Catholic Church as ‘the world’s largest non-governmental bureaucracy’ and advocating its clericalisation (Cayley, *Intellectual Journey*, p. 16). And so in 1969 he left the priesthood following a rebuke by the Vatican. As a result, he transformed the centre into a radical think-tank called the ‘Centro Intercultural de Documentación’ (CIDOC), from which he produced a series of devastating, wide-ranging critiques of Western modernity (which Illich termed ‘the age of instrumentality’), arguing that the benefits of many modern technologies and social arrangements were illusory, and that such developments had the effect of

undermining self-sufficiency, dignity and freedom. (Note, however, that at the end of his *Intellectual Journey*, David Cayley interestingly notes that ‘Illich was, in many ways, quite superbly modern’ – p. 463.) The content of these multi-faceted critiques will form a major focus of both this review essay, and of this *Self & Society* Illich symposium more generally.

Illich’s radical counter-cultural (sometimes characterised as ‘anarchist’) views became widely known and celebrated via a quartet of books published during the early–mid 1970s – namely, *Deschooling Society* (1971 – his best-known and most influential book), *Tools for Conviviality* (1973 – the most general statement of his world-view), *Energy and Equity* (1974) and *Medical Nemesis* (1976). According to Cayley’s *Intellectual Journey*, Illich embarked upon an ‘almost inhumanly hectic schedule of lectures, interviews, and conferences’ promoting his ideas (p. 17). Especially relevant to Humanistic Psychology are his views on schooling and medicine – accusing them of institutionalising and manipulating basic aspects of life. In *Deschooling Society*, in place of mass schooling Illich proposed adopting a model of learning where skills and knowledge were transmitted via networks of informal and voluntary relationships – an approach that radical counter-cultural thinkers are still eagerly advocating today, over half a century later.

With regards to health and medicine, Illich claimed that modern medicine hadn’t reduced overall human suffering, and indeed that ever-more ailments were caused by medical interventions *themselves* – or ‘iatrogenic illness’. Illich also maintained that modern medicine actively *creates* new illness categories, and through its ideology encourages the illusory hope that all suffering can be avoided – thus undermining our resources for coping with the vicissitudes or

living, and turning people into relatively passive consumers of medical services. Thus, in Cayley’s *Intellectual Journey*, we read that ‘*Up to a point*, modern medical techniques will enhance health. Beyond this point, medicine will become injurious and begin to eat away at the cultural matrix in which birth and death, illness and suffering, were once embedded.’ (p. 451, my italics)

Two subsequent collections of occasional pieces, *Toward a History of Needs* (1978) and *Shadow Work* (1981), emphasised the distorting influence on society and culture of the economics of scarcity, and the assumption that economies function to remedy scarcities rather than to share goods. His *Toward a History of Needs* also initiated a project in the history or archaeology of ideas that was subsequently first fully developed in *Gender* (1982), an attempt to recover social experiences of female–male complementarity that have been obscured by modern economics. This book came under sustained attack from the feminist movement, attacks which Cayley says ‘disgraced’ Illich at the time, with his book falling ‘into oblivion’ (*Intellectual Journey*, p. 18).

*H<sub>2</sub>O and the Waters of Forgetfulness* (1985) extended this project into a history of ‘stuff’; and *ABC: The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind* (1988, with Barry Sanders) advanced Illich’s project into the literacy field, as did his book *In the Vineyard of the Text* (1993). *In the Mirror of the Past* (1992) one finds a collection of occasional essays and talks from the 1980s, linking his concerns with economics, education, history and the then newly emerging ideological meaning of ‘life’.

Illich was a polymath speaking at least eight languages fluently and was well versed in classical languages, writing regularly in four (English, Spanish, German and French). His books have been translated into approaching 20 languages; and his oeuvre has had a considerable influence on much contemporary

independent scholarship, like that of Barbara Duden, Wolfgang Sachs, David Schwartz, Uwe Pörksen, Lee Hoinacki, and Madhu Suri Prakash and Gustavo Esteva. The latter's considerable works are fully referenced in Chapter 2 of *The Challenges of Ivan Illich* collection (p. 29, note 4). Illich was also a professor of Science, Technology, and Society at Penn State University, and taught at universities the world over.

A search of the *Self & Society* archive on 'Ivan Illich' yields just 13 hits – and in the 13 titles retrieved by this search, four of them have my name on them as author (with my first mention appearing nearly 30 years ago in a letter to the editor from Vol. 24 (3), 1996, p. 55). Incredibly, none of the 13 'hits' includes Illich's name, except for a short book review from 1975 by S&S's founding editor Vivian Milroy of Illich's *Medicinal Nemesis* (Milroy's 1975 review is reproduced in this symposium). It would be interesting to write a piece trying to understand this extraordinary neglect of Illich's wide-ranging humanistic *oeuvre* and ideas in S&S, but that fascinating question is, alas, beyond the scope of this review essay.

### The Three Books in Review

Taken together, the three books under review here provide a wide-ranging breadth of content and style which brilliantly showcase the extraordinary life and radical counter-cultural ideas of Ivan Illich. First, in the 1992 book *Ivan Illich in Conversation*, we find world-renowned Illich expert David Cayley – himself a very considerable thinker and scholar, and who fittingly features strongly in this theme symposium – engaging with Illich in highly personal, in-depth conversations which are accessible and invitingly flowing; conversations which, notably, Illich had always been very reluctant to engage in, until David Cayley persuaded Illich to be interviewed by him in 1988. As I understand it, the story goes that Illich and Cayley met

for the first time at the Intercultural Center of Documentation (CIDOC) in Cuernavaca, Mexico, in 1969. Cayley had been volunteering as a teacher at a school in the island of Borneo, within the development aid programme of the Canadian University Service Overseas. Cayley's attention had been captured by the writings Illich was publishing at that time critiquing modern educational institutions, that became part of his seminal book, *Deschooling Society*.

In 1988 Cayley was visiting State College, Pennsylvania, where Illich was conducting seminars. During the breaks of these meetings they conducted the interviews, meeting two hours a day for eight days in a row. A year later, in 1989, with all the material recorded, Cayley edited it, and launched a five-part series for *Ideas* – radio programmes for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) titled 'Part Moon, Part Travelling Salesman: Conversations with Ivan Illich'.<sup>1</sup>

With regard to the interview format of this first book under review here, as regular readers of S&S will know, under my editorship of the journal there has been a privileging of the interview-cum-conversation format, as for me it offers a superb form for conveying ideas and creative thinking in an emergently organic, 'alive' way that is squarely congruent with all that's best about Humanistic Psychology (HP) as a practice. Certainly, in *In Conversation*, Cayley's stated hope is that 'A patchwork interview... may help to place [Illich's] work in the context of [his] inner biography' (p. 5).

Staying with this theme for a moment: a key precept that HP, phenomenology and Steiner-inspired Goethean science all share is that of *starting from (the data of) experience*, rather than from disembodied theory. And in this light, reading (and now writing about) the extended-conversation book under review here has been a delight. It is also therefore an

excellent way into the world-view of this most radical of humanist thinkers, based on interviews between Illich and Cayley between 1988 and 1992.

These fascinating conversations, conducted when Illich was in his early 60s, range over a wide selection of Illich's published work and his public career as a priest, a university vice-rector, founder of the Centre for Intercultural Documentation in Cuernavaca, and author of a series of searing counter-cultural books that captured the imaginations of so many counter-cultural radicals, especially in the 1970s. It would be so easy to lazily dismiss Illich as a kind of cussed contrarian; yet his overriding drive was to preserve at least some aspects of our very humanity – an absolutely central humanistic project that makes it all the more perplexing that his many and diverse works have had such little exposure in S&S over the years.

An astonishingly free thinker and a kind of anti-institutional libertarian of sorts (yes – exceedingly difficult to categorise!), Ivan Illich was a relentless critic of what he saw as the dehumanising impacts of many modern, pragmatic approaches to problem solving – and at his peak, a trenchant scourge of 'modernity', and of technologism and the myth of 'progress'. If we take Illich seriously, we are perforce driven to fundamental questioning of both ourselves and of our culture more generally, particularly its technocratic nature. In this sense, one could even make a case for Illich's radical ideas being, if anything, *even more* prescient today than they were when articulated many decades ago. For Illich, in modernity, mass secularisation has compromised the felt body, substituting 'soul-capturing abstractions' (Cayley's *Intellectual Journey*, p. 20) that sacrifice the present moment to futural abstractions like 'progress', 'development', 'globalization', etc. For Illich,

indeed, such categories were 'man-eating idols'.

The ten interviews in *In Conversation* helpfully proceed chronologically through Illich's work from the 1960s through to the 1980s, and most interviews begin with Cayley's intention to discuss one of Illich's books (p. xv). The interview format provides a very effective framework for conveying Illich's biography and surveying his various written works, and enables reflective thinking about both.

In the Preface, we read that as a speaker, Illich was 'mercurial, spontaneous and often surprising' (the surprise of the beginner's mind; pp. xiii, xiv); and that both Illich's ambivalence about the interview form and his meandering digressions are preserved in the published exchanges. Illich is never 'a captive of his own positions' – generating conversations with a 'darting, digressive, and unfinished quality' (p. xiv). I was especially struck by Cayley's description of Illich's position on the environment as demonstrated at his last great 'international teach-in' at the University of Toronto in 1970 – over half a century ago. He writes in terms that are, if anything, even more prescient now, over 50 years on:

[Illich] argued that unless the degradation of nature was met by a fundamental change in the orientation of modern societies, environmentalism would only end up spawning a new set of tutelary institutions staffed by a new set of experts in the surveillance and management of daily life. (p. viii)

The book's ten interviews are preceded by a considerable 57-page introduction to Illich's intellectual career, which includes the intention to pre-digest the material that is to follow in the ten interviews. Cayley's choice of material consistently helped me to understand why I personally have always found Illich and his thought so enthralling and

exciting. Thus, we read that ‘Illich is an anomaly among modern scholars because he insists that the habits of the heart are as crucial to scholarship as the habits of the head’ (p. 4) – what a great way to characterise the project of Humanistic Psychology! For Illich, in the current day (his words), ‘The habits of the heart [which he referred to as *ascesis*]... are peripherals to the pursuit of higher learning’ (ibid.). *Ascesis* is sometimes defined as ‘Rigorous self-denial and active self-restraint’, and Illich (his words) ‘wants to reclaim for ascetical theory, method, and discipline a status equal to that [which] the University now assigns to critical and technical disciplines’ (ibid.).

Cayley is emphatic that Illich is not a ‘sociologist’ – and certainly not an ‘academic’ one; rather, *ascesis* ‘is the principle mode of Illich’s writing. [It] prepares the ground for insight’; and ‘without it, insight becomes predatory, self-aggrandizing, one-sided, and, ultimately, heartless’ (ibid.). On reading this, I realised just how important it is not to assess Illich’s contributions on the basis of narrow intellectual/rational principles and criteria alone. This again is surely a humanistic approach par excellence to knowledge and knowing, and needs to be carefully spelt out in an era that is typically unreflectively dominated by narrow ‘left-brain’ rationalism and technological thinking (Martin Heidegger and Rudolf Steiner’s critiques also come to mind here). Much later, on page 241, we find Illich saying, ‘Once thinking becomes a monocular perception of reality, it’s dead’.

This insight also throws light on just how easy it is for Illich to be misunderstood or misrepresented on the basis of assessment criteria that miss the subtlety of his work. It also got me thinking about *ways of reading* (a book) – for of course books can be read in many different ways, from a marker-pen-in-hand analytical mind-frame to a kind of

meditative sensibility in which one sets aside all pre-decided theoretical judgement criteria, allows a text to ‘wash over’ one, fully immersed, and then just seeing ‘what comes up’. It might well be that *In Conversation* could be a book to imbibe more in this latter way, rather than analytically trying to fit the text into what we think we already know about Illich and his manifold contributions.

For Cayley, there certainly exists a ‘wholeness and consistency’ spanning right across Illich’s work (p. 5), and core humanistic themes and preoccupations recur throughout. For example, Illich sees *hope* as ‘a trusting faith in the goodness of nature’ (p. 9; in *Intellectual Journey*, Cayley refers to how Illich’s 1970s writings were ‘delicately poised between hope and foreboding’ – p. 466); on pp. 49–50 we read about how, for Illich, we really need to deconstruct the (humanistically often take-for-granted) notion of *responsibility*; and how he similarly problematises the usage of the term ‘life’ (as opposed to ‘lives’ – see p. 255) and what modern mainstream medicine has done with it (more on that later). And on pp. 273–4 we read of ‘a society in which the mystery and the beauty of living with one’s own mortality has disappeared’.

There is quite a bit of focus on the background to Illich’s interest in schooling and education, and his famous book *Deschooling Society* – covered in detail in the first interview in Chapter 1, ‘The myth of education’. For example, we read that for Illich, ‘true learning... can only be the leisured pursuit of free people’ (p. 8), that schools’ monopoly of the definition of education inhibits alternatives (ibid.), and that Illich is strongly against schooling’s ‘institutionalization of values’ (p. 10).

Illich’s critique of and campaign against (‘economic’) development is referred to by Cayley as ‘clairvoyant’, as at the time it

greatly offended conventional wisdom, with Illich's provocative allusion to 'modernized poverty' (p. 11; see also my interview with David Cayley in this symposium). In relation to the Catholic Church and his work with the Center for Intercultural Documentation, Illich also offended both the Catholic left and the Catholic right (p. 12) – but certainly not from a 'soggy centrist' political place! For some at least, this might be seen as a badge of no little honour. According to Cayley, reading Illich's *Tools for Conviviality* (1973) 'showed me the hopelessness of trying to plot a responsive contemporary politics on a single left–right axis' (p. 15). On this left–right issue, as on many others, and like all great thinkers, Illich was surely many many years ahead of his time. We can note in passing that Cayley sees Illich's *Shadow Work* on modern economics (1981) as a key work for 'any political reconstruction' (ibid.).

Illich's 1973 *Tools for Conviviality* is seen by Cayley as a pivotal book (p. 14), with its distinctive philosophy of technology, and with Cayley placing Illich in the same technology ball-park as the likes of E.F. Schumacher and Marshall McLuhan (p. 16). According to Cayley, Illich 'suggested that charting policy options on a left–right political spectrum would yield only a choice of tyrannies...' (ibid.); and Illich invokes Thomas Aquinas in advocating austerity and self-limitation 'as the only alternative to intensified surveillance and management by technocratic elites' (p. 17) – which some might see as eerily prophetic in relation to today's 'globalist' world. As Cayley has it in his *Intellectual Journey*, 'the future Illich prophesied is more and more present and... this urges a careful rereading of his anatomy of Western civilisation' (p. 21).

Illich's *Limits to Medicine* (1976) is seen as possibly his most influential book, with Illich seeing the major threat at the time being 'the pathogenic pursuit' of health itself (p. 20) –

echoes here of Rudolf Steiner's lecture titled 'The feverish pursuit of health' given in Munich on 5 December 1907.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, in the 11,000-word anonymous essay 'In search of Ivan Illich' on the 'Inner Explorations' website<sup>3</sup> ('where Christian mysticism, theology and metaphysics meet Eastern religions, Jungian psychology and a new sense of the earth'), we read that at the University of Florence, where Illich studied histology and worked on discerning blood groups by crystallography, 'He was interested in the work of Rudolf Steiner and Ludwig Klages, as well as primitive art' (my italics). This isn't at all surprising, as Illich's parents were actually friends with Steiner<sup>4</sup> and Steiner was a visitor to the family household<sup>5</sup> and, indeed, a close family friend.<sup>6</sup> And in his *Intellectual Journey* book, Cayley also refers to Illich's uncle (his mother's sister) being 'a follower of Rudolf Steiner' (p. 444; though in a personal communication, Cayley told me that 'I'm not sure there's any source or foundation for the idea that Steiner was a family friend'). It would certainly be interesting to discover the extent to which Illich's world-view was influenced by Rudolf Steiner's cosmology.

In Cayley's excellent introduction, we learn discursively and in a highly readable way about Illich's relationships with a host of other great thinkers, like Polanyi, Ariès, Bachelard, Foucault, Fromm (Illich and Fromm were neighbours and close friends – p. 293), Goodman (see below), Friere, Maritain, Kohr, Reimer, Holt, Ignatiev.... So we're learning here about the lineage of Illich's thinking, and the way it was informed by engagement with some of the greatest thinkers of the age – with an always-interesting narrative that weaves in the academic influences and life experiences that informed the core theses of his main publications, with shared anecdotes and discussions of the meetings and debates he

engaged in with some of the most formidable intellectuals of the times.

I loved Lee Hoinacki's first experience of Illich when he first met him, characterised by Cayley as Illich expressing 'a brisk and worldly competence within an aura of eloquent silence' (pp. 6–7). I was also very taken with Illich's openness to reconsidering his views on issues, given both changed circumstances and his own humility in admitting that perhaps he hadn't got it right previously. He is clearly acutely aware of changes in society that might make his previous ideas less relevant than when they were originally conceived and written. Thus, for example, we read that:

I believe that during the mid-1980s there has been a change in the mental space in which many people live. Some kind of catastrophic breakdown of one way of seeing things has led to the emergence of a different way of seeing things. The subject of my writing has been the perception of sense in the way we live; and in this respect, we are, in my opinion, ...passing over a watershed. I had not expected, in my lifetime, to observe this passage. (pp. 169–70)

An example of a change of thinking is his admission that in relation to his celebrated *Medical Nemesis* work from the mid-1970s:

I am distressed that I was blind to a much more profound symbolic iatrogenic effect – the iatrogenesis of the body itself. I overlooked the degree to which the experience of our bodies and our selves had become the result of medical concepts and cares.... (pp. 20–1, his italics)

I think such radical, almost self-deprecating open-mindedness might be a rare thing in such eminent, high-profile public figures – and it's surely a model for all of us. Yet self-deprecation can sometimes be taken too far, and even become self-undermining – and Cayley isn't going to let Illich get away with that! Thus, on p. 158, while understanding

that Illich might not want to 'be a captive' of his former statements, Cayley says to Illich, 'I feel you go too far in denying [your former ideas'] relevance today'.

Cayley's always engaging introduction covers a wide range of themes, like Illich's controversial work on gender and the attacks launched on it by feminist scholars (pp. 35–6, and discussed at length in Chapter/interview 6); his view on the importance of the recovery of the commons (p. 35) – yet another theme on which Illich was years ahead of the game; the computer with its 'cybernetic image of the self' replacing the book as 'the root metaphor of the age' (p. 37); his engagement with the philosophy of technology, and specifically through the work of Hugh of St Victor from the 12<sup>th</sup> century (p. 41; for Cayley, Illich's 'whole career can be seen as an effort to revive Hugh's project and re-embed technology in a philosophical and theological matrix' – pp. 48–9; for Hugh highlighted the difference between an age of tools, and our current age of systems); his work on disembodiment (echoes of Merleau-Ponty and Foucault here) and on water (pp. 46–7); his highly prescient call for 'a philosophy of the soil' (p. 48) – and so on.

While Illich himself says he speaks and writes as a historian, Cayley prefers to call him 'an iconoclast, in the literal sense' (p. 54). And further – and I love this about Illich – he is 'impossible to classify in conventional categories. He is a man of neither the left nor the right..., no more an anti-modernist than he is a post-modernist' (ibid.; see also my interview with David Cayley in this symposium). And for Cayley, Illich also demonstrates just what a revolutionary faith Christianity is (when shorn of its human-made institutional shenanigans). Cayley continues in the closing part of his introduction:



A vivid curiosity and an intuitive feel for what is really going on are certainly part of Illich's genius.... There is a penetrating power of thought that modern English can only call insight.... [He] never lost his capacity for surprise or the courage to put instinct above ideology.... He is genuinely horrified [at the contemporary world], and his sadness is sometimes deep.... But he also knows there is a light in the world that the darkness cannot comprehend... [and] that light shines in these pages. (pp. 55–7 *passim*)

One of the features of the interview-cum-conversation format that I find so helpful is the way in which we are given access to the *way of thinking* of great figures like Illich, and to their emotional/spiritual process; to the struggles, self-doubts and the sometimes rocky journey they've had in the process of reaching the *apparently* settled, firm viewpoints that they express in their published works. It surely takes courage to so expose oneself, and I applaud Illich, and of course David Cayley, for these priceless conversations.

Just a few highlights for me from the ten interviews. The first interview is titled 'The myth of education' (cf. Anna Dusseau's review essay in this symposium). I loved what Illich says about schooling around page 67. He emphasises that he was emphatically *not* advocating the abolition of schools, merely their disestablishment (p. 64), and that he was not against schools per se, but against *compulsory* schooling (p. 68).

Illich says that

Schooling... creates certain myths which are a requirement for a consumer society.... [I]t makes you believe that learning can be sliced up into pieces and quantified.... [T]his builds a society which believes in... the packaging of knowledge... – which believes in knowledge not as a good, but as a value – and which conceives of it therefore in commercial terms. (p. 67)

He cites Ivar Berg's *The Great Training Robbery*<sup>7</sup> (recommended to him by Paul Goodman) which shows that 'there is absolutely no connection between the subjects people have learned in school and the effectiveness of those people in jobs requiring preparation for those subjects' (p. 69). For Illich, schooling is about social control, grading and the creation of a class society just as much as it is about 'human capital' investment (*ibid.*).

In Chapter 7, 'The mask of love', we find Illich speaking of how he loved Paul Goodman very much (p. 200), considering him to be 'one of the greatest thinkers I've known' (p. 201; and he says something similar about George Orwell on p. 278). It was through a conversation with Goodman that Illich became so interested in 'literacy on the mode of being of our Western culture' (p. 202), and so to the work with Barry Sanders and their book *ABC: The Alphabetization of the Modern Mind*.<sup>8</sup>

There are also some very interesting perspectives on science. Whilst addressing the critical feminist response to his work on gender, Illich critiques science from the standpoint of what he sees as its human-centricity: '...science is profoundly sexist... primarily because it is an attempt to view reality from the point of view of the human being' (p. 178); for 'The category of the human being... is a recently engineered social construct' (p. 179). And he later (p. 259) cites a comparatively little-known 1935 book by Ludwik Fleck, a Polish physician and biologist, who in *The Genesis of a Scientific Fact*<sup>9</sup> paved the way for philosopher Thomas Kuhn and his famous work on paradigms<sup>10</sup> with Fleck's argument that scientific 'facts' are *contingent creations* (see also Cayley's *Intellectual Journey*, pp. 164 and 337). For Illich, Fleck 'showed that you can analyze what happens in a laboratory not only as a

discovery of the truth but also as *the creation of facts by definitions*. In other words, observations are imposed by paradigms rather than being self-evident appearances’ (*In Conversation*, p. 259, my italics).

The ‘disabling’ nature of the ‘professions’ is well covered in interview 7, ‘The mask of love’, with the notion of ‘care’ being subjected to a characteristically searching critique by Illich. In relation to politics, we read that ‘Today, politics almost inevitably focusses attention on intermediate goals but does not let you see what the things are to which we have to say NO! – as, for instance, to care’ (p. 218). The place of the computer in the modern age is also raised in interview 8, ‘Walking the watershed’. We read of ‘the cybernetic nightmare state of the twentieth-first century’, of the danger of the world of cybernetic modelling and of computers being ‘the root metaphors for felt perception’ (p. 241), and that the then young generation were losing their voice ‘by imagining themselves according to the model of the computer’ (p. 247).

In sum, this is an engaging book at many levels. Reviewers differ on whether it constitutes a good introduction to Illich’s work (it’s 50+-page Introduction certainly *is* a good place to start on any journey into Illich’s oeuvre). Certainly, it is very useful in terms of giving Illich the opportunity to contextualise what the intentions, aspirations and intuitions were that accompanied his major and most influential works when he penned them. If you like the ebb and flow of the interview format, and prefer to start from experience rather than theory, then *In Conversation* may well be *the way* into Illich for the uninitiated. But if you are more drawn to theory and a systematic style, then David Cayley’s other book under review here – to which I now turn – may be the one for you to start engaging with Illich.

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The second book under review in this essay, then, is David Cayley’s monumental and massively impressive book *Ivan Illich: An Intellectual Journey*, published just a few years ago. With regard to *Intellectual Journey*, I couldn’t put it better than Dr Simon Ravenscroft of the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Cambridge, who for me has perfectly expressed just how good Cayley’s book is:

No other book yet published summarises and synthesises Illich’s life and thought at this length and in this detail. It is a much-needed intervention with sustained political, social, philosophical, and theological resonance. Cayley’s book should now form the starting point for all future critical conversation around Illich’s varied, generative, challenging, and often surprising ideas.

Certainly, any remotely serious scholar of Illich’s ideas simply *has* to read this book. As Cayley writes about his book:

In its pages I try to see Illich whole – understanding his various beginnings in the light of what he said to me at the end – and I try to say what I think the example of his life and thought means for our time.

Note, however, that the book is not a biography as commonly understood; ‘His biography, [Illich] once told me, could never be written because it was “hidden”. Some of this hiding was deliberate...’ (p. 9). So while *Intellectual Journey* is by no means a conventional biography, Cayley does have much to say throughout on the various circumstances in which Illich lived (p. 14). Cayley is explicit about his relationship with Illich – ‘Ivan Illich was my friend, and this is certainly the context in which this book should be read’, he writes (p. 14); a ‘beloved

friend’, indeed, who ‘was at the same time my teacher’ (p. 15).

After a substantial introduction titled ‘Introduction: Ivan Illich as I Knew Him’ (25pp), a Prologue looks at Illich’s early life; and then the 14 subsequent chapters consider: his exile; his time as Cuernavaca in Mexico; his life in and around the church; the deschooling-society theme; ‘Illich as Revolutionary’; the ‘disabling professions’ theme (explored in the interview with Cayley in this symposium); ‘certainties’ (looking at the ten years from 1966 to 1976 when Illich was ‘taken up by campaigns’ (Illich) and questioning a host of conventional ‘certainties’ – for Illich ‘thought outside and against many taken-for-granted modern certainties’ – p. 13); the theme of gender; embodiment and disembodiment; reading, writing and language; life; ‘Corruptio Optimi Pessima’ (meaning ‘The corruption of the best is the worst’ – a key theme for Illich – viz. how good intentions can commonly turn out badly); Apocalypse (looking at Illich as a reluctantly apocalyptic thinker, ‘the books he published between 1970 and 1976 all warn[ing] of a world on the edge of an abyss and about to descend into terminal “counter-productivity”’ – p. 2; for he foresaw ‘a gruesome apocalypse’, p. 17); Illich’s way of life; an epilogue titled ‘The Art of Suffering’; and finally Cayley’s substantial concluding chapter (nearly 20 pages). There are nearly 70 pages of detailed notes and references, and a detailed index.

I can only give a comparatively brief, broad-brush sketch of Cayley’s book here, given that this essay is already probably too long. It’s certainly very difficult to write about this book without continually raiding one’s thesaurus of superlatives. One of the many reasons that Illich’s work has such prescience today is that he was grappling with the most momentous of epochal processes and unfoldings, as well as with the details of

schooling, medicine, technology, gender and so on. Thus, like all great thinkers he is exercised by what we might call ‘the fall of Modernity’ towards the ‘*corruptio optimi quae est pessima*’ (or ‘the corruption of the best is the worst’). For Illich, great corruptions had taken place as an institutional Christian salvation narrative had ended up administering people’s habits and ways of living. Any possibility of spaces of openness to ‘surprise’ became the purview of the Church’s institutionalisation; and Illich was contemptuous of these processes – and so of course made enemies with institutionalised religion.<sup>11</sup> Cayley is, needless to say, very insightful and informative about all this.

In this essay I will focus predominantly on Cayley’s Introduction and his Conclusion – otherwise it will become inordinately long; for it is quite impossible to do adequate justice to *Intellectual Journey* in a few thousand words. There is a quite beautiful passage which will, I think, appeal to all humanistic, existential and transpersonal practitioners and theorists, where Cayley cites Illich’s openness to discovering the other as ‘a radical surprise’. Thus we read of Illich saying that ‘Only by taking the predictability out of the face of the other can I be surprised by him’ (Cayley, p. 11). And Illich’s extraordinary words from a November 1988 lecture are worth quoting at some length here:

When I submit my heart, my mind, my body, I come to be below the other. When I listen unconditionally, respectfully, courageously with the readiness to take in the other as a radical surprise, I do something else. I bow, bend over toward the total otherness of someone. But I renounce searching for bridges between the other and me, recognizing that a gulf separates us. Leaning into this chasm makes me aware of the depth of my loneliness, and able to bear it in the light of the substantial likeness between the other and myself. All that reaches me is the other in his word, which I accept on faith.

Quoted in *Intellectual Journey*, p. 10

For Cayley (ibid.), ‘Illich believed that one can know another only by first unknowing them’ – echoes here of Krishnamurti and other great existential thinkers; which means, in turn, having no expectations of the other. And the ‘gulf’ between people must be ‘respected and only leaned into’ (Cayley).

This view also manifests in Illich’s attitude to, and critique of, modernity – for modernity tends in the opposite direction, striving à la Francis Bacon (1561–1626) for ‘the taming of chance’ (philosopher Ian Hacking’s phrase), and ‘the hounding of nature [so as to] bind her to our service’ (Cayley, p. 11). For this writer, Illich is very much in tune with thinkers like Rudolf Steiner and James Hillman, when we read that for Illich, ‘Things happen neither by chance nor by necessity but in response to a call.... Everything depends on that disposition to listen and to respond...’ (ibid., p. 12); and thus did Illich go ‘where he felt he was called to go’ (p. 20). And love becomes central in all this, as for Illich, ‘He was seeking conditions... favorable to “the practice of love”’ (Cayley, p. 14) – with Illich striving for ‘something profoundly different from any[thing] previously known’ – namely, ‘a new complementarity’ between ‘the practice of love’ and ‘critical habits of thought’ (*Intellectual Journey*, p. 22). For Illich, personal austerity and renunciation were ‘preparations for the deeper communion between people that he thought was impeded and often prevented altogether by the glitter and the glut of a technologically unrestrained society’ (ibid.).

Ever a paradox, Illich was an ‘ascetic who counseled enjoyment’! (ibid.). Indeed, ‘he often chose paradoxical or contradictory figures to describe himself’ (ibid.). In *Intellectual Journey*, Cayley does indeed speak of Illich as ‘a contradictory figure’ – but one who ‘not only embodied contradiction, he demonstrated that

contradiction, as complementarity, is the key to what he called conviviality...’. And Illich is simultaneously an apocalyptic *and* an anti-apocalyptic thinker (p. 467) – a tension or dialectic, the nature of which is a recurrent theme in Cayley’s *Intellectual Journey*. We also read that Illich ‘had a magnetic personality and presence’, and that like all great masters, he ‘often tried to veil, counteract, or undermine his influence over others’ (p. 15). Paradox again – Cayley describes Illich in terms of both his ‘clairvoyant powers of intellectual discernment’ and also his ‘quite ordinary vanities, fallibilities, errors of judgment etc.’ (ibid.).

There is also much about *living* (as opposed to ‘life’) and death in Illich’s world-view that has profound resonance with Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology. Thus, we read that for Illich, our lives harbour ‘a mysterious historicity’ (Illich) – ‘a significance lying below the biographical surface in the form of what Illich calls “seeds”’ (Cayley, p. 13) – echoes here of James Hillman’s ‘daimon’ in his book *The Soul’s Code*. And Illich ‘thinks that only death, the final surprise, will disclose the meaning of what has gone before’ – urging us, phenomenologically, to ‘bracket all ready-made explanations’ (Cayley, p. 13).

Cayley distinguishes four distinct periods of Illich’s career (pp. 16–20). We read that much of both his ‘missiology’ and his later teaching were ‘a mixture of hardheaded sociology and mystical theology’ (p. 16) – though Illich did not see himself as a sociologist. In his period of peak impact in the 1970s, we read that his tone was both ‘dire’ *and* ‘extraordinarily hopeful’ (p. 17): ‘he maintained the view that radical change was not only possible but imminent’ (ibid.). However, he increasingly realised that ‘his efforts at deschooling, demedicalization, deceleration, and so on had been blocked by myths or certainties lying below the level of everyday thought’

(ibid.). So he returned to history, and what Cayley calls Illich's realisation that scarcity was 'the anchoring myth of modernity' (p. 18).

We also read about Illich's indictment of the bad faith of institutions and his call for an 'institutional revolution' (p. 23); and – again – that 'Once thinking becomes a monocular perception of reality, it's dead' (Illich, quoted on p. 24).

In his concluding chapter to the book, Cayley shares his experience of writing the book of discovering that Illich was 'a philosopher of complementarity.... The understanding of complementarity informs Illich's work from beginning to end.' (pp. 450, 451) For Cayley, this notion

points towards a wholeness that can only be sustained when the opposites that compose the whole are each given their due.... The alternative to recognizing this 'coincidence of opposites' is what Illich calls 'a monocular perception of reality' – a perception that registers only the single, inexorable track along which we are endlessly progressing without ever really knowing what is propelling us along this way. (p. 464)

Frijof Capra's work on physics from the 1970s immediately comes to mind,<sup>12</sup> which I viscerally remember having such an impact on my then-student friends and myself when it came out in 1976. The sheer thirst for such a world-view was palpable then, and it is surely desperately needed today, and at every level of existence – scientific, cultural and cosmic. For as Cayley rightly says, 'only complementarity perspectives can disclose the whole of reality', with each existence 'throwing a shadow that must be acknowledged', and 'Balance – opposites held together in tension – is... the best to which we can aspire' (p. 450). This is thinking that coheres closely with the best of Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology.

And judging by the sheer size of the literature on complementarity published in recent years (see my footnote 11), it seems that once again here, we see a great thinker many years ahead of his time. Thus, Cayley writes further that, 'Wherever Illich turns his attention, he finds opposing domains whose balance is threatened by the predominance of one or the other' (p. 451). For Illich's 'underlying worldly ideal was always balance and a careful drawing of distinctions...' (p. 458).

We also see what could arguably be viewed as a very early example of the deployment of 'cancel culture', with Illich's 1982 book on gender being effectively 'cancelled' by the feminist 'movement' (or, dare I say, *institution?*), with the book being 'vilified and more or less stricken from the intellectual record' (p. 452). Yet for Cayley, it is a book that 'might have served as a wildly promising seedbed of ideas on how the vernacular is constituted' (ibid.) – and in which, according to Cayley, 'these [feminist] critics... completely confounded gender with patriarchy...' (p. 453). And it is, of course, *language itself* which is at stake here; for 'The "shaping of language", to take just one of Illich's examples, is almost entirely in professional hands' (ibid.); the 'professionalisation of language' is indeed a fertile theme that could be profitably pursued in the present day). In relation to the notion of 'community', for example, we read that

words like *community* that ought to refer to a complementary hemisphere in which culture grows wild and state and market are held at bay have been so thoroughly colonized that they have largely lost this denotation.... A one-dimensional mode of life – or radical monopoly, in Illich's terms – has... utterly overcome its proper complement.... (p. 452, Cayley's italics)

Cayley then returns to the themes of surprise and monocular perception, referred to earlier.

He writes, with echoes of Vandana Shiva, that:

Illich... tried to preserve or restore spaces in which independent action was possible and people could still be surprised. He deplored monoculture and monotony – radical monopoly and ‘monocular perception’. Each domain of experience acquired its character and consistency in relation to some opposing domain. Medicine can ameliorate the human condition only so long as it doesn’t abolish it. (p. 453)

Cayley is emphatic that what he is calling ‘complementarity’ should not be confused or conflated with dualism:

Complementarity is something else altogether. It holds that, in the world as it is, there are inherent limits, that each thing is structured and conditioned by its opposite, and that opposites, when overextended, lapse into one another. This view... has always been a countercurrent to the mainstream of Western thought. (p. 454)

For Cayley, and with echoes of *Self & Society* feature writer Miki Kashtan (see her contribution to this symposium), in the current day every institution ‘is stretched past its proper limits and every person [is] living beyond their capacity’ (p. 455).

Illich, we are told, was ‘terribly sad’ that young people were ‘trained to seek only the “average”, which he defines as an indifferent “tolerance of *all* ideas”’; (p. 457, Cayley’s italics). Illich is always willing to take a stand, to render a judgement, we’re told; and for Illich, ‘spiritual indecision’ of the ‘seeking the average’ kind, which simply averages out opposing claims, ‘is the very contrary of seeking the middle way’ (Illich, quoted by Cayley, *ibid.*). For Illich, Cayley avers, his ‘middle way is life on the edge – the razor’s edge of discernment and distinction...’ (p. 458); and the distinction between ‘spiritual indecision’ and Illich’s middle way is, for Cayley, a crucial one.

In his closing comments, Cayley also highlights the dialectic in Illich between innovative freedom and rootedness in tradition – for Illich, they were different sides of the same coin (p. 464). Thus,

Without the rootedness, innovation is promiscuous and unguided, as we see in the riot of ‘disruptive’ innovation taking place all around us. Without innovation, the opposite occurs, and rootedness in tradition lapses into arid habit... Grounding without freedom is bondage, ungrounded freedom is permissiveness. (p. 464)

I am reminded here of a term coined by my 1980s counselling trainer, Tony Storey – ‘disciplines of ignorance’.

Talking of counselling, Cayley has interesting observations to make about Illich’s attitude to encountering the other. For Illich “‘aims at facing people with a willingness to take them... *at their*” word rather than basing his understanding on what he knows about them’ (Illich, quoted by Cayley, p. 466). Here we see Illich being much closer to Carl Rogers and phenomenology than he was to Freud – and Illich’s approach to engagement and judgement very much goes against the current toxic culture of ‘cancellation’, whereby *anything* a given person says gets rejected out of hand and in its entirety, based purely on the *pre-decided* ideological category into which the person has been simplistically placed. Cayley continues:

To take the other at their word is not only to refrain from judgment – ‘judge not that you be not judged’ – but also to recognize that what happens to me, or fails to happen, is an impenetrable mystery – a set of chances that may mysteriously fit me even as they remain chances.... To take the other ‘at their word’ points to a meaning in each existence that exceeds both the other’s intention and my expectation, conditioned by what I think I already know about them. Mystery is fundamental, not as an anti-intellectual idea....

but as an indication of the limits of knowledge and the disposition, always, to be surprised. (p. 466)

How unspeakably beautiful that is. And note how Illich's approach is attempting to transcend the common prejudicial human trait of leaping to (often self-satisfied and self-serving) conclusions about the other, based on what we choose to perceive based on our preconceptions, rather than striving, as far as possible, to experience the other in the moment just as they are; echoes here of Jiddu Krishnamurti's notion of 'choiceless awareness'.<sup>13</sup> In this spirit, in *Challenges of Ivan Illich* (p. 61), we find Domenico Farias quoting Illich as saying: 'Let's be alive and let's celebrate – really celebrate – enjoy consciously, ritually, openly, the permission to be alive at this moment'. And like Krishnamurti, Illich was a 'nomad' – 'Few people today could manifest a more non-territorialized existence than he' (Farias, p. 63).

Cayley asks, 'Of what use or interest, then, are Illich's proposals?' (p. 467). His answer to this question is fascinatingly relevant to the current day. Thus, Illich himself, speaking some 35 years ago in 1988, 'saw "extraordinary opportunities" arising from the implosion of society and the collapse of faith in universal development' (ibid.).

David Cayley's *Intellectual Journey* is a monumental magnum opus – a book of love and commitment that very few people would have had either the intellect or the sheer staying power to complete. Students of Illich owe Cayley a massive debt of gratitude that is quite impossible to exaggerate for having written this magnificent book.

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One of the editors of the third book under review here – *The Challenges of Ivan Illich* –

Lee Hoinacki, a close friend and collaborator of Illich's, actually had some involvement in Cayley's *In Conversation* (reviewed above), as he transcribed the interviews in Cayley's book, and they worked together to produce *In Conversation*. Hoinacki, an appropriately 'independent scholar', and his co-editor Carl Mitcham have put together a very substantial collection of some 20 chapters of variable length, that consider Illich from almost every conceivable perspective, and which was published a few months before Illich died in 2002. Due to the inordinate length of this essay to date, I can only give relatively brief attention to this excellent collection here.

The 20 constituent chapters are divided into six parts, in a book of over 250 pages with a very small point size – there are certainly lots of words for your bucks here. In the first two chapters, the book's editors, Hoinacki and Mitcham, look respectively at the experience of reading Illich, and the challenges of this anthology. Part II looks at the person of Illich (five chapters), with notable contributions from publisher Marion Boyars in 'The adventure of publishing Ivan Illich', who published most of his writings; and John L. McKnight on Illich's friendships.

Part III then looks at Illich's 'Arenas of Thought', including chapters on 'Economy, subsistence, and psychological inquiry' by Robert Kugelmann (see below); on literacy, by Barry Sanders; and the notion of hospitality, by Alfons Garrigós. Part IV is titled 'Facing Society', and includes chapters on the nightmare of 'the American dream', by Aaron Falbel, and two chapters on the experience of studying with Illich, by Madhu Suri Prakash and Eugene J. Burkart. Part V, 'Extending Interpretations', then includes 'Energy and the mystery of iniquity' by Jean Robert and 'Detour and sacrifice: Ivan Illich and René Girard' by Jean-Pierre Dupuy. The final part, 'Epilogue', consists of an address

given by Illich himself in March 1998, titled ‘The cultivation of conspiracy’.

We read in the acknowledgements (p. vii) that the book had its genesis on Ivan Illich’s seventieth birthday in 1996, when a small group of friends at Pennsylvania State University wished to reflect on the implications of his work. Their chosen theme was the phrase ‘No Easy Answers’, ‘because that was precisely our state of mind’, we’re told. Over 50 colleagues from the Americas, Europe and Asia were formally invited to share their perspectives on this theme; and just shy of 30 contributions were received, only about half of which the editors were able to publish in this unique volume – as they write, ‘Space limitations forced us to exclude much more than we would have liked’.

Co-editor Lee Hoinacki begins his introductory chapter, ‘Reading Ivan Illich’, by averring that attempting to interpret Ivan Illich is a ‘perilous enterprise’ (p. 1). We read further that despite not having produced a coherent social theory, and that Illich will not be remembered as an important twentieth-century philosopher (though Mitcham writes later that Illich *as philosopher* set out to ‘rethink’ the world – p. 14 – thus re-storying, rather than analytically clarifying), Illich *has* made ‘startling contributions in each of these areas’ (Hoinacki, p. 1), in which he ‘bears witness’ against Western modernity (p. 2), ‘calling into question the most noteworthy and awesome triumphs of human ingenuity’ (p. 3) in a writing style ‘characterised more by brilliant epigrammatic judgments than by conventional or linear argument’ (p. 4), with Illich ‘often proceed[ing] more by way of acute assertion than by sustained argument’ (p. 6). A bit later in Chapter 2, co-editor Carl Mitcham refers to how Illich ‘often [chose] to speak elliptically and circuitously.... It is not always easy to pin down either his thought or his influence’ (p. 13); to people being ‘mesmerized by his masterful rhetoric’, and

being stung by his ‘barbed judgments and sarcastic diatribes’ (ibid.); and to his ‘suggestive and unsystematic thought’ (p. 14).

Reading all this, and more, helped me to realise one reason why I am so drawn to Illich – viz. that he tends to privilege searing, sometimes intuitive and often counterfactual insight over careful, systematic argumentation. Illich is the kind of writer that analytically inclined philosophers will typically find infuriating (a bit like the way in which Donald Winnicott is viewed within Psychoanalysis, or James Hillman within Jungian Analytical Psychology), and yet that bold, creative, out-of-the-box thinkers and activists just adore. There’s no right or wrong about this – both approaches have their place and their value. I don’t think it’s legitimate or fair to criticise Illich for what he *isn’t* – I’m just hugely grateful that he was essentially peerless at what he did.

For Hoinacki, Illich saw what Marx completely missed, and drilled down into the detail of what Heidegger only ‘murkily ruminated about’ (p. 3). Interestingly, Illich’s views are described as being ‘radical anarchist’ in co-editor Carl Mitcham’s Chapter 2, ‘The challenges of this collection’ (p. 9). Mitcham refers to Illich’s ‘intense, commanding presence’ (p. 13), and he continues to set out five ‘crucial overlapping issues raised in Illich’s work’ – namely: (1) his ‘sociological’ challenge to modern institutions; (2) his dis-ease with ‘the received approaches to history in terms of politics, economics, or culture...’; (3) the question of philosophical anthropology, ‘reject[ing] the idea of an ahistorical human being’; (4) his ethics centred on autonomy, friendship and silence; and (5) theological questions, and his nostrum that ‘The corruption of the best is the worst’, referred to earlier (pp. 15–18).

Mitcham draws a contrast, referred to earlier, between Illich’s ‘slashing attacks’ during the



1970s on mainstream institutions, on the one hand, and how, after this, ‘he began to recognize the futility of this strategy... with social criticism being replaced first by historical archaeology, and then by lament’ – with his commentaries morphing from social criticism into ‘historical elegy’ (p. 18). For Mitcham, the motif of the elegy is important: thus, ‘The elegy implicitly calls upon us to be still and savor the tragedy – as well as the comedy – of the human condition’ – seeing Illich as primarily ‘one who cries out in our high-tech cities for recognition of the destruction that has been rendered by technoscientific progress and its glamorous excitements, both epistemological and political’ (p. 19). For Mitcham, Illich does practise deconstruction (cf. my interview with David Cayley in this issue), but with the intention of ‘pull[ing] us up short, so that we might possibly learn to live in a new way in our cities of manifold erasures and allurements’ (ibid.). Mitcham sees this collection, then, as ‘inviting us to rethink Illich and thereby our selves and our lives’ (ibid.). This chapter includes two immensely valuable appendices – one being a detailed list of the publications emanating from the famed Centro Intercultural de Documentación (CIDOC; pp. 20–4); and an annotated Illich bibliography of his major books (pp. 24–8).

Looking all-too-briefly at the rest of the book: first, I found especially interesting publisher Marion Boyars’s personal experience of being Illich’s main publisher (Chapter 4; Boyars sadly died before she could complete the chapter, however – p. 47). Clearly and understandably a great admirer of Illich, she writes:

Our publishing *Deschooling Society* coincided by chance with a Teilhard De Chardin Conference, and Ivan Illich was a featured speaker. I invited myself and sold the two Illich titles from a big table to the very large enchanted audience. Illich was mobbed. A very tall and extremely handsome man whose public

speaking was very clear despite his guttural accent, he provoked the listeners with his courageous attack on received notions and his call for us ‘to create the humanity, the dignity, and the joyfulness of each one of us’. The reformers in those days were always complaining and whining – here was a revolutionary who, with charm, intellect, and humor, analyzed, dismantled, and built up again. (p. 44)

And we learn later that he was ‘a marvelous conversationalist’ with ‘an unusual capacity to make friends’ (ibid.), with striking ‘originality of thought’, ‘a philosopher and personality with real charisma... with an abiding belief in the intelligence and self-reliance of the individual who could come to solutions through their own awareness’ (p. 45). However, he was also ‘the most severe and uncompromising taskmaster’ (ibid.). Boyars certainly captures well the visceral excitement with which Illich’s ideas were received at the height of his powers; she writes, for example, that ‘The newspaper coverage was never-ending. The Establishment fought his writings...; the young applauded his revolutionary stance’. (p. 47) And in what might even be the final words that the great publisher Marion Boyars wrote before she died, she concluded: ‘Do I think that Illich is the devil incarnate? Sometimes. If one is allowed to love a mind, I plead guilty. If loving the mind one loves the man, so be it.’ (ibid.)

In Chapter 6, The librarian Gesine Bottomley has some fascinating observations about Illich. For example:

He regularly showered the library with slips measuring 3 x 5 inches, containing bibliographic details about the books and articles he needed for his research. These slips were like thin index cards, which he filed in very long cardboard boxes, several of which were lined up next to each other on his desk, each representing the temptation or possibility to be turned into a book eventually. (p. 54)

And perhaps unsurprisingly, we read that in 1990, Illich wrote to Bottomley that ‘the massive offer of electronic data bases further threatens to decrease the research ability of scholars, young and old’ (p. 56). In what remains of my reviewing of *Challenges*, I’ll reluctantly confine myself to the chapters by Robert Kugelmann (‘Economy, subsistence, and psychological inquiry’) and Barbara Duden (‘The quest for past somatics’), both of which will be of particular interest to humanistic psychologists. For Kugelmann – an authority and widely published author on the psychology of pain – ‘Reading Illich, I began to reconsider my place in society as a professional, a citizen, and a person’ (p. 74), immediately distancing himself from the field of psychology. He continues, ‘Psychology serves to perpetuate *homo economicus* and the social structures that support it... – psychology is a handmaid of economics’ (p. 75). Kugelmann even claims that ‘Psychology is a “disabling profession”, perhaps the disabling profession of the [twentieth] century’ (ibid.). And while Illich’s work has made comparatively little impact on the field of psychology (more’s the great pity, in my view), Kugelmann goes on to outline three significant contributions to psychology that are suggested by his work: namely, (1) questioning the scientific status of psychology, stemming from his critique of economics; (2) questioning psychology’s object – individual behaviour and experience; and (3) questioning the meaning of critiques in light of our living in technological milieux (ibid.).

In relation to his first point, Kugelmann argues that Humanistic Psychology is no antidote to psychology’s objectification of people: he provocatively writes (though he does also concede that the following claims do need at least some qualification):

Humanistic psychologists insist on a piece of the action, whether in the therapy or the education business. Their desire to maximize human potential and to provide non-reductionistic alternatives to the excesses of reductionistic theories deepens our neediness in the economic sense.... As a profession, [psychology] has made a ‘cash-cow’ of the I–Thou relationship, helping people adjust to the realities of economic life. If, as Illich writes, the economy, or the reign of scarcity, is the inverse of culture, then *psychology has been a major means of dehumanization*. (p. 76, my italics)

In terms of psychology’s unit of study, if psychology were to take Illich seriously, ‘it would, first, study psychological life in the context of the economy... It would investigate the psychological consequences of disvalue – [viz.] the ways that contemporary psychological concepts foster economic relations at the expense of subsistence relations’ (Kugelmann, p. 78). In short, ‘psychology as a science and profession is tied to the project of modernity – the establishment of an economy’ (ibid.).<sup>14</sup>

Kugelmann sees Illich’s world-view as one of neither psychological reductionism nor of social constructionism – for ‘Neither the reductionists nor the constructionists reckon with Nemesis’ (p. 79) – ‘nemesis’ being the disvalue that industrial production generates, with nemesis delimiting modern living ‘because as needs are perpetually stimulated and growth is perpetually promised, the consequences are increased helplessness, passivity, and dependence’ (ibid.). For ‘The proliferation of modern objects not only atrophies human abilities, it disables the social relationships in which the activities take place’ (p. 80).

What Illich offers, in response to this anomie, is the key place of *subsistence* in human living: thus, ‘Subsistence activities produce use-values, which foster the “aliveness” of a people..., [and] Illich

observes that the level of subsistence activities has typically marked the well-being of a culture' (ibid.). For 'subsistence activities are inherently face-to-face relationships. Relationships mediated by modern instrumentalities... are disembodied social relationships.... Mediated or disembodied social relationships differ from the face-to-face....' (p. 81). For Illich, then, subsistence means continuous embodiment, where he sees embodiment as (Illich's words) 'the ontological foundation of all forms of my human existence' (quoted on p. 81). So as labour-intensive activities decline, so, too, do I–Thou relations, 'as disembodied existence dominates daily life, diminishing our subsisting together'; and the absence of (the) 'soul' in today's psychology has become a liability (p. 83).

Much to ponder here for any open- and critically minded (humanistic) psychologist!

In Chapter 19, Barbara Duden looks at the theme of the body and the flesh in relation to Illich's thinking, focusing in particular on his later rethinking of his 1976 book *Medical Nemesis* (see Vivian Milroy's review in this symposium). What is at stake here is what Illich saw as 'the deep transformation of the self in the age of systems' (p. 228). Duden quotes from Illich and American paediatrician Dr Robert Mendelsohn's extraordinary statement, 'Medical ethics: a call to debunk bio-ethics'.<sup>15</sup> In that statement, they write that 'Medical ethics is an oxymoron' – because (Duden) 'biomedicine's object has ceased to be the person. Instead, the new biocracy manages life processes "from conception to organ harvest"' (p. 227). Persons are thus reduced to some-thing to be managed; and 'The concrete person was thus transformed into a resource, a resource fostering and legitimating the proliferation of agents and services of high-tech biomanagement' (ibid.).

Duden goes on to highlight Illich's 1990 lectures on 'the gaze', in which the gaze of modern biomedicine and its effects, and the historical study of ocular perception, are deeply interrogated.<sup>16</sup> Duden summarises the view Illich reached in his research on this question thus: 'modern health consciousness cannot be fully grasped without an awareness of the transformation of the senses in the service of clinical rituals that professionally transmit a disincarnate ego through the medium of graphically recorded data from the body' (p. 228). And returning again to the theme of suffering and its intrinsic nature in relation to human being – a major concern for Illich: modern biomedicine and its accoutrements

lay the basis for a new model of the disenfleshed ego: the replacement of the always tragic human condition by a technogenic condition set on improvement, of hope by expectations. One is offered pain management in lieu of the art of suffering, technomorph conditioning in lieu of historically embedded virtuous practices. (ibid.)

There are overlaps here with the work of at least some psychologists who have had similar concerns about the technocratic drive to find technological fixes for suffering in Late Modernity.<sup>17</sup>

I hope that in these brief comments I have given enough of substance to show how *The Challenges of Ivan Illich* collection is a must-read for all serious Ivan Illich scholars and students, including psychologists.

To round off this review essay, then: Illich was an independent, critical 'out of the box' thinker par excellence, who followed his own destiny path wherever it led, and absolutely knew his own mind, and who has been called 'the greatest social critic of the twentieth century'. That's quite an accolade for a century that was replete with big-hitting

‘social critics’. I love David Cayley’s characterisation in *In Conversation* of how Illich consistently succeeded in ‘wriggl[ing] out of a destiny designed for him by others’ (p. 6). Illich was surely someone who could easily have been a world-renowned arm-chair academic professor, if he’d wanted to be – and I, for one, am delighted that he lived the life he did, as a kind of irritating gadfly to self-important hubristic academia – with the latter trying to ignore him if they possibly could, but – thankfully – never quite succeeding! As Cayley writes, ‘Illich taught, on and off, at universities for much of his life, but he generally camped at their margins, refusing any regular appointment and, as he said, “soberly milking that sacred cow” in order to support the more intimate and convivial academic style that he preferred’ (p. 4).

I’m reminded again here of the great spiritual teacher, Jiddu Krishnamurti, who could hold in-depth critical conversations with academics from virtually any discipline, more than holding his own – and yet he had virtually no formal academic credentials to his name.

None of the three books reviewed here is an unambiguously introductory book on Illich’s oeuvre, or a book for anyone completely fresh to Illich’s ideas. I have to confess that on realising this, I did do a search to see if there was such a thing as an *Illich For Beginners* in the ‘For Beginners’ publisher’s series – but perhaps thankfully, I didn’t find one; and my hunch is that the great man would likely have been horrified by the idea. But if someone relatively new to Illich were to start from this trilogy of books, I would suggest starting with Cayley’s ‘Introduction: Ivan Illich as I knew him’ in his *Intellectual Journey* (pp. 1–25); then to Lee Hoinacki’s Chapter 1, ‘Reading Ivan Illich’ in *Challenges...* (pp. 1–7); then the very long discursive introduction in Cayley’s *In Conversation* (pp. 1–57). And then the three books in the following order: (1) *Challenges...* (perhaps reading chapters of

particular personal interest only); (2), *In Conversation*; and then (3), *Intellectual Journey*.

In my nearly seven decades of life to date, Ivan Illich is perhaps the most brilliant critical thinker I have ever come across; and it has been an unmitigated delight to showcase some of that thinking in this essay. And with technology (AI) and technocracy being such urgent themes today as I write, retrieving Illich’s radical critical insights on technology seems to me to be an urgent task and necessity to help humanity navigate these choppiest of evolutionary waters.<sup>18</sup> Illich did warn in his writings of an inhuman future, and (Cayley) ‘spoke to me of the “depression” he suffered while writing *Tools for Conviviality* and contemplating this future’ (*Intellectual Journey*, p. 466). Illich did indeed see himself as a philosopher of technology, and as Cayley writes in *Intellectual Journey*, people were (and are!) being ‘swallowed by the system’, with operators in cybernetic systems ‘los[ing] the ability to distinguish themselves from the networks in which they are enmeshed’ (p. 19).

Certainly, the world of today – early 2024 – desperately needs the kind of thinking and insight – in terms of both content and process – that Illich’s kaleidoscopic oeuvre represents and champions; and I hope this review essay (notwithstanding its inordinate length), the rest of this inspiring symposium, and in particular David Cayley’s manifold brilliant contributions to the discipline of Illich Studies, will give some clue as to why this might be so. As *Intellectual Journey*’s dust jacket states, ‘Many convergent crises [that Illich] foresaw are [now] in full public view’. And for Cayley in *Intellectual Journey* (p. 467):

Illich’s emphasis on surprise, on friendship, and on reversion to tradition continues to inspire many people who are trying ‘to recover and enlarge the commons’ and build convivial ways

of life amid the debris of development.... Illich offers a way of thinking and a style of awareness that can sustain those who continue to try to establish what bulwarks they can against the unlimited. ... [I]n *Tools for Conviviality* he has set out the terms for what he called 'recovery'.

If you're unfamiliar with Illich's work, why not give it a try? Certainly, these three books would be an excellent starting-point.

To end, finally, on a quintessentially humanistic note: can humanity find a way to create a 'good society' not through further institutionalisation, bureaucratisation and 'audit', but through the fulsome embracing of faith, hope and love? (Again, note that Illich was not a *purist* anarchist, as he '...never imagined a world without institutions. He prayed only for self-aware and self-limiting institutions' – p. 465.) Illich was emphatic that if unrestrained, technology would end up with 'the world transform[ed]... into a treatment ward in which people are constantly taught, socialized, normalized, tested, and reformed' (Cayley's *Intellectual Journey*, p. 21). If there is any radical counter-cultural thinking that can assist us to address these issues, these books make a compelling, even irresistible case for placing Ivan Illich at, or very near, the top of the list.

Neither revolution nor reformation can ultimately change a society; rather you must tell a new powerful tale, one so persuasive that it sweeps away the old myths and becomes the preferred story, one so inclusive that it gathers all the bits of our past and our present into a coherent whole, one that even shines some light into the future so that we can take the next step.... If you want to change a society, then you have to tell an alternative story.

Ivan Illich

## Notes and References

1 See 'Part Moon, Part Travelling Salesman: Conversations with Ivan Illich', 6

November 2014; available at <http://tinyurl.com/yssda9dv> (accessed 8 January 2024). All of Cayley's broadcasts with Illich are available under 'Podcasts' on his website at <https://www.davidcayley.com/>. My warm thanks to David Cayley for generously correcting several points of factual detail in this essay.

- 2 Steiner's lecture on health is available at <http://tinyurl.com/37v2pmwp> (accessed 6 January 2024).
- 3 'In search of Ivan Illich', available at <http://tinyurl.com/yc69zjbf> (accessed 6 January 2024).
- 4 Source: S. O'Mahony, 'Medical Nemesis 40 years on: the enduring legacy of Ivan Illich', *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh*, 46, 2016, pp. 134–9; p. 134.
- 5 Cited in Vincent Di Stefano, 'On Ivan Illich and the Limits to Medicine', *Integral Reflections*, 21 September 2017; available at <http://tinyurl.com/yc87yxvz> (accessed 6 January 2024).
- 6 Patricia L. Inman, 'An intellectual biography of Ivan Illich', Doctor of Education Dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1999, p. 2; available at <http://tinyurl.com/2bnbnju5> (accessed 6 January 2024).
- 7 Ivar Berg's *Education and Jobs: The Great Training Robbery*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973 (reprinted by Eliot Werner Publications, 2003).
- 8 Ivan Illich and Barry Sanders, *ABC: The Alphabetization of the Modern Mind*, Vintage, New York, 1989.
- 9 Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1962.
- 10 Ludwik Fleck, *Entstehung und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache – Einführung in die Lehre vom Denkstil und Denkkollektiv* (in German) [transl.: Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact – Introduction to the Doctrine of Thinking Style and Collective Thinking], Schwabe und Co., Verlagsbuchhandlung, Basel, 1935; see also Fleck, *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*

- (foreword by Thomas Kuhn), Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1981.
- 11 For the best articulation of the religious views underpinning all of Illich's writing, see David Cayley's *The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich as told to David Cayley*, House of Anansi Press, Toronto, 2005. Illich's contribution is to re-found the gospel's formative axioms, showing how it is the perversions entailed in their elaboration and institutionalisation that have led to the evils of modernity, with institutional developments inside the Catholic Church seen to have turned into the modern state ('modernity was Christianity turned inside out' – Cayley, *Intellectual Journey*, p. 6). For Illich, medieval Christianity enabled the legal to colonise the heart of love, perverting Christ's act of liberation from law – which Illich sees as the message of the gospel. In what for him was the paradigm case of the parable of the Good Samaritan, Illich invoked it to explain how its spirit of love cannot be institutionalised without perverting it. Thus, the Samaritan acts *out of a freedom of love* that would likely be corrupted or lost if it were to become an institutional obligation. Indeed, long-time friend and colleague of Illich, Lee Hoinacki, told David Cayley that all of Illich's work could be understood as an attempt to 'do theology in a new way' (Cayley's *Intellectual Journey*, p. 5). In *Intellectual Journey* (p. 9), Cayley also interestingly reveals that Illich had stayed silent on his experiences with the Church for decades, only finally 'stammering' in the Cayley interviews 'what I have avoided saying for thirty years'.
- 12 Capra, *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism*, HarperCollins, New York, 1976. See also D. Favrholt (ed.), *Complementarity beyond Physics (1928–1962)* (Niels Bohr's Collected Works, Volume 10), North Holland, Totnes, Devon, 1999; Jan Faye and Henry J. Folse (eds), *The Philosophical Writings of Niels Bohr, Vol. 4: Causality and Complementarity: Supplementary Papers*, Ox Bow Press, Woodbridge, Conn., 1999; Arun Bala, *Complementarity beyond Physics: Niels Bohr's Parallels*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2016; Arkady Plotnitsky, *Niels Bohr and Complementarity: An Introduction*, Springer, Heidelberg, 2012; Makoto Katsumori, *Niels Bohr's Complementarity: Its Structure, History, and Intersections with Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*, Springer, Heidelberg, 2011; Arkady Plotnitsky, *Complementarity: Anti-epistemology after Bohr and Derrida*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 1974; John Losee (ed.), *Complementarity, Causality and Explanation*, Transaction Publishers, Piscataway, NJ, 2013; Brady Wagoner, Nandita Chaudhary and Pernille Hviid (eds), *Cultural Psychology and Its Future: Complementarity in a New Key*, Information Age Publishing, Charlotte, NC, 2014; Jack Shulman Avrin, *On Complementarity: A Universal Organizing Principle*, World Scientific Publishing Co., Hackensack, NJ, 2021; Giuseppe Tulli, *One Whole: A Philosophical Analysis of the Principle of Complementarity in the World and Man*, Independently published, 2020; Eduardo Ochoa, *Complementarity: A Method to Work with Complex Systems*, indep. publ., 2021;
- 13 See Peter Butcher, 'The phenomenological psychology of J. Krishnamurti', *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 18 (1), 1986, pp. 35–50; 37–8.
- 14 I endeavour to respond to at least some of these charges in my 2003 book *Therapy beyond Modernity: Deconstructing and Transcending Profession-centred Therapy*, Karnac (now Routledge), London.
- 15 'Medical ethics: a call to debunk bio-ethics', in Ivan Illich, *In the Mirror of the Past: Lectures and Addresses, 1978–1990*, Marion Boyars, London, 1992, p. 233.
- 16 See Barbara Duden, Ivan Illich and Mother Jerome, 'The scoptic past and the ethics of the gaze: a plea for the historical study of ocular perception', Working Paper 6, University Park, PA – Science,

Technology, and Society Studies, November 1995; available at <http://tinyurl.com/bd8x5drz> (accessed 21 January 2024).

- 17 See, for example, Robert L. Woolfolk, ‘The power of negative thinking: truth, melancholia, and the tragic sense of life’, *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 22 (1), 2002, pp. 19–27.

18 See, for example, Silja Samerski, ‘Tools for degrowth? Ivan Illich’s critique of technology revisited’, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 197 (2), 2016, pp. 1637–46.

## Resources

‘Introduction’ chapter to Cayley’s *Ivan Illich: An Intellectual Journey* – available at <http://tinyurl.com/2s3b2xkt> (accessed 5 January 2024).

Lee Hoinacki, chapter on ‘Reading Ivan Illich’, available at <http://tinyurl.com/333wued3> (accessed 4 January 2024).

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## Ivan Illich’s Key Books in English

*Church, Change and Development*, Seabury Press, Fayetteville, NC, 1970. ISBN 978-0816425051.

*Mission and Midwifery: Essays on Missionary Formation* [Mambo Occasional Papers. Missio-pastoral Series, no. 4], Mambo Press, Gwelo, 1970.

*Celebration of Awareness*, Calder & Boyars, London, 1971. ISBN 978-0-7145-0837-5.

*Deschooling Society*, Marion Boyars, London, 1971. ISBN 978-0-06-012139-6.

*Tradition and Revolution* [with Lionel Rubinoff], Macmillan of Canada / St Martin’s Press, New York, 1971. ASIN: B004G843PK.

*Tools for Conviviality*, Harper & Row, New York, 1973. ISBN 978-0-06-080308-7.

*Energy and Equity*, Harper & Row, New York, 1974. ISBN 978-0-06-080327-8.

*After Deschooling, What?*, Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, London, 1974. ISBN 0-904613-00-3.

*Medical Nemesis*, Calder & Boyars. London, 1975. ISBN 978-0-7145-1096-5 (multiple reprintings; see next citation).

*Limits to Medicine – Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health*, Marion Boyars, London, 1976. ISBN 978-0714529936.

- Imprisoned in the Global Classroom* [with Etienne Verne], Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, London, 1976. ISBN 978-0904613308.
- Disabling Professions* [with 4 others], Marion Boyars, London, 1977. ISBN 978-0714-525105.
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- H<sub>2</sub>O and the Waters of Forgetfulness*, Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, Dallas, 1985. ISBN 978-0-911005-06-6.
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- Blasphemy: A Radical Critique of Our Technological Culture*, Publishing Group West Argonaut Press, Berkeley, Calif., 1995. ISBN 978-1-882206-02-5 [and Aaron Press, Morristown, NJ, 1995].
- The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich as Told to David Cayley*, House of Anansi Press, Toronto, 2005. ISBN 978-0-88784-714-1.
- Beyond Economics and Ecology: The Radical Thought of Ivan Illich* [4 essays], Marion Boyars, London, 2013. ISBN 978-0714531588.
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