

Remembering Rimas

Simon du Plock

I first met Rimas in 1997 when I gave a paper at a conference entitled ‘Humanistic psychology towards the XXI century’, which he hosted at the University of Vilnius, where he was later to hold the chair of Professor of Clinical Psychology. This was a ground-breaking event that brought together therapists from, primarily, the Baltic States who sought to develop their own way of working, following their recent liberation from Soviet domination. In the case of Lithuania, freedom had only been achieved in 1990, and there was much debate about the future of psychology and psychotherapy in the region, how to move away from the influence of Soviet psychiatry and the relevance of the Western approaches that could now be openly explored.

I remember that Dr John Rowan was present and talked about humanistic therapy as practised in the UK. There were also several invited participants from the United States, and it was interesting to note how many Baltic States therapists resonated with our perhaps more ‘tragic’ understanding of what it means to be human, compared with the optimistic, self-actualising tone of some of the American contributions.

Rimas and I had an immediate rapport and I was delighted to be invited, in 2000, to the first inaugural conference of the Institute of Humanistic and Existential Psychology (HEPI) on ‘The Post-Soviet Person’. This eventually led, in 2009, to our collaboration on a presentation at a conference entitled ‘East European versus West European Mentalities: Can We Hope to Understand One Another?’ at Sigmund Freud University in Vienna. We gave a paper called ‘Psychotherapy in the West European and post-Soviet space: From control to control’, and I recall very clearly the powerful way in which he spoke from his own lived experience on this topic.

The UK-Baltic link was encouraged by Rimas, and continues to be strong, so that now UK practitioners regularly contribute to conferences and training at HEPI, which he established in 1995 in the tranquil spar town of Birstonas to the west of Vilnius. Before my most recent visit there in May this year I reviewed my association with Rimas and realised that this would be my sixteenth time in Lithuania, ten of these trips to his training institute, all of which grew out of those early meetings with him. Sadly, on this occasion, he was absent, having died the previous month, and I missed him greatly.

In the COVID years, when it was impossible to travel, we maintained contact via emails and Christmas cards, often featuring cats: a shared love. I felt honoured at the responsibility Rimas placed on me when he asked me to be a supporter for the periodic renewal of his professorship at Vilnius

University in, I think, 2012. I was very much his junior in teaching experience and publications then, something which was underlined for me when I read his CV. Rimas was modest about his achievements, while embodying a certain presence and gravitas, but there I could read about his long-established and deep interest in existential therapy, and the extent to which he was central in promoting it widely in Eastern Europe.

Rimas agreed to join the Editorial Board of this Journal in 2005. His publications in *Existential Analysis* (referenced below) evidence his accessible but erudite style, something which I also saw in the quality of the relationships he engendered in his teaching. It seems to me that he taught by example, and embodied a generosity of spirit that was quietly inspiring. I was delighted when, in 2006, he presented me with a beautifully framed hand-written diploma as an Honorary Member of the East European Association for Existential Therapy. My pleasure in this gift was, above all, that it reminded me of the special connection I felt with Rimas and his colleagues; it occupies pride of place in my office.

Rimas's contribution to East-West intellectual understanding and cooperation in the world of existential therapy was considerable, and will endure through the work of his friends, colleagues and students at HEPI; this is a remarkable legacy for a remarkable man whom I count it a privilege to have known.

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Papers published in *Existential Analysis*

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- Kočiūnas, R. & Dragan, T. (2008). The phenomenon of self-disclosure in a psychotherapy group. *Existential Analysis: The Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis*. 19.2: 345-363.
- Kočiūnas, R. (2017). Existential therapy in Lithuania: Its post-Soviet context and present. *Existential Analysis: The Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis*. 28.2: 315-323.
- Kočiūnas, R. & Vaštakė, M. (2017). Existential supervision: Phenomenological research. *Existential Analysis: The Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis*. 28.2: 324-337.