

Jacob Stattman talking

with Mona Lisa Boyesen, Clothilde and Vivian Milroy

Continued from last month

Now I want to talk about manipulation in a slightly different way, which again can be conscious or unconscious on the part of the leader, it can be covert or overt. This is the area of labeling and judgements, what I call disguised interpretations because within the humanistic framework the claim is that we are not interpreting behaviour as in orthodox therapies and that we have conveniently left behind all those bad labels - neurotic, psychotic, schizophrenic, etc. that we as a movement and as a method have liberated from this pigeon-holing. But any group leader or participant can remember many examples of where behaviour was labelled or was judged with explicit or implicit value judgements about the goodness or badness of the behaviour. In other words there is a reward and punishment structure and a regular system of interpretation that is going on behind a different set of fashionable labels. For example, a person is told he is not trying or he doesn't really want to change etc etc. Some of these statements are natural spontaneous responses to resistance, avoidance, phoniness and so on in the individual who is the centre of the group's attention. But there's a big difference in whether these statements come from group members or from the leader, because if they come from the leader regardless of whether the leader is claiming to be one of the group or not, it carries a certain authority. It carries the authority of one who in some sense is presupposed to have some special knowledge, if not special knowledge perceptions. As any kind of label or judgement, the person then seeks rewarding labels rather than primitive labels. He measures himself and his own behaviour by virtue of these labels or judgements which are coming from others. To the degree that this phenomenon of labelling is going on - it certainly is a form of depersonalising the individual, i.e. disguising their spontaneous feeling, whatever it is. This happens as far as I know in every form of group, encounter, gestalt or bioenergetic. It doesn't matter what the method is. It's as if it's a very natural human thing to label, it's a need to identify emotion and reaction to another person in some way that is communicable. If I am a group leader and I say to someone 'you are a killer' which is a statement I've heard many times in groups, this person is going to take that statement with all the anxiety and guilt that it arouses and all the confusion because he has perhaps not experienced or perceived in himself any strong desire to kill liberally, now the person who uses a label like that knows what he means in psychodynamic terms, there's a certain behaviour he has perceived, perhaps he has generalised this person with regard to the body type or character and the word killer is a kind of summation of his instant analysis of this person. But from my point of view any label whether it's scientifically acceptable or jargonish like 'killer' has the same effect - it reduces a person to a category according to some preconceived ideas that are generalised and are now being applied to one individual. It takes away the uniqueness and the existential claims. It further paralyses the person to a degree because now he is being asked to deal with certain knowledge which is not yet explicit on the part of the leader and it's very likely that it will polarise their own emotional response with respect to their unconscious impulses which the leader has perceived and which made him call the ,

person a killer in the first place. So it's not helpful from my point of view at any point unless the leader was consciously and purposefully using the word as technique with a particular purpose in mind which he can make explicit to the person in a way that enables him to associate with it so that it is a helpful specific process rather than a generalised labelling. My own experience is that many times leaders will use these labels, not because they themselves have some explicit understanding of what lies behind the labels - what they really mean - but because it is a very comfortable and convenient way to either hide their own ignorance of what's going on at the movement and their consequent anxiety about what to do or because it's a way of consciously or unconsciously currying favour and support from the rest of the group, or it's simply a way to gain power over this person because of the leader's own particular need for power which is manifested in this way - which makes the leader then no different to anyone else on the street who uses labels to control. Nothing special and certainly nothing humanistic. And it violates, from my point of view, one of the main principles which enable a person to change, which is that the person comes to his own understanding and provides his own explanations and his own labels which arise out of his own experience. So they are understandable to himself so that he can make sense out of his experience. When I provide the label, whether it's scientific or whether it's from the world of jargon I am in a sense explaining the person to himself which is contrary to the whole notion of existential change so that I'm not even following good psychodynamics. These labels and judgements are often a convenient disguise for the leader's need for omniscience and omnipotence and in terms of Reichian psychodynamics omnipotence comes about because of an unfulfilled need in childhood. The leader is using the group to fulfil his needs, and then he must at an unconscious level retain power and authority over the group, and if the techniques aren't sufficient he will have to resort to labelling and judgements.

No I'm talking about somewhere in between. Many times a lot of the leader's behaviour could very easily be seen by the observer as a kind of transference. Meaning that they are not seeing the person as themselves but they are seeing the person emotionally as some instrumental person in their own life with unfinished business and they are consciously counteracting whatever is being thrown at them by the group member. And just as transference projects to some immediate figure feelings that really belong to childhood so when the group leader labels somebody or uses a certain kind of pressure or manipulation on him, it's very likely that this is what the orthodox people call transference and it is happening, that you identify negatively with some quality in a person or with a whole person in your group but you are not aware of it because you have not explored sufficiently. A lot of what I'm saying, if the leader takes it to heart could easily result in him being paralysed. He wouldn't dare say or do anything for fear of manipulating or depersonalising the other person because he would have to assume that there were unconscious factors operating within himself. I'm not saying that he should be mute or on the other side non-directive in the Rogerian sense because that to me is beginning to approach a kind of abandonment, in that I don't feel that the leader provides sufficient affective boundaries - just as when you tell a child it is free to do anything it wants it doesn't take advantage of it. It wants certain boundaries and these boundaries may be physical or emotional. There are certain emotional responses on the part of the person apparent which may be positive or negative responses but are experienced by the child as boundaries in which

the child can then operate. Obviously the helpfulness of these boundaries is relative to the integration of the parents, and the same is true of the leader. In other words, a non-directive leader can quite conceivably constantly permit a person to be stumbling, searching or the leader can provide a false reaction to the person. For example if a group member makes the leader angry, there's no reason why the leader shouldn't display this anger. That's not directive. The leader has every right and indeed responsibility to display his own reaction. But he has the added responsibility of trying to assess his own therapy. That still doesn't justify labelling. There's a big difference between saying 'You're hurting me, you are making me angry' and saying 'You don't want to work. You're just trying to attack me; which is a disguised interpretation of the individual's motivations. That's the same as orthodox interpretation. So I'm saying not non-directive but expressive. And at times directive as long as the directiveness is explicit. For example, in using a technique, making it very clear that this particular technique has a structure and in order for it to be effective the person must utilise it. To that degree one can say it is manipulation, but as long as it is explicit the person can make a choice - 'Yes, I do want to do it' or 'No, I don't'. And in the act of making a choice the person is also revealing his personality and that can be dealt with. But if the manipulation isn't explicit and if the interpretations are disguised, then the individual is really going to have no recourse but to try to seek approval from the leader. And again, if the leader is in any degree trying to hide his own needs and motivations, or if these are uncounscious, then the whole process is being converted. As far as non-directive therapy, there's an extreme example in the book 'Dice Therapy' by Luke Radhart, non-directive therapist who said that he moron because he wasn't allowed to express himself or show himself, but always simply to feed back to the person their own expressions. I think the humanistic psychologist is busy disclosing himself, and rightly, but that certainly can't be equated with saying that any behaviour on the part of the leader is therefore good and that means denying the sensibility of the leader rather than that of the individual.

The last thing I want to say on this is to do with what I call the 'helping syndrome'. or the 'missionary posture'. To me one of the most covert manipulations and the most effective because it is disguised under the mantle of good intentions, is the leader who seriously and consciously believes that it is his job to help a person change. This belief takes on a tremendous pressure of force and the more powerful the techniques at the disposal of that leader, the more the person is going to be forced to change regardless of what their own unique personality is. A person is being made to have experiences for his own good and to the extent that he is unwilling to participate in that, in supporting the leader's need to be a helper, they are punished in one sense or another. Often the group is seduced into supporting the leader in order to win his approval and so they will also demand that the person do something for his own good. The worst part about it is that it disguises the natural reactions of the individual, whatever they may be, which can then be worked with. The person is caught in the same role as that of the child, who needs and wants to please the parent. The parent must be made to feel good so that the child can feel free. The parent who leaves makes the child feel guilty because somehow he hasn't done the right thing. The same thing happens in a group. The person who can't successfully work or refuses to be 'helped' is often ejected or judged either unworthy of the process or in some measure competing with the leader.

This point about leaders' motivation is terribly interesting. My own view of most of the psychiatrists I've met is that they are more in need of therapy than the average member of the public. Is there the same thing in humanistic psychology? Are the leaders there because they need more in fact than the group does?

I wouldn't say more. I would say it almost follows - and it's not bad, it's good - that anyone who is a people-helper to some degree is fulfilling certain personal needs, and needs to fulfil these needs, through being a helper whether it's a therapist, a group leader, a nurse, a priest or what-have-you. I think it's good in the sense that it takes a tremendous amount of motivation and energy to want to give to others, the same as an artist must have a particular motive force. If the therapist is going to enable a person to make fundamental changes, it calls for tremendous motivation and some of that is supplied by his own needs, to be approved of, to be seen as a good person etc. So I don't think that's bad. I think it becomes bad when the leader has to deny this in himself, has to pretend that he's being objective or scientific.

I wasn't saying 'bad'. There's a case for saying that mental patients can work with other mental patients in a more helpful way.

I think that a leader is a resource, but is also characterised by a particular kind of motivation, which isn't true of the general public, and that's why they become what they are. The only issue I'm concerned about is whether they can make that explicit to themselves and, when it's appropriate, to an individual or a group. And that they don't disguise the need in the way they use techniques or in the way they respond personally to the group. That's what I'm concerned with. It's not the need itself but the disclosure or disguising of it. I don't believe in objectivity, the attempts to be objective are just another form of disguising the person. What I'm concerned about, ethically, and pragmatically, is whether the individual or the group has the freedom to be able to be themselves in terms of the leader's personality, or are they being consciously or unconsciously forced to accept this disguise.

Now I want to talk about something that's more general, the relationship again between the leader and the technique but particularly with reference to the psychological resistance to change and the subsequent defences a person creates in order to support that resistance.

First: one can choose to fight the resistance or make friends with it. When one fights the resistance, it gets strong. It has to because it's being attacked. That means that a resistance which is using a certain amount of energy has to draw on even more energy from other parts of the personality and the body in order to become adequate for the attack that it is experiencing. When that happens, the elements as the resistance grows become weaker. These are often those parts of the personality that one is attempting to strengthen, so a vicious cycle gets set up - you tackle the resistance, the resistance grows; as the resistance grows, the healthy parts of the personality are being depleted of energy; as they are being depleted of energy, the problem that one is attempting to deal with has been exacerbated. At a certain point, it is very likely that the resistance can be overcome. This is often called a breakthrough. From my point of view, what happens when we succeed in smashing through the resistance is that it looks like the

problem has been solved to some degree. The person has an abreaction which may be intense; they experience what we call a breakthrough, and the assumption is that this is all good, and I would say that many times it is good. But I want for a moment to consider the negative possibilities. When a breakthrough occurs as a result of smashing a resistance, the first possible negative result is that disassociation occurs between the person's observing of it and the experience that they had. So that they may say *'It happened to me'* rather than *'I did it'*. It's the difference between having something happen to you, when you are a passive reactor and a situation where one is able to identify with the experience as a participating actor. In the first instance there has been what I call a pseudo-change. It is observable, it is affective involving a great deal of emotion. The person seems, acts and looks differently than he did before 'he experience, but I believe what has happened is a shift in the resistances. The resistance, which was apparently smashed, is now under a different form which won't be observable immediately. In a sense you could say that the energy which comprised the resistance and the psychological elements in the resistance - fear, depression and so on - have gone more deeply into the organism or are part of a new form of behaviour which isn't immediately perceptible as resistance. Once the person has come down from the breakthrough and a certain amount of time has elapsed, he will begin to recognise this resistance. And in time this resistance will reassert itself because of the habitual chronic form of resistance in the same form as it had originally before the breakthrough. The next result of this is gradually to engender a sense of hopelessness within the individual with respect to changing himself. They had an intense experience, they felt differently, but now everything's the same, nothing's happened. So then the breakthrough can be seen as supporting a chronic sense of failure rather than bringing new hope and real change.

On the other hand, utilising resistance rather than fighting it, this is more creative but a more difficult way to work, both for the leader and for the individual. It means the first thing that has to be done in making friends with the resistance is to identify it, and identify how it serves in the overall personality, what its purpose and function are, in the good sense. In other words, resistance is initially identified as something bad, contradictory to good, pulling a person back, denying emotional experience, supporting bad chronic behaviour. It is seen as an enemy of the personality, which is a disassociation again. It is as if the person has, in the sense of having rather than being, a resistance as if they've inherited a germ or disease from outside. I believe this perception comes because even people in humanistic psychology are more infected by the old nineteenth century medical model of personality than they realise. So the resistances are seen as something to be cut out, eliminated, a germ. And this mode of looking at resistances is automatically going to lead to that negative example I've already given.

Your model of energy flow, a kind of hydraulic or electrical model; are you seeing this in the same way as the energy flows in the body?

I'm going to give a very concrete example of this one, because it's not just in the body - it's in verbal habits and everything.

Verbal habits, this is a different sort of energy flow. The energy flow I mean is the

charge which is going through the body, which is there and can be sensed and felt and used.

It's not different, it's a hierarchy. First there is a basic energy, the life energy, then that manifests itself as an organic energy, then that manifests itself as physical awareness - organs, blood circulation, cell behaviour and so on, then it moves up to some sort of interaction between mental activity and physical activity. Then it finally manifests itself as behaviour. So for example if someone says to me 'Can I borrow your car?' and I say 'Well, OK' when I really want to say 'No', in the act of saying 'Well, OK' the resistance against saying 'No' employs a certain amount of energy. I have to block the 'No', and that has ramifications right down to the deepest energy source. That's a very light example. I'm saying it's like when you drop a rock in the water and the circles move out. The rock is the pure feelings, the pure energy, By the time the furthest circle comes, it's the level of behaviour. So that those verbal statements outside in the furthest ring are still tied in to the core, and vice versa. As I elicit the core feelings, it affects the verbal. So I can't really separate - I can only look at it as a graduation.

What I want to say about this business of utilising the resistance is that if one can identify it's purpose, enable the person to participate, to accept the resistance, its purpose and function and to understand why it is there, that very act of making friends with the resistance lowers its power, and it makes it very clear to the individual why he has to have it, because in this act of examination-- which can be done with Gestalt and fantasy and body movement - the person doesn't see the resistance as something bad to be got rid of - he sees that he is utilising his energy in a particular way, and that this way is necessary given his here-and-now personality, and in terms of his history. Once he sees that, then he can understand what is necessary to change, what implications there are in dealing with the resistance which he can't see when the resistance is a foe. They can understand the implications and can make conscious decisions about whether to take that risk or not. Then the notion of talking responsibility makes sense, it's not a blind impulse but an evaluation. If the evaluation is absent, the person can take a blind impulsive leap but I believe there's a lot of disassociation in that, and that in the long run I won't make much of a fundamental difference. If they can identify the resistance in terms of their overall personality, see it not as an enemy but as a necessary component in their behaviour, then they are often more willing and less afraid of taking the steps necessary to change, so that in a sense they are easier to work with. The change does occur, often accompanied by an abreaction - still an intense experience - but disassociation doesn't follow. The most fundamental thing about it is that the person himself made the decision, it wasn't an *'it happened to me'* experience and it wasn't due to the superior knowledge of the leader or therapist. Through the resources of the leader the person, in terms of his own historical context, identified the resistance, identified what was necessary to change it, understood the implications and the consequences, and acted accordingly. None of this is that simple, because a person may still decide to take a step which brings about change in consequences and behaviour further than perhaps their mind will go, so they will still regress to some degree to the original behaviour. But I think that in the short run and in particular in the long run, more actual change occurs with this second process. There's a good reason for it because just the opposite occurs to that first

example. One makes friends with the resistance, then the energy begins to flow from the resistance to the stronger parts of the personality, because the resistance is no longer being held by the personality against the terror of change. There is a voluntary shift in energy from the resistance to the desire for growth or change, and that's what we intended to do in the first place. What comprises the resistance is usually some intuitive or conscious sense of devastation, terror, madness and finally death. Resistance serves to protect us from experiencing those overwhelming sensations; often we adapt a pattern of resistance in childhood, the resistance serves to gain approval from parental figures. A simple example is perhaps that a child *agrees* not to be angry because it upsets the mother or the school-teacher or what-have-you. In order not to express anger that may spontaneously arise, the child has to resist that anger. That means a certain amount of energy is tied up in the physical organism to hold back emotion and thoughts which would trigger the anger and thus incur disapproval or perhaps even worse would hurt the parental figure. The child is being asked to protect himself and that figure from his anger. This is then a resistance. And as he grows up this resistance serves the purpose of facilitating the gaining of approval. The trouble, is that after a while it becomes counter-productive; the person is controlled by the resistance, he can no longer decide to be angry when he feels like it. If this isn't understood by adults who have worked in a group, they can explode through into anger, but since they haven't dealt with the traumatic side of it adequately, or if they have fought the resistance rather than making friends with it the underlying theory that developed in childhood is not going to be dealt with adequately, and that's the part of them that gives them their identity, not their expression of anger. So that they are going to have to rebuild their resistance because they haven't gone through the underlying source, the cause of the resistance. If they have made friends with the resistance they won't have to the same degree rebuild the resistance - and that's what change means. There is a group norm, and that is usually concerned with the notion of health and good change as opposed to what is identified in society as 'bad' change. So the 'good' child, the one who suppressed his spontaneity in order to please his parents or in order to avoid punishment, a group identifies that behaviour as bad, they see it as suppressive and counter to growth. The group identifies as good what the person would previously have labelled as bad, the impulsive spontaneous outpouring of emotions that were not tolerated in childhood, whether it was anger or crying or the desire for more physical contact with the parents, more love and more understanding. In other words the group is always supporting this norm in some degree and the struggle for the individual in the group is to make the shift from that behaviour which had been approved of by the parents to that behaviour which is now being approved of by the group, particularly the group leader. The ambiguity of what many times the leader or different norm of behaviour will still act punishment type of syndrome, so that the person who cannot express anger is reacted to in exactly the same way by the leader and the group as he was by his parents even though they are demanding the opposite kind of behaviour. It's still a parent-child kind of relationship, but it's disguised. It still means that the individual is not really making his own decisions, at least not as fully as pretended. What they've done is change parents, and the new parents have an opposite norm, but it's still a parent-child role. This is carried to a degree where the individual goes to groups but will not achieve the amount of autonomy that the literature promises. Another more subtle problem area are the implicit expectations that the group process is so much faster and more efficient than

any of the old orthodox methods, I would say that everyone has suffered to some degree from that expectation. Almost everything I've said up to now can be seen as a good phase in a long process, perhaps three to five years, but if all these expectations could be achieved in six months or one year I don't see how they could be anything but repressive to some degree. In other words humanistic psychology is different, and I think more effective but it still must allow for certain time factors in behavioural change, more than it implies in its literature.

to be continued next month

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