

and humour of Mahrer himself, and one called him a 'Goon' — meaning that in some way his approach was quite anarchic. Mahrer was a bit puzzled, because for him a goon was a criminal who bumped people off. The participant said to me later

that he had discovered that Mahrer was a bit of a goon in this sense too, since he had in the past been a boxer!

This was a very enjoyable couple of days, enabling people to be in the presence of a master; a rare privilege and pleasure.

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## ***Honest Supervision***

### ***Personal impressions of Alvin Mahrer's 'Experiential Supervision' workshop***

*Tony Wilson*

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This workshop, organised by AHPP at Regents' College, seemed attractive because I was looking for something fresh in supervision, and as Mahrer was completely unknown to me, and it was sponsored by AHP, that was good enough. There were some 20-plus of us and John Rowan chaired in his taciturn and able way. As this seemed to be a shortened version of Al's usual two-day presentation, we sat and, mostly, listened, with some lively discussion from time to time.

I was gripped both by Al and by his subject for the entire day. Here was an approach to supervision and therapy that put openness and honesty uncompromisingly at the front of all agendas. Other ethical issues follow a long way behind honesty. Within his system there is room neither to hide nor for mediocrity. Once accepted as a person who can handle radical revision in the manner of Mahrer, and

given that you want to be a better therapist, then you will be a brilliant therapist, says Al. I tend to believe him. I struggled with it but believe it works in exactly the ways he says it works, because I probably often think in the 'crazy' way that he thinks, and have similar experience of supervisions. I also identified the simplicity and structure of his approach as being present in much of my therapeutic involvement.

One of the most powerful and sustaining influences in my life has been the co-counselling trainers' supervision group which I took part in for ten months of every year for fifteen years. From early in the day bells rang for me on the similarities between the approach of Mahrer and that of the trainers' group — simplicity, power, radical challenge, freedom to explore and reach my own conclusions, and lightness, warmth and caring attention.

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Perhaps the essence of his drive for honesty is the way he asks questions: not 'why do you want to be a therapist?' but more like 'what do you like doing/about yourself in that situation?', and following this up with room for the supervisee to play with any new found insights until a sense of proportion is achieved. All very simple and permission-giving and humanistic.

In common with his client therapy, each supervision session has a completeness that allows the person to go into life with something new to be with. Mahrer encourages supervisees to practise ways of being with the client and to find like minds with approaches similar to the ones discovered or reinforced in the session. He definitely does not believe in tying therapists to approaches and practices that they have trained in. Rather he seeks to open up the ground where any mismatch lies, so that that the practitioner can gain insight and empowerment to develop potential in ways that they are learning are appropriate to them.

Because I have tended to operate largely outside formal institutions, constructing my therapeutic approach accordingly, I suspect that some of those present had much greater difficulty with the day than I did — perhaps because such simple and powerful ideas have to be fully embraced or they just don't work. And in the psychotherapeutic world of institutional power and of committed approaches to theory, training and practice, that is often too difficult a task to contemplate.

Al wants people to take on his system and try it. I intend to attempt to do that. But for his part, Al needs to do more than sow seeds, he needs to come over here fairly often, to inspire, nurture and cultivate a

crop, not of clones, but of healthy derivatives. It would help also if his books were considerably shortened and published in paperback — they seem a stark contrast with his essentially simple and accessible humanistic approach.

What is not clearly humanistic is his insistence on the use of client session tapes, which is apparently common practice in Canada, but is not so common here. Routine taping, even with a client's willing agreement, would I feel bring more problems than benefits, especially if taken to a supervision group rather than one-to-one sessions.

I like to think that client feelings of safety can be enhanced by knowing the therapist is in, and values, supervision. Asking permission to tape a session occasionally might add to such feelings. But routine taping must surely sometimes produce anxieties and suspicions, lessening the feeling of safety, plus also actually reducing it by dilution of confidentiality. It is a risky habit. Such practice is in line with medical tradition, and carries all the dangers and connotations which surround that tradition. I believe that humanistic therapy in Britain is not suited to routine taping. If I am to try Al's ideas, then it will be without the routine use of tapes. There is no difficulty in achieving depth, clarity and honesty using straightforward humanistic principles along with the rest of Al's ideas.

At this moment, some two weeks later, there is within me a considerable resistance to doing anything at all about taking this further — but it's summer and it can wait. In any case the subject won't go away for long. If any of it interests you enough to want to try it out, please get in touch in early Autumn.