

Martin Hall

Zen and the Art of Upstaging Psychiatrists

My Encounters With Orthodox Psychiatry

The first time I met a psychiatrist I was still a school-kid.

"You'll Grow out of it," he said.

The last time I met a psychiatrist I was a good deal older, and wiser.

"You'll grow out of it," he said.

I've been through this movie before I thought. I wrote a letter quoting Thomas Szasz and R. D. Laing amongst others. I haven't heard from him since, so he must have got the message. I hope so, because I find writing songs and dancing much more therapeutic.

The ones I've met in the years between have been almost identical; there must be a factory somewhere turning out clones with slight variations. What amazes me is their lack of knowledge of developments in their own field, particularly the growth of humanistic psychology. It's like going to study painting with Picasso, and having to show him which end of the brush to hold.

I've only been in hospital once, as a voluntary patient. I stayed a week. It was like *Waiting for Godot*. The only worthwhile things which happened were two unintentionally funny meetings. I always thought Monty Python's *Flying Circus* was anarchic, surrealist fantasy. Now I know different; "reality" is even crazier. The first meeting was with the Chief Indian (Consultant psychiatrist). He pored over copious notes collected by his colleagues and said "Mm. . . .Yes," in a very bad imitation of a sage. I never saw the notes or the conclusions drawn from them. This is the axis upon which this article revolves. Why are most orthodox psychiatrists so reluctant to share their notes and ideas/conclusions with their helpless patients? Are they so insecure that they can't relate to patients as fellow human beings? Or is it professional arrogance? Probably a mixture of both.

He became noticeably uneasy when I asked if Encounter Groups were held at the hospital, and if they did any Reichian-inspired massage or other humanistic therapies. From his mumblings the awful truth hit me. He'd never even heard of Wilhelm Reich, and knew next-to-nothing about any of the other major humanistic psychologists and their ideas and methods. His unease turned into fear; his fear into aggression.

"Was I an Anarchist or a hippie?"

"Was I influenced by subversive ideas from books or friends?"

"No," I replied, "I'm just trying to be me, and seeking help to free me totally." We put away our arrows and called a truce.

The last meeting was with the Chief Indian, and his braves as well, who had apparently been watching me all week and scribbling notes on my general behaviour and inter-action with my fellow patients. They all agreed that I was friendly and couldn't see much wrong with me. They didn't seem to understand that you don't have to scream, cry, or climb up walls, to feel deeply uneasy within yourself, with others, so out of contact with your own life-energy. The braves were kind people, but trapped by their training from accepting different views of reality and being. The Chief Indian made noises about getting me back to permanent employment and transcending my difficulties by just being ordinary. I made noises about having found most jobs so de-humanising and meaningless that I was better off using my music as therapy. No feedback. No indication of anything more constructive. It pleased me that no-one wanted to push the river; but I was still left without a boat. So I left for good.

As well as my hospital stay, I've been subjected to "Freud for the under-fives," (No disrespect for kids intended); and multi-coloured magic pills, which were very pretty and looked like space-age jelly babies. These colourful pills are materialised from strange ingredients by alchemists who dwell in neon-lit subterranean cellars. They are meant to impress people and stop them from wondering if most psychiatrists are aware enough to help them naturally. So I chose to opt-out of all this madness and follow my own path; I've met some wise and loving people since.



AHP Notes

At our January committee meeting, we agreed to hold the AGM during the conference at Buxton. We felt that it would be an appropriate occasion to seek support and input from as many AHP members as possible. Please see the sheet enclosed in this issue for precise details of the time and place and agenda as well as details of vacant committee places and current members who are willing to stand for re-election.

There has been a lot of discussion in the committee about our role in the humanistic psychology field. Some members feel we need to have more known representatives from the growth movement, if not on the executive committee, then certainly involved in special working committees in the association. Others feel that we need people with particular skills, for example, publicity, conference planning, secretarial/administrative work, or particular interests, for example, in social work, education, self-help, industrial relations. But we are all agreed that as a committee, we need new blood and fresh ideas to infuse and actuate the body of experience of present members.

And many of us feel that it is an exciting time for humanistic psychology in Britain right now. Despite the demise of Quaesitor and Community, the