

***Dreamwork in Psychotherapy and Self-Change* by Alvin R. Mahrer PhD. W.W. Norton & Co 1989**

Alvin Mahrer is an unusual man; Professor of Psychology at Ottawa, developer of Experiential Psychotherapy, producer of the only comprehensive theory of humanistic psychology (*Experiencing* 1978). He has now turned his attention to dreams. This book surveys all the major theories of dreams and dreaming and describes how do work on dreams using Mahrer's experiential method giving explicit guidelines, detailed examples and many short transcripts.

Writing about dreams has been around for the last four thousand years. About 140 AD Artemidorus of Daldis wrote "Those who are skilled in dream interpretation discern the dream wishes through the veil of symbols". Freud added little with his major book "The Interpretation of Dreams" in 1900. Mahrer asserts that it is virtually impossible to have justified confidence in the interpreted meaning of a dream. In order to interpret the meaning of the dream, you must first choose which dream elements to interpret. How many? Which ones? How large or small should each be? Moving from the dream element to the interpreted meaning, and then to the overall interpretation of the dream is a highly personal, creative, probably idiosyncratic achievement. Should a whole series of dreams be considered? Should the dream have been written down - if so the Communicative approach to psychotherapy would consider that a violation of the fundamental rule of free association.

Alvin Mahrer by-passes all these questions with his approach, as unconventional as his whole method of experiential psychotherapy. We tend to think of a dream as composed of visual elements with a narrative connecting them. Mahrer's experiential approach considers that the valuable thing about a dream is that you can get inside and "be" the experiencing that is contained in the dream. The important parts are the peak moments - the moments of strongest feeling. He likes to find at least two in a dream and taking each in turn let himself and the client be and behave in the peak moment as if it were real, as if he were really in the immediate live scene; this intensifies the bodily sensations. This is in fact the general method of Experiential Psychotherapy, the almost symbiotic co-experiencing and amplification of emotions by the therapist alongside the client in open-ended sessions. Through the intensification of experiencing, the client evokes and then embodies a deeper potential in themselves.

However, the apparent chaos of intensified emotions and experiencing is not random. For Mahrer, it is part of a structured series of steps. Prior to the intensified experiencing is identifying a recent connected

situation - rather like the day residue in Freudian theory. Afterwards, is being the dream experiencing in an earlier connected life situation and in the recent situation. The final step is taking the behavioural change, implied by the new access to tire deeper potential into the world.

Alvin Mahrer's approach to dreams challenges me to move from the visual to the visceral; to the intense moments in dreams not the striking symbols. It encourages me to then engage with the client in the reliving of the dream: being in it rather than talking about it. More than this is difficult to do. It would involve working using his whole method of psychotherapy. I have witnessed him working this way once in a workshop demonstration. It is peculiarly Alvin Mahrer, idiosyncratic, hard to emulate but very challenging. However, I do recommend this book. It is extremely practical, both surveying the whole field of therapeutic dream work and giving practical instruction for working on your own dreams or with clients dreams.

**Martin Jelfs**

***Further Learning from the Patient: The Analytic Space and Process* by Patrick Casement, Routledge, London, 1990.**

£9.90

Patrick Casement has become a notable figure in the world of psychoanalytic psychotherapy. His first book "*On Learning From The Patient*" is a best seller. His most recent publication seems to be headed for a similar literary position.

Both have been described as potential classics in their field. Casement was trained as, and is a member of the British Analytical Society.

The major theme of his latest text is Casement's concern regarding psychoanalytic theory and technique, which he considers to be rooted in dogma. In the beginning of the book Casement describes his personal journey from dogmatic certainty to his present open minded position. Chapter I is devoted to Casement's concern regarding the "stereotypical" interpretations imposed by psychoanalytic theory. He argues instead for an approach which concentrates at the level of the individual and one that can enable the therapist to offer the patient "creative" interpretations.

Casement goes on to describe the case study of a young girl who was seen by him in the family home in order to show how the patient's difficulties were resolved partly as a direct consequence of a basic alteration in the psychoanalytic ground rules.

In the following chapters Casement documents numerous clinical examples and proposes some therapeutic strategies to counterbalance