

## Friday Seminars

The NWRPA relaunch continues with the third of a series of six seminars in our comfortable new venue in Chorlton. Like our other meetings the one in April with Robin Hobbes engaged everybody's attention and enthusiasm. In the last three seminars ten new members have joined the Association. This means we have not only relaunched but are out at sea heading for a cruise in sunnier climes. Our current series of seminars takes us to July 2013. The direction we take from August onwards will as always depend on the interests and contributions of our members so please join in this debate. If you have an interest in particular topics or speakers, or would like to present a seminar yourself, please let us know.



**Robin Hobbes**

### **Silent Psychotherapy with John Cage**



Pictured are

Robin Hobbes (left)

John Cage (right)

Robin Hobbes is a Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapist, an extremely amateurish composer and clumsy instrumentalist. He is Co-Director of Elan training and development, a humanistic and integrative psychotherapy training centre in south Manchester. He is also chairman of the Manchester Wagner Society and he has given talks on Wagner throughout the UK.

Robin structured his warmly received presentation as a group discussion. This summary reflects that group discussion. I hope you will excuse the sometimes inaccurate quotes and lack of attribution.

The evening began and ended with videos of performances of John Cage's 4.33. Famously this is silent piece of music. The first film was of a performance by the classical pianist David Tudor. Of this piece the composer said that the experience of music is sounds and silence and the function of the composer is to integrate sound and silence; that the composer has nothing to say and is saying it. (You may note here that Cage is influenced by Zen.) 4.33 is 4 minutes and 33 seconds long, intentionally an average length for elevator muzak. It is actually performed by David Tudor. He opens the piano and intently follows the three movement score, which contains bars from which the notes have escaped. He completes the music and closes his piano. Hence this piece is not just an absence of sound. It has a structure and is performed in front of an audience. A parallel is that therapy may be silent but there too there is a structure. In Rufus Wainwright's performance of 4.33 he explicitly asks the audience for silence.

Silence in therapy can be frightening for clients. It throws them back on themselves, and to deeper levels of the self. It can also be comforting, a way of grounding ourselves in the here and now and stilling the mind. It is way of being in the world and allowing it to disclose itself. We need to be silent for someone to be heard. Silence can be a contribution to an individual or group therapy.

The playwrights Beckett and Pinter use massive silences where the processes of the self become more apparent. Silence may not be silent. If the world is still we may be listening to the noise of ourselves processing stuff. The way Cage speaks of silence does make it sound like quite paradoxical stuff. The performer of 4.33 may be isolating his or her self from the audience or making a deeper connection.

[You can watch the videos Robin showed by going to YouTube and searching for John Cage 4.33](#)

Part of Robin's structure for this evening was to tell us about John Cage. He was influenced by the first uses of sensory deprivation chambers in the 1950s. and wrote a book called "Silence!" He studied Zen Buddhism and thought it a mistaken quest to think of yourself as an individual. For Cage art should not be different from life; with its accidents, changes, variety and disorder and momentary beauty. He consciously used chance in composition, at times through the I Ching. He wanted to get the composer out of the picture. The bars of 4.33 are organised by chance. Speaking about the reception to the premiere he said that the critics had missed the point. There is no such thing as silence. In the film of this performance you can hear the audience talking and walking out and the ambient sounds from outside the concert hall. For him silence is not the absence of sound but changing your mind about the sound you are listening to. Silence derives it's meaning from context. People who suffer from PTSD suffer more when silent. Being sent to Coventry is a punishment. Modern classical music audiences leave a silence before applauding.

For the object relations psychotherapist Harry Guntrip a securely held baby can forget about being held and then come back to the awareness of being held. Anxiety by the parent or baby will interrupt this. This security of the unawareness of being securely held becomes the preverbal aesthetic experience of being absorbed in the experience of music, landscape or silence. A secure silence offers a receptivity to whatever emerges. (It was no surprise to hear that Guntrip was analysed by D.W. Winnicott.) The idea of a golden time of silence where we are absorbed in a primordial flow is countered by the persecutory nature of some silences. We can disappear in our own silent bubble rather than have an intense and transformative experience like the Shamans.

It is a both the trained and intuitive role of the therapist to time when to speak and not to speak, and not to be heedless of ether speech or silence. To notice when our clients have gone somewhere in a session. To listen to what is said and what is not said. To similarly listen to the sound and silence of our own internal conversation.

We ended with the video of an a full orchestral performance of 4.33. We ended with the thought that this piece can be profound art, a moving experience, the affront experienced by the audience members who walked out and the music critics who thought it an April Fool. The sense that the sound of the audience was the music.

Our thanks to Robin for facilitating a lively sense of being together in both sound and silence.

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Book now for the following NWRPA Friday Seminars or feel free to join us on the day.

**Dr. John Casson: Working in Miniature**

Friday 10 May 2013

**Helen Rowland**

Where Truth Lies: The Postmodern Turn in Psychotherapy

Friday 14 June 2013

**Amelia Mangani**

Title to be announced. Amelia is a Lacanian psychoanalyst.

Friday 12 July 2013

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