

Friday Seminars

Peter Philippon: Self in Relation: on being a Gestalt Psychotherapist

Friday, 8 November 6.30pm-8.30pm, free to members, £7.50 to non-members

Peter practices Classical Gestalt Psychotherapy, a field-relational offshoot from psychoanalysis. It is based on a theory of self and other emergent from contact, which puts the emphasis on how I become I and you become you in our encounter. The therapist cannot be an objective observer of the client's activity, but is inevitably part of the action. Any solidification of the self process, whether it is a support for living or a fixation painfully out of synch with the client's current life, is an achievement rather than a given. The therapist cannot be the same therapist for different clients, a client does not appear the same to different therapists. Therapy for both therapist and client is an act of courage and creativity.

Peter Philippon, M.Sc. (Gestalt Psychotherapy) is a UKCP Registered psychotherapist and trainer, a Teaching and Supervising Member of the Gestalt Psychotherapy & Training Institute UK, and a founder member of the Manchester Gestalt Centre. Peter is the author of *Self in Relation*, Gestalt Journal Press, and *The Emergent Self* Karnac/UKCP and *Gestalt Therapy: Roots and Branches* Karnac.



Winter Break

The NWRPA will have a winter break. There is no seminar in December 2013. We are currently arranging a programme of seminars for the first three months of 2014. These will all be held on the second Friday evening of each month in Chorlton. We trust these will be as interesting and engaging as our programme for 2013.



Kieran Nolan:

OCD: The Research

Friday 11 October 2013

Thank you to Kieran for agreeing to speak to us at short notice about his research. He talked both about the process of his research and the poetic representation of his material from his interviewees. The Association's custom is to omit client material from summaries of presentations which means missing out on some of the richness of this seminar. The intriguing idea of poetic representation in research became clearer during his talk.

Kieran is a Transactional Analyst and UKCP Registered Psychotherapist, Group Therapist and Experienced Supervisor and Trainer. He is currently studying for a PhD at the University of Manchester, researching Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.

Kieran began with a summary of the mainstream conceptions of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. NICE guidelines only recommend treatment with medication or Cognitive Behavioural Therapy using an exposure and response prevention.

DSM IV categorises OCD as an anxiety disorder which occupies a sufferer for an hour or more a day. For example someone may have the anxious and obsessive thought "I could stab someone" and then have a compulsion to avoid knives, going into kitchens etc. The upcoming DSM-5 changes this. OCD is part of a group of Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders. The other disorders included in this group are body dysmorphic disorder and trichotillomania (hair-pulling disorder), as well as two new disorders: hoarding disorder and excoriation (skin-picking) disorder.

Kieran has a longstanding interest as a therapist in OCD and a good overview of the relevant research. His conclusion is that there is no evidence that it is a neurological disorder. There are multiple pathways to the kinds of thoughts, feelings and behaviour that lead to obsessions and compulsions. There are links to shame, abuse and trauma. For example sexual abuse can lead to a sense of being dirty and compulsive washing. Part of the problem is that not only do we have obsessions and compulsions but we find them egodystonic. Kieran gave a not uncommon example of a good mother who has murderous thoughts about her child and finds this thought overwhelming and irrational.

According to Sigmund Freud obsessions and compulsions arise from our inability to accept love and hate. We consciously fail to accept the darker sides of ourselves. The psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott thought these kinds of problems arise when a child is forced to think too early in its development. The child becomes thought based and taken out of their body.

While helpful in understanding OCD, psychoanalysts found even prolonged analysis did not lead to any significant symptomatic change. This is a contrast to CBT where various explanations have not stood the test of time while treatment has been relatively successful. Although Kieran thought this success had been overstated.

His view of OCD is that it involves a fragmentation of reality and thought action fusion (TAF). TAF occurs where our thoughts and actions are not experienced as separate. So for example a person can be as distressed, guilty and shamed by the thought of pushing someone onto a railway track as they would be by carrying out this act. Without TAF we may be troubled by this thought but it then fades away; while the person with TAF will be persistently troubled by the thought, and to the point where they may seek professional help. Instead of bearable guilt the person feels a shame which is permanent. This is where obsessions arise. Anxious thoughts become entrenched.

This was the interesting part of Kieran's seminar. The fascinating and moving part was his summary of his research. Heuristic research involves the personal experience of the researcher. Hence it differs from other quantitative or qualitative methods and is related to a critical theory approach. The stages of heuristic inquiry are summarised in Clark Moustakas (1990).

Initial engagement. The task of the first phase is to discover an intense interest, a passionate concern that calls out to the researcher.

Immersion. The research question is lived in waking, sleeping and even dream states. This requires alertness, concentration and self-searching.

Incubation. This involves a retreat from the intense, concentrated focus, allowing the expansion of knowledge to take place at a more subtle level.

Illumination. This involves a breakthrough, a process of awakening that occurs naturally when the researcher is open and receptive to tacit knowledge and intuition.

Explication. This involves a full examination of what has been awakened in consciousness. What is required is organization and a comprehensive depiction of the core themes.

Creative synthesis. Thoroughly familiar with the data, and following a preparatory phase of solitude and meditation, the researcher puts the components and core themes usually into the form of creative synthesis expressed as a narrative account, a report, a thesis, a poem, story, drawing, painting, etc.

Validation of the heuristic inquiry. The question of validity is one of meaning. Does the synthesis present comprehensively, vividly, and accurately the meanings and essences of the experience? Returning again and again to the data to check whether they embrace the necessary and sufficient meanings. Finally, feedback is obtained through participant validation, and receiving responses from others.

And so we come Kieran's use of Gee's model of poetic representation. Fittingly for this heuristic method he reads and writes poetry. He interviewed a number of people about their experience of OCD, and often in public places. The transcripts are then changed into poems. This uses every line of the individual interview transcript and so retains virtually all of the interviewees words. The interviewee will see the transcript and can comment on this. Typically one individual transcript will become around a hundred stanzas of four lines each. This shaping is done by Kieran and he identifies a themes for each poem. This identification is a subjective judgement by him. Some examples of themes are: OCD manifestation, family dynamics, negative self image, difficulties in intimate relationships, information processing problems and over responsibility.

I do not often find the presentation of research results so involving and moving. This was different. Kieran showed us some of the poems that emerged from his research. As poems they conveyed the depth of his interviewees lived experience of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder in an artful, economic and powerful way.

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