

NWRPA Friday Seminars

A long story: Impasse and change in therapeutic work

Frank Kelley

Friday 12 May 2017

6.30pm-8.30pm, free to members, £7.50 to non-members

It is true that we need to keep faith with our therapeutic approach, particularly at times of pressure and crisis in our therapeutic work. It is equally true that keeping this faith in our approach can lead us and our clients into an impasse. An impasse may be the sign that our approach imposes limitations on our work with particular clients, or groups of clients, and is a sign that we may need to ask ourselves about changing our way of working. This is the story of that change and it is a long story. Like some changes in therapy it happened quickly but also had a very long gestation.

Frank Kelley is now retired and was a psychodynamic counsellor in the NHS.

Compassionate Mind Focused Therapy

Katherine Skaife

Friday 9 June 2017

Venue:

**The Manchester Institute for Psychotherapy
454 Barlow Moor Road
Chorlton
Manchester M21 0BQ**

A map of our venue and more information about the Association is available on our website at: www.nwrpa.org.uk

Election of Treasurer and changes to the NWRPA bank account

We would like to say a big *Thank You* to our Treasurer Ruth Bowhill who is standing down after five years of quietly effective work.

The Members present at this meeting unanimously voted to pass a resolution to:

- Elect Frank Kelley as our Treasurer for 2017.
- Agree that Ruth Bowhill is no longer an authorised signatory to the NWRPA Natwest bank account.
- Elect Frank Kelley and Paul Melia as authorised signatories to our Natwest bank account.
- To change the signing rules so that one only one signatory is needed for amounts up to £100.00.
- To change the signing rules so that both signatories are needed for unlimited amounts.
- To complete a Change of Mandate application to our bank to effect these changes.

Three Words in Therapy

Our speakers in this format have always been well received. We usually hold these talks twice a year, in summer and winter, and have three speakers at each seminar.

Our next 3 Words is in July 2017.

Most speakers are our own members or regular seminar attenders. If you have a burning issue you want to share, or want to take the first steps in this kind of public speaking, please let us know.

Email nwrpa2010@ntlworld.com or phone 0161 432 8653 before the end of June 2017

You can speak for around fifteen minutes on any subject of your choice that will be of interest to other counsellors, psychotherapists and trainees. As the format suggests your talk will have a one word title

Zen and the Art of Gestalt Therapy

Rodney Hill

Friday 7 April 2017

Rodney Hill is a qualified gestalt executive coach and is working to full accreditation as a gestalt psychotherapist. See www.yourtherapistmanchester.com He spent most of his working life as a chief officer in local government services.

Without apparent effort or strain Rodney gave us a connected perspective which encompassed Zen, Gestalt Therapy and post war changes in culture in the USA including the art movement of Abstract Expression. He particularly focused on the Gestalt concepts of the creative void, working at the impasse and Beisser's Paradoxical Theory of Change, all of which reflect key elements of Zen practice. His interest in the Chan tradition of Zen is a recent one and he has been struck by the mirroring between Zen and Gestalt.

Both Zen and Gestalt are concerned with the here and now and body and mind. For Rodney the body means the physical body, the breathing body and the emotional body. After his introduction he led a meditation which brought us into the here and now of the opening of the seminar. This experience also made sense of his remarks about mind and body.



He showed us some well known gestalt images. This includes the one on the left. It is an image of a young woman and, looked at differently, an image of an old woman. Which image we see depends on what we are treating as the figure and what as the ground.

It fits with the Gestalt idea that we readily treat our vision as the truth and become stuck in our way of looking at the world. I needed help to work out the one on the left which confirms the point about being stuck in our way of thinking.

The wisdom of Zen is often conveyed in stories, such as this one about Basho. He studied many sutras and thought he understood. His Zen master told him you are a great Buddhist but you have only used the words of Buddha and the teachers. Give me one word of your own.

Time passed and Basho could not answer and had reached an impenetrable wall. Then there was the sound of a frog splashing in the monastery garden. Basho spoke of the frog splashing and his master said he had attained enlightenment.

We can see links between this Zen story and the key concepts of Gestalt that Rodney introduced. These are, *The Creative Void*, *Working at the Impasse* (Basho's impenetrable wall) and *The Paradoxical Theory of Change* (Basho only has enlightenment when he is not trying.)

Fritz Perls was the founder of Gestalt and established the Esalen Institute in California in 1964. He was a German Jew, involved in avant garde art in Berlin and trained as Freudian psychoanalyst in 1928. One of the Freudian legacies was using the act of eating as a metaphor for our relationship with the world.

His wife, Laura Perls, was also very involved in the evolution of Gestalt. They fled Nazi Germany and went to South Africa and then the USA. Rodney mentioned two books. The first book Fritz and Laura Perls wrote was *Ego, Hunger and Aggression* (1942). They also wrote *Gestalt Therapy* (1951) with Paul Goodman and Ralph Hefferline

Other centres were founded in the USA and Canada. Gestalt Therapy became the second most common therapy in the USA after psychoanalysis. While Freud is a primary influence Perls valued ordinary human relationships and working in the here and now and so phenomenology and existentialism were also influences. While in South Africa he was impressed with the work of Jan Smuts and his concept of holism. (See *Holism and Evolution* - 1926). His long interest in theatre and the arts also meant that he learnt from Jacob Moreno the founder of psychodrama. Hence the famous two chair technique in Gestalt.

In Gestalt therapist and client dialogue, a communication of phenomenological experiences. The aim is not the just the relief of pain and symptoms but to develop potential through growing awareness.

CPD certificates

If you would like a CPD certificate for the NWRPA seminars you attend please email Frank Kelley at nwrpa2010@ntlworld.com

Zen and the Art of Gestalt Therapy

Zen came late to the USA. There had been some academic interest in the 19th century and there was a World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. Zen was practiced in the Chinese and Japanese immigrant communities. Buddhist teachers arrived in the 1930s and established the Buddhist Society of America.

After World War II and the Korean War returning military brought back a deeper knowledge of the Far East. In 1949 the first temple was built in Chicago. The Zen teachers who settled in America were shocked by western self hatred, guilt and shame. The appeal of Chan Zen was that it was more acetic and rigorous and less ritualistic than other forms of Buddhism. Unlike Indian Buddhism it was influenced by Taoism and Confucianism.

A key development was when D. T. Suzuki came to the USA in 1950. He was not an academic or a Zen teacher but had a huge influence on Americans, including Karen Horney, John Cage, the Abstract Impressionists and Jazz musicians.

Rodney played us John Cage's *4' 33"*, a "silent composition" which was Zen in that it is an act of framing of unintended sounds in a moment of attention. He showed Ad Reinhardt's *Abstract Painting 63*. This oil painting was apparently just black but was actually layers of dark colour which had lost their sheen and so the brush strokes were not reflected. Reinhardt was inspired by the Zen practice of ascetic detachment and slowing down the experience of looking.

He also played Abbey Lincoln's *I Must have that Man (1957)* pointing out that therapy is like jazz, an improvisation within a strict framework. We sit with feelings of openness, emptiness and indiscriminate experience. Zen is not misled by thought and language. We stay at an impasse which is both a frightening void and a fertile place. Maturity is working with impasse. It means encouraging self support and genuine contact with the other rather than isolation or being submerged.

This creative adjustment is healthy and we take responsibility for ecological balance. We reach impasse because of a lack of external support and a belief we cannot support ourselves. This leads to our manipulating others to provide that support. The therapist does not provide support but is a loving presence that parallels in therapy the approach of a Zen Buddhist teacher.

Arnold Beisser thought that *the paradoxical theory of change* was central to Gestalt. He wrote *that change occurs when one becomes what he is, not when he tries to become what he is not*. Trying to be who one is not is not self supporting and this resistance needs to be acknowledged and understood. This fits with the idea of the Jungian James Hollis that we need to experience ambivalence, ambiguity and anxiety and, while doing so, be able to live a life.

Fritz and Laura Perls used the act of eating as a metaphor for our relationship with the world. In this seminar Rodney offered us a varied and well balanced meal with ingredients from all over the world. It was complex and far from fast food but slowly and pleasantly digestible and remains nourishing well after being eaten.

Renew your NWRPA membership for 2017

We began a new membership year in January 2017 and membership will last for the calendar year up to the end of December 2017. Membership of the NWRPA is £25 a year - or £20 if you are a student, unwaged or retired. Membership gives you free entry to all our seminars which represents a generous saving of 66% on the cost of the ten seminars we will have in 2017.

To renew please pay at our seminars or send a cheque made out to the NWRPA. Our postal, email and website addresses are at the end of this newsletter. If you would prefer to pay online please email Frank Kelley at nwrpa2010@ntlworld.com for details of our online bank account

Contact the Association:

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(NB this is a mailing address only)