

NWRPA Friday Seminars

Zen and the Art of Gestalt Therapy

Rodney Hill

Friday 7 April 2017

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

NB Because of the Easter Holidays the April Seminar is one week earlier than usual.

Rodney will provide an overview of the theory and practice of gestalt psychotherapy. He will also consider the influence of (and parallels with) Zen Buddhism giving specific consideration to 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.

Rodney Hill is a qualified gestalt executive coach and is working to full accreditation as a gestalt psychotherapist. See www.yourtherapistmanchester.com

Compassionate Mind Focused Therapy

Friday 12 May 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

Vote on banking changes at our meeting on the 7 April 2017



A big Thank You to our Treasurer Ruth Bowhill who is standing down after five years of quietly effective work.

This means we need to make the following formal decisions at our April meeting.

- Elect a new treasurer
- Formally elect new signatories to our Natwest bank account.
- Formally minute these decisions as part of a Change of Mandate application to our bank to effect these changes.

Renew your NWRPA membership for 2017

We hope you have enjoyed the seminars in 2016 and want to renew your membership. 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 - which represents a generous saving of 66% on the cost of the ten seminars we will have in 2017.

To renew please 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

If you are not a member and want to join there is information on how to do this on our website at www.nwrpa.org.uk. Membership of NWRPA is open to qualified and trainee psychotherapists and counsellors, to members of related professions and to individuals who have a longstanding interest in psychotherapy and counselling. To apply for membership you will need to live or work in the North West of England and subscribe to a professional code of ethics that is recognised by the Association.

Binge Eating: on the other side of the pleasure principle

Paul Melia

Friday 10 March 2017

Paul Melia is a therapist and supervisor at Therapy in Manchester, a counselling and psychotherapy service in Manchester, see <https://therapyinmanchester.co.uk/>. He is well known to us as the Chair of the NWRPA and the person who organises our programme of seminars.

Thank you to Paul for this clear and intriguing discussion of the psychoanalytic concept of drives.

The centre of this seminar was a 20-minute Radio 4 programme of women in a therapy group talking about binge eating. As one woman comments, 'I think the thing to realise is that [binge eating has] nothing to do with normal eating. It's not a little bit extra, it's not having a pudding when you shouldn't or over indulging occasionally. It's a kind of robotic, almost pleasureless loss of control...' The programme - 'I Wanted to Explode' - is available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p045vff0>.

For Paul binge eating has nothing to do with instinct and everything to do with drive: that strange, silent world on the other side of the pleasure principle - indifferent to our happiness, indifferent to our well-being, indifferent to our life.

To illustrate the nature of a drive Paul referred to Powell and Pressburger's 1940 film *The Red Shoes*. This comes from a Hans Christian Anderson tale. A poor woman puts on a pair of red shoes and cannot stop dancing. An executioner cuts off her feet which continue to dance. The dancer then has wooden feet and finds peace in religion. The Red Shoes stand for a drive. It wants, persists, it is a repetitive movement, and aims at satisfaction at any price, and even at the price of a person's happiness or life.

To convey an image of a drive Paul also used the, possibly mythical, Mongolian Worm (below). It is shaped like a sausage about two feet long, has no head nor leg and it is so poisonous that merely to touch it means instant death. It lives in the most desolate parts of the Gobi Desert.



Paul uses Jacques Lacan's reading of Sigmund Freud's concept of a drive. There are four drives, oral, anal, scopic and invocative. Each drive is associated with an erogenous zone of the body and each is the threshold between inside and outside and each has relation to the mother/other and is crucial in the care of a baby.

The Mother is a requiring, demanding agency. For example in requiring the baby to eat. The drive is a consistent thrust or pressure, a constant force. Lacan said for the drive there is no day or night, spring or autumn.

Though they aim at satisfaction which goes to the mother and back to the baby Drives cannot be satisfied. They are not wholly of the body or the mind. The Lacanian idea of *Jouissance* is about a strange excessive 'enjoyment' or 'satisfaction' that can be destructive or almost pleasureless. It comes from a drive whose only function is satisfaction which makes it different from other more complex parts of our unconscious life. Like continually biting your fingernails or the metaphor of cutting off your nose to spite your face, over and over again. All drives are potentially lethal.

The drive requires a demanding agency, this is the Mother and later the Superego. The drive also requires an object. The object is not fixed, it may be a part of the body, an idea, a person, an everyday object.

CPD certificates

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

Binge Eating: on the other side of the pleasure principle

To Lacan there are four fates for a drive. It can be reversed into its' opposite, it can be turned round on the self, it can be sublimated or repressed.

One striking feature of Lacan's theory is that this surrealistic collage of drives can never be satisfied. For example the oral drive is related to hunger, however, rather like the Mongolian Death Worm, the oral drive cannot be satisfied by food. A point Paul made was that we should not confuse a Lacanian drive with our more ordinary ideas about instincts.

Paul returned to this radio programme and noted that what the women said fitted with Freud's views on anorexia and bulimia and with Lacan's views on drives and jouissance. This is not like normal eating or even normal overeating. It is robotic, fast, a compulsion and the thinking self is disabled. The drives have a life of their own. The last is not just a metaphor. While other parts of the personality may be more complex the drives have the single function of a constant pressure to be satisfied.

This is a different way of thinking about eating disorders. Drives are not necessarily affected by childhood eating experiences, of being overfed or starved, or of food being the only comfort of an abused person. It can seem to be related to shame, but is more likely that shame is a consequence of the driven nature of an eating disorder and the need to keep this driven compulsion secret and hidden.

Eating disorders are very hard to treat. Their compulsive nature makes it hard for eating advice or programmes like Weight watchers to be helpful. Normally our Superegos can keep our bad or self destructive impulses in check (I think this is what is meant by willpower.) With eating disorders the Superego can be as ineffective as the reality checking of the Ego.

Paul pointed out how destructive our drives are, they are indifferent to our health and life. As one woman noted that her eating disorder was tantamount to self harm and was a slow form of suicide. Indeed this is the price of jouissance.

Thinking about this satisfying but joyless and destructive compulsions can lead to therapeutic nihilism. However Paul pointed that people are motivated to seek therapy when the price of jouissance becomes too high and they experience being drained of satisfaction.

I think that Lacanian psychoanalysis is one of the hardest therapeutic approaches to understand and particularly if trying to do by reading translations of Lacan's original writings. While there was some bafflement in this seminar Paul was able to convey the power of Lacanian psychoanalysis to understand the most intractable psychological problems and tie these difficult concepts to the lived experiences of the women interviewed about their eating disorders.

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(NB this is a mailing address only)