

Two-Chair Work: its transformative potential and pitfalls

Solutions to the technique's recurring problems and limitations

A weekend workshop in Athens with Michael Soth (24 – 25 March 2018)

When it comes to shifting the focus of therapeutic interaction from 'talking about' to 'exploring the experience', there are few techniques more useful than 'empty-chair' or 'two-chair' work (this applies to therapy as well as supervision).

However, when therapists risk using the technique, it often does not produce the intended or intuited results. Having started with what seemed a burning, vibrant issue, the spark gets lost, and the interaction 'goes flat' or starts going round in circles.

This CPD workshop is designed to engender both detailed knowledge and skill as well as confidence, whatever level of experience you are currently bringing to this type of work.



The 'empty-chair' technique or 'two-chair work' is one of the best-known and widely-used humanistic methods. The technique invites/allows the client to embody the felt reality of particular relationship difficulties they feel caught in and bring them to life (rather than 'talking about'). This can take the shape of psychodrama or role-play of the dialogue with actual others, or it can simply be an externalising and enacting of internal, fantasised or dreamt dynamics.

One of the advantages of the technique is that it can be applied fluidly to both external and internal relationships, often helping the client to not only *see*, but *feel* the parallels and connections between internal and external ways of relating which are at the root of what perpetuates unsatisfying, polarised or destructive relationships.

Undoubtedly, the technique has many therapeutic uses and benefits, and can facilitate powerful, transformative experiences. But when therapists attempt to use it, they frequently report in supervision that it did not work, that it 'went flat', or that the client self-consciously refused to 'perform'.

How can we anticipate and deal with these recurring obstacles?

Rather than setting ourselves (and the client) up for the pressure of the technique having to produce a 'good' outcome, let's understand the inherent principles of the technique and how the dialogue is actually *bound* to 'go flat'. Based on that understanding, we can then pay attention to *how* it does go flat when it does and make that awareness useful for the particular dialogue we have set up in the first place. This kind of stance takes care of the usual 'self-consciousness' or 'performance anxiety' associated with the use of the technique (for both client and therapist), and helps therapists maintain the exploratory intention inherent in the approach.

Although the technique arises from within a Gestalt paradigm and fits and belongs with the principles of that holistic approach and its underlying field theory, it has been taken up and is being used by a wide variety of other therapeutic schools, often without practitioners even knowing about its origins in Gestalt. But in order to address the inherent pitfalls and difficulties of the technique, the perspectives and paradigms of other approaches are very useful, especially body-oriented and psychoanalytic perspectives, but also, for example, NLP and CBT. Because I bring this broad-spectrum perspective to the technique, the workshop should be suitable for practitioners from across the modalities and orientations.

This weekend workshop is an opportunity to comprehensively enhance your confidence in using the technique, by understanding and familiarising yourself with its inherent pitfalls and recurring stumbling blocks. As the use of any technique is very much about the detail of the therapist's actual delivery as well as the underlying principles, we will proceed sequentially during the course of the workshop, addressing the various stages of two-chair work:

1. perceiving the polarities,
2. setting up the dialogue,
3. directing it and
4. facilitating resolution, including the possibility of taking a third position.

Discussion of the principles and theory will alternate with skills practice in 2's or 3's or small groups. A detailed paper, containing many of the ideas and principles of the workshop will be available.



About Michael Soth

Michael Soth is an integral-relational Body Psychotherapist, trainer and supervisor (UKCP), living in Oxford, UK. Over the last 30 years he has been teaching on a variety of counselling and therapy training courses, alongside working as Training Director at the Chiron Centre for Body Psychotherapy.

Inheriting concepts, values and ways of working from both psychoanalytic and humanistic traditions, he is interested in the therapeutic relationship as a bodymind process between two people who are both wounded and whole.



In his work and teaching, he integrates an unusually wide range of psychotherapeutic approaches, working towards a full-spectrum integration of all therapeutic modalities and approaches, each with their gifts, wisdom and expertise as well as their shadow aspects, fallacies and areas of obliviousness. He has written numerous articles and is a frequent presenter at conferences. Extracts from his published writing as well as hand-outs, blogs and summaries of presentations are available through his website for INTEGRA CPD: www.integra-cpd.co.uk.

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A broad-spectrum integration of a wide variety of therapeutic approaches:

Here is a list of approaches that Michael draws from and includes, vaguely in sequence of his own trainings and his exposure to them over the last 30 years:

- drawing on all the schools of the Body Psychotherapy tradition (Reichian, vegeto, bioenergetics, biosynthesis, biodynamic, somatic psychology, somatic trauma therapy, etc)
- wide range of humanistic-integrative approaches, incl. Gestalt, Process-Oriented Psychology, breathwork & rebirthing, Transactional Analysis, Psychodrama, and others; also existential perspectives
- psychoanalytic: object relations, self psychology, intersubjectivity & relational perspectives
- systemic: both in terms of Bert Hellinger's family constellations and the systemic approach, as well as systems theory, complexity theory and integral and fractal perspectives
- transpersonal: Jungian and archetypal psychology, psychosynthesis, Wilber, mindfulness
- constructivist, including NLP (Neurolinguistic Programming) and hypnotherapy (Erickson)
- cognitive-behavioural models and techniques
- somatic trauma therapies, including Rothschild, Levine (Somatic Experiencing), Ogden (sensori-motor) and EMDR

These days, many of the above approaches are being combined into new hybrid forms, so Michael aims to keep updated with these ongoing developments."

Booking & further information for the workshop:

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