

Booking Form

Please reserve a place for me on the CPD weekend “Working at the Edge of Chaos” - 29 & 30 April 2017.

I enclose a cheque for £180/£200.

I enclose a cheque for £
and would like to apply for a bursary.

Please make cheques payable to: Michael Soth.

Name

Address

.....

..... Postcode

phone (w)

phone (h)

email

Professional background / training:

.....

.....

My practice (years/setting/approach, etc):

.....

.....

.....

Please send the booking form to: Michael Soth
14 Hawthorn Close, Oxford OX2 9DY



Format of the Weekend:

We will meet 10am - 5pm on Saturday, 9.30am - 4.30pm on Sunday, with a couple of tea breaks during the morning and afternoon session, and one hour for lunch.

Venue:

We will meet in a modern Community Centre in Summertown, North Oxford, near to restaurants and shops as well as a good range of B&Bs for overnight accommodation.

Booking & Bursaries:

To qualify for the early booking fee of £180, we need to receive your completed booking form and cheque by 31 Jan. 2017. After that date, the full fee of £200 will be payable. These payments are non-refundable unless the workshop is cancelled.

At any stage we will reserve 10% of the enrolments we receive for our bursary fund. To apply for a bursary, please send a deposit of at least £100 and a concise statement of your situation and the relevant reasons for the bursary application.

Confirmation of bookings, details of the venue and directions will be sent out in mid-April 2017.

For further details, contact:

Michael: info@integra-cpd.co.uk
Tel.: 01865 725 205

Please contact me for any queries related to booking, practical details or special needs you want to let me know about.

Nick: nick@erthworks.co.uk

Working at the Edge of Chaos

Dancing between risk and stability in psychotherapy

A CPD weekend in Oxford for counsellors and psychotherapists

with Nick Totton & Michael Soth

Open to practitioners from all approaches and theoretical orientations

Dates: Sat./Sun. 29 & 30 April 2017

Cost: £200 - Venue: Oxford, UK

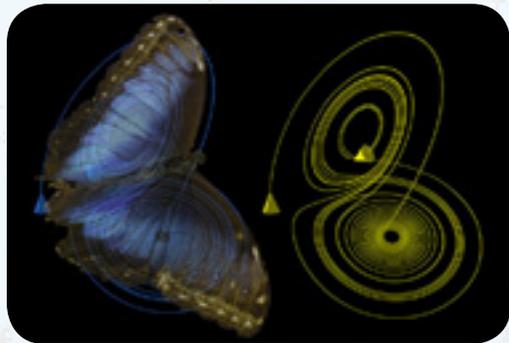
(£180 if booked by 31 January 2017 - bursaries available)

www.erthworks.co.uk or www.integra-cpd.co.uk

How are chaos and complexity relevant to our work as therapists?

Chaos and complexity theory are recently developed disciplines that give us new perspectives on how systems evolve and change. Therefore, the more we think about *therapy in terms of systems*, the more these theories apply to our work: to each individual bodymind-*psyche* as a system, or the therapeutic relationship, or the social networks both client and therapist are embedded in.

Process in complex systems - from galaxies to human beings to microbes - is understood to operate in a dynamic tension between stable equilibrium and evolving change, between established structures and emerging process: *at the edge of chaos*.



The well-known idea is that it only takes a butterfly flapping its wings to tip the meteorological balance towards engendering a hurricane on the other side of the planet.

It's not that simple, of course, but there are similar dynamics at work in the psyche, where unconscious forces can accumulate invisibly, and lead to apparently sudden, big outer changes.

The traditional 'linear' paradigm of change in therapy

That is not how we traditionally approach change in therapy where it is usually assumed that it takes lots of concerted effort – by both client and therapist - to make big and lasting changes. The bigger the effort and force we apply, the bigger the change. In such a Newtonian universe - rather than attending to systemic configurations - we get focussed on what *we want to achieve*, i.e. on insight, sustained discipline and conscious choices; this usually involves overcoming resistances. The very idea of therapy being effective is then defined in quite linear terms as achieving progress, i.e. moving the client on, closer towards some idea of psychological health; and frequently the client is expected to fully get behind the change project.

Within that mindset, much of therapy subscribes to some idea of *what's wrong and needs to be improved*, i.e. ideas of pathology, borrowed from medicine - we therefore then need a 'treatment plan' and a therapy that is goal-oriented, symptom-focussed and directive, operating through an exclusively 'linear' paradigm of change. Even humanistic therapies can imply 'linear' agendas (e.g. self-actualisation). The idea of change as something we envision, plan and make happen is based on such 'linearity', like climbing up a mountain of steady progress.



Not all change is 'linear' – in fact 'linear' is the exception

Complexity theory reminds us that most change in reality does not follow those linear ideas (which are virtual abstractions and at best approximations, like a sequence of straight lines approximating an organic curve).

In reality, many interdependent variables as well as feedback loops affect every part of a system - on the one hand keeping things stable in the *status quo* and on the other pushing for new structures, 'attractors' and integrations. This can lead to apparently sudden ruptures and new possibilities (which - we understand with hindsight - have been brewing for a long time, waiting for favourable conditions).

This kind of dynamic change has been called 'non-linear' (as the effect is not in proportion to the force invested in making it happen). And it is in the nature of the beast that this kind of change is unpredictable and uncontrollable.

Wanderer, your footsteps are the road, and nothing more; wanderer, there is no road, the road is made by walking. By walking one makes the road, and upon glancing behind one sees the path that never will be trod again. Wanderer, there is no road - only wind trails upon the sea.

Antonio Machado

So rather than relying on conscious intention, deliberation and discipline, change is seen as always already emerging, always already underway. Therefore, rather than forcing change - to get rid of something negative, or to create something positive - we can be interested in what is already happening, what wants to happen, and what is opposing it.

This resonates with Gestalt's paradoxical theory: "Change happens when we accept 'what is'." We then take as our starting point that we are in conflict already - pushing for change, resisting emergence, fighting against 'what is' - those force fields always already exist, and we ignore or override them at our peril.

A spectrum of non-linear systemic forces and tendencies

Thus, complexity gives us a more comprehensive and embracing notion that there are many different types of change: linear and non-linear, regressive or progressive, sudden or incremental, overwhelming or organic, chaotic or planned; and it gives us the idea that systemic change might only need a therapist flapping their wings in a facilitative way, rather than pushing a boulder - or a donkey - up the hill.

At the boundary between established state and emerging process is the edge of chaos, where things are complex and in flux, the full picture unknown and outcomes unpredictable - like the shapes formed by the turbulences of rising smoke or flowing water, sensitive to the slightest environmental variations. The therapeutic process is similar, and it depends on the subtlety of our perception whether we are able to notice where that edge of chaos is from moment to moment.



Stability and risk - the paradox at the edge of chaos

Traditional science, and traditional therapy, find it hard to tolerate and operate beyond control, in that fertile area at the edge of chaos. Complexity theory, however, gives us the tools to thrive there, helping us to understand non-linear change and to surrender to its participative, unpredictable nature.

Inevitably, this confronts us with our own comfort zones and habits as therapists, e.g. our own bias towards stability or change, our own tendency to court, avoid or accept risk. This kind of enquiry opens up a rich field of therapeutic spontaneity and creativity: rather than fighting for change or against the status quo, we attend to subtle messages of emergent phenomena in the field which are already happening.

Why call it 'paradoxical'?

Because the more we include our spontaneous embodied, emotional, imaginal and mental processes in our moment-to-moment awareness, the more elusive the clear distinction between 'risk' and 'stability' becomes - we realise that these apparent polarities co-create each other, deconstruct each other, until each subtly turns into the other. At the edge of chaos, risk and stability imply each other ...

Chaos implies 'embodiment' and bodymind process

Following the therapeutic process at this level of paradox requires attention to bodymind and systemic micro-detail, both internally and interpersonally, and a therapeutic presence that is equally fluid and solid: anchored and stable as well as nimble and mercurial. We then recognise that on pre-reflexive levels of the interaction in the therapeutic relationship, the attachment - and the working alliance - is indeed a shifting, oscillating complex dance - there are many butterflies flapping their wings all the time, and it needs our own differentiated embodiment and flesh-and-blood presence to notice and pursue them.

Learning together at the edge of chaos

In this territory, timing, responsiveness and spontaneity are crucial - learning about therapy at the edge of chaos cannot happen via a manual, not even a video: you need to be present, embodied in the room in the group and participate. Left-brain reflection - as important as it is in the therapeutic position - usually happens after the event, maybe in preparation for the next one ... For this event, we will turn that requirement into a feature: just as we do not have control over the process in therapy, we cannot and will not set a curriculum for this weekend, and you will become co-responsible for the unfolding of your own and the group's learning process.

The weekend is an opportunity to dance at your own growing edge as a person and a therapist, to deepen your own idiosyncratic therapeutic style and find your own way to inhabit the paradox of risk and stability.

Rather than imagining that we are directing the boat of therapy across a calm lake in a straight deliberate line, facilitating any kind of dynamic process in any complex system is more like white water rafting - giving an occasional intentional steer at a crucial moment, but knowing that the situation is fundamentally unpredictable. The illusion of being able to control the process is one of the greatest hindrances in the helping professions, and complexity puts that impulse into perspective.

Nick Totton

I am a therapist and trainer with 30 years experience. Originally a Reichian body therapist, my approach has become broad based and open to the spontaneous and unexpected. I have an MA in Psychoanalytic Studies, and have worked with Process-Oriented Psychology and trained as a craniosacral therapist. I am currently involved with ecopsychology and addressing climate change. I have a grown up daughter. I have written several books, including *Body Psychotherapy: An Introduction*; *Psychotherapy and Politics*; *Press When Illuminated: New and Selected Poems*; and most recently, *Wild Therapy* and *Not A Tame Lion*, both published by PCCS Books. See www.nicktotton.net. I live in Cornwall with my partner and grow vegetables.



Michael Soth



I describe myself these days as an integral-relational Body Psychotherapist, trainer, supervisor and consultant. Over the last 28 years I have been teaching on a variety of counselling courses and worked as Training Director at the Chiron Centre for Body Psychotherapy. Inheriting concepts, values and ways of working from both psychoanalytic and humanistic traditions, I am interested in the therapeutic relationship as a bodymind process between two people who are both wounded and whole.

I draw on a wide range of psychotherapeutic approaches, including Gestalt, Process-Oriented Psychology, TA, Psychosynthesis, Family Constellations and others from the humanistic side; and relational, intersubjective and object relations perspectives as well as Jungian and archetypal psychology from the psychoanalytic end of the spectrum.

For details of other CPD events, as well as my published writing, blogs and other resources, visit: www.integra-cpd.co.uk.