

Memory, Meaning and Mortality: control-alt-delete – some clinical reflections on the nature of suicidal phantasies

Pete Holloway

This paper will involve an exploration of two clinical case examples of dramatherapy work with two highly suicidal individuals. For both of these individuals the fantasy of their own enacted death is an attempt to resolve their own problematic relationship to the memory of their existence. For one client the desire is to free himself of his own profoundly traumatic formative memories so that he is no longer haunted by them; for the other client her desire is to delete her own existence in the lives and memories of others who may have attempted to love or care about her.

The dramatherapy practice under consideration in these clinical scenarios is loosely based around the dramatic metaphor of a “why-dunnit”, as opposed to a “whodunnit”, to investigate and explore the motives behind potential ‘self-murder’. The therapist attempts to position himself as detective-supporter-healer in response to the material and psychological reality of each individual containing within themselves the potential of perpetrator (of self-murder), victim and near-death survivor.

The relationship between the clients’ desired fantasy of their enacted death, their own memories and lived experience, and the reality of remaining alive (despite previous serious attempts) will be explored through a dramatherapeutic perspective of conducting intensive group work with suicide survivors and adapting insights from that group experience to individual work with currently suicidal clients.

The paper will draw on insights from dramatherapy practice, existential psychotherapy and suicidology research and will invite discussion with participants/audience members to share their own thoughts and insights into the conflicting and contradictory dilemmas that each of these clients (and the therapist) are faced with.

Biography

Pete Holloway has been a Lecturer on the MA Dramatherapy programme at Roehampton University since its inception in 1993 and is also currently employed as a Consultant Dramatherapist and Clinical Lead for a specialist psychological therapies team within community mental health service in the UK NHS.

Recent Publications

Holloway – “Cancer as Countertransference – isolation, uncertainty and empathy: the (un)holy trinity of the therapeutic endeavour”. Dramatherapy Wales Conference, November 2019

Holloway – “Tilting at Giants: the effects of austerity on the psychodynamic tradition in public health provision – a challenge for arts therapists” Ecarte, Alcalá de Henares 2019

Holloway, Seebohm & Seymour - “Thesis, antithesis, synthesis: new articulations of stasis and change” Ecarte, Krakow 2017

Holloway & Seebohm - “‘The world turned inside out’ - politics, professionalism and therapeutic process” Keynote presentation Dramatherapy Wales Conference, November 2016

Dokter, Holloway & Seebohm (eds) - “Dramatherapy and Destructiveness – Creating the Evidence-base, Playing with Thanatos” Routledge 2011

