

# TOMORROW, AND TOMORROW, AND TOMORROW ...

## CREEPING TOWARDS A POSTMODERN TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

**Reference:** Kellett van Leer, P. (2017). *Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow ... Creeping towards a Postmodern Transactional Analysis*. Retrieved from: <http://www.psychamerica.info/home/publications>

Jacques-Alain Miller once mused that, “The most pertinent references are not always the most explicit ones, and no index of names will ever detect them. One would need an index of all that is not said: back-of-the-mind thoughts, cryptic allusions, resonances, and other *invisibilia*. Actually, I might just have a go at it one day ...” (2016: 191).

In putting the more pertinent thoughts on the side of the non-explicit, the invisibled, Miller is echoing the Freudian hypothesis that the most pertinent thoughts are the domain of the unconscious, and the psychoanalytic project that such thoughts can be detected and indexed. Such a project, of course, is notoriously vicarious; while we can rely on the unconscious to ‘speak its mind’ with no deference to our civilized manner nor reference to burden of translation that such a speaking imposes, we cannot rely on any success with regard to the task of an indexing, whatever shape or form that might take. Perhaps the analytic project can be seen, in the end, as one of indexing; but then, as with so many such propositions, the value of such a notion hinges on how we define the process of indexing.

Miller’s words also refer us to the Foucauldian notion of the periphery, that population – of peoples or ideas, of forms of life – that form the event horizon of those dominant master discourses that comprise a social order at any given time. Again, in this sense, the most pertinent references, in this sense, are those that tend to be drowned out, marginalized if not pathologised; othered, in other words.

Postmodernism arose in recognition that such other discourses have pertinence, one that master discourses are forged to silence, just as psychoanalysis arose in recognition that the unconscious speaks the truth, one that conscious thoughts are forged to hide.

Transactional analysis, like any more-or-less coherent philosophy, theory and practice has its authorised center and its radical periphery, a fringe that is all too often invisibled. This collection of my own musings on what I have come to call ‘a postmodern transactional analysis’ represents a part of my attempt to have a go at indexing a resonance or allusion to such invisibilia within Transactional Analysis, or TA.

## ANOTHER FINE MESS

Why bother with such an indexing? Well, in part, I believe it is warranted due to the fine mess in which the center has lead TA today.

In its barren, post-apocalyptic place of birth, North America, TA is largely extinct, and one can do little more than excavate the bones of its previous heyday here and there in those urban meccas where the fragments of a fossilized mantra can yet be unearthed. In Europe, one can come across pockets of a divergent resurgence; from a fledgling return to the orthodoxy of TA's early idealistic pseudo-pragmatism, discovered as if for the first time and buoyed by a naïve and oppressively normalizing cognitive-behaviorism, through the largely untranslated Italian project of a translation of Eric Berne's pseudo-Freudian roots, to the relational fetishists, led by a secessionist London whose post-colonial evangelical mission preaches a watered-down version of US relational and developmental psychoanalysis with fundamentalist fervor. If we head further eastward towards the oceanic edge of the Pacific Rim, we can hear the tangled echoes of each of these whisperings, amongst which the seeds of new life straining to see the light, such as the Cocreative perspective within TA, which continues to be nurtured by one of its original proponents, Professor Keith Tudor of Auckland University, someone to whom I owe a great deal regarding this project.

There are many reasons for this fine mess within TA. One reason can be found in the political 'will to power' that determines the authorised, *(in)corporated* face of TA. In this regard, the desire for legitimacy as defined by modernist, scientific values has resulted in a sterilized, impotent body of philosophy, theory and practice; a mirage of a coherent and lack-less body of 'knowledge' that nonetheless appears seductively attractive to students, practitioners and clients for a variety of reasons that coalesce around the desire for the comfort of an imaginary sense of mastery.

Yet more fundamentally, the fossilization of TA arises from a resistance to evolve from a modernist paradigm towards a postmodernist one. TA is, of course, not alone in this amongst the humanistic psychotherapies (or, indeed, several psychoanalytic strains) even though the challenge of such evolution is at the very heart of the analytic principle and process, epitomized in the notion of working through, as opposed to that of repetition.

Attempts at shedding a postmodern light upon TA began in the early '80s; championed by the likes of Barbara and Jim Allen and Bruce Loria, and have continued to be developed by such as Graeme Summers and Keith Tudor, to name a few of those who have been most influential on my own development. Yet these attempts have been actively fought to such an extent that we can hear only the faintest gravitational echo of a postmodernist sensibility in the sanitized discourse that (pre)dominates our TA training institutions and publications. In line with the Foucauldian principle of marginalization, it is no surprise that the postmodernist endeavor should find itself already/always relegated to the periphery, just as psychoanalysis and transactional analysis find themselves sidelined as countercultural within the wider zeitgeist of contemporary psy-practices.

Perhaps this is a *necessity*, in the Lacanian sense. After all, the search for ways to develop theory and practice that acknowledge this dynamic of normative oppression while, at the same time, refusing to submit, offers a fertile and (let's not deny it) enjoyable drive that generates creativity and originality, if nothing else.

## SILVER LININGS

One of the many opportunities afforded by the fearfully asymmetrical postmodernist worlds we inhabit (and from which we cannot retreat) is the circumvention of master discourses and the

decentering of those institutions that attempt a consolidation of power and authority. Such decentering is spurred in particular when institutional power is experienced as dogmatic and restrictive, hindering rather than nurturing a growthful evolution.

The administration ostensibly governing the US at the time of writing these musings in 2016/17 is an all-too obvious example. Yet another such consolidation – more pertinent here, though it would seem less apparent – manifests as the tyranny of *editorial homogeneity*, and while this is something that self-publishing will not cure, it is something that self-publishing can actively decenter, speaking a truth to a power that fears its denied impotence.

And while, on the one hand, the internet can famously give voice to lies and distortions in the name of some #realtruth – the Trumpery of perversion – nonetheless, the internet can also give voice to the periphery, to the invisibles, and thus, to “the most pertinent”.

Furthermore, the internet is a place where a far greater diversity of voices may be raised and heard by a far greater readership when compared with subscription-only journals, journals whose profits benefit the publishing house more than the authors whose work is bound thereafter in the wrongs of copyrights.

It is for these reasons, primarily amongst other, that I have chosen to publish this collection of papers here.

To be relevant, to speak meaningfully in, of and to our lives, analytic theory must evolve. The danger is all too often that, where any theory, be it of analysis or cake-baking, assumes the status of a doctrine, becomes fixed as an accepted ‘truth’, then that theory is all too easily defended with an irrational zeal in such a way as to eclipse an analytic exploration of our truths, as I discuss in my paper *Beyond Dogma*. Official journals and trainings programmes all too easily become the standard bearers of such a perversion, invariably creating the kind of strains within the practice of psychotherapy that give birth to destructive splits. Yet it is such splits that in time give rise to new shoots, some of which may flourish, if only to eventually grow into the gnarled trunks that in turn give rise to new shoots.

Certainly, the musings you’ll find here are generally regarded as heretical by many – though not all – of the self-appointed apostles of Eric Berne, the father of TA; a man who admittedly would hardly have aligned himself with post-modernism (but, then, neither did Freud, one who is regarded by many as a father of postmodernism). And so, as such, these musings have been *invisibles* by those who lay claim to define the mainstream within TA, those who lay claim to define the *authorised* body of knowledge of TA; the ‘truth’.

These most pertinent references, then, are amongst the unauthorised invisibles of the TA of tomorrow.

## RAGTAG

It is in this context that this ragtag collection of papers sketches out a panorama of what I have called *postmodern transactional analysis*. Not *the* postmodern *school* of transactional analysis, for such a definitive claim to a meta-narrative is contrary to a postmodernist project, but rather *a* postmodern transactional analysis, not a *school*, not a dogma, but rather a way of introducing postmodernist

ethics and philosophy into a transactional analysis that, as this collection of papers demonstrates, has become ossified, if not petrified.

What I have been able to include here represents those of my writings that have not become ensnared within the wrongs publishing rights.

- Kellett, P. (2004a). *The Truth is Out There: Constructing Contamination*. The EATA Newsletter, 78: 6 – 10 and The Script, 34(1): 1 – 2
- Kellett, P. (2004b). *Queer Constructions: The Making of Gay Men and the Role of the Homoerotic in Psychotherapy*. Transactional Analysis Journal, 34 (1): 180 – 190
- Kellett, P. (2006a). Theory Papers from CTA written examination
- Kellett, P. (2006b). *The Enigma of Desire Part 1: Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. Transactions, 5: 18 – 32
- Kellett, P. (2007a). *Playing with Theory: a Relational Search for Self*. In: Tudor, K. (Ed) *The Adult is Parent to the Child: Transactional Analysis with Children and Young People* (238 – 249). Dorset: Russell House Publishing
- Kellett, P. (2007b). *The Enigma of Desire 2: The Development of Selfhood*. Transactions, 6: 15 – 33
- Kellett, P. (2007c). *Beyond Dogma: Playing with Theory*. ITA National Conference; York, 12 – 15 April 2007
- Kellett van Leer, P. (2009). *In Your Absence: Desire and the Impossibility of Intimacy*. Transactional Analysis Journal, 39 (2): 117 – 129
- Kellett van Leer, P. (2011). *Aspects of Selfhood*. In: Fowlie, H. and Sills, C. (Eds.) *Relational Transactional Analysis: Principles in Practice* (69 – 80). London: Karnac Books
- Kellett van Leer, P. (2015). *Variations on a Theme: Handling Transference from Freud to Laplanche*. In: Bonnigal-Katz, D. (Ed.) *Sitegeist: a Journal of Psychoanalysis & Philosophy*, 10 (Spring 2015): 35 - 53
- Kellett van Leer, P. (2016). *Postmodern Transactional Analysis I: The Development, Structure and Function of Identity*
- Kellett van Leer, P. (2017a). *Postmodern Transactional Analysis II: The Development, Structure and Function of Selfhood*
- Kellett van Leer, P. (in review). *Postmodern Transactional Analysis III: Decontamination & the Enigmatic Enquiry*
- Kellett van Leer, P. (in review). *Postmodern Transactional Analysis IV: Deconfusion & the Enigmatic Interpretation*

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## DECONTAMINATING TA

*Then how should I begin  
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?*

(T. S. ELIOT, 1963, *THE LOVE SONG OF J. ALFRED PRUFROCK*)

Casting my eye over these papers, these butt ends, I have come to see several threads that, you could say, bind this weave. One such thread is that of *decontamination*, immediately announced in the oldest article, and very much the focus *da capo* of the first of the series of four papers entitled “Postmodern Transactional Analysis”.

Might we not say, then, that this towards postmodernism is, at least in part, a process of decontamination; the decontamination of a TA that has become contaminated with those strictures and restrictions of an outdated modernism and the constraints of the processes of standardisation and sanitization I outlined above?

One aim, then, that this creeping onwards attempts is the *decontamination* of TA. This echoes Jean Laplanche’s project of refounding psychoanalysis via a psychoanalysis of psychoanalysis, if not Jacques Lacan’s project of returning to Freud. Yet TA is no psychoanalysis, as Berne made clear from the outset; something that I have come to discover through my adventures in the consulting room. TA is indeed a preparatory, and many of the problems that rent TA philosophy, theory and practice that I discuss in my papers are born of an attempted overreach, a stretching of TA beyond its remit to prepare analysands for psychoanalysis.

Thus, it is in the hope that TA might begin to evolve that I publish these papers here. As for who might be interested in reading them; frankly, I wait to find out. The trainee or practitioner who is looking for the Holy Grail of an integrated, complete theory of human nature that creates the illusion of intellectual, emotional and practical mastery will be inevitably disappointed, even if, at first, some tantalising promise is glimpsed. So too the unwitting client, who perhaps more honestly seeks relief from her or his anguish. Rather, the earnest *analysand* may find ways to play with the ideas put forward here; with one important caveat, something Berne was wistfully fond of pointing out; to return to Prufrock:

*I am no prophet ... and here’s no great matter*