

JACK THE RIPPER, THE AESTHETIC CRITERION, AND THE STRUCTURE OF “EVIL”

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Evil and beauty overwhelm the contact- boundary



Beauty is the sublime. We assimilate its rapture into our enchantment with the world. Beauty is for without purpose. It draws us always forward — to dream, to hope, to create. It shines through the aesthetic of contact.

Evil is darkness intractable. Its life-annihilating power destroys understanding. It assaults us; we cannot assimilate it. It freezes us in horror. Evil shatters form — overwhelms sense and sensibility.

The aesthetic criterion of contacting has been accused of being blind to evil, to Jack the Rippers. It returns gestalt therapy to individualism and worse, to moral nihilism where anything goes.

Not so: The aesthetic criterion is the heart of our clinical practice. Without it we lose the creative freedom of contacting itself. Gestalt therapists always already use the aesthetic criterion in their work.

There *is* an ethical structure intrinsic in the theory/practice of gestalt therapy — and this is a *command to relationality*.

I will hand out a summary and glossary of terms. There will be small group process, experiment, and discussion.

Dan Bloom is a Fellow of the NYIGT. He has written about the aesthetic criterion in gestalt therapy and most recently on its place in the ethics implicit in gestalt therapy's theory/practice. His particular interest is in amplifying the existential and phenomenological dimensions of our clinical practice. He has recently been drawn to “evil” in his study of Arendt and Levinas from within a gestalt therapy frame.