

Does it matter if we look at Biodynamic Massage from a psycho-analytic perspective?

By Gill Westland

The question of how we look at and reflect on biodynamic massage has preoccupied me for some time. In the past this has often been stimulated by discomfort when in discussions, but I have not known quite why. However, what has been clear to me is that something has not been quite right. There are other questions linked with the opening title. These are does it matter whether we have a stated philosophical, scientific or psychological perspective from which to view biodynamic massage? What difference does it make to discussion on biodynamic massage if we are talking within a stated perspective?

Even if we do take an explicit position how aware are we of where we slip from it? What does the language that we use implicitly say about the view we are taking? How would it change things if we were more aware of our underlying assumptions? As we become aware of our assumptions, are these congruent with biodynamic massage? If they are not congruent, what value might they have anyway?

My concerns about having an explicit perspective from which to view biodynamic massage led me to write about a psycho-spiritual model of supervision for biodynamic massage.¹ Part of the aim of this article is to say more about the thinking behind the model and why I think it serves biodynamic massage well.

More recently the question of the philosophical underpinning of biodynamic massage has re-emerged in the context of major revisions going on in the sciences. New physics, new biology, rapid developments in neuroscience and child psychology research are fuelling discussions within psychotherapy.

In 2001 the UKCP Conference at Warwick University was entitled “Revolutionary Connections, Psychotherapy and Neuroscience”. I attended the conference and presented a workshop on “How do Body Psychotherapists work with overwhelming feelings? It was well received and participants had an *experience* of how embodied relationship is created with another which is containing of feelings.

The preparation for the conference, subsequent reading and discussion has refined my position. But before I go more directly into the theme of this paper and current thoughts I want to make some background comments to give context to the discussion.

Perspectives have political consequences

During the 1980's I became acquainted with Kuhn's book “*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*” and learned about the social construction of science. Kuhn refers to “normal science” where “research is firmly based upon one or more past scientific achievements, achievements that some particular community acknowledges for a time as supplying the foundation for its further practice.”² Science has bias not only in what is talked about, but what funding is given for scientific research by governments and industry.

This means that even if you have innovative thinking, you need to be “in the discussion” to stay in work and to advance your career. To be ignored means to be outside the prevailing community and paradigm.

All might not be lost though. Sometimes ideas are ahead of their times or their significance not appreciated. An example of this often given is Mendel's work on genetics which was “discovered” in an obscure journal many years after it was written. His work has since become part of mainstream science.

Our culture has awarded science with authority, and Varela et al³ has commented on the curious situation where “science is so dominant that we give it the authority to explain even when it denies what is most immediate and direct - our everyday, immediate experience”.

Nevertheless, increasingly the general public distrusts science and in many ways is ahead of it. Comparatively few complementary therapies are validated using strict scientific criteria, but there is a steady growth in the consumption of them. Robinson⁴ quotes the Report to the Department of Health⁵ which shows that there are 12,648 reflexologists, 7,634 massage therapists and 6,943 aromatherapists.

Biodynamic massage is included in the massage therapists grouping putting it in the second largest complementary therapy grouping in Britain. Robinson also reports that some five million people annually consult a complementary therapist and between 1990 and 1997 there has been a 46% increase in visits to complementary therapists. This is more than visits to primary care practitioners.

Biodynamic massage and Body Psychotherapy - inside or outside orthodoxy?

Biodynamic massage is inextricably linked with body psychotherapy. Biodynamic massage is *both* a complementary therapy and a mode of access in body psychotherapy. This gives body psychotherapists practising biodynamic massage, and biodynamic massage therapists the unusual position of being able to bridge the communities of body psychotherapy, and complementary therapy from their experience of using biodynamic massage. Both biodynamic massage and body psychotherapy are interesting in that their founders started out working within the scientific norms of medicine, but moved beyond them. Freud, himself also did this.

Body Psychotherapy

Reich, the acknowledged founder of body psychotherapy was a psychiatrist, led psycho-analytic seminars and worked alongside Freud to support his emerging theories. Over his life time he moved from an accepted biological perspective looking for the physiological basis of libido / neurosis to the discovery of the life force and orgone energy. Reich writes "...it was the consistent pursuit of the biological phenomena of the orgasm that led to the discovery of the orgone, thus to the cosmic energy which has a specific biological effect."⁶

As his ideas developed empirically he knew that he was moving beyond the confines of the science of his day, but could not deny his observations. In his scientific biography *The Function of the Orgasm* he summarises "The investigation of living matter went beyond the confines of depth psychology and physiology and entered unexplained biological territory. Sexuality and the living process became identical, and a new avenue of approach to the problem of biogenesis was opened. What was psychology became biophysics and a part of genuine, experimental natural science. Its core remains, as always, the enigma of love, to which we owe our being."⁷

In 1934 Reich was expelled from the International Psycho-analytic Association, ostensibly because of differences with Freud about the death instinct. Reich continued his work and teaching and gradually became part of "forbidden science"⁸. Boadella⁹ has described how body psychotherapy has functioned subsequently more like an "underground movement". Staunton also writes on this theme "In the past body psychotherapy has been taken less seriously in professional circles than most traditional approaches. It has been associated with "alternative" body *therapies* - primal therapy, rebirthing, Rolfing, shiatsu, Alexander, and Feldenkrais - and seen as a "fringe" therapy."¹⁰ In describing the field of psychotherapy Clarkson includes Reich in her examples of people hard to classify "because they cross over in terms of values, or because they have become fundamentally integrated with others. Reich "was from a psychoanalytic lineage, but his influence today is most clearly manifested in the humanistic/existential grouping"¹¹

More recently Totton also grapples with classification and puts forward the notion "the Reichian body psychotherapy tradition may represent a "third way", which we could visualise as the third apex of a triangle with the humanistic and psychodynamic traditions as its other two angles."¹² He argues for post Reichian body psychotherapy knowing its history and giving more attention to relationship issues. By this he means especially issues of transference and counter-transference.

It seems that body psychotherapists are often in the position of explaining and locating themselves. The history of body psychotherapy has meant that body psychotherapists, like any excluded minority group, have needed to think about political and philosophical issues, perhaps more than if they were in the "orthodox" community. How traditional or orthodox are they? Where do they want to be? How inside or outside do they want to be?

Biodynamic massage

Biodynamic massage was developed by Gerda Boyesen, who was a physiotherapist, psychologist and analyst, and held posts in Norwegian psychiatric hospitals. She came to her ideas independently and has not seen herself as "post-Reichian" although she has sometimes been incorrectly described this way.¹³ She was inspired by the massage work of the Head Physiotherapist, Aadel Bulow-Hansen at Ullevål psychiatric hospital. Bulow-Hansen had a lot of autonomy in her post, but was responsible to the head psychiatrist, Dr Trygve Braatoy. Braatoy was part of the group of psychiatrists taught by Reich in his time in Scandinavia. Nowadays Bulow-Hansen's massage is called Psycho-motorik technique and it is researched at Oslo university by Eline Thornquist and others.¹⁴

Whilst Bulow-Hansen's work was an influence on biodynamic massage, it was not the only one. Gerda Boyesen moved to Britain and taught her own psychology called biodynamic psychology, which included

biodynamic massage. Over the years other training institutes have been set up independently and have developed biodynamic massage in different directions.

The Chiron Centre, for example has worked to integrate humanistic and psycho-analytic psychotherapy. In their biodynamic massage they have emphasised the interpersonal relationship between therapist and client. The Cambridge Body Psychotherapy Centre (CBPC) has taken biodynamic massage into a psycho-spiritual framework. This places the spiritual at the centre of their work. The psycho-spiritual perspective draws on the wisdom of spiritual tradition, and also brings to it the insights of Western psychology. CBPC's biodynamic massage includes the interpersonal relationship, but it is not the main focus.

The atmospheres around the various centres also reflects the work going on in them. The Chiron Centre is probably most "hard edged", and the London School of Biodynamic Psychology (LSBP) most "soft edged" and CBPC is probably somewhere in the middle. These different atmospheres will tend to suit certain students and clients more than others and provide a rich choice.

Biodynamic massage and physiotherapy

Next I want to write about the significance of biodynamic massage having part of its lineage connected with Norwegian physiotherapy as practised in a psychiatric setting. Physiotherapy within psychiatry is different in Norway and Britain. These differences have an impact on the perception of biodynamic massage. They also highlight some of the issues around belonging to professional groupings and where orthodoxy lies. In Norway physiotherapy is a familiar discipline included in the healthcare team in psychiatry. In contrast, physiotherapy is rarely represented in psychiatry in Britain. Biodynamic massage is found in some National Health Service (NHS) settings, including mental health ones, but has mostly been practised in a private context. In Britain biodynamic massage is seen more like a complementary therapy but a possible development could have been its incorporation into British physiotherapy.

Apart from cultural differences about Norwegian physiotherapy in psychiatry the major stumbling block is that work with the energy of the life force is central to biodynamic massage, and the concept of energy is outside the medical model of thinking, except within a sub-section of it represented by the British Holistic Medical Association. This whole issue is of interest because some energy based complementary therapies are slowly being included in the NHS. How has this happened? And, does that open up the possibility more for biodynamic massage in the NHS?

Energy and Science

According to Oschman the position of 'energy medicine' is changing and a major gap in biology being filled: "Many therapists who work daily and successfully with human energy systems have felt alienated from the sciences that provide the logical and rational foundation for conventional medicine. Some of their most remarkable and important experiences, and those of their clients, seem to defy analysis from current scientific perspectives. A close look at energy medicine resolves this unnecessary confusion and controversy ... scientists have developed more than adequate measurable and logical connections between biological fields and generally accepted scientific knowledge. Methods have been developed to measure subtle but important energy fields within and around the human body ... We are beginning to understand the biophysical mechanisms that enable the discerning therapist to sense and manipulate energy fields for the benefit of the patient."¹⁵

Oschman goes on to document current research in this area. Another highly recommended book "*The Field*" by Lynne McTaggart documents similar respectable research papers, which when they are put together point to a shifting paradigm. The results of their well-designed experiments "fly in the face of current biology and physics. Together, these studies offer us copious information about the central organising force governing our bodies and the rest of the cosmos." She continues "At our most elemental, we are not a chemical reaction, but an energetic charge. Human beings and all living things are a coalescence of energy in a field of energy connected to every other living thing in the world. This pulsating energy field is the central engine of our being and our consciousness, the alpha and omega of our existence."¹⁶

Physiotherapy, biodynamic massage and the NHS

In my own experience biodynamic massage has had an interesting acquaintance with British physiotherapy. Atypically, Fulbourn psychiatric hospital in Cambridge, where I worked for a number of years had a small physiotherapy department and its head, Mary Hare wrote one of the few textbooks on physiotherapy in psychiatry.¹⁷ Mary Hare became acquainted with biodynamic massage through myself and later by Clover

Southwell, who ran various groups and demonstrations at the hospital in the 1980's. This was in the context of a model of psychiatry called Social therapy pioneered by Dr David Clark¹⁸. This model was very enabling of experimentation and innovation. Subsequently, the physiotherapy department was run by Patricia Caddy and she has employed two physiotherapy assistants, who have also been biodynamic massage therapists. These were Judy Cowell, and then Lesley Davies. Their biodynamic massage qualifications were regarded as a positive factor in their appointments.

During the 1980's I also taught biodynamic massage to a special interest group of physiotherapists in Harrogate in the physiotherapy department. The department reminded me of the open clinics at the Boyesen Centre, and I recognised more distinctly the physiotherapy roots in some aspects of the Boyesen Centre. The reception of biodynamic massage by these physiotherapists was mixed. They liked the massage and the hands on work as a counter balance to modern physiotherapy, which has become more technological. But one stumbling block seemed to be the place of emotion in the NHS, and its climate of not allowing feelings to have much space.

Biodynamic massage and the medical model has another significant link through the work of Peg Nunneley. Nunneley, a nurse and a psychologist has written on biodynamic psychology with case examples applied to angina¹⁹, idiopathic lower back pain²⁰, Parkinson's Syndrome²¹, migraine²², and depression²³. These articles bridge the communities of medicine and biodynamic psychology.

Biodynamic massage as a complementary therapy has its own issues about where it belongs. But biodynamic massage within body psychotherapy, and then body psychotherapy within the larger field of psychotherapy is even more problematic. Massage as part of psychotherapy is quite unusual. Moreover apart from some body psychotherapy trainings (but not all) psychotherapists have no training in the use of touch, and therefore no experience of its use and potential as a form of communication within psychotherapy. It is from this lack of embodied experience that discussions on the use of touch in psychotherapy are often discussed. Carroll has entered this debate courageously with her excellent chapter *Biodynamic massage in psychotherapy: re-integrating, re-owning and re-associating through the body*²⁴ in which she is implicitly talking to psycho-analytic psychotherapy.

Body Psychotherapy comes into dialogue

Body psychotherapy has been "unorthodox", but with "orthodox roots". This is gradually changing and shows how boundaries around orthodoxy can shift. The advent of the Rugby conferences, which later became the UK Council for Psychotherapy gave an opportunity to body psychotherapists to dialogue face to face with other modalities of psychotherapy. This came about because the Rugby conferences were open to anyone practising psychotherapy from whatever modality.

This policy of inclusion of psychotherapies is not the situation in the rest of Europe where body psychotherapy is more "outside". Body psychotherapists have been able to use the opportunity of inclusion and have gradually found their place within UKCP.

There is currently an enormous interest in the body through the recognition of trauma impacting on the body; developments in neuroscience, and especially new understanding of the neurological impact of early attachment and misattunements between infants and carers. See for example, van der Kolk,²⁵ Rothschild,²⁶ Schore,²⁷ de Zuleta.²⁸

Body psychotherapists and biodynamic massage therapists have particular expertise which includes working with very early pre-verbal states, direct work with the life force, working with the rhythms of embodied relationship, and disassociated states, and more. These areas are of interest to other psychotherapists and UKCP is one forum where this is manifesting. In 2001 at the UKCP conference, Roz Carroll, our first Association of Holistic Biodynamic Massage Therapists chair took a leading role very skilfully. David Boadella was also a key note speaker.

Levels of Consciousness and the Location of Biodynamic Massage

So far I have been setting the background and now I want to turn more directly to the question of whether it matters if we look at biodynamic massage from a psycho-analytic perspective. Wilber has written about consciousness as a spectrum or "rainbow" and postulates that different psychotherapies operate within different bands of consciousness. All psychotherapies are useful in some way, but clarity is needed about what is within

and outside a band of consciousness within which a psychotherapy is operating. Without this there is muddle, confusion and misunderstanding.

Whilst different psychotherapy and complementary therapy communities function relatively more in one band of consciousness than another, it should be remembered that it is human beings engaging in discussion. The whole range of consciousness is there from whatever perspective and community we are discussing in and the whole range is potentially available to all of us.

Wilber is aware that he is oversimplifying, but places at one end of the spectrum universal consciousness or unity consciousness, which is central to all major religions. Psycho-spiritual psychotherapy roots its perspective in this level and from time to time glimpses it. Wilber writes "...this type of awareness, this unity consciousness or supreme identity, is the nature and condition of all sentient beings; but ... we progressively limit our world and turn from our true nature to embrace boundaries. Our originally pure and unitive consciousness then functions on varied levels, with different identities and different boundaries."²⁹

Gradually we see the world through more and more layers of filtering as we create relatively more solid boundaries. Areas of our experience get walled off and unknown to us. And so at the other end of the spectrum are territories where consciousness is relatively more narrow. One of these territories Wilbur calls the ego level. This is the main arena of psychoanalysis. Varela et al comment that psychoanalysis uses "unreason" but "the psycho-analytic method works predominately within an individual's conceptual system"³⁰.

This process of developing filtering of direct experience is what happens for all of us. It is required for healthy ego development. It is just how it is, it is neither good, nor bad. Buddhist psychology describes human beings as being composed of five skandhas. These are also known as the Five Aggregates or heaps and are a map of ego development. These are form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness.³¹ This process of ego development enables us to relate in communities, but if we are identified with the skandhas, we lose contact with the immediacy of being in the present moment. Our perceptions become filtered through past experiences, fantasies, beliefs and projections.

At one end of Wilber's spectrum of consciousness there is "no boundary" and at the other end there are layers of relatively rigid form creating boundaries. Linda Hartley has written about direct experience and the skandhas, and related this to Authentic movement "There is nothing inherently wrong with the five skandhas and their contents; they are completely natural occurrences ... But there is a problem with the way in which we complicate the simplicity of each moment through our complex elaboration of associations, projections, judgements, and interpretations. It is the source of all our personal and interpersonal conflict, the way we solidify our position, become entrenched in our opinions, and create enemies within and without."³²

Turning back to Wilber, he describes the territory of each band of consciousness, where we create divisions or boundaries between what is me and not-me. These boundaries mark the battlefields of each territory and what the different psychotherapies operating within each band are working to heal. One example of this is the fractured mind/body relationship, which body psychotherapists work to heal. At the level of unity consciousness there is no division into mind and body, but many of us identify ourselves with the mind and have disassociated from the body. As the body is disowned we create a boundary between mind and body. Dualism is born and Western thinking is dominated by it. We come to believe the dualistic illusion and act on it even if we intellectually know otherwise for it is hard to escape culture and patterning.

In Wilber's mapping of the territory of different psychotherapies he does not include Biodynamic psychotherapy, although he does include Bioenergetic Analysis, Humanistic Psychology and Transpersonal psychologies. In the spectrum of consciousness Wilber locates Transpersonal psychologies towards the Unity Consciousness end. Humanistic psychologies are more in the direction of the ego level, and Bioenergetic Analysis nearer still to the ego level. I would like to suggest that Biodynamic psychology might be located in the transpersonal territory.

Carroll, for example describes an experience, which seems to fit this territory and also has a feel of unity conscious to it. The experience of biodynamic massage was as a student in the Cambridge training: "As the massage therapist worked, I began to have a sense that someone was sloughing off a layer of me, like a snake invited to shed a skin. And then it felt as if I was becoming the sea; my body was one with the rhythm of the waves. I felt as huge and fluid as the ocean. It changed again. I both sensed and saw an image of a ribbon of light down my body, from my head to my toes."³³

Using Wilber's model I would locate the main Body Psychotherapy trainings in the Transpersonal bands with the Chiron Centre more towards the ego level and the LSBP and CBPC closer to the unity consciousness end of the spectrum.

Knowing the Territory of the Discussion

In discussion of biodynamic massage I feel that the more familiar we are with the territory in which we are debating, the more clarity there will be and hopefully the less talking at cross purposes. So if we are talking about doing "bodywork", the body has become objectified as not-me. This might be helpful for mapping purposes, but we are considering our experience from a place of lost connection with our wholeness, rather than the manifestation of interconnectedness.

Similarly it is not possible to touch *only* muscle; muscle is not separate from energy, nor mind. When we touch muscle we are touching the world. If we work "intrapersonally" this does not mean that we are not working "interpersonally". There is no "inner" and "outer". Thich Nhat Hanh invites you to look into yourself: "In the beginning you may think that form is just physical and not mental. But every cell of your body contains all aspects of yourself One cell of your body contains your entire body. It also contains all of your feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness, and not only yours, but also your parents' and your ancestors'"³⁴ These sorts of comments are congruent with a psycho-spiritual perspective, but will be quite puzzling to someone looking from an ego level.

Equally I have often experienced a profound hurt when my experience has been denied. For example, I have talked in psycho-analytic and cognitive therapy contexts about my experience of sensations emerging in my belly, which gradually become more sharp as a named emotion. More than once I have been told that thoughts give rise to feelings and that my experience was wrong. Whilst thoughts may well give rise to feelings, this was not my experience.

Naming the paradigm of discussion and having a congruent mode for the discussion

I do feel that it is important to name the paradigm that we are working within. However, it is human to be separated from parts of ourselves and our discussions will inevitably have different degrees of disembodiment and our view only partial. Accepting this as how it is, I also feel that the mode of reflection needs to be anchored in subjective experience. This subjective experience needs to have ample time, space and safety for the potency of the field to emerge. The CBPC psycho-spiritual supervision model drew on Buddhist psychology to give a form for the emergent experience. The form or map can be a way of holding experience so that it becomes possible to slow it down, bring awareness to it and to really see it. In talking about biodynamic massage it was felt important to have a way of reflecting on sessions and theory of biodynamic massage that didn't get more distant from the experienced moment than was necessary.

Varela et al have also offered a model from Buddhist psychology for exploration and "the possibility for circularity between the sciences of mind (cognitive science) and human experience". They discuss the existential philosophers and phenomenology, which *describes* human experience and they point out that the mode of discussion in phenomenology is abstract reasoning and "linguistic exhibitions". They inform us that Asian philosophy unlike Western philosophy never became a "purely abstract occupation" as it was tied into meditation.

Furthermore they offer Buddhism as a tradition that can work with human experience in its immediacy and reflectively. In Buddhism "mindfulness" is fundamental, "Mindfulness means that the mind is present in embodied everyday experience: mindfulness techniques are designed to lead the mind back from its theories and preoccupations, back from the abstract attitude, to the situation of one's experience itself." This awareness practice leads to a more panoramic view; also a "condition which feels neither purely mental or physical".³⁵ As the meditator lets go and deepens into experience, intention and act are closer, and duality lessens. So I would like to suggest that our theories about biodynamic massage could be the object of mindfulness, be experienced and only after ample time be conveyed. Then the theory can be adjusted; and then this can be taken into mindfulness and the process repeated.

When we report on experience our discourse is inevitably in language. Language, by its very nature is always talking about historical experience in these sorts of conversations and distanced from direct experience. However, the more care we take with language the closer that we can stay to our experience. Language has an

energetic resonance and finding the precise and exact word can sometimes chime exactly the right note. An example of this is from a client who has difficulty languaging her experience, but also knows a lot of words and is very literate. Her sense of being met energetically depends a lot on whether the word is right. Sadness, grief-stricken, heart-broken, sorrowful all resonate differently for her, but when we find the “right” word we both feel it instantly.

If another psychotherapy conceptual framework such as psycho-analysis is bolted on to biodynamic massage, the language may be subtly off-key, and there can be an experience of a peculiar dissonance. The speaker feels like s/he knows the biodynamic massage territory, but the verbalisation of it suggests otherwise.

Conclusion

It seems to me that looking at biodynamic massage through psycho-analytic eyes has a lot to do with the history and politics of body psychotherapy and biodynamic massage. Traditionally psycho-analysis has been at the apex of the psychotherapy hierarchy. If we adopt the psycho-analytic perspective, or what we think it is, it gives us access to prestigious debate and perhaps acceptability. It is a common experience to want to belong and to be accepted. There is no doubt that this desire has fuelled much useful thinking within body psychotherapy and biodynamic massage, particularly about the transferential relationship, the mainstay of psycho-analysis. But in looking at biodynamic massage psycho-analytically I think there is a risk of losing the depth and breadth of biodynamic massage and what is encapsulated in it. Furthermore, I believe that we need to develop ways of talking with each other that honour our experience of biodynamic massage. This does not throw out conceptualisations such as diagnosis for these can be helpful maps, but these should come out of reflection on experience.

For myself, my dilemmas about all this current debate have been resolved by locating biodynamic massage within a psycho-spiritual tradition. It seems to me that this perspective is broad and deep enough to include the spectrum of theoretical positions which arise from human experience and provides the vehicle for the ongoing deepening of experience.

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