

SOMATIC EXPERIENCE IN PSYCHOANALYSIS & PSYCHOTHERAPY
BILL CORNELL

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CHAPTER 8 – ROUGH AND TUMBLE: SENSING, PLAYING, AND MATURATION

“Can you feel the sameness of your life in your body as you sit here?” I waited. Body time tends to be slower than cognitive time. “Take your time. Give yourself time.... You can’t tell what you want. It’s all the same. You can’t let anything be that important... Safeness, sameness. They can’t make a difference.”

*“When is the stopping, the waiting, a killing off of something? You often disappear into this sameness. What’s the risk? Would you stay with your body a little longer?”
“I hold myself back all the time. My body is thick, like it doesn’t want anything to bother it. It imagines that everything out there is going to be bad news.”*

Zack, with his therapist’s assistance, was able to sustain a quiet, persistent, and ultimately unsettling attention to the *sensations of sameness*. Gradually, his bodily experience began to disrupt a habitual pattern of a sameness of being, generate associations, and take on the edge of new meaning and potentials.

“Insufficient or lifeless play is a common experience of children with depressed, withdrawn, apathetic or drugged mothers...the effect of these violations of mutual regulation in play is that the infant’s self-regulation is sacrificed.” (Liechtenburg and Meares, 1996.)

“Does this make sense? Am I making sense?” How many times have we heard our clients say this to us, in many variations, reflecting their anxieties about making sense? What these questions usually mean is something like *“Am I understandable, sensible, sane?”* Questions about making sense reflect fears of coming across as confused, nutty, irrational, and an appeal to order and rationality.

Another way of “making sense” is through a sense of enlivening play, of exploration and self-experiencing.

(Fritz Perls quote of LOSING OUR MINDS AND COMING TO OUR SENSES)

Sensing, the conscious use of one’s senses, can be deeply sensible – organizing, orienting, informative. We can use our bodily sensations at the surface of our skin, in our muscles, and within our viscera to learn, to disorganize ourselves, and then reorganize ourselves.

The life of the body is never fully replaced by the life of the mind. Mind and body remain in constant dialogue, often in a dialectal tension.

(See THE EMBODIED MIND – Chapter 8 – Enaction: Embodied Cognition)

The notion of *play* was central to Winnicott. He saw play as:

1. An imaginative and interpersonal space for transition.
2. As a physical/bodily exploration of one's own body and the physical environment.

(See Winnicott's PLAY AND REALITY)

Winnicott distinguished between mobility and motility.

Mobility has to do with movement from one place to another and use of one's muscles and movement to get something. (a means)

Motility refers to the literal experience of movement in and of itself, the experience of "muscle pleasure". (an end) What is central is not the goal of the action, but the pleasure in the movement itself.

Winnicott saw *motility as fundamentally linked to aggression*, as in one's capacity to explore one's environment (venturing), both impersonal and interpersonal, and inherent in the pleasures of play.

Exploratory-assertive motivations arise from a person's *interest*, and that in the pursuit of these interesting phenomena, the person develops efficiency and competence.

"The *play urge* is both robust and fragile. It is fragile because a great number of environmental manipulations can reduce play...there is a general principle: Play only occurs when one feels safe, secure, and feeling good, which makes play an exceptionally sensitive measure for all things bad." (Panksepp & Biven, 2012)

According to Winnicott, when all goes well, "the summation of motility contributes to the individual's ability to start to exist". A person experiences themselves as a separate source of interest, initiative, and agency – both with others, and with nature, and one's physical environment as well. (Having an individual self.)

(The backdrop for our wilderness intensives...)

"The nonhuman environment constitutes one of the most basically important ingredients in human psychological existence." (Searles, 1960.) Our bodily capacities to move, to seek, and to explore the physicalities of the non-personal world around us, are fundamental to our sense of having an alive self.

Then there is the physicality of moving one human body against another.

Many people have experienced body-to-body physical play not with pleasure but with tension, fear, fighting, competing and intimidation. Yet there is also a deep and intense longing for play that involves physical contact, pleasure and intimacy.

Winnicott described patterns of motility within the interpersonal environment, the crucial ways in which an infant's exploratory, often "unintegrated" movements are perceived, received, and given meaning within a primary relationship.

- He emphasized the client's relief and delight in having someone to come up against with aggression (as distinct from hostility), so as to feel the force and boundaries of one's own body against the body of another that can welcome the contact, stay put, and keep its own form. (In health, the freedom to go looking for appropriate opposition.)

He said the true self is bound up with bodily aliveness, that comes from the aliveness of the body tissues and the working of the body's functions....*the spontaneous gesture is the true self in action.*

It was Winnicott's conviction that for the psyche to truly be vital it needed to become fundamentally rooted in the body, and that for the actions of the 'spontaneous gestures' to be sustained as a source of self-agency, they need to be recognized as healthy and meaningful.

- The second pattern of motility is describes as '*reactions to impingement*' upon the individual. After a series of impingements, the body's motility is likely to be organized in some pattern of neurotic withdrawal from the environment and others, so as to preserve some sense of individual existence.

He describes withdrawal as a preservation of the "true" self into solitude or isolation, with the protective social shield of an adapted "false" self. Reich elaborated on this in describing character armor and defenses.

- The third pattern, which is extreme, is exaggerated to such a degree that there is not even a resting place for individual experience, and the result is a failure of the narcissistic state to evolve an individual.

The individual then develops as an extension of the shell rather than the core, as an extension of the impinging environment. What is left of a core is hidden away and is difficult to find even in the most far-reaching therapy. *The individual exists by not being found.*

What is significant here, from a body-centered perspective, is Winnicott's comprehension of bodily movement as central in both the development and the defense of the self.

The Holding Environment

Winnicott has become portrayed as a paragon of the maternal presence. His idea of the holding environment has great seductive power, evoking the wish fulfillment of our longings for comfort and being known by others, for the relentless, unsoiled empathy and attunement of the mother.

Holding, by its very nature, is not just comforting, it is also aggressive. *To hold tight; hold on; hold down; hold off; hold out; hold back; hold in.* Each of these holdings contains a very different sense of the body – of the body in relation to itself, of the body in action, of the body in relation to its surroundings, of the body in relation to other bodies.

Presentation of Supervision Session with Guy and Paul

We must process and utilize our own somatic experience and impulses when we are with our clients. We must allow for multiple levels of observations, reflections and wonderings when working with body processes, as well as the multiplicity of meanings and potential interventions as a result of these body processes.

A primary task of the therapist is to provide “embodied attentiveness” to their own bodies as well as the client’s body during a session.

Bodywork and body psychotherapy are at their best when they afford a client the opportunity to discover, to find out through moving from the embodied known into movements, sensations, or interactions that are unfamiliar.

This is learning through experience, rather than analysis or interpretation. Symbolization and cognition may follow, but here they do not lead.

(The Embodied Analyst: From Freud & Reich to Relationality by Jon Sletvold)