

Transformative Moments: Short Stories from the Biodynamic Psychotherapy Room

With Dr Elya Steinberg

Self-Regulation

Every particular landscape of events in the therapy room and events that are surrounding this time, act as a microcosm of the universe of the intersubjectivity of the two people in the room. The web of phenomena can be described as multi parallel levels and patterns of balance and flux that we can relate to as phenomenological research.

As much as we, as therapists, can have a fuller understanding of more parallel processes we can be more effective. When biodynamic psychotherapists use Vegetotherapy and Biodynamic massage, they are essentially working in the first two modes of relationality (non-verbal modes) in the interpersonal field to enable dynamic self-regulative processes, which facilitates organic "emergent properties and motives" (Mitchell, 2000, p 57), not only as a mental representation but also concurrently with bodily manifestations.

Bodily manifestations can for example be seen in the case with which I began my first blog on (date). However, just using the 'movie' of the occurrences, elaborating on the detailed visceralised story of the client, can enable us to start getting a fuller perspective on the multilevel intersubjective and intersubjective processes occurring within the client.

A Movie: Recounted from Biodynamic Psychotherapy: An Overview

. . . and turn the most secret thoughts in her diary into what she calls "real writing", and gradually the energy in the room changes *[her self-regulatory process impacts upon the field-regulatory process as well as the entire group and the energy - the field - in the room]* **and we all feel that we are marching "into the real" with her** *[activation of the participants mirror neurones and adaptive oscillation]*. **From the universal pain that pounds the room sprout new buds, her pale face becomes pink once again** *[changes in the colour of the skin are a manifestation of a shift in the activity of the nervous system. Changing from a pale face -which is a manifestation of the active 'old' (phylogenetically) un-myelinated parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nerve system to pink - which is a manifestation of the activity of the 'new' (phylogenetically) myelinated*

parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system. The parasympathetic nervous system is activated concurrently with the social engagement system (Porges 2005, 2011); her hands that previously froze over her mouth [immobilisation presents as another sign of the activity of the 'old' (phylogenetically) un-myelinated parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nerve system, which is also active when we feel that we are in life threatening situations (Porges 2005, 2011)] awaken and begin to move seemingly of their own accord in excitement [activity of the sympathetic nervous system, which enables mobilisation rather than immobilisation and paralysis] in order to add additional dimensions to the pouring words. Her body straightens up and starts swaying to the rhythm of her words [synchronicity emerges between movement, gesture and words, which shows vertical integration between her body and her brain and horizontal integration (Siegel 2010) between the left side of her brain—Broca's area, which is responsible for speech production—and the right side of her brain. The activity of her body is an emergent property of internal harmonisation], and she no longer needs support for her back, which was previously aching, and it seems that the strength of her vitality serves her and is like an internal support invisible to the naked eye, enabling her to sit straight and at the same to develop new dimensions [there is a change in posture from a collapsed, defeated and resigned posture to an upright posture (Keleman 1985), which is usually accompanied by a change in the breathing pattern - these changes can now impact upon the implicit procedural memory and the perception of the life situation. Those mental and emotional insights that occur with spontaneous body manifestation suggest that those moments became a transformative moments3].

Four Modes of Relationality

Mitchell (2000) spoke about four modes of relationality. He stressed that all four modes of relationality exist throughout our entire lives and that we should not regard one level above the other as a mode that the person needs to grow out of, or as a primitive mode. These are different levels of organisation of selves in our relationship. As a therapist you may not choose to speak about a particular mode and the parallel process does not have to be conscious for the client in order to enable a good therapeutic process. However, it is important that the therapist develops conscious awareness of all of the modes. The four modes of relationality are:

I. Non reflective presymbolic behaviour – reciprocal influence & mutual regulation – “detailed inquiry’ to track the subtle choreography of interpersonal microadaptation ‘here and now’. This is the non-verbal dance between a good enough mother and her baby. This is when and where we acquired our "implicit relational knowing" (Mitchell, 2000, p. 60).

II. Affective permeability – Affect transmission – ‘The empathic linkage’. This is the non-verbal capacity to feel the emotions of another. From Biodynamic Psychology point of view it is the emotional aspect of energy permeability.

III. Self-other configuration – Experience organized into self and other. In this mode of relationality we use our verbal capacities.

IV. Intersubjectivity – Mutual recognition of self-reflective, agentic processes. This is an essential verbal-based capacity.

Analysis of the 'movie'

The analysis of the 'movie' shows the importance of the psychotherapeutic information that could be captured from the Non reflective Presymbolic Behaviour. When a therapist knows how to look at the non-verbal dance he/she can observe information not available for the untrained eye.

What feels right about touch and why it contributes to the psychotherapeutic transformative moments?

To answer this question, I must consciously relate to the differing intensity between people regarding the 'right' touch, and which cues— energetic, emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical—we can use to direct and intend toward attunement. In my opinion, it is attunement that enables both sides greater movement towards health. Attunement, as it derives from attuned musical instruments. It can be improved dramatically through the right touch.

We 'listen' with our body and soul to the communicative musicality. We listen and synchronize to the pulse and the quality of the rhythmic beats of life dancing with the narrative creating 'communicative musicality' (Malloch & Trevarthen 2009). Processes that are fundamentally engross: co-adaptation and co-regulation.

To harness the intersubjectivity communication, it is not enough to understand the top-down cognitive direction, which is based mainly on the last, verbal, two modes of relationality. We need to get the full picture of the four modes of relationality as they are happening in the here and now. This kind of aspect of the psychotherapeutic relationship is crucial. For example, we can improve the second modality of intersubjectivity: affective (emotional) and energetic permeability through touch.

The process of communication in life as in the therapeutic encounter entail listening, processing and transmitting information, so the first stage of communication of emotions as we wish to enhance in psychotherapy is to learn to

'listen' to emotion. By improving our affective and energetic permeability we first improve our capacity to perceive the emotions of another. The perception of the emotions of another will provide us with the basic affective component of empathy, knowing another person's internal state, including her thoughts and feeling (Decety & William 2009). One of the ways to perceive and impact emotions is through touch.

Matthew J. Hertenstein and Dacher Keltner (2006, page 528) remind us of previous research about touch which demonstrated that "touch is thought to communicate the hedonic tone of emotion" (Hertenstein, 2005; Hertenstein & Campos, 2001; Jones & Yarbrough, 1985; Knapp & Hall, 1997). And that "touch is thought to be an intensifier of emotion- related communication..." (Knapp & Hall, 1997).

Matthew J. Hertenstein and Dacher Keltner (2006) also researched few other aspects of touch: they found that individuals could communicate distinct emotions through tactile stimulation. The evidence indicates that humans can communicate several distinct emotions through touch and that touch communicates more than the hedonic tone and intensity of emotions. They documented that the tactile modality can signal distinct emotions like anger, fear, disgust, love, gratitude, and sympathy.

This would be beneficial in the psychotherapeutic encounter to both people, the therapist and the client. The therapist could 'listen' to the emotion via touch, "identify emotions from the experience of being touched" (Hertenstein & Keltner, 2006, p. 528) and process them. And they can offer through the touch a containment, gratitude, love, and sympathy communicated via touch. In this way touch can offer an experience of non-verbal 'Corrective Experience' of containment.

However, this bring us to a crucial point, which was presented in The Five Ethical Principles Gerda Boyesen defined in her article from 1980 'Biodynamic Concepts and Definitions' from *IFBP Journal of Biodynamic Psychology* No 1 Spring (page 90 to 92). Those Ethical Principles stressed the importance of the therapists' capacity to know themselves, regulate themselves emotionally and physiologically. If therapists have fuller awareness of themselves and develop capacity to regulate themselves, then and just then, they can consciously support those processes in another through touch.

The Five Ethical Principles (page 91)

1. The more you can release and discharge on your own, the better is your self-regulatory capacity.

The more spontaneous your self-regulation, the better you can help another person.

2. Your technique can fail a client, but a client can never fail your technique.
3. Follow the Pleasure-principle.

If you feel good while working on somebody, then your work is (probably) good. If you feel good when somebody is working on you, then his/her work is good. If you feel bad, then the work is bad.

4. Make friends with the resistance.

As a receiver, accept and explore your resistance; whatever manifestation it has in you, it is there for a valuable reason, as it was created, unconsciously, to protect you from hurt.

As a helper, pay attention to the resistance in your client, have respect for its many manifestations against surrender. Know, that if you approach them gently, they might melt under your hand - if you pierce through them, they will only increase.

5. Your work lies in who you are.

As a helper, do not analyse your, client, let your client guide your approach. And you - you look, you listen, you feel, you breathe, you think. Then let your hands speak.

Over the past 7 weeks, I have shared thoughts and ideas related to biodynamic massage and biodynamic psychotherapy. I offered my concepts and clinical applications in hopes of stimulating both interest in this process and collegial interactions with you.

This blog ends my weekly series and hopefully sets the foundation for the articles appearing in SPT Magazine's Fall Issue online September 15, 2016. There I write in depth about biodynamic psychotherapy in action, sharing a case study from a student training so readers can see the entire process in one continuous sequence and flow.

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