CENTRE PROFILE
THE CENTRE FOR BIOSYNTHESIS

The Origins and Development of Biosynthesis

David Boadella

When I first discovered the writings of Wilhelm Reich in 1952, Reich was still alive, but had lost interest in therapy. In fact he claimed that a crooked tree will never grow straight. Nevertheless, because in his early years he believed passionately in the existence of a profound relationship between psychic contact and vegetative liveliness, I was eager to learn his methods of character analysis and vegetotherapy, since I too was interested in the reunification of mind and body. I was no doctor or psychologist, but an educator with a deep interest in childhood development, and a strong believer in the root meaning of the word 'education': *e-ducare*, to draw out.

I learned vegetotherapy in the early fifties from Doris Howard, a doctor trained by Reich's Norwegian co-worker, Odd Havrevold; from Paul Ritter, a brilliant architect and lay therapist who was a friend of A.S. Neill; and from Ola Raknes, a philosopher, linguist, psychoanalyst and vegetotherapist.

Reich spent five crucial years of his life in Scandinavia developing vegetotherapy, the name given to his method of softening muscle tensions and deepening breathing so as to release blocked emotions and recover a sense of pulsation and streaming in the body. This Scandinavian legacy was deeply focused on qualities of contact between people. It was also phenomenological, in that it saw the energetic field of a relationship as a contact exchange which could either resonate with basic needs, or interfere with them. It was no coincidence that Neill, Ritter, Raknes and Reich's first trainee in Denmark, Tage Philipson, were all deeply involved with the developmental process in early infancy. When I first met Philipson in Paris in 1956, there was an immediate rapport between us due to his organismic understanding of the principles of self-regulation.

After Reich moved to America his followers developed a more solipsistic focus on pure energy flow and used increasingly pushy methods of breaking down armouring in order to release high charge feelings. They also began to lose the sense of character as a system of personal defences learned as protection against early stress, a process that culminated some years later in Janov's theory of the primal scream, formulated in the belief that pure emotional expression of primal pain would be sufficient to eradicate neurosis — although Reich himself had clearly warned of the uselessness of pushing on

muscles unless the therapist was in clear contact with the emotional ripeness of the patient. Nic Waal, another Scandinavian therapist trained in vegetotherapy and specialising in childhood, had told me as early as 1952 of the dangers of provoking psychotic reactions unless enough 'ego-building' had been done beforehand. Here were the germs of biosynthesis' future emphasis on the importance of emotional containment, boundary formation, and the principle that energetic work must always be carried out within a context of contact exchange.

In what circumstances did biosynthesis evolve, both as a development of Reich's vegetotherapy, and as a new method distinct from other approaches such as bioenergetics and biodynamics? During the late sixties various significant events took place: the American humanistic leaders came to Britain; the AHP was formed; and Paul Lowe (a follower at that time of Arthur Janov) established at Quaesitor the first European growth centre. In 1968 I helped to arrange the first bioenergetic workshop in Europe, with Alexander Lowen, and the first teaching course in Britain, given by Gerda Boyesen from Norway. Whereas classical bioenergetic work focused on stress positions, often involving pain, and will-directed movements, frequently in the standing position, the biodynamic work developed by Gerda Boyesen emphasised the pleasure principle and a surrender to the vegetative flow of the person, often in a lying position. There was a stark polarity between these two approaches, one focusing on the psycho-peristalsis of the gut, which Gerda Boyesen referred to as the 'id-canal', the other on an athletic image coordinated in the erect posture by the spine, which Alexander Lowen correctly saw as the axis of the motoric ego. What would later become biosynthesis grew up in the tension field of the polarities between voluntary and involuntary, motoric ego and vegetative ID, stress toleration and stress reduction, sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, and what we would later call 'vertical grounding' (standing) and 'horizontal grounding' (lying).

Two contacts I made at this time were to be of major importance in stimulating the development of a third mode of body-psychotherapy, one which sought broader levels of integration for the patient: the first was with the Laban method of dance therapy, as taught by Lisa Ullman and Diana Jordan; the second was with Stanley Keleman and marked the start of a 25-year friendship.

Diana Jordan's movement therapy taught me a trust in spontaneous self-organising movements of the person in all body positions and at all levels of tension-charge. She worked with what she called 'shape-flow'. This became a key principle in biosynthesis, which evolved a concept of primordial motoric fields of development, patterns of intentionality expressed in semi-voluntary movements that activated less conscious parts of the nervous system (the gamma system) and were linked to emotional attitudes, belief systems and qualities of experience.

Stanley Keleman, when we first met in 1966, was on his way back from Europe to America, where he was to give up his practice as a chiropractor on the East coast and establish the Center for Energetic Studies in California. Keleman was a renegade from the bioenergetic movement insofar as, although still one of its trainers, he was critical of much of its fundamental theory and practice. His focus was not on

regression or energy discharge, but on the shape of our pulsation, and on the organising principles of what he called our 'formative process'. He stressed the importance of reorganising the postural set of the body, rather than reliving trauma in a way which, he pointed out, can often re-imprint it. Therapy was much more than energetic release: it was a reorganisation of communication, including of course non-verbal communication. In my presentation on non-verbal communication at the Conference of the British Psychological Association in 1969 I linked body-psychotherapy with ethology and showed its roots in Darwin's crucial insight of over a hundred years before, that just as states of emotion generate specific postures, so reorganised postures help create less troubled emotional states. This emphasis on the communicative function of the body prepared the way for biosynthesis' strong focus on the contact channels of expression and, particularly in therapeutic work, on their relationship to each other: the eyes, in facing; the voice, in sounding; the arms in bounding and bonding; the legs in grounding.

At the end of the sixties, after twelve years of practice as a body-psychotherapist, I founded the journal *Energy & Character*, later to become the *Journal of Biosynthesis*, as a medium of communication for methods, principles and processes in therapeutic work with the emotional life of the body. It celebrates its quarter-centenary this year. In 1971 my book on Reich was published, and this was followed by a series of events which led to the gradual emergence of biosynthesis as a distinct method, with its own style, philosophy, theory and intentionality.

Although I was a guest at both first and second bioenergetic international conferences in Mexico (1971) and Colorado (1973), I felt myself a stranger to their over-directive, therapist-dominated way of working. The formative principle was ignored and the cathartic principle ruled supreme. In a series of papers in *Energy & Character* I set out my doubts. By good fortune at this time I discovered the work of Frank Lake, who had approached the understanding of character by looking at character states as basically bi-polar, with the possibility of swinging between two contrasted extremes. Lake's insight into what he called the 'schizo-hysteric swing' was a restatement of Reich's polarity between the world and the self, and I was able to take it deeper in a series of papers on energetic polarities in both the character and the body, under the title 'Between Coma and Convulsion'. Life held a balance between freezing and flooding, ice and fire, contraction and expansion, 'self-collection' and 'self-extension'. The polarity concept of biosynthesis means that no technique, no method, no principle is right for every person. Where some need more, others need less. The polarity principle has been a major key to energetic diagnosis and process-centred treatment.

Lake and I were mutually encouraged by each other's work. I brought him into contact with the IDHP, thus initiating his teaching work in London, and he and I became two of its several directors. The polarity concept became a foundation stone for biosynthesis, and at the end of 1973 Jay Stattman invited me to teach it at the Tavistock Institute for Human Relations. It was later developed in a series of articles written together with David Smith, and over several periods of collaboration with Dr Jerome Liss from the Albert

Einstein College of Medicine, where we applied a systems-theory approach to therapeutic work.

Biosynthesis is often identified by one of its major discoveries, the therapeutic use of the embryological principle of somatic organisation. William Sheldon, followed by Keleman, had already introduced embryology into psychology, but a personal experience led me to look deeper at the insights of one of Frank Lake's teachers, Francis Mott, who as early as 1948 had used the word 'biosynthesis' to express the integration between three layers of expression in a person: he called them 'umbilical affect' (belly feelings), 'kinaesthetic affect' (motoric feelings), and 'foetal skin affect' (sensations).

I first taught my own extension of these principles and their application to body-psychotherapy at the Biodynamic Centre in London in September 1975, and continued to teach them on the many IDHP courses I led over the next five years as well as at over a dozen different bio-energetic trainings in Europe and abroad. In order to rebalance the imbalance created by neurosis between feelings, actions and perceptions, we need to develop an awareness of three therapeutic modalities, which in biosynthesis are called 'centering', 'grounding' and 'facing'. Centering is a rebalancing of breathing and of the polar extremes between overcharge and undercharge; grounding is better contact with the earth, daily reality and the will; facing is a clear contact in the bi-personal field and the ability to sensitise communication. This embryological model of biosynthesis became so valuable that it found its way into other body-psychotherapy forms, influencing bioenergetics, biodynamics, organismic psychotherapy and biosystemic psychology.

Biosynthesis also developed an understanding of styles of touch based on the classical four elements, and of how these could induce forms of movement. The concept of shape-flow took another step forward with the discovery that the German embryologists Otto Hartmann and Erich Blechschmidt had described patterns of intentionality linked to embryonic development, which I then called, following Rupert Sheldrake, 'motoric fields'. These are personal postural states and may express either the frozen history of the patient or, as that history unfreezes, his unfolding future as it is danced in the present.

In the early eighties biosynthesis was recognised as an innovative therapy and earned a place in the first of the Open University *Handbooks on Psychotherapy*. Meanwhile teaching work, due to many foreign contacts, expanded greatly and training workshops were offered in every country of Western Europe. In 1980 I had the good fortune to meet Andreas Wehowsky, who that year set up in Berlin the first European Trainings in Biosynthesis, which he then ran for a further ten years. He is a colleague who shares my concern to transcend the duality between scientific and spiritual world views. His account of the way in which breathing can be used in biosynthesis as a sensitive instrument is presented below.

During this time of geographic expansion the emphasis within biosynthesis was deepening, from embryology, morphology and energetics to incarnation, contact with the inner self and qualities of essence, seeking expression through daily life. It became influenced by the subtle anatomy of Robert Moore, an Irish healer working in Denmark; this was to develop into a

focus on what in biosynthesis is called the 'earth-light axis', which represents in people the bridge between personal and meta-personal, sensual and spiritual, existential and essential, matter and meaning, soma and significance.

In 1985 my book *Lifestreams* was published, I left England, and the Centre for Biosynthesis was established in Zürich.

The Centre for Biosynthesis and its Activities

Silvia Specht

The Centre for Biosynthesis was formed in Zürich in July 1986 and moved to its permanent home in Heiden, Switzerland, in July 1994. I am its administrator and also a member of its teaching staff, and David Boadella is director of psychotherapy trainings. Here at Heiden, with a view that takes in four countries, Lake Constance and the Austrian Alps, our primary task is the training of psychotherapists who are open both to the somatic level of experience and to transpersonal and essential-spiritual levels of reality. The teaching model is interdisciplinary and multi-modal, as necessitated by the depth and complexity of human beings and by the reality that therapeutic methods are always having to be reinvented in our search for the right path to the centre of the mystery that is personal process.

Trainings are available to doctors, psychologists, academics from the human sciences and non-academic people with a background in one of the helping professions. They run for thirty days a year over three years, followed by a further two years of intensive supervision. All those who complete the three-year training are given a Certificate, but the Diploma in Biosynthesis is reserved for those who complete the full five years. Teaching is given in English with German translation; discussion is largely in German. Trainings are also arranged in other locations: for further information on courses in the UK please contact Yig Labworth, 9 Eastwood Road, Muswell Hill, London N10 1NL.

Publications

The Centre for Biosynthesis publishes the now 25-year-old international *Journal of Biosynthesis: Energy & Character.* The German version of this, edited by Bernhard Maul, has been appearing twice a year since 1990, and Spanish, Portuguese and Czech versions are in active preparation. Biosynthesis is represented by ten books, over a hundred published articles, and over three hundred lecturers at some 150 institutions.