A journey towards integration

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'Despite the divagations and false starts of this day's journey, he knew where he was going and what would happen.'

Ursula Le Guin, *Two Delays on the Northern Line*

Not every practitioner chooses to work integratively. However, many of us who are attracted to more than one approach have welcomed the integrative label.

Previously the word 'eclectic' was used commonly by therapists whose journeys had covered more than one landscape. The Oxford English Dictionary provides a guideline on this, indicating that the practitioner had 'select(ed) such doctrines as pleased him in every school'. This sounds rather haphazard, and perhaps it was so, though the thought has a certain charm. On the other hand, the OED tells us that integration requires us to 'combine (parts) into a whole'.

Integrative practice involves an intellectual synthesis. Concepts presented in different models of psychotherapy need to be compared and related to one another. Cross-model links need to be tested as they arise, through their use in thinking about client material; and also in practice, through their application as technique during sessions with clients. The process of integration has an alchemical quality. When it has

happened enough, a unique core conceptual system arises which is greater than the sum of its parts. Genuine integration requires a long period of cooking. When conceptual understandings have been integrated into a practitioner's personality, there is an ease of response within the session which no longer feels like technique.

A standard model of integration could not encompass the varied approaches represented by all the current integrative practitioners. One person's integration does not necessarily work for the next. Choices about what to integrate are individual. While such decisions may seem to be made on intellectual grounds, I think they are also sourced experientially from personal history, genetic predisposition, and possibly personal karma as well. That is why this article explores some of my personal sources of inspiration in creating my own integration of bodywork and psychodynamic psychotherapy. I will consider the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches, and the limits to inclusivity in my integrative model, as well as suggesting some positive outcomes in integrating aspects of both approaches.

I. Beginnings

I experience my body as the seat of my emotions and the instrument with which I understand the world and express myself. I have developed this way through predisposition and through trying to fill some gaps. As the child of intellectual parents, I felt out of place growing up in the suburban America of the 1950's. I spent a lot of time sitting around reading novels, a bulwark against school, where athletic prowess was the acme of success. Also, when I was three years old, my mother became blind: I grew up identifying with a woman who moved cautiously through a small space. I now imagine that I lived my early life as if I didn't have a body at all. In adolescence I began to find my own way and, as teenagers do, became particularly interested in my body, which I explored through yoga and dance. Still, my participation in the world was less than full-bodied. Later I continued to try to understand my curious experience of lack of body through meditation and Tai Chi and, eventually, psychotherapeutic bodywork. My sense of embodiment has grown steadily – yet to this day if I enter a darkened room I move like a blind person.

In my working life as a psychotherapist, I have had an unswerving fascination with body process. By 'body' I mean the physical association of organ systems, the skeleto-muscular system, the nervous system etc., as well as each body's patterns of suppressing, holding and expressing emotions – that which was termed 'character armour' by Wilhelm Reich. A further dimension is the interaction of body systems and character armour with the energy sources that charge them both from within ourselves through food and the air we breath, and from our environment in the form of cosmic energy. This aspect of the body has most notably been worked with in Eastern practices such as yoga and Tai Chi Chu'an. The practice of internal martial arts also includes the notion of the cultivation of the body as a way to personal insight and spiritual awakening.

Reich's initial understanding and practice was psychoanalytic. This is reflected in his systematic, thorough exploration of the roots of his patients'

pathology and his emphasis on the relationship he and the patient formed. His belief in the wholesomeness of human sexuality and the possibility of healing pathology helped create a sea change in psychotherapeutic thinking and practice. So he can be seen as a kind of hinge figure spanning two forms of practice. He stands with his back foot in the psychoanalytic camp and his front foot in the developing humanistic camp. He taught or inspired a significant handful of bodywork therapists, all of whose work is characterized by the therapist using their hands as a tool to enable the client to become aware of blocked and open areas.

The development of bodywork in the 1950's and 60's was part of a larger trend in humanistic therapy. Person-centred therapy, psychodrama, encounter, Gestalt, TA, were also developing and becoming more widely known. During this period, in enclaves such as Esalen Institute, the San Francisco Bay area, London, and some other major cities, there was a lot of excitement and optimism about the development of human potential. In the 1970's, many of us training and working on ourselves within the humanistic framework, and I would say particularly in the realm of bodywork, felt that almost anything was possible when it came to human transformation.

As a client in sessions with my bodywork therapist, the experience of a seemingly infinite amount of bioenergy streaming through my body accompanied by long-buried images and feelings, was utterly compelling. The notion that my defenses were an actual embodied thing that could be touched, influenced and changed, fostered the idea that personal history was unnecessary and could be got rid of if only I could 'get my feelings out'. That I could change myself so drastically, and so quickly, seemed quite naturally to link up to the belief that I could become whoever I wanted to be, and this led on to the idea that I could have whatever I wanted to have. I remember sharing many conversations along these lines with fellow trainees.

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However, I gradually discovered that my own ability to live differently was not as great as I had hoped. True, bodywork had dismantled some of my character defenses and at times enabled me to take pleasure in being alive. But I had not got to grips with my own existential limitations. In fact I could not have or be whatever I wanted. Furthermore, I had to face and manage the humdrum side of life – getting the groceries, hassling my way through relationships, entertaining myself. Awareness dawned that something was missing in the bodywork approach to personal growth.

II. A fork in the path

Along with many others who had begun their self-exploration with the body, I began to study the rich seam of work on human relationship available in books by psychoanalytic writers. This is the point at which I ceased to be a bodywork therapist only, and began to develop an integrative perspective.

Klein, Winnicott, and Milner particularly fascinated me. All these excellent practitioners have written vividly about their patients' bodily states. They and others introduced me to the depth and richness that characterises therapeutic process when the analyst helps the patient use language to discover the meaning of raw emotional states.

Working out the puzzle involved in conceptualising my personal experience within a theoretical model appealed to my intellect, but also satisfied something in me beyond thinking. It was pleasurable when an idea opened the door to emotion. Working on myself now included the possibilities that occur when transference and interpretation come into play. Putting myself into relationship with a therapist upon whom, it was understood, I could project any and all of my feelings, was both exciting and containing. I also spent time conversing with my dreams, pondering my own symbolic creations. I learned how reflection could lead to awareness, and awareness to change. Eventually I was able to reconstruct emotionally a period of my life not remembered – the year my mother was hospitalised with glaucoma. Doing this changed my relationship to my history as nothing had before.

III. Conflicting views

In professional practice, the duality of body and mind tends to play itself out in the split between the humanistic and psychoanalytic camps. In both models, the therapist's need to help the client heal the splits within, and bridge the split between self and others, is the source of all technique. However, these two approaches differ in their tool of choice.

In bodywork, the main therapeutic tool for the exploration of the client's process is touch. It is thought that as a child, in order to comply with a parent or carer, the client has taken over the other person's disapproval and converted it into bodily armouring as a defense against their original feelings. An effective bodywork therapist is able to apply different qualities of touch to the client's body in order to stimulate the client to feel the ways in which they physically hold in or release emotions which have been repressed in the past. The aim is to re-stimulate the experience in exactly the form it took originally by undoing the physical block. In this way it is possible to set a process in motion that will break up a pattern of character defenses still holding the client hostage long after the distressing, traumatic situation that caused it to be created is past. Most forms of bodywork include some guidelines or structures for talking about the emotions and narrative material elicited through touch. The aim of the process is for the client to embody their feelings rather than their defences in order to live more fully and openly in the present.

Humanistic psychotherapy, with its respect for the whole person and emphasis on healing as opposed to

psychopathology, seems to be the natural home for bodywork. Many body therapists place themselves within the realm of humanistic therapy, and a number of humanistic therapists use bodywork techniques as part of their approach.

Psychodynamic psychotherapy takes an almost archaeological approach to process, carefully sifting through personal fragments in pursuit of a recognisable form.

The intervention of choice is interpretation. The psychotherapist listens to the client's verbal narrative and then uses words to suggest that the client says, feels or acts as they do because of specific unprocessed experiences in the past which the client is trying to work through in the present by projecting them onto the therapist. This takes the form of transference or, if too unbearable, is lodged with the therapist as counter transference. The aim is to translate the original experience, which has become obfuscated and encoded because it was not acceptable, into a meaningful narrative. This frees the client from the need to repeat the unresolved experience. Within the psychodynamic relationship it is possible to examine the past and place the client's feelings in a narrative context in order to re-forge their identity in the present.

Clearly the aim of these two approaches is very similar, and I believe that one approach is not necessarily better or more justified than the other. The difference between them is the choice of tool - on the one hand touch, on the other hand interpretation.

Psychodynamic therapists are not trained as bodyworkers and almost without exception do not use bodywork with their patients. They use words. Although it may limit the depth and effectiveness of the process, a whole psychodynamic psychotherapy can be conducted with little or no notice taken of the patient's body. If the patient's body language or the therapist's own bodily responses are noted, they tend to be valued for their symbolic contribution to the process of constructing meaning, rather than as experiences in their own right. This has its uses; however, there is a split created here through the reification of the body. It is not understood as the location of a process in its own right, but rather as a source of symbolic communications. If the life of the body itself is ignored, can we say that the client has actually been recognized by the therapist?

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Bodywork therapists, and perhaps other humanistic therapists, do not find themselves in so clear cut a situation as our psychodynamic

colleagues, since it is impossible, and would be undesirable, to conduct a therapy with no words at all. And even if a bodywork process were conducted in total silence, this would still create conditions where the client, perhaps silently, fantasises about the therapist, projects feelings onto her, and makes interpretations. So in bodywork therapy there are two strands, body process and verbal communication, and this leads to a fundamental difficulty in bodywork as a psychotherapeutic approach.

While the client is engaged in releasing energy from blocked areas of the body, all the sensation, image, emotion and memory encapsulated in the split-off energy blocks is experienced in the here and now. For example, the client does not just feel angry because it's *as if* someone is a significant figure from their past; in a full-blown catharsis the client relives a past experience with *literally* all the *same* biochemical/energetic charge of the original. This happens because the original experience was not seen through to completion. Biochemical residues of the emotional experience still remain in the client's body encapsulated in the connective tissues. For the client's body the original experience is *happening now.* During a cathartic experience of this nature there is no room for the therapist to be more than an impersonal facilitator, guide and container of the process. The client is not projecting any feelings onto the therapist at this point, and there is no felt need to explore the client-therapist relationship.

But by its nature the reliving of biochemical states is short-lived. The rest of the time, when the client and therapist greet each other, when the client unloads about her week, when they say good-bye, or indeed when they sit together and ponder the meaning of the bodywork they have engaged in together, they create and develop a relationship with each other. Fantasies about the therapist, in the psychodynamic sense, inevitably become part of the client's experience of therapy.

When this happens, it constitutes a shift from literal, self-referential presentations to symbolic, relational experiences. Once this threshold is crossed, I believe there is no going back. By using the therapist as a screen for his projections, the client has entered the relational world, and from now on explorations of body process will always include an element of what he wants or fears from the therapist in the here and now. From now on, the client will interpret the therapist's touch, at least partly, to mean something within the client-therapist relationship.

If unrecognised, this shift in focus can lead to disastrous consequences in terms of acting out - perhaps sexually or with anger and longing – potentially on both sides of the relationship. The better outcome, if bodywork proceeds, is splitting. Both parties operate in two modes, body process and verbal analysis. This can be effective if bodywork is time-limited, framed up properly, and relinquished at the right moment. This is making the best use of our capacity to split our experience into different compartments. However what is split is not whole, and what is not whole may be experienced as less than satisfying.

Each mode, bodywork and psychodynamic psychotherapy,

makes its own profound contribution to the conduct of psychotherapeutic process, and at the same time each in its own way involves splitting the mind from the body. As practitioners we need to make our own choices about how we get to grips with this inherent duality.

IV. Signposts

A meditation teacher once told me, 'You are split in every direction.' As I have explored my own emotional process on both sides of the mind/body divide, I can begin to grasp something of what she meant. My development, both personally and as a therapist, has been two-stranded in a way that reflects the experience of many of us with a Western mind-set. We characterise our personal duality as the thinking mind (i.e. the brain) and the feeling body. In fact the brain is an organ of the body, and the body, through its vast peripheral nervous system, is capable of 'thinking' functions such as reacting to stress and feeling emotion, without routing any information through the brain. This suggests that it ought to be possible to integrate the treatment of all the phenomena of body and mind within one psychotherapeutic model.

For me, integrating bodywork and psychodynamic psychotherapy has involved setting aside both touch and interpretation as routine interventions in the consulting room. This may sound like boarding a small boat with a stranger to take an unpredictable voyage and starting out by throwing all the tools overboard. But, for the most part, the boat sails better for it.

Interpretations, which I might previously have made out loud, have joined other thoughts I may have about my client, and remain an element of my own reflections. The client's narrative, and our dialogue, which I now think of as the 'word-based' aspect of the work, is the weaving of the client's experience. When a person uses their own words to choose the colours and textures of their story, the pattern of the fabric emerges with unique clarity.

I do find that interpretation is very occasionally useful, at times when projection and counter-projection, which are always present, come strongly to the fore. If there is a muddle between us, interpreting can invite the client to contextualise what is happening in our process as a phenomenon they have experienced before. Also, interpretation, by indicating that there is a meaning to what is happening, can provide a boundary to feelings which might otherwise be experienced as overwhelming.

I have not entirely abandoned bodywork. My own experience, both as client and therapist, is that bodywork which includes touch happens best when it takes place in a workshop setting. The group by its very presence and awareness provides a good energetic container for the use of touch. Participants may work with each other as well as or instead of the facilitator and this highlights the act of investigating body process rather than the relational aspect. The work can also be taken to weekly therapy and extended there through reflection.

In the group setting, I think a bodywork session is often most effective when it is relatively short. It can be tempting to go on and on, but then there is more and more risk

that the material will not be processed through reflection. The aim should be to enhance awareness and develop a sense of choice, not to dismantle the defence system. Less is more, because bodywork can be very powerful and tends to go on affecting a person long after the actual session.

Experiencing bodywork that includes touch can provide an excellent internal reference for psychotherapy practitioners. In the consulting room a client's gut-wrenching expressions of grief, anger, depression, can be overwhelming for the therapist who does not know the physicality of his own emotions. If the therapist cuts off from the client's feelings through fear, the client may lose the possibility for deeper self-awareness. Sometimes psychotherapists who have themselves experienced bodywork as part of their training may fare better than those who have not.

In my one to one work, I have refined bodywork into a 'body-based' background to therapeutic process, which does not involve touch. Specifically, this can include exploring the client's body process with words. But more often, it involves allowing the client to experience his or her own body process without needing to rush away from it into words. At times, this may mean guiding the client in cultivating awareness of how to silently feel the feelings their bodies offer them.

I learned the potential for this to happen from my clients. One, who spent years exploring her body's responses to extreme physical and emotional suffering as part of each session, identified the re-entry phase, when I asked her to sit silently with me to steady herself, as instrumental in her personal growth. These few minutes at the end of each session enabled her to become aware of her surroundings in a concrete, sensory way she had never known. She said about this, 'I have a self now. I didn't before.'

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I have cultivated my understanding of body-based process through my study of Tai Chi, which emphasizes sensing tiny shifts in posture, muscle tension and the movement of energy within the body. After a number of years, I found that my practice in class and on my own began to extend naturally into my client work. Just sitting down and attending to the other person invited me to align my posture, relax my muscles and become aware of my joints, and feel my energy blocking and flowing. A kind of tuning has resulted. This seems to establish a subliminal somatic resonance which can allow my client and me to receive each

other as whole bodies without needing to acknowledge it verbally.

I have found that at times this body tuning constellates a situation in which my body becomes a receiver for body-based transference (which I experience as physically manifested projective identification), perhaps much in the same way that a radio receives airwaves which translate into sound. At other times body tuning has seemed to clear my energy field and has made it possible for my client and myself to generate a fine stillness between us. A body-based energy envelope seems to contain us. This seems to promote insight in a way which I have not found words to describe.

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V. A station on the way

In my attempt to integrate bodywork and psychodynamic psychotherapy, I have developed an approach that is idiosyncratic, rewarding, and incomplete. I didn't set out to create it - rather it has been a response to my own personal and professional dilemmas and choices as well as some serious mental and physical exertion. I think that in the practice of psychotherapy, any approach, including this one, is only as good as the results it achieves in practice, and must always be open to questioning and alteration.

Further Reading

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