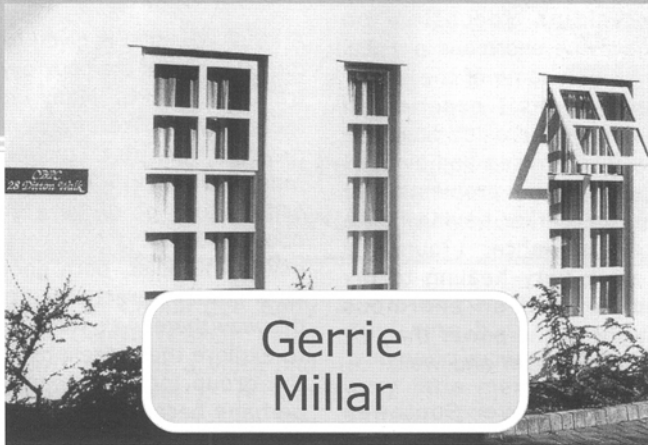


PART THREE:  
STUDENT  
PERSPECTIVES

personal reflections on  
body psychotherapy at  
Cambridge Body Psychotherapy  
Centre



I came to my training at Cambridge Body Psychotherapy Centre (CBPC) having previously completed a four year training in what was called 'body-oriented psychotherapy.' The training I had completed was itself going through significant change and had provided me with ideas from bioenergetics and body psychotherapy whilst also trying to integrate humanistic and psychoanalytic theory.

I had been drawn to the body oriented psychotherapy training initially as I wanted to learn more about the

physical communications of the body, what Gill Westland would call 'the body stream' (Westland, 2002). I had long been aware of the experience of emotion in my own body, and through my own psychotherapy of the importance of being with the experience before necessarily giving words to it. So I started my training at CBPC with a deep yearning for more understanding of my own emotional experience through my own body.

One of the first modules I completed was Body and Energy (now called first

year body psychotherapy). I was very excited about doing the Body and Energy course, when I started in September 1996. I also felt quite a lot of fear. The first weekend focussed on boundaries and included a lot of non-verbal work e.g. making a contact with another person in the group non-verbally and exploring that experience bodily. In pairs we also explored our own boundary in relation to another person. These exercises gave me a vivid and powerful sense of how to pursue more freely what I want and need, my fear of rejection, how I become overwhelmed and what I do to avoid real contact with other people.

A later weekend focussing on breathing gave me enormous physical pleasure. As with some of the earlier work on boundaries I experienced my intense need for a lot of space and I felt very energised and alive. I had experienced some problems with my back a year earlier having had a period of severe sciatica. I found the breathing work very healing to my back. I developed an enormous sense of strength and power that my body was strong again and well.

A weekend with Clover Southwell experiencing vegetotherapy, working directly with the physical communications of the body (a kind of free association of bodily processes) filled me with joy and pleasure and a deep sense of spiritual connectedness. In one of my essays I wrote 'I feel more energised than I have felt all week. I am looking into my garden. It is filled with beauty - with scent, shape and colour.'

Another very exciting aspect of training at CBPC were the modules on biodynamic massage. Although excited about doing the biodynamic

massage training I was also frightened. I had quite a lot of anxiety about my hands and my ability to actually do something physically which involved touching another person and their reaction to my touch. Would I be able to do it? was the main question floating around in my mind. The first year Foundation Biodynamic Massage equips students to practise at massage level with members of the public. At this stage the student is not equipped to work with the deeper process of the client. This comes later with two more modules of biodynamic massage and completion of the rest of the body psychotherapy training.

A lot of attention is given to the use of touch as part of the body psychotherapy training at CBPC. Many interpersonal feelings will arise between client and psychotherapist in biodynamic massage work. The massage can bring up a lot of different feelings about this sort of interaction with the psychotherapist, both good and bad. As a student practising in working in this way there were many opportunities to explore these feelings. Feelings in the group included fear of rejection perhaps because of our bodies - we might be seen as too thin, too flabby etc. A positive and strong interpersonal communication in biodynamic massage can be the experience of being nurtured and nourished. The psychotherapist, in giving the client very caring attention in a biodynamic massage, can give the person a feeling of being accepted for who they are.

One of the over-riding aspects of training at CBPC for me was the feeling of being accepted for who I am. Certainly for me the massage

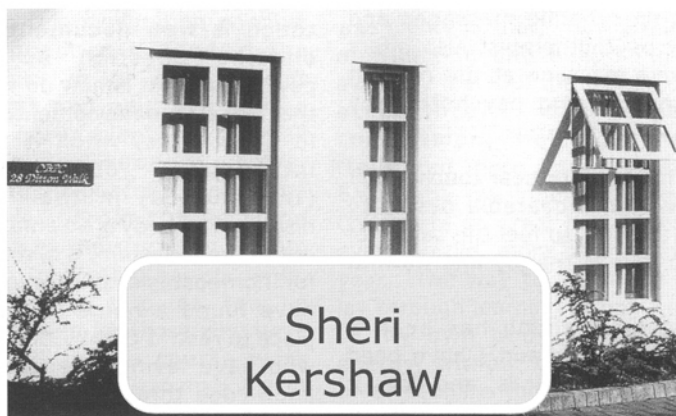
became a wonderful validation of me as a person and I think it was during the massage that I felt the most fully accepted for who I am.

I found the training overall a very nurturing and holding experience. The nurturing extended to the bringing and sharing of food for lunch during the training weekends. This became a rich expression of concern and love

for one another, and for me personally gave me an opportunity to express my creativity in the making of cakes and bread!

### Further Reading

Westland, G., (2002) *Personal Reflections on Developments in Body Psychotherapy*, Self and Society, Vol 30 No 1 April-May 2002.



Before I came to Cambridge Body Psychotherapy Centre (CBPC), I had trained for two years as a Voice and Movement therapist (VMT). At that time catharsis was the chosen key and there was no understanding of trauma and its longstanding effects on the body. So body process was not used to aid personal integration. One of the effects of the Voice Movement Training was to bring forward and to heighten my awareness, but with nothing to ease my great discomfort of being alive. I had introduced myself to my terror. Some months before I started body psychotherapy training I began individual body psychotherapy. My psychotherapist, John Waterston was a solid and gentle rock in the midst of my distress.

I am, as you might have guessed, a soul who has experienced many traumatic incidents in my life. I had very little memory of events, and those I remembered were fragmented sequentially and in time. Had I ever been psychiatrically diagnosed I might have been considered for a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder.

The training at CBPC brought me home to my body. I came to trust that when I shook it was not that I was crazy and inadequate, but because I had had reason to be frightened. I could believe the memory embedded in the re-activated process held in the very cells of my existence. I was amongst people whom I could trust, because

I was taught to trust myself and to choose for myself. The core of the CBPC training is that our innate nature is self-regulating and its function is a movement towards health.

The CBPC training involves touch and some psychotherapists of different persuasions might be of the opinion that touch is not applicable in my case. They would be right....and they would be wrong. A section of the training includes biodynamic massage; and my body psychotherapist also offers biodynamic massage at my request within my ongoing psychotherapy process.

I find it hard still to bear touch, but I also have an unbearable desire to have safe touch, to feel the safety of it and to take in the joy and warmth it offers.

Touch in the training has been a negotiated process and I have been guided to feel how it is, and does it feel helpful to me....I have learned to trust my body to know when, what,

and how much is integrating. I have learned to choose, to say stop and discovered that I am listened to. There has been a compassionate and non-judgemental experiment in safety. The sensation of this process was of being skinless and foetal. Over time I have grown an outer skin (container) through the warmth of taking in touch. I believe that the effects of lack of touch for a baby and the absolute developmental need for touch is well documented. The ongoing question as a body psychotherapist is how do we support this arrested developmental function in our clients, when it has been interrupted or fragmented (traumatised) in their personal history. The body is an amazing thing, our nervous system, a system looking for homeostasis and integration. I have found a home in my body, a place to rest. I thank CBPC and those who have lovingly passed on their knowledge through experience.



At this time last year I was immersed in the struggle of writing my long thesis, an important requirement for attaining the CBPC Certificate in Body Psychotherapy. During that year I attended courses at the Centre every second weekend as well as one module with the format of three four day blocs. So

the Centre and what happened there formed and informed, a large part of my life. A year later, I have had some time to reflect on what the Centre has meant to me.

I wrote my thesis on 'Towards Integration', a life task which I am very much concerned about as I am

in my 70th year. The module of which the thesis was part, allowed me to explore and pull together past different types of training and experience; to find and feel the threads that weave through, both dark and light and multi-hued, that give my life meaning and purpose. To find some of this thread I had to go deeply into places within which I had never dared to go before.

What made this exploration possible were the qualities I found at the Centre walking in the door, the soft light carpets and neutral coloured walls, the green plants on a small table, simple wooden chairs, contribute to the peaceful, welcoming atmosphere. From the hall and cloakroom area the student goes into the kitchen to greet other students, maybe have a cup of tea, a comforting nibble for those who have travelled far, before course work starts. Here we also eat magnificent lunches provided by each of us bringing food to share as well as congregate in tea breaks. There is a sense of comfort, inclusion, nurture, abundance, sharing and liveliness. Through the windows at the back of the Centre we can see an attractive garden which we have enjoyed watching grow. On warm sunny days we may sit and talk outside in the sunshine, by the garden, informally on the lawn. At the other end of the kitchen, there is a quieter space with a bookcase of relevant books in which students may browse or maybe buy. There is also a system in place for borrowing books from the library. One advantage of the Centre's location, not the most attractive part of Cambridge, is that there is plenty of parking space and easy access to main roads.

This is not the place to describe the various modules. But maybe I can convey the quality of what I received by telling you that I began this training seven years ago, only planning to take one module. I gained so much from that I continued, at first one module a year until last year when I took three. Each time I carried on because I had learned so much from each course, learning not only in terms of book learning, though there was plenty of that, but more in terms of widening and deepening how I lived my life. All the words, such as acceptance, non-judgement, compassion, holding, presence translated more into everyday life. Each time my inner resistance and critic were so great that I balked at every hurdle, more so than ever last year. The way to my self-discovery lay through learning to feel and listen to my own body sensations and energy, without censure and to be able to share these without fear. I valued deeply the time spent in meditation at the beginning of each class, which brought a sense of deep spiritual connection. Passing last year's finishing line was only possible because of the holding, gentleness and integrity of the trainers and fellow-trainees. The whole experience has raised my sense of well-being, widened my experience, and deepened my sense of relatedness, all of which I bring to my work as a body psychotherapist.

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