

**Biodynamic Psychotherapy and the Pleasure Principle:  
Can we connect clinical experience and scientific theories?.**

**Group session.**

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Sigmund Freud said There is a no-mans land between psyche and soma and it will be for my followers to go into this unknown borderland and explore it

**Introduction**

The Biodynamic Discipline was developed by Gerda Boyesen. A discipline<sup>1</sup> is determined by a range of objects and methods, a corpus of assumptions that are perceived as true, and an array of rules, definitions and taxonomy, techniques and tools.

In this context, I include aspects of the Biodynamic Psychology model of thinking and essence to explain the background and concepts. One of the major concepts, which I explore here, is the biodynamic psychology model of emotional and physiological regulation called the ‘emotional vaso-mororic cycle’.

I see this task as one forging links between physics and metaphysics, connecting science and psychotherapy through the body. For decades psychotherapy was conceptualised as metaphysics because its subjective methods and outcome were un-measurable by the standards of scientific objective methodology.

Following developments in the last 2-3 decades in the theoretical horizon, and in measuring tools and methodologies in neuroscience, science, medicine and in quantum physics, new bridges are evolving. These links between subjective experiences and objective methodology start to bridge the historical divisions made in the human being (such as the mind/body split or different biological systems: cardio-vascular system, respiratory system, immune system, endocrinology system neurologic system).

Biodynamic work is based on respect for the human individual - for the person’s potential and that person’s current life choices<sup>2</sup>. We work to support the natural movement towards health and to draw body, mind and soul back into alignment by using body awareness, expression, verbal understanding and touch.

**Background**

Biodynamic psychotherapy enables us to be in touch with our innermost strengths, our secrets and our deepest wounds, while at the same time it enables pleasure to be experienced on deep levels. It is almost impossible to record the depth of the biodynamic multilayer psychotherapeutic experience because so often it materialises without words as we go deeper and deeper into a more powerful experience, sometimes calm and relaxing, sometimes heightened and energized.

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<sup>1</sup> . Michel Foucault

<sup>2</sup> Clover Southwell

Progress in neuroscience, medicine, psychology and quantum physics have created waves of insight which are now further underpinning our empirical understanding. We see that the body is essential to the definition of ‘self’<sup>3</sup> (for instance: via stimulation of the human insular cortex on both sides). Messages from the body – for instance, through movement and touch – are central in both the healing process and in re-establishing the sense of self when this has been undermined. Within biodynamic psychology the self is seen as a single identity, an inseparable, multidimensional combination of body, soul, spirit, mind and emotion. We emphasise the importance of regulation in all these dimensions and thus foster a sense of well-being, to restore the capacity for pleasure and self-regulation. This approach can help identify non pharmacological interventions facilitating ‘biofeedback’ and ‘feedforward’ pathways leading to primary preventative<sup>4</sup> interventions.

I suggest that, the employment of the Biodynamic Psychology model as a framework is essential with its non-pharmacological interventions including multisensory inputs and visceromotor inputs. The non-pharmacological multisensory interventions used range across a very broad spectrum including: vegetotherapy, biodynamic massage, rooted talking, movement and body-psychotherapy as well as aspects of conventional psychotherapy.

This suggestion is underpinned by neuroscience. We see that “advances in the field of affective neuroscience and biological psychiatry have provided the knowledge about the influences of those inputs on emotions. Multisensory inputs influenced the ‘orbital prefrontal network’ through the orbitofrontal cortex (OFC) and dorsomedial prefrontal cortex (MdPEC) regions and as such provide integration of sensory information, primarily information of an affective value<sup>5</sup>. Visceromotor information influenced the ‘medial prefrontal network’. Both of these networks have interconnections that allow convergence of sensorymotor integration and visceromotor control in the processing of emotionally salient information, and thereby facilitate the regulation of emotional behavior” [ML Phillips et al, 2008].

A.D. Craig<sup>6</sup>, a pain researcher and neuroscientist from Arizona said “as human, we perceive feelings from our bodies that relate our state of well being, our energy and

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<sup>3</sup> A, Damasio, Feelings of Emotion and the Self; Ann. N.Y. Acad. Sci. 1001: 253–261 (2003)

<sup>4</sup> Primary prevention In [medicine](#), **prevention** is any activity which reduces the burden of mortality or morbidity from [disease](#). This takes place at primary, secondary and tertiary prevention levels.

1. **Primary prevention** avoids the development of a disease. Most population-based [health promotion](#) activities are primary preventive measures.
2. **Secondary prevention** activities are aimed at early disease detection, thereby increasing opportunities for interventions to prevent progression of the disease and emergence of [symptoms](#).
3. **Tertiary prevention** reduces the negative impact of an already established disease by restoring function and reducing disease-related complications.

[Wikipedia]

<sup>5</sup> \*ML Phillips, CD Landouceur, WC Drevets: ‘A neural model of voluntary and automatic emotion regulation: implications for understanding the pathophysiology and neurodevelopment of bipolar disorder; *Molecular Psychiatry* 2008 **13** 833-857,

\*Öngür D, Price JL: The organisation of networks within the orbital and medial prefrontal cortex of rats, monkeys and human. *Cereb Cortex* 2000; **10**:206-219

\*Ghashghaei HT, Hilgetag CC, Barbas H. Sequence of information processing for emotions based on anatomic dialogue between prefrontal cortex and amygdala. *Neuroimage* 2007; **34**:905-923.

<sup>6</sup> A.D. Craig, How do you feel? Introception: the sense of physiological condition of the body; Nature reviews neuroscience, volume 2, August 2002; 655-66.

stress levels, our mood and disposition” we see that “recent anatomical work detailed neural system in primates and in humans that represent all aspects of the physiological condition of the physical body. The system constitutes a representation of the ‘material me’<sup>7</sup>, and might provide a foundation for subjective feelings, emotion and self awareness”.

A.D. Craig (2002), following Sir Charles Sherrington (1900), Wiliam James<sup>8</sup> (1890) and Charles Darwin<sup>9</sup>: presented neurobiological evidence to the natural philosophical arguments and regarded “the feelings from our bodies as the basis for self-awareness and emotion”. Those arguments are similar to the school of thoughts in traditional body-psychotherapy for over a century. Craig stresses the important to recognize that this neural sensory system (especially the vagus) is part of an entire network involved in homeostasis; that is, in the autonomic, hormonal and behavioural neural mechanisms that maintain optimal physiological conditions in the body and that respond in an integrated and ongoing fashion to all interior and exterior environmental challenges”. He concludes that this conceptual framework has strong implications for medicine”. Because the integrated neural representation of all aspects of the condition of the body in a system responsible for homeostasis, allostasis system and associated with stress<sup>10</sup>.

This notion is congruent with the biodynamic psychology point of view as beautifully expressed by Gerda Boyesen “in the biodynamic view, the function of mind, body and spirit are totally interfused. Everything that happens in us and everything that we do – our shivers, shouts, visions, actions, thoughts, feelings- are all manifestations of the life-force moving in us. How someone relates to movement of their life force is central to the biodynamic image of the person”.

### **Biodynamic group session: theory and experience:**

#### **Duet between right brain and left brain**

I started writing this paper while I was observing one of our training groups at a workshop given by Gillie Gilbert. It was a unique opportunity to write this essay while in the session, to be feeling it all (right brain) and, concurrently, to describe the possible connections to scientific theories (left brain). In this essay, I have not endeavoured to follow the training session chronologically, but to describe unique moments that have characteristic qualities of Biodynamic Psychology Training and Psychotherapy as it occurs within the London School of Biodynamic Psychotherapy (LSBP). In a minute, in human being, there is billions of parallel process. Usually, we are conscious of not more of 2,000 of them. In body psychotherapy we attempt to expand the amount of concurrent processes that we aware of. However, when I write about it here I can concentrate just on one at a time. And we can speak about the quality of a moment in length. I am aiming in this article to capture the infinite possibilities of the subjective experience at a moment and analyse them scientifically.

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<sup>7</sup> Sir Charles Sherrington conceptualized a sense of ‘the material me’ by considering that all of these feelings are related and form a foundation for the sense of one’s physical self, Sherrington, C. S. Text-book of Physiology (ed. Schäfer, E. A.) 920–1001 (Pentland, Edinburgh, UK, 1900).

<sup>8</sup> James, W. The Principles of Psychology [online]  
<<http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/James/Principles/index.htm>> (1890).

<sup>9</sup> Charles Darwin (1809-1882) said: “The goal of emotion... is to effect physical movement and regain a state of physical equilibrium”.

<sup>10</sup> McEwen, BS. Protective and Damaging Effects of Stress Mediators NEJM 1998; 338:3:171-79

You may experience through reading about of the session that deep inside our bodies we know the truth. This inner implicit core within us, using information from mirror neurons, the autonomic nervous system and other mechanisms, knows how to read the implicit core in others and enables us to gently communicate what is hidden beneath our words or silence. We will explore here the unique contributions of touch and inner voice within the context of the biodynamic approach enabling the development of resilience<sup>11</sup> and hope<sup>12</sup>.

I concluded from that session that the biodynamic therapist develops a huge capacity for right brain to right brain communication (non-verbal) integrate with a high capacity of left brain to left brain communication (verbal). Only someone with this capacity and ability can facilitate such inner communication in another.

The words seemingly came from my Right Brain. They were chaotic rather than ordered See if you can read these words (in italic) in a slow to yourself whilst being aware of your breathing):

*'Pleasurable energy ....a meditative state .... streaming of energy in the room .... The wonderful present of the therapist....calm.... accepting..... profound and multilayered'.*

*The group members are going through the chaos of the unconscious with the deep knowledge that according to the second law of entropy<sup>13</sup> we may find pockets of order and stability in the chaos; a most unexpected island of rest.* When a person connects to that core of order in himself, the inner self (the primary personality<sup>14</sup>), the experience of being becomes the most pleasurable empowering experience of the 'self', it enables listening to the inner voice and the impulses from within, an absolute truth in that moment, the power of now<sup>15</sup>. This calm and quiet island of 'grounded' peace in oneself, can allow us the courage we have lost through being repeatedly wounded in our childhood by our caregivers failing celebrate with us the whole spectrum of our being. They were unable to see and validate the 'self'. Because of the limitations of our caretakers to celebrate this whole spectrum, we experienced as

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<sup>11</sup> <sup>11</sup> Michael Rutter; Ann. N.Y. Acad. Sci. 1094:1-12 (2006); Implication of Resilience Concepts for Scientific Understanding: "Resilience is an interactive concept that refers to a relative resistance to environmental risk experiences, or the overcoming of stress or adversity. As such, it differs from both social competence positive mental health. Resilience differs from traditional concepts of risk and protection in its focus on **individual variation** in response to comparable experiences." "...there is the evidence that, in some circumstances the experience of stress or adversity sometimes *strengthens* resistance to later stress – as called steeling effect."

<sup>12</sup> In his book, The Anatomy of Hope, Jerome Groopman, M.D. describes true hope as opposed to the common approach to optimism, according to which "everything will sort itself out eventually". The main difference between hope and optimism is rooted in total reality. Hope is a feeling of elation that we see – in our mind – a way to a better future. Hope does not disregard the deep pitfalls and setbacks, significant fears and anxiety down the road. True hope is not misleading, and is based on a focused perception of reality.

<sup>13</sup> Entropy - A measure for chaos in a materialised system that is composed of many components

<sup>14</sup> Gerda Boyesen: the primary personality and its relationship to the streaming (from the book 'in the wake of Reich, edited by david Bondella

<sup>15</sup> Ecar Toll The power of now

children developmental influences<sup>16</sup> were foiled which put us at risk of less than optimal development<sup>17</sup>.

The whole self is a multidimensional combination of body, soul, spirit, mind and emotion. These different layers of the same multidimensional self move on the axis of time. With each moment and event the whole self is affected including the complex and magnificent systems of oscillatory communication<sup>18</sup>. For each event, whether pleasurable, balanced and regulated<sup>19</sup> (Affect regulate), or a traumatic failure to cope with stress (Affect dysregulation), the whole self will be influenced. The 'self' creates endless dynamic moments and cascades. In a single moment of time during the therapy, the therapist can support the unfolding of one particular aspect and at the same time hold the existence of all the other aspects and layers at the back of the mind.

The following is a brief description of my experience and perception of a few moments in a training session (again as before, the words that seemingly came from my Right Brain are in *Italic* – see if you observe any difference in your own body while reading it in slow rhythm to yourself and while again remain aware of your own breathing. Rhythm and prosody are very important aspects of right brain to right brain communication<sup>20</sup>):

*The therapist's intention is to enable balance (such as synchronised affect regulation) in a group member (using biodynamic multisensory intervention, Vegetotherapy). This influences everyone in the room. The therapeutic experience which the therapist facilitates may be conceptualized as the transformation of external (interactive regulation) into internal regulation (auto regulation) in one member of the group and this process influences all observing group members in the room as the session progresses (my question was is this interactive regulation or social regulation? Does it happen because as they watch it their mirror neuron are in action, as we see in kinaesthetic learning? Or the collective experience influenced by electromagnetic field changes?). We, all the people in the room, are moving to the level of pleasure and acceptance – of herself, yourself, himself and myself. – accepting the human race as it is, as I am. It feels akin to the gentle ripples created when stones have been thrown repeatedly into water and the participants experience waves of pleasure (can we understand this sensation as electromagnetic induction?). The experience of deep understanding without words is present in the room; timeless, pleasurable and synchronised – reminding me what one of our student Shelonit El-Yashar once said "if all the people on the planet were to experience this deep level of acceptance and*

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<sup>16</sup> Heinz Kohut: Self psychology and humanities

<sup>17</sup> Allan N Schore: page 180 Affect dysregulation

<sup>18</sup> Alfons Schnitzler and Joachim Gross, Normal and pathological oscillatory communication in the brain. Nature review Neuroscience, volume 6 April 2005; 265- 296

<sup>19</sup> Allan N Schore in his book Affect Dysregulation (page 179) argued that in attachment transactions of affective synchrony, the psychobiology attuned caregiver interactively regulates the infant's positive and negative states, thereby constructing a growth facilitating environment for the experience-dependent maturation of a control system in the infant's right brain. The efficient functioning of this coping system is central to the infant's expanding capacity for **self-regulation**, the ability to flexibly regulate stressful emotional states through interactions with other humans – **interactive regulation** in interconnected contexts, and without other humans – **autoregulation** in autonomous context. . . in this manner a secure attachment relationship facilitate right brain development, promotes efficient affect regulation, and foster adaptive infant mental health.

<sup>20</sup> Brain Circuits and Functions of the Mind – edit by Colwyn Trevarthen 1990

*calmness – then there would not be any more war”. Interestingly similar to what one of Gerda Boyesen’s students in Paris said years ago to Gerda “Gerda, you have found the key to happiness”<sup>21</sup> Totally present, the voice down, tune in, instructions are coming at the same frequency and are synchronised to the movement of the strokes and the energy. There is a deep experience of understanding between everyone without the need for speech. All is well in the deep experience of being, where people meet beyond defensive mechanisms and cognitive understanding.*

*After the training session, **the room is full with laughter**. Pleasure is flowing and people are experiencing: ‘it is ok to be me’, ‘it is ok to be authentic’ ‘no need for crap or acting on the stage’. The total and profound experience of being truly accepted for who I am and what I feel, deepens, along with the victorious feeling of strength, sensitive, vulnerable and understanding, together with the complexity of human being, all is ok. The biodynamic laughter has the essence of Zen – when we know that all of us are the same in the core essence of what we are. Wheatear in some time, I am special, unique and irreplaceable. All is one and each one is unique. The laughter and amusement come from a feeling of relief, it is ok, it is safe, being full me, acknowledged by others and myself. Knowing that you see me, and I see you and it is ok. The self is accepted, acknowledged and appreciated fully as an embodied subjective experience.*

Isn’t this exactly what the baby needs when it is born? Isn’t this what the human soul needs to reach during a lifetime? To safely experience the feeling in a presence moment I am perfect being. Thought it maybe be temporary experience it can nourish one for the rest of their life, enabling self actualisation and self confidence. I believe that this experience is facilitates a natural movement towards mental and physical health, fulfilment and self-growth.

Creating a safe, non judgmental environment and a secure atmosphere is an important aspect of Biodynamic work. In Vegetotherapy we are enable the experience and the truth from within the person to emerge without interpretations or judgment. We are open to the infinite possibilities of the subjective experience and let it to emerge.

The important of safety versus confrontation has been summarised by Leonie Welberg in the news of Nature Reviews Neuroscience<sup>22</sup> in a “A study published recently in *Science* showed that people who feel that they’re not in control are more likely to see non-existing patterns”. In that research they saw that “When participants were made to feel more confident through self-affirmation techniques the effects (of seeing non-existing patterns) disappeared indicating that: “There is no point going up to them and telling them they are wrong, we need to make them feel more secure,” says Professor Galinsky of Northwestern University (Evanston, Illinois, USA), who also contributed to the study (*BBC news*, 3 October 2008).”

### **Summery and comment:**

It is important to emphasize that the terms ‘regulation’ and ‘self-regulation’ in Biodynamic Psychology are wider concepts than that more usually the accepted, which Allan N. Schore suggested in his books on ‘Affect Regulation’. In his books,

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<sup>21</sup> Gerda Boyesen, *Body Psychotherapy is a Psychotherapy. The flesh of the soul: the body we work with*, edit by Michael heller. Peter Lang, Bern 2001

<sup>22</sup> Leonie Welberg *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, volume 9, November 2008

Schore defines the 'capacity for self-regulation' as, 'the ability to flexibly regulate stressful emotional states'. In Biodynamic Psychology, according to the basic principle of the vaso-motoric emotional cycle this is defined first as the broader experiences which actively regulate the human mind/brain/body with also physical movements, touch and biological processes. Secondly, Biodynamic Psychology defines the specific part of 'regulate stressful emotional states' as the **down-regulation** processes which is only one half of the possibilities one can use for regulation and self regulation. The other half of the possibilities are within the **up-regulation** processes. The process of up regulation support self actualisation, expression and movement into action. This enables the person to express and respond to challenges with appropriate active responses. For instance, if we face a danger, e.g. a cat sees a dog, it needs to be able to respond with an appropriate stable dynamic active response derived from the fight and flight reactions. In order to enable stable dynamic active respond the whole body has to respond as one communicative system and to be available to move into action.

I see it as matched principle to the concepts of the allostasis system which McEwen, BS (1998) speaks about. "Allostasis – the ability to achieve stability through change – it is critical to survival... Through allostasis, the autonomic nerve system, the Hipotalamic – Pituitary - Adrenal (HPA) axis , and the cardiovascular, metabolic and immune systems protect the body by responding to internal and external stress". He describes the normal allostatic response, in which an adaptive response (activity) is initiated by a stressor (challenge, stimulation), sustained for an appropriate interval and then turned off (recovery)."

In the group session I have described above, we can feel the experience of some of the down regulation aspects of the Biodynamic Psychotherapeutic work. In my opinion, these synchronised moments support normal oscillation in our nervous system and natural movement toward health. Synchronised oscillation is essential to the developmental of 'Self', self-regulation capacity, resilience and independent well-being.