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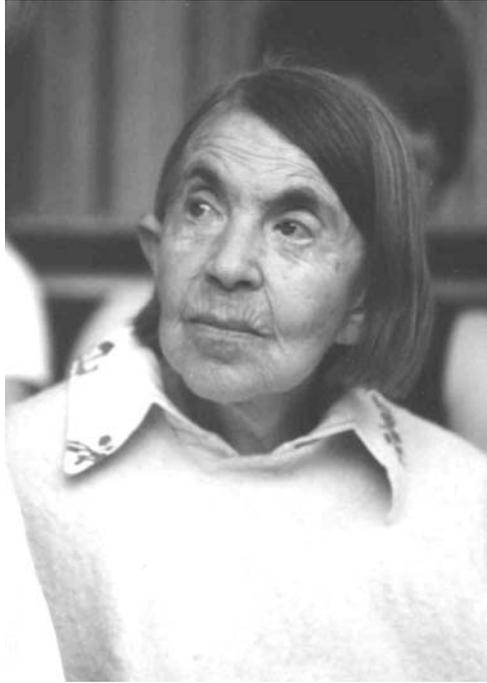


Volume 3 Number 1 2004

The Official Publication of
THE UNITED STATES ASSOCIATION FOR
BODY PSYCHOTHERAPY

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Charlotte Selver

Born April 4, 1901 – Ruhrort, Germany
Emigrated to United States - 1938
Died August 22, 2003 – Muir Beach, California

“Becoming more and more able to be there in situations, whether easy or difficult; to be more there with our mind, with our hearts, with our sensitivities, with our strengths - this is very, very important.”

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USABP Mission Statement

The USABP believes that integration of the body and mind is essential to effective psychotherapy, and to that end, its mission is to develop and advance the art, science, and practice of body psychotherapy in a professional, ethical, and caring manner in order to promote the health and welfare of humanity.
(revised October 1999)

The USA Body Psychotherapy Journal

Editorial, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2004

Charlotte Selver was clearly an amazing woman. Working beyond the age of 100, she imparted to those who worked with her, often for thirty or more years, a powerful way of deeply knowing them-selves and others. Unlike other contributors to this issue, I never met Charlotte Selver, nor have I really studied Sensory Awareness in depth. I have only experienced a brief but intriguing Sensory Awareness work-shop at the last USABP convention. So when Judyth O. Weaver, PhD, the main exponent of Charlotte Selver's work in the US, offered to co-edit an issue on her mentor, I was thrilled, both for us as a journal, but also for the chance to get to know both her and Selver better. Dr. Weaver has researched and commissioned (in some cases cajoled and conjured) all of the articles for this volume. It has been my delightful task to view them as an outsider and to plague all contributors for additional examples and explanations. They have been amazingly patient and forthcoming.

Volume 3, No.1 reflects a threefold purpose. First, it honors one of the important forbearers of our work through her own words and of those who knew her. I would like to continue in this journal to honor the "elders" with publication of works by and inspired by them. Secondly, it is part of our mission to contribute to the history of body psychotherapy, so in addition to honoring Selver herself, we have included an article about Selver's most important teacher, Elsa Gindler and one by her as well. In it, her only published work, Gindler anticipates concepts later articulated by Reich and others. Body psychotherapy's historical position at the alternative edge of both psychology and medicine particularly requires us to document our genesis and our relationship to the larger field of psychotherapy. Finally, we have solicited a number of articles by her students about their own work with what they gleaned from her, including concrete examples of how body psychotherapists, our readers, could use this work in clinical practice.

The articles in this issue fall into several categories and some fall into more than one. First, we present, to the extent possible, the experience of Selver herself, which several contributors describe as profound. In addition to the photo on the first page, there are three of the very few articles written by Charlotte Selver herself or transcribed by her students. There are also two interviews conducted with her, 15 years apart, describing her work and giving slightly different views of her and her work. In reading her words, it struck me how closely they echoed Reich's therapeutic goals when she spoke of somatic experiencing as accessing our original nature, the closer to which we come, the happier and healthier we will be. She gives us a primer on self-regulation.

After these, our guest editor, Judyth Weaver, writes of the significance of Elsa Gindler, Selver's mentor, and outlines some of the connections to American psychotherapeutic traditions. She then thoughtfully elaborates her own integration of sensory awareness and somatic psychotherapy, comparing it to the Zen practice she had acquired in Japan. This introduces a theme which runs through many of the following articles: the capacity of sensory awareness to deepen whatever experience or technique the psychotherapist is engaged in, both for the therapist and for the client.

Indeed, it reminds me of the popular work, Eckhardt Tolle's *POWER OF NOW* (1999). Staying in the present moment and in one's own body allows a spontaneous transformation that is almost impossible any other way. Psychoanalyst Michael Parsons explores contiguous territory in *THE DOVE THAT RETURNS, THE DOVE THAT VANISHES: Paradox and Creativity in Psychoanalysis* (2000), juxtaposing the therapist's deep concern to understand and the readiness to be taken by surprise. Both are essential, but the knowing, doing, theory and technique aspects of our work are often easier to articulate and transmit than the values of being, spontaneity and love. And, even if we embrace both poles, we must continually hold within our beings the creative tension between these opposites if we are to become and express in our profession all that we are and can be. In an earlier volume, I quoted a teacher of mine as saying, "Psychotherapists are born and then they need all the training they can get." We must also concede that we need all the training we can get in order to allow our theories and techniques to infuse our being and becoming so that we greet each therapeutic moment with our whole being as utterly unique.

The largest section of this issue is inaugurated by tributes from Peter Levine, PhD and Marjorie Rand, PhD, both originators of important schools of body psychotherapy. Each details how Selver's work influenced their work in both theory and practice.

Following them, five psychotherapists with differing backgrounds describe how they have used, elaborated and adapted what they learned from her in their practice and teaching. Terry Ray, MA, LPC, describes her amusingly ambivalent introduction to Selver and her work as it crept up on her to lodge within her and deepen over many years of workshops, flowering in her ability to "listen deeply and to be open and present" to her clients. Barbara Cabott, Psy.D., L.M.T., who studied with Selver over a span of 32 years, gives a brief description of its personal impact, and takes us through three sessions with an individual client, demonstrating the power of sensing in facilitating profound bodymind interventions. In "Sensing Is the Heart of Contact," Ginger Clark, PhD, MFT, a relational somatic psychotherapist, uses two case vignettes to demonstrate that "Sensing is both a means and an end: contact is sensing with the heart and at the heart of contact is sensing." Richard Lowe, MA, MFT, in describing Selver's influence on his work, elucidates six principles that inform how he works with clients. And, Connie Smith Siegel, MFA, illustrates through description, cases and examples of patients' drawings, her creative integration of sensory awareness with deep art work. Finally, Suzanne Kilkus, MA, in an unusual synthesis of personal and professional development, allows us to directly experience with her, through excerpts from papers she wrote for

graduate courses, the impact of sensory awareness training on her personal and professional development as well as her clinical practice.

In conclusion, we reprint the Epilogue to the only book written on Sensory Awareness, by Selver's husband and collaborator, Charles C.W. Brooks.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank two people who were of inestimable support in the early issues of this journal, Mary Giuffra, PhD and Cynthia V.N. Peck, MA. When I felt totally at sea and overwhelmed, each in a different way guided me and gave unstinting help. Mary is amazing at connecting with people and finding resources both human and material. And, when resources were not available, she pitched in and proofread the entire first two years of journal. After working with the material so much, I could never have done it. Her comments, however, were so trenchant and pivotal, that I have persuaded her to join the peer review board so that authors can benefit from her incisive erudition earlier in the process. Cynthia nudged me to be less dryly academic and livelier in my own writing, frequently suggesting metaphors and interesting angles when I could think of none.

Jacqueline Carleton, PhD
Fall 2004
New York City

The USA Body Psychotherapy Journal

Guest Editorial, Vol. 3, No. 1,

Judyth O. Weaver and Charlotte Selver



When Charlotte Selver emigrated from Germany in 1938 and settled in New York City she began giving private sessions, and eventually classes, in the work of somatic inquiry that she learned from her teacher, Elsa Gindler, and that she eventually called "Sensory Awareness."

In the early 1950's Selver taught classes at the New School for Social Research. In 1957 she was one of the presenters, along with Eric Fromm and Daisetz Suzuki, at the seminal conference in Mexico called "Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis." Zen popularizer Alan Watts also studied with Selver, calling her work "Living Zen," and eventually they gave

workshops together. Selver also taught workshops with Shunryu Suzuki, founder of the Zen Center in San Francisco. In 1963 Selver gave the first experiential workshop at Esalen Institute in California.

With Charles V.W. Brooks, her husband and colleague of thirty years, they regularly taught in Maine in summer, New York City in fall, Mexico in winter, and California in spring. Selver also eventually returned to teaching regularly in Germany and maintained this schedule of travel and leading classes until shortly before her death at 102.

People in varying fields were influenced by the work Selver offered; one of the largest groups was in the field of psychotherapy. Even though Selver herself was not a psychologist and would not take her work into the realm of psychotherapy, psychologists and therapists of various persuasions have studied the process of Sensory Awareness and been influenced by it. Many have incorporated it into their lives and practice and have also referred their own clients to the work.

I began studying intensively with Charlotte Selver and Charles V.W. Brooks in 1968. Their work seemed to be similar to the practices I learned in the Zen Buddhist monastery in Japan that I had recently left. When I realized my direction was toward the study of body-mind integrative therapy, it made complete sense to me that the practice of Sensory Awareness would have to be the foundation. This was affirmed to me in 1984 when I met Wilhelm Reich's daughter, Eva, and learned how interested her father was in the work of Elsa Gindler. Reich's first wife, Annie, a psychoanalyst, had studied with Gindler as had Otto Fenichel and his wife, Clare. Reich's second mate and love of his life, Elsa Lindenberg, also studied with Gindler. Eva is sure these influences on her father directed him to working with the body and breath.

In our own professional organization there are many who can trace their lineage of "tuning into the organism" to the teachings of Charlotte Selver: Katherine Brown, Marjorie Rand and Ilana Rubinfeld, among others, have studied with Selver. Some of them are gracing the pages of this journal with their contributions. I imagine that many more of our colleagues have been influenced by Selver and the work of Sensory Awareness, probably even without knowing of their lineage.

At each of our last three conferences, I have been honored to present this work of Sensory Awareness as the foundation of body-orientated psychotherapy. And it has been a great honor and pleasure to have been asked to co-edit this journal with Jacqueline Carleton. Often, people in the more quiet somatic practices are not inclined to writing. Charlotte Selver, herself, didn't write much. (You will notice that two of the three pieces by her in this journal were transcribed from her classes.) Putting some of our experiences and thoughts in words to be printed was very challenging for some of us. Some of us have struggled to do so as an expression of gratefulness to our teacher and as a hope that others in the field of somatic psychotherapy could recognize the influence in their own work.

As our field becomes more accepted in the psychoanalytic world and our work more sought after, it is a thrill to have this issue of our relatively young organization honoring and commemorating the work of such a foundational teacher, Charlotte Selver.

Judyth O. Weaver, PhD
Guest Editor

On Being in Touch with Oneself

Charlotte Selver

Reprinted from: Charlotte Selver, Collected Writings Volume I: Sensory Awareness And Our Attitude Toward Life(1999), with permission of the Sensory Awareness Foundation, Mill Valley, CA (www.sensoryawareness.org).

Excerpts from a talk by Charlotte Selver. It was first published by the Charlotte Selver Foundation in the brochure Sensory Awareness in 1973. Mary Alice Roche did the final editing; the first draft and editing was done by Teri Moldin.

Abstract

In this talk Selver mentions the miracles of everyday life such as waking in the morning. She speaks against compartmentalizing humans into bodies or minds and supports the focus on a unified organismic human being. Citing the potential of young children and the work of Emi Pikler, she also talks about how conscious sensing is the re-educational tool for the nervous system.

Keywords

Children – Emi Pikler – Breath – Experiment – Whole Self – Charlotte Selver – Natural Potential

Have you ever wondered, when you woke up in the morning, just in the transition between sleep and waking, at the miracle that you could feel yourself, feel whether you were rested or not, feel the warmth of your limbs? That when you opened your eyes you could see your room, that the details came to you without your making the slightest effort? Were you astonished by the fact that, with a motion of your hand, you could remove your blanket, get up and move through your room?

Did it occur to you as interesting that when you took your breakfast you could taste the orange juice, taste whether the coffee was too weak, too strong, or just to your liking? Did you realize when the telephone rang that you heard it without trying to - and that you knew it was the telephone and not the doorbell? All this belongs to your biological equipment!

Did you notice your ability not only to distinguish what your friend said, but also the mood in which he said it, his hesitation, his interest? Have you ever thought about these marvelous capacities of yours? Did you wonder about the fact that thoughts came to you in response to what he said - that you remembered things? All this is the property of your organism, your living self.

Some people might wonder at the fact that I am including facets of awareness that are often attributed to what is called the 'mind'. But I would say that, as I look out from here, I see people. I do not see minds, I do not see bodies -but I see human beings. I assume you have the same impression when you look around. So I doubt that we could question that a person is a psychosomatic unity. I might add that until mind and body are commonly experienced and understood as what they really are - one rich, unified organization, functioning as a complex unity - people will continue to be to one degree or another self-alienated.

Our natural potential can best be seen by watching children from infancy to two years, because at that age there is the best chance they are still unspoiled. It is wonderful to see what a child will undertake when he is given the opportunity to move around freely and is not interfered with (whether it be by hindering him, interrupting his activities, or helping him) when no one is ambitious for him, and he is "permitted to live in peace and develop according to his own pace and individual needs", as stated by the Hungarian pediatrician, Dr. Emmy Pikler.

The young child regards everything with interest; he explores each movement as it becomes possible for him. When he comes to sitting, he sits in a marvelous posture which nobody taught him. Coming to standing is a tremendous job of balancing. When he plays he gives himself entirely to what he does. It is this wholeness and directness which is so striking in children who are still intact. His muscles and joints give easily; he has a perfect sense for the space he has at his disposal, and - extremely important -he relies on his base of support, whether it is the floor or a rolling stick, and whether he is squatting, sitting or standing.

Even before he can speak, a child can communicate what he wants – and does not want – if the adult would only listen. But what if the mother does not listen, and insists on what she wants rather than what the baby wants? Sooner or later many a child is overruled, either by force or by learning he has to compromise if he wants to have mother's love and approval. All kinds of devices, rewards, and threats will be used by the mother to achieve this. In eating, for instance, what is the result? A dulling of taste, an ignoring of even the clearest messages, such as whether or not he has had enough. "I don't seem to know; mother knows!"

Some of his spontaneous self-assurance gets lost, and where does the genuine expressiveness of his whole little self go, if not into holding back, or becoming lifeless?

Much scientific work is being done today to determine whether, in functioning and expression, genetic factors are responsible or whether experience-determined factors have left their imprint. My personal experience is that all too often genetic factors are blamed when actually wrong conditioning has created harmful changes. The emphasis in organismic-orientation is on release of these modifiable elements.

I have spoken about how unfailing children's responses are, and in what basic ways self-alienation can be created, with simultaneous physical hindrances. Other interferences may happen at an even earlier stage and continue to happen throughout our development. For example, insensitive handling by the mother at a time when the baby most needs love and support may

make the baby pull back, and lay the basis for feelings of insecurity - which express themselves in contractions, holding of breath, and other malfunctions.

Taboos may be created when the baby explores himself physically and finds there are some regions he is told to keep away from. Also, coaxing to premature physical “achievements” on the part of ambitious parents may result in unnecessary and harmful effort, sometimes producing weaknesses such as bowed legs, curved backs, flat feet and so on, to say nothing of the loss of the feeling of satisfaction and pride which goes with the freedom to explore, and with self-accomplishment.

It is not difficult to see the effect of the constant admonition of parents, teachers and important adults to: “Speak thus and so! Sit straight! Put your shoulders back! Chest up, buttocks tucked under!” Advice like this, if followed (and who has not at least tried?) blocks spontaneous motion and stifles natural behavior. And what about such advice as: “Pay attention! Answer quickly! Make an effort! Think hard!” Have you thought of the psychosomatic conflict and confusion which such remarks must create?

The sad thing, and at the same time the telling one, is that most children give in, often with anger and a feeling of defeat, and with a blotting out of the protest which is both psychological and physical and with this they drift away from the true language of the organism. They give up, without knowing the great value of what they are giving up.

So, we can understand how various attitudes develop toward what we call “body”. Often the “body” is taken for granted. People say, “It is best when we do not feel anything of our body.” They mean that when they do not feel anything, it is working smoothly; but when they do feel something, that means trouble. Either they feel discomfort, or have wishes they do not dare to give in to.

Many people use “their bodies” as a means for competition in regard to strength, appearance, sex-appeal - often patterning themselves after current idols. Others, who have been overprotected in childhood, regard “their bodies” with utmost concern, afraid to enjoy living for fear something may happen to “their body”.

Another prevalent attitude is that our head is our only source of information about ourselves. To be in contact with ourselves physically is for many a waste of time in a civilization in which everything circles around “doing”, “getting”, “succeeding”, “gaining”, “competing” but with hardly any room for existing – existing in a biological sense, simply being.

What we do for what we call our body is more or less routine: we groom ourselves; we use cosmetics; we diet; we exercise; we take our daily bath. But do all these activities come from a real sense of self? This indifference to ourselves as living beings does not work.

Such self alienation influences at every moment those who have been exposed to unwise conditioning. In standing or sitting we may hold ourselves according to an image of how one should look in these “positions”, an esthetic idea which has little to do with the laws of nature and where everything is put and posed – or superimposed. We may hold ourselves upright, constricting the abdominal region, with tissues strained - an unnoticed waste of energy – or we may collapse, pulled down by our own weight, and call it “being comfortable” rather than realizing the lack of reactivity, the lack of sensitivity toward the life-activities within us. We make similar discoveries in those basic activities in which we constantly find ourselves, like lying, standing, walking, etc. – any kind of movement and expression.

The primary aim of our approach is to make it possible for a person to re-experience himself as a totality, to bring him back to the degree of aliveness and receptivity of which he is capable. The tool for this process is sensory re-education, or conscious sensing. It is that natural activity of the organism which happens just like seeing or hearing. Our organ for sensing – the sensory nervous system – spreads through the entire organism by a multitude of nerves, including the skin. So we really cannot help but be sensing to one degree or another as long as we are awake. The question is to what degree we allow it, or hinder it, in our daily lives.

To study sensory phenomena, people need quiet – an atmosphere of peace and concentration. But many people, when they first come to me, are disturbed about just that quiet. They come to be “exercised”; they want to be “told”; they expect to be “shown”. The air is full of questions like, “What is proper breathing?” “Where should I put my arms?” “What am I supposed to do in standing?” “How should I bend?” There is no end to the “shoulds” and “hows” and “supposed tos”.

To discover that one can find out for oneself is a revelation. There is a great difference between “knowing” I have a head, “seeing” it in the mirror, and actually sensing one’s head. It is usually a surprise to the person that he can learn directly, through his own sensations, that right within him is the best source of orientation. Thus, learning to sense opens a whole new world.

In the beginning, some people are looking only for pleasant sensations; but often when I ask, “What do you feel of yourself?” the answer is, “Nothing; nothing hurts me.” Only a disturbance is registered by these people. With time, the student becomes less disturbed by his “trouble” signals, as he realizes that feeling a disturbance means that deep down he knows that something else would be more satisfactory - and demands it. He therefore gets interested in what creates the disturbance, and what he could allow for change. Gradually his sensations get clearer. He becomes more aware of what “his body” has to tell him: what feels better, what not so good; where he is alive, where too lifeless; where he rests and where he contracts or presses; where it feels free and where not. This means that he begins to get more in touch with himself.

Often the seemingly least-significant sensations turn out to be most significant. There is no “right” or “wrong,” just sensations which come to consciousness and from which we can learn. To be able to get clearer messages, it is necessary for the total self to become awake, receptive and ready for the slightest changes. Yet, most important, there is no need to do anything. Changes will happen by themselves when the organism is allowed to assert its needs.

Let me repeat, sensing is the tool for all our experiments; through it we become aware of many important things – the functioning of breathing, for instance. It is interesting how many theories of “correct” breathing have been proclaimed. What

one learned with one method has to be unlearned with the next. We turn the tables; instead of our educating breathing, we learn from it.

Breathing is the most intimate indicator of our personal condition – something so utterly fine and honest that it should be treated with more humility. In sensory awareness we study breathing in rest, in motion, in our daily activities. We learn to feel and obey its varying rhythm.

What we are constantly dealing with is reality. As long as we live, we must breathe. Breathing indicates life. It has an important job to do; it cleans us out, it replenishes us. Imagine what it means for a person to experience this more fully! There is a two-way reactivity – the musculature, by and by, becomes more reactive to breathing, while breathing adjusts itself to the demands of the organism.

In our experiments we learn a lot about our musculature - and about our structure - not as abstract knowledge, but in practical work. We learn through experience that we have many joints and that they are meant to be used; to give, and not to be rigid. We learn through experience that the spine is a very flexible structure. We learn through experience that seeing happens by itself, that straining of the eyes in order to see only results in strained eyes and impaired - rather than better - vision. We learn that straining to think blocks rather than improves thinking. We learn that stretching our muscles does not mean straining them - that our muscles can expand or contract freely and, in fact, are meant to give in every motion.

We learn a lot about our attitudes; we begin very early to distinguish the difference between “doing” and “letting happen.” We become conscious of how ‘we use our energy, conscious of effort, and that effort impedes rather than helps us in our tasks.

In our experiments there is much play about too little and too much. Our days are made up of activities demanding various amounts of energy; we open a letter; we carry a package; we close a window; we wash our dishes; we write or type, or speak, or drive a car. We can exhaust ourselves with the way we handle these tasks (many people do) or we can be stimulated – regenerated – by them, simply by being tuned in for what is now required. We learn that to be more in touch with ourselves means to be more in touch with what we do. Then the needed amount of energy is available – not too little, and not too much. Imagine how valuable this information can be in daily life.

Also, in this freeing process long-forgotten memories may flare up, and the origin of hindrances become clear. We may gradually realize that, as adults, we do not need to stay hampered with these old hindrances, that we can relate anew, with shutters more and more open. When a person experiences how good it feels to cooperate with the laws of nature within himself, instead of interfering with them, he may – by the gratification he gets – realize that he is meant to be open for life and there is no need to protect himself against it.

At the beginning, I spoke of the child’s relation to the earth, the floor, the base of support. He is at home on it; he can rest on it. In using the floor’s good hardness which gives support and offers resistance, he grows strong through it. He moves over it, he learns to act in space. And he is always supported.

As we gradually give up our holding back, we adults become increasingly aware that there is something under us inviting us to comfort, always there to support us in everything we do. That something is the earth. We have returned to our home; we are once again children of the earth – related but free. As the young child trusts, and acts in accordance with natural law, which operates both inside and outside of him, couldn’t we, as adults, rediscover what we have not really lost – our natural heritage? Being in touch with natural law as it is working through us is nothing less than being in touch with ourselves. Is this not a wonderful invitation?

On Breathing

Charlotte Selver

Reprinted from: Charlotte Selver, *Collected Writings Volume I: Sensory Awareness And Our Attitude Toward Life* (1999), with permission of the Sensory Awareness Foundation, Mill Valley, CA (www.sensoryawareness.org).

This text was first printed in 1971 as the very first publication of the Sensory Awareness Foundation (Charlotte Selver Foundation at that time). It is an excerpt from Charlotte Selver's June 1966 workshop on breathing in New York City. Editing by Mary Alice Roche.

Abstract

In this excerpt from a workshop Selver talks about possibilities of being more there and the distinction between spontaneous and habitual behavior. She focuses on breathing and the possibilities of allowing it to be natural. She clarifies how breath is the primary indicator for our conditions and how it can be support for our healing and learning.

Keywords

Breathing – Explorations – Spontaneous Behavior – Habitual Behavior – Satisfactory Exhalation

We have been seeing some photographs. Among them was one of grasses growing beside water. There was such appeal in the strength and vivacity of the grass, and such wonderful fusion of water, stone, earth, sunlight and shade with the plants, that I thought there could not be anything better to make us conscious – from the beginning – that nothing in nature is isolated, that we also, by nature, are not isolated from the world around us, and that the process of breathing is connected with *everything* which happens in us and around us, just as the plants are connected to everything around them.

Actually, every event, every presence – even our *sitting here*, our all *being together* --already has, in the moment it occurs, an influence on us: on our breathing, our blood circulation, our stomach activities, the functioning of our glands, and so on. In other words, all the mysterious interwovenness which is happening in the living organism is coming to expression in every moment in which we are living in our environment.

We are usually not enough awake for it, but sometimes you may have noticed that when something or somebody really interests you, you are speeded up, even when you were tired a moment ago. Your breathing changes; your vitality changes; you are functioning quite differently than before. And you may wonder, how is this possible?

Nowhere in the organism is there any limit to *being there* for any occasion; everything in us can be constantly responding to anything with which we happen to be in connection – if we allow it. We are constantly in connection with something, and therefore are never alone, never isolated. The whole day is full of invitations, but only we ourselves can realize if and when we respond to them. That is the question: do we respond to these everlasting invitations which can keep us young, movable, and reactive – never repeating, always new, because each invitation is new? Imagine what a change such responsiveness would bring in our lives! Who would like it? Who is against it?

The distinction between spontaneous and habitual behavior is one of the main topics of our work in general. How a person lives – is he habitual, or is he reactive in everyday living? – is the great question upon which our work turns. Many people do not make a distinction between spontaneous and habitual breathing. They have the notion that when they are just as they always are, this is being spontaneous, just as people who are very pushy, or very lazy, say, “This is my nature; it’s the way I am,” while it is only a habit – a deviation from their true nature.

Breathing is always as the person is. It is the clearest index of what is happening in the person – unless it is made up. Many people think they should breathe ‘properly.’ Forget it! It is no use, because there is no ‘proper’ breathing. Your breathing indicates very clearly what state you are in. When you are more reactive, your breathing is more reactive; when you are more habitual, your breathing is more habitual; if you are pushy, your breathing gets pushy, too, or stops. You can depend on it – as your breathing is, so you are. I should say, at any given moment my breathing is me, it is always me.

Now, as we go more directly into the study of breathing, please do not close yourself to other sensations. Everything which happens in us is very precious. When you care only for breathing, you are impoverishing yourself. It is much better when you have first the experience of the great variety of processes and sensations which is you. Remember the grasses in the photograph; we are not working on something isolated.

When all goes well, our breathing is an automatic energy supply. It supplies the amount of energy needed at the moment for whatever we happen to do, in exactly the way the dynamic requests of living require -- if we *allow it*. It is tremendously sensitive. Every little bit more of a demand or every little bit less of a demand – when we are innerly awake – will be reacted to in our breathing without our doing anything to it. It is about the same thing, for instance, as when an artist plays a Brahms concerto. There are passages which need a great delicacy and quiet, and there are passages which are very emotional and powerful. And the one who plays has to be able to give all of that, otherwise he just doesn’t play well.

Every person who plays the piano can tell you that to play pianissimo needs the greatest presence, a kind of *being fully there* for this pianissimo, and for this only. In the next moment he must be there for a crescendo, and then for a greater crescendo, until the greatest power is developed.

And we have the same wonderful possibility in breathing. When we are lying on the floor, breathing will react to our lying there, and it will nourish us. But it is something else when we are playing the piano, or fighting, or when we are running or jumping, or whatever it is. The response in breathing, if we are not holding it back or are not too uninterested or habitual inside so that it can't happen, will constantly allow the necessary supply of energy for what we are doing. We don't have to say, "Breathe!" For heaven's sake, forget that! It comes by itself, spontaneously – *if we allow it*. Therefore, it is the allowing – the possibility of becoming more permissive – that we want to explore.

When we become more sensitive for what being permissive means, then the whole day is full of opportunities for exercising this possibility of becoming more permissive – or, if I might say it differently, more loving in the way we contact whatever we contact. And the role which breathing plays in this is tremendous. As soon as we become more open for something we do, we find that the first thing in which we can recognize this increased openness is our breathing. In other words, when the heart is touched, when the inner is touched, when we really allow something to – as we say so nicely – *touch* us, then something in us opens, becomes awake and interested, and simply makes us breathe. We don't make ourselves do it. *It makes itself felt.*

Exploring breathing really needs to be a practice, but a practice which is absolutely new each time – not a repetition of old ways, but a finding out what is going on in the condition and activity in which you happen to be at a particular moment. No moment can be compared with another; in each there is something new to discover. There are people who have spent a lifetime practicing breathing in this way. It is one of the most wonderful, most gratifying practices in which you can engage, because as you are finding out about breathing through experiencing it, you will become quieter and quieter, freer and freer, healthier and healthier, and more and more alive. As long as you live, it never ends; so don't worry about how long it will take you!

It is very important that you set aside time for this exploration of your breathing, perhaps beginning with not breathing at all. Who has already noticed that we all stop our breathing a great deal? Perhaps we don't notice it, or only when someone asks about it. It is very important to notice. And once we do, the question of permissiveness comes up.

If you are dutiful, when you feel you stop breathing, then *you begin to breathe*. That means, you *do* something. That does not mean that *it* wants to breathe in you. Maybe it wants to continue to stop breathing. At one point, you will certainly feel that your breathing starts by itself; and that is a wonderful discovery. Do not go about your daily life saying to yourself, "Breathe!" When you find yourself holding your breath, wait a little. Wait until your breathing begins to function again for whatever you happen to be doing. You will notice that, when your breathing stops, something is not quite right in your relationship to what you are doing. Either you are too anxious, or too hesitant, or too shy, or resisting something, or holding back in some way. In other words, you are not fully *there* for what you happen to be doing at that moment; and it is very interesting psychologically to find out what makes you stop your breath at that particular moment.

It is possible for you to put into everything, not only into what you are doing at that moment, too much pressure, too much urgency, or too much watching or observing. In very many people, when they watch or observe – whomp! – breathing stops. When the head is too busy, breathing stops. There are thousands of reasons why breathing may stop. You may be awed; you may be shocked; you may be this or that; and it's no use being angry with yourself about it. Be grateful that you feel it, and don't push yourself toward changing. Then you will discover this marvelous fact, that breathing will start by itself again – when you are not hindering it.

The most important thing is that you learn to have patience and respect for what you find, and not get into regimenting yourself in terms of, "Breathe! Breathe! Breathe!" Is this clear? Be very careful about this. It can destroy the discovery of spontaneous breathing entirely – if you try to force your breathing along as soon as you find you are not breathing.

When you feel your breathing is too shallow, which usually means that you are not participating enough in what the occasion demands, you may become a little more ready for what you are doing right then. And you will find that this change has an effect on your breathing. And when your breathing changes – becomes faster or slower, or you have to sigh, or anything – permit it happily. This is one way to learn what permissiveness is.

We will have to give a little time to the question of exhalation. I wonder which of you, without being invited to it until now, has found that there is much exhalation going on? For instance, in some of our experiments, you may have needed to allow considerable exhalation to go through the head. Being as busy as we are, with one activity heaped on top of another, our heads have lost their elasticity and freedom. Often this lack of freedom is created through the holding of too much inhalation inside of us, which doesn't permit the cleaning out, the sweeping out, the renewing that is needed. Only fully permitted exhalation can do this. It would be helpful to give yourself plenty of time to find out whether you allow exhaling as needed; that means whatever time exhaling wants to take when you do not *do* it, but *allow* it until you have, so to speak, a feeling of satisfaction, of completion.

It is also possible that, having permitted a satisfactory exhalation, nothing further seems to occur immediately in breathing. Don't be upset by this. At one point breathing will start again. There is no need to worry if the inhalation does not come immediately after the exhalation; and please listen to me as I say once more, if *it comes*, not if *you inhale*. Who can feel the difference? You know, some people *take* a breath. Wait until it comes by itself! And allow it to distribute in you as *it* wants to. In other words, be an open house for your breathing, and don't manipulate it.

All this is a question of sensitivity, and when you orient yourself, you become a fine discoverer. It is much better when you find out about things for yourself, when you trust your own sensations and learn from them and do not have to be told everything. That is truly 'exploring'. And you will be delighted at how clear a language the organism speak.

Sensory Awareness and Our Attitude Toward Life

Charlotte Selver

From: Charlotte Selver, Collected Writings Volume I: Sensory Awareness And Our Attitude Toward Life (1999), with permission of the Sensory Awareness Foundation, Mill Valley, CA (www.sensoryawareness.org).

This text is an excerpt from the introduction to A Taste of Sensory Awareness. It was written in collaboration with Gordon Bennett and first published by the SAF in 1989.

Abstract

In this excerpt Selver presents the attitude of the work of Sensory Awareness and the responsibility of becoming aware and more fully living our lives through simple, daily activities. She clarifies how Sensory Awareness, even though often having therapeutic effects, is not meant to be therapy.

Keywords

Sensory Awareness – Awareness – Experimenting - Discovery

In our work of Sensory Awareness, we experiment with all the simple activities of daily life, all the things which we have been doing since we were born, or which we have learned in our earliest infancy, such as walking, standing, sitting, lying, moving, resting, seeing, speaking, listening, etc. As Elsa Gindler said, “*Life is the Playground for our work.*”

Our daily life gives us opportunity enough for discovery: in combing our hair, washing the dishes, in speaking to somebody, and so on. In such “unimportant” areas of life we can experience the same attitudes we have in “important” areas, where we are often too absorbed to feel clearly what is happening.

Although practicing Sensory Awareness often has therapeutic effects, it would be a misunderstanding to think of our work as therapy. Our purpose is not to make living healthier, but to make it more conscious; not to make it happier, but to let it come more into accord with our original nature. The more we arrive at our original nature, the more we discover that healthier and happier living and relating *comes about by itself*.

We begin to discover that experiences within the organism are parallel to experiences in life. This can be difficult. Often we may find ourselves full of fear, not wanting to allow changes. Through experimenting, we may come face-to-face with the reasons for previously unexplained problems in our lives. But with growing ability to permit what becomes necessary, our elasticity grows, and so does our security.

We cannot know how much energy we have as long as we keep interfering with our own activities. We cannot know our real abilities until we have freed ourselves to such an extent that they can unfold more fully. As Elsa Gindler used to say, “*If we would have the strength at our disposal that we use in hindering ourselves, we would be as strong as lions.*”

What creates our freedom, or our lack of freedom, is our *attitude* toward whatever we meet: the way we are living our daily lives; the way we are with our families and friends; the way we do our work; the way we read the newspaper; in short, the way we are in this world. When it is understood that we are including the broader questions of our *attitude-toward-life*, this will help us much more than just working on what we call “the body”.

So, in the very simple experiments of a Sensory Awareness session, we can make some small steps to come to ourselves and to awaken some of the possibilities which are dormant inside us. For instance, we may work to become so quiet that life can begin to whisper to us again, so that we are not just seeing the big, blunt things, but can be touched and nurtured by the beauty of what may be small and quiet.

But not only beauty becomes conscious: there is also an opening of our heart to those difficulties in life which demand our presence and maybe our help. Too often, we don’t see and we don’t feel what is happening around us. Too often, we are only interested in ourselves, our family and maybe our very close friends. To become sensitive enough and free enough to become active as a member of our community, country, and world - this is also part of awakening.

For me, Elsa Gindler was a great example of this through her deep involvement in what was happening in the world. During the Hitler time, although she was invited to live in Switzerland, where she could have been secure, she stayed in Berlin giving help to whoever needed it. Her life was in danger from resisting Hitler, and from the constant bombings, but she did not leave.

This attitude of responsibility is part of becoming aware, so that we would not be part of the “*Me* generation”, but rather of the “*We* generation”, embracing everyone and everything on this planet. Do you not feel that everyone has an equal right to live a life, unconditioned, free from pressure and rejection, free from starvation and harassment?

Becoming more and more able to be there in situations, whether easy or difficult; to be more there with our mind, with our hearts, with our sensitivities, with our strengths - this is very, very important.

An Interview with Charlotte Selver and Charles Brooks

By Ilana Rubenfeld

Abstract

Ilana Rubenfeld comments on the simplicity and profundity of the teaching of Charlotte Selver, excerpting an interview with Charlotte Selver and Charles V. W. Brooks that took place in September 1976, in New York City, in which the development of "Sensory Awareness" was discussed. The author states that the emphasis of Selver's work on awareness and presence influenced both the creation of the Rubenfeld Synergy Method® and the field of body psychotherapy.

Keywords

Support – Elsa Gindler – Erich Fromm – Fritz Perls – Reich – Eva Reich – Rubenfeld Synergy Method

It was a hot, steamy New York City day in the mid 1960's. I was rushing up the street, weaving between hordes of people. Finally, I reached Charlotte's building, rode the elevator and walked through a very familiar door. I entered, looked around and recognized many colleagues already lying on their backs on her famous wooden floor. This was always the beginning (as the first four notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony): Charlotte Selver sitting in the front, facing us. There was a hush in the room.

"Let the floor support you, allow your body to rest on the floor," she said, followed by a long pause of silence. "Which parts of you are in contact with the floor and which parts are not in contact with the floor?" A very long pause of silence followed as we all continued to lie on the floor. "Do you feel any difference?" she asked. The hush was broken! "Charlotte, why do we lie on the floor for such a long time?" a young man asked. And with a wonderful Viennese accent, she replied, smiling, "Because sooner or later, something will change and it won't be the floor!"

Well, there you have it! Sounds simple and yet so profound! Charlotte was a master at teaching us to experience the obvious. *Awareness* was (and is) the key to any change. It was many years later that I began to understand and experience what she meant. The above scene was repeated in many variations, and I can remember them vividly.

In 1977, Thomas Hanna asked me to be a contributing editor of the *Somatics Journal*. He asked me what I wanted to write as my first assignment and my reply was clear! "I want to interview Charlotte Selver and Charles Brooks!" I told him. He was quite pleased at this plan and gave me the green light. Since we all lived in New York, I was able to arrange this meeting with ease. The following are some highlights of this historic interview. (It was published in its entirety in the Spring 1977 issue of *Somatics*.)

CHARLOTTE SELVER AND CHARLES V.W. BROOKS: An Interview by Ilana Rubenfeld

The following interview took place in September 1976, in New York City, at the apartment of Dora Dubsky, teacher of music.

Rubenfeld: I was so surprised to come here and find the name of my former music teachers on the door!

Selver: You studied music?

Rubenfeld: Yes. I graduated from the Juilliard School of Music as a conductor, and it was music that led me to body/mind work. How did it begin for you?

Selver (smiling): I was also a musician. My greatest interest as a young girl was music. I wanted to become a pianist. It is perhaps good that I did not follow it up. With my increasing deafness, I would not have been able to hear my music nor anybody else's. At that time, I went to the first international youth meeting after the war (WWI). One of the people who made a great impression on me was a woman who picked up children from the street...children who had lost their parents...and made the first experimental school with them. She gave an hour of gymnastics, and it was there that she looked over at me and she said, "You must have something to do with movement. Do you know Elsa Gindler?" I didn't. I had never heard of her. She said, "She has done wonders for me. When you go to Berlin, be sure that you visit her." When I was in Berlin, I suddenly remembered, looked into the telephone book, found her address, and went one day into her studio. In this first hour she didn't seem to see me. I was sitting in the background while she was working. In that hour I had the feeling that whatever I had learned was nothing compared to what I felt she offered. Her approach was entirely different. She didn't teach anything!

Rubenfeld (laughing): To teach nothing is to teach everything!

Selver: I remember that first session. The people were working on jumping, and jumping was something that was always the most horrible thing for me. Gindler said, "Do you feel the air through which you jump?" And the people continued to jump.

Gindler said, "How would it help little Mary when the teacher tells her, 'Look at Elsie! How beautiful she jumps. Do it the same way!' How does it help her? She has to find out for herself." Such remarks, feeling the ground, feeling the space, feeling the air and so on, which she interjected while people were experimenting on jumping, were for me entirely new. And it took me so that I decided I wanted to work with her. I felt I had to start all over again. She rejected me three times! So the last time I came to her, she explained why it would be so difficult for me. "You have to unlearn everything which you have learned" she said, "and that's the most difficult thing in the world. I'd rather not take the responsibility. But if you insist, I will accept you." After I had worked with her for over a year, one day she came to me, put her hand on my shoulder and said, "At last, the first movement!" It took me a very long time to lose this shellac...very long. So that's how I came to it.

Rubinfeld: That was certainly a very important moment. She met you and understood the great difficulties you would have from your previous training and habit patterns.

Selver: Yes, she knew and she waited. During those first years that I was with her, she continued with her own experimentation that extended into our sessions. In fact, she never stopped her research. As I see it now, this was the beginning of the basis of her way of working: *exploration*. And out of that, gradually, her work evolved. So breathing was not something to be taught, but to be experienced and permitted to be self-directive. We found out how, when one does not interfere, breathing asserts itself in the most natural way. And this went on with everything: work on motion, on balance, on speaking, on the way one approaches others, each task, and so on.

Rubinfeld: When did you come to the United States, Charlotte?

Selver: At the end of 1938.

Rubinfeld: In the beginning, here in New York, what kind of response did you find to your work? What kind of people came to you?

Selver: I had a lot of luck. That was most important! And fortunately, people liked me. My great chance came when I met Erich Fromm, and he began to work with me and was very fascinated. He mentioned it to the psychiatrists in the William Allison White Association. And I got a lot of students.

Rubinfeld: Speaking of therapists, what happened with you and Fritz Perls?

Selver: Fromm told Perls to see me. He worked for one and a half years. He wanted me to work with each one of his patients, just before he would take over. He was very touched by the work, and he used some of it in his own work.

Rubinfeld: I remember Fritz saying many times, "Lose your head and come to your senses!"

Selver: You know this whole thing that is so strong in his books: you *have* no body, you *have* no organism, you *are* the organism! I think this is the most important thing in our work that he used.

Rubinfeld: Those concepts showed up strongly in his work. You certainly influenced him. Charlotte, when did you meet Charles? And how did you two come to collaborate?

Brooks: It was quite a while ago. It was February, 1958, that's almost 19 years ago. I went to her class and was hooked immediately. Gradually, I slipped out of the cabinet work I was doing, and into living and studying with Charlotte full time.

Rubinfeld: Quite a dynamic mixture of energies!

Brooks: Yes, a very fascinating and unique situation. In 1963, I taught my first class. That was 14 years ago. I feel it's only the last couple of years that I have really begun to feel my way into it.

Rubinfeld: How do you feel about the process taking this amount of time?

Brooks: I was very deeply conditioned. But when I came to Charlotte's work, I found that it was really so different than the Reichians and also my bioenergetic friends. They were therapists using methods, and it was one person healing another person, essentially symptoms, through methods and techniques that had become, sort of orthodox.

Selver: Reich was very strongly influenced by Elsa Gindler. His first wife was a teacher of our work, and his emphasis on breathing stems from that time.

Rubinfeld: That's a very interesting connection. I don't know how many people know about that.

Brooks: We met Eva Reich at the Association for Humanistic Psychology Conference in Princeton just a few days ago. And I was discussing this with her. She apparently knew it already. I can say, "I am an organism." That's a beautiful, intellectual, philosophical statement. But what do I mean by it? This is something that I would say can only be *experienced*, which makes it mystical.

Selver: What Charles calls mystical - the experiences which one has, in breathing, in balance, in contact with another person - this can be very clearly experienced and yet be experienced as a wonder too. Revelations can come from the very smallest experience. For instance, eating. By the way, I forgot to mention Alan Watts, who had at least as much influence on my way of going about the work as Fromm had. When I visited Watts, I felt we were very akin. And when he worked with me, he exclaimed, "But this is the living Zen!"

Rubenfeld: Living Zen! That is beautiful!

Selver: From that encounter, we had a lot of seminars together and he brought me into contact with many people in California.

Rubenfeld: All these connections and interfaces!

Selver: You know, first Elsa Gindler and Heinrich Jacoby, then Erich Fromm, who spoke to Fritz Perls, and then Alan Watts and meeting Richard Baker who interested Suzuki Roshi in our work.

Rubenfeld: Did you ever have the occasion to speak to or meet Moshe Feldenkrais?

Selver: No, I have not had the occasion to meet him personally.

Rubenfeld: Well, I hope that I can arrange such a meeting...would you enjoy that?

Selver: If I can hear him.

Rubenfeld: OK. (*Everyone laughs*) Feldekrais also mentions Jacoby. Moshe told me that he met and studied with Jacoby in Europe in the late 1940's, and that he was very influenced by him. There is a great parallel between the self-healing of Elsa Gindler and Moshe Feldenkrais. While working in Judo, Moshe injured his knee. The doctors examined him and could not alter his condition without an operation. So he began to search for ways to heal his own knee. It's fascinating, how people have gotten into this kind of work because of their own personal life and tragedy.

Selver: Elsa Gindler told me that her doctor suggested that she go to a sanatorium, and had predicted that she would die during that time (T.B.). He later met her on the street and said, "What? You are...here? Come, I want to examine you. Were you in treatment? What did you do?" She answered, "I had this diet and I worked on breathing!" And her doctor said, "Wonders can sometimes happen!"

Rubenfeld: Yes...This happened to F.M. Alexander in connection to his voice problems. When he lost his voice, the doctors said, "Just don't talk and you'll get your voice back!"

Selver: Yes, F.M. Alexander was a great inspiration to me. I went into the public library and found one of his books.

Rubenfeld: Which book, Charlotte?

Selver: *The Use of the Self*. I was amazed that somebody coming from Australia, who had an entirely different background, had also originated something out of his own difficulty very similar to Gindler. You know his fabulous description of standing before the mirror, because he couldn't feel it, seeing what he was doing?

Rubenfeld: Lately, I've been asking very serious questions about the way people touch each other. (This is 1977. Now, in 2004, I'm still asking these questions of my students and colleagues.) I'm sad to see that touch is used to "correct" other people. In other words, they're touching with hands that already have a preconceived idea of what they want (to have happen). Would you share some ideas you have about the way that touch, the kind of touch that you see evolving, is more organic?

Selver: Everything is "getting in touch." You speak and you get in touch with somebody. You get in touch with your work, and so on. Hands are only one way to come in touch.

Brooks: Millions of people in the United States have cats and dogs and horses as a substitute, because touching another human being brings too many associations into play. So touch is to me no different from feeling one's own breathing and being one's own breathing. And it's no different from my feeling of going into a room with a fine painting, and getting so quiet that the painting can speak. Everybody goes in and sees a painting and right away their minds start to buzz. Same thing with touch...buzz, buzz, buzz.

Rubinfeld: The same with touch. People touch, and instead of touching and waiting, they already have an idea that it has to go this way or that way.

Brooks: The essential thing is the touch and wait.

Rubinfeld: Yes. Touch and wait, there's a delicate balance.

Brooks: Yes, a fine line that has to be worked at - like playing a violin.

Rubinfeld: Oh yes. When people ask me why my work looks so simple, I say it took me many years. I've been searching and experimenting for over 15 years, and I think I'm just beginning to understand (the synergy of all aspects of life) something. More people are appreciating the work (awareness and changes) coming from within, rather than the work coming from without.

Selver: The important thing is...just permit the *presence*. Actually everybody's a healer. If anyone allows a full contact, then something goes out from one to the other. Really, in giving, one receives at the same time. And in receiving, one gives at the same time.

Rubinfeld: It's like a total circle - an act of synergy.

Selver: Yes, without wanting to give something special.

Rubinfeld: That's right. It's being really *there* that is so special. Charlotte, some professionals call your work "soft." Can you share some of your thoughts about this?

Selver: I wouldn't call it "soft." In fact, there is a great deal of discipline necessary in our work. To be able to really contact somebody already requires a great deal of awakesness and quiet and fullness of connection, and to arrive at that is, in itself, already a long road.

Rubinfeld: How did you come to name your work "Sensory Awareness?"

Selver: This is one of the greatest problems. Elsa Gindler never called it anything. She said, "I'm working with human beings." She also called it at one time "Nach-Entfaltung". The literal translation is "to unfold in a later stage of one's life" which means that we already have everything. It has to be dug out and opened up. Often Gindler would work on the same activity, like balance, for three months. And it would involve *everything*.

Rubinfeld: In other words, everything! That's why Zen says if you can sit, you can do anything.

Selver: And when you speak of simple, do you know the beautiful story of the Zen student who went after 30 years to his master, slapped him in the face and said, "Why didn't you tell me right away that it is so simple?" (Everyone laughs a great deal...) So you asked about the name "Sensory Awareness". Very often "perception" means only "what I see", and it's often very much in the head. But when one says "sensory", that includes all the senses. The whole nervous system is impregnated by anything that happens, and one must be quiet enough and receptive enough so that this can happen, so that no thought and no words interfere with it. One is just being open for the experience itself. And I have not yet, I should say, found a way to make it so simple that people would lick their lips for it.

Rubinfeld (laughs): That's a good description, "lick their lips for it."

Selver: Did you know that the long-term study group has been working at least as much in the fields, in the kitchen, and in the woodshop, together with the Zen students.

Rubinfeld: That is wonderful!

Selver: And I found this was a very essential part of the work of the study group, because it led directly into daily life. I think that's one of the most important aspects of our work--the way it becomes integrated and used in everybody's life, not something separate that you do at certain hours and when you have done it, it's over. Now, you have asked a lot of very important questions, the history of the work and how we came to it. Nobody else could answer you that.

Rubenfeld: That's right, nobody! You're the only one that could really do that! For me it's exciting to hear the history of the people who influenced you and whom you influenced. What's happening today (1977) is very important. The paths - Gindler, (Perls), Jacoby, F.M. Alexander, Feldenkrais, you and Charles - are converging. This makes it a very exciting time to be living!

End of interview

While preparing this article, I re-read the 1977 interview with Charlotte Selver many times and I came to appreciate how important her work has been, and still is, in the body psychotherapy field. In the 1960's, I met Fritz Perls (co-founder of Gestalt Therapy) and I was deeply impressed by how he peppered his sessions by asking us to close our eyes and "go inside" our bodies - ourselves. After sometime, Fritz would then instruct us to open our eyes and "look outside" at the environment to see if anything had changed. He called this experiential process "shuttling". After studying with Charlotte Selver and doing the interview, I understood how much Fritz Perls had integrated her approach and thereby influenced my work.

Charlotte Selver's way of teaching "awareness", the "obvious", and "the now" influenced the creation of the Rubenfeld Synergy Method[®]. Indeed, I dare say that all body-psychotherapy is indebted to the life work of Charlotte Selver!

I conclude with a poem by a great Japanese artist, Hokusai (1760-1849). It embodies Charlotte's spirit!

I have been in love with painting ever since I became conscious of it at the age of six. I drew some pictures I thought fairly good when I was fifty, but nothing I did before the age of seventy was of any value at all. At seventy-three, I have at last caught every aspect of nature -- birds, fish, animals, insects, trees, grasses, all. When I am eighty I shall have developed still further, and I will really master the secrets of art at ninety. When I reach a hundred my work will be truly sublime and my final goal will be attained around the age of one hundred and ten, when every line and dot I draw will be imbued with life! -Hokusai

Biography

Ilana Rubenfeld, musician, conductor and Alexander Method teacher, studied with Fritz Perls, Moshe Feldenkrais, and Charlotte Selver. She created her own integration which she calls Rubenfeld Synergy. She has taught throughout the world and maintains an extensive training program. At the USABP Conference in Baltimore in 2002 she received recognition with the Lifetime Achievement Award. She can be reached at rubenfeld@aol.com.

Interview with Charlotte Selver

John Schick

Abstract

In this interview Charlotte talks about the necessity of the work of Sensory Awareness being involved in the world situation. She cites the importance of differentiating between sensations and emotions and describes some of the strong influences she received from Elsa Gindler.

Keywords

Elsa Gindler – World – Communication - Differentiating

This interview was conducted with Charlotte at her home in early June, 1987, two months after her eighty-sixth birthday. At the time, she had just finished conducting three-month study group at Green Gulch Farm in Muir Beach, California. As I talked with her, she was preparing for a trip to Europe two days hence.

Schick: This spring you've celebrated your eighty-sixth birthday, and I'm wondering, do you sense your approach to the work maturing or changing in any way?

Selver: It changes every day because it's no method, it's always meeting new whatever reality brings, whatever at the moment is acute. But I do think that the enormous difficulties in the world situation, the problem of starvation, the political injustices, the persecutions and all that is happening now, has augmented my desire to let people open their eyes and open their hearts for others in the world and become active in that what is necessary today. I do see the danger that when people become very involved in studying breathing, for instance, or becoming quiet, that this will become their world, so that they lose connection with all that is happening in the world, and by that narrow their own viewpoints and their participation with life.

Schick: Has this become a deep concern of yours?

Selver: It's my concern and I try as much as possible wherever I can, during the work to find ways to let people feel what is happening in the world. For instance, I have sometimes taken articles from the newspapers which describe a condition in a certain country and I ask my students to read it and to feel what they read. I have tried to open their hearts for what is happening with the hope that it is in some way possible for them that they become active and play a positive role in the world, instead of just keeping their attention on their study and in the narrow room of their friends and interests.

Schick: Do you consider this development of a person's responsiveness toward all life to be an important aspect of this work?

Selver: This is what the work is about. When one studies human nature and really experiences what is given; when one takes it seriously to see, to listen, and to feel, then it is obvious that the wish will come to contribute to a world which makes it possible that more and more people can be open for what they experience, and lose their aggressions, and feel with others, and listen to others, and speak their mind, and act their mind. The greatest influence on me was the way Elsa Gindler lived. She was there for everybody. She was conscious of the influence which poverty and oppression had on so many people. The way she went through the Hitler time; working; hiding people who were persecuted, sharing her very meager rations with them, helping them to get out of the country, even at the risk of her own life, all this has been working in me.

Schick: Are there any other changes in approach which you notice?

Selver: Yes, it has become more a question of communication, of the quality and clarity of communication. One very important part of this is that people speak directly out of their experience and not speak *about* what they experience. But that when they speak, they relive their experience, and by that the way of speaking becomes more direct and more precise, more fully backed by their experience. One of the things which is difficult to bring about is that people learn to differentiate between sensation and emotion. Most of those who come to our work have been in psychoanalysis, or have worked with psychotherapists, and they slide very easily into the emotional experience rather than into the sensory experience. So to keep the keel straight is very important, that people don't mix it up. Of course, very often, in a sensory experience, emotions come up and they should not be suppressed, but one would have to feel the difference between the two.

Schick: Have the kinds of people who come to study with you changed over the years?

Selver: Oh, yes. When I first started out in New York, I often had people come to me who had kinks in themselves. Now, most people come because they are interested in the work itself, and they come to see how far they can trace their own abilities.

Schick: What would you say are some of the important questions which occupy you now concerning the work?

Selver: How it is that we can help people to become more awake, and how, after they begin to wake up, they learn to trust their own sensations. And how it is that they can discover they really can see, and hear, and sense; and that this alone can be a very powerful agent in one's life. One can learn not to restrict one's view; to feel oneself as a member of this planet we all live on. It's important that people learn to stop circling around themselves and instead to become open to the world and active. When I started to study with Elsa Gindler, I was very deeply impressed by her including the whole cosmos in her work. She made us conscious of the fact that every person has his potentials, and how very important it is that we make it possible that more and more people can develop these potentials.

Schick: This is a theme we keep returning to; it's clear that this whole question of a person's responsiveness to the larger world in which she lives is a very important one for you.

Selver: **Yes, it's extremely important.**

Schick: Why do you think it is that this responsiveness is lacking in so many people today?

Selver: Many people feel they are too weak for such a task, but in the moment in which a person wakes up and becomes more ready, and by this I mean more willing, they will discover in themselves a boundless amount of energy. So the work is partly to discover what amount of energy is needed for every given task and to allow that this energy can be expressed unhindered. This is what it means to be potent. And this potency goes hand in hand with seeing more, hearing more, feeling more, and being more in touch with what happens. Some people think that they get so sensitive they can't stand it. You realize that one **can** stand it? But this has something to do with being able to stand. People have usually learned from other people what to think, and we are not going this way because we feel that the person has all the abilities to find out for himself. He doesn't have to look to other people to be told what is right. This possibility of discovering gradually that one can trust one's own reactions can be a very powerful event.

Schick: So, you try to provide your students with questions, which they must investigate on their own?

Selver: Yes, that's right. This is very important, this is the only way to create a healthier society. The basis in our work is that when one gradually begins to go into each activity anew, one loses one's habitual stance. And this approaching each activity anew means a person who is awake and changeable. When one becomes more awake, when one loses one's restrictions, the organism becomes a very movable and elastic entity. The more one loses the tendency to protect oneself, the more one becomes trustful of one's own abilities... with all this comes movability and elasticity. So that one does not always toot into the old horn, but rather learns to approach every situation anew, more and more new, so gradually as people are more with what they are doing, they become more reactive. The tendency to withhold gives up by itself. No one has to do it, it happens on its own.

Schick: So it's partly a question of becoming more awake, of becoming more responsible. . .

Selver: The first thing is one must have occasions to discover that one can trust oneself.

Schick: Do you try to provide such occasions in the classes?

Selver: **This is the practice.** While people are attending to the given task, the attitudes which they bring with them clearly show. At first, only other people see it, but by and by, people feel it themselves, and then they discover how they acquired these attitudes; most of the time it's something they acquired long ago. It takes patience and time to discover what the gesture says. For instance, the gestures of people who always want to be graceful, this kind of false gesture [indicates gesture], or people who are afraid, or aggressive, they discover it in themselves. When I am used to shouting and then I begin to hear, to listen, my voice lessens because it's not necessary to shout on every occasion. It's not always agreeable what one finds. It's a beginning of a new beginning. It has nothing to do with criticism, or feeling guilty, or anything like that, but just in quiet and openness to feel what belongs to the moment and what doesn't. I remember when I was, for the first time, with Gindler, I was just a guest, and she asked, "Do you feel that you are going through space?" "Do you feel the air around you?" "Do you really want to jump?" "Do you use the floor as a springboard?" I had been studying gymnastics and had never heard such questions. I was amazed! In my studies up until I met Gindler, I had been learning something entirely apart from reality. I

was taught certain things and I learned them, but I never came more in contact with my environment and my own inner capacities and so on.

Schick: So for you it all started with Gindler . . .

Selver: The very first time I visited Gindler and heard her ask questions of her students, I realized this was the work I had to go into.

Schick: And you are still working at it in your eighty-sixth year.

Selver: I am fascinated by it. It's my dish.

Biography

John Schick, student of Charlotte Selver and Charles Brooks is now a licensed psychotherapist. He lives with his family in Muir Beach, California.

The Influence of Elsa Gindler on Somatic Psychotherapy and on Charlotte Selver

Judyth O. Weaver, PhD, SEP, RCST

Abstract

This article depicts the early stages of the practice of somatic inquiry in Europe and its influence in psychotherapy as well as other fields. It tracks the work coming to the United States with Charlotte Selver and others and traces its influence and implications in various somatic fields and with varied members of the body-psychotherapeutic community.

Keywords

History – Influence/Fields – Influence/Professionals – Influence/Global - Psychoanalysis

This article was written to be a chapter in the German book Handbuch der Körperpsychotherapie (Handbook of Body Psychotherapy) which will be published by Hogrefe Verlag later this year. The editors, Halko Weiss and Gustl Marlock, recognize the two primary ancestors of the body-psychotherapy to be Wilhelm Reich and Elsa Gindler. Wilhelm Reich taught and influenced many psychotherapists in Europe and later in the United States. Elsa Gindler's work influenced many in Europe and some of those eventually came to the U.S. and taught. One of Gindler's students who carried her work to the United States was Charlotte Selver. This article is included here as a contribution to the history of body-psychotherapy and as an assist to understand the antecedent of influence on Charlotte Selver.

In the United States psychotherapists such as Eric Fromm and Fritz and Laura Perls were avid students of Selver as were many from other creative fields. As Selver developed the work she names "Sensory Awareness" she became well known as a pioneer in the human potential movement, teaching frequently at Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, and influencing many psychotherapist of various persuasions.

Although Selver studied with Gindler only eleven years, she was profoundly affected by the work. Throughout Selver's more than eighty years of teaching she frequently referred to Gindler, passing on her wisdom in words and practice to many.

Background

Elsa Gindler (1885-1961), who began as a teacher of *Harmonische Gymnastik*, might today be considered the grandmother of somatic psychotherapy. As a young woman diagnosed with tuberculosis, she worked by herself to heal. To find the possibilities for regeneration and health, she gave her complete attention to what happened in her at every moment in every activity during the entire day. Devoted student, colleague and friend Elfriede Hengstenberg explained, "She found that in this practice she came into a state where she was no longer disturbed by her own thoughts and worries. And she came to experience— consciously experience—that calm in the physical field (*Gelassenheit*) is equivalent to trust in the psychic field. This was her discovery, and it became basic to all subsequent research" (Hengstenberg, 1985).

Gindler had studied *Harmonische Gymnastik* with Hedwig Kallmeyer, but in teaching it she eventually felt the fixed set of common move-ments for everyone was a narrowness of approach. She wanted freedom for people to explore independently and develop individually — a way to experience and learn from one's own somatic behavior in all of life's situations. Her work grew to offer opportunities for each person to become more aware of what was happening in one's own organism. In her classes she did not teach "techniques," and she eventually changed from using the word "exercise" (*Übung*) to "experiment" (*Versuch*). The natural activities of everyday life were the material for her classes. Gindler's focus was "*tasten*"; in English we would say, "sensing our way."

By 1913, Gindler had developed her way of working with relaxation. Attention to the breath was basic: "For her breathing was a teacher: simply being attentive to it is a way of learning how things are with one, of learning what needs to change for fuller functioning—for more reactivity in breathing and thus in the whole person. She did not teach others what they 'ought' to be, but only to find out how they were" (Roche, 1978).

About her work of presence, Gindler wrote only one article: *Die Gymnastik des Berufsmenschen (Gymnastics for Working People)* which appeared in the journal of the Deutschen Gymnastik-Bund (Gindler, 1926). She never gave a name to the simple, deep processes in which she led her students. Charlotte Selver, one of several disciples who brought Gindler's work to the U.S., says that the closest Gindler got to a name was "*Arbeit am Menschen*" — "working with the human being," though others think that was just a phrase she used. Gindler lived her entire life in Berlin. She never advertised her classes, yet over the years her work spread and has had a far ranging influence in many fields, in particular that of psychotherapy.

In 1925, Elsa Gindler met the experimental musician and educator, Heinrich Jacoby. After studying with each other, they collaborated in the development of what is now sometimes termed the Jacoby-Gindler work. Jacoby had a great interest in psychoanalysis, and through him Gindler became interested and referred her students to the work.

Influence on Psychotherapy in Europe

Gindler herself had many students who were involved in the psychotherapeutic field:

Clare Nathansohn began studying with her in 1915. When Clare married Otto Fenichel, a student of Freud, he also began studying with Gindler. Fenichel said of her experience, “I got my husband to go, too, and he was very interested. Later on he would have me talk to his psychoanalytic groups about the Gindler work, and then we would all discuss it” (Fenichel, 1981).

About Gindler’s interest in psychotherapy Fenichel said, “Psycho-analysis spread at that time and some of her pupils were into it. One of them was my husband, and there were others. Gindler was interested to see what was going on and she learned. From then on she said things in class that she could have said only if she considered mental activity as an important matter much involved with movement.” Fenichel goes on to say, “She knew more and more about human beings. And this is the important thing; she became more and more interested not just in the body but the whole being. She said, ‘If you don’t want to get over the rope, don’t be surprised that you can’t make it.’ She noticed that something that is not ‘body’ gets the body going. And that ‘something’ effects the function of this body” (Fenichel, 1981).

Wilhelm Reich never studied with Gindler, but it seems he was influenced by her approach in several ways. After the Reichs left Vienna and moved to Berlin, Annie, Reich’s first wife, studied with Clare Fenichel. Reich’s daughter Eva remembers the many Sunday picnics of the close friends, the Reichs and the Fenichels, where her father would assiduously question Clare about the Gindler work. “Now, tell me, what is it that you do?” he would ask (Reich, 1984).

Elsa Lindenberg, Reich’s great love and long-term companion, studied with Gindler both before and after the Second World War. She also studied with Fenichel while she was living in Norway with Reich.

Eva feels that the vicarious knowledge of this work definitely influenced her father in his becoming aware of breath and body while working with his psychoanalytic clients (Reich, 2001).

Influence in Other Fields

Gindler’s work gave many the depth and connection for which they were looking:

Ruth Nörenberg, who came to Gindler after she had studied *Gymnastik* at the Loheland School, said “It soon became clear to me, however, that the Gindler work was not just *Gymnastik* in the usual sense, but was an education of the whole human being, a *Lebens-Schule* (school of life) as she [Gindler] called it” (Nörenberg, 1981).

She wrote about her work with Gindler: “Through our experimentation I managed, slowly and painfully, to work myself out of a number of holes, by gradually coming to a fuller understanding of the deep sense of Elsa Gindler’s teaching – until I found the path to myself. This process was not unlike a psychological ‘depth analysis’ (of which, however, nothing was known at that time) even with respect to the subsequent ‘catharsis,’ the clearing up of inner disorders. I gradually learned to be more in charge of myself, to understand myself better—without falling into those unproductive and crippling feelings of inferiority that so easily deteriorate into depressions.

“The unity of mind, body and spirit was much *discussed* at that time. There, in Gindler’s classes, we *experienced* it in practice. And a clear consciousness of this has never left me” (Nörenberg, 1981).

After the war Nörenberg became a physical therapist and felt she was able to work in the spirit of Gindler.

For others the Gindler work fulfilled a need:

Elsa Henschke-Durham had many physical problems when she came to study with Gindler at the age of eighteen. She had been working with small children and difficult or disturbed older ones of working parents. Durham relates, “Under Elsa Gindler’s guidance I became aware that the organism was not just a machine to be used, that there was a way for me to become familiar with it, to relate to it, to allow it to function according to its own needs. What a revelation! ...With incredible persistence, Elsa Gindler made me aware that un-needed contractions...were brought on by my mental attitude. My holding was a defense” (Durham, 1981).

Durham was encouraged by Gindler to go to the U.S. and in 1934 opened a studio in New York. Like so many other Gindler students, she received referrals of medical and psychoanalytic patients and worked with them very successfully. In 1941 she married a European psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. Durham wrote of the times: “Interest in psychoanalysis was just spreading but often even deep psychoanalysis did not free a person from the physical tensions that had developed through repressions and negative resistances; here was an area left out. So we worked together. Analysts came with their personal needs, and then sent their analysts.” (Durham, 1981).

Many developed their understandings and enhanced careers from the Gindler work:

Lily Pincus, author of *Death and the Family* (1974) and co-author of *Secrets and the Family* (1978), among other books, studied with Gindler from 1928 to 1939. First a social worker and then a family therapist at the Institute for Marital Studies at the Tavistock Institute for Human Relations in England, Pincus describes Gindler’s work as helping her students to “harmonize body, intellect and feeling through self-awareness...” (Pincus, 1981).

In her article “From Dance to Psychotherapy” (Heller, 1983), Gertrud Falke-Heller describes how Gindler influenced her transformation from a famous dancer and dance teacher to an occupational therapist who was able to work with both neurotic and psychotic patients. After leaving Germany she worked with the Kurt Joss dance company in England and as “Teacher of Relaxation” at the Crichton Royal Hospital, with shell-shocked soldiers and others suffering from neuroses,

psychoses, schizophrenia and asthma. She eventually taught at Freiburg University and later at the Lindauer Psychotherapy conference.

Heller's student, Dr. med. Helmuth Stolze, developed his therapeutic process based on movement as inner experience and called it *Konzentrierte Bewegungstherapie* (Concentrative Movement Therapy). Stolze eventually taught with Heller and later with Miriam Goldberg. Stolze's description of *KBT* (CMT) sounds very reminiscent of Gindler when he says that it "...cannot be systematized into exercises. Its application is, rather, of an intuitive character, obedient to the moment..." He goes on to say, "In the inquiry into what a man is in his very self, the therapist must be able to experience himself and, over and over again, make himself ready for the experience. A therapist who is 'insensitive', who is too 'deaf' and 'dumb' as to what is going on, who has 'no taste of' and cannot 'smell out' his patients is not capable of working...only a therapist who is entirely *present* in 'readiness for experiencing' can be effective in this therapy" (Stolze, 1983).

Many of Gindler's students throughout Europe have had profound influence on other modes of working with people. Gindler's long-time friend and colleague, Elfriede Hengstenberg, had been certified to teach Bode *Gymnastik*; in 1920 she also received a teaching certificate from Gindler. Hengstenberg worked with children, preferring to work together with their parents when possible. She preferred to begin work with mothers prenatally and afterward to continue with the children's parents and teachers. She also gave workshops for the Hungarian pediatrician, Emmi Pikler who after the Second World War established a nursery-home for children who had no one to care for them. There, at Lóczy, Pikler showed how supporting natural development in the child's own time—and on his/her own initiative and independent experimentation—also facilitates mental and emotional development (Pikler, 1994).

Moshe Feldenkrais, developer of Awareness through Movement and Functional Integration, now more commonly known around the world as the Feldenkrais Method, was influenced by the Gindler work through his studies with her close colleague, Heinrich Jacoby. (Feldenkrais, 1981).

Influence in the United States

One of the most important inspirations for body-psychotherapists of many persuasions has been Charlotte Selver (1901-2003). Selver was a graduate of the Bode *Gymnastik* school and had done graduate work with Mary Wigman when she came to study with Elsa Gindler in 1923. Following studies with Gindler she immigrated to the United States in 1938. She settled in New York City, where she offered classes and private sessions in the Gindler work. Selver coined the name Sensory Awareness, "to single out the awareness of *direct perception*, as distinguished from the intellectual or conventional awareness—the verbalized knowledge—that is still the almost exclusive aim of education..." (Brooks, 1974). In 1958 Charles Van Wycks Brooks began studying with Selver. They eventually married, and in 1963 he began teaching with her.

During her early days of teaching, one of Selver's most ardent students was the prominent psychoanalyst Erich Fromm. In 1955 Fromm and Selver gave a joint lecture at the New School for Social Research entitled "On Being in Touch with Oneself" (Roche, 2000)

Clara Thompson, who co-founded the William Alanson White Association of Psychiatry (with Erich Fromm and Harry Stack Sullivan), was also one of Selver's students, as were many other of her colleagues at the Association. Betty Winkler Keane was a very successful actress when her psychiatrist, Thompson, recommended that she take classes with Selver. Keane, who eventually collaborated with Jungian analyst Edward Whitmont (he worked at the verbal and she at the non-verbal level), was one of the first of Selver's students to begin teaching. Keane worked in NYC, weaving together Jungian analysis with acting out dream sequences and the work of sensing.

Fritz Perls, one of the twentieth century's most influential innovators in psychotherapy, was deeply influenced by Gindler's work. In the early 1930's Perls was a patient of Wilhelm Reich, and Perls' wife, Laura, was a student of Gindler. Both Fritz and Laura, the developers of Gestalt Therapy, studied with Selver in New York—Fritz very extensively and also privately. In 1947 Perls gave a talk at the William Alanson White Institute entitled "Planned Psychotherapy," in which he said, "I recommend as necessary complementary aspects of the study of the human personality at least three subjects: Gestalt psychology, semantics, and last but not least, the approach of the Gindler School" (Gregory, 2001).

Alan Watts, the popularizer of Zen Buddhism in the West, studied with Charlotte Selver. They gave many workshops together in New York and California. He introduced her to Esalen Institute, the newly founded center for the study of human potential in California, and in 1963 Selver presented Esalen's very first experiential workshop. Over time her teaching there brought about a great breadth of contact and influence within the psychoanalytic community in the U.S.

Many have been influenced by the Gindler/Selver work and incorporated it into their own modes of psychotherapy. At Esalen, Seymour Carter studied Sensory Awareness with Selver and Brooks and Gestalt Therapy with Perls. He continues to teach there and in Europe. Marjorie Rand, an international trainer of Integrated Body Psychotherapy (IBP), also acknowledges the influence of Sensory Awareness on her work (Rand, 2001). The author began intensive studies with Charlotte Selver and Charles Brooks in 1968, eventually integrating Sensory Awareness into her form of somatic psychotherapy which she calls Somatic Reclaiming.

Other Influences

Gindler's work has also traveled to the East and influenced therapists and counselors there. In 1973 at Esalen Institute, Professor Hiroshi Ito, the first Japanese counseling psychology graduate from the U.S. (1948), participated in workshop sessions in Sensory Awareness with the author. Returning to Japan, Ito reformed his teaching and created "New Counseling," which included the practice of Sensory Awareness and eventually the Alexander Technique.

Peter Levine, creator of Somatic Experiencing, who uses fine somatic tracking in his work to resolve shock and trauma affect, cites a workshop taken with Charlotte Selver in 1968 that had great influence on his work.

Doris Breyer, a student of Mary Wigman and a professional dancer, studied with Gindler before coming to New York in 1942, where she worked and trained with Alexander Lowen. When she moved to California, Stanley Keleman studied with her and also referred many of his clients.

Others came to the United States to live and teach and had significant influence on different modes of work with children and adults in both creative and therapeutic processes:

Carola Speads was Gindler's student and her teaching assistant from 1925 to 1938. Speads brought her work to New York and, for a time, shared a studio with Charlotte Selver. Speads called her work "Physical Reeducation" and had a very successful practice until her death in 1999. Susan Gregory, a Gestalt therapist, recital artist and former opera singer, was Speads' student from 1963 to 1995 and calls the Gindler work "an essential part of Gestalt therapy's historical ground" (Gregory, 2001).

Other areas of expression and creativity have also been influenced by the work of Elsa Gindler. Mary Whitehouse, creator of "Movement in Depth," also known as "Authentic Movement," studied briefly with Selver and Brooks, as did Mary's students, Joan Chodorow and Janet Adler. Aligned with Jungian depth analysis, Chodorow's work is focused in the context of analytic work, and Adler's is developing with particular interest in mystical experience.

Although not considered a psychotherapy or even a body psychotherapy, Rosen Method Bodywork is influenced by Gindler's work through Marion Rosen's teacher, Lucy Heyer. Lucy studied with Gindler; her husband, Gustaf Heyer, was a student and colleague of C.G. Jung. The Heyers were part of a group in Munich who were using somatic methods in conjunction with psychoanalysis.

Rosen studied with Heyer for two years before leaving Germany. She relates, "During this time I became very familiar with the body and truly admired how it was put together. That knowledge complemented what I was seeing in the work that Mrs. Heyer's husband was doing with psychiatry; I began to see how they worked together. The Heyers used massage and breathing to open people up and make it easier for them to get in touch with their problems in psychotherapy. They found that this way of treatment was much shorter and more effective" (Rosen, 2003.)

Here again the Gindler work was used as an adjunct to psychotherapy. Claudio Naranjo, eclectic psychotherapist, says, "Psycho-therapy as a healing modality has changed and evolved...Despite not fitting the description of psychotherapy, Marion Rosen's approach suggests ways of meditation-in-relationship using skillful touch. It is clearly related to earlier approaches to emotional healing – notably Reichian work—that allow the person's deeper self to emerge by assisting in the dissolution of 'character armor' (Naranjo, 2003).

All worked in their individual ways.

Mary Alice Roche is a director of The Lifwynn Foundation for Social Research, which promotes the work of Trigant Burrow, the first American-born psychoanalyst and founder and one-time president of the American Psychoanalytic Association. A long-time student of Sensory Awareness and researcher and editor of many bulletins of the Charlotte Selver Foundation, (later named the Sensory Awareness Foundation), Roche says, "...[Gindler] offered them the possibility of being responsible to themselves in simply finding out how it is, and how it wants to change. This is one way her work was, and still is, different from all 'systems.' In that early article she was already saying, 'Each student is working in his own fashion. That means that each one in the class is working differently...The student begins to feel that he is in charge of himself...His consciousness of self is heightened'" (Roche, 1978).

Roche also suggests that "it was the genius of Elsa Gindler that the path she opened led, not to some preconceived ideal she had set for her students, but to a continually unfolding discovery of their own unique way of being. Since no one can really copy another's way of being, no student could copy Gindler in any other manner than by becoming ever more himself or herself. Teacher and student worked together, growing in their own ways, toward their own innate power, their own creativity" (Roche, 1983).

Implications for Psychotherapy

Elsa Gindler's process of attending fully and exploring all the basic, natural activities of life has had a profound influence on a wide variety of people and applications. Without being a method or a technique, Gindler's approach has made a huge impact amongst many psychotherapeutic disciplines.

The uniqueness Gindler looked for in her students is just what we hope and work for with our clients in psychotherapy - to help them uncover their connection and faith in their own innate beings. Without a sense of this in their own organisms, physical and sensorial as well as mental and emotional, the wholeness of the human being we are working with will not feel complete. Focusing on the experiences in their bodies, their senses, the somatic elements of a person's consciousness

supports them to stay in the present and work with the reality of what is happening -- to work with the actuality of the affects. To be grounded in and support them to experience and work from their inside out allows the organic processes to return to their natural balances.

Somatic inquiry, essential to so many integrated psychotherapeutic approaches, especially when working with pre-verbal and other deep issues, instructs the practitioner how to work at depths and delicacies without projecting or interfering. The clarity of sensory awareness leads both the therapist and client in working with all aspects of the client's experience. The body psychotherapist is thereby supported to be less directive as the client is allowed to discover and claim his/her autonomy.

Used both within therapeutic sessions as well as in conjunction with psychotherapy, the simple, basic work of sensing, derived from Elsa Gindler, is one of the essential and vital foundations of the field of somatic/body-oriented psychotherapy.

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Biography

Judyth O. Weaver, PhD in Reichian Psychology. Having studied with Charlotte Selver since 1968, she is authorized to offer Sensory Awareness and has led intensive month-long seminars as well as shorter classes and workshops through out the world. She is certified as a Somatic Experiencing Practitioner, in Craniosacral Biodynamic Therapy, and in Prenatal and Birth Therapy. She is a Rosen Method practitioner and teacher and having been authorized to teach T'ia Chi Ch'uan in 1971, has been recognized as a master teacher for 33 years. Judyth has been professor at California Institute for Integral Studies since 1979, teaches Sensory Awareness practicum at John F. Kennedy University, and is co-founder of Santa Barbara Graduate Institute and creator of its Somatic Psychology doctoral program. She maintains a private practice in Mill Valley, California and regularly teaches internationally.

Gymnastik for Busy People

Elsa Gindler

Translated from the German, Die Gymnastik des Berufsmenschen, originally published in 1926 in Gymnastik, the Journal of the Deutscher Gymnastik-Bund (German Gymnastik Association)

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Abstract

The author writes about consciousness in the simple, ordinary activities of life such as standing, sitting, and working to awaken an understanding of what happens in them. Breath is a major focus, as is relaxation, tension, and gravity, to help people understand more fully their own constitution in order to learn how to take care of themselves. This article, written early in her work, is the only piece she published and all that was not burned when her studio was destroyed in the final months of World War II.

Keywords

Movements – Relaxation – Breathing - Gravity

It is difficult for me to speak about **Gymnastik** because the aim of my work is not the learning of certain movements, but rather the achievement of concentration. Only by means of concentration can we attain the full functioning of the physical apparatus in relation to mental and spiritual life. We therefore advise our students from the very first lesson that our work must be pursued consciously; it can only be entered into and understood through consciousness.

Now it becomes ever more and more apparent to all of us that we do not quite keep up with our lives – that the balance of physical, spiritual and intellectual forces is disturbed. In most cases this disturbance already begins to happen in the school years. Then, beyond the problems of school and puberty, problems in family relationships and profession – and perhaps misfortune – bring us difficulties with which we can no longer cope. We no longer lead our lives thoughtfully and sensitively. We become rushed and allow confusions around and within us to accumulate in such a way that they get the upper hand at very inappropriate moments.

Inadequacy dominates us in general and in particular. Daily there are the same, small, endless, infinitely important mishaps. In the morning we are not rested and therefore get up just that much too late to permit ourselves to take care of our body with the calmness and quickness which would fill us with well-being and vigor. It is not without reason that we say, “I must bathe, I must brush my teeth (drink coffee, go to the theater, a party, etc.)” instead of, “I am going to brush my teeth, etc.” These expressions reveal something important – that we do everything in order to be finished with it, and then the next thing that must be done comes along. If a room is cleaned for the purposes of getting through with it, it looks different from the room that has been cleaned with the sense of having it clean and orderly. And how extraordinary: the success is so much greater with the latter yet no more time is needed. On the contrary, we become able to reduce the time for a task while substantially increasing the quality of the results.

We also come into a state that is more human because, when a task is executed thoughtfully, and when we are contented with ourselves in the doing, we experience consciousness. By that I mean consciousness that is centered, reacts to the environment and can think and feel. I deliberately avoid defining this consciousness as soul, psyche, mind, feeling, subconsciousness, individuality, or even the “body-soul.” For me, the small word “I” summarizes all this. And I always advise my students to replace my words with their own (those words which they use in talking to themselves) in order to avoid getting a knot in their psyche and having to philosophize for hours about what was really meant. In that same time they could be doing something useful.

It may be regarded as somewhat presumptuous to wish to approach the attainment of consciousness by means of *Gymnastik*. And it really is! We are always embarrassed when this work is called *Gymnastik*. Most people have become accustomed to regard *Gymnastik* as certain exercises, so the first question put to us is always about our “typical exercises.” To this we can only reply that our work is not *Gymnastik* in the ordinary sense, which certainly does not bring about consciousness: what does is the mind that is present and concentrated on situation.

In general people think, “When I have learned the relaxation exercises I am relaxed; if I can do the breathing exercises I can breathe; when I do the swinging exercises I work with *elan*; and when I have learned how to correct bow-legs or knock-knees, they will be straight.” This is not true, and we invariably see failure resulting from this naive opinion.

It is clear that merely learning and doing these *Gymnastik* exercises cannot lead to the attainment of full consciousness. How do we get closer to that? Simply by using all our spirit and feeling in bringing our body closer to be a responsive instrument for living. We see to it that our students do not learn an exercise; rather, the *Gymnastik* are a means by which we attempt to increase intelligence. When we breathe, we do not learn fixed exercises, rather, exercises are the means of our getting acquainted with the workings of our lungs, either through inducing or releasing holdings. When we become aware that our shoulder-girdle is not in a position where it works easily we do not put it into the correct position from without. That

does not really help anything, for as soon as the person is busy with something else he forgets his shoulder-girdle. Admittedly these are people who can clench and hold it in just the “right” place, but then that’s just what it looks like – like clenching.

Usually we start a course by asking our students what they want to work on. In the beginning the result is shocking. Either nobody says anything, or somebody says, “You should get rid of my stomach,” and other similar requests. The first stumbling block is when I answer that I would not think of getting rid of someone else’s stomach; the person would have to do that for himself.

Let us assume it has been decided to work on the shoulder girdle. We carefully examine it as to detail of form and usage. With the help of a skeleton we find out how it can best fulfill its function. We compare our functioning with that of the skeleton and then work to find out what has to happen within ourselves to come closer to such functioning.

In most instances, and especially during the beginning sessions, we work blindfolded so that each person is trying, by himself, to determine from where the holding of a wrong position originates, and what hinders the shoulder-girdle from finding the right position. Suddenly, each student is working in his own fashion. That means that each one in the class works differently, with a pervading concentration and quiet that would be envied in many lecture halls.

The leader notices at once where something goes amiss. He sees, for instance, how some students have a talent for always choosing the most difficult and problematic tasks. It is the business of the leader to point out that one reaches an objective by using the simplest and easiest experiments. In each course, however, we work with completely different exercises, inventing new ones as it goes along.

In this manner we accomplish something essential. The student begins to feel that he is in charge of himself. He suddenly feels that if he wishes he can work on his whole body in the same manner that he worked on his shoulder-girdle. His consciousness of self is heightened, he is no longer confused by the range of the subject matter, and he is encouraged. This is a state, which cannot be attained by exercises alone, regardless of how thought-out they may be.

So much for our way of working. Now to the areas of learning, which are breathing, relaxation, and tension – words often misused as are all beautiful things in the world. As long as they remain just words, they create mischief; as soon as they are imbued with experience they become great mediators of life.

One of the most delicate and difficult areas of our work is breathing. As we can see among small children and animals, every movement can increase and deepen breathing. Among adults, however, whose physical, spiritual, and mental processes are no longer governed by the unity of consciousness, the relationship between breathing and movement is disturbed. And almost all of us are in this situation. Regardless of whether we want to speak, make a small movement, or think, we impede breathing. Even while resting we impede it. We need only to consider how freely the neck emerges from the trunk of most animals, and, in a quiet moment, compare our own neck to theirs. Usually we will find that our neck is being pulled considerably inward from the middle of the body, approximately from the diaphragm. When this interconnection is observed for a longer time, it will be noticed that this cramping is quite arbitrary and that when one lets it go, one suddenly feels that the neck can be held much more freely. The constriction in the airstream through the neck (that occurs in almost everyone) suddenly ceases, and one feels much freer. At any time when this can be consciously permitted one feels not only that movements will not disturb the breathing, but can increasingly deepen it. Instead of becoming tired, one becomes refreshed by work. If this were translated to living, we would become more and more refreshed and productive the more demands are made upon us.

Actually, we imagine life to be that way, and we see over and over again that people who accomplish the most are fresher than those who do nothing. And if we observe successful people we can often see that they display a wonderful flexibility in reacting, in constantly changing from activity to rest. They have flexible breathing, or functional breathing. This is not easily attainable. Our students repeatedly confirm with little satisfaction that they need only think of an activity to feel how they immediately become rigid and impede their innate capacities. One is so used to doing it that it is difficult to abandon this nonsense.

In difficult situations – for example in marital quarrels or with the unexpected appearance of one’s employer – we see that this gasping for breath and cramp in the diaphragm and stomach regions assumes frightening dimensions. Breathing stops, or a breath is hastily drawn, and the situation – which probably demands our greatest responsiveness – is hopelessly lost. We all know this condition well: embarrassment, anxiety, ill humor, confusion in the mental and spiritual realms; trembling or an embarrassed fidgeting with arms and legs in the physical realm. If one is already conscious of how cramping – or constriction – can be eliminated by becoming aware of it, one is suddenly equal to the situation. The breath flows more freely, the mental confusion abates, one can make use of one’s capacities.

It is clear that we cannot begin by working with large movements if even the smallest cause interference with the natural flow of breathing. One must first come to know – through observing oneself – just what one does with breathing while brushing one’s teeth, while putting on one’s socks, or while eating. So we begin by attempting to waken in our students an understanding of what happens in these daily performances. Then we have them try to make any movement without interfering with breathing. This requires so much work that one could probably stay with it forever. The main playground for this practice, however, is not the class session – there the release of constricted breathing is attained relatively easily and quickly. It is in life outside the classroom where we must notice how breathing becomes constricted in response to the most trivial causes; it is there where the tendency to constriction must be overcome. Simply noticing the constriction already brings help, and the oftener we notice it, and the more we accustom ourselves to investigating whether it is not perhaps an interference with breathing, the more easily and naturally it will be relieved. Small happenings allow us more time to do this than the big ones, but in any case we will begin to feel the beneficial effects as soon as breathing is released, noticing that

rigidity immediately vanishes. It is this, which we have to experience; how at the moment natural breathing is permitted we get the feeling of life. In addition, constricted breathing is closely related to unhealthy physical tension; we can never reach physical ease if the activity of breathing is not simultaneously freed of all constriction.

We must recognize and sense the connection between breathing and bodily movement, and bring about their correlation. In doing so we begin to understand that the demands made upon us by life are not so overwhelmingly difficult, that they can be carried out with greater economy of strength, without our usual maximum effort and turmoil.

Holding one's breath during exhalation is one of the more familiar interferences with breathing. Its counterpart frequently occurs during inhalation, manifesting itself as a kind of sucking in of air. Good undisturbed breathing happens involuntarily. We can, however, influence breathing willfully, thereby modifying it and diverting it from its natural course. This occurs when we do not wait for inhalation to be stimulated on its own through physical impulse, and when we do not permit exhalation to occur completely.

If one wishes to carry breathing all the way to completion, it is necessary to be able to carry through the four phases of breathing: inhalation, pause, exhalation, and pause. These pauses and the conscious feeling of them are of the greatest importance. The pause, or rest, after exhalation must not be lifeless. It should never be a matter of holding the breath. On the contrary, it should most closely resemble the pause we experience in music – which is the vital preparation for what is to follow. It is wonderful to see how inhalation emerges from this living pause. There is an opening of the cells: the air enters easily and silently and we feel fresh and toned up.

What happens, though, if we do not wait until the lungs have opened up? And when do we wait for it? Immediately after exhalation, we often take in air arbitrarily and try to pump the lungs full of air before they ask for it. This is utterly inappropriate. We soon feel how the course of air in the lungs falters, and there occurs a thick feeling around the breastbone, the air is dammed up in the large bronchi and there is pressure and closure in the small ones. The air does not and cannot enter the lungs freely because the small lung vesicles have not yet opened. And it is these that must be supplied with oxygen while breathing. Access to them, the smallest bronchia, is provided by vessels more delicate than hair, so naturally the attempt to press the dammed-up air into them must fail. In addition, it often occurs that the air vesicles, at the time when the air is prematurely pumped in, have not yet emptied themselves of the old supply of air. They now do that, and the air stream trying to work upward and outward from inside collides with the air being pumped in from the outside so that there occurs a kind of piling up, and the result is a pressed, constricted feeling. But if we wait for the opening of the smallest vesicles we thereby permit a pause to occur completely. Then, as soon as the vesicles become empty, they suck in air automatically. The air then easily penetrates the smallest, hair-fine vessels. Nowhere does congestion occur and nowhere is there a sensation of thickness or of lack of air. We do not need to bring into action any special activity for inhalation.

This is the difference between the breathing that occurs when the lungs and vesicles are open and breathing, which occurs through the arbitrary inhalation of air. The difference for movement is very significant. If movement is undertaken during arbitrary breathing – i.e., while air is being pumped in – it will not be alive and will get no feeling of movement. If the movement occurs with open breathing, the movement becomes alive.

For releasing people from constrictions, only those movements can be fruitful which are connected with conscious and spontaneous breathing or, to state it more specifically, with breathing which happens through open vessels. Anything else would be more likely to disturb the collaboration between breathing and movement and to increase the habit of excessive and inappropriate effort. This is an additional reason compelling us to carefully assess any movements to be used in releasing constriction. For example, it makes running, for which much inhalation of air is necessary, seem unsuitable. The tendency is to pull in air-which does not help supply the lungs with air, nor assist in eliminating the deficiency of oxygen resulting from running. If we practice running in our work, we start by doing so for such a short time that we can run with open breathing, then gradually increase the time.

An adequate supply of air is necessary and helpful in every task. It is not possible to swim or even float quietly without the ability to provide the lungs with air. In jumping, the jump succeeds quite differently, and even its form is different, if one has prepared oneself through “opening” for it. One can see this also among animals. Cats prepare for their leaps; no ladybug or bird flies up without making itself light through filling up with air. We can gradually come close to this if we observe ourselves continually in daily life, preferably on minor occasions. Thinking about it, alone, will not bring us a step closer. We must just open our senses to these phenomena.

When the student has learned to react with breathing to the small stimuli, and has come to improved functioning of the lungs, a new task emerges spontaneously – that of bringing the entire lungs to more working. Almost all of us use only a small part of the lungs in breathing. If this small part functions well, as has been described, we can accomplish much in life. However, in our work it is clearly shown, that, if we engage the full capacity of the lungs in working, we can increase our efficiency significantly. And here begins the education in exhalation. It must take place without pressure, it must be elastic, it must be like the gentlest breeze, and it must bring about the greatest possible emptying.

In the course of these considerations we have often used the word “constriction” or “cramping” and must go into this topic in greater detail. I have tried to show to what a great extent constriction is bound up with disturbances in breathing and these, once again, with disturbances in the psychic realm. Releasings, or relaxations, are hence utterly dependent upon our being able to create a living image of the state of relaxation and of realizing it through suitable exercises.

For us relaxation is that condition in which we have the greatest capacity of reacting. It is a stillness within us, a readiness to respond appropriately to any stimulus. We read that the Arabs have a capacity through which, after long hours of trekking through the desert, they can lie motionless on the sand for ten minutes, and in this ten minutes to regenerate

themselves so that they are then able to continue walking for hours longer. This is an example of relaxation. We hear that top businessmen often remain utterly motionless for a moment while directing all their senses inward. Then, suddenly, they seem to awaken and make decisions that are uniquely right. It is clear that in this moment of being in themselves relaxation has taken place. This is the kind of relaxation we are seeking. It can be most readily reached through the experience of gravity.

It is gravity, which our limbs must learn to feel and understand. Indeed, every cell in us must once again become able to respond to gravity. Who of us, for instance, is truly relaxed as we lie in bed before going to sleep – responding to gravity, as does a sleeping animal? When we attempt to feel the weight everywhere in the body, even in the head, we get into a state where nature takes over the work for us. To the extent that we can come to a way of lying in which this state is possible, natural breathing will occur – not arbitrary breathing with great movements of the chest, but a quiet breathing where the breath flows imperceptibly back and forth and brings sleep.

As for standing – real standing – we must feel how we give our weight, pound for pound, onto the earth, and how in doing so the feet become steadily lighter. Here is a paradox: the weightier we become the lighter we become and the quieter we become.

In sitting we must be upright. As long as we slouch, we disturb all the internal functions. When one straightens up, one can feel how breathing immediately becomes quieter and more satisfying. It can often be observed how people, who are bored or fatigued, in order to come to themselves, take a good strong stretch out of the crooked position. In sitting the joints will be freely movable, and there will be plenty of room for the stomach to function and for the spine to stretch itself to its full extension. If we then swing the torso forward at the hip joints, there is an expansion of the upper portion of the lungs, the same expansion we find so beneficial in swimming and especially in walking against the wind.

Now a word about tension, our third area of study. It may seem that tension comes off rather poorly in our work, but I must say that it only seems that way. Healthy tension is for us in the greatest contrast to constricting. We gladly give ourselves a workout, but we do not wish to wear ourselves out – and that is where the difference lies. In reality, whoever is truly able to relax is also capable of healthy tension. This we perceive as the beautiful changeability of energies that react to every stimulus, increasing and diminishing as required. Above all, it includes the strong feeling of inner strength, of effortlessness in accomplishment – in short, a heightened *joie de vivre*. Healthy tension, as we understand it, is the possibility of overcoming the greatest obstacles with the greatest ease through the power of heightened breathing.

Generally speaking, in all of this, the most essential things we have to keep in mind are: that any correction made from without is of little value, and that each of us must try to gain understanding for the special nature of our own constitution in order to learn how to take care of ourselves.

Biography

Elsa Gindler (1885-1961) lived and worked in and around Berlin, Germany. As a young woman, healing herself from Tuberculosis deeply influenced her work as she began to develop a very simple, direct process of somatic inquiry that she sometimes called "*Arbeit am Menschen*" – "working with the human being." She led her students, amongst whom were Carola Speads and Charlotte Selver who both brought the work to the United States, how to be "a responsive instrument for living."

Integrating Sensory Awareness And Somatic Psychotherapy

Judyth O. Weaver, PhD, SEP, RCSP

Abstract

The author depicts how, after returning from serious study in a Zen Buddhist monastery in Japan, she entered the work of Sensory Awareness which she felt was a western version of Zen practice. After studying Reichian therapy the author connects the lineage and intention between these seemingly disparate practices. During years of practice the two fields are integrated in highly successful and satisfying experiences. Case studies are presented and the philosophy and method of teaching this “Sensory-Awareness-based somatic psychotherapy” in graduate schools.

Keywords

Sensory Awareness – Somatic Psychotherapy – Reichian Therapy – Integrating Practices
Case Histories – Somatic Reclaiming - Teaching

Meeting Sensory Awareness

I was a dancer in my early days. In 1959 in New York City, I saw a class for “Nonverbal Communication” in the catalogue of the New School for Social Research, and I thought, “That’s for me!” But the course schedule interfered with one of my dance classes, so that was that. Several years later, after having lived in Asia for three years, half of that time dancing and half the time studying in a Zen Buddhist Monastery, I saw again the names of the people who had offered that class: Charlotte Selver and Charles Brooks. This time the name of their course was “Sensory Awareness,” and this time it fit into my schedule and into my needs. After a life of movement and then the stillness I had desired and found in the Zen monastery, upon my return from Asia I was looking for ways to integrate those seemingly opposite modes of living. How to combine and live the stillness in movement and be able to share with people the movement in stillness? I had begun to study t’ai chi ch’uan, and here in Sensory Awareness was a more pervasive, wholistic manner of living.

The work in the classes was very much like living in the monastery: Pay attention. Be conscious of what you are doing. Be present. Don’t let your mind get carried away. I was thrilled and intrigued. I took as many classes as I could. In order to study with Charlotte and Charles, in the years since 1968 I have followed them to Esalen (in Big Sur, California), Mexico, New York City, and Monhegan Island, Maine. I remember telling my Zen Master that I had found the American version of Zen. I could appreciate this simple practice of being more present in everything I did in my life.

Introduction to Reichian Therapy

When my marriage ended and I was left with a toddler and an infant, I felt the need for supportive therapy and found a therapist to work somatically with me. (I had never had success with talk therapists, and being a dancer I felt there had to be some way to integrate the body/mind.) I eventually heard of Wilhelm Reich and was so intrigued by his work that I began to study in this field. When Charles Brooks learned I was studying Reich, he was very pleased. Charles very much respected Reich and his work. I could see how the two ways of working were connected. I became certified in Reichian therapy in 1976 and was told by my mentor to begin offering therapy sessions. I earned my doctorate in Reichian psychology in 1979.

In Sensory Awareness, there is nothing to teach. It is just the activity of experiencing and working to be ever more present for the moment. As my ability to be more present deepened, like in Zen, the SA became more in me and I became more it. Of course, as I became ever more present in the moment for myself, I became more present in the moment for my clients. My working with them changed: a lot of what I had been taught got dropped by the wayside. Not the knowledge, but the techniques. If I am going to be fully present and responsive to the moment and able to help another be more in the moment, it doesn’t make sense to use a technique that I was taught some time ago. Sensory Awareness taught me the essence of being fresh and responding to what is happening at each moment...just what I learned in Zen.

Integrating Sensory Awareness and Reichian Therapy

Almost without my knowing it, in my quest to be as real and honest as possible, I integrated what I received from Sensory Awareness into my clinical work. Eventually I found myself no longer calling it “Reichian Therapy.” In my effort to be accurate, the name had evolved to “Reichian-based Awareness Therapy.” Even though the name was unwieldy, I felt my work was good. In fact, it seemed to some that my work was a combination of meditation -- actually the sensory awareness work-- and energetic release. (In 1982, I gave a workshop in Japan for the Centre for Bio-Energy with exactly that title: Sensory Awareness and Reichian Release.) I seemed to help my clients deeply and relatively economically, and I felt very ethical and happy about the way I was working.

Some years later, in 1984, I met Eva Reich, the daughter of Wilhelm Reich, the man whose work I had studied so much and to whom I felt we all owed a great debt. In our talking she asked me what I did. I thought, "Uh, oh, now I'm in trouble," because I knew that Reich never wanted his therapeutic work to be named after him. I told Eva that even though I had been trained and certified in Reichian Therapy, I had begun to integrate another kind of work into the basis of the therapeutic process. I told her that the work was called Sensory Awareness, that Charlotte Selver was my main teacher, and that her teacher in Europe had been Elsa Gindler. Then I gritted my teeth and held my breath, waiting for whatever would come from this dynamic woman who was on her eighth world tour. I was surprised and encouraged when she exclaimed, "Oh, how wonderful! My father would be so very glad!"

Eva then proceeded to tell me that she remembered being a child and going on hikes in the mountains with her mother and father and their best friends, Otto and Clare Fenichel (Otto and Wilhelm were both students of Freud), and that her father would keep asking them about the classes they took with Gindler. He would say, "Now tell me, what is it that you do?" (Reich, 1984). In our subsequent talks over the years, Eva has been very clear how she felt her father and his work were influenced by Gindler's work. Eva herself was sent to childrens' classes that Clare Fenichel taught and has talked about how much she loved the ways she was encouraged to use her body and be active and creative. She has stated several times that she does not think her father would have begun to work with the body, and especially the breath, if he had not been influenced by the Gindler way through so many of her students (Reich, 2001, 2003).

I was thrilled! I felt I was on a good track and was being supported to continue. Eva and I began a wonderful friendship that continues to this day. We spend many hours discussing her work with her father and his influence.

Explorations and Confirmations

I have had several important experiences that have confirmed for me my way of working. One was an extended client relationship that began when I was in my early "Reichian Therapy" stage.

Tom, a 31-year old male, came to see me. He presented a history of severe tension and acute pain, especially in the upper parts of his body; a great deal of nervous twitching and strong spasms; and obsessional mentality that absorbed much of his life. He stated he "enjoyed sex very much, but at the same time...didn't feel a great release." He would masturbate every night if he didn't sleep with someone. The masturbation was closely tied into a rich fantasy life. Most of his romantic relationships lasted about three months and then would end. He was not able to sustain interest in much of anything in his life -- work, recreational activities, etc.

We began to work regularly, using the general Reichian mode in which I had been trained. Our work followed the basic structure: breathe deeply, and kick and hit to build up a charge; release the charge through movements, sounds and emotions; and then allow relaxation. Admittedly, I was always one of the more gentle Reichian therapists, trying to work with the client as personally and as sensitively as I possibly could within this framework I had been taught, as well as going in actively and deeply when appropriate.

We concentrated on Tom's breathing and worked with his segment blocks, beginning with his eyes. I would physically work with his muscular armor. We also addressed his character armor -- we worked on his substance abuse and inability to sustain activities and feelings -- and to this system I added, at the end of our sessions, the craniosacral work that I had also been taught. As Tom became able to breathe more fully and deeply, his chest began to move and soften, his throat began to open from the sounds he made, and his muscles became more pliable and flexible. Sometimes tears and crying came. Memories would come, and we could understand some of his patterns and how to work with them.

It was gratifying work for both of us. As Tom's armor began to open up, so did various aspects of his life. He made a commitment to a relationship. He made better connections with other members of his family. His physical pains changed -- they lessened, he understood them differently and saw new ways to work with them, but they were still there.

We worked many of Tom's issues, and he was happier and healthier. But eventually I had to admit there were areas that we were not able to address. At a certain point I felt that we had come to a plateau and that the way we were working was not enabling us to go further. It was frustrating for me: I could appreciate the good work that had been done and I felt there was further to go, but there were delicate points I was missing, some aspects with which I was not able to make contact. Certainly there were parts of both his psyche and soma that I was not able to reach deeply enough to work with. After three years we terminated his therapy with mutual good will.

Eight years later Tom asked to begin seeing me again. I told him that my work had changed, that it had gotten more subtle. (I am not sure that I told him I was incorporating Sensory Awareness, because I am not sure I consciously knew at that time.) He told me he'd be happy to work with me and my changes. What ensued during this second sequence of therapy was exquisite and a great learning for both of us. With the clarity of the somatic tracking that SA afforded, we were both awed by the depth and intensity of the material that opened up almost effortlessly. Sensory Awareness offered such safety, such acknowledgement of my client's resources, so much honor and respect for his senses and feelings. It all coalesced into a meeting with his inner being that supported the expression of impressive depths. This is where I had hoped to go the first time we worked together!

Sometimes the sessions would begin with Tom focusing on his breath, but this time he did not have to breathe especially heavily or do anything in particular. More often, we would start with a brief verbal catching up, and then I would ask him to tune into his organism and report his experience to me. Sometimes he would tune in and respond himself to what

was wanting to happen, through movement or touch or even sound. Other times he would ask me for physical contact on a particular area of tension or pain. I would put my hands where he requested and stay with him as fully as I could. I very simply made gentle contact, as fully as I could, with one of his areas of contraction. The area would move (or not), or would give an inclination of wanting to move and in what way, and I would go with it or stay still as it directed. I would be able to "stay with" this energetic process until it was complete. I did not attack his armor or devise exercises for him to do. I just stayed with him as completely as was possible.

In the beginning of this stage of our working, the spasms could be clearly perceived, and I could relatively easily feel the releases and resolutions that evolved. Reich's methods that I had used in our previous time of working -- moving the eyes to help open the ocular block, making sounds to help release the throat block, etc. -- combined very well with what I was doing and were easily incorporated. As we continued to work and as many of the obvious muscular spasms were resolved, the work became more subtle and more glorious.

It seemed that I was meeting Tom at a pulsatory level and that I could work with those pulsations --some were stymied and almost non-existent, and some were fiercely defensive and overreacting. Working from my Sensory Awareness experiences, I could meet him and stay with him. Incomplete energetic patterns were able to be satisfied and completed, and overacting ones were resolved and released. Sometimes it felt like riding an energetic wave. I could go with it and feel the release and resolution when they naturally occurred.

The work was wonderful and gratifying for both of us. It felt as if "knots were being untied" (Tom's words). Movements, actions, even situations, could be fulfilled and carried to completion. By my simple touch and my staying with it, I could help Tom come into contact, acknowledge what was happening, and work with it, and he could come to what he called his "authentic reactions." Tom felt feelings "unimaginably deep and sweet," and recollections -- some of them memories and some of them energetic -- were experienced and integrated. He began to speak about a heretofore unknown "bodily confidence" and connection. Eventually, he was able to admit experiencing pleasure and to "sustain feelings" that he had previously escaped or refused to allow.

We were both impressed at the depth and intensity of the material that had opened up. This does not mean that infantile or even pre-natal material had not arisen in our first stage of working. It had, but the quality of the experiences and the capacity for resolutions were very different this time. Emotions and sensations that we worked so hard to access in the earlier work came flowing freely now, at just the right time. He was clearly opening up organically.

Previously, Tom said he experienced his chest as having a "steel plate" in it, which eventually softened and moved. This time, it began to feel to him more like an "iceberg floating off," which gradually got softer and more movable and pliable, allowing much more comprehensive fullness of feelings than before. Through his sensing work many memories and understandings came to Tom, with clear perceptions and organic directions of how to live his life well and also how to negotiate and integrate the ghosts of the past. Tom began to speak about a "clarity" within himself for which he was grateful and from which he could learn, and an ability to experience a depth of emotions that was moving and gratifying.

Tom's life began to demonstrate his strength and clarity. He made important decisions needed to follow a life that made sense and was satisfying to him. After some time, we terminated again. I trust Tom is continuing his life work of sensing and following his authentic impulses.

Somatic Reclaiming

Many people had asked me what I called my work. (By this time I had stopped using that unwieldy name, and I really didn't have a name.) I kept on saying that I was just working the way I felt best...working with the whole person. I felt I was very much following a grand tradition, for Elsa Gindler never named her work. When she was asked what she called it, she sometimes said, "*Arbeit am Menschen*," which could be translated as "working with the human being."

One day, after an unusually deep and precious session, Tom asked me again if I had a name for my work. I said it was "Somatic Reclaiming." It was clear to me that I was not teaching anyone anything special, anything new, but that my job was to help them find their way back to reclaim their senses, their sanity, their sense of self that they had as their birthright...and that it was Sensory Awareness that was giving me the clarity to do so.

The Meeting of Sensory Awareness and Psychotherapy

Charlotte Selver was not a psychologist. She didn't put much stock in psychotherapy. In fact, she strongly felt that SA was enough and that if people continued with their sensing, they would resolve their issues. However, her teacher, Elsa Gindler, did have an interest in psychotherapy that came through her own colleague, Hendrick Jacoby (Weaver, 2004).

Many psychotherapists of varying methods have learnt from SA. Many have knowingly incorporated SA into their own psychotherapeutic work, Fritz Perls being one of the most notable (Gregory, 2001). I think many more have unknowingly integrated SA into their therapeutic processes. In fact, I sincerely believe that every somatic psychotherapist includes Sensory Awareness in their work, whether they do it consciously or not. Personally, I don't see how we can be somatic psychotherapists without Sensory Awareness as our foundation.

Teaching Sensory Awareness in the Context of Somatic Psychology

In the twenty-five years I have been teaching at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, I have been able to establish courses in both Sensory Awareness and the Psychology of Wilhelm Reich. This was a wonderful ground for me to begin to create the kind of training I believe is necessary for somatic psychotherapy: to have a basis in Sensory Awareness and then continue the sensitive somatic inquiry into clinical applications in more professionally-oriented courses. The success of this work at CIIS gave me the support to create the doctoral program in somatic psychology when I co-founded Santa Barbara Graduate Institute. For me it was organic training – education from the inside out. In the first year of the program, students did a lot of inner exploration, with courses in SA from the perspective of their experiences as individuals and in interaction with others. The second year's classes in SA expanded to "Sensory Awareness as Process and as Therapeutic Tool," and the third year developed further, into "Sensory Awareness in Clinical Practice – Supervision."

It is my experience at CIIS and SBGI, and now at JFK (which also includes a practicum in SA as foundational in their Som Psy program), that the Sensory Awareness component allows students to take the time to focus on tracking themselves and their own senses. Then, from that center, they can branch out into the clinical relationship. This greatly informs their clarity on transference and counter-transference and gives them skills to help ground themselves and know themselves in a very real, visceral way. Sensory Awareness work also helps them to share their experiences clearly and to draw on these experiences when working with their own clients and students.

Other Countries, Other Therapies

In 1972, I offered classes in SA to the first group of Japanese psychologists who came to visit Esalen. The leader of that group was so impressed by SA that he returned to Japan and changed his teaching of psychology and counseling, creating "New Counseling," which incorporated SA. He also founded the Japan Association of Humanistic Education. In 1988 Charlotte asked me to go to Japan in her place to lead workshops for JAHE. Since then I have continued to offer workshops in SA in Japan and other countries (Weaver, 1997-98). I have been honored to teach outside the U.S. and to work with therapists from other cultures. It is always my experience that no matter how different the trauma or the culture, the common place of meeting and communicating can be through SA. There we all have a common language (Weaver, 1997-98).

I was part of a group of somatic therapists who conducted the Clinic for Survivors of Political Torture for some years in San Francisco. Of course, we all felt that the best way to work with these people to assist their healing was somatically. My experience was that SA was the best tool I could share with them.

With the Holocaust survivor who was a hidden child during the war, we worked on finding and hearing her voice so that she could express herself appropriately. We also used SA to work with centering and grounding so that she could relax, stop injuring herself so much, and eventually realize that she was really, finally, safe. Breath was a very important aspect here. The process of finding her breath--learning to allow her breath, learning that she did not have to control it, that it could speak for her and be resourceful and supportive--was a huge assist and change in her life.

With the men who had fought and been tortured in their wars, an essential part of their healing was to help them release the traumas of the past by finding their way to their current sensory experiences, and be able to differentiate between past and present.

The latest growth and development in my own work over these past ten years is in the essential field of prenatal and birth therapy. How wonderful and important it is when we can work early with the early traumas! How invaluable it is to have SA skills to track oneself and also the infants, and to help the parents do so too. Since we are essentially working nonverbally with infants, it is even more crucial to have these sensory awareness skills.

It Works Both Ways

Sometimes I have clients who come to me for Sensory Awareness sessions, and our work turns into somatic psychotherapy.

Nancy was a student of SA and came to me as a Sensory Awareness client after we met and talked at a workshop of Charlotte's. During our first session, as I put my hands on her shoulder, it became evident that her tightness there was holding on to more than just physical tension. As we worked with issues of mother, family boundaries, abandonment, her creativity, and so on, the somatic psychological work would at times direct us back to her left shoulder. Sometimes I would touch it, sometimes she would make the physical contact herself. Her shoulder became something of a touchstone in our work together, and the sensing process was a wonderful guide through her psyche as well as her more physical aspects.

Sam came to me after having done some workshops with Charlotte and classes with another leader. He had never done therapy and wanted to do some individual work in SA. As we worked somatically, it became clear that other psychological issues were intertwined. We are now doing psychotherapy, even though his sessions are still largely devoted to the sensing work. He begins by checking in to whatever is happening with him in the present moment, following his breath or addressing

whatever other physical experience is most acute for him. When emotional issues come up, they are smoothly incorporated and integrated. Sometimes he arrives with an emotional issue and we begin there. By being able to work somatically as well as facing the emotional roller coaster, the issues become clearer and are more easily dealt with from the basic grounding of the sensory awareness. He has come to use SA as his daily meditation and says it works well for him as something to return to for support during the day and especially helps him in dealing with his emotions.

More often I have therapy clients who, realizing the benefit of the sensing work for their well being, pursue Sensory Awareness practice further by taking classes and workshops offered by SA leaders.

Sandy is a psychologist who heard of me through a Reichian therapy resource. Because of her intellectual and academic orientation, it definitely took some time and repeated changes of focus to attract her away from her interpretation, knowledge, and thoughts and toward her senses and other bodily responses. I would frequently direct her back to her breath and question her about her sensations. As she progressed, she was intrigued and astonished at the depth and breadth that our work could go with the inclusion of sensory awareness. She was amazed at what information she received by paying attention to micro-movements and giving them their expression and full movement. Physical patterns she had been using for years without connecting very much with them now told a story that she had long forgotten and that played a very important part in her life. She was so intrigued with the sensory awareness that she began taking classes with Charlotte and is now investigating further study in somatic psychology, so that she can integrate all this into her own professional work.

Either way it works, and I'm ever grateful for the lineage, the leaders throughout the world, and their creativity and devotion to the simple work of somatic inquiry.

Charlotte Selver was a dynamic force. She encouraged people, she insulted some of them, she inspired many. More than she knew and more than most of us know, she has influenced many forms of psychotherapy, mainly somatic-oriented psychotherapy. We are indebted to the integrity of her work.

Resources

Sensory Awareness Foundation: www.sensoryawareness.org.

Sensory Awareness Leaders Guild : contact through www.sensoryawareness.org.

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Please note: all names and incidents cited in this article have been changed to protect the identity of the persons.

Biography

Judyth O. Weaver, PhD in Reichian Psychology. Having studied with Charlotte Selver since 1968, she is authorized to offer Sensory Awareness and has led intensive month-long seminars as well as shorter classes and workshops through out the world. She is certified as a Somatic Experiencing Practitioner, in Craniosacral Biodynamic Therapy, and in Prenatal and Birth Therapy. She is a Rosen Method practitioner and teacher and having been authorized to teach T'ia Chi Ch'uan in 1971, has been recognized as a master teacher for 33 years. Judyth has been professor at California Institute for Integral Studies since 1979, teaches Sensory Awareness practicum at John F. Kennedy University, and is co-founder of Santa Barbara Graduate Institute and creator of its Somatic Psychology doctoral program. She maintains a private practice in Mill Valley, California and regularly teaches internationally.

Charlotte Selver in 1965

Peter A. Levine, PhD

Abstract

The author describes his first, and only, experience in a workshop with Charlotte Selver and the unexpected and immense effect it had on him. He credits her work with informing his development of Sensory Awareness.

Keywords

Body Awareness – EMG – Relaxation – Organismic Understanding – Somatic Experiencing

I first met Charlotte Selver in 1965. She was giving a workshop for a group of Zen students at the Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. The year before, I had come out to California as a graduate student in Medical Biophysics at UC Berkeley. My friend Jack brought me to the workshop, telling me it was about “body awareness.” “What’s that?” I asked, not knowing, quite frankly, that I even had a body. After the first few hours I found it weird; during the next few hours I found it tiring and boring (As did some of the Zen students, I later found out.)

It seemed ridiculous to be picking up rocks and feeling them, feeling their weight, shapes, textures; feeling my feet contacting the ground...and on and on. But then after many hours of frustration, she had us lie on the floor to feel our breath (this I was able to do!) and then she asked us if we could “feel our feet breathing”, (from ridiculous to bizarre, I thought). But then a minor miracle occurred. I not only felt my “feet breathe”, but soon I felt my entire body breathing. Eight hours later I left the church and gazed across into the San Francisco skyline. Everything sparkled with life. I had never felt nor seen anything quite like that before.

This previously unknown feeling seemed to last for several days. When I was asked, that semester, to teach a course in the Natural Sciences, I hooked one of my eager students to a plysmograph (a device that measures respiration), and then also measured EMG (small electrical firings in various muscles, including the feet). I discovered that when I was able to “put” my young, fiery, red-haired sophomore student into, what I imagined, was a similar relaxed and alert state as I had experienced with Charlotte, there was a dramatic modulation, a rhythmic “coherence” between the electro-muscle activity and her breathing. When she felt frustrated, as she and I frequently did in this endeavor, there was no such coherence. This new organismic understanding informed my work in the next decades; in the development of Somatic Experiencing[®], a somatic approach to the healing of trauma my experience with Charlotte echoed ever present. And some years ago we both presented at a somatic conference and I noticed that our presentations overlapped. I contacted the conference organizer ‘threatening’ to leave if they did not change my time so that I could attend her presentation. At that time I gave her a copy of my book (“Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma”) and thanked her for her inspiration and contribution; I thank and honor you Charlotte Selver.

Biography

Peter A. Levine received his PhD in medical biophysics from the University of California at Berkeley, and also holds a doctorate in psychology from International University. He is the developer of “Somatic Experiencing” and teaches trainings in this work throughout the world and in various indigenous cultures. He has been stress consultant for NASA in the development of the first Space Shuttle. Dr. Levine was a stress consultant for NASA on the development of the space shuttle project. He is a member of the Institute of World Affairs Task Force of “Psychologists for Social Responsibility” and serves on the APA “Presidential Initiative on responding to large scale disasters and ethno-political warfare.

Peter is the author of the best selling book [Waking the Tiger - Healing Trauma](#), available in eight languages as well as three audio learning series for “Sounds True”: “*Healing Trauma, Restoring the wisdom of the Body,*” “*It Won’t Hurt Forever, Guiding your Child through Trauma,*” and “*Healing Sexual Trauma-Transforming the Sacred Wound*”

Peter is the Director of the Foundation for Human Enrichment and may be contacted through www.traumahealing.com.

Experiencing: A Memoir

Marjorie L. Rand, PhD

Abstract

The author describes her journey through dance and gestalt and how she discovered Sensory Awareness without knowing what it was. She describes how SA has been her introduction to the concept of meditation. She cites the importance of SA in body psychotherapy and how she uses it in her own IBP practice.

Keywords

Gestalt Therapy – Authentic Movement – Body Psychotherapy

“It doesn’t matter what you do if approached through your whole being, devoting yourself to something, coming more to unity, to what you are actually communicating with, a person, a task or a situation”. Charlotte Selver, (Waking Up-Becoming Respons-Able Green Gulch Farm Study Group May 2, 1988)

A BRIEF HISTORY

In my former pre-therapy life, I was a dancer, and in some ways, I still am. After my first round of college in the 60’s I got married and had children. I still danced several times a week. Through the dance world I took a class from a dance therapist and discovered dance/movement therapy. I felt I had found my niche and began to study it intensely. I certainly was highly influenced by Authentic Movement, the work of Mary Whitehouse, to which Marcia Leventhal, Susan Lovell and Joanne Segel introduced me. I was also influenced by Continuum, the work of Emilie Conrad. This very non-structured approach to movement appealed to me, and although I didn’t know it at the time, had many similarities to Sensory Awareness (SA). Through my studies in dance therapy I happened to take some classes in what I didn’t know then, was SA. Several of Charlotte Selver’s students who lived in Los Angeles were giving classes and sessions in this work. Those who primarily influenced me in those days were Ellen Jacobs (Barbara Colburn) and Ginger Clark.

In the 70’s I trained in Gestalt therapy and again found the influence of Charlotte Selver in Perls’ Awareness Continuum. Throughout the 70’s and 80’s, I took workshops with Charlotte (and at that time, also her husband Charles Brooks) mostly at Esalen Institute in Big Sur, I also spent time at Zen Center San Francisco, Tassajara and Zen Center Los Angeles sitting zazen. During this time I discovered the work of Magda Proskauer (Breath Awareness) and Marion Rosen (whose teacher was influenced by Elsa Gindler, who was also Charlotte’s teacher).

During my graduate studies, I developed my own work called Gestalt Movement Therapy and began to give workshops. SA always was and still is an integral part of my work. In the 80’s I joined in partnership with Jack Rosenberg and helped develop Integrative Body Psychotherapy (IBP). Jack also studied SA and so it is a prominent feature of the IBP method.

EXPERIENCING SENSORY AWARENESS

The classes in SA were a new world for me, and I consider them to have introduced me to the concept of meditation. Never knowing what to expect, I would perhaps lie on the floor with a smooth stone on my forehead EXPERIENCING. Just EXPERIENCING. Having been a performer and a “doer” all my life, learning how to simply experience changed me forever. I learned how one’s perception could be altered by attention to “what is.” The experience is quite psychedelic in nature. It definitely changed my relationship to reality.

I remember one workshop in particular, when Charlotte had us standing on the deck at Esalen for what felt like more than an hour, EXPERIENCING STANDING!! At the end I was consumed with fear. I felt so far away from the ground. Charlotte simply said to me, “If you were in your feet instead of your head, you wouldn’t be afraid.”

Words of wisdom which again influenced me forever

Anyone who knows me and my work knows that I am primarily interested in bringing awareness and energy DOWN TO THE FEET-GROUNDING. We teach what we have to learn!

By the time I met Charlotte, she was already in her 70’s and Charles Brooks, her husband helped lead the workshops. She was hard of hearing and she carried a wooden box and held a horn to her ear, although she did use more modern forms of hearing aids later. But I will always carry the memory of that box and horn. She spoke only when necessary. This minimalist style was characteristic of Charlotte and made everything that came from her so much more valuable. I believe I remember almost every word I heard her say, and they were all gems. Another inimitable comment from Charlotte on the same subject was, “Usually the head is the point of disturbance. It’s good that we can think. Thinking is one of our major occupations, but what we call thinking should not eliminate everything else.”

Another aspect of SA and also Authentic Movement (AM) is the element of witnessing and being witnessed. A person can do any process on their own, but the relational aspect of working in a dyad or a group and being observed, makes the experience more real and adds dimension which may not have been discovered otherwise.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SENSORY AWARENESS IN BODY PSYCHOTHERAPY (BP)

Although Charlotte never claimed SA to be psychotherapy, only PURE AWARENESS for awareness' sake, I do not see how BP can be practiced without it. To me, awareness has to be the first step in any process. Without awareness, there can be no change. Arnie Bieser coined the term "The Paradoxical Theory of Change" -you must first acknowledge what IS before it can change. Often awareness alone produces change. Fritz Perls said, "Awareness in and of itself is curative."

I begin every session with simply experiencing, the breath as it is, sensations, thoughts, feelings, memories, anything which comes to awareness as it is, without judgment or interpretation. The insight that can come from simply observing one's experience in the moment is profound. A client referred another potential client to me who came for two sessions and never returned. She told my client "How can you work with her? She doesn't DO anything?" I believe this non-doing, less-is-more style is empowering to the client. We simply guide the client on the path to self discovery. Unfinished movement sequences complete, blocks dissolve, energy flows, breath happens without our having to do something. I believe our grounded and witnessing presence with the client is all that is necessary. This way of being is not easy to accomplish. It has taken most of my almost thirty years of experience as a therapist for me to get here. Without SA I don't know if I ever would have gotten here.

HOW I USE SA IN THE CONTEXT OF A BODY PSYCHOTHERAPY SESSION

You can practice SA alone or with another person, either as therapist or client. If you are with another person, you may report your awareness to that person, and perhaps be guided to deepen the awareness or move it. If you are alone, it is good to write your experience in a journal after the session. A session does not have to have any content material, although it may and often does. However, increased awareness and noticing the degree of presence in your own body is the only aim of the session. Often thoughts, feelings, memories or sensations may claim your attention. When that happens just allow them to be there and follow where they lead, always bringing your attention back to your body. Using SA to bring awareness often brings feelings and they can be worked with at the time they arise in the session. This can be done for as long as forty-five minutes, or as short as the amount of time you have. You can do as much or little of this as you like. You may want to spend the whole session sensing into only one place. That is fine.

Feel yourself lying (or sitting or standing). Feel your feet beneath you. Notice your connection to the ground. What is the quality of your relationship with the earth? Now follow your breath as it enters you and notice where it goes. Perhaps you can feel your breath in the space inside your head. Now notice the quality of the space. What happens when you allow breath to enter? Is it possible to sense the sinus cavities in your skull? Perhaps your awareness wants to go into your soft palette at the back of your throat. It may or may not be possible to go there. What happens in that space? Notice what is happening in the rest of your body now. Where does your breath want to go? Explore following your breath and see where it takes you. Continuing to allow the breath to come and go at its own pace and rhythm. Can you feel the space inside your body? Where does your awareness go? What places in your body seem to be out of your awareness? Notice if there is any part of your body that may want to move. If there is, go to that place and allow it to do what it wants to do. Or maybe the movement you feel is internal. Just monitor that. What do you notice? Can you feel what connects your head to your feet? Where do you feel that? Can you feel your whole body now? Be with yourself and listen for any message that might come to you from your body.

In a body psychotherapy session, I would focus on whatever comes into the client's awareness and after every verbal exchange, I would ask the client what they are feeling in their body, and let that awareness take us to the next issue. For example, the following is an excerpt from a session.

The client is a 32 year old woman whose mother is in the process of dying of cancer. She has been doing Integrative Body Psychotherapy for one and a half years.

CLIENT: I feel that I need to make a big change in my life.

THERAPIST: Where do you feel that in your body?

CLIENT: I always feel it in my gut.

THERAPIST: Can you describe the feeling in your gut?

CLIENT: Yes, it feels empty, like it's hollow.

THERAPIST: Just allow yourself to experience the hollowness and see what happens.

CLIENT: Now I feel something in my throat.

THERAPIST: OK be with that for now.

CLIENT: I feel tears in my throat.

THERAPIST: Stay with that awareness.

CLIENT: I don't want to cry.

THERAPIST: Just watch the not wanting to cry-where do you feel it?

CLIENT: My throat is tight.

THERAPIST: Go into the tightness.

CLIENT: (starts to cry)

THERAPIST: What do you feel now?

CLIENT: My throat is looser.

THERAPIST: And your gut?

CLIENT: I feel energy swirling around in there now.

This excerpt reflects the power of working with awareness and sensation to create change without dealing with content.

I can honestly say that SA has been the single most important influence in my work and in my life. Charlotte will certainly live on within me and within those who knew her.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Biography

Marjorie L. Rand, PhD specializes in Integrative Body Psychotherapy (IBP) and Pre and Perinatal Psychology. She is in private practice in Manhattan Beach and Brentwood, California. She is International Coordinator of IBP Institutes where she trains and supervises therapists in the U.S., Canada, Europe and Israel. She is the co-author of *Body, Self and Soul: Sustaining Integration* and has contributed a chapter to *Getting In Touch, A Guide To The New Body Psychotherapies*, Quest, Wheaton, Ill., 1997. She is currently co-authoring a book on the somatic side of vicarious trauma (in press, W.W. Norton) with Babette Rothschild. She has also published many articles on Somatic Psychology and Pre and Perinatal Psychology. Dr. Rand is on the Conference Committee and was a member of the former Ethics, Training Standards, and Advisory Committees of the United States Association of Body Psychotherapy. She is also a Diplomate of The American Psychotherapy Association. She can be reached at www.drrandbodymindtherapy.com.

How is Breathing Now?

Terry Ray, MA, LPC

Abstract

The work of Sensory Awareness is a way for the psychotherapist to listen to what is underneath the words that the client is saying, and a way of guiding her to open to her deeper and more profound understandings. The author describes her powerful introduction to Charlotte Selver's work and offers a clear example of how she brings her background of sensing to her psychotherapy practice.

Keywords

Listening – Questioning – Vipassana Meditation - Yoga

I first met Charlotte Selver in Mexico in 1975. It wasn't love at first sight. It wasn't even close. I liked being on the ocean in the small fishing village, Barra de Navidad, but the classes were strange. I waited for days for this little old lady with a funny accent to explain what we were doing and all she would say were things like "Do you feel your feet?" and "How is breathing?" To which I replied silently, "Of course I feel my feet, and what do you mean, how is breathing, and what does this matter anyway?" I put up with this for over a week, obediently doing the experiments in class, but mostly looking forward to lunch.

It happened with a jolt. About ten days into the workshop, I was in my small apartment washing dishes when heard my own critical voice for the first time ever, and in the same instant I felt a deep self-hatred. I felt it through and through, in the way I stood, held a plate, walked across the room, and spoke. The hostility informed my thoughts, and was lodged in everything I did. It was in my musculature, and in my breath. This shocking insight was so powerful and pervasive that it wasn't even unpleasant. It was more like, "Wow!" It was just the truth. I lived this, experiencing it for almost three days. As I felt it subside I began to feel a new warm and wonderful and tender place inside me, and compassion began to emerge for the first time I could remember in my entire life.

I was hooked. I studied with Charlotte, for many years, discovering deeper and deeper layers of who I am, and finding out about being present, or being "all here" as Charlotte would say. Through her guidance and presence she taught me how to simply be with what is happening without having to change anything, and that this in itself leads to natural healing.

The most valuable qualities I can bring to my practice are the ability to listen deeply, and to be open and present to my client in a nonjudgmental way. The person I am with senses this and begins to have confidence in me, and more importantly, in herself. When I hear the depth of her terror or shame or hatred or sadness, these feelings have space to exist and be accepted by her and consequently lose the power they once held.

Charlotte taught us to "listen with our whole being." She would ask us, "Is your belly listening? Are your feet listening? I learned to listen with more than my ears. I began to hear when there was something underneath the words my client was saying. I could hear what was not being said, or know when someone was talking around his feelings instead of really feeling them.

A client I'll call Roger came to talk to me because his wife, Karen, stopped wanting to make love with him. It started after their only daughter went off to college and Karen decided to get a job. He was considering a divorce.

Roger was the president of a large company and had a substantial income. He had been the sole income producer of the family since he was first married. Roger spoke with clarity and conviction when he was talking about his work. I asked him how he felt about his wife's working, and when he told me he loved his wife, accepted that she wanted to go to work, and that he supported her in this, he sounded convincing. He believed what he was saying, and I almost believed him too. But there was something that told me otherwise. At the time I wasn't aware of how I knew. I only knew that he didn't accept his wife working.

On reflection I realized I could hear slightly less strength and conviction in his voice than he had when he was talking about his work. As he said the word "accept" he said it quickly and there was a slightest dropping the tone of the last syllable. He was better than most at hiding his feelings, or more accurately, better at hiding from them.

I asked Roger to talk more about Karen working. He paused, his breath got shorter and his lips tightened slightly. I then asked him if he could feel anything in his mouth. His lips tightened more. I asked him to stay with what he was feeling. After a minute or so, he looked out the window and said, "I'm really pissed."

Roger wanted to be encouraging to his wife, but in fact he didn't like her working at all. I praised him for acknowledging what was true even though it was unpleasant.

The next time Roger came to see me, he was still angry and said he and his wife had been cold to each other all week. He talked more about his wife and was annoyed that she seemed happy in her new job. He said he felt more in touch with what was happening in him. He said he felt his anger. It seemed to me that there was something more.

When someone is speaking from his or her deeper feelings, or what is really true for them there is a certain quality that is difficult to describe but can be felt. The energy seems to change in the room. The truth has a certain ring. When Roger was expressing his anger, nothing rang.

I asked Roger if he could stay with the feeling of the sensations without words, noticing them as if they had nothing to do with his wife, but were more like a mysterious energy in him that he could explore. He said he would try. I asked him to close his eyes and notice what he was aware of. He said he was aware of anger. I asked him *where* he was aware of it. This confused him, and he said he didn't know, so I asked him if he could feel it in his feet and he said no. Then I asked him if he could feel it in his arms and he said no. I continued directing him until I came to his eyes. He replied, "A little," then quickly blurted, "My mouth. It's in my mouth." "Good." I said, "Stay with the feeling."

A few moments later, Roger's jaw started to shake. The shaking was strong and lasted about a minute. Then he said, "I'm afraid. I'm afraid she will leave me. An old boyfriend of hers works in the same company she is in and I'm afraid she will leave me for him." The fear was real for him. The depth and tone of his voice was unmistakable.

Roger, in running his company, had always been the one in control, and now with his wife, he was not. It felt intolerable to him. We continued delving into his sensations and he uncovered and confided feelings of jealousy and helplessness. I was moved by the extent of his vulnerability.

When Roger came to see me the next week his voice was cheerful and he looked years younger. His skin actually appeared a lighter color. He told me that he had shared his feelings with his wife, and as he was talking with her, he remembered the helplessness he had felt as a child when his father came home drunk and had terrorized him and his mother. Roger said that he and his wife had wept together. He said he they were closer now than they had been in years. Karen assured him there was absolutely nothing between her and the old boyfriend and that if it were important to him, she would look for another job. After being close with her, it was not an issue for him anymore.

Sometimes when I am working with a client, either during the session or afterwards, I start to feel angry or sad even though she didn't seem that way. This makes me wonder if something in me has tuned into her on a level below consciousness. The next time I am with her, I can direct my questioning with the feeling in mind, and often it turns out to be true, but not always. Even though I have a hunch, because of the work I have done in sensing, I have learned that I don't really know what is happening in her. When I have a questioning attitude, it creates space and possibilities in me as well as my client. When I think, "I know," it closes the doors.

Sensory Awareness is a practice in which I learned to be with each moment in a new and fresh way. Through sensing I discovered if I don't try to change things and can allow the natural development of a situation, the outcome is fresh, spontaneous and alive. I learned to trust the ongoing unfolding process, and realized that if I don't attempt to fix or help my client, a useful and appropriate response will come about by itself. The ability to not have to be in control or react is crucial to allowing the person I am with to begin to believe in her own inner intelligence and find her own process of healing.

I am endlessly grateful to have this practice and to be able to bring it into the world through my psychotherapy practice as well as leading classes in Sensory Awareness, Vipassana meditation and yoga asking students and clients questions like, "Can you feel your feet?" and "How is breathing now?"

Biography

Terry Ray, MA, LPC, is a licensed psychotherapist, has been a teacher of Vipassana meditation and Sensory Awareness for over 25 years in retreats, weekly sitting groups, private classes and at Naropa Institute. She is authorized to lead Sensory Awareness classes by Charlotte Selver and has served as President of the Sensory Awareness Leader's Guild. She may be reached at www.terryray.org.

My Experience with Charlotte Selver and Sensory Awareness

Barbara Cabott, Psy.D., LMT

Abstract

This article reflects Dr. Barbara Cabott's experiences with Charlotte Selver, over a span of 32 years. The author expresses the benefits received through Selver's work in Sensory Awareness, both at a personal level and a professional level. Case examples are included, showing how sensing is combined with Psychotherapy to benefit clients in private practice. Dr. Cabott takes you step by step through three sessions where sensory experiments facilitated change at a body, mind, emotional level, showing the power and authenticity of sensing and body mind interventions.

Keywords

Bioenergetic Therapy – Body Psyche Integration – Assimilation – Being with Clients

In 1972, I found my way to Charlotte Selver. I was a patient of Robert Zimmerman, M.D., Alexander Lowen's partner in Bio-energetic Therapy. Dr. Zimmerman recommended that I work with Charlotte because of my interest in movement. I was a Movement Therapist in a mental hospital at the time.

Finding Charlotte was a challenge, but I succeeded, and found myself sitting on the floor of the New York School of Social Research, once a week for many weeks, studying Sensory Awareness. I immediately felt that "ecstasy" was just around the corner with this amazing practice, if not immediately present. I studied with Charlotte at least once a year, every year, from 1972 until right before her death. During that time I had many deep experiences; of inner peace, a feeling of wholeness and integration within my entire organism, that felt natural and harmonious.

The work of Sensory Awareness, was so fresh and new, so organic, so natural, it made me feel at once alive and at rest—all in balance. I learned to come to sitting or standing, bringing all of myself with me. Such a novel, yet normal concept, brought me to the freshness of the present moment. I learned to sit, according to my natural design, to walk so I stepped on the ground, feeling the support underneath me, yet not coming down so hard I crushed everything beneath my feet, to catch balls, so that each catch was alive and new.

Charlotte had so many ways of introducing us to our body and its movement, and for listening and attending to the feedback from our movement to our senses, so that we learned totally from our own inner wisdom. In this connection we became whole. The integration that came with the wholeness was healing - not only to our bodies, but also to our psyche.

In my private practice as a Psychologist, I introduce sensing to clients, so that I may share the many gifts it brings. I encourage them to bring their attention to their senses, to allow the sensory feedback to "adjust" their bodies, and also their minds and emotions.

A therapy session with Dora illustrates adjusting body and mind through sensing. Dora wanted to own more of her personal power. We began with a bioenergetic grounding exercise. During this exercise, I observed Dora's legs were unstable and shaky. We moved to a sensory experiment.* I hoped she would gain a sense of balance and stability in her legs by connecting sensing to movement.

I asked Dora to come to lying and raise one leg slightly off the floor, then slowly return her leg to the support of the floor, yielding to the weight of gravity. Working alternately with each leg, I encouraged her to attend to her shifting weight. Attention focused in this way, and to the effects of gravity, fosters connections from senses to the brain and back to movement. Movement thus integrated becomes increasingly more organic, and we adjust to the task at hand, naturally. Next, Dora repeated the movement, bringing awareness to her bones. I encouraged an attitude of curiosity and pleasure towards the movement of her bones and muscles.

As we brought the experiment to a close, Dora reflected on her experience. "This is more honoring of the body, there is pleasure in following the movement, rather than using the legs as a machine to get you somewhere. This is more about transforming than fixing." When we returned to the bioenergetic grounding exercise she definitely showed more balance and stability. There was increased awareness as a result of paying attention to her legs at a cellular level. Through very simple experiments, the body, through sensing, becomes a lived metaphor for change and transformation.

Sensing also adds a deep dimension to therapy, bringing results words alone never could. A session with Alicia, on assimilation, exemplifies this. Charlotte often talked about "assimilating" and "taking in". We worked a lot with seeing (taking in the world), rather than looking, (pushing the world out). I often encourage clients to assimilate ideas, images, relationships, in the same way a plant takes in nutrients through its cells. I encourage them to take in and let their world nourish them, rather than push the world away. I teach how senses nourish the body, and feed our brain.

Alicia was acutely fearful of other's judgments of her. She saw all people as critical and harsh. One day, I asked her to look at my face and assimilate what she saw, to take me in like the plant takes in nutrients. (She was familiar with the metaphor). Alicia looked at me and said she felt tense because she saw me as judging and critical. I suggested she move around my office and find objects that took her attention. She chose a few objects, and one by one, felt their texture and weight. I encouraged her to take the objects into her cells, step by step. This exploration with sensing brought her into the present moment, below old conditioning of fear and judgment. Soon she felt more restful inside.

We sat together and repeated the face to face experiment. I invited her to take in my face, in the same way she had assimilated the objects in the office. Immediately the quality of her gaze shifted and her face relaxed. She said, “I see a caring person who is trying to help me”. This was a moment in therapy filled with true presence. A now moment where she took in the outer world without the hindrance of old filters. I was able to remain connected and join together with her experience. This moment of connection between client and therapist would be impossible to reach with words alone.

I can only imagine that new sensations rippled through Alicia’s nervous system in gentle streams of energy, registering in her brain, “this face, this person is safe”. Alicia, as with Dora, experienced this in her cells. It became a total experience, not an idea in her mind. Soon after this session, she stopped her anti-anxiety medication, which she had been taking for three years, and has remained medication free for a year now. The body and sensing became allies toward healing.

In being with my clients, I know to attend to sitting, to notice whether I am grounded in my feet, or holding tension in my shoulders. I remind myself, through sensing, to listen and adjust, so that I can be fully present with my clients. If the therapy process seems “stuck”, we engage in some simple practices, like tapping, or working with rocks or sandbags, and sensing how they effect us. Often, new and innovative insights come from these simple experiments that “wake up” both mind and body.

A session with Max illustrates this well. He talked of wanting to be a ‘good boy’, of rushing around in his mind to the next thing so he could please everyone else. He said, “I can’t sit still.” I asked him if he could remain at rest in the session, without feeling pressured to ‘get’ somewhere or ‘do’ something. He found this uncomfortable, because images came up about his mother, and he felt very sad about how much of his life was devoted to pleasing her.

I offered an experiment with sandbags. Sandbags are small squares of silk, filled with sand, which we used in Charlotte’s classes. They offer a great versatility in sensing. I handed Max a sandbag, and I took one also. Before we started the experiment, he said he wanted to throw the sandbag, but was fearful of following his wish. I encouraged him to do so, and we threw sandbags back and forth. Throwing sandbags almost always, and immediately, wakes up the mind and body, bringing the client’s attention to the experience of the present moment.

On one of the catches, I asked Max to let the sandbag fall into his hand, and notice how he received its weight. He felt the weight for a few moments, then burst into sobbing. “I just needed to play with my Mom, he said, I love to play, I need to play”. And he did. Attention and feeling the weight of gravity often ‘melts’ tenseness in the body, freeing feelings. The session ended there. Max wanted to leave the session by throwing his sandbag to me.

Max’s experience opened a window to deep layers of his psyche and emotions. Throwing the sandbags brought his senses alive, raising his vitality. His interaction with me gave him a different experience than the one he had with his Mother. Our next step was to integrate his experience with words, giving it context and meaning. The ability to integrate differing parts of the nervous system, the verbal, emotional and somatic, is the strength of body mind therapies, and sensing is a powerful avenue to integration.

In my personal life, and in my Professional practice, I am deeply indebted to Charlotte for her teaching. Her experiments in sensing were presented with pristine clarity and her words describing “how it should be” if we were truly sensing were like a finely polished diamond. I have great respect and awe for how she taught this very subtle, yet powerful practice. It has made my life qualitatively different, from that moment in the New York studio in 1972, until the “Celebration of Her Life Workshop” in San Francisco in 2003.

* Charlotte introduced sensing through “experiments”, as distinguished from exercises. We were experimenting, like explorers discovering the vast terrain within us that held our untapped potential.

Biography

Dr. Barbara Cabott is a licensed Psychologist and licensed Massage Therapist, in private practice in Portland, Oregon. She studied with many of the pioneers in the somatic therapy movement during the 70’s and 80’s. Her vision has been to bring these revolutionary practices into the mainstream of Psychology. Following that vision, she pursued a Doctorate in Psychology, with a thesis that focused on the neuroscientific underpinnings of alternative therapies. She practices Holistic Psychotherapy, a blend of body-mind integration, art and sandtray, hypnosis and EMDR.. She is currently completing a book dedicated to the synthesis of neuroscientific research and Holistic Therapy. She can be reached at bibc@imagina.com

Sensing is the Heart of Contact

Ginger Clark, PhD, MFT

Abstract

Sensory Awareness or “sensing” is fundamental to the practice of relational somatic psychotherapy, both for the therapist and the client. Two cases illustrate how sensing prepares the ground for attuned contact with the bodyself and with another. In this sense, sensing is both a means and an end.

Keywords

Relational Somatic Psychotherapy – Voice Dialogue – Inner Child - Contact

The work that Charlotte Selver introduced me to over thirty years ago continues to unfold in me as part of my personal and professional practice. As a relational somatic psychotherapist, I use sensing to help my clients and myself come more into the embodied moment. For, the moment is where change occurs. When I am more in contact with breathing, with what is under me and with what I am feeling throughout my bodyself, I am more available to sense what is happening in the other. As I become more available for contact with the other in the moment, a resonance or connection is possible. This sense of attunement is often experienced by the other as my caring or being interested in him/her and by the other as his/her being “seen” by me. When the experience of being seen is embodied or sensed in the bodyself, the other experiences more aliveness and at the same time, relief from the alienation from his/her bodyself and from others.

For example, when I first started working with Abel, his answer to the question, “What do you feel in your body right now?” would be an apologetic “Nothing!” A bright, articulate fellow, Abel felt embarrassed and inadequate at not being able to come up with more of an answer than that. Even rolling a tennis ball under each foot, one at a time and then standing did not improve his sensing contact with the floor. Then as we engaged in tapping ourselves all over, I noticed he came back to his jaw for more concentrated tapping. When I invited him to allow, “What is needed now”, he spontaneously let himself “come to hanging” (allowing the weight of his upper body and head to bring him to ‘bending over’). Afterwards, I asked him what he experienced. In addition to feeling tingling in his hands, he said he noticed how sensitively painful and tight his jaw area was, like he was “holding everything together” right there. Given the opportunity for sensing the answer to the question “What does it want?” he found he did indeed feel something of his bodyself. Becoming engaged in tapping seemed to have brought him more into his bodyself moment. His eyes were brighter – his curiosity was aroused. He was eager for more discoveries.

The next session, we experimented with “voice dialogue” which involved his sensing deeply into his abdomen and speaking from there. After a time he touched the pain and vulnerability of his childhood. He later commented that he had up until now poooh-pooohed the notion of “inner child” but having had this direct experience of the sadness and isolation he once felt and was feeling now, he was reconsidering that judgment. He sensed what he called the “truth” coming from this abdominal center. At the end of the work I sensed we were experiencing a few moments of connection as we looked at each other. Curious about what he was experiencing in those moments, I asked him. He replied, “I am feeling a little trust”. (The significant word in that sentence is “trust”, not “little”!) I believe the combination of my attuned presence and the sensing work in this and the previous session allowed him to become more grounded in his bodyself experience, which supported experiencing deeper contact with me.

The richness of work with Vida over the past three years was a direct result of the foundation that was laid doing sensing work with her. Vida, like I had, thirty-five years ago, lived entirely “in her head”. She came to therapy because of a deep depression following a break-up of a long-term relationship. We first worked with her coming into a sense of the support that what is under her and her breathing offered. She was amazed at how much less anxious she felt when she could sense her bodyself as she was sitting. Suggestions like the following helped her come more into bodyself connection: “What do you sense of your toes? Try moving them a little! What do you sense of your breathing? How much space does it want?” Then when she felt more bodyself connected, she would say with a delighted look on her face, “It is like magic!”

Gradually, as she was able to come more and more often into touch with her bodyself, she was able to be in the room with me. That is, the support she was able to feel through awareness of breathing and her weight helped her to feel the energy of contact with me. She could really see me and experience eye contact for relatively long periods of time without losing herself by going into her head. At the same time she allowed herself to be seen by me, something quite unfamiliar for her and heretofore, avoided. She had survived an abusive childhood by attempting to make herself invisible. As she put it she was afraid to “make a mark” or even a sound. She used to keep herself cold, so as to not feel anything but her contraction. “Take up as little space as possible” was her credo.

The more she felt seen and valued by me, the more she became known to herself. As her heart opened to herself, she could experience hours of “just being” whether she was walking along the beach, experiencing the wind, the water and the sand or just sitting on her bed. As we worked with standing, sounding, kicking and pushing she became more assertive. Eventually she had the experience of anger. She had known by analyzing her behavior that she must be angry, but she had not

dared experience her anger. For that she needed to experience the containment of a bodyself and contact with an attuned other.

As she became more embodied, she could set boundaries and reach out thus increasing her capacity for deep contact with others. She could tolerate disappointment more readily. She had access to her life energy and desire. As her relationship with her bodyself became more intimate, this aspect of her experiencing sometimes seemed to take on its own personality, which she referred to as “my little self”. She could come home to herself and she could reach out for connection. She could self-soothe with sensing or turn to another. She made her mark in her apartment by painting the walls and buying a special mug for herself. And finally, when she felt cold she was able to turn on the heat! In short, grounded in her bodyself experience she came more fully into the world.

In sum, sensing is a means to strengthen bodyself awareness for contact as well as sensing is contacting. Sensing is both a means and an end: Contact is sensing with the heart and at the heart of contact is sensing.

Biography

Ginger Clark, PhD, MFT started working with Charlotte Selver in 1971 and was a member of the first long-term study group from 1972-73. She has nearly forty years' experience practicing and teaching various mindbody disciplines and was schooled on a doctoral level in both psychological and physiological aspects of human functioning at UCLA. She practices relational somatic psychotherapy in Venice, California and is a certified leader of Sensory Awareness practice. She has nearly finished writing a book on three listening practices that strengthen bodyself awareness, capacity for self-soothing and living fully.

How Charlotte Selver Has Influenced My Work

Richard Lowe, MA, MFT

Abstract

In this article I describe how I was first attracted to the work of Charlotte Selver, known as Sensory Awareness, my assessment of Charlotte Selver's importance, her work's correspondence to psychotherapy, and how her work has influenced my work as an integrative psychotherapist.

Keywords

Direct Sensory Experimentation – Embodied – Fuller Organismic Responsiveness
Human Potential Movement

In the early 1970's after many years of Bioenergetic therapy and exploring various forms of what was then called "body work" I was fortunate to discover the work of Charlotte Selver known as Sensory Awareness. I found her way of working a breath of fresh air. Instead of being treated with techniques or being told what I was experiencing, or being told the right way to be, she led students in sensory experiments designed to help deepen awareness and responsiveness to actual sensations in the moment. This deceptively simple yet profound approach intrigued me as I gradually gained a fresher and more empowered sense of myself and of life.

Over the course of my many years of study with Charlotte and her husband Charles Brooks their skillful use of direct sensory experimentation helped me as well as most of the other students I observed becoming progressively more embodied and truly present. During this process it became clear that there were certain habitual tensions, attitudes and ways of perceiving things that were restricting my authentic aliveness. Over time, with keener awareness and fuller organismic responsiveness, these restrictions diminished more and more into the background as my sensing became progressively more awake, and as I became more oriented to the real world instead of the habitual world of my projections and inaccurate perceptions.

Charlotte was one of the most influential pioneers in the Human Potential and somatic movements. Yet I believe her true importance has gone largely unappreciated because she was so resistant to writing about her work. This was frustrating to many of her students, me included. Charlotte was loathe to define how she worked and would bristle at any suggestion that her work involved techniques, methods or exercises. Her way of teaching was mostly Socratic and experimental, asking questions and devising experiments through which students would discover in their own way and in their own time.

I must confess I can sympathize with her now as I struggle to describe how she has influenced my work as a psychotherapist. She did not train anybody but rather taught by example. The best way I can put it now is that my work with her has instilled certain principles in me that effect and inform what I do with my clients:

- 1 The way we show up in the world is a result of our attitudes and perceptions which are embodied in our very tissues as well as in our breath, our relationship to gravity and in our movement. These dynamics give shape to our sense of reality and thus shape our life.
- 2 The organism has profound wisdom particularly the more we can be more fully awake to it. It greatly helps, therefore, to rediscover this wisdom by developing through practical experience the capacity to more deeply sense the here-and-now realm of organismic reality.
- 3 It's important to help people experience that they are much more than merely a mind and much more than merely a body. We are usually in our imaginations or caught in our thoughts. All of us need to be more fully awake to what this person, this occasion asks of us. What is it to really show up and be more truly responsive to what life brings to us? Powerful changes in how we relate to our environment and to others happen when we are more fully present.
- 4 Encourage the person to stay with what is actually being experienced and let it develop and change. Help the person become aware of when and how he/she compulsively moves away from sensing. Becoming aware of how, when and where we are not sensing is an important part of becoming more alive.
- 5 "Body work", psychotherapy, and various forms of personal and spiritual growth, etc. can become traps in which a person becomes self absorbed and removed from real relating with others. Truer sensing and aliveness necessarily involve developing deeper relationships.
- 6 Experiments/experiences that involve real play are often the richest, for underneath the mask of adulthood lies the liveliness of the child within. Reawakening a sense of wholehearted being is essential to real health.

Currently I am not leading groups and mostly work with individual adults as well as couples and children. Many of the clients I see have initially no conscious desire to explore the quality of their sensing. In these cases I gradually introduce ways of exploring their perception as it relates to their presenting problem(s) and is appropriate to their situation. I usually devise experiments for clients to explore in session, and have found it quite helpful to give experiments to take home to try

out. Clients who are able to use a journal in combination with their “homework” experiments find the combination particularly productive. The element of writing to the self and from the self helps stimulate greater awareness and honesty.

As a psychotherapist I have found many fruitful relationships between Sensory Awareness and various psychotherapeutic approaches. For example, in the Humanistic/Existential work of Jim Bugental with its emphasis on deepening presence, with Adlerian Therapy with its stress on the importance of social interest, with Cognitive Behavioral’s focus on the dynamics of perception, the felt-sense Focusing work of Eugene Gendlin, the processing of here-and-now experiencing in Gestalt Therapy and in Virginia Satir’s work. There are many more such correspondences which I believe only lend evidence that Sensory Awareness, Charlotte Selver’s legacy, is a basic key to the development of human potential and real somatic health.

Biography

Richard Lowe, MA,MFT is a psychotherapist in private practice in San Rafael and Novato, CA, who specializes in Integrative psychotherapy with adults, couples and children. He studied with Charlotte Selver for over 15 years and was the first president of the Sensory Awareness Leaders Guild.

Sensory Awareness, Creative Expression, and Healing

Connie Smith Siegel, MFA

Abstract

This article describes the use of art to address personal issues, using a process called Self-Guidance in Drawing and Color. This process combines creative expression with Sensory Awareness, revealing an elemental body language that not only expresses strong emotion in line, shape and color, but transforms them as well.

Keywords

Sensory Awareness – Fine Art – Self-guidance in Drawing and Color
Person Centered Expressive Therapy

The organism has these innate possibilities of renewing relationships, of balancing out, of healing, of recreating. This is not what we do, but these are properties of the organism since birth-they are inborn, inbuilt. Charlotte Selver, [Learning Through Sensing](#)

As a graduate student and later professor of fine art, I felt that art should never be used for anything other than self-expression. I was especially critical of the field of art therapy and the use of art to diagnose disorders. Yet now, more than thirty years later, I find myself deeply involved in a therapeutic process called Self-Guidance in Drawing and Color that uses art to express and transform difficult personal issues. Through this creative process each person can access an inner wisdom in response to their problems-they can become their own healer, their own oracle. Far from diminishing, I have discovered that the focus on healing can expand aesthetic possibilities.

The doorway for these discoveries and shift of attitude did not come initially from therapy, but from the practice of Sensory Awareness. From the first classes with Charlotte on Monhegan Island in 1966 to her last in the house on Muir Beach, her cultivation of attention-listening to inner sensations and allowing natural responses -has profoundly influenced my life and work.

This influence revolutionized my teaching when I offered classes in 1972 to fellow students in a long-term study group in Sensory Awareness. Because they rejected my university drawing exercises, we evolved a simpler process of drawing. Beginning with closed eyes we simply noticed the subtle sensations inherent in the drawing process itself, such as breathing and the touch of our hands on the paper. As we worked we discovered that these ordinary sensations generated a wealth of abstract forms and colors-a primal, body language unique to each person, immediately accessible. This language revealed emotional feeling states-elemental forces, which could find their natural balance: opposites could be integrated, and differences reconciled. I later evolved a method of choosing color chips from a pile that could further clarify the feeling states expressed in the drawings.

In order to move this dynamic process into specific life issues, I developed the process called Self-Guidance in Drawing and Color. My former husband, a doctor and therapist, helped create a three-part structure, which allowed people to define their issue. If the issue was healing, they would feel the discomfort or pain as inner sensation and then draw with closed eyes. After seeing this first drawing, people would draw a second and third drawing, with no intention, allowing a natural response. The three drawings that emerge from this process demonstrate the natural movement of energy, in response to the discomfort. They reflect an important dynamic inherent in Charlotte's work-by sensing what is real in the moment, change can happen by itself, without expectation or intention. We are not here to change our nature, but to let it unfold by itself. This spontaneous movement of energy is awesome, especially with emotional states such as anger and loss. Sometimes these energetic movements create dramatic shifts of consciousness.

I witnessed such a transformation with a professional woman who was deeply confused, unable to function in her life. This state was reflected in the fragmented forms in the first drawing. The somber tomb-like form that appeared in her second drawing evoked an overwhelming sense of being buried alive in an abusive marriage. In the third drawing the tomb-like form exploded into vigorous strokes of black and red, with the words "leave me alone." This dynamic fire of anger, expressed freely in this way, led to renewed vitality and a final drawing of large, rhythmic forms in orange, red and blue, with the words, "dancing with the rhythms." After a difficult separation, she found joy and a new life for herself, which included dancing. The drawing and color sequence allowed her to acknowledge her profound despair, and anger. In breaking through her denial of these strong emotions she could be energized by them, and to move into lighter expressions.

The pattern of movement from heavy to light I have just described is common to many situations. In the illustration here we can observe a parallel pattern in another person as the elemental qualities of fire and earth evoked by rage (1, 2) move by stages into the lighter elements of air and water (3,4).



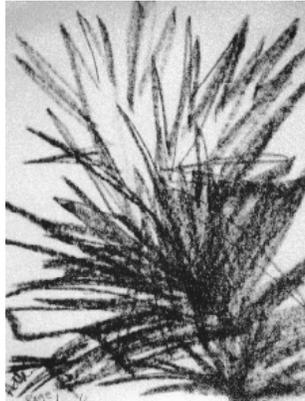
1



2



3



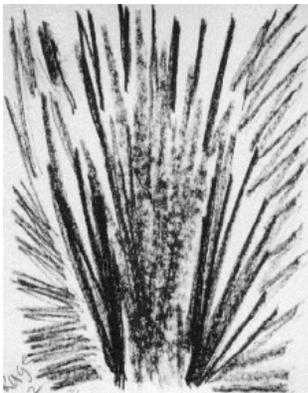
4

Illustration

These four drawings are called Rage. In this series the fire of rage is expressed (1), becomes contained by earth, (2), and disperses into rambling loops of air and water (3,4).

1

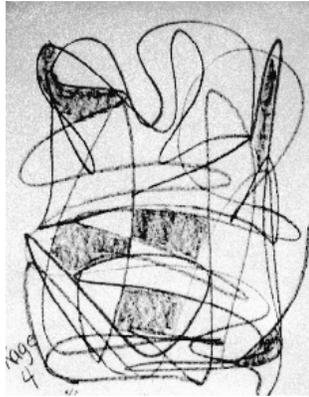
But every situation is different and unpredictable. In a response to a deep betrayal in a marriage, another person drew a dark hard knot of pain, isolated and alone in the middle of the page (5). In the second drawing this isolated form evolved downward into a vertical tower, grounded in the earth (6). The third drawing reinforced this stable form, giving her strength to meet a difficult separation (7).



5



6



7

Illustration

These three drawings are called Pain. A hard knot of pain and anger expressed in drawing 5 becomes vertical in drawing 6 and moves into a tower of strength in drawing 7.

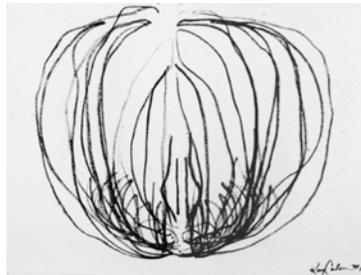
2

In fully owning the elemental power inherent in anger and pain, we can allow the balancing response—we can witness our natural tendency toward wholeness. In the middle of personal chaos we can recognize the deep sense of order in the world.

Along with this individual work I have presented the Self-Guidance process in graduate programs and in healing contexts. The inclusion of movement, sound, and poetry in the process was reinforced as I studied and taught in the certificate program in Person Centered Expressive Therapy, founded by Natalie Rogers. Working with people in the context of the peace and environmental movement has been especially moving to me. Witnessing the balancing of elemental forces in response to conflict and war has given concrete evidence that the reconciliation of opposites is not just a hope, but also the fulfillment of an urge for wholeness. As we can see from the drawings from a conference, (8,9,10), peace is not just a concept, but also an entirely natural state of being, a dynamic equilibrium, intensely creative.



8



9



10

Illustration

These three drawings are called War. Kay's first drawing of a skull evoked by war (8) evolved into a globe (9), and finally into a sacred grove of trees, a personal place of peacemaking. (10).

3

The use of creative expression is especially effective on those occasions when there are no words to express the enormity of the feeling. This is especially true when we have lost a loved one through death. After expressing a dark mass of grief following her father's death, one woman was startled by the fiery explosion of rage in the second drawing. She found a soothing relief in the gentle, blue strokes of water of the last drawing. Another person, after losing both of her much loved parents in the same year, used the process to choose colors and draw from each. From the bright blues and reds of her father to the bright yellow sun in her mother's drawing, her parent's qualities became alive in the moment, still vibrant in her.

Vocational issues can be addressed as well. An artist overwhelmed by the demands of his job expressed his frustration with a sharp form resembling a decayed tooth. As he experienced the drawing through movement, the contracted form began to expand until the lines grew progressively lighter, almost flying off the page. His courage in fully acknowledging frustration led to a renewal of energy, a reminder of his creative fire. Within a few months he adjusted his work schedule, allowing more time for his painting.

I have used the Self-Guidance process to address many other issues, from the trauma following sexual assault to the challenges of breast cancer. Drawing and color not only gives shape and form to often unspeakable traumas, but also can spontaneously generate a balancing, life-affirming response. As I continue to witness these responses I find a renewed trust in our natural wisdom, and the inherent order of the world.

Although many meditation disciplines, personal and group therapy have contributed to the Self-Guidance process, the practice of Sensory Awareness continues to be the primary foundation of this work. Charlotte's conviction that we embody the wisdom and power of the natural world has supported and inspired my own research. Her enduring fascination with our sensory experience has revealed the inner source of creative expression-always different, always alive. In sharing her fascination with human life Charlotte was a artist in her own right, waking up our sensations in the same way a musician might pluck the strings of an instrument. She could feel the pulse of a group much like a conductor, always listening, improvising. She opened us to the wonder of our own nature-not only the capacity for joy, but the inner resources we have to meet difficult situations. The work in the classes was clearly restorative, and yet Charlotte never described her work as therapeutic. She often declared firmly at the beginning of a workshop, "We are not here to cure symptoms, or to relieve pain, but to simply become aware of our own functioning." We became aware of our own sensations as if resonating with a painting, poem or musical piece, with no expectations, no judgments. Through this awareness we could find ourselves regenerated in subtle, but powerful ways. Colors and tactile sensations could be more vivid, and we might feel a kind of inner peace. This fuller sense of living not only relieves pain and trauma, but over time, prevents it, in the same way prevention may be the most enduring value of the Self-Guidance process.

Although I have been astonished by the effectiveness of art in directly addressing difficult life issues, perhaps the greatest discovery for me has been to appreciate again the healing powers inherent in art, just for its own sake. As we choose a color, make a line, or build a pot, we are speaking an intimate language of sensation-a universal language of touch, movement, space, seeing, weight and gravity, available to everyone. These direct sensations create a lively dialogue with elemental forces - we can see our nature reflected in the world, perfect in all its manifestations. Much like Charlotte's dedicated invitations to awareness, we are reminded that we are whole beings-not alone, but always supported and nourished by the natural world.

Biography

Connie Smith Siegel is an exhibiting landscape artist who has taught drawing and painting at the University of Colorado, California Institute for Integral Studies, Esalen Institute and the Department of Art and Consciousness at John F. Kennedy University. She has been a long-term student of Sensory Awareness and has worked extensively with movement, sound improvisation, poetry, and expressive art therapies. She is writing a book called *The Natural Language of Drawing and Color*, which combines drawing, color, Sensory Awareness and healing. She may be reached at 215 Central, Box 262, Woodacre, CA 84873. Email cssiegel@cwnet.com or 415-488-4497.

Sensory Awareness and Graduate School: Reflections of a Grateful Student

Suzanne Kilkus, MA

Abstract

This article offers reflections on a course in Sensory Awareness that was part of the graduate curriculum in a somatic psychology program. The student's perspective includes the effects of sensory awareness practice on personal and professional development, clinical practice and academic support.

Keywords

Sensory Awareness – Santa Barbara Graduate Institute – Integrative Learning
Synergistic Learning – Physical Sensation

In the fall of 2000 I began my PhD coursework with the Santa Barbara Graduate Institute (SBGI). I was a member of the inaugural class in the Somatic Psychology program. I had been a self guided student of somatic psychology in the context of my clinical practice as a therapist for many years. I had taken a number of trainings and personal development programs and wanted to formalize my studies with a PhD. One of the core courses of the program was Sensory Awareness (As the program has evolved, so has the content of this course and it is no longer in the form written about here). As I was attracted to SBGI due to their philosophy of integrative and synergistic learning, I imagined that an integral aspect of our coursework would be experiential. I was curious how experiential learning and academic rigor would be blended and how this course in Sensory Awareness, that ran through all three years of study, would impact my learning and support the development of our academic discipline. Having recently completed my coursework, I can say I experienced this core course as a strong foundation for the rigors of my academic experience, which involved over 24 hours of class per monthly weekend, an airline commute between the Midwest and California and the abundance of study and writing required for the 4 - 5 courses during each quarter. My intention in writing this article is to describe my process of learning in the Sensory Awareness (SA) classes, the effects this experience had on my personal and academic development as well as my clinical practice and to honor the work of Charlotte Selver and the teachers in her lineage. The reflections offered are chosen from papers written to describe the experiences of the classes.

During the SA class of the first weekend of courses, I became very aware of the state of my being. We were invited by our teacher to come to standing from our seated position and to take a half hour to do so paying attention to the sensory process. I found this to be a physically painful experience. About this I wrote, **“Throughout the whole weekend I felt physical resistance reflecting my ambivalence about being here. I had made a commitment to myself to pay close attention to my inner experience and to act authentically from it. In the past, in new situations, I might have pretended positiveness, acted on what I thought was socially expected of me or what might get social approval and say and do things I didn’t mean or intend. Listening to my body, being truthful about my ambivalence, and staying in contact with my sensations, painful as they were, kept me on the path of authentic action and new experience.”** During the month that followed these first classes of sensory awareness I noticed a change. **“Since that first weekend I have noticed a shift in my awareness of sensation. I have discovered another “room” in the house of my being. It is a room without walls, floors or boundaries of any sort. I name it as the room of unified experience with all life. In tuning into my sensate potential I am aware of oneness. In my years of meditating I have thought that it is through focusing in my mind that I experience oneness with all. I am discovering that through non-judgmental attention of physical sensation I touch into experiences of cosmic proportions. I now know that instead of transcending my body, I am entering body-being and coming alive, stepping into the universe and finding my ground.”** While sensory awareness can be experienced in any moment, I noticed at times there was a process of preparation and engagement with it.

After a few months of practice I wrote this. **“The invitation is nothing short of monumental. I travel halfway across the country to attend graduate school. I’m faced with academic and intellectual challenges that require significant energy and attention. I continue to make the transition from 22 years of professional practice to student life. But when I am faced with the invitation into sensory awareness, I feel my body erupt with fear and panic, my breath shortens and I think momentarily that I’ll never be able to do it. I’m curious about the unfolding of this little drama. Why, with so many other seemingly more demanding tasks at hand, would paying attention to my internal experience be so formidable?”** From this point on I found fear as an occasional and interesting companion in my practice. **“Being able to acknowledge and stay with fear, experience the panic and watch my thought process becomes part of the whole experience of tuning into my senses.”** Appreciation is an apt container for the process of awareness otherwise judgment and criticism will take up residence and draw attention away from the sensual life. I discovered that I could not be critical towards myself or others and sensitively engaged at the same time.

These reflections also included noticing the effects of greater sensory awareness in my life and studies. I made this observation. **“One powerful effect of my heightened sensory awareness is an increased ability to understand and**

integrate what I am studying. I read something and I take it into my whole body. I spend time with an idea or a practice and I somatically learn it. I was recently reading a piece about relationship as a spiritual path. The description used the metaphor of a stone dropped into a pond and the ripples created from that action. I not only held that image, I became the stone, the ripple, and the pond. I felt the wave action in my body; I experienced the boundlessness of a bottomless lake, the solidity and history of the stone. I knew the concept intellectually, and I lived it fully in that moment. To have my whole sensory experience available for learning on this level accelerates my learning, gives dimensionality to the materials, and produces creative ideas and processes. Potentials in me are being tapped and mined. My learning contributes to others learning in new ways. I'm experiencing what feels like a well of pristine water coming from a continuous wellspring deep in the earth of my body."

Contact and connections with others became rich palettes of colorful engagement. Out of an experience of non-verbal contact, while exploring the hand of another, came this reflection. **"In the conscious presence of another person, I expand who I am. Exploring with sight, touch, smell and feel, the hand of another, and then to have that reciprocated, was an insightful task of meeting and revealing. Touching without speaking activated core sensual connections. Being aware of myself while being aware of the other, who was being aware of me while being aware of himself, created the basic energetic dance of human existence. Poetry, art, literature, sculpture, music, and dance all formed in the moments of attending to the exquisite beauty of hand on hand, finger pads and life lines across palms. The common hand becomes a Michelangelo work of art, never to be seen and felt the same again."**

I paid attention to the variety of pathways to the consciousness of sensory awareness. A few months later out of a SA process of maintaining focus on myself while connecting with others, I observed, **"I felt an urge to leave my personal awareness, to distract my own discoveries with my search for others. I decided to continue somatic presencing out of a stronger desire to become as grounded in myself as possible so that all my actions came from authentic impulse and not reactive distraction. I noticed thoughts and fears of being "left out" as I heard others engage while I stayed with myself. My body began feeling solid, clear and responsive. And then I noticed an impulse from deep within for contact and began with opening my eyes and using sight to gently touch my friend across the room. It quickly grew into a joyous meeting of hands and hearts. From that point on any contact I made with another was sheer delight. I felt larger than myself each time I contacted another as the energy exchanged created something larger than the sum of our individual signatures. Laughter erupted from my belly and chest and there was a non linear sense of time as all moments became somatic connection."**

At this point in the chronology of my coursework, the tragic events of September 11 occurred. The inner resources I had developed through my sensory awareness practice were invaluable in the soul searching and meaning making I attempted at that time. I wrote, **"It is in my senses that I experience the deepest connections with life. This is my deepest longing and yet, I am quick to numb my senses as I attempt to make sense – cognitively – out of the events of the world. The weekend after the bombing when I couldn't attend classes, I read Pema Chodron's book, *When Things Fall Apart*. As I read I cried. Her words were jarring in their starkness and soothing in their comfort. I realize that my practice in sensory awareness is making me more human. It is giving me access to what makes me most human, my ability to feel life consciously from within. When I let myself cry with sadness and fear, grief and anger, I am fully in myself and I know on an ever deepening level that expanding my ability to do this contributes to the healing of all life around me."**

Sensory awareness practice alerts me to when I've used my body as a warehouse to store my daily experiences and invites me to redesign myself as a windmill, moving energy in and out in creative ways which in turn produces more energy for my use. Bringing this attitude and resource into clinical practice forms the quality of my contact with the client. Here is one session description. **"She walks into the room, dressed in brightly colored fall fleece. The hat covering her head could be indicating the coolness of the outdoor temperature, but we both know that it tells the story of hair loss from the year-long chemotherapy treatments from breast cancer. She has come to see me because she wants to "make friends with her breath." She describes the tangle she feels inside as her breath tries to find its way through the passage from the outside world to her inside world. She expresses dismay as if reporting struggles with a contrary child, an indication of her inner critic admonishing her for this effort. I notice that her breath is high in her chest, her shoulders are slumped over around her solar plexus and her lower back slouched in the chair protruding her abdomen forward. With her permission I ask her to begin noticing her breath without judgment – to ask her inner critic to stand down for the moment. She closes her eyes and turns inside. I ask her to sense her breath as it enters and leaves her body. I watch her shoulder tension ease as she visibly relaxes. She tells me the details of the streaming sensations, of the coolness as she inhales and the warmth as she exhales. With this description come more details of her attempts to take herself back out into the world as the new person she is in the aftermath of her cancer. The session unfolds from here as a weaving of somatic/sensory awareness, emotional coloring of her experience, her psychological understanding, and her changing perspective of who she is and wants to be."**

As I meet with clients I notice a change in my language, wanting to be more precise in my invitation to awareness. Where I use to suggest "observe", I now often use "sense" or "feel", and I notice a qualitative difference in the response I receive; which, in turn, leads deeper into the transformative experience being sought.

In addition my clinical presence is enhanced by my somatic awareness. **"I may begin with 'watching' my breathing, both from the outside and on the inside. That experience can best be described in metaphor. It's like watching the fire flame from a candle. I see the dancing movement and the heat rising from the tip of the flame against a reflected surface. When I shift my focus to sensing my breath, I feel the coolness of air pass into my nostrils, streaming along**

my nasal passage, down the back of my throat. The inflation of my lungs stretches my torso. I feel the muscle fiber extend to its ends. As my breath deepens I feel slight tightness in my lower intercostals muscles as they stretch into their potential. After a few breaths, the tightness eases and the stretch feels elastic in its pull and contraction. I am inside the flame dancing. I am the heat rising. I am the fire burning. This is the difference between perspective and experience. Both of these aspects of human consciousness inform thought and action. Alone, perspective without experience is empty, cool, flat, and requires external validation. And experience without perspective can be chaotic, unconscious, closed to learning, and potentially discouraging. Integrate the two and I see and feel the fire. I know and dance the flame. I generate and enjoy the heat.”

I am indebted to my Sensory Awareness teacher, Judyth Weaver, for her vision, patience, clear direction and guidance without an agenda. I know myself and live more vibrantly because of Charlotte Selver’s vision and unwavering commitment to the development of human potential through directly experiencing our lives through our senses. Her legacy lives on in each of her students and her students’ students. Sir Isaac Newton said that if we see farther it is by standing on the shoulders of giants. Charlotte Selver was a giant of heart, intention, focus and contribution. I am one of the many who are grateful for the nourishment of her life’s work.

Biography

Suzanne Kilkus, MA, has recently completed her coursework for a PhD in Somatic Psychology at the Santa Barbara Graduate Institute. She is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist having trained with The Family Therapy Institute of St. Paul, MN. She is certified in body centered therapy and relationship transformation with the Hendricks Institute in CA. She is in private practice in Madison, Wisconsin. You can reach her with comments at heartspace@ameritech.net or at 55 Waunona Woods Ct., Madison, WI 53713

Epilogue

Charles V. W. Brooks

Reprinted with permission from Sensory Awareness: The Rediscovery of Experiencing (1974), Epilogue. New York, Viking pp 225-226.

Keywords

Respect – Common Humanity - Aliveness

In working together even for very short periods in sensory awareness, a group of people develop a sense of respect and affection for one another which is not often met with. For we are working on our common humanity, on those fundamental attributes which antedate our many divergent cultures. Though our groups seldom afford the drama (and melodrama) of “encounter groups,” with their verbal confrontation, a very direct and deep meeting of people, in sensitivity and quiet emotional honesty, is possible, using no techniques, in the usual sense, at all. In the longer workshops, many of our students form good and friendly relations with people in the community, no matter how conservative the community may be in other respects. For we are beginning to lose our ideas about our behavior and beginning to feel how our behavior is. Though our work, in its nature, tends to subvert and undermine every institution, it is only to let in the fresh air and sunshine which institutions keep out. To become a little more human; and as he accepts a little, he becomes able to accept more. Finally he finds he can accept the city with the country, or the country with the city, and the night with the day.

As I have said, despite the immediate delights, the work is slow. Distraction alternates with perception, and resistance with insight. The attention flags, one tires. The road can seldom be direct, so we must be prepared for detours. In other words, our sessions are work and require discipline. But if the discipline is imposed by the leader, it will defeat its purpose. He must instead, by his own presence and experience (or, lacking that, by his skill) arouse the interest in the group which will guide their attention and tide them over the shallows.

We have, therefore, a difficult task, though a delightful one. We must seek the aliveness in ourselves which awakens it in others. If we instruct and explain, we do what has already been done in our usual education, even when it seems to contradict this education on the surface. We merely substitute a new authority for the old. If we play games, using techniques which we have found are sensational, we fall into another pit, where perhaps everyone has had fun, but little insight has been gained. Of the two sidetracks, the first may have an intellectual influence, with possibly some political or social value, while the second may shake people out of certain habits and entice them into new pleasures which may be felt as liberating. I myself have oscillated between these two sidetracks in years of teaching. But it is like that muddy water which often must be pumped from a well before the clear water flows. And the fact that the muddy water may be useful does not mean that one should not continue to seek the clear. When the clear water begins to come (and it may come, and disappear for long periods, and come again), it is unmistakable.

Such clear water, flowing everywhere among a group of people, may-as Charlotte says it is her only task to do-penetrate through their skins and stir them awake.

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Editor
USA Body Psychotherapy Journal
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