

## BOOK REVIEW

# The New Collected Papers of Biodynamic Psychology, Massage and Psychotherapy: 2022

E-book edited by Courtenay Young

Mark Ludwig

**S**cholars and students of somatic psychology and psychology have just received an enormous legacy gift. With the e-publication of *The New Collected Papers of Biodynamic Psychology, Massage & Psychotherapy: 2022* we are presented a uniquely valuable, large, and accessible archive of writings from the beginning of the modern body psychotherapy movement. I believe it is safe to say that not many readers of this review, outside the Biodynamic communities, have ever seen or read any of these 150 articles, which were written and published between 1970 and 2022. Their voices tell the story of a vibrant professional community engaged in serious collegial exchange on essential questions still under discussion today within our larger community: the essential processes of regulation; models of organismic integration; the qualities of bio-energy; the science underlying clinical practice, work with the self-righting capacity of clients; the role of emotional expression in psychological health; the relationship between psychodynamics and biodynamics; vegetative resonance in therapy; and the impact of instrumental touch on psychological states, among others.

Perhaps because we somatic psychotherapists sometimes identify ourselves as a branch of *psychotherapy*, it's somewhat controversial today in our field to place the emphasis on "somatic" vs "psychological" when discussing our work. I believe and hope that we represent a kind of new health enterprise, a whole-person model of integrated functional life processes. Clearly the detailing of these foundations remains a vast horizon, but Boyesen's position was very clear: the body itself must share the central focus of clinical theory and practice.

"Gerda Boyesen, a pioneer before her time, never tired of advocating that the body "has a mind of its own" and that the gut-feelings have their own 'intelligence'! She – and all the people she trained – have applied this knowledge in their therapeutic work and have been bridging an essential gap in the understanding of a person's integral psyche-and-soma: these are indivisible. This is a unifying principle of all the different Body Psychotherapies that have descended from Wilhelm Reich's pioneering work."

"The technique of 'dynamic relaxation' consists of a special form of massage, which aims the whole time to furthering abdominal respiratory release and, in this way, towards giving a relaxation so deep that underlying, repressed emotional patterns are awakened and especially those containing traumatic autonomic responses. In this way, we can influence both the repressed emotions and the associated psychological material."

—From the 2<sup>nd</sup> Preface by Ebba and Mona-Lisa Boyesen

This timely work was imagined, organized, and edited by Courtenay Young, himself a student of Gerda Boyesen and Biodynamic psychology in London in the 1970s. This compilation was built through the cooperation of the international Biodynamic professional community, its various professional publications, and the somatic psychology journal *Energy and Character*, founded by David Boadella. Several important one-off articles from additional sources are included by benefit of Courtenay Young's extensive connections and his own editorial acumen.

These works flow from the foundational theory and practice of Gerda Boyesen (1922–2005) and the deep Norwegian body psychotherapy tradition. Boyesen was a Norwegian psychologist and physiotherapist, and a participant in the fertile community around Aadel Bulow Hansen, the woman who, with psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Trygve Braatøy, co-developed the Norwegian school of Psychomotoric Physiotherapy. Within that community, Hansen explored the connection between occupational and war-related stress, muscle tension, changes in respiration, and mental distress. Essentially, these are among the early pioneers in the understanding of autonomic nervous system regulation, a project which continues today as a central focus of our field. Braatøy recruited Hansen to his psychiatric clinic, where she joined a professionally integrated team in the treatment of a spectrum of mental health issues from neurosis through trauma and psychosis. This is a community with a strong grounding in the organismic model of health and wellness, wherein psychodynamics are held as inseparable from biodynamics.

For readers not familiar with the generative contributions of Scandinavian holistic psychotherapists, I would refer you to Michel Heller's informative 2007 two-part article, "The Golden Age of Body psychotherapy in Oslo" in the UK journal *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy*. The region remains a thriving center for mind-body psychological inquiry and somatic practice. Michel Heller writes:

"Today, Norway is one of the only European countries in which science and body techniques can associate in a way that can be exploited by health and academic institutions."

Later, Boyesen was also influenced by the work of Wilhelm Reich through her therapy with Norwegian Reichian traditions grounded in Ola Ranknes's Characteranalytic Vegetotherapy. She and the Biodynamic community remained conversant with trends and new ideas in international body psychotherapy as the scene developed, but they remain deeply, and you could even say uniquely, rooted in the organismic/whole person-in-context model. This commitment across many decades is what makes this collection so instructive, and such a welcome exposition of a truly somatic approach to psychotherapy.

It's necessary and relevant to acknowledge again that most of these 150 articles by 50 clinicians have never before been seen by North American body psychotherapists, although the works were all originally published in English in UK professional journals. This may be due to the fact that American neo-Reichian entrepreneurs, almost exclusively male, capitalized on the western European enthusiasm for body-centered psychological approaches, and exported their mindscape through numerous trans-Atlantic training programs, giving Europeans back a, sometimes muddled, version of their own creations. I worked as a European trainer in one such enterprise!

By contrast, the vast majority of papers in this volume are written by European women. The integrative Norwegian tradition evolves from a female line, which includes Nic Wal, Bulow Hansen, Gerda Boyesen, Lillimore Johnson, and, more recently Berit Bunken. Whatever putative gender qualities are operating in this lineage, it seems clear that the tradition and its therapy express a good deal of compassion for human problems-of-living and faith in the somatic intelligence and self-healing capacity of our embodied selves.

Interestingly, some European-trained women like Marion Rosen (Rosen bodywork) and Charlotte Selver (Sensory Awareness), influenced by Elsa Gindler, brought back to the US a feeling for these less-directive, more resonant approaches.

Kate Codrington makes several excellent points in this direction in Article 9.6:

“The body of work Gerda created, Biodynamic Psychology, was different to that of her contemporaries. She brought a female, cyclical sensitivity to her clients and teachings that was entirely absent previously. While her male counterparts tried to ‘break’ body armor with physical stress, she described herself as a midwife, holding space, waiting and encouraging the body to find its own way to unfold towards expression and regulation while the armoring that was ripe was encouraged to melt away... There was a great deal of importance attached to the therapists’ relationship to their own body and the somatic resonance arising from clients’ process. Again, something that has become a widespread tool across the board in psychotherapy, somatic movement and therapeutic circles... Biodynamic is a generous, spiritual modality, holding that all humans have the capacity for healing and well-being. She inspired absolute trust in the wisdom of the body and its energy to find its own way... It’s a client centered and client led approach, that was established right at the beginning of the client centered, humanistic psychotherapy movement. This trust in energy and our essential ‘goodness’ is now a common-held, unremarkable tenet from trauma therapy, somatic practices, yoga, through meditation and beyond, yet it was a radical shift at the time before interoception was a thing.”

Boyesen learned a relaxation-based model from Bulow Hansen’s work, and continued to employ more these “soft techniques” (George Downing), emphasizing presence, attentiveness to the slower rhythms of unfolding tension patterns, and massage interventions to support deep relaxation. It is in attending to these periods of deepening relaxation that Boyesen began to notice how increased sounds of peristaltic activity accompanied moments of both relaxation and integrative insight and understanding. She theorized that the human organism could discharge its tension in two directions: upward and out through the head and extremities, accompanied by the sound and fury of Reich’s model, and also downward, and inward, as decreased muscular tension, facilitated by massage and breath work, allowed release and “digestion” of trapped fluids and the body’s stress chemistry. Her investigations led her to develop the use of medical stethoscopes to improve her listening. She called her technique “Psycho-peristaltic Massage,” and Young’s volume contains copious examples of the application of this revolutionary somatic psychology clinical tool.

At 1,552 pages, *The New Collected Papers of Biodynamic Psychology, Massage & Psychotherapy: 2022* is a veritable tome. The material (44.2 MB (44,213,377 bytes) is available for purchase and use by agreement with Courtenay Young through his publication center, Body Psychotherapy Publications (<http://www.bodypsychotherapypublications.com>). Like psychoanalysis, our field has seldom been of one mind about its foundational theories, and periodically engages in “split-offs and break aways.” Psychology and psychotherapy are rife with multiple perspectives and, at times, bloody political feuds. In his preface, Courtenay demonstrates his insider knowledge of this community and the history he lived as the Biodynamic community formed and developed in multiple directions. Those who are interested in such histories will find much of interest here.

Courtenay’s motivations for this effort are multiple, but always imbedded in his personal development and clinical experience. In the preface he chooses a lovely quote from an Ebba Boyesen article, and continues to reflect on his own process in connection with Somatic Psychotherapy:

*“To listen to its signals and to become familiar with its plasmatic expressions brings one in touch with a very subtle core of being where instinct and consciousness function in unity. By*

*following these impulses, one is eventually led to a way of existence in which the life-force can function without undue compromise and can guide the body in a self-regulating harmony. One can almost ask – is this discovery a hitherto unknown law of nature?”*

He continues:

“I have found this to be very true in relation to the practice of a reasonably steady continuum of ‘body awareness’ and modern Mindfulness practices: this sort of awareness, this sort of re-“centering” and “grounding” (David Boadella) helps to sustain – and is in harmony with – a moment-to-moment form of inner awareness and emotional self-regulation that provides a much more peaceful, harmonized, dynamic state of ■ absorption, ■ inner processing, ■ affect and ■ appropriate action. This is not an airy-fairy form of spirituality, nor one sustained by regular prayer or practice, nor one mediated by priests and scriptures, it is more of a medium in which I swim, constantly dipping my awareness both inside and outside: what is within me and what is around me.”

If we are to develop our field of somatic psychotherapy and psychology, we will need many and more such volumes of this quality and quantity from which to investigate the development of the essential concepts and practices underlying our clinical paradigm. This publication, edited by Courtenay Young, is an important step in that direction. Somatic psychology scholars and practitioners could rejoice if this intra-modality level of internal discussion and writing became widely accessible. These intra-modality publications offer a level of access to the actions and experience of the practitioner that are of another order from important resources like Marlock et al.’s *The Handbook of Body Psychotherapy*. If the mainstream and sectarian publications of neo-Reichian journals became visible, we could see ourselves more clearly and find a fruitful direction for our development conceptually and clinically. We have this journal, the *International Body Psychotherapy Journal*, and we have *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy*, and we had, until it ceased publication, nearly five decades of multi-year volumes of *Energy and Character*. More riches like this Biodynamic e-anthology await to resurface into public domains. I am thinking here from my own professional reading over 40 years: *Bioenergetic Analysis · The Clinical Journal of the IIBA*, *The Radix Journal*, *The Hakomi Forum Professional Journal*, *Somatic Psychotherapy Today*, *The Rosen Method International Journal*, *Core Energetics’ Energy and Consciousness*, the numerous USABP Conference Proceedings, and the sectarian-moment publications like the multi-volume *Black Butte Conference Proceedings* from the US Bioenergetic community. When you graze in a field as large as *The New Collected Papers of Biodynamic Psychology, Massage & Psychotherapy: 2022* one is apt to lay back and dream from time to time. My dream-du-jour is a searchable archive of our shared thought and practice!

As we attempt today to articulate the underlying assumptions of our field, we will find some of those foundation stones expressed in Biodynamic literature. Many themes in this body of work will be familiar to students and practitioners of somatic psychotherapy. It would only be a distortion and be unfair to the writers to summarize or generalize about these 150 articles. In future issues, I hope to be able use the occasion of this publication to draw out some of the threads of fundamental theory and practice discussed herein.



*The New Collected Papers of Biodynamic Psychology, Massage and Psychotherapy: 2022* can be purchased online at <http://www.bodypsychotherapypublications.com>



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