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## Somatic Colloquium: Embodied Relating

### Introduction

### Asaf Rolef Ben-Shahar, PhD\*

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Big bodies interest me — by which I don't mean heavy-built people, but big bodies – families, organisations, communities. The body of our community as body psychotherapists has a painful history of ostracising and marginalising. It often had to fight for its right to exist alongside the more mainstream therapeutic modalities. Reich and the first generation of his students had to struggle to be acknowledged as legitimate theoreticians and clinicians, and we are fortunate to be living in a different era. Most psychoanalytic journals are not only addressing the body in psychotherapy, but also relating to somatic methodologies of working with the body in therapy. Looking at the body psychotherapeutic community I am left wondering about the body that we are; what kind of body do we have? Sadly, it feels that we are oftentimes fragmented and isolated — that even within body-psychotherapy there exists a lot of segregation, dissociation, and primarily, lack of rigorous interdisciplinary dialogue.

We at the IBPJ wanted to help us embody our communal body by facilitating interdisciplinary discussions through a platform for clinicians from different modalities to share their thoughts and feelings about themes that concern us all.

This colloquium is the first dialogue in what we hope to be many. We have asked Nick Totton to write about embodied relating, the connection between being bodies and being in relationships, from his own theoretical and clinical stance, Embodied Relational Therapy (ERT). Following Totton's lucid foundation of his ideas and understanding, we have asked four leading figures in the field of body psychotherapy to each write a responding paper, dialoguing with Totton's. Finally, Totton has shortly commented about those responses.

The four respondents are David Boadella, founder of Biosynthesis; Stanley Keleman, pioneer of Formative Psychology; Will Davis, who created Functional Analysis; and Akira Ikemi, one of the most senior clinicians in Focusing Oriented Psychotherapy today. We are delighted and proud that such prominent members of our community were willing to partake in this project and are certain that our readers will appreciate the variety and conviction, the similarities and differentness. We hope that this project will continue and are engaged in gathering material (and writers) for further themes around which to dialogue.

We hope that you enjoy the richness of this unravelling body and, as always, invite feedback, questions, and comments.

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## Embodied Relating: The Ground of Psychotherapy

### Nick Totton, MA

#### Abstract

This paper argues and tries to demonstrate that embodiment cannot simply be bolted onto traditional concepts of transference, countertransference, and projection, or vice versa, but that a fully embodied therapy must be reconceived from the ground up. It offers an embodied account of relational patterns; a theoretical context for this account, which draws on theories of embodied cognition and on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty; and, following out of these two themes, an argument for thinking of therapy as play. There is also a note on embodied social and cultural processes. The conclusion is that an embodied therapy throws into question the separation between world and perceiving subject, as well as between one subject and another.

*Keywords:* embodiment, phenomenology, embodied cognition, embodied relationship

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Why did psychoanalysis develop as a “one-person psychology”, i.e. as having a disproportionately large interest in the intra-psychic, at the expense of the inter-psychic? Why was the therapeutic relationship conceived of as primarily a manifestation of the illness (the “neurosis”) of the patient? Why was a sharp cleavage established between talking and acting, and between verbal and non-verbal, and why was the word, the symbolic, given such a remarkably elevated and protected status? And, in the same vein, why were most movement-related therapies split off from the talking therapies for so long, and initially assigned mainly to handicapped or autistic patients as second-class treatments? These questions are all interrelated.

Daniel Stern (2010, p. 119)

#### Introduction

This paper is intended as a contribution to a collective project which has been underway for some years now: the project of developing a *contemporary theory of body psychotherapy*, which dialogues with other contemporary thinking and research, but at the same time asserts its unique viewpoint through conscious, critical ownership of body psychotherapy’s historical positions — a theory which above all is founded in lived experience. Many practitioners are involved in this effort; for me personally, the most valuable work has come from a group of UK practitioners including Shoshi Asheri, Roz Carroll, Asaf Rolef Ben-Shahar and Michael Soth; from assimilating the work of certain neuroscientists, notably Stephen Porges, and relational psychoanalysts, notably Daniel Stern and the Boston Change Process Study Group; and also from the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

What follows will be primarily a piece of theory, with only a little clinical anecdote to enliven it. I hope that readers will be able to connect it to their own clinical experience. Where it perhaps

breaks new ground is in more or less dropping body psychotherapy’s long-standing effort to learn from verbal psychotherapy. I suggest that we have learnt enough — in some cases, rather too much — and that we might now usefully focus on *teaching*, by which I mean teaching verbal therapists that embodiment is central to what they, as well as we, are trying to do. I hope that among other uses this is a paper that body psychotherapists, especially relationally oriented ones, can pass on to their sceptical or uninformed verbal colleagues, and that they can also use to strengthen their grounding in the core positions of body psychotherapy.

I am of course not the first person to write about this, and more is being written all the time. However, it seems to me that much of this writing does not have enough commitment to the extraordinarily radical results of taking embodiment really seriously. It reminds me somewhat of negotiations around emancipating some segment of the population — women, say, or blacks. For a considerable time the hegemonic group often still somehow believes that it can maintain a veto and keep ultimate control of how the newly emancipated group will behave. It is only when the privileging — though not the contribution — of the rational and the verbal is wholly surrendered that embodied relationship can be integrated. I am quite aware of the irony of the fact that I am making this claim in a rational and verbal style.

In what follows, I will address three primary themes: an embodied account of relational patterns; a theoretical context for this account; and an argument, which follows from the previous two themes, for thinking of therapy as *play*. In the course of all this, I hope to shed some light on the questions posed by Daniel Stern in the epigraph to this paper. I will also add a note on the embodied relating of more-than-two, i.e. embodied social and cultural processes.

#### The Embodiment Matrix

I am not in front of my body, I am in it or rather I am it... If we can still speak of interpretation in relation to the perception of one’s own body, we shall have to say that it interprets itself.

(Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 150)

The embodied therapeutic relationship is frequently treated as an interesting and somewhat exotic optional extra, relatively marginal to the core themes of verbal therapy — an additional channel through which practitioners — perhaps only unusually sensitive ones, with all the ambiguous implications of ‘sensitive’ — can gain information about their clients’ psychological processes. Correspondingly, within body psychotherapy concepts like transference-countertransference and projection have been adopted and adapted from verbal therapy, and bolted on, often crudely, to our embodied practice.

I will argue that we should think the other way around and recognise embodiment as the matrix of human relating. Our current theory of the therapeutic relationship needs to be remade from the ground up as a fully embodied account — not just of body psychotherapy, but of *all* psychotherapy. ‘Embodied countertransference’, for example, is not a special sub-category of a wider phenomenon; it is the thing itself. We might more usefully call countertransference which is *not* experienced in the practitioner’s body ‘disembodied countertransference’, and ask why and how it has become dissociated.

Here is a superbly vivid description of an embodied counter-transference, from Susie Orbach:

For my part, I began to feel rather tiny. Like Alice...I felt myself grow down and grow in as though I were a miniature. Doreen appeared as a blow-up doll or, perhaps I should more accurately say, an overblown, overgrown, blown-up pretend woman figure such as are sold

for sexual purposes on the internet. My diminution was not altogether unpleasant. I went back and forth between feeling teetered over as though I was this little thing underneath her, and then sensing my lungs expand to take a metaphorical hearty breath as they were poised to shoot forward to prick and deflate her. She was at once substantial and puffed out, carrying too much water to let her feet sit comfortably in her dainty shoes, and yet almost menacingly large and solid. (Orbach, 2003, p. 4)

We need no context to grasp the *mutuality* of the experience: something is happening both to the therapist and to the client. Or one could start to distance oneself from this by re-centring in the therapist's subjectivity, by saying that "something is happening to the therapist's perception of herself and her perception of the client". And this distancing does perhaps begin to occur as Orbach interprets her experience:

My body countertransference with Doreen was a visceral rendition of her early experience of bodies around her being too large and yet not sufficiently robust or stable for her to find or develop a body herself from. She *did* feel them teetering over her. She couldn't get them to be in focus, and the volatility of the body size I experienced in the countertransference was a version of the search for a body for herself that could moor itself by finding a place in the physical storm that surrounded her. (2003, p. 4)

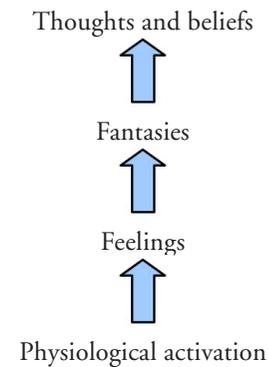
"A visceral rendition", "a version" — phrases like these are surely attempts at withdrawal from the "physical storm" in which Orbach was caught up — positioning it as a record or transcription of *something else*, of an experience which was *not* the practitioner's. Embodied countertransference is a micro-enactment, in which the therapist is helplessly acted-upon by the client's presence; and as with full-blown enactments, it is neither possible nor desirable to dissociate oneself, in any sense of the phrase, from the intersubjective nexus (Soth, 2005, pp. 49-50). As Orbach makes exquisitely clear, her helplessness was a direct function of Doreen's; it was *necessary* for her to experience it in order to come into relationship with her client. It's similar to what James Hillman (1979) says about dreams: that when we *interpret* them "we wrong the dream, we wrong the soul", because "dreams are the primary givens" (Hillman, 1979, pp. 2, 4). The embodied therapeutic relationship is also a primary given, part of the body's dream; to interpret it can often be to deny it.

My suggestion, then, is that therapists experience a natural and inevitable desire to extricate themselves from most forms of embodied countertransference (sexual desire is sometimes an exception). It can make one feel uncomfortably out of control, and hence both vulnerable and irresponsible. This natural defensive reaction leads in many cases, though not in Orbach's account, to the preconscious erasure of the most embodied aspects of therapeutic relationship, the abstraction and intellectualisation of these visceral experiences. This allows the therapist to stay apparently in command of the situation, but, just as when we resist full enactments, it limits the potential for transformative relational experience. 'Embodied countertransference' is nothing but a special case of embodied relating; if we refuse one, then we at least partially refuse the other and thus weaken our capacity to connect deeply with our clients.

### The Up-Hierarchy

The ground of the psyche is the affective mode in its most expansive form as feeling, which is the root and fundament of all the other modes and contains them in tacit or latent form. (Heron, 1992, p. 20)

To understand embodied relating, we need to be clear about what we mean by 'embodiment'. As a counterweight to the usual top-down way of perceiving mind-body relations, I want to use John Heron's 'up-hierarchy', in which the lower elements sequentially shape and determine the upper ones. Heron's basic up-hierarchy consists of what he sees as the four fundamental modes of human experience: from the bottom, Affective Imaginal Conceptual Practical. I have adapted this by selecting a different set of moments out of the continuum, starting with the level of our physiology, which most psychologically-oriented systems, including Heron's, leave out of the picture entirely or treat as a separate substrate.



These four levels represent moments in what is really a smooth and continuous shift from what is called the 'physical' to what is called the 'psychological'. Each of these levels, like the many other intermediate levels which could in principle be distinguished, expresses emergent properties of the one below. As Heron says, "In an up-hierarchy it is not a matter of the higher controlling and ruling the lower, as in a down-hierarchy, but of the higher branching and flowering out of, and bearing the fruit of, the lower" (1992, p. 20). Hence there is no sense in which the upper levels of the up-hierarchy are "better" than the lower ones.

The up-hierarchy I have illustrated, however, is plainly over-simplified; many levels in many dimensions, and many interpenetrating hierarchies, would be required to come anywhere near an adequate depiction. For example, although in one sense culture clearly emerges from and depends on embodiment — there could be no culture without bodies, while the opposite is not the case (Wilden, 1987, pp. 73ff) — it is undeniable that embodiment in turn is socially constructed (Haraway, 1991; Grosz, 1994; Evans, 2002), emerging from and depending on culture. This exemplifies what is a frequent feature of ecological and other cybernetic systems, and what Gregory Bateson (e.g. 1971) calls 'circular causality': a continuous feedback loop rather than a unidirectional arrow.

So 'embodiment' has two important senses. On the one hand it refers to the *state* of being a self-aware organism, something which all living human beings share, corporeality. On the other hand, it refers to the meta-level *process* of knowing and experiencing that one is this organism, and that there really is no separate psychological realm divorced from the body (though there sometimes seems to be), and equally no separate bodily realm divorced from the psyche. This is a process in which we are all involved, but which is realised to different degrees in different people at different times, due in part to conditioning by social and cultural context, which will be to varying degrees "body-friendly". For everyone, there are

moments of exaltation or suffering when one *knows* oneself to be unified bodymindspirit, and moments of alienation or dissociation when these aspects of experience seem to peel apart and even to attack each other.

### Embodied knowing

Our body is not just the executant of the goals we frame or just the locus of the causal factors which shape our representations. Our understanding itself is embodied. That is, our bodily know-how and the way we act and move can encode components of our understanding of self and world. (Taylor, 1995, p. 170)

Embodiment in this second sense can be understood as (aspiration toward) a full and practical awareness of the whole up-hierarchy from physiology through feelings and fantasies to thoughts. This entails what Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1991) call *enaction*, a coinage from the phrase ‘embodied action’:

We...call into question the assumption...that cognition consists of the representation of a world that is independent of our perceptual and cognitive capacities by a cognitive system that exists independent of the world. We outline instead a view of cognition as *embodied action*... (1991, p. xx)

This viewpoint is very much indebted to the work of Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1964, 1968) and other phenomenologists, as well as to the Madhayamika school of Buddhism (Varela, Thompson & Roche, 1991, pp. 217-35). A whole range of approaches, many of them much more mainstream in their picture of reality, converge on the same position. The ensemble of such approaches is known as ‘embodied cognitive science’ (Wilson & Foglia, 2011); what they share is a belief that cognition is integrally bound up with the embodied nature of being, and a rejection of the traditional view that the body is peripheral to mental processes.

Among the many strands which make up embodied cognitive science are research and theoretical work around mirror neurons (Oberman and Ramachandran, 2007; Rizzolatti and Craighero, 2004); artificial intelligence and robotics (Clark, 1997); ecological perception (Gibson, 1979; Sewall, 1999); and dynamic systems as applied to human development (Thielen & Smith, 1994). All of this material considerably enriches body psychotherapy’s conception of embodiment. Much of it also addresses embodied cognition of other people, which enables, and in some ways actually *constitutes*, embodied relating.

### The Felt Sense of the Other

It is through my body that I understand other people.  
(Merleau-Ponty, 1962, pp. 184-5)

The felt sense is an interaction with the presence of the other.  
(Ikemi, 2005, p. 286)

Embodied relating, then, is a specialised area of embodied cognition which involves what we might, drawing on Gendlin (e.g. 1998), call ‘the felt sense of the other’. I thought briefly that I had coined this expression, but it turns out to be used by several people, in particular Akira Ikemi (2005; 2013) who works at the meeting point of person-centred therapy and Focusing. What especially appeals to me about the phrase is its double-sidedness: it names both *my* felt sense of *the other person*, and *the other’s* felt sense of *me* — both central to the

transference matrix, where transference and counter-transference are woven out of the same substance, braided together in a trans-causal process of mutual co-arising (Totton, 2011; Varela et al., 1991). As Merleau-Ponty says, “Every perception doubled with a counter-perception...is an act with two faces, one no longer knows who speaks and who listens” (Merleau-Ponty 1968, pp. 264-5).

This sentence seems to me to encapsulate and give a context for the whole elaborate therapeutic apparatus of identifications, introjections, projections, transferences and counter-transferences, and so on. The medium in which all these transactions circulate is what Merleau-Ponty calls ‘flesh’.

The Flesh is the mysterious tissue or matrix that underlies and gives rise to both the perceiver and the perceived as interdependent aspects of its own spontaneous activity. It is the reciprocal presence of the sentient in the sensible and of the sensible in the sentient, a mystery of which we have always, at least tacitly, been aware since we have never been able to affirm one of the phenomena, the perceivable world or the perceiving self, without implicitly affirming the existence of the other. (Abram, 1997, p. 66)

Merleau-Ponty discovers this reciprocity in the whole of reality (and this has been usefully applied to ecopsychology: Abram, 1997; Cataldi & Hamrick, 2007). He also finds it specifically in human relating, where he names it *intercorporeality* (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 19; 1968, p. 143), a fleshly intersubjectivity, and also wrote of ‘carnal intersubjectivity’ (1968, p. 173). Through embodiment, we are immediately and inherently linked in shared understanding; no one can touch the other without *being* touched. “Subjects are joined by their belongingness to a common world. Furthermore...they ‘open’ onto each other” (Crossley, 1995, p. 57). Embodiment, or flesh, is the matrix for human relationship; and psychotherapy is perhaps the place where this can be brought most clearly into awareness.

A point that emerges strongly out of work on embodied cognition is the important role of implicit knowledge in human learning. For every repeated activity from riding a bicycle to forming a relationship, humans rely on preconscious or unconscious patterns of activation and behaviour which are developed when the activity was first learned (Thielen and Smith, 1994). As sports instructors know very well, it is extremely hard to affect these implicit procedural habits, which have to be brought into awareness before they can be changed (Straub & Williams, 1984).

Some of the deepest embodied, implicit patterns we hold seem to be those around relating (Boston Change Process Study Group, 2008). Following Juhane (2003, ch. 9), I have chosen to call such patterns ‘engrams’, a longstanding neurological term for the physical unit of memory, which was never pinpointed in neural structures and is now conceived as holographic. The term ‘engram’ literally means something *inscribed within*. Embodied relational engrams, then, are formed in our earliest relationships; and we use them, for better or worse, as blueprints in each attempt to negotiate new encounters. As Allison Priestman and I have written:

The embodied engrams which store our early experiences of relationship are enormously powerful in shaping our experience...and, equally, other people’s experience of us: human bodies constantly respond to and become entrained with each other’s relational engrams, and this process in a therapeutic context is traditionally described in the language of transference and projection. The therapist’s countertransference is in large part an out-of-awareness reaction to the client’s transference engram: joining in the physiological dance. (Totton & Priestman, 2012, p. 39)

I now want to take this a step further, and suggest that the transference and counter-transference components cannot be separated out and linear causality allotted in such a straightforward way. We could equally say, as Jacques Lacan does in an early paper (1950), that it is the therapist's countertransference engram which elicits the client's transference. Each subject's engram is an 'exogram' for the other.

...as soon as we acknowledge that other people may (in certain circumstances) form part of our external memory fields, with their own dynamic engrams potentially acting as exograms for us, it becomes clear that passive external words and images in no way exhaust the media in which cognition and remembering are situated and that materiality can have many different kinds of causal efficacy. (Sutton, 2008, p. 43)

Interrelating individuals are equal partners in the physiological dance referred to earlier: each forward movement of one dancer's limbs implies and elicits, gives meaning to and takes its meaning from, a backward movement of the other, and vice versa. Listen, they're playing our tune: the dance is a unique synthesis of the two partners' relational engrams, in which each constitutes an exogram for the other. Again we encounter circular causality, mutual co-arising.

### Embodied Relating and Mutuality

This move to situate subjectivity in the lived body jeopardizes dualistic metaphysics altogether. There remains no basis for preserving the mutual exclusivity of the categories subject and object, inner and outer, I and world.

(Young, 1990, p. 161)

The first epigraph to the previous section of this paper is part of a longer passage: Faced with an angry or threatening gesture, I have no need, in order to understand it, to recall the feelings which I myself experienced when I used these gestures on my own account... It is as if the other person's intentions inhabited my body and mine his... It is through my body that I understand other people. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, pp. 184-5)

Merleau-Ponty is describing the sort of core human experience now generally framed within the concept of mirror neurons (which had, of course, not been identified when Merleau-Ponty was writing). However, it is important to realise that mirror neuron theory neither *defines* the experience it refers to, nor, really, *illuminates* it; most of its effect is simply to *underwrite* the lived experience, to licence belief in it. And that lived experience is not some sort of internal "simulation" of the other's action or expression, as it is often theorised (e.g. Gallese and Goldman, 1998; Oberman and Ramachandran, 2007), but *a direct and immediate knowing* (Gallagher, 2005, 2012; Lindblom, 2007).

Mirror neuron theory comes to life when incorporated into the wider field of embodied cognition. Paraphrasing Stephen Gallagher (2005), Jessica Lindblom writes:

Mirror neurons and shared representations are not primarily the mediators of simulation but the *enactment* of direct intersubjective perception. [Gallagher] exemplifies this view in the imitation of facial expression, emphasizing that infants have no need to simulate the facial gesture internally, as an extra step, since through actually seeing it, they already simulate it on their own faces. This means, one's own body is already communicating with the other's body at unconscious and perceptual levels that are sufficient for intersubjective interaction to emerge. (Lindblom, 2007, p. 128)

Gallagher and Lindblom are referring to the well-established fact that infants — as soon as thirty five minutes after birth! — will spontaneously try to reproduce adult facial expressions (Meltzoff & Moore, 1995). There are two interwoven aspects to this: the infant *responds* to the adult in the act of *receiving* the adult's expressed emotion. The at-a-distance image of embodied mirroring is perhaps better conceived more tactilely, as an *intaglio print*, in which the convex and concave, "receiver" and "transmitter" faces of the same image match and coincide. With an intaglio print, an image is cut into a metal plate and then inked; a sheet of paper is pressed into the image with a roller, and this intimate contact produces an embossed image on the paper. An image (engram), which has been carved into one surface, now stands out from another surface.

This metaphor of an intaglio is vaguely inspired by, though quite distinct from, Jean Laplanche's concept of "embossed" and "hollowed out" transference (e.g. Laplanche, 1992, pp. 12-13.) It returns us to the Merleau-Ponty passage I quoted earlier: "Every perception doubled with a counter-perception...is an act with two faces, one no longer knows who speaks and who listens" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, pp. 264-5). Merleau-Ponty constantly refers back to the experience of touching one's own body, and applies it equally to one's relationships with others and with the world. The example of infant imitation demonstrates most clearly how central embodied enaction is to an experience of relationship. Here is the hinge on which this whole paper turns: the image of embodied relating as "an act with two faces", a combined engram/exogram, an intaglio imprinting which fuses together the experience of two bodyminds.

### The Obvious Question

If any of this is true, why are we not — as we appear not to be — transparent to each other? Why are we not of one flesh? Why is human life suffused with experiences of misunderstanding, of loneliness and isolation, and also with attempts to avoid close contact — what Freud (1908, p. 153) described as "the feeling of repulsion in us which is undoubtedly connected with the barriers that arise between each single ego and the others"? On one level this is an unanswerable question about the nature of human existence; on another, it is rather a question with only two answers, between which the only way to choose is by following one's own temperamental preference. These answers can be briefly summed up as "innate imperfection" and "contingent circumstances", with Freud for example preferring the former and Reich for example the latter (see Freud, 1930; Reich, 1945; for a speculative narrative of possible contingent circumstances, see Totton 2011, ch. 5).

Staying closer to the immediate situation, though, there is a lot to be said about how this alienation is *transmitted* through the generations. One can think of an infant experiencing the intaglio imprint of an adult's early wounding as it is held in the adult's character structure, and how the infant in turn struggles to survive and assimilate the invasion of this "foreign body" (Laplanche 1976; Totton, 2002), helplessly imprinted upon just as by a facial expression. As Martin Stanton summarises the thinking of Jean Laplanche:

The first intake of messages from the other is neither naturally assimilated, nor greeted with projective elaboration, but experienced as an intrusion of the other. The affective processing of the inside of the body is therefore also primarily marked out as 'other' — the inner body is therefore an 'inner foreign body' (*corps étranger interne*). (Stanton, 1997, p. 38)

Laplanche, like Freud, sees this as part of the human condition; I prefer to see it, like

Reich, as a product of social conditions — the messages of the other cannot be assimilated because they are messages about intolerable wounds. Either way, it is the condition we are born into by being born into embodied relating.

In his last book, *Forms of Vitality* (2010), Daniel Stern gives an excellent example of how relational engrams work:

A mother and her 9-month old son were sitting side by side on the floor playing with a cardboard jigsaw puzzle.

The boy picked up a piece of puzzle and brought it to his mouth.

His mother said in a normal voice “No, it’s not to eat, it’s a leaf” (of the puzzle). She stopped his movement with her hand.

The boy answered “Ugh.” Then he tried again to get the piece to his mouth.

She repeated, in a firmer voice this time, “No!”

His response was “Uugggh!”

She escalated even higher and said, “NO, IT’S NOT TO EAT!!!”

He escalated even further, “UUGGHHH!!!”

She then leaned forward toward him, lowered her eyebrows, and said in a flat voice with no melody and much vocal tension (as in anger), “DON’T YOU YELL AT YOUR MOTHER. I SAID NO!”

He then over-escalated her, yet again, and said “UUUGGGHHH!!!”

At this point she gave up and conceded the victory to him. She sat back, her face softened and broke into a slightly seductive smile. She said, with a melodic voice, “Does that taste good?”

He then put the puzzle piece in his mouth.

She then made him pay for his victory. With a disgusted wrinkling of her nose and a slightly contemptuous voice she said, “It’s only cardboard, does that taste good?”

(Stern, 2010, pp. 146-7)

This interaction creates a relational engram which no amount of verbal therapy will be able to unearth. Stern suggests that

[t]he whole scene...was a lesson in how to negotiate with a woman.... The infant... was already learning non-verbally about the negotiation of the authenticity of desire.

He will spend the rest of his life expanding his knowledge of how to do this. In addition, it will come into play in the consulting room. (Stern, 2010, p. 148).

Stern also emphasises that embodied dynamic patterns, ‘vitality forms’, are central in constructing and maintaining this engram.

When as client we come to meet a therapist, we deploy an ensemble of embodied-relational engrams developed through previous interactions. It is against these engrams that we measure and test our interaction with the therapist to see where it best fits. We have an inbuilt preference for using an existing engram rather than developing a new one, because the latter process is emotionally and energetically expensive: it requires a melting-down and recasting of armouring, so to speak. (It is only if and when this melting-down takes place that the therapy can be transformative.) So locking our interaction into a familiar pattern is parsimonious, in some senses even skillful. As with all human activity, our first resource is pattern recognition.

The shortcoming of pattern recognition, of course, is that it opens the door to *mis*recognition. And because relationship is always *between* the entities relating, how we as therapist are approached influences our own experience of the situation, as we in turn

parsimoniously try to fit it into our ensemble of previously experienced situations. We often find ourselves giving embodied assurances that in fact we *are* like the client’s mother, father, etc. What we as therapist try to do, therefore, is to surrender to this process of engram-matching *with awareness*. If we don’t surrender to it, nothing useful happens, no information is gained; if we surrender totally and lose awareness, nothing useful happens either, no information is gained. Like the Fool in the Tarot pack, we dance precariously on an edge between these two attractors. We play.

### Therapy as Play

The resemblance between the process of therapy and the phenomenon of play is, in fact, profound.

(Bateson, 1954, p. 191)

Not only do the playing animals not quite mean what they are saying but, also, they are usually communicating about something which does not exist.

(Bateson, 1954, p. 182)

The work of Stephen Porges (2011) on the Social Engagement System is increasingly well-known. Its relationship to body psychotherapy is similar to that of mirror neuron theory: it supports us in believing what we already know from direct experience, that our organisms have an inherent and skilful tendency towards forming relationships with others. Porges describes a complex interactive network of cranial nerves and functional systems that was originally devoted to absorbing oxygen from water, gradually developed in mammals into a system for absorbing food and comfort from the mother’s breast, and then, in humans, brought together with visual, facial, and vocal interaction with a caretaker to become, in adults, a system for absorbing relational nourishment from a social context.

In terms of the up-hierarchy discussed earlier, Porges’ work is largely concerned with the crucial transition from physiology to feeling. For the purposes of this paper, though, I am going to pick out one fairly tangential aspect of the work, concerned with the role of *play*. Porges (2011, p. 278) identifies five physiological states of activation, which can be thought of as species-wide (in fact, mammalian-wide) engrams, ancient scaffolds on which our personal engrams are constructed. Four of these states are: *social engagement* (the polyvagal system), *mobilization* (fight-flight), *immobilization* (freeze), and *immobilization without fear* (involved in various forms of intimacy). The fifth state is *play*, which Porges suggests is a combination of mobilization with social engagement.

All of these states are of enormous interest in relation to therapy, especially immobilization without fear; but I want to focus here on play, which Porges describes like this:

Access to the social engagement system is critical in defining mobilization as play and not aggression. ... A ‘polyvagal’ definition of play requires reciprocal interactions and a constant awareness of the actions of others. Play is different than fight-flight behaviors. Although fight-flight behaviors often require an awareness of others, they do not require reciprocal interactions and an ability to restrain mobilization. Play recruits another circuit [social engagement] that enables aggressive and defensive behaviors to be contained. (2011, p. 276)

Isn’t this very relevant to the “as-if” character of psychotherapy, where — if there is relational work at play — both client and therapist need to experience deep positive and

negative feelings towards each other while inhibiting the sort of actions that would normally be implied by such deep feelings? Must not client and therapist alike hold some meta-perspective which reminds them, “I am not *really* loving or hating this person in front of me, though I *am* feeling *real* love or hate”?

We are brought back again to the work of Gregory Bateson, this time to his paper on play and fantasy (1954) which was a key document in the development of systemic family therapy. Bateson argued (1954, pp. 178-80) that play in humans and other mammals is a matter of meta-signals, which convey the message, “This is not what it seems”. He relates this to a number of other human activities, including threat, deceit, dramatization, ritual, and psychotherapy. (Hopefully it is clear that I am not writing about Winnicottian play *in* therapy, but about the very different idea of therapy as play.)

Bateson’s insight is extremely important but in its original form quite dry and abstract, in fact distinctly disembodied. When we combine it with Porges’s description of the *embodied signalling* of play, it takes on a very different tone. Porges isn’t talking about some sort of coded message flashing between the protagonists, but about a contagious state of physiological activation, transmitted through the flesh. We could think of this as a particular kind of *relaxation*, which translates further up the up-hierarchy as the “realization that signals are signals” rather than reality (Bateson, 1954, p. 178). This state of relaxation connects with the state of “immobilization without fear” also described by Porges (2011, pp. 178-9) and also essential to therapy. What else could keep us in our chairs for an hour?

### Social Embodiment

Social practices are the sedimentation of history at the level of the body. When I teach, when I write this article, when I run a race or teach one of my children how to ride a bicycle, my body is oriented in particular ways, conforming to or rejecting particular norms, responding to the constraints and restraints of those practices as they have evolved in interaction with other practices over time. Through its engagement in these practices, my body has taken on a history that is not of my making but is nevertheless part of my inheritance.

(May, 2005, p. 524)

As mentioned above, many theorists of embodied cognition see human social interaction facilitated by the ability to *simulate* the experience of others, to use mirror neurons and other capacities to create an internal model of someone else’s internal state (Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004; Oberman & Ramachandran, 2007). Merleau-Ponty provides a less arms-length, more embodied conception of fleshly intersubjectivity, implying that “the body and its sensorimotor processes function as a social resonance mechanism” (Lindblom, 2007, p. 144). Hence, “embodiment is the underlying foundation for the individual and social mind rather than merely linking or bridging them from these two different perspectives” (Lindblom, 2007, p. 246).

However while embodiment is the ground of social relations it is also constructed *through* social relations. This is paradoxical from the viewpoint of formal Western logic, but such chains of mutual or circular causation are common from the perspective of ecological and other cybernetic systems, and are the foundation of Buddhist ontology (Macy, 1991, p. 1995). In fact it would seem as though the relaxed physiological state of

play described earlier, which allows one to distinguish the sign from the reality, the map from the territory, is a part of what can be reached through meditation, especially in the Zen tradition (Watts, 1969, 1973).

Returning to the theme of social embodiment, Shawn Gallagher (2013) has recently treated the concept of the ‘extended mind’ (Clark & Chalmers, 1998; previously one of Gregory Bateson’s 1980 insights) as applying not only to the body and the physical world but also to the social world:

Just as a notebook or a hand-held piece of technology may be viewed as affording a way to enhance or extend our mental possibilities, so our encounters with others, especially in the context of various institutional procedures and social practices may offer structures that support and extend our cognitive abilities. (Gallagher, 2013, p. 4)

In other words, people are continuously using each other and their environment as exograms, extensions of their minds. But since people are also being used in the same way by others, the concept of one’s own mind, like one’s own body, is thrown into question, exposed as to some degree illusory. Rather, there are collective projects flowing through and between us, expressing themselves in different ways at different moments in different bodyminds. “Mind” cannot be separated from “body”. It is the knowing continuum of flesh that underlies and gives meaning to our social world. As has often been said, language would be an inadequate tool for communication if we didn’t already know what each other mean.

The linguist Edward Sapir says something similar about gesture:

We respond to gestures with an extreme alertness and, one might almost say, in accordance with an elaborate and secret code that is written nowhere, known to none and understood by all.... Like everything else in human conduct, gesture roots in the reactive necessities of the organism, but the laws of gesture, the unwritten code of gestured messages and responses, is the anonymous work of an elaborate social tradition. (1949, p. 556)

Embodiment, as Sapir writes in the case of gesture, “roots in the reactive necessities of the organism”, but what we conceive to be those necessities are themselves socially constructed. Embodied cognition enacts our world, but the world, including the social world, sets the conditions of embodied cognition. Embodiment (in the sense of consciously self-aware corporeality) is inherently languaged (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 155), but language, equally, is inherently embodied — “discourse itself is a fleshy process.... It is produced through the work of the body” (Crossley, 1995, pp. 50-51). Time to turn “but” into “and”, and acknowledge that cutting the circle of causation at any point, privileging either disembodied language and society or the unlanguage, unsocialised organism, is fundamentally unhelpful and untrue to human experience.

What is constructed as embodied subjectivity combines traumatic and non-traumatic elements, often in the same engram, and inherited through generations as well as newly minted (Totton, 2009, 2010). Both trauma and nurture are what one *takes in* from the world into which one comes. They are the stuff out of which one is made, out of which one makes one’s self. But unless the self that is constructed is an open system, open in both directions to the world and to others, it is both illusory and deadly. In the play of therapy, it is sometimes possible to expose and explore deadly defences against openness without destructive effect; but only when the therapist is prepared to join in the serious game.

## Conclusion

Mental models and neural networks can be reshaped by doing something differently, imagining it differently, seeing another doing it, or by hearing about it in words. The walls separating different modes of experiencing are starting to come down as we realize that it all has to pass by way of imagined movement.

(Stern, 2010, p. 135)

In describing embodied relating as the ground of psychotherapy, I am not saying that it is the whole of psychotherapy. I am intending a fairly precise claim: that it is the surface on which therapy stands (or falls), the soil in which everything grows (or fails to grow). And like the ground, embodied relating can easily be forgotten or ignored, as we hurl great skyscrapers of theory into the stratosphere.

Like soil, embodied relating is a medium: the flesh as it manifests in human relationship. It is the medium through which infants assimilate both nurture and trauma; the medium through which patterns of creativity and defence are reproduced in the therapy room; and the medium through which, potentially, change can be generated and stuck patterns released. It is becoming clearer and clearer that, as Daniel Stern indicates in the epigraph to this section, both stuckness and change are fundamentally cross-modal (Stern, 1985, 2010) — a pattern, which can be expressed in many different channels, but always with the same underlying dynamic structure or “form of vitality”. The central role of dynamic structure supports the sense of many researchers that motor imagery is the crucial element that actualises new learning:

There is a growing notion that therapeutic change cannot happen if there is not a ‘real’ or imagined action at the local level.... Changes in ‘implicit relational knowing’ occur only when one ‘does’, i.e., enacts an aspect of the relationship in a new way. It need not be reflected upon and verbalized. (Stern, 2010, pp. 134-5)

This is not to say that actual bodily movement is required (though it certainly doesn’t hinder); here Stern is talking about motor *imagery*, forming new neural circuits which can be elicited in many ways including through talking. However, it does suggest reasons — as I hope this whole paper has done — for considering changing theoretical and clinical priorities, and thinking and working from the embodied-relational ground up. How this would work from a detailed clinical point of view, though, is a subject for another paper.

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## BIOGRAPHY

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## Response to Nick Totton's Embodied Relating, The Ground of Psychotherapy David Boadella, BA, MEd, DScHon

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Nick Totton has given us an admirable view of the embodied relationship in body psychotherapy. It advances our understanding of what Wilhelm Reich called 'vegetative identification', and enriches the concepts of somatic transference. Totton draws on deep roots in phenomenological philosophy (Merleau-Ponty) to broaden the basis of his view. He deepens the reader's interest by introducing concepts such as 'engrams' and 'intaglios' to widen the understanding of what Daniel Stern (2010) calls "vitality forms". Totton links embodied relating, naturally, to mirror neurons. These exist not only in the motoric part of the brain, but also in the higher limbic system, which supports empathy in contact. To his view of mirror neurons could be added the recent research, by Tognioli and others (2007), on "anti mirror neurons". In any relationship, the balance between mirroring and anti-mirroring is the balance between "you" and "I". This is essential in order to avoid the extremes of over-caring (where one loses oneself in the other) or egocentricity (where one loses the other by retreating too much into oneself).

Totton draws on Gregory Bateson to emphasise important resemblances between therapy and play. Play is a creative sharing between individuals, in which resources can be activated and the vitality affect of two or more people can be shared. There are play centres in the brain which have become dysfunctional in many neurotic states, most strongly in depression. Totton links the theme of therapy as play with the social engagement theory of Steven Porges.

Porges is a brilliant neurologist whose work should be fundamental for all body psychotherapists. He discovered a third branch of the vegetative nervous system, the so-called 'ventral vagal', which mediates between the extremes of sympathetic stress and parasympathetic resignation. The ventral vagal system involves neurons in the brain stem which have three main connections:

- to the lungs and the heart, leading to more centred breathing and heart rhythms;
- to the face and voice muscles, leading to more contact and empathic dialogue;
- and to the muscle spindles of the major muscles of the body, leading to more balanced muscle tone.

Totton's paper quotes a wide range of other valuable sources. Establishing the right frame for emotional contact is essential for all body psychotherapists, in particular when dealing with highly charged emotional energy states, in order to avoid re-traumatisation. Nic Waal (personal communication), Reich's Norwegian colleague pointed this out half a century ago. Stanley Keleman and I have continually emphasised this for many years (in a series of papers published in *Energy and Character*. This background is described in detail in Boadella, 2014). This is another reason why Totton's emphasis on clear contact as the basis of embodied relating is of fundamental importance.

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David Boadella was trained in vegetotherapy in the early nineteen fifties, and began work as an individual therapist in 1957. After thirteen years of practice he founded *Energy and Character, the Journal of Biosynthesis*, in 1970.

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## Embodying Response to Nick Totton's Embodied Relating, The Ground of Psychotherapy Stanley Keleman

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### Introduction

The human situation is such that our inherited patterns of action for satisfying needs or resolving conflicts do not match the modern situations in which we live. The notion of being natural as a guide for how to behave is passé. The human cortex's ability to respond to and imagine situations as well as to invent times of action and duration goes beyond the responses of the brainstem and limbic system.

The cortex uses voluntary muscular effort to influence so many levels of the organism's expressions. This ability creates tools and new relationships that alter how the body relates to itself and others. The human cortex and its muscular organs have invented many skills that have redefined how we use our body at work, in sexuality and love relationships, as well as in society.

Since the human enterprise has made great progress in preventing unnatural deaths and extending longevity, all stages of the human organism's cycle of shapes — childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, full-grown adult, and the maturing and older adult somatic shapes — have come more and more under the influence of the cortex and voluntary muscular effort to be developmental and learning dynamics.

The human ability to make transitions in its age-shapes, as well as a result of personal and social demands, produces stress that can be found in the organism's underforming of a specific set of preserved behavioral patterns. This can create anxiety and doubt as to how to behave, and an over-reliance on instinctual responses to carry one through. Being confronted by somatic-emotional-cognitive transitions from one stage of instinctual existence to another — or through important situations like personal relationships — without the experience of outside guidance can create cortical, emotional, and muscular pain. With the evolution to voluntary muscular-cortical effort, one no longer needs to rely on the instinctual, that is involuntary, management of patterns of inherited responses. This change from involuntary regulation to voluntary muscular-cortical effort for managing behavior and introducing voluntary forming behaviors, makes vivid the formative dynamic of the human being.

### Embodying

In Nick Totton's article about *Embodied Relating*, Totton talks about the need to reconceive embodiment from the view of relational patterns and embodied cognition. Totton also speaks about the relational aspects of embodiment, without grasping the notion that these relationships are somatic patterns of behaving that cue responses between infants and adults. Formative Psychology® has pointed out how somatic postures and emotional attitudes are a co-bodying relationship process, and how body postures affect how one experiences and knows another,

oneself, and the relationship (Keleman, 1985; 1987). Totton uses and refers often to engrams without identifying these as synaptic neural-muscular re-embodied maps and thus a somatic process of a particular kind of relationship between the muscular and neural body (Koob, 2009).

I think that being bodied is not only a relationship of the organism to the world but of the organism with itself. The human, like all animals, adapts its structure to the world it finds itself in. A developmental response that emerged was to change the world through domesticating animals, building shelters, cultivating plants, and rearing children. These practiced voluntary acts bring about anatomic behavioral changes, from influencing reflex acts to differentiating them, through the reorganizing, rehearsing, planning, and voluntarily applying that brought about the new behavior. This voluntarily developed behavior forms culture, civil codes of practiced muscular behavior that results in embodying new anatomic realities. It is a process of voluntary muscular effort to preserve and differentiate new expressions and transmit them, and is the relationship that constitutes an embodied life and the development of values and meanings which enrich human existence.

The evolution of the body through the voluntary motor acts governed by the cortex develops an organismic interior relationship of the body with itself and with others (Sheets-Johnstone, 1990). The voluntary muscular effort forms new motor patterns from inherited ones, by reassembling them, editing them, and applying them to create new anatomic relationships that result in a personal awareness of being an embodying process. This is an animate forming process of creating situations which extend our somatic presence over time.

Voluntary muscular efforts develop motor, muscular-neural-synaptic memories. The body that is able to grow from its voluntary muscular and cortical efforts begins to know itself as a personal formative agent of metamorphosis and morphogenesis, as an embodying agent of its life.

Sigmund Freud told us, "Anatomy is destiny" — but anatomy is more than destiny. It is also a behavior, a developing agent of expressions, experiencing, knowing, and understanding that is able to voluntarily influence relationships within itself and with the world of others. One is born bodied, but forming and embodying oneself through this process of voluntary forming is what creates a personal embodied life (Keleman, 2012). This orientation offers a way not only to address human dilemmas, but also to voluntarily change soma, to develop inherited possibilities and create educational and clinical tools. This is what it is to form personal and interpersonal relationships enriched by the values and meaning that are grounded in an experiential knowing of the embodying process and forming a personal embodied existence.

Totton is fond of Merleau Ponty, who deserves praise, but does not actually articulate that the organism is a primarily expressive architecture. Totton may not realize that he's implicitly saying that there is an unembodied realm influencing the bodied realm. Nina Bull (1951) has pointed out that feelings are feedback from uncompleted or delayed motor patterns.

The primary layer of the organism's structure is a pulsatory, cellular-molecular organization of behavioral interactions. These cellular chemical-electrical patterns are also organized structures that are neural maps and muscular expressive images, which include thought (Fields, 2009). All these acts — motor, muscular, cortical and neural — are anatomic behaviors, on a micro or macro, voluntary or involuntary level.

### Forming and Living an Embodied Life

Experiencing and being aware of inherited soma do not by themselves constitute an embodied life. The body's forming process is at the heart of animate existence. The body lives a process of continuous morphogenesis, and its voluntary muscular effort organizes a personal somatic life

field. This is the difference between a bodied life with body awareness and a personal embodied life awareness, which results largely from voluntary muscular efforts.

The bodied life is a life of morphogenesis that is the continual change of somatic shapes. Voluntary morphogenesis is how the organism learns how to use muscular effort to influence its inherited behavior, to repeat the effort to form memory structures of how it influenced its own behavior, and to recall its differentiated patterns over and over again to form new expressions. This creates a personal life field that has both subjective and social values and meaning.

Being embodied depends upon the organism's use of voluntary effort to generate experience and to form a memory of the body's relationship with itself. This remembering is an anatomic process, which is the ground of "I can do this; I can organize a personal behavior." Voluntary muscular effort helps form the personal somatic reality of an embodied life and makes new expressions so the organism is not a victim of its inherited responses.

Voluntary muscular effort facilitates excitatory patterns and gives them body by forming somatic memories. Voluntarily influencing inherited behavior is being able to voluntarily repeat the action of being bodily present when needed, that is, not to fall into old reflex patterns of response. Forming an embodied life and transmitting its stages of development furthers the human evolutionary dimension. It is a continuing education associated with the desire to form an autobiographical identity, a Formative rather than a causal identity.

Being embodied is a Formative process. For the organism it is imperative to develop voluntary motor acts to facilitate forming a personal somatic excitatory life field that rebodies its involuntary and voluntary experiences of changing somatic shapes. This demands that each person endeavor to develop, over time, fine motor skills for differentiating reflex motor patterns into new anatomic expressions of behavior and relationships. Voluntary muscular effort generates and develops the life field of one's somatic structures and alters the structures' excitatory, emotional, cognitive aliveness. Voluntary effort is not mental willpower. It is a muscular-neural effort that brings about an embodied way of experiencing anatomic morphogenesis, bestowing experiential awareness of past, present, and future anatomic-excitatory-structural possibilities and the values they are given.

Living an embodied life takes voluntary muscular effort to influence inherited somatic behavioral shapes, like reaching and approaching, withdrawing and retreating, and generating new motoric, feeling, and cognitive feedback. Voluntary muscular effort organizes memory structures that extend the permanence of personal formed acts, beyond the immediate situation and even the lifetime of the individual. Forming an embodied life helps the organism transcend its own field and be part of the larger evolutionary field of animate existence, making the organism an agent of its own destiny.

### Conclusion

The body is a forming field, a process of metamorphoses and morphogenesis. This pulsatory process is an involuntary/voluntary excitatory tide, which organizes an anatomic architecture of behavioral expressions that in turn birth patterns of acting, which generate experiences of all sorts, and are remembered. Voluntary-muscular, and then cortical, effort generates relationships within the organism and constructs a personal embodied life.

That is the forming of an evolving embodying lifestyle. Voluntary muscular-cortical effort also involves influencing developing transitional shapes and emergency alarm patterns, which all too often exhibit excessive involuntary responses to the dilemmas of living.

We have to take responsibility to form our own lives, to give body to the experiences we generate, and to live a personal life of continual morphogenesis. Voluntary effort brings about self-empowerment. This ability forms new expressions and a narrative of influence that makes us

agents of our own personal life field of existing.

This paper offers a view linked to an evolutionary process of human experience, memories of previous and present forming shapes of behavior, and voluntary efforts which create behavior that is not genetically programmed.

### BIOGRAPHY

Stanley Keleman is the director of the Center for Energetic Studies in Berkeley California where he teaches the Formative approach to human development. He is a somatic educator who has been researching and developing the Formative principles, an original method for influencing inherited behavior. He was awarded a PhD in Human Letters from Saybrook Graduate School in June of 2007. USABP awarded him a life time achievement award. Email: skeleman@aol.com

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## Response to Nick Totton's Embodied Relating: The Ground of Psychotherapy Will Davis

### Abstract

While agreeing with Totton's position on an embodied relationality in therapy, I have looked for clarification about some of the basic concepts to better understand the fused state of therapist/patient. This intertwined relationship is of particular interest to me because my position is that the role of the other is overemphasized in development and therapy.

*Keywords:* embodiment, self organizing, endo self, embodied relations

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Totton has written a good article. The embodied relational model is a growing theme in body psychotherapy and, as he points out, in other approaches as well. He takes a clear and strong position on a difficult theme. The therapist was originally considered to be "neutral" but over the last 100 years psychotherapy has gradually moved along a continuum towards more contact and interaction with the patient. How to do that and still maintain appropriate boundaries is a constant issue.

Theoretically, I am in the same camp as Totton. I agree with the underlying body/mind unity perspective. Concerning his argument for a "ground up" model basing the work first on physiology, I have also shown how this idea is growing even within robotics and computing design (Davis, 2012). I support his position that we should not simply "bolt on" ideas from verbal therapy but rather make the concepts not only our own, but an integral part of psychotherapy in general. In addition, his paper prompted me to reflect on my own point of view about self/other/us and, as any good piece will, it brings up questions.

### A. Some general considerations

I do not take issue with the paper in general but with broader themes of using one's body to understand/know the other in a therapeutic relationship. The first theme is the need in general to clarify the many terms we use to describe various states of intersubjectivity and our individual responses to it. Of course it is beyond a short paper like Totton's to go into this and it is not his task; it is for all of us to do (and the focus of the 2014 EABP conference in Lisbon). For example, we use the terms embodied (counter)transference, somatic (counter)transference, resonance, vegetative identification, superimposition, intersubjectivity and empathy (a nice word in German – *mitgefühl*: to feel with). Mixed in with these terms are mirror neurons, primary identification, projective identification and Boadella's (Personal correspondence, September 2006) "real transference" which is similar to Reich's genuine transference (1976). An example of how confusing all this language is: ...it is the therapist's countertransference engrams that

elicits the patient's transference." (Totton, p.5). I think a countertransference from the therapist will elicit a corresponding *countertransference* in the patient. I am also confused by the example from psychoanalyst Susie Orbach, although for Totton it is a "superbly vivid example of embodied countertransference" (p. 2). Was the patient transferring and Orbach had an embodied countertransference as suggested? Or was the patient simply being who she is – her "engrams" – indifferent to Orbach and Orbach had transference to the patient? Or is it projective identification: Orbach felt herself take a deep breath, blowing herself up as she had described the patient was? Was she identifying with the patient's power and enjoying it? Or was she unconsciously defending herself against a perceived attack.

I never understood the difference between projective identification and unconscious embodied countertransference which brings me to my second general theme: if we are going to work with the embodied relations within a unified body/mind state, we need to have some sort of criteria to delineate these different states. How do I know it is projective identification whereby I am unconsciously identifying with the projected feelings of the patient or the patient's transference is activating an unconscious, unresolved issue I have about myself? If the therapist is clear he will know it is projective identification. If he is acting out of his unconscious unacknowledged problem, he will *believe* it is the patient. Working with a patient I was hurt and became angry when she (maybe) suggested that I wasn't as "spiritual" as she was: "...oh, but I know you are not interested in that sort of thing." I had a (too) strong, immediate urge to take her into the next room to show her all my "spiritual" books on the shelf. I felt the anger in the body and I had the clear "I will show you" thought both at the same time. (At least I was a unified body/mind in my neurosis!) But it was clearly an overreaction on my part due to issues about being seen and appreciated. She was a highly successful business woman and could be seen as competitive so I had an embodied countertransference against her transference. Or did I? Maybe it meant nothing to her – it was all my imagination – in which case, my response was embodied transference. What are the criteria to know that any of the various terms listed above are actually happening?

I have taken the terminology of transmitter and receiver from German body psychotherapist Theresia Mestmäcker (Personal correspondence, at L'Academie de Sinsans, 2002) to deal with all these terms we use. We need to consider the quality, the clarity of any transmission and any reception as much as the content. What we transmit is not always what is received. All communications are filtered through our "engrams" and it is painfully clear that many of these are *not* clear. Are we empathic, resonating, embodied, or symbiotic, borderless, invasive? I remember in a congress presentation the first time I heard a therapist say he uses his body in the therapy to understand the patient. Immediately I was thinking and feeling, "I do not want *my* therapy based on *that* body!" It didn't seem to me to be a very clear receiver. In doing group supervisions, especially when using photos of patients, it is fascinating what the different supervisees respond to and in what manner. Sometimes it seems like three different patients are being presented simultaneously.

### B. Connective tissue as "the flesh"

Totton uses the words "flesh" and matrix to discuss our embodied response to the other. I do think information is being transmitted unconsciously, below the verbal level and it is received in the body. I have written (Davis, 2012) elsewhere about Alan Schore's (1999) views on body-based, non-verbal communication.

Concerning projective identification, there must be a “psycho-biological holding” by the therapist of the dangerous, projected, “nonverbal emotions” of the patient whereby the patient can vicariously explore and experience these emotions within a safe context. The therapist must “hold” and “metabolize” these emotions for the patient within her own *body* so that the patient can take them back again as his own. Havens and Larson (in Schore, 1999) comment, ‘Perhaps the most striking evidence of successful empathy is the occurrence in our bodies of sensations that the patient has described in his or hers.’ and that psychotherapeutic resonance is expressed in ‘specific sensations and/or feelings kinesthetically perceived by the therapist.’ (Havens & Larson as cited in Schore, 1999, p.10). This is more than an embodied self. This is embodied psychotherapy (Davis, 2012, p.5.).

Of course, it is of importance how little distortion the information goes through as it is being transmitted and received, but I am convinced that the physical reality of this “flesh” or matrix is in the connective tissue. In *Energy Medicine: The Scientific Basis*, Oschman (2000) refers to the networking of the connective tissue and calls it the matrix whereby information is passed throughout the whole body *instantaneously* outside the enteric, the vegetative and the central nervous system. (See my reaction to a perceived attack on my spirituality) Oschman is especially good at describing the energetic qualities of connective tissue. Connective tissue is a semi-conductor – between an insulator and a conductor - and all the biological energies pass through it: bio-magnetism, bio-acoustic, bio-luminescence, bio-chemical, bio-electric as well as all secretions. These energies are information, instructions for the body/mind. This is of importance if, according to Jantsch (p. 35) energy systems manifest themselves in the organization of material processes and structures.

Connective tissue is a semi-conducting communication network. It conveys bio-electric signals between every part of the body and every other part...bio-electric, bio-magnetic, bio-chemical and bio-acoustic signals moving through collagen fibers, ground substance and associated layers of water molecules. (Larson, 1990 p. 253)

The condition of the connective tissue determines the quality of the transmission and receptions: hypo-hydrated and hyper-hydrated. A slight reduction in hydration of the tissue caused by chronic stress, which for body psychotherapists is character armor, will result in a radical reduction and distortion of transmissions and receptions. A 10-20% decrease in hydration slows protons by 5000 fold. When wet, a photon moves along a collagen protein at 1 tenth of a millionth of a second. When dehydrated, the same distance takes 1 million seconds. Electrons are affected by hydration, too (Oschman, 1997). Communication and *mis*-communication travel through the “flesh” of connective tissue.

### C. On Engrams and Embodied Relating

I need clarification on embodied relational engrams. If an engram is, from a neurological point of view, “the physical unit of memory”, “something inscribed within” (Totton, p. 5), it seems to imply that engrams arise from outside influences, i.e. relationship. Yet, when referring to mirror neurons, and I appreciate the nuanced distinction Totton makes here, he seems to be implying the opposite: “...it is not some sort of ‘internal’ stimulation’ of the other’s action

or expression...but a direct and immediate knowing”. And, mirror neurons, “...*underwrite* the lived experience.” (Totton, p.5). My need for clarification is woven through the discussion on engrams: Porges’s engram is an “ancient scaffolding” on which we build” (Totton, p.8). Yet, Totton refers to engrams as being cultural/social. If I understand correctly, and there is no reason to believe I do, it seems Totton is using engrams as both innate, pre-existing patterns, archetypes, gestalts or programming and, at the same time, as learned cultural experiences through interaction with others.

Totton discusses this using the infant’s face recognition ability. We are impressed by how early an infant recognizes a face. Kendal (2012) reports “that from birth onward, infants are much more likely to look at faces than any other object” (p. 288), and goes on to describe the neurology of face recognition. Kendal points out that the infant is better wired to differentiate hands – position, with or without fingers - than faces. “The cells that responded to faces were not selective for any unique face, but for the general category of faces. This suggested “...that a particular face, a particular grandmother, is represented by a small, specialized collection of nerve cells – an ensemble of grandmother cells, or proto-grandmother cells.” (ibid., p.291) Furthermore it has been shown that even wasps and bees are capable of face recognition (Tibbetts & Dyer, 2013).

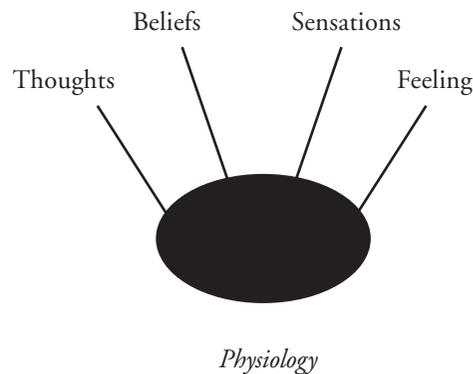
I refer to this research to point out that face recognition seems to exist independently of relationship and that relationship is built on this innate ability. The issue to me is, are we over-interpreting when we talk about infants imitating, receiving and responding to the other? Babies make faces when they are unaware that someone is looking at them. They seem to be responding to their own experiences of themselves and may be doing this when it appears to the outside observer that the infant is in relationship with the other. It is similar to Totton’s reference to Bateson’s (p.7) comment about how we anthropomorphize animals, or what the psychoanalyst Loewald (in Mitchell, 2000) would call imposing a secondary process view on the primary process, or Maturana and Varela’s (1998) “operational closure”. (p. 135)

This point is of particular interest to me. In a recently published paper I postulate an “endo self” which exists before relationship (Davis, 2014). The formulation of an *a priori* sense of self changes the dynamics of embodied relations. Is the infant “reproducing” the adult’s expression whereby the object is the center of this relational dynamic, or is the infant experiencing itself in relationship? Is it an imitation as a learning process or is it the excitation of a pre-existent state or facility and the infant is experiencing the satisfaction of a completed gestalt and is subject oriented. Ryan (1991) speaks to this: “The pleasure in mastery, in effectance, ...in experiencing action merely for its own sake is, as Piaget once called it, a basic fact of psychic life” (p. 209). I fear too many conclusions are being drawn and interpretations made about what is happening within the baby with the little knowledge we have of that state.

This brings us back to embodied relating themes: fusing, interacting endo and exograms, and circular causality. I need more clarity about this very important dynamic and the roles of self/other, social/cultural, and me/you/us specifically, because it will help me with my own formulation of an endo self. Do two different individuals become one in the embodied relational state? Is my unified body/mind/spirit, “me”, fusing with another’s, “you”, and creating a *new* system, an emergence, an “us” whereby the “me” and the “you” are gone? Is this Reich’s superimposition? Totton seems to be saying there is no subject/object: “Here is the hinge on which this paper

turns; the image of embodied relating as 'an act with two faces', a combined engram/exogram, an intaglio imprinting which fuses together the experience of the two body/minds (Totton, p. 6). Yet, he quotes Merleau-Ponty: "It is *as if* the other's intentions inhabit my body and mine his... It is through *my* body that I understand the other people" (p. 5 italics mine). Merleau-Ponty (Pagis, 2009) is a phenomenologist who, as far as I understand, emphasizes the *individual* experience (p.267). If that is so, then isn't it still two individuals experiencing the other within their separate individualities? If not, who is doing the experiencing? In the opposite direction from embodied relating, this is where I have always had trouble with transcendental psychology. If I transcend myself, who is left to have the new selfless experience?

My same confusion continues through his presentation of an up-hierarchy. Yes, unified body/mind, and yes to: "There is no psychological realm divorced from the body" (p. 3), and even though hierarchical, there is no judgment of "better". But can a body exist without a mind, a sense of self, of existence? I prefer the ice, steam, water analogy I offered at the EABP Congress in Vienna (2012). The three of them seem to be quite different and separate. Yet we know that they are the same on the molecular level. It is only different energy states that make the differentiation to us; they are differentiated but indivisible. I would formulate Totton's hierarchy of physiological to feelings to thoughts and beliefs as all emerging simultaneously from the same source. The diagram below attempts to represent a simultaneous emergence.



Instead of a hierarchy that implies a building up of a structure, I prefer the modeling of development more in terms of what Jantsch (1979) calls unfolding.

Unfolding is not the same as building up. The latter emphasizes structure and describes the emergence of hierarchal levels by the joining of systems 'from the bottom up'. Unfolding, in contrast, implies the interweaving of processes which lead simultaneously phenomena of structuration at different hierarchical levels. Complexity emerges from the interpenetration of processes of differentiation and integration, processes running from 'the top down' and from the 'bottom up' at the same time and which shapes the hierarchal levels from both sides. (p. 75)

Besides it being a good developmental model for the infant, I think this description fits well with Totton's "act with two faces" ...the fusing of two body minds as a co-evolutionary process in the therapeutic encounter.

## D. Conclusion

I think this is an important paper and clearly written despite my questioning. I bring up these points because Totton's paper has stimulated me to think more deeply about my own position on the critical themes he writes about. I am grateful for the invitation to participate in this discussion.

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Will Davis (1943) is an American with 40 years experience in psychotherapy. He has a psychology degree and was trained in Encounter Groups, Gestalt Therapy, Radix and in various alternative healing methods. He conducts body psychotherapy training workshops in Europe. Will developed the body-oriented psychotherapy, Functional Analysis, and is considered one of the major researchers in the fields of the functioning of the instroke and of the plasmatic basis of early disturbances. He is on the International Advisory Boards of the *Journal of Energy and Character* and the *International Journal of Body Psychotherapy*. He is a member of the Scientific Committee of the Italian Society of Psychologists and Psychiatrists and the European Association of Body Psychotherapy. He lives with his wife in the south of France. Email: willdaviswilldavis@gmail.com

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## Responsive Combodying, Novelty, and Therapy Response to Nick Totton's Embodied Relating, The Ground of Psychotherapy Akira Ikemi, PhD

### Abstract

In this paper, written as a response to Nick Totton's article "Embodied Relating: The Ground of Psychotherapy", the author first presents his recent view on embodiment. The term *responsive combodying* is used to express the three perspectives comprising his view. From this standpoint, reflexive awareness about the pre-reflexive living forward of the body is articulated. The implicit and the unconscious are contrasted on the grounds of their respective temporalities. While the unconscious points to the past, combodying pre-reflexively points to the not-yet, to novel ways of relating and living. In psychotherapy, novel ways of living forward change both the client's and therapist's existence.

*Keywords:* combodying, the implicit, reflexive awareness, Focusing

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### Introduction

Nick Totton has written an engaging paper entitled "Embodied Relating: The Ground of Psychotherapy" in this journal. In the second to last line of his article, he hopes his paper has provided reasons for "considering changing theoretical and clinical priorities, and thinking and working from the embodied-relational ground up".

"Yes, let's do that!" was my reaction to this line as I finished reading his paper. I too, share this enthusiasm for letting the body speak for and from itself, rather than imposing and framing concepts upon it. Totton writes, "I am quite aware of the irony of the fact that I am making this claim in a rational and verbal style." I wonder if it would really be an "irony". I am cautious about imposing verbal and rational concepts on the body, for I appreciate the body as interacting in language, before language, after language, and in wider ways than language.

There are many points of convergence between Totton's article and my views. I was delighted to read the following sentence about 'the felt sense of the other'. "I thought briefly that I had coined this expression, but it turns out to be used by several people, in particular Akira Ikemi." Though pleased to see this meeting point, there are also differences in our outlooks. In this particular instance, I feel that Totton has interpreted my phrase to mean a 'chiasm' in Merleau-Ponty's (1968) sense, which I do not intend. I will discuss more of this at a later point in this paper. The overall aim of this paper is to augment Totton's theoretical elaborations by bringing in an angle on embodiment that seems to be missing, or that is different from his. To do so, I first present my evolving views on embodiment (Ikemi, 2014) and then discuss how this interplays with Totton's article.

### Responsive Combodying

In a recent paper entitled "Sunflowers, Sardines and Responsive Combodying: Three Perspectives on Embodiment" (Ikemi, 2014), I elaborated on some aspects of embodiment. The first aspect exemplified by sunflowers comes from Gendlin's (1993, p.24) assertion that "we have plant bodies." Let us imagine a sunflower plant, for example. The sunflower has no input channels for perception, yet it knows exactly how to live. It "knows" that it is right to turn to the sun, for example. This self organizing-generating of life is not something that the sunflower was taught by its parents. The plant-body is not a blank slate upon which learning occurs. It *is* the interaction with the environment. More specifically, it *is* the organizing-generating of life in interaction with the environment. Gendlin (1973, p.324) gives another example to illustrate the same point: No one teaches a baby how to crawl. The body is capable of interacting with the environment and generating the right modes of interaction with the environment even though they might not be learned.

Moreover, every sunflower plant is different, as they are not like products produced in a factory. Some sunflower plants are taller than others, the color of the petals may differ slightly, and so forth. Each plant organizes and generates its own life from slightly differing environmental conditions.

In the vein of the above examples, my recent article (Ikemi, 2014) provides the illustration of people walking. Everyone walks in a slightly different way. If one were to devise a computer program for walking, the variables would be immense: body size and weight; the size and shape of each foot; muscle tone in the calves, thighs, hips, lower back, shoulders, and perhaps all areas of the body; the movement of each joint in the entire body; respiration; climatic conditions such as heat, wind chill, humidity, rain, snow, wind velocity, and direction; digestion (the walk differs when there is gas in the colons or when one has indigestion); cardiac output and blood circulation; emotions; schedule; the fit of shoes; items carried; road surface.... The list is probably inexhaustible. When there is a slight change in the inclination of the pavement, the body automatically adjusts. Walking on a stone pavement, where each stone varies in shape and size, I am amazed how my walk adjusts itself, even before I am aware of the pavement conditions. All this is done pre-reflexively, so that one can carry on and concentrate on a conversation while walking. A person does not need to reflect on the conditions involved in the walk, and yet the body *generates* its own right walk. The walk being generated is "right", since if it were not right, the person would be stumbling all the time. In fact, the body is "aware" of the multitudes of ever-changing conditions in the environment and *lives forward* with these.

The second perspective presented in this paper articulates how the body is a "body-in-the-universe". Some sea turtles lay eggs on the night of the full moon. The moon "inhabits" the body of the turtle, as well as the tide, the sandy beaches, the birds that prey on the eggs, the baby turtles to be born, the whole universe. Gendlin (1973) gives an example of a squirrel raised in a metal cage.

... a squirrel raised from birth in a metal cage, having never seen a nut on the ground, when given a nut at a certain age, will "bury" it. That is to say, it will scratch the metal floor, will pick up the nut, place it at the spot at which it scratched, and heap imaginary soil on the top of it. (p.324)

The soil, the earth, is "in" the squirrel. The body is "in" the universe and the universe is "in" the body. Human beings are "in" not only what humans call nature, but also so much more, including the situation, symbols, and historicity such as language, culture, and history. For instance, in the human body, it is not uncommon for blood pressure to go up when

stocks go down. Our bodies are “in” the symbolic world, and the symbolic world is “in” our bodies as well.

The word ‘embodiment’ sounds Western and dualistic to me. The prefix “em-” means “to put in”. Thus, to ‘embody’ means to “put into the body”, as if souls are incarnated into the body. The word itself implies a dualism of body and spirit or soul and matter. Therefore, instead of using this word, I have coined the term *combodying* where the prefix “com-” means “altogether with”. The term is also a verb, implying the ongoing process of generating life.

Combodying is always already situated and interacting with the world, the universe. I do not mean it in the sense of the ‘chiasm’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1968), which is described originally in Merleau-Ponty (1962, p.92) as a tactile perception of the right hand touching the left hand. As with the sunflower example above, the body interacts with the environment even without perception, since the sunflower has no perception channels. In another article that Totton referenced (Ikemi, 2013), I elaborated on a sense of someone watching me, which is a bodily sentience lacking direct perception. Gendlin (1992) attempts to carry forward the important understanding of the body that Merleau-Ponty initiated. I agree with Gendlin that the body is already relating to the world before perception and that starting the study of intentionality from perception greatly limits the intricate relating of the body. Thus, although my gaze of an other includes her gaze of me in a ‘chiasm’, it is not only the gaze, not only perception. My body is sweating, and I perceive the perspiration on my skin only after the sweating has well started. And maybe she and I are both emitting some pheromones, which again is not perception. So much more goes on in ‘embodied relating’ than literally meets the eye.

In the third perspective articulated about the body (Ikemi, 2014), combodying forward is seen as a pre-reflexive process, and yet one’s reflections about aspects of combodying can change the ways one combodyes. For example, ancient Chinese medicine discovered meridian points in the body. Stimulating these meridian points changes how bodies combody. Even intensive surgery can be done with acupunctural anesthesia. Similarly, when one turns one’s attention, in a mindful way, to the chakras while walking, one will notice that the walking changes immediately. Together with this, breathing changes, posture changes, and so many other aspects of combodying change instantly. The body responds to and combodyes differently when there are concepts and procedures that have precisely such effects. Thus, many concepts and procedures in body psychotherapy are capable of altering the mode of combodying, i.e., how the body interacts and lives forward from the present situation.

### From the Ground Up

I am much for “from the ground up” instead of imposing concepts on combodying. Totton adapts an “up-hierarchy” so that there are four levels, “physiological activation” at the base and then upwards into “feelings”, then “fantasies” and finally “thoughts and beliefs” at the top. I am somewhat hesitant to make a critique of this because Totton himself writes that this hierarchy is “plainly over-simplified” and much more work is “required to come anywhere near an adequate depiction”. However, I deliberately choose to dwell on this because it illustrates the differences in how we think.

From my point of view, there seem to be too many concepts here already, with which Totton’s explication hierarchy is structured. First of all, what is meant by “up”? And how does the concept of “hierarchy” function? It would seem to function by organizing thoughts into a coherent system of relationship between concepts wherein the higher on the hierarchy,

the more dis-embodied one gets. Are not these concepts imposed on the body? Moreover, the base of this hierarchy is “physiological activation” which is already a concept. The body in itself and physiology are not identical; physiology, rather, is the science of how the body functions. “Activation” is also a concept.

Being mindful of the body, one might notice, for instance, that breathing is fast, or that the body is hot and sweating and yet feeling cold and chills, that the body is wanting to lie down and rest, or that there is some felt sense in the chest. Combodyed existence is pre-conceptual or pre-reflexive. One needs to reflect on aspects of combodying so that meaning can be generated. One might reflect on a body whose breathing is fast, and which is itself hot and sweating, yet cold and wanting to lie down — and try out the concept of “fever”. If the thermometer shows that indeed it is fever, some meaning is created and an appropriate next set of behaviors can be conceived. But more refinements continue. Is it a cold? Or the flu? What if the symptoms of a common cold or influenza don’t appear — what then? One needs to reflect further. Or what if the thermometer shows a normal temperature reading? One needs to turn away from the instrument (in this case, thermometer) and reflect using much of one’s capacities — feelings (is it an affective reaction to something?); recollection (is it alcohol or was anything else ingested?); thoughts (was the day’s work exhausting? Is it lack of stamina or insufficient exercise?) thoughts-feelings (should a medical examination be pursued?); and Focusing (shall the felt sense in the chest be focused on?).

Instead of making a set of classifications such as “physiological activation”, “feelings”, “fantasies”, and “thoughts and beliefs”, I prefer to keep it simple, so that, on the one hand, there is the pre-reflexive and, on the other, reflexive awareness. Reflexive awareness makes use of different modes of reflection including recollection, thinking, feeling, and Focusing. However, since it would be difficult to make arbitrary distinctions between these modes — one can be recollecting and thinking and feeling at the same time — I prefer not to distinguish them and instead choose to keep them all within reflexive awareness.

In fact, one can engage each of Totton’s hierarchy stages with reflexive awareness by reflecting upon feelings, fantasies, thoughts, beliefs, and the body. It is the interplay of the pre-reflexive and reflexive awareness that I wanted to emphasize in another article (Ikemi, 2013) that Totton references.

### The Implicit and the Unconscious

Totton writes, “Something that emerges strongly from work on embodied cognition is the important role of implicit knowledge in human learning.” He seems to equate implicit knowledge with preconscious or unconscious patterns and, referencing other authors, he goes on, “...we rely on preconscious or unconscious patterns of activation and behaviour which we developed when first learning the activity”. In the next paragraph, he uses this model to understand ‘engrams’. He explains, “Our embodied relational engrams, then, are formed in our earliest relationships; and we use them, for better or worse, as blueprints in each attempt to negotiate new encounters.” Apparently, Totton is trying to explain embodied relating or the bodily sentience of relating by hypothesizing about how they came to be.

Here, it seems evident to me that a popularly employed conceptual framework is imposed on the bodily sentience of relating. It is seen as a product, as it were of previous learning. When a person wonders about a product, frequently asked questions are: “How was it made?” “When was it made?” “Who made it?”. Totton seems to be asking these questions about bodily sentience.

Assumed here is that the product is already made, a *fait accompli*. So one looks to the past to see how it was made. But is bodily relating a *fait accompli*?

Totton seems to equate implicit knowledge with the psychoanalytic concepts of preconscious and unconscious. Psychological contents, in psychoanalytic theory, are assumed to be based in memory. Gendlin (1990) argues that this is so because in many theories and philosophies, including psychoanalysis, human nature is seen as being unable to generate its own order. Therefore, in those theories, human nature must be conditioned by patterns imposed on it. Without learning, human nature is thought of as blank, with no order of its own. Thus, in this line of thinking, any bodily sentience would be seen as a representation of what was learned in the past and stored in memory.

In contrast, “the implicit” implies something that is not-yet in Gendlin’s philosophy. My felt sense of hunger at this very moment, for instance, seems to be implying something like dahl curry at a particular Indian restaurant. My bodily sentience of hunger points to something that is not-yet, the future, since I am not at the Indian restaurant yet. Of course, I can think of reasons why I want dahl and look for past events that may have shaped this direction. But past events alone cannot determine the body’s forward projection. A sniff of Chinese food cooking at the restaurant on the corner may change my body’s implying. Then, all the reasons I have thought about for why I want dahl tonight must be altered. As in walking, the body pre-reflexively integrates the ever-changing multitudes of information and constantly adjusts and generates the next novel steps of life.

### Dance, Play, and Therapy

Yes, therapy can be symbolized as dance and play. On the dance, Totton writes, “Each forward movement of one dancer’s limbs implies and elicits, gives meaning to and takes its meaning from, a backward movement of the other, and vice versa. And listen, they’re playing our tune: the dance is a unique synthesis of the two partners’ relational engrams, in which each constitutes an exogram for the other. Again we are encountering circular causality, mutual co-arising.”

And here is my version: First there’s the rhythm, the music, and the commitment to dance with this partner. These interactions, including the relationship with the partner, come first. Each of the dancers is combodying in the interaction with this partner, with this music, with these surrounding people, with this occasion for the dance, and much more, as the two “co-arise” in the dance. The body begins to generate its own movements, instead of just repeating the same steps. Novel bodily movements arise. Why did I sway my torso this way? Before I can reflect on this, more new movements arise. The other’s movements blend into my movements in a sense of oneness, and at times surprise me when novel movements by the other catch me off-guard. The oneness is temporarily suspended with an outstanding otherness of the other. The other arises, and then falls back into the oneness.

Rather than the particular movement of the limbs, there would be an encompassing sense of dancing with this person in this situation. That felt sense would be difficult to express in words. One would have to reflect on the mutual pre-reflexive bodily living of the relationship with the other person. It is such reflexive activity from the felt sense of the relationship that creates new meanings and carries forward the relationship. Blueprints, as engrams and exograms do, play a part in the dance. However, the dance is not a repetition, not a reliving of the script in the blueprint. Combodying incorporates the past and the whole present situation, and yet it newly

lives forward. And this is what happens in therapy as well. The newly living forward changes both the client’s and the therapist’s existence.

It is my hope that this response to Nick Totton’s article will shed light on an aspect of embodied relating that is not emphasized as much in Totton’s article: the perspective of novelty, the forward life-generating process. I do not downgrade the importance of understanding persons through their personal histories and narratives. But just as much as with attending to the past, I value reflecting on discovering the newly developing living-forward with the relationship and with the whole situation, which are implied in combodying.

### BIOGRAPHY

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**Response to Commentaries by Stanley Keleman,  
David Boadella, Akiri Ikemi and Will Davis  
Nick Totton**

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I very much value and benefit from a collaborative, cooperative approach to the development of theory; and I have generally experienced a lack of this in the field of body psychotherapy, apart from a small group of close colleagues. So I am delighted and honoured to have been asked to contribute a paper in this format, and to receive responses from such a distinguished group of practitioners.

At the same time, I have of course felt, as I suspect everyone does in this situation, frustration and disappointment, a sense of being misread! After an initial bout of spluttering, though - "Haven't they noticed the paragraph on page...", "Can't they see that I'm saying the exact opposite..." - I realised that 'misreading' is better understood as 'critical feedback': that I am being shown exactly what is unclear, confused and missing in my paper. For which I am, reluctantly, grateful; especially since I have this opportunity to clarify what I thought I was saying, what I intended but failed to communicate.

I shall start briefly with Stanley Keleman. Disappointingly, Keleman has chosen to say almost nothing about my paper, but instead to write, interestingly, about his own interests. This is of course itself feedback of a sort. In the first of the two paragraphs (literally) where he refers to what I say, I was alarmed to read how I fail to grasp that relationships are 'somatic patterns of behaving that cue responses between infants and adults', and fail to identify engrams as 'synaptic neural-muscular re-embodied maps'. I agree with both formulations, though the first strikes me as oversimplified (relationship styles start that way, but are altered by the responses we get) and the second overcomplicated (what does 're-embodied' mean?)

Keleman's sole other reference to my paper mentions Merleau-Ponty, then goes on 'Totton may not realize that he's implicitly saying that there is an unembodied realm influencing the bodied realm'. I don't know whether 'he' is me or Merleau-Ponty; I hope the latter, since I'm quite sure that I am saying nothing of the kind. I agree that in some passages (not the ones I use) Merleau-Ponty is arguably caught in aspects of the paradigm he is trying to leave behind. And that is really all I can say about Keleman's paper, without reversing the intended process and commenting on his ideas rather than him commenting on mine. David Boadella's brief response is pleasingly positive. There are two ways, however, in which our positions seem to differ. Firstly, Boadella seems to think that neuroscience offers *explanations* rather than *redescriptions* of what we experience in relationship: in other words, that to speak of 'mirror neurones' and 'anti mirror neurones' is to say *more* than one does when speaking of 'the balance between "you" and "I"'. Taking a phenomenological view, I would suggest that in some ways it says *less*, and at best says the same thing differently. This overvaluation of what neuroscience can offer runs through all four responses.

Secondly, and importantly, Boadella still gives relationship only a secondary place in body psychotherapy, with the primary place still occupied by work with and on the client's body and energy field. I of course agree that 'establishing the right frame of emotional contact is essential for all body psychotherapists, in particular ... in order to avoid retraumatisation'. But my paper tries to go a lot further than that, arguing that both body and verbal psychotherapy depend wholly on the embodied relationship between client and therapist. I will say more about this below.

I feel much more community of understanding with Will Davis and Akira Ikemi: I don't know how old in years anyone is, but my sense is that the three of us are in the same conceptual generation, and share a lot of common ground. I value Ikemi's emphasis on 'the forward life-generating process' alongside understanding how the past has shaped the present; this is, I think, an important aspect of my own practice, which I didn't look at in this paper. The work of therapy, the work of life in fact, is to create a future out of the material which the past has given us: to transform limitation into possibility.

Where I think Ikemi and I may disagree is around the relationship between thinking and embodiment, concepts and bodily experiences. Ikemi seems to maintain a sharp and simple dichotomy between the two, and to believe that it is possible to occupy a 'pre-conceptual or pre-reflexive' space. (But doesn't 'pre-' imply the same hierarchy of disembodiment which he finds in my paper?) He points out, quite rightly, that 'physiology' for example is a concept; but seems to assume that it is therefore disembodied. However, 'body' is equally a concept! Not only can we not discuss *anything* without using concepts; we cannot consciously *experience* anything without using concepts. I disagree with the commonly held view that this intrinsically alienates us from our experience, and my brief discussion in the paper of 'full' and 'empty' speech is intended to address this issue; following on from it we can maybe speak of 'full' and 'empty', embodied and disembodied, thought as well (Sheets-Johnstone, 1990).

Ikemi responds in a reflexively negative way to the word 'hierarchy'; but a logical hierarchy is quite different from a hierarchy of value. He says that 'the higher on the hierarchy, the more dis-embodied one gets'. But I stress in my paper that 'each of these levels ... expresses emergent properties of the one below'- embodiment provides the ground and core of psychological functions. I quote John Heron:

In an up-hierarchy it is not a matter of the higher controlling and ruling the lower, as in a down-hierarchy, but of the higher branching and flowering out of, and bearing the fruit of, the lower.

(Heron. 1992, p. 20)

I was perhaps over ambitious in trying to squeeze so much into one paper (I am currently writing a book about embodied relating, for which this exchange will be very helpful). Another aspect which I think I failed to explain adequately is mutual or circular causality. This concept, which I learnt from Gregory Bateson and Joanna Macy, is of fundamental importance in suggesting ways forward on several pressing issues - notably the environmental crisis (Totton, 2011). It is also my answer to the questions raised by Will Davis, in his very thoughtful paper, about issues of cause and effect.

Several of Davis's points are ultimately about causality. For instance: 'it seems Totton is using engrams as both innate, pre-existing patterns, archetypes, gestalts or programming and, at the same time, as learned cultural experiences through interaction with others.' This is exactly right - and a good example of mutual causation; as I say in my paper,

While our embodiment is the ground of social relations it is also constructed *through* social relations. This is paradoxical from the viewpoint of formal Western logic, but such chains of mutual or circular causation are common from the perspective of ecological and other cybernetic systems, and are the foundation of Buddhist ontology.

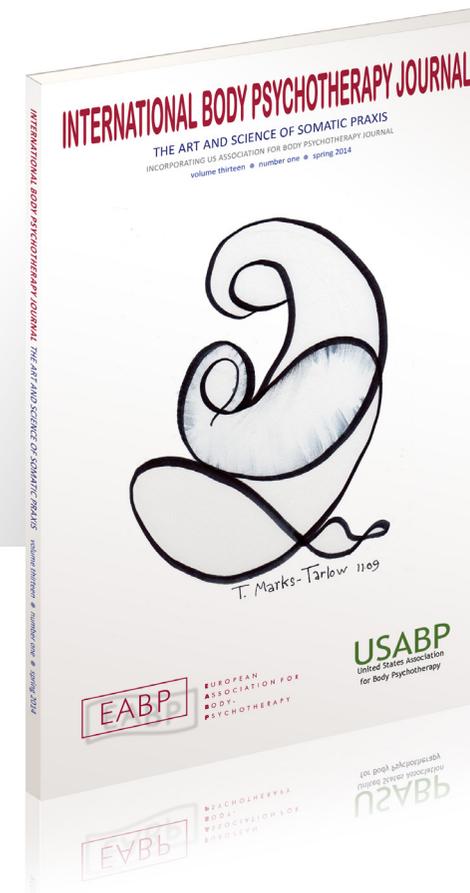
I have realised that I would need to say a good deal more about mutual causation in order to make my position really clear. The same goes for the overall systemic approach that takes us beyond the either/or impasse. Davis writes of infants that 'face recognition seems to exist independently of relationship and that relationship is built on this innate ability'. This implies an either/or: either what infants do in imitating facial expressions *is* relationship or it *isn't*. Such formulations are fundamental to western logic; but over the last century or so, we have become aware of so many situations with which this logic cannot deal. Babies imitating adult expressions neither *are* nor *aren't* relating; but they are doing what later takes on relational meaning for them, and already takes on relational meaning for the adults who respond to it - and if it didn't, the babies might not survive. Everything grows from this act of proto-relating.

I would respond similarly to Davis's earlier wrestling with issues of transference, counter transference and so on: basically, he is asking 'is it the practitioner or the client who is responsible for what is experienced?' I tried quite hard in my paper to argue that this is another false either/or: it is always a matter of *both* - aspects of client and practitioner which resonate with and respond to each other. Whatever is constellated in a given therapy session is co-created through and in relational interaction.

There is a great deal more to say here; but it will probably have to wait for my book! Again, I am grateful to those who have responded to the paper; and also grateful to the IBPJ and to Asaf Rolef Ben-Shahar for inviting me to write it, at exactly the right moment. I hope that the process has contributed in some small way to strengthening the spirit of collegiality in the networks of body psychotherapy.

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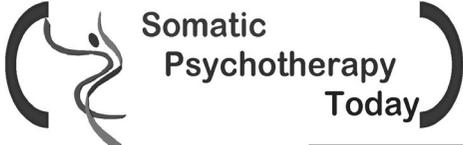
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