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article about a workshop given at congress "the art of relating" from european association of bodypsychotherapy in netherlands about the self-understanding of bodypsychotherapists during working (handling trans- and countertransference)

Contact is the rebellious factor in bodypsychotherapy

I have been working in the field of bodypsychotherapy for about 17 years and when communicating with my colleagues I am often struck by how difficult it can be to express our manifold dynamic and differentiated perceptions in language. Therefore I have made it my aim in this article to describe the different ways a therapist has of perceiving their clients. This comes from an insight that especially in the field of bodypsychotherapie we need a language which is less abstract and theoretical.

The seven various levels of contact in bodypsychotherapy:

Perceiving

Sensing with the body

In my work as a body therapist my primary awareness lies in maintaining the feeling of my own body, to love myself enough to be able to notice calmly what is going on. I keep breathing deeply or take a position which allows me to be aware of myself in the presence of my clients. I may increase the distance between my clients and me in one instance. In another instance I might cross my arms or my legs. Sometimes I will not stay seated but get up, and I may also ask my respective clients to move or change their position. The beginning of each body therapy session consists of making sure that I succeed in feeling a streaming and pulsation within myself while being in contact with my client. Being a live organism, it is important to feel and understand my senses.

In the first years of my work I practised various forms of dynamic meditation every day, which helped me, simply because they were strenuous for the body, to get out of the images of my mind and to be aware of my senses. Later I practised many exercises to refine my senses: Tai Chi and Aikido taught me to rest in my centre even when complex things are going on (1). Meditation on a regular basis trained me to concentrate on what I am experiencing. Fasting cleansed my body as a feeling organism, to keep it ready for impressions perceived by the senses. I did verbal exercises (2) which helped me to perceive even more precisely how my clients speak and move and to listen more accurately which kind of perception via the

senses they prefer or neglect. I learned, for example, that there are people who prefer to arrange their experiences in inner pictures and others who organise them as sounds or hear them as voices or stories. Today I come back to those initial exercises, whenever I feel heavy or confused in my work.

I also make it a habit to deal with the files of my clients in my free time, whenever I am at ease and the feeling of my body is stable, when I feel really "round and strong like a bear" within myself and around myself. At these times, when there is strong sense of streaming, I often find new ways to improve my work or find solutions for my clients difficult emotional armourings.

Describing

Finding the language of the emotions

Next level of contact relates to the need to describe, what I have perceived. I feel it is difficult to be able to stay soft enough in a world of facts, realities and suffering to find the words which describe my experiences well enough. In practice I experience how many problems it can create when clients speak of their fear, their pleasure or their anger as if those were objects like a chair, a table or a candle. In those emotional words events, people and actions are hidden which have to be understood. Behind the rage, for example, there may be a hot trembling feeling in her belly which soars up and which she fears, may find its way through her throat and her mouth at an inappropriate moment she may start screaming. Then she can learn to deal with this emotion. If she is angry, it is more than an object which she hopes perhaps she can throw in the garbage like an old piece of furniture, so that it will not disturb her.

Of the courage to say things the way they are

I am also dealing with re-transforming these seeming objects into the events which are hidden within them. This means, that it is sometimes difficult, as the appropriate words simply do not want to come up. At other times, it is rather difficult to say those words: For example, if I smell, that a client smells in a dull and dusty way, I cannot tell her just like that without embarrassing this young lady. Other impressions do not seem to have anything to do with the situation at first, for example, if I have to scratch my shoulders some minutes after the beginning of a session. However, if I have the courage to make it a topic, a sudden memory might come up in my client, which has to do with her corresponding shoulder.

The difficulty on this second level of contact is my acting out of a wholeness where basically each event can have meaning attributed to it. I may be confronted with sensations and events that shock my own pulsation and activate my fragmentation. Then I am in the middle of a body therapy session, fragmented into the pieces of me as a person and I create confusion being in contact. I worsen the situation if I leave myself in this situation pretending to help my client with her shock. The only thing that helps here, is coming back into contact with myself and, for example, feeling my trembling again or my tense belly.

On this second level of contact it is helpful if I am able to describe my situation. I get along well with my schizoid fragmentation, if I can name what is going on in moments of confusion and how I feel. At the end of a body therapy session I usually write down briefly its content, the process and what I felt being in contact with the client. If all that does not help, I make some exercises for myself during the break or I

speak to myself in a loud voice. This may also be transformed into some kind of prayer.

Measuring/assessing

Pulsation as a yardstick for contact

Closeness is the next area important to me in this work: It is part of my profession, that I have to deal with new and unknown human interactions on a daily basis. Many colleagues try to limit that by acting according to a set pattern: This person is a masochist, so I have to do this or that, or this is a typical hysterical patient, etc...; but then I lose my basis, my sympathy for these people. Pulsation is my point of departure at every session and I am able to be touched. Even if we have already been working together for thirty sessions and the person comes in again, my body stays receptive for what this person brings in today. I might feel a sudden heaviness in my chest or see a sparkle in his eyes. If I do not notice these small signals any more, I will lose my liveliness in my work and I cannot offer it any more to the person opposite. I would treat these live people according to patterns and by that reduce them to patterns.

Pulsating work makes me curious

Once I am in this sympathetic condition, I become aware of my natural curiosity. If I discover, for example, that somebody is engaged in astrology, I also feel like dealing with this topic. It goes without saying that it also means work reading something about it or having an astrological session myself. However but after all these years of doing this work, I can also see how much more knowledgeable I have become through the interests of my clients. I am not talking of abstract knowledge, but a knowledge connected to concrete experiences with a human being.

There was one client, for example, who was so interested in altered states of consciousness, that he supported his interest with psychoactive substances. What a fun afternoon we spent together looking for magic mushrooms in the meadow one autumn, sitting at the edge of the woods afterwards, giggling and dreaming! (3)

In this third area of my work, something else came in to existence, almost unnoticed, which I am only beginning to understand. I feel really enthusiastic about it: A lot of knowledge about being human, which is always connected with concrete people and events, is actually wisdom.

In many interactions between people, the amount of information and knowledge seems to be in the way and lead to misunderstandings. But this kind of knowledge, which practically forced itself onto me, is on the contrary helpful in every interaction. I would like to give an example: I know from my work, the impression that somebody does not feel himself. If I touch the thigh of this client, my feeling always seem to get to sleep and the contact with her feels cold. In technical terms this is called repression (one aspect of a complex reality which cannot or does not want be felt as belonging to this person). I got to that point three times and each time I couldn't find a solution. So the need within me to really want to understand what repression is being triggered. Maybe I get some literature or talk with friends about it and thus, a deeper understanding of the issue slowly unfolds. I notice this especially, when the contact does not get cold any more at the next touch or maybe the one after that, but when I get to think of new options. In this way I bring „repression“ as my client's symptom into our live interaction. By doing so, I allow my feelings to participate. Then I may notice at the end of

a session, after my client has gone home and my sensing is still reverberating, that she only rarely touches this part of her body, maybe because she doesn't like her leg. So there is already another option that can be dealt with in the next session.

Naming structures

Beyond therapeutical technique

Of course I make use of the diagnostics of holistic medicine in this area, such as the fantastic book of J.M. Gleditsch(4); or Ohashi (5). In the session of anamnesis I am first and foremost interested in excluding certain indications against body therapy, but also in getting an overall view of the life-story of my clients or their tale of woe. This is also the session where I get on my marks, so to speak. I get an overall view by the way my clients convey their life-stories and their content. Then I organize those pieces of information. I try to find a centre in the presence of the many pieces of news and symptoms. In doing so, the Asian teaching of the elements may be helpful. Its diagnostics allows me to get insights into the prominent weaknesses and hidden disorders of a client, or analytical knowledge about disorders of body pulsation through traumatic events may be helpful (6;7). At the session of anamnesis or when feeling into it afterwards, I am always able to find an inner space where I can become aware of a certain relaxation and expansion of my sense of my clients. Some people talk of terrible tragedies in their lives and then I can feel, how something gets fearfully tense within me. I may think: „My God, destiny really doesn't mean well with this woman.“ So we both look for the polarity of her experience, for the other side, where she learned to come through a very difficult situation with a great ability to assert herself. And I support her in learning to accept this good side of her drama. But the technical phenomenon (polarisation and validation of an issue) is only the result of my endeavours to relax my energy field again while being in contact with this person. In this context it is interesting, that in the many cases, when we did not succeed in finding a solution at first, I was confronted with parts of me which I could not possibly accept and which I noticed in my clients.

After all, an emotionally clear beginning allows a good development of the continuing work. Once contact gets more dynamic and eruptive feelings look for their expression, I am flexible and ready to act, if my energy field rests in the centre of my body. With a very strong client, for example, who acts on his hate at a certain phase of the work, I need emotional power ready for tensions and able to support what he is acting out, rather than evading his power by rationalizations or therapeutical explanations. With people with massive emotional disorders, clear orientation also helps me to penetrate the layer of the always friendly and efficient everyday face via the power of my voice or certain acupuncture points.

Hence, interpreting the material presented by the client as resistance against his deep hurt in a confused energetic situation may be as re-traumatizing as an emotionally clear situation opens an option for the client to surrender to his respective emotion in a safe therapeutical setting. In this context I want to mention that Sigmund Freud himself used the interpretation of latent „transference“ on the analyst only, when the psychoanalytical ground rule of his clients' free association got stuck (8) Today, however, this interpretation is already used in everyday language to block the flow of associations and emotions. „But this is a transference.“ in everyday language has become synonymous with: You disqualify yourself with this statement / I don't want to have anything to do with it.

Of the necessity to lose the overall view while being in contact

At this point the issue of power can sneak into the therapeutical area, if male or female therapists think they have an overview of the interaction and judge their clients. Since the scientific discoveries of the 1920's, however, the position of the objective observer of a situation cannot be maintained any more(9). The observer and his object are interrelated in a continuous dialogue. We as therapists have to rely deeply on the perceptions of our sensory apparatus and we illustrate our trust in the complex variety of aliveness exactly by having our sensations flow into the therapeutical contact.

„The analyst who strictly follows Freud's taboo strengthens the patient's own conviction that words are good and touch is always erotic and destructive and hence bad. Both, therapists and clients have to learn to master their arousal; they have to realize that fantasy does not have to lead to action. Thus, the therapist's touch can break through the client's resistance and help him to differentiate and come to terms with both ways of experience. (10)

Working with the wall

Now I am in front of a wall in body therapy (11): I use my senses for orientation: the way I feel my body, how my muscles contract or expand, how tense my belly feels, how soft my look is or if my eyes work together at all: All these hints help me in my therapeutical contact. These experiences are the wall, the limit of my work. If I work too much and feel overloaded and constipated, I need more distance from my clients. If I feel needy and emotionally hungry, I slow the work down and find out, what I need exactly. Staying at this wall is the border I offer in my work, which sometimes limits me to my conscious will. My practical experience tells me, that I do not find applicable solutions in the area of ideas. There, only concepts are exchanged against other concepts and the conflict of not-being-able to-trust-in-our-being is nourished further. I find solutions in getting conscious of my limits, my limitations. This may mean that I invite somebody to notice his compulsive carnal instincts with more curiosity and accuracy as well as to invite another client to come out of his cocoon and to experience what is still possibly at the border of the experiences he has had up to then.

Moreover, many a transformation takes place at this wall. The widening of my sense of streaming takes place where it finds its limits, and it is good to stay there if I want to notice this transformation. Stanley Keleman and others describe extensively how we get information for the solution of our problems in recalling and getting ever more present for the structure and organization of our subjective experience. (12;13)

Recognizing interrelations

Special features of sexual disorders while being in contact

If I stay in my centre with all the information given up to now and follow the sensations of my body, two different directions of my pulsation arise:

One tends to gather within myself and to get dense and denser, so that the quality of my inner experience changes.

When this happens, I may experience intense heat or changes in my perception of colour or light. If these energies gather in my head, inner pictures can develop. They sometimes come up as replays of situations and events already experienced or as constructions of completely new

situations. Some of them unfold in the form of a continuous series of dreams, I find others realized weeks or months later as an event in my everyday reality. In my experience, these inner worlds are by no means a mere turning away from reality, but they complete and enrich it in manifold ways.

The pleasure of touching

The other direction of pulsation is an expanding and widening of my sense of heat. Pulsations or streams of a warm melting power flow through my body. They come and ebb and come up again. Those sensations, which may increase hot waves full of pleasure in sexual contact and look for their expression in the convulsions of orgasm. But they do not find their end there, only a certain height and intensity which unfolds further in the subsequent melting experiences of the body. I am very grateful to Freud's disciple Wilhem Reich for stressing the analogy between these sensations and our sexual experience. More than 15 years ago, this view helped me to understand later the many strange body sensations I experienced during the age of adolescence. I could find out something about the fear I had had, that something was wrong with me, and I could learn to understand my body as a healthy pulsating organism. Reich called these sensations an expression of our orgastic potency (14) This does not refer to our faculty of having an erection or of ejaculating or of having sensations in clitoris or vagina, but our ability to deal with the power of intense feelings in our whole body. Orgastic potency means for example our capacity of being able to experience the strong trembling and shaking with fear without blocking it by holding our breath, or being able to express eruptive outbursts of rage via movements and voice without hurting ourselves or others; or it means letting the melting streams of love flow in our heart without having to give up the 'I'. In this sense, orgastic disorder begins where „something“ constricts our throat, when we feel divided at our diaphragm or when our genitals feel energetically empty without being able to free us from these sensations.

Many of my clients are completely uninterested in this orgastic experience. Their body pulsation is limited in most cases, and in many cases remnants of a pulsing sensation are crammed into mystic/esoteric models, so that their intrinsic capacity of being human and sympathetic is being transfigured: If I explain my special ability to allow my heart to be soft with the special abilities of my guru or a religious practice, then I deprive myself of my power of feeling these sensations. Or if I am only able to act out my hatred while being in a soccer stadium and yelling terms of abuse at the opposing team, I stay restricted in my ability of experiencing this hot-blooded power as an expression of being human in my relationships.

In this fifth level of contact in body psychotherapy we are dealing with the understanding of the energetic background of a symptom - be it a pain disease which cannot be verified diagnostically, or a behaviour disorder or a persistent conflict in a relationship.

As a body therapist I have to rely on a vigorous orgastic power, which helps me in my everyday work to support my client in expanding their emotional sensations. I reach an especially interesting phase in this work once a clients experiences for the first time the break-through of sexual sensations or of sensations of pleasure. People nowadays tend to direct these sensations to the people close to them or there is deep shame and embarassment if they experience pleasure in the presence of a stranger(wich, in a way, am I still for them). In these situations I sometimes follow my clients' symptoms, as I do with all other emotions. But the tension, I was speaking of comes into existence, if I myself experience arousal coming up.

Just as I feel myself in my work so, I also feel how my power gathers in my speech centre with one client, or how it gathers in my sexual centre with another one. As I work with touch, these differences will certainly be felt by my clients. Being in contact, the question arises how to deal with my arousal, for example. I certainly do not intend to act on what I feel with a client. This would be a simple functionalisation of a person to be the object of my desire. This would be no expression of contact in body psychotherapy, but the end of contact and the beginning of a neurotic object relationship. Yet, to control my arousal by tensing my belly would leave me without the most important sensorium in my work, my streaming.

Well then, to put it short: I let my arousal be. Maybe I notice a pleasurable tingling under my skin, or how my eyes get more alive and I continue working. Maybe my experience seems to be helpful for the work in countertransference and I make my arousal a theme in her presence. In doing so, the energy fields of both of us can expand and give energy to each other or we work out, being in contact, how she may protect her own power in a better way, when confronted with such emotions.

Whenever I talked about these sensations, pictures came up in peoples' minds. To put it simply, the unexpressed sexual power in our heads transforms into pictures of copulating couples or other sexual actions. Irina Tweedie wrote in her fascinating autobiographic report „Daughter of Fire“ (15), how, in the presence of her Indian guru, she was haunted for weeks by such pictures. It is one of the few books I know, where people report their sexual pictures in a simple and yet truthful way. So I stay with my own pleasurable experience in those situations and I support the feelings of my clients in the same way. In his case study „the first year“ the psychoanalytically orientated body psychotherapist Tilmann Moser describes how he has an erection while working with a female client and he inner process he went through to deal with this experience (16). In the therapeutical context it may seem appropriate to me also to take these feelings into consideration or I try to give room to my sexual feelings after the session. Not the fact of experiencing or talking about such feelings is the boundary of this understanding. The boundary is not to project those feelings on the client „you are responsible for my arousal/satisfaction and not acting them out by touching in a sexual way. In other words, when I work, I also trust in the meaning of my sexual feelings, as I do with other body sensations and I stay in contact with my streaming sensation.

„I think, if people lived their own life fully up to the last bit, if they let each feeling take its form, expressed each thought, put into being each dream, I believe that the whole world would then get such an impetus of new joyfulness, that we would forget all diseases and we would develop to something subtler and richer than even the hellenic ideal.“ (17)

Sexual Abuse

As everybody is talking about the topic of sexual abuse nowadays, I want to talk about how this also applies to bodypsychotherapy. Being a bodypsychotherapist doesn't make one a better person. nor does receiving a training analysis with a renowned psychoanalyst of the International Association of Psychoanalysis prevents you from being abusive. This has been well researched (see: 17;18;19). There are disturbances in my energetic sensation, whenever I have to deal with abused male or female clients. To put it simply, there are two distinctive features: In one case I feel, how my pelvis contracts as soon as she enters the room and in the subsequent conversation I experience myself increasingly as if I was sexless. It is difficult to describe how a person without sex feels, and

often something nebulous and confused blends into my energy field. In the other case there is a strong resonance right away. Many male and female clients can feel that themselves, but some people are not conscious of how strongly their energy field creates sexual sensations. Being in resonance I feel how my eyes start to sparkle, how I feel electrified and a certain tingling develops under my skin.

With clients of both types I start with closing my energy field. In the first case, because otherwise I would get increasingly confused and I would not be able to work therapeutically. In the other, because I would feel drawn into a sexual feeling too quickly and too strongly without being able to integrate the other aspects of what I am experiencing; I would be drawn out of my compassionate centre. At the same time another abusive act on an energetic level would be the direct consequence, even if it was hidden in the form of a therapeutical intervention.

So I change to the first or second level of contact, as described above, and try to reestablish my distance, thus making it possible to describe what is going on and to put up boundaries.

Intuition/Meditation

The source of contact

Body therapy can turn into an addiction for the therapist. We have so many sensual experiences and situations full of life which we maybe do not feel in our everyday life, that we can get addicted to our work, simply because it is so pleasant. Addicts of other drugs also put up with side effects, such as occasional inner restlessness or exhaustion.

Again and again, I love being completely alone with myself in the course of a year. This is when I discover suddenly, how intensely I feel divided into above and below or what a deep resignation is coming up within me, when there is nobody there to experience this streaming with. In those phases of my life my power gathers in my centre and sinks into a deep black hole. I am always afraid of moving in that direction, but after a while there is immeasurable pleasure. When my power gathers within and has its effects, a sweet heaviness and surrender develop, wideness and expansion too, which many years ago culminated in a special experience. I experienced how my personal power became one aspect of a power surrounding me, which is always there. My mind likes to shut itself off from this experience, but again and again, I find my way back to it. On this sixth level of contact I feel carried by a light, almost happy power which has its roots in my ability to be alone with myself and to reconnect my power with this bigger power. I have the impression that I can find my way so well in this infinitely complex field of my contacts and relationships, because I can surrender to the insights and sensations coming out of deep meditation. This applies especially to those phases of sexual arousal in body psychotherapy: The experience of the source of my own power and the connection to the world around me in the depth of my own self allows me, to follow my body sensations calmly during those phases of my work without having to connect them to my male or female clients.

„Love seems like a relationship, but it begins with being deeply alone. Love finds its expression in relating, but the source of love is not relating. The source of love is meditation.“ (20)

The levels of contact mentioned above have so many layers and are so complex, that they need continuous application and persistent learning. Then more and more of the different aspects are internalized, so that we eventually deal with them without having to think about it. This means, we act intuitively. All people concerned agree without talking, that a sentence, a gesture or a touch are consistent. Synchronicity are characteristic of this level of contact. We can stop wanting to convince our clients that our intuition is right. As this leads to disputes about being right and the joy of a shared give and take gets lost. If your client does not share your intuition, you should go back to one of the first five levels of contact as I've written above, where you can describe in a more differentiated way and where you stay more transparent.

Love

Sometimes I experience that my streaming connects deeply with the streaming of another person. My belief system tells me, that this is only possible if I know the other person well and if we are familiar with each other. Yet, my experience tells me that it happens suddenly. All of a sudden, it is there and my I pours into a streaming and flowing with this other human being - I have already had this experience with trees and animals and stones, - and this becoming-aware-of-my-connectedness touches me and replaces 'I' and 'You'. At this point I want to thank my teacher Michael Barnett who invites me to this kind of contact in such a simple and lively way; or, as Martin Buber puts it:

„The oneness of oppositions is the mystery of the innermost core of dialogue.“

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