



by Tom Warnecke

# Biosynthesis

## a body centred psychotherapy

Conflicts and problems in day to day life have their roots in our subconscious basic attitudes. They form as part of individual human development on the basis of our subjective experience of relating to others during early childhood. As such, basic attitudes of relating to ourselves and others have always been the principal focus of psychotherapeutic work. The field of body-centred psychotherapy evolved in the pursuit of understanding the organisation of psycho-dynamic development and disturbance. Pioneers of body-psychotherapy recognised that the body often offers a direct way of working with the subconscious. Biosynthesis, developed by David Boadella over the last 30 years, aims to revive the pleasurable sensations of life-energy in the whole organism by integrating body, mind and spirit. Biosynthesis is based on the understanding that mind and body are interdependent.

### Mind and body

Deep and powerful feeling images are constantly being generated by various parts of our bodies engaged in the tasks and challenges of our daily lives. Pleasurable, uncomfortable or distressing, such feeling images have more say in the way we feel about ourselves than any mental perceptions we might maintain. In particular during early childhood, we learn to unconsciously suppress un-fulfilled primary needs and feelings of distress, e.g. pain, sadness or anger, by restricting our breathing as well as tensing, collapsing, or inflating the parts of our bodies from which such feelings originate. Over time, this leads to the

formation of individual habits. Lack of vitality, chronic discomfort and pain, anxiety, depression or hyper-activity are some examples of habitual constriction. Once we find it safe enough to experience ourselves outside the constrictions and habitual patterns by which we have learned to structure ourselves, we experience sensations and feelings which give new sense and meaning to our life.

### The organisation of the body

Central to understanding the organisation of the body is the phenomenon of "pulsation" which describes a wave-like pattern of tension and charge, relaxation and discharge. Distortions of pulsation lead to tendencies towards splitting, experienced as fragmentation of dimensions of self, and melting which we experience as confusion and dependency. In contrast, pulsation can be natural inner rhythm, creativity, and a sense of "being in the flow". But the organisation of the body also pre-defines three main realms of human activity and existence. These derive from the three primary cell layers in the embryo, the ectoderm, mesoderm and ectoderm. To reflect these three realms, David Boadella identified three primary therapeutic modes: centring, grounding, and facing which I will describe briefly.

### Centring

The therapeutic work of centring is concerned with restricted breathing patterns and the balance between the two branches of the autonomic nervous system. The sympathetic branch prepares us for fight or flight, associated with emotions of anger and fear, while the parasympathetic branch activates relaxation and resignation and supports states of pleasure, grieving and sadness. The autonomic nervous system is central to emotionality and states such as anxiety or depression. Tendencies towards impulsive emotional acting out or suppressing emotions (and the often underlying fear of "falling apart") are expressed in individual breathing patterns. In contrast, balanced breathing and emotionality can be experienced as a sense of "being at home" in one-self. Finding appropriate and constructive ways of emotional expression is facilitated through emotional release or, often more important, the discovery of ways to contain an emotion.

### Grounding

Two distinctly different motor systems facilitate our movement and posture, the Alpha or voluntary muscular system and the Gamma or involuntary system. Subconscious basic attitudes find their expression in the involuntary motor system which David Boadella calls "the wish to move" as opposed to the Alpha system's "will to move". Involuntary muscle is responsible for reflexes but also for muscular tonus which supports emotional balance. Hyper or over-tonus is an excess of tension as required for a particular action and muscles appear tense and rigid. In under-grounded postures, muscles feel slack and spongy with a deficit of

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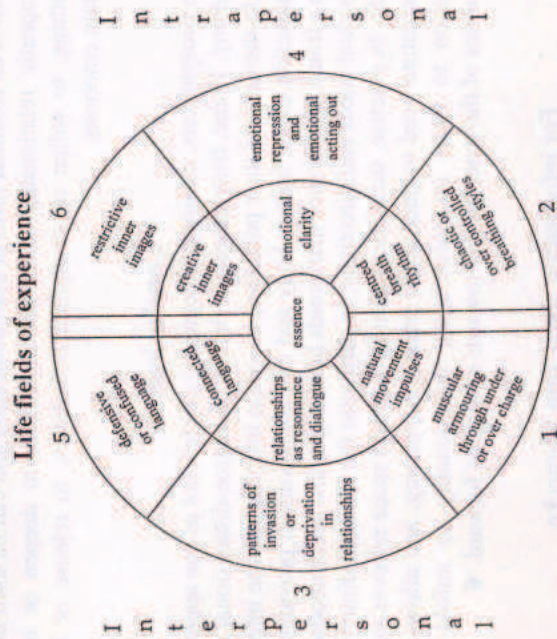
tonus. Both diminish our sense of control and mastery of life. Grounding of posture and re-toning of muscles is facilitated by exploring and supporting intentionality in posture and movement rather than through exercises. To stimulate our self-healing capacity, body-work needs to be relational and encourage dialogue with and through the body.

**Facing**

Perception is not only drawn from externally oriented sensory systems but also from internal organs and muscular systems. Over and under sensitivity are the two polarities of both internal and external perception. Basic attitudes also manifest in mental scripts, belief-systems and in the style and manner of eye-contact and verbal expressions. Therapeutic work of facing and shaping of experience through eye-contact and voice communication takes place whilst talking about experiences and current conflicts. Difficulties to verbally articulate feelings, sensations and bodily expressions are common. Becoming aware of sensations and often subtle feelings and finding appropriate expressions is part of a process of building "bridges" between different personality aspects and to the world around. Such processes are an essential part of integrative work and establish meaning and sense of directing in our lives.

**Inner essence, self and life fields of experience**

Disassociation from our essence or true self is a natural response to often traumatic experiences of invasive or depriving early relationships. The particular ways in which we relate to different aspects of our-selves, as well as to others, reflect such disassociation and can be understood as life fields of experience.



David Boadella's diagram illustrates the polarities within basic London & South East Connection - April/July 99

**Touch has been used as a therapeutic modality for at least 2000 years.**

dimensions of experience. The more disconnected expressions and aspects of each life field are shown in the outer circles. The right side represents the more internally, and the left side the more externally oriented fields. In Biosynthesis, each life field has its own modality of therapeutic work. However, concepts of either what is normal or ideal would be detrimental to growth and development, which is first of all individual. The relationship between therapist and client needs to be both nourishing and challenging, but also respectful and authentic, to encourage the emergence of our inner essence and its self-healing potential. The capacity for authentic relationships, the sense of direction in ones life, the embodiment of value in daily living, but also the spiritual dimension of life, are all expressions and manifestations of inner essence which cannot be reduced but only respected.

**Touch in psychotherapy**

Touch has been used as a therapeutic modality for at least 2000 years. We can speak and listen through our hands. An exploration of hand to hand contact between therapist and client for example, will show individual patterns of behaviour, expectations and anxieties. Hand contact can be warm, mechanical or withdrawn, sensations and feelings are evoked, acknowledged and change as the intentionality of involuntary muscle is encouraged and supported. Contactful touch, with a client's informed consent and within its appropriate ethical boundaries, can provide a new frame of reference for qualities of touch and its distortions such as invasive or depriving touch. Touch is an essential form of communication and can be used in the therapeutic relationship to invite movement, to deepen or relax breathing, to soften or strengthen boundaries, to release or help contain emotions.

**Conclusions**

I see Biosynthesis, meaning "integration of life", not as one approach but many. To me, Biosynthesis is first of all a three-dimensional map of life-themes and their polarities, based on insights into the internal organisation of the human body and its expressions. It provides me with a frame of reference that avoids labelling whilst accommodating individual needs and directions, in particular the spiritual dimension of life. In practise, such orientation in time and space relieves me of a premature need to understand what is happening, and allows my attention to focus on encouraging intentionality to unfold the dynamics of the inner ground towards new steps forward.

For information about Tom Warnecke see advert on page 15 (bottom left).

**Suggested Reading:**

- David Boadella**  
Lifestreams,  
An Introduction to  
Biosynthesis  
Routledge & Kegan  
Paul, London, 1987
- Stanley Keleman**  
Patterns of Distress  
Center Press, Berkeley  
1989
- "Energy & Character"**  
the journal of  
Biosynthesis, is  
published twice a year  
by Abbotsbury  
Publications  
(Sloane and Partner  
6 Surrey Close  
Gransby Ind. Est.  
Weymouth  
Dorset DT4 9TY)