

The Body of TA

Hello and thank you to the Cumbrian organising committee for your kind invitation asking me to present this keynote. I am both delighted and somewhat nervous to be standing here. In fact I am having a rather vivid felt sense of what Susan Jeffers termed 'feel the fear and do it anyway'.

I may be doing her a great injustice but I never could bring myself to read that book. I'm afraid the title always seemed to me to represent an ulterior attempt to bully or cajole someone out of feeling afraid rather than understand the meaning of the fear.

I guess it also reminded me of our family motto 'It doesn't do to dwell'. I must say I am now rather proud of having made a career out of dwelling and encouraging others to do so too.

These days I like to think of the dwelling I allow myself and encourage in others as like the term that Winnicott used. He talked of 'indwelling' to describe 'the achievement of a close and easy relationship between the psyche and the body and body functioning'.

I'd like now to ask you to dwell with me for a while on the theme of this conference. The body of TA.

What does *the body of* mean?

I grappled for some time in how to design a speech around *the body of*.

Today we meet here as a **body of** colleagues, I am proud to be part of that body, presumably because you are here we all share an interest in a body of theory that is TA, some of us are supported by a professional bodies, the ITA, IDTA etc. The advertisement for this conference stated that there would be workshops about body psychotherapy – the body in TA.

Now I am passionate about TA as a dynamic body of theory. At the time I chose to train in TA I was applying for a clinical psychology masters course and in those days we had to choose a cognitive behavioural or a psychodynamic route. I didn't want to make this choice.

Around this time I decided to embark on my own therapy and it was as a client that I first saw that TA offered me the opportunity to explore both routes, the cognitive behavioural and the psychodynamic, **and** whatsmore to be an active participant in my own healing process. I remember clearly asking the question in my first session 'do you think you'll be able to help me'? The Therapist's reply engaged and intrigued me "Yes and you'll have to make some changes". I was hooked; here was someone willing to engage with me and insisting my involvement too.

This was in sharp contrast to the psychologists I had consulted who appeared to share the same opinion as many of my Aunts that 'I suffered with my nerves', as if my nerves weren't part of me.

You see this split, it seems, is all down to Descartes who wrote "I have a clear and distinct idea of **myself** as a thinking non-extended thing and a clear and distinct idea of body as an extended and non-thinking thing".

Descartes argued the mind, a thinking thing, can exist apart from its extended body. And therefore, the mind is a substance distinct from the body, a substance whose essence is thought.

I was taught that one of the basic philosophical assumptions of our body of TA theory is that everyone has the capacity to think. In training I swallowed this whole, understanding it as 'everyone must think'. I now feel some discomfort in the confrontations I made of my first group of clients. When I posed a question and they answered "I don't know" I would say "Yes you do", "You can think and feel at the same time". I was diagnosing a 'don't think' injunction and inviting what I believed was a thinking response. Actually I think the responses were almost always an over adaptation, as was my application of the theory. Me acting in a way I thought a transactional analyst should, the client producing what they thought I needed to hear. Why wouldn't you in response to that confrontation.

However in writing this speech I am now remembering a client from that time who in response very respectfully gave me an article from the 20th century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, he wrote "What we cannot speak about, we must passover in silence. I think the appropriate ulterior in that was "back off"

After my CTA exam something clicked. I gave myself permission to think and speak for myself and to some extent my passion since has been to challenge that thinking does not necessarily involve cognition and that meaning making may not involve words.

These days I believe not knowing and not being able to verbalise does not necessarily mean passivity or unwillingness to problem solve.

Just last weekend, I observed the 9 month old daughter of a friend of mine crawling for the first time. As Lilly (Lilly the Kid her parents call her) made her first attempts at crawling. As I watched her she appeared to be intensely involved in thinking, working out, **though her body**, where to put her hand and then how to move her knee, cross laterally.

Cross lateral crawling is believed to help to develop the connections across the corpus callosum and so aid communication between the left and right hemisphere of the brain.

You see, not knowing or not verbalising does not mean that thinking is not going on. It is just a different type of thinking, more a process of making important meaning through experience.

Shocking for Descartes maybe, my belief is that we need our bodies to think with and through. Our bodies can actually help us understand our thinking.

Originally Freud apparently massaged his patients and it was through this process that the free associative technique was developed. A route to the unconscious it seemed could be found through the body. However, an enlivened body in that era was too threatening and Freud developed a more distant way of working, the patient was on the couch, the analyst behind, lets not let the enlivened body get in the way of the analysis.

Both Freud and Berne appeared to radically change their way of working as a result of external challenges.

Freud admitted that he did not like his patients looking at him. Also love and sex emerged in the transference phenomenon and he felt the need to protect the moral code of psychoanalysis when some psychoanalysts acted out in the erotic transference with their patients.

Changes in Berne's way of working and writing about his work came about when he was not received with open arms on his first application to the Psychoanalytic society in 1956. In fact this is often quoted as the very reason that TA exists today.

Prior to this, in 1949 he had written,

To understand intuition, it seems necessary to avoid the belief that in order to know something the individual must be able to put into words what he knows and how he knows it.....Dog's know things and so do bees....

True knowledge is to know how to **act** rather than how to know words. Berne in 1949 was not so insistent on explanations as he has come to be known since.

At this stage his theory was not so much about thinking cognitively or at least verbalising those thoughts, it was more about behaviour, how we **act**. In his writings he made frequent reference to the body, noticing gestures to help diagnose ego states and asking 'which sphincter is the patient holding tight'. In fact in his attention to diagnosis, the behavioural and phenomenological very much involved the patient's body.

He also knew the importance of the body in relationship. That it plays a vital role in our psychological and interpersonal development. The formation of his theory around stimulus hunger was based on the work of Spitz who had found that infants deprived of handling would sink into an irreversible decline. He wrote of tissue scripts, and tissue damage in third degree games.

My most favourite reference whilst preparing this speech is to be found in his description of the primal protocol; here there is reference to 'thinking with our muscles'. The primal protocol was described as a system which forms the original **skeleton** of the script and in many ways being the most important;

However after 1956, Berne's emphasis shifted. In Hello, he wrote "From two to six **the ground is firmer** because nearly everyone remembers a few transactions, incidents or impressions from that phase of script development". The focus here is on more explicit memories, involving language and words.

Like Freud, Berne could see the importance of the body in psychotherapeutic work but moved away from incorporating it into his methodology. When he did refer to it, his attention was very much focused on the patient's body. There was no reference to therapists using signals in their own body as an aid to diagnosis, or using their own body in work with the client. In fact, in 1967 he expressed a specific wish that Transactional Analysts do not have physical contact with their clients.

He believed that if a transactional analyst considered bodily contact was desirable for a certain patient he should refer her to a dance class, a sensory awareness group or a permission class. This was beyond his remit and that which he was prepared to recommend to his followers.

His job as he saw it was as a head mechanic and he emphasised the importance of cure. In 1971 he wrote, if you're going to cure people's heads I think you should use the medical model, and he emphasised being a real doctor.

Over time, the body in Berne's writing came to be referred to as a way of signalling script and a means of indicating that something needed fixing rather than a body wanting something to be understood.

Berne's later, hugely popular books were promoted as a compromise between common sense and Freudian therapy. After his perceived rejection from the psychoanalytic society in 1956, Berne liked the common sense approach.

It appears to me that by now he was not into knowing; without knowing **how** we know something. Although he had written in 1949 in his studies on intuition that there is time for scientific method and a time for intuition, that one carries more certainty and the other more possibilities; it seems to me that Berne became increasingly focussed on providing answers and certainty for his patients.

Much earlier, Wilhelm Reich, the pioneer of body psychotherapy apparently also struggled with the splitting of mind and body. His concept of character analysis proposed that people form a body armour to protect themselves not only from the challenge of living with others in the world but also from their own desires and instincts.

Reich's theory of Character formation is more different than it is similar from Berne's model of script, yet for me, both describe a tension between our desires and impulses and the compromises we make for the sake of relationship. Whilst Berne appeared more focussed on the head or the mind Reich is similarly accused of siding with the body against the ego.

I have always delighted in Berne's unapologetic capacity to change his mind, yet, like Reich, Berne's theory is often read as dogma. Both men were determined characters and at times this determination came across as inflexibility.

Reich was expelled from the the International Psychoanalytic Association in 1934 for political militancy and Berne when he was still working to gain the status of psychoanalyst, dared to defy Freudian concepts of the unconscious in his writings. From their different yet both rather iconoclastic positions, they each created a solid foundation of theory which certainly in their earlier writings meandered back and forth from their original psychoanalytic roots whilst creating new and dynamic methods of working.

Body Psychotherapists trained now in a neo Reichian perspective I believe are enjoying a capacity for holding more possibilities in the way that Reich was not able to afford himself. Similarly Transactional Analysts these days are enjoying the capacity to question and expand or disagree with some of the basic assumptions in the application of TA.

In my opinion both Berne and Reich found some difficulty with recognising that more often than not the crux of the work is in the dynamic tension between ego and body. Although their theories are rich and complex, both men were passionate about their patients experiencing a better life; Reich in arguing that the best cure was to be found in an active guilt free sex life and Berne in getting a new show on the road, free of limiting script behaviours.

I consider that each of them in their eagerness, looked to find a way out of the dilemma their patients were experiencing, before they truly found a way in.

Today I am appreciating more, that the way in to understanding an impasse is that opposing views each have energy of their own, something important that needs to be heard. In allowing room for the validity of each force, however irrational and an acknowledgment of that which needs to be expressed, we find a truer and more congruent understanding.

Whilst respecting the passion behind the goals of Reich and Berne, I see their methods as in contrast to Winnicott who in his work with the Piggie stressed the "Importance of my not *understanding* what she had not yet been able to give me clues for."

For me, the most exciting aspect of integrating attention to the body into my work as a transactional analyst has been to expand my toleration for not knowing, to not making meaning too quickly and allowing more space for my client's experience to deepen. This is often not as comfortable as it sounds, both client and therapist have to experience the tension for longer and a willingness to stay with discomfort until something emerges.

One of the best things that I have heard recently from one of my clients is Steff, it is strange but since working with you I feel like my therapy is "happening to me". This was an experienced client and an experienced practitioner. Like me, she was taught, "weather happens", our experiences don't happen, we must always take responsibility for the happening.

Actually what this client is now able to do, is to allow things to emerge, rather than direct them. As a result she is discovering a more organic process of making meaning rather than one that is imposed by an insistence on thinking and understanding.

I have developed more confidence in this way of working by watching a number of body psychotherapists. A particularly defining moment for me was in a workshop where a client, who was allowing her body to shake quite fiercely, asked the therapist "Do you know what is happening". At that time I was waiting for an assured reply from the therapist. Instead her potent reply was 'No - but I trust that your body does' I was impressed!

More and more I find that allowing space and being willing to be a solid presence in this dynamic tension, generates an environment whereby clients develop more capacity to recognise that **they** are the author of their own experience.

However, what also remains vital for me is that the proverbial baby is not thrown out with the bathwater.

Whilst I consider the body is involved in all aspects of the way that each of us has shaped our lives I still remember why I chose TA, it remains for me a system that affords me the possibility of working across the range of the cognitive behavioural and psychoanalytic. Different clients need different approaches, and the same client may need different approaches over time. My job is to use what I know to help the client, not to get the client to fit the theory.

What happens, all too often in my view when people start to reshape good theory like that of Berne or Reich is that new ideas also have the potential to become dogma. Sometimes in an attempt to get their passionate views heard developing theorists may be seen to regard the foundations of their theory as old hat. The new order is the one where it is now at.

I consider that if we are to keep enjoying the body of TA as the dynamic theory that it is, we need to come together as a body of colleagues to discuss, debate, disagree, change our minds, and develop.

I consider we need our own bodies to think through and that we need each other as a body of colleagues to think with.

Events such as today provide the opportunity for us to get together. There is a great selection of workshops on offer, the co-ordinating team have done a good job, and by way of summarising this keynote I would like to coin Jane McQuillan's phrase "What is a body to do?" I invite you to join as a body of colleagues today, to wonder, to question, to debate, to disagree and be open to entertaining paradox. Not necessarily this or that but maybe this and that.

I enjoy vigorous debate, there is a vitality in disagreement and my experience is that if I listen long enough and undefensively to opposing views my thinking is not always but often reshaped, reformulated and certainly revitalised. Both Berne and Reich's original theories are agile and supple enough to be stretched. We can be creative and find ways to apply our ideas and remain flexible enough to provide a range of possibilities for our clients.

My invitation to you at the conference today again is to entertain the capacity for paradox. Winnicott was a master at this. In preparing this speech I found reference to something he had written in a personal letter to Augusta Bonnard. He wrote. "Let's enjoy being ourselves and enjoy seeing what we do when we meet it in the work of others".

I encourage you to do the same.

Enjoy!

References

Jeffers S.(1997) *Feel the fear and do it anyway* Rider & Co; New Ed edition

Berne E. (1949) 'The Nature of Intuition' *The Psychiatric Quarterly* 23: 203-26

Berne (1964) *Games People Play* New York: Grove Press

Berne E. (1968) Transcription of Eric Berne in Vienna *IV International Congress of Group Psychotherapy*.

Berne E. (1971) 'Away from a theory of the Impact of Interpersonal Interaction on Non-Verbal Participation' *Transactional Analysis Journal* 1 (1): 6 – 13

Cornell W.F (2002) Transference, Desire and Vulnerability in Body Centred Psychotherapy. *Energy and Character* vol 30 2 April

Stewart I. (1992) *Eric Berne* London, Sage Publications

Totton N. (Ed.) (2005) *New Dimensions in Body Psychotherapy* England: Open University Press

Winnicott D. W. (1965) *The maturational processes and the facilitating environment* London: Karnac Books