

# The Relational Turn and Body Psychotherapy

## III. Salsa Lessons and the Emergent Self

### Somatic organization, relationality, and the place of self in body-psychotherapy

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#### Abstract

This is the third of four papers, together forming *The Relational Turn and Body-Psychotherapy*. These papers examine the touching points between body-psychotherapy and the exciting and encompassing field of relational psychoanalysis. The first paper *From Ballroom Dance to Five Rhythms* (Rolef Ben-Shahar, 2010), explored some basic concepts in relational psychotherapy. It also pointed out the relevance of relational thinking to the history and practice of body psychotherapy. The second paper *Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, Something Blue* (Rolef Ben-Shahar, 2011) expanded the discussion on intersubjectivity and examined the balance between regressive and novel aspects of intersubjectivity. This paper will explore connections between somatic, linguistic and relational organizations, and the place of the self in relational body-psychotherapy. Lastly, the fourth paper: *Gliding on the Strings That Connect Us*, will demonstrate the use of resonance (somatic countertransference) in body psychotherapy within a relational framework.

#### Keywords

Somatic – Linguistic – Relational – Emergence - Flow

#### Shiva and Micky

Everything is in flux. Only after we have been stunned by the infinite diversity of processes constituting the universe can we understand the importance of the organizing principle that creates order from chaos.  
Fritz Perls<sup>1</sup>

Like the Hindu deity Shiva, the creator and destroyer, all organic matter pulsates between form and flow, organization and deconstruction. The dance into assuming organizations, deconstructing these, and reassuming forms exists on all levels of nature, which Jung and Bateson (1979, 1987) called *creatura*. The alive world of *creatura* is revealed only in the process of distinction and differentiation (assuming form).

Belonging to the world of *creatura*, we too organize our reality through forming and deconstructing. This organized reality, in turn, shapes us. We are created by assuming forms, through the process of making distinctions. We impose models of reality on the world and actively shape our reality, which in return shapes our thoughts, feelings, and actions. Life could therefore be understood as a movement through patterns of reality-making in which we partake (Rolef Ben-Shahar, 2001). This, in my understanding, is the essence of Freud's developmental model and Reich's character analysis.

Viewing our life task as creative-organization was expressed by philosophers, therapists and in spiritual approaches for many centuries (Carroll, 2009; Grand, 1998; Judith, 1996; Keeney, 1983; Sullivan, 1953). This paper uses the term *form* to describe organization (structure, the noun) and *flow* to represent the *in between* space of flux (the verb, of becoming). These two phases are forever in continuum. At each present moment some elements of our reality are formed and others are not, the terms *flow* and *form* are therefore metaphoric approximations.

An important assumption when arguing for life as an organizing principle is that dynamic movement is at the basis of reality. According to this worldview, the universe is pulsating, and we partake in its pulsation. Arguably, the universe has not fully emerged out of *tohu bohu*, the biblical state of pre-creation: undifferentiated chaos is still in our midst, but in the process of creation we temporarily give *tohu bohu* shape.

My friend Micky Gerber offered the metaphor of the ocean and waves. We could be discussed both as an ocean (the universe we're a part of) and as individual waves. On some level our existence could be distinguished; on another level, speaking of individual waves is meaningless. The truth of the ocean is in its movement. The water is not the same water; it evaporates only to transform and return from the rivers. The landscape changes too but the coming and going of the ocean, the currents and undercurrents, the flow, the unifying movement of aliveness is always there.

This idea of universal flux relates to and is informed by the Buddhist notion of emptiness (Preece, 2000; Sumedho, 1992) as well as by Taoist philosophy (Lash, 1989). The concept of a pulsating universe also connects to some philosophers and psychoanalytic thinkers like Immanuel Kant (1781), Schopenhauer (1818), Fairbairn (1952), Merleau-Ponty (1962), Harry Stack Sullivan (1953), and of course Wilhelm Reich (1973).

Our dynamic reality within this flux therefore depends on the temporary forms we assume – the waves we become. This subjective existence, short as it may be, bittersweet as it is, is transient and can only be captured in the here-and-now. As Daniel Stern (2004) wrote: “The only time of raw subjective reality, of phenomenal experience, is the present moment” (p. 3).

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<sup>1</sup> (Perls, 1948, p.51)

In this paper, using some theoretical concepts and clinical vignettes, I hope to illustrate the relevance of the form-flow cycle to relationality and to body-psychotherapy.

### Alex – the gentle giant and the forms we made

Life makes shapes. These shapes are part of an organizing process that embodies emotions, thoughts, and experiences into a structure. Stanley Keleman<sup>2</sup>

When I first saw Alex, he seemed like a living contradiction; over six foot tall, heavily built and sporting a charming smile, Alex nevertheless seemed to have no impact on those around him, as if he only barely existed. Having moved to England from Germany nine years earlier, Alex, now thirty seven, was depressed, lonely and anxious for as long he could remember. Alongside his successful career and highly lucrative salary in a banking company, he had no friends and no substantial relationship or sexual experience to speak of. He was socially awkward, both in his body language and in his speech. His traumatic family history screamed from every movement, from every connection we made. An unspoken (and even unspeakable) family secret that had affected Alex all his life would only be discovered three years into therapy. On the one hand, Alex expected me to *do him*, and was reluctant to engage psychotherapeutically, yet on the other hand, he actively defeated any initiative I presented. Perhaps, as my supervisor once offered, he needed to devastate me and witness my survival. Perhaps he wanted me to accept him for who he was, even if it was impossible for him to do so himself – and at the cost of his wish for change.

During the first year of therapy with Alex, I noticed that I've come to dislike Tuesdays. My main countertransference with him was terror; I felt frozen and frightened a great deal of the time with him, and listening to my body, I elected to go slow, as to allow myself to breathe without dissociating. At the same time, I would think very little about him between sessions, and (untypically) would not remember important biographical details from his life.

Behind the scenes of struggling to engage with Alex, of dialoging with his desire for doing more (and quicker), and with my sense of needing to wait, we slowly found ourselves in a relationship. It was not an easy relationship for me, as Alex was always reiterating his dissatisfaction with therapy and with me (yet kept coming back), and refused to surrender to the therapeutic process; he did not want to go to the places he would later visit. But, thankfully, he kept demonstrating what he called "my German nature" and arrived, week after week. Increasingly Alex allowed us to connect, and at the same time started making some very small changes in his life. Change was painstakingly slow, though, and his huge, robust and robot-like body – just like his frightened attitudes – would move very rigidly, risk very little.

One day Alex arrived at the session after visiting his father. He looked sad, tired, and bodily defeated. This emotional-physical stance would occur once a month or so. Following his routine moaning about therapy not working, about my passivity and his despair, he looked at me for help with big puppy eyes, sadness, and yearning, "can't you do something to help?" Moved by the extent of his pain, I managed to contain my savior fantasy and thought this might be an opening for us to connect, but instead Alex expressed some suicidal ideation and quickly withdrew into his isolated shell. This was a known territory for us: the familiar transference organization of an authority figure (both parents) that witnessed Alex's plea for help, and while they accepted his helpless positioning, were unable and unwilling to help. His father, the teacher, believing men should stand up for themselves yet never having managed to do so himself; his mother giving up before she began. In his family, learned helplessness was the coping strategy of choice, resulting in limited social skills, depleted motivational aspirations and external attribution of control (Fincham & Hokoda, 1987; Maier & Seligman, 1976; Mikulnicer, Yinon, & Kabili, 1991). I felt stuck, my body stiffened. We both entered a familiar position between us, our dear old shared impasse. Then, faint music could be heard from outside, and we both heard it, our eyes met, and we smiled.

### Form and Flow – three organizing spheres

I propose that the three major channels through which we take form are somatic (bodily), linguistic (cognitive), and relational organizations. These axes will be further explored below. To function in the world we need some constants, some order in the chaos. We impose these artificial distinctions upon our reality by assuming forms to support the mediation between inside and outside.

### Somatic organizations

The basis of our psychic life is the construction of bodily states, gestures, and ways of moving which have social and emotional meaning. Ian Grand<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> (Keleman, 1985, p.xi)

<sup>3</sup> (Grand, 1998, p.172)

We make life shapes through cellular, muscular, neural and structural dynamics, mediating between inside and outside. Amoebas define themselves through their flexible membranes, creating a boundary and maintaining fluidity of dialogue with this boundary; to an extent we do the same. Our process of making forms allows us to survive in the world: we need somatic organizations to breathe, digest, think and act in the world. But our somatic organizations require a degree of flexibility for us to successfully respond to the changing (inner and outer) environment. The less mobility and flexibility a form attains, the more likely it is to become rigidified and maladaptive. When somatic forms rigidify they become character armor. The shapes of our somatic organizations and the knowhow of reorganizing somatically are probably two of the most important contributions of body-psychotherapy to the wider field of psychotherapy.

The understanding of somatic organization expressed in this paper is largely based on Stanley Keleman's formative psychology (1981, 1985, 1987; Keleman & Adler, 2000) but is also informed by other psychoanalytic and body-psychotherapeutic philosophies and practices (Boadella, 1985; Carroll, 2002; Lowen, 1958; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Painter, 1984; Reich, 1933, 1950, 1973; Roffman, 2003; Winnicott, 1960b).

## Linguistic organizations

Language is a tool for imposing distinctions upon the world. Bradford Keeney<sup>4</sup>

Cognition is presented here as an interactive process of distinction-making (through language), in which we create our world and at the same time limit it with this very creation. Our thoughts and beliefs, language and cognitive schemas create impositions (forms) that mediate between the flux of reality and our capacity to contain it and tolerate flow. Just like our somatic organizations provide us with a (both real and illusory) bodily container, so does our language equip us with a similarly real and not-real psychic container. Through our linguistically-based cognition we engage in continuous reorganization of meaning: we reorient ourselves to the past and future, to others and self (Fangarette, 1963).

To illustrate this cognitive organization, consider the case-vignette of John, a 38-year-old single man, who arrived to therapy with a narrative that was almost impossible to follow. His highly associative and jittery language made it extremely difficult for me to relate to him. John had a depressed, alcoholic, and schizophrenic mother, and he himself was bordering on schizophrenia, with periods of excessive paranoia and a somewhat amusing affinity for conspiracy theories.

John had a very fragile sense of self, and was unable to fully differentiate his feelings and thoughts from those of others. He was certain that he could read everybody's mind and that, in return, he too was transparent to people. We spent long sessions in which John got angry with me for thoughts I supposedly had about him, which he could easily read (and mostly were not true). Curiously, in his speech, John rarely spoke in the first person, regularly omitting *I* from his sentences. Three years into psychotherapy, and without specific therapeutic focus on his speech, John's conversation was more coherent, his *I* more present in his talking. His reality changed alongside his language: each informed and created the other.

Interpreting linguistic organizations as a crucial aspect of human development is based on the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who in 1921 stated: "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world" (p.148). Other contributing theoreticians and theories are Noam Chomsky's transformational Grammar (1957), Systemic thinking (Bateson, 1972, 1974; Keeney, 1983; Korzybski, 1924) and the field of Neuro-Linguistic-Programming (Bandler & Grinder, 1979; Dilts, 1988, 1999; Gordon, 1978; Grinder & Bandler, 1981).

## Relational organizations

The infant organizes its feeling-experience relative to the feeling states of others, and there is a clear interactive learning process between the infant and others right from the beginning. Franklyn Sills<sup>5</sup>

Relational theory understands identity to always be organized in relation to others. As the two previous papers labored to argue, we emerge out of a union and the initial self is primarily dyadic; a separate subjectivity develops much later. It is through our attachment relationships that we are created as individuals (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983; Mitchell, 2002; Sullivan, 1940). Throughout life, one major way of organizing our identity is engaging in relational shifts – entering and leaving relationships. The qualities of our identity-formation and our ego-strength are dependent on our capacity to open to different orders of relational forms, to surrender our individual self into the creation of a dyadic self, a familial or organizational self, and a social self. Our early forms of (attachment) relationships become the relational matrices which we impose on our reality in adulthood (Bowlby, 1988). Our character, personality and identity are therefore in ongoing dialogue with our real and internalized attachment figures (Whitaker, 2000). Unless we actively learn to identify these relational forms, it is doubtful that we can have significant relationships other than those we have always known: we need to claim our identity and consciously shape our relatedness to truly become human subjectivities.

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<sup>4</sup> (Keeney, 1983, p.25)

<sup>5</sup> (Sills, 2009, p.53)

Dyadic forms of consciousness (or wider minds) are deeply challenging to Western-indoctrinated philosophy where the self is seen as localized within clear bodily boundaries and is sharply distinguished and separated from its environment. We are asked to consider the individual as a partial system, a partial self. The following example is presented to clarify how somatic, cognitive and relational organization may change in relational body-psychotherapy.

### Alex – letting it come

It will come if it is there and you let it come. Gertrude Stein<sup>6</sup>

Having heard the music from outside, I asked Alex to teach me salsa. Alex loved Latin dancing and danced since a very early age. Ten minutes from their house in Munich, there was a Latin-dancing school and, wishing to spend as little time as possible at home, the dancing school became a perfect haven for him; he was also a natural. Whenever he spoke of dancing his entire demeanor changed, his eyes would light up and I saw a different man with me. "Teach me to salsa," I asked Alex and he looked at me shocked, his eyes searching to see if I was joking, and then smiled and with great simplicity stood up and took my hands, "stand up," he said.

We spent the session dancing. It was slightly embarrassing for me – I love dancing but was never good in following choreographed movements and it took me a long time to master these moves.

This mountain of a man, who seemed to move without coordination or charge, danced like the wind. He reminded me of the elegant hippos in Disney's fantasia, dancing as if they were born to ballet. I, on the other hand, could not have been less comfortable. Alex held me patiently, his hand resting assuredly on my hip, he explained the moves and demonstrated them but it didn't really work for me. I became increasingly awkward and shy. Alex let go of my hand and hip and showed me, step by step, the moves. I could do them all when they were disconnected but wasn't able to do them cohesively.

"This is really quite embarrassing for me," I told Alex, "I don't think I can do this." Alex smiled "of course you can." He took my hand again, held my hip and said with an air of authority and a smile: "You remember the steps well enough. Now just forget about the steps and let go into us dancing together, just be with me."

There was no music in the room, just a hint of some faint tunes from outside and the muffled sound of our footsteps on the carpet, but it made sense to surrender to Alex and to trust in his agility and guidance. And before I managed to think, my feet were doing the moves they were supposed to. In those moments, I had to let go of the therapeutic position. In hindsight, perhaps it was this very holding on to maintain my therapeutic stance which shamed me and rigidified me, so I became a student, a lover, a dance partner. It was ok.

Actually, it was more than ok, it became fun. I started to discover my own rhythms, and began to enjoy myself. For the first time in forty minutes I stopped looking at my feet and looked at Alex; he was beaming. Both of us knew that we had done more than salsa. The *us* that was co-created between us had to be outside of the therapeutic positioning which was saturated with rigid transference organizations. The intersubjective connection, which had later allowed us to deepen our therapeutic work and for Alex to emerge out of his isolated lonely-self took place in a seemingly non-therapeutic setting<sup>7</sup>.

Once our bodies were organized differently, we could speak in different tongues. The salsa-lesson was by no means the end of our work, but it had become an anchor, a reference point to which we were able to return, time and again, in our attempts to soften rigid muscular positions, thought patterns or relational organizations.

In that respect, the therapeutic task was playing. Not unlike the Gestalt principle of "differentiation and integration" (Perls, 1966, p.7), Alex and I were safely deconstructing rigidities, tolerating unknown factors, and recognizing the inevitability of a new form, a new mind, that will emerge.

The salsa lesson represented a shift in organization on all the three levels mentioned above. The culture which developed between Alex and me, despite holding a curative and generative potential, had become a stagnant agent in our work. Normally, he would sit tightly, allowing very little motion, and even if somatic interventions were possible, they would involve a rigid relational organization (of me 'doing something' to him), thus carrying a limiting and limited scope. But teaching me salsa allowed for the necessary suspension of disbelief: Alex was able to position himself differently in relation to me (which was aided by my own stumbling and reorganization) and so change had become possible. The novelty that was made possible, and would later characterize our work together emerged from a willingness to get lost (i.e. to loosen rigidified forms, both Alex's, my own and ours). Something new was created.

It is my belief that other therapeutic modalities would greatly benefit from the knowledge gained in body-psychotherapy about recognizing somatic forms and changing somatic forms. At the same time, we body-psychotherapists could benefit from expanding our horizons in identifying and learning from disciplines where other organizations are explored and taught. I hope that these four papers have managed to raise curiosity and interest in the relevance of such an expansion of expertise and exploration.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Stern (1983, p.96).

<sup>7</sup> Barbara Pizer's (2005) discussion on the power of the *non-analytic* third demonstrates this point.

## The Emergent Self

“The doctrine of emergence,” according to philosopher Donald Davidson (Davidson, 1970; Field, 1996), “is the claim that when basic physiochemical processes achieve a certain level of complexity of an approximate kind, genuinely novel characteristics such as mentality, appear as ‘emergent qualities’” (Field, 1996), (p.48). Fritjof Capra (2002) further elaborated: “Emergence results in the creation of novelty, and this novelty is often qualitatively different from the phenomena out of which it emerged” (p.36).

The phenomena of emergence relate to both Eastern and Western ideas. For example, the great theoretician Gödel (1931) presented his famous mathematical theorem, claiming that any mathematical structure which is at least as big as the system of whole numbers, contained elements (propositions) which could not, *even in principle*, be proven true or false within the system itself. Gödel did not maintain that these could not be proven at all, but instead that they needed to be weighed from a larger mathematical structure.

Looking at the ideas presented by Gödel and Davidson as psychotherapists, we may come to consider that some changes cannot take place within a system, but require a larger system of which it is a part. Simply said - we cannot do it all by ourselves. How comforting! A mind that emerges from a body, cannot simply be explained in physiological terms, but may require a social explanation. An individual within a family might similarly require a systemic, familial, or social explanation to understand its motivations, wounds, or healing prospects.

The therapeutic relationship is one such larger system, a place where we do not have to do it all by ourselves. By our very willingness to enter a relationship with our clients, we change the setting of the wound. Pains and hurts now exist in a world that includes us, therapists, in them. Healing can take place since a significant relationship has already changed the experiencing-self, the phenomenological-ego. Humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers (1957) said it most succinctly: “I am hypothesizing that significant positive personality change does not occur except in a relationship” (p.221).

Emergent phenomena are at the heart of relational psychotherapy. Ogden's 'analytical third' (1992, 1994) is possibly the clearest example of an emergent entity. However, the forerunners of relational psychotherapy already described emergent phenomena. Harry Stack Sullivan, for instance, was a radical psychiatrist, and an important influence on relational psychoanalysis. Sullivan devised the concept of "interpersonal field" (1953) to describe a mind that was not personally carried in our physical brains, but was instead an interpersonal context. For Sullivan, mind emerged in interactions with others (*ibid*).

Despite the novelty of the emergent self, it is ever so tempting to still use metaphors belonging to previous paradigms (older classes). There are some beautiful descriptions of brain-mind interactions. Shlain (1998), for example, described the right hemisphere as “the realm of altered states of consciousness where faith and mystery rule over logic” (p. 19).

However, describing mental and relational processes using metaphors of brain mechanics, physical localization and neural networks is, in my opinion, an epistemological and an aesthetic mistake. It is a mistake not because it is *wrong*, since physical metaphors as well as systemic metaphors are still just that – stories and metaphors. It is an aesthetic mistake because it keeps us glued to an inappropriate, old paradigm. It was not merely the physical movement that turned our salsa lesson into a pivotal moment of change in therapy, nor was it solely my shamed attitude that invited Alex to step fourth and define himself differently towards me. Rather, it was all of these and more – it was a momentary surrender of *the system* that allowed for the creation of something new, which deserves a new language (we were created).

My wife, Tom, once offered me the metaphor of a music box to ponder the relationship between mind and brain (Rolef Ben-Shahar & Rolef Ben-Shahar, 2005). Could the music be said to be in a music box? Is it outside of it (in the composer's mind, the music box's builder)? Surely, we must realize that both answers are true yet both are partial and limited, that we are called to change our language when we talk of music: it is no longer appropriate to speak of springs and screws. Speaking of the tune that comes out of a music box in mechanical terms is not an ontological mistake, of course, yet it misses the better story – it is a phenomenological error.

Taking into account the historical context of psychotherapy, the medico-physical model of mind has been speaking about mind in brain-terminology, using causal connections to explain mental and relational processes. Descriptions of mind and relational processes using similar terminology still tend to be taken for truth and used by us (therapists) to *qualify* the validity of the practice, instead of being used as metaphors. Moreover, such descriptions easily tempt us to forge erroneous causal connections between biochemical, genetic, or otherwise physical activities and the emergent phenomena (e.g. you're depressed *because* your brain-chemistry is imbalanced; I've got fat genes; hypnosis exists *because* of left-hemisphere inhibition and right-hemisphere predominance; or - we need relationships *because* they cause our brain structure to change and secrete serotonin...).

### A Mind that no longer lives in the Brain

Fritjof Capra's (2002) lucid description may deepen our discussion of emergence:

The brain is a specific structure through which this process [cognition] operates. The relationship between the mind and the brain, therefore, is one between process and structure. Moreover, the brain is not the only structure through which the process of cognition operates. The entire structure of the organism participates in the process of cognition (pp.32-33).

As a body-psychotherapist, by no means am I attempting to dispute the mind-body or mind-brain connection; on the contrary – our existence – and our mental processes cannot be said to be anything but embodied. We cannot *not* have a body: we cannot think, feel, exist, or relate other than as embodied organisms. However, I would like to question the validity of reducing one to the other, and of the frequently presented linear causal-connection between mind and body. The bodymind is not similar to the mechanistic body or to the ethereal mind; it belongs to a different class of organization. Similarly, the transition from one-person to two-person psychology (the relational turn) is an understanding that *I* and *Thou* cannot be reduced to one another or explained in causal, classical-physics terminology. The *us*, the intersubjective third, is deeply connected to me and to you, but is of a different class of organization, and cannot be explained simply in terminology of me, and you.

Moreover, should we accept the dialectics of the relational position, in the final account; mind and body do not exist separately, as these emerge in connection with others. We may similarly argue that you and I do not exist, only I-in-relation-to-you (self-in-relation). Gregory Bateson (1974) elaborated: “an individual in a system is always part of that system and is therefore subject to all the constraints and necessities of the particular part-whole relationship in which he exists” (p.27).

The temptation to explain an emergent phenomenon (e.g. a bodymind, or the *us-ness* created in a relationship) is great – after all, we possess the language and description of the old while having to be created afresh in the new. This has sometimes resulted in an attempt to explain psychotherapy in pseudo-scientific language, or indeed a scientific (physical) language. That connections between the two classes of experiences exist there is no doubt, but is this connection causal? As long as psychotherapy (and bodywork modalities) try to justify their efficacy via their own class while using previous-paradigm terminology, we will remain stuck in a Gödelian loop (a system that tries to prove itself from inside), resembling Baron von Münchhausen, trying to escape from drowning in a swamp by pulling our own hair.

When a baby is born, the two adults (traditionally) involved in its making become parents, and a family is created. This family now requires a new language, a new frame of relating – I say to my daughter: "I'm ok with you eating this cookie, but let's ask mom how many you've had." My wife became a mom and we, as a family, need to reorganize and find new form – inventing ourselves as we go along. Elaborating on the work of biologist Garstand, Jungian Analyst Nathan Field (1996) explained: “evolution itself can be seen to proceed by retracing its steps, as it were, along the path which led it to the dead end and making a fresh start in a more promising direction” (p.15).

### The dance between form and flow

The ability to laugh, temporarily regress, lose control, and then reintegrate may be seen as a cardinal sign of well-being. Frank Farrelly<sup>8</sup>

To sustain physical and mental health we need to be able to remain sufficiently flexible: to regulate our fluidity and manage to challenge our somatic, cognitive, and relational habitual positions and play with life. Without this we lose our responsiveness and aliveness, we become rigidified (and life becomes rigidified for us) and unable to successfully respond to our changing environment. Health does not only demand the capacity to continually take new, more adaptive forms, but also to cultivate the transitional space of flux and flow. If we are unable to tolerate flow, and need to quickly find a new organization, we would in all likelihood assume our habitual organization.

Stanley Keleman (1985) depicted the need for fluid movement most beautifully in writing: “The state of liquidity reveals the state of human life. An embryo or an infant is somewhat liquid-like, fragile yet flexible. Growth makes an organism more dense, stringy, solid” (p.56). Keleman (1987) further regarded symptoms as resulting from not knowing how to organize and disorganize ourselves. We therefore require re-training in forming ourselves in the world. Whereas body-psychotherapy invested a great deal in learning how to somatically organize and reorganize, relational psychotherapy offers theoretical and clinical suggestions for reorganizing relational forms. Body psychotherapists can probably recognize those trancelike states which accompany a change in somatic organizations and those where relationships seem to shift (not unlike our salsa dance).

Uninterrupted, the self is self-regulating in nature and maintains a dialectic (homeostatic) relationship with inside and outside influences. The organismic process of organization is similar to the process of scientific revolutions described by Thomas Kuhn (1962). It begins with a specific adaptive organization. As situations change, the particular organization becomes increasingly maladaptive until it is obstructive for the system, at which point great pressure is operating on the system to change alongside an activation of the investment of preserving the status quo; our desire to stay the same strengthens when change approaches. The form begins to deconstruct and an intense period of uncertainty and not-knowing, which I call *flow*, follows. From the flow a new form emerges – more or less adaptive to the new situation. This cyclical movement<sup>9</sup> is not a process that simply *happens to us*: we are active participatory-agents within it.

Psychoanalyst Thomas Ogden (1985) wrote: "The dialectical process moves toward integration, but integration is never complete; each integration creates a new dialectical opposition and a new dynamic tension" (p.131). Indeed, when we shift from our habitual formation into yet-unformed transitional spaces, we enter a trance-like process. For me, those moments

<sup>8</sup> (Farrelly & Brandsma, 1974, p.100)

<sup>9</sup> In presenting this cycle, I was influenced by Ilana Rubinfeld's (2001) seven steps of change

of unformulated experiences are rich with potential for change, growth, and healing. Psychotherapy makes use of this natural phenomenon by studying the sufficient and necessary conditions for mobilizing impasses on this cycle.

As I have proposed before (2002), we experience those trance-like openings whenever we shift from our habitual way of being in the world to a new organization. These moments of flow may therefore be understood as our natural creative mode, and are thus necessary for biological and psychological growth. Do trance-like moments not happen regularly when we help a client soften a muscular organization?

### **Attachment relationships: dyadic selves and surrender**

As the previous two papers suggested, we begin life as a dyad, sharing a primary intersubjectivity (Trevarthen, 1974) from which our individual subjectivity later emerges. Localized identity is possibly the one form we are most invested in preserving (but it's me!), or at least the deconstruction of which is accompanied by most anxiety. To recognize that self and mind are not individually localized but are also fluid as any other experiential organization comes as a shock to many people.

During one of our sessions, I asked Charlie to imagine knocking on heaven's doors of his mother's womb. At 41, he still called his mother nearly daily and was unable to form any romantic relationship or real friendships. Charlie did not recognize his difficulty separating from his mother, "what's wrong with speaking to Mum every day?" he asked repeatedly. When he one day spoke of Dylan's *Knocking on heaven's door*, I suggested he imagined himself begging his mother's womb to open up and allow him back inside. Charlie was first appalled but then became increasingly curious, and readily engaged with this idea. His face became contorted almost immediately and his breathing accelerated. For the first time in our work together, Charlie spoke of his yearning for his mother's love – "this is what I've been doing throughout my life," he said.

Charlie was born premature, and always felt rushed to grow up (his sister had some developmental disabilities, and his mother craved a helper). Following this session, Charlie began to view his reaching out to his mother through the complex matrix of providing for her needs and secretly wishing for her to provide for him. He recognized how, through the years, he survived on the breadcrumbs of his continuous giving. With these understandings, his mourning process began.

As discussed in the previous two papers, attachment theory regards our formative relationships as supplying us with the relational form through which we relate to others during our life (a big-enough-self to hold the individuating child). When we experience good-enough parenting a wider dyadic self is created that enables us to explore the world with less fear (Bowlby, 1973, 1988; Winnicott, 1958, 1960a, 1965).

### **Loosening rigid forms and surrendering to flow**

Playing is always liable to become frightening. Games and their organization must be looked at as part of an attempt to forestall the frightening aspect of playing. Donald Winnicott<sup>10</sup>

A man is running terrified in the woods. He is running as fast as he can, since a tiger is chasing him and tigers, as we all know, run faster than men. Suddenly the woods make way to a plateau and for some odd reason the man is relieved. He looks back: the tiger is still after him; he looks straight ahead and realizes that it's a cliff. Death by a tiger or death by jumping, what a choice! Heaving, the man nears the edge of the cliff and jumps, but his arm - terrified even more than he is, reaches out and clasps a branch. The tiger approaches, groaning. His long strong claws start scooping the man up, the smell of blood and fear touches the man's breath. He looks up, despairingly and cries: "Please, help me God."

Momentarily nothing happens, but then the man notices that everything has frozen in time. The clouds disperse and from within the clouds the man hears God saying: "Ok. I will help you. But first you have to let go."

This story might sound melodramatic, but our lives begin quite similarly. Inside the known (if increasingly uncomfortable) safety of the womb all is cared for. Our every need is being contained - we are fed without eating, provided oxygen without having to draw breath, protected without an active immune system. Hell, even gravity doesn't affect us as much as the amniotic fluid buffers its impact. And then we are washed into a land of possibilities, of yet unrealized potential, and therefore of dread. Upon our emergence from the womb, we face such dramatic experiences, and this is before the system is conscious enough to voluntarily trust and let go. Each surrender thereafter is saturated, in my belief, with the potential and dread of leaving the birth canal, of leaving the Garden of Eden. My father used to tell us how his scariest skydiving was his second. The first one was simply unfathomable; the second required consciousness – he knew what was coming. Perhaps psychotherapy is a form of skydiving?

In a similar vein, Alexander technique teacher Michael Gelb (1981) explained: "The Technique teaches a pupil to trust reason at the risk of feeling disorientated, to venture from the 'known to the unknown' [*sic*]. This journey necessitates a willingness both to make mistakes and to profit by them" (p.100). Many people seek therapy because of an outdated form: a *vow* they have unconsciously taken as children which is no longer relevant and becomes obstructive (e.g. "I shall never cry again"), a self-limiting belief (e.g. "nobody can love me without me having to give first"), or a harmful transference construct

<sup>10</sup> (Winnicott, 1971, p.67)

(e.g. seeking physically strong and emotionally dependent men to find the father that would protect you, only to be abandoned time and again). Forms, however outdated, demand respect: they had their contextual use, they have emerged from a systemic attempt to foster self-regulation; most painful relational forms are evidence of sacrifices we (thought we) made for love.

I believe it is imperative to honor and respect even the most obstructive forms (e.g. pains, self-hate, and perversions) and approach the venture to surrender with this appreciation in mind. Surrender to flow is potentially a risky, frightening, and disorientating business. Under the appropriate facilitative circumstance it is also highly beneficial, but premature or mindless surrender to flow could be dangerous (Fellows, 1986).

Psychologist Wilson Van Dusen (1958) acknowledged both the terror and the potential in flow: “At the very center of psychotherapeutic experiences there is an awesome hole” (p.87). Van Dusen continued: “The state is characterized by total uncertainty. One doesn’t know answers, one doesn’t know solutions. Even the problems besetting one may be unclear. This uncertainty can be painful” (ibid, p.93). However, the way out from the void emerges not from actively seeking, but through surrender: “It is chaotic with possibilities. One feels helpless and waits. It is central that one’s own will can no longer find a way out” (ibid).

Body psychotherapist Ilana Rubinfeld (2001) echoed this voice saying: “we cannot experience with new, *nonhabitual* behavior unless we experience the discomfort of our old ways breaking apart. We cannot change without first falling into what I have called ‘the fertile void’”(p.20).

All psychotherapy involves assisting clients in loosening rigid forms and awakening their capacity to flow. Different modalities apply different skills, techniques, and theoretical constructs to facilitate the process. Psychoanalysis, for example, is possibly the most rigorous therapeutic discipline for tolerating flow, as it does not rush to provide or suggest alternative forms. Body psychotherapy brings an incredible wealth of working with somatic organizations, supporting these forms and assisting us in considering alternatives. Touch could be invaluable to tolerating the terrifying surrender to flow.

Douglas Flemons (1966) compared psychotherapy to jazz improvisation, encouraging “freedom within form” (p.236). Approaching the same phenomenon from a different angle, Wilhelm Reich saw the goal of therapy as attaining the capacity to fully give in to the involuntary pulsation of breath (Gilbert, 1999). So what is it that we are really doing when we play therapeutic jazz?

### A Salsa lesson and an emergent self

I can remember Alex's hand over my hip very well. I recall my surprise in discovering that his rigid hand felt so confident, fluid and natural on my body. I remember the inner homophobic voices giving way to his expert leading. I have since tried to duplicate those steps with limited success. Admittedly, the thought of taking dance classes still gives me the creeps, although it's a shame, if more teachers like Alex are about. I also know that the good dancer that was there, in the end, was only partly me. As I remember the me (us) who danced so elegantly, I miss him, I miss the me that was discovered there.

It has been over five years since I saw Alex last and the memory of our dance is still a formative power in my personal, let alone my clinical life. I left that session a different man, and frankly I leave most (at least most long-term) therapeutic relationships a different person from the person who entered them. The thought that my clients can change me so deeply, frequently in unexpected and sometimes in very challenging ways – is a scary thought. However, the possibility that I may enter a meaningful therapeutic relationship (as a therapist or as a client), one that is affect-laden and involves two individual subjectivities, without significant change – well, I find this thought scarier still. And, as a very frightened man, it is no surprise that I usually opt for the least scary possibility.

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