

The Development of Body-Oriented Psychotherapy in Russia

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a brief overview of the history and current state of body-oriented psychotherapy in Russia. This review of the main areas of body-oriented psychotherapy in Russia includes a presentation of biosynthesis, Bodydynamics, Bioenergetic Analysis, and thanatotherapy.

Keywords: psychotherapy, body-oriented psychotherapy, Biosynthesis, RABOP, Bodydynamics, Bioenergetic Analysis, Thanatotherapy, trauma work, Hakomi, SOBBORUS, Bioenergetic Analysis Society, International Association of Thanatotherapy

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I first find it necessary to say a few words about the general development of psychotherapy in Russia before talking about the development of body-oriented psychotherapy in particular.

Unfortunately, according to the USSR official communist ideology, disorders of the neurotic spectrum could be found only in a decaying capitalist society, whereas there could be no such disorders in a prosperous society of developed socialism. Psychoanalysis was considered a bourgeois pseudoscience; therefore, the development of psychotherapy in the USSR was extremely limited. While academic psychology was actively developing and the names of academic psychologists from the USSR are known all over the world, psychotherapy was developing in isolation from international schools of psychotherapy. This led to the fact that domestic psychotherapy was represented mainly by cognitive-behavioral therapy, and even that modality was presented by “the reinventors of the wheel.”

Now let’s turn to the development of body-oriented psychotherapy in Russia.

The pioneer of the field was Vladimir Baskakov, the founder and first president of the Russian Association of Body-Oriented Psychotherapy.

This is how Baskakov, in his book *Russian Body-Oriented Psychotherapy*, describes the first steps toward body-oriented psychotherapy in our country:

“At that time, it was impossible to talk about the existence of body psychotherapy in our country as about a number of schools, directions, with its well-organized methodology, experience in providing professional assistance and the institution of supervision. Single copies of western books on body therapy at that time could only be obtained by getting them under the table at international book fairs. The Iron Curtain was not a metaphor for us, we could feel it everywhere. With the beginning of perestroika, remarkable specialists

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came to our country, for example, an English Bioenergetic specialist, Rosslyn Langdon, or Eric Westfal, professor of the University of Oldenburg (hereinafter – co-founders of the International program ‘Body Culture’). A great impetus in understanding the basics of body psychotherapy was given to us by the German specialist Heinrich Werner... Besides wonderful trainers unconcealed charlatans rushed to our country. The reverence that existed at the time for everything imported, based on the Soviet pattern ‘everything imported is the best,’ led to the fact that many of us visited such ‘specialists.’”

The first conference on body psychotherapy, *Russia: Soul and Body*, held in Moscow in July 1999, can be considered a significant milestone in the development of Russian body psychotherapy. During the preparation for this conference, the lack of a clear definition of the field of body psychotherapy led to the representation of all approaches that, to one degree or another, worked with the body – massage, yoga, etc. – many having nothing to do with body psychotherapy. Later on, we proposed criteria that differentiated body psychotherapy from other kinds of bodywork.

The Russian Association for Body-Oriented Psychotherapists was created in 1999. In 2000, RABOP became a full member of the European Association for Body Psychotherapy (EABP). Since then, RABOP has been the national EABP representative in Russia – and the National Russian Association in EABP – and had the right to accept Russian body psychotherapists as members of the EABP.

In 2014 RABOP organized a meeting of the Council of National Associations in Moscow. Five body-oriented conferences were held during RABOP’s existence. Further popularization of the field of body psychotherapy was facilitated by the publication of *The Body Psychotherapy Anthology* edited by Vladimir Baskakov, regular releases of RABOP Bulletins, a RABOP Training Program, the organization of international programs on Biosynthesis, Bodydynamics, work with shock trauma, and the participation of RABOP members in interdisciplinary conferences.

Unfortunately, in 2015, the RABOP ceased to exist due to disagreements between its members regarding the further development of the association. At that point, the RABOP had 20 full EABP members, one candidate, and eight associates.

Four schools of body-oriented psychotherapy are active in Russia:

1. Biosynthesis, established in 1994, is the first international long-term training program in body-oriented psychotherapy. Five groups have graduated from the international training program in collaboration with the International Institute for Biosynthesis. Currently, the Russian branch of the Institute is recruiting for a sixth training in Moscow and the second training in

Rostov-on-Don. During this time, three international trainers, four trainers, six assistant trainers, and 32 Biosynthesis therapists were trained and are members of the International Biosynthesis Foundation (IFB) and the European Association of Biosynthesis (EABS). In May 2019, the international meeting of Biosynthesis psychotherapists was held in Moscow with the participation of Sylvia Specht-Boadella and other international trainers, as well as professionals from Russia, Switzerland, Germany, Greece, Cyprus, Spain, Israel, Ukraine, Brazil.

2. Bodydynamics came to Russia in 2004. In collaboration with the International Institute for Bodydynamics, there have been ten foundation trainings offered.

- Foundation courses in Moscow (2005-2014): 183 students
- Foundation courses in other cities (2012-2016): 73 students
- Bodydynamics shock trauma training program (2006, 2015-2016): 63 students
- Bodydynamics work with birth trauma: 73 students

In May 2015, to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Bodydynamics in Russia, Moscow hosted the world’s first International Bodydynamics Conference with the participation of Erik Jarlmaes and Lisbeth Marcher.

Unfortunately, cooperation with the Bodydynamics International Institute was terminated in 2018. Erik Jarlmaes continues to conduct separate authorial programs in Moscow and Lisbeth Marcher plans to come to Moscow in June 2020.

3. Bioenergetic Analysis came to Perm in 2007. The first graduation of seven certified bioenergetic therapists took place in 2014. The first international training program started in 2011 in Moscow and in 2017, the first graduation of 12 certified bioenergetic therapists took place. Currently, a second group is graduating, and a third group is being organized.

4. Thanatotherapy was created by Russian psychotherapist Vladimir Baskakov in the 90s. The Institute of Thanatotherapy was created in 2001, and the International Association of Thanatotherapy was created in 2008. This method studies the process of dying, attitudes toward death, and the total relaxation of the body. Our attitude toward death affects our whole life and the deepest issues of our psyche.

The Concept of Thanatotherapy

Thanatotherapy addresses the contact with the process of dying and death itself; the main goal of Thanatotherapy is to make this contact full and real. Everyone knows that one must die; nobody believes that one will die. Thus, the transition from a “permanent” state of dying to a terminal, final phase is a great emotional and physical shock.

The phenomenon of right, natural dying, as well as the notion of a biological and social body, lie at the base of Thanatotherapy. Life and death are nothing but two sides of the same reality. When we try to ignore death, we deprive ourselves of a great source of energy – the energy of the fear of death.

Thanatotherapy is intended for use by:

- *All mortals* – to arrive at a more complete awareness of their life task and of their place in the universal life/death process; to establish full contact with their inner and outer resources; to achieve the greatest possible relaxation, similar to the state of the body just after death, and still come back to life.
- *People seeking personal growth* – for the great transpersonal experience that is the separation from the body and the “quest of the soul.”
- *People who are physically ill* – to trigger and activate the biological reactions of the self-healing process.
- *Psychotherapists and practical psychologists* – to make a strong effect on problem patterns without pushing a client into acting out.
- *People with sleep disorders* – to regain contact with this kind of “minor death.”
- *Men and women who have problems with sexual relationships* – to recognize the cause of their difficulties and find a solution.
- *Pregnant women* – to come into contact with their biological body and its healthy reactions as a basis for natural and painless birth.
- *People who fear death* – to step over the barriers of their fear, to see their problems as the root of their fear, and to find ways toward a solution.
- *Patients who are terminally ill* – to recognize and accept their pain, and thus find relief.
- *Those who take care of the terminally ill (professionals and*

relatives of patients) – to learn how to relax patients, take away their pain, distract them from destructive and painful thoughts, raise their spirits, and give way to optimism and acceptance.

There are currently several professional associations of body-oriented psychotherapists in Russia:

- SOBBORUS, the Community for Professional Practitioner Support, established in 2016. Research projects on Biosynthesis, Bodydynamics, and other approaches are conducted by the association. In May 2017, SOBBORUS organized the All-Russian Conference for Biosynthesis, The Russian Biosynthetic Therapists Meeting, and in May 2019, the International Biosynthesis Therapists Meeting.
- The Bioenergetic Analysis Society which conducts training in Bioenergetic Analysis and is developing this approach in Russia.
- The Institute of Thanatotherapy and the International Association of Thanatotherapy.

In addition, the following training programs are being conducted:

- Hakomi
- Peter Levine’s Somatic Experiencing® trauma work
- Work with shock and developmental trauma

The following books are published in Russian:

- Bodydynamics. (2010). *Body psychotherapy*.
- *The Development of Bodydynamics in Russia*. (2015) A collection of articles and abstracts from the First All-Russian Conference dedicated to the 10th anniversary of Bodydynamics in Russia.
- Biosynthesis. (2016). *Life Streams: Interviews with David Boadella*.
- Biosynthesis. (2017). *Inspiration and Embodiment*.
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