

BOOK REVIEW

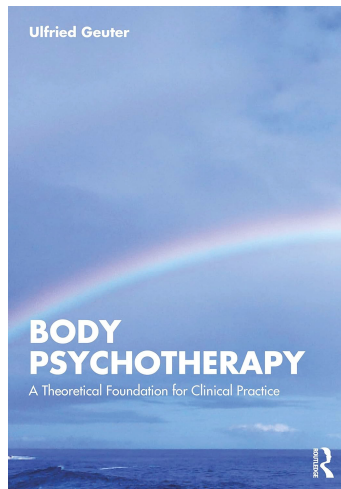
# Body Psychotherapy

*A Theoretical Foundation for Clinical Practice*

by **Ulfried Geuter**

*Translated by Elizabeth Marshall*

**Christopher Walling**



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Ulfried Geuter's new English translation of *Body Psychotherapy: A Theoretical Foundation for Clinical Practice* is a book with a legacy of its own. Geuter opens his new text by sharing the remarkable history of how this translation marks the second edition of the book, first published in German in 2015, and now the revised English version in 2023. In his ambitious attempt to find "a common ground" for all the various body psychotherapy schools, Geuter reports that his hope for this contribution to the field was to write for psychotherapists of every orientation, and for students in the profession. I am happy to report that he has succeeded, for I adopted the textbook for my graduate students in advanced somatic psychotherapy theory and techniques at the California Institute of Integral Studies just this year, and we are ever grateful both to him and for the experience of the German Association for Body Psychotherapy (DGK) that helped make the textbook available now for an English-speaking audience. Geuter acknowledged further that the European Association for Body Psychotherapy and the Wilhelm Reich Foundation sponsored the translation along with the DGK.

The book begins by tracing the origins of body psychotherapy to three historical traditions: what he calls "critical psychoanalysis" (Reichian), body education and bodywork methods (from reform gymnastics and expressive dance), and experiential body psychotherapy (from the human potential movement and humanistic psychotherapies).

These traditions underscore the focus on the patient's inner life, embodied experience, and the therapeutic relationship. It then delves into defining body psychotherapy, and differentiating it from related fields such as body-oriented, body-centered, sensorimotor, somatic, body-mind, and body mind psychotherapy. Geuter notes that he prefers the term *Body Psychotherapy* for its international recognition and its emphasis on treating patients through both bodily and psychological means – though of course we use the term *Somatic Psychotherapy* now in North America, given its more inclusive connotations. He debates the use of the term soma, or Lieb in German (living body), arguing that it is an unnecessary iteration. However, I think it's important for Geuter to further explore how somatics as a discipline, particularly in the United States, has led to many traditions that work not just with the “bodily means or various states and tensions,” but that also see the living body or soma as an epistemology of its own, not merely a therapy with bodily and psychological means, but a form of knowledge production equally valid to objective, subjective, or intersubjective phenomenology.

Geuter spends time exploring the “quest for natural aliveness” throughout subsequent chapters, and the legacy of the many schools in our global history of body psychotherapy. While it's perhaps impossible at this point to compile a list of schools that is truly exhaustive and thorough, he does cover many of the more historical traditions from recent generations in Europe and the United States. There was not, however, acknowledgement of the many indigenous systems of somatic healing that permeate throughout the Americas that incorporate touch, dance, and movement as psychological healing systems. Nor was there mention of subaltern methods in research that would have given a multicultural inclusion to the lineages section. Also, sadly it did not appear that Geuter was aware there are now only two remaining university programs granting accredited degrees to clinicians in somatic psychology here in the United States: the California Institute of Integral Studies, and the Naropa Institute.

The real synthesis of Geuter's text comes in the central chapters on memory, emotions, child development, and working with affect. He has worked hard throughout his career to synthesize a multi-method framework that allows for maximum inclusivity of the research to date, while looking for common factors that touch across our rich traditions and techniques. I was particularly impressed with his summary of how to best work with what he calls the various “channels” of communication (movement, posture, gestures, facial expressions, prosody, and proxemics). He also spends a whole chapter on working with the dimensions of transference and countertransference – a refreshing read for a relational-somatic psychoanalyst like yours truly.

With his appreciation of the intersubjective turn in body psychotherapy, and his dedication to creating a theoretical consideration of the body experienced in psychotherapy, he has managed to offer in this second edition a wonderful textbook for academics and psychotherapists alike to appreciate the rich summaries of how an experienced-based embodied system of theory and technique can help advance any psychological system when the body is taken up as an essential component of the therapeutic action in process.

Where I and many clinicians will differ with Ulfried, however, is how he ends the book with a chapter opining on whether body psychotherapy should be integrated with other psychotherapies, or remain autonomous. He states:

“Body psychotherapy brings to this integration a perspective that is generally lacking in other approaches: our understanding of body experience as the foundation for self-experience, the bodily aspects of core processes of affective regulation, the anchoring of memory, the emotions and the schemas of experience and behavior in the body, the developing of schemas in bodily interaction, the understanding of

how human beings communicate implicitly from body to body and the appreciation of therapy as a resonant, embodied encounter. What distinguishes it from other approaches is its ‘holistic perspective, oriented toward the systemic wholeness of subjective experience, in which the psychic dimension of human experience and the bodily dimension of lived experience are equally appreciate’ (Marlock & Weiss, 2015, p. 11).” (Geuter, p. 373-374)

As a professor of Somatic Psychology, I must confess I wish we could lay claim to all these features of our clinical methods exclusively, but sadly we cannot. It is simply not true that we are the only psychotherapy that sees bodily experience as the foundation for self-experience. We share this with much of relational psychoanalysis today, with its emphasis upon early infant development, the skin ego, and the bodily ego as primary processes involved in our psychic development. We also cannot lay claim to the bodily aspects of core processes of affect regulation, working with procedural memories, core emotions, and other schemas of experience in the body, as countless psychotherapies now in humanistic and psychodynamic traditions leverage advances from affective neuroscience to do much of the same. In recent studies we have conducted at the Traumatic Stress Research Consortium surveying body psychotherapists throughout the world, we have in fact discovered most of our representative samples are in fact integrationists – often practicing two or more modalities along with body psychotherapy. Body psychotherapists in practice are integral psychotherapists, according to the survey research.

Where I do agree, however, is that what distinguishes ours from other approaches is our emphasis upon a holistic perspective – a dynamic wholeness that body psychotherapy does seem to preserve that is often absent from many other schools of psychotherapy: a mind-body unity in both theory and praxis. This, I think, is because we have always been “experience-near” in our clinical work since the days of Reich, and have never forgotten the potency of shared affective experiences that can be felt between us, rather than just analyzed or interpreted away. Body/somatic psychotherapists have simply been ahead of the affective curve in our methods before other psychotherapies caught on. But with each passing decade, we have more in common with other psychoanalytic, psychodynamic, and humanistic approaches than we have differences. The body is here to stay in depth-oriented psychotherapies, and hopefully we can deliver on Ulfried’s hope to welcome all students and therapies into the embodied fold as they now contribute with us to advances in helping create a more embodied, liberated, and healthy world.



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## REFERENCES

**Geuter, U. (2023).** *Body psychotherapy: A theoretical foundation for clinical practice* (pp. 373–374). Taylor and Francis. Kindle Edition.