

Body Psychotherapy in Brazil

Rubens Kignel

ABSTRACT

This article aims to briefly introduce the development of body psychotherapy in Brazil. Initially focused on distinctive Brazilian approaches, methods from abroad were later incorporated.

Keywords: psychotherapy, body psychotherapy, Biodynamics, Biosynthesis, Bioenergetics, body and mind

International Body Psychotherapy Journal
The Art and Science of Somatic Praxis
Volume 19, Number 2,
Fall/Winter 2020/2021, pp. 130–133
ISSN 2169–4745 Printing, ISSN 2168–1279 Online
© Author and USABP/EABP. Reprints and
permissions: secretariat@eabp.org

In the 1970s, the military regime was in full command of Brazil, exercising repression and violence at full throttle. During this period, two psychiatrists, **José Ângelo Gaiarsa** and **Roberto Freire**, and a psychoanalyst, **Ana Verônica Mautner**, each in their own way, laid the foundation for the Brazilian Reichian movement and were responsible for the dissemination of Reich's work in Brazil.

José Ângelo Gaiarsa was born in São Paulo, Brazil in 1920. A psychiatrist who graduated from the University of São Paulo and specialized in psychiatry at the Paulista Association of Medicine, Gaiarsa was also a Reichian psychologist specializing in practical ethics and nonverbal communication.

Gaiarsa was deeply involved with the press, and active in television. For ten years (1983–1993), he hosted the program *Puzzle of the Day-to-Day* on TV Bandeirantes, in which he invited viewers to participate in analyzing emotional problems.

He authored more than 35 books, and introduced body techniques to psychotherapy in Brazil. His publications in the field of psychotherapy contributed to the scientific development and socialization of knowledge about the body and subjectivity, as well as to topics such as family, sexuality, and loving relationships.

Roberto Freire (1927–2008) was a Brazilian psychiatrist, journalist, and writer known as the creator of a heterodox new therapeutic technique called Somaterapia, a body therapy based on the psychoanalytic theories of Wilhelm Reich and anarchist concepts. Somaterapia is practiced in Brazil and in Europe by the anarchist collective Brancaleone.

Freire was a film and theater director, the author of telenovelas, a lyricist, scientific researcher, and staff member of the magazine *Realidade*. He was also one of the founders of the magazine *Caros Amigos*.

Ana Verônica Mautner was born in 1935 in Pest, Hungary and killed on January 30, 2019. She was a Brazilian Reichian psychologist, psychoanalyst, essayist, and chronicler. From a non-religious Jewish family, her parents were both Communists who immigrated to Brazil from Hungary when Anna Verônica was three. They arrived a few days before World War II was declared. She grew up in São Paulo, in the Lapa neighborhood, where her parents opened a hair salon.

In the 1970s, the military regime was in full command of Brazil, exercising repression and violence at full throttle.

In 1948, as a teenager, Ana Verônica joined the Dror – a socialist Zionist youth movement, which she abandoned when she decided to attend university. She graduated in social sciences at the University of São Paulo, where she also received a master's degree in social psychology. She was part of the generation of leftist sociologists and philosophers in São Paulo.

Ana Verônica later lived in Rio de Janeiro, where she was a journalist for the *Tribuna da Imprensa* and *Diários Associados*, and she worked in New York, London, and Canada. She also worked as a publicist and chronicler at the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*. She was a passionate traveler and forerunner of women's autonomy.

In the 1970s, she devoted herself to a body therapy approach based on the work of Wilhelm Reich. This approach included individual and group therapy, dance, stretching, and physical exercises that externalized aggression. Ana Verônica became a professor at the University of São Paulo and at the Fundação Getulio Vargas. At the same time as Gaiarsa, she founded the Reichian psychotherapy course at the Sedes Sapientiae Institute, which influenced several generations of therapists.



These three individuals stimulated the birth of the Reichian movement and influenced a great number of psychotherapists in Brazil. At that time, they were real Reichians – that is, disciples of Reich who added the work of other masters in their clinics and theories. Encouraged by these precursors, other neo-Reichian movements emerged: Bioenergetics, Biodynamics, Biosynthesis, Formative Psychology, and Biosystemics.

Brazilian psychotherapists went abroad to train, or invited master teachers such as Alexander Lowen, David Boadella, Gerda Boyesen, Stanley Keleman, Jerome Liss, Frank Hladky, Ronald Robbins, Ebba Boyesen, Lisbeth Marcher, and Clover Southwell to come to Brazil frequently enough for Brazilians to be certified in their approach.

Institutes for Lowen's Bioenergetics, Boadella's Biosynthesis, and Boyesen's Biodynamics were each officially established in the 1980s, and still operate today. Later, Jerome Liss, Stanley Keleman, and Lisbeth Marcher opened their respective schools of Biosystemics, Formative Psychology, and Biodynamics.

After five years of training in London from 1975 to 1980 at the Centre for Biodynamic Psychology with Gerda Boyesen and other teachers, I graduated and had the pleasure of opening the first School of Biodynamics in Brazil. Joining me as trainers were François Lewin, Christiane Lewin, and Ebba Boyesen, among others. Maurizio Stupiglia was one of the trainers I invited to Brazil.

With two colleagues, Esther Frankel and Liane Zink, I created the Brazilian Institute of Biosynthesis in 1986,

which is still in existence today. I had the honor of publishing the first body psychotherapy books in Brazil in collaboration with The Summus Publishing House, Boadella, and Boyesen.

Colleagues such as Liane Zink, José Alberto Cotta, Carlos Briganti, Nicolau Maluf, Jr., Sandra Guimarães, Esther Frankel, Miriam Campos, and many others have created their own institutes, and their efforts further honor and disseminate the work of Wilhelm Reich.

In 2005, I was president of the International Congress of Body Psychotherapy in São Paulo, titled "Psychotherapy on the Social Web." With approximately 800 participants from Brazil and abroad, it was the largest International Congress in South America. We had speakers from America and Europe, and a beautiful presentation by Brazilian artists.

In 2018, I organized a series of international conferences in São Paulo titled *Chaos and Rigidity*, the two extreme poles of social politics from a psychotherapeutic point of view. We invited the following international guest speakers from Europe and Brazil: Menno de Langue, François Lewin, Christiane Lewin, Maurizio Stupiglia, Rosanna de Sanctis, Umberto Galimberti, and Ivan Izquierdo. The Brazilian speakers were Gabriel de Oliveira, José Alberto Cotta, Heloisa Daldin, Mary Jane, Flavia Piovesan, Gilberto Safra, and Marisa Correia da Silva e Wania Cidade. Each conference attracted about 300 participants.

Today, there are training schools in the following Brazilian cities: Natal Recife, Salvador, Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba, Florianópolis, Porto Alegre, Belo Horizonte, Goiania, Manaus, Ribeirão Preto, Americana, Sorocaba, and Brasília. As in Europe, we have many approaches: Biodynamic psychology, Bioenergetics, Biosystemics, and Biosynthesis are all widely accepted popular approaches. Both individual and group work are also well accepted.

Touch

As we know, body psychotherapy uses touch to release tension, seek harmonization, stimulate and encourage movement, and often sedate and calm powerful emotions and sensations that flood the body.

In Brazil and in some South American countries, touch is an accepted part of treatment and of the therapeutic process – for example, Biodynamic massage addresses muscle armor and works with movement. There are no significant differences between Brazilian and European practices, although touch is a more accepted social norm in Brazil.

In this post-COVID phase, it is impossible to know how continuity will be affected, but I believe that there will be a recovery with some adaptations.

In Conclusion

The Brazilian movement grew to be so strong that some of us became important trainers in Europe, the Middle East, Japan, USA, and other countries. This included Esther Frankel (deceased), José Alberto Cotta, Carlos Briganti, Liane Zink, and I.

We do not have a Brazilian association of body psychotherapy. Instead, our institutes link to the EABP and USABP.

The future of body psychotherapy in Brazil is established and stable. Institutes are developing and improving, and are constantly updating and integrating the knowledge that originates and develops here and abroad.



Rubens Kignel, PhD is a psychotherapist and teacher in Brazil, Europe and Japan. He holds a doctorate in Communications and Semiotics from the University of Bologna and is a guest teacher at the University of São Paulo.

Email: rubens.kignel@gmail.com

Bold Performances from Our Latin American Colleagues

Madlen Algafari

A few years ago, I attended the Body Psychotherapy Conference in Natal, Brazil. It was a truly astonishing experience. For days on and after my return, I reflected on how, from the moment I arrived at the venue, my experiences at the conference could never have taken place in Europe.

To begin, right at the entrance to the conference, someone was lying on the floor covered in tiny screaming alarms used to prevent muggers from stealing handbags. I leaned over and at least moved aside the alarm that was screeching directly on top of his forehead. In the next few minutes, I watched other delegates arrive. I was astonished to see that Europeans and North Americans were more likely to step over this person, while Latin Americans sought contact and tried to relieve his discomfort.

Still affected by this experience, I then found myself in the middle of a large hall full of scattered parts of dolls – heads, torsos, left hands, right hands, left feet, right feet. We were all asked to pick a body part and write our name on it using a Sharpie. I chose a right hand.

In the next hall, a giant human silhouette had been drawn on the floor, and we were asked to stand in the place of the body part we had chosen. Again, a stunning realization surfaced – all of us Europeans had chosen right hands and heads!

In the course of the next few days, while the conference was in full bloom, the body parts were left to hang on a tree right outside the entrance, swaying in the breeze and eerily reminding us to think about our own body, about its integrity, and about its *dismemberment*.

To this day, I still talk about one of the workshops I attended. The program specified that it was forbidden to take pictures or talk during the workshop. At the designated time, around 30 colleagues and I were led in one at a time and given a piece of paper. It was dark inside. As our eyes adjusted to the darkness, we began to distinguish a naked male body lying on the floor with a multitude of condoms hanging above him on the ceiling, all full of white and red liquid. In turn, each participant was asked to stand above this male body and read the text on our piece of paper. Mine said: “*Humankind is growing, but what about humanity?*”



We were then directed to write a single word on the body using a glowing marker. I wrote “courage” on his left thigh. When he was all covered with words, the naked man stood up in front of us like Leonardo’s Vitruvian. On his body, we could read: *courage, love, truth, nakedness, natural, nature, regress, honesty, togetherness, meaning...*

As the words pierced our minds like nails perfectly hit on the head, the naked man proceeded to tear the condoms from the ceiling. Symbolically full of semen and menstrual blood, these condoms guarded against life rather than embraced it. The white and red paint soon covered his whole body, combining with the glowing words.

At the exit, there was a sign: “*Before you exit, ask yourselves what you are asking yourselves.*” We sat outside speechless for at least another 30 minutes.

Such a performance-workshop would be almost impossible in Europe. I have been pondering this experience for years! I am still stunned by the power of the messages delivered by our colleagues, the body psychotherapists of Latin America.

You might also find yourself pondering it after reading my testimony. It is well worth it!