

Report on the UKCP conference

by Brett Walwyn

The 9th UKCP Professional Conference met September 10th-12th at Robinson College, Cambridge. The conference subtitle, 'About a Body: Working with the Embodied Mind in Psychotherapy', put the focus squarely in the realm of Body Psychotherapy and techniques that address the body, such as biodynamic massage.

I represented the Association at a poster presentation on biodynamic massage, selling journals, handing out registers and leaflets, and generally spreading the word about our work. The other poster displays turned out to be quite complementary, covering subjects like vegetotherapy, attachment theory and touch. Many delegates were interested in what biodynamic massage has to offer, and how it might interface with their work.

The keynote address was delivered by Jaak Panksepp, Research Professor of Psychobiology, who gave an impressive talk on affective neuroscience and the relationship between thought, feeling and action. I thought there was a general level of acceptance of the importance of the body in therapeutic work, despite the very different approaches used by different therapists. Much of this may be due to recent research in neuroscience, that has demonstrated scientifically the complex interactions between mind and body and the unreasonableness of treating them as separate.

Body psychotherapy and biodynamic massage were well represented at the Conference. Roz Carroll, Gill Westland, Kathrin Stauffer, Clover Southwell, Gerda

Boyesen and others presented papers and contributed much to a very rich and thought-provoking programme. My own work with bereavement led me to attend sessions on "Touch and Psychotherapy with the Client facing Death" by Jungian Analyst Joy Schaverien, and a workshop on the role of the body in liminal journeys by Jane Frances. Both were very enjoyable and contrasted well. Joy Schaverien's talk was based in her own client work, whereas Jane's workshop included reading extracts from novels and poetry and reflecting on how the journey into and out of texts parallels the therapeutic journey. Ivan Eisler also gave a fascinating presentation of his work with family therapy and body image in anorexia nervosa.

Because there was so much thinking about the body over the three-day conference it was a great relief to connect to the body physically, and there was an imaginative and much-needed optional programme of singing, movement or belly dancing on Friday night. I chose belly dancing with Ruth Cowan. My belly has always been easy to find, but I had a great time finding my inner belly dancer in a packed room full of warmth and laughter. The theme of connecting to the body continued for me in my first session on Sunday. Maura Sills from the Karuna Institute gave a profound and rewarding workshop on embodied presence. Using Buddhist philosophy to examine the relational field between individuals, we worked in small groups to explore embodiment with

Maura's guidance.

In contrast to this, Beverley Zabriskie, a Jungian analyst in New York, gave an intellectually challenging talk on Psyche and Soma and the place of imagination as a link between them. I felt her presentation talked around the role of the body in therapy, rather than addressing it directly, but it still contained some interesting insights. This talk concluded the conference programme, and I think I would have liked a final session that pulled the strands of the conference together more effectively.

I found the Conference very satisfying and I struggled to choose talks and workshops from a very full list. The venue of Robinson College was excellent. A major contributor to the enjoyment of any conference I attend is the catering, and I am happy to say that the food was of consistently good quality, especially the conference dinner Saturday night, followed by dancing.

The Conference demonstrated to me that the importance of the body in psychotherapy has been solidly established. As understanding of the subtleties of working with the body develops among practitioners of many different therapies, biodynamic massage should be increasingly recognised for the unique contribution it makes to both massage and psychotherapy.