

# AChP Conference 2005: Meeting in the Flesh

## Introduction by Brett Walwyn

The subtitle of this conference, held on April 23rd at Robinson College, Cambridge, was 'Meeting in the Flesh: Embodied Relationships in Psychotherapy'.

The keynote address was by Nick Totton, on the subject 'Do Bodies Tell the Truth', a thought-provoking presentation on how the body manifests expression, but not necessarily information. A wide range of workshops were on offer including topics like 'Transference, Receiving and Contact in Body Psychotherapy', 'Family constellations' and 'Working with Desire and Envy', among others. The Association sponsored a workshop by Brett Walwyn, Sue Frazer and Kathrin Stauffer entitled 'The Therapeutic Relationship in a Biodynamic Massage Context'. The following is an extract from the workshop description:

The psychotherapeutic relationship has been characterised as consisting of five different components (Clarkson)

1. The transference relationship
2. The developmentally needed relationship
3. The Working Alliance
4. The I-Thou relationship
5. The transpersonal relationship

We want to explore what may be required of the therapist and client in order to be open to all these levels of relationship in the powerful and intimate contact of biodynamic massage. Therapist and client will be invited to pay attention to their physical sensations and feelings, as well as their thoughts and fantasies. After the massage session, participants will be encouraged to share their experiences and perhaps reflect on what may be distinctive about the physical meeting of therapist and client in a biodynamic massage session.

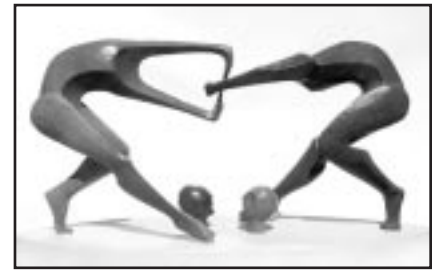
Unfortunately, only one person arrived to participate in the workshop. An interesting dialogue developed with the one participant, an integrative psychotherapist and Alexander teacher who had received biodynamic massage, and who shared her experiences with us. We were disappointed and curious as to why the workshop had not seemed more attractive to therapists attending the conference, and we would welcome any feedback about this.

The conference had a full and interesting programme with a good lunch and a good venue.

## The making of a conference by Kathrin Stauffer

The idea for the conference 'Meeting in the Flesh' was born at the AGM of the Association of Chiron Psychotherapists AChP in November 2002, and I joined the conference committee partly out of a sense that I would want massage to be represented. The conference had a difficult early life and didn't really come to blossoming until it had reached maturity.

At first, work progressed quite well for a time. The members of the committee (Alicja Drewnowska, Dianne Chipperfield, Robert Downes, Tom Warnecke, and myself) managed quickly to agree on an outline of the kind of conference that we envisaged. We always knew that we did not want to organise a conference that would serve to explain or demonstrate to non-body psychotherapists what body psychotherapy is. We wanted to have a conference that would encourage and reflect the discussions that go on at the cutting edge of body psychotherapy. We wanted to talk about the sorts of things that we find interesting, not give a PR exercise for the profession. So we aimed the programme primarily at other body psychotherapists, with the awareness



that other psychotherapists and body therapists might find something to interest them as well.

We also found our topic quickly. Amongst those of us in the committee, embodied relationships were a common interest. Moreover we felt that the topic was a bit of a trademark of body psychotherapy in the UK - in contrast to body psychotherapy in, say, the German-speaking part of the world where people seem much more preoccupied with fine-tuning technique. We were really pleased that Nick Totton could attend as our main speaker. Next came all the administrative logistics to making a conference happen.

Quite early on, we started to meet at the Royal Festival Hall, and we sort of got into a pattern of meeting about once every two months, usually on Sunday mornings. For a time, when the RFH was undergoing extensive renovations, we'd meet in the Members' Rooms at the Tate. Our pleasure in meeting in these wonderful venues became part of the spirit of the conference (although thankfully not my grumpiness at having to get up in time to catch the 9.15 train from Cambridge to London on Sunday mornings!). Early on, we decided to make it a one-day conference, mostly because the idea of organising accommodation for at least 100 people was just too daunting for us beginners!

One of the difficulties we encountered was finding a London venue that was the right size, suitable, affordable, comfortable, pleasant to look at, and available at

a date that suited us. After a long and frustrating search we finally agreed that the London venue idea was not working and then decided on the Cambridge venue of Robinson College. A further snag was the news of the up-coming UKCP professional conference on the topic of the body, which initially took the wind out of our sails but once we got over the shock of that, decided that we must simply avoid overlaps.

After all of that, the really labour-intensive activities started. It was an amazing amount of work to set up a budget, design and write the advertisement, the call for workshops, and the website. Then came the selection and organising of the workshops, and finally the collating of the conference pack for all participants. This final task we did on the last Sunday before the conference. Naturally, hundreds of emails went around between all of us, the participants and Jannith Wong, our invaluable administrator.

Chewing fingernails and quelling panic attacks were our main pre-occupation when, about two weeks before the conference, we still had only about 30 bookings, having budgeted for 100. Somehow we managed to support each other through this and calm any doubts we might have had about the workshop choices, of which we were rather proud. Finally, during that last week, the bookings came flooding in at just over 100. Phew!

As you can imagine, running the conference itself was equally nerve wracking for us but I can say that in the final panel discussion I felt warmth spreading around my heart. By the time we repaired to the bar for drinks, the committee was beginning to get rather happy, and dinner afterwards was a very giddy affair.

Although it was a lot of work, we

somehow feel that it might not be so bad the second time round; ‘famous last words’. It was work well worth doing though, and it was often a pure pleasure to be working in this particular committee. I would do it again!

### Comments by Lorna McNeur

My experience of the conference was of a wonderfully successful day. This tallies with the many conversations that I had and comments that I heard, during the day and after. Many of the workshops were constructively challenging and/or deeply moving, from which good conversations and exchanges were inspired on many levels. The venue and catering were gracious and generous, and the labyrinthine corridors provided conversation opportunities for lost participants searching for their chosen workshops.

There were therapists from various different backgrounds and much excitement about experiencing different approaches and ways of being and doing. A touching sense of ‘open-heartedness’ was present in the conference atmosphere, which was commented upon by many participants. This was especially felt during the Plenary Session in which the five panellists (Nick Totton, Clover Southwell, Jochen Lude, Shoshi Asheri, and Roz Carroll) were invited by the superb moderator, Robert Downes to share with us ‘the essential passion of their work through the years’. Intellect and intuition danced in the words spoken with care and compassion. One was left with a calm and gentle feeling from having bathed in the authenticity of the moment.

### The workshops on offer included:

#### *Morning workshops*

- Family Constellations and the Phenomena of Transference and Counter-Transference and the Therapeutic Relationship – *Yishai Gaster*
- Identity, Ownership and Our Bodies, an Intra-personal Exploration – *Joanne Ablack & Robert Downes*
- The Therapeutic Relationship in a Biodynamic Context – *Sue Frazer, Sue Armstrong, Brett Walwyn, Kathrin Stauffer*
- Exploring the Body through the Creative Arts – *Dianne Chipperfield*
- Somatic Dialogue in the Therapeutic Relationship – *Tom Warnecke*
- A Way into the Deepest Experience of Being – *Gillie Gilbert*

#### *Afternoon workshops*

- Working with Desire and Envy as Peers – *Anne Marie Keary, Cathy Lasher, Leticia Valles and Liza Waller*
- Intimately Violent Again – *Doron Levene*
- The Therapist’s Internal Process – From an Embodied, Holistic, Relational, Integral Perspective – *Michael Soth*
- Psychotherapist Embodiment – A Radical New Approach to the Body in Therapy – *Dr Robert Shaw*
- Authentic Movement: Embodying and Witnessing The Movement of the Inner Self – *Linda Hartley*
- From Wanting to Having: Receiving and Contact in Body Psychotherapy – *Kathrin Stauffer*