

# The History of Biodynamic Massage

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*(Please note that this article is a transcript from the above talk, it was not conceptualised as a written article or as a theoretical paper)*

I assume that nearly all of you here have received teaching of Biodynamic Massage at the Chiron Centre or at Cambridge Personal Development which grew out of Chiron.

I want to look back at the history of Biodynamic Massage up to the current time at the Chiron Centre, which mainly tells about the time when I received the teaching at the Boyesen Centre, and I want to say a bit about how we have developed it further here at the Chiron Centre up to the present day. The latter would be a topic on its own.

Before we came to London and before we started the Chiron Centre - the founder directors being Bernd Eiden, Jochen Lude and Rainer Pervöltz - we were engaged in a self-help project in Berlin. From 1974 to 1977 we were already experimenting with massage as it was taught by George Downing, which is a kind of intuitive Esalen type of massage. During that time, we also received some teaching by Robyn Speyer, who was at the time a trainer at the Gerda Boyesen Centre in London. She came to teach us Energy Distribution Massage. She enthused us about the training in London and motivated us finally to move to London. This happened in January 1978 and we continued our training at the Boyesen Centre in London.

The massage took a big proportion of the training. We learnt how to use the Biodynamic Massage in combination with the psychotherapeutic process. We also learnt how to use massage just as massage, how to use the massage as separate from the psychotherapy process and to work with clients who were in therapy with somebody else.

Throughout the training we were receiving weekly massage as well as giving massage to other students. We were personally taught and supervised by Gerda Boyesen from 1978 to 1982 in a weekly afternoon group setting, and occasionally other trainers came into the training for shorter periods. I want to say a few words about Gerda's teaching and her personality. Her teaching was very spontaneous, intuitive and creative, it was not a very systematic approach. She told lots of stories and she would give bits and pieces of her wisdom, but you had to find your own way of putting it together in a systematic way.

At the time I did not have a problem with that. I enjoyed what she was giving and I found her to be a very gifted woman and when she worked, she would really meet the client a hundred per cent in the way she would perceive what was going on and how she touched the client. She was extremely precise in her touch and she was able to pick up a lot of what was happening on a very subtle level. She had a very accepting and loving presence and she appeared to be the perfect 'Good Mother', certainly when she was with the client while she worked. She managed to create a strong positive transference, which enabled the client to be deeply affected by the massage. She was not so good in keeping a steady, ongoing contact

over longer periods and providing continuity and holding a client involved in a longer process, or remembering what happened before. She would also change her ideas suddenly because she had a new exciting insight and was sometimes disrespectful of her staff members due to changing her mind, which made working with her sometimes quite difficult. She is still alive and is still teaching at her Institute nowadays, where you can experience her.

Gerda Boyesen presented Biodynamic Massage as her thing, which it is. However she also adapted various principles from already existing views, but the way she put it together was unique. She drew a lot of ideas from already existing theories and methods, commonly used in Norwegian psychiatric hospitals by physiotherapists who worked within a therapeutic context. In general, I would say that she contributed a lot to the movement of body psychotherapy and that she softened the existing concepts, which were primarily bioenergetic concepts and the basic Neo-Reichian understanding about muscular armour. What she contributed was the concept of the tissue armour, which is the concept of the fluids. She stressed in particular the importance of the second part of the vasotomoric cycle, which is more the down-going energy, the melting, the importance of harmonisation and also the whole concept of the peristalsis and the significance of the psycho peristalsis in the psychotherapeutic process. The emotional energy cycle, so called the vasomotoric cycle, is a key concept for the biodynamic work, as well as the understanding of the movement of up-going and down-going energy; the understanding of an open and a closed system; the concept of the alimentary canal (the emotional canal) and the importance of the vegetative level; the startle reflex pattern; the concept of contraction and expansion and pulsation; the primary and secondary personality and the manifestation of neurosis in a physical sense and the concept of hypo- and hyper- tonus work within the massage. She elaborated on the biological purification, the completion of cycles, the flow of libido, the elimination of toxins and chemostasis, the melting of resistances and the movement of pleasure and libido.

The aims of Biodynamic Massage are to reach an independent inner well being and to get more in touch with a sense of self regulation, which means that we are more in touch with what we need and what we want and that we are able to get that. And I would say that the greatest strength of the Biodynamic Massage is, that we can stimulate a fine level of energy in the body which can be sensed as a movement and a flow inside, which is very sweet and pleasurable and has expansive qualities and which also gives us a sense of feeling part of our surroundings, or feeling more part of the world, so it could have in a sense maybe a transpersonal quality - it's contacting the life force within us.

When you hear this, it sounds quite wonderful, I guess, and it brings up a lot of questions: why do we need to do any psychotherapy if the massage can do all this? Why not just receive ongoing massage which will wash all blocks away and heal us and change us into these wonderful beings who are in touch with their life force and inner well being? It obviously is not as simple as that and the theory can have its shortcomings and be a bit naive, if it is applied too simplistically. And I think it is important to look at the time when the theory blossomed - it was particularly in the sixties and seventies, which was also the time of the peace movement and the belief that love could change the world and, in the same way, the Biodynamic approach could be criticised as saying, by being in touch with the flow and the peristalsis, that it would change neurosis and problems in the personality - of course is not as easy as that!

Now I want to say more about the history of Biodynamic Massage out of the tradition in Norway where Gerda Boyesen comes from. In 1934, Reich emigrated to Norway and he

influenced three people there quite strongly who received his teaching: One person was Nic Waal; then there was Ola Raknes and the third person is Dr Havrevoll. They all received analysis and individual therapy from Reich and they later became vegetotherapists. In 1947 Gerda Boyesen started reading a book about neurotic character and it was the first time she had come across the concept of analysis and vegetotherapy. She also heard a lecture by a psychiatrist, Dr Trygve Braatøy - who supported body therapy - and she understood that in order to be a vegetotherapist, one needed to be a medical person or a physiotherapist as well, and that's why she engaged in various studies which included psychology, physiotherapy and vegetotherapy. And these became the three main areas which she studied independently for some time and integrated later in her theories of Biodynamic Psychology. She underwent vegetotherapy with Ola Raknes, who taught her about breathing work, body work and cathartic work, as well as analytical vegetotherapy.

In our context here, the training in massage which Gerda Boyesen received in these years, is the focus of our interest. Most influential was the work at the Bülow-Hansen Institute. Aadel Bülow-Hansen was a physiotherapist and had developed her own method of massage work on the whole body instead of doing physiotherapy exercises. She was not particularly interested in psychology or in vegetotherapy and did not know about Wilhelm Reich or Ola Raknes. Instead, she created her own ideas, which were surprisingly similar to the basic Reichian understanding. She received a lot of support from the psychiatrist Dr Braatøy, as it was the tradition in Norway at the time that psychiatric patients received physiotherapy as part of their treatment.

One basic idea which came across from Bülow-Hansen was that she reported that vegetative reactions, emotions and memories would emerge out of a massage process in ongoing massage. And her teaching focused a lot on postural change; on the understanding of how the startle reflex pattern manifests in the body; the importance of the diaphragm - to open up the free, spontaneous breathing; and the understanding of vegetative discharge in the body. Her experience was that emotional conflicts are held in the body in muscle tensions and the diaphragm block and the muscular tensions are all over the body. She found that with massage a process would start to happen and deeper and unconscious material would emerge and that massage would achieve a postural change. The aim of the massage was to undo contraction and to help more spontaneous movements that would be facilitated which indirectly influence the psychic level. However Bülow-Hansen's interest was only the physical, postural change and not the psychological aspect of it.

What Gerda Boyesen learned through the work at the Bülow-Hansen Institute, was the deep massage on the hyper-tonus muscle which later became the deep draining, as we know it today. It is called psychomotoric work by Bülow-Hansen and is still practiced today. This particular massage is very strong and is not, according to Bülow-Hansen, used on patients who have strong psycho somatic symptoms, nor on borderlines, hysteria, or depression.

Gerda also learnt from Bülow-Hansen that massage can heal neurotic patterns due to the vegetative discharge. Gerda observed that clients get better and improve much more when they had vegetative symptoms such as sweating, nausea, stomach pains, trembling, diarrhoea, vomiting, etc. She then came to the conclusion that vegetative discharge was more important than emotional discharge and that the vegetative level touched the core or the deepest layer in the personality and that those patients who had vegetative symptoms were cured faster.

Therefore, the emotional experience in the therapy was treated more as secondary. I think that's quite an important statement to keep in mind. She was also confirmed in the belief that a block was held in the muscle, which is a basic Reichian idea, but Bülow-Hansen came to the same conclusion independently of Reich, that if you undo the tension physically through massage, you may get a release through vegetative discharge and through an emotional discharge. So Gerda Boyesen understood the development of the armouring by seeing it as a build up of unfinished cycles: A conflict creates a tension; the conflict gets repressed; the emotional internal pressure disappears, but what remains is a residual tension on the physical level which causes a block or a stasis and this block can be undone by a vegetative discharge. This is a marvellous concept because it basically says that via receiving massage, we could change all our tensions and problems - if we would take it in literally.

There is now another important influence in the work of Gerda Boyesen which is the meeting with another physiotherapist - Lillemor Johnsen who worked in psychiatry as well - and she focused not on hypertonus, which we had with Bülow-Hansen, but on the treatment of the hypotonus - the slack, the resigned, the undercharged tonus of the muscle, which reflects in psychological terms, depression and resignation. She observed that particular patients with mental illness had no tonus any more in their muscular structure except deep inside the body, or more in the base of the skull, and in general, that there was a lack of tension. The hypotonus treatment became another pillar in the Gerda Boyesen approach. Lillemor Johnsen criticized Bülow-Hansen because she ignored the importance of the hypo-tonus in the body and how to work with it. Lillemor developed a very subtle way of working with the breathing to encourage responses in the hypo-tonus muscles.

Then there is another person who is important and influenced Gerda. He is Dr Olesen, a homeopath, a naturopath and GP, who developed a massage which he called pump massage and it worked especially on the venous and lymphatic circulation, which have the particular function of eliminating the fluid stasis. He held a theory that internal fluid pressure created symptoms and therefore the fluid pressure needed to be reduced, which subsequently reduced the symptoms. Therefore, he used the massage to improve the circulation of the fluids and elimination of the internal fluid pressure. He talked about the connective tissue a lot and particularly that the connective tissue contains the stasis of residual fluid in the body and he developed the concept of transudation and distension pressure. Gerda took these theories further and developed the whole concept of tissue armour and that sometimes over-provocation could lead to more tissue armour. She found that those patients, who looked old or who developed more fat tissue, often had an over-provocation in their system and that it was an expression of an unresolved, deeper dynamic which was more stuck in the tissue or the surface of the body and not on the muscle and therefore demanded a different treatment. Deep muscular work would be wrong and even increase the tissue armour.

The concept of psycho-peristalsis is a discovery or a new invention of Gerda Boyesen herself and is not a theory she took from anyone else. She reflected on the fact that in psychotherapy, there's talking therapy - which is like a mild discharge - and there is vegetative therapy, which is more about stronger emotions being discharged - screaming, crying, etc. She concluded that in massage there can be the same: there can be a strong vegetative discharge with physical reactions such as tremor, diarrhoea (which I mentioned before), or there can be a milder discharge which is the ongoing psycho-peristalsis. She found that the psycho-peristalsis was best influenced by staying on the membrane of the muscle which created more explosive sounds and, out of that, she then developed the concept of emptying. The peristalsis was also a very safe treatment because it followed the concept of working the closest to the

ego, because the work with psycho-peristalsis stayed more on the fluid pressure and indicated how ripe or how unconscious the material was. If you stayed with the psycho-peristalsis, it was more likely that you didn't over-provoke the client. She found that some people who received too much of the deep draining type of massage, were over-provoked and built up a secondary armour because they got stuck more on the tissue level. When she actually worked in a softer way with them, not so deep, not so strong with the inner dynamic but used more emptying and distributing type of massages, guided by the sounds of the psycho-peristalsis, she discovered that these clients got better and developed less symptoms.

It became evident that those clients on whom she did the psycho-peristalsis massage reported a release of inner pressure and eventually they got more of a sense of a deeper well being and started to have pleasurable streamings in their body. She also found that those patients she saw in the rush hour traffic did not get better so quickly and that their therapy took longer. This was because she couldn't hear the sounds so well because of the traffic noise and then she found out that, if she changed their times, she could follow their sounds more specifically and then the treatment would be more successful. So, her conclusion out of that theory is that the work with the psycho-peristalsis touches more on the deeper relaxation phase of the cycle and is a key to completing the vasomotoric cycle and a key to achieving a better internal flow, a better connection to pleasure and a deeper sense of well being.

Through these experiences and discoveries Gerda Boyesen intergrated various methods of working, which then became part of the biodynamic massage techniques. She found a way of working which was effective for strong and defended types of personalities; then she created a massage which was more for sensitive types of clients and the combination of both was the possibility of working with someone who at first was strongly defended, but who would suddenly open up and maybe become over flooded and who would then need more subtle and sensitive treatment. And her way of working provided all these possibilities because she combined what she learnt from these different schools which I mentioned: the hyper and the hypo; the fluid work and the psycho peristalsis work - so all this came together in the biodynamic massage approach - and not to forget her understanding of the emotional functioning of the body through her studies of psychology and vegetotherapy.

She also experimented with massage, as a treatment for more disturbed clients. There is a case on a manic depressive client, 'Oscar', on whom she worked successfully on the fluid pressure to influence the manic or depressive cycle. Gerda was particularly gifted in working in that way and she could do that very precise and sensitive work on difficult people. My experience is that one needs to be extremely skilled and gifted to be able to do that. So, my conclusion and advice would be to say that Biodynamic Massage does not work that easily and successfully on very disturbed people. There might be a sensational session and an apparent shift, but there is not enough research done on the long term effect of massage on severely disturbed clients.

Now, I want to say something more about the time when Gerda Boyesen moved to London in 1969. She was very interested in the avant-garde movement. She wanted to break free from the establishment and the restrictions in Norway and she was interested in meeting Laing and Cooper and she made contacts in that direction. She was very lucky to be referred Ola Raknes's patients in London, so she could start working. She also started to lecture when she came to London and she started experimenting with vegetotherapy. While in Norway the massage and the psychotherapy and vegetotherapy were separated because that was the tradition of how it was done there, she experimented and created a synthesis of the massage

and the psychotherapy in London, because she believed that the two would go very well together.

Gerda also got to know John Pierrakos, who was part of the bioenergetic movement, and she started to integrate the biodynamic with the bioenergetic concepts. Some of the biodynamic views became very central for the development of body psychotherapy in general. She succeeded quite well in her teaching in blending massage with vegetotherapy and she created some new terms. For instance, she talked a lot about the dynamic relaxation, which is her belief that through relaxation - for instance through massage, but it could also be through vegetotherapy - we aim to reach the client underneath or behind the resistance and defences and we don't necessarily engage and battle with the resistance and the defence systems, which is more what the bioenergetic people might do. We are trying to reach the repressed feelings beneath the resistance and she would manage to do that sometimes simply through her presence. She could create a very secure atmosphere and just through her being, there would be a sense of melting and letting go in the client, which enhanced a deeper dynamic or updrift to emerge.

Her concept of massage became increasingly important for her and became a bit of a mission for her. Sometimes, her ideas were a bit grandiose and a bit unrealistic. The organisation of the Centre was run in a very chaotic way with many changes of staff and administrators and there were several cycles of collapse and new beginnings. This was not really good for the public as things changed continually and so people were quite put off by that. So, unfortunately, the biodynamic work stayed very much in a certain internal circle, but was not really taken seriously by the external professional world. I still remember that we were quite shocked when we started to move out of the close circle of Boyesen Centre atmosphere and started to go out more and talk about what we were doing; that we had quite a lot of scepticism and mistrust to meet and were looked at as a bunch of 'weirdies'. We realised that it demanded quite a strong identity and quite a strong confidence in meeting the world with the idea of massaging as part of psychotherapy. And I'm sure that you struggle now with similar difficulties because there is still a split in the movement of body psychotherapy and that there continues to be all this scepticism around. It is something which we still want to fight for: That massage gets more recognised as part of body psychotherapy - which also means that we need to do more research and bring these issues into public awareness.

The Chiron Centre was founded in 1983 - that's when we separated from the Boyesen Centre - and we were at the time Jochen, myself, Rainer and a few other colleagues. We started to do our own work and establish our own training school, which then became the Chiron Centre. We felt that massage was too over-emphasised in the Boyesen work and we didn't want to give so much importance to the massage, because we wanted to be part of UKCP and be recognised for our work as psychotherapy. Besides this, we were also sceptical and felt that some of the concepts around massage were a bit grandiose, as I said before, and also a bit naive, because it is too simplistic to say that the psycho peristalsis work would enable us to reach our primary personality and that we would be in touch with our core and deeper love and harmony.

Biodynamic Massage still has an important part in the psychotherapy training at Chiron, even if some of our psychotherapists do not practice massage later as part of their therapeutic work. It helps therapists to develop an embodied sense of oneself, to gain an awareness of an energetic presence and a quality of touch, to be able to relate to another person at a nonverbal level and to develop sensitivity to energy movements in the body.

In work with clients massage is excellent for achieving body awareness: to help the client to get in touch with their bodies with their internal sensations and movements; to help the client to feel more inner space in the body; to feel the flow and feel where it's stuck; and feel the swing of the metabolisms and the swing of the emotions; what it feels like when I may have a feeling and where I hold it and when I express it and that whole circulation of the fluid and also, after the expression, the kind of downward flow and the melting and the joy of having got, or having expressed it, what I want. And all this process is incredibly rich and opening and brings the client a sense of aliveness inside, of pleasure, and pleasure is always expanding and has, therefore, a deep therapeutic effect and meaning.

Then massage is a means to reach deeper, unconscious material. In the same way as Jungians may use symbols and images to reach the unconscious, we can use the massage and direct bodywork to reach more involuntary and unconscious material. So, by touching, we establish a kind of body dialogue and the body will always respond with a 'yes' or 'no' reaction, and we help the client to get more in touch with this - more often at first - unconscious, spontaneous involuntary reaction. And that helps to sometimes release deeper suppressed old feelings, so the massage then has a de-armouring quality and is freeing the old fixed patterns in the body. So, with massage, we help to work on the integration of the body/mind split because the basic Reichian principle is that the physical armour, the physical tension, is always identical with a psychological tension, psychological block.

At Chiron we use the massage as part of the psychotherapeutic process only for certain clients, and massage does not play such an important part in the process as it does in the classical biodynamic approach. We look at the process also in terms of the developmental stages and work much more with the therapeutic relationship. Massage is often more beneficial in the initial stages of the process to reach and enable an inner dynamic to emerge. A client may reach a level in the therapeutic relationship, where physical touch could be counterproductive. Massage, or touch in general, invites fusion and symbiosis, but does not enable separation and differentiation, which happens later in the development of the child through language and other ways of relating. It is very helpful to use Stephen Johnson's developmental model presented in his book 'Characterological Transformation' and explore, how the application of massage could support or hinder the client to move on in their developmental stage. He talks about the basic human rights which need to be encouraged to expand: the right to exist, the right to need, the right to be assertive, the right to be independent and the right to be sexual. It would be too much in the context of this talk to deepen this, as our theme is not massage and psychotherapy, but I want to make a few statements to finalise this:

Biodynamic Massage can be beneficial for the first two stages, the right to be and the right to need, and partly for the third stage, the right to assert oneself as well. Some clients get a sense of identity through physical holding only, a bodily identity and may need a positive relating on the physical level to develop trust, which they would not get through verbal work alone. Massage meets them on a deep unconscious level and provides a necessary experience which enables them gradually to enter a psychological process and to develop a sense of 'I' on a psychic level.

Massage is not possible when there is a negative or sexual transference, and because both are such an important aspect of the therapeutic process, massage is naturally often better left behind, when issues of this nature are in the foreground. When there is a sexual transference, any touch is easily sexualised. Massage works on a pre-oedipal level - it is about providing

contact, holding, caring, parenting, gratifying, stroking, saying yes. It is not about frustration and separation and working with the 'no' and fostering independence.

I do not want to create the impression that massage is a preliminary stage before the 'real thing' psychotherapy will start. You have all experienced how deeply profound and therapeutic massage can be.

It was a pleasure for me to give this talk to you and I do wish that Biodynamic Massage gets carried forward more into public awareness and becomes more part of the movement of Body Psychotherapy. I still believe in it, as a powerful way of working, although I have changed and developed in the last 15 years. Therefore it was quite good to talk more about my original training and look at these beliefs and ask myself again what I take on and what I leave behind, and I hope that I have communicated some of that today. Quite a lot of practitioners of psychotherapy who have completed the Chiron training, leave the massage behind because they find it too difficult to integrate massage with relationship work, with transference, and hold these two very different positions as part of the work. There is the psychodynamic understanding and there is the biodynamic understanding and they represent two very different principles. Often people choose either to be more on the one side or more on the other side, which is a split and I hope that ten years along the line that split will be more integrated. It is very difficult and demands great expertise.

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