

## BOOK REVIEW

### WHAT TOUCHES US

*The Embodied Self, Movement and Psychoanalysis*, By Katya Bloom, foreword by Anne Alvarez. London: Karnac, 2006; 226pp., £22.50.

Katya Bloom, movement psychotherapist, has created a uniquely valuable exploration into the relationship between body, mind and emotions in her book, *The Embodied Self*. Primarily an overview of how dance movement therapy and psychoanalysis can inform and benefit each other, Bloom's book takes the reader into a fascinating exploration of how the language of movement can enhance therapy for both infants and adults.

*The Embodied Self* poses a number of important questions to modern therapeutic practitioners, one of them being, 'If parts of the psyche can become somatised and lodged in the musculature . . . can movement offer a means of recovering and reintegrating them?' (p. 5). Bloom demonstrates again and again how recourse to the language of movement can enable patients to rapidly get in touch with traumas – whether infantile or adult – and then make conscious choices to re-cast their inner experience along more productive lines.

The insight that movement and body states can reflect as well as modify emotional/mental conditions is to be found through human history in many cultures. It is the foundation of disciplines such as yoga and oriental approaches including Tai Chi, martial arts and Shiatsu. Further, Bloom

makes the point that in our modern times 'the evidence from affective neuroscience is convincing – emotional experience is inseparable from the body' (p. 64).

*The Embodied Self* adds its unique contribution to this rich spectrum of knowledge by specifically focusing on psychoanalysis and modern dance movement therapeutics (DMT), two methods of therapy used widely in Western cultures.

Bloom's extensive background in DMT provides fascinating insights drawn from nearly two decades of work in fields as diverse as actor training (p. 19), Laban movement analysis (p. 22), Amerta movement (p. 37) and many others. Her similarly extensive background in psychoanalysis enables her to give a thorough overview of the current state of psychoanalytical practice in relation to movement therapy (p. 43), as well as a series of case studies in which her effective synthesis of psychoanalysis and movement therapy has benefited both infants and adults (pp. 155–95).

By providing a detailed introduction to the current state of thinking and language in movement therapy and psychoanalysis (pp. 3–84), Bloom is convincingly able to lay out a matrix for understanding how movement can illuminate therapeutic interactions. She introduces a wide variety of intriguing and very human case studies to illustrate her points (pp. 87–195).

Taken together, these case studies illustrate that the use of movement can enhance – sometimes dramatically – the speed and effectiveness of mental and emotional healing. These findings corroborate the

experience of this reviewer in conflict zones in Europe and Africa, training refugees in self-help approaches to detraumatization. Using methods largely drawn from Asian disciplines such as yoga, Tai Chi or Shiatsu, I have been impressed at how movement or breath-based self-help approaches can rapidly diminish the intensity of mental-emotional energy bound up in trauma. When this intensity is reduced, trauma victims can more readily integrate their horrific experiences into ongoing daily life (Wells, 2003). In fact, some United Nations staff have informally described these approaches as being amongst the fastest detraumatization modalities available. In my experience, Asian disciplines appear to have developed highly effective theories and modalities for healing difficult mental-emotional patterns, derived from centuries of careful observation. Katya Bloom's synthesis of DMT and psychoanalysis does much to support these views.

Further, Bloom assists an interested therapist in an exploration of how they might more consciously 'listen with their body' in a therapy session, and shows how this could well enhance their cognisance of their patients' experiences, as well as deepening their appreciation of transference and counter-transference within the therapy (p. 65). In fact Bloom's instantly applicable descriptions of how a therapist's 'embodied attentiveness' can help deepen their awareness of counter-transference may be one of the most important and useful features of the book.

Again, her findings here corroborate this reviewer's experience that understanding the body patterns of emotions can help a therapist swiftly develop a working hypothesis as to the nature of a client's emotional state, stored trauma, as well as its causes. Considerable research has shown that

humans – along with their mammalian ancestors – demonstrate similar body patterns for emotions (Goleman, 1995). In my experience, understanding these 'emotional signatures' (Wells, 2004, 57) does more than give clues as to predominant emotions stored in the unconscious. Therapists can go much further when they intentionally 'listen with their body' to these emotional patterns, to use Bloom's terminology (p. 79). By subtly mimicking these patterns a therapist can discover a rich array of data as to what might have caused the emotional pattern in the first place (Wells, 2004, 60). This intentional enabling of the transference can dramatically speed up the discovery of the most effective healing modality for a trauma victim.

Bloom's work on transference will significantly advance the understanding of the therapeutic community in these areas and is a worthy addition to the field. In an age that is increasingly focusing on whole systems rather than a Cartesian split into separated parts, it is perhaps inevitable that the broad field of data provided by the human body and its movements will be increasingly incorporated into therapeutic settings. *The Embodied Self* makes an important step towards building a vocabulary and structure of thought for this purpose.

## REFERENCES

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