

GUEST EDITOR'S EDITORIAL

Welcome to this special issue of *Psychotherapy and Politics International* on the Politics of Body Psychotherapy.

Body psychotherapy has long had an association with radical politics, though the nature of that association has changed over time. Wilhelm Reich, who has a good claim to being the founder of the discipline (although, as with most phenomena, one can always find antecedents and anticipations), was for some years an active communist, and his work as a body psychotherapist was inseparable from his political campaigning around issues of sexual freedom including the provision of information, contraception and access to abortion. He founded the Sexpol movement, which at its peak had 40,000 members in pre-war Germany.

Reich's exclusion from the International Psychoanalytic Association in 1934 has often been linked to his communism and Freud's wish to avoid bringing the Nazis down on German psychoanalysts, but there is good reason to think that his sexual politics were also unacceptable—just as they had eventually caused his expulsion from the German Communist Party in 1932, as a 'counter-revolutionary' who 'wishes to make fornication organizations out of our associations' (Sharaf, 1984, p. 170).

Cut adrift from his support systems, Reich became more politically labile, developing into what one might, in American terms, call a right-wing libertarian, though such a definition is too limiting. And America was indeed where he ended up, with the dubious honour of having his books burned by the US Food and Drugs Administration as they had been burned by the Nazis. Reich's work, and body psychotherapy, took on a new political life when they were discovered by the revolutionary youth movements of the 1960s and 1970s in both the US and Europe. Body psychotherapy became, at least in part, a component of the Human Potential and Radical Therapy movements, and Reich a posthumous prophet of sexual liberation. However, sexual liberation was now conceived in very different terms from Reich's: as a matter, one might say, of breadth rather than depth—what Marcuse (1955) called 'repressive desublimation'.


In one way or another, then, body psychotherapy has historically been generally on the radical left, "best understood," in Don Hanlon Johnson's words, "within a much broader movement of resistance to the West's long history of denigrating the value of the human body and the natural environment" (Johnson, 1997, p. xvi). To what extent is this still true? As with psychotherapy in general, the answer has to be "much less than it once was." Like all the other modalities which emerged and identified with 60s radicalism, body psychotherapy has made major compromises with the mainstream in the wake of that revolution's defeat. Many of its practitioners would not think of body psychotherapy as radical, or even as political at all; they seek acceptance by the establishment and see the obstacles to that acceptance as being about the lack of "evidence base" rather than the presence of subversive themes.

Not everyone feels this way, however; and I am very glad to be able to bring together the contents of this special issue as a demonstration of that fact—a set of six papers, mostly by relatively young practitioners, which are suffused with political energy. By "political energy" I don't mean that they display ideological allegiances, but that they are thoroughly alert to issues of power and powerlessness and to the need for representation and support of non-mainstream subject positions. Between them they speak about transgender, eros in the therapy room, touch and intellectual disability, childlessness by choice, disability and normativity, and the community-building potential of non-verbal connection.

Strange as these themes might have seemed in the early days of body psychotherapy, these are political issues for our time: examples of what Michel Foucault (e.g. 2008) calls 'biopolitics', and sees as a defining force of our era—the extension of governmentality to all aspects of human and other-than-human life, and the contestation of that process. If it is true, as I think it is, that biopolitics has become central to society, then body psychotherapy clearly has a role and a responsibility in addressing the implications. It seems to me that these papers take up that role and responsibility, and that Reich, who himself anticipated many of the biopolitical issues we now face, might have approved.

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