BOOK REVIEW · 2007

Review of the Handbook of Body Psychotherapy

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Published in *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy* (2007). A substantial review of the German *Handbook of Body Psychotherapy* by Gustl Marlock and Halko Weiss — a landmark comprehensive overview of the field. Soth uses the review as an opportunity to assess the current state of body psychotherapy as a discipline, its achievements and its unresolved challenges.

KEY THEMES

— The current state of body psychotherapy as a discipline

— What the Handbook achieves and what it misses

— The relational dimension absent from most body psychotherapy literature

— Body psychotherapy and the medical model

— Prospects for a genuinely integral-relational body psychotherapy

A Landmark Publication

The German Handbook of Body Psychotherapy represents a genuine landmark — a comprehensive attempt to survey the field in all its diversity, from its Reichian origins through the various post-Reichian schools to the most recent developments. For practitioners and researchers wishing to understand the full breadth of the body psychotherapy tradition, it is an invaluable resource.

The handbook is encyclopaedic in its coverage — including historical chapters, theoretical expositions, and clinical applications across a wide range of presentations and settings. It draws on contributions from leading practitioners from many different schools, giving the reader a genuine sense of the tradition's internal diversity. This is in itself a significant achievement, given body psychotherapy's historical tendency towards sectarianism and mutual incomprehension between schools.

The review which follows is necessarily selective — I have chosen to focus on the questions which the handbook raises but does not fully answer, as these seem to me more useful than a simple summary of its achievements.

What is Missing

The most significant absence in the handbook is a sustained engagement with the relational turn — with the recognition that the therapist's subjectivity is always already implicated in the therapeutic process, and that the therapeutic relationship itself is a co-created field rather than a neutral context for the application of body-oriented technique.

The handbook's framing largely reproduces the medical-model assumption which body psychotherapy has always theoretically opposed but practically reproduced: the therapist as knowledgeable expert who applies techniques to a client's body-mind system. Even those chapters which gesture towards relational perspectives tend to treat relationship as a supporting condition for the 'real work' rather than as itself the primary vehicle of therapeutic action.

This is not a criticism of the individual contributions — many of which are excellent — but of the overall framing. The field as a whole has not yet fully assimilated the relational revolution which has transformed psychoanalysis and humanistic psychotherapy over the last thirty years. The handbook reflects this lag.

Prospects for the Future

Despite these limitations, the handbook represents a genuine achievement and a springboard for future development. The field is clearly maturing — there is more theoretical sophistication, more clinical nuance, more awareness of complexity than in earlier body psychotherapy literature. The chapters on neuroscience, attachment, and trauma demonstrate the field's capacity to engage productively with adjacent disciplines.

What is needed now is a second volume — one which takes the relational turn seriously, which engages with the contributions of relational psychoanalysis and intersubjectivity, which theorises embodied countertransference as a central clinical concept, and which addresses the ways in which the body psychotherapy tradition's medical model assumptions have been both necessary and limiting.

Writing a chapter on group body psychotherapy for the English translation of the handbook provided an opportunity to contribute something of this relational perspective. It is not the ideal vehicle for addressing all the misgivings raised in this review — but it represents a beginning, and hopefully a springboard into the future as well as a brilliant compilation of the past.

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