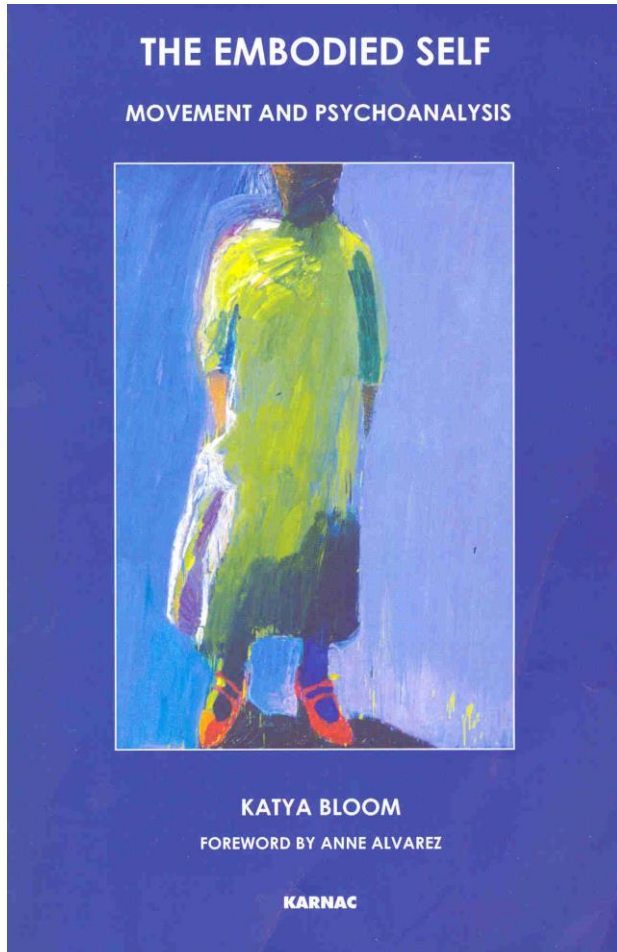


Book Reviews

The Embodied Self: Movement and Psychoanalysis By Katya Bloom



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Throughout her book, *The Embodied Self: Movement and Psychoanalysis*, Bloom draws together the mind, as understood by psychoanalysis, and the body, as described by Laban Movement Analysis (LMA). She explores how the language of dance movement therapy (DMT) is useful in supporting psychoanalytic work and vice versa. The book is divided into three parts. Part one describes relevant psychoanalytic theory and DMT theory. Part two provides a description of her observations of infants and children. Part three describes her clinical work with adults. The book is structured well. Bloom brings together theory early on in the book and then later demonstrates the practical application of the theory. Bloom concludes by asserting that psychoanalysis and DMT together generate maximum insight into the client's experience.

Psychoanalysis is subject to controversy in the fields of psychology and psychiatry. Currently those interventions with the greatest esteem are those that have been empirically validated, usually brief cost-effective interventions. Psychoanalysis tends to favour long-term therapy and has limited support relative to other theoretical frameworks. Irrespective of this marginalization, psychoanalysis has its enthusiasts, Bloom being amongst them.

Bloom begins with a salient quote from Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, that highlights the communication of the body and the relationship that the psyche has with the body.

“He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his finger-tips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore” (Freud, 1905)

Building her case of support for psychoanalysis, Bloom contrasts the focus of psychoanalysis by commenting on relevant neuroscientific studies that assert, “emotional experience is inseparable from the body” (p.64). Traditionally these two fields of study, neuroscience and psychoanalysis, have not complemented each other and have been seen to be quite distinct. However, recently, neuroscience seems to have confirmed the psychoanalytic idea of unconscious processes and the function of emotions and thoughts.

Bloom describes preverbal states of infancy, primitive psychic states and the body's significant role in affect regulation. She describes primary defences, utilised in order to cope with difficult early relationships, as being psychophysical. Object relations theory is a derivative of psychoanalytic theory and refers to the relationship particularly between family members, more specifically mother and child. The theory also suggests that past relationships may affect us in the present by impacting on our sense of self and other. Bloom suggests that DMT, with its descriptive language and focus has the tools to witness these processes more fully than traditional psychotherapy.

Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) is described succinctly and put forward as a correct way of describing human movement patterns and Bloom states that as the body signals unconscious processes LMA is an essential tool for understanding body and mind. By understanding LMA we can begin to read the body and therefore its store of these unconscious processes. Similarly, with an understanding of object relations and unconscious processes we can become more attuned to transference and countertransference in the therapeutic setting. Bloom goes on to describe LMA's basic effort elements, states and drives.

Bloom also makes reference to Amerta movement as a way for therapists to develop a greater awareness of their own bodily felt sense or experience as a window into unconscious processes, particularly transference. She describes the body as a diagnostic tool. Bloom refers to 'embodied attentiveness' and describes it as being aware of the therapist's own mind and body during the process of therapeutic work. She asserts that they are equally important in generating information about projections that may be occurring.

Bloom suggests that therapists can become more receptive to the client's experience by developing attentiveness to their own bodies. She writes:

"The more the therapist is anchored in his body, aware of the sensations, and feelings, the breathing, the relationship to time and space, the more likely he may be to consciously introject patients anxiety rather than react to it" (p.66).

She also suggests that movement psychotherapy (her preferred term for DMT) or at least body awareness should be a part of psychotherapist's training in order to benefit the work with the client and also for better therapist self care.

The book has numerous case studies and vignettes to illustrate her ideas. Bloom uses both psychoanalysis and LMA as a framework for understanding her cases. Her description of a young boy highlights the use of both these frameworks:

"Sam's speed in crawling and push towards walking often gave me the feeling that he was unable to tolerate the confusing changes in his life. He seemed to deny the separation from father and instead seemed to phantasize having replaced him" (p.100).

Referring again to the once popular Oedipal theory: "What he now has to contend with is the real Oedipal dilemma, which is rather different from what he previously lived through. His striving to assert himself through accelerated time has given way, in

the collapsing, to a state of mind in which weight and flow predominated. The internally focused dream state or, ... as flow, weight and space. The timeless spell drive are seen" (p.101).

In relation to an infant who was repeatedly restrained into passivity by the mother, Bloom writes:

"I felt a harsh superego had taken up residence in her stiff neck" (p.110).

"I could sense her predicament in my body, my neck and shoulders. I felt her tension and adhesion to her mother" (p.111).

Another boy is described as projecting angrily as he removes a toy animal:

"This strong, sudden, direct action of a punch as Oscar selects and gets rid of the largest beast seemed to leave no doubt about his feelings towards his mother" (p.124).

The removal of the elephant she determines is an angry projection towards the pregnant mother.

Bloom concludes that in practice psychoanalysis and DMT complement each other well. However, it seems that in order for psychoanalysis to become as esteemed as it once was further research will need to be undertaken. Bloom encourages dialogue to generate further applications of these traditions. In summary her conclusions include the idea that psychoanalysis can provide the theoretical framework for understanding why people move the way they do, as well as the transference or projections that may occur between client and therapist, or between client and objects in the room (as seen with Oscar). Other conclusions include that LMA can provide a useful vocabulary for recognising and describing movement sequences and styles that may be communicating unconscious processes. Finally, that movement training could provide a greater awareness of the therapist's own body that will give greater insight into the client's processes as well as the effects on the therapist.

Freud, S. (1905). Fragment from an analysis of a case of hysteria. S.E., 7:7-122. London: Hogarth

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