

## **Notes on Bodywork**

A classic admonition in Zen Buddhism says: to paint bamboo, you must be bamboo. This is spoken in respect to the art of brush painting, where each stroke must stand as it is made. The thin rice paper one applies the brush to cannot receive erasure or correction.

Wallace Stevens has put it into poetry:

### **The Snow Man**

One must have a mind of winter  
To regard the frost and the boughs  
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time  
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,  
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think  
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,  
In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land  
Full of the same wind  
That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow,  
And, nothing himself, beholds  
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

The Zen admonition, translated psychologically, says to empty oneself of the appurtenances of ego, one of the most insidious of which is the notion that one has emptied oneself of the appurtenances of ego.

## **Introductory**

For effective Dreamshadow Transpersonal Breathwork (DTB) facilitation, one must rid oneself of any presumption of expertise, any notion of spiritual achievement, any idea that one is really good at performing bodywork. Effective bodywork follows the expression of the breather, not the ideas of the facilitator. It ideally is a collaboration with the breather in which the facilitator vanishes, seeking nothing that is not there. Useful bodywork in Holotropic Breathwork is not massage, acupressure, Reiki, aura manipulation, or any other programmatic technique. Nor is it psychic midwifery, i.e., creating a rebirth experience.

All bodywork is experimental. It can only be considered in terms of the single, simple test that whatever one does must elicit a perceptible and congruent response. If there is no response, the facilitator has made a mistake. Calling this a mistake does not imply anything derogatory about the facilitator. Rather than dwelling on a mistake, the only meaningful thing one can do is learn from it.

To be able to make mistakes is necessary, both practically and metaphysically, for us to have free will. We should also realize that bodywork is not absolutely necessary for every participant in their session, and it could even interfere with the experience of a person at a particular phase of their process.

Bodywork has two aspects, theory and practice. It is easiest to see practice happening, but the facilitator who only focuses on practice will not grow. Learning the practical aspect of bodywork depends mainly on in-person instruction and develops through experience. Watching videos can be helpful, but there is no substitute for touching a body. Theory may seem less important than practice, but theory is the leading edge of human innovation and understanding.

## **Theory**

### ***Basic Perinatal Matrices (BPM)***

Stan Grof's interest in bodywork was originally inspired by Wilhelm Reich. Reich was the first person Freud authorized to perform psychoanalysis. Freud ultimately disowned him, however, because Reich developed Freud's idea about the importance of sexual energy (libido) to a degree that Freud found too extreme. Despite this, Reich became an important influence on psychiatry in the 1950's with his idea of *character analysis*. Finally, however, his descent into psychosis undermined his reputation.

Reich discovered bodywork by accident, but In *Beyond the Brain* Stan describes Reich's contribution to psychotherapy as "of great significance and lasting value:"

[Reich's] dissatisfaction with the methods of [classical] psychoanalysis led him to the development of a system called "character analysis," and later, "character analytic vegetotherapy." It was a radical departure from classical Freudian techniques, since it concentrated on the treatment of neuroses from a biophysical point of view, and involved physiological elements. Reich used hyperventilation, a variety of body manipulations,

and direct physical contact to mobilize the jammed energies<sup>1</sup> and remove the blocks. According to him, the goal of the therapy was the patient's capacity to surrender fully to the spontaneous and involuntary movements of the body that are normally associated with the respiratory process. (Grof S. , *Beyond the Brain*, 1985, p. 166)

Stan's initial theory of bodywork derives from his characterization of Basic Perinatal Matrices (BPM), which he developed in the course of his work with LSD psychotherapy in Prague and at the Maryland State Psychiatric Research Center. When he arrived at Esalen institute and subsequently created Holotropic Breathwork, he was exposed to reports of experiences that went beyond BPM theory. Consequently, he started to think he might be going crazy-- until he found inspiration from conversations with Fritz Capra, who had just published the *Tao of Physics*. Capra's description of quantum particles as in two places simultaneously may have inspired Stan's idea of *doppelte buchfuehrung* (double bookkeeping) as a phenomenon in Breathwork sessions. Capra's comparison of quantum mechanics and Oriental mysticism may have as well collaterally inspired Stan's conception of hylotropic and holotropic modes of consciousness:

The *hylotropic*, or matter-oriented, mode of consciousness is the term I am using for the normal, everyday experience of consensus reality. The *holotropic mode of consciousness*, or consciousness aiming toward wholeness and totality of existence, characterizes certain nonordinary psychological states, such as meditative, mystical, or psychedelic experiences. It can also be observed in many spontaneously occurring episodes referred to as psychotic by contemporary psychiatry. (Grof S. , *The Adventure of Self-Discovery*, 1988, pp. 38-9)

### ***Hylotropic/Holotropic***

The significance of the *hylotropic/holotropic* distinction for bodywork is not thoroughly clear, but Stan associates the experience of ego death with transition between the two modes of consciousness:

The symbolic counterpart of [the] final stage of childbirth is the *death-rebirth experience*; it represents the termination and resolution of the death-rebirth struggle. Paradoxically, while only a small step from an experience of phenomenal liberation, the individual has a feeling of impending catastrophe of enormous proportions. This frequently results in a desperate and determined struggle to stop the process. If allowed to happen, the transition from BPM III to BPM IV involves a sense of total annihilation on all imaginable levels – physical destruction, emotional

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<sup>1</sup> This term may carry some Cartesian baggage. It should be reinterpreted in the DTB framework to distinguish it from the remnant of 19<sup>th</sup> century physics that modern psychology unfortunately imported.

disaster, intellectual and philosophical defeat, ultimate moral failure, and absolute damnation of transcendental proportions. This experience of *ego death* seems to entail an instant merciless destruction of all previous reference points in the life of the individual. *Ego death and rebirth* is not a one-time experience. During deep systematic self-exploration, the unconscious<sup>2</sup> presents it repeatedly with varying emphasis and increasing proportions until the process is completed. (Grof S. , *The Adventure of Self-Discovery*, 1988, p. 30)

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René Descartes established a model of a person as an individual, material, machine that moved on a line through time. That model provided the basic metaphor that gave rise to Isaac Newton's science of physics. Although modern science has progressed well beyond the Cartesian-Newtonian model, mainstream culture has absorbed a bias toward the model that persists to this day, largely because it provides a simple and somewhat effective way of looking at things. For our holotropic perspective we need to realize how the model limits psychological and spiritual discernment, because it sees a person mainly as a separate, individual thing, minimizes the social nature of human life, and fails to take account of the modern scientific understanding that everything in the universe has evolved in relation to all that preceded it. Grof's holotropic paradigm is a significant new model for psychology that accounts for important factors missing from the Cartesian paradigm.

Grof's says that trauma may occur at any stage of the birth process. Different implementations of bodywork may be useful to address trauma that occurred in particular ways at different clinical stages. Consideration of archetypes is a steppingstone for understanding some larger aspects of birth trauma, as well as other traumas that can occur at various times in a person's hyletropic (ordinary) life history. The hyletropic perspective views people in terms of the *Cartesian paradigm*. Grof describes a paradigm as "a constellation of beliefs, values, and techniques shared by the members of a given...community. (Grof S. , *Beyond the Brain*, 1985, p. 3) The concept was originated by Thomas Kuhn, a physicist and historian of science. (Kuhn, 1962) He identifies its modern version as a description of the constellation that characterized the development of physics from Galileo through Newton. (Galileo died in the year and month that Newton was born. Descartes' life falls in the midst of that period.)

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<sup>2</sup> There has been an unfortunate tendency in modern psychology to treat consciousness as some kind of stuff or being that can act as an agent. A psychology based on Whitehead's cosmology, rather than Descartes, understands consciousness as simply a function of evolutionarily advanced creatures that can focus not only on present events, but also on past events. For Whitehead the past, both personal and universal, can be thought of as a different understanding of the 'unconscious.' Past events are real, not just something in memory. A past event is not actual like a present event, but otherwise preserves the feeling of everything that took place in the event. (See Appendix)

The following table compares the four physiological stages of the birth process Grof distinguishes and compares them with associated major psychological themes and selected psychopathology:

<b>Physiological Stages</b>	<b>Psychological themes</b>	<b>Psychopathology</b>
I. Intrauterine existence before the onset of delivery	Oceanic Feeling	Paranoid psychosis, Loss of personal boundaries
II. The period of uterine contractions preceding opening of the cervix	Feeling Overwhelmed, No Way Out	Endogenous depression, Inferiority neurosis
III. Passage through the birth canal	The Struggle for Life	Agitated depression, Sado-masochism, Obsessive-compulsive neurosis
IV. Emergence	The Death-Rebirth Experience	Mania, Religious delusion, Apocalyptic fears

Stan's BPM theory leads to the assumption that one practical role of bodywork is to facilitate catharsis of any trauma that interferes with psychological completion of the birth process. Understanding other possibilities for bodywork additionally requires recognition of the *hylotropic/holotropic* distinction in conjunction with thorough familiarity of the biology of the human birth process and with Grof's characterization of Basic Perinatal Matrices as it applies to the physiological stages of the process. This distinction is important to prevent always thinking of bodywork as a remedy for birth trauma.<sup>3</sup>

Effective bodywork must begin with understanding as much as possible about the birth process, but full effectiveness also requires understanding the whole variety of life histories, and the spiritual nature of the universe. Of course, to demand so much of a facilitator is utterly unrealistic. In the face of such a demand then, all a facilitator can do is understand that whatever they think they know is miniscule in respect to the totality of things, humbly acknowledge profound ignorance, and constantly work towards self-understanding by going within to reach the impossible depth of our soul.

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<sup>3</sup> Stan recounts a situation in which a facilitator acted as if she were mothering a birth process when the confused participant experienced himself as a dying Viking warrior on a battlefield.

Heraclitus said,

You would not find out the boundaries of the soul, even by traveling along every path: so deep a measure does it have. Fr. 45 (Kirk, Raven, & Schofield, 1983, p. 203)

Only by pursuing the impossible task of fathoming the depths of the soul can one achieve integration of the hylotropic and holotropic that is necessary to live in the world without alienation. Too many people choose life in one realm or the other, immersing themselves in material pursuit or traveling on a spiritual bypass. For the bulk of humanity, material pursuit has been the dominant concern, simply because satisfying the material requirements of life has been a struggle during most of human history. In the twentieth century psychedelic discoveries have provided an on-ramp to the spiritual bypass that was previously provided by dogmatic religion.

Stan's conception of the *hylotropic/holotropic* distinction developed during his work at Esalen as a new idea to be considered in addition to his earlier characterization of Basic Perinatal Matrices. Stan's initial understanding of bodywork, inspired largely by Reich's discoveries, focuses on possibilities of birth trauma in terms of the Perinatal Matrices. His subsequent understanding, informed by his *hylotropic/holotropic* distinction, expands to consider all manner of possibilities for trauma to occur in human and cosmic history. This creates the need for conceiving bodywork in a framework of even greater complexity than birth trauma, while not losing sight of BPM aspects of trauma.

The next step, then, is to consider archetypes associated with the stages. This understanding can be further enhanced by knowing the archetypal themes Stan associates with the physiological stages.

Physiological Stages	Archetypal themes
I. Intrauterine existence before the onset of delivery.	The Amniotic Universe
II. The period of uterine contractions preceding opening of the cervix.	Cosmic Engulfment and No Exit
III. Passage through the birth canal.	The Death-Rebirth Struggle
IV. Emergence.	Transition from dark to light

Each stage presents possibilities of existential circumstances that can become bases for diverse psychic phenomena and even archetypal phenomena.

Stage One may comprise an oceanic, amniotic heaven or, for the baby of a sick or addicted mother, a toxic hell. Stage Two begins distinction of baby from mother, but concurrently feelings of pressure occur. It presents the possibility of claustrophobic, no-exit experiences such as fortify horror stories. Later in life endogenous depression may be associated with this stage. Stage Three comprises numerous possibilities, including violent struggle, synergistic aggression and retribution mutually involving baby's and mother's bodies, and the hero's journey through the valley of the shadow of death. It can also present possibilities of encounter with blood, urine, and feces. In Stage Four the baby finally dies to the uterine world in a burst of light and inhales the breath of life, perhaps again along with blood and other physiological detritus. Abnormalities of birth and medical interventions broaden the archetypal possibilities. For instance, the dramatic increase of caesarian births in the US has greatly increased the possibility of the archetype of transcendent rescue.

### **COEX**

Besides his theory of BPMs and his theory of hyletropic and holotropic realms, Stan formulated COEX as a third theory (Grof S. , 2000):

[Along with] information about the biographical-recollective level of the psyche that emerged from my psychedelic and holotropic research was the discovery that emotionally relevant memories are not stored in the unconscious as a mosaic of isolated imprints, but in the form of complex dynamic constellations. I coined for them the name COEX systems, which is short for 'systems of condensed experience.'<sup>4</sup> A COEX system consists of emotionally charged memories<sup>5</sup> from different periods of our life that resemble each other in the quality of emotion or physical sensation that they share. Each COEX has a basic theme that permeates all its layers and represents their common denominator. The individual layers then contain variations on this basic theme that occurred at different periods of the person's life.

The nature of the central theme varies considerably from one COEX to

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<sup>4</sup> This description should not be interpreted in a spatial way. It rather denotes a system of relations that transcend space and time. Such systems may have negative or positive effects. Negatively they may connect traumatic experiences. Positively they may map a route that leads to creative inspiration.

<sup>5</sup> For Whitehead, COEXs are not patterns in one's unconscious memory, instead they are patterns of relations between real past events. Real events can be revisited in feelings as intense as originally. PTSD, for instance, represents such revisitation. Catharsis can be accomplished by establishing a safe and supportive situation for revisitation that encourages a new attitude which helps to understand and accommodate the trauma in ways that are less disruptive than the original trauma was.

another. The layers of a particular system can, for example, contain all the major memories of humiliating, degrading, and shaming experiences that have damaged our self-esteem. In another COEX system, the common denominator can be anxiety experienced in various shocking and terrifying situations or claustrophobic and suffocating feelings evoked by oppressive and confining circumstances. Rejection and emotional deprivation damaging our ability to trust men, women, or people in general, is another common motif. Situations that have generated in us profound feelings of guilt and a sense of failure, events that have left us with a conviction that sex is dangerous or disgusting, and encounters with indiscriminate aggression and violence can be added to the above list as characteristic examples. Particularly important are COEX systems that contain memories of encounters with situations endangering life, health, and integrity of the body.

When I first described the COEX systems in the early stages of my psychedelic research, I thought that they governed the dynamics of the biographical level of the unconscious. As my experience with holotropic states became richer and more extensive, I realized that the roots of the COEX systems reach much deeper. Each of the COEX constellations seems to be superimposed over and anchored in a particular aspect of the trauma of birth. In addition, a typical COEX system reaches even further and has its deepest roots in various forms of transpersonal phenomena, such as past life experiences, Jungian archetypes, conscious identification with various animals, and others. At present, I see the COEX systems as general organizing principles of the human psyche. The concept of COEX systems resembles to some extent Jung's ideas about psychological complexes (Jung 1960) and Hanskarl Leuner's transphenomenal dynamic systems (Leuner 1962), but has many features that differentiate it from both of these concepts.

The COEX systems play an important role in our psychological life. They can influence the way we perceive ourselves, other people, and the world and how we feel about them. They are the dynamic forces behind our emotional and psychosomatic symptoms, difficulties in relationships with other people, and irrational behavior. There exists a dynamic interplay between the COEX systems and the external world. External events in our life can specifically activate corresponding COEX systems and, conversely, active COEX systems can make us perceive and behave in such a way that we recreate their core themes in our present life. (Grof S. , *Realms of the Human Unconscious*, 1976)

## **Practice**



The typical practical question is, “How do I do bodywork?” It tends to be shorthand for, “How do I do work on a person’s body?” Surgeons work on people’s bodies, so do massage practitioners, chiropractors, physical therapists, etc. Breathwork bodywork is very different. In Breathwork a facilitator does not work on a person’s body. With Breathwork, a competent facilitator simply seeks to help a person express feelings that may be associated with certain bodily experience. Such feelings may be associated with particular parts or movements of a person’s body. But there is no way to determine such associations abstractly or in terms of some set of rules. What is more, associations may be fluid and changing.

Grof’s *Holotropic Breathwork* (Grof & Grof, *Holotropic Breathwork*, 2010) has two important discussions of details regarding situations and interventions relevant to bodywork that may be found pp. 37-43 and Appendix 1, pp. 185-198. Some special situations are:

- Choking, pressure on chest
- Muscular tensions and spasms
- Genital area, sex, nudity
- Overactive, erratic, and aggressive behavior
- Demonic energy
- Excessive self-control, inhibition
- Nausea, vomiting
- Standing, dancing
- Reliving biological birth

Besides these, the following need particular consideration:

- Releasing
- Supporting and nourishing
  - Trauma by omission
  - Anaclitic needs
  - Ethical concerns
  - Facilitator error

### **Combining Theory and Practice**

While perinatal experience may be a pivotal focus of bodywork, perinatal experience is not deterministic regarding subsequent biography, as Freudian theory would imply. Rather, perinatal experience provides a store or cache of material which can be ameliorated or intensified by subsequent experiences.

The importance of Grof's perinatal theory is grounded in the evolutionary significance of human birth. Human gestation is first of all a matter of the developing animal body. And the birth process is first of all bodily. Anthropologically, two factors are central, the developing size of the human brain and the narrowing of the human pelvis to facilitate upright, efficient walking. Both of these factors interact. As our chimpanzee ancestors came down out of the trees and moved out into the savannah, they had to walk and run efficiently to hunt and to avoid predators, and they had to become more intelligent to negotiate a more challenging environment. Grof's profound insight is to link the bodily birth process with psychic process and psychopathology.

Grof's perinatal theory is supported by the very recent scientific understanding that human experience begins before birth. Only in the twentieth century and since has the understanding developed that a baby is not born as a blank slate, that learning takes place in the womb, and even social behavior develops there, for instance in the case of twins.

To do effective bodywork requires freeing oneself from as many preconceptions as possible. A crucial step in learning is to have experiences of effective bodywork for yourself. Then you can aim to have yourself become like the facilitator who has done effective bodywork for you. To paint bamboo, you can become bamboo. The significant impediment to practicing effective bodywork is you. You must work to get yourself out of the way. This is the most difficult of all efforts in life, but it will yield benefits in all aspects of life including Breathwork. Consideration of theory can be especially helpful for getting oneself out of the way.

Truly effective psychotherapy and self-exploration requires a broad theoretical framework based on recognition of the multilevel nature of consciousness that would transcend the sectarian chauvinism of many present mainstream therapeutic approaches. (Beyond the Brain, p. 142)

Grof's theory goes beyond the simple discoveries of biology and behavioral science. It rests on phenomenological observations from experiences in intense non-ordinary states. It also provides a comprehensive rubric for the architecture of psychopathology and abnormal psychology.

### **Evolution**

[The Evolution of Human Birth, Karen R. Rosenberg and Wenda R. Trevathan](#)

### **Physiology of Birth**

[Study of Fetal Perception Takes Off, Ferris Jab](#)

[What We Learn Before We're Born, Annie Murphy Paul](#)

[The Timing of Birth, Roger Smith](#)

[Germes Are Us, Michael Specter](#)

### **Basic Perinatal Matrices**

[Birth and Archetypes, BPMs](#)

[The Experience of Babies What Little Babies See That You No Longer Can, Jean Berko](#)

[Gleason – Unfolding Language, Unfolding Life](#)

### **Reich**

Stan's discussion of Reich (Grof S. , Beyond the Brain, 1985) pp.165-170

[Review – Adventures in the Orgasmatron, L Gibson](#)

## Appendix

### Self-Creation

The idea of energy in Newton's physics is mechanical. It picks up on Descartes's conception of the human body as a machine. This idea worked well for developing physical science, and the success of physical science became a model for the subsequent natural sciences that developed.

Modern psychology, which effectively begins with Freud when he returned from studying with Charcot at the Salpêtrière asylum in Paris, aspired to be a science as successful as the natural sciences and consequently applied the Cartesian-Newtonian machine model to human beings. This model led to regarding difficulties in human psychological function analogously to problems that cause machines to malfunction or break down. It has thus led to an attempt to explain human thoughts and consciousness in terms of the brain as an electro-mechanical device that routes energy along pathways in a material brain. The idea at the basis of this explanation is that mental activity can be reduced to the mechanical operation of atoms and molecules that are driven by Newtonian energy.

Alfred North Whitehead has a very different idea of energy than Newton. His model is an organism that grows and develops in a way that manifests creativity and purpose, rather than something that is driven. Abner Shimony, a physicist who has challenged Einstein, characterizes Whitehead's idea of energy:

"The notion of physical energy, which is at the base of physics, must ... be conceived as an abstraction from the complex energy, emotional and purposeful, inherent in the subjective form<sup>6</sup> of the final synthesis in which each occasion completes itself." (Adventures of Ideas, p. 239). --Despite the obscurity of Whitehead's exposition it offers a possibility which Schrodinger has denied: the possibility of integrating the mind into a scientific picture of the world. (Shimony, 1993, p. 320)

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<sup>6</sup> Subjective form is the self-defining characteristic an event achieves in becoming a particular event, i.e., a self, which is its synthesis:

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;  
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells  
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's  
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;  
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:  
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;  
Selves — goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,  
Crying *Whát I dó is me: for that I came.* (Hopkins, 1985)

Once realized, subjective form continues to characterize an event even when the event is past.

Schrodinger's infamous cat paradox (Schrödinger's cat - Wikipedia) was an attempt to show that consciousness is a mechanical activity that creates existence, which continues the Cartesian-Newtonian idea that reality is fundamentally mechanical (Epperson, 2004, p. ix), and ultimately that a human feeling like friendship or love is explained better by hormones than by poetry. Although Cartesian-Newtonian science may be thought of as the poetry of the intellect, poetry is the true science of the heart's affections.

Creation, rather than mechanism, is the fundamental nature of the cosmos by Whitehead's estimation, and self-creation has the paradoxical Zen quality of intending to become before it is. The self creates itself; it is not something that is created by some god-like consciousness.

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