



The Embodied Self: The New Bridge Between Psychoanalysis and the Moving Body

A Review of

The Embodied Self: Movement and Psychoanalysis

by Katya Bloom

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Reviewed by

Ilene Serlin 

The exciting new discoveries about the connection between the body and trauma (Serlin, in press) are setting the stage for further discoveries and connections. *The Embodied Self: Movement and Psychoanalysis* builds on the connection between movement and psychoanalytic theory, with lucid theory and detailed observations of infants and mothers. This book should be required reading for students in psychoanalytic training as well as for those being trained in somatic and movement psychotherapy.

Psychoanalysis needs an understanding of movement as a language to balance its emphasis on verbal and visual languages and its view of action as “acting out.” Although it is based on the Western Cartesian epistemological separation of body and mind, psychoanalysis did, however, have roots in the body. For example, for Freud the ego was a body ego, and for Melanie Klein fantasies about the mother's breast and other body parts of the parents formed a core of her theory. What Bloom does in this book is to build on these theories of body ego by adding the key element of movement. Communications, including the flow and blocks, are all related to patient resistance, therapist countertransference, and history of trauma. Through careful case observation and documentation, Bloom is able to ground her theory in direct observation of therapist and patient interactions. She introduces the reader to an observation system that is based on objective qualities of time, weight, space, and flow (Laban, 1971) and has enormous potential to add to the assessment of movement therapy as an evidence-based modality.

Bloom explores the early communication between mother and infant as a basis for psychophysical patterns that persist throughout life. As a therapist, she is keenly attuned to the importance of somatic awareness in the therapist. Through heightened somatic awareness, the therapist can track his or her own somatic responses in therapy and what the patient may be disowning.

My own interests are more existential than psychoanalytic, so I am interested in one of Bloom's underlying questions: "What does it mean to be embodied?" (p. xvi; Serlin, 1996a, 2002, 2005; Serlin & Stern, 1998). The terror of the threat of nonbeing links existential and psychoanalytic approaches. Although these are infantile experiences of fears of annihilation and helplessness, they are also adult fears of life-threatening illness, loss of identity, or death (Van den Berg, 1962).

Bloom's inquiry is framed in terms of two questions: (1) What can psychoanalytic theory contribute to the perception and understanding of emotional and psychological processes that may enhance and help to underpin the theoretical foundations in the profession of dance therapy? What elements of psychoanalytic theory are most relevant for this exploration? (2) Can closer attention to movement, supported by some experience of both movement analysis and the practice of movement, offer an added dimension of insight into emotional and psychic processes, which could be of use to psychotherapists, psychoanalysts, and psychoanalytic observers? What elements of the language of movement are most relevant for this observation (p. 4)?

Bloom defines *embodiment* as "the tendency towards a balance and integration of the different aspects of the self—sensory, emotional, and mental—within the containing confines of the bodily structure, bounded by the skin and responsive to internal and external stimuli" (p. 5). She defines *movement* as "bodily responses to these stimuli; it comprises posture, gesture, position as well as movement through space.... It is not only what one *does*, but is also a sensorial registering of who and how one is" (p. 6).

Another key topic addressed by Bloom is that of countertransference. She ties in the very relevant recent work by Allen Schore (1994) showing how the body attunes to others, producing an empathetic connection. The body also attunes to its own experiences and understandings, using information from its mirror neurons and proprioceptors. Shore called this "a preverbal bodily based dialogue" (Schore, 2001, p. 67), whereas Bloom calls it "the language of movement" (p. 11).

Bloom also uses attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) to explore the importance of the early bonding between mother and child as a bodily phenomenon. She then introduces the Kestenberg Movement Profile (Kestenberg Amighi, Loman, Lewis, & Sossin, 1999) to describe mother–infant attunement. This profile was derived from Laban Movement Analysis (Bartenieff, 1980). I had the pleasure of studying with Irmgard Bartenieff in the 1970s and wish that all clinicians had her keen eye for observable dynamics of movement that are correlated with personality style, coping and defensive styles, leadership styles, and capacity for intimacy.

Bloom then explores various disciplines that train participants in embodied awareness. This is a particularly practical section because it directs readers to additional resources such as Body–Mind Centering (Cohen, 1993) and authentic movement (Jung, 1977). She also introduces the reader to pioneers, from Rudolf von Laban (1879–1958), who created a movement vocabulary that is used around the world, to dance therapy pioneers such as Marian Chace, to Amerta movement.

Bloom next turns to an examination of psychoanalytic concepts that are clearly related to the body. She addresses splitting and projective identification, the depressive position, symbol formation, transitional space, false self, body attention, psychosomatic processes, and integration.

Bloom's theory of change seems to point to the body as a key tool in psychoanalysis that holds the key to primitive feelings and traumas. The body is also the nexus of change, beginning with what she calls *embodied attentiveness* (p. 65).

I would add that embodied attentiveness can also be understood from an existential perspective. French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty introduced the term corporeal (1964), Sheets-Johnstone (1978) asked what is a kinesthetic image, and I describe a process called *kinaesthetic imagining* (Serlin, 1996b).

Embodied attentiveness leads to a more nuanced discernment of styles of movement. Bloom looks at the relation between Jung's functions of the ego and Laban's effort qualities (Laban, 1971), as both are ways of describing personality types and function. This articulation of the relation between Jung's and Laban's theories is long overdue and is likely to lead to profound new understandings of personality.

Case Studies

Bloom presents four psychoanalytic studies of babies and young children that were carried out at the Tavistock Clinic, and then describes her work with three patients in clinical movement psychotherapy. She emphasizes the importance of transference and countertransference in the body and summarizes her clinical assessment as follows: "Each patient can be said to have moved from a two-dimensional to a more three-dimensional way of relating to trauma and loss, in which a sense of perspective was achieved" (p. 198).

Summary

Bloom concludes by stating that psychoanalysis can contribute a deeper understanding of psychological processes and object relations to the field of dance-movement therapy. She suggests that Laban Movement Analysis may provide an objective vocabulary to talk about qualities and patterns of movement. She also feels that Laban Movement Analysis can help (a) connect raw experience and thinking, (b) make psychological metaphors more tangible, and (c) allow therapists to include patients' bodily experience and therapists' somatic countertransference in the therapeutic process. Both movement and psychoanalysis have an enormous amount to share as they move toward a more integral therapeutic approach.

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