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Relational Embodied Supervision



Julianne Appel-Opper and Jon Sletvold

In two videos, German relational psychotherapist Julianne Appel-Opper and Norwegian relational psychoanalyst, Jon Sletvold set about to see how effectively they could help each other to unlock two intractable cases through their own take on the embodied relational approach. First, Jon presents his work with someone with whom he feels unable to create a developing and deepening connection with interesting results. In the course of this supervision, by examining his own embodied resonances as he thinks about this patient, he gradually comes to a place where he grasps the complex defenses that may be blocking intimacy between them by locating them in his own body. Finally, he knows what it is that he needs to say to his patient, and experiences a sense of calm and liberation.

Underpinned by contemporary relational psychoanalysis and dialogical gestalt psychotherapy, Julianne Appel-Opper brings field theory to life as part of her approach to embodied supervision. Both Jon and her, actively explore the embodied field between Jon and his client thus moving and being moved and walking into a Third perspective. Different speeds in walking open various sensations and ideas about the implicit body-to-body-communication.

In her accompanying talk she illustrates through 3 case examples her approach she calls the 'Relational Living Body Psychotherapy'. It is with their bodies, she suggests, that clients broadcast their attachment histories. As therapists, we inevitably and physically react to these embodied narratives. They reach us skin-to-skin, heart-to-heart and muscle-to-muscle, stimulating responses and impulses in reply. She proposes that subtle physical impulses that the therapist experiences during the session are at the core of the work.

The pair then switches places, with Jon supervising Julianne. In this second video we can observe how he helps her to reach some new insights about

a client who had experienced extreme early neglect and trauma. His approach demonstrates the theory that, by supporting the therapist in imagining the client's bodily experience, and by focusing closely on her bodily countertransference she will come closer to a third position of being able to overview the core themes of the required therapy work. Micro-observation of affect is at the core of their discussion, and an empathic connection is notable in both videos.

In an accompanying video Jon argues that the therapist's own body forms the constitutional foundation of our capacity to experience and communicate in the therapeutic situation. The therapeutic process is seen as a continuous process of registering, feeling, sensing, what is happening and changing in the therapist's body as s/he interacts with the patient - a process that largely proceeds beyond the bounds of conscious awareness. It is argued that therapeutic action is fundamentally dependent on the therapist's ability and freedom to respond immediately - verbally and nonverbally - to the patient's e-motions, actions and verbalizations. The importance of reflective thought is acknowledged, and is seen as resting on the analyst's ability to gain awareness of unconscious bodily relational experiences. On the basis of these assumptions, he suggests that training and supervision, in addition to its traditional emphasis on exchange of words, should focus on sensitizing therapists to embodied experience and expression.

Julianne Appel-Opper is a Clinical Psychologist, Depth Psychological Psychotherapist, UKCP registered Gestalt and Integrative Psychotherapist, supervisor. She has 25 years of clinical experience, including 12 years of living and working in France, USA, Israel and UK. Since 2001 she has worked internationally as a trainer and a visiting tutor at several psychotherapy training institutes. She has developed the '*Relational Living Body Psychotherapy*' which she has written about including the British Gestalt Journal, USA Body Psychotherapy Journal as well as contributing to books.

Jon Sletvold is a licensed specialist in clinical psychology and psychotherapy. He was founding Board Director and is currently Faculty, Training and Supervising Analyst at the Norwegian Character Analytic Institute. He is former chair of the Psychotherapy Speciality Board of the Norwegian Psychological Association. He is the co-editor of two previous books (in Norwegian), and the author of the recently published book: *The Embodied Analyst - From Freud and Reich to Relationality*, which has won the Gradiva Award for the Best Book 2015. (Routledge Taylor and Frances Group, January 2014).

These four videos can be found in the Confer online module, *Embodied Approaches to Psychotherapy* at www.conferonline.org. The package of presentations includes contributions by [Julianne Appel-Opper](#), [Shoshi Asheri](#), [Bill Cornell](#), [Morit Heitzler](#), [Dr Pat Ogden](#), [Dr Susie Orbach](#), [Dr Asaf Rolef Ben-Shahar](#), [Dr Yorai Sella](#), [Jon Sletvold](#), [Michael Soth](#), [Dr Kathrin Stauffer](#), [Nick Totton](#) with work by Dr Ruella Frank in the pipe-line.