

# DISCOVERING THAT NO IS THE GROUND FOR YES:

childhood sexual abuse  
trauma and working  
with the motoric fields  
of Biosynthesis

by *Attracta Gill*

*'So many childhood sexual abuse survivors are basically held captive and their last resort is to just become immobilized'*

Pat Ogden

## ABSTRACT:

David Boadella (1931) is the originator and pioneer of Biosynthesis Somatic Therapy. He is the author of 'Lifestreams: An Introduction to Biosynthesis (1987) and 'Wilhelm Reich: the evolution of his work' (1985). One of his major contributions has been the dedication that he put into founding and editing *Energy & Character*, the first journal about Body-Psychotherapy (rather than any particular method) which has been published continuously now for over 30 years.

Biosynthesis, which means integration of life, is a body-oriented and psychodynamic psychotherapy which has roots in depth psychology, influenced by the humanistic tradition of psychotherapy and with a strong transpersonal dimension. Biosynthesis has been researched and developed over the last 30 years by David and Silvia Boadella and has been integrated with the emerging flow of discovery produced by neuro-science.

Biosynthesis therapists believe that each person from the moment of conception has a unique potential and this potential is greater than the trauma or pathology experienced. We work within the containing membrane of the therapeutic alliance to help the client realize this unrealized potential or inner essence.

In this article I would like to explore the work of motoric fields in Biosynthesis and show through an example of a short case study how a client who experienced childhood sexual trauma can use somatic movement to move from a place of being victimized and frozen to a place of awakened expression of assertion and potential.

### The 9 Motoric Fields of Biosynthesis:

*'Motoric Fields join movement to breathing, and movement to feeling and can be used to construct a new body image reflecting the potentiality for adaptive response to environmental stress and for experiencing the joy of living'.*

David Boadella

The German embryologist Erich Blechschmidt (2004), who developed the concept of embryodynamic fields to describe the different force fields that act on embryonic tissue when the body is forming, heavily influenced David Boadella. David has used this concept as a descriptive schema to explain the 'motoric fields that are involved in every developmental step, from free floating in the womb, through birth and suckling, to crawling, standing, grasping and all later skills' (1999:55). These fields are centred on movement and each of them has a healthy and unhealthy aspect depending on the type of character conditioning and trauma experienced.

Boadella (1999) explains that two nervous impulses pattern our movements; the first of these originates in the brain cortex and travels down to the alpha nerve to give direct signals to the voluntary muscles to act. The second originates in the brain stem and travels down to the gamma nerve and through the muscle spindle it gives signal to the muscle to get into appropriate tonus. This is called the readiness system.

As the conditioned movement overlays the unconditioned movement (just as the conscious mind overlays the unconscious mind) in Biosynthesis we are interested in looking for the movement tendency which can be seen as the seed of change to step out of our character pattern or pathology. This happens anatomically when the spindle receives fibers from the vegetative nervous system, which regulates the flow of emotional energies in the body. Therefore by listening and looking for movement impulses from the readiness system the Biosynthesis therapist is in a good position to help the client elicit spontaneous changes on a somatic level which contacts the unconscious without using words as the primary tool. Boadella organized the motoric fields into four pairs of polarities, which relate to the eight movements available to the embryo in the womb with the ninth field positioned at the centre of the motoric field system. This he calls the pulsation field.

### The Pulsation Field:

*'Pulsation links with play and play links to life. We can help the client to play and recover the joy and playfulness of life'*

David Boadella

This represents the main pulsation in the body, which starts with the heartbeat of the fetus at 21 days after conception. Following on from this the body has many pulsations such as the rhythm of breathing, which begins after birth. Boadella (1999) points out that some people emphasise their in-breath more than their out-breath. He differentiates between the containment stroke and the release stroke. With the containment stroke we might encourage the client to move out and breathe in – this will help to build boundaries and contain charge. By using the release stroke we breathe out and move out – this is helpful in states of tension or blockage and helps to open boundaries, emotion and charge.

### The Flexion and Extension Fields:

According to Boadella (1999) this is related to the flexion field of the fetus in the womb and is connected to contraction and expansion. He believes that as an adult it can have a self-protective and self-preservative function such as in times of fear or cold. This motoric field also occurs frequently when a person is characterologically identified with depression or hopelessness. On the other hand when a person denies fear or defends against collapse this field will be avoided. In the extension field the body moves into the opposite of flexion. Boadella (1999) sees birth itself as the first great extension. The baby will kick and move her arms into space. This field is related to the client expressing strong feelings of rage or distress and being able to 'stand up for himself or herself'. An unhealthy extension field occurs when a person believes that being small is dangerous and they find themselves trying to extend all of the time.

### The Traction and Opposition Fields:

The Traction field is found primarily in the arms and a healthy traction field is recognized by being able to sustain healthy contact in relationship whilst getting your needs met. In the unhealthy expression of this field we meet co-dependency, fear of independence and symbiosis. The Opposition field is the opposite of the Traction field and is developed in pushing. Boadella (1999) points out that the fetus experiences the earliest opposition field as he pushes against the pelvic floor with the head. Having good clear boundaries and being able to express 'no' characterize a healthy opposition field. It is essential to develop this field for people who have experienced invasion of their boundaries during their childhood. An unhealthy expression of this field can be met in the angry psychopathic character that pushes all contact away. Boadella (1999) suggests that for such a character expression of other fields will be more helpful in the therapeutic work.

### The Canalisation and Rotation Fields:

Boadella (1999) describes the canalization field as highly linear and focused. This field is related to purpose, focus and is goal oriented. An unhealthy expression of the canalization field is obsession, tunnel vision and rigidity. These characters might be better served by rotation or pulsation. The Rotation field is related to our birthing process as the child rotates during birth and we can express it in a healthy manner by being flexible and open to new ideas. Boadella (1999) explains that we can meet unhealthy expression of this field particularly in the hysterical character that gets ungrounded easily.

### The Activation and Absorption Fields:

A healthy Activation field means that a person is ready to move and prepare for action. Some people have great difficulty expressing this field and this shows in more depressive tendencies. Boadella (1999) suggests running, dancing or jumping as ways to express this field. An unhealthy expression of the Activation field is seen in over-activity and being unable to rest. The Absorption field allows a person to lie quietly and take in nourishment from the environment, being rather than doing. This may be a helpful field for the client who has just worked with strong emotion and needs to move into the absorption field of nourishment and integration. An unhealthy expression of this field can be seen in the person who procrastinates and gets stuck.

### The Dance of Interaction between the helper and the helped:

*'The trauma can only be worked through after a secure bond is established with another person. The presence of an attachment figure provides people with the security necessary to explore their life experiences and to interrupt the inner or social isolation that keeps people stuck in repetitive patterns'.*

Van Der Kolk

Jane had a history of early childhood sexual abuse continuing until the age of 10. Her mother colluded with the abuse and would leave her in situations where the perpetrator had access to her. In other words she would encourage the victimisation of her child. Jane reported that her mother was clingy, mean, cruel, cold and selfish. In order to survive, Jane was very dependent on her mother and never argued or stood up to her. She had an unhealthy symbiotic relationship with her.

As an adult Jane often has a strong negative transference reaction to older women, particularly those in authority and has repeated experiences of being victimised and bullied. She has a conflict between her 'inner feeling' of protesting and her

'outer feeling' of freezing and being submissive. She feels unable to use an assertive 'no'. Her therapist happens to be an older woman and Jane starts to feel afraid and intimidated of her. She brings this to the attention of her therapist at the start of her session. The therapist asks her client to sculpt her body into the scared position. The client sits on the floor and takes the position of the fetus (**Flexion field**). The therapist then asks her to take the position of how she experiences the therapist. She stands waves her arms and makes a hissing noise (**Activation field**). The therapist switches positions and becomes the small client in a fetal position and asks the client to become the hissing therapist. The client positions herself about 10 feet away and becomes the hissing angry therapist. She slowly approaches the figure on the floor whilst hissing and flailing her arms. In this position the client gets to visually see what happens to her in the flexion field when she feels bullied and overwhelmed.

The therapist now comes back to the here and now of the issue at hand and asks the client to once more take the fetal position and the therapist resumes the transference relationship of being the perpetrator. The therapist approaches the cowering client, hissing and attacking and stands with her arms stretched over her. The therapist keeps in good contact by voice and asks her client about any inner impulse she may be experiencing. The client reports that she now has an impulse to do something very different from her history. She experiences an impulse to stand (**Activation field**) and with the encouragement of her therapist she starts to move into the standing position (**Extension field**). Jane then uses her arms and hands to touch the therapist's hands and starts to push (**Opposition field**). As she pushes forward the therapist encourages her to use sound and voice the word 'no'. The client continues to push the therapist firmly using the word 'no' and all the while being supported by the therapist to use her breath and to stay focused and grounded with the earth (**Canalisation field**). She finally backs the therapist to a wall and her body spontaneously breaks into a joyful dance (**Rotation field**). The session ends with therapist and client sitting on the floor processing the client's experience (**Absorption field**).

*'On the deepest level, change always involves the body. A new attitude means new perceptions, new feelings, and new muscular patterns. Psychological and physiological change go hand in hand. Since our deepest traumas are imbedded in our guts and muscles, to free ourselves we must free our bodies. Yet we are more than just bodies. We are minds and spirits, feelings and imaginings. And though the body speaks, it must always be the whole person to whom we listen.'*

Ron Kurtz

In this session we see that with the support and emotional resonance of the therapist, the client moves through the motoric fields of the body in order to access the healthy movement impulses that had been blocked due to sexual and emotional trauma. The therapist facilitates this by firstly asking the client to experience the polarity of victim and perpetrator and then victim again. Thus we are starting to look for signs from the client and her readiness system in relation to mood and intention.

'In Biosynthesis the therapist is interested both to follow and support spontaneous movements: and to induce and elicit them by leading a part of the body in a certain direction, where it is invited, not required to follow' (Boadella, 1999:54). Therefore the Biosynthesis therapist seeks to listen to the gamma tone of the muscle and its readiness. This is what David Boadella calls the 'Soul of the Muscle'. The therapist supports the client to move through the motoric fields of flexion, extension, opposition, canalization, activation, rotation and absorption. The use of these movement tendencies is central to Biosynthesis, particularly in the work of Trauma.

The one motoric field that we did not work with is Traction. The therapist consciously makes this clinical decision because the client has reported that she had been overly dependent on her mother and experienced unhealthy symbiosis to survive. She gets stuck in the pathology of the Traction field, which does not serve her well as an adult. We can clearly see in this vignette how the appropriate form of action of saying 'no' to perpetrators was inhibited and not possible. The flexion and traction field may feel very safe to this client as she can withdraw from the world or cling to help herself feel safe. These were probably the positions that gave her the most comfort as a child. The client feels fearful to activate the extension field, which would require her to stand up for herself and open her up further to the stresses of the world and relationships.

The client being over-powered as a child experiences the Opposition field as being violated; she could not resist the sexual abuse through fear of further punishment. 'For people who learned to give up their boundaries and surrender to invasion without protest, the opposition field is essential to practice and develop' (Boadella, 1999:60) These motoric fields that have remained frozen in the body as dormant tendencies are waiting to be re-evoked in the relevant therapeutic context. As Boadella (2011) explains 'We are not trying to relive the trauma but reshaping history, finding a different way to respond, a different way of being in the world'.

An important question to ask is what could we do that is the opposite of the disturbance? What could the client do that is the opposite of the flexion field? As Biosynthesis therapists we offer a safe place to creatively explore progression out of the frozen history of the trauma. As Van Der Kolk (1989:406) suggests 'Once the traumatic experiences have been located in time and place, a person can start making distinctions between current life stresses and past trauma and decrease the impact of the trauma on present experience'.

We trust that the inner ground and inner impulses will appear if we create a safe place for the client. We attempt to get the inner feeling, the action and the emotion connected so that our movements and relationships in life are rewarding. Before the session, the client's inner feeling is protest, the action is submission and the emotion is freezing and victimisation. After the session the client's inner feeling is one of protest, the action is healthy opposition and the emotion is healthy aggressiveness and empowerment. Peter Levine (2001:5) suggests that 'when you are able to help people resolve trauma in this way, in this titrated, gentle, progressive way you get again as a side effect a real thing between instinct, feeling sensation *and* perception and cognition'.

Alexander Lowen (1995) suggests that any individual who was crippled psychologically by the forced suppression of his natural impulses becomes free and joyous as his body regains its freedom and grace. Joy is waiting to be let out of the prison of childhood trauma, which cuts off the sun from reaching the heart. In this case study we can see that childhood sexual abuse has had a very negative impact on the healthy aspects of the various motoric fields. From this perspective Biosynthesis Somatic Psychotherapy is very well placed to work with the trauma of childhood sexual abuse in a way that avoids re-traumatisation of the client and encourages the discovery of latent possibilities within the body.

### Training in Biosynthesis:

*'Working with the Body can change the mind'*

David Boadella

Biosynthesis establishes a link between the 7 chakras and possible disturbances as evident in different character structures. In the first week of training the emphasis is on the root chakra, autonomy and the will to survive. Major teaching themes are grounding and holding patterns in the body, polarity tendencies in the body, and impulse qualities in movement.

In the centering week the emphasis is on the hara chakra and on pre- and perinatal aspects of experience, womb life, birthing, and ways to help clients with birth or pre-natal trauma.

The bounding week concentrates on the energies of the solar plexus chakra, and the sympathetic emotions of anger and anxiety, in relation to the movement patterns of constructive aggression, and constructive self defence, or safety-seeking. The emphasis is also on self-esteem and image.


The fourth week of bonding focuses on the heart chakra as the centre of a love relationship, and looks at patterns of cooperation in partnership, (as opposed to symbiotic collusion, or destructive collusion).

The sounding week concentrates on the throat chakra, clear communication and self-expression. The 3rd eye chakra is connected to facing and letting go. Therapeutic work on the eye block includes ways of transforming restrictive imagery to creative imagery, and ways of grounding imagery in the body and in movement.

Finally the crowning week connects the crown chakra as a gate between personal existence and the transpersonal. We work with themes of healthy spirituality as opposed to pseudo spiritual escape from the body. We look at attitudes to death. There is intensive teaching on working with resources and qualities of essence.

### Conclusion:

In this article I have attempted to show how movement patterns in the body can be negatively impacted on by childhood trauma. I have explored specific Motoric Field Patterns (healthy and unhealthy aspects) found in different character structures and through the example of a clinical piece of work illustrate how we can work somatically by increasing the range of body responses available to the client. David Boadella who celebrated his 80th birthday last year has dedicated his life to researching Body Psychotherapy and its connections to neuroscience, imagery, spirituality, meditation, movement, language and philosophy. He is an original man who is passionate about helping people find resources somatically to transform the misery of human suffering and trauma. His training is well structured and is grounded in sound psychological and scientific theory whilst allowing for the creativity of both therapist and

client to emerge intuitively and collaboratively. I feel very fortunate to have discovered David and his pioneering work of Biosynthesis. I look very much to the future and feel inspired to 'break new ground' and introduce his life's work to Ireland. 



**Attracta Gill**, MA MIACP MIAHIP ICP ECP, has studied Psychodynamic Psychotherapy, Biosynthesis Somatic Psychotherapy, Gestalt Psychotherapy, Existential Philosophy/Psychotherapy, Art Therapy and Dance and Movement therapy. She has a love of working with dance, movement and poetry to

help people reconnect with their inner essence. Having spent 5 years training at the International Institute for Biosynthesis in Switzerland, David and Silvia Boadella have asked Attracta and Austin Breslin to take responsibility for the new Irish Institute of Biosynthesis. This will provide Post Graduate training at Introductory, Certificate and Diploma level. In Brussels in October 1998 Biosynthesis was the first body-psychotherapy method to receive scientific recognition from the European Association for Psychotherapy (EAP) and graduates can apply for the European Certificate for Psychotherapy. For further information please contact agill3@hotmail.com or 087 2382978.

## REFERENCES

- Blechschildt, E., Freeman, B. (2004). *The ontogenetic basis of human anatomy: The biodynamic approach to development from conception to birth*. North Atlantic Books: Berkeley, CA.
- Boadella, D. (1987). *Lifestreams: An Introduction to Biosynthesis*. New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Boadella, D. Shape Postures and Postures of the soul: The Biosynthesis concept of motoric fields. *Energy & Character, International Journal of Biosynthesis*, 1999;30 (1).
- Boadella, D. (2011). *Biosynthesis Training Solar Plexus Week*. Lecture/Class Heiden: Switzerland, unpublished.
- Kurtz, R., & Prester, H. (2004). *The Body Reveals: An Illustrated guide to the Psychology of the Body*. Harper & Row: New York.
- Levine, P.A., & Frederick, A. (1997). *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma: The Innate Capacity to Transform Overwhelming Experiences*. North Atlantic Books.
- Levine, P. (2011). *How to learn from the unspoken voice of Trauma*. Paper presented at A Teleseminar Session with Ruth Buczynski New Treatment for Trauma Series 2011: NICABM:Connecticut USA, viewed December 2011.
- Lowen, A. (1995). *Joy: The Surrender to the Body and to Life*. Penguin: USA
- Ogden, P., Pain, C., Minton, K. (2006). *Trauma & the Body: A Sensorimotor Approach to Psychotherapy*. Norton & Company
- Van der Kolk BA. The compulsion to repeat the trauma: re-enactment, revictimization, and masochism. *Psychiatr Clin North Am* 1989;12(2):389-411