

FROM <http://www.bodydynamicusa.com/theory/individuation-mutual-connection-bodys-resources/>

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Part 2

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The Art of Following Structure — Exploring the Roots of the Bodynamic System An Interview with Lisbeth Marcher by...

Individuation, Mutual Connection, and the Body's Resources

An Interview with Lisbeth Marcher by Peter Bernhardt, M.F.T.

(part 1 of 2)

Lisbeth Marcher

Lisbeth Marcher

Because of new research into child development, the developmental perspective has captured the attention of the

therapeutic community for the last fifteen years, and it is transforming the way therapy is being carried out. Most schools of body psychotherapy have also been deeply impacted by this shift, but most have had to rely on theories that address primarily psychological development to inform their work. In this interview, I discuss the formation of a truly somatically based theory of human development with its founder, Lisbeth Marcher. While this theory complements the ideas of Mahler, Stern, and other modern developmental theorists, it has also arrived at unique conclusions about the nature of being human.

Marcher is a Danish body psychotherapist who has conducted her own extensive research into psychomotor development over the last twenty years. By testing the psychological content of each muscle independently of others, and by studying when each of these muscles first becomes activated in the sequence of psychomotor development, she has acquired enormous range and accuracy in interpreting body structure and process. She is comfortable on the one hand exploring intrauterine, birth, and early infant states, and on the other, having done original research on somatic aspects of peer and group relations, she is at ease exploring the territory of later childhood and adolescence, areas often ignored by other developmental theories. David Boadella, the noted Reichian scholar, has called her “the Scandinavian legacy of Wilhelm Reich” and goes on to say that her system, called Bodydynamics, offers one of the most advanced character structure models to come out of the new generation of body therapies emerging in Europe.

In this interview, we focused on what might be called the “metasomatics” of her theory, the over-arching ideas from which

she works. One of these is her belief that the driving force in humans is the desire to be connected to others and to the larger oneness that surrounds us. She calls this the **drive toward mutual connection** and holds that the essential field for this connection resides in the body. Another central idea is that of somatic resource which relates to **the potential integrating function of the psychomotor patterns**, which she evokes in her clients. It is not enough, she says, to re-experience traumatic situations to heal them. We need then to go on and create a new psychomotor imprint and activate resources hidden in the body. I spoke with her as she was preparing a presentation of her work on rebirthing infants and children at the 1991 pre- and perinatal-psychology conference in Atlanta, Georgia:

PB: As I see it, body psychotherapy has been in something of an identity crisis for the last years. Many therapists I know have distanced themselves from the emotional release work so prevalent in the sixties and seventies, and are moving away from working with the body to a more purely psychotherapeutic stance. On the other hand, I see a number of systems emerging that reeducate or retrain the body, which don't really make the therapeutic—in the sense of resolving “psychological conflicts—a dearly stated goal. From what I know of your work, it seems that you have managed both to keep therapy at the heart of what you do, and to have kept the body at the center of the therapy process. How is this possible for you?

LM: It comes from my belief that our basic drive is toward being connected to other people, what I have called **the drive toward mutual connection**. This means that people who come to me are ultimately struggling to be in relationship. Opening relationships is

the essence of therapy, and of life, so I can't abandon that goal. And I can't separate my understanding of relationship from the body and body awareness. It is through **body awareness** that we sense ourselves in relation to the other. The more body awareness we can attain—which includes an awareness of sensation, energy, and emotion—the more we are able to establish deep connections to others. **So these two things, mutual connection and body awareness, are inextricably linked for me. Therapy that doesn't deal with body awareness will always lack something. Body awareness work that leaves out relationship will always lack something.**

PB: Your idea of mutual connection seems to have something in common with **Reich's idea of two energy streams** messing—which he called **cosmic superimposition**—during the mastic pulsation. Is it similar?

LM: I always felt that Reich was wrong to make the sexual experience the core of his idea of relationship. He, like Freud, took sexual energy to be the primary drive inside us. **I don't agree. To me, the human experience is much broader than that.** I feel it took him down a certain path that he got stuck in—everyone running around trying to have the most intense orgasm, missing all the mutual connection around them. But it would be a mistake to make a caricature out of Reich, to simplify his idea too much. He was really the first to come up with a **truly integrated therapy including the body, and his ideas are very important,** very strong. And of course, sexuality and the orgasm are profound forms of connectedness and are key aspects to any therapy.

Let me say too, that I **don't see myself as a Reichian so much as I see myself in a field that has been defined by Reich.** So much of

what has followed has been in response to his ideas. My own route to body psychotherapy was actually initially quite independent of Reich's influence. **It was only later that I took on and integrated his work, and understood where it could help my thinking.**

PB: How is your work different from Reich's and neo-Reichians'?

LM: Well, the **core of Reich's ideas is pulsation and establishing a free flow of energy in the body through releasing what he calls the "armor,"** and also through **activating the breathing system in a conscious way to build a charge of energy to evoke** an energetic/emotional discharge. I don't disagree with Reich's concept of pulsation, but I **don't think the best way to get to it is through turning the tap on full-blast** and seeing what happens. To me, that is **not an integrated therapy. Essential parts of the self get split off in that kind of work.** I see the **same problem with Stan Grof's Holotropic Breathwork.** I admire what he has done in uncovering birth issues, but **I don't believe you need to hyper-ventilate to work through** birth trauma. In fact, what happens in that work—having experienced it myself and seen a number of others who have gone through it—is that **so many issues from so many age levels come up that they can't be fully integrated.** In that sense, I am concerned about what therapy is—**what actually helps a person change their life**—not just have an intense, unintegrated experience. Therapy is a long term, slow process. We may get better at it, we may deepen it, we may extend its range, but we can't shorten it by much.

PB: You said so many age levels come up in the holotropic breathing. Can you explain that?

LM: Well, the way I work is to activate specifically those muscles related to an issue or psychomotor pattern, and not others, because I want to work with just the one issue at a time. This allows it to be experienced more fully and worked through. High activation breathing techniques activate all the muscles from all ages at once, which means that all these issues will pop up at random, like a roman candle, and you don't really know what's going on, where it's coming from. Often the content is split off from the emotion, or something will emerge that is too far away from the person's ability to handle it so that we dissociate from what has emerged. We come away thinking, "that was the deepest thing I've ever experienced," and then we forget about it, or treat it as an icon; we worship emotionality per se, or Aliveness, or Orgasm, or Birth—big things larger than life, larger than our own self. We all want something to follow.

PB: Isn't your focus on mutual connection just another form of that?

LM: Well, I'd like to think that the idea of mutual connection is a broad enough, flexible enough way of thinking about human experience that it avoids that. I suppose any theory risks being used to avoid coming to terms with ourselves. And of course, it too is a limited way of thinking where we need to look at life in many different ways.

But I see mutual connection as a way of organizing what so many of us are looking at into a larger picture. I see different people mapping out different aspects of mutual connection. Freud looked at the oedipal situation, and the child's wish to connect to his or her parents; Reich looked at the nature of orgasmic connection; Mahler and others looked at the separation/individuation process in early

childhood; Klaus and Kennel looked at infant bonding; now we speak of intrauterine bonding; and so on. Each of these stages is important, but it is the whole picture that I want to emphasize. There is no time in our lives when the experience of connectedness is not a crucial aspect, and finally it is a spiritual aspect we are talking about. At the same time, I am fascinated with the different aspects that gain ascendancy at different developmental stages, and as a therapist it is very important and enjoyable to illuminate these particular qualities of mutual connection.

Another place I got confirmation was from the work on Niels Bohr, the Danish physicist, who discovered that when nuclear particles were split, they would move away in opposite directions from each other at the speed of light. But the amazing thing was that these particles would mirror each other exactly, turning right or left in unison instantaneously, without any perceivable force connecting them. This says to me that we are always connected in some way to all life, and we are never alone in an absolute sense. You are always part of a wholeness. For example, at certain ages children appear to want nothing but to be away from their parents, to be independent. But in fact, while they truly seek this independence, they are still desiring a kind of connectedness. One of the tasks of life is to learn to recognize, tolerate, and enjoy a multiplicity of styles of connectedness in ourselves and in others.

PB: How does this relate to body psychotherapy?

LM: Well, how is it that we experience this mutual connection? We can know it in our minds, of course, and that is important, but it is through the body, through body awareness that we know it most profoundly. Though maybe I just fell into a dualism that I don't

believe in; it is a whole experience. But certainly the body is a huge field of our experience, without which we would live narrow lives. It is also that **mutual connection is an energetic process for me, not just an idea—and our body is the conductor for this energy.**

PB: How do you work therapeutically with mutual connection?

LM: Well, there are many parts to that answer, but the most important part is that I always work with body awareness as the beginning place. By building a careful field of body awareness, you have a base to work from, and it is what ultimately I want people to take away with them, **the capacity to sense themselves in different life situations.** That is **mutual connection—the capacity to experience ourselves in relation to others.** You might say that what I do is look for the holes in body awareness and from that, **I infer a break in mutual connection. I then track** that break to the person's present life—in their **character structure, in their body, and finally in their own life history.** Then I help them work through the emotions that are unresolved there. And finally, what is very important is that I help them **find new resources so that they can build the impulse that was missing or blocked.** For me, it is not enough to work with the unfinished emotions. We need to **find and activate the resources that were given up.** In my system, this is done by knowing precisely the developmental movements from different stages, and the specific muscles used at that stage, and activating them.

PB: You said earlier that a break in this connection in the child leads to a break in their developmental process. What exactly is a break in mutual connection?

LM: I come to this question from a number of viewpoints, but the most important is the developmental perspective. I've come to believe that the child goes through seven major stages from the womb to adolescence. Each of these stages offers crucial resources to the formation of a whole self, and thus to the maturing of the capacity for mutual connection. I think of each stage as organized around a particular need or right. They are, beginning with the earliest: the right to exist; the right to have needs; the right to be autonomous; to be intentional, directed and willful; the right to feel loving and sexual feelings; the right to have your own opinions; and finally the right to be a full member of a group without having to be special on the one hand and being able to perform, shine and compete on the other.

Each of these needs or rights is social in nature, that is to say they happen in the context of a relationship. If these needs are thwarted, it is because the parents or the social group can't tolerate something in the child, so there is a break in the sense of connectedness between them: connected in the sense that "I can be me and you can be you and we can be together." We then form a character defense, which, as Reich pointed out, is a compromise we make. I will do this, or give up that, in order to stay connected to you. I will give up my boundaries, or my sexuality or whatever, as long as I can remain a member of this family or this group. But even though we compromise, there is still a break, because we are no longer ourselves, and the only way to have the deep connection with others is when we are ourselves.

PB: Can you give some examples of breaks in mutual connection?

LM: The first stage of development takes place in utero, during the birth process and in the first month of life. During this stage, the most central task for the child is coming to sense his/her own existence, physically, psychologically, and spiritually. If there is a trauma in the womb, such as the mother becoming ill, or if the parents are struggling to make psychological space for the child, or if there are any number of difficulties in the birth or the first month or so of life, the child's sense of a secure existence is threatened, and thus there is a disruption in the foundation of mutual connection. After this time, the child may have many good experiences, some which may even begin to heal this basic break. But until these experiences are worked through, the child will always feel a basic struggle to exist. This would certainly create difficulties later in life, feeling connected to other people.

Let me offer an example from later in development. At around eight months, the child's motor skills, and thus his/her ability to explore the world take off—almost explode. Crawling moves to standing and walking, and fine motor skills lead to grasping, picking things up, and to games of give and take. At the same time, the child is learning to move away from mother and develop a sense of personal boundaries. I call this the age of the development of the capacity for autonomy. Here mutual connection means something quite different from what was needed at the existence stage. Here, the child needs a relationship where there is help when needed, but also where he/she is allowed to explore the world. The child wants someone to share the joy and excitement of this exploration without feeling taken over, and without being expected to be able to do more than he/she really can do. A break in mutual connection here would lead to either a feeling that the child can never really be on

its own and play in the world, or to a flight into activity to get away from feelings of engulfment or helplessness.

And so a child goes through each stage. A particular aspect of relationship becomes a focus of development. During the next stage, what I call the will stage, from two to four, the child is learning to do things, to plan and complete tasks, and this leads to a sense of the power to do things—and this leads to the power to say no—but also to choose to do things for another, the beginning of the feelings of altruism. Parents often confuse this capacity to say no with a power struggle—the child wanting to control them. I certainly don't see it that way. Of course there are often power struggles, but it is the parents who are struggling! I don't mean to imply that this is an easy time for parents, but I do believe there is a way through it that allows the child's sense of will to be affirmed. Next comes what I call the love/sexuality stage, from three to six, where the child develops a deep sense of romance on the one hand, and sexuality—more a sensuality at this age—on the other. Often parents promote one aspect over the other—either affirming the child's love and denying the child's emerging sexuality, or somehow activating the child's sexuality but de-emphasizing the child's feelings of love. I am not speaking here of incest or sexual abuse, which I see more as a shock issue rather than a characterological one.

After the love/sexuality stage comes the opinions stage, between six and eight. Here cognitive development has brought the child to the place where he or she develops a view of the world, and starts to have strong beliefs and ideas of things in a new way. The next stage, from seven to twelve, I call the solidarity/performance stage. Here the major task, in terms of mutual connection, is how to be in

groups. The child wonders, “Am I good enough to be a member of a group?” and “Can I shine in a group, compete and win and still be included?” In Denmark, solidarity is very strong, and we are able to support each other deeply, but beware the person who wants to rise up and have different ideas or really compete. In America, it is somewhat the opposite. There is a lot of support for doing your own thing, but little sense of creating community and deep support.

So this is my map—though there is one thing I would add about breaks in mutual connection, and that is shock. If people receive **deep shocks**, which can come from physical and sexual abuse, severe illnesses, accidents, surgeries, and so on, then this too can create a break in mutual connection. **Shock needs to be worked with differently than do “character” issues, issues that evolved gradually in the family and cultural atmosphere.**

Again, at each of these stages the child **gains resources—cognitive, social, emotional, and psychomotoric**. It is a whole integrated process. In my system, Bodydynamics, we make particular use of the psychomotor patterns that become active at each stage. There is research that shows that at least in some cases, psychomotor development actually precedes cognitive development, that psychomotor patterns act as a foundation from which other capacities emerge. If there are problems in psychomotor development, there will be problems in cognitive, emotional, and social development. Our theory is that whatever good or bad environmental influences are happening at a given stage, they will be embedded in the psychomotor processes of the grown adult. This connection to the psychomotor process is **especially true at the earliest developmental stages, where motor development is so rapid and where language is less a resource.**

PB: Can you say more about **how** you **use the idea of resource** in therapy? **TYPO**

LM: I see the biggest problem in body psychotherapy to be **integration**. We know through Reich, Lowen, Grof, and others that deep emotion and memory in us are actually relatively accessible. The problem is what actually helps people to change. For me, the answer has come through **understanding what “resource” is**. Reich was the first to conceive of the **muscular “armor”** and he saw it as **something to be free of, something that restricted the free flow of energy**. This is **true as far as it goes, but it misses the fact that the armor is in effect one kind of resource in that it helped us to survive**. Take it away, and people have no defenses—no resource. **Lillemore Johnsen**, a Norwegian physiotherapist, was the first to use the term **“resource”** in the sense that I have come to use it. It came out of her work with poorly functioning clients who seemed to have no resource—no ability to function in the world. She discovered when she did physical therapy with these people, that instead of a predominantly tense muscle pattern, their muscles were in fact undertense, or hyporesponsive. When she used a very gentle kind of touch with these muscles, she found she could **reawaken the resigned impulse in the muscle and it could find its lost function**; the client then had more resources. She worked a lot with schizophrenics and other hospitalized patients using this approach, and found they got better. **This was somewhat the opposite of Reich’s rigorous, a aggressive touch, which can actually break down what resources a person has**.

But even a soft touch brings with it the problem of integration. In my own original training in the Relaxation Method, we used a very fine

deep touch that brought up a great deal of emotion in my clients, but the work remained in many ways **incomplete**. In fact, there too some people nearly had psychotic episodes with the amount of material that was activated.

Seeing **Johnsen's** work, however, I began to formulate my own ideas. She also worked to understand child development, especially very early development, and this sent me on a journey to map out very clearly the psychological content of different muscles and link them to the time of their first activation.

PB: How is this actually useful in therapy?

LM: Well, it is the key to integration. **Each time we form a character attitude, it is in relation to our own impulses.** At the body level, this means that we **either give it up to some degree, and thus form a hypo-responsive muscle,** or we **fight for it in a rigid way, forming a hyper-responsive muscle.** Integration comes when the muscle can come back into its normal “healthy” range of response, neither giving up nor rigidly fighting. We have our own impulses, our own movement toward life, toward mutual connection, but we also **come to have choice. The impulse can come to consciousness,** we can **assess what reality has to offer and make our choice based on knowing what's happening inside us and outside us.** You see, character defenses create illusions. I may have the fantasy that it is hopeless to reach out. This comes from a memory I have about bad experiences reaching out in the past, but also I get a feeling in my arm when I reach out that it is hopeless because the hypo-responsive muscle has no life; it wants to give up; it gets no good feeling from reaching. So the muscle confirms the fantasy: “It is too hard, too much to ask for help.” But if I can help the person sense

that his muscles can actually do it, that this muscle can come to life and **allow the impulse to reach to come alive again**, then I can work also with the fantasy. Now there are the resources in the body to change the fantasy, and there is the basis for deep lasting change.

I call this **developmental holding**, holding someone in a developmental activity, and working it through until the impulse is reawakened and practiced. In this way, my therapy is very different from therapies that focus just on what happened or didn't happen. For me, integration happens when a new decision is made based on new motor and cognitive abilities or resources. **In some ways, it is a lot more boring to watch and it is hard work.** The tendency is often to regress to an earlier place to get out of the hard work. In that way, my work is not "process" oriented, because process work usually means regression, which in itself can become a defense.

PB: Can you give me an example of what some specific resources are?

LM: Well, the movement of development is toward greater and greater **individuation and independence—greater sense of oneself as whole.** This takes place in many arenas, in **cognitive, emotional, and motoric and perceptual realms.** But at a body level, **one crucial example is that of learning to create boundaries.** I think of boundaries ultimately as an energy field around the body that if we learn to sense, can become a profound resource in our daily life. It is also crucial for a healthy mature capacity for mutual connection. **Mutual connection does not have to take place in a merged state.** **This is one of our greatest confusions.** It is possible to have deep profound connections to others while maintaining boundaries. In fact, for adults, boundaried contact is a prerequisite to more

merged forms of contact. Especially people with problems from very early in life have never learned to form secure boundaries, and thus always feel invaded, or that they have to give all of themselves in order to be loved or cared for.

Developmentally, we know that certain muscles are activated at certain times that relate to boundary formation—the iliotibial tract is one example in the legs. The triceps in the arms help push people away, and the medial deltoids help create a sense of personal space, and so on. Once we had established that boundaries were an issue with a client, at the appropriate time, we would activate these muscles through touch or movement, and also work with the psychological issues at the same time. Once this is sensed in the body, it then needs to be practiced, and we might give homework on it, try using boundaries in specific ways, and so on. So it is not enough to know you were invaded and have poor boundaries. For full integration, that training is necessary so that new resources become rooted in the body. I also make use of the therapeutic relationship to facilitate this. I am active about supporting these new resources, both with me and in the world. I teach them how to sense their boundaries with me, and I support them to do it in the world. In that way, creating resources has a parenting component, helping to give the messages that were missed when they were children.

PB: How do you integrate spirituality into your work?

LM: Again, let me come at that question from a developmental perspective. Children, as I know them, up to the age of about three or four, are directly in contact with spirituality. They see auras, spirits, and are in touch with other manifestations of energy. Then

there is a **closing that happens** at around that time. This is **partly from denial in the family and in the culture, but it seems actually to be more a natural developmental process**. Why is this so? What is the need to have these things go underground? I don't know the answer to this, but it **seems important to respect it**. One idea is that spirituality closes as other aspects such as emotion, sexuality, and cognition take a more forward position. Later on, in the teenage years, the child opens again to spiritual explorations. We might say that there is a **"spiritual latency period,"** similar to the natural closing of sexual feelings around age six, which then open again during adolescence.

It is important to respect this natural closing of awareness of spirituality because I think there is a lot of confusion about how we come to spirituality. What I see happening is a lot of people **jumping out to their spirituality rather than expanding out to it**. Their spirituality is particularly not integrated with their emotions. People try to move to a mental level of mutual connection before they know how to live fully in an emotional kind of mutual connection.

This is what I would call **a defensive form of spirituality**. Let me explain: If a young child is traumatized during this natural time of opening to spirituality, then his/her experience of spirituality will be affected in some way. It may be that there is a decision to shut it down completely—**to close, to stop knowing, because it is too painful or frightening**. But there **also may be a decision to flee into the spiritual as a way to escape the pain of this world**. The decision to go toward spirituality seems more common where there has been **early** massive trauma or shock—something that brings up strongly the issues of existence. Later in life this person will have remained in touch with their spirituality, but it has become a

defense. The problem comes in living fully in a here and now way. They don't have a choice. They are stuck in the spiritual.

For me, in therapy, the integration of spirituality would tend to take place **toward the end of therapy**, and this is because I work in a specific way **developmentally**. I work with **later issues moving to earlier and earlier developmental stages**. This is so that the person can make **use of the resources of later ages** to go through the intense regressions of the very early stuff—intrauterine or birth trauma and the first year or so of life. So I would first work with someone's issues in getting **group support**; their ability to have strong **opinions**; their sexual and **heart issues**; their right to have strong **emotions** and so on; **before I would work with earlier issues, including spirituality**. **With some** people, the task is to help them **open up to energy** and spirituality. **For others**, the task would be to help them learn to have **boundaries around their spirituality**, so they can have emotions and arguments, and go to the movies without being flooded with past lives or without alienating their friends. I see some people make the same mistake Reich made when he focused so strongly on sexuality. They forget what it is to be a person.

For me the goal of therapy is not the orgasm, not nirvana, but the **experience of having choice**. I believe that we have the greatest choices, the deepest choices when we are **in touch with our bodies and our emotions and our thoughts and our spirituality**, and **when we don't confuse them**. If I were to be a junkie about anything, it would be for body awareness and body experience, because for me, that is how I know myself the best.

PB: So we might call it **your quest for "body reality."**

LM: Yes, body reality. Reality is very deep for me. I really want people to be in their reality because it is the only place from which you can make a clear choice. It is our defense system that creates illusions. Then these illusions create new illusions and soon.

*Reference: The Relaxation Method is a very developed system of body awareness and massage originating in Denmark—we know it in the U.S. through Charlotte Solver who pioneered sensory awareness in this country. TYPO ..

Continue Reading Part 2: The Art of Following Structure — Exploring the Roots of the Bodydynamic System

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The Art of Following Structure – Exploring the Roots of the Bodydynamic System

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(part 2 of 2)

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Read part 1 here: Individuation, Mutual Connection, and the Body's Resources Lisbeth Marcher

Lisbeth Marcher

In a **previous** interview, Lisbeth Marcher discussed her **basic principle of mutual connection and how her commitment to relationship has influenced her thinking**. In **this** interview, undertaken on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the formation of the Bodydynamic Institute, I wanted to get more at the **process of discovery she embarked on twenty-five years ago**. I also wanted to highlight **Marcher's love of structure—her ability to see the underlying architecture of people's behavior**. A passionate builder of models, she took on the task of investigating each muscle in the body in order to understand its psychological "content." Out of this process came a number of discoveries that laid the foundation for a new theory of body psychotherapy, which Marcher calls Bodydynamic Analysis, or to use a more generic subtitle, "Somatic Developmental Psychology."

There are **three key aspects of Marcher's model**: The first is the hypothesis that muscles respond to stress in one of two ways, either resignation, resulting in a hypo-response, or over-control, resulting in turn in a hyper-response, i.e., a dual response theory. The second is a theory of a link between motor development and psychological development and an accompanying seven-stage map of this developmental process. The third is a character structure model, comprised of seven types that correspond to the seven developmental stages. Each of these seven character types incorporate two positions, one dominated by the hypo-response and one dominated by the hyper-response.

The most concrete example of Marcher's research can be seen in the **Bodymap**, which is an outline of the body in which all the muscles in the body are charted. During a Bodymap test, each muscle is tested for degrees of hyper-or hypo-response. The degree of response is charted on a map of the body. Properly interpreted, the Bodymap shows patterns of resignation, resistance, and healthy functioning, and it indicates the impact of environmental stress or trauma at varying stages in the client's growth. This map can be subjected to intensive analysis. It can pinpoint specific character structure issues and specific "functional" strengths and weaknesses: the client's ability to maintain his/her boundaries, how grounded he/she is, his/her ability to tolerate intimate interactions, and even how well he/she is able to think and plan.

The Bodymap shows just how many levels of information Marcher has been able to integrate into her thinking, and emphasizes what is meant by her ability to follow structure—see the superscription of this interview. Students of Bodydynamics are often daunted by the sheer mass of information presented in the Bodydynamic Model, and

some are even tempted to see it as overly rule-bound. In this they have missed the **liveliness of Marcher's mind, her willingness to stay with a problem until she has figured out how it all fits together, to discover the underlying structure of experience.** For her, it has been fun—a kind of play. Also, she has the kind of personality that has allowed others to be deeply involved in her journey. The Bodydynamic Model is still **constantly undergoing expansion, refinement, and stimulating new research,** much of which has been and continues to be carried out by her colleagues at the main institute in Denmark, and now increasingly in other parts of the world. It is the particular admixture of Marcher's inclusiveness, intellectual playfulness, and profound insight into human problems that has made her my most important teacher.

In this interview, Marcher speaks about the process of **linking psychological content to specific motor patterns and specific muscles.** She describes some of the mechanisms by which the brain operates, i.e., the mechanisms that tie movement to thought and language. She describes **how she moves between levels of observation—from listening to language and thinking styles to observing movement patterns and body posture.** Next, she describes **how language and movement reflect different character structure issues and different age levels.** She also discusses how she uses the principles of muscle activation and a knowledge of hyper- and hypo-responsive muscles in her work. We also review various influences on her thought, not only from her previous training, but also from her early childhood.

PB: I'd like you to talk some about your **personal history.** The more I know you, the more I sense that there are events in your life that have been especially important, not only **in shaping your direction,**

but also in **giving you some of the tools** you would come to need. For example, I know you were a sort of gymnastic child prodigy from a very early age, so that your deep training in the body began very early. I also know you were born in a time of tremendous upheaval in your country and in the world, namely during **World War II**. I can imagine that these two vastly different events must have had a complicated impact on you.

LM: As to the war, yes, it had a tremendous impact on me. It was a terrible time in my country and I have very early memories of some of the things that happened. I saw the jackboots marching through our town. When I was three years old, I saw people chased by German soldiers and shot dead in the street, and my family and I were in danger of being shot ourselves, if we had been discovered. My parents were involved in the resistance, and this meant that we had meetings and such at our house that put our family in great **danger**. I could not know about these meetings, so my parents had to lie to me. But I knew something was going on, and was terribly afraid for my family.

The level of **terror** I felt at that time has left a deep imprint on me. It also led to certain kinds of extrasensory experiences in those years. I had the experience of leaving my body and following family members and their friends on their journeys, tracking them, trying to keep them safe. I wasn't able to talk to anyone about these experiences, because I didn't think anyone could understand such things. In one out-of-body experience, I saw a school bombed and children dying. These events were confirmed later by others. I could recognize people who had been in my house that I had never actually seen. Now, through the understanding of shock that we have developed, I can see just how terrible it was for a child to have

to go through these things. In fact, my ability to work with shock comes in part from my having to deal personally with levels of fear that hadn't healed.

As to the gymnast part of it, this was indeed going on simultaneously with the war, and the two are intertwined in some way. When I was two-and-a-half, my older sister, who was twelve at the time, invited me to hang around the gym class she was assisting in. As it turned out, I was quite good at **gymnastics**. I caught onto things very quickly—more quickly than the others, and was soon taking part myself. It was always fun for me, so I stayed with it. One thing that became clear at that time was that I had the ability to contain myself—to focus and to learn. I could **stand back and learn moves by watching closely the movements of the others**. This allowed me to excel. It was a pretty healthy situation, because the teacher and my family didn't make too big a deal out of it—it was just fun. I did formal gymnastic training until I was seven, but after that I kept it up on my own.

PB: What do you think you may have learned as a gymnast that you were able to use later?

LM: Well, in a way I felt the benefit of it right away, as well as later. This is where the war came into it. In order to do gymnastics well, you have **to be extraordinarily centered. I took this part of the training to heart, and practiced it frequently—every day**, in fact. Being the kind of child I was, this was not just a mechanical centering, but something I took into my being. In fact, now I think that this ability to center and make use of it under stress helped me to endure the terror of the war. It kept me grounded when I wanted to leave my body. So I guess you could say I have a very early

imprint of the power of the body's resources, and the value of conscious exercise of these resources.

Later on, when I was undergoing my training in relaxation therapy, these defenses began to disintegrate, because of the nature of that method. This relaxation work focused on breaking down muscle tension, without realizing that tension is often what holds you together. I'm sure that my centering, however vital a resource it was, was also a kind of defense against shock. **What we now know is that shock structure breaks down pretty easily at a certain point because it is so brittle.** I was getting a two-hour massage each week, in which the people treating me would go into the hypertense muscles and very skillfully and subtly penetrate and stay with the tension until it began to let go. This is fine work for many people, **but not for those with a weak defense system for containing shock trauma or early developmental trauma.** It was from this traumatic therapy experience that **I resolved to modify the relaxation method.** I did in fact go through a very rough time. There were **times when it was hard for me to hold on to reality. I look pretty solid from the outside, so no one saw how much trouble I was in.**

PB: What other impact did the war have on you, if any?

LM: **Very early I made the decision to do something about all the fear in the world—no less! Especially the unspoken fear.** I saw so many things in the war that I began to get another perspective on life. **I saw a kind of coherence of things. If you have a spiritual experience, you are not only seeing the separateness of events, but also the wholeness of them.** I was seeing how all things are connected, all life is part of the same spiritual energy, the same source, the same ground-spring.

PB: You had another particular hurdle to overcome—your dyslexia.

LM: I found out I was dyslexic in the second grade. I started to have stomachaches, but when the doctor examined me, there was nothing physically wrong. I was taken to one of the leading experts in dyslexia in Denmark at that time. He tested me extensively and found that I was dyslexic to such an extent that it constituted a handicap. He said that I would never be able to read and write like other kids. I was very intelligent, but it would be a problem, he said. I was told about all the accomplished people who had been dyslexic, like Niels Bohr and Hans Christian Andersen. My dyslexia never hit me at the psychological level because those around me made it clear that I was okay. The school I went to had a program to deal with dyslexia. Spelling was always my biggest problem, but I was good at expressing my thoughts. I was good at math, and often got top marks, and I did well in physics. But I couldn't read until I was eleven.

** 'a general term for disorders that involve difficulty in learning to read or interpret words, letters, and other symbols, but that do not affect general intelligence.'*

Then I read my first real book. Things take longer when you're dyslexic; you have to learn new ways of remembering. It's a lot harder to learn languages. Where a normal person goes through one process, I am faced with three or four. My special teacher was very good at helping me overcome these difficulties, and I still use many of the things she taught me. She was always very down-to-earth. She made it very clear that dyslexia was a handicap, and explained what consequences it would have for me. Some professions were closed to me: for example, I could never be a pharmacist, an office manager, a language teacher. When you're

dyslexic, you think differently; your **brain works differently**. If I had had negative experiences with my teachers and my schoolmates, then it would have been much worse for me.

PB: Your **father had been an actor when he was young and made his living as a printer**, and your **mother had been a high-level amateur athlete and a masseuse**. Your father's character especially was a strong influence on you.

LM: Both of my parents, to my way of thinking, had **special qualities**. They **looked into people's hearts, not at what they were doing**. They had the ability to see people as they really were. **Both of them were there for people when they really needed help, even if that meant personal danger**.

My dad had the most direct influence on my thinking. He had strong **socialist** ideas. He printed a communist paper and a journal that covered the new thinking about teaching that was emerging at that time. These and many other papers were always in our home. And there was always a lot of **intense discussion about current events**. If I asked my dad why people acted the way they did, he would **describe how people came to different ways of doing things**, the impact that class norms had on people. For example, he described why the working class didn't read in the way that we did in our middle class family. He never put people down, and **he taught me to see the positive aspects of working class norms—like the emphasis on fellowship and on family life**. Having heart was the most important thing to him.

I'll tell you one story about my dad that left a deep impression on me. I remember when I was eight and we were **swimming** in the

sea. I got scared, because the current pulled my feet out from under me. I called for my dad to help me. I think I expected him just to come and get me out of there. But instead, he came up beside me and asked, in a very matter-of-fact, non-judgmental way, “What are you afraid of?” “I can’t stand,” I said. “So don’t stand. Now you are floating, so feel where the current will take you,” he said. And I found I could really do what he said, sense myself floating, and then I looked and saw the current would take me to a safe place. So he said, “Just trust your body sense—that you can float and that you will be safe.” He taught me that I could use my inner senses to orient myself, that I could know from inside me what was safe or not safe. He taught me to trust myself from deep inside.

PB: We’ve had many discussions about Danish culture and how it is different from American culture. What were the key intellectual movements in Denmark that have had an impact on you? **TYPO**

LM: Well, I think one of the strongest must have been Grundtvig, a Lutheran minister who had a huge impact on Danish culture. By the way, Martin Luther King, Jr., actually went to a school in the U.S. that was based on Grundtvig’s principles. Grundtvig started a free church movement in Denmark. He is also the founder of a special kind of non-academic school still flourishing in Denmark—schools where adults go to learn about ways of living, philosophy, literature, religion, and so on, typically after high school graduation. He taught how to have a spiritual life, how to value yourself and to be present in life. This man was very alive, and open to emotions in himself. The most important thing to him was that you had an opinion, even if it created conflict. He emphasized having God inside you: being able to sense the physical aspects of God as well as the spiritual aspects. My dad’s parents brought him up in this way, so these

ideas also came down to me through him. In fact, my dad met Grundtvig when he was a child.

'Grundtvig, a Lutheran minister N. F. S. Grundtvig - Wikipedia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/N._F._S._Grundtvig

Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig most often referred to as N. F. S. Grundtvig, was a Danish pastor, author, poet, philosopher, historian, son of a Lutheran pastor, Johan Ottosen Grundtvig (1734–1813).'

PB: It's easy to see how these themes are alive in your own work: How to see people's essences, into their hearts on the one **band**, and then also to see the influence of culture.

LM: I think I took that deep inside me: that people need their defense system, and that we have to understand why they do what they do—**why one culture develops one way of doing things and others do it in another way**; why the nomads need a different character structure than an agrarian culture, for instance; how they have **to plan differently and follow their own impulses differently and see the world differently**.

Speaking of the impact of culture, I had, in common with all other leftist young people in Europe, and especially in Scandinavia, read Marx. Marx affected the way all Europeans understand power dynamics and social problems—a view quite different from the attitude predominant in America. I also got from Marx the power of the dialectic process, the power of making use of duality rather than getting caught in it.

PB: How did you come to choose to train in relaxation therapy?

LM: I had wanted to become a midwife since I was seven. But when I had a closer look at the training, I found it was too strenuous

for a single parent, as I was at the time. So I looked around and considered other careers. I looked into physiotherapy and occupational therapy, even considered becoming an accountant because I loved math. Then I found relaxation training, and saw that it was the right thing for me: working with people, and teaching them how to sense the body in a healthy way. I started training as soon as my kids were old enough to go to preschool, when I was twenty-five.

PB: What influence has the relaxation method had on your way of thinking?

LM: The training in relaxation method was quite extensive: four years of training in anatomy, kinesiology, massage, and a kind of physical education system. There was also a psychological emphasis in our training. The goal for people coming to us to become trainers in the method was to learn to use their bodies in better ways in their lives. The massage technique we learned went deep, both in the sense of extensive training, and also in the results: our clients experienced profound changes as we probed into personal issues that had been hidden deep in their bodies. It was, however, a system that concentrated only on the hyper-responsive musculature, and thus the outcome for at least some people was the breaking down of their defense system, so they actually functioned less well.

It was my encounter with the ideas of the

Norwegian Lillemor Johnsen, her concept of the muscular hypo-response to trauma that filled a big gap in my thinking.

Her idea was that it was in the hypo-responsive muscles that a person's underdeveloped resources reside; if we can waken these hypo-responsive muscles, then missing parts of the person come to life. The person begins to build structure, build ego capacity, instead of structure and ego defense being broken down, as happened in the relaxation method. Lillemor's thinking also included another important element for me, which was that she thought developmentally. She thought about which areas of the body were becoming active and which age level, though she did not really pinpoint specific muscles. These ideas, **resourcing and thinking developmentally**, were very stimulating for me. Johnsen was in fact the one who originated the idea of mapping areas of hyper-and hypo-response in the body. She also mapped areas that were healthy. Her map used a similar system of grading to the one I now use, in that there was a **range of four levels of hyper-response, and four levels of hypo-response, and one area of healthy tissue**. I even use the same color-coding system as Lille-mor: **red for hyper, green for neutral or healthy, and blue for hypo**. However, for me there were many missing bits in her system, both in terms of therapy and of theory.

Here is where circumstance has played a big role in the discoveries that followed: without my training in the relaxation method, which was extremely detailed when it came to the study of anatomy and the analysis of movement, I never would have been able later to detail the theory in the way that I have. The relaxation method also taught me something of clinical importance, which is a core part of the Bodydynamic approach now, and that is **the progression from talking about an issue, to seeing very specifically how it is active in a person's life, and finally to creating specific action plans—**

homework—for people to work with to bring about concrete change in their lives.

PB: Could you talk about how you came to study each muscle's psychological function or content?

LM: Well, it began simply by asking some of my friends if they would be willing to have me touch specific muscles, and asking them to talk about what associations came up for them: what images, thoughts, sensations, emotions, and memories. In this way, I began to get data back from them. I had become a teacher in the relaxation school and began to use this situation to do research with clients there. After some initial explorations, I started a project in which I asked trainees to record their work with clients in specific ways. I asked them to chart which muscles they had activated in each session and also to describe what particular psychological issues their clients came up with. I also asked that clients report their experience of each session in writing.

Each week, I got about thirty-six letters both from trainees and clients. These letters became the basis for supervision, but they also began to form a kind of database, categorizing what specific psychological function or content related to which specific muscles. I did this for five years. I estimate that I received 10,000 letters in all.

PB: How did the process of assigning psychological issues to particular muscles actually work?

LM: Well, it was a long process to find a specific muscle's content. I would get this mass of associations that were **by no means clear in the sense of giving me a larger organizing theme**. I would **sit with**

the material, thinking and talking about it, and then I would wait for more information to confirm my intuitions. Some muscles were clearer than others when it came to revealing their meaning, in the link between motor function and psychological function. Eventually I began to get a sense of solidity regarding some muscles' psychological function. Part of the challenge was in trusting what people's associations were. Once you get the big picture, of course, it is easy to go back and see what all the fragments and pieces meant. But at the time, people would come up with so many levels of associations. I began to discuss the data with some of my colleagues, many of whom later became my co-founders in the Bodydynamic Institute. We began to put together the associations with function in a way that made sense.

Let me describe an example of the process. The tensor fascia latae is a muscle in the upper leg.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tensor_fasciae_latae_muscle

When we touched this muscle, people began to speak about various issues and experiences connected to what we now call containment. Containment is the ability to incorporate feelings, thoughts and sensations in yourself, to keep yourself together, especially under stress. Why did this small muscle in the leg bring up the issues of containment? Finally it became clear that this little muscle serves the function of tensing the fascia sheet that surrounds and contains the leg. So its content was rooted in its function in a very simple and concrete way: it contains the leg, so when it is activated, people have the inner experience of holding themselves together, of being more contained. The memories activated when we touch this muscle are there because when we need containment of a specific kind, we activate that muscle particularly. It all fits together. But there is this slow process of going from

the very concrete physical function to increasingly abstract, psychological functions.

PB: Of course, I am particularly fascinated by this progression from the concrete to the very abstract, complicated psychological functions you have connected to each muscle, and how it is possible to do that. It seems so far-fetched, in a way.

LM: I've recently read some neurological research that may describe the mechanism by which this progression from concrete to abstract takes place (*New York Times*, November 8, 1994, page B5). The neuro-scientists are now saying that higher thought, located in the neo-cortex, may well have evolved directly out of the cerebellum, which is the structure in the brain that has to do with planning and orchestrating movement. This link has been intuitively obvious to people who have studied the body. It is also reflected in the fact that many of our key linguistic metaphors are linked to body experience: Stand your ground; I can't stand it; backed into a corner; I've got to hand it to you; you're a pain in the neck; to have both feet on the ground; to be stiff-necked, hard-headed or tight-fisted; to get cold feet; etc.

New York Times, November 8, 1994, page B5

perhaps this may be the article 'Theory on Human Brain Hints How Its Unique Traits Arose - structure thought to coordinate body movements, according to a brash theory on brain evolution that has gained backing from new research. The theory holds that modern humans evolved when areas of the cerebellum, the part of the
November 08, 1994 - By SANDRA BLAKESLEE - Science; Health - Print Headline: "Theory on Human Brain Hints How Its Unique Traits Arose"

Where do these weird expressions come from, if not that we have some direct link between who we are psychologically and who we

are in our bodies? This research helps us think about the specific mechanism by which the link was established in the course of evolution; the complex thinking required to plan and execute movement began to expand the brain's ability to think. But it also means that thinking is set originally in a body language. So when it comes to the **progression from concrete muscle function to higher abstract thinking, it reflects the brain's structure**. It's as though the brain takes a movement and sees how far it can go with it, how it can make use of it, how it can play with it: "If I move my arm in this way, what happens? What happens when I'm with other people? Oh! If I push them away, I feel better. What happens if I tell them to go away, if I use language to do what I did with my body? Hey, it works!" **Thus language begins to extend what begins in the body, and yet it is still rooted there.**

PB: Can we look at some more specific examples of psychological content?

LM: Well, **with some muscles we have an idea of the content, but we don't have as clear a link as we would like**. For example, the **galea apponeurotica is the cap of fascia that covers the head**. We can see that it is related to planning, to being able to organize thinking so that the person can retain a plan of action in his mind. When it is palpated, these are the associations that come up, and when people are planning, this tissue activates. But we don't know why—there is no obvious function it serves. One day the link will come, or we will modify our understanding of it.

The scalp is the anatomical area bordered by the face at the front, and by the neck at the sides ... S: The skin on the head from which head hair grows. ... A: The aponeurosis called epicranial aponeurosis (or galea aponeurotica) is the next layer. ...

vessels are firmly attached to the fibrous tissue of the superficial fascial layer, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epicranial_aponeurosis

Another example of the kind of discovery we made, after a long time of being puzzled, is about the **quadratus lumborum**. This is a muscle in the back that runs from the lower ribs to the crest of iliacus, the pelvic bone. When this muscle is palpated, people's associations have to do with showing who they are and meeting the world, of exploring and interacting with the world. Sometimes people would describe letting their emotions come out, being able to express their feelings. But there were qualities in the associations that had to do with more than just emotion: they **related to a quality of exploration**, of a sense of being myself in the world, of being able to sense my inner impulses and express them in the world. We know that this muscle is **a secondary breathing muscle, which is to say that it supports the breathing under certain circumstances**. But there was **more** to it than that. The link to **exploration** came to us when we were practicing certain developmental movements. It turns out that the quadrants lumborum is a primary muscle relating to crawling. Now crawling begins at about seven to nine months, and this is the first time that the child can really go out and explore the world. Up until then, the world comes to the child, more or less.

*quadratus lumborum https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quadratus_lumborum_muscle
The quadratus lumborum is a muscle of the posterior abdominal wall. It is the deepest abdominal muscle and commonly referred to as a back muscle.*

So this is a key muscle involved in the child's process of actively moving out into the world. Aha! Suddenly it all came together. Here was the missing piece that organized all the associations that we were getting. That was very exciting. We **also recognized another**

level of complexity of this muscle and its function. It served as one of the fundamental bridges between the upper and lower body, between the function of standing in the world, which comes from the lower body, and reaching out into the world, which comes from the upper body.

Now we also say that this muscle is one of the muscles that can tell us how well a person is integrating his personal, inner life with his more external life. This last bit came when we began to look at all these factors in terms of organizing character structure. Before we had created the character structure model, I had tried to organize a vast amount of material simply according to the age level of a particular function. It turned out that this was a poor way to organize it. For one thing, there was so much information that the trainees could not manage it. For another, it left out the central organizing impact that came when we finally got the right themes in the right places.

A major insight came to me in response to another mystery that turned up in the course of our research. This is somewhat complicated to explain, so bear with me. When working with a client on a particular issue, we would palpate muscles that we thought were connected to the age level relating to the issue that he was speaking about. Sometimes this palpation was indeed helpful: the person would become more able to access resources within that issue. But there were other times when touching the muscles appeared to be unhelpful. The person would become more confused and vague, and we couldn't really get at the issue. This puzzled me for a long time before I figured out what was going on.

My **realization** is now a key to our character structure system: What is of relevance is **not simply the age at which a muscle comes into play**, it is the **specific theme that a particular muscle activates in relation to that age**. Now we simply say that our character structures overlap in time somewhat with the developmental stage that precedes it and the one that comes after it. For example, the autonomy structure phase is eight months to two-and-a-half years. The need structure phase that precedes it runs from one month to one-and-a-half years, an overlap of ten months. What this means in practice is that **for ten months or so the need structure muscles and the autonomy muscles are being activated at the same time**.

PB: How does it come about that a muscle becomes hypo- or hyper-responsive?

LM: Let me use the **autonomy phase as an illustration**. At this age, there are many ways in which the child begins to test himself in the world, and he is learning a vast amount of new motor behavior. How the world receives and supports this exploration is tremendously important. How much help or intrusion the child gets at various points is vital for his later ability to have his own sense of autonomy: Will he have to fight the world to keep his impulse? Has he been so unsupported that he has had to give up the process of exploration? While there are many muscles that come into play at this age, and which also carry some of the same overall issues concerning autonomy, the **quadratus lumborum** is one of the most important, because the ability to crawl, then stand and walk, is so crucial to being able to explore the world.

As to how a muscle becomes hyper or hypo, our basic hypothesis is that if a trauma occurs relatively early in a muscle's critical

period, or is relatively intense, the muscle will more likely tend to become hypo-responsive. The impulse in the muscle has been overcome, it cannot hold up under the stress, so it gives up to varying degrees. If the trauma is relatively late within the critical period, when the muscle has established the impulse more securely, or if the trauma is relatively light, we believe that the muscle will more likely become hyper-responsive: it will hold onto the impulse, to control it. A person who has, say, a **hypo-responsive** quadratus might have been severely **discouraged in exploration** of the world.

I recall one client who had a very difficult time finding what she wanted to do in the world, and she struggled with serious depression. In working with her on this issue, we found that her mother's father had died when she was about one year old. My speculation is that at the critical time when she began to move out into the world, her mother became quite depressed, because she deeply mourned her father. In all likelihood, this client's mother, under normal circumstances, would have been enthusiastic about her daughter's budding explorations. But because she was depressed, she was unable to respond with the kind of joy that the child yearns for. As it turned out, my client had never even crawled. Instead, as some kids do, she moved around by scooting on her butt and went directly to walking without ever really using her quadratus muscle. In a way, she never got to have the inner experience of a certain kind of exploration, of joyously and energetically moving out and playing, and thus when she was an adult, could not find her way, could not locate, let alone trust, her impulses to explore the world. So this is an example of the hypo-responsive dynamic. In characterological terms we would say that this person was stuck in the "early autonomy structure;" it is an

autonomy-age issue, and the muscles are more hypo, so the trauma more likely occurred early in the phase.

At the **hyper-responsive** end of the spectrum, I think of a man I know who has a hyper-responsive quadratus, as well as other “late autonomy structure” muscle patterns and issues. He has lots of energy to explore the world, and in fact has a very strong impulse to move out into the world, but he has to do it **alone**. He is very **afraid of someone coming in and taking over his enthusiasm** or messing with his impulses. He finds it very **hard to accept any help**, and pushes people away when they offer any. This man had an intrusive mother who would try to take over his impulses, and include herself in his enthusiasm.

PB: How might you work with a person who had a problem related to this muscle?

LM: This for me is **a question of levels**. The simplest thing to say is that eventually you have to go to where the trauma took place and create a new imprint, to heal the injury. But to get there, you have to look at the big picture. First, you need to look at the character structure as a whole, at all the ages and issues a person has, to see when it is best and in what way it is best to approach an issue. The other critical evaluation you have to make is: “How many **resources** does this person have?” By resources I mean how much **energy, flexibility**, how much **observing ego**, how much body awareness, and so on. If the person doesn't have a lot of resources, then before you do any really deep character work, you have to develop some in his structure, teach the person how to use his body, how to sense it and so on. I have come to believe that if you do this resource-development part well, you have made it much

easier to work with the characterological part. In the two examples I gave, the first person, the hypo-responsive woman, had very little resource. Much of the work would be about helping her to build herself up and to be able to sense herself more; teaching her about grounding, about how to develop aspects of herself that are missing.

As part of the general **process of accessing resources**, I would in all probability teach her something about motor skills development. I might give her **crawling** lessons, so that she **learned it from the ground up**; I might show her how to activate her quadratus lumborum. If this proved difficult for her (as in fact it did) I would lead her further back, letting her roll over from her stomach to her back, and back again. I might even start her off with lifting her head, one of an infant's first movements, and thus **gradually work our way** forward during a series of sessions, leading her through perceptual stages of development in such a way that she always kept in contact with herself, and yet was closely in touch with the content of the movements. This would mean that she could begin to coordinate her movements better, and let more life and sensual awareness into them. This would also activate the psychological themes connected with these movements, thus giving her more **energy**.

Sometimes you can see very big changes in a person's life just from doing this kind of resource work. But you have to be **careful not to activate too much at the emotional level** while doing it. I am very careful not to regress people psychologically when I am doing this. It can easily become an overwhelming and not very useful experience. Too many issues surface all at once, and if the person has been through many traumas, the process simply grinds to a

halt. But to get back to our example: Eventually this person would get to the crawling stage, and we would encourage the crawling impulse, to see if it could emerge as an impulse, not just a task to be done. If we could get this, then we would really have something useful and we would carefully build on it. Eventually the impulse could become stronger.

She might begin to get not just the impulse to **crawl**, but also the impulse to **explore**. That is crucial in the sense that here is the link from pure movement to psychological content. Here again she would likely need a lot of support in waking this exploring impulse. She would need me to play with her and provide a rich environment that would make it fun and emotionally and relationally rewarding to be out there in the world. Once we had established this capacity within her, we might then begin to approach her problem of finding her capacity to explore the world **more from the psychological, characterological side**: what was actually going on at that age, what was her mother like, etc. And **from there** we could work with creating a new imprint at a **deeper relational, emotional level**.

PB: How can you speak about working with the early movements and not work regressively? What do you mean by that?

LM: Well, here again it is a question of level, and here I suspect we are talking ultimately about levels of organization in the brain. In my work,

I have come to distinguish between four levels of body awareness: body sensation, body experience, body expression, and body regression. When I work to bring out a person's resources, I keep them on the first levels primarily: body sensing and body experience, and help them to encapsulate and set aside the emotions and the strong regressive forces. This may sound somewhat controlling, but people often experience a kind of relief or safety in not having to engage with these powerful forces before they are ready. For many, this is part of what caused the trauma in the first place, being overwhelmed by a storm of pain, fear and helplessness, so not to contain it can be retraumatizing.

If we consider again the man who had the more hyper-responsive quadratus lumborum and generally had to keep people away from him, the issue connected to the quadratus would be more about a split between his energy as he expresses it with other people, with the world, and how he relates to himself, his private self. He believes he has to protect his most private self from being invaded and thus creates a split between his center, located more in the lower half of the body, and his more relational part, located in the upper body, in his arms and face. He already has plenty of resources. But he has lost the experience of being able to be in himself and to be with other people at the same time. He is always performing when he is with other people, he is controlling his impulses very carefully. Here more pure character structure work needs to be done. You have to help him to believe that you will not invade him, that it is safe to experience himself without performing.

At the body level, once you could get there, the task would be to help the quadratus soften its tension to allow a flow of sensation to move down into his center. Here you don't go in and break the tension, you go in and meet the resistance in the muscle and talk to

it and help it relax a little bit at a time. The confrontation, if there is one, occurs when you point out his defenses to him: resisting any support from others, his patterns of self-isolation. If we stay with the metaphor of crawling, we want to teach him that he doesn't have to push so much with his exploration. People with a lot of late-autonomy issues are often quite overactive and lack other ways of making contact with the world. They become trapped, overheated, and locked into the impulse of exploration. They don't know how not to explore!

So these are two very different ways of working, but they are in a sense both going in the same direction: toward being able to **explore the world in a way that is both vital and safe**. But to get there, these two people have different paths to take. One needs to be woken up and supported very carefully, the other needs help to get into deeper contact with himself.

PB: How does your concept of hyper- and hypo-responsiveness fit in with the concept of muscles coming into play or being activated?

LM: Well, when the child is born, only a very few muscles are active in the sense that a voluntary impulse is active in it. Most muscles are at that time activated through involuntary reflexes. But as the child develops, specific muscles become innervated or awakened by the voluntary branch of the nervous system. These awakened muscles feel very different from those that are not yet awake. We call sleeping muscles "baby muscles," because they have a strange quality to the touch. A baby muscle has energy; it's not dead, but it has little sense of structure. You can't test them for hyper- and hypo-response. When the muscle becomes active, it develops an aliveness, or what we call responsiveness. The critical period for

imprinting this muscle motorically and psychologically is at the time it first comes awake.

So one meaning of “active” is that the muscle has woken up developmentally and begins being used in accordance with its psychological/functional content. Another meaning of “active” is that later in life a specific issue is surfacing strongly in a person’s life and the muscles are being used intensely. This is the case, for example, under stress situations of various kinds, and it is also the case during therapy. At such times, muscles might actually change their responsiveness; i.e., either become more healthy or develop deeper dysfunctions. In some adult individuals who have not really grown up, we find muscles that feel like baby muscles: these people have certain functions within themselves which never really awake.

Thus our whole developmental theory is based on the concept of muscles becoming active. We worked a long time with this concept of becoming active, and further elaborated our data by testing children. Here we started getting a clearer picture of when the specific muscles would become active in the course of the child’s motoric development.

The aforementioned problematics concerning the overlapping character structure gave us a lot of trouble until we found this simple solution. It was the same discovery that led to the solution of the question of why some clients became so confused when I activated apparently age-appropriate muscles. These were in fact muscles related to that age, but not to the same theme. It is not enough to say that muscles are relevant to a certain age; one also has to see the theme they are connected with. Once we found the

larger themes from which to organize our character structure system, the whole developmental map has become much more comprehensible. And it worked both ways. It was by sifting through all the associations from clients that we could see the larger pattern of themes.

Coming full circle now, back to the quadratus lumborum, the issues that it is connected with, and the way people spoke about their inner experience, became part of the heart of what we call the autonomy phase or autonomy structure, for which the key developmental task is to be able to explore the world through following your impulse. We now track that theme, and other sub-themes, through that structure. Here finally all the forces come together: The developmental movements, the palpation, the psychological function.

PB: I want to return to the nature of character structure and how you work with it. Having heard you go through all these levels of organization, it seems to me that character is where it all comes together. It is the largest box—it contains the most. I personally went through a resistance to thinking in terms of character. I found it rigidifying and kind of boring. Now I understand more why it is so important—for two reasons, I think. One is the organizing aspect, the other is getting something about human endeavor deep into one's core: The need for defenses and also the cost of defenses. I've heard you say that "If you don't go into the point of most pain you can't change." This is fundamentally a statement about the nature of character, isn't it?

LM: Yes. And character is the greatest puzzle. We can understand existentially why people need to avoid that pain, but on the other

hand, we can't understand why they aren't willing to go into it. That is the dilemma seen from the outside.

One of the first big insights for me, and one way I think very differently from other theorists, is that I see the later age levels as much harder, really, to work with than the earlier ones. This is because the ego becomes much stronger as it ripens, and thus when trauma assails the more mature self, the character decisions that result are much more potent, much more resistant to change. To my way of thinking, it is relatively easy to work with birth or early-infancy material, once you can see it and are willing to go in at the re-parenting level—the deep tissue level. Of course working with early issues must be done carefully and the timing must be correct and so on. I don't mean to minimize these issues. But the later character issues are so much more tenacious.

I believe the reason that so many people have been so focused only on the early issues is in the nature of the defenses themselves: we avoid the point of most pain, so we go to where it is relatively less difficult to tolerate. And because of the way the nervous system is organized, it is comparatively easier to bear the pain in the earlier phases—which is one of Freud's core insights: regression. So when we do a lot of process work with people, we tend to get involved with earlier and earlier issues! Both the client and the therapist feel compelled to do this. It is not that there is more pain in the later character structures, per se, but that there is more power in the decisions that emerge from them. When we confront our own issues from later stages, it is also difficult to face the fact that we had more of our own personality involved in the choice to take up a defensive position. This is a different kind of pain than in the earlier issues, where it is clear that as an infant or a

small child we had little choice in the defense systems we had to construct.

Maybe this is why I like the metaphor of the coach so much, because the **coach, while he has sympathy for you in your suffering, has only one goal: to get you to the next step.** To move you forward developmentally, to support you, to push you to some place you don't know if you want to go to or can get to. A good coach will take you to the point of the most pain in such a way that you can get through it or over it.

This is where we have a lot to offer with the understanding of the hyper- and hypo-response and the levels of muscle dysfunction. If you have this knowledge, you know just how hard or soft you need to be: You don't just follow process, but follow structure.

I like that—following structure. That is what I do!

PB: Tell me more about that. How do you follow structure?

LM: At a certain point in my work, I began to make sure I was always touching both a hyper muscle and a hypo muscle at the same time. This way I was not just releasing tension or building resources, I was addressing the structure as a whole. I was trying to speak to and understand the whole structure, not just one part. What I found is that, if instead of going into parts that were the most dysfunctional and provoking them, you began to work with the muscles that are only a little bit out of balance, then the other muscles that contain the deeper, more damaged parts of the self will begin to wake up and say, "Hey, here is someone who is really going to be able to help. I'll consider coming out." In terms of following structure here, I am trying to pick the points in the struc-

ture that are ready to move. The trouble with following process alone is that process is like water: it wants to avoid any places that it will get stuck. By looking at the whole structure, the riverbed and the water, you can say: “Hey, if that rock were able to move, then the whole river would flow more freely.”

Here we want to work with developmental retainment. It's kind of like finding the rocks in the river and gently moving them.

Let's say a woman wants to work on an issue. She wants more contact. This issue shows up in the body as various small reaching movements, say, but when she talks about how hard it is not to have the kind of contact she wants, she makes pushing-away movements or her arms go dead. As she goes into the issue, she tries to activate her resources, those developmental movements that, if they could be completed in a healthy way, would get her what she wants. If she could in fact reach out and pull someone toward her, she would be successful. But in talking about it, her defenses come up—memories of failures or violations are consciously or unconsciously activated. At the body level, hyper- and hypo-responses begin to kick in, and it starts to get hard. Here is where the structure says, “Hey, this is too much work, and it won't change anyway. Let's get out of here.” So the easiest route is—normally—downward, to earlier issues. So the client remembers an earlier issue, and both client and therapist say, “Aha!! Here's the real source of the problem—this early stuff. Lets go for it!” So off they go, chasing that issue, and the structure of the initial issue is left basically intact. There has been no change in the movement pattern and the hyper- and hypo-structure related to the problem is still basically there.

Using what we have termed developmental retainment, we stay with the structure. We say, “Yeah, this is hard, but what do you need to get through this? Where is it that these movements want to go if you could get some help with it?” We stay with the movements until the movement pattern completes itself. This is where the structure itself begins to change, because the reasons, the justifications for the structure can’t hold up while this fundamentally new information is coming through to the body.

But a caution: We are able to do this because we work very specifically with the particular muscles that are involved in those movements that are incomplete. The more specific you can be, the more you reach—as I’ve said, the point of the most resistance of the fantasy or the most pain—to those specific parts of the brain that are holding the issue in check. The more general the movements, the less specific the issues that are evoked. This is where the study of the Bodymap research has been so invaluable: We see the whole structure at once.

From the Bodymap we have learned so much about the nature of character, something we could never have gotten to in another way. It is hard to overestimate how important a tool I think this has been for the development of my understanding and of Bodydynamic analysis as such.

PB: You speak about character and character defense as something that to some extent lets you escape pain. This makes me remember what you told me at the beginning of this interview about your experience of the war. You had made a decision to do something about the fear in the world. What has happened to that decision? How have you realized this vision in your life?

LM: I think the core of my commitment has been that I have really tried to teach people **how not to be afraid**. Not to be afraid of life. Not to be afraid of anger or pain or fear. And to examine our core decisions in life to see if we are moving toward life, moving toward love, or away from it. People are **entitled to defend themselves, yet ultimately to grow we have to go where we cannot defend** ourselves. Pain is an inevitable part of choosing life. From being in the war, I saw the worst things that can happen to people, so perhaps that has taught me that I can endure anything. I have lost the need to be protected at some basic level. I also got a gift from my parents, who demonstrated an ability to go into life and to do what you have to do, even if it puts you at risk.

You can't push people to go into their fear and pain, but you can **help them get stronger so they can face their emotions and so they can see where they have made choices to limit their life**. The worst thing about character structure is that it limits our ability to be in mutual connection with ourselves, with others, and with the world; it keeps us from being able to commit to life. Here I am a bit like Reich. I think Reich chose life. He did it at great cost to himself, but still he did everything he could to be alive. He did it in spite of his character. And his vision of character as armor, as something between us and life, still contains a core of truth for me. I don't believe in breaking down the armor, as he did. I have created a system quite different from Reich's in that I help people build more ego strength, but I still believe in the radicality of Reich's quest. At its core, therapy should be a radical process for each person who undertakes it. It should disturb our own individual status quo.

In a way, both Reich and I came out of the wars of Europe, though we were two or three generations apart. A major difference in the influences that shaped us is our respective cultures. The Danish culture has been able to seek its resources and to choose love over power. Reich's culture did not. We are both very political, but he had to work against his culture, and I had the luxury of being able to work with mine. Wars are the stupidest expression of character structure, of choosing power over life. Maybe we both learned something from being witnesses to that.

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