

MEMORY AND CONSCIOUSNESS: IN THE MIND'S EYE, IN THE MIND'S BODY

Lecture for the Netherlands Vereniging voor Pesso Psychotherapie Conference November 25, 2000

by

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This article scientifically explains the connection between memory and consciousness and how they intrinsically involve the body; localizing this concept as central within body psychotherapy theory, while also giving a clear and condensed overview of the Pesso Boyden System Psychomotor modality. Our past experiences and the memories associated with them can lead to a body filled with emotion, these "charged body states" come before emotional expression but this emotionality is often unconsciously suppressed and so remains stuck in the body. The result of this can manifest anywhere along the continuum of disease. This modality creates a venue, an environment where the client can safely express these "body-bound emotions." Everything we experience or have experienced in our lives is registered and stored in our brain and in our body. Brain research shows that our consciousness, our idea of who we are and what is going on around us, is for the most part based on and driven by memory. This explains why people who have grown up in an unsupportive environment tend to have a negative adult experience as well. In PBSP®, by reenacting and then recreating more positive symbolic "as-if-past" conditioning. Thus clients are provided a way to reinterpret their consciousness, allowing them to create new, positive, experiences and therefore a new way of viewing the world.

This abstract was provided in 2005 by Colleen Campbell. It will be part of her annotated bibliography of the field of Body Psychotherapy for the USABP Journal. She is currently pursuing a doctorate in clinical psychology from the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. See Colleen Campbell Annotated Bibliography.

I am pleased to speak before you at this first Congress of the Nederlands Vereniging voor Pesso-psychotherapie, internationally known as Pesso Boyden System Psychomotor.

First I want to express my and my life-partner, Diane Boyden-Pesso's appreciation for the solid organization you have established here in Holland. Then we wish to congratulate you on this fine, well planned program that you have created. We want you to know how touched and grateful we are for the dedication and energy you bring to support and carry on the work that we have spent our lives creating and refining. To the various committees of organization and all the individuals contributing to the goal and theme of this day "referring to the body in psychotherapy" verwijzen naar het lichaam in de psychotherapie we extend a heart-felt dank ye vel.

How timely this program is. Traditional psychotherapy is now ready to explore the possibilities for healing emotional problems by including working with body experience and expression.

Today we will present you with some of the comprehensive theories, techniques and procedures for working with the body that are available in this method. Let me tell you in brief what I will cover.

We have developed a technology that helps clients examine, in elaborate detail, the organization of their consciousness. They learn to track and re-explore the memories that are the foundation of their present sets of perceptions, emotions, behaviors and thoughts.

When memories of the past are awakened, they arouse affect which often shows up as charged body states. These affectively charged body states are indeed the precursors of emotional expression. The emotional behavior that underlies those states is often unconsciously suppressed and remains bound in the body. The psychologically unsophisticated general public looks upon those disturbing conditions as a sign of something gone wrong. As people often experience physical discomfort along with these disagreeable feelings they tend to want the unpleasantness removed by any means available, massage, medication and sometimes even surgery.

The path we follow is to construct a symbolic “virtual arena” where clients are given opportunities for the satisfying expression of those body-bound emotions in a carefully structured experience. This is accomplished with the help of role-playing group members who provide the internally anticipated, visual, motoric, tactile and verbal interactions to the emotionally expressed actions. This technique, called “accommodation,” results not only in the reduction of physical discomfort, but also leaves the client in a more relaxed and pleasurable condition – more open to, and anticipating, satisfying external events and stimuli.

We believe that our real, deficit-ridden memories influence our perceptions in the present. Thus, we take the further route of providing clients with the tools to create interactive events, structured in the therapy setting, out of which they can create new, symbolic, deficit-satisfying, memories. This is not something we do casually or incidentally. It requires much the same specificity and control as I imagine delicate brain surgery requires.

We are careful in applying a well-developed technology which assists the client to use her total self in the creation of those new symbolic memories. We do not try to change the real memories -- they remain the memory of what has really happened to the client. However, new symbolic memories seem to enable clients to understand more clearly and deal more successfully with what actually happened to them in the past.

When clients look at the world through the lens and influence of those new symbolic memories they report that they see and experience the present more fully and with greater pleasure. They also report that these experiences appear to contribute to the evolution of their psyches to more mature and individuated states.

Now to begin -- Cartesian duality is invalid. Recent brain research makes it abundantly clear. The mind and the body are one.

Neurological studies show that our consciousness and thought arise from sensations and information coming from our bodies during interactive experiences. As Antonio Damasio clearly states, consciousness comes from “The Feeling of What Happens,” which in fact is the title of his latest book.

Antonio Damasio, M.D.

Author of:
“The Feeling of What Happens”

As we grow up, the experiences we have of living in our bodies in interactions with the rest of the world teaches us how to live well in that world we have found. Those bodily based experiences are the source of our implicit and explicit memories and are a record of how we have lived in the world. They are also the basis for the thoughts and ideas we formulate about how to live in the world.

Implicit Memory

- **Non-consciously (automatically) recallable memory of routine motor/behavioral patterns**
 - Opening a door, riding a bicycle, driving a car
- Unconscious emotional memories
 - Stored in body states, motor impulses, etc.

Explicit Memory

- **Consciously recallable memory of emotionally charged and significant events**
 - Rites of passage and other landmark occasions
 - Dangerous situations
 - Episodes resulting in great pleasure
 - Thoughts about how the world is

Our left hemisphere is so organized that it can automatically produce verbal narratives to describe to ourselves and others what we have felt in our bodies, seen with our eyes, and learned with our entire beings about the world.

Thus, the interactions we experience which impact our life strongly and the thoughts we have about those experiences, are registered in brain/body, neural circuitry, and form the content of our most significant memories.

And here is a central point -- brain research shows that what we experience as consciousness of the present, is largely based on -- and largely driven by -- memory.

It is for that reason that nobel laureate, Gerald Edelman, routinely calls consciousness “the remembered present.” in his latest book, “A universe of Consciousness.”

Gerald Edelman, M.D., Ph.D.

Author of:
“A Universe of Consciousness”

The Remembered Present

Consciousness of the
Present,
– is largely based on
– and largely driven by
Memories of the Past

So, if we have troubles in the present -- for instance, the present looks miserable and the future looks even worse, the trouble may well have been something that happened – or didn't happen to us -- in the past.

And, we may be seeing the impact of that problematic past as if it were still happening in the present. Freud knew that reality long ago, but now neural research shows us that consciousness indeed is neurally dependent on memory and that is why the past can play those tricks on us.

Memory's Effect on Perception

Everything we perceive *today*
includes and is influenced by
memories of significant events
we have seen in the past

Memory's Effect on Action

Every action we take *today*
includes and is influenced by
memories of significant actions
we have taken in the past

It is clear that memory plays a powerful part in the organization and composition of our present consciousness. One can even say we are the memories of our past perceptions and actions.

Let me bring in another component. To accurately examine the influence of the past on our lives, we must add the influence of our genetic heritage on our lives. I do not merely mean the influence of our own mother's and father's ancestral genetic contributions, but the influence of evolutionary selection from the beginning of time on our genetic organization -- which results in us humans having certain kinds of minds and bodies. We are all the heirs of that evolutionary process that has -- by a kind of trial and error process -- "learned" to, live, procreate and evolve, generation after generation, species after species, from the first appearance of "living stuff" on this planet. That too is a kind of memory -- one could refer to it as genetic or evolutionary memory -- as it certainly has an influence on how we perceive and how we act moment to moment.

Our genes are the source for the information that guides our cells to construct the very systems and neural processes that give rise to perception and action in the first place. We naturally and without thinking, access that gene-inspired information -- perfectly suited to provide avenues, strategies, perceptions and actions that can lead to successful outcomes. On this basis, I now posit two classes of memory -- autobiographical memory and evolutionary/genetic memory.

Two Classes of Memory

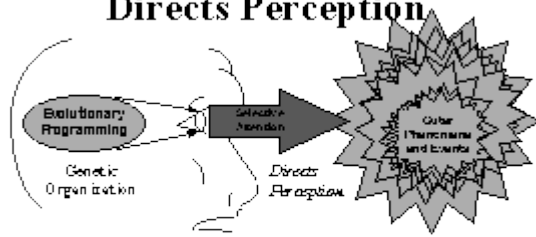
- **Autobiographical Memory**
- **Evolutionary/Genetic Memory**

Autobiographical Memory

Memory based on our individual experiences in life

Thus, we selectively attend to the outside world as we look out of our actual eyes (I will talk about the mind's eye later) and land our sight on those elements that will promote our genetic goals.

Genetic Organization Directs Perception



Outer Phenomena awaken *Evolutionary Programming*
To Selectively Attend to information in the *Outer World*
Vital to survival of the *self and of the species*

[See enlarged view](#)

Our autobiographical memory is tabula rasa at our birth, but our evolutionary/genetic memory is not. It is full of what one could call a “passion for existence.” Under its influence we seek and selectively attend to those elements in the world that will lead to the continuity of our individual existence. And as we mature, it insistently “pushes” us to actions and interactions that will result in the continuity of our species. It is as if our genes “anticipate” our individual demise and have built into us a craving for sexual and social interactions that can result in the continuity of our species. From that genetic source we yearn to find our mates, find our calling and make our contributions to the world.

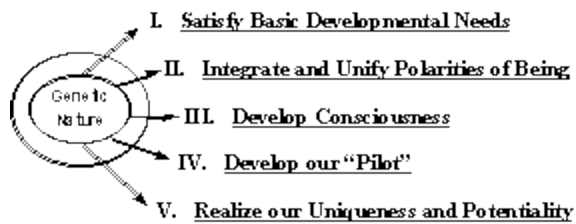
But before we are able to arrive at that generative phase of life, we first have to experience appropriate and stable parenting interactions that naturally lead to successful maturation and individuation. Of course the culture we are born in influences what kind of rearing we will receive. But the most fitting program for optimum maturation can be divined by observing rearing impulses in loving parents, and noting what new born babes long for and thrive with when they receive it.

It is our belief that when we have had the good fortune to have those needs met at the right age and with the right kinship relationship figure, we can anticipate a life with a good portion of pleasure, satisfaction, meaning and connectedness. When we have had the misfortune of an impoverished history, we live -- and continue to anticipate living -- with a high amount of opposite qualities. Instead of pleasure – we anticipate pain; instead of satisfaction -- we anticipate frustration; instead of meaning – we anticipate despair; and instead of connectedness – we anticipate alienation and isolation.

After many years of observing deep, emotional experience and bodily expression in controlled settings we have concluded the following five innate tasks or evolutionary, genetic requirements that lead to the good life.

Genetic Nature Makes Demands

We are pushed by our Genetic Nature to:



And what if we have not had those needs met?

Those who have had that unfortunate history have an inclination to see the world in a negative light and are rather destined to have a fairly unsatisfactory present and future. What do psychotherapists do about this condition? How do they go about helping clients overcome the vicissitudes of negative actual histories recorded in both mind and body?

I will not now review the many modes of psychotherapy available, but most modalities offer "real-time," verbal interactions with the therapist as the major component of their treatment. Our process differs from these methods in two ways. First in the inclusion of body based experience, expression and interactions in the therapeutic process and secondly in the employment of "symbolic time" as well as "real time" interactions

In the therapeutic setting of the actual "here and now" of the group room, we establish a "virtual/symbolic stage" alongside the "actual reality stage" where "symbolic time" -- "there and then" - - interactive experiences are organized. This is not a fixed stage, for it can virtually move through time and space, just as the shifts occur in clients' minds as they remember events happening at different ages, in different places with different people. In this "symbolic time," "there and then" stage, clients' memories are externalized and "come alive" with them included in it.

It is a given that the client's autobiographical memories of neglect and violation underlie and drive their present day, undesirable conscious experience and behavior. As I noted above, in our method therapists help clients carefully design new interactive events to create new "symbolic memories" more in line with genetic expectations to offset the negative effects of their "actual memories."

How do we know which memories may be significantly distorting and undermining our present experiences and actions so that we can more accurately and precisely construct new, symbolic memories, which memories -- had they really happened -- would have provided the basis for a more livable and satisfying existence? We help the client learn that by a process called micro-tracking. That is, we micro-track present consciousness.

Present consciousness consists of what we are perceiving now, how we react or feel about what we are perceiving now and the thoughts that arise while we are perceiving and reacting. In this method we attend to the mercurial play of emotions that move on the client's face, moment to moment, in response to rapidly shifting affective states that are caused by the client's immediate consciousness. To

get a bit technical, and using Edelman's term, what we are looking at may be the felt response to the "reentrant loop" between perceiving and reacting.

To help the client be more conscious of their own emotional states and to know the context of those states, we posit the notion of a "witness figure." That figure, once enrolled, will make statements like, "I see how fearful you are when you talk about the situation at the office." Those statements are made only with the beforehand agreement of the client -- who is the only determinant of their accuracy and validity.

The words for the witness statements are organized by the therapist, not the role-player. For it takes great sensitivity and skill to first: find the just-right single word to name the emotion showing on the client's face. And second: to simultaneously register and remember -- accurately and without paraphrase -- the words the client used when speaking about the context which aroused that emotion. Then those words can be said back to her by the witness figure.

An accurate witness statement has a recognizable effect. The client nods in knowing agreement with the truth of the statement and looks at the therapist with a sense of increased alliance. What often follows is the client's expression of some evaluative statement -- a good example of declarative memory -- like, "You'd better be fearful and on guard with that kind of boss." That kind of phrase is spoken back to the client (with their beforehand agreement) by another hypothetical figure, in this case it might be called a Voice of Warning for the name of the figure is dependent on the "gist" of the idea being presented.

Voice figures are used to track the thoughts of the client and to present those thoughts back to the them as if they were commands. For indeed such thoughts and ideas, stored in our memory, are reacted to by us as if they were good suggestions for how to survive in the world as we have found it. Which indeed is how they arose in the first place -- out of interactions that taught us those unhappy truths as we learned about life.

If the micro-tracking is accurate and successful it increases the client's consciousness of her own process while she is simultaneously in that process. We call that effect "enriching the pilot of the client."

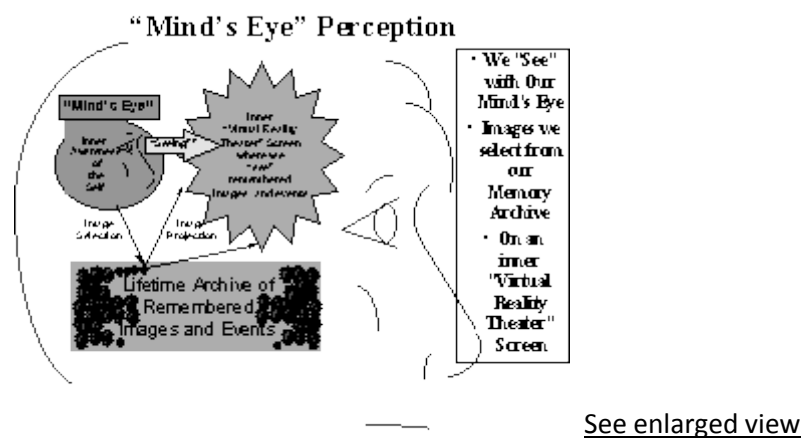
As the micro-tracking process continues, the client gains greater and greater perspective on her inner workings and an important shift begins to occur. The interactions with the witness and voice figures are established in the "here and now" arena of the therapy room but associations begin to occur to the client as she notes the similarity of what she is conscious of now with what she suddenly remembers of the "there and then" of her past.

She may suddenly speak animatedly of her father and some similarly unpleasant situation she experienced with him. We assume that she is now, not only seeing the room with her actual eyes, but she is simultaneously seeing her father in her mind's eye. And, as Damasio points out, whatever we are conscious of results in a feeling. Here she is conscious of her father and she has a lot of feeling, but those feelings are not relevant to the "here and now" of the therapy room, but of the "there and then" of the past.

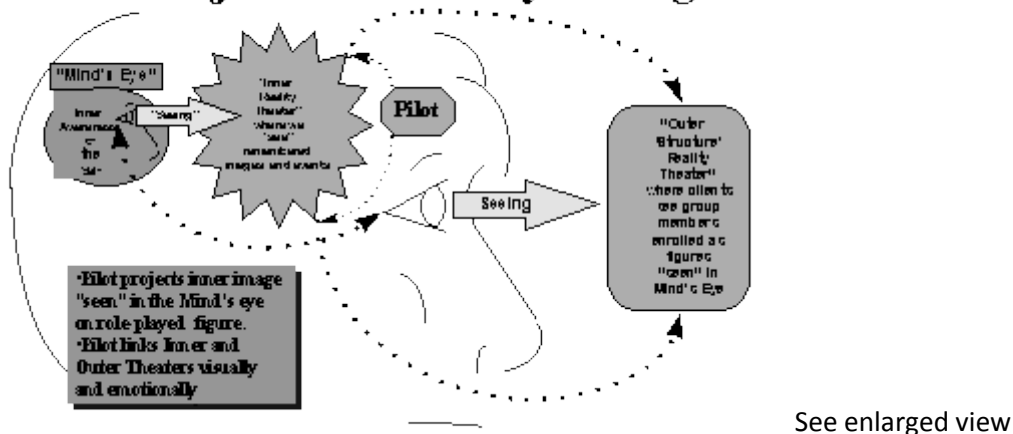
The therapist can note this shift and say something like, “Since you are thinking of your father and reacting so strongly to that image of him perhaps this would be a time to have some one in the group enroll as that part of your father so he can be represented in the virtual arena of the “there and then” of the past. That is how we can have both stages in play at the same time. For indeed, the client is still in the room with the therapist, the role played witness figure, the voice figure and the rest of the group in the “here and now” but part of her psyche is also active in the “there and then” of the past and that can be externalized, illustrated and represented in role-play.

If the client is ready to make that step and chooses someone from the group to step into the role of the father she is seeing in her mind’s eye, an interesting thing happens.

But first, let’s look at the slides about the mind’s eye for a moment.

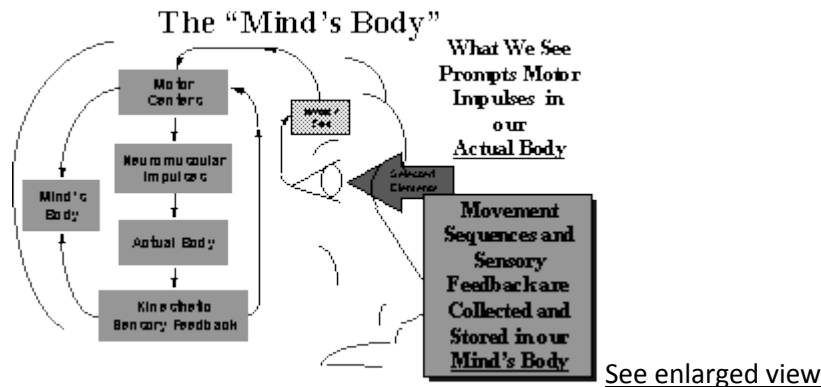


Pilot Projects Mind's Eye Images



Once the group member steps into the role, and onto the “virtual stage” the client has a kind of “stereoscopic vision” – simultaneously seeing the real person with her “actual eyes” while she is so vividly seeing her real father in her “mind’s eye. But a remarkable shift happens in the psyche of the client. She knows it is a role-player before her, but since she has consciously projected attributes of her

real father on him, part of her reacts to him as if he himself were really in the room at whatever age she was at that time!! I can only imagine, or guess that her “mind’s body” is at work and affecting her actual body – for she is experiencing this moment with some modicum of body sensations, impulses and postures relevant to that time.



What is even more remarkable is that the same responses can be released by having an object or even a volume in the air represent her real father.

The “Mind’s Eye”

- **What’s in our Mind’s Eye can consciously or unconsciously:**
 - Be projected outwardly
 - in the air
 - on an object
 - on a person
 - and reacted to as if “real”

This is what can occur in a one to one session when there are no group members or role-players available. More of that later in the day.

Now a bit more about the “mind’s body.” Damasio writes about what he calls the “as if body” in the mind -- a neural organization which gives us the facility to review and practice complex body behaviors without moving a muscle. He suggests that when we do that internal practice, we are in effect, “making a memory of the future.”

Clearly we have a vast storehouse of neural information and coordination to be used for many different purposes. In this method we do not focus on making a “memory of the future” but we assist clients in making a “symbolic memory of the past” which they can store in the “as if body” in the mind -- or the mind’s body. That “memory” may be accessed consciously or unconsciously and may influence present consciousness in some of the same ways that actual memories affect present consciousness.

The “Mind’s Body”

- **In our Mind’s Body we can:**
 - feel movement sensations** *without actually moving*
 - experience how we moved** *at different ages*
 - practice complex movement sequences** *at rest*
- **Experiences stored in our Mind’s Body:**
 - influence** *Actual Body behavior and sensations*

But I have jumped ahead. Let us return to the client with the role-played figure of real father.

On the “virtual stage” of the “there and then,” she can feel all the emotions and impulses that had been stored in her “mind’s body.” She may have never consciously noted those states in the past and if she had, she would not have acted on them, for fear that it would have had disastrous consequences. Now, on this “virtual stage,” she can safely give full attention and free rein to those body states – feel the emotions that were linked to them and allow the motor behavior that would rise from them to be expressed with her actual body. There may be fear, anger, grief and affection associated with her father and the expression of those emotions are facilitated with the help of good accommodation.

In the grip of the pain of that loss she may also find the longing for what should, or could, have happened between a father and a daughter. She may remember that she wished then for a father who was not so dangerous and un-protective as her real father. What to do now? The only father she had was the one she had.

In this method we take the route of giving her the option of experiencing a new, symbolic more fatherly, father. One more in line with what our genetic memory has primed us to anticipate. She can ask another group member to take the role of an ideal father and create an interactive event for herself with this new possibility.

Let us assume that all steps of enrolling group members have been appropriately accomplished and she is now in the midst of experiencing how it would have been in the past to have the contact she wanted with a father who would have been protective and supportive at the ages she would have needed it.

Can you picture such a scene? Just as she had the capacity to respond emotionally to the representation of her real father, she fully believes in the emotional reality of the representation of an ideal father. She surrenders in amazement to the abundant sense of relief, pleasure and safety that contact with such a father would have provided had it happened when she was a child. This sense of relief is often followed by waves of grief as the full impact of what clients have lost also washes over them.

Soon the oscillating rhythm of joy and grief subsides and a feeling of peaceful contentment comes over her, visible to all in the room. Where to store such a moment so it will have long term effect on her life? We make the move of suggesting to her that she access her “mind’s body” as she experiences those powerful emotions in her actual body. With her mind’s body she can call on the memories of her childhood body states and combine those interior body images and remembered body sensations with

the actual emotional, kinesthetic, tactile, auditory and visual inputs she is experiencing in her real body now. We help her use her “mind’s body” not to make a memory of the future, but to make a symbolic memory of the hypothetical past we have organized on the “virtual stage” of the “there and then” in the therapy room.

When that final step is completed and the client indicates she is ready to stop, she tells her role-players to de-roll. They do so and thereby leave the virtual stage of the “there and then” and return to the actual stage of the “here and now” of the therapy session.

This new symbolic memory can be refreshed and reinforced – not by repeating the identical process in the therapy room, but by the client – motivated by her own initiative and pleasure -- recalling and re-tasting it over and over again.

The interactive event has happened in the present, but some part of the mind -- perhaps using that which is registered in the mind’s eye and in the mind’s body -- responds to this event as if it had happened in the past.

For whatever reason, clients undergoing this process often report that they experience their present with more satisfaction and that they have more anticipation of pleasure, meaning and connectedness in the future than before.

This ends a condensed overview of the work. I hope it has given you information which you have found of interest.

Thank you

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