

Freeing The Body

Lots of anger in your thighs? Lots of loneliness in your mouth? Hmm. For a few weeks before I climbed onto that Rolfing bodywork table, a friend and I had giggled over how others had described Rolfing and its strangely wired, 3-D emotional release. Yet there I was on the table, crying softly as I felt the bands around my abdomen, the "holdings" I had lived with for as long as I can remember, give way. After the terror had passed, there was a feeling that now, finally, I could stop tiptoeing around my life.

Today more and more bodyworkers, regardless

Bodyworkers say muscles store memories, and they know how to get the emotions—and the kinks—out.

By Elizabeth Hanly

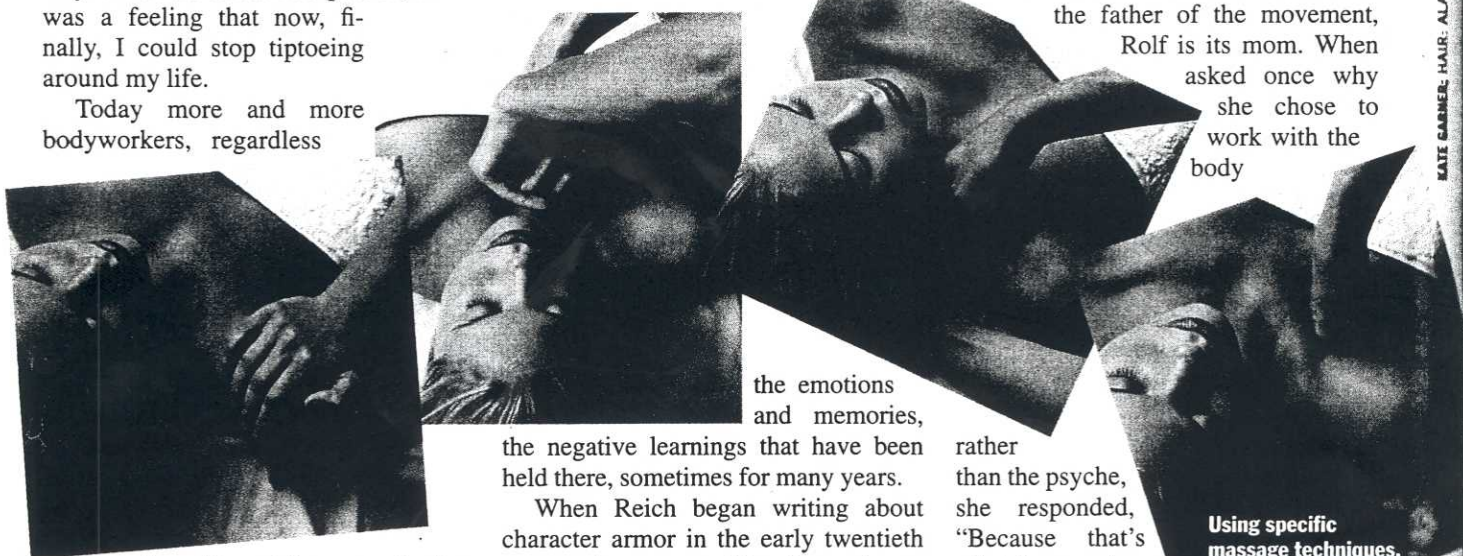
I had my first quite startling taste of body memory at the chiropractor's. I knew nothing of the phenomenon at the time. But Joseph Adler of New York, who was working on my spine, told me later that he'd almost come to expect these spontaneous flashes—these replays of events from several decades earlier—in his patients. (Yet no mention of the body-memory phenomenon occurs in mainstream chiropractic training.) I had only that one flashing image.

My back improved, and work with Joe Adler ended. But I couldn't quite let go of the clarity of that body memory. It was plenty disturbing, but wherever it came from, it revealed much about my confused familial dynamics.

There are several schools of bodywork said to approach body memory in an organized way. Each of them claims rather quietly to facilitate "emotional reorganization" through work with the body's holding patterns.

Any self-respecting journey into bodywork/body memory must begin with Ida Rolf. If Wilhelm Reich is the father of the movement,

Rolf is its mom. When asked once why she chose to work with the body



the emotions and memories,

the negative learnings that have been held there, sometimes for many years.

When Reich began writing about character armor in the early twentieth century, he was considered a madman. Mainstream scientists of his day were sure memory resided exclusively in the brain. Although modern-day scientists still don't dispute that, it is now widely accepted that all of our senses can activate memories in the brain. If the smell of bread baking can take one back to the family kitchen of childhood, perhaps a particular kind of touch on a specific area of the body can cause a long-forgotten scenario to resurface.

rather than the psyche, she responded, "Because that's what I can get my hands on."

An organic chemist and physiologist, Rolf hypothesized that fasciae, highly plastic connective tissue that blankets the muscles, serve as a lattice connecting every structure in the body. The fasciae are the network through which all the body's communications pass. Often, due to "character armoring," a physical injury, or even just plain daily stress, this

Using specific massage techniques, bodyworkers release tight muscles and, they say, stress.

KATE GARNER; HAIR: ALAIN PINON FOR FREDERIC FEKKA; AT BERGDORF GOODMAN; MAKEUP: VIRGINIE

(continued from page 92) closure, in so doing I found it limited its own power.

My final stop was Trager bodywork, which evokes things both delicious and forbidden. It's named for founder Milton Trager, M.D., who began his career as a physical therapist more than 70 years ago and continues to teach advanced classes for bodyworkers at his home in Southern California.

The goal of Trager work is to "re-mind" the nervous system of pleasure. It seeks to make all body parts go *boi-ng*. New York-based Roger Tolle tried to explain. "Think of a place you really love visiting," he said. "Maybe a beach. Think of how your arms swing when you strolled. Think of how your feet felt on the sand. Memories alone can change tension patterns, right?"

It's the job of the Trager practitioner to evoke similar feelings of pleasure, similar body memories that a client can learn to plug into. And how is this pleasure achieved? Mostly through jiggling. Not patterned jiggling, but inspired jiggling.

Trager training is as much learning about inspiration as anything else. It is less structured than many other techniques, which allows Tolle to engage more directly in occasional "body psychotherapy."

During my hour-and-a-half session, Tolle jiggled my legs. He'd elevate a leg slightly, holding it from behind at the ankle and calf, and shake it gently. He'd move around a little, jiggling then from behind the knee. He'd pull the leg slightly and jiggle some more. Claustrophobic memories were rising: the do's and don'ts of my family's *Leave It to Beaver* household. But Tolle seemed to outwit those memories. I found myself laughing a great deal.

Afterward, Tolle gave me some Trager homework. Mentastics they're called, simple leg and arm exercises to deepen the release. "Your core is held so tight," he said, "that you don't allow the superficial structures to give you any support." Not a bad metaphor, either, I thought, and left feeling that I was wearing a gigantic bow across my ass.

Reich once suggested that healing only in the mind is incomplete. Healing must occur in the very tissues, he said, if the mind/psyche is to be able to grow and recover. I spoke with a New Mexico-based Rolfer, Brian Fahey. He told me of his experience with "dry

drunks," those who continue the sort of self-abuse and outer-directed violence so often seen in alcoholics. "Until the issues that first brought up the addiction are removed from the body," Fahey said, "the behavior patterns continue to pop up."

In spite of decades of tantalizing anecdotes, the mainstream psychological community, at least in the United States, seems largely oblivious to bodywork. Nevertheless, practitioners of the various bodywork methods are optimistic. "I look forward to the day when it will be considered negligent for a psychotherapist not to include some type of bodywork in his or her practice—either directly or in a team approach," said biophysicist and therapist Peter Levine, who heads the Ergos Institute in Boulder, a training center for the care of trauma. "Europeans are far ahead of us," Levine continued. "Right now in the United States, a number of psychotherapists are stuck in very real concerns about the ethics of touch. Others are being just plain territorial about their practices."



others, I discovered, understand body therapy simply as a sort of cathartic beating of pillows. But those therapists like Levine, those on the cutting edge of bodywork, talk not only of the release of trauma and negative patterns

from the tissues through deep massage but also of the need to learn far more about the "rhythmic reeducation" of those tissues.

"All this is just in its infancy," said Levine. In the meantime, too many healers are left with a dilemma. Bodyworkers may be unearthing psychological material that they're not always trained to understand or prepared to handle, and psychotherapists may be cutting their patients off from a source of more complete healing.

Perhaps the National Institutes of Health's newly established research program in alternative healing practices will shed more light on bodywork. For now we are left with what not only bodyworkers, clients, and an occasional psychotherapist claim but, perhaps more tellingly, what lovers have always insisted: The body remembers. •

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