The Healing Art of Classical Art of Clas

Patricia Sherwood

# The Healing Art of Clay Therapy

Patricia Sherwood

**ACER Press** 

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#### DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the many students of Sophia College of Counselling who insisted I document our clay therapy training program and my clients, whose inner work provided the anvil for the shaping of this healing art of clay. It is through their willingness to work with and explore clay in therapy that this book is possible.

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# CLAY AS EXPRESSIVE THERAPY

O world invisible, we view thee,
O world intangible, we touch thee,
O world unknowable, we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!
Francis Thompson

Increasingly, therapists are searching for innovative tools to facilitate the client to explore more fully his or her presenting experience in therapy. After almost one hundred years of talk-based therapies providing the recognised tools for working with client experience, there has been a move to action tools in therapy. The challenges of resistant clients, defensive clients, less articulate groups of clients (including some children, adolescents and many adults), have led to the quest for therapeutic tools not dependent on high levels of verbal articulation. We have seen the emergence of a range of artistic therapies: dance therapy; art therapy; drama therapy; music therapy; therapy involving sound; and gesture and movement therapy.

Among the artistic therapies, clay therapy has substantial capacity to contribute in a major way to the therapeutic process. While many therapists implicitly recognise the potential of clay therapy, few venture to use it regularly in their practice. Goryl's (1995) survey shows that only 25 per cent of the therapists in his sample used clay in their practice, although 99 per cent said they believed that clay was very therapeutic. This book aims to inspire therapists to engage with clay in the therapeutic process. It provides precise

sequences for working in a deeply engaging manner with a range of commonly presenting issues in therapy. *The Healing Art of Clay Therapy* is essentially a handbook, with step-by-step guidelines, for making clay work powerfully and transformingly in the therapeutic process. It is based on my work as a clay therapist and counselling and psychotherapy trainer over the past eight years, and has emerged from my professional training as a body-based psychotherapist. I provide precise and well-articulated processes, documented in writing and photographs, drawn from my student training programs. These processes illustrate the use of clay for working with a range of commonly presenting issues in therapy, including family of origin patterns, grief, fear, anger, blocks to speaking, couple communication and self-parenting.

#### Documented clay work in therapy

Currently documented material on the use of clay work in therapy is not abundant. Much of what emerges is in the field of occupational therapy, rather than solely psychotherapeutic work. In current publications, six main arenas emerge: applications in palliative and aged care; applications in family therapy; in abuse recovery work; among children; with the blind; and in personal development work by therapists.

In work with palliative care clients, Shaw (1997) outlines its contribution to patient wellbeing, sense of enjoyment and self-expression. He posits the question as to whether the value of clay work lives in the duplication of a pseudo reality for the patients, or in the capacity for clay to transcend reality. I would suggest very strongly the latter. Work in my clinical practice with clay demonstrates that the attraction of clay lies in its capacity to capture

experience as it emerges in the immediacy of the moment from the client's body, and in the surprising and often powerfully evocative forms it arouses in the client's consciousness. Long-forgotten memories, unacknowledged imprints of experience, arise from the hands of the client in a moment of new consciousness, or insight, about the impact of the experience. Another well-documented use of clay as a therapeutic tool is Yaretzky, Leveinson and Kimichi's integration of clay into group work occupational therapy with frail elderly clients (1996). The aim of the therapy was to combine bilateral sensorimotor activities of the upper limbs with social interaction directed towards future leisure time activity. The subject of the focus of the clay work was the home, which is central to the experience of these elderly people. The group work forum also stimulated feelings of cooperation, support and social wellbeing.

In work with children, clay therapy is sometimes included among play therapy techniques. Hall, Kaduson and Schaefer (2002:12) list clay therapy as part of a game called the 'Power Animal Technique' where children construct a desired animal in clay to create a positive symbol of strength. Paula Phillips (1994) in the *American Journal of Art Therapy* reviews a video on the use of clay therapy when working with a boy and his anger. Robert Racusin (2000) includes clay in the materials he used for his brief psychodynamic psychotherapeutic interventions with children but does not elaborate on how specifically clay is used with particular presenting problems. Kahn (1996) working with exceptional children, suggests that clay therapy offers an alternative approach to learning paradigms and can also provide emotional release and healing for the child. He enumerates a range of topics for lessons in

which clay can facilitate both the cognitive and affective development of the child.

Kameguchi's (2001) seminal work on school refusal by Japanese children uses a combination of systems theory and a clay-sculpting medium to work with families to establish clear boundaries in family relationships. Here, the exciting potential of clay in family therapy is explored and documented. Henley (2002) in his landmark book, *Clayworks in Art Therapy*, gives a detailed portrayal of the use of clay with children suffering from a range of disorders including Asperger's, aggression, autism, and post-traumatic stress disorders. Here the variety of possibilities for using clay from the more conventional making of traditional clay forms to free expression in the natural environment is documented to illustrate the malleability and diversity of clay therapy. Henley's work captures with artistry and sensitivity the application of clay in psychotherapy with children, which he interprets within a psychoanalytic framework.

Clay as an expressive medium in abuse recovery work is reported in the *Denver Post* (1999), commenting on Denise Garvey's art therapy work depicting her survival and recovery journey from a domestic violence relationship. Clay sculpting is also used in work with sexually abused children. Dufrene (1994) documents her work with three sexually abused sisters to express and resolve their feelings regarding the abuse, develop expressions of self-protective safety, and work with the issues arising from their removal to foster families. Work with anorexic and bulimic members of families has been undertaken by Macks (1990) using clay as an expressive medium.

Hermann's (1995) very moving article, *A Trojan Horse of Clay*, based on his work with clay in art therapy programs in a residential school for the blind,

explicates powerfully the role of clay in providing a medium for clients to work with their issues and their deep feelings. Their ideas, fantasies and emotions can be turned into tangible shapes directed by their own sensory control of the material. They have the opportunity to regain control and insight, and to explore their inner world in a sensory manner.

Ihde (1999), a psychotherapist and potter, illustrates the use of clay by therapists for their own personal development and healing. She specialises in making pots and believes that the pot is a record of her inner life experiences. She uses pottery with clients and sees that, for them, the fashioning of a pot is a key representation of the process they must go through to direct their change and develop a new approach to the world. Clay art forces clients to come face to face with the obstacles they have in themselves and to see themselves raw, stripped of incidental details that often act as defence mechanisms.

### Potential contribution of clay work to therapy

Clay work is like the Cinderella of the art therapies. She still waits to be discovered with her magic, her beauty and her ability to transform the wells of human suffering into places of insight and celebration. Her dark earthy solid mass, often appearing in greyish, brownish or terracotta dress, is hardly alluring at first sight. Touching this sticky cold mass, you sense she has a longing and determination to merge with your skin. Clay calls to be known, to become explored by the senses, to be pushed, pulled, moulded, hollowed out, and to be added to piece by piece by piece. She brings many gifts to the therapeutic process including:

#### THE HEALING ART OF CLAY THERAPY

- 1 responsiveness to human feelings
- 2 expressiveness of the inexpressible
- 3 tangibility of the intangible
- 4 knowingness of the unknowable
- 5 visibility of the invisible
- 6 apprehensibility of the inapprehensible.

#### Responsiveness to human feelings

Many clients have marvelled at the capacity of clay to so quickly absorb and express what they are feeling. One client responded to her first therapeutic experience of clay:

At first I hated that cold damp heavy sense of it ... it felt so heavy like the winter damp around me... but once I really touched it [it] was like blotting paper accurately and concretely absorbing my feelings at a given moment. It was like it merged into my hands and I could express any feelings and it would be immediately responsive to them ... I fell in love with it.

This sense of falling in love with clay has been expressed many times by clients and psychotherapy trainees and has its roots in the immediacy of the responsiveness of the substance to the deepest feelings. It is as though for those moments, there are no barriers or blockages to your ability to express your feelings. Lee Hutt, a psychotherapist and clay worker is reported when interviewed by the *Boston Globe* (1997) to reply: 'It's the same kind of feeling that you get when you fall in love.'

#### Expressiveness of the inexpressible

Human experience is so vast, complex and intricate that human verbal languages make vain attempts to capture some parts of it. At times when our deepest thoughts and feelings are in turmoil, or hidden beyond our consciousness or buried under the floorboards, and we feel stuck, unable to grasp clearly our essential problem, clay comes to the rescue asking only that we hold her. No words are needed to mould, shape, carve or hollow into this expressive medium. Freed from the demands of verbal fluency, clay gives us the opportunity to become deeply expressive. I recall one day being asked by a desperate program facilitator to do some personal development work with a group of at-risk Indigenous adolescents who were undertaking a semi-compulsory training program to retain their financial government allowances. The young adolescents' resistance was quietly impenetrable, and the facilitator had given up and walked away. This was a group in which words had no currency. Their bodies expressed it all: 'We survive and we are here because we are survivors ... what can you tell us?... our experiences are beyond words and beyond your comprehension.' The moment I saw their bodies, I knew clay was the only way to engage any of them. I gave them each big chunks of this delicious moist earth medium straight from the riverbed. They saw her and recognised her. They knew in their bodies her ancient language, the language of the earth ... their mother and ours..., if only we remembered. They remembered, even after generations of dispossession from their land, and they eagerly reached for it. It was the first movement from the previously stony silent bodies. Their bodies came to life as they shaped and moulded the clay keenly over the day. They told their stories of pain and abuse to

their mother the earth. She understood, and I was privileged to witness this communication. They came back the next day for more. We worked with pain, with anger, powerfully and transformingly without words. A week later, one of them walked six kilometres to the door of a community counselling centre where I had my practice. She sensed she had found a way to heal her life.

#### Tangibility of the intangible

For many clients the non-material dimension of experience, the intangible, is not readily accessible. This is often the case with males or the scientifically minded. It is very difficult to grasp any angle of experiences that they encounter, that are not tangible. Feelings belong to the world of intangibles and therefore are difficult to understand or transform because they cannot be readily viewed or touched. Clay is the ideal medium for such clients and for all persons who at some moments want to grasp externally some of their inner life. In this solid, tangible, pliable piece of the earth, one may imprint one's inner life. This is particularly powerful when working with anger, which is one of the most elusive and unmanageable human emotions. Doug was so frustrated with his sudden surges of anger towards his wife. We used clay to work backwards from the exploded anger to the inner trauma that is the root of the vulnerability against which the anger was a defence. He could grasp his experience and work consciously and confidently to heal the root of the anger.

#### Knowingness of the unknowable

Clay is an ideal substance for exploration of the unknown. It is so malleable, yet it is also capable of such clear forms and lines. It gives the client the opportunity to

penetrate layer upon layer into the deepest levels of their experience. It emerges into being under the client's hands, birthed often before any conscious thought has intervened. It has a primal, raw truth in its immediacy and powerfulness. It can bring to the surface that which is unknown with a power and clarity that is awesome. Such is the case of the client Maria, who reported feeling this heaviness in her heart but could not name the roots of it. It was simply deeply pervasive in her life and she felt as though she was carrying unknowable grief. She began by sculpting her heart. She made it like a heart-shaped cake tin and laid it with the closed part of the heart facing upwards. When asked what was inside her heart she became fearful, agitated and distressed. She said she did not know, but it would be too scary to turn over the heart and have a look. Maria then decided after sitting with this heart for ten minutes that she could cut a little tiny window in it and have just a peek at its contents. She did this, looked and gasped. She then moulded in clay a woman crucified with three gouges in her womb. She began to weep. Out of her consciousness arose the story of her grief. She knew it related to the two fathers of her three children whom she experienced as crucifying her life energy. She had known she had anger towards her first husband but the grief of her broken trust, his disappearance with one of her young children years ago, was so overwhelming that it had simply slowly extinguished her heart energy to produce a silent, unknown grief until clay came to her help. From the moment the unknowable weight upon her heart became knowable, she experienced the beginning of her healing and the transformation of her grief. Several weeks later, after much resourcing and boundary work, she made another sculpture of her heart and this time she uncovered a beautiful being standing upright, protecting her and showing her a new direction forward in her life.

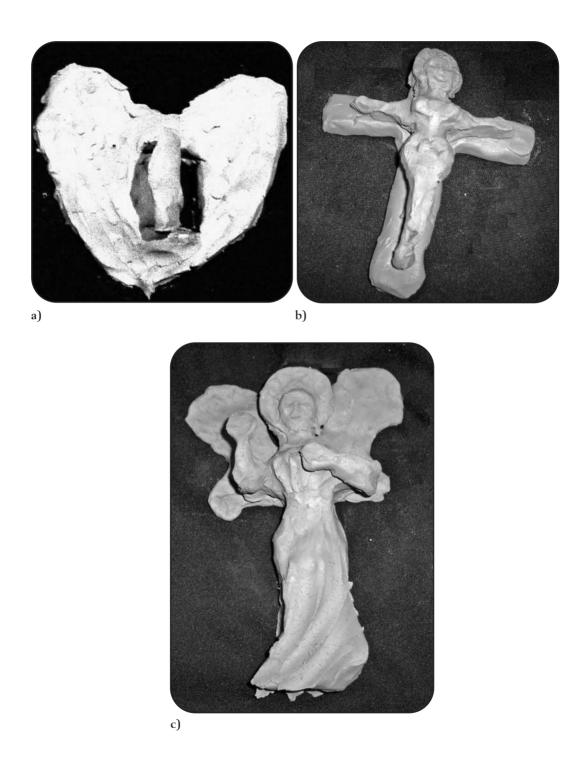


Image 1: a) the broken heart, b) the crucified one, and c) the resurrection (Artist: Maria, July 1996)

#### Visibility of the invisible

Clay therapy enables us to see our own inner traumas and places of wounding. In the seeing, there is not only the bringing of consciousness to the previously unseen place for healing, but there is the remarkable opportunity to experience compassion towards oneself and towards others. When a client holds in his or her hand the clay form of the suffering part within themselves, the doorway of compassion in their heart is opened. Rhonda was very judgemental at what she perceived as her lack of tenacity in the workplace. Working through a series of clay pieces she finally discovered behind her anger at herself the one who suffered, her three-year-old, a pitifully curled-up child in a gesture of retreat from the criticism of the mother. Seeing this vulnerable part of herself gave her the ability to work with this part of her wounded psyche with love and acceptance. I have witnessed many acts of men, women and adolescents revealing what had been kept hidden in their innermost selves and weeping openly when they actually hold in their hand the wounded one, below all the layers of defence.

#### Apprehensibility of the inapprehensible

Finally, clay is a medium which, when combined with specific psychotherapeutic sequences, can readily make the inapprehensible, apprehensible. Women and men from all educational backgrounds, as well as adolescents, have the opportunity to view their psyche in a manner that is readily comprehensible. The 'ah ha!' experience, the moment of insight arises from the communion between the hands that shape the clay forms, and the consciousness of the client. Often it is

dramatic, startling in its power of revelation. Always it is freeing clients from old world views and limited understandings.

Clay as an expressive therapy is making her debut as the field of expressive and action therapies expand rapidly in psychotherapeutic practice. It is a suitable therapeutic medium for most client groups. However, its use is not recommended with pregnant women, children under seven years old (whose life force is preoccupied with building new bodies), frail aged or any other persons whose life energy is much depleted. Clay work requires direct connection of the hands with the material and this requires a certain amount of energy and life force. While in the long term it always has a regenerating effect on the life energy, in the short term it may temporarily deplete some of it (Mees-Christeller 1985:23). Clay work is also not recommended for clients with a serious psychotic history or serious mental disturbances. Clay work in therapy provides a powerful medium to work through many core issues: anger, grief, fear, and move the client from crippling emotional experiences to flourishing opportunities for inner growth and healing.

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# CLAY USE IN BODY-BASED PSYCHOTHERAPY

To the emotionally stressed person, clay can be raw feeling to mould and transform, or to pound and destroy.

N. Bolton

#### Introduction to body-based psychotherapy

Body-based psychotherapy assumes a model of a human being as interrelated energetic systems encompassing physical body, life forces, and thinking and feeling forces. All experiences have energetic resonances in the cellular structures of the body. Cutting edge research in mind–body immunity clearly demonstrates that what we think and feel affects the body's cells. How we manage change, crisis, emotional and physical stress in our lives, significantly affects the illnesses that we create in our physical bodies. Yet, as Borysenko and Borysenko (1994) point out, the power of the quality of our thoughts and feelings to heal ourselves is substantial and variable. There is an inextricable link between the body and mind, bridged by human experiences. In her hallmark work, *Molecules of Emotion: the mind–body connection*, Candice Pert (1997) demonstrates very clearly the link between particular feeling states and chemical responses of the body that profoundly affect the health of the body's cells. She has written more than 250 articles on peptides and their receptors and the immune system's response to the neuropeptides. She has drawn international attention to this connection and

profoundly influenced cancer research and AIDS research. At the 1997 Ian Gawler conference in Victoria, she delivered an excellent paper that summarised the role of neuropeptides as chemoattractants for human monocytes and tumour cells. In cutting edge physiology and biophysics, in environmental studies, the connections between all aspects of the human being are being clearly established as part of a model of energetic systems and interconnectedness of parts.

Traditional modalities of psychotherapy interventions are mind based, consisting of reflection, conversation and words. If these fail and the condition becomes more acute, then often body-based interventions involving the medical administration of chemical substances are used in treatment. Body-based psychotherapy adds a different way of working with the human mental conditions of trauma. This is a term that combines the therapies previously described as 'expressive', or 'experiential', or 'somatic', or a combination of these. The main currents of this work flow out of dance therapy, music and drama therapy, somatic therapies and eastern philosophies, particularly Buddhism. There is a strong connection between the body and the mind which is mediated by breath and reflected in a range of Buddhist-influenced psychotherapies, the most well known being Hakomi. In the broadest sense of the word, Freud, Sando Ferenczi, Adler, Rich and Jung could be called pioneers in body-based psychotherapy because they drew attention to the body as the driving force in the distribution of certain human experiences (McNeeley 1987). However, it is only recently that primary significance has been given to the client's holistic experience as an integrative dance of body, mind, heart and spirit, and appropriate therapeutic tools been applied to capture the experience directly, in its wholeness. Such body-based approaches emphasise awareness of

direct experience and the active participation with the body and mind in psychotherapeutic interventions. In the 1970s Gendlin found that clients would progress more rapidly in therapy if they were able to experience a felt sense or physical manifestation of their feelings. He developed a technique called focusing to help clients connect to their felt sense in their body. Gendlin's basic principle of body psychotherapy was that whatever is said must be checked against the concretely felt experiencing of the person. Essentially, he argued that therapeutically authentic words for the here and now are those which have a directly sensed effect on parts of the body. Otherwise, however interesting the words are, they are not the therapeutic points of intervention in the present moment. Weiner edited an impressive collection of body-based psychotherapeutic approaches in his work: Beyond Talk Therapy: using movement and expressive techniques in clinical practice (2002). Duhl (2002:80) identifies action metaphors in which he includes sculpting and psychodrama. He defines action metaphors as processes that shed light on an issue and which involve gestures, voice tones, pace and energy exchanges. However, he sees the greatest power of action metaphors in their ability to communicate to the therapist wholes not fragments of an experience:

... action metaphors grasp wholes, whereas language is analytic and linear. Action metaphors allow an individual to externalize entire images of what is held in his or her mind in a form that the therapist or trainer can render safe and useful. ...

In the managed care reality of today's mental health care work, it is essential that therapists have quick ways to understand whole issues. Action metaphors,

because they grasp whole gestalts, can cut through a morass of words, advancing clients' experience dramatically and quickly.

This holistic therapeutic approach is at the heart of the body-based psychotherapies, recently termed 'action therapies'. Whenever this approach is missing in our psychotherapeutic interventions we are ignoring major resources potentially available. Verbal therapies alone mean that a whole range of client experience and resources is not accessed or mobilised. A wide range of resources within the therapist is not being validated or engaged in the therapeutic process. Some of the most potentially effective dynamics afforded between client and therapist are stifled. Duhl (2002) emphasises the ability of action-based metaphors to facilitate new dimensions to both inner and outer awarenesses of the client and therapist. The covert is made overt in such a way that both therapist and client can experience hitherto unknown meanings. Out of this awareness images arise with power and clarity that provide revelations to client and therapist in the therapeutic encounter. The therapy direction becomes vitally alive and reflective of the deep dimensions of experience that cannot be captured in language alone.

## Steiner's body-based model of human psycho-spiritual wellbeing

The particular body-based model of the human being that I use is based primarily on the psycho-philosophical work of Dr Rudolf Steiner who wrote between 1904 and 1923. Steiner's model of a human being in its most simplistic presentation is fourfold (1994). This includes the physical body, the life body or etheric, the

lower layers of mind consciousness or energetic layers where the experiences of antipathy and sympathy are stored (astrality), and the creative individual consciousness or I AM. Like all body-based models, it shares the basic assumption that the body is the map of the thoughts and feelings. It also assumes that all aspects of the human being can be seen as different rates of energetic vibrations that are interpenetrable. This means very clearly that our thoughts, feelings and bodily experiences are intimately interrelated. This concept, while comparatively new to modern psychology, has formed the core of Buddhist psychology for over 2,500 years. Tim Mon (1995) in his scholarly exposition of Buddha Abhidharma, details the connection between thoughts, feelings and body. Macy (1991), in her powerful work World as Lover, World as Self, draws attention to the Buddhist notion of interdependence, now represented in modern systems theories. This notion of the human being as an energetic system and interrelated with surrounding energetic systems of beingness, mineral, plant and animal was revived by Steiner in the early decades of the twentieth century. Let us now consider in more detail these four bodies and their energetic interpenetration.

#### 1 The physical body

The physical body of the human being consists only of about a quarter of the reality we face and experience. It is that part of our experience that correlates to the mineral kingdom of nature and can be clearly touched and observed. Its existence is indisputable because it confirms readily with the world view of empiricism.

#### 2 The etheric body

Interpenetrating the physical body is what Steiner termed the 'etheric body', or the life body. In China it is called the 'chi', in India the 'pranic body', and in other terminologies the 'subtle body'. This body is responsible for the health of the physical body. When it is vibrant and well due to good eating, sleeping and rhythmical bodily patterns, a person is said to be healthy. Physical, mental and emotional stress drain it of its life force, as do lack of exercise and a sedentary indoor lifestyle. This body is the centre of many healing traditions in Eastern cultures. When it disintegrates, we are dead. It acts as a buffer between the physical body and our emotional and cognitive experiences.

### 3 The lower layers of mind consciousness: astrality

This body could be described as the lower layers of mind consciousness from a Buddhist perspective. Steiner names it the 'astrality'. This is the aspect of the human being that provides the gateway to experience through the senses and that provides the storehouse of experience both pleasurable and painful. Many of our defence mechanisms merge out of our struggle to survive and avoid pain on the astral level. However, this results in many aspects of experience being cut off, denied and suppressed. These pockets of astral experience often run the person's life through the unconscious. This is the dimension of experience which Steiner sees as driven by sympathy and antipathy and which Buddha describes as driven by aversion and desires. Here the imprints of human experience resonate. Sardello

in his introduction to Steiner's (1999:xiii) collection of essays titled *A Psychology* of Body, Soul and Spirit, points out that this astrality is not some kind of fixed container but rather an inner dynamic, mobile, developing, flowing relationship between the outer world, mediated by the senses through the physical body, and the most intimate realms of inner consciousness, mediated by the I AM. Encountering astral patterns, breaking through defences to self-knowledge or insight, entails the discovery of new resources that can be accessed through the I AM, or core of a human being's highest consciousness.

#### 4 The I AM

Through all of these three dimensions, there is that which could be truly called uniquely human consciousness, which Tagar named the I AM, and which has been variously labelled as the 'individual creative being', the 'self-aware human consciousness', the 'I consciousness', the 'place of insight'. Within the I AM are the resources of the human spirit, the capacities to rise above the pain, limitations and darkness of experiences and to bring back hope, healing and growth. It is the part that strives for what Maslow (1968) terms 'self-actualisation' and it is the part that can achieve Maslow's self-transcendence. It provides the bridge between the personal and transcendent meaning structures. It brings to the human psyche the capacity to access resources of strength, courage, determination, love, joy and other qualities which Maslow (1973) named the 'B values or higher order values'. Steiner (1994) argues that just as the physical body has its centre in the brain, the soul experiences have their centre in this I AM. What there is of the spirit in the I AM is the transcendent principle of spirit which connects the person to the

highest transcendent powers. However, this I AM also comprises the self of each human being and captures our individual essence. Although it remains invisible, psychological health and wellbeing depend on the capacity of the individual to insert his or her I AM into their experiences and to integrate and process all experiences in a meaningful way so nothing of their experience remains cut-off, denied, repressed or buried under the floorboards. The stronger the I AM, and the stronger the ability of a person to access the part of their 'I' that connects them with transpersonal resources and meanings, then the greater the resources they have to bring to life's challenges and daily demands. The relationship and functioning of these particular bodies is further detailed by Steiner (1999) in his work: *Body, Soul and Spirit*. This model provides a framework within which the body–mind–spirit connection in psychotherapy can be elucidated in a precise manner and appropriate therapeutic tools designed. This will be illustrated in the following chapters of applied interventions in clay therapy.

#### Languages for communicating in bodybased psychotherapies

The experiences that resound within our energetic systems either become a resource of intuitions and energy or a burden and stress. Much of our experience is non-verbal and easily escapes our consciousness. These unconscious contents are absorbed into our physical and subtle bodies, blocking circulation, adding to our sense of depletion, exhaustion, stress and illness. For health, it is essential that we become aware of the non-verbal dimension of experience. If the contents of our experience are to become conscious and released, a range of non-verbal communication skills must be acquired to access and communicate with these

contents. Non-verbal modes of intra as well as inter communication and knowing include: bodily sensations of body as well as of emotional dynamics; externalising subtle inner movements and postures to make them conscious through gestures; visualisations of inner states of being; and the externalising of inner vibrations into perceptible sounds. Most of our inner experiences are not directly verbal. Pleasure and pain, tension and relaxation, fear and hope, anger and hurt, pride and humiliation—none of them can easily be captured by words alone. Verbal communication, both with oneself and with others, is, at best, a second-hand translation of direct experience, varying in accuracy, transparency and clarity. As a result, in a highly intellectualised, verbalised, conceptualised, computerised Western culture, most of our important experiences are being communicated by means of translation into a second-hand medium: words. They remain largely cut off from our awareness and not acknowledged. Often we can hardly name for ourselves what is really happening within us, let alone to others (Sherwood & Tagar 2000a:18–19).

In order to become aware of our inner experience we need sophisticated tools for expression. The rhythmic, vibrational dynamics of the human bodies constantly create patterns, pictures, tunes, sensations and inner sounds, all below the threshold of consciousness, but which eventually leave imprints in the human body that become a map for inner experience. Consciousness can expand to include them when equipped with the modes of expression that these dynamics live and communicate. There are basically four indigenous languages of experience, which facilitate the articulation of our experience. They are sensing, gesture, visualisation and sound. These four languages have been identified by Tagar (1995) and developed in his model of psychotherapy

which he called *philophonetics* but recently renamed: *psychophonetics*. These languages are described by Sherwood and Tagar (2000b:19–20) as follows:

#### Sensing

The human ability of becoming aware of any phenomena is based on the activity of the senses. Taken together, over and above the division into the separate senses, the capacity to sense all together is termed by Tagar 'sense-ability'. Through the senses experience comes into being; through the senses it is being inscribed, ingrained into the resonance fabric of the subtle bodies. Through sensing, every aspect of the ingrained experience can be traced, accessed, and brought once again to consciousness. Clay material is an ideal medium for sensing into someone's experience and capturing it in a visible, tangible, concrete form.

#### Gesturing/movement

The human body is regarded as an instrument of meaning, enabling an inner being to live in an outer world. We claim that the human body can serve as a precise map for the human psyche, through which every aspect of a person's inner life could be traced and observed in full consciousness. The body and its expressive ability is regarded as a screen onto which the psychic dynamic can be projected, and from which it could be read. The body acts in four major capacities in relation to human experience:

- 1 an absorber of experience
- 2 a carrier of experience
- 3 a reflector of experience
- 4 an expresser of experience.

The gestures relate to the fourth capacity: the body as an expresser of experience. We know that every human experience can be directly expressed in a gesture by every basically functioning person, and be universally understood.

#### Visualising

An inherent ability lives within people to create accurate pictures of inner situations with which they can explore, grasp, and comprehend their inner reality. This ability is made conscious, being refined and encouraged as a major means of communication with oneself. This is not guided imagery but an authentic, spontaneous, organic activity of visualising in one's imaginative capacity a created representation of inner experience.

#### Sounding

The sounds of human speech, consonants and vowels, when spoken on their own or perceived on their own, become patterns of vibrations that can resound within the subtle bodies. Every sound, once allowed to resound within someone's senseability, will create an echo within a particular range of human experience. Experience, which lives in patterns of resonance, can be precisely matched with the resonance patterns of the sounds of speech. The sounds can resound in the depths of inner experiences from all levels and periods of a person's life, bringing it back to life. The correlation between the sounds of human speech and inner embodied experiences becomes the major tool for the exploration, confrontation, transformation, and healing of inner patterns. We know that every human experience, once expressed in a gesture, can find its precise counterpart in a particular combination of sounds of speech—sensed, spoken, or visualised.

Traces of every experience, from every layer of consciousness, from every period of someone's life can be accessed through a combined use of these tools. Once accessed and made conscious, these patterns of inner experiences can be explored, released, and transformed. With the use of these tools of non-verbal intra-communication we can explore the non-verbal dynamics that take place. This can heal traces of undigested experience, clear unwanted deposits of experience from the passing day, recreate a flexible boundary around our space for a more effective protection, and access our deeper, higher resources of intelligence, strength and creativity (Sherwood & Tagar 2000b).

This modality assumes a strong mind-body connection. Hence, the body can become a diagnostic map for the human psyche through which every aspect of the inner life can be traced and observed (Tagar 1996). For example, when speaking of abuse, the client may be aware of a knotted sensation in the stomach, which can be sensed and externalised in gesture. If the breath is held around this contorted gesture and released with a sound (consonant or vowel), then the client can capture the gesture of how they do not breathe. This gesture can be made in clay and can facilitate the client to bring new breath, new breathing patterns to these sites in his or her bodily experience.

#### Clay as a body-based tool of action therapy

These non-verbal expressive languages, when applied to clay work, produce a therapy that is penetrating, profound and transformative. Clay's particular strength is its power to penetrate into the layers of astrality, where the imprints of experiences of aversion and desires are held, and to bring them to the surface

where they may be viewed with concreteness that often astounds the client and the therapist. Most of the clay therapeutic processes outlined in this manual incorporate the non-verbal processes of sensing, visualising, gesturing and occasionally sounding. The expression of the information derived from these processes in clay forms is immediate and concrete. Because of the extraordinary flexibility of clay, it enables gestures of experiences to be readily formed in a powerful and visible material. A wounded heart may appear in an undeniable way before the client's eyes and the extent of the damage is unavoidable. It is there to be acknowledged and to be transformed by the creation in clay of the qualities it may need to recover. The final piece can then express the recovering heart in all its winged glory. Once the client has so intimately and penetratingly expressed his or her inner life, held it in his or her own hands, and brought it into the light of his or her consciousness, healing has already begun. The clay pieces remain as graphic monuments to the inner work that calls to be done and to the inner work that has been accomplished.

#### The language of clay forms

Clay shapes and forms contain the three key polarities which reflect the formative forces in nature and in the life body or chi force of the human being. Tagar (conversation 1996) names these polarities as gravity and levity, contraction and expansion, concavity and convexity. They are seen in all natural forms in many arrangements and combinations, and they graphically portray gestures of the human psyche.

#### Gravity and levity

Gravity captures the gesture of being drawn earthward and reflects the psychic states of tiredness, being burdened. It appears as collapsing and being overwhelmed by the weight of life's conditions or responsibilities.





Levity contrasts strongly with gravity and reflects the gesture of reaching heavenward, achievement and life-giving energy. In its energetic form it demonstrates breathing deeply and walking uprightly.

The dance between gravity and levity is the movement of seeking balance between reaching upward to the heights of the spirit's aspiration, and the pull of life's responsibilities downward and earthward. The struggle is to help the human spirit to rise out of matter and to bring the spirit back into matter.

#### Contraction and expansion

Contraction is represented by arms and legs crossed in a restricted space. It represents the psychic gesture of retreat from intimacy with another. There is no space to breathe, no space for me, and in its extreme form it captures the sense of

depression. There is the gesture of not having the space to be who you are capable of being.





In contrast, expansion reflects the opening out of the arms, the embracing, welcoming warming gesture of expanding waves of joy and happiness and life. This is the psychic gesture of 'I can be who I can be', there is room for me to celebrate who I am and to share my life. The breath moves freely and without restraint. The being can speak powerfully and clearly express his or her truth. There is the sense of being who you are.

In the tension between expansion and contraction is the pull between the summer and winter of the human psyche. In contraction there is the sense of the psyche's winter of coiling in and around to rediscover inner resources. In the expansion there is the psyche's gesture of revealing its strength, potential and desire to dance and celebrate. It is the fullness and the ripening of the psyche.

### Concavity and convexity

Concavity reflects the hollowing out sense of being undermined by life. There is shallow restricted breathing and sense of emptiness in life.





Convexity represents the state of total exposure, of confident vulnerability, of freedom to expose who you are to the world. The breath is expanding and reaching beyond the person's boundaries. There is a sense of exhilaration and of confidence. In concavity the psyche has hollowed itself out, creating a nurturing space for others and this is held against the tension of the convex gesture of the psyche to celebrate its own self and to expand its space beyond its own boundaries.



Image 2: A natural object demonstrating these different polarities in clay work

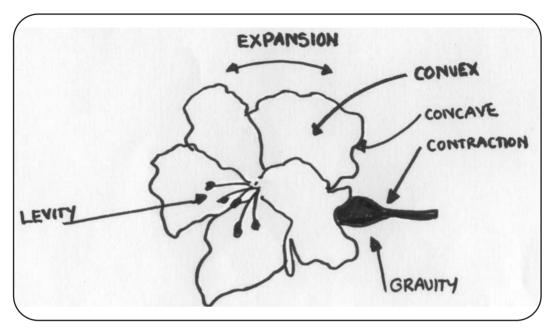


Image 3: A natural object demonstrating these different polarities in clay work

Artist: Elizabeth, September 2003

The image above drawn from nature captures the diversity of polarities expressed in and through natural forms.

All these archetypal forms combine in each and every clay piece to capture a particular experience of pain or pleasure, triumph or defeat, sense of self-flourishing or collapse of space for self. They represent poignantly and powerfully a penetrating visual portrayal of inner experience, known and seen fully through its birthing in the form of clay. This is the heart of clay therapy. It becomes a medium to make the inner world of the psyche visible, known, tangible and apprehensible.

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# WORKING WITH FAMILY OF ORIGIN DYNAMICS

One always learns one's mystery at the price of one's innocence.

R. Davies

The experiences in the family of origin have long been identified as one of the major influences on the development of the psycho-social wellbeing of the individual. From the early psychoanalysts to contemporary psychodynamic practitioners, the dynamics of the family of origin have been a focus of interest in the therapeutic encounter. Freud identified the significance of the relationship between the child and each of its parents for its future adult development with his famous Oedipus and Electra complex (Ehrenwald 1991:353). Jung posited that due to unmet needs from our family of origin we are likely to project these onto our choices for adult relationships, marrying someone who represents either our mother or our father (Singer 1973:230). Humanistic practitioners are also aware of the impact of the family of origin in the stories of client experience. Systemic therapists have made family patterns of interaction the focal point of the therapeutic process. In the 1960s family system theorists brought the role of the family as the primary focus of the therapeutic intervention to the foreground, and developed a number of models and practices for exploring the family functioning (Epstein & Bishop 1981). They argued that the family as a system was more powerful than intrapsychic factors in determining the behaviour of any individual family member.

Regardless of the particular theoretical model used by the therapist, most would concur that many presenting issues have their roots in early family experiences. Psychotherapists work to expand the picture of the impact of the family of origin members on the client using a variety of verbal tools. David Kantor from the Boston Family Institute developed family sculpture, where space became a powerful tool to denote emotional enmeshment or estrangement. Duhl (2002:83–4) describes very vividly the contribution of family sculpture to the expressive therapeutic experience in his training experience at the Boston Family Institute:

Trainees in roles as family members assumed postures, gestures, and movements suggested by the sculpture and enacted them. The pattern of movements and interactions was repeated several times to capture the pattern of the system. After the enactment, players gave feedback on what was experienced in their roles, positions and movements. Thus the sculptor began to get a sense of the multicentric reality ... when the sculpting process was experienced in a family therapy situation, from several members' points of view, family members began to see how each person was an actor in someone else's version of the same family play...

The particular body-based psychotherapeutic clay process articulated in this chapter for working with family of origin issues offers a non-verbal tool for creating graphic and powerful images and forms of the impact of family of origin experiences on the client. This clay sequence can also be applied to the family of marriage or procreation to elucidate family dynamics in the client's

experience. Traces of these experiences continue to vibrate in the etheric and astral bodies outlined in the preceding chapter. These experiences can be accessed through the body and enlarged using clay to create a vibrant picture of how the body's breath, or etheric flow, is constrained and constricted as a result of particular contractions in response to traumatic experiences.

#### Client's intention or wish

As a matter of practice, I do not proceed to any sequence without the client first expressing a clear psychotherapeutic wish to undertake a particular task. This is in keeping with my commitment to an empowering model of psychotherapy and my training in humanistic counselling and *philophonetics* where a client 'wish' is regarded as a critical precedent before beginning these interventions. Due to the potential powerfully penetrating nature of these interventions, the wish establishes the client's intentionality and harnesses their inner resources to protect and support them during the process of the psychotherapy.

#### Enter-Exit-Behold

The 'enter–exit–behold' sequence is the core process used in this body-based model of clay therapy. It was developed by Tagar (1996) for use in the counselling session and in 1997 I applied it to clay work in therapy. The sequence enables the client to enter the site of the imprint of wounding without becoming flooded or overwhelmed by it. This process enables the client to enter the inner pattern of experience, then to formally exit it, and finally to proceed to a safe place to behold the dynamic of suffering and to gain the necessary information about the experience. With this information client and counsellor can design the

healing process. The exit process prevents what is uncovered from flooding the client, or exposing the client's vulnerability so that the client moves into an intrusive stress phase. The major contribution of this sequence is to establish a middle position between flooding, intrusive, expressive therapies and detached, controlling, cognitive therapies. This is described in detail by Sherwood (2000) in her article on working effectively with sexual abuse survivors. Whenever the client chooses to gain more information about an experience, or to defend him or herself from some invasion upon self, or to discover the quality of nurturing he or she requires to heal, then this sequence is invoked.

#### Enter

To 'enter' the client finds the part of the body that, when the stressful experience is recounted, feels tension or stress. The client then gestures the tension, breathes into the tension and 'enters' the position physically with his or her whole body. The client is encouraged to exaggerate the position until he or she has a clear picture of what is happening to them in that position. From this position, the client re-experiences the active dynamics of the abuse pattern from the inside. The client is not left in this position to experience the terror, pain or fear any longer than is necessary to obtain a snapshot of what is going on within the place of the wounding. As soon as this snapshot is obtained, the counsellor will call the client to 'exit' the position.

#### Exit

Exit means literally physically getting out of the gesture completely by taking a step backwards, and shaking it off by shaking hands and arms as if to throw off the energetic sensed experience. The client is asked to move to another physical position in the room that is uncontaminated by the painful experience. If the client goes very deeply into the experience and becomes flooded, then a variation of the exit sequence termed *bamboo*, is used to enable the client to get out, by repeating the exiting sequence. This involves tracing the trauma through the different parts of the body, until the client no longer experiences the wounding sensation and is literally 'out' of the body imprint of the wounding. This is detailed next.

#### Behold

From this exited position, the client looks back at the physical position of the person who was suffering and describes what is going on for that person. From this bridge of safety, the client beholds the dynamics involved as an outside observer. A physically different place is used for the client to reflect upon the trauma he or she has observed. He or she does so with distance, as someone observing a drama on a stage. This is the act of beholding—the client getting a picture of what they have just expressed in bodily form. They are then able to share this with the counsellor and identify what they need to do next with the wounded place. This technique works effectively to enable the client to uncover to him or herself the dynamics of the layers of experience without risking being flooded and caught back inside the wounded place that they have so long defended themselves against. Through this process, the client can go into the site of the inner pain, but rather than be overwhelmed and fall back into some intrusive stress state the client can insert their adult fully present self between the experience of the abuse and their current life. Here the client is standing on the

bridge; capable of beholding the experience, with all their adult resources mobilised to bring about its healing (Sherwood 2000a). On exiting, the client gains perspective on the experience without remaining stuck in the emotionally traumatising place. Very occasionally, a client may not fully exit from the experience just by completing the one exit and they may still feel flooded by the experience. In that case, a 'bamboo sequence' is required.

## A cautionary note: exiting the client: the bamboo sequence

This is a term coined by Tagar to describe the repetitive steps required to exit a difficult experience. The term aims to capture the repetitive rings and spaces on a hamboo stalk.

The bamboo sequence is predicated in three distinct situations when using the enter-exit-behold sequence described above:

- 1 If for any reason the client becomes flooded upon entering into the place in his or her body where the imprint of the trauma is contained and does not wish to remain there.
- 2 The therapist assesses that it is not in the interest of the client's wellbeing to remain there.
- 3 The client exits but still experiences the intense feelings of being inside the experience.

The client can be fully exited by undertaking the following effective procedure:

- calling the client's name out loud
- asking him or her to place their hands on the part of the body that contains the fear
- capturing in their hands the fear
- throwing the fear away from their body making the sound 'g' out loud
- stepping backwards out of that part of the body.

Repeat the above procedure as often as necessary for the person to feel safe and completely outside of the experience. This will differ with individuals. Some persons will exit immediately, some may take two or three repeats and the very occasional person may require several.

Once the client is fully out of the experience, that is fully exited, check by asking the client some basic questions. These include: What is the colour of the walls of the room around you? What is the colour of my hair? What day of the week is it? These questions ensure the client can be assessed to be grounded in the present reality and no longer caught up in an experience belonging to another place and time.

After this, it is recommended that the client breathes deeply and has something to drink to consolidate his/her presence in the present moment. Then consult with the client as to what they wish to do next – whether he/she feels able to pursue the matter being discussed at this session or leave it to another visit (session).

## Application of the enter-exit-behold sequence to clay therapy

In my development of the application of enter—exit—behold to clay therapy the process has been adapted as follows: the client evokes a key experience that captures the relationship with, for example, his or her older sister. He or she senses where in the body they feel most disturbed or moved as they reflect on the experience. He or she gestures the feeling and enters into that part of the body to capture the imprint of the experience of the relationship. Once the client has a sense of it they exit and, rather than just behold their experience abstractly, they make in clay the imprint of the experience. This is very powerful because of its concreteness. The client beholds in a deeper and more directly experiential way. While making the imprint in clay, the client profoundly engages in the experience through the bodily action of moulding, shaping, forming and this intensifies the sensation and the vividness of the experience. This clay work is a very concrete visible depiction of the experience to behold at deeper and deeper layers so that insight and healing may be brought into this place of experience.

### Clay sequence for family of origin

Exercise: To develop a deeply experienced depiction of the imprints of the client's relationship with key members of his or her family of origin (for example, when the client was under 12 years of age).

#### Materials

Working size board, usually about half a metre by half a metre

A water spray bottle

An airtight bucket of standard pottery clay in one of the earth hues

Towel for cleaning hands

Implements for cutting or carving the clay

(Jewellery, in particular rings, should be removed)

#### **Directions**

#### Step 1

- Make the number of hand-sized round balls of clay for the number of
  influential family members (exclude members who you had no immediate
  experience of when you were growing up because they lived elsewhere, had
  died or who were not present in the family stories).
- Add an extra ball to represent the client.

- Begin with working to capture the imprint of your relationship with your father. This father may be biological or adoptive. If more than one father, for example father and stepfather, then do a piece for each one.
- Choose a strongly remembered experience that you recall that represents the essence of your relationship with your father.
- Recall in detail the experience, your age, the physical surroundings and any other physical details.
- Find where in your body you feel the strongest sensation as you recall the experience.

- Gesture the feeling in this part of your body with both hands. Does it feel like a knot, a lump, a hollow (or something else)?
- Literally step into that part of your body by taking a step forward and imagining you are stepping into that part, for example, your heart.
- Sense into the forms and shapes in that part of your body and breathe into them.
- Exit or step backwards out of that part of your body.
- Take a piece of clay and shape it into a form that represents the gesture of the imprint you sensed when you entered into that part.
- When completed, look back on the finished piece and note the feelings that arise as you behold this piece. Breathe with the feelings.

#### Step 3

Repeat this exact sequence with each of the significant members of the family, one at a time, until there is a clay model of experience for each family member.

#### Step 4

On completion of all of the models of experience of family members ask the client to arrange the pieces in relationship to each other as they express his or her experience of living in the family system. This then provides a deeply moving clay psycho-dramatic depiction of the family system that gives the client the opportunity to gain new insights and awareness about their own situation.

### Illustrated case study: Cianti

Cianti is working with her family of origin. She decided that, under the age of 12, there were five key significant relationships in her childhood in her family system.

#### Working with family of origin dynamics

These included her father, mother, brother, her stepfather, and her Uncle Bob.

After having completed the steps outlined above she produced this clay portrait of her experience of her family of origin.

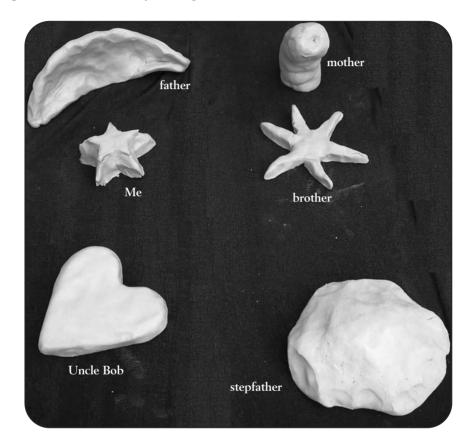


Image 4: Illustration of a family system in clay therapy (Artist: Cianti, February 2003)

Cianti then described her experience of each member depicted in the clay pieces as follows:

My adoptive father: closely associated with nature. He had unconditional love, shown in clay with openness of arms which is how I remember and felt him in my life.

My adoptive mother: She overpowered me and I felt helpless and contained and shadowed in her presence. She felt like a block, there was no giving or receiving just hard and crushing.

My adoptive brother set an unobtainable standard. He was a star so very far away from me because he was older and idealised. I could never live up to his standards. I could not reach him and my mother adored him.

My Uncle Bob was a beautiful loving kind man who I experienced as a force of real love and delight in my childhood. A very beautiful experience.

My stepfather is an empty inverted shell. I felt totally reluctant to do this one. I was confronted by fear, it was choking my throat. I could feel the terror and horror. I was crying, my foot started shaking and my leg was shaking too. I wanted to flee away. The counsellor supported me to stay and be with my little child. I decided I would not abandon my little child. I kept saying to her 'I am here. I will stay with you, I will not abandon you.' I breathed deep breaths. I stayed in my body. I called upon my higher self to connect with me and strengthen me. I called on Mother Nature as my resource. I stopped shaking. I stayed with my inner frightened child and she began to calm down. I did not abandon her. I stayed with her in the face of my stepfather who had hated me, stifled me and taken my innocence by abusing me sexually and emotionally. Today I was, and I am, strongly connected with my inner child whom I can now protect. She is no longer abandoned and at the mercy of this man who abused me. I love my child and I will always endeavour to protect her.

I am a little bud, part of nature in this family of origin. I am fresh and beautiful with lots of potential and I place myself between the two males who loved and protected me: my father and my Uncle Bob.

### Illustrated case study: Anne

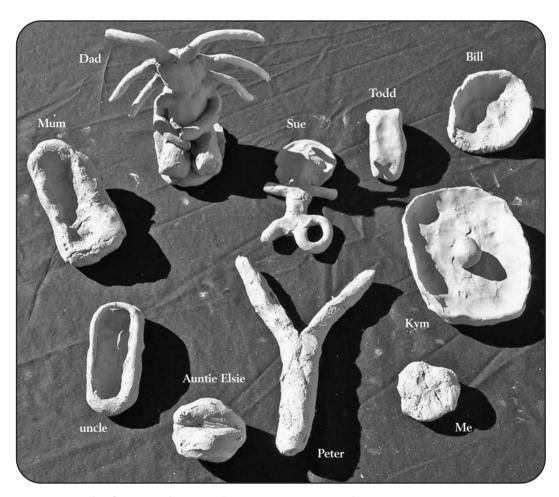


Image 5: Family of origin sculpture in clay (Artist: Anne, November 2002)

My mother: There is the sense of being in a coffin, all of her edges turning inside.

A sense of flatness and not wanting to see what is going on.

My father: Inside there is anger, splintered and exposed with spikes of rage coming out from his heart.

Aunty Elsie stands there as solid as a rock. There is a sense of contentment like a black cat purring and stroking its head against you and being loved. A sense of really being loved unconditionally. Aunty Elsie's husband also gives me the experience of being unconditionally loved and adored like a beautiful daughter. There is a feeling of safety, peacefulness and breathing all throughout my body when I think of him.

Kym has a dark shadow around him and there is a feeling of numbness like a big hole. But deep in the hole there is a pearl.

Bill is the feeling of him protecting me and trying to be a guard. He seems to have layers of weight upon his shoulders.

Todd: I feel hurt, tearful and afraid of him as though he takes the wind out of my sail. Peter has an expansive feeling. His arms are open out wide. The feeling is that he is an angel from heaven. I feel joy and love around him and his arms reach out into the sky.

Grandma: I feel hit in the back by her and have grief and anger and resentment. Why did she not like me? I have a deep hurt in my heart.

Me: I feel very thin and flattened, sheer and transparent. I am not able to absorb hardly anything because I feel so fragile.

As a consequence of this family system depiction, this client's overwhelming feeling was a sense of emptiness. She needed to build up her inner resource, rediscover herself and create boundaries to hold a space for herself.

#### Reflection and directions on this exercise

This is a powerful exercise and for clients with several family members you may need to allow one and half to two hours to complete the pieces and reflect upon them. It is critical that considerable time is allocated after the completion of the clay depictions for reflection, and to process the strong feelings that are inevitably evoked. Much that was below the floorboards surfaces in this exercise with an immediacy and presence that cannot be denied. It is often helpful to photograph the completed family profile so it can be used in later sessions, if required, by the client. I always give the client the option of deciding which pieces they wish to keep and take home with them to work further on and which pieces they wish to recycle and return to the clay bucket. Sometimes we might choose a particular piece or pieces to form the foundation of homework for ongoing consolidation of strengthening processes that emerged in the therapy session. Often, pieces the client does not wish to keep or that have outlived their psychotherapeutic usefulness are returned to the earth by being planted in a garden where the rain will gradually dissolve the form back to its mother.

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### HEALING GRIEF THROUGH CLAY THERAPY

We shall rescue the entombed heart. We shall bring it to the surface, to the light and the air. We shall nurse it and listen respectfully to its story. The heart's story of pain and suffocation, of darkness and yearning. We shall help our feelings to live in the sun. Together again we shall find relief and joy.

Michael Leunig (1990), A Common Prayer

Grief and loss are an endemic plague upon the heart of our clients in the twentyfirst century as they experience losses through death, divorces, accidents, overdoses, suicides, economic restructuring, environmental degradation and species extinction. Everywhere, families, communities and environments are undergoing massive changes that are experienced as losses. The associated grief is an inescapable aspect of today's chaotic and challenged communities of the world. Kissane and Bloch (2002:11) isolate a number of socio-economic changes that have contributed towards change and loss issues among family systems. These include the emergence of no-fault divorce that has seen the number rise to 40 per cent and above, emergence of single-parent families in substantial number and changing attitudes in the younger generation about the longevity of relationships, child rearing, and sexual behaviour and gender divisions. All psychotherapists who have worked deeply with grief and loss know what a complex experience it is. Often, it is simplified by medical practitioners and defined as depression and treated with drugs for depression. Underlying grief and loss experiences are the clusters of feelings that Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1970) so insightfully identified as denial and isolation, anger, bargaining and mood change from hope to depression.

It is essential that all these emotions are worked through with the grieving client, in addition to the grief sequences identified in this chapter. The four tasks of grief work identified by Leick and Davidson-Nielsen (1987) include recognising the loss, releasing the emotions, developing new skills and reinvesting the emotional energy. These are translated into three processes in this body-based model of psychotherapy.

## The three body-based processes of healing grief

Three processes for transforming grief are described by Tagar (personal communication 1998) as follows:

- 1 restoring breath to the shrivelled part of the body or organ that is holding the grief;
- 2 providing the qualities that have been lost to the parts of the body feeling hollowed out by the grief;
- 3 creating a ritual to honour the potential of the meeting that has been lost, broken, destroyed or in some way thwarted.

I have created the following interventions in clay, based on the above processes, to enable the client to work with their experience of grief in a deeply healing way. The processes outlined below have been trialled with children as young as seven, adolescents and adults and they have been profoundly transformative experiences for all age groups.

### Restoring breath to the shrivelled part of the body or organ that is holding the grief

In the body-based model that establishes a strong connection between thoughts/ feelings and body, the breath is experienced as a primary mediator. In Buddhistbased psychotherapies considerable attention is give to the role of the breath. Thich Nhat Hanh (1975) in his work The Miracle of Mindfulness talks about the need to breathe through the pain, and the loss, and to keep breathing in the present moment in order to retain a healthy oneness. Zimberoff and Hartman (1999), in their book Breathwork: Exploring the Frontier of Being and Doing, argue that breath work is a powerful therapeutic modality that provides a means to work on the physical, emotional, spiritual layers of experience and bridge the conscious and unconscious experiences. When someone is experiencing something traumatic, there is the innate response to stop breathing into the part of the body that is energetically experiencing the trauma. This results in a contraction in the natural flow of the breath that is reflected in the energetic/etheric/chi or pranic body that supports the life forces of the physical body. The contraction over time blocks the natural flow of the life force and results eventually in illness in the physical body. Grief then sets into the very body as a cooling, hardening, contracting force and it has a shrivelling effect on the parts of the organism so affected. Breathing meditation has long been used in Buddhist meditation practices to release the blocked breathing and restore the natural flow of the breath. In body-based psychotherapy this process becomes precisely focused on the particular part of the body that holds the grief. Using the same enter-exit-behold procedure detailed earlier (see page 35), a powerfully

penetrating use of the breath to release the grief lodged in the body can be developed through clay therapy.

### Clay sequence 1 for grief: Restoring the breath

Exercise: to release the grief stored in the body by bringing the breath back to that part of the body that has become constricted.

#### Materials

Working size board usually about half a metre by half a metre

A water spray bottle

An airtight bucket of standard pottery clay in one of the earth hues

Towel for cleaning hands

Two good hand-sized balls of clay

Implements for cutting or carving the clay

(Jewellery, in particular rings, should be removed)

#### **Directions**

- Ask the client to recall in detail the experience of grief with such detail and intensity that it evokes a bodily sensation.
- Ask them which part of the body feels most uncomfortable.

#### Step 2

- Get the client to stand up and place their hands on that part of the body and gently gesture the sensation at that place.
- Have the client walk into that precise part of the body by taking a step forward and imagining stepping into that part of the body.
- Ask them to sense how the breath does not move in that part of the body. Is it twisted, blocked, tearing, an empty hole, flattened?
- Get the client to step backward out of this place and make the shape of how
  the breath is not moving in the ball of clay. This is the imprint of how the life
  force is contracted in this part of their body.
- Ask the client, on completion of the clay piece, to talk briefly about their feelings as they related to this clay shape.

#### Step 3

Spend time with the client (from 5 to 30 minutes), breathing into this place
until the client experiences the breath flowing freely. During this time, the
client may weep as the flow of the etheric force is restored and the breath
flows again through the previously contracted part of the body.

- Now have the client go back into the same place on the body and sense the shape of how the breath is now moving.
- Exit and make the shape in clay.
- The difference between the first clay shape and the last indicates the amount of change that has been achieved in the exercise and how much more breath work may still be required to heal the site.
- The final clay shape should reflect a progressive change from contraction to expansion, from concave to more convex.

For homework, get the client to continue the breathing exercise if the shape still remains reasonably contracted.

## Clay sequence 2 for grief: Resourcing the lost qualities

Exercise: providing the qualities that have been lost to the parts of the body feeling hollowed out by the grief.

#### Repeat Steps 1 and 2 above.

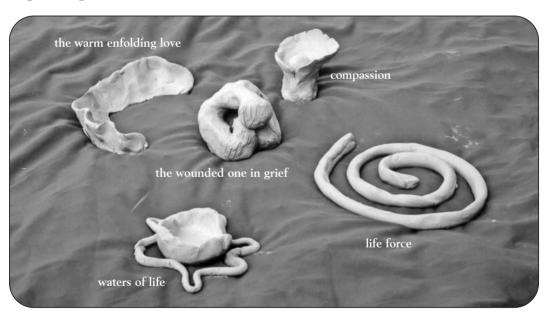


Image 6: Grief and loss sequence (Artist: Clive, October 2003)

- Place one hand on the part of the body most disturbed by the feelings of grief.
- Step back into the site of the loss and answer the question: 'What qualities have I lost in my life as a result of this loss?'

- When these qualities are identified, step backwards and exit the site of the grief.
- Make each of these qualities in clay.

#### Step 4

- Choose the quality you wish to acquire first.
- Recall somebody who represents that quality.
- Imagine what that quality feels like.
- Stand in the gesture of that quality.
- Breathe in that quality into the part of the body that is wounded by the grief.
- Choose a colour for that quality and breathe in that colour.
- Find a sound for that quality.
- Give yourself that sound.
- Make the quality in clay.

#### Step 5

• Repeat Step 4 for each of the missing qualities.

#### Step 6

- Have the client repeat Step 5 on a daily basis.
- Brainstorm with the client ways to reorganise their life to increase their exposure to each particular quality through their personal and social experiences.

Illustrated below is the image of the wounded one suffering the grief after having received the qualities needed to bring about recovery. The recovering one is standing above the old experience of the wounded one.



Image 7: The recovering one contrasted with the wounded one (Artist: Clive, October 2003)

Clive describes the healing process of the above sequences as follows:

In all the resourcing process it was most important for me to not only feel the compassion but to be able to give it. When I did the enfolding love, I felt it within, but it had to be given. Perhaps I should define my grief on this issue in the future more clearly as grief at not being able to be present for my children for so long; not able to support and protect them. Now that I am more able to fill the emptiness within, with the love and compassion I am able to radiate that as an enfolding quality to the world. When I stood and projected just that I felt a beautiful response.

## Clay sequence 3 for grief: Honouring the potential of the relationship/attribute

Exercise: Creating a ritual to honour the potential of the meeting that has been lost, broken, destroyed or in someway thwarted.

#### Step 1

- Enter back into the place of the body that is the site of grief but has now received the qualities it needs to recover.
- Focus on how the qualities are healing the wounded place in the body.
- Step backwards (exit) and gesture with your whole body the shape of the healed one.
- Make the form in clay.
- Walk around the room in the gesture of the healed one.

#### Step 2

• Create a ritual using the healed one made in clay to honour the potential of the relationship or the attribute of the person that has been lost through accident or illness (or for other reasons). This may be done in many ways but must involve the body in the activity. It could involve planting a flower garden to honour the potential of the meeting of the two persons; it may be the planting of a tree, a dance, a poem, a drawing to honour the lost potential.

## Illustrated case study: grief recovery from the loss of a loved one.

This is the experiential description of a client (Pam, 2003) working through their grief and loss process:

I placed my hands onto my heart and stepped into the site of grief evoking my memory of the sudden death of Tom— not yet two years. I feel the hard constricted solid mass that has wedged its way into my heart and I am flooded by my loss and I am overwhelmed by my sister and her children's loss. I create my first piece of clay.

I entered back in to find the qualities that been lost and the pain is too unbearable, I leave the room and I am assisted by Norah. She talks to me in a gentle voice that helps to slowly break loose the stones that have gathered. I am asked what qualities have been lost. All I can see is his shining face and I search the qualities that he had. So many, of brightness, fun, joy, laughter, love, acceptance ... I could find them all and as I did each one would be replaced with the pain of his life, of the depression he suffered for five years before he died, of a man searching for his soul. ... I kept seeing my sister and Monique her second daughter, I could see myself in their kitchen and I remember the first stone that was lodged, when Monique would not come home ... she was 17 using drugs, drinking, and eating ... I felt helpless and useless.

... so I search my grief and for what I have lost and I realise it is the loss of my sister and her family's vitality, support and stability. My sister is the one who

was always there for me growing up and so was her husband. I was only 12 years old when they married and I looked to them as the ideal couple and mother and father. They were both really caring; they listened to me as a teenager. They were supportive and gave good advice. I found the quality that was lost and I evoked the strength and stability, so that now I can give back this quality to my sister and be there for her and her children.

When I entered back into the place of grief and loss, I could see it had transformed into a flower and I had a strong sense of a wildflower, just like the ones he loved.

#### Directions and reflection on the exercise

This is a powerfully transforming exercise. The three components of it may be achieved by a client in one hour if the breathing exercise is not a lengthy process. However, the process can be broken into three one-hour sessions if preferred. Clay usually slows down the inner process and involves more time than verbal work. However, this is most desirable because it leaves a lasting imprint on the energetic layers of the physical, etheric and astral bodies and as such should bring sustainable change from grief and loss to recovery and rebirth. Clay in grief work has the potential to mobilise the client's healing resources and to concretely and directly facilitate, through the engaging of the client's I AM, the rise of the Phoenix from the ashes of his or her experience of grief.

#### THE HEALING ART OF CLAY THERAPY

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# TRANSFORMING FEAR THROUGH CLAY THERAPY

There is courage involved if you want to become truth.

There is a broken open place in a lover.

Where are those qualities of bravery and sharp compassion...

Rumi

All of us carry fear. It is the primitive emotional response of pain and acts as a warning to keep away from the wounded place. However, with increasing self-awareness comes the clear consciousness that fears that are not encountered run our lives in destructive ways, consuming our clarity, sabotaging our relationships and poisoning even the clearest space in our lives. To empower ourselves to become who we may be in the world, we first confront our fears, for the terrorist and the saboteur lie within the hearts and minds of us all.

Fear comes in many degrees. There is fear that is a passing thought only, then there is stress. There is the fear that grips the mind and preoccupies the stage of the life, often manifesting as anxiety or panic attacks or, in its severe forms, as obsessive compulsive disorder. Stress results in recurrent patterns of arousal and tension in the body. These patterns can be debilitating and in the long term result in exhaustion (Sehnert 1981:21). The uncertainties and regular changes in contemporary life often create patterns of stress. Panic attacks are identified by Ingham (1993) as severe experiences of stress. In fact, most of the literature tries to devise ways to manage panic disorders. However, in many conventional therapies the root of the disorder, the basic traumatic experience underlying the panic attack, is rarely uncovered.

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The clay therapy sequence is particularly valuable here because it uncovers the very core, the root of the panic attack, so that it may be transformed and healed. Whenever a client presents with the desire to get rid of some fear then this sequence in clay is useful, for not only does it give the client insight into the root of the fear which is so often hidden, but also tools and resources to transform the fear. This clay sequence is not recommended for clients with severe anxiety disorders or obsessive compulsive disorders. In the case of an unknown fear issue that the client wishes to explore in clay, much new information can arise for the client, some of which may be distressing. The aim, however, is not to distress the client or leave the client in a distressing place, but simply to gather sufficient information about the trauma to bring about the healing.

Here, I remind you of the 'bamboo' sequence (see page 38) which gives a solid outline of how to exit the client from any experiences they do not wish to remain caught up in. It is only required in the rare case when the standard enter–exit–behold sequence is not sufficient to exit the client.

Working with fear in this clay sequence is not recommended for persons with high levels of vulnerability, histories of severe mental disorders, fragile senses of self, and low levels of life force. It is not suitable for children or adolescents.

This fear sequence has four steps:

- 1 the site of the fear
- 2 the gesture of the one trapped in the site of the fear
- 3 the quality needed to heal the fear
- 4 the healed one.

### Fear sequence in clay therapy

Exercise: To uncover the cause of the fear, find and apply the qualities required to bring healing to the site of the fear in the body.

#### **Materials**

Working size board usually about half a metre by half a metre

A water spray bottle

An airtight bucket of standard pottery clay in one of the earth hues

Towel for cleaning hands

Implements for cutting or carving the clay

Three to four good hand-sized balls of clay

(Jewellery, in particular rings, should be removed)

#### Step 1: the site of the fear

- Evoke an experience of fear. Recall the details of the place, the persons and the incident.
- Sense the part of the body which feels most disturbed by the recollection.
- Place your hand on that part of the body.
- Take a step forward into that part of the body.
- Breathe into that part of the body and observe the shape of how the breath is not flowing freely in that place.
- Step out and make the shape of it in clay.

#### Step 2: the gesture of the one trapped in the site of the fear

• Visualise stepping into the site of fear that you have just made in clay.

#### THE HEALING ART OF CLAY THERAPY

- Place your hand on the same part of the body that you originally entered into and stand in this site of fear again.
- With your whole body, become the shape of the gesture of how you are trapped in that place (represented by the first piece of clay).
- While in this gesture describe the feelings you sense when your body is in this gesture.
- Describe your earliest memories of your body being in this gesture.
- Exit from the gesture by stepping backwards and make the gesture of the suffering one in the second piece of clay.

#### Step 3: the quality needed to heal the fear

- Hold the gesture of the suffering one in your hands.
- Sense into the quality needed to assist the recovery.
- Make the quality in clay.

#### Step 4: the healing one

- Apply the quality required to the wounded one.
- Recall somebody who represents that quality.
- Imagine what that quality feels like.
- Stand in the gesture of that quality.
- Breathe in that quality into the part of the body that is wounded by the fear.
- Choose a colour for that quality and breathe in that colour.
- Find a sound for that quality.
- Give yourself that sound.
- Make the image of the wounded fearful one after it has received the qualities it requires to recover. This is the healing one.

#### Transforming fear

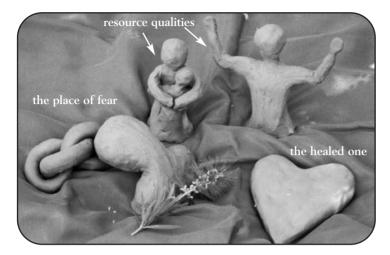


Image 8: The fear sequence



**Image 9:** The qualities needed to recover



**Image 10:** The healed one

Artist: Shirley, October 2003

## Illustrated case study of fear

Clive describes his story. His presenting issue was fear when a person responded to him in a certain way:

I stepped in and the fear energy felt like I was spreading all limbs out and falling. I felt that I was being pushed and had no control. When I entered the second time I was in the gesture of crouching with legs and arms out. People were holding me and were very angry. I felt like I was in Germany in a medieval castle with a group of people. I shout at them: 'Don't do it! You are mistaken I don't deserve this!' I see the turrets and the green hills around. They throw me off the parapet and I was killed instantly on jagged rocks below. While falling I have a sense of betrayal. Why me? The answer comes from within me: scapegoat for

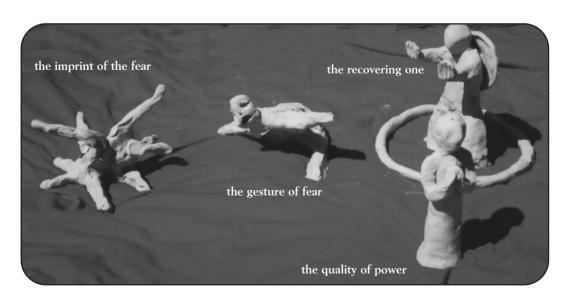


Image 11: A fear sequence (Artist: Clive, October 2003)

another's actions. I am made to take the blame and suffer the effects of the angry mob. It feels like some sort of disaster had occurred.

The quality I need to recover is power to be in command, a sense of selfempowerment. I sculpture me standing strong and unafraid. I have a shield around my back to protect me from betrayal. I speak to them. 'Listen to me.' I can now stand upright and serene, in charge of myself, no need to panic.



Image 12: The recovered one free from fear (Artist: Clive, October 2003)

The artist describes the above as follows:

Me, strong and unafraid, standing on the ground feet slightly apart with my hands up in front of me to ward off. I have a shield on my back to protect my back. I have a circle of protection around me. I speak to them, 'LISTEN TO ME!'

#### Directions and reflection on the exercise

There may not always be time to sculpture the four pieces in a one-hour session. It is essential for the client to do all the steps. Sometimes Step 4 is an excellent step to repeat for homework. So for example, every day for a week the client repeats Step 3, resourcing the fearful part of him or herself with the necessary quality as described above with breathing, gesture, colour, sound. On the day before the next session, the client makes the healed one in clay and brings it to the session. This has proven to be a very powerful and effective process for creating a healing imprint and image in the place of the fear.

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# TRANSMUTING ANGER THROUGH CLAY THERAPY

These natural qualities of clay allow it to be a therapeutic medium in which destruction and creation can both occur.

Essentially therapy is just that.

N. Bolton

Dealing with anger and managing anger are commonly presenting issues among clients. Too often in my view, anger is treated as a phenomenon of substance, when it is only a symptom camouflaging a deep inner wounding. For example, McKay, Rogers and McKay (1989) in their classic text *When Anger Hurts*: *Quieting the storm within* concentrate on strategies for managing anger outbursts like controlling stress, healthy self-talk, response choice rehearsal and problem-solving communication. They treat anger like a substance in itself, while work with clay reveals anger simply to be smoke. The real fire is the deep-seated experience within, which is triggered by a similarity in presentation with the person or situation triggering the anger. The deep-seated wounding needs to be addressed. Only then will anger not continue to arise. Until the wounding can be identified and the healing of the wounding effected, one cannot expect a permanent and far-reaching extinguishing of the anger.

In this body-based model of psychotherapy, anger would be defined as a reaction characterised by increased breathing, pulse rate, heart beat and the absence of full clear breathing in the body resulting in the lack of higher consciousness or I AM being fully present to the experience. The anger response is not in proportion to the trigger incident and the I AM or place of insight

appears to be absent when a person is angry (Tagar 1998:40). The person has no insight into the wounding because he or she is consumed by the pace at which the anger overtakes them. Like a bushfire out of control, anger proceeds at an uncontrollable rate.

I have observed in clinical practice that clay is the ideal medium for working with anger. The quick explosiveness of anger allows no time for insight into the dynamics that underlie anger. With the use of clay the whole process of anger can be slowed down and the client can step by step move backwards through the anger from the explosion, to the place where the tension builds up just prior to the explosion, then backwards again, to discover the underlying wounding in a very concrete and observable manner. Then the deep-seated root of the anger may be seen and the real issue that needs to be addressed to stop repetition of the anger, can be identified and healed.

Anger reactions may be either imploded or exploded, as determined by the pattern of breathing. In imploded anger the breath is held within and the gesture is one of internal collapse and implosion. With imploded anger the internal organs are eaten away by the acidifying anger and the resultant health problems are ulcers, arthritis and chronic fatigue. With imploded anger there are secondary reactions identified by Tagar (1998:16) as sarcasm, cynicism, bitterness, gossip, revengeful actions, and malicious actions. Exploded anger is where the breath explodes out and takes over other people's space. Exploded anger is accompanied by yelling, screaming, hitting, breaking and very visible displays of destruction that immediately follow the trigger. The resultant body illnesses are high blood pressure, strokes, heart attacks and inflammatory conditions.

The root of anger is difficult to identify and many people can testify to being defeated in trying to manage it. Tagar developed a reaction sequence which requires the client to slow down the anger reaction and move slowly backwards from the explosion, to the build-up, to the original wounding (conversation, 1998). I have translated this abstraction into a distinct clay sequence which helps the client and counsellor to follow this complex process back to the root of the anger, and to effect healing at the root cause of the problem. This anger sequence in clay has been conducted in Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, South Africa, among indigenous Africans, Australian Aboriginals, Europeans and Asians with the same powerfully transforming effect. It is effective for ages 7 to 60 plus, producing insight and awareness according to the age and the maturity of the client.

Clay is an ideal material for absorbing the strong emotions of anger and for allowing expression of these emotions. Pounding, slashing, throwing balls of clay on a board on the ground enable the client to express anger which Kramer (1971) describes as 'chaotic discharge'. Henley (2002:56) points out that clay also facilitates reintegration of the chaotic mood that has been expressed.

### Imploded anger

Prior to commencing this clay sequence for discovering the wounding underlying the anger reaction, it is essential to explode imploded anger. Simply stated, the client must express suppressed anger, rage and frustration so it may be observed through outer actions and gestures. This is done by:

- 1 finding the part of the body where the anger resides
- 2 placing one's hands on that part of the body

- 3 breathing in and exploding outwards with a loud 'g' towards a wall
- 4 this is repeated several times until the client can see their anger dripping down the wall.

If the anger is very imploded the client may begin by throwing balls of clay on a board or on the ground and saying 'g'. They may throw balls of clay on the ground on a board with force. They may go outside and throw clay against an unpainted brick wall. The client may tear the clay apart so it lies on the floor in fragments. Henley (2002:127) cites Macks (1990) who describes a woman who dug her nails into the clay repeatedly, slashing it with her fingernails. All suppressed or imploded anger must be first exploded. The variety of ways is almost as endless as the imaginative possibilities. This stage is critical because it provides socially acceptable ways for expressing frustration, rage and conflict. Clay being a solid earthy medium can absorb a great deal of anger and rage.

## Clay sequences for anger

Exercise 1: to gain insight into the root of anger, and to expose the original wounding which underlies the anger.

#### **Materials**

Working size board usually about half a metre by half a metre

A water spray bottle

An airtight bucket of standard pottery clay in one of the earth hues

Towel for cleaning hands

Three good hand-sized balls of clay

Implements for cutting and carving clay

(Jewellery, in particular rings, should be removed)

#### **Directions**

#### Step 1: To express the exploded anger

- Recall a situation where you exploded your anger. Remember the persons, the setting, the time, the incident of dispute.
- Sense into the part of your body that is most uncomfortable when you recall this incident.
- Place your hand on that part of the body.
- Step forward into that part of your body.
- Sense into the anger and capture it with your hands.
- Explode it against a wall with a 'g'.
- Repeat several times until you can see the shape of your exploded anger dripping down the wall.
- Exit and make the shape of the anger in clay.

If the anger is not clearly exploded, then repeat Step 1 again and again. Imploded anger may be created as a block, a round ball, a flat block, a solid square but in all cases is solid, impenetrable, and shows no signs of breaking out.

Exploded anger takes any of the following forms:



Image 13: Exploded anger (Artist: Julia, October 2003)



Image 14: Exploded anger (Artist: Anita, October 2003)



Image 15: Exploded anger (Artist: Cianti, March 2003)

Shattered pieces, pointed arms or octopus arms waving around, arrowlike arms emanating from the mass, or a spreading out mass of clay are all forms of exploded anger.

#### Step 2: The place of suffering: the torture chamber

- Enter again into the place in your body where the anger is experienced.
- This time sense backwards to the time before you explode.
- This is the place where the pressure builds up before you explode.
- Feel the pressure build up in this place.
- Sense how you are trapped in this place of pressure. Is it like being caught between a vice, in a prison, under a rock (or otherwise confined)?
- Exit from this place by stepping backwards and make the shape of the place in which you are trapped in clay.



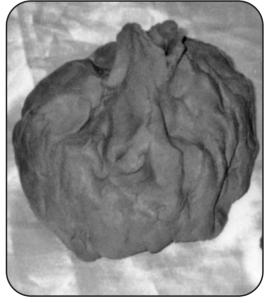


Image 17: Torture chamber

Artist: Shirley, October 2003

Image 16: Torture chamber (Artist: Julia, October 2003)

#### Step 3: Uncovering the one who suffers: the wounded one

- Enter back into the place of the body where the anger has been sensed.
- Step into the torture chamber.
- Enter fully into the gesture with your whole body of how you are trapped in the torture chamber.
- Sense the shape of your body and identify the feelings you have when your body is in this shape.
- Sense into your earliest memory of your body being in this shape.
- Exit and make the shape of the gesture of suffering in clay.
- Note down your feelings and your earliest memory of being in this shape.

Step 3 uncovers the root of the anger. The wounded place in the psyche is attempting to protect itself with a primitive defence of anger. This wounded one becomes the focus for the healing of this particular manifestation of anger.



Image 18: The wounded one

Artist: Cianti, March 2003

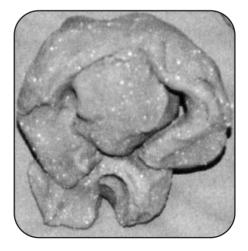


Image 19: The wounded one

Artist: Elizabeth, October 2003

#### Exercise 2: To begin to heal the wounded one.

The wounded one uncovered through the clay sequence will have a wound that, although unique and which must be identified as such, falls into two categories of healing sequences.

#### 1 Resourcing

This is required when the wound is a result of absence, or depletion. This may mean absence of love, connectedness, warmth, tenderness, joy, rest, peace or many other qualities. The imprint of the wounding is like an empty, hollowed-out part of the client's energetic system which is causing trauma because of its emptiness. To build recovery here, the therapist needs to bring back the missing quality to the place by engaging the client's highest consciousness, and to re-image and recreate the missing quality as follows:

Apply the quality required to the wounded one.

- Recall somebody who represents that quality.
- Imagine what that quality feels like.
- Stand in the gesture of that quality.
- Breathe in that quality into the part of the body that is wounded by the fear.
- Choose a colour for that quality and breathe in that colour.
- Find a sound for that quality.
- Give yourself that sound.
- Make the image in clay of the wounded one after it has received the qualities it requires to recover. This is the healing one.

There are various ways in which the therapist can undertake resourcing, and the above is suggestive not prescriptive. However, in the body-based energetic model

of psychotherapy, the energetic imprints are best changed by energetic languages that involve the body such as gesture, sounding, drawing and sculpting, moving. We would also argue that memory is in the body cells not in some abstract place called 'mind'.

#### 2 Empowering

When the wound is a result of an invasion of toxic energy through words, actions, behaviour of another person, or situation that has been experienced as an invasion of the client's energetic system, empowerment is required. This is because the client has experienced a collapse of personal space, collapsed boundaries, defeat, abuse and lack of power to keep his or her energetic field clear (Sherwood and Tagar 2000). The task is to remove the energy experienced by the client as a toxic invasion. This is done by an empowerment sequence developed by Tagar. 'Unblocking' is the major sequence used for empowerment. This sequence helps the client develop the following:

- 1 a clear picture of the internal dynamic resulting in the disempowerment experience
- 2 the character, gesture, shape and sound of the invading or pressuring power
- 3 the effect of the invading force on his or her own vulnerable part.

'Unblocking' consists of re-playing the dynamics of invasion in sound and gesture, leading to the stirring of the internal, previously suppressed natural reaction against it. That natural response is practised until the client feels able to confront the initial force without a reaction. This empowerment process is documented in detail by Sherwood and Tagar in the case study of the nurse client Mary (2000a: 45–46). In essence, in clay it comprises the following:

• Enter back into the wounded one you have made in clay through the same

- position in your body that you entered in to begin the anger sequence.
- While inside with the wounded one describe how the force attacks you. Do
  you feel it is like a hammer, an axe, an arrow, a twisting (or something else)?
   What is the rate at which the force attacks you?
- Exit and hit a cushion with the gesture of how the force is experienced as hitting you.
- Find a sound that goes with the shape of the gesture. Choose the sound that feels most like the shape of the force. It is the correct sound when it represents the shape of the gesture of the force and your body dislikes the sound.
- Ensure you are well resourced from within to face the sound.
- Practise pushing the force away with a strong earth sound like a 'b', 'd' or 'g', or 'p' without making the sound of the force of the invasion.
- When you are effective in doing this without the sound, then add the sound of
  the invading force. The counsellor says the sound just once, the client pushes it
  away with a counter sound that gives the client renewed strength. Repeat this
  last process as many times as required, until the sound no longer affects you.
  This means that you have no revulsion or aversion to the sound of the force any
  more.
- Stand in the new position of strength.
- Use your hands in the stop gesture to keep the force out and speak out with a 'd' at the same time to reinforce the stop gesture.
- Make the gesture of the new strong empowered position in clay.
- Make the image of the guard around this new strong empowered one in clay.
- For homework repeat the gesture of strength daily, with the sound of 'd', as you hold your personal space against the force.

#### THE HEALING ART OF CLAY THERAPY

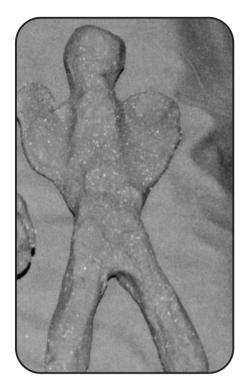


Image 20: The recovering one(Artist: Elizabeth, October 2003)



Image 21: The recovering one (Artist: Rena, October 2003)

# Illustrated case study: Anger sequence

The trigger incident for Rena was being oppressed as a five-year-old child by a dominating adult forcing her to do things she did not wish to do. Rena tells her story:

Recalling a moment of imploded anger was when my daughter Charlie was only two years old and my mother in-law had given her a label brand t-shirt. It was very expensive and was midriff with an overlay of lace. Charlie refused to wear it at all because it was scratchy on her tummy. Charlie and I were in a room with my mother-in-law, father-in-law and two other adults when mother-in-law discovered Charlie would not wear her top. She became furious and aimed her anger at Charlie, telling her she was a horrid grand daughter who didn't deserve

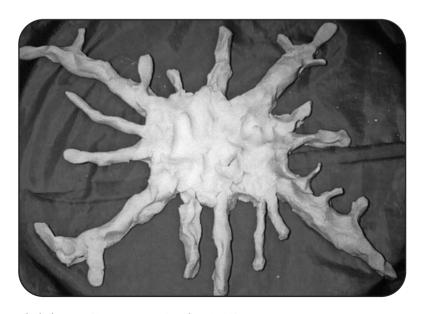


Image 22: Exploded anger (Artist: Rena, October 2003)

the good things in life and that she would never buy her another gift. I wanted to physically attack the woman, but instead I was very calm and told her she had no right to speak to any child that way, and what was wrong with the other adults in the room that they would allow this kind of thing to occur, I picked Charlie up and walked out of the room.

I stepped into the sensation in my chest, and once the anger was exploded it looked like a tentacled monster.

The torture chamber was a piece of granite rock with a hole in it, just large enough for me to fit in, but not enough room to move or breathe, and there was another rock placed on top which was too heavy to shift.

The one who suffers was me at age four perhaps. I would play under the house we lived in—it was raised on stilts—with boys from next door. One day I went under the house as usual and before I knew what was happening, I was being held down by two of them while one pulled off my pants. I cried and screamed at them, and they let me go. I remember being very confused, sad and lonely. I told no one and didn't play with the boys next door again.

The qualities required to heal were trust, love and comfort.

Pink was the colour with a slow rocking side to side motion and the sound was 'mmmm' as one would comfort a small child.

The healing one is me after I had breathed in the qualities.

The image of the anger was exploded, its tentacles reaching out and taking over the space.



Image 23: Torture chamber

Artist: Rena, October 2003



Image 24: The wounded one

Artist: Rena, October 2003

The torture chamber was a solid rock-like structure within which the suffering one was trapped. There is a rock-like top holding the suffering one inside the torture chamber.

Once inside the torture chamber, there was a little one profoundly crushed and curled up in gesture of utter hopelessness and defeat. When entering into the gesture the feelings aroused were a sense of betrayal. The client identified their earliest memory of this betrayal when they were five years old.

After an empowerment sequence to restore the space of the wounded one, the gesture changed into one of power, strength and uprightness.

#### Reflection and discussion

It requires a minimum of two, one-hour sessions to complete both of the sequences in clay. It is important that both sequences are done in clay. The first sequence simply reveals the deep root of the anger, the wounded one. It is essential to follow it up with a session which works to heal the wounded one,

either through resourcing or empowerment, depending on the needs of the wounded one. It is also important to remind the client that in the face of the trigger to their anger they must visualise holding the wounded one and protecting it by either giving it the missing quality or by defending it from the force of invasion by repeating under their breath 'd', 'd', 'd' while visualising the guard. The homework is critical in these sequences to ensure that the new learning and new imprint is consolidated in the client's energetic system.

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Sherwood, P & Tagar, Y 2000b, 'Experience awareness tools for preventing burnout in nurses', *Australian Journal of Holistic Nursing* 7(3): 45–7.

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# REMOVING BLOCKS TO SPEAKING ONE'S TRUTH

Your defects are the way that glory gets manifested.

Rumi

The quality of human lives is comprised by not speaking their truth.

Everywhere—on the political, communal and personal arenas—the struggle for the right to speak one's truth continues. As psychotherapists, our arena of action is to support the speaking up of truth in the individual life. Unspoken truth of who I AM, and of what I need, and what I experience, is the unconstructive dynamic underlying much neurosis and psychosis. When I explore with depressed clients the core of their malaise, it appears to be that they experience no space for themselves to be who they uniquely are. They have consistently been in circumstances where they have not experienced the power to speak up for themselves as they are, nor to create opportunities in their lives to cultivate and expand who they are with all their unique potential and possibilities as a human being. In this model of a human being, we would say that their I AM is unable to realise its potential. Removing blocks to speaking one's truth is one of the tasks required to facilitate the reclaiming of a space for the self to speak its truth. Clay provides a very concrete observable medium for illustrating the block and the force required to break through the block.

## Clay sequences for blocked speaking

Exercise: To remove the block to speaking and to speak one's truth.

#### **Materials**

Working size board usually about half a metre by half a metre

A water spray bottle

An airtight bucket of standard pottery clay in one of the earth hues

Towel for cleaning hands

Three good hand-sized balls of clay

Implements for cutting and carving the clay

(Jewellery, in particular rings, should be removed)

#### **Directions**

#### Step 1: To express the shape of the block

Ask the client to recall an incident in which they did not speak up. Concretise the details of the situation as much as possible by questioning him or her about the situation, the details of the event and the descriptions of the other persons involved.

- Find the part of the body that feels most uncomfortable on recalling the incident.
- Step into that part of the body and sense how the breath is not moving in that part of the body.
- Exit or step backwards then gesture the shape of the block.
- Make the block in clay.

#### Step 2: To make an implement to break through the block

- Visualise what implement would be needed to break through the block.
- Examples may be an axe, sword, blowtorch, chainsaw.
- Make the implement in clay.

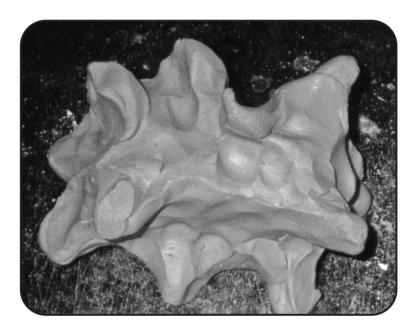


Image 25: The block (Artist: Anita, October 2002)

#### Step 3: Breaking through the block

- Enter back into the place of blocked speaking in the body.
- Apply the implement to the block using a sound and gesture of the implement.
- Repeat the sound and gesture of the implement until you experience that the block has been broken through.
- Exit or step backwards and make in clay the shape of the block that has been broken through.

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Image 26: The implement (Artist: Anita, October 2002)



Image 27: The implement (the sword) breaking the block (Artist: Anita, October 2002)



**Image 28:** Speaking up after breaking the block

Artist: Anita, October 2002

This illustration demonstrates that the block has been clearly removed. There is now a clear passageway for the speaking up.

#### Step 4: Speaking up

- Speak up to the person or situation and speak out loud what you did not say but now are able to say.
- Repeat this process until you sense the power of speaking up.

# Illustrated case study: Speaking up

Julia worked on the block in her voice when a family member did not acknowledge her at a recent family gathering.

#### Step 1: the block

Julia experienced discomfort in the chest. When she stepped in she sensed a huge wall coming down and crushing her, stopping her from speaking up for herself.

#### Step 2: the implement

Julia decided very clearly that she needed a sword and the sound must be strong 'ka!, ka!'. The sword must be applied with great force to this very substantial and seemingly impenetrable block.

#### Step 3: breaking through the block

Julia stepped into the place where the block was lodged and kept slashing at it with the sword and making the sound. Some bits of the block broke off and other bits were torn off. She then stepped out and made the broken block in clay.

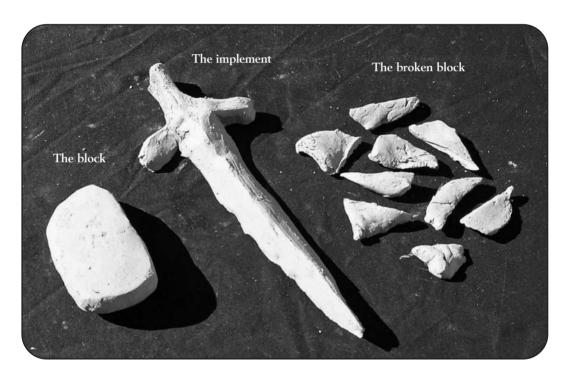


Image 29: Breaking through the block (Artist: Julia, October 2003)

#### Step 4: speaking out

She stood there and spoke out strongly:

I feel hurt and upset when you do not acknowledge that I am here.

This case illustrates that the block is not completely broken through. The client recognised and chose to do further work on this using an empowerment sequence outlined on pages 78–9.

#### Reflection and discussions

This process is particularly suitable for children from the age of seven, adolescents, as well as adults and can be done singularly with a client or in small groups. It is important to ensure that the tool is strong enough to break the block and it is sometimes useful to spend time exploring what substance the block is composed of. Is it brick, stone, wood, metal?—because this will affect the fit with the chosen implement. Also when the block is only partially broken through, it is necessary to repeat the application of the implement to the block.

During the process of speaking up, when the new imprint is being created that will support the client in their self-respect, it is very beneficial to enlarge the imprint of speaking up. This can be done by following the speaking up with standing in the gesture of speaking up, visualising the speaking up, and if time permits, making the gesture of speaking up in clay.

#### References

Barks, C 2002, The soul of Rumi, Harper Row, NY.

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# CREATING COMMUNICATION IN COUPLE WORK

I mirrored the summits in you and the bending slopes, and even the passing flocks of your thoughts and your desires.

Kahlil Gibran

Difficulties with communication are at the heart of many couples presenting in therapy. It is often astonishing for the therapist to view how little active and effective listening occurs in the communication process between many couples. There is so often much unintentional hurt arising from poor listening skills. This refers to the inability by an individual to distinguish between his or her feelings and his or her partner's feelings.

This exercise is designed to facilitate the development of accurate empathetic listening skills between couples and to assist them in separating out their feelings from their partner's feelings. The idea for this sequence emerged in a conversation with Tagar in 1996. There are three steps to this sequence to be completed by each of the partners in turn.

## Clay sequence for couple communication

Exercise: to develop accurate empathetic listening skills and to identify and separate out one's own feelings from one's partner's feelings.

#### **Materials**

Two working size boards usually about half a metre by half a metre

A water spray bottle

An airtight bucket of standard pottery clay in one of the earth hues

Towel for cleaning hands

Three good hand-sized balls of clay for each partner

Implements for cutting or carving

(Jewellery, in particular rings, should be removed)

#### Directions

Have the couple sit face to face. Ask the person who volunteers to tell a story first, to select a short incident that has happened to them that has strong feelings attached to it. Ask them to select an incident that can be related to the other person in five minutes and which can be repeated with accuracy three times.

Step 1: To sculpture in clay the shape representing the general feeling of the story recounted to you by your partner

- The speaking partner recounts the incident in five minutes.
- The listening partner senses into the general feeling of the story.

 The listening partner, upon completion of the story, selects a ball of clay and makes the general feeling in clay.

# Step 2: To sculpture in clay the shape representing the feelings of the person telling the story

- The speaking partner recounts the incident in five minutes.
- The listening partner senses into the speaking partner's feeling of the story.
- The listening partner, upon completion of the story, selects a ball of clay and makes the speaking partner's feeling in clay.

# Step 3: To sculpture in clay the shape representing the listener's response to the story

- The speaking partner recounts the incident in five minutes.
- The listening partner senses into his or her own feeling of the story.
- The listening partner, upon completion of the story, selects a ball of clay and makes his or her own feeling in response to the story in clay.

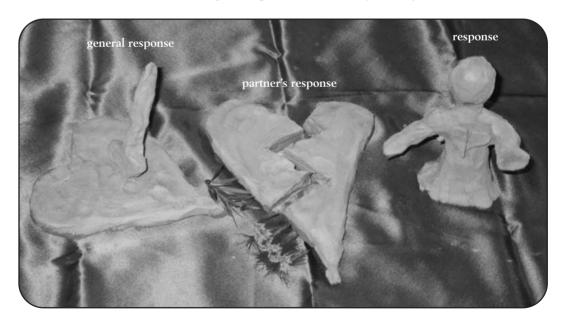


Image 30: Couple communication (Artist: Shirley, October 2003)

#### Interpretation of exercise

On completion of all three sculptures the sculptor (listening partner) asks the storyteller (speaking partner) which one of the pieces most closely resembles the storyteller's feelings about the story they have told. If the storyteller chooses piece two, this indicates the sculptor has a high ability to accurately enter into another person's feelings. If the storyteller chooses piece one, then this indicates that the sculptor tends to immediately sense into another person's feelings, and their first response is usually more accurate than a later response to another person's feelings. If the storyteller selects piece three, then this indicates that the sculptor of the pieces has difficulty sensing into another person's feelings accurately and distinguishing them from his or her own feelings, except in the very rare case where the pieces sculptured in two and three are identical.

Now proceed to repeat the above exercise but on this occasion the roles are reversed.

# Case study of couple communication experience

This case study was completed by two friends. Julia told the story of how her new relationship with a man was tearing her in two between him and her children. She felt as though she was becoming two persons with two lives. It seemed impossible to satisfy the demands and needs of both the partner and the children. The first piece made by the listener was of a person cut in half. When Julia retold the same story the second piece made was that of the storyteller's feelings, which was a heart torn apart with an arrow piercing it. The final piece represented the listener's

response to the story and here she sculpted a strong upright figure protecting her children from the force. The three pieces are illustrated below:

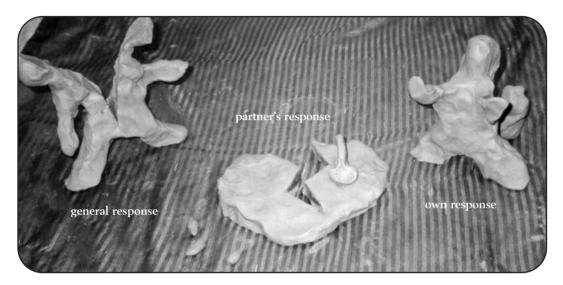


Image 31: Couple communication (Artist: Julia, October 2003)

The client chooses the first piece as representing her feelings most accurately, demonstrating that the listener's first response is very empathetic. The client also saw the second piece as reflecting her feelings but not so powerfully. The client did not identify with the last piece as her primary feeling. This illustrates that the listener has good empathetic qualities and can distinguish her feelings from the client's feelings.

#### Reflection and discussion

In couple work this exercise is very powerful because it creates time and a visible space of the couple to reflect on each other's feelings. The clay medium creates very concrete images of different feelings that cannot be easily dismissed as is often the case in talk therapy. When working with a couple, it is good to focus the

#### THE HEALING ART OF CLAY THERAPY

exercise on a key issue in which they are having differences in understanding each other's experience or feelings. The exercise will usually take one hour to complete.

#### References

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# WORKING WITH THE WOUND IN THE PSYCHE

The wounded healer is not any human person, but a personification presenting a kind of consciousness. This kind of consciousness refers to mutilations and afflictions of the body organs that release the sparks of consciousness in these organs.

J. Hillman

Often it is difficult for clients to understand that their inner thoughts and feelings are realities that may be grasped, uncovered and healed. They often relate to their inner experiences as though they were in some sort of fog. They feel surrounded by a misty haze of distress, pain, grief or whatever. This exercise is very simple and designed to assist the client experience concretely the emotional wounding he or she is experiencing. It captures the gesture of the experience through the body. In this body-based model of psychotherapy, when a client experiences an emotional trauma the energetic impact of the force causing the trauma is lodged in a particular part of the body. Because it is painful, the client chooses not to breathe in that part of the body and breathes around this area rather than through this area. Eventually, the etheric body, which carries the energetic flow that permeates the physical body, carries this gesture of not breathing which I describe as an 'imprint'. This sequence enables the client to precisely uncover the imprint lodged in the etheric or chi body and to gain insight into the site of the suffering. This sequence is particularly powerful in exposing the inner life to those who are not articulate about it, to adolescents, resistant clients and with

men. The aim of the sequence is simply to get the client to gain insight into the reality of his or her feelings, and to develop an awareness of the ability to protect oneself energetically from particular experiences.

## Clay sequences for exposing the wound

Exercise: to create a concrete representation of the client's feelings and to acquire the skill to protect oneself energetically from particular energetic forces that cause the wounding.

#### Materials

Working size board usually about half a metre by half a metre

A water spray bottle

An airtight bucket of standard pottery clay in one of the earth hues

Towel for cleaning hands

Three large balls of clay

Sharp object that can be used for cutting clay or carving clay

(Jewellery, in particular rings, should be removed)

#### **Directions**

#### Step 1: Capturing the wounded site

Recall an experience of feeling emotionally upset or disturbed. Recall the
precise details of the situation. Include the physical context, whom you were
speaking to and any other relevant details. When a complex picture has been

visualised describe which part of the body feels most uncomfortable, in the sense of restriction of the breath, when you speak about the experience.

- Place your hand on that part of the body.
- Step into that part of the body by taking a step forward.
- Sense into the shape of how the breath does not move in this part of the body.
   Is it lumpy, twisted, tearing (or some other shape)?
- Step backwards and make the shape of how the breath does not move in that part of the body in clay.
- This shape represents the imprint of the energetic wounding in the etheric body.

#### Step 2: Capturing the force that creates the wounding

- Recall the incident again.
- Step forward into the same part of the body identified above.
- Sense the force that creates the wounding.
- Identify the shape of the force in a very concrete manner. Is it like arrows, a hammer, a vice, a saw (or something else altogether)?.
- Step backwards and exit the wounded site.
- Make the shape of the force in clay.
- Upon completion, place the force next to the wound. There will be a fit of the shapes, that is, the shape of the wound could have been made by the shape of a force of this nature.

#### Step 3: Creating a guard to protect the wound from the force

- Reflect on the wound and the force that you are experiencing as creating the wound.
- Reflect with the counsellor about possible guards that could be created and placed to protect the wound from the force.

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- Make the guard in clay.
- Place the guard between the wound and the force.
- Enlarge the power of the guard by standing in the gesture of the guard.
- Create a sound for the guard and make the sound out loud.
- Create a colour for the guard.
- Give the guard a name.
- Stand between the wound and the force in the gesture of the guard making the sound of the guard. Sense the shape of the guard strongly in your body.



Image 32: Protecting the wound from the force (Artist: Clive, October 2003)

# Illustrated case study: working with the wound

Shirley recounts a wounding experience when she was a young child, just 10 years old. Her wish is to understand the experience more deeply as she feels it affects her adult life, particularly her relationship with her mother. She grew up on a dairy farm with her mother, father and brothers. One day after school, her father came

#### Working with the wound in the psyche

to drive her home and said to her: 'Your mother is leaving, do you want to go with her or stay with me?' The client chose to stay with her father because the situation seemed less scary than going to a completely different place that she did not know or understand. Also she loved her horse and the animals on the farm and all her friends at school, and the thought of leaving them all was too much. She cried a lot when her mother left her and felt totally empty, as though she was being hollowed out. There was nobody to talk to her about her pain. Her older brothers teased her if she cried. She experienced the force as sucking her life force out—creating a deep hollowing-out emptiness.

She chose to insert as the guard her adult I AM, the centre of her own spiritual power which is the one thing she can rely on not to abandon her and which loves her totally and unconditionally.

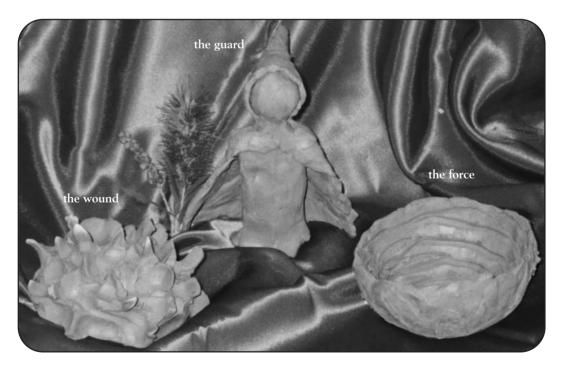


Image 33: Guarding the wound (Artist: Shirley, October 2003)

### Reflection and discussion

This exercise is very powerful because it creates consciousness about the realities of emotional experience. It should also help the client to have compassion for him or herself which is an important step in the healing process. The size of the force and the size of the wounding are very significant. If the weapon of the force is made very large, it suggests a powerful and penetrating wounding experience. One must then encourage the client to create a guard of equal or more substance than the force, if it is to adequately protect the wound from the force. It is most important to place the guard in the centre between the wound and the weapon or force. The client needs to be left in an empowered place, so it is critical to enlarge the resources provided by the guard until the client feels empowered to fend off the force.

#### Reference

Hillman, J 1990, The essential James Hillman: a blue fire, Routledge, London.

# SELF-PARENTING: RESOURCING THROUGH BUILDING ARCHETYPES

You have been interested in your shadow Look instead directly at the sun...

Rumi

The unhealed child within us is the subject of many personal development workshops today. There is widespread acceptance of the early view of the psychoanalytical and psychodynamic theorists that our adult behaviours have as their basis many unmet needs and unfinished developmental phases of the early years of our lives. While Freud (cited in Kail & Cavanagh 1996:12) saw these stages characterised by psychosexual needs, Erikson went on to develop a complex model of psycho-social developmental needs of each phase of the lifespan. His childhood phases are the critical developmental blocks for mature functioning adulthood and the development of key qualities of hope, will, purpose, competence and fidelity (Kail & Cavanagh 1996:14).

While the psychodynamic theorists and practitioners strongly recognise the need to revisit earlier unfinished, unmet developmental needs, the body-based psychotherapists see the early unmet needs of the child vibrating in the energetic field of the body and the etheric or life-body, with the immediacy and vitality of today. They live in the present moment because the energetic imprints remain in the physical body and the subtle bodies, including the etheric body and layers of mind consciousness or astrality. Tagar (1998:53)

describes these when he distinguishes between going back to earlier memories and working with the energetic imprints in the present: 'the inner children are not back there in the memory, they are here, operating in the present. They never moved into the past. They are always here.' Tagar (1998:54) goes on to posit a cyclical model of development where each seven-year phase of the lifespan is as the ring on a growing tree, not bypassed but continually vibrating in the present moment:

Every adult carries within oneself the traces and echoes of previous ages at any given point in time. These dictate one's behaviour, reactions, responses, access and blocks regarding one's inner resources and energies, one's relationships, well-being, creativity, a sense of direction and of meaning. The inner children within one's psyche are very often surrounded by defences which were instinctively erected in the face of early threats. These defences are still there, covering an inner part of ourselves, within which an untapped potential for growth is hidden.

The inner child with its unmet needs so often runs the adult life and supports a variety of unskilful intimate relationships, unproductive work situations, conflicts with our own children, continuing depreciating images of self and undermining self-esteem and the capacity to change one's life skilfully.

Too often clients seek to have these needs of their inner child met by demanding it from their parents who were then, and often still are, unqualified and unable to meet these needs. They become locked in a destructive downward spiral with their parents, forever demanding that some of these

unmet needs be met, and repeatedly being rejected or wounded just as they were as a child. Tagar (1998:56) describes this dynamic beautifully in his poem titled, *The motto of self-parenting*.

The inner child is the healing and growing place for all of us. Here the healing potential of each one of us waits to be cultivated and released. Herein lies the promise of redemption. The redemption comes from our own endeavours at the anvil of our soul's childhood experiences. We bring back to the hurt and abandoned child the mature loving adult consciousness, the I AM presence, or highest part of our consciousness that is a bridge to all the archetypal resources. We meet our own child, we engage our highest resources to heal and redeem the child and in so doing we liberate ourselves as adults from the constraints of fear, and limitations. This sequence is designed to meet the needs of the child that has experienced inadequate parenting. It is powerful and profound in its capacity to touch deeply the most penetrating needs of our psyche: the archetypal mother and father. As Rosa, a trainee in 2002, so poignantly expressed it:

Clay work can be used to evoke the image we hold of the mother archetype and the father archetype so we can let go of our earth mother and father's failings and become whole in the face of our own inner mother and father.

There are two sequences here, one for the mother archetype and one for the father archetype. The mother archetype sequence will be required when the client's wish is to heal his or her relationship with their mother or to heal their inner child that was abused, neglected or abandoned by their mother.

The father archetype sequence is used when the client's wish is to heal their relationship with their father or to heal their inner child that was neglected, abused or abandoned by their father.

# Clay sequences for archetypes

#### Motherhood

Exercise: to create an archetype of my ideal mother with all the qualities of ideal motherhood that I can now access myself and give to my inner child.

#### **Materials**

Working size board usually about half a metre by half a metre

A water spray bottle

An airtight bucket of standard pottery clay in one of the earth hues

Towel for cleaning hands

At least 2 kg of clay

Sharp object that can be used for cutting clay or carving clay

(Jewellery, in particular rings, should be removed)

#### **Directions**

#### Step 1: Identifying the qualities

- Begin by identifying some person, living or dead, or human or spiritual
  archetype that represents the qualities of ideal motherhood. A sample selection
  of such qualities may include nurturing, loving, enfolding, caring, softness,
  tenderness.
- List all the qualities of ideal motherhood that this person represents.
- For each quality listed, undertake the following so that the quality is really experienced in the body.
  - Stand up in the gesture of the particular quality.
  - Make a sound for the particular quality while you walk around the room.
  - Visualise a colour for that quality.
  - Imagine receiving the quality.
  - Breathe in the quality.
  - Imagine giving the quality to your inner child.
  - Make the quality in clay.

#### Step 2: Sculpturing the motherhood archetype

- When all the motherhood qualities have been made in clay, then sense yourself into them all.
- Stand in a gesture that represents the totality of these motherhood qualities.
   This becomes the motherhood archetype.
- Breathe in the motherhood archetype.
- Make the archetype in clay.

#### **Fatherhood**

Exercise: to create an archetype of my ideal father with all the qualities of ideal fatherhood that I can now access myself and give to my inner child.

#### Step 1: Identifying the qualities

- Begin by identifying some person, living or dead, or human or spiritual
  archetype that represents the qualities of ideal fatherhood. Ideal fatherhood
  qualities include strength, courage, understanding, energy, justice.
- List all the qualities of ideal fatherhood that this person represents.
- For each quality listed, undertake the following so that the quality is really experienced in the body.
  - Stand up in the gesture of the particular quality.
  - Make a sound for the particular quality while you walk around the room.
  - Visualise a colour for that quality.
  - Imagine receiving the quality.
  - Breathe in the quality.
  - Imagine giving the quality to your inner child.
  - Make the quality in clay.

#### Step 2: Sculpturing the fatherhood archetype

• When all the fatherhood qualities have been made in clay, then sense yourself into them all.



Image 34: Motherhood and fatherhood archetypes (Artist: Shirley, October 2003)

- Stand in a gesture that represents the totality of these fatherhood qualities. This becomes the fatherhood archetype.
- Breathe in the fatherhood archetype.
- Make the archetype in clay.



Image 35: Mother archetype



Image 36: Father archetype

(Artist: Elizabeth, October 2003)

# Illustrated case study: Creating archetypes of fatherhood and motherhood

Clive, in 2003, identified the qualities of motherhood as: nurturing, loving, feminine, enfolding, warm, nourishing, self-sacrificial, caring.

He identified the qualities of the father archetype as present, listening, strong, loving, regal, just, energetic, protecting, understanding,

The client first sculptured the motherhood, then the fatherhood.

His description of the meaning of this process is poignant and transcendent:

My feeling is that the mother and father archetypes are not only related to my biological parents but reflect my relationship to the motherhood and fatherhood aspects of God. I often feel that the Father aspect of the Divine is not there for me and has not heard my calls for help and support. The Divine Motherhood seems to have been unable to enfold me and salve my wounds. It was easy to do my archetypes because I merely had to embody the opposites of what my parents actually were like.

Father is strong and kingly, instead of distant he is seated which indicates available and present for me. He holds his staff of power and the orb of office. Hs head is inclined forward as he listens to me.



Image 37: Motherhood and Fatherhood archetypes (Artist: Clive, October 2003)

Mother is in motion, beautifully clothed, arms outstretched to enfold and care for me. She is feminine, womanly ready to stoop to minister to the needs of others. She is caring and understanding, not angry, hard or bitter.

## Reflection and discussion

This is a powerful resourcing sequence for the client—to engage in building his or her sense of power over his or her life. It can be done with any person aged from six onwards. In most sessions I would do only one of the archetypes, either the masculine or the feminine, as usually this will take an hour per piece especially with the sculpting of each quality. It is not always essential to do the sculpting of each quality prior to building the archetype of the father or mother. It is advised to do each quality when the client's inner resourcing powers are weak and/or underdeveloped or under-accessed. However, it is beneficial for all clients to create each quality in clay because it creates a strong new imprint in the energetic layers of the experience of the client. On completion of the clay sculpture of the archetype, it is recommended that it be kept and fired if possible. The client, for homework each day, has a visible reminder of his or her ability to access higher resources. I have the client breathe in the qualities, gesture them and sound them, for a two-week period following the session.

This archetype sequence is a bold and creative way to symbolise the client's empowerment process in therapy.

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# REFLECTIONS ON CLAY THERAPY IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

The truth shall set you free.

John 8:32

Clay therapy is the Cinderella of the art therapies. Quietly in the background tending the hearth, she is often easily ignored and her power unseen. Her inherent queenly heritage, her power to reveal the truth, has largely been overlooked by the more attractive and colourful artistic therapies. However, her time has come to reveal her real nature and psychotherapeutic power. Hand in hand with body-based psychotherapy, clay therapy becomes a powerfully transforming practice, and her gestures revealed are truth making, truth breaking and truth speaking.

## Truth making

Clay therapy is the one who fits the beautiful slipper, and who reveals the imposters, the sycophants, the pretenders, the ignorant and the deluded. Many a client and trainee has come to body-based clay therapy with the notion that they have worked on 'their inner stuff' and don't have any pressing issues. However, when Cinderella begins her work, all unfinished business begins to emerge in this body-based clay therapy. Our average psychotherapy trainee workshop of 20 persons spans over three days. It is common to keep one psychotherapist assistant

engaged full-time supporting trainees who go into deep process during their training. Always the responses of trainees are similar '... I thought I had worked on it'; 'I believed the issue was resolved'; 'I did not know it went so deeply'. Trainees and clients are awed at the capacity of these body-based clay therapeutic interventions to transform aspects of their lives, through the experience of deep integrity with their inner lives.

## Truth breaking

Body-based clay therapy is also like Cinderella who reveals the truth about the ugly, the vain and the stupid. Little can remain hidden, cut-off, denied, repressed or ignored when clay is brought into body-based therapy. Even the most resistant clients enter into places in their experience that they have never been in before, nor thought possible. The power of body-based clay cannot be underestimated. It involves first the physical body and goes deeply into the energetic layers of the subtle energy bodies, which I have named as the etheric or life body and the layers of mind consciousness or astrality which store the imprints of all experiences, and like a suction process brings them to the surface. That which is hidden away, stored behind well-wrought defences, will likely be accessed and brought out into the light of day. Not only during the counselling session, but for days afterwards, material that was previously repressed may arise in the

It is the material par excellence for penetrating defences. However, this means clay must be used judiciously, and the therapist must assess the client's capacity to be exposed to previously hidden away parts of self. Henley (2002) would also support this view. He demonstrates with the case of a highly traumatised child

that had been kidnapped. She simply could not enter into clay work except to destroy the figure he had created. Henley astutely cautions in the use of clay:

... clay may induce regression in ways that intensify affective reactions, weaken ego-controls and encourage both direct and symbolic acting out. It is up to the art therapist to assess whether a client possesses sufficient ego strength and impulse control to handle this sometimes provocative medium (2002:105).

The use of clay is contra-indicated for highly dissociated individuals, individuals with fragile life or etheric forces, psychotic individuals or individuals who are fragmented with insufficient integrated self or I AM. As a truth-breaking process, opening the realities of inner experience, body-based clay therapy is the queen. She is powerful and must always be handled with the respect her power commands. I firmly honour her power and, in addition to the above contraindications, I do not undertake a clay process without the client first clearly expressing a psychotherapeutic wish or intention of what they wish to uncover, heal or transform.

## Truth speaking

Like Cinderella, who claims her real heritage, so clay therapy opens the door for all clients to claim their strength, their potential, and to speak and become their truth in the world. This process of becoming their potential is an unfolding journey from birth. Freshwater (1998:15) describes 'the process of becoming (as) the process of remembering, reconnecting the fragments of oneness in order to become reunited'. She cites the Dylan Thomas image of the oak tree being felled

in the acorn as a reminder that simultaneously things exist in their completeness but also in their process of becoming. Hillman (1996:6) elaborates by claiming that 'each person bears a uniqueness that asks to be lived and that is already present before it can be lived'. Body-based clay therapy, at its best, has as its fruition truth speaking for individuals, so that more of their uniqueness, their I AM may become manifest in their world. Like Cinderella, clients may emerge from the hearth, to claim their royal heritage: their unique potential. It opens the door for clients to manifest more fully who they are capable of being.

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# CLAY THERAPY WORKSHOPS (IN A LOCATION NEAR YOU)

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