

# The theory of Love

## Assured voluntary regulation

UKCP interviews CHRE Chief Executive Harry Cayton

## Research conference 2012

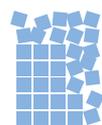
A snapshot of the day

## Plus UKCP book series

Lynette Harborne discusses her new book *Psychotherapy and Spiritual Direction*

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## Feature articles

### The theory of love

- Evolving a theory of love 2
- Constellations and love 3
- Love: where relationships, mind and brain meet 6
- We have chemistry! The role of four primary temperament dimensions in mate choice and partner compatibility 8
- The joy of love and hate: a psychoanalytic view 11
- How we love 13
- Living body principles – what's LOVE got to with it? 15
- Six ways to love 18

### Love in the therapy room

- Accepting the therapeutic relationship as love 22
- Love: taking a stance 24
- Therapeutic encounter – a kind of loving 26
- Transcultural perspectives on love and hate: the yin and yang of relationships, within and without therapy 28
- Love, separation and reconciliation: systemic theory and its relationship with emotions 30

## Discussion

- Sharing concepts to support Black issues in the therapeutic process 32
- Letter 34

## UKCP news

- A snapshot of the 2012 Research Conference 35
- Assured voluntary regulation: interview 37
- Putting the pieces together 41
- Transpersonal Special Interest Group: second meeting, 20 May 2012 42

## UKCP members

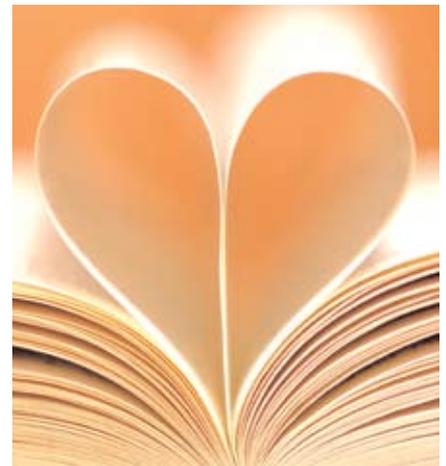
- Reparative therapy, psychotherapy and Pilkington – where do we go from here? 44
- Raising your profile 45
- Referral services and email scams affecting members 45
- Book reviews 46
- Psychotherapy and spiritual direction: two languages, one voice? 47
- Books in the UKCP series 49
- New members 51

## Continuing professional development

- Events 52



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# Living body principles – what’s LOVE got to do with it?

When it comes to understanding their own body’s sensations, Kai Ehrhardt believes most people are challenged. But when the body awakes to itself, new possibilities of *eros* emerge

**M**any people today have left behind a reductionist worldview. They have no doubt that body, psyche, mind and environment are interconnected. Everything is part of a complex, living process that has evolved over hundreds of millions of years. For the first time in history, we can collectively recognise that we are coming from somewhere and that we are going somewhere. Witnessing ourselves on an unfolding trajectory that seems to have order and purpose to it, we have become active participants in our own evolution.

It is one thing to understand that cognitively or emotionally. But what is it like to experience the systemic, holistically emergent aspects of our reality on the cellular level of our own bodies?



**Kai Ehrhardt**

Kai Ehrhardt is a breath therapist, somatics educator and group facilitator devoted to the cultivation of the conscious body. He founded [www.embodied-being.com](http://www.embodied-being.com) and is currently establishing the Somatic Arts Academy in Berlin. He also holds the German Heilpraktiker licence for psychotherapy. Kai believes that the conscious body and experiencing the deeper meaning of *eros* are crucial elements towards an integral way of life. Kai has been teaching since 2002 and lives in Berlin and New York City.

Most people are right at home connecting to their thoughts and perhaps have a little more trouble sometimes identifying emotions. However, when it comes to sensations, many people are more challenged. This is interesting when you consider that the capacity of organisms to respond to sensory input is developmentally a lot older – at least 505 million years! Sensory information is primarily processed in us by the reptilian brain. The limbic system governs emotional information; this started about 300 million years ago. After that the (neo) cortex gave rise to cognition, memory, thought and abstraction – starting about 200 million years ago.

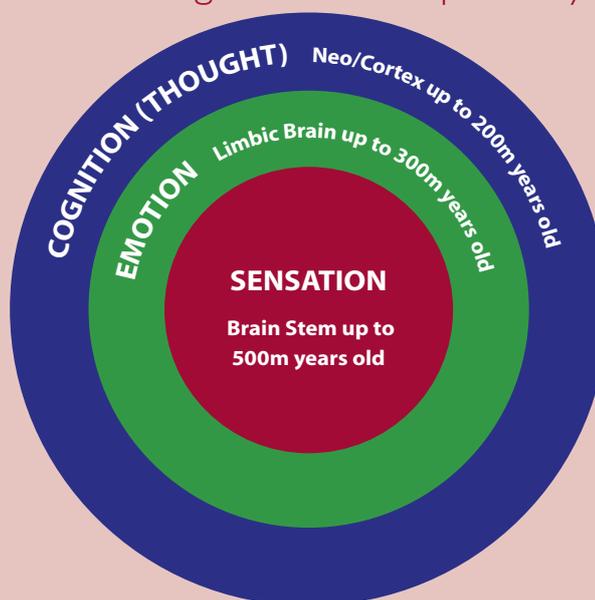
Most people usually need time when asked to sense. What sounds fairly simple at first turns out to consist of lots of unfamiliar layers, which can cause confusion. What

“Witnessing ourselves on an unfolding trajectory that seems to have order and purpose to it, we have become active participants in our own evolution”

really is a sensation, an emotion or a thought? How do I distinguish them? What are sensations that are always available even without the presence of pain, pleasure or other strong stimuli? Am I memorising sensation (Neo/Cortex) or is it happening in real time (Brain Stem)?

When people truly arrive at the level of their sensations – meaning when, for instance, they truly discover breath movement in the back, chest, belly or pelvic floor – they realise several things:

## Development of organisations' response systems



“ Everything is part of a complex, living process that has evolved over hundreds of millions of years ”

- a) **Thought activity decreases.** Thought activity is where a lot of our psycho-emotional suffering gets created and maintained. Up to 90% of our evaluations of situations, other people and ourselves have little or nothing to do with what is actually happening.
- b) **Sensation is an experience only possible now.** It connects us to what is actually happening – instead of stories, fantasies or emotionally triggered information that stems from an older or an imagined context.
- c) **Evaluation, comparison and judgment are not possible at the level of sensation.** There is no object/subject split – things just are. It is not possible to have a preference, as in like/don't like, good/bad or right/wrong.
- d) Because sensation connects to that which is, **we become more inclusive and invoke our capacity for empathy.**
- e) By sensing ourselves as we are, **we gain inner strength.**

Quite a few body-based disciplines (somatics) have used these principles very effectively in various therapeutic and personal growth-related ways for many decades. This is not about isolating sensation and condemning emotion or thought. By connecting to the deeper layers of sensation, a more balanced relationship between all three domains naturally arises.

### Life's principle of adaptation

When the body awakes to itself, new possibilities emerge. Somatics research, based on the experience of breath, movement and bodywork, has shown over and over again that our psychology and biography are reflected in our body. Tissue, breath and body adapt to mental/emotional patterns in a very concrete way. Shame, inhibition, confidence, rage, joy, vulnerability – every persistent or recurring emotional state or thought pattern – form physical correlations.

To what degree are the shoulders curved or raised? Is the upper belly area collapsed inward? In what way is the lumbar spine contracted while impacting hips or neck? What shape is maintained in the toes and the jaw? What is the state of the skin, muscles, organs, bones, fluids and connective tissue? What location, rhythm, texture is reflected in inhalations and exhalations, and what habitual degree of effort is used to breathe, stand and walk?

Our physical form reliably encodes who we are as actual in-FORM-ation expressed through the very form of our body. Emotions, thoughts and environment are in a constant feedback loop with cellular properties. Tissue adapts to context. When the context changes tissue changes. It is how nature evolved in the first place. But it happens also the other way around. In other words, once shaped, the tissue then reinforces the emotional-mental pattern that imprinted it. A catch-22 is created – one reason why it is so hard to transcend persistent habits. Our identity is preserved in our very tissue – until consciousness or life changes free us from this revolving door.

Once we learn to become conscious of our body through sensing it, we get to discern the degree of compression or density in it. We can start to discern where open, receptive and undefended space is available. What quality and quantity of flow or movement articulation is possible? And how does that influence my state of being, my relationships and my outlook?

### Self-regulatory, systemic intelligence

When awareness interrupts the catch-22 mentioned above, the body starts to deeply regulate itself. One condition that supports that is: slowing down to sense and allow for 'non-functional' movements. These are movements that don't serve an immediate, obvious purpose, like reaching out to grasp a cup or like stretching a particular muscle. These movements are guided by systemic needs that are more complex than the mind can cognitively grasp. However, they just appear to have no immediate function. In actuality, they follow the rich wisdom that has accumulated in organismic intelligence over aeons. If this is a conscious process,

“ Every persistent or recurring emotional state or thought pattern forms physical correlations ”

the body may no longer be experienced 'a part here and a part there'. In advanced embodiment stages, it experiences itself as one – all at once.

As we slow down and sense, we become aware of internal relationships and start to notice systemically orchestrated movement impulses. These movements follow unwinding and nonlinear dynamics. They are guided by intelligent, systemic 'desires'. For instance, the small finger of the right hand may suddenly be lengthened by itself while triggering an inward spiralling motion of the arm connected to it. At the same time, the left foot engages in lateral spreading sensation in the sole and toes. This means that we can sense internal relationships that are no longer just linear – as in 'this move follows that move'. The movements can also be simultaneous, yet far apart and still related. Experiencing the body in relationship with itself in such a deep way cultivates trust in life's unpredictability, against which we usually tend to guard and 'insure' ourselves from in numerous ways.

The nature of this nonlinear, self-regulatory process is simultaneously healing and unfolding. Physical/psychological stresses unwind and latent potential emerges at the same time. That can be a tremendously delicious awakening to new territory. It is always different and cannot be preconceived by the mind. Possibility, discovery and a sense of clarity emerge. Deeply experiencing our physical fullness may move through numerous challenging stages, but in the end it always feels 'ful-filling' and pleasurable. Many people describe this state of conscious embodiment as 'having come home'.

### The dynamic interplay of life's forces expresses an erotic event

The organismic push that initiates the birth of a child happens in its own perfect, contextual tension and timing. In the same way, a dying leaf falls from a tree at a particular moment. During this moment all forces involved conspire to a particular

blend of effort and none-effort. When the month of February is unusually warm in the north, flowers will come out early. They will not follow a timetable and stick to March or April. They follow the whole context.

Life's driving forces create a complex dynamic. Some may refer to this as *eros*. We could argue about what *eros* is or isn't. What we cannot argue about is that everything can feel erotic if we allow ourselves to drop into the wet and pulsating sensation of life happening. Through our conscious bodies, we can access life as a sensual event inside and outside our skin.

Conscious embodiment increases our sense of fullness. The clarity of systemic direction gained in step 3 is now identical to our essential desires. They become the vectors behind our personal *eros*. The whole body contextually inFORMs our *eros*. Since we now operate from literal fullness gained through embodiment, our *eros* reflects that fullness through the nature of our desires. The cultural implications of this are huge.

Embodied consciousness – which could also be called embodied *eros* – describes a living connection to context. We just know what move is next and when. At the same time being plugged into *eros* provides a kind of built-in, systemic safety. Mental activity left to its own devices separates; it needs lines, demarcations, lots of rules and timetables to create safety. Our increasing cultural preoccupation with safety to which we have sacrificed much of our *eros* is only another reflection of the dying dominance of rational and mental values.

### Universal empathy and love have a tissue equivalent

Beneath the tissue indentations created by our personal history, our biological history has also left an imprint. The imprint from that history that goes back at least 505 million years could be summarised as: am I safe?

When we become adept at embodiment practices we start to notice the ancient

“ Our physical form reliably encodes who we are ”

question, am I safe? in our very tissue. It is like a permanent, subtle activation that creates a sort of systemic, persistent tension or cramp throughout the whole body. This systemic tension is practically always unconscious. After all, it has been with us since the beginning. Imagine you are alone in your apartment and all of a sudden you become aware of the ever so slight humming of the fridge. In the same way, just much, much more subtle, the fear of not being safe and the fear of death are wired into our system and are humming there right now.

Once we slow down and stay with body awareness long enough, we start to sense it. At first it feels like an impenetrable wall. Suddenly, it seems like we have never, ever been relaxed or at peace. We realise that instead we have always been busy trying to feel better or safer. That realisation can be quite disturbing.

The attempt to pass this wall of subtle tension will likely be met with resistance. Fully feeling it and surrendering to it will, however, make it melt. Our sensate consciousness acts on it like hot tea on a cube of sugar. The cramp is nothing but our deepest layers of fear manifesting in cellular structure. Once this primal holding dissolves, we are in the presence of a sense of unconditional love. This ultimate systemic tension marks the line between 'I am separate from the world' and 'I am integrally interwoven'.

### Conscious incarnation

Culturally we have yet to understand what it means to consciously incarnate. Once we become familiar with the emerging possibilities available in conscious embodiment, we understand that systemic and integrative concept can actually be experienced through our wet, breathing bodies. The body is integral by definition. The intention is not to regress to sensation – though at first we might – but to use the tool of consciousness to penetrate our whole existence. We then discover ourselves as a continuum of interpenetrating experiences. Together they create something larger than the sum of sensations, emotions and thoughts. We could call it a fourth state expressing through embodied consciousness or embodied integral *eros*.

This can be approached as a developmental path toward unconditional

“ Through our conscious bodies, we can access life as a sensual event inside and outside our skin ”

love and Self-emergence. It opens the door to a dynamically pulsating, self-regulatory state of balance that has the potential to transcend and include reductionist, dualistic perception on a deep cellular level.

Many people involved with advanced somatics understand that this points toward a new evolutionary destination beyond our capacity to walk upright and think straight. A body that lights up in all sensory felt directions – awake in every pore. The full-blown pleasure of being alive propelled by the intelligence of life's *eros*. The tension of our current global issues actually accelerates this. We are forced to awaken to systemic awareness. Discovering the body as a voluptuous gate towards integral, unconditional love is an incredible gem on the way. [P](#)

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