Dirk Marivoet

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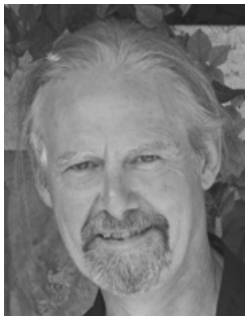

Dirk Marivoet is the director of the Institute for Bodymind Integration in Ghent (Belgium). He studied Core-Energetics under John C. Pierrakos, MD; Postural Integration®, Energetic Integration and Pelvic-Heart Integration under Jack Painter, PhD (and has been a certified trainer/supervisor since 1999). He has also worked extensively with native shamanism both in Europe and North America. Earlier in the 80s and 90s he was adjunct faculty Psychomotor Therapy at Leuven University, where he still teaches.

Serge Prengel, LMHC is the editor the *Proactive Mindfulness* project (http://proactiveminfulness.com).
For better or worse, this transcript retains the spontaneous, spoken-language quality of the podcast conversation.

Serge Prengel: Hi Dirk.

Dirk Marivoet: Hi Serge.

Serge: So while you have a lot of influences in your work, probably the most important one has been Postural Integration.

Dirk: Yes that's indeed where my more holistic approach to the body found root. I have been trying to bring body and mind together since I graduated as a psychomotor therapist (which is an academic discipline here in Belgium). But, in academic circles, the split between the body and the mind, or the psyche and the motor, or all of these dualities weren't brought together satisfactorily for me.

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: I discovered Postural Integration in the early 1980's. And all material and work coming from America, was the goldmine for us Europeans back then. That gave me and so many other people access to a truly holistic approach…. You know, one where you can work simultaneously with the body, and where you have a way to deal with the emotions… to work through the emotions, and to see what's in the mind: What the thoughts are…. And to ask where does the person go? You know…. And just to be able to see so much… to read… to learn in the body.

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: This work became right away a kind of passion for me, from which I could explore a few more things But it's still my first love, I would say.

Serge: Mmm Hmm. Maybe it makes sense to talk a little bit to say it's "Postural" Integration, not "Structural" Integration.

Dirk: Yes. Well already in the name, you see that in “Postural” Integration the word “posture” is there, and this refers to both your physical posture as well as your attitudes. So it’s a lot about your way of life… It’s about how you are in the horizontal and vertical dimensions in your life (the interpersonal and the intrapersonal). This brings the “whole” person into the field… Jack Painter, the founder of Postural Integration was also strongly influenced by Wilhelm Reich, so by the whole idea that emotional blockages are in the body. You know, this brings…yeah… the whole idea of posture into aliveness.

Serge: So you pointed out, we talk about posture in a way in 2 different meanings. One is the physical posture of the body: The way the body holds itself.

Dirk: Mmm Hmm.

Serge: And another is in a way the attitude that we have toward the world.

Dirk: Yes. Exactly. And so we deal in this method with the structural part also: How to deal with gravity… (Like the Structural Integration people are doing). And we have many techniques to work with structure (for Jack Painter, had himself worked with Ida Rolf and had been in Rolfing classes). We are doing kind of that work, but within a new synthesis. We are bringing in Gestalt work, bringing in Reichian “energetic work”, bringing in 5 Elements/oriental medicine work, movement awareness… all into one conceptual frame, into a new paradigm system.

Serge: So understanding of course the absurdity of trying to find one case that shows all the aspects of how the approach works. Is there a way to talk maybe about an example of say how it might work out in a session? Or in a therapy…

Dirk: Yeah. Well of course, in therapy, you never know who comes into your therapy room…. So you might have a very insecure person. Or you might have a very needy person. Or you might have just simply a good feeling expressive person who just wants to explore some work with you… (new work with the body). So you don't know who comes in… And so either, people are like what Jack Painter called “natural character styled”: These people are like grounded; they are like receptive; they are like expressive; they are like… they have a certain freedom: So then, of course, you can work with a good energy system, with a healthy dynamic… Either they are like so many people are, not in that place: They are kind of ungrounded; they are kind of fragmented; they are kind of needy; or inflated; or compressed…

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: So to give an example of these 5 things I’m telling… let’s take the insecure person. Well, this man or this woman will be not well in the body; will not be very embodied; will not be very well feeling; would be… more in the head; would be breathing superficially; may have the eyes somewhere in the room, but not with me…. So then my work is to create, through the relationship, some sense of security for this person.

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: The way I do this is that while we're sitting in the room together, that maybe I suggest the person can feel him or her self, or can touch himself in order to make it okay for the person to make a connection to him or herself. So also to make it physical: to feel the floor, the contact with the seat, etc. And these are already steps in the progression of a session.

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: The person is already into a process where he is doing some significant work for his fragmentation. Somebody else can be a needy type person. Somebody who… sticks the head out with a lot of expectations and a lot of hopefulness, but clearly not in tune with the possibility to find inner satisfaction.

Serge: So I'm just noticing as you make these descriptions. And I'm comparing it in a way to say Reichian and Neo-Reichian character types.

Dirk: Yes.

Serge: That you really, in a way, when you describe… You not so much describe say the appearance of the body in a static form as you describe literally the posture. When you say… the sticking out the head that way. So you're not just in a way describing the shape, but the whole movement of the way the person encounters the world.

Dirk: Yeah. Exactly. So it's also the shape of course, because we can read the body like in the other Reichian (or Rolfing) schools. But we're interested in the postures, in the expressions, the nonverbal signs. We are interested to see how people organize their own energy, and how this energy is organized in the field with me, with the room, with the outside world… So I am perceptive to all that information. And then I am making an assessment about where and how to give a first step to the person.

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: So that it's relevant, and that it's helpful for the person, to help to go "somewhere".

Serge: Yeah. And so these postures: Do you have in Postural Integration, the same typology say as Reichian types? Or is it a different typology? Or is it something that's more flexible?

Dirk: Well of course we have a lot in common - and we have borrowed quite a bit from the Reichian and the Lowenian and Pierrakos' character descriptions -, but I think that Postural Integration in a way has, because it was not developed as a psychotherapy, and so not developed for people really with big psychological problems, is following more the human potential road.

And the personal growth and the strong body work side that we have ends up more in descriptions of natural character styles. Well I know that the core-energetic people (I'm one myself) or bioenergetics people also do that in a way, the importance is to lower the barrier for the client to come to therapy.

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: Because when I as a therapist am in “a natural state” and I sense the other person (the client) and I try to sense his/her “natural” traits: Like is this person grounded? Is he receptive? Is he expressive? Passionate? Creative? Joyful? Satisfied? These are all things that are already there. So it's very important to have a vision, I believe. And I think Jack Painter had very much of that. And to see the person as much as possible with his healthy traits.

Serge: So the opposite of looking for pathology, but looking for the traits.

Dirk: Yeah.

Serge: Yeah. And as you're talking, you mentioned several. So it doesn't give me a sense of… There's a menu of 5 or 6 or 10 traits. But there is a sense of openness about what it might be. Or is there some predetermined kind of looking for some traits?

Dirk: Well we have of course a whole framework that Jack Painter developed. Something that is known as the “Energetic Cycle.” You know where we look at how, in a natural flow, energy can be charged more and discharged more. And how we can bring ourselves to levels of joy and pleasure. Ecstatic feelings even. Or surrendering into orgasmic feelings, etc. It’s an elaboration of Reich’s 4-beat orgasm formula if you want.

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: So there is a map that is written down and that is publicized, and which is one of the signposts to work with. And then of course there is the whole knowledge about the relationship that we have built. And knowledge about the connection with the fascia (myofascia). This is the tissue that surrounds the muscles. Rolfing also works on that level, but we look at how it connects with for instance, the fragmented dynamic or with the needy personality. How does the fascia look in the compressed person? What is the denseness of it? And we look at it in a quite specialized way: In layers of fascia…. How it can be hard on the outside and maybe soft on the inside… When you touch the person, you can feel e.g. hardness on the outside, but then more softness on the inside. It’s like the core and the sleeve layers are not together in this person.

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: Or it may be the other way around…(Soft on the outside and hard on the inside, or hard outside, hard inside or soft outside vs. soft inside). So Jack Painter also developed a whole let’s say “new” characterology. It has similarities with the Reichian or the Lowenian character types. Or also with the Keleman types. He puts it all in a chart in his book. But we are doing a lot with touch… with the tissue, and I think that is the original part that Postural Integration is bringing to the world.

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: How does the tissue feel? And how can you work with the different tissue qualities? And what are the criteria to move from old quality tissue to new quality? E.g. to help tissue from a fragmented state to a grounded state. Or to evolve from neediness to a state of simply being able to receive (in the tissue)? How does it appear in the tissue… how does it appear not only in the posture, but in the whole appearance of the skin and the fascia?

Serge: So to keep part in the way that there's difference between other methods, is that this involves touch.

Dirk: Yes.

Serge: And with the touch, there is that awareness of the practitioner of the fascia, and the tissue. So it's not just in terms of appearance, but of the touching of it.

Dirk: Exactly. The touching gives us so much more additional information, more than our eyes can tell or our ears can hear. Or even our somatic countertransference teaches us: In the touching really, if you learn how to do it. And of course this needs practice and training. Then opens a whole new field (dimension) that I believe in body psychotherapy in general is not so well known. There are not so many schools that have that touching skill as a specialty. It's a very powerful additional tool we have, and a very effective one. Like really being able to transform the tissue with the help of the client and his energy and his consciousness. To make it more soft when it's hard on the outside; more smooth when it's in a blocked tense state: Like in the case where the person is holding back… "I'm not letting go of this rigidity in my back". When that starts to go with the help of the breathing that we do, with the help of the physical work, by touching the body….

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: That's really where the change lasts…. When change lasts, it is because the pattern has also changed at the level of the tissue.

Serge: So at the beginning when we were talking about what's a session like. You mentioned something. And you were talking about say an insecure person. And helping the person ground and feel safer. So at that moment they're still not touching because they have to establish rapport you have to establish safety. So let's talk a little bit about what happens in the work when the work involves touching. And some of the sense of what the work is about.

Dirk: Yeah. You say that so well. It is clear that like in any other therapy we need to create rapport. And we need to find security. We need to have the permission of the client to work without clothes and to be allowed to touch. So when we have that, and have come to a point where we can start working with touch, the first thing we do is learn the client how to work with touch. We learn the client for instance to find out how to create security within him/herself? We can use forms of self-touch for that purpose. Or some people you know are touching themselves and they're not aware of the fact that they are …touching themselves. So bringing awareness to the self-touch of the person is an entrance to the touch of the therapist (later). That I say "now how would it be for you that I put my hand now, there where you have your hands"? Then "what is the message there"? or "What is my hand bringing now as a message to you?" So, that's a start of a way to work with the touch. And then also to invite in the emotional contents and the "What does it mean?"; the meaning of the touch. And then if we see for instance there is some stuckness, some blockage: The client feels e.g. "oh my chest, I feel so closed here. I cannot open my heart. I feel this tightness in my chest". Then we may propose, I may propose to do a "myofascial stroke". That's how we call that. So then we bring in a Structural Integration technique: Combined with the breath and working with the characterological dynamic at the same time (this then is called a Postural Integration stroke). So looking for instance at how the client is doing with his eyes: Is he or she looking at me? Is he

fragmenting? Is there a neediness? Is there compression in the body? Or is it simply good? Is there already an openness and a temporary ecstatic feeling even.

Serge: Mmm Hmm. So…

Dirk: And it can happen very quickly.

Serge: So that sense of… they're definitely is this in depth body work integrated with a sense of the psychological dynamics. Is that also related to moment by moment in the relationship with the therapist? In what way does it show up?

Dirk: Yes. Every moment is important: I would answer your question like that. As we go along together working with touch and working with the breath both client and therapist, we discover together what and where the next step may be. So the client in our work is really the center of the therapy. So I ask the client e.g. where he wants to go next… which is a good next step for you? Where do you feel this goes? What is happening in your body when it wants to open up? Or what is happening in your body simply? Is there a tightness still? Is there a contraction somewhere? What do you do with it? So we are following the process (phenomenelogically in the here-and-now). And in that way it's not the therapist who knows.

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: Myron Sharaf (Wilhelm Reich's biographer) once said while looking at a demonstration of Jack Painter. (I think it was somewhere in Spain during a congress). He described Jack's work as a "who done it". It's a who done it!... So exploring little by little where is it connected to? It can come to mommy or daddy. And it could come to the story. In the end we both know what it's about.

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: And of course with a lot of theory (in the background). At times I know in advance a little bit where things are held. What the story more or less is. But I prefer not to know. I prefer to be a little bit innocent.

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: Just explore. We'll explore together. We see where we get stuck or where you get stuck or I get stuck.

Serge: Yeah.

Dirk: It's also a very nice moment to reveal myself. How I feel stuck for instance: A very helpful moment for the client as well….

Serge: Yeah. Yeah. But in this case there is a form of intimacy that is different from say other forms of therapy. And it's related to the fact that you are literally touching the points of stuckness. It's not just an abstract concept. It's not… there's not the distance of two chairs being far apart. But you're literally touching the stuckness and the tissue at the same time as the emotion is intense.

Dirk: Yes. You say that so well.

Serge: Thank you.

Dirk: And it really changes the whole approach to therapy for me. Because when I'm not working in a touch modality, when I'm doing other work like e.g. my psychomotor therapy, where I have sessions without touching. Then when I observed myself, I saw I get into “frames” sometimes. I get into the “knowledge” side. I get into my head. And then that's my countertransference in a way. The work happens in another way. I don’t say work doesn't happen, but it happens in another way. It’s another process when I'm working with touch. It’s a lot of intimacy there. And there's a lot of exchange possible, and a lot of responsibility that can stay with the client. I don't have to know much and the client is really feeling a lot there. And he or she has so much information now (that I am able to follow and imagine, because I have had so many sessions myself). But that’s really where I want to have the center of the therapy: In the client a lot.

Serge: And so together with stuckness is also the notion of resistance.

Dirk: Mmm Hmm.

Serge: What about resistance?

Dirk: Yeah. Sometimes people are resisting touch.

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: So they go like “no don’t touch me, get out.” “Don't touch me here” you know…”you can touch me here but you can't touch me there”. Or “No, I’m not taking off this piece of clothing for you.” So that’s all posture in a way…

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: It’s their character style of appearing. So then yeah… it needs creativity. Going “under the radar” for instance would be good for some. Like with an inflated person, who is so strong, but it's an illusion. It's an air Castle…. And I can wish that person could come down in the body, could feel relaxed. So then I go under the radar and say something like, “Oh I feel you have all this strength… all this energy. And it's so great to feel that from you. And how would it feel for you to bring more of that strength also in your legs?”

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: It’s a strategy to deal with the issue.

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: I am usually not saying something like “You are not grounded. Get into your knees… get down”. But wait… sometimes I do that also…. There's no right and wrong way…. There's no good way and bad way…. You just need to learn so many ways of doing it…. Sometimes I’m more permissive, sometimes more authoritarian when working with the resistance.

Serge: Mmm Hmm. So what you're describing is in a way the resistance is perceived in a context where there is a relational context between the client and the therapist. And it's not your resisting, but how am I adjusting my approach…

Dirk: Okay.

Serge: to meet the client where they are?

Dirk: Yes. Exactly. That's exactly what it's about! To meet the client where he or she is! And that's my job. I need to do that work! And the client is not supposed to have dealt with so much complexity him/herself…

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: I need to help the client to find ways… to help him or her to stay in the relationship.

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: And for me for myself to help myself to stay in the relationship.

Serge: Yeah. So this might be a good place to end. But I want to check with you if there is something else that you might want to add.

Dirk: Mmm Hmm. Well maybe this you know… Postural Integration is the main method that Jack developed…And in his lifetime he also developed and did a lot of "Energetic Integration," which is work that is not focused on the myofascia so much, but more on the "energetic cycle," (energy economy - progressive cycles of charging and discharging energy up to a plateau and onto relaxation, combined with "bodymind drama",etc…) And there exist separate trainings in these methods. So people can learn Postural Integration: They can learn all the myofascial work, structured like the 10 Rolfing-Structural Integration sessions (only we have 12 of those paradigm sessions, because we do extra work with the relationship and with the outside world; and so we bring in the horizontal (next to the vertical axis)… the relational with the other and with the world into the scheme). And people can learn "Energetic Integration" work…. But these methods are also overlapping and have similarities in the way they work e.g. with the character traits. And in the way they work with the energy (the charging and the discharging). And then (lastly) we have also a specialized work which is called "Pelvic-Heart Integration" (a sexological body psychotherapeutic approach) where we are dealing with the split between the heart and the genitals (the oedipal conflict). It's dealing with the love and sexuality split in a specialized way.

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: It's dealing with the masculine and the feminine. Whatever that means for somebody. Because we don't want to be stereotyped with these… with descriptions.

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: It's about some polarity. It has to do with "the sun and the moon" in a way. Or how your masculine and feminine can be and be brought into a better relationship. It's about how to bring your genitals and your heart energies into a better flow. So basically to overcome "rigidity". And thus to help people to get to even better feeling places.

Serge: Mmm Hmm.

Dirk: So there's a whole, let's say, area of work (that we call "Bodymind integration") with corners where other forms of psychotherapy don't touch. And this I think is the great gift that Jack Painter made to the world: to develop this. And we're bringing it in the world. With many people all over the world - in different continents. I'm in Belgium and working in Europe mostly. But I'm traveling and…it's very nice to see other people doing it. Very nice to do the research as well and to develop it further.

Serge: Thanks Dirk.

This conversation was transcribed by Tricia Gunter.

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