

Martha Davis: Non-verbal aspects of psychotherapy*

KRISTINA and MARTIN STANTON, Department of Psychoanalytic Studies, University of Kent, Canterbury

Martha Davis is one of the most eminent figures in American research on non-verbal communication in psychiatry and psychotherapy. She is a professor at New York University, and at Hahnemann University Medical School in Philadelphia, as well as being President of the American Institute for Non-Verbal Communication Research. She is the author of many books and articles on the analysis of body movement, the most recent of which is 'Non-verbal Behaviour Research and Psychotherapy' in *From Research to Clinical Practice: The Implications of Social and Developmental Research for Psychotherapy* (eds. George Stricker and Robert Keisner, London & New York: Plenum Press, 1988). She is also editor of the journal *Kinesis*, which features and comments on current non-verbal communication research. One of her many achievements has been to invent a rating system to assist the diagnosis of psychiatric illness through movement patterns. This is based on some 30 years' research experience, beginning with work in Albert Scheflen's revolutionary team (described at length in Scheflen, *Communicational Structure: Analysis of a Psychotherapy Transaction*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973). The Davis Communicative Behaviour Assessment Scale is based on the Laban system of movement analysis, and employs trained raters to check diagnosis using video material. In the past, this has been used to establish movement profiles of schizophrenia, but more recently, Dr Davis has moved on to creating interactive movement assessments in psychotherapy process research.

The aim of her one-day marathon conference on 19 November 1988 was to introduce the British psychiatric and psychotherapeutic community to this work. The audience ranged from psychiatrists to clinical psychologists, psychoanalysts, and dance movement therapists, and all were invited to ask questions from their particular perspectives and interests. In an intermediary session, the audience was divided into four sections to analyse respectively the posture, gesture, emblematic movement, and interactional movement of George Bush and Michael Dukakis, whose televised interviews with David Frost provided a wealth of material. When finally the sound was turned on, there was much amusement, and astonishment at the limitations of the verbal medium, as well as at the speaker's

profound knowledge of the extensive non-verbal communications training which the Republican politicians employed. Interestingly, Dukakis was coached only by his wife, while Bush had up to 11 coaching sessions per week during the campaign. Senator Dan Quayle was evidently programmed by his wife, who provided kinaesthetic cues by touching his back, and carefully timed the closure of his public encounters.

The opening paper presented a brief history of the relationships between non-verbal research and psychotherapy, as well as focusing on the contributions of psychoanalytical pioneers like Felix Deutsch, and the work of the American school, especially Scheflen. Dr Davis took care to explain how research in this field had taken the direction it had, and this inevitably involved her in some autobiographical accounts, which gave a real sense of the enthusiasm and dedication that motivated these pioneers. She also presented and commented on a video tape of an actual psychotherapeutic session, concentrating on interactive movement patterns. She pointed out the movement style of both participants, illustrated the unconscious aspects of movement, and drew parallels between posture shift and punctuation, especially in bringing the session to a full stop. It was noted that mirroring in early interviews tended to promote rapport, and that each psychotherapist had a unique pattern in making interventions in the non-verbal sphere.

Professor Davis was invited by the Laban Centre for Movement and Dance, at Goldsmith's College, University of London, and was welcomed by Professor Dulicai, who both founded the movement therapy programme there, and heads the movement section of creative arts therapies at Hahnemann University and Medical School in Philadelphia. Davis's conference papers, as well as her clinical sessions at the Laban Centre, were intended to develop Anglo-American links in movement analysis and therapy that have been started by Dulicai. It is to be hoped that this will result in the increasing integration of movement analysis and therapy in British mental health programmes. This certainly was the declared intention of the organiser, Lawrence Higgins, of the British Association of Dance Movement Therapy, who promised the audience a series of similar day conferences in the future. Judging by the audience appreciation, there are many converts, and we can look forward to fascinating developments in the future.

*Seminar held at St George's Hospital Medical School, 19 November 1988.