

BOOK REVIEW

CALATONIA: A THERAPEUTIC APPROACH THAT PROMOTES SOMATIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL REGULATION

Anita Ribeiro Blanchard, Ana Maria Galvão Rios & Lead Maria Perillo Seixas (eds) (2019)

Miami: Alma Street Enterprise

ISBN: 9781097914357, 325pp., p/bk

This book introducing the work of Pethő Sándor, a Hungarian doctor, focuses on his Calatonia method and the allied series of somatic techniques (known as Subtle Touch) that are widely used throughout Brazil.

Sándor settled in São Paulo, Brazil, after the Second World War, and his gentle and powerful method has been used in conjunction with Jungian psychotherapy by therapists (such as occupational therapists and child development therapists), as well as in the fields of education, health and well-being, personal growth, and stress prevention. Over the past fifty years, Sándor's method has also travelled beyond the borders of Brazil (Blanchard, 2019); however, until the publication of this book, the background theory underpinning Subtle Touch and Catalonia has been largely misrepresented due to the language barrier. Although there are many books, theses and dissertations which have been written about the method in Portuguese, there are scant publications in English (Delmanto, 2008; Farah, 2017) which adequately address the theoretical framework of

Subtle Touch and Calatonia. From this perspective, this book represents a significant milestone in the history of Calatonia by virtue of the fact that this is the first major publication in English in which the philosophy, practice and development of the method are finally presented exhaustively to an international audience.

Having had the privilege of being trained in Pethö Sándor's specialised Subtle Touch Psychophysical Integration method by the man himself, and having incorporated his method into my practice as an occupational therapist, lecturer and circle dance teacher and researcher (both in Brazil, where I am from originally, and in the United Kingdom, where I currently live and work), it is a honour to review this much-needed publication.

The book comprises sixteen chapters, written by authors who, with the exception of one guest collaborator (Herbet, 2019), learned the method directly from Sándor at the Sedes Sapientiae Institute, São Paulo. The majority of the chapters were originally published in the indexed Brazilian journal *Hermes* (Instituto Sedes Sapientiae, n.d.) between 1996 (when the journal was launched) and 2018. As most of the chapters were originally published in Portuguese, their translation has been carefully and competently revised and edited by a cognitive scientist (Comfort, 2019) and a language teacher in the UK (Hofton, cited in Blanchard 2019, pg.xiv) in order to preserve cultural references and idioms particular to Brazil as well as to provide an accurate equivalent in English. For the purpose of this review, I will focus on just some of the chapters. Having studied and trained under Sándor over many years and having the greatest respect for him and his work, I thought it imperative that I focus particularly on chapter one. Furthermore, I am very familiar with the original article, written in Portuguese, on which this chapter based.

The first chapter, entitled “Calatonia”, which was originally published in 1969 in the *Psychology Bulletin*, a journal of the São Paulo Society of Psychology, by Pethő Sándor, has been translated and reprinted for the purpose of this book. In this chapter, a very detailed description and the historical and theoretical basis of Calatonia are provided by Pethő Sándor. Left with no conventional medical resources due to wartime shortages, Sándor began to experiment with touch and gentle manipulations applied to the distal parts of a patient’s body (i.e., the feet, the hands, the head). He initially explored the effects of gentle touch in obstetrics, particularly in cases of circulatory problems. Later, he noticed that gentle touches alleviated symptoms in several conditions, such as phantom limb syndrome, psychosomatic complaints, pain, catatonic states, and so on. Thus he began, with his intuitive and caring manner, a life-long observation of the effects of gentle therapeutic touch on the individual and realised that global self-regulatory mechanisms lead to positive results and well-being. Paulo Machado Filho’s chapter provides an insightful account of the legacy of Pethő Sándor and a context for his method as ‘a powerful therapeutic technique’ (Machado Filho 2019, p.24).

From an academic perspective, my interest was piqued by Rosa Farah’s (1949-2016) chapter three, in which she describes the teaching of the method within the professional course of psychology at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo. She, along with many other of the authors included in this volume, gives special emphasis to the fact that the Subtle Touch technique and Calatonia are administered by a therapist who, whilst being genuinely present, guides their client through their inner experience, enabling them ultimately to heal themselves physically, mentally, psychologically and spiritually. I used Rosa Farah’s book (Farah, 1995) whilst teaching my BSc (Hons) Occupational Therapy

students at the University of São Paulo, Brazil, and I am excited at the prospect of now doing the same with my students in the UK by referring them to her chapter in this new publication.

Blanchard's (2019) unique contribution presents a summary of recent novel insights from cognitive neuroscience in which she claims that we, at last, have a clearer understanding of the highly subtle ways in which this method influences our body and psyche (chapter sixteen). This chapter provides a detailed knowledge situating Calatonia within the context of other somatic and body-based techniques (Blanchard 2019, p.286). Blanchard (2019) explores the key findings in neuroscience, neuropsychology and the neuroscience of touch. What she has discovered is that Calatonia, whilst relying on the Resting-State Network connectivity, integrates Mind Wandering and "apperceptive" processes, as well as using the potential of the Orienting Reflex to reorganise motivational and appetitive systems. It not only balances the autonomic nervous system (ANS) but also whole brain connectivity and chrono-architecture (subcortical-cortical large scale networks). Blanchard also points out that during a Calatonia session a certain 'tempo' is created which establishes a compatibility between the patient's rhythm and the therapist's rhythm, a harmonisation that is conducive to dyadic regulation, which thereby strengthens the naturally occurring interpersonal synchronization on a therapeutic level of fine-tuned non-verbal communication (Koole & Tschacher, 2016; Schore, 2009; Siegel, 2012).

Marilena Dreyfuss Armando, in her chapter 'Calatonia and Resilience' discusses Calatonia as a method for the facilitation of self-regulation (Armando 2019, p.268). Informed by an aspect of my own doctoral research with circle dance and well-being (Borges da Costa, 2014; Borges da Costa & Cox, 2016), I also noted that Armando (2019)

discusses the relevance of Calatonia in relation to resilience and spirituality. She has been motivated to do so particularly due to key findings of her own research with students of the post-graduate course Body-Based Techniques at the Sedes Sapientae Institute (Armando, 2006) and other scholars (Jung, 1969, Menegatti-Chequini, 2011; Rios, 2008).

Chapter sixteen is a very succinct account of the latest insights into Calatonia that stem from recent discoveries by neuroscientists about the effects of subtle touch on the brain; it is unfortunate that Anita Blanchard was unable to include the rest of her findings in this book. However, a recent publication (Blanchard and Comfort, 2020) explores some of these findings in much greater detail. As with any collection of essays (originally written mainly in Portuguese and all by different authors), there is always the possibility that the final book might end up being written in an uneven or inconsistent way. However, Anita Blanchard and her team have done a splendid editorial job. The range of topics covered through the lens of sixteen authors from different professional backgrounds (clinical psychologists, Jungian analysts, an occupational therapist, a psychiatrist, and a pedagogue) provides a rich contribution towards our understanding of the application of Subtle Touch and Calatonia in different domains and settings. Its accessible language and well-integrated reflexive style makes this book a potentially very useful introductory volume for understanding the history and the practice of Calatonia and Subtle Touch to various audiences including practitioners, students and researchers.

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