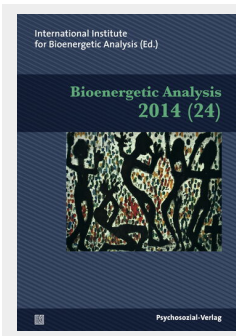


Maê Nascimento

The Present Dilemma of Psychotherapy



Bioenergetic Analysis

24. Volume, No. 1, 2014, Page 11–31

Psychosozial-Verlag

DOI: [10.30820/0743-4804-2014-24-11](https://doi.org/10.30820/0743-4804-2014-24-11)



Submissions for consideration for the next volume of *Bioenergetic Analysis* must be sent to the editor (vincentiaschroeter@gmail.com) between June 1st and September 1st, 2014.

Bibliographic information of Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek (The German Library)
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;
detailed bibliographic data are available at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

2014 Psychosozial-Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, Gießen, Germany
info@psychosozial-verlag.de
www.psychosozial-verlag.de



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Cover design & layout based on drafts by Hanspeter Ludwig, Wetzlar

<https://doi.org/10.30820/0743-4804-2014-24>
ISBN (PDF-E-Book) 978-3-8379-6799-9
ISBN (Print) 978-3-8379-2372-8
ISSN (Online) 2747-8882 · ISSN (Print) 0743-4804

The Present Dilemma of Psychotherapy¹

Psychotherapy at Risk

Maê Nascimento

Abstracts

English

This paper intends to be a warning for us, psychotherapists, to be carefully attuned to the huge changes presented by the cultural mutation we are going through and to get ready to adjust to the new era. It describes some of the directions where the current cultural forces are leading to, turning the human being into less reflexive and more tuned to the outside, taken by appearance and living poor and superficial relationships – with self and others. Then, it gives some suggestions towards ways to recover a deeper connection with one's real essence. Yet it focuses on and values Bioenergetics as being a great path to get there and claims that the momentum for bioenergetic therapists is to give more emphasis to help people go towards the inside in compensation for the tremendous strength of the external reality pulling us to the outside.

Finally, it brings the description of two body exercises as suggestions to work energetically with the body in order to achieve that new place.

Das Gegenwärtige Dilemma (German)

Dieser Artikel will uns Psychotherapeuten als Warnung dienen, bedächtig auf die riesigen Veränderungen einzugehen, die sich aus der kulturellen Mutation ergeben,

¹ This paper was presented at the 22nd IIBA International Conference, May 29th – June 2nd, 2013, in Palermo, Italy.

und bereit zu sein, uns der neuen Zeit anzupassen. Er beschreibt einigen Richtungen, in welche die gegenwärtigen kulturellen Kräfte laufen; sie lassen den Menschen weniger reflektierend und mehr auf das Äußere eingestellt, von der äußeren Erscheinung eingenommen und in verarmten und oberflächlichen Verbindungen mit sich selbst und anderen lebend. Dann gibt es einige Vorschläge für Wege, eine tiefere Verbindung mit seinem wahren Wesen wiederherzustellen. Es betont und schätzt, dass die Bioenergetik ein ausgezeichneter Weg ist, dies zu erreichen, und erklärt, dass der Schwerpunkt für bioenergetische Therapeuten darin liegt, den Menschen zu helfen mehr auf das Innere einzugehen als Ausgleich für die ungeheure Stärke der äußerlichen Realität, die uns nach außen zieht.

Zum Schluss beschreibt es zwei Körperübungen, die dazu dienen, energetisch mit dem Körper zu arbeiten um das obere Ziel zu erreichen.

Le dilemme moderne (French)

Cet article nous invite, nous psychothérapeutes, à être attentifs aux grands changements produits par la transformation culturelle à laquelle nous assistons aujourd'hui, et ce, afin de nous préparer à répondre à des nouvelles problématiques. L'article décrit les tendances produites par le courant culturel moderne qui pousse les êtres humains à être plutôt tourné vers l'extérieur au détriment des capacités réflexives, à vivre des relations pauvres et superficielles dominées par l'apparence et l'image, et ceci autant dans leur relations avec les autres qu'avec eux même.

Ensuite l'article propose des manières d'aider à retrouver une relation profonde avec son essence réelle. Il se centre alors, pour le mettre en avant, sur le fait que la bioénergie est une voie de premier choix pour y arriver. Il affirme haut et fort que c'est le moment, pour les psychothérapeutes en analyse bioénergétique, d'accorder une grande importance au fait d'aider les personnes à se tourner vers leur intérieur, ceci pour compenser cette énorme pression qui nous pousse à être tournés vers l'extérieur.

Pour terminer, il présente et décrit deux exercices corporels qui permettent de travailler énergétiquement avec le corps pour travailler dans ce sens.

El Dilema Actual (Spanish)

Este documento tiene el propósito de advertirnos a nosotros, los psicoterapeutas, para que nos mantengamos cuidadosamente en sintonía con los grandes cambios de la mutación cultural por la que estamos atravesando y prepararnos para la adaptación a una

nueva era. También describe algunas de las direcciones a las que se dirigen las fuerzas culturales actuales, haciendo al ser humano menos reflexivo y en más sintonía con el exterior, dejándose llevar por las apariencias y viviendo relaciones mediocres y superficiales con uno mismo y con otros. A continuación proporciona algunas sugerencias para recuperar una conexión más profunda con la verdadera esencia de uno mismo, sin dejar de enfocarse en los valores bioenergéticos como un gran medio para llegar hasta allí. Así mismo afirma que el momentum para los terapeutas bioenergéticos consiste en proporcionar más énfasis para ayudar a la gente a dirigirse hacia el interior en compensación por la tremenda fuerza de la realidad externa que nos arrastra hacia el exterior.

Finalmente, describe dos ejercicios corporales como sugerencias para trabajar enérgicamente con el cuerpo y así poder llegar hasta ese nuevo lugar.

Il dilemma presente (Italian)

Questo saggio vuole essere di monito per noi psicoterapeuti affinché ci sintonizziamo attentamente con i grandi cambiamenti determinati dal cambiamento culturale che stiamo attraversando per essere pronti ad adeguarci alla nuova era. Descrive alcune direzioni in cui ci conducono le attuali tendenze culturali che rendono l'essere umano meno riflessivo e più in sintonia con l'esterno, preso dalle apparenze e coinvolto in relazioni povere e superficiali – con sé e con gli altri. Quindi, fornisce dei suggerimenti per recuperare una connessione più profonda con la propria vera essenza. Inoltre si concentra e considera la bioenergetica come un grande percorso per arrivare ad essa e sostiene che lo specifico, per i terapeuti bioenergetici, è aumentare l'attenzione ad aiutare le persone ad andare verso l'interno compensando l'enorme forza della realtà esterna che ci tira verso l'esterno.

Infine, vengono descritti due esercizi come suggerimenti di lavoro corporeo energetico utili al raggiungimento di questi risultati.

O Dilema da Psicoterapia no Momento Atual (Portuguese)

Este artigo pretende ser um alerta para todos nós, psicoterapeutas, para estarmos cuidadosamente atentos às enormes transformações deflagradas pela mutação cultural que ocorre no momento atual e seu impacto na dinâmica psíquica do ser humano. É um alerta, também, para nos prepararmos para os necessários ajustes a essa nova era. Descreve algumas das direções para as quais as forças culturais conduzem no momento, tornando o ser humano menos reflexivo e mais voltado para fora, mais impulsivo e com relacionamentos pobres e superficiais – consigo mesmo e com

outros. Sugere, também, algumas medidas para restaurar a subjetividade e a conexão do indivíduo com sua real essência. Focaliza, ainda, a Bioenergética como um excelente caminho para atingir esse objetivo e conclama os terapeutas bioenergéticos para realizar os ajustes que se fizerem necessários. Como um exemplo dessa proposta, sugere que se enfatize ajudar a pessoa a ir em direção a seu interior, em compensação à tremenda força da realidade externa puxando para fora.

Prologue

As a first step, allow me to tell you a short story, which came to my mind just when I was reflecting upon our daily professional practice in these present days. It made me feel restless and brought up many issues and questions. The scene I will describe shows us a piece of a regular day of a psychotherapist in his daily practice, in a minute alone between two sessions.

He closes the door behind a client who left his office and all of a sudden, he feels taken by many doubts and a huge insecurity. Had he kept the real unconscious meaning of that woman's slip, which led her to that fit of anxiety? Had he made it right by presenting her with an interpretation referring to her father when she became so upset and went berserk? Was the interpretation correct? In order to appease his mind he decided to share the issue with a colleague, someone close to him with whom he used to communicate about his findings and thoughts over his clients unconscious contents (and also over his own). Having some minutes left before the next client, he took his iPad and quickly typed an e-mail to that friend, explaining the whole situation and asking for his view on the matter. So he wrote:

“Dear Breuer, I have reached a crucial moment with Ana O.: she went crazy and had a fit of fury when I mentioned her father...Her reaction caught me by surprise and I have felt desponded: do you think I ran too fast with her? Do you think that perhaps I should not have brought her father into the conversation? Please let me know as soon as possible, perhaps at the time of your next break.

Kind regards,
Your friend Freud”

Now, how does this story sound to you? Does it seem likely?

Can you figure out Freud, as we know him, living and attuned to the modern world instead his own time (end of the XIX century – beginning of the XX century) and its customs?

The answer is NO!

The fantasized scene though brings us the urge to face the great dimension of the radical cultural changes we are going through and their impact over people's personality and way of living.

I. Concepts in Mutation

1. The XX Century

Knowledge comes from a combination of human being's needs, opportunities and resources at each moment of History. The scope of this knowledge sets out the paths to be taken and the patterns of thoughts and behavior.

Getting back to Freud, as a fantastic scientist, a talented writer and a genius in his findings as he had always been, could we imagine his theories and letters being typed quickly on iPads? Would he conceive, nowadays, a theory about the unconscious? Would he explain the psychic dynamics through drives and repression? Would he elect sexuality as the central pillar of his theory of our mental functioning, around which all defenses rise – building up different personalities, depending on how they had been structured?

And again, the answer is *NO*.

It is pretty well known that the human's way of thinking and behaving are defined by a set of rules and social values at a certain moment. Thus we cannot isolate Freud's theories from the severe and restricted patterns of his surrounding morality: the extreme value of modesty and prudence, the hiding of the body and its restrained expression. Hence limiting, containing and forbidding were predominant values in that culture and were essential for Freud's framing psychic dynamics with concepts such as unconscious, drive and repression. His main concepts were absolutely attuned to that "cultural spirit". From the collective point of view, societies were extremely rigid and isolated from each other, since distances were really large and the available forms of communication, very slow. The socio-economic system was defined as a patriarchal society.

From 1960 on, cultural changes start to go faster and real revolutions take place, the first of them being the sexual revolution. Through this radical change, women take control over their bodies and can freely choose their partners regardless of marriage. This brand new achievement helped to increase their self-esteem and their aspiration for getting jobs and taking part in the business area. This is when women got out of

their homes and roles of housewives and mothers were given a secondary place since there were promising new horizons they could now dream of.

2. The XXI Century

As we get closer to the third millennium, technology develops immensely and computers get to be crucial, first to the corporative area, then to people's lives. This is when the era of globalization gets started: in this condition all that happens around the world in all fields can be shared and communicated in "real time". The world as a consequence becomes much smaller by accessible information. Everything can be exposed to everyone and that is the beginning of the "global village" – which is linked by the virtual web, the internet. People's connection to the internet has then become a social mechanism of inclusion/exclusion, since everybody feels compelled to participate in social networks sharing about last minute events, new trends and so on. No one dares *not to be* part of this system because if they do they will be out and excluded. Nevertheless when people get related to "everybody" in the net by being in on up-to-date fashion, by speaking the "internet language" and by possessing all objects imposed by the market, they miss the opportunity to express their subjectivity, which is not important from the point of view of belonging to the global village. Everyone there communicates in the same language and talks about the same matters, so differences are not valuable. This makes an enormous impact on both individual and collective psychic functioning, and this is so huge that it surpasses the scope of a simple transformation and becomes a real "*cultural mutation*". This is a concept developed by the eminent French psychoanalyst Charles Melman to describe the present wave of changes. As he says,

"This is not a natural, progressive change in social environment but a radical transformation never seen before: a real 'cultural mutation' which seems to give birth to a 'new psychic economy'". (Melman, 2003, p. 11)

The "new psychic economy" perfectly fits the present economic system – the so called liberalism with its absence of mechanisms of regulation for the new emergent drives: *possessing and accumulating*. The market with no boundaries is sovereign – despising old generational values and references, changing the meaning of life and work and bringing greed for possessing everything that is offered in order to bring immediate satisfaction. Melman adds:

“Is not the liberal ideal in favor of mutual enrichment making exchanges free of any regulatory rules? We see here a dual relationship free from obstacles which affects psychic dynamics. It is true that this connection to a system with no limits makes the task easier.” (Melman, 2003, p. 28)

Considering such cultural scenery, crucial issues come to us who are interested in understanding human behavior:

What is left of the person’s connection to real essence if what really matters is a massive consuming of everything that allegedly provokes immediate satisfaction to be shared among all “net friends”?

How much time does this person devote to be in touch with his own thoughts and feelings concerning everything he goes through in his daily life? Can this sacred moment of a deep and intimate connection with oneself remain in the midst of the hallucinating rhythm of external demanding?

The answers to those questions will only come up if we look carefully into the “new human being” from those new perspectives.

II. The New Human Being

1. The Person Towards the Outside

The new psychic economy shows a completely different man from the one Psychology had been studying up until thirty years ago. Freud posed sexuality as the axis of his theory about psychic dynamics because sex at that time was hidden and forbidden, thus to be repressed. According to him, sex was always there, but in the unconscious – the reservoir where all drives got stored. Today, however, the objects of drives are no longer in the unconscious: they are in the reality itself. Says Melman:

“Is there any room left for the unconscious in a world where we are provided with unlimited freedom to express anything we want, being so exposed as if we were in a strongly illuminated stage, no need of repression? In the new psychic economy, the unconscious is not that place which keeps the pleasure we used to pursue along our entire lives – not anymore. From now on the object is found in the reality.” (Melman, 2003, p. 40).

According to this point of view, limits are no longer active and drives can be satisfied any time and anywhere. Furthermore we miss the father’s authority which used to set

limits and boundaries. On the contrary, the father, today, is very often treated like a friend among others – a status to which he voluntarily submits allegedly to be closer to his kids. The sexual drive itself no longer serves as a pattern for all other drives and gets a status similar to any other vital needs like eating, needing water, protection, etc. Thus it can be satisfied by making use of any of the numerous objects advertised in the media by the market. About the present situation Melman states:

“Progress has been the source of unlimited freedom: no other society has ever known such a free expression of all drives, such easy opportunities for choosing a partner ... It is perfectly clear that everybody is allowed to publically get satisfaction for all passions and further more, for asking recognition, acceptance and even legalization for them, including sex changes. Yes, this is a time of amazing freedom but at the same time absolutely sterile for thinking; yet, thinking has never been so rare as it is now.” (Melman, 2003, p. 29)

Thinking and reflecting are not as valuable in our culture as they used to be. Instead, what is valuable is everything regarding image, external appearance, or whatever can be shown off. For example, we can see how successful the reality shows are that we see on TV as well as the videos posted on internet sites like You tube, showing people in their daily lives, in scenes going from the most ordinary to the most bizarre. There is no privacy anymore, quite the opposite: it seems like a person’s existence is only legitimate if it is displayed and approved by the (anonymous) crowds who watch the performances posted in the digital media and in social networks (Facebook, Twitter and others). Anyway, people only exist if they show off, if they expose themselves revealing everything.

Regarding this picture, some questions come to mind. Where are our personal views, feelings and emotions- all things provoked by others that raise so many sensations and fantasies? Is there a real person behind the one who is showing off in performances? Who is this person?

Besides the loss of subjectivity and loss of limits to the individual’s public exposure, we can also see the increasing loss of respect and reverence to the sacred, as in death, for example. Sometimes death is considered only as a circumstance to be explored. When speaking about an exhibition of human anatomy, which was composed by human corpses filled up with a special kind of plastic, Melman reports,

“This ‘anatomic art’ exhibition has to do with searching for absolute authenticity – in other words, not an approach through representation but through the object itself. If things keep going this way, the mark of this cultural mutation will be the erasure of the hidden place which holds the sacred, meaning that place where sex and death are held.” (Melman, 2003, p. 20)

Regarding sex losing its old significance I have just read in a newspaper about an American photographer who is making an exhibition² with photos he took of his mother making love with different young men. She posed for him.

It sounds shocking and it seems to reveal a brand new status of sex in human's psychic economy – which, for the moment is absolutely vague and inscrutable.

The failure of setting limits and contention is involved in the crescent level of violence in behaviors for eliminating immediate discomfort and frustration. Without much thinking, mothers throw their babies out in bags, kids kill their parents out of intolerance to their setting limits, and spouses murder partners that do not submit to them and so on. Those scenes are fully described every day in the newspaper. The bullying, which is also a kind of violence that quickly spreads over all kinds of relationship (including social networks) come from not being able to cope with frustration and differences in people's daily lives; there is no repression, it is like: "I want it now!" or "If you stay in my way I will eliminate you!". Emotional coldness leads to violence, which comes from losing limits.

2. Consuming and Satisfaction

Another factor playing an essential part in the new human dynamics is *money*. It has come to be central in people's lives, but not in the sense which it had in the past as a value in retribution for people's abilities and resources applied to work. Today it comes with two main goals: *consume and accumulate*.

Axel Capriles, a Jungian psychologist and Phd in Economics, brings out a pretty bold proposition over this issue. He says:

"The role of sex proposed by Freud in the last century has been usurped in the present world by the money complex." (Capriles, 2003, p. 27).

Besides being a much desired object, money is nowadays responsible for many emotional malfunctions. People's most incredible fantasies have been associated to money, which definitely determines "who we are" in modern society. Money allows us to buy all sorts of things pushed by the market even when we do not need them. Moreover, the more superfluous objects one can buy the higher one's status, power and prestige is on a social scale.

2 Leigh Ledare, "Hard truths: Photography, Maternity and Identity" – Photographer's Gallery, London

In the XIX and XX (at the beginning) centuries the manufacturing process was guided by principles and values based on the collective social wellbeing. Nowadays the main goal is consuming and searching for references outside, on others approval, which makes someone important in their social environment. Capriles says,

“Quite differently from people towards the inside from the past, who had their behavior modulated by a set of internalized ideals, people towards the outside of the modern consuming society need desperately others approval and directions.” (Capriles, p. 81).

3. Money and New Pathologies

It is amazing how engaged people are in this new life style. Working has become the central axis in their lives, although not motivated by providing personal growth and professional realization (besides means), but by making more and more money to allow for more consuming. For an overcrowded world increasingly concentrated in urban areas the “essential items” for living in big cities – food, a house to live, health, education – have gotten more and more expensive. Fighting for jobs, which are getting rare and precious, is also a daily routine: people do whatever it takes to keep them and devote big amounts of their time and energy to corporative demands. Such situations plus women’s determination on getting recognition for their professional capacity have provoked a radical change on family structure and dynamics. Both men and women spend a big amount of time in their lives investing in their careers and start to think about having kids close to their forties. As a consequence they will be older parents, with less energy available to fully be with their children and always too busy to give them proper affective nutrition. So we can see that children are taken away too early from their mothers to be passed on to professional caretakers while mother and father are away, fighting to keep their jobs since competition is one of the most valued attributes in this economic system. Thus money has become people’s main goal and also acts as an intruder in all types of relationships. It is there, sometimes in a silent way, in interpersonal unwritten contracts, setting boundaries and acting as a hidden trigger ready to evolve into interpersonal conflicts (between husband and wife, between parents and their kids, between friends and so on). Capriles says,

“Money can actually be the straightest way to the darkest areas of personality. Like Freud finding in dreams the real access to the unconscious – where traumas and sexual

problems remain locked, the money complex is the '*via reggia*' towards human insanity." (Capriles, p. 131)

Considering the great importance of money for the male's sexual identity and potency, losing it can be devastating and provoke a decrease in self-esteem leading to deep depression. Although this connection (manliness equals money) is very well known, new scenery evolves from women's emancipation: the burden upon contemporary women's shoulders for showing their intelligence and abilities by working and making money has increased considerably. They have been pushed to show their competency through economic independence by which they gain a sense of self-value. This situation makes a strong impact on family dynamics and causes many distortions in children's behavior. One very common result today is ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) to which doctors used to prescribe Ritalin to make children slow down. What could be the possible meaning of this disorder? Melman's view about it says that all energy of women is invested in working and social relationships leaving no room for their children. He says,

"When you talk with that mother you can clearly see that her child does not have a room in her psychic economy. She has organized her life in a way that no trace of motherhood can disorganize the instances she cares for, those ones regarding the needs of an active, intelligent, and socially successful woman." (Melman, 2003, p. 98)

Nevertheless there lives the danger: one cannot say that this woman has really abandoned her home. She has learned how to make everything work well at home and to guarantee good care for her children. What this home might miss, however, can be associated with the emotional distance that becomes the mark of the mother-child affective relationship (and later that of father-child). We have been learning that the first relationship with the primary caretaker early in life sets up a relationship pattern based on continuity and constancy. What happens then from now on?

III. Implications for the Clinical View and Psychotherapy

1. New Development Paths

The new socio-cultural conditions (or this cultural mutation) raise some crucial questions about the clinical approach and about the practice of psychotherapy.

For instance:

- How will the children be who are born in the third millennium, considering those fundamental changes in their familiar and affective structure?
- How will the children be who are born from homosexual or transsexual couples or as an “independent production” made by a single parent through artificial insemination?
- What references will those different arrangements provide in terms of identity and subjectivity?
- How will those babies develop being passed on so early in life to professional caretakers and not having much opportunity of getting close to their mothers in that kind of special interaction?

Based on research, Neuroscience states that the human brain has a very intense developmental phase at the very beginning of the baby’s life coming from the mother-baby interaction. Alan Schore, a famous neuroscientist, says that when attachment is severely compromised we get inefficient brain organizations regarding affective regulation and coping with stress, producing malfunctioning in a child’s mental health. He says:

“Development may be conceptualized as the transformation of external into internal regulation. This progression represents an increase of complexity of the maturing brain systems that adaptively regulate the interaction between the developing organism and the social environment. The experiences necessary for this experience-dependent maturation are created within the attachment context, the dyadic regulation of emotions. More specifically, as outlined in the previous paper, the primary caregiver of the securely attached infant affords emotional access to the child and responds appropriately and promptly to his or her positive and negative states. She allows for the interactive generation of high levels of positive affect in co-shared play states, and low levels of negative affect in the interactive repair of social stress, i. e., attachment ruptures.” (Schore, 2001b, p. 3)

How can we think of the brain’s development process in third millennium babies? Perhaps they will be born provided with the finest abilities to handle computers and other complex technological gadgets (we can observe that children are able to handle games and other technological products very early in their lives). But what can we say regarding their relational abilities? How about learning to leave in the world as a differentiated human being when there are not enough meaningful connections to help them develop individuality? What will be, in the long term, the consequences of lacking limits, of dissolving the authority figure, so far embedded in the father?

What happens to the third millennium young people who are connected to

hundreds of virtual friends through social networks (Facebook, Twitter) but do not develop personal relationships that could bring the learning of handling differences, of tolerating frustration, of dealing with conflicts and sharing feelings? It seems that people are increasingly alone and the consequences of that may be harmful for the progress of their being and soul. This seems to also be the view of Daniel Siegel, of Interpersonal Neurobiology and founder of Mindsight Institute, when he answers a question asked by one of his newsletter readers:

Question: “How are the Internet and our digital age affecting the human mind?”

Siegel: “At our recent gathering at the Wisdom 2.0 conference in San Francisco, we addressed this question by exploring how individuals are connecting in ways that do not support a deep sense of being seen or felt by others. And so, as Sherry Turkle puts it, we are ‘alone together’ and ironically people feel more isolated than ever. IPNB views the mind as both an embodied and relational process, and so in many ways these constrained communications are not just shaping the mind, but they are creating a more externally focused way of living that can create more stress, less meaning, and more loneliness in our world. At the conference, we were seeking creative ways to alter this trend and help the mind and our relationships become more integrated.” (Siegel, 2013).

2. Some of the Modern Clinical Forms

It is not in the scope of this paper to list and describe many new clinical forms. However, I will refer here to two of the classic and very well known pathologies seen under this new perspective.

A. Depression

Depression was, in the past, associated with losing value in the eyes of the other – this other being filled with the projected quality of being idealized.

Today we have a new situation: the sense of human dignity related in the past to a value based on one’s own attributes is focused in present times on the individual’s mercantile value. This means that he is valued by as much as he is able to consume and his self esteem is directly associated to his level of economic power. Melman says:

“The specificity of economic exchanges leads to one’s commercial value being related to random circumstances not related to intrinsic and personal qualities. For instance the creation of a new technology might make useless one’s talents and attributes. Today, struggling for recognition is a daily task based upon one’s participation in social, com-

mercial and mercantile exchanges. That is why depression is so common in the present day.” (Melman, 2002, p. 98)

B. Hysteria

In the classic form of hysteria (very rare nowadays) there were very complex somatic expressions coming from repressed demands, which would never get satisfaction. Today a form of hysteria (very common) comes with all types of theatrical performances of hysterical behavior. As Melman points out,

“In traditional hysteria there was a theatricality which we see nowadays in this modern trend of coming in and performing on the show ... the main goal is to prove that everyone can participate on the show and to become an artist.” (Melman, 2002, p. 102)

A form of collective hysteria has also become very frequent.

“It begins with people’s existences, which are not acknowledged as such; then they create a group with only one voice for being listened to in their claiming” (Melman, 2002, p. 102).

We can see once again in those descriptions that subjectivity seems no longer to be present and that those qualities, which make a person unique do not seem as meaningful as they used to.

3. Changes in the Clinical View

Considering such radical changes we must also revise psychotherapy principles and statements. The way we knew it, as a long term and slow self-knowledge process may no longer fit in this moment when everything happens fast and focused and such is also the client’s expectation. On the other hand, since we work for the person’s connection to a private inner space where he can feel “home” and which keeps his own self and uniqueness – I feel strongly that we can not accept the shallowness and lack of subjectivity of modern society. We must help the person to recover intellectual capacities and life experience to think, create and make choices instead of just consuming, resembling and yearning for others approval as a condition for his existence. Thus the challenge for us, therapists, is helping people to keep alive and safe those attributes which essentially differentiate humankind from all the other living beings.

IV. New Propositions for Bioenergetics

The great difference of body therapies in general and of Bioenergetics in particular is the integrated body-mind perspective, the personality building and expressing on both levels as a functional identity, an original concept by Wilhelm Reich³. From this point of view health can be seen as a harmonic functioning of both aspects – psychic and somatic. The integration of these processes around the purest expression of the person's core is his *self*, which is exclusive and unique. Alexander Lowen says,

“The bioenergetic therapy joins the principle of activity on a somatic level to an analytical procedure on a psychic level. The method's unity is granted by putting the focus upon the character which expresses both aspects of personality – psychic and somatic.”
(Lowen, 1977, p. 52)

Let us remember though that Lowen – as well as his contemporary colleagues used to work with repressed contents to unveil what was behind his clients' blockages and restrictions. Thus he claimed freeing a body that had been captured by chronic tension (provoked by repressive mechanisms) by recovering its natural flow of energy. In order to get there he created many body exercises aiming at the client's expression of their deepest emotions and feelings: screaming, kicking and crying were some of those exercises.

We must keep in mind that this was in perfect accordance to the XX century patterns where repression was the cornerstone of psychic life.

In the XXI century, though things are pretty different and, reflecting the radical changes of the “*cultural mutation*” the body expresses absence of limits and boundaries. Attuned to the principles of liberalism the body is presently something you show off with no shame or prudence and this is part of the “new human being” who seeks all the time for satisfaction and external approval. The present body acts and expresses itself with superficiality and artificiality, showing a fake appearance of a “free” body. Our culture values above all what is on the exterior thus the “perfect” body has the standard that is requested by the market and that follows all rules of consuming.

We see now a body that is “built” from the outside that is sculpted by all sorts of diets, by a “bodybuilding” that brings together parameters of the ideal shape, by plastic surgeries and clinical procedures with promises of a “dream-body”.

3 “The concept of Functional Identity ... only means that muscular attitudes and character attitudes have the same function in the psychic mechanism: they can replace each other and influence one another. They, basically, can not be apart. They are equivalent in their roles.” (Reich, W. – A função do orgasmo – Ed. Brasiliense, 1977, pp. 230)

How could we believe then that this apparently free body represents the real self of the person if it is grounded in a standard, which is imposed by corporations that profit immensely from everything that this body consumes?

The problem is that people do not seem really alive in their bodies and do not recognize as being their emotions and feelings emerging from places they do not recognize. They live as if their bodies were just a shell for someone emptied of his subjectivity. *So if in old times the body could not express itself freely, nowadays it expresses something vague, lost, with no identity.* People's disconnection with their core or self is growing bigger and when they feel unhappy they tend to seek relieve on the most external surface and this of course does not work at all. Furthermore, unhappiness only increases and they probably will not feel better unless they dig deeper inside to make a connection to the inner self. So how do we deal with the body of the present time? How can we help it with the search for its own authenticity and its most true expression?

V. Man Towards the Inside

1. Considering Restoring the Inner World Prior to Expression

It might look like a paradox when we say that the person must plunge deeply inside himself in order to be able to express his real being but that seems to be the only path for getting there. The body is an excellent vehicle for making this journey and Bioenergetics offers a wide range of possibilities to provide this approach. Just to mention two of its main cornerstones – *grounding and breathing*: they are both essential when we want to help the client get in touch with his sensations, emotions and feelings.

Grounding is one of the most important concepts created by Lowen. It is a crucial condition for the client when working with the body for it is responsible for keeping him connected on one hand to his inside world and on the other hand to external reality. About the matter Lowen says,

“We start with the legs and feet because they are the basis to support the ego's structure. But they play another essential part: through our legs we keep contact with the only invariable reality in our lives – the floor or earth” (Lowen, 1977, p. 101).

This rooting is absolutely necessary when we deal with energetic processes for the client's recognition of his own contents and for elaborating them.

The other fundamental aspect we must focus in any bodywork is *breathing* because its malfunction is at the root of most distortions of the individual's connection with his self. Through breathing the blocked energy can retrieve its natural flow and movement can be restored, so the attention to it must always be pointed out to the client.

Of course this is not new for any of us, bioenergetic psychotherapists. But there is one thing that from my point of view should be reassessed. As I see it, although Lowen's propositions allow the client to be aware of his feelings, they give emphasis to the *expression* of those feelings – this is clearly implied in his proposed exercises. This sight could be considered absolutely compatible with his time when body language was severely restricted by rigid moral values.

Nevertheless considering the radical cultural changes, perhaps we could think about approaching the body from another perspective. Nowadays, personality (as well as the body) suffers from different distortions coming from excessive exposition and too much focus on appearance – thus mostly turned to the outside. For this reason I think that now, the emphasis might be redirected to the opposite direction, allowing the person to come away from the exterior, going from the outside appearance to the interior, to his real self. Then when we are sure about the client restoring the connection with his inner world, we can think about helping him to express himself. I see this as a spontaneous and cyclic movement in the natural functioning of the human being.

2. Two Body Touches for Restoring Connection to Inner Self

I would like to suggest two body touches created by DEP (Dinâmica Energética do Psiquismo), a therapy school that aims for the expansion of consciousness, and the integration of spirituality in people's unitary being. It works with all human dimensions, helping to get out of the identification with the ego and increasing connection with the personal and spiritual self. Theda Basso, founder of this school says,

“When the therapist touches the client he must have the conscious intention of radiating energy to help the client with his process of moving the flow of energy and at the same time to stimulate conscious awareness of this flow, mainly his emotions.” (Basso & Pulstilnik, 2001, p. 39)

A. Lumbar touch

The therapist must be at the client's side so that he can observe his reactions and ask him from time to time what is going on.

With the client in a grounding position (standing with knees slightly bent), touch the lumbar zone of the vertebral column between the fourth and fifth vertebrae with the index and middle fingers and the palm of your hand facing down toward the floor. The client is asked to breathe so that he can keep the focus upon what happens within himself. (See fig. 1 – note the spot indicating where to place your hand in the lumbar region).

“It is a physical touch ... that reaches the energetic flow through the nervous system and not through the bone structure or muscular layers ... This touch activates the energy through the autonomous nervous system and by resonance over the sensory and emotional fields. It also activates the perineum and the Hara⁴, facilitating an internal grounding and a deep plunging within oneself”. (Basso & Pulstilnik, 2001, p. 49–50)

B. Cervical touch

With the client in a standing grounded position, touch very gently with your middle finger the base of the neck in the occipital foramen, before the first cervical vertebrae. Your hand will be facing down toward the floor. (See fig. 1 – note the spot indicating where to place your hand in the cervical area.)

“This touch must be done with the conscious intention of activating the enervation of cranial parasympathetic which enervates the arms, lungs and heart. The aim is to relax the ego control in a way to help the person plunge into his inner being and to get more conscious.” (ibid, p. 57).

It is important for the therapist to note the position of the hands in each touch because they have to be turned to the same direction of the energy flow (down in both cases).

You can select any of those touches according to what is going on with the client. However there is a generic parameter that may be helpful in choosing one rather than the other and this would be the client’s pattern of energy charge.

“For the client with a higher energy charge who shows himself defensive, not surrendering to his feelings we select the touch which activates the parasympathetic system and promotes expansion and relaxation ... For the client with a lower energy charge who tends

⁴ “Centro Hara – by which the mother’s blood had fed us through umbilical cord and where we get our blood nutrition through our digestive process.” (Basso & Pulstilnik, 2001, p. 50)

to get easily into emotional discharge or collapsing, we select a touch which activates the sympathetic system in a way to help the client to strengthen internal grounding and to be self-supportive to the experience he goes through." (ibid, p. 63).

The reason for using these techniques when doing energetic work is based on the fact that they *create a more introspective nature helping the connection with the energy flow – and it does this without any kind of interference or suggestion coming from the therapist*. This is particularly important in these present times when the pressure over people's behavior comes from the external world, not offering much opportunity for examining alternatives before making choices. We expect that this is one new way the client can open a space to be herself with minimal interference from the therapist.

Yet, we cannot forget that the therapist always has a double task: one regarding the client and another regarding himself. During this work the therapist must be fully present with an attitude of a non-judgmental observer and listener. This means to be in his space of silence. It is the place from where the therapist gives room to the client's process without controlling it or directing it.

In a previous paper I explored the of receptivity of the therapist through attentive silence,

"The space of silence must be activated in a conscious way by the therapist. In order to get there, the therapist must focus her attention on her breathing and its route through the back along the spinal medulla ... After a few minutes of this procedure, silence and calm gradually replace the babbling caused by the usual flow of thoughts from the ego. There is where the therapist will find an empty space, cleared from all inconvenient interference, allowing her to receive information coming from the therapeutic relationship. As this flow of information is not under ego control, you get a wide range and exempt quality of perception. Since this is a non-conventional type of breathing, it requires attention to keep it focused." (Nascimento, 2005, p. 98)

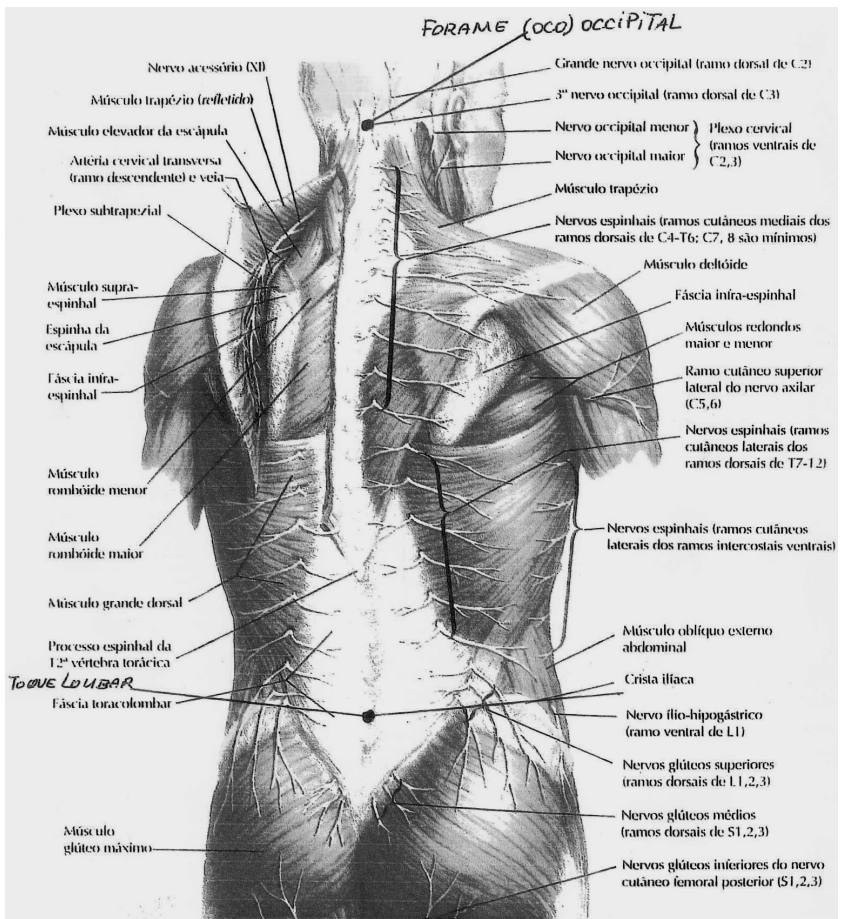
VI. Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to talk about the amazing transformations happening in the present time and some of their implications for the clinical view and psychotherapy. It surely has many more questions than answers and this can make us feel quite restless. However, if we want to follow the human being's evolution, we must review our classic concepts and be ready to make the necessary changes in order to expand our knowledge and to help in our clinical practice.

Although Bioenergetics is a great psychotherapeutic approach it may also need some

adjustments in time, so we, bioenergetic therapists should not be concerned about making changes and creating new alternatives to deal with the body and with relational aspects. Some of the Lowen's concepts – like *grounding*, are essential for working with the body, as I think they will always be. On the other hand by reviewing the theory and adding fresh and new ideas to Bioenergetics we will certainly be honoring its founder.

Our biggest challenge as professionals devoted to learning about the human being is to figure out how we can contribute to restore and preserve what is his real essence: his ability to reflect, to make choices and to be in relationships. When those aspects are in balance, we can be sure that the energy is moving in its natural flow and that we will be watching a healthy person.



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