

Alfred Adler and Wilhelm Reich Irreconcilable differences or the same basic truth? Matthias Wenke Translated by Elizabeth Marshall¹

Abstract

This article compares the radical, holistic understanding of body and mind in the individual psychology of Alfred Adler with Wilhelm Reich's functional identity of psyche and soma. Both start with the immediate, subjective experience of the individual and as such this makes their approaches in principle to phenomenologies of the body in the sense of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. The author develops the view that from two different starting points Adler and Reich came to almost identical conclusions about body and mind. He demonstrates the discrepancies in Reich's criticism of Adler's concept of *finality* in organics, which arise through his insistence on physical *causality*. He shows that the fundamental pioneering work of both Adler and Reich lies in the fact that they each established independently of one another that the basic state of the human being is primarily unneurotic, consistent, autonomous and social. Today this assumption forms the basis for all humanistic therapies.

Keywords: individual psychology, Alfred Adler, Wilhelm Reich, phenomenology, body psychotherapy, causality, finality, social interest, sense of community, vegetotherapy, sexual economy, character analysis, life style, holism, psyche and soma, functional identity.

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“As you move, so is the meaning of your life.” Alfred Adler

Reich on Adler

Wilhelm Reich writes about the theory of his contemporary, Alfred Adler: “Any reference to Adler in discussing the sex-economic theory of structure is indicative of a deep misunderstanding” (Reich, 1942/1972, p. 150).

I disagree with this and I'd like to show why.

Science as a protection against reality: phenomenology

Let us look first at the epistemological basis of Adler and Reich, at their understanding of science. Reich writes: “Viewed from the standpoint of unarmoured life, scientific theory is a contrived foothold in the chaos of living phenomena. Hence it serves the purpose of a psychic protection” (Reich, 1942/1972, p.39).

Now compare Adler's view on this: “Authors who are afraid of losing their bearings or of being criticized, only value such facts as can be measured physically in laboratories and are expressed in and reduced to numbers” (Adler, 1938a, p.154). But: “An idea, a view of a fact,

¹ Translations of Wilhelm Reich are by Vincent R. Carfagno. Translations of Alfred Adler are by Elizabeth Marshall, as are those of all other authors except as indicated in the reference section.

should never be identified with the fact itself“ (Adler, 1930a, p.7). So according to Adler too, science serves to defend against the unarmoured life.

Both authors recognize that scientific ideas about reality are defensive instruments of psychic security and in doing so they point to a primary level of directly experienced reality, which is the original source of secondary theorizing. This immediate reality is the subject of phenomenology, the science of incarnated consciousness and its relation to the world, being-in-the-world, which was developed by Husserl (1913) and Merleau-Ponty (1966).

The psychoanalysis that Reich practices is a clinical empirical science in the phenomenological sense: he observes and describes with his senses and his empathy the phenomena, which appear between him and his patients, while remaining impartial and open for the actual present. His use of a biological-medical language doesn't alter this basic subjective attitude of trying to understand symptoms through identification and empathy: "I merely attempted to establish a relation between what is experienced as self and what is experienced as world" (Reich, 1942/1972, p.42).

At the core of such an approach lies phenomenological experience and the search for patients' fundamental being-in-the world as whole body-subjects and the hermeneutic understanding of their situation: "We (...) made evaluations on the basis of the manner in which a person dealt with his conflicts and the motives which prompted his actions" (Reich, 1942/1973, p.92).

Adler points exactly in the same direction: "Individual psychology is research of the personality; that means we consider patients' reaction, their relationship to life's tasks" (Adler, 1935j, p.1). Both authors are concerned with the response of the patient as a whole person to life, to themselves, to their fellow human beings – their *being-in-the-world* (Merleau-Ponty).

Reich emphasizes the holistic aspect of his philosophy: "My present theory of the identity and unity of psycho-physical functioning originated in Bergsonian thinking, and has become a new theory of the functional relationship between body and mind" (Reich, 1942/1973, pp. 23-24).

And listen to Adler on psychophysical unity: "The findings of individual psychology point to the fact that a persons' behavioral forms all fall into a whole and that they are an expression of the lifestyle of that individual. The so-called conscious and the unconscious are not contradictory but form a single entity" (Adler, 1929d, p.87).

The unconscious is therefore not a sealed area in the dark depths of a biological instinct machine. It is the living body-subject, that doesn't convey itself in words but is immediately present in all aspects of expression. Adler differentiates between non-conceptual knowledge (experienced knowledge and body-knowledge) and conceptual understanding, "(...) for those things can also be conscious, which can't be expressed in words and concepts" (Adler, 1937i, p.66). An example is the deep background sensation of being alive. Neuroscientists speak of *explicit* and *implicit memory*, Gilligan (1999) of the *cognitive* and the *somatic self*.

In Adler's understanding there exists only an integrated self, which can conceal itself in its parts. This holistic self is the *seeing body* (Merleau-Ponty, 1986, p.181), which can be its own environment: "The raw material, with which individual psychology works, is the relationship of the individual to the problems of the outside world. (...) This outside world includes the individual's own body and his own soul functions" (Adler, 1935e). Thus the relationship to yourself encompasses all others (Davis, 2014).

This concept of the body as experienced body-space lies at the heart of phenomenology, namely "that the body is the congealed Gestalt of existence itself" (Merleau-Ponty, 1966, p.273).

The unity of psyche and soma: organ dialect

One of Reich's fundamental achievements was to overcome the separation of psyche and soma and show the unity of all expressions of life: "Psychic tension and alleviation cannot be without a somatic representation, for tension and relaxation are biophysical conditions. Until now, apparently, we have merely carried over these concepts into the psychic sphere. (...) But it would be wrong to speak of the 'transfer' of physiological concepts to the psychic sphere, for what we have in mind is not an analogy but a real identity: the unity of psychic and somatic function." (Reich, 1933/1945, p. 340). This process is open in both directions, as psyche and soma penetrate each other completely. So we can state that every idea, every intention, every feeling is the nucleus for a movement.

Adler too recognized this inseparable unity and showed that psyche and body mirror one another: "In rage, fear, grief or any other emotion the body always speaks, and the body of every individual speaks its own language" (Adler, 1931b, p.42f). "We shouldn't forget that the organism is a unity and that if there is an impulse at one point the organism will vibrate as a whole." (1934h, p.66). "We have to learn to understand the dialect of the organs" (1934h, p.70f). "As you move, so is the meaning of your life" (1933b, p.77): one could hardly express the core of body psychotherapy more astutely.

Reich has a similar view: "For character-analytic therapy, the muscular attitudes take on another importance also. They offer the possibility of avoiding when necessary, the complicated detour via the psychic structure and of breaking through to the affects directly from the somatic attitude. (...) The muscular attitude is identical with what we call 'body expression'" (Reich, 1942/1973, p.301). And here the circle comes around to Adler's organ dialect.

Some variations of body psychotherapy take the position that we are completely our bodies and that we embody, express and position ourselves completely therein. But still we all have the experience that we have our bodies and that they are our medium for achieving our goals. How to bring these two attitudes together?

Here we must differentiate between the body (German: *Koerper*) and the *living-body* (German: *Leib*). The living-body is not identical to the body in a biological sense. We see objective bodies when we look at others and also when we see our own bodies partially as objects (for example when we look at our arm), but it is the living-body that we feel and inhabit. The biological body is an abstraction, a collective construct from the external *third-person* perspective; the living-body is the energetically streaming life body of the primordial sphere (Husserl) of each person, from the *first-person* perspective. Living-body means therefore the only really experienced phenomenal body, the experienced interior horizon of the subject, which simultaneously includes the world in always flowing, open horizons. The experiencing, embodied consciousness, which can constitute its own environment, is at the center and simultaneously contains everything. Adler expresses this in an unparalleled metaphor: "The individual is consequently both the picture and the artist. He is the artist of his own personality" (Adler, 1930a, p.7).

The dialectics of *being a body* and having a body are described by Rolef Ben Shahr (2014, p.158): "(...) as functionally identical systems (*bodymind*), and as two systems, which (...) complement one another (*body - mind*)."

In the final analysis a holistic phenomenology of the living body cannot be biological in a materialistic sense, because as I have shown the crux of the matter is the immediate reality of our experience: *consciousness is not in the body, but rather the body is in consciousness*. In this

context Adler clarifies a widespread misunderstanding: “The brain is an instrument of the mind, not its source” (Adler, 1931b, p.136; Wenke, 2011).

Thus the living body and consciousness are not separate. “One cannot ascribe certain movements to body mechanics and others to consciousness” (Merleau-Ponty, 1966, p.151). This touches on fundamental decisions with regard to cause and effect.

Causality or finality of the living?

Adler questions the validity of classic, physical causality in the realm of mobile life. Rather he sees a universal *finality*, a goal-orientation: “All life forms capable of movement (...) are also capable of foresight and can assess the direction in which they should be moving. (...) This anticipation of the direction of movement is the central principle of the mind. Once we have grasped this we can understand how the mind rules the body – it gives the body the goals for its movements” (Adler, 1931b, p.30ff).

Without intention there can be no movement. Intention is an aiming for something, anticipation (Husserl: *protention*). “*We are not capable of thinking, feeling or willing without having a goal.* All causalities are inadequate for living organisms trying to cope with the chaos of all possible future developments and to neutralize the aimlessness, whose victims we would otherwise be” (Adler, 1930q, p.21). What we call motives or reasons for our actions are goals and not causes. Adler points out that often basic goals are “secret” and therefore operational; they lead us without understanding (but not without knowing). Full presence (by meditation for instance) allows us to leave this intentional circle.

With the help of the reflexive function of the bladder Reich does attempt to show that there can be no principle of finality in biology at all (1942/1973, p. 282): “The urinary bladder does not contract ‘in order to fulfil the function of micturition’ by virtue of divine will or supernatural biological powers. It contracts in response to a simple causal principle which is anything but divine. It contracts because its mechanical filling induces a contraction. This principle can be applied to any other function at will.”

Is Reich describing here a causal chain of stimulus and response despite the fact that he rejects mechanistic explanations? What he is describing only becomes clear as a *metaphor* for his functional approach, whereby life functions out of itself and is not bothered about goals subsequently attributed to it. Nevertheless, living function cannot ever be meaningless (mechanical) functioning.

But what is this functioning-out-of-itself? In contemporary vocabulary we could speak of *autopoietic* and *self-referential systems* (Maturana & Varela 1987). “Living systems react to stimuli as to a sign: a stimulus means something against the background of the particular life-style. (...). A creature is always to be found on the horizon of interpretation. It generates meaning out of the pragmatics of its existence. A biology which allows for this can’t be formulated as a theory of mechanistic causality, but must assume a biological subject-theory as its starting point” (Weber, 2003, p.13).

Already on the elementary level of protozoans there is context and meaning: “Even a simple organism doesn’t react to its environment in a causal way, but rather according to the meaning this has for its inner state as a closed system. (...). Thus there is no reason to presume that there are two different processes – psychic and physical - involved in behaviour” (Weber, 2003, p.117).

Adler had already formulated something similar in the thirties: “The individual-

psychological theory is based on the experiential fact of the primordially of the gamete as a self, a whole, a personality. (...). Outside this self of the gamete there is neither an "id" nor "instincts" (...). In the experience of all these realities lies the compulsion to conform or to resolve" (Adler, 1931n, p. 59). *Mobile life and phenomenological experience are one and the same.*

Artificially isolated organs such as Reich's bladder may react unconsciously to pressure or electrical stimulus by contracting, but they do not represent the living reality. Here it is always whole organ systems that interact with the whole living-body in specific *situations*. We can understand that partially autonomic subsystems, as so-called *complexes*, are used by the whole organism as instruments through universal contextuality. There is no action without a situation, no organ function without an environment. "No content without context" (Will Davis, personal communication).

This corresponds exactly to Adler's understanding: "It is a question of considering the life of the soul in context" (Adler, 1927a, p.82). "Where there is a goal, the feelings adjust so as to promote its achievement. Therefore, we are no longer in the realm of physiology or biology: the development of feelings can't be explained through chemical theories or predicted by chemical experiments" (Adler, 1931b, p.33f).

Therefore, even reflexes (such as a bladder contraction) are not a question of mechanics, but are "congealed" *responses, responses of the living body* of the organism in context, automated attitudes to the world. Thus the bladder is a part of the intentional field of its owner. The body is the *incarnated* person and expresses him/her fully. "With the unconscious we want to indicate something which is not said with words. But the human being "speaks" with her body too, (...) and so expresses a kind of consciousness. Someone who wets the bed speaks as it were with his bladder" (Adler, 1937i, p.56).

Reich speaks of a purpose-means relationship, or of *finality*: "Muscular rigidity and psychic rigidity are a unit, the sign of a disturbance of the vegetative motility of the biological system as a whole. (...) The difference between the mechanistic-anatomical and the functional view can easily be demonstrated here: sex economy conceives of the nerves only as the transmitters of general vegetative excitation" (Reich, 1933/1945, p. 341).

And he emphasizes: "A psychic idea has to have a function and has to have an origin" (Reich, 1942/1973, pp. 255-256).

With that both directions are open: on the one hand the idea is a function of the whole personality or of their whole life-style, this means it serves a purpose (*finality*), on the other it is the cognitive surface of an emotional or energetic experience (*functional identity*). Here we have again the dialectic of *body-mind* and *bodymind*.

Reich's functional approach matches Adler's final life-style theory if we read his *general function* as the energy of *being-in-the-world*. Merleau-Ponty (1966, p.297) speaks of an *intentional arc* emanating from the body, directing the life-energy.

This is incomprehensible without a goal in the sense of finality. If this bodily alignment is shaken or ceases then symptoms appear, which are similar to those of losing the ground beneath one's feet: dizziness, hallucinations and so on. Adler writes: "If the striving for success is interrupted, there are shock symptoms throughout the body. Then fear of madness ensues, (...) and thoughts of death and other symptoms appear" (Adler, 1937i, p.203).

Reich understands, as does Adler, the development of character as a *finality*, a method of self-protection, even if he does want to re-interpret it *causally*: "The process we have in mind, though we are talking about it in absolute terms, is definitely of a causal nature. The ego, i.e. that part of the person that is exposed to danger, becomes rigid (...). It acquires in this process a chronic, automatically functioning mode of reaction, i.e. its 'character'" (Reich, 1933, p.338).

As I already demonstrated *every* reaction is a response of the living-body of a feeling subject and not causal mechanics – this includes the self-rigidification of the ego described here as self-protection. It *acts*. It *relates* spontaneously. Self-protection is a fundamental goal. Reich (1942/1973, p.27) himself emphasizes universal intentionality: “Life was characterized by a remarkable rationality and purposefulness of instinctive, involuntary action.”

Reich’s idea of the automatized reaction of character development is described by Adler as a *mechanized life-style* (in Datler et al., 2009, p.160): “Right from the beginning in the life of a child it is subject to a training (...). After a while this becomes mechanized, so that it finds its way according to these mechanized movements and forms of expression.” Thus character means the loss of freedom through the fixation of certain behavioral schemata, once self-created in a dangerous position.

Reich (1942/1973, pp.148-150.) criticises Adler’s concept of character: “He had contended that character, ‘not sexuality’, was the cause of psychic illness. (...) For I had not the least doubt that Freud’s and not Adler’s theory of neurosis was the correct one. (...) Character traits such as ‘inferiority complex’ or ‘will to power’ are merely surface manifestations in the process of armouring in the biological sense of the vegetative inhibition of vital functioning.”

This criticism is based on a misunderstanding. Adler understood character, as did Reich, as an energetic-affective means of protection for the whole individual, a *result* of their development, but not its *cause*: “Character traits are therefore only the external manifestation of a person’s line of movement. (...) They aren’t the primary factor, but the secondary, which has been forced to develop through the person’s secret goal and must therefore be seen teleologically” (Adler, 1927a, p.146).

Thus we can establish here that Adler’s concept of finality isn’t affected by Reich’s criticism. Intentionality, finality and *being-in-the-world* are universals in the understanding of psychophysical dynamics.

With a scientific, bio-medical assumption of universal causality everything becomes a mechanism and there is no-body who experiences and chooses. The subject of all experiences is *eliminated* and therewith freedom and responsibility.

Intersubjectivity, resonance and sense of community

The universal intentionality of *being-in-the-world* reveals us as beings who are always in relationship, at least with ourselves. Just as there are no isolated organs, there cannot be isolated human beings.

Adler recognized the search for contact, relationship, community as the fundamental driving power of human existence: “The oldest instinct of humanity is concerned with the connection of human beings to their fellow humans” (Adler, 1931b, p.198). “That the first act of the new-born child, drinking at its mother’s breast, is cooperation – and not as Freud (...) believed cannibalism and therefore proof of an inborn sadistic instinct – and that this act is as good for the mother as for the child is thus easy to understand” (Adler, 1933b, p.150).

Although we can’t look into other people’s minds, we are always in profound psychophysical connection with them. We share the same space. Let us think about the surprising synchronisation of thoughts, sensations and bodies in systemic family constellations. This means for body psychotherapy especially: “I understand the others through my living body, just as I perceive things through it” (Merleau-Ponty, 1966, p.220).

For Adler empathy, identification is the therapeutic method of choice: “Understanding is really an act of identifying. (...). If I was in their position, in their shoes, then I’d act just

as they do (...). If I can feel myself at one with them then I can understand them” (Adler in Datler et al., 2009, p.169f).

Only what we have first understood in ourselves can we recognize and understand in others. Adler formulates it thus: “I can only heal you with the truth into which I have expanded myself” (Adler, 1928j, p.698).

The feeling of unity with another is a profound interpersonal *resonance* in a free space of trust. How is this resonance possible? Adler sees it as a universal human skill. “We can only find the explanation in the in-born sense of community. This is really a cosmic feeling, a reflection of the interrelationship of all things cosmic, which lives in us (...) and which gives us the ability to feel our way into things, which lie outside our own bodies” (Adler, 1927a, p.65). This ability to expand the ostensible physical borders of the self and to decentralize is remarkable, revealing as it does that these borders are only concepts and that our nature is the open space itself, receptive for whatever comes along.

In Reich (1942/1973, p.277) we find the model of a community of moving ‘electric bladders’, with which he sketches his understanding of non-neurotic human relationships, both to oneself and to other people. “In these movements the charged organic bladder would display a unity. If it were capable of self-perception it would experience the rhythmic alternation of extension, expansion and contraction in a pleasurable way. (...) Such a bladder would feel at one with its surroundings just like a small child. There would be direct contact with other organic spheres, for they would identify with one another on the basis of the sensations of movement and rhythm.”

All those qualities which Adler summarizes as a sense of community are included here. Also both Reich and Adler regard it as natural to live in relationship and resonance: also an experience of oneness seems healthy to both of them.

So we are living continuously in an *intersubjective space*, which Rolef Ben Shahr (2014) calls ‘*wider mind*’ and Gilligan (1999) ‘*relational self*’, in which reciprocity and *co-mobility* are possible (Heisterkamp, 1993, p.77f.). As therapists we put our bodies into the interpersonal field, allow ourselves to be touched, moved, and open ourselves up for bodily resonance with the involuntary expressive aspects of our patients: “We might describe resonance as the sensory and bodily apparatus of the wider mind” (Rolef Ben-Shahar, 2014, p.310). Why else is it possible that I can touch the experience of a client by one of my spontaneously emerging inner images or body sensations? Used in this context, metaphoric words can function as “little energy particles” (Lilly Davis).

For our freedom as humans in general this means that we are always connected to the conditions of the field in which we move. We never exist as isolated egos above things and we can’t act arbitrarily. We swim like fish in common water. In each situation there is something like a coherent, suprapersonal necessity, which we can usually sense immediately. Above all we can sense when we fall short of this logic and *behave inappropriately*. Or to quote Adler: “If the inexorable demands of the ideal community didn’t exist and if everyone could just satisfy their own mistaken laws of movement – one could just as well say, with more phantasy, their instincts, their acquired reflexes – then there would be no conflicts” (Adler, 1933b, p.123). We can conceive of this as the *self-organization of the phenomenal field*.

According to Adler (1931b, p.16) health means confidence into that field, a fundamental sense of community, neuroticism the absence of it, i.e. antisociality.

The qualities of Reich’s *genital character* as the healthy pole of human possibilities correspond to Adler’s sense of community.

As well as a sense of community Reich's patients develop spontaneous activities in those fields which Adler (1931b, p.16) understands as universal *tasks of life*: "Individual psychology knows of no vital issues which aren't related to one of these three main questions – the work issue, the social issue and the sexual issue."

The new kind of social orientation which Reich (1942/1973, pp. 179-180) describes occurs naturally out of the change in the patient's *being-in-the-world* (their life-style), which is the root of all behaviour. "The picture (...) corresponded to a *different form of sociality*. (...). This other form of morality was not governed by a 'Thou shalt' or 'Thou shalt not'; (...). It was replaced by something which might almost be called *vegetative consideration*. (...). Actions were carried out in accordance with a *self-regulating principle*."

Adler's method also emphasizes the dissolving of the neurosis by self-referential in-depth change and not through manipulation (Adler, 1930 q, p.62). "The indestructible fate of humankind is the sense of community. (...). Thus individual psychology asserts that by virtue of their physicalness, a biological factor, human beings tend towards a sense of community, towards the good" (Adler, 1931n, p.90f).

The ground-breaking point here is that Adler and Reich have discovered something which most human sciences including academic psychology could not even imagine: *the primal existence of a good, social, lucid, autonomic, basic condition of all human beings, of which character and neurosis are but self-concealing deformations*. The unrestricted and competent protagonist with complete self-responsibility.

In his theory of the *endo-self Will* Davis (2014) has described exactly this phenomenon. Buddhism refers to it as the universal *Buddha nature* in all sentient beings (Wenke, 2014).

Form, being and flow: neurosis as self-obstruction

A faculty that is connected to psycho-physical health is that of *surrender*. Adler (1912a, p.192) starts with trust in other people: "A deficit in the sense of community impedes the capacity for surrender and for comradeship, which create the only secure anchorage for love and marriage." Surrender has here an explicitly sexual character. "Without a feeling of surrender, love is not possible. (...) Behind psychic impotence we find a deficit in the capacity for surrender, for co-operation" (Adler, 1930q, p.196). "If sexual feelings of love, respect or surrender are dissociated, they freeze up into perversion or neurosis" (Adler, 1937i, p.166).

Reich starts with the sexual side and establishes similar correlations between love, surrender and sociality: "Psychic health depends upon orgasmic potency (...). The essential requirement to cure psychic disturbances is the re-establishment of the natural capacity for love" (Reich, 1942/1973, p.6). "Orgasmic potency is the capacity to surrender to the flow of biological energy" (...) (Reich 1942/1973, p. 102). "The intensity of asocial actions is dependent upon the disturbance of the genital function" (Reich, 1942/1973, p. 81).

As psychic and sexual love are functionally identical, these approaches are equivalent, regardless of where you begin. Sexuality is deepest intersubjective communication whereby not only bodies but also psychic perspectives interweave openly.

Reich describes *orgasmic potency* and the capacity to experience energetic *streaming* as the results of a deep loosening of the character armoring. "I categorized as 'vegetative currents' all somatic phenomena which in contrast to rigid muscular armorings, are characterized by movement" (Reich, 1942/1973, p. 271). This "stream" or "current" is the phenomenological description of what is very obviously a first-hand experience of the living body, an indicator of psychophysical health.

Adler too recognised the dialectics of form and movement and the streaming quality of life. But he emphasizes “that the right characterization of a soul process in words, in a concept of language, can only fail through its own poverty, because it isn’t possible to give a fixed name to this ceaseless flow” (Adler, 1933b, p.172). “The human mind is all too accustomed to putting all flow into a fixed form and not to consider the movement but the frozen movement, movement which has become form. We individual psychologists have always tried to dissolve into movement what we grasp as form” (ibid, p.185). This is the dialectic of *form* and *flow*.

Phenomenologically it’s not about measurable classical physical energy. What is meant is one’s own experience, one’s own direct perception of the phenomenon of life energy as flowing current or as blocked in pain. This energy permeates all experience and feeds all somato-physical processes such as digestion, heartbeat, feelings, all expressive movements and actions.

Energy in movement is vitality which pushes forward, aggression. Reich and Adler see this in the same way: “The designation “aggressive drive” appears (in Adler) from the start in two senses (...). The first sense is the need for activity of the healthy voluntary organs of the musculoskeletal system, affectively neutral to cheerful. The second sense is the response to an obstruction of some other endeavour (...)” (Metzger in Adler, 1907a, p.12).

As for Reich (1942/1973, p. 156): “Every positive manifestation of life is aggressive. (...) Aggression is the life expression of the musculature, of the system of movement. (...) Much of the inhibition of aggression which our children have to endure, to their own detriment, is the result of equating ‘aggressive’ with ‘wicked’ or ‘sexual’. Aggression is always an attempt to provide the means for the gratification of a vital need.”

If parents, siblings or other early attachment figures make a taboo of primary healthy aggression and punish it with scorn or some form of violence, then the child is forced to disconnect both from its anger as well as from its vital energy. It can no longer cope with joy and begins to experience the world as *enemy territory* (Adler, 1927a, p.245f.), where free and spontaneous life will be hated and destroyed. “Fear is a phase of the aggressive drive which is directed against one’s own person (...)” (Adler, 1928n, p.61). Through the experience of powerlessness in the face of its tormentor healthy, innocent aggression is perverted to anger against one’s own life flow. The tormentor is transformed into a part of the self, into an omnipresent and automated introject. As soon as an impulse of the life energy flow appears, fear is mobilized.

This very movement pattern is meant in Adler’s neurosis formula: “Yes, but’ is the best definition of neurosis. Everyone knows that numerous people are stuck in this situation” (Adler, 1937i, p.109). Life becomes difficult, danger lurks everywhere and the neurotic can only freeze up with fear. “Neurotics don’t solve the problems they are faced with. When confronted with them, they react with shock (...)” (Adler, 1930q, p.129). Shock means *too much* energy, whether from aggression, pleasure or joy, which triggers fear.

Such vegetative survival patterns become according to Adler *intelligent reflexes*. “I often found neurosis, (...) in psychic situations in which one could have expected a fit of rage” (Adler, 1912a, p.157). “A number of neurotic symptoms such as erythrophobia, neurotic constipation and colic, asthma, probably dizziness, vomiting, headaches and migraines too, are related (...) to the voluntary, but unconscious interaction of anus contraction (...) and the action of the abdominal press. These are symbolic acts, a language of the belly” (ibid, p.67).

Reich (1942/1973, p. 300) observed the same things: “All our patients report that they went through periods in childhood in which, by means of certain practices in vegetative

behaviour (holding the breath, tensing the abdominal muscular pressure, etc.) they learned to suppress their impulses of hate, anxiety and love. Until now analytical psychology has merely concerned itself with *what* the child suppresses and what the motives are (...). It did not inquire into the way in which children habitually fight against impulses. It is precisely the physiological process of repression which deserves our keenest attention.”

Current research on neuroplasticity confirms Adler and Reich in their assumption, that our experiences train and form the body also on the level of our central, peripheral and vegetative nervous systems. Through exercise (even imagined) we can ‘channel’ neuronal connections (Bauer, 2006; Fuchs 2008). *We become what we do*. Adler: “We tend to ascribe inherited deficits to what is in reality the result of self-training in childhood” (1929d, p.140).

Reich too (1942/1973, p.300-301) understands individual development as a kind of *vegetative training*: “There can be no doubt that most of what people are in the habit of describing as ‘disposition’ or ‘instinctual constitution’ will prove to be acquired vegetative behavior.” Thus creative responses of the living body under acute threat become chronic automated symptoms, under which the later patient, who is also their producer, suffers deeply.

Adler’s neurosis formula ‘Yes, but..’ is the psychic expression of Reich’s self-blocking of the somatic life energy: “The neurosis is nothing other than the sum of all chronically automatic inhibitions of natural sexual excitation. Everything else is the result of this original disturbance” (Reich, 1942/1973, pp. 258-259). “This idea (...) led step by step directly to my present view that *sexuality and anxiety are manifestations of two antithetical vegetative sensations of excitation*” (Reich, 1942/1973, p. 134).

In one of Reich’s (1942/1973, p. 312-313) patients it becomes clear that the neurotic blocking is a particular form of self-relationship, in which we are subject and object simultaneously: “Fortunately it occurred to me that not only the warded off affect but also the defense was represented in his muscular attitude. The smallness and cramped attitude of his mouth could, of course, be nothing other than the expression of its opposite, the protruding, twitching, crying mouth.” This is not the result of biological mechanics. We are so to speak standing in our own way for reasons which are understandable but which have long disappeared.

Many protective mechanisms serve to create a subjective sense of being in control, which is quite obvious in the case of compulsive disorders. The more neurotic a person is, the more they will cling to systems, rules or dogmas and the more they will try to prevent any loss of control. Thus they will withdraw from spontaneous, natural life, which is always opening up new horizons in a permanent flowing present.

Therefore, expansiveness is freedom. And life is movement. Fear – as shocked, constricted energy – prevents connection with others. If we have access to life and spontaneously do what is right in the moment, then there is life expressing itself through our bodies and we are freely part of the situation. That is the intersubjective field of the *sense of community* (Adler), of the *relational self* (Gilligan 1999) or of the *wider mind* (Rolef Ben-Shahar, 2014, p.96).

Therapy as resonance

Heisterkamp (1993, p.14) understands neurosis as “*self-handicapping born of necessity* and the basic principal of treatment as empathic resonance.”

Here resonance is meant as empathy with the bodily sensations of the client which appear via the body of the therapist in the *intersubjective body* (Rolef Ben-Shahar, 2014, p.61). Adler:

“I always feel a coldness in my back (...) whenever I'm in the same room as a psychotic person” (in Bottome, 2013, p.101).

Therefore, Adler recommends for therapists: “It is perfectly natural for human beings to express themselves with their whole bodies and therefore it's often more enlightening to observe someone's movements – how they walk, sit, smile or fidget – than to listen to what they say. Furthermore, we can utilize this in our evaluation of their symptoms” (1929c, p.80).

Reich expresses it thus: “Alongside the ‘what’ of the old Freudian technique I placed the ‘how’. I already knew that the ‘how’, i.e. the form of the behaviour and of the communications, was far more important than what the patient told the analyst. Words can lie. The expression never lies. (...) Character attitudes had to be understood spontaneously. The intellectual understanding of the unconscious was superseded by the patient's immediate perception of his own expression” (Reich, 1942/1973, p.171).

The individual subjective world, all perceptions and memories, originate from internal and external experiences of the body. The basic structure of this internal world is therefore corporeal and without speech. This is due to the fact “that the child structures its life, what I call life-style, at a time when both speech and concepts are inadequately developed. If it continues to grow in its own way then it develops a movement structure, which was never expressed in words and is therefore invulnerable to criticism (.). We can't speak here of a repressed unconscious, but rather of something which was never understood, which defies understanding” (Adler, 1933b, p.30).

Trying to recognize this uncomprehended movement structure, Adler inquires into the *earliest childhood memories*. But he warns: “This schematic fiction should never be interpreted other than as an allegory, however concrete it may appear to be” (Adler, 1912a, p.44). “These are allegories for deep energetic, intentional patterns in the living body, for all memories are connected (...) to the external organs of perception and action, which are related to the environment. (...). Thus we can argue that each organ has as a function of this psychic context its own recollection, its own memory, in the central psychomotor superstructure” (Adler, 1907a, p.99).

If we approach this from the body perspective then images and affects appear as reported by Reich (1942/1973, p. 300): “It never ceases to be surprising how the loosening of a muscular spasm not only releases the vegetative energy, but over and above this, reproduces a memory of that situation in infancy in which the repression of the instinct occurred. It can be said that every muscular rigidity contains the history and the meaning of its origin.”

Thus Adler and Reich have found from complementary perspectives the same truth:

“As you move, so is the meaning of your life” (Adler, 1933b, p.77).

BIOGRAPHY

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