

Integrating Daniel Quinn's cultural criticism with body psychotherapy perspectives

Benedek T. Tihanyi MD^{1,2}, Ádám Balázs Czinege

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¹ Institute of Health Promotion and Sport Sciences, ELTE Eötvös Loránd University,

² Doctoral School of Psychology, ELTE Eötvös Loránd University

Abstract

We, in the field of body-oriented therapies, seem to agree that an adaptive body-mind connection is essential for the maintenance and restoration of health, and that socio-cultural effects can strongly damage it. Some traced back the historical origin of chronic body suppression to the beginning of civilisation (Fogel, 2013). Cultural criticism provides a model to explain the properties of civilisation, defined here as a complex socio-economical system characterised by totalitarian agriculture, settled lifestyle, mass-size population, constant exponential population growth and territorial expansion, and social stratification (Quinn, 2009a). Civilised lifestyle could lead to a discrepancy between biological and cultural evolution, and abandonment of evolutionarily adaptive self-regulatory (Bárdos, 2003) and social (Von Rueden & Van Vugt, 2015) strategies. We suggest that the consequent homeostatic dysregulation together with the pattern of domination might contribute to a damaged body-mind connection in the civilised culture, and interact with personal and family stories of trauma. We propose for the therapists an affirmative approach: explore the part of the clients' suffering that originates from civilisation, reveal it and empathize with it. We also suggest that the process of helping clients get in touch adaptively with their body resonates with helping society get in touch sustainably with the ecosystem, and that the two approaches could fruitfully interact.

Keywords: Body-mind connection, evolutionary medicine, cultural criticism, Daniel Quinn, civilisation

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Introduction

A basic assumption in the field of body psychotherapy is that the personal attitude towards the body has a fundamental effect on mental and physical health and well-being (Lowen, 1967; Young, 2010). An adaptive body-mind connection may be characterised as an attitude of integrating body experiences and needs into behaviour and of dealing with one's body with an accepting and responsible attitude (Mehling et al., 2012; Tihanyi, Ferentzi, Daubenmier, Drew, & Köteles, 2017). In contrast, a maladaptive body-mind connection could be characterised

by concepts such as: objectified, disciplined, over-controlled body (Teall, 2015), avoidance and neglect of body sensations, or even exclusive amplification of pain and other sensations of discomfort (Bakal, Coll, & Schaefer, 2008; Köteles & Doering, 2016), suppression of bodily needs and exploitation of the body's capacity (Fogel, 2013). It is also often assumed in our field, that the mere process of growing up in our culture risks the trauma of socialisation, that is, a developmental self-wounding and suppression of some parts of the self in order to survive, especially that of body needs, embodied pleasure, and emotions (Berman, 1990; Brown, 2012; Reich, 1980; cited in: Totton, 2003). Hence we, as body-oriented therapists, might meet with wounds in our clients' (or our own) body-mind connection which were initiated by the socio-cultural environment.

To help healing socio-cultural wounds, it is important to identify the basic features of the socio-cultural environment which promotes maladaptive attitudes towards the body, and the historical origin of these features. Most frequent answers mention modern Western life, especially its fast pace, materialism, consumerism, globalisation, industrial revolution, either secularism or religion, dualistic worldview (dating back to antiquity)(Totton, 2003). Freud-Maxxian discourse about self-objectification, repression, exploitation, domination and power are also apparent in the answers (Fromm, 2012; Marcuse, 1955). It is also assumed that (some level of) body suppression is an inherent part of human evolution, and adaptive body-mind connection on the population level is yet to come (Aposhyan, 2004; Totton, 2003). However, some body-oriented therapists trace the origin of body suppression back to ancient times, 6000 BC and the appearance of patriarchy (DeMeo, 1991), or even to the Neolithic agricultural revolution, understood as the beginning of civilisation (Fogel, 2013; Totton, 2011). Fogel also underlines that an adaptive body-mind connection and socio-cultural tradition, namely the one to be found in tribal cultures, were apparent in the vast majority of the history of human species, and still is so in some surviving groups, while Totton (2011) emphasises that the domestication of plants and animals came together with the domestication of ourselves and our bodies, and a spontaneous, connective 'wild' state of mind can be (re)learnt through various means, including therapy.

Cultural criticism: The origins and features of civilisation

To understand more precisely the features and historical origins of civilisation, we can turn to a field outside of, and rarely if ever mentioned in the literature of body psychotherapy: Daniel Quinn's cultural criticism. In our article, we define cultural criticism as a non-scientific discourse which is interdisciplinarily related to history, cultural anthropology, ecology, and evolutionary science. Its scope is to gather the fundamental narratives behind cultures, and make them explicit by understanding the evolutionary history, socio-economical system, and lifestyle of different human populations. By explicitly formalising the fundamental cultural narratives, cultural criticism aims to build a discursive understanding of the functioning and history of individual populations, which is, on the conscious level, mostly unavailable for individuals sharing the in-group belief system thereof.

In his works, Quinn (2009a) points out that the Neolithic agricultural revolution, which is usually understood as a primarily technological change, can also be interpreted in a way that it affects not merely the tools and the operational knowledge thereof that a human population utilise, but rather the fundamental relationship between a population, their culture (and its basic assumptions), lifestyle, and environment. According to him, civilisation may be understood as a complex socio-economical system characterised by a specific type of agriculture, settled lifestyle,

mass-size (or, even, global) population, constant exponential population growth and territorial expansion (as long as there is where to), urban development, and social stratification (Quinn, 2009a). Members of civilisation will perceive their society and themselves as separated entities from the rest of the world and especially from the community of life (see also Totton, 2011). Also, they will consider their social system both as 'developed' (with respect to nonhuman life and non-civilised societies, which are considered 'primitive') and the only inherently human way of life.

The aforementioned agricultural system appears to be of special importance in Quinn's (2009a) interpretation of the sociocultural mechanism and narrative of civilisation, as it is the central means of food production for the population. According to him, this type of agriculture is an attempt to gain complete control over a given piece of land with respect to what sort of species can live or feed there and what sort of species cannot. The common practice results in the cultivation of species which serve as food or other resource for humans or for the food of humans. Other species, which do not, are usually labelled as superfluous, harmful or dangerous, and therefore allowed or even doomed to be destroyed. Also, generally, the totality of food requirement of the population is aimed to be produced by agriculture. For this reason and for the attempted complete control, Quinn (ibid) uses the term 'totalitarian agriculture' to distinguish it from other forms of agriculture.

This attempt to produce all the required amount of food by growing it and by controlling the ecosystem of a given piece of land requires an extreme amount of work in terms of time and energy (Lee, 1979). The extreme amount of work needed in totalitarian agriculture may be also attributed to the generally monocultural fashion in which it operates: farmers create vast pieces of land with a fragile and unstable ecosystem, which is more prone to collapsing or suffering ecological catastrophes (Quinn, 2009a). The fragility and instability of totalitarian farming needs to be counterbalanced by excessive work and preparation for the worse by means of storing extreme amounts of food or other products. On the other hand, totalitarian monocultural farming is a lifestyle which on its own does yield an extreme amount of food (or other products) (Quinn, 2009a). This excess (food) production could in theory be invested in less working hours or higher level of life standard, life expectancy and comfort. Still, historical observations show that since the agricultural revolution the major part of the population (predominantly members of the lower social classes) has had to work hard, long, and much during their life in generally low if not miserable conditions, and high life expectancy is a luxury which has been available only recently and only for the highest social classes. However, a study that compared twenty different results on this subject revealed, that peoples who live in a tribal social system have an increased chance to reach their seventies, provided they are alive at their fifteenth birthday, independently of their social status (Gurven & Kaplan, 2007).

A possible solution for this apparent paradox lies in the social system of civilisation: the minority (higher social classes) appropriating the fruit of the majority's (lower social classes) work by force, and thus coercing them to work actually more than would be enough to sustain their lives (Bookchin, 1982). This train of thought, of course, may also be found in (neo-) Marxian discourse, but there it is usually attributed to a necessary historical development or to the defectiveness of human nature. Quinn (1997), however, argues that the coercive, ruling attitude and hierarchy that characterises civilisation are neither necessary nor innate for humans, which is supported by the existence of non-hierarchical human societies (Meritt, 2001; Quinn, 1997). Quinn (1997) attributes this type of behaviour or attitude to the fundamental cultural narrative of civilisation, which makes its members believe that hierarchy, and civilisation in

general, is a necessary and inevitable part of the human condition. Also, he closely relates the hierarchical social system to the coercing, ruling attitude reflected in the practice of totalitarian agriculture, observing the parallelism of domination over lower social classes and domination over nonhuman life. As an example, in small-scale societies leadership is based on trustworthiness, personal experience and connections, and is rather a coordinative function, exerting authority mostly when the group needs it (an emergency, for example), while in large-scale societies, leaders are elected rather based on appearance and second-hand information or are chosen by other leaders, which gives space to misguidance, and possession of power by possibly unsuitable (for instance, narcissistic, overconfident) individuals (Von Rueden & Van Vugt, 2015).

The combination of hierarchy, appropriation of products, and an excess yield of available food also has ecological consequences (Quinn, 1997, 2009a, 2009b). As it was experimentally shown, populations grow or decrease in connection with the amount of food available for them (Calhoun, 1973). This causal connection between population size and food availability works for humans as species, too (Hopfenberg, 2003) (despite individual attitudes towards birth planning), and it explains the constant and exponential population growth since the agricultural revolution. According to cultural criticism, population growth in turn has been the reason for the aggressive territorial expansion throughout civilised human history, contributing to warfare (Diamond & Bellwood, 2003; Quinn, 1997, 2009b). Famine is also seen as correlating with the combination of hierarchical society with a type of agriculture based on totalitarian control: it is a unique characteristic of such a population that even though there is more than enough food, there are people who are starving (this does not contradict the process of excess food fuelling population growth as it may be observed that usually more children are born in poor families than in rich ones)(Quinn, 1997, 2009a). The growth of settlements into towns and cities may also be explained along these lines: any type of agriculture requires a more or less settled lifestyle, and totalitarian agriculture yields a vast amount of food which in turn causes oversized populations: the result is masses of people living together in a relatively small place (Quinn, 1997).

As a summary, Quinn (1997, 2009a) understands the behavioural pattern of civilisation as follows: growing all the required food in a completely controlling and coercive way of agriculture, generating scarcity by not letting the majority of people freely having it and, thus, coercing them to work excessively or starve when plenty of food is available, propelling a constant and exponential population growth with this excess amount of resources instead, which in turn fuels a constant territorial expansion and an overall domination of the planet's ecosystem and biosphere, resulting in global ecocatastrophes, famine, epidemics and war (suggested by others also: Farb, 1978; Hopfenberg, 2014). This behavioural pattern may be explained along the fundamental cultural narrative (or, in his terms, 'vision' or 'story')(Quinn, 1997, p. 26) thereof, whose maxim may be formulated as *the world was created for man, and man was created to rule it*. In this interpretation, social, ecological, economical, and also spiritual issues and problems of civilisation are but the result of realising (enacting) this cultural narrative.

It was suggested that the ongoing realisation of civilised cultural narratives can potentially lead to the collapse of civilisation, ecological catastrophes, or even extinction of humankind (Hopfenberg, 2009; Totton, 2011). Although it can be thought that civilisation provides relative health and well-being for its members, which compensate for unlikely or rare 'trade-offs' like long-term extinction, wars, ecological catastrophes, famine and poverty for many, in fact, a growing body of results will be presented in the next section, that shows that civilisation

is rather a risk factor for health, civilised individuals live with more stress factors and less protective factors.

Evolutionary medicine: discrepancy between biological and cultural evolution in civilisation

Evolutionary medicine is an integrative discipline involving findings of evolutionary biology, evolutionary psychology, nutrition sciences, sport physiology, toxicology, archaeology and history which are related to health sciences (Nesse et al., 2010). Researchers of evolutionary medicine suggest that:

”From a genetic standpoint, humans living today are Stone Age hunter-gatherers displaced through time to a world that differs from that for which our genetic constitution was selected. Unlike evolutionary maladaptation, our current discordance has little effect on reproductive success; rather it acts as a potent promoter of chronic illnesses: atherosclerosis, essential hypertension, many cancers, diabetes mellitus, and obesity, among others. These diseases are the results of interaction between genetically controlled biochemical processes and a myriad of biocultural influences — lifestyle factors — that include nutrition, exercise, and exposure to noxious substances. Although our genes have hardly changed, our culture has been transformed almost beyond recognition during the past 10,000 years” (Eaton, Konner, & Shostak, 1988, p. 1).

In the same paper (ibid), it is suggested that the discrepancy between biological and cultural evolution leads to *diseases of civilisation* that altogether cause three out of four deaths in developed nations, but which are rare among populations whose lifestyles reflect those of our pre-agricultural ancestors. Some concrete examples of civilised lifestyle that risk health:

- (1) In higher social classes physical inactivity and sedentary lifestyle (Chakravarthy & Booth, 2004) and as we propose, mentally overloading work also, while in lower classes physically demanding non-ergonomic work.
- (2) Lack of free time, qualitative and quantitative sleep problems (Bárdos, 2003), and disruption of other biorhythms (Chakravarthy & Booth, 2004).
- (3) Qualitative malnutrition (deficiency in important nutritive factors, e.g. vitamins, microelements, fibres) (Lallo, Rose, & Armelagos, 1980), in lower classes quantitative malnutrition as well, in higher classes quantitative overfeeding and lack of fasting periods (Caramoci et al., 2016; Chakravarthy & Booth, 2004).
- (4) Civilisation also fostered epidemics (G. a. W. Rook, 2010),
- (5) while a counter-attack against epidemics, hygiene revolution, exterminated gastrointestinal commensal or pseudocommensal organisms necessary for health (G. A. Rook & Lowry, 2008).

Social support is a factor which is also mentioned in evolutionary medicine, and furthermore exerts a huge effect on civilised life quality. It is suggested that human species was evolved to live in small scale, egalitarian tribes organized by face-to-face personal connections, while individuals in the large-scale, complex societies of civilisation tend to play the role of ‘a conscientious employee in the faceless corporation and the dutiful citizen in the metropolis, but a surprisingly high proportion of them crave more intimacy’ (Vugt & Ahuja, 2011, p. 6). Hierarchy and the consequent social inequalities increase morbidity rate through the subjectively

perceived socio-economic status (Sapolsky, 2005). The shift from small-scale to large-scale society also decreases the cultivation of personal connections through verbal communication, and more strikingly, through touch, even though we are evolved to practice them regularly (Mithen, 1996), and we need them for balanced self-regulation, pain reduction, and mental and physical development (Björnsdotter, Morrison, & Olausson, 2010; Bystrova, 2009). Taking child-birth as an example, in civilised societies separation of the new-borns from the caregivers, loss of breastfeeding, and medical interventions are frequent, they can all disturb birth and have a detrimental effect on development (Olza & MacDonnell, 2010). The term 'birth trauma' was even coined for the effect of disturbed birth, and was suggested to block safe attachment between caregivers and infants (Miklosko, 2013). In contrast, according to observations made among a group of Amazonian Indians, the Yequanas, in tribal populations after an undisturbed birth, infants are carried on the mother providing sufficient dermal contact and the possibility to feed anytime when needed, which besides its important role in a more adaptive individual development, also leads to a lactational anovulation for 5-7 years (an effective built-in contraceptive process) (Liedloff, 1985).

Some suggest that the lack of strong connection between infants and caregivers raises the risk of child abuse (physical, sexual, psychological) (Trevathan, Smith, & McKenna, 1999), and consequent PTSD or developmental trauma disorder in itself can block safe attachment in adulthood (with other adults and the offspring), unless they are healed (Herman, 1997; Levine, 1997; Van der Kolk, 2007). It is proposed that civilised lifestyle can contribute to weakening the family connection, e.g. through extreme workload and lack of time, more frustration, and, according to others, a cognitive thinking style based on dominance and violence (DeMeo, 1991; Totton, 2011).

Lack of sufficient social support and isolation disrupt homeostatic regulation (e.g. immune and endocrine system) and also increase pain (Porges, 2003; Shankar, McMunn, Banks, & Steptoe, 2011). Thus, social isolation and the aforementioned civilised lifestyle factors can interact in a multiplying manner, increase distress, and cause chronic inflammation, chronic diseases, mood disorders, discomfort and pain in the body, and finally decrease life expectancy. To a limited extent, some genetic adaptation to civilised lifestyle (for instance, lactose tolerance) (Diamond, 2002), and epigenetic adaptation might also occurred (e.g. tolerating abundance of food) (Harpending & Cochran, 2009). Moreover, general intelligence was found to exert a buffering effect on the discrepancy between biological and cultural evolution (Kanazawa, 2004). However, considering the results of evolutionary medicine, the capacity of these buffers seems to be insufficient in protecting against all the challenges of civilisation. These civilised risk factors can also resonate and interact with the issues we usually work with as therapists: stories of personal development and transgenerational family history.

Maintaining maladaptive cultural variants, the role of body-mind connection

Why has civilisation been sustained by its members despite these strikingly negative consequences?

(1) In fact, archaeology explores several examples of human history, for example from South America, when a group had decided to follow some elements of the civilisation, e.g. totalitarian agriculture, urbanisation, and then they abandoned it (Quinn, 2009a). In the cultural narrative of civilisation, there are two beliefs which may have prevented its members from changing their lifestyles in an adaptive way; and they could be described as '*we have the one and only right way for people to live*', and '*man was born a totalitarian agriculturalist and a city builder, and that*

our way was ordained from the beginning of time' (Quinn, 1997). Accepting these beliefs might lead to an interpretation in which all the aforementioned negative effects of civilisation could be considered as trade-offs, which are worth being paid for the development of humankind, and where the abandonment of civilisation necessarily appears as a relapse to the dangerous, miserable, and short life of the primitives.

(2) Another possible formulation of the aforementioned two beliefs is nicknamed by Quinn (1997) as "the Great Forgetting" (1997, p. 242): conceiving of non-civilised human life as primitive and their lifestyle as dangerous, miserable and short, as if civilised human beings would have forgotten all the realistic (and, many times positive, with respect to civilisation) qualities of tribal life, discussed in the previous sections of this paper. It is worth noting that all the findings related to the real nature of non-civilised human societies are rather recent; the first source discussing the relativity of civilisation is, from 1887 (Powell & Boas, 1887). Before that, a realistic comparison of different cultures was not conceivable. However, in these recent findings, most of the examined tribal societies might have already been attacked or disturbed by neighbouring civilised populations.

(3) Finally, a fulfilling human life is 'meaningful' (Ryff & Singer, 2013), understanding and predictability are basic human needs (Berne, Steiner, & Kerr, 1976; Max-Neef, Elizalde, & Hopenhayn, 1992). Quinn (1997, 2009b) also asserts that societies need some 'vision' or 'story' (cultural narrative) to realise. The rather puzzling attachment to civilisation despite its dysfunctional and harmful effects on everyday life may be also explained along these lines: human beings appear to crave for meaning and structure, even if the specific ones they have is maladaptive for them.

We suggest that the phenomenon of maladaptive body-mind connection (described in the Introduction, such as turning against the body, judging it negatively, blaming the body to be weak and dysfunctional or avoiding and ignoring it) can be partly understood as an effort for reduce the cognitive dissonance between the cultural incentive that 'civilisation must continue' and the fatigue, distress, pain and other body complaints increased in civilisation. Another civilised feature which might disrupt body-mind connection is the pattern of control, hierarchy, and dominance (in contrast with the tribal patterns of cooperation, egalitarianism), which we since the childhood absorb from our caregivers and others and can use it as a pattern for how to treat our own body (Bakal et al., 2008). A maladaptive body-mind connection is a key mediator in blocking health behaviour and engraving the harmful effects of civilised lifestyle, and at the same time it contributes to the continuing of civilised culture.

Discussion, therapeutic aspects

In this paper we summarised arguments from the field of cultural criticism of Daniel Quinn and evolutionary medicine in order to shed more light on the mechanisms involved in the civilised culture's disruptions of body-mind connection. We focused on the maladaptive features of our current lifestyle and cultural narratives, and concluded that civilisation could be accounted for a vast majority of contemporary physical and mental problems and diseases, and this effect is mediated by the disruption of personal connection with the body.

The intention of body psychology and other sciences to introduce a paradigm of embodiment, that is a functional connection, co-operation, or even equality between 'body'

and 'mind' is similar to the intention of cultural criticism to introduce a memetic collection where humans are part of the ecosystem and 'nature', and not the ruler of it. In fact, (body) psychotherapy can help either to maintain civilisation or to shift from its cultural narratives. A therapeutic process which wishes to make the client feel OK not just with oneself and persons around, but the world (Birtalan, 2017), accepting the maladaptive features of civilisation as they are and letting go of the stress caused by them can (1) bring more comfort to the client, and at the same time (2) weaken motivation to discover the cultural reasons of discomfort and change them. On the other hand, a therapeutic process can also bring to consciousness the discrepancy between civilised lifestyle and needs, (1) increasing the motivation to change the lifestyle, but (2) also decreasing the probability to feel integrated into civilisation and (at least in the short-term) increasing subjective suffering.

Therefore, we propose to deal with the impact of civilisation on our clients with an affirmative attitude. The spreading affirmative approach in psychotherapy, which states that some problems of our clients might originate from or strengthened by social and political effects, was used mostly with minorities (Glickman & Harvey, 2013; Ritter & Terndrup, 2002; Schlosser, 2006). However, also for clients who belong to the majority of the civilised society, it seems important to affirm that (at least) a part of their problem stems from the predominant cultural environment (rather than/besides personal maladaptive mental development and history). Concrete elements of how to deal affirmatively with civilisation in a therapeutic process: (1) accepting or proposing the connection between the problems of the client and civilisation (lifestyle, social isolation, environment). (2) Being aware that turning towards the body and ceasing body suppression can reveal and amplify negative body experiences that may be caused by current cultural-environmental factors. (3) Providing information to explore such factors, and empathising with the difficulties of accepting or changing them. (4) Exploring which body needs are dissatisfied in the life of the clients, and supporting them in finding ways to satisfy these needs: how to use free time, how to reform working hours, or how to find a job that is more satisfying. Some therapists even started to establish communities and villages which provide an alternative place to live (Totton, 2011). In a therapeutic process that misses the affirmative approach, a client might feel that all the problems (also in connection with work, social isolation) stem from personal biography, and that the only solution to decrease suffering is to change oneself, and not lifestyle and environment – which is not always the case. The detrimental effect of familial and societal suppression on the self and body was highlighted many times in the literature of (body) psychotherapy (Conger, 2005; Orbach, 2009; Rolef Ben-Shahar, 2015; Totton, 2006), and the analysis of civilised lifestyle can supplement and provide details to this notion (Totton, 2011).

Another significant learning from Quinn's cultural criticism, relates to the price of sharing narratives of the civilisation. The critic faces the possibility of ecological catastrophes and the threat of extinction, and fear, depression and helplessness are understandable results. Many try to avoid such news and information (Totton, 2011). However, from the view of cultural criticism, humans were and are able to live in a sustainable life, proved by tribal societies, and a cultural shift could still prevent extinction (Hopfenberg, 2009). Moreover, tribal functioning is not only possible in hunter-gatherer or horticultural societies of the ancient times or outside of the territory of civilisation, but also in urban environments (Meritt, 2001).

This paper intends to introduce aspects of evolutionary medicine and Quinn's cultural criticism in the discourse of body psychotherapy, and not to investigate all the related results

and topics. Discovering to which extent the 20th century (body) psychotherapy thinkers (e.g. Freud, Reich) realised the effect of the Neolithic agricultural revolution and civilisation, can be the scope of a future research. Many aspect that could reveal the connection between personal body-mind connection, consequences of civilisation, and discrepancy between biological and cultural evolution remain to be examined, like sexuality, unemployment and homelessness, jurisdiction, war trauma, intergenerational relations and rites of passage, religion, existentialism, and spirituality, industrial and technological revolution, environmental psychology, pollution, information boom, and more. The often mentioned benefits of civilisation should be further examined (for example, mortality during and after childbirth, technical development). Moreover, the non-scientific model of Quinn is yet to be tested. However, in our opinion, the conclusions of cultural criticism resonate with the assumption of body psychotherapy, and we propose that further interaction of the two fields would be fruitful.

Conclusion

The belief that the mind possesses power over body seems parallel to the belief that dominant humans possess power on inferior ones, dominant cultures possess power over inferior ones, and humankind in general possesses power over other species and the overall ecosystem. Or to put it in another way, being in touch or out of touch with ourselves, our body, seems equivalent with being in touch or out of touch with others and the world (Totton, 2002). On one hand, what we, as body-oriented therapists can learn from cultural criticism is a model showing a stem of maladaptive body-mind connection. We can use such information in our therapeutic sessions in order to give more empathy to and affirm the cultural origin of our client's problems and help the clients understand (and maybe accept and cope with) them. On the other hand, cultural criticism could also profit from body psychotherapy, as we offer tools and experiences for helping individuals shift from the dominant, exploiting, and expanding attitude towards a more adaptive one, first on the intraindividual level, that is - the personal connection with the body.

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BIOGRAPHIES

Benedek T. Tihanyi MD: researcher of the Institute of Health Promotion and Sport Sciences, ELTE Eötvös Loránd University since 2005, Phd student of the Doctoral School of Psychology, ELTE Eötvös Loránd University since 2008, teacher of theory of Body Psychotherapy at the Hungarian Association for Body Psychotherapy since 2017. Doctor of medicine graduated in the Semmelweis University in 2014, Trainer of focusing since 2014 and instructor of yoga since 2008. Research interest: personal connection with body, body pleasure, psychobiology of 'energy' experiences, sustainable lifestyle and motivation to behavioural change
Email: tihanyi.benedek@ppk.elte.hu

Ádám Balázs Czinege: BA degree in English and Italian languages, literature and culture at Eötvös Loránd University, 2010; BA degree in composition and choir direction at the Liszt Academy of Music, Budapest, 2014 ,personal counsellor at Háttér Support Society for LGBT People in Hungary since 2015. Research interest: ecology and sociopsychology of civilised and tribal cultures.

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