

Body Psychotherapy in Spain

*Somatic historical milestones
and Spanish Character-Analytic Psychotherapy*

José Martín Amenabar Beitia

ABSTRACT

This article covers some historical milestones of body psychotherapy worldwide, and offers a panoramic view of diverse models in the Spanish field, drawing attention to Character-Analytic Psychotherapy, one of the most relevant current body psychotherapy contributions due to its influence nationally and internationally. The author then delves into some of the issues he considers paramount from a historical and methodological point of view, and for the future of body psychotherapy.

Keywords: body psychotherapy in Spain, Character-Analytic Psychotherapy, vegetotherapy

Submitted: 20.09.2022

Accepted: 25.11.2022

International Body Psychotherapy Journal
The Art and Science of Somatic Praxis

Volume 21, Number 2,
Winter 2023, pp. 106-116

ISSN 2169-4745 Printing, ISSN 2168-1279 Online

© Author and USABP/EABP.

Reprints and permissions: secretariat@eabp.org

W

ilhelm Reich: The Birth of the Mind-Body Paradigm and Character-Analytic Vegetotherapy

From 1920 to 1934, Wilhelm Reich was a disciple and colleague of Sigmund Freud. In 1934, Reich was expelled from the International Psychoanalytic Association for reasons related to his rebellious and indomitable character, and his innovative and restless spirit. During that time, in addition to being a renowned psychotherapist, he directed the psychoanalytic technique seminars in Vienna, and contributed to the creation of several sexual hygiene centers. Some of his most relevant psychoanalytic contributions included the study of resistance in the analytic process, the role of negative transference, and character analysis. Reich questioned the universality of the Oedipus complex, considering its presence to be a reflection of patriarchal social and family structures, and rejected the existence of the death drive, as he considered sadism and masochism as secondary manifestations to sexual repression.

*“... pathology is gestated
in the process
of interaction with others,
in the relationships
in which we participate...”*

Always a fervent defender of the first Freudian formulation on anxiety, according to which anxiety is considered a consequence of sexual repression, Reich maintained that all psychic disturbance denotes a disturbance of sexuality, and specifically, a disturbance of orgasmic power, which supposes an inhibition in the capacity to abandon oneself to the discharge of sexual arousal.

The Reichian approach is linked to the dismantling of social and family structures that restrict and impede the free expression of sexuality. Sexuality without repression is identified, according to Reich, with organic life, and therefore with what is healthy. This approach, which undoubtedly goes beyond the merely clinical field, clashed with Freud's vision, which remained strictly scientific and free of social and political issues. In keeping with his spirit as a social reformer, Reich went on to propose modifications in psychoanalytic practice that were not to Freud's liking. These various innovations occurred at a time when psychoanalysis was fighting for public acceptance and the acquisition of a scientific status that did not match Reich's revolutionary spirit. For these reasons, it is not surprising that Reich was expelled.

Reich's psychotherapeutic contributions, first within psychoanalytic praxis, and later in his journey through unexplored paths, led to the creation of a differentiated theoretical and methodological body of work, a new paradigm with original and fruitful research approaches and interventions in both clinical and psychosocial fields.

Like his colleague Ferenczi before him, Reich took into consideration not only what patients said, but also how they said it – their tone of voice, gestures, body position, etc. – that is, the study of form linked to content. Reich observed that neurosis was accompanied by chronic muscle tension, inhibited respiration, and neurovegetative disorders (Serrano, 2011).

To introduce his psychotherapeutic method, developed in the 1930s, Reich coined the name Character-Analytic Vegetotherapy. With the term "Vegetotherapy," Reich insisted on the effect that all types of behavior have on the vegetative nerv-

ous system, and the repercussions that may arise as a consequence of the degree of activation of its two subsystems: the sympathetic and the parasympathetic, finding that "sympathicotonia is what maintains the armour" (Serrano, 2011, p. 31). Meanwhile, in using the term "Character-Analytic," emphasis was placed on the character as a form of chronic resistance, insofar as it supposes a limitation or contraction of expressive, emotional, and pleasurable capacities that significantly diminish our potentiality and constrict our being. The psychotherapeutic process, then, would ideally aim at dissolving the character armor or, in other words, support evolution towards the genital character, characterized by the presentation of a flexible armor, creativity, and the capacity for self-regulation.

It should be noted that vegetative balance is linked with the capacity for pleasure. In Reichian terms, this would mean being able to live in accordance with the function of the orgasm.¹ Libidinal energy would flow freely, in contrast to what happens when armoring occurs and energy is blocked.

The field of psychotherapy is facing a radical change of approach. Whereas Freud considered language to be the exclusive means of psychological knowledge and "healing," Reich "gives the word to the body. If the 'patient' stands up, if he walks, if he cries, if he hits the couch in a fit of rage, this is good for treatment. We will no longer speak of a passage to action or acting out; the therapeutic process implies, on the contrary, the passage through the action" (Lapassade, 1982, p. 57).

We could say, to use Lapassade's expression, that Reich shows us the psychotherapeutic possibilities of passage through action, or, to paraphrase Freud, the body as the royal road toward knowledge of the unconscious. In fact, "every muscular rigidity contains the history and the meaning of its origin" (Reich, 1942, p. 267). This truly emblematic phrase emerges as an illuminating and inspiring beacon for numerous formulations and developments of body psychotherapy: the exalted appearance of the thesis of body memory, the body as a record of our emotional life, the speaking body, the body that tells of our conflicts and psychic sufferings, and

1. Reich was a pioneer in the study of sexuality, having entered the field several decades before William Masters and Virginia Johnson became world famous in 1966 with the publication of their book *Human Sexual Response*.

showcases our character traits, denoting who we are and how we have constituted ourselves.

Reich raises the possibility that working on the muscles or through the breath might provide a means of access to the emotional world. He leaves behind the prohibition on touch, and the exclusive use of language that previously characterized the psychoanalytic method, envisioning instead new horizons of exploration and new psychotherapeutic alternatives.

Post-Reichian and Neo-Reichian

There is no doubt that “Reich laid the foundations of a somatic psychology” (Boadella, 1993, p. 19), and stands as the primary reference in the field of body psychotherapy (Boadella, 1993; Geuter, 2015; Totton, 2003). He is at the origin of much of what was developed later, even in cases where his influence is unrecognized, ignored, or obviated.

Reichian work has given rise to a great diversity of possibilities, paths, and ramifications. As heirs to the legacy of Wilhelm Reich, we have, on the one hand, the post-Reichian psychotherapists – such as Elsworth Baker, Ola Raknes, Morton Herskowitz, Nic Waal, Federico Navarro, or Xavier Serrano, who maintain close proximity with the essence of Reichian work. On the other hand, there are the neo-Reichian psychotherapists, who, although Reich’s work is their foundational reference, propose either somewhat divergent or clearly differentiating developments. These include the following neo-Reichian psychotherapeutic proposals:

- Bioenergetics, created by Alexander Lowen together with John Pierrakos
- Core Energetics, created by John Pierrakos after having separated from Alexander Lowen
- Biodynamic Therapy, created by Gerda Boyesen
- Biosynthesis, created by David Boadella
- The Radix Method, created by Charles Kelley
- Postural Integration, created by Jack Painter

Among the many influences and derivations of Reichian work, I would like to highlight the developments carried out by Fritz Perls and Alexander Lowen.

Fritz Perls: Gestalt Therapy

Prior to the formulation of his influential psychotherapeutic proposal, gestalt therapy, Fritz Perls practiced as a psychoanalyst for more than 20 years, carrying out his supervision with Helene Deutsch and Otto Fenichel, and undergoing his own analysis with several psychoanalysts, Karen Horney and Wilhelm Reich among them (Peñarubia, 2009).

From Reich, whom he met in 1930, Perls absorbed various teachings, such as:

- Valuing the how (form) beyond the what (content)
- Considering the role of muscle tension as a repressor of impulses, and their emotional significance
- The relationship between body rigidity and a petrified ego
- The focus on sensation as well as immediate and direct expression
- The concept of self-regulation (organismic)

Perls was interested not only in the expressive capacity and movement of the body, but also in the lived experience of patients, and their degree of awareness. “For Perls the first step was to concentrate on the bodily sensations so as to restore the bodily sense of the client, and then to undo muscular repressions” (Kepner, 1992, pp. 211–212).

It is evident that the training of Fritz Perls, Laura Perls (who was very interested in dance and eurythmy), and Paul Goodman (one of Lowen’s first patients), informed them such that, from its historical beginnings, gestalt therapy strongly emphasized body phenomena (Kepner, 1992). In any case, the question is often raised: is gestalt a mind-body therapy? Among the gestaltists, there is no consensus, due to the heterogeneity of therapeutic positions. As Ginger (2005) points out, although all gestaltists are interested in what the body expresses, some of them stay there (observing it and questioning it verbally); others mobilize the patient’s body with body exercises; and there are those who even intervene with their own body, and do not hesitate to touch the client if they see it necessary. In this regard, the testimony of Laura Perls should be highlighted: “I employ all kinds of physical contact if I think that doing so can help the

patient take a step in realizing the present situation [...]. I will light a cigarette, give someone a spoonful of something, fix a woman's hair, hold someone's hand or hug a patient to my chest if that seems to me to be the best means of establishing communication" (Laura Perls, cited in Ginger, 2005, p. 118).

Even when the principles of gestalt do not entail the obligation of bodily mobilization, Ginger (2005) opines that active intervention on or with the body constitutes a powerful shift to deepen therapeutic work, increase its effectiveness, and reduce its duration.

Corporal intervention, according to Ginger (2005), requires strict ethical control, as well as mutual trust between psychotherapist and patient. Due to these demands, and given the risks of ambiguity inherent in a dyadic context, its implementation is the exception rather than the rule in individual therapy. Generally, body-mind games or exercises, through which new facets of oneself can be discovered or made more explicit, are practiced in a group context, where contact with the therapist or with peers can be safely explored. "Naturally, these exercises cannot be programmed in advance, precisely because it is essential that they respond to the atmosphere and concerns of the moment" (Ginger, 2008, p. 13), and may involve the whole group or a particular patient, and their ability to focus on exploring a certain experience – for example, the experience of tenderness.

In gestalt work, it is possible to make use of a wide range of resources, ranging from the psychodramatic approach to the implementation of a particular body-psyche intervention (for example, bioenergetics), as well as other options such as poetry, drawing, music, or dance. "If we assume that the gestalt is more a certain attitude than a set of techniques, the important thing is then to determine if the therapist's attitude is gestaltic, beyond the purity or application of his techniques" (Peñarrubia, 2009, p. 268).

Perhaps because since its inception it has been nurtured with numerous tools from other orientations or psychotherapeutic proposals, and is especially characterized by its holistic vision and work in the here and now, gestalt therapy, according to Kepner (1992), has not developed a corpus of techniques as complete as that provided by either the Reichian approach or purely somatic approaches – for example, Rolfing.

Alexander Lowen: Bioenergetics

Wilhelm Reich was Alexander Lowen's teacher from 1940 to 1952, and his analyst from 1942 to 1945. On one occasion in which Lowen attended Reich's laboratory, Reich told him that if he was really interested in his work, the only way to get started was to undergo psychotherapy. The suggestion must have surprised Lowen, since he hadn't thought about it, replying that of course he was interested, but what he really wanted was to become famous. Reich replied that yes, it would make him famous. It seems that this answer was what Lowen needed to overcome his resistance and enter the field to which he dedicated the rest of his life (Lowen, 1976).

Lowen's first therapeutic session with Reich was an unforgettable experience. At a certain point, Reich told him that he was not breathing, and that it was noticeable in the immobilization of his chest. Lowen resumed his breathing, which began to manifest easily and deeply. After a time, Reich invited him to tilt his head back and open his eyes wide. Lowen did so, and suddenly (unexpectedly) a scream escaped his throat. It should be noted that in order to mobilize any type of emotional expression, the previous step in Reich's therapeutic process was to make the patient breathe easily and deeply, which served as a bridge, a link, to connect the patient (in this case Lowen) with their past experiences and memories (Lowen, 1976).

Although his assessment of Reichian psychotherapy was positive, Lowen continued to suffer from chronic muscular tension that prevented him from enjoying life as he wanted, and he thought that the solution was to resume his psychotherapeutic process. He did so with John Pierrakos, a doctor who had undergone Reichian psychotherapy and with whom he became associated in 1953. During Pierrakos's treatment, which lasted almost three years, Lowen directed much of the bodywork, devising the postures and body exercises that they tested on themselves and later applied to their patients. As Lowen felt the need to work especially on his legs, this led him to propose the standing position as the starting point for psychotherapeutic work, instead of starting from the supine position, which is what Reich proposed. Another of the changes proposed by Lowen and Pierrakos, with respect to the methodology of character-analytic vegetotherapy, was the implementation of a chair

or seat in order to promote deep and full breathing. This was how, together, they created bioenergetics. In 1956, they founded the Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis (Lowen, 1976).

Ola Raknes and Federico Navarro: Post-Reichian Developments in Norway and Italy

On his scientific journey through different countries (Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and the United States) Reich disseminated his knowledge and trained numerous psychotherapists according to certain clinical and methodological principles – for example, working on the dissolution of the armor in a cephalocaudal direction, that is, starting with the ocular segment and working on the successive segments², finishing with the seventh or last, pelvic segment. This way of working implies addressing the pre-Oedipal problems before the Oedipal). However, he did not write a manual that systematized his method and techniques (Serrano, 1993; Ortiz, 2016).

One of Reich's closest disciples and transmitters of his teachings on vegetotherapy was Ola Raknes, who, in his country, Norway, established a training group with great influence and tradition. Reich considered him a dear friend and collaborator, a loyal person with great knowledge of his work and praxis, "one of the few masters" (Reich, 1950, p. 145).

Accepting a Reichian training position offered to him in Italy by a group of professionals headed by Federico Navarro, Raknes, already an octogenarian, traveled to Naples for three summers to impart his theoretical and practical knowledge. The seeds planted during this time gave way to a bountiful harvest. In 1974, Navarro, in the company of several colleagues, founded the Società Italiana de Richerche y Terapia Orgonómica (SIRTO), an association that in 1979 would be renamed Scuola Europea di Orgonoterapia (SEOr). In 1994, the association was reorganized, this time under the name IFOC (International Federation of Orgonomic Colleges³), with the idea of bringing together the vari-

ous post-Reichian associations from all around the world – not only those in Europe – and with Federico Navarro as honorary president, Jean Loic Albina as secretary, and Xavier Serrano as president.

Wilhelm Reich had communicated to Ola Raknes his desire to provide a methodology to vegetotherapy, a task that Raknes failed to carry out, and that he in turn entrusted to Federico Navarro (Navarro, 1993). This work was finally realized by Navarro in his book *Methodology of Character-Analytic Vegetotherapy*, where he states that "Vegetotherapy seeks to heal the patient through 'particular' bodily interventions (actings) that provoke neurovegetative, emotional, and muscular reactions capable of restructuring a healthy psycho-affectivity" (Navarro, 1993, p. 24). Navarro also addresses the following questions, among others: 1) Reichian clinical and methodological principles; 2) gradual and non-violent dissolution of energy blockages; 3) energetic diagnosis based on the presence and possible combination of hypo-orgony, hyper-orgony, or disorgony; 4) Reichian massage; 5) setting; 6) types of action and their application, depending on the body segments.

As a vegetotherapy manual, Navarro's book is brief and "reflects only the basic clinical references" (Serrano, 1993, p. 14), lacking further elaboration or more explanations regarding its formulations. With regard to Navarro's literary style, Serrano said he uses "excessively cryptic language" (Serrano, 2004, p. 196).

Vegetotherapy versus Bioenergetics

When comparing both psychotherapeutic processes, we can consider the following:

1. From the methodological point of view (Gonçalvez, 2008), there is a substantial key difference with respect to the direction of mind-body work. In Reich's approach, it goes from the head to the feet (cephalocaudal direction), while Lowen works from the legs and feet (rooting exercises) and then goes on to consider those areas of the body that are more tense.

2. The seven segments referred to by Reich are: 1) the ocular segment; 2) the oral segment; 3) the cervical segment; 4) the thoracic segment; 5) the diaphragmatic segment; 6) the abdominal segment; 7) the pelvic segment.

3. The first major Reichian association was the American College of Orgonomy.

2. "It makes no sense to modify the 'way of holding on' if the emotional base that disturbs it (pregenital) continues intact" (Urquizu & Arias, 1990, p. 74). In fact, "the feeling of security is not born from 'planting your feet more firmly' but from knowing who you are and where you are, for which you need a good contact with yourself and with reality, which in turn supposes a good functioning of all telereceptors" (Urquizu & Arias, 1990, p. 58).
3. Rooting or grounding work could be useful at the end of the psychotherapeutic process, and not at the beginning, once the pregenital segments have been worked on (Urquizu & Arias, 1990).
4. For Reich, the deepest root of the contact would be in the ocular and diaphragmatic segments while for Lowen it would be in the legs (Gonçalvez, 2008).
5. Regarding patients with armoring deficits (Gonçalvez, 2008), in the Reichian approach, priority is given to working with the pregenital segments, while in Lowen's approach, work with the legs and spine is prioritized, with the idea that the energy overload descends to the ground and can be discharged, thus avoiding the risk of crisis or psychological decompensation.
6. Despite the precautions that are taken, the fact is that starting psychotherapeutic work with the legs and feet entails a risk of energetic overload of the upper segments (Urquizu & Arias, 1990).
7. The Reichian cephalocaudal direction of the psychotherapeutic process "allows for contact and gradual tolerance of higher energy levels, thus avoiding the risk of the patient being flooded by an excess of energy that can lead to confused, psychotic or depressive anxieties" (Gonçalvez, 2008, pp. 2-3).
8. Reich offers deep social criticism, with the idea that social transformation results in better health conditions and the prevention of armoring, while Lowen focuses on individual or personal change, with the idea that the individual can adapt and live pleasantly in society (Gonçalvez, 2008; Urquizu & Arias, 1990). As Lowen himself clarifies: "Although I had many similar feelings, I was not a revolutionary like Reich, as much as I wanted to see many changes in this culture. My founding of the Institute for

Bioenergetic Analysis was motivated by a sincere hope that I would help alleviate the suffering of people. But it was also motivated by my personal and narcissistic needs. Through it, I would fulfill my expressed desire to become famous" (Lowen, 2013, p. 88).

Taking into account everything referenced in this section, we can conclude, in accordance with Urquizu & Arias (1990), that bioenergetics constitutes a "very personal" development, "a different path," carried out by Lowen, based on certain discoveries made by Reich.

Overview of Mind-Body Approaches in Spain

When researching the range of current approaches in Spanish body psychotherapy, an interesting option is to consult the website of the Spanish Federation of Associations of Psychotherapists (FEAP), and, more specifically, the different sections that make it up, such as the Section of Body and Emotional Psychotherapies, where we find the following associations or schools:

- Laureano Cuesta Association of Psychotherapists
- Spanish Association of Gestalt Therapy (AETG)
- Spanish Association of Psychosomatotherapy
- Spanish School of Reichian Therapy (ESTER)

Some of these associations or schools, such as the AETG, incorporate a large number of centers, institutes, or schools at the national level. ESTER, in addition to expanding nationally with several centers, has international delegations in several countries. On the other hand, we cannot ignore other important classical models at the international level, with their corresponding working groups in Spain. Such is the case with bioenergetics.

Although it is true that Spanish body psychotherapy exceeds the framework of the FEAP, it is worth recognizing that affiliation to such a federation is a guarantee of educational and professional quality in the Spanish sphere, as is the affiliation with the European Association for Body Psychotherapy (EABP), of which ESTER has been a part since its constitution.

Scanning the wide span of Spanish body psychotherapy that one can find browsing the Internet, I have found these approaches:

1. Gestalt therapy
2. Gestalt therapy with basic training in bioenergetics
3. Gestalt therapy with bodywork based on dance and expressive movement
4. Bioenergetics
5. Integrative bioenergetic body therapy, taking into consideration (Reichian) character analysis, bioenergetics, gestalt therapy, and psychodrama
6. Biosynthesis
7. Energetic body psychotherapy, taking Core Energetics as a fundamental basis
8. Primal therapy
9. Humanistic integrative body psychotherapy, integrating mindfulness and biosynthesis
10. Somatic Experiencing
11. EMDR
12. Focusing
13. Hakomi
14. Holotropic Breathwork
15. Sensorimotor Psychotherapy
16. Character-Analytic psychotherapy:
 - a. Character-Analytic Vegetotherapy
 - b. Brief Character-Analytic Psychotherapy (PBC), created by Xavier Serrano

Character-analytic psychotherapy constitutes a current psychotherapy model systematized by Xavier Serrano Hortelano, within the clinical teams of the Spanish School of Reichian Psychotherapy⁴ (ESTER). This is a post-Reichian development that emerges with great brilliance in the current panorama of body psychotherapy, and which we will deal with below.

Xavier Serrano: Post-Reichian Development in Spain

It is often said that that which is not written does not exist. This is something that Xavier Serrano refers to on many occasions, encouraging his colleagues to write, so that the knowledge they possess does not die, so that it can be known or transmitted beyond the echo of words. That is why he has endeavored to leave a testimony of his knowledge, not only through countless courses, seminars, workshops, or conferences, but also through writing.⁵ Proof of this is his book, *Character-Analytic Psychotherapy* (2020), which contains his vast clinical experience, a seemingly infinite account of supervisions, debates, and reflections, and rich psychotherapeutic knowledge, all forged through the professional career of its author, Xavier Serrano Hortelano, in the company of his colleagues and friends from the Escuela Española de Psicoterapia Reichiana (ESTER), which he co-founded and has directed since its inception in 1987 in the city of Valencia. It is a book that compiles Reichian and post-Reichian knowledge of the genealogical line that, starting from the wisdom and originality of Wilhelm Reich, continues to consolidate, nourish, and fertilize itself through Ola Raknes, Federico Navarro, and Xavier Serrano himself.

In *Character-Analytic Psychotherapy*, Serrano addresses, with knowledge, clinical wealth, and great depth, the main axes of post-Reichian clinical interventions. These range from the role of psychotherapy and the psychotherapist to the political and ecological praxis, the study of the setting, structural diagnosis, working with character-analytic vegetotherapy, brief character-analytic psychotherapy, clinical interventions in couple conflicts, and the role of the therapeutic group. Several of these contributions are new; for example, structural diagnosis and its relevance for the modulation and adequacy of corresponding clinical intervention, which had not been addressed by Reich, Navarro,⁶ or other authors, while other contributions have been developed in greater depth, in a

4. Since 2021, ESTER has used the term Reichian psychotherapy, instead of the term Reichian therapy, in its group presentation. Its new name is La Escuela Española de Psicoterapia Reichiana (Spanish School of Reichian Psychotherapy), as it appears on its Facebook wall.

5. Xavier Serrano is a prolific author who has written a large number of scientific articles, popular articles, and several books throughout his professional life.

sum of knowledge that propels the Reichian paradigm towards the future.

The ESTER collective uses the name Character-Analytic Psychotherapy to encompass different types of clinical practice settings, such as crisis intervention, focal psychotherapy with brief character-analytic psychotherapy, or deep psychotherapy with character-analytic vegetotherapy. Clinical practice can also take an individual, couple, or group approach, depending on the characteristics, circumstances, and needs of the patient in question. Let us bear in mind that “the character-analytic psychotherapist will modulate their way of being and relating to the patient according to the type of setting (crisis, brief, or deep) and their structure” (Serrano, 2020, p. 77), in such a way that in certain people and situations the therapist’s posture can be quite aseptic and neutral, while in other cases it is convenient to be very empathic and close.

For the formulation of a methodology for a brief or focal setting within the Reichian paradigm, where we find as a bibliographic antecedent the story of Raknes (1950) about a patient whom he attended for 12 sessions with good results, we owe credit to Xavier Serrano, who devised it from certain technical elements of the psychodynamic focal proposals, and from certain clinical considerations he adapted from the praxis of vegetotherapy (for example, modifying the time of applying the actings⁶). In fact, Character-analytic Brief Psychotherapy (PBC) is still the translation and adaptation of the deep psychotherapeutic approach to a brief setting, and for this reason it will have more limited goals. While in vegetotherapy, regression and transference neurosis are favored, leading to significant characterological change, in PBC, we operate especially paying attention to the current reality, considering the attenuation of symptoms as a fundamental goal.

Serrano first presented the PBC model in a meeting with his colleagues and friends of ESTER, and then

later, in 1990, at an international congress. From then on, the model began to spread, with encouraging results in a short time, and with the publication of a book released in 2007. Years later, in 2011, Serrano published *Profundizando en el diván reichiano* (*Deepening on the Reichian couch*), where he writes in detail and at length about the particularities and possibilities of character-analytic vegetotherapy. Then, in 2020, we have Character-analytic psychotherapy, a synthesis and update of Serrano’s two previous works, and the continuation of a thrilling trajectory in which Serrano has nourished debates and contributions to body psychotherapy. More than a book, it is a legacy of great knowledge and wisdom, the fruit of a life project to which he has been and still remains dedicated with passion, delight, and devotion.

Drawing upon the many years of ESTER’s experience, the inclusion of the therapeutic group is considered very convenient, not as an alternative to individual work (whether in a brief setting or a deeper one), but as a complementary approach that enables us to work within an advanced phase of treatment on the problems and dynamics that do not appear, or are barely expressed, in the dyadic context with the therapist, and that can emerge and be expressed in different variations in the context of a shared relationship with other people. In this regard, Serrano’s books illustrate how to proceed and what tools to use in the therapeutic group, in addition to talking about couple relationships, their difficulties and conflicts over time, and how to address them from Reichian praxis.

A cardinal guiding issue in the psychotherapeutic work of Xavier and the ESTER collective is the underlying knowledge in each intervention proposal, considering a large number of psychodynamic, energetic and relational variables in the encounter with the patient in question. In this sense, and taking into account that every “healing” process passes through the psychotherapist-patient relational axis, we speak not about a mere application

-
6. Federico Navarro was always a great professional reference for Xavier Serrano. In addition, with the passage of time, the relationship between the two was crowned with the bond of a friendship that they enjoyed for twenty years, until Federico’s death.
 7. In PBC, the application of acting (with a duration of about five to eight minutes) constitutes “a dynamizer of the sensory system, a kinesthetic contact pathway and neutralizer of distress” (Serrano, 2020, p. 78), which serves as a great resource of insight. Vegetotherapy fulfills the possibilities mentioned in the PBC, and since the depth of scope of its acting (with a duration of about 15 to 20 minutes) is significantly greater, there are usually emotional reactions related to traumatic events at the same time that a readjustment takes place in the function of the autonomic nervous system.

of techniques, some of them very powerful, which, in the hands of psychotherapists infused with narcissism or lacking in knowledge, can be dangerous, but rather about knowing how to consider to what extent, and when, it is beneficial to work with a certain (psycho-somatic) tool, or at the level of transference and countertransference.

Training and Deontology

Although a certain technique or form of intervention may be valuable and successful with one patient, it may not be appropriate for other patients, or under differing conditions. The same sun that can help to grow can also burn or destroy. It is vitally important to know how to proceed, and to what extent, with certain patients and at certain times. And in the case of psychosomatic interventions, it is also necessary to know the logic of energy circulation, and the possible repercussions of energy release from some segments upon others. The idea of catharsis for its own sake, promoting the release of energy at any time and on any body area or segment, can be fatal: “You run the risk, taking energy upwards, of being able to explode a compensated psychotic nucleus and, therefore, of uncontrolled crisis” (Navarro, 1993, p. 28). That is why practices that encourage increased energy could be contraindicated in cases of psychosis or prepsychosis (Totton, 2003) unless the psychotherapist knows when to proceed with it, and how to properly prepare patients (for example, previously helping them to mature and strengthen their defensive ego capacity) for such a moment.

It is essential for psychotherapists to know in which psychological terrain they are moving, and what kinds of steps can be beneficial in the helping relationship. We should not ignore or overlook that the level of depth and the type of work proposed will depend on the evolutionary moment of the patients, on their psychic structure and the relational framework or setting. In this regard, and preserving the distance with the field of psychotherapy (where patients, with the assistance of the psychotherapist, carry out their own work), I would like to refer, as a simile, to the great difference that exists between the superficial treatment of a trauma and the deep intervention carried out by a surgeon, which requires, among other ingredients, expert knowledge and an operating room as conditions to

be able to tackle such a task, because otherwise the open processes will be fatally affected.

In the world of (body) psychotherapy there are times when practitioners slip in who lack sufficient training and professional ethics. There are opportunistic psychotherapists with little professional rigor or integrity who, ignoring the possible repercussions of their interventions or what they may be promoting, present themselves to society as great healers or saviors in an exercise of narcissism and omnipotence that can have serious consequences in their patients.

Being aware that, in a world characterized by an excess of information and offers of all kinds, we need to rediscover and reaffirm the value of true training, we can congratulate ourselves on having, through the work of Xavier Serrano and his group, a (body) psychotherapeutic model based on solid clinical bases and guided by intellectual honesty and professional ethics.

Ecologic and Social Vision in the Reichian Paradigm

With successive and updated contributions, ESTER has consolidated and developed a unique and broad body of knowledge in different aspects and areas of research and intervention. Its model presents a view that goes far beyond what is properly psychotherapeutic, forming part of an ecological conception, made known by Xavier Serrano as the *ecology of human systems*, which is consistent with the thesis that pathology is gestated in the process of interaction with others, in the relationships in which we participate, in such a way that the commitment to change and improvement might have a significant impact on the various relational systems, both at the micro-social and macro-social levels. Let us remember in this regard the preventive and social work carried out by Wilhelm Reich himself – for example, in 1931, when he participated in the founding of the Sex-Pol, a German association for the sexual politics of the proletariat; or in 1950, in the United States, with the creation of the Ergonomic Infant Research Center (OIRC). It is evident that in the Reichian paradigm, the preventive ecological perspective of the psychopathological and the psychotherapeutic is inseparable. We work and fight for a healthy society to humanize our (social) life. The idea is “to apply this knowledge not only in

the clinical or psychopathology field, but also in all those activities that can facilitate its potential and the functionality of its praxis (sexology, education, institutional analysis, preventive care in pregnancy, childbirth and family system, etc.)” (Serrano, 2020, p. 83), so that we can live and grow, as much

as possible, (energetically) free, with true options of satisfactory self-regulation in the different relational environments throughout our entire life cycle: living together with respect, collaboration and mutual support, with affective and supportive ties – humanly.



José Martín Amenabar Beitia is a Doctor in Psychology, professor at the Faculty of Psychology at the Universidad del País Vasco (UPV/EHU). He is an associate member of the Escuela Española de Psicoterapia Reichiana (ESTER).

This article was translated by Eva Palicio Mayoral.

Email: josemartin.amenabar@ehu.eus.

REFERENCES

- Boadella, D. (1993).** *Corrientes de vida. Una introducción a la biosíntesis*. Buenos Aires: Paidós.
- Geuter, U. (2015).** The history and scope of body psychotherapy. In G. Marlock, H. Weiss, C. Young, & M. Soth (Eds.), *The handbook of body psychotherapy and somatic psychology* (pp. 22-39). Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.
- Ginger, S. (2005).** *Gestalt. El arte del contacto*. Barcelona: RBA.
- . (2008). Cuando el verbo se hizo carne... Palabra y cuerpo en terapia gestalt. *Revista de Terapia Gestalt*, (28), 11-17.
- Gonçalves, L. (2008).** Diferencias metodológicas entre el análisis reichiano y el análisis bioenergético. In: Encontro Paranaense, Congresso Brasileiro, Convenção Brasil/Latino-América, XIII, VIII, II, 2008.
- Kepner, J. I. (1992).** *Proceso corporal. Un enfoque Gestalt para el trabajo corporal en psicoterapia*. México: El Manual Moderno.
- Latapade, G. (1982).** *La bio-energía. Ensayo sobre la obra de W. Reich*. 2ª edición. Buenos Aires: Gedisa.
- Lowen, A. (1976).** *Bioenergetics*. New York: Penguin Books.
- . (2013). *Honoring the body*. Hinesburg, VT: The Alexander Lowen Foundation.
- Navarro, F. (1993).** *Metodología de la vegetoterapia-caracteroanalítica*. Valencia: Publicaciones Orgón de la Escuela Española de Terapia Reichiana.
- Ortiz, F. (2016).** *Psicoterapia corporal*. Ciudad de México: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana y editorial Pax México.
- Peñarrubia, F. (2009).** *Terapia Gestalt. La vía del vacío fértil*. Madrid: Alianza, 2ª edición, primera reimpresión.

Raknes, O. (1950). A short treatment with orgone therapy. *Orgone Energy Bulletin*, 2(1), 22-31.

Reich, W. (1942). *The discovery of the orgone. Vol. 1. The function of the orgasm.* New York: Orgone Institute Press.

_____. (1950). Orgonomy 1935-1950 (I) A brief account. *Orgone Energy Bulletin*, 2(3), 143-151.

Serrano, X. (1993). Prólogo. En F. Navarro, *Metodología de la vegetoterapia-caracteroanalítica* (pp. 9-14). Valencia: Publicaciones Orgón de la Escuela Española de Terapia Reichiana.

_____. (2004). In memoriam Federico Navarro, pionero del movimiento postreichiano: un maestro de la vida. *Revista de la Asociación Española de Neuropsiquiatría*, 24(89), 187-200.

_____. (2011). *Profundizando en el diván reichiano.* Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva.

_____. (2020). *La psicoterapia caracteroanalítica.* Valencia: Sensor.

Totton, N. (2003). *Body psychotherapy : An introduction.* Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Urquizu, J., & Arias, P. (1990). El análisis bioenergético y la vegetoterapia caracteroanalítica. Dos caminos diferentes. *Energía, Carácter y Sociedad*, 8(1), 48-79.