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# INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH VERSION

It is my privilege and honor to write this introduction to the English edition of the Bioenergetic Reader. This project, a labor of love of Vita Heinrich-Clauer and her crew of worthy colleagues, including Ginger Clark who has edited this version, all working as volunteers, and supported by a succession of elected leaders of the International Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis, also all working as volunteers, is more than just a compilation of professional articles. This is a historical document. It traces the development of thinking and practice in Bioenergetic Analysis as it has developed since the seminal contributions of Alexander Lowen, which both preceded and were continuous with much of what is included in this volume.

The papers in this compendium span a wide range of ideas, perspectives, clinical applications, and viewpoints. By no means are all the authors in agreement about all aspects of what constitutes effective bioenergetic work. But we (I am one of the authors) share a common conviction and belief in the importance of a unitary view of mind, body and spirit, and strive to avoid dichotomizing the elements. And we strive consistently to maintain that unitary view of function even as we explore each of these areas of human experience. The papers all show the author's common valuation of the experience of the body, the living energetic experience, as integral to the expression of self.

For this way of seeing things to be fully a part of the therapeutic encounter, the therapist must develop a refined and sophisticated understanding and consciousness of the life of the body as lived in the therapeutic space. These articles reveal the many ways bioenergetic therapists have come to

understand that process. There are different takes here on how to respond to the form, the characterological organization, the developmental level, and the characteristic patterns of the body of someone engaged in a body-oriented psychotherapy. There are also different ways of conceptualizing development, and the impact of relationships on the emerging personality. The relative importance of constitutional endowment, attachment experiences, social influences, and internal processes are considered, with different authors weighting different factors, or configuring the factors in different ways, all striving to get a better understanding of human beings and our functioning. All seem to me to also be seeking better, more effective ways to reduce suffering and dysfunction, the ravages of damage done to us.

Some of the authors are interested primarily in the internal organization and experience of that suffering, and in ways to relieve it. Others want to understand the matrix, familial and social in which that suffering is caused, and what factors cause the suffering, and how. Some authors look mostly toward the hope for an enlightened and enlivened self, living out the potential for pleasure and self-realization. Others, without ignoring the hopeful and the inspiring in the vision of a life lived with pleasure, want to remind us to keep ourselves attuned to the pain and harm that underlie the constrictions and deformations our patients present us with, and which we know in ourselves.

This is a living document vibrant with passion, intensity, certainty and uncertainty. It documents our efforts to forge a vision for Bioenergetic Analysis that continues the best of the legacy left to us. That legacy includes the endless encounter with the reality of life lived in the body. Take these articles as they are and see the forces and ideas and personalities at work in shaping an orientation, a theory, and perhaps even a mission. It is that mission, in the end, which is what matters most. As this volume is published, I have every conviction that it will be only the first in a series. Authors – some the same as have written here – are writing and presenting new ideas, new vignettes, new visions, and thus challenging us all to remain focused on that which is most important – facing the human experience in all its splendor and squalor, and doing what we can, in the ways available to us to, to make life better for ourselves and those we care about, including our patients.

*Scott Baum*  
*President IIBA Board of Trustees*  
*September 2010*

# ENGLISH EDITOR'S NOTE

When Scott Baum invited me to do a “light” editing of the manuscript for the English translation of the Bioenergetics Reader, I welcomed the opportunity. It gave me an excuse to devote several days to reading, something I truly enjoy and never have enough time for (the editing kind of came naturally!). I was struck by the richness and diversity of the material that bioenergetic practitioners have created over the last few decades. I acquired a deep appreciation of the contribution of each of the authors and have been enriched by their different perspectives on the work fathered by Alexander Lowen. Ranging from highly technical and analytical to the deeply experiential, the articles illuminate the unique contribution of Alexander Lowen to our understanding of how to come to live fully through our bodies in connection with others. I am grateful to Scott Baum and Barbara Bendel and the many volunteers for supporting me in the editing process so that you, the reader, can more readily access what these authors have presented.

*Ginger Clark*

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT (GERMAN VERSION)**

This book is addressed to body-psychotherapeutic, analytic, depth psychological and behavior therapeutic colleagues, and meets the growing interest in integrating the body into psychotherapy. Bioenergetic Analysis – one of the first analytic methods of body psychotherapy with a long tradition and much experiential knowledge – appears before the public in this anthology with innovations and the still (and today more than ever) valid statements about the importance of the body in psychotherapy.

The newer developments within Bioenergetic Analysis (since the beginning of the '90s) have been published mostly in English only, and have therefore hardly been accessible to German and other European readers. This book contains a selection of articles which continue from the classical works of the '80s (according to Lowen) up to current theoretical contributions and case studies. The articles of 25 authors reflect the wide spectrum of current concepts and therapeutic approaches of Bioenergetic Analysis, and how these are modified according to attachment theory, relational psychoanalysis, research on early childhood and neurobiology. Concrete case studies explicate the relationship to practice.

In future the Reader will be released in other European languages by different publishing houses in Belgium, Italy, Spain and Brazil. Without the enthusiasm of many colleagues, this huge project would not have been possible to accomplish! They have dedicated their time and energy to share their ideas for this book project.

My deepest thanks go to the members of the committee who were involved in the development of this book and the selection of the articles!



First of all I would like to mention Phil Helfaer (Israel/USA), Margit Koemeda-Lutz (Switzerland) and Odila Weigand (Brazil), as well as the former Executive Committee of the International Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis, particularly Hugo Steinmann (Switzerland), Violaine de Clerck (Belgium), Alex Munroe (Canada), Guy Tonella (France), Liane Zink and Romero Magalhaes (Brazil), Helen Resneck-Sannes (USA), Gabriella Buti-Zaccagnini (Italy), Jim Elniski (USA) and the new President of the IIBA, Scott Baum (USA), who always endorsed this project sympathetically and optimistically in all professional, organizational and financial aspects.

Barbara Bendel (Switzerland), in her function as Executive Administrator has helped with countless changes in layout, corrections and translations, as well as with coordination of contacts with the authors and the publishing house.

I would also like to include in my thanks the consultants in the different countries who locally supported the project and organized the translations: Jaime Pérez and Edith Liberman (Spain), Mariarosaria Filoni and Nicoletta Cinotti (Italy), Claude Maskens (Belgium), and Helen Resneck-Sannes (USA).

The group of German translators has worked with great attention to detail but with no or little remuneration. Above all I thank Peter Brandenburg, Stefan Grenz, Irma Ben-Hamida, Beatrice Amstutz, Regine Armbruster-Heyer and Carolin Besuden for utilizing not only their language skills, but also their professional knowledge and their love for Bioenergetic Analysis.

I thank the editorial office of the Psychosozial Verlag, Sandra Rolle for the supportive and friendly collaboration, and Katharina Zilles who brought great competence and patience to the corrections and revisions.

From my husband, Jörg Clauer, I experienced infinite understanding and professional support during the three years of working on this book.

And last but not least, I thank all the authors for their willingness to provide or write so many excellent and full of heart-and-soul articles, and to make again and again, mostly with patience and collegial fairness, the many exhausting little corrections.

The mutual collegial appreciation was in many cases intensified by writing, reading and correcting, because we listened carefully – word by word – to each other. In some places it was also exposed to great stress and imposition, and demanded a lot on both sides – of myself and the authors. The result helps – this is my hope – to forget these situations! The project of this book was for all participants a great and enriching challenge. Its magnitude could

not really have been foreseen at the beginning of this work. All the more, I am very pleased that we all have come to a successful end.

*Vita Heinrich-Clauer*

*Osnabrück, September 2008*

# FOREWORD

According to the Indenture of Trust of October 2, 1956, Alexander Lowen, together with his colleagues John C. Pierrakos, William B. Walling, Alice R. Kahn and Robert Sturz, founded the International Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis (IIBA) in New York. In books, monographs, articles, workshops and keynote lectures, Alexander Lowen, Director of the IIBA (1956–1996), presented his understanding of body psychotherapy to the public and continually developed it. Considering his lifework, he was, beyond a doubt, a distinctive and extremely inspiring personality, and is therefore perceived as the sole spiritual father of Bioenergetic Analysis (BA). Over the decades, Lowen himself, as well as BA, evolved through creative discussion and debate. Stages of this process can be followed in the *International Journal for Bioenergetic Analysis*.

During my tenure as president of the IIBA (2002–2008) the idea arose to collect, arrange and edit or re-edit stimulating articles by colleagues of Lowen, in a reader. We wished to demonstrate the development of BA within the context of new scientific findings in the aftermath of Lowen's active formulation.

To have an idea and to also realize it are famously two different processes. One day, a former member of the Board of Trustees, Vita Heinrich-Clauer, offered to get more involved in the operational tasks. I suggested to her to actualize this book. The result is now in front of you and represents – besides the *International Journal for Bioenergetic Analysis* – the first publication of the IIBA since the publications of Alexander Lowen.

I am full of gratitude towards Vita Heinrich-Clauer who has coordinated

and edited this book in an overwhelming tour de force. My thanks to all of the authors and all who have creatively participated in the completion of this project. On behalf of our patients, may this reader awaken and deepen your interest in the psychotherapeutic approach of Bioenergetic Analysis.

*Hugo Steinmann*  
*President IIBA (2002–2008)*  
*Stans, July 2008*



# ***INTRODUCTION***

# FOUNDATIONS OF BIOENERGETIC ANALYSIS

*Philip M. Helfaer*

Bioenergetic Analysis has been a light hidden under a basket. This collection of readings is meant to let that light shine out to the world. Our purposes in publishing this volume are to bring our work to the wider therapeutic, professional, and consuming communities; to demonstrate Bioenergetic Analysis as a developing discipline; and to illustrate some recent applications and relationships in related fields of science and health care.

This introduction presents an outline of the observational, clinical, and theoretical foundations of bioenergetics. Bioenergetic Analysis emerged directly from psychoanalysis, and once emerged it established a radically different perspective on the human condition and opened up entirely new vistas for naturalistic and therapeutic exploration. Psychoanalysis, primarily guided by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), created a view of the mind. Bioenergetics, primarily under the influence of Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957) and Alexander Lowen (1910–2008), created a view of the whole person, body and mind. The idea that the “whole person” is addressed in bioenergetics has two basic meanings. First, in describing character and bringing the concept of character into the therapeutic field, Reich described not just the mind, but a full psychological portrait of the person (Shapiro 1989, pp. 56ff.), how he/she looked and behaved in addition to mental contents. Reich then expanded on this picture by bringing specific aspects of somatic functioning into the therapeutic field. Alexander Lowen described the person as a body-self and brought into the therapeutic field an expanded description of the body to include its overall form and motility. Lowen came to address

the central therapeutic task as “seeing the person”, which means literally looking at his or her body.

## **WILHELM REICH’S PIONEERING STUDIES: SOMA AND PSYCHE**

The foundations of bioenergetics were set forth in 1934 in a remarkable paper by the then young psychoanalyst, Wilhelm Reich. Even the name of the paper brought a new vocabulary to psychoanalysis, “Psychic Contact and Vegetative Current”. This paper, and another one, “The Expressive Language of the Living”<sup>1</sup>, published about ten years later, contain the essential sources of Bioenergetic Analysis and established a new paradigm for the treatment of neurosis, depression, anxiety, and many other forms of the personality disorders that cause ordinary human misery.

The new therapy Reich developed brought therapeutic focus to the affects (especially pleasure, anxiety, and anger), the body, and the expressive movement of the body. Reich’s new therapy not only retained the centrality of sex and sexuality as the key factor in etiology, it went further in that it also established the capacity for orgasmic sexuality as the key to health and healing. Libido was embodied. Reich understood the evolution of his work as having been based on the study of the sexual orgasm. Reich’s new therapy also included the analysis of the mind, behavior, the way the patient related to the therapist, and the therapist’s own inner responses. It established a specific conception of the unitary functioning of the person, that is, of mind and body, a unity that included the domains of experience and behavior.

To grasp the nature of Reich’s work, it is important to understand (i) that his new therapy followed a clear line of development, (ii) that it was based on the solid bed-rock of clinical observation, (iii) that it kept a consistent focus on the study of sex, sexuality, and the sexual orgasm, and, finally, (iv) that while doing therapy, Reich always kept the clear goal of establishing the essential criterion for health, which he called *orgasmic potency*. Reich was the first to introduce and systematically describe biological motility as a realm of phenomena intrinsic in the analytic situation. This means he described

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1 These are Chapters XIII and XIV of *Character Analysis* (edition in References). All references to Reich’s writings in this Introduction are from these chapters; citations list page numbers only for a less cluttered text.

functions of the living body, aspects of biological life as it is expressed through the individual person, including expressive movements, emotion, pulsation within the body, waves of excitation, and various involuntary and autonomically regulated bodily phenomena. These phenomena are outside the realm of language, where analytic work had previously confined itself. As a result, a depth of human nature emerged in the therapy process that had not been contacted before.

The bioenergetic conception of motility evident in Reich's two foundational papers evolved out of his earlier innovations in psychoanalysis. As a psychoanalyst, he began with a careful study of *resistance*. Development of *character analysis* followed. Character analytic technique assiduously avoids interpretation of unconscious drive derivatives. It focuses on the observable surface of behavior, what Reich called the formal aspects of the patient's behavior. By "formal aspects" Reich meant the manner or characteristic way in which the patient expressed him or herself, as contrasted with the "hidden meaning" of the expression.

Through careful observation, attention to character, and steady focus on therapeutic goals, Reich described a whole new range of phenomena in the therapeutic setting. These included very specific and astute descriptions of small characteristic ways of functioning, small movements which concealed deep emotion and meaning, and various kinds of autonomic reactivity and involuntary expressiveness. Reich was gifted with a striking ability to sense the relevant quality of the ongoing experience of the therapy process, to describe it precisely, and to develop an original conceptualization of it that brought the therapeutic process into focus and established an efficacious paradigm. Reich's original concept of armor, "*the armoring of the periphery of the biopsychic system*" (Reich 1945, p. 338), is a good example of his exceptional capacity to observe, describe, and conceptualize.

"The ego, i.e., that part of the person that is exposed to danger [...] acquires an automatically functioning mode of reaction, i.e., its 'character'. It is as if the affective personality armored itself, as if the hard shell it develops were intended to deflect and weaken the blows of the outer world as well as the clamoring of the inner needs. [...] the ability to regulate the energy economy depends upon the extent of the armoring" (Reich 1945, p. 338).

Therapeutic work acts to free the person from the restrictions of the armor, releasing passion, emotion, expression, or as Reich says "experiences which operate as vegetative-energetic *concentrations of energy*"



(Reich 1945, p. 294). His goal in character analysis is for the “vegetative sources of the personality to begin to flow anew” (p. 303).

The notion that a person is a psycho-somatic unity is common-place in contemporary thought. The formulation of this conception is often casual and non-specific. In Reich’s work, the concept of the psychosomatic unity of the person has *specific* meanings, with actual clinical, functional implications. These specific meanings developed as follows. With consistent application of character analytic technique, Reich noticed “states of vegetative excitation and tension regularly appear, of which the patient was previously unaware” (Reich 1945, p. 305). He uses the term “vegetative” to refer to the non-verbal expression of emotions and involuntary movements under the influence of the autonomic nervous system. Here he is approaching what we might now refer to as affect regulation (Schoore 1994). Reich’s theory of affects is also still entirely relevant to contemporary thinking, as one can see, for example, in his analysis of aggression and hate (Reich 1945, pp. 338, 345, 389f.; Rizutto et al. 2004).

Once in the position of observing the obvious manifestations of “vegetative excitation”, that is, tensions, arousal, and excitations, Reich was strategically placed to be open to further observations of bodily phenomena. Specifically, working with character armor (of the ego or psyche) led to the observation and description of muscular armor. The bodily expression of muscular armoring includes stiffness, rigidity, and “increased tonus,” that is, muscle tension. Finally, the most important observation to come out of this evolution at this point is that these muscular tensions, that is, muscular armoring, *have the same function as character armor, that is, the blocking or binding of “vegetative excitation, anxiety, or sexual sensations”* (Reich 1945, p. 340).

Character is an aspect of the ego (psyche) protecting the person from inner and outer stimulation by binding excitation, anxiety, and pleasure. Muscular armoring (body) has the same function. Both inhibit, regulate, and express, the underlying process of emotion and excitation. Therapeutically, anxiety, aggression, and pleasure can be released by loosening either character or muscular armor, allowing, in either case, for increased flow (motility) of excitation. *In this sense, character armor and body armor are functionally identical; and this is one precise meaning of the unity of psyche and soma, mind and body.*

Reich’s unique genius is seen in his introduction of the idea of “vegetative current” into this conceptualization of the functional identity of muscular

and character armor. Vegetative current is an energetic concept. It refers to a biological flow or movement, a current of excitation, within the organism. While it is modulated or structured in part by the autonomic nervous system, it is not defined in terms of the pathways of those enervations. It is defined by the meaning of the expressive movement of the body. Emotion is literally a movement within the body. Such movement can be outwards towards the periphery of the body and the world, in which case there is an expansion which can take the form of pleasure or aggression; or, the movement can be inwards towards the core of the body, a contraction which takes the form of unpleasure or the experience of anxiety. These are the two basic emotions and movements. Armor, both of the character and the body, function to regulate or inhibit these flows (Reich 1945, pp. 338, 356). When Reich said the goal of therapy is to have “the vegetative sources of the personality begin to flow anew”, (Reich 1945, p. 303), he meant it literally. Here is another specific meaning of psychosomatic unity. An energetic or excitatory process (“vegetative current”) is the common root between the movements out or the movements in. The affect, spontaneous movements, or various vague excitations released when either character or body armor are softened are all forms of energetic movement.

A seminal insight that came from Reich’s work on character analysis is an understanding of the actual mechanism by which early childhood experience impacts present day experience. Here, again, Reich shifted the paradigm away from “hidden meanings” and the unconscious mind, to here-and-now behavior. Early experience that has an impact does so by virtue of becoming the basis for characteristic modes of behavior of the person, not just what the person does, but how and in what manner he or she does it. The past can be “extracted”, as Reich put it, through analysis of the present. This basic idea of character analysis is still a significant part of psychoanalytic practice (Shapiro 1989; Stark 1994).

Reich’s observations and conceptualizations of body armor and related underlying affective and energetic processes, as described in “The Expressive Language of the Living”, offer a remarkably comprehensive clinical guide. He described armoring as a series of segmental rings of tensions arranged at right angles to the longitudinal axis of the body. Functionally, these rings of tension serve to impede or inhibit a unitary flow of excitation through the whole body. Reich catalogued the bodily expressions and emotions typical to each segment; and he described the orgasm reflex, a soft, spontaneous pulsatory movement of the whole body that emerges as

the armoring below the diaphragm is successively dissolved. He related the orgasm reflex to the capacity for sexual surrender. In all these descriptions, observations, and conceptualizations, he profoundly touched the core of human emotional and sexual life.

All who came in contact with Reich's work realized he had developed a therapeutic tool that reached deeply into the individual. Reich's description of his early cases in character analysis already revealed patients going through extremely powerful experiences clearly beyond the range of affect to which they were accustomed and healing for that very reason. Nonetheless, no one at the time, including Reich himself, and later, Alexander Lowen, had enough experience or the foresight to understand and appreciate fully the meaning of embarking on the therapeutic and healing projects made possible by that tool.

## **ALEXANDER LOWEN AND BIOENERGETICS**

Alexander Lowen, founder of Bioenergetic Analysis, built his therapeutic house on the foundation of Reich's conceptions of motility, character, body armor, and sexuality. Wilhelm Reich emigrated to America in 1939, just before the outbreak of World War II. In 1940–41, Reich gave a course at the New School for Social Research in New York City, called "Biological Aspects of Character Formation" (Sharaf 1983, p. 265). Lowen, then a young high school teacher, attended. Lowen, himself the child of Russian Jewish immigrants, pursued studies and therapy with Reich, and by 1954 was in the process of establishing an institute separate from the Reichians (See *Honoring the Body*).

Lowen frankly acknowledged both his indebtedness to Reich and, from the beginning, he also established that his approach was different from Reich's (*Language of the Body*, pp. xii, 17, 94, 99)<sup>2</sup>. Lowen shifted the focus of Reich's work in four essential ways. First, Reich had come to the conclusion that the energetic phenomena he observed in his patients were a biological expression of a type of energy dispersed throughout the universe. Bioenergy is cosmic energy, and he embarked on a serious course of scientific investigation to study it. To Lowen, it was clear that doing therapy with

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2 For interest, references in text to Alexander Lowen's writings will be by the name of the book, bibliographic data as listed in references.