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Body and Body Psychotherapy in the Global Village

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Abstracts

English

The reality of the Global Village profoundly influences body psychotherapy, challenging fundamental received concepts such as "nature", "body" and "personal identity". This paper investigates these changes, particularly developing three points: a) the concepts of "body" and "nature" in the founding fathers of body psychotherapy; b) the challenge to these concepts by developments in advanced technology and virtual communication; c) the task of body psychotherapy today – namely – to raise awareness of the importance of both the external "nature" around us and our internal, bodily "nature", both of which can no longer be taken for granted, but must become the object of our choices and lifestyles. In the clinical considerations section the author presents a technique of "nurturing contact" that allows the patient's deep experience of his own bodily essence.

Key words: body psychotherapy, global village, nature, choice, nurturing contact

German

Die Wirklichkeit des Globalen Dorfes hat tiefe Auswirkungen auf die Körperpsychotherpie, da sie überlieferte Grundbegriffe wie "Natur", "Leib" oder "persönliche Identität" infrage stellt. Der Aufsatz geht diesen Auswirkungen nach, und zwar in drei Schritten: a) der Begriff des "Leibes" und der "Natur" bei den Gründungsvätern

der Körperpsychotherapie; b) die Infragestellung dieser Begriffe durch die Entwicklungen der modernen Technologie und der virtuellen Kommunikation; c) die Aufgabe der Körperpsychotherapie heute: Sensibilisierung für den Wert der uns umgebenden äußeren und unserer eigenen leiblichen Natur, einer Natur, die jedoch nicht mehr fraglos vorausgesetzt werden kann, sondern die gewählt und gelebt werden muss. In den klinischen Überlegungen wird die Technik des "nährenden Kontakts" vorgestellt, die dem Patienten eine tiefe Erfahrung seines Leibseins vermitteln kann.

French

La réalité de la globalisation influence profondément la thérapie psychocorporelle aujourd'hui, et remet en question nos concepts de base tels que la "nature", le "corps" et l'"identité". Cet article examine de près ces changements, et développe plus particulièrement les trois thèmes suivants: a) les concepts de "corps" et de "nature" chez les pères fondateurs de la psychothérapie corporelle; b) comment l'évolution de la technologie de pointe et de la communication virtuelle bouscule ces concepts et les remet en question; c) le fait qu'aujourd'hui, la tâche des thérapies psychocorporelles – à savoir- développer la conscience de l'importance de la "nature" tant à l'extérieur qu'à l'intérieur de nous, ne peut plus être considérée comme un fait acquis mais doit devenir l'objet de nos choix et nos modes de vie. Dans la partie clinique de l'article, l'auteur présente une technique de "contact nourrissant" qui permet aux patients de faire l'expérience profonde de leur nature intrinsèquement corporelle.

Spanish

La realidad de la Aldea Global influye profundamente en la psicoterapia corporal, desafiando conceptos fundamentales recibidos tales como "naturaleza", "cuerpo" , e "identidad personal". Este artículo investiga estos cambios, desarrollando tres puntos en particular: a) los conceptos de "cuerpo" y "naturaleza" en los padres fundadores de la psicoterapia corporal; b) el desafío de estos conceptos a causa del desarrollo en tecnología avanzada y comunicación virtual; c) la tarea de la psicoterapia corporal hoy-principalmente- incrementar la consciencia tanto de la "naturaleza" externa como de nuestra "naturaleza" corporal interna, ninguna de las dos puede darse por supuesta pero deben llegar a ser el objeto de nuestras elecciones y estilos de vida. En el apartado de consideraciones clínicas, el autor presenta una técnica de "contacto nutritivo" que permite al paciente experimentar la experiencia profunda de su própia esencia corporal.

Italian

La realtà del Villaggio Globale incide profondamente sulla psicoterapia corporea, mettendo in discussione tràditi concetti-base come "natura", "corpo" o "identità personale". La relazione indaga su questi cambiamenti, soffermandosi su tre punti: a) i concetti di "corpo" e "natura" nei padri fondatori della psicoterapia corporea; b) la messa in discussione di questi concetti attraverso gli sviluppi della tecnologia avanzata e della comunicazione virtuale; c) il compito della psicoterapia corporea oggi: sensibilizzare al valore di una "natura" esterna e interna, ovvero corporea, non più scontata, ma oggetto di scelte e di stili di vita. Nelle considerazioni cliniche l'autore presenta la tecnica del "contatto nutritivo" che aiuta il paziente a vivere a un livello profondo il suo "essere corpo".

Foreword

Finding Maê Nascimento's article on *The Present Dilemma of Psychotherapy* in the latest volume of *Bioenergetic Analysis* (Nascimento, 2014) was a pleasant surprise for me. As I had already written my present essay, I discovered that we share many ideas, finding there an *a posteriori* confirmation of a common ground in our thinking. One of these shared ideas is the necessity for us bioenergetic therapists to engage with the historical moment we are living in, or, as my colleague puts it: "the urge to face the great dimension of the radical cultural changes we are going through and their impact over people's personality and way of living" (Nascimento, 2014, p. 15). Moreover, I found surprising synergies in our clinical perspective, as the author proposes a model of energetic work that aims to "create a more introspective nature helping the connection with the energetic flow – and it does this without any kind of interference or suggestion coming from the therapist" (ibid., p. 29). This purpose agrees perfectly with the objectives of the techniques of *nurturing contact* presented below in my clinical considerations.

There are, however, also substantial differences between our contributions. Whereas Maê Nascimento focuses on changes in personality and lifestyle, the shift from "people towards the inside from the past" to "people towards the outside of the modern consuming society" (ibid., p. 20), I try to describe the overall process of the transformation of nature, included the human body, into an artifact. Also in general I am more cautious regarding the valuation of all these changes. I always try to bear in mind that our reference model, namely the person gifted with inner profundity, is the result of a rather recent historical evolution. As I pointed out elsewhere, this

evolution is intimately connected to the rise of Romanticism, symbolically starting with the hero of modern society, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (Helferich, 2010). I will come back to these differences in my final considerations. As I said initially, however, I am very pleased that reflection on the "global" present has started within our bioenergetic community, and therefore consider Maê Nascimento's essay and mine as two complementary contributions of a common discourse.

Introduction

To contemplate the prevailing trends of our times and make conjectures about their possible future developments almost inevitably brings on a sense of unease and even anxiety – no one knows where this journey will end. We only know that we are on the road, travelling faster and faster, as though we were being whirled around in the great *Maelström*, the relentless vortex in Edgar Allan Poe's story of the same title. It is not by chance that one of today's most perspicacious sociological approaches is called *The Theory of Acceleration*; its fundamental assumption is that in modernity "there exists practically no sphere of life or society that has not been affected or transformed by the drive to acceleration" (Rosa, 2012, p. 285; see also Rosa 2005, engl. transl. 2013).

This process of acceleration requires a great effort at integration on the part of the individual so as to keep up with the pace of the times and face the vague sense of alienation that so easily creeps into the world we live in. Saying this, we already touch on some questions central to the role of psychotherapy in the Global Village, and particularly the much-discussed judgment of it made from the psychotherapeutic perspective. In this light, I should like to quote a famous passage in the New Testament (Mark 8, 36; King James version): *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?* The Evangelist's warning encourages us to make a careful evaluation of the processes of communication and of knowledge peculiar to the Global Village.

We must weigh the possible advantages of the development of technology and information (primarily the broadening of the individual's freedom of communication and self-expression), but also the possible dangers and dark sides of the Global Village as concerns the identity of individuals, their perception of self and the world, and their experience of their own bodies. We must also keep in mind that the Global Village is only the tangible expression of an even deeper tendency, a tendency towards the appropriation, transformation and, we might say, digital "re-burning" of the entire natural world, including man.

Thus, it leads to a reflection on the hypothetical *loss of one's soul* conjured up by the Evangelist: with its sensitive instruments for the perception and self-perception of psychic processes, psychotherapy is the privileged guardian of the individual's intimate side. It is the task of psychotherapy, along with philosophy and sociology, to delve into, watch over and formulate theories about the repercussions of technological development on our personal and social life – on our identity in the broadest sense.

This task of discernment is especially pressing today in the field of body psychotherapy. Since it is explicitly interested in the somatic dimension of the patient, his/her "being body", body psychotherapy – more than other approaches – confronts our "being nature". This is because, as a felicitous definition puts it, "the body is the nature we are" (Böhme, 2003, p. 63). And it is precisely for this reason, for its intimate connection with the patient's bodily nature, that today body psychotherapy finds itself having to reconsider its basic assumptions, and so is in a particularly difficult situation, as if the proverbial rug under its feet had been taken away. Indeed, it would seem that recent developments in science and applied technology, the prevailing tendencies of our times as a whole, can be summed up in the idea, "Nature does not exist". Or more precisely, "What we once called 'nature' no longer exists".

The idea that "nature no longer exists" gives us an insight into how profoundly the Global Village affects body psychotherapy today. It affects its received fundamental theoretical premises and also its possible role in 21st century society. Below we investigate these changes, concentrating on three points:

A) The vision of "body" and of "nature" in the founding fathers of body psychotherapy, especially in Alexander Lowen.

B) The reopening of these questions, which has become necessary due to the development of technology and the new virtual reality.

C) The new task of body psychotherapy: to create awareness of the value of an external and internal "nature", no longer, however, to be taken for granted, but instead an object of choice and lifestyle.

A. "Body" and "Nature" in the Founding Fathers of Body Psychotherapy

The term "founding fathers" refers here to personalities such as David Boadella, Gerda Boyesen, John Pierrakos, Alexander Lowen and Malcolm Brown, who each in their own way and in a very personal fashion have interpreted and carried on the shared inheritance of Wilhelm Reich. As we know, though remaining within the field of psychotherapy in the strict sense, all their approaches significantly broaden

the traditional analytic setting, including explicitly and under many forms the patient's bodily experience while undergoing therapy. But, as many will ask, why should there be this broadening of the borders of the confirmed analytic setting? What reason is there to introduce into the therapeutic encounter experiences and techniques like direct contact between therapist and patient, techniques potentially confusing and in any case not easy to manage (Klopstech, 2000; Helferich, 2004; Buti Zaccagnini, 2010)?

In the end, the answers to these questions are to be found in a vision of man that is common to body psychotherapy. This vision involves the relationship between "nature" and "culture" in human beings, and more precisely the significance of the human body as a crossroads of these two dimensions. As Alexander Lowen writes, expressing this shared vision in an exemplary fashion:

> "The goal of bioenergetics is to help people regain their primary nature, which is the condition of being free, the state of being graceful and the quality of being beautiful. Freedom, grace and beauty are the natural attributes of every animal organism. [...] The primary nature of every human being is to be open to life and love. Being guarded, armored, distrustful and enclosed is second nature in our culture. It is the means we adopt to protect ourselves against being hurt, but when such attitudes become characterological or structured in the personality, they constitute a more severe hurt and create a greater crippling than the one originally suffered" (Lowen, 1975, p. 43–44).

As can be seen in this representative quotation, Lowen presupposes a conflicting dynamics between the "primary nature" of man and his "second nature", which is social or appertains to character. A series of opposites is drawn around this conflicting dynamic, such as the following:

➢ achievement– pleasure
➢ thinking – feeling (or)
➢ adult – child.

These opposites are grouped around the antipodes of "Ego" and "body" that underlie the "culture"- "nature" polarity (Lowen, 1970, p. 211).

Actually, these polarities rest on a common foundation, as the very term "bioenergy" suggests: "We work with the hypothesis that there is one fundamental energy in the human body whether it manifests itself in psychic phenomena or in somatic motion. This energy we call simply 'bioenergy'. Psychic processes as well as somatic processes are determined by the operation of this bioenergy. All living processes can be reduced to manifestations of this bioenergy" (Lowen, 1958, p. 16).

From this standpoint it is possible to conceptualize, as Wilhelm Reich already had done, the relationship between psychic/mental phenomena and somatic phenomena in man as "functional identity between mind and body". And it is faith in the vital energy of this corporeal-organismic foundation that guides our therapeutic work, understood as correction of the inevitable damage to the body and psyche of the individual that the cultural process involves: "Bioenergetics is a therapeutic technique to help a person get back together with his body and to help him enjoy to the fullest degree possible the life of the body" (Lowen, 1975, p. 43).

In a previous essay I identified as "romantic inheritance" this longing of body psychotherapy for the "natural wholeness" (Malcolm Brown) of man (Helferich, 2010). This is an attempt to reconcile, to heal the age-old scission (schism) between the Self and its *Leib*, its living organism. Here we cannot dwell any longer on this aspiration; we only want to make it clear that we in no way intend the adjective "romantic" in a negative sense. The modern individual, endowed with "interior profundity" (Charles Taylor), is largely a child of European Romanticism. Instead, what interests us here is the concept of "nature". Certainly, all the founding fathers of body psychotherapy are aware of the long evolutionary process that has characterized human history, and of the need for the process of education and socialization in which this history is repeated. And certainly they are all aware of the fact that the human body is a limit-concept between "nature" and "culture", an element of culturalized nature, just as it is an element of culture in natural guise.

Yet, in all these approaches the reference to "nature" seems strangely ingenuous. It is placed seamlessly within a philosophical tradition that from Aristotle's time has conceived nature as the form of being that has its own laws within itself. To distinguish this idea of nature from the human *téchne,* Aristotle cites a figurative example of the Sophist Antifonte: "If you buried a bed and the putrefaction became vigorous enough to produce a sprout, what would be produced would not be a bed, but a piece of wood" (Aristotle, 1967, p. 34 [193a]). "Nature", then, is seen as something primordial, distinct from and prior to cultural man, an autonomous sphere of being. In agreement with this premise, the human body is also thought of as an unexamined given that can be influenced by human action only within certain limits. In the writing of the founding fathers we find many references to the animal reign and to children, as well as the metaphor of the great "Mother Nature", which confirm this observation. What is more, this idea of nature also has a normative value as moral philosophy. It serves as a model for what is "natural" and "unnatural" and therefore does or does not have value. In the concept of "primary nature" in Lowen, it is possible to show how the meaning of nature as origin blends together with that of the nature-model.

B.   Re-opening Questions Due to Developmental Technology and Virtual Reality: The Fading Away of Nature

We can therefore say that classic body psychotherapy is based on a received and as it were "stable" idea of nature, both as regards external nature and man's bodily nature. In fact, however, for some time now and particularly since the last century we have been witnessing a continual "shifting of borders" (Böhme, 2011, p. 5) between what is natural and what is artificial, between nature and culture. This is a process that ends up by making it more and more difficult to distinguish between these two spheres, at all levels. The first level is global and involves man's impact on nature: climate change, reduced biodiversity, the disappearance of forests, etc. It would seem that only volcanoes and earthquakes, as a result of movements of the earth's surface, are left as unhappy witnesses of nature's original activity. The second level takes us back to our daily lives, where we witness profound shifts in the borders between nature and *téchne,* a move towards the colonization by information systems of everything around us. This ongoing process was already defined in the early 1990s as "ubiquitous computing". Thus we have a vision of a world around us that is made intelligent by an interwoven system of mini-computers and interactive sensors ("ambient intelligence"). In his *Philosophy of Intelligent Worlds,* the philosopher Klaus Wiegerling summarizes this concept as follows,

> "Ubiquitous computing consists [...] in information-system equipment that permeates the entire mesosphere, which not only accompanies our lives, but will also change both our experience of the world and of ourselves, including the experience of our bodies. Technologies, and in particular media technologies, have always modified the way people experience the world and themselves. The new quality of the information vision of ubiquitous computing lies in the fact that the whole world, in a certain sense, comes to be permeated "informationally", so that every physical object, and not the least our body, can become a piece of information equipment, [...] that everything can become a means, an apparatus for connection, and its own informatics space" (Wiegerling, 2011, p. 14).

The perspective point of ubiquitous computing is a "smart" world, completely available to humans, who in turn are part of a technologically augmented reality. Among the various problems identified by Wiegerling, we indicate here only the fact that in this smart world the point of intersection between man and technology tends to become invisible, so that complex information systems can gradually substitute man as the subject of action. Another problem is the question of the world's "resistance" *(Widerständigkeit)*. In an environment that is technologically augmented and functionally standardized to meet determined needs, the world tends to lose its character

of resistance or oppositionality in respect to man. These experiences of the resistance of things and of the world in general are, however, indispensable for the constitution of our identity. To give an example, we need only consider that our children and grandchildren will never be able to have the experience previously considered to be archetypical, that of Hansel and Gretel who get lost in the woods and in the end find a way out: at every moment and wherever they may be, it will be possible to locate them.

C.   New Task – Valuing External and Internal Nature

1.   Nature Versus Construction

It is precisely at this point that we find the goal of the third great border shift: over-coming the resistance of nature as life, organism, animal body and human body. *"But you do not die because you are ill; you die because you live"*, writes Montaigne in one of his *Essays,* expressing what may be the hardest experience of the human condition, but is surely the most evident experience left of our cultural heritage (Montaigne, 1992, p. 1462). Today, on the contrary, medical technology has opened up for dis-cussion the given conditions of everything we used to consider natural in man. As reproductive medicine, it can intervene artificially in our genetic make-up, and we must not forget that today only legal limits restrict the scope of these concrete possi-bilities. As transplant medicine, it can freely change and substitute organs and parts of our organism, on the basis of a "practiced Cartesianism" (Böhme, 2003, p. 168) regarding *homme machine.* The story of the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy in *The Intruder*, is a moving description of just such an experience: Nancy, suffering from progressive cardiac insufficiency, had agreed to live with the heart of another person, probably a woman much younger than he (Nancy, 2000). As with plastic surgery and pharmacology, medicine can modify both our outer and inner aspects. Through the widespread psycho-pharmacological practice of neuro-enhancement, people's moods can undergo psycho-physical improvement to meet their needs to achieve.

   All these tendencies and realities of medical technology can be summed up in the concepts of *Biofact* and *Cyborg.* The *Cyborg* is so far only a vision, deriving from astronautics. It is a being that is a mix of living organism and cybernetic elements, meant to improve survival possibilities in space (for example, as regards the perception of dangerous radiation through implanted sensors). *Biofacts*, on the other hand, are

artificial objects made by man on an organic-biological foundation. Examples are food made from genetically modified plants, or the case of Dolly, the cloned sheep, probably the most famous *Biofact*. As it is impossible in these cases to separate what is natural from what is not, it is appropriate to speak of "secondary corporeality" (Wiegerling, 2011).

However, the term "secondary corporeality" already leads us to doubt whether and in what sense we can still speak about "nature":

> "If modernity has always been connoted by the intention to transform what is given into what is constructed, this project was enlarged to include man's body, which is the Nature we are, only in the 20th century. On various fronts man has begun his transformation into an artifact. This poses the question of what man should be held to be as given, and so as Nature. In light of this challenge, the question is posed for the first time whether and in what sense it is essential to man to be Nature" (Böhme, 2003, p. 152).

These troublesome questions may sound like a threat to body psychotherapy, in its aim to lead the patient back to identification with the lived experience of his concrete body, as Alexander Lowen writes in another representative passage, "Bioenergetics rests on the simple proposition that each person is his body. No person exists apart from the living body in which he has his existence and through which he expresses himself and relates to the world around him" (Lowen, 1975, p. 54).

2. Personal Identity in the Global Village

Besides the nature that surrounds us and that we are, the developments of computer technology have also transformed the whole field of human communication. Here, too, the physical body as concrete presence is fading away, if not already completely gone. As regards communication, it is difficult to speak of nature in the Global Village, for what is natural has always been collocated in space and time, while the Global Village represents our success in overcoming, or perhaps even canceling, these limits.

The metaphor of the Global Village was created back in the 1960s by the Canadian expert in mass media, Marshall McLuhan (1911–1980), who describes it in the following evocative terms,

> "Ours is a brand-new world of allatonceness. 'Time' has ceased, 'space' has vanished. We now live in a global village … a simultaneous happening. […] Information pours upon us,

instantaneously and continuously. As soon as information is acquired, it is very rapidly replaced by still newer information. [...] The new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of the global village" (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967, p. 63 and 67).[1]

If this vision was at the time based only on the presence of traditional media like periodicals and television, it has certainly been perfectly fulfilled by the worldwide web, which has existed since 1991. In fact, the internet is not actually a medium in the classical sense. As its original name, *Interconnected Networks*, suggests, it represents a "hybrid medium", offering a general infrastructure that gives access to a great variety of visual, digital and audio information. While this simultaneity of media modes already goes beyond the traditional concept of media, the really revolutionary aspect of the internet lies in its "democratic" character, meaning its interactive potential (one-to many; one-to-one; many-to-many; many-to-one). In this sense, the presence of the internet has opened an enormous space of freedom for communication beyond any limit of time and of space, "in real time". It has created new spaces like the social networks and chatrooms, as well as virtual worlds like Second Life, which represent new forms of encounter and expression, both at the individual and collective levels. But in what sense does all this touch the topic under discussion?

To be as concise as possible, we can perhaps single out two central fields that interest both psychotherapy in general and body psychotherapy in particular: the question of reality and that of personal identity. Perhaps their common denominator lies precisely in a tendency towards the loosening or broadening of these concepts.

3. Reality and Personal Identity

Let us look first at the question of "reality". What is "virtual reality"? We may recall that the Latin term *virtus* ("power", "force") and then the medieval Latin term *virtuale* refer to something whose ontological state is less precisely definable than the term *realis*. While *realis* denominates a concrete, material reality, the *virtuale* has a changing quality, referring to something that "potentially" or "possibly" could be or happen.

This iridescent quality is made possible by the fact that the virtual reality we are speaking about exists inside a media space, or inside a reality that is in some way "enriched" by media. But we have to remember that the media, in sharp contrast with the

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1 Due to a mistake in composition, the original title was The Medium is the Massage rather than the Message. McLuhan found this mistake enlightening and so decided not to correct it.

ingenuous name of *medium*, and so of mere mediators, have qualities that go further: not only do they have the power to select and transform reality according to their specific mode of presentation (for example, as photos, or children's stories), but they also have the power of constructing reality (by defining what is more "important" and so "really real" and what is less so). In the end, they also have the potential power to substitute reality. For example, for all of us there exists the danger of instinctively identifying the report of political events offered on television with "politics" in general. This obscure confusion between the medium and its contents, between world and medium, is already expressed by the above-mentioned Marshall McLuhan in his paradoxical formula, "The medium is the message". The following passage by Klaus Wiegerling sums up this complex superimposition:

> "The more complex is a society, the more important does media mediation become. In our society, being and appearance are so thoroughly mixed that it is almost impossible to speak of a reality independent of consciousness, clearly distinct from simulation and fiction. Our reality consists in a mixture of elements that are real in the strictest sense with simulative, fictional elements created with technical means. It has become, we may say, virtual, and so less connected to an outer, physically based world independent of consciousness than it is to an inner experience, which includes media productions" (Wiegerling, 2008, p. 230).

The reference to inner experience offers us the opportunity to move on to the question of personal identity. By now experts are convinced that assiduous presence online fosters a tendency to a so-called "multiple personality" in users. Let us try to understand in what sense.

In our context, this tendency is expressed above all in the relationship between the "online mode" and the "offline mode" in a user's life. We note *en passant* that the mere fact of distinguishing between "online" and "offline" modes of existence implies a huge change of the way we view our lives. What up to now we have simply called "life" – our one and only daily life – now coincides with the "offline mode" of existence, which is always compared to and seen in reference to the "online mode". More specifically, the question of multiple personality is linked to the online mode, in relation to factors like the average amount of time passed online each day, as well as to the age and personal maturity of the user.

But speaking more generally, we realize every day that our life takes place simultaneously on two parallel levels, the real-life level and the virtual one. Thus, we speak of a new social pattern called "networked individualism", and of the fact that we are more and more able to and do choose the partners of our communication freely and

outside the concrete ties of our life, of the *Lebenswelt* (Metzner-Szigeth, 2008). In the phenomenon of networked individualism, important trends of sociological change are converging with the extremely rapid development of information technology. Between society's eagerness and demand (demand pull) on the one hand and the offer of new sophisticated communication technology on the other (technology push), it sometimes seems hard to say which is the driving factor. It is easy to foresee that in the future our online life will become more and more important in respect to our real life. "Real life" will tend to be "elsewhere", in the great space of a simultaneous common presence. This is the space of a "free" communication, free also in the sense of being tendentially de-localized, because the body has no part in it. The body is the great absence.

As we know, the various realities of the internet, above all chatrooms and sophisticated virtual games like *Second Life* and *World of Warcraft,* provide room for multiple forms of constructing and presenting one's Self. We have already noted that these interactive forms open up wide spaces of creativity, freedom and play. But on the whole, internet reality works in many ways as a powerful scenario for a perspective presentation of one's own image, a form of "virtualization" of the Self. In the absence of a real Other, the user has the possibility of presenting himself and moving in many different forms, none of which are binding and which he is free to shed from one moment to the next. In this sense, the network has been called the sphere of "as-if", a sphere in which "any reference to things or happenings or real persons is purely casual".

We cannot continue to treat the question of multiple identity here; it is a phenomenon that will doubtlessly become ever more pervasive in the future. Nor can we dwell at length on other aspects of the Global Village that touch on our topic. Among these, there is above all the question of our perception of the world, as well as the problems of psychic integration of our experience. As far as perception is concerned, we might investigate further the growing importance of images and of the visual dimension in general, a dimension tendentially detached from the body and its concrete postures and sensations. It is not by chance that today image theory stirs such great interest in philosophy and communication sciences, so much so that over the last decade a new discipline has been created, called *Bildwissenschaft*, "science of the image" (Sachs-Hombach, 2009).

As regards psychic integration of experience, we can recall the above-mentioned "Theory of acceleration", which focuses on the growing difficulty of conceiving personal life today as an "organic unity" founded on an overall project for life over time. The lived experience of "resonance" with the world (Rosa, 2012, p. 9), even if it is not lasting, is based on successful psychic integration of our experience of the world.

For the inhabitants of the Global Village this integration is and will be especially arduous. As Klaus Wiegerling writes, "In the future the construction of identity will occur under more difficult conditions" (Wiegerling, 2008, p. 250).

4.   The Nature in Front of Us – Choices and Lifestyle

Let us go back and pick up the thread of our argument. Starting from the concept of "body" and "nature" in the founding fathers of body psychotherapy, we have underscored the limits of their discourse in the conditions of the present, on two levels. First, there is a limit as regards changes in external nature and in the human body, i.e., the progressive technologization of both these spheres, which tendentially perverts the relationship with nature. Secondly, there is a limit as regards the world of the Global Village, a completely artificial reality that leads to numerous problems for the formation of a personal identity. Reviewing some of the key-words we have had occasion to use, such as ubiquitous computing, Biofact, virtual reality, online and offline modes of existence, and perspective identity, we become increasingly aware of the extreme complexity of the world we live in. It is as though diverse layers of meaning of "nature", "reality" and "identity" were living side by side in a sort of kaleidoscopic co-presence, participating in rapidly evolving processes. How can we get our bearings, how can we behave, how can we live in this situation?

A distinction made by the philosopher Gernot Böhme provides a useful contribution to our discussion of the concepts of "body" and "nature". Böhme presented this distinction in a speech given at the *Modena Festival of Philosophy* in September, 2011, dedicated to Nature. According to Böhme, in a technological civilization like ours, we can no longer take for granted "being body", "being nature" and "being part of a surrounding nature". It is as if this "old nature" for quite some time now had been "behind us". However, we have another nature "in front of us". More precisely, "Nature is in front of us like a task. [...] Nature is no longer simply what is given, but what is wanted" (Böhme, 2013/2014, p. 22). This means that we must ponder, decide and concretely realize on a daily basis whether and how we want to related to external nature and to the nature we are, what meaning we want to give them. These choices are expressed as a pragmatic attitude and merge in a lifestyle.

To give a concrete example, we need only consider that in the memory of humankind, though childbirth always took place within a cultural context, it was considered to be and to happen naturally. In the course of the 20th century, childbirth became the prerogative of new medical-technological know-how: birth-giving was moved from home to hospital, while the figure of the midwife, the traditional representative

of received knowledge, was pushed aside. By contrast, in recent decades childbirth has become the object of an informed choice that tends once again to limit medical aspects: today we can and must choose what kind of delivery to have, how and to what extent to make it again a "natural childbirth".

Another concrete example is found in the bioenergetic exercises conceived by husband and wife Leslie and Alexander Lowen in the 1950s and 1960s. By doing these exercises, we *choose* to explore ourselves as corporeal beings *(Leibwesen)*. We affirm, appreciate and accept being an organism, a part of the nature that surrounds us and that we ourselves are. Doing these exercises with a certain regularity, integrating them in our daily lives, we make this choice into a lifestyle. The image of Alexander Lowen as an old man who continues doing his exercises every day is a great example.

Psychotherapy in the Global Village is obliged to take into consideration the extreme complexity of this new reality, above all as concerns the identity of young people, the so-called "digital natives". For them, the presence of the computer as an integral part of the world is taken for granted just as cars and televisions were for the preceding generation of "digital immigrants". Indeed, it is just this tendentially destabilizing complexity that confirms the importance of psychotherapy. In the existential encounter with a concrete Other, the patient can and must experience the dignity and value of his/her own irreplaceable personality and of the irreplaceable personality of the Other and of all others.

Body psychotherapy also finds itself facing new challenges. It has already undergone a great change in respect to its beginnings, defining itself today as *somatic-relational* psychotherapy. Will it succeed in formulating and conceptually integrating the changes happening in today's technological world regarding the body and nature in general? Will it turn out to be "antiquated" or "out of date" in the face of this *smart* world?

Perhaps body psychotherapy's "critical humanism" (Schneider, 2012, p. 687), its specific and precious "untimeliness" (Nietzsche), lies precisely in its critical awareness of our "being nature". It would seem, therefore, that the importance of the body approach is even more tangible within our culture. The contemporary philosophers speak of "the growing loss of a unitary experience of life", of "alienation from our own body" (Wiegerling, 2011), and in general of "loss of the awareness of a coherent feeling of self or of life over time" (Rosa, 2011, p. 1058). These are phenomena that in his 1983 book on *Narcissism* Alexander Lowen, by then an old man, perspicaciously perceived as the growing "unreality of present time".

This is doubtlessly a very negative judgment. Yet one aspect of the complexity we have spoken of is that the reality of the Global Village – perhaps like the phenomenon of technology in general – also opens considerable spaces of freedom. Within this reality, in any case, we can identify two great tasks for body psychotherapy today: the

curative task of restoring the patient's experience to his own body and to root it in this body, and the *pedagogical* task of making him sensitive to the value of an external and personal-corporeal "nature" no longer to be taken for granted, but rather the object of choices and lifestyles.

D.   Clinical Considerations

The curative task of restoring the patient's experience to and rooting it in his own body is a general objective of body psychotherapy that can be realized in manifold ways. Following the line of the previous discussion, in my clinical considerations I would like to focus on the question of time in psychotherapy. How can we, in a world of ongoing acceleration, bring the patient back to experience the biological rhythms of life? How can we bring him back to the "time of the body"?

1.   Nurturing Contact

At this point, I would like to present the techniques of "nurturing contact" which are, in my experience, one valuable way of approaching these challenging objectives. These techniques have been elaborated in the *Organismic Psychotherapy* of Malcolm Brown (Brown, 1990), and therein represent the main tool for reaching deeper levels of our experience. At first sight, this kind of contact seems rather similar to the techniques we are familiar with in our established practice as bioenergetic therapists: while the patient lies supine or prone on the mattress, we work with contact, holding one or two hands on various parts of his body – on the forehead, under the neck, on the belly, in the area of the sacrum, on the knees, etc. But the difference from our usual way of using direct touch, the peculiarity of the nurturing contact lies in its duration. It is usually a soft, non-directive, long-term contact that provides the possibility for the patient to feel deeply. And that needs time. The contact may last 5, 10, 15 or even 20 minutes in the same part of the body, while the therapist stays with the patient in an attentively waiting, observing position.

In this unstructured, open "space of silence" (Nascimento, 2005), many things can happen. Feeling deeply, the patient may have regressive experiences, going back to primordial layers of the Self. The creative unconscious may produce powerful images, frightening or consoling, as I have described in referring to my own experience (Helferich, 2004a). The body may answer with manifold spontaneous organismic reactions from within, while experiencing all kinds of emotion. In certain cases,

"nothing" happens, the patient is busy thinking, or falls asleep. In other cases, he may experience a profound sense of peace and harmony as an effect of equilibration processes among various parts of the bodily Self. Sometimes, the body may express a need for direct interaction with the therapist, desiring more physical pressure or even a kind of struggle, for example. In these cases, "nurturing contact" becomes "catalytic contact", the other form of direct touch, which includes many kinds of interactive movement between patient and therapist.

As we can see, these techniques of non-directive, long-term contact aim at a deep integration and balancing of the embodied Soul. They operate by deliberately slowing down the rather quick processes of our consciousness and decelerating control systems of our mind, creating a different kind of receptivity, an "undifferentiated emptiness" or "diffused consciousness" (Brown, 2001). These deceleration processes facilitate alternative forms of energy activation, especially regarding our "second brain" (Michael Gershon), the visceral sphere, which may be conceived of as a bridge towards nonverbal, bodily-mediated layers of memory and feeling.

Regarding the therapist, the activation of such forms of bodily experience "from within" require two basic abilities. First of all, the therapist must develop the art of waiting. He has to learn to tolerate the uncertainty that comes from the patient's passivity and silence in a situation where he sometimes literally does not know what is going on with the patient. Waiting without actively doing anything easily creates anxiety, a sense of "feeling useless" or "doing nothing". These are countertransferential realities that deserve our respect. They require the therapist's ability to cope with his anxiety and to manage the timing of nurturing contact in each case, without forcing himself.

Secondly, in order to create an effective, nonverbal connection to the patient's inner life, the therapist has to develop a subtle receptivity through using his own bodily experience. This naturally includes continuous awareness of the bodily process of breathing of both patient and therapist, and towards the specific quality of contact, as may become evident in the temperature of his hands (e.g. warm – cold – changing).

Finally, we must consider still another, more objective prerequisite regarding the setting. Naturally, long-term contact is only possible within a therapeutic frame that provides time enough for this kind of deceleration. Therefore, a setting of one hour and a half or of two hours is more suitable, which is why I personally prefer sessions of one hour and a half whenever possible.

At this point, a general reflection regarding the temporal framework of our setting in body psychotherapy seems to be appropriate. Compared to all forms of purely verbal therapy, our approach is more complex. Moving on two levels, we usually integrate a verbal phase with an experiential part of the session. It seems, however, that since its beginnings body psychotherapy has adopted from psychoanalysis a setting

of forty-five or fifty minute sessions. But this temporal framework was created – and fits perfectly – for a purely verbal form of psychotherapy. Unfortunately, it has been adopted without considering the different temporal requirements of bodily experience. I do not want to say that providing excellent body psychotherapy within sessions of forty-five or fifty minutes is not possible. The realities of our daily work force us to do so, as this duration is the usual framework. We ought to admit, however, that many possible options of intervention are almost automatically excluded by the therapist when the time frame is so restricted.

2.   Clinical Vignette

Alice, a 32-year-old client, is at a positive time of her life. In fact, notwithstanding certain difficulties regarding her career as a future psychotherapist, she has a good outlook on life and is planning to marry in the summer. Having been in therapy for more than three years with a frequency of one hourly session per week, she has successfully tackled many problems concerning self-confidence, female identity and her schizoid and oral character traits. Over the years, we have built up a good and trusting relationship, and I enjoy working with her.

During Easter vacation, she studied Lowen's *Depression and the Body*, which impressed her deeply. Therefore, in the present session she wants to start doing body work immediately, and I agree to this. We begin with some activating exercises, like grounding, bending over (aka forward bend; elephant), and arching (aka the bow). While she is arching, I ask her to find a sound, which expresses the over-all impact of Lowen's book on her. What she produces sounds like wailing. After that, I ask her to stand still for a while and to feel her body. She touches her neck and her shoulders, as if wanting to give herself a massage. In the end, she puts her hands on her belly. When asked how she would like to proceed, she says she wants to focus on her belly, and I invite her to lie down on a mattress in a supine position.

She agrees to receive contact from my hand on her belly. In the following phase of about ten minutes, she initially appears to be relaxed, and her breathing is regular and abdominal. After a while, however, she starts swallowing. Her breathing becomes more and more thoracic, her legs become agitated, and she opens and closes her hands, making faint sounds.

Some minutes later, she starts coughing violently, almost getting sick. Her whole body trembles and she starts to cry. After that, she caresses her eyes and face with her hands. By and by she gets calmer, turns slowly to the right and to the left, and in the end calms down completely and closes her eyes.

After a moment of silence, we start talking about what happened. She says it was a very intense and fearful experience, a feeling of being blocked and paralyzed that started from the hands and arms, as if her body was going to be petrified. By opening and closing her hands and moving her pelvis and legs, she tried to defend herself, but nonetheless she felt in danger of being petrified, of becoming white marble.

Unfortunately, we did not have enough time in that session to explore in detail exactly what it was that emerged; what it means to "become a stone"; what kind of recollections, images and emotions were associated with this. Therefore, I proposed to her that she draw a picture of the stone at home.

This clinical vignette demonstrates how a seemingly simple technique of nurturing contact, such as a hand on the belly can elicit profound bodily and psychic experiences, as this patient was sufficiently ready and open to let it happen. There is the problem of the time limit, too, but as there is a good therapeutic relationship, we would talk about the experience in the next session, follow-up and explore more deeply the meaning of her reaction.

3.   Correspondences in Clinical Perspectives

As I mentioned above, I was pleasantly surprised to find similar ideas to my own considerations in Maê Nascimento's essay in the latest *International Journal (2014)*. This convergence regards the urgency of theoretically addressing the globalization process, as well as clinical considerations and propositions to counterbalance it.

Regarding the clinical aspect, the correspondences are quite evident to the attentive reader of "Two Body Touches for Restoring Connection to Inner Self" (Nascimento, 2014, p. 27–29). Even though the two kinds of touches are applied in a standing position (as opposed to the lying position usually used in nurturing contact), they essentially pursue the same goal, i. e. to "activate the energy through the autonomous nervous system and not through the bone structure or muscular levels. [...] It also activates the perineum and the Hara, facilitating an internal grounding and a deep plunging within oneself" (p. 28).

This is quite congruent with the concept of *horizontal grounding* in Organismic Psychotherapy, which aims at alleviating Ego-control by activating visceral energy flow (as in the tradition of Gerda Boyesen's work). The other noteworthy correspondence concerns the therapist's non-directive style, a stance that "gives room for the client's process without controlling it or directing it" (p. 29). This is exactly the attitude required by long-term nurturing contact: a subtle awareness of organismic processes going

on in the co-created field of relationship, as well as the deepest respect for the client's autonomous personal development, his *Selbstbewegung* (literally: "self-movement"), to quote an appropriate German expression. This profoundly humanistic orientation of the therapist, this humble stepping-back from himself out of respect for the patient, is mindful of the fluid yet powerful quality of "emptiness" in Zen philosophy.

Conclusion

After these clinical considerations, we return to our general discourse to draw a conclusion. I think we body psychotherapists ought to take the reality of the Global Village as a fact. We have to acknowledge that for quite a while we have been living simultaneously in two parallel worlds. There is a prevailing tendency to transform the traditional "real reality" of nature and body, as well as traditional "real communication", into a parallel artificially recreated or digitally mediated reality.

As we have already mentioned, the assessment of these developments is complex. We have to carefully weigh potentially negative tendencies, which might harm our bodily and personal identity, against the new spaces of freedom and choice we have at our disposal. In fact, we already have to continually choose what kind of "body", what kind of "nature", what kind of "human being" we want to be and all these choices have to find an expression in a corresponding lifestyle.

Psychotherapy, too, finds itself continually compelled to choose how far, and in which ways, to be involved in these ongoing changes, for example, regarding the question of to what extent digitally mediated communication can, should, or should not, take part in the therapeutic process. In this complex scenario, body psychotherapy becomes increasingly important. Highlighting the basic fact that "we are our body", body psychotherapy invites and challenges us to critically assess and counterbalance the prevailing trends of our time, the progressive evaporation of nature, body and direct forms of human relationships. In fact, the techniques of "nurturing contact" presented above in the clinical considerations are a bridge to the patient's experience of himself as the *organismic entirety* he is.

All in all, ours appears to be essentially a corrective, compensatory position in relation to the powerful combination of the dominant technological, economic and social trends of our time. In my opinion, however, this is precisely the most precious contribution of body psychotherapy's *critical* and *healing humanism* in our present time.

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