

MOTION AND EMOTION: a Reichian perspective

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The following article was prompted by experiences many of us in the dance therapy community had shared as participants in a workshop with pioneer dance therapist Liljan Espenak in early 1988. The workshop focused strongly on the links between bodily and emotional expression and raised issues about the 'safety' of emotional expression and the boundaries of dance therapy as a modality.

In this paper I wish to highlight the work of Wilhelm Reich, pioneer of the body-centered psychotherapies, hoping to clarify some issues, establish a basis of understanding and promote interest in further study and discussion.

As a dancer who has experienced Reichian therapy and the study of dance-movement therapy, I have often been struck by the common links and shared objectives of these modalities. Briefly, both modalities have the body and emotional expression as basic sources; both work towards holistic well-being through the body. Reich's work is an inspiring 'body' of scientific and psychotherapeutic knowledge and rich clinical observation concerned with precisely these matters.

Specifically, but not exclusively, Reich discovered that emotion and motion are one concept: emotion is the flow of life energy in the body. 'Working directly with the body became, as dreams had for Freud, the royal road to the unconscious' (Luton, 1984: 131). Reich referred to E-motion; energy in motion.

This energy is what Reich called orgone energy or, perhaps more familiarly, prana or chi, which enlivens all living things. Reich '... was able to quantify this energy; demonstrate it electropically, photographically, thermically, magnetically; and to accumulate it' (Luton, 1984: 132). He 'found that energy flowed in the body from the perineum up the spine and over the head, in a strong stream. Then the stream, like a fountain, flowed gently down the front of the body, as if pulled by gravity' (Luton, 1984: 135). He understood that 'the shapes of objects conform to the flow of energy in and around them' (Luton,

1984: 134). This is underscored by Liljan Espenak's observation that clients changed 'according to the emotions in the particular part of the body where the problems were located' (Hagemann, 1988: 10).

Investigating Reich's work tells us why this is so and, importantly, gives us the necessary tools for working safely with emotional release, as distinct from emotional representation, in dance-movement therapy, where appropriate. I feel strongly that whilst representation is possibly our fundamental tool, we need to understand the dynamics and potentials of release in order to be clear in our work and to come to terms with release as a concept in dance-movement therapy.

It is necessary to distinguish between representation of emotional material through dance-movement, passive release which encourages relaxation and integration, and the autonomic response which facilitates release of emotion and is most often triggered by heightened breathing. The autonomic response is bodily expression of a most profound nature, which often gives rise to spontaneous insight and access to hitherto unconscious, or in Reich's terms 'stored' material of deep personal experience. This experience could perhaps be understood as the difference between experiencing emotion and letting go of emotion, allowing the possibility of resolution and healing.

Reich called his modality Orgonomy, 'a science of physical energy' (Reich, 1952: 110). When the flow of energy is impeded, stasis (or tension) is the result. 'Reich found stasis of energy appeared in the body as a result of repressing emotion' (Luton, 1984: 132). This stasis, or 'frozen history' as Reich called it, corresponds to a standing wave of energy. Release is facilitated by 'charging' the body through heightened breathing (not hyperventilation) and/or stress positions (see Lowen's work) which release the standing wave into abreaction.

It is important to note that this form of release follows organic principles and can be monitored and further understood by looking at Reich's

four-beat or 'orgasm formula'. This is a release pattern he observed: Mechanical tension - Bioenergetic charge - Bioenergetic discharge - Mechanical relaxation.

Further investigation revealed this four-beat pattern applied to all functions of the autonomic system. Even cell division followed this four-beat pattern. Reich was to propose that the orgasm formula was the formula of life itself. (Luton, 1984: 131)

The physical manifestation of stasis is evident in the body as 'armouring', seen clearly in the musculature. 'The armouring in the body corresponds to a record of past trauma' (Luton, 1984: 146). This is another layer of observational skill we could, with benefit, integrate into our work.

Reich developed a concept of the body divided into seven segments. The segments, which correspond to the innervation of the autonomic nervous system are: ocular, oral, cervical, thoracic, diaphragmatic, abdominal and pelvic. (Luton, 1984: 139)

Obviously great skill, self-knowledge and training are needed to work this way. I am not suggesting that we all become body therapists, but that we clarify the areas of overlap; that we understand the similarities and use what is relevant with integrity; that we understand the differences, particularly with a view to 'knowing what we don't know'. I am suggesting that an understanding of Reich's work could clear up many areas of confusion and provide a rich source of professional insight.

This is a highly selective overview of Reich's work, and in that sense, unsatisfactory. For a full and balanced account of Reich, the man and the depth and breadth of his work, see his biography, *Fury on Earth* by Myron Sharaf. Alexander Lowen's books are also very accessible.

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Photo: Mary Buith

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