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The Integrated Bodymind's View on 'Body/Mind Integration'

Michael Soth

Presented at the Chiron Association's AGM in 1999, this substantial article attempts to re-formulate the core concepts of body psychotherapy from an integrated relational perspective — applying three rules: reformulate Reichian concepts relationally, reformulate analytic concepts holistically, and reformulate medical model assumptions from a 'wounded healer' position.

KEY THEMES

— Three rules for re-formulating integrative concepts

— The body/mind split as spontaneous vs reflective opposition

— Character structure as frozen relationship, not fixed armour

— Transference as bodymind parallel process

— Bodymind integration as tool of intersubjective perception

— The field of psychotherapy mirrors the fragmentation of the client's bodymind

Three Rules for Re-formulation

This article was written following a presentation to the Chiron Association's AGM and attempts to re-formulate a selection of our basic concepts from an approximation of a third position — one which is neither purely Reichian nor purely analytic, but attempts to hold both in productive tension.

In summary, I will do this by attempting to re-formulate: Reichian concepts relationally; analytic concepts holistically and energetically; structural concepts as processes and relationships; and medical model assumptions from a 'wounded healer' position as paradox and conflict.

Rule 1: Reformulate all Reichian concepts relationally. The Reichian tradition has tended to work with the client's bodymind as if it were a quasi-biological system in isolation. The idea of vegetotherapy, character analysis, and the armouring concept — all of these can be reformulated: not 'armour' as a thing the person has, but 'armour' as a relationship pattern, a habitual way of relating to spontaneous experience and to the other.

Rule 2: Reformulate all analytic concepts holistically and energetically. Analytic concepts such as projective identification, object relations, splitting — all of these were conceived within a framework which separates mind from body. Re-formulating them holistically means understanding them as bodymind processes: projective identification is not just a mental operation but a bodymind communication, transmitted non-verbally through posture, tone, breath and subtle energetic field.

Rule 3: Reformulate all structural entities as energetic processes and relationships. From this perspective, we want to appreciate all structural 'entities' and 'objects' as they appear in analytic theory and re-formulate them also as processes and relationships. It's not only a fixed object that gets introjected — it's also a whole relationship.

The Bodymind Spectrum

If we want to work with the whole spectrum of body/mind processes (in both client and therapist), we might start with a simple list: body — emotion — image — mind — intuition. The client's subjective sense of self is a stream which is fed by these tributaries.

Each therapeutic approach tends to favour and privilege certain processes over others, both in terms of their sensitivity to them and the importance they place on them as ingredients in therapy. The various therapeutic approaches represented in the field each tend to favour certain parts of the elephant — the proverbial blind men of the Sufi story.

Comparative outcome research into the effects of psychotherapy has consistently failed to show significant differences between approaches. The famous Dodo bird verdict — 'All of them are winners and all of them must have prizes' — states that all kinds of therapy work at times, and that differences in theory and technique are not the main indicators of differential outcome. The question then becomes: what is it that actually works, which no single tradition has fully theorised?

The Field of Psychotherapy Mirrors the Client's Fragmentation

Each therapeutic approach tends to favour and privilege certain processes over others. The field of psychotherapy, taken as a whole, mirrors the fragmentation of the client's bodymind: we have therapies of the mind (cognitive-behavioural), therapies of emotion (humanistic), therapies of image and symbol (Jungian), therapies of sensation and movement (Body Psychotherapy), and therapies of relationship (relational psychoanalysis).

What would it mean to work with the whole spectrum? It would mean attending not just to the various levels individually, but to the relationships between them — to the way body-emotion-image-mind-intuition work in harmony, work against each other, or work in parallel but dissociated (unconnected).

This leads to what I call a holistic bodymind phenomenology of the relationship, with re-enactment and parallel process as central notions. If relationship is the central tool of psychotherapy, then we need an holistic body/mind phenomenology of relationship which does not succumb to or perpetuate body/mind dualism and the objectification of the body.

Character Structure Re-formulated Relationally

Character structure, in the Reichian tradition, has been understood as a kind of armour — a fixed bodymind pattern which protects the person from the re-experience of their wound. Re-formulated relationally, character structure is the embodiment of the originally wounding relationship: both poles of it — the wounded child and the wounding parent — are internalised and embodied in different regions of the client's bodymind.

This means that when we work with character structure, we are always working with a relationship — specifically, the originally wounding relationship as it has become internalised. The diaphragm is not just 'armoured' in some abstract biological sense; it is

the site of the battle between two internalised objects, the child's fear and the parent's demand.

From this perspective, the therapist's own bodymind becomes a resonant instrument: the parallel process between client's wound and therapist's experience is not a distortion to be corrected but the primary source of clinical information. Bodymind integration, re-formulated, becomes not a technique to impose on the client, but a quality of the therapist's own awareness — the capacity to hold awareness of the split-ness and fragmentation of the client's experience, across all the bodymind levels, in the here-and-now relationship.

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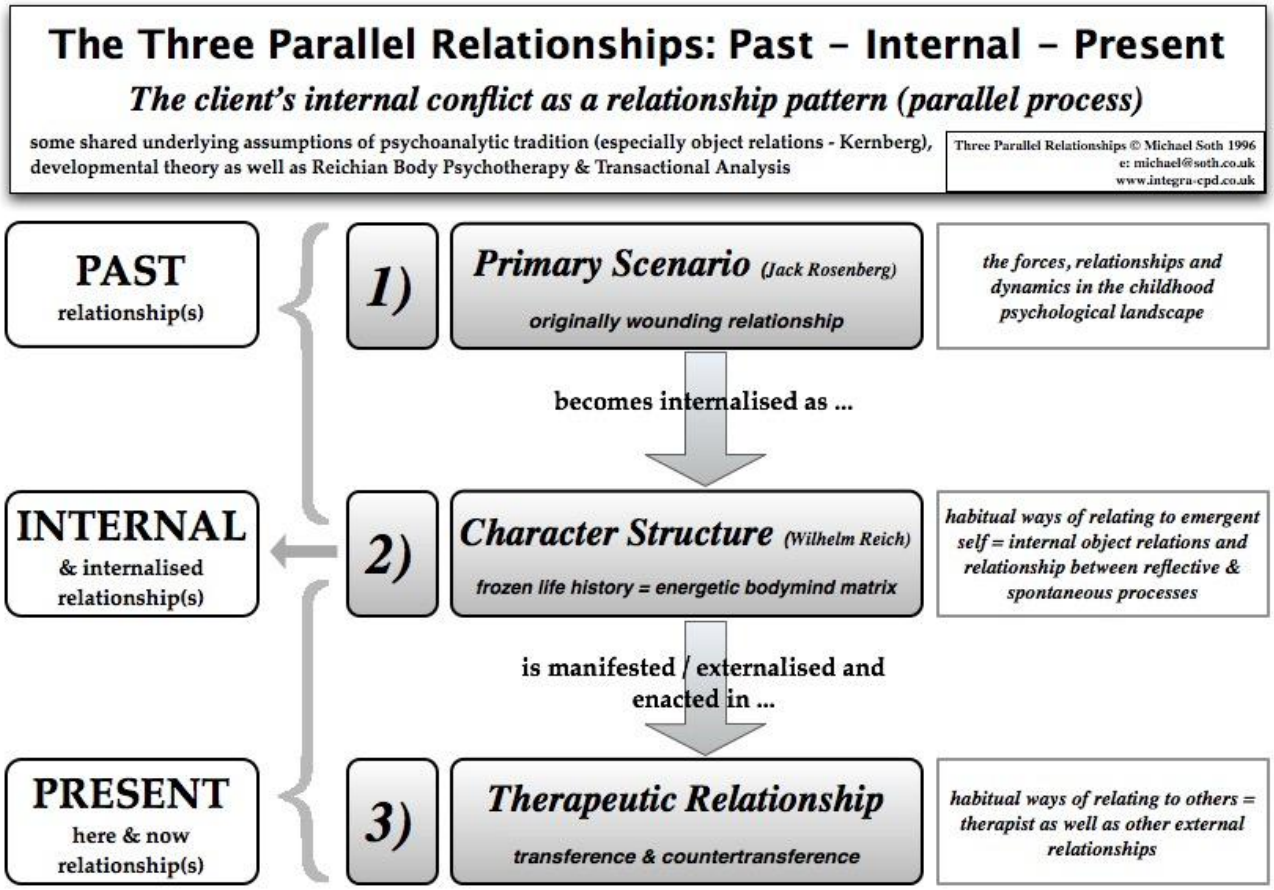
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5 Steps of Character Formation

based on Johnson, S. (1994) "Character Styles" and Reich, W. (1934/1974) "Character Analysis"

1	**self-affirmation** rooted in instinctual / 'object-seeking' need	CORE (Reich's PRIMARY)
2	**negative environmental response** = the wounding, 'not good-enough' response (abandonment, invasion, rejection, etc, etc)	
3	**organismic reaction** = protest against (2) = functional response to / against frustration	SECONDARY (Reich's term)
4	**self-negation = turning against self** = **i.e. turning against against both (1) and (3)** - involves internalisation of the 'wounding object' on all levels across body / mind spectrum (through imitation, introjection and identification with the object) = unconscious attachment to internalised frustrating / suppressing 'bad' object - defined by what is *denying* and / or *suppressing* ('anti-libidinal')	
5	**adjustment process (compromise)** = habitual 'unnatural' accommodation to avoid pain whilst maintaining contact - defined by compensation mechanisms (what is *exaggerated*)	FAÇADE

5 Steps of Character Formation · Michael Soth, 1995



The Three Parallel Relationships: Past – Internal – Present · Michael Soth, 1996

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5 Steps of Character Formation

Based on Johnson (1994) Character Styles and Reich (1934) Character Analysis

1

Self-affirmation

Rooted in instinctual / 'object-seeking' need

CORE

2

Negative environmental response

The wounding, 'not good-enough' response (abandonment, invasion, rejection, etc.)

3

Organismic reaction

Protest against (2) = functional response to / against frustration

SECONDARY

4

Self-negation = turning against self

Turning against both (1) and (3) — internalisation of the wounding object across body/mind spectrum; unconscious attachment to internalised frustrating 'bad object'

5

Adjustment process (compromise)

Habitual 'unnatural' accommodation to avoid pain whilst maintaining contact — defined by compensation mechanisms

FACADE

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Three Parallel Relationships: Past - Internal - Present

The client's internal conflict as a relationship pattern (parallel process)

PAST	**1 · Primary Scenario** Originally wounding relationship	Forces & dynamics in the childhood psychological landscape
	becomes internalised as...	
INTERNAL	**2 · Character Structure** Frozen life history = energetic bodymind matrix	Habitual ways of relating to emergent self = internal object relations
	is manifested / externalised and enacted in...	
PRESENT	**3 · Therapeutic Relationship** Transference & countertransference	Habitual ways of relating to others = therapist & other external relationships

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