PRESENTATION NOTES · 2001

An Integrative Triangle: Freud, Reich and Jung

By Michael Soth

Notes for a presentation exploring the 'integrative triangle' of Freud, Reich and Jung — three foundational figures whose unresolved conflicts and complementary insights between them define the tensions at the heart of any genuinely integrative psychotherapy. Rather than choosing between them, Soth argues for a third position that holds all three in productive tension.

KEY THEMES

— The Freud-Reich-Jung triangle as integrative map

— How any two collude against the third

— Body, mind and spirit as the three poles

— Inheriting the wounds of our therapeutic ancestors

— Finding a third position beyond idealisation and disappointment

Three Foundational Tensions

The 'integrative triangle' arose from a recognition that the major disputes in psychotherapy — and specifically in body psychotherapy — tend to resolve into three fundamental positions, each associated with one of the founding fathers: Freud, Reich, and Jung.

The triangle can be described in terms of the collusive agreements between any two which exclude the third. Freud and Reich share a focus on sexuality, biology, and the drives versus Jung's symbolic, transpersonal 'opus contra naturam'. Freud and Jung share a reliance on the mind to access psychological reality versus Reich's insistence on physicality and literal bodily expression. Reich and Jung share an optimism about transformation and liberation versus Freud's Saturnian sense of limitation, irresolution, and the irreducible tragedy of existence.

In crude terms, we could say that Reich champions the body, Freud the mind, and Jung the spirit — and that a genuinely integrative position must find ways of honouring all three, rather than privileging any one at the expense of the others.

Inheriting the Wounds of our Therapeutic Ancestors

As therapists, we inherit the wounds of our family ancestors, the wounds of our cultural forebears, and also the wounds of our therapeutic ancestors. We could think of Berne and Reich as two fathers whose unresolved struggles against grandfather Freud leave us caught in a stance of protesting and polarising against Freud — who is nevertheless active as an introjected internal object in the psyche of the TA, Gestalt and Body Psychotherapy communities, and the humanistic movement in general.

Their unresolved conflicts manifest as gaps, contradictions and lacunae in our theory, language, meta-psychology and practice. Moving towards an integrated position significantly involves addressing those reactions, wounds and conflicts, getting beyond defensive, dogmatic and polarising stances, and establishing a third position that both transcends and includes both polarities.

A useful exercise, both individually and collectively, is to imagine the Freud, Reich and Jung in ourselves and in our professional community, and to fantasise a continuation of the unfinished struggles between them. This would include recognising the therapeutic weapons each used to pathologise the others — which may open the possibility that they could actually be therapeutically helpful to each other, rather than just defensively therapising each other.

Finding a Third Position

The idea of the Freud-Jung-Reich triangle was that a position between idealisation and disappointment becomes more possible the more we plumb the rifts and conflicts between the three of them — and the archetypal positions they inhabit and represent — in ourselves. We really need to identify with, and perhaps get lost in, each of them before we can recognise the depth of our habitual biases.

The third position is not a comfortable synthesis or a bland eclecticism that simply takes something from each. It is a position that can hold the genuine contradictions between the three — can feel the pull of each without collapsing into any one, and can use the tension between them as generative rather than paralysing.

From this third position, we can begin to re-formulate the core concepts of our tradition: reformulating Reichian concepts relationally, reformulating Freudian concepts holistically and energetically, and reformulating Jungian concepts in terms of embodied parallel process. The integrative triangle is not a destination but a navigation tool — a way of staying oriented when the inevitable idealisation of one tradition and disappointment with another threatens to pull us off course.

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