

The Process of Orgone Therapy

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The discovery of muscular armoring in the body by Wilhelm Reich came directly out of his explorations into the character structure of his patients. "Character analysis" was Reich's seminal contribution to psychoanalytic technique. In essence, Reich found that by attending strictly and consistently to the form of the patient's verbal productions rather than their content, he was able to deal more effectively with the patient's defensive structure and thus penetrate more deeply and surely into the structure of the neurosis. Each patient has a characteristic "way" in which he expressed himself. By focusing on this way, be it a form of repeated or chronic facial expression, of speaking, of holding oneself, of walking, etc., and by repetitively describing to the patient this way, mimicking the patient, and eventually analysis of the behavior regarding its present-day and past functions, patients, after initially venting anger at the therapist for "attacking" them, eventually give in to the softer, yielding emotions against which their defenses protect them. By systematically working on the character of the patient, layer after layer of blocked emotions are released in the therapeutic sessions until, each individual finds that at their "core" they are naturally, healthfully aggressive, responsible, independent, loving, sexual creatures.

Reich's "character analytic treatment" underwent a significant transformation when he discovered that the character armor was "anchored" in patterns of chronic muscular tension in the body. That is, muscular armoring distributed in definite patterns throughout the body served the same defensive purpose as the character armoring did in the psyche.

At about the same time that Reich discovered muscular armoring, his earlier, psychoanalytically based concepts of an energetic basis for neurosis were maturing through experiments on the biophysics of life and the emotions and the discovery of a "life energy" in all living things and in the cosmos. With the discovery of "orgone energy", Reich recast his understanding of neurosis and its treatment. The goal of "orgonomic therapy" became the establishment of the free flow of life energy through the body by therapeutic work on the character and muscular armoring.

The patient must be brought in contact with the ways in which he behaves and holds himself and the muscular tensions sustaining these traits. The latter are dissolved by deep massage on the tense musculature. The combined work results in spontaneous emotional release and a deepening of the therapy. In the process the relationship to the therapist and to significant figures in one's life also deepen. Sometimes radical changes are necessary in the patient's work or significant relationships in order to move forward. Here the therapist discusses matters with the patient and supports their movement toward health.

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