

REICH, PSYCHOANALYSIS, AND THE BODY*

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1. Reich and the human body in social theory

Wilhelm Reich became a member of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society in 1920, whilst still a medical student. During the 1920s and early 1930s, his work on psychoanalytic theory led to the publication of two major books, *The Function of the Orgasm* (1927; henceforth *FO*) and *Character Analysis* (1934; henceforth *CA*). In the former, he argued that the blocking of sexual energy was the root cause of all neurosis; in the latter, that therapeutic technique must identify and overcome the resistances of the patient's character before addressing itself to the interpretation of specific symptoms. During the same period, he was also much involved in socialist politics, into which he attempted to 'inject' his psychoanalytic concerns, for instance in the organization of SexPol clinics for workers in Berlin in the early 1930s. He also published theoretical work on the relations between social structure, the family, and sexual repression; and in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1933) he analysed the unconscious bases of the authoritarian character-structures which he viewed as crucial features of fascism's mass support.

In 1934, he was expelled first from the Communist Party and then from the Psychoanalytic Association. He became increasingly concerned with discovering the physical basis of the Freudian libido, which he later regarded as one manifestation of a universal cosmic energy, called orgone

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Two other papers with closely related themes were written while I was a visiting fellow at the HRC: 'The Missing Body: Foucault, Habermas and Psychoanalysis' and 'Merleau-Ponty and the Phenomenology of the Body' (available at www.russellkeat.net); the former provides a fuller account of what I call, in section 1 of the present paper, 'the twin strategy of materialisation and etherealisation'

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energy. Moving to America in 1939, he set up the Orgonon Institute in the state of Maine. There, amongst many other activities, he constructed special boxes, orgone accumulators, which he believed could be used in the cure of various organic and psychological illnesses, including cancer. Prosecuted by the F.D.A. for misleading the public, he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment in 1956 for contempt of court, and died of a heart-attack in jail a year later. All his publications found at the Institute were either burned or impounded.

In this paper I will explore the conception of the human body that Reich had developed by around 1935 in the theory and practice of what he termed 'character-analytic vegetotherapy'. (As will be seen later, 'vegetotherapy' derives from the name sometime given to one part of the human nervous system; Reich was aware that, unfortunately, it made English readers think of vegetables). I begin by presenting certain episodes from one of Reich's case-histories involving this therapeutic approach.

The patient was a 27 year old male alcoholic, with an unhappy marriage and a general sense of listless superficiality in his social contacts. Always polite, friendly, and unaggressive, he had an awkward, forcedly jaunty walk, an expressionless face, a small tight mouth, and a general air of submission, "as if he were continually on his guard" (*FO*, p.278). Reich says that he was initially faced with the decision of whether to "first consider his psychic reserve or his very striking facial expression" (p.279), and opting for the latter, he persistently described this expression to the patient, who eventually responded with twitchings of the mouth that built up until "his lips began to protrude and retract rhythmically and to hold the protruded position for several seconds ... his face took on the unmistakable expression of an infant" (p.279). This was followed by a tearless crying, uttering sounds "like the outbreak of a long-suppressed, painful sob" (pp.279-80). Reich hypothesized that the patient's small constricted mouth was a 'muscular defence' against this infantile crying.

Some weeks later, following a similar initial sequence, the patient's mouth "became distorted, the musculature of his jaws became stiff as a board, and he grit his teeth", sat up shaking with anger, and "raised his fist as if he were going to strike a blow, without, however, following through ... The whole action dissolved into a whimpering kind of weeping", expressing the "impotent rage" often experienced by children (p.281). This episode evoked previously long-buried memories of the patient's early relationship with his brother, the aggressive feelings towards whom had been curbed through fear of his mother's displeasure.

In a subsequent session, the patient began talking of the joys of trout-fishing. He gave a lengthy and detailed description of this activity, with just one significant omission: the moment at which the trout bites into the hook. One month later, as Reich continued to work on the patient's muscular defences, a strange set of bodily movements emerged. Spontaneously, the patient said that he felt like a fish. "His

mouth”, says Reich, “was spasmodically protruded, rigid, and distorted. His body jerked from the shoulders to the legs. His back was stiff as a board: (p.287); and, “with each jerk of his body, the patient for a time thrust his arms forward, as if embracing someone” (p.288). Discussing this episode, the patient recognized how he himself had represented the trout in his previous story; and he connected this to his relationship with his mother, whom he saw as having neglected and disappointed him, often unexpectedly punishing him when he had hoped for something pleasant from her. Reich comments: “His caution became understandable now. He did not trust anyone; he did not wish to be caught: (p.288).

I am interested in Reich’s work as a possible resource in combatting a marked tendency within social theory and philosophy for the human body to be excluded from their object-domains. This exclusion results, I suggest, from what might be called ‘a twin strategy of materialization and etherealization’.

I shall illustrate its operation in the case of certain anti-positivist conceptions of social theory. In these, the object-domain for social theory is defined in terms of the supposedly distinctive features of the human species: in the bad old Cartesian days, consciousness; with twentieth-century enlightenment, language, itself conceptualized by the various structuralist, hermeneutic, Wittgensteinian, or post-structuralist schools as, respectively, a system of signs, a sacred text, a set of social rules, or a powerful discourse. Can the human body be included in a domain defined in these ways? Not, it would seem, when regarded as a material thing: in this form, it is therefore relegated to the status of an object for the natural sciences, for biochemistry, physiology, anatomy, neurology, and so on. It is thereby materialized and excluded. But it can avoid this fate, be re-instated, by assuming instead an etherealized form, as the bearer of linguistic or quasi-linguistic meanings. For instance, its elements can perform as the arbitrary signifiers of a Saussurian sign, as analogues of the ‘acoustic image’; or, within a hermeneutically reconstructed psychoanalysis, they can function as hysterical symptoms to be deciphered like the distorted texts of the dream.

Both the old and new versions of the dualism that underlies these definitions of the domain of social theory (consciousness, or language, v. material body) often re-appear in a somewhat different guise as an implicit division between two supposedly distinctive types of psychopathological theory and practice. On the one hand, there are the so-called ‘somatic’ approaches, such as neurosurgery, chemotherapy, electric shock treatment, or behaviour modification. Here the human body exists as the material object for natural-scientific investigation and control. On the other hand there are the ‘non-somatic’ approaches of orthodox psychoanalysis, humanistic counselling, or the kind of theoretical and technical eclecticism typical of much actual psychotherapy. Here the emphasis is on achieving some form of self-understanding, through methods that focus upon the patient’s capacity for reflective consciousness, and the communicative, dialogic relationship with the therapist.

Jürgen Habermas, in his quasi-hermeneutic account of psychoanalysis, provides a particularly striking example of this latter conception of therapeutic process. In it, the patient's body almost disappears from sight, and with it, I suspect, much of the affective, emotional character of that process. Claiming that Freud had misunderstood the epistemological status of his own theory by viewing it as an empirical science, Habermas proceeds to remove from that theory its unacceptably positivist elements: the biological instincts with their somatic sources, and the neurological model of psychic energy. In this way, he can ensure that Freud's occasionally expressed hope that one day, psychoanalytic techniques might be replaced by somatic ones, should never be realized.

Reich, however, believed that he was already beginning to achieve just this with his character-analytic vegetotherapy. So I turn now to examine how he arrived at what are, in effect, the two components of this approach: character-analysis, and vegetotherapy.

2. The two routes to CAV

The starting-point for the former, character-analysis, was Reich's dissatisfaction with orthodox psychoanalytic technique. Proceeding according to the general formula of 'bringing the unconscious to consciousness', and interpreting material roughly in the order in which it was presented, he was stuck by the ability of his patients to produce plentiful material, accept its interpretation, yet remain quite unmoved and unaffected. He came to regard this as indicating a basic resistance to the analysis, involving an often concealed negative transference to the analyst. In identifying the presence and nature of this resistance, he switched his attention from the *content* of the patient's dreams, memories, and so on, to the *manner* in which they were presented, to what would now be called the patient's non-verbal or paralinguistic behaviour. Thus he focussed upon such items as tone of voice, facial expression, handclasp, quality of silences, and postural bearing, regarding these as indices or expressions of what he came to call the patient's *character*, "the specific mode of existence" of an individual" (CA, p.53); and he later constructed a typology of characters: the hysterical, compulsive, masochistic, phallic-narcissistic, etc. But initially he operated with a much less theoretical vocabulary, talking of, for instance, the "always conventional and correct", supremely polite patient.

Reich argued that it was the patient's character that was responsible for the resistance to analysis, and that no interpretation of specific symptoms could usefully proceed until this had been overcome. Further, he went on to reject the orthodox psychoanalytic distinction between the symptom-neuroses and the character-neuroses, according to which the unconscious conflicts and defences that led normally to the formation of neurotic symptoms might in other cases appear in the form of character-traits or personality structures. Against this, Reich claimed that "the symptom-neurosis is always rooted in a neurotic character", which has already been formed "in its principal features" by the end of

the Oedipal period (p.50). The symptom-neurosis is merely that special case where “the neurotic character *also* produced symptoms ... became concentrated in them, as it were” (p.50, my italics). Thus for Reich, every analysis must be a character-analysis.

The neurotic character, says Reich, is a “compact defence-mechanism”, formed via the infantile conflicts referred to in the psychoanalytic theory of the neuroses, and now serving as what he called (initially in a metaphorical sense) an ‘armour’:

“It is as if the affective personality armoured itself, as if the hard shell it develops were intended to deflect and weaken the blows of the outer world as well as the clamouring of the inner needs . . . the ego has become less flexible and more rigid; and . . . the ability to regulate the energy economy depends upon the extent of the armouring.” (CA, p. 374)

But Reich was soon to understand this ‘armour’ in a more literal sense, as a system of rigidities in the patient’s skeletal musculature. To see how he came to make this move, and thus to introduce the ‘vegetative’ element of CAV, we need now to explore his theory of sexual energy.

With the publication in 1920 of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud had introduced a radically new element into psychoanalytic theory, the death-instinct, and initiated a series of increasingly chaotic and bitter debates amongst psychoanalysts about its apparently pessimistic or conservative implications both for the therapeutic process, and for social and political theory. Reich was keen to resist these implications, to reject Freud’s hypothesis, and to present himself as defender of what he took to be the exclusively sexual nature of instinctual demands. The death-instinct, with its associated concept of primary masochism, led to “a complete liquidation of the psychoanalytic theory of neurosis”:

“Until this point, a neurosis was looked upon as the result of a conflict between sexual demand and *fear* of punishment. Now it was said that a neurosis was a conflict between sexual demand and *demand* for punishment, i.e. the exact opposite of fear of punishment for sexual activities”. (FO, p.127; my italics)

For Reich, the instincts were sexual; instinctual energy was sexual energy; and neurosis resulted from the repression of sexual impulses, and hence from the blocking of sexual energy. Further, it was only in genital sexuality that satisfactory discharge of this energy could be achieved. Thus the severity of psychic illness is related to the severity of genital disturbance, and its cure requires establishment of the capacity for full sexual gratification, or what he called ‘orgastic potency’, defined as:

“... the capacity to surrender to the flow of biological energy, free of any inhibitions; the capacity to discharge completely the damned-up sexual excitation through involuntary, pleasurable convulsions of the body” (*FO*, p.90).

If Reich was correct, then all neurotic patients must be suffering from some degree of sexual disturbance. This was inconsistent with the supposed clinical evidence that many patients had satisfactory sex-lives; and it undermined the orthodox theoretical distinction between the psycho-neuroses and the actual neuroses, one feature of the latter being that, unlike the former, the symptoms were said to be “the direct outcome of the absence or inadequacy of sexual satisfaction” (J. Laplanche & J-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, Hogarth Press 1973, p.10). Reich was quite happy to accept this theoretical consequence, and he proceeded to dispute the relevance of the clinical evidence. It assumed, he argued, minimal and inadequate criteria of healthy sexuality: in the case of men, for instance, a mere capacity for erection and ejaculation.

This was not good enough for Reich. We can get some idea of the spirit in which he rejected such criteria from the following passage:

“Most disturbed of all were those men who liked to boast and make a big show of their masculinity, men who possessed or conquered as many women as possible, who could ‘do it’ again and again in one night. It became clear that though they were erectively very potent, such men experienced no or very little pleasure at the moment of ejaculation, or they experienced the exact opposite, disgust and unpleasure. The precise analysis of fantasies during the sexual act revealed that men usually had sadistic or conceited attitudes ... [such a man] merely wants to prove his potency or to be admired for his erective endurance.” (*FO*, pp. 88-89)

In his positive account of orgasmic potency, Reich emphasized the absence of any “pathological deviations” from mutual tenderness, together with the capacity to “surrender” all conscious control and become subject to what he describes as the involuntary, wave-like motions of the ‘orgasm reflex’: “Men who feel that ‘surrender’ is feminine are always orgasmically disturbed” (p.93)

Orgasmic potency is the capacity to discharge ‘sexual energy’. Of what does this energy consist? Reich argued that we could begin to answer this question by considering the operation of the vegetative nervous system. At this point one needs to understand a little basic neurophysiology (see, e.g. C. Noback and R. Demarest, *The Human Nervous System*, McGraw-Hill 1972). The human nervous system is usually said to be divided into two sub-systems, the voluntary and the involuntary (or autonomic, or *vegetative*) and both can themselves be divided into central (brain and spinal column)

and peripheral sectors. The vegetative system both receives information from, and controls the operation of, the various internal bodily organs and glands, including the genitals, heart, digestive tracts, etc, and is usually thought to be involved in emotional experience. The voluntary system receives information from the senses and controls the operation of the skeletal musculature.

It was in the peripheral vegetative nervous system that Reich 'located' sexual energy. He claimed that the various bodily sensations involved in sexual excitation and pleasure were generated there, and that so too were the sensations involved in the experience of anxiety, especially in the cardiac region and the diaphragm. Fortunately for his purposes, it had been discovered that there were two 'branches' of the vegetative system, the parasympathetic and the sympathetic, whose activation had antithetical effects on the organs and glands. For instance, whilst sympathetic nerve activity inhibited the salivary and digestive glands, stimulated cardiac activity, and constricted the blood-vessels, parasympathetic activity had the reverse effect. A similarly antithetical relationship applied to the operation of the sexual glands and organs.

Reich now proposed the following hypothesis: that sexual excitation and pleasure involved the predominance of parasympathetic nerve activity, whilst the blocking of sexual excitation, and hence anxiety, that of sympathetic activity. But he was not content to leave the matter there. He insisted that the orthodox neurophysiological account of the vegetative system be further developed (in fact, radically rejected) by understanding the respective predominance of its two branches as due to the 'flowing out' and 'back' of some kind of bioelectric energy, which he then proceeded to build instruments to measure. This was the forerunner of his later orgone energy.

We now need just one more element to arrive at the theory of character-analytic vegetotherapy: the skeletal musculature. Reich argued as follows. When the discharge of sexual energy is blocked, anxiety arises, through 'overloading' of the vegetative nervous system, i.e. hyperactivation of its sympathetic branch. This anxiety is then 'bound' in the skeletal musculature, in the form of hypertonic rigidities. In other words, the muscular armour is formed as the result of the repression of sexual excitation, as the organism's way of dealing with the resultant anxiety. And to release the flow of sexual energy, this armour must be dissolved, by appropriate therapeutic techniques. The initially metaphorical sense of character 'armour' thus acquires a more literal sense as the muscular 'armour'.

3. CAV with and without energetics

The character 'armour' and the muscular 'armour' are, says Reich, 'functionally identical' (FO, p. 296: they both deal with the anxiety resulting from the blocking of sexual energy. And they likewise have the same history, being the psychological and somatic 'sides' of the repression of sexual excitation. Thus "*every muscular rigidity contains the history and the meaning of its origin*" (FO,

p.269). *“The spasm of the musculature is the somatic side of the process of repression, and the basis of its continued preservation”* (p.271). This theory, he believed, provided the grounds for a new and effective approach to the conduct of therapy:

“Until now, analytic psychology has merely concerned itself with what the child suppressed and what the motives are which cause him to learn to control his emotions. It did not enquire into the way in which children habitually fight against impulses. It is precisely the physiological process of repression that deserves our keenest attention” (p.269).

Reich described a large number of these physiological processes, and their effects on the structure and mode of operation of the patient’s body. He was interested, for example, in the childhood sources of inhibitions of breathing. “There is not a single neurotic person who is capable of breathing out deeply and evenly in one breath”, he claimed (p. 299). The blocks on complete exhalation typically involve abdominal tension, an inability to allow one’s head to fall back, and a tightening and raising of the shoulders. These inhibitions have their roots in the child’s ‘techniques’ of holding or reducing their breath to suppress or control ‘unacceptable’ emotions. But these are not the only techniques employed. For example, in the following passage Reich describes a common pattern of armouring resulting from the suppression of crying. There is

“... a mask-like facial expression. The chin is thrust forward and looks broad; the neck just below the chin has a lifeless appearance ... the floor of the mouth is tense. Such patients often suffer from nausea. Their voices are usually low, monotonous, or ‘thin’. This attitude can also be tested on oneself. Imagine that you are suppressing an impulse to cry. The muscles of the floor of the mouth become very tense, the entire musculature of the head will be put in a condition of continual tension, the chin will be thrust forward, and the mouth will be tight” (p.273).

More generally, he notes how many parental admonishments to their children take the form of demands for bodily control: ‘pull yourself together’, ‘grit your teeth’, ‘grin and bear it’, ‘hold your head high’, and so on (p.302).

Discussing the somatic processes involved in the repression of specifically sexual feelings, Reich focusses upon the formation of what he calls ‘the dead pelvis’ (p.306), involving the inability of the pelvis to move independently of the thighs and upper abdomen, and often associated with a sense of ‘emptiness’ or ‘weakness’ in the genital area. This pelvic rigidity is part of a more general ‘holding back’ of the body, with the back arched, the shoulders pulled back, the abdomen and chest arched forward, and the pelvis tipped back, withdrawn, the whole syndrome being a way of controlling or

blocking problematic sexual excitation (p.310), and displayed in a striking form in the typical ‘military attitude’ or bearing (p. 323).

According to Reich, as we have seen, the overall function of these complex patterns of muscular armouring is to bind the vegetative anxiety resulting from sexual repression. The aim of the therapeutic process, therefore, was to gradually dissolve this armouring and establish the patient’s capacity for sexual gratification, orgasmic potency. To achieve this, Reich employed a variety of techniques of breathing, massage, manipulation, and so on; but these were always combined with the ‘psychological’ techniques of character-analysis, the generation of and reflection upon repressed memories, and more orthodox interpretive procedures. CAV was not an exclusively somatic technique, as I tried to indicate earlier in the case of ‘the trout man’. Indeed, as I will argue later, there are elements in that case history which cannot be understood in terms of Reich’s own theory of the formation of the body. But first I wish to propose a rather major revision of that theory: to eliminate what *he* regarded as its foundation, the sex-economic model of instinctual energy.

There are many reasons for being sceptical about this model. First, even if one is prepared to accept the existence in humans of innate drives with organic bases, I think it implausible to believe either that these are exclusively ‘sexual’, or that their operation involves the accumulation and discharge of some distinctive form of physical energy. Second, in order to talk of the flow, blocking, discharge, etc. of this energy in a literal way, Reich is forced to make claims about the operation of the vegetative nervous system which, so far as I can see, depart radically from any scientifically supported account of it. For he entirely reconceptualizes the ‘standard view’ of the respective activation by electrical impulses of its two branches of nerve pathways (the sympathetic and parasympathetic) as itself the result of the movements of some *further* form of bioelectric energy. Third, his proposed energy economy is located solely in the *peripheral* areas of the vegetative nervous system, thereby excluding any reference to the now well-established controls and influences on this by elements of the *central* nervous system, including both the hypothalamus and the cortex (Noback and Demarest *op. cit.*). Put in psychological ‘language’, this means that the economy of sexual energy is open to no cognitive or reflective influences whatsoever.

However, the rejection of Reich’s ‘sexual energetics’ does not entail rejection of the rest of his theory of the formation of the human body. In particular, none of the claims made about the ‘physiological processes of repression’ depend for their truth on his belief that *what* is repressed is ‘sexual energy’. They depend rather on a complex set of admittedly rather speculative hypotheses about the effects on the skeletal musculature of the neurophysiological processes involved in various forms of emotional (including sexual) experience, and on a further set of hypotheses concerning the relationship between those processes and the kinds of bodily sensations and feelings involved in those experiences. In other

words, although Reich's theory of sexual energy is 'fundamental' to his account of CAV in the sense that it provides, in his view, a deeper level of explanation, it is *not* fundamental in the sense of being *logically presupposed* by the rest of that account. And it is this de-energised version that I wish to explore in the remainder of this paper as a resource for the re-instatement of the human body in the domain of social theory.

However, it might be objected at this point that Reich's model of sexual energy is involved not only in the supposed explanation of the neuroses and their somatic forms, but also in specifying the aim or goal of the therapeutic process, namely the establishment of orgasmic potency. And surely this concept really does presuppose the theory of sexual energy? What, then, could possibly replace this concept in my bowdlerized version of Reich? I shall proceed to answer this somewhat indirectly by drawing out an implicit element in much of Reich's work, and suggesting that we view him as, amongst other things, a 'moralist of the body'.

4. Reich as a moralist of the body

I begin by quoting a characteristic piece of Reichian invective. The following, he says, are "a few examples of artificial behaviour":

"... loud, obtrusive laughter; forced, rigid handshake; unvarying, dull friendliness; conceited display of superficial knowledge; frequent repetition of empty astonishment, surprise or delight etc.; rigid adherence to definite views, plans, goals...; obtrusive modesty in demeanour; grand gestures in speaking; childish wooing of people's favour; boastfulness in sexual matters; exaggerated display of sexual charm; promiscuous flirtation; ... markedly dignified conduct; affected, pathetic or over-refined manner of speech; markedly authoritative..., haughty or patronising behaviour; pseudo-exuberant fellowship; adherence to conventional conversational tone; ... sexual giggling or obscene talk; ... suggestively looking into the eyes of the other person while talking; affected swaying of the hips; cocky or athletic gait, etc." (CA, p. 359).

There are two features of this passage I wish to comment on. First, there is the embodied character of the objects of the diatribe. Most of the supposedly objectionable items are presented either directly in terms of particular forms of bodily movement and expression ('forced handshake', 'grand gestures', 'affected swaying of the hips', etc.), or else in ways that would usually be at least partly identified by means of such bodily expressions ('childish wooing of people's favour', 'haughty or patronizing behaviour', 'promiscuous flirtation, etc.). The phrases used here are drawn primarily from the impressions one forms of people in the context of their bodily presence.

Second, most of the moral concepts employed involve variations on a small number of implicit thematic contrasts: in particular, ‘the artificial’ v. ‘the natural’, and ‘the rigid’ v. ‘the flexible’. Thus we have: the pretentious, insincere, conceited, exaggerated, grandiose and empty, as against the genuine, simple, direct, open and honest; and the fixed, stereotyped, awkward, and inflexible, as against the flowing, adaptable, spontaneous, and rhythmical. (Here I draw on other passages as well as the one quoted above).

These two features indicate roughly what I mean by calling Reich ‘a moralist of the body’. But what is the justification for his normative standpoint here? For Reich, it was undoubtedly his theory of sexual energy, his biological view of the instincts, and his claim that what is morally admirable is whatever naturally results from their unrepressed operations. Yet I suggest that it may be possible to reconstruct this morality of the body *without* those assumptions. For example, the variations on the theme ‘artificial v. natural’ might be understood in terms of a set of norms against the concealment of emotions and feelings, against various forms of deception and pretence, against the emotional emptiness of certain ways of relating to people, and against the prohibitions and pressures that give rise to these phenomena. I am not suggesting that all Reich’s judgments should or could be accepted and justified: only that they do not require what he took to be their basis.

But what are the implications of this proposed reconstruction for his conception of orgasmic potency as the therapeutic goal? Two moves would be necessary to partially ‘rescue’ this, if one rejects Reich’s theory of sexual energy. First, one would need to distinguish between the *capacity* for ‘sexual gratification’ and its actual *exercise*. Reich, of course, believed that the latter was necessary, because of his accumulation-discharge model; but once this model is abandoned, the distinction becomes significant, and ‘establishing orgasmic potency’ can be understood as establishing a potentiality, not necessarily its realization. Second, one would need to remove from his account of orgasmic potency the references to the flows of sexual energy, whilst possibly *retaining* his description of the attitudes, emotions, bodily movements and experiences involved and of their physiological bases. For instance, one might wish to accept Reich’s opposition to certain features of ‘masculinity’ in sexual activity — the desire to dominate, to remain ‘in control’, the incapacity to ‘surrender; and also to endorse his view that these are not merely abstract, ethereal ‘attitudes’, but are also essentially rooted in the structure and operation of the masculine body.

In this way, the concept of orgasmic potency would be reconstructed as another example of Reich’s ‘moralism of the body’; and it might turn out that there is in fact a positive correlation between the capacity for sexual activity characterized in this way, and other areas of social activity of the kind involved in the passage I quoted earlier. If such a relationship existed, establishment of ‘orgasmic potency’ might remain as in some way a significant criterion of the successful outcome of therapeutic

processes, although the normative concepts involved here would, I believe, lead one well beyond any orthodox definition of neurosis or psychopathology.

5. Embodied gender, engendered bodies

In *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Penguin Books 1975) Juliet Mitchell conducts a detailed and stringent critique of Reich's work, in the course of a more general argument against various feminist objections to the ideological character of Freudian psychoanalysis. She claims that both these objections, and Reich's work, fail to recognize the nature and significance of Freud's theory of the unconscious; and that this theory can contribute greatly to an understanding of "how femininity is lived in the mind" (p.7). In the last part of this paper, I want to suggest that Reich's position, unlike Freud's, may help us to understand how femininity, and masculinity, are 'lived in the body'; but also that Mitchell is right in criticizing the absence in his work of certain features of the Freudian unconscious.

I described earlier (in section 1) a twin strategy by which the human body is removed from the domain of social theory, and proposed that Reich's account of the body might provide a resource in opposing this tendency. I shall now try to illustrate these ideas in the case of gender-differentiation. Many discussions of this involve certain assumptions that relegate the formation of male and female bodies to the realm of the biologically innate, distinguishing this process from the supposedly cultural or social construction of gender. Thus differences between the bodies of men and women are understood in terms of the genetically governed ontogenesis of various anatomical, physiological and hormonal features; and these matters of biological 'sex' are distinguished from the (implicitly non-somatic) features of socio-cultural 'gender'.

For example Vernon Reynolds, in *The Biology of Human Action* (W. H. Freeman 1980) introduces the sex v. gender distinction in the following, fairly typical way:

"Sex is used to refer to those aspects of maleness and femaleness *of an organic kind*. Thus *the physical construction* of a naked man or woman is 'sexual'. Gender is used to refer to the *societal or cultural* side of things ... We are nearly all born with the *external physical characteristics* of one sex or the other [e.g. the external reproductive organs - R.K.], so our *sex* is announced at birth and often the first thing a mother hears (and wants to know) is the sex of her baby. This knowledge influences her responsivity to the baby and she will normally encourage by what she says and does those subsequent activities of the infant's that seem to her to be appropriate for a boy or girl. Thus in effect she is assigning her child a *gender* and conditioning it into *an appropriate role*" (pp. 135-36; all italics except 'gender' and 'sex' mine – R.K.).

But this way of making the distinction between ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ can easily conceal the possibility that one aspect of gender-formation is itself ‘somatic’, in generating both ‘external’ differences in forms of movement, facial expressions, posture, and so on, and ‘internal’ differences in bodily experience. That the former differences exist (though varying, of course, between different cultures, classes, and individuals) is indicated by the fact that when we see men and women engaging in bodily activities normally performed by the opposite sex/gender, such as a man cuddling a baby or a woman throwing a cricket ball, the often apparent ‘oddity’ is due not merely to the surprise at role-reversal, but to noticeable peculiarities in the bodily movements involved (though these are difficult to specify explicitly). And to understand why these differences exist we need to examine how, for example, what Reynolds terms the differential ‘responsivity’ of parent to male and female child operates in the kinds of ways I described earlier in my account of Reich on the emotions and skeletal musculature.

Gender, then, is embodied; and to confine the body exclusively to the category of biological ‘sex’ is to practice the strategy of materialization. But there is also the strategy of etherealization, which conceptualizes the embodiment of gender in terms of linguistic or quasi-linguistic models. Ray Birdwhistell, for example, in *Kinesics and Context* (University of Pennsylvania Press 1970) notes that in contemporary North American cultures there are gender differences in postural features such as the angle at which the pelvis is held, and the angle between the legs in upright stances. But these are then analysed in terms of the acquisition and employment of gender-codes, of ‘kines’ and ‘kinemorphs’ and other such analogues of linguistic elements and systems. I do not, of course, want to rule out this approach to the body, but rather to suggest that taken by itself, it ignores the gender-differentiated lived histories and present experiences and appearances of the body that may also be involved in these and other examples.

Finally, I return to the trout man. Reich interprets this patient’s somewhat bizarre bodily performance by reference to his repressed fear of being ‘caught’ by his mother, via the verbal expression ‘caught like a trout’. Yet his own theory of the formation of the body is incapable, I believe, of providing any coherent explanation of this. For it excludes the kinds of unconscious processes of transformation and disguise which Freud had postulated in, for example, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900; Penguin Books 1976). There he had argued that, to arrive at the latent dream-wish from its manifest context, one must recognize the use by the unconscious of the mechanisms of displacement and condensation, its delight in puns, metaphors, images, symbols, and so on.

Earlier, in their *Studies in Hysteria* (1895; Penguin Books 1974) Freud and Breuer had in effect made reference to some of these mechanisms in interpreting a number of hysterical somatic symptoms. For example, Frau Cäcilie M. suffered from a violent pain in her right heel, which they relate to an

episode in which, upon being led to meet a group of strangers in a hospital, she had feared that she would not 'find herself on a right footing' (p.252). Here, it would seem, their interpretation relies upon the ability of the unconscious to, as it were, 'literalize' in a somatic form the body-metaphor of 'the right footing'. Our language is rich in such metaphors; and indeed it can be argued that often, in their use as descriptions of various attitudes, emotions, and character-traits, there is a significant literal basis for them. But in the example just mentioned, and in several others, what is apparently going on is a somatic re-literalization of the metaphorical extension of the verbal phrase's possibly literal initial sense.

Surely something like this must be involved in the trout man's body operating 'like a caught trout'? Yet Reich seems to regard this as no different from other episodes in the case history, such as the facial 'regressions' to repressed childhood experiences. There, the concealed muscular form results in some way, according to Reich, from the actual physiological processes involved in those experiences (e.g. holding back crying). But one could not account for the trout episode in anything like this manner. The unconscious, after all, has a fine sense of humour, which Reich is apparently unwilling to appreciate.

Bibliographical note [2013]

The two texts by Reich used in this paper are:

Wilhelm Reich, *Character Analysis*, 1st edn 1933/4; 2nd edn 1944; 3rd (enlarged) edn 1948. All quotations and page-references are from the New York, Pocket Books paperback edition, published in 1976. This reproduces the new translation of the 3rd edition by Vincent R. Carfagno, first published in hardback by Farrar, Straus and Giroux Inc. in 1961.

Wilhelm Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm*. All quotations are from the paperback edition published by Pocket Books, New York, in 1975, which reproduces the new translation by Vincent R. Carfagno, first published in 1961 in hardback by Farrar, Straus and Giroux Inc. This is not a translation of the book by Reich published in 1927, *Die Funktion des Orgasmus*, but of a later work written by him and first published in an English translation in 1942, with the title *The Discovery of the Orgone Volume I: The Function of the Orgasm*. The passages I quote from *FO* are restricted to those which, as far as I can judge, accurately reflect Reich's theoretical position in the late 1920s, and excluding his later theory of orgone energy etc. (Similar remarks apply to my quotations from the third, 1948 edition of *CA*, in relation to the first, 1933/4 edition).

I have found the following secondary work on Reich especially helpful:

Boadella, David (1973) *Wilhelm Reich: The Evolution of His Work*, Contemporary Books, Chicago

Edwards, Paul (1967) 'Wilhelm Reich', in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. P. Edwards, Macmillan and The Free Press, New York, Vol. 7.

Sharaf, Myron (1984) *Fury on Earth: A Biography of Wilhelm Reich*, Hutchinson, London