

BRIEF EXPLANATION ON THE TYPE OF WORK WE DO

Lic. María Adela Palcos

Psychologist

Published in the Revista de Psicología de Buenos Aires, Nos. 17/18
Abril 1973

Our work is based on some premises which I shall try to delineate briefly. I somehow resist to begin by stating premises, because in truth, our learning does not begin thus: on the contrary, our approach to reality is made from an intuitive, sensitive angle which we afterwards try to translate into rational?intellectual language. This translation is very difficult, the result is usually poor, and one remains with the conviction that in that passage the essence of knowledge is lost. We shall attempt it all the same.

We postulate that:

1. **The human being is an energetic being**, who constantly takes, gives, and transforms energy.
2. **We are immersed in an energetic universe** separated from it only by our skin. This is a very weak separation, and it only counts at a concrete physical level. Energies move freely in and out through the skin.
3. **Our raison d'être** is indissolubly united to the universe that surrounds us, and our relation to it is not contiguous but continuous. The absence of actual consciousness of this immersion usually causes the feelings of emptiness and loneliness in which we live.
4. This **continuity** or interpenetration also occurs between human beings, so that many wishes and impulses are more related to other people's similar impulses and wishes than to mine in other levels of myself.
5. And this brings us to another postulation which says that **man is plural**; we do not possess one personality but many juxtaposed or opposed characters and a central self or essence of which we rarely take notice. This self is generally displaced from that central position where it belongs and results in a lack of balance.
6. We could define these characters as crystallized structures that, as a whole, constitute what we call **psychic mechanization or false personality**. Our sense of identity is usually formed around one of these characters, and not around the central self; this distorts and limits our possibilities as human beings.
7. Each character reveals itself through a **posture (plastic)**; we call this an attitude, a psycho?physic way of being and of relating, which has the advantage of being easily detected through our work because it is shaped in the body. Each plastic involves patterns of breathing, perceiving, feeling, thinking, answering, knowing, etc. There are many possible plastics, as for example: expansive, trustful, joyful, reflexive, doubtful, timorous, aggressive, frightening, etc.
8. It is frequent to observe that the individual remains **fixed in a plastic** that corresponds to a very intense life experience (of success, approval, rebellion, aggression, dread, etc.), which he did not want or could not express at the moment, and which forms a physical correlation, which we call "traba" (block or hindrance). The fixed posture or plastic reactivates the experience and makes the correlative emotional states chronic.
9. The block is located in certain areas of the body and can be seen or touched. Areas of energetic overload are formed and create rigidity, tension, ache, and even organic illness. Blocks also form devitalized areas which affect muscular tone, provoke poor blood circulation, lack of strength, etc., and, from the point of view of conscience, create unrecognized or unowned areas of the body.
10. To finish, we shall point out the existence of various centers in human beings, which are in charge of functionally organizing the available energy. We shall mention only some: a) motor or movement center b) sexual c)vegetative d)emotional e)intellectual; to which we could add a higher or more transcendent emotional center and a higher or more transcendent mental center. They are placed in different areas of the body and one generally verifies:

- that the energy does not distribute equally among them and some become preponderant.
- that frequently two or more centers interfere one another, disturbing the corresponding functions.

Example: an interference between the intellectual and the motor center produces the kind of mechanical talk, superabundant and meaningless, that we all know very well, where words hasten faster than thought. Another case we can quote is the interference between the sexual and the intellectual centers which leads to an excessive vehemence and passion in the defense of an idea (this passion belongs to the sexual function).

The aim of our work is to release these blocks and encourage the experience of the different postures or characters without being imprisoned by any of them, developing the different levels or centers physically and psychologically, so as to integrate them, stop being a slave to mechanisms and become an individual (individuated, unified and fully owning himself)

To express it with the words of one of the members of the Institute; who recently passed through an opening of consciousness... *"it is not that something happened to me...it is I went through something. Things do not happen, they exist; I go through experiences, I walk in and out. Time does not pass, I pass through time."*

We use different means to our aims:

1) Physical movement

2) massage or hand treatment

3) dramatization

4) exercises with the voice

5) painting

other means are projected for the future such as modelling, space constructions, carpentry, weaving and physical labors altogether.

We shall now describe these means briefly:

1. Physical Movement

It is in mixed groups, to the sound of music and with the use of relaxation techniques. An instructor guides the class and the class, *in a circle*, follow his guidance.

1.1. It is through imitation, because thus movement springs from the physical center and not the intellectual center, as it usually occurs in our culture. Surrendering to the plastic or posture of another promotes greater interior relaxation and a focused attention.

At other moments we encourage individual and free interpretation of the music and at more advanced stages of training, the pupil also leads the class, going through three basic complementary experiences: to lead, to be led, and neither to lead nor be led.

1.2 It is to the sound of music:

- because music is an element of extraordinary richness that enables us to enter into correspondence with the most complete array of human expression.

- because it helps to achieve continuity in movement, which is a great balancing force for the psyche.

- because the different musical rhythms, the folkloric ones above all, activate reflexes, habitually in a latent or damaged state. Reflexes are immediate movement responses, independent of the mind, that, because of the type of education received in our cultural milieu, are usually inhibited; the activation of these reflexes produces joy and a great liberation of energy, which can then be available to flow through the total organism.

- because it contributes to mobilizing the stereotypic postures enriching and enlarging the repertoire of possible postures.

1.3 It is expressive, because we consider that many of the human disturbances have their origin in the non-expression of emotional states, therefore creating fixations. We have verified that by fully expressing, with the whole body and the whole voice, the feeling that originally formed the block or fixation, the accumulated tension may be discharged and the fixation eliminated.

1.4 It is respiratory:

- because breathing is the only organic function which everyone can willingly control; everyone, without previous training, may accelerate the respiratory rhythm, delay it, detain it for a moment, etc. So this is a very direct way of connection with our organic world that enables us to become acquainted with unexplored areas of ourselves.

-because air is nourishment for human beings, and it is important for us to select the quantity and quality that is convenient to us to inhale according to the moment. We shall mention some types of breathing: the classic breathing: deep abdominal, intercostal or medium and high, according to the way in which air is predominantly located. Breathing, according to the way in which air is passed through the nostrils, is vital, emotional or mental. Finally, there is a type of breathing for each posture.

-because I am what I breathe.

In relation to this I think it is useful to quote an experience as told by the person who lived it:

“Three years ago, after the death of my grandmother, to whom I had been very close, I was called to go to her house, where my grandfather lived alone.

It was the first time I was going, after what had happened, I was very afraid to face it and was truly worried. During the afternoon I had gone to work at the Institute, and after a class I had the opportunity to talk to M.A. and share my worries with her. She told me something that is apparently very simple but that has been very important to me, as much in that opportunity as in others. She told me not to forget to breathe and to be very aware of my breathing before going into the house.

I realized I almost was not breathing, as if dread had left me without air. Consequently I had an unbearable oppression in the sternum and solar plexus area.

I did as she had told me and although the situation provoked a deep sadness in me, for all it implied, the sadness did not turn into a terrible and depressing anguish, which had begun to grow before going there.

The change of breathing provoked a psycho-physical change which I experienced in many other circumstances. As if at first instance dread cut off my breath, which then produces in me a state in which I am but am not, I see but I can't look at, I can't be in my eyes, outside, it is as if I remained in the rear, behind myself.

At the same time the situation invades me and there is no room for any other feeling or sensation but that which the circumstance provokes.

Breathing in a special way moves me forward, it is like a change of level, it brings me out and helps me take a better distance with what is happening. I can participate in a more integrated way in the present situation and handle it without unnecessary harm”

Returning to the movement:

1.5 It is relaxing, so that we can learn to relax not only in a state of repose but also in action. We explore the possibility of going from one expression to the other, from one attitude to the opposite one, as, for example, from anger to affection. These changes require an ability to relax and help to break our mechanical responses. There is no possibility of true change without a previous relaxation. Breathing in certain ways, accompanied by a deep relaxation, changes our level of consciousness and allow unusual clarity and penetration. Reality is envisioned with an embracing and inclusive quality. Consequently, I shall quote a man who describes his own experience:

“49 years old, moderate general education, college drop-out, ex-businessman; fourteen years of personal therapy that includes individual analysis (a very orthodox first therapist and a less orthodox second one), psychodrama and several experiences in marathons and laboratories. “After three years in our physical movement sessions I experience this: this class ends with a meditation during which, for the first time I feel truly relaxed and I perceive (with my eyes closed) that I am sinking in a warm brightness ?it's like peacefully letting myself go under the sea. I perceive that I am united to the Universe, that I take part in it. This realization calms me down and gives me a sense of inner peace. Then, I analyze what I felt and it becomes clear that I felt my energetic unity with the whole and a clear idea of being “part and whole” at the same time. It makes my existence meaningful, takes away the fear of death, it is a physical perception of the continuity of “this” which “I” am now. It projects my existence backwards and towards the future; everything is a luminous wake. I must point out that everything I experience takes place in the body and not in the mind (more precisely: it does not appear in the form of thoughts but as a feeling that overtakes the whole body).

A few years have gone by now, and I haven't had the same experience again. However, the memory is ingrained and whenever I “stop the machine”, I'm overcome by a strange feeling of security concerning my existential anguish.

Perhaps this experience may sound mystical or inspired by religion to a lot of people. I must say then that up to that particular moment I had been a bigoted atheist, a “rationalist”. After that, I haven’t felt the need to deny the existence of God. Religious feeling has come to my life through a different path”.

1.6 It is usually performed in **mixed groups**, because energy is greatly mobilized by the encounter of masculine and feminine polarities. However, there are also one-sex classes which are useful to work certain details and improve the quality of movement.

1.7 We work in a **circle** so that we face each other, which contributes to a better circulation of energy among those who participate and, simultaneously, while the circle as a whole evolves to different positions, dwindling away into the center, spreading out, turning about, etc, it generates a greater energy potential and integration of its members. People come out of the class feeling as good as new, revitalized and connected to one another. We have noted that certain geometrical patterns promote a better production and transformation of the energies at play.

Returning to the movement:

1.5 It is **relaxing**, so that we can learn to relax not only in a state of repose but also in action. We explore the possibility of going from one expression to the other, from one attitude to the opposite one, as, for example, from anger to affection. These changes require an ability to relax and help to break our mechanical responses. There is no possibility of true change without a previous relaxation. Breathing in certain ways, accompanied by a deep relaxation, changes our level of consciousness and allow unusual clarity and penetration. Reality is envisioned with an embracing and inclusive quality. Consequently, I shall quote a man who describes his own experience:

“49 years old, moderate general education, college drop-out, ex-businessman; fourteen years of personal therapy that includes individual analysis (a very orthodox first therapist and a less orthodox second one), psychodrama and several experiences in marathons and laboratories. “After three years in our physical movement sessions I experience this: this class ends with a meditation during which, for the first time I feel truly relaxed and I perceive (with my eyes closed) that I am sinking in a warm brightness ?it’s like peacefully letting myself go under the sea. I perceive that I am united to the Universe, that I take part in it. This realization calms me down and gives me a sense of inner peace. Then, I analyze what I felt and it becomes clear that I felt my energetic unity with the whole and a clear idea of being “part and whole” at the same time. It makes my existence meaningful, takes away the fear of death, it is a physical perception of the continuity of “this” which “I” am now. It projects my existence backwards and towards the future; everything is a luminous wake. I must point out that everything I experience takes place in the body and not in the mind (more precisely: it does not appear in the form of thoughts but as a feeling that overtakes the whole body).

A few years have gone by now, and I haven’t had the same experience again. However, the memory is ingrained and whenever I “stop the machine”, I’m overcome by a strange feeling of security concerning my existential anguish.

2. **Massage**

We suggest it as a way to loosen up those areas in the body which do not give in with movement only (it is also prescribed to help organic or postural ailments).

Usually two masseurs work on one person. They use their hands, feet, elbows, etc, but their whole bodies take part by means of a rocking movement which helps generate and discharge energy. Certain breathing rhythms are used at this work, sometimes masseurs and the person receiving the massage breathe in unison, since that improves concentration and blends together the intentions of the three of them.

The voice also plays its part. Sounds are produced which relate to the area being worked on and the one receiving the massage is encouraged to express himself by use of his voice, his gestures, his words or his movement. Its main purposes are:

2.1. Relax

2.2. Blood and energy circulation. Energy tends to flow from low to high charge areas. This means that tense muscles or blocked areas take in an increasing amount of energy and therefore it is necessary to help reverse that circuit. It is interesting to include an experience here:

“For many years I had suffered from migraine, which could last a fortnight. I got some relief through massage and exercises, but it would never disappear completely. One day, I attended our Institute, as usual, with a sharp pain in the occipital area, towards the crown of the head, at the temples, frontal sinus, the eye sockets and down to the throat. I felt nauseous and distressed.

M.A. made me sit on a stretcher and helped me to relax; suddenly she hit the sides of my head, at eye level, with a tremendously hard blow delivered with the edge of her open hands. The terrible pain brought forth murderous instincts and indescribable hatred.

I am pleased to say that in these two years since then, I have never suffered from migraine again.”

Other purposes massage seek are:

2.3. posture correction. One of our work’s aims is to help human beings embrace their verticality, so as to synthesize the two types of energy that supports them: one originating in the earth and the other one in the sun. That is why we work mainly on the joints.

2.4 conscience and transformation of emotional traumas: massage contributes greatly in the necessary awakening of conscience of unrecognized areas of our body and our past. Past events block the flow of energy in our bodies and massage unblocks the flow and helps the memories and all their emotional weight back into consciousness.

The following experience can bring light into this:

“One day I received a group massage that stirred up memories from childhood. I was lying on the stretcher and D., who was guiding the massage, was working in the collar-bone area, separating my major pectoral from my deltoid. It triggered an internal revolution. My inner monologue went like this:

“What is she after?”

I have the right to be as I am (meaning ‘the right to have my muscles shortened, my arm with an inward twist that deprived my chest of its proper space). My father’s image popped up and he was calling me “mula” (mule), the word he used for me as a child because of my stubbornness. I confronted this image and I remembered: My father wanted me to make coffee in the morning and I didn’t feel like it. I finally gave in to his authority, but the stubborn mule in me complained all along. During the massage I had this terrible cough that expelled physically what I had found in my psyche. I got up and spat in the basin. When I wanted to lie on the stretcher again, D. stood in my way and prevented me from doing as I wanted. It made me angry but it was not her I wanted out of my way, it was my father.

Then Jorge played my father and we had the following dialogue:

“Make the coffee”

“I won’t. Can’t the boys do that?”

“You are the woman in the house”

“Why? You can do it yourself!”

“I work all day”

“And I study”

“Your studies are for yourself”

“Are they? And who wanted me to study?”

The dialogue could have gone on for ever, but Jorge suddenly busted:

What will I do if you are not a mule!

That stopped me and forced me to stand in his shoes for a moment. Maybe he only knew how to communicate with the mule. And all of a sudden I UNDERSTOOD. I hugged Irene.

“Dad, dad, I want my dad”, I sobbed.”

Another purpose of the massage can be:

2.5 Reconnection. With oneself and the environment. Sometimes, on account of a physical trauma, the individual blocks his energy circuits, turning his sensibility in and isolating himself from the world. When he receives the loving touch of massage, he can restore a loving rapport with himself and others.

3. Painting

The world of art and all its flare inhibits many people of their natural expression and the connection that painting, sculpting, dancing and acting allow with the self. This inhibition keeps many from enlarging and enriching their sensibility in the task of transforming their inner world into an objective expression. Working on a piece of art, we can remember and see ourselves and our feelings and thoughts more objectively in the process of expressing and elaborating our inner world, and, at the same time, our sensibility finds a purpose other than being committed to fear, self-pity or frustration (just to mention a few of the feelings that eat up our sensitive potential).

In our method, painting, shaping, working on clay, collages and other techniques spring from the essential physical experience. This activities are usually carried out in groups.

4. Working with the voice

The same principles apply here. The voice is communication; it is an exchange between the inner world and its surroundings. Inarticulate voices are also means of expression. Articulate voices are language.

Any inhibition or interference in the “communication channel” shows in our voice and in the muscles and organs who take part in its emission: respiratory system, neck, throat, face.

Vocal blocks are worked on both physically and psychologically. Physically, we focus on posture and breathing, working out and relaxing the throat and face muscles; psychologically, we liberate the voice in order to open the floodgates to a free flow of emotions. Shouting, grunting, blabbering, whining, howling, even singing are forbidden to many of us because only milder vocal expressions are socially accepted (“lower your tone honey”, “I only sing in the shower”, “not so loud”, etc.). Liberating these sounds brings forth inhibited psychic contents allowing a deep energetic transformation.

The whole journey of transformation implies a sequence:

CRY		SONG
	SOUND	
NOISE		WORD

5. Dramatization

This is another very useful technique when expression and verbalization are necessary and when some kind of real or fake plot is necessary for the denouement and elaboration of a character. It is used both on its own and in combination with some of the means already exposed. A brief dramatization can take place during a physical movement class or at some stage of a massage session (as described previously).

We also work with what we call “pairs of polarities”. That is: we work on the physical posture and verbal expression of a certain trait ?generosity, for example? and then we switch to its opposite ?meanness. Kindness, evil; blandness, strictness; conservative, innovative, etc. These opposites traits are encouraged to establish a dialogue and relate through different drama techniques.

I’d like to mention one particular technique which we call “Who Am I” since I consider it helps the access to very deep understanding. It must be carried out in a state of profound relaxation from all the people involved and the coordinator must have gone through the experience him or herself in order to accompany the person and help the exteriorization of feelings when necessary.

THE PEOPLE WE WORK WITH

All kinds of people attend our Institute. Their aims are very different: some are concerned with their weight, some seek physical movement, fitness, a means of expression; some have respiratory or postural problems and others are in the search of a deeper understanding of themselves.

This last group join intensive work teams in which the techniques described above are applied. Masonry, farming and gardening are also used in order to dismantle firmly uprooted mechanisms and social conditionings. Group outings and live-ins are organized which result in the creation of meaningful bonding and enriching experiences.

One of the mottoes for our work is “to help, helping oneself” because we have proved that it creates a transitive character in the tasks and a projection of what I do in others which breaks through personal limitations and develops other levels in our being: the higher emotional and higher mental centers, in charge of our connection with wholeness.

Oneness transcends our personal level and is perceived as a conjunction with the whole.

To mention some of the things that remain unmentioned: from the very beginning, our work has firm roots in the native South American culture. We feel deeply bound to this powerful roots. It is also based on yoga and other oriental disciplines, on the Greek culture’s legacy ?Apollo and Dionysus postures and attitudes (plus the orientalist), which I have not described here to avoid making these notes excessively lengthy.

I would like to add that ours is a system that avoids fixed patterns. We value mobility and flexibility so that the coordinator guiding a movement class or any other activity feels free to choose the exercises and techniques that his or her own perception and intuition dictate.

We therefore come to the end of these notes who have been written with the help and collaboration of people who attend the Institute and have contributed a brief description of their personal experiences.

These notes were written at the request of the Buenos Aires Association of Psychologists and published in the Argentine Magazine of Psychology, numbers 17/18.