

Selected Outline of major concepts from FRITZ PERLS' EGO,
AGGRESSION, AND HUNGER, prepared by HOWARD GREENBERG

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ZERO POINT : The point where differentiation starts. The person can go in a variety of directions. Choice at the zero point is a function of the demands of the field or the situation. Everything is in flux or process.

ANNIHILATION : Making something **totally** disappear.

DESTRUCTION : Makes only the structure disappear.

All the above concepts relate to figure-ground formation. From where the person starts and what happens after a figure is "satisfied".

Chapter II Psychological Approach

SCREEN EXPRESSIONS : These are verbal communications that have **no** precise referents and serve the true purpose of concealing the person from his listener. For example, when a person talks of "nervousness" he is disguising his true experience. The words of the person are used "as if" they are the objects themselves, eg. as if they are actual sensations, or other states of the individual, which they are not. Perls cites the influence of the early Gestalt Psychologists to Gestalt Therapy, in particular Köhler and Wertheimer.

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Chapter III The Organism and its Balance :

There is a basic tendency for the organism to strive for balance. That is, the person strives for an equilibrium between his needs and wants and what the environment has to offer.

NEUROTIC FUNCTIONING : The person is often unaware that there is a emotional component to sensations. The person experiences the situation as incomplete. The person acts as if he has a blind spot or scotoma. As a consequence, the persons wants and needs are often not met. The equilibrium is at a level that does not satisfy some important wants.

Chapter IV Realty :

The person has a **SUBJECTIVE REALTY** and this is derived out of a specific (to the individual) sphere of interest which in turn is dictated by specific needs.

FIGURES : disappear as soon as needs are gratified.

Chapter V The Answer of the Organism :

There is an **interdependency** between the Organism and the Environment. There is a sequence that the organism follows : (1) the organism is at rest; (2) then there is then some sort of disturbing factor, either internally or externally; (3) the organism then creates an image of the thing which would possibly satisfy the disturbance, or senses something in the environment; (4) the organism develops an "answer" to the situation aiming at : decreasing tension and returning to organismic balance. This is what Reich called **organismic self-regulation**.

Perls defines adjustment in 2 ways : **Alloplastic** : adjustment to the environment; **Autoplastic** : adjustment to self.

VI Defense

Every defense requires a tremendous amount of energy and activity. The ego can only concentrate on **one** thing at a time. This leads to increased vulnerability, which in turn tends to create **amouring** (taken from Reich's **character armour**) and censoring. The function of censoring is to limit and reduce bad thoughts and feelings from inside, and disturbing information from outside.

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Chapter VI Good and Bad

Good = satisfaction Bad = frustration

However, temporary frustration is useful as it leads to the reality principle, and possible satisfactions eventually.

Projection : is the inability to distinguish between one's own reactions and others. Often both good and bad are projected, **conflict, confusion**

good = liking = desire for contact

bad = disliking = nuisance = desire to annihilate

VIII Neurosis

Can be defined as the conflict between the person's social and biological needs.

Neurosis can also be seen as a disorganization of proper functioning of the personality within its environment.

Healthy functioning : is an appreciation of which dangers are real and which are imaginary and/or exaggerated. In **neurotic functioning** a threat is responded to as if it has to be annihilated or avoided.

The disadvantage of avoidance is that it impairs holistic functioning, and as a consequence intelligence and action deteriorate.

TYPES OF AVOIDANCES :

(a) **Subtractive or Annihilative functions** : Scotoma, selectivity (as found in hysteric and paranoids), inhibition (as found in conversion hysteria, and self consciousness), repression, and flight.

(b) **Addition or Hypertrophic growths** : Overcompensation, Armouring, obsessions (this allows avoiding of objects or wishes), permanent projections, hallucinations, complaints, intellectualizing (avoids feelings), poor coordination.

(3) **Changes and Distortions** : Displacement, sublimation, character features, symptoms, guilt and anxiety, projection, fixation, indecisiveness, retroflection.

The object of treatment is to facilitate organismic balance.

Chapter IX organismic Reorganization

A **Phobic** attitude is an essential part of every neurosis. Involved in this is

Armouring : the inhibiting of excitement by breathing shallowly. In addition,

anxiety is caused physically from the conflict of breathing freely and self-control, that is, holding the breath in. Anxiety is thus seen as the conflict between excitement and inadequate excitement. Anxiety can be overcome by relaxing chest muscles and venting excitement.

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Chapter X Time

There is no reality other than the present.

Chapter XI Past and Future

Striving for security in the future spoils present life.

The past oriented person avoids taking responsibility for his life and actions. A common symptom found here is **suppression of crying**. The task of mourning must be finished before new contact can be adequate.

Chapter XII Past and Present

The compulsive behavior is an attempt to finish or solve a past problem. This is swallowed mental material that consists of traumatic and introjected material.

MENTAL METABOLISM :**(1) HUNGER INSTINCT :**

Hanging on bite, with the growth of teeth, biting often, inhibited biting, inhibited ability to hurt (others), projections and/or retroflections.

Impatience can be defined as swallowing without chewing. This is often combined with **greed** and an inability to achieve satisfaction.

(2) RESISTANCES :

Genital, Anal

Oral (which Perls emphasizes) : refusing "food"; disgust (when repressed, is found in Paranoiac character) is the refusal of food whether it is real or imagined. This refusal takes place in the throat and stomach. Repression of Disgust = resistance against resistance = oral frigidity = lack of "taste".

(3) RETROFLECTION :

The effects of aggression must not be neutralized by love. If this happens the aggression is directed against the body.

(4) MENTAL FOOD :

A person's mind wanders, this is due to lack of contact. Perls suggests chewing mental food rather than swallowing without tasting.

(5) INTROJECTION :

What happens here is that things taken in are preserved but actually the organism requires their destruction.

Total Introjection : Introject remains intact and isolated. Found in (a)

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Melancholia (which is really an impulse to attack, which is redirected against an introjected object); (b) **Severe conscience-** aggression is projected onto the introjected object; (c) **As-if personality** : aggression or love is projected onto a person who is afterwards introjected.

Partial Introjection : Only parts of the personality is introjected.

Assimilation : Chewing up and assimilating by splitting up and differentiating swallowed material.

(6) **DUMMY COMPLEX** : Where the hanging on bite is used as a deflection. This can be worked through with the reestablishing of successful aggression.

(7) **THE EGO AS A FUNCTION OF THE ORGANISM** : Every inhibition and repression narrows down the **ego boundaries**. It is only at the boundaries that **contact** can take place, and these boundaries constitute the ego.

(8) **THE SPLIT OF THE PERSONALITY** : This occurs where the boundary appears between the accepted and refused parts of the personality.

Conflict : Avoidance of external conflicts results in the creation of internal ones.

(9) **SENSO-MOTORIC RESISTANCES** : This is the reluctance of the person to let go of oneself and finish unfinished situations. Resistance has a dialectic = assistance. Some resistances that are not fully dealt with become repressed or overcompensated (for example, embarrassment becomes pseudo-courage). Removal of resistance may be **dangerous**, if the person has not developed hardly any ego functions than those of resistance. Perls suggests that rather than undoing resistance it is better to undo retroflexion. The criterion is whether the person's resistance is useful or not.

Scotomization : is the most frequent senso-motor resistance. Also, increased senso-motor sensitivity (eg. touchiness) is a resistance. This leads to avoidance of situations. Persons easily offended and hurt have an equally strong inclination toward inflicting pain onto others.

(10) **PROJECTION** : Confluence is essential for the development of projections. In neurosis there is difficulty in expressing oneself. Expression, is thus, replaced

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with play acting, showing off, hypocrisy, self-consciousness, and projecting.

Projections often take place outside and within the personality. An example : over stern conscience can be cured by changing self reproach into object approach. Another example : Fear of being hurt by others- the projection can be reduced by owning the previously unexpressed desire to threaten others and to inflict pain.

(11) PSEUDO-METABOLISM OF THE PARANOIC CHARACTER :

Introjected material is felt as ego-alien and provokes dental aggression or the desire to get rid of it. This material is defecated as a projection. There is always an anesthesia in the anus. There is a reduced feeling of the defecation urge, and a permanent constriction (tightening) of the anus muscle, chronic constipation.

Pseudo metabolism material taken in is insufficiently assimilated and passes out more or less unused.

Repressed **disgust** is important here, so there tends to be oral as well as anal anesthesia.

Undigested parts (repressed memories) are gotten rid of either by (a) **assimilation**- by bringing up and rechewing. **It is important here to stay with the disgust.** (b) **Ejection** : but once anal anesthesia creates confluence the ejection is not felt as a separation and becomes a **projection**. The person here responds aggressively but not dentally and the destruction is incomplete and leads only to **retroreflection**.

(12) MEGALOMANIA : This is the **Outcast Complex**, found in obsessional neurosis, and also in paranoia. Projection, Introjection. The cure for megalomania is (a) thorough destruction and tasting of physical and mental food as preparation for assimilation; attention is given to unearthing repressed disgust and chewing of introject. (b) feeling defecation function (shitting) : developing the ability to stand embarrassment and shame; and then learning to recognize and assimilate projections.

(13) EMOTIONAL RESISTANCES :

Incomplete emotions : Both sadness and worrying (corresponds to nibbling of food) are partly repressed aggression, projections or retroreflections.

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Resentment : correspond to unfinishable situation; there is a hanging on attitude. The person projects his dental potency into the fixation object.

Every emotion changes from positive to negative when its tension or intensity increases beyond a certain limit. The inability to face unpleasant situations lead to feelings of embarrassment, disgust and shame, and these are the means whereby neurosis is produced through repression. Help and change can come about through the ability to endure shame, embarrassment, and disgust.

The treatment of the **phobia**(that causes the embarrassment, shame, etc.) requires the ability and willingness of the person to endure both fear and the attempt at action (which may fail).

CONCENTRATION THERAPY

The main characteristic of neurosis is **avoidance**. and the correct opposite is **concentration**. The therapy is basically to assist the patient find facts which he hides from himself. A **symptom** is a hidden **gestalt**.

Neuresthenia is characterized by a lack of concentration, fatigue, head and backaches, malcoodination, lack of interest, dyspepsia (translated as a disgust with life).

Concentration on Eating :

Impatience and greed [introjection/confluence] vs. cutting and chewing [contact].

Appetite (frustrated), disgust, oral frigidity, pseudo taste for food

The ability to tolerate disgust is very important for successful therapy.

Visualizations : deficiency in visualization = often the fear of looking at thing one wants to avoid.

Detailed descriptions are important when working with dreams.

Sense of Actuality :

Types of verbal expression :

(a) **EXPRESSIVE SPEAKING**- Emotional discharge brings about change within ourselves (**Autoplastic Action**)Present oriented

(b) **PURPOSIVE or SUGGESTIVE SPEAKING**- intends to bring about change in someone else (**Alloplastic Action**). Future oriented.

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(c) DESCRIPTIVE SPEAKING

Past Thinking : scapegoating

Future Thinking : Daydreaming as compensation for frustrations. Daydreams often give information about the direction of one's needs.

Internal Silence-Listening to one's thinking will help develop the sense of actuality.

First Person Singular : The avoidance of responsibility and the avoidance of ego-language are clearly related.

Cure : is only possible when one changes neurotic symptoms into conscious ego functions.

Ego Language : is used for assimilating disowned parts (those projected or repressed).

Undoing Retroreflections

Principal Inhibitions :

(a) **REPRESSIONS** : Retroreflections play a great part in producing and maintaining repressions. Repression is retroflected **Oppression**.

(b) **INTROJECTION** : Material remains essentially intact but has changed from environment to the internal field. Passivity becomes activity. Hypertrophied ego functions.

(c) **PROJECTION** : Material unchanged slips from the internal field to external field. Activity becomes passivity. Hypertrophied ego function and hallucinations.

(d) **RETROFLECTIONS** : Little material is lost and ego functions are intact, but self is a substitute for object with the purpose of avoiding "dangerous" contact. This loss of contact is bad because it leads to inadequate emotional discharge and impaired functioning.

Most important Retroreflections : Self-hatred, narcissism, and self-control.

Self Control-Ability to suppress one's own emotions and other expressions. Self-control eventually changes into **over-control**. The tendency to dominate others leads to great brutality against one's own organismic needs. Also, those with too much self-discipline are inhibited disciplinarians and bullies. **Inferior feelings** : arrogance concealed behind a retroreflection.

One can undo **embarrassing** retroreflections at first, through fantasy.

Introspection can be seen as retroflected object observation.

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Body Concentrations :

Neurotic Symptoms are always a sign that the biological self wants attention. By re-establishing the differentiated movements of the body we dissolve the rigid personality's numbness and awkwardness. Thus, with **full contact** with the neurotic symptom we dissolve it.

People **repress** vital functions by muscular contractions. Conflict is mostly raged in the person between unaccepted organismic urges and the motoric system.

Anxiety, stiff chest muscles

Sexual inhibition, stiffness in the lower back

Contact disturbances, tightness of jaw muscles and arms.

Tension : Awareness and responsibility

Hypotonus : confluence and depression, found in projection.

GOAL : THE ABILITY TO STAND AND EXPRESS PAIN; TO CONCENTRATE WITH INTEREST WITHOUT SHOUTING FOR RELIEF

Assimilation of Projections :

Projections change the entire environmental field, and act **as-if** the projected object or wish is a reality. Steps toward assimilation : (a) awareness that one is projecting (1) outwards;(2) Inwards- that there is an **internal** obsessional struggle between the persecutor and the victim within oneself. (3) Working with the dreams- pleasant one are often attempts to complete unfinished business; and unpleasant one are often projections. (b) **getting to the nucleus** : Getting to the underlying sense of every projection, eg. a policeman in a dream may boil down to wanting to watch or punish a certain person.

The need for affection, love, and admiration is an important projection. Can change the object relation and direction to the desire to love and to give affection, etc.

(c) Remove anal and oral frigidity in order to establish the proper boundary between the personality and the world. (d) Express oneself fully (can first be done in fantasy if necessary).

Undoing a Negation : The goal in this is toward self-regulation. This is undoing a repression. Often a person negates a negation. Example : 1. feeling disgust, desire to vomit, 2. oral frigidity , 3. very spicy foods.

AVOIDANCE OF FEELINGS : Find out what you want to avoid and how you manage to avoid the real feeling.

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Self-Consciousness-This is neither expression nor repression but in-between. Self-awareness changes into self-consciousness. Feelings are unexpressed and incapable of being expressed. Neither figure nor field.

Hiding the expression of powerful emotions of which we are ashamed (or afraid or embarrassed) of is experienced as **self-consciousness** and muscularity as **awkwardness**.

Undoing self-consciousness : by bringing into expression (foreground) that which has not been expressed.

Character features of Self-consciousness : Brazen, impudent, cynical, profane, servile, unctuous, awkwardness, inability to look at the hated/loved person in the eye, fixed stare, etc.

There is always some **suppressed** action or emotion. Often what is needed is the ability to say a clear cut "NO!".

People with ungratified narcissistic wishes will develop self-consciousness whenever there is a chance that might become the center of attraction.

CURE : Change self-consciousness into object consciousness. Also develop the awareness of wishes, urges, emotions, and expressions by word, art, or action.

Working with Claustrophobia : (1) develop awareness of projection, and of armour. (2) awareness of specific contractions of chest (3) dissolve armour+adequate oxygen supply (4) express bottled up excitement.

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FIGURES : disappear as soon as needs are gratified.

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