

Alessandra Callegari. Interview with Alexander Lowen (2002)¹

Translation, comments and Afterword – Svetlana Dinaburg.

Alexander Lowen: "Father" of bioenergetic talks about America, terrorism, the West and what needs to be done to really "change"

(interview July 31, 2002)

He is 92 years old – he will turn this age on December 23rd - but he calmly looks about twenty younger. Alexander Lowen, Father of bioenergetic analysis, one of the greatest living psychotherapists, student of that Wilhelm Reich who since the 1930s has revolutionized psychoanalysis, and he was the first to give importance to body language² valuable in itself, as verbal. Lowen takes me in a very informal way, welcoming me in Bermuda shorts, a short-sleeved shirt and sandals in the garden of his villa in New Canaan, Connecticut, where cats, ducks and a few chickens circulate. Eyes as blue as the sky and extraordinarily penetrating, the dry and snappy physique of someone who has always put into practice their theories on the relationship between psyche and body, the smile of someone who knows – and has not only written it – what true joy is. The home library stretches as far as the eye can see. We are located in his office, where he receives patients (he still has them): here is an ordinary couch, as well as a couple of chairs, a bioenergetic stool, a mirror.

– Dr. Lowen, it has been 44 years since the publication of your first book, *The Language of the Body*³. What has changed since then? What is bioenergetics for today? Or rather, what is the biggest problem people have to deal with today and for which it may be useful to resort to bioenergetics?

– Bioenergetics is as useful today as it was then. What I can say is that people, in America and beyond, today – perhaps even more than before – are not deeply in touch with themselves, and therefore are not able to really see what is happening around them, in their own country, in others, in the world⁴. A similar thing can be seen, for example, with regard to the problem of aids: people don't take care of themselves at the level of their sexual behaviour, much less of others. And they do not even care about the possible destructive consequences. That's why I think things will get worse and worse, especially in certain parts of the world. Until people become more aware⁵ (in the case of aids, for example, until they take responsibility for knowing where they are, how they are, even by undergoing an HIV test), there is no way to really change things. After all, the real problem is precisely that people don't want to 'know'. They do not care.

– One wonders why people are so self-destructive...

1 The history of this interview is given at the end of the text, in Afterword of the translator.

2 Although body language has been studied for a long time before, in particular, by C. Darwin and E. Kretschmer, A. Lowen's priority thing is in practical systemic learning. The preface of A. Lowen's book "Body Language" begins with a quote from Charles Darwin from the book "The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals". Alan Pease, known as "Mr Body Language" released his worldwide bestseller in 1981.

3 More precisely, A. Lowen's first book published in 1958 was called *Physical Dynamics of Character Structure: Bodily Form and Movement in Analytic Therapy* (Grune & Stratton, 1958), then it was published as *The Language of the Body*, and finally, the 2012 edition had a double title *The Language of the Body: Physical Dynamics of Character Structure*.

4 In the original – *nell'universo*, in the universe.

5 In the original – *consapevole*, i.e. aware, competent, conscious, informed, wise etc..

– It's because their life is empty. There is no joy in it. The problem lies in a sexuality that is too much 'doing' and too little 'feeling'. Precisely that of sexuality is one of the fields in which the difference of mentality between the various cultures and visions of the world is most expressed today. For Islam, the immorality demonstrated by the West is an abomination⁶ (and the Americans are the example) in their costumes. It is a violation not only of the Koran, but of the Bible itself. Just think of the commandments, of "not coveting another man's woman". When Muslims see Western women dressed a certain way, they naturally find it immoral. In fact, people lack a true moral sense; there is neither in itself nor towards others. For this reason, I think that a real transformation is difficult, because there is no sense of dignity, of morality, of respect. What matters is just making money. And this is true for all of the West. This can also be seen in relations with the environment. Man is destroying his own habitat with no possibility of return: oceans, air, land. He destroys it piece by piece, and it's not a matter that can be solved by movements or associations, because it's something much deeper, it has to do with something wrong with people.

– What?

– It is wrong that the mind controls everything, even feelings and emotions. With the mind, people think, "I can do this and that," but they don't really sense it, they don't feel it. People are not healthy. And even when they do something for self, for example physical activity, gymnastics, sports, etc., they don't do it to feel good, but only or mainly to be stronger, more beautiful. For the picture. In short, they do not hear. Feeling has nothing to do with intelligence, nor with strength. This is why bioenergetics can teach you to become more alive, more vital, AND to feel it.

– The problem, therefore, arises above all in the West, and some are starting to understand it. Is the *new age*⁷ a sort of response to this need for change?

– We have to be careful with the *new age* because it also includes dangerous things⁸. Like indulging in the use of drugs, etc. As for movements of a more spiritual nature, and which have to do with meditation, I don't think they are really effective if they don't go to the heart of the problem, which is to work on body. Otherwise it's just a matter of head, of mind. They continue to masturbate the brain, so to speak, albeit in different forms. In reality, we live in a society where everything is too much. There is too much noise, too much movement, too much stimulation. People go crazy for it, they don't have the chance to stop and listen, and they believe that life is like this, that there is no remedy. New York is kind of the symbol of all this... that's why I came away here to Connecticut.

– Speaking of New York, it's been a year since 9/11. What has changed in Americans?

– We need to understand the word 'change': if we are referring to a real transformation, which involves the whole human being, mind and body, I would say that not much has changed.

– Yet it was a shock, a real trauma...

6 In the original – abominio, i.e. abomination, disgust.

7 In context, here they are not talking about the changes brought by the coming XXI century, but about the 'new age' subculture -- the synthesis of psychedelic culture, mystical consciousness, spiritual practices, etc.

8 In Italian, it sounds very prettily: dangerous things – *cose pericolose*.

How were they supposed to change? Become more aware? Really take care of yourself, or of others, or of the world? I would say absolutely not. However traumatic that event was – an experience of horror and terror⁹ – real change requires much more, a long work, not a single experience. Of course, many have lost loved ones, homes and money. It can be said that some have different emotions, someone is full of fear, or anger, someone is depressed. But this is not a profound psychic transformation that leads to new behaviors or lifestyles. To really change, people must have a deep understanding of their lives – realizing that it is not full or happy, that it is not well – and must work on themselves, really get involved.

– What is the difference between horror and terror¹⁰?

– I wrote about it a long time ago, since the seventies. Although used interchangeably, the two terms refer to different experiences. Terror implies intense fear, which can also refer to imaginary and future dangers. Horror implies a sense of shock in the face of a gruesome event. But while terror is related to the emotional reaction of fear to danger directed towards oneself, in horror this danger is directed towards others. In the case of 9/11, there are those who have experienced one or the other, but above all the horror. And the horror numbs the mind: it is unable to understand the logic or the meaning of the event, it does not find a sense, it is incredible, it cannot possibly happen¹¹. At the time, thirty years ago, I emphasized how the experience of horror experienced by a small child, a kind of nightmare, can determine a split in the personality and induce an unreal quality, typical of the schizoid character. And I underlined how this type of experience is more widespread than one might think, bearing in mind that the horror, in childhood, already resides in the absence of human contact between family members. But that would take us far...

– Back to New York...

– Yes. You see, I maintain that the horror – beyond that tragic event which was 9/11 – is much more everyday. And that's what people don't understand. The horror is directly proportional to the lack of human feeling in interpersonal relationships, and is a much more important aspect of the rampant violence to which we generally refer. New York is emblematic. I'm from New York, I was born and raised there. But in my time the city didn't

9 In the original – *orrore e terrore*. Here and below, they are talking about two different types or aspects of extremal fear, and *not* comparing different phenomena – *horror* as strong fear and *terrorism* as intimidation. In Russian, the meaning of the word “*terror*” is associated primarily with terrorism as a political phenomenon and is understood as “*violent actions (persecution, destruction, hostage-taking, murder, etc.) with the aim of intimidating, suppressing political opponents, competitors, imposing a certain line behavior*” (Big Encyclopedic Dictionary). To a lesser extent, terror is domestic violence and aggression: intimidation of others, instilling a sense of fear with one's behavior - someone “terrorizes” neighbors, classmates, the area, etc. (in slang - “*to nightmare*”). In Russian, the concept of terror is unambiguously associated with cruelty, ruthlessness and radicalism; mitigating contexts are not applicable to it (as opposed to “*to nightmare softly*”). In other languages, where the original meaning (lat. *fear, horror*) has been preserved, the idioms *holy terror* (En.) are possible – the “punishment of the Lord”, a “real plague” or a “real devil”, an everyday tyrant (unbearable child, tormentor, annoying with a bad temper or tediousness); *un sacro terrore* (It.) - reverent awe. In addition, there is the meaning of terror (En.) – formidable, inspiring fear (from “*threatening with danger, death, expressing a threat*” to “*majestic, severe*”). For example, “*Terror*” - the famous warship, a member of the polar expeditions of D. Ross and D. Franklin.

10 It is noteworthy that A. Callegari is also trying to clarify this difference – not linguistic, but psychological. Although in Italian *orrore e terrore* can be the synonyms, the word *orrore* also means *disgust, abomination, horror from looking at something ugly or creepy*. That is probably why she asks how A. Lowen understands this.

11 In the Webster Dictionary, terror is extreme fear that excites the body and mind (*fear that agitates body and mind*), a synonym is *panic*, while horror is *shock or trembling with horror and disgust*. As we can understand, the fundamental difference between is very important here – extreme rational fear (terror), when the threat is great, but understandable, and irrational horror – disorganizing and paralyzing, a meeting with something terrible, decaying, beyond the limits of human notion of reality.

have the impersonal character it has today. The concrete and glass skyscrapers have an unreal quality and the frenetic pace, the incessant activity, the noises, the traffic, the dirt are a nightmare, something from which we dissociate ourselves in order not to continually see that it is real, because it is too much. And all the horror that surrounds us enters our homes, with radio and TV, today also the internet. And we don't even see it as such anymore, because if we did, we would go crazy. And even more serious is the loss of human values. The value that matters in New York is money. This is why it is a symbol.

– And the Towers...

– They were the symbol of the symbol. Remember another example of a collapsed tower? It's in the Bible. And it's amazing how much people don't think about it. Why did God bring down the tower of Babel by punishing people? For their presumption, their pride¹². Well, people haven't changed. They want to be like God. And then their towers come crashing down, this time at the hands of terrorists.

– Terrorists like God?

– In a certain sense, yes: everyone has their own pride... The point is that there is a slice of the world – for example, the Islamic world – which thinks that Americans are only interested in money and sex. And they hate them for it. And they want to destroy it, to the extent that the Americans persist in selling their way of life, spreading it by any means, imposing it on the world. Americans don't understand this. I obviously don't want to say that this is a good reason to bring down our skyscrapers, but it is true that people don't want to see things this way. And instead I believe that what happened will repeat itself, perhaps in different forms, but always tragic.

– So what can be done?

– Certainly not continue to bring war everywhere – neither in Afghanistan nor in Iraq. A militaristic policy is bound to lead America towards other repercussions, towards more hatred and more violence. Bush, immediately after 11 September, was seen as the 'father of the country', but if he persists in wanting to be a general rather than a president, he will only lose support, both internally and internationally. And America with him, unfortunately.

– But do Americans understand this hatred?

– Yes and no. They have difficulty understanding mentalities that are profoundly different from their own. And above all, what is missing is a profound moral sense, towards oneself and towards others. Which has nothing to do with wounded pride or nationalism. I mean the sense of dignity, respect for oneself and for others. People's real problem is his tendency to self-destruct, both personally and globally. And this applies not only to America, of course, but to the entire West.

– What do you think of the anti-globalization?

– The moral question is not resolved with movements or associations. It is something that is wrong within us. People think they solve everything with their mind instead of 'feeling'. But feeling has nothing to do with intelligence or strength. Anyone who is no longer able to hear is sick. Only by working on self, on the own body thanks to which people 'feels'-can

¹² Hereinafter, "*pride*" - *orgoglio* (It.) is also *arrogance*, *hubris*, *self-conceit*, it has the meaning of "*exorbitant pride*" and is opposed to *sense of self-worth* or *dignity* (*il senso della dignità*), as discussed above.

they heal themselves and aspire, as it is sacrosanct, to a healthy, free, happy life. And be able to truly love. You see, with my wife, for example, I have lived happily for 60 years. She died recently, and has been a wonderful companion. But to love, you need to be aware and responsible for yourself¹³.

– You were talking about New York earlier. Have you always lived there?

– I was born in New York in 1910 and have always lived there, until I went to Switzerland in 1947 to study medicine...

– Why in Switzerland?

– On the one hand, because I was too old, at 36, to enroll in medicine in America (the law did not allow it at the time). Then also because, being a pupil of Reich, I was considered 'dangerous', like him. He was seen as a kind of 'devil'. Yet it is enough to read his books to realize that he was not. As for me, I went to Geneva because I spoke French. And I studied medicine because I wanted to understand more about disease¹⁴.

– How did you meet Reich?

– In 1940, at the age of 30, I took a long trip around the USA with some friends: I remember that in that period I felt that there was something wrong with me, I was depressed, I felt a great emptiness. I knew I had sexual problems. As for my parents, they were opposites: my mother was a very non-sensual¹⁵ type, she was austere, controlled, often angry. She was ashamed of her sexuality. And I had taken from her. My father, on the other hand, was someone who loved life, very sensual. In short, I wanted to get to the bottom of my problem, and in September 1940, at the end of that summer trip, I happened to read a syllabus of the New School for Social Researches¹⁶ in NY. There was a course entitled "The Unity and Antithesis of Body and Mind": a certain Professor Reich taught it, who had just arrived in the United States from Europe. When I listened to him talk, I knew he knew what he was talking about. And that he went on a deeper level than I'd ever heard. He appeared to me very brilliant, gifted with a rare ability to understand. So I signed up for his class¹⁷. I was skeptical at first, but when I started my therapy with him, my life began to change. This is why I decided to graduate in medicine and to work as a 'doctor', as a therapist: not only as a psychologist, who works on the psyche level, but as one who works on the body and the psyche¹⁸.

– Then? How did your relationship with him end?

13 In the original – *consapevoli e responsabili di sé*.

14 In the original – *E ho studiato medicina perché volevo capire di più cos'era la malattia*. It seems that this is not about diseases in general, but about a disease that does not allow people to be happy, including A. Lowen himself, as he understood after studying with W. Reich.

15 In the original – *mia madre era un tipo molto poco sensuale*, here sensuality is not only sexual, but also "carnal", as a general ability to feel.

16 The New School for Social Research in New-York (NSSR) is a graduate-level institution, then known as the "University in Exile", because famous researchers who fled from Europe from fascism also taught there. In 1940, A. Lowen was a doctor of law (J.S.D., 1936, Brooklyn Law School), and the course of characterological analysis and therapy with W. Reich was analogous to therapeutic training, but required further education.

17 W. Reich's work at NSSR was short-lived (only 2 semesters, how V.W. Hilton wrote, see below). He arrived in New York in 1939 with his laboratory and began experiments, on the basis of which he soon claimed to have discovered orgone energy. At the same time, he began to use orgone accumulators for medical purposes, for the treatment of cancer and schizophrenia, but the leadership of the NSSR considered that the school of social research was not suitable for this, and in May 1941 W. Reich lost his position (Wikipedia).

18 He graduated from the University of Geneva in 1951 with a doctorate in medicine (M.D.).

I have worked with Reich for 4-5 years and ours has been a varied relationship. At the end of his life Reich had a lot of problems, and maybe he freaked out a little¹⁹. He had some internal conflicts that he had never been able to get over. Reich had, I would say, a narcissistic problem, and he hadn't been able to solve it, but nobody couldn't tell him. He was a very brilliant man, no doubt, but he also was too 'in the head'²⁰. After all, it's something that concerns us all a bit, not being connected with reality, with feelings. Reich was very vulnerable due to his background, his family problems. I returned from Switzerland after graduation and visited him at his home in Orgonon²¹, Rangeley, Maine. It was a strange encounter and the last time I saw him. My wife was with me, but he asked me not to let her come to him. She was very attractive, and he preferred not to meet her. He may seem strange, but he had problems with women, he was easily subdued by his own sensuality. And then Reich had a lot of people around him, often 'little ones', who surrounded him out of interest, but they were not able to keep up with them. One even committed suicide. Many 'weak' were attracted to him, who were or appeared so strong, but were then addicted to him. And he couldn't see for himself that he ended up becoming some kind of tyrant, because of his big ego. He was in a sense a prisoner of his own ego. That's why I walked away from it. Furthermore, when I returned from Switzerland and had to take an exam to get a license and be able to practice as a doctor, I had a lot of problems. Being related to Reich was always a problem! But I really love what he did and theorized, he was really great. I remember him saying to me, "Lowen, you have to work with people's energy. The problems are always at an energy level". I think I did, and went beyond that.

– Who are Reich's true disciples in America today?

– I ! (laughs) Actually, there is a College of Orgonomy. And they do what they call 'orgone therapy'. They use Reich's orgone machine, but what they do is unknown. Sadly, the Reichian movement is over. The problem with Reichians is that they work from a great, brilliant idea, but they don't know how to bring it to life²².

– What do you mean?

The neo-Reichians work on the body, but... Or rather, they persist in working on the body starting from fixed categories, they start with the eyes instead of the grounding²³, they are afraid of reality, of the reality of the body, which has feeling, while the mind has no feeling. When the body feels, it can be very painful, but that doesn't mean it doesn't have to feel. In reality, the work of the neo-Reichians today does not represent the true development of Reich's theories, while bioenergetics is: not surprisingly, the term is a combination of bio, life, and energy. It has to do with vital energy. I work with energy: if I look at a body, I see it.

He gets up, shows me a poster on the wall that represents a tree and a human body in comparison.

19 In the original – *un po' fuori di testa*.

20 In the original – '*nella testa*'.

21 W. Reich bought an old farm in 1942 and gradually built a research center there (Orgon Institute), where he moved to live with his colleagues. It now houses the Wilhelm Reich Museum.

22 The topic of neo-Reichian therapy deserves special attention. For now, you can read the materials by Xavier Serrano Ortelano – <https://xavierserranohortelano.com/en/psicoterapiacaracteroanalitica.php> about his Character-Analytic Psychotherapy.

23 In the original – grounding, this word becomes cross-cultural.

– You see? There are three different areas in the body, and if you make a comparison with a tree, you can see it clearly: the head, the body, the legs, correspond to the crown, trunk, roots: which confirms that nature is always the same although it manifests itself in different ways.

– So how does bioenergetics differ from other approaches?

– You can't change with your mind, you change with your body²⁴. The energy of the body has to be changed. Where does the body get energy from? From breath and food. Here is the importance of breathing properly and eating properly. Without breath there is no energy, without energy the body contracts, it is not fully alive, and that is why then one needs to compensate with different mechanisms, or one tries to be stronger, faster, more beautiful... But the only way people can learn is through feeling, through personal, physical, concrete experience. Reading a book is not enough, it does not change. Even bioenergetics, which I have also cultivated for many years: alone is not enough, if you don't go to the bottom, if you don't go with the energy in your feet, and in your heart. Look, I'll show you how to send energy into your feet.

Lowen gets up, stands in front of me, in a basic bioenergetic position, with his knees bent, and looking me in the eyes, he loads his weight forcefully into his legs, down to his feet, but always maintaining a relaxed and calm position.

– Do you see my eyes? They are more alive, more brilliant. I do exercises every day, especially grounding. And I work a lot with my feet. They are fundamental. Grounding without your feet is not enough. You have to press like this, it's not enough to breathe by going up and down with your knees. You have to work on your feet, feel contact with the ground. Push hard and breathe, and make a sound, a long 'aaaaaaah'. If you don't go with the energy in your feet, you go 'out' with your head. Just 15 minutes every morning. It's incredible how Westerners don't stand on their feet: they stand on their feet, but not on their feet²⁵. They use their legs to move, but not their feet. It took me a lifetime to figure this out: I started studying grounding 50 years ago, and today I have a new understanding of it all.

– And how do you work with patients?

– When a patient comes to me, I talk to him about his emotions. About the fact that he breathes badly, that he doesn't give energy to his body, that he has no grounding. And let's start working on this. Crying is also important. If you get to the bottom of this work, changes can occur. But you can't work on the body starting from the head, it doesn't work.

– It takes a lot of time?

– Yes, that's clear. Of course, it depends on from person to person. Of course, one experience is not enough, but sometimes people get scared. Not everyone is willing to move forward. You have to go step by step, and start from the base, from the feet, from the foundations, as when building a house. Not from the eyes, like the neo-Reichians do.

– Is it important to work taking into account the different characters?

24 In the original – *Non si può cambiare con la mente, si cambia con il corpo*. This is one of the most famous theses of bioenergetics.

25 In the original – *stanno 'in' piedi, ma non 'nei' piedi*. In the sense that the legs are not an extension of themselves.

– No, it doesn't matter that much. I started working with characters 50 years ago, and I've written a lot about it. But the risk is to become fossilized on characters instead of considering the person, the single individual for what he is. After all, no one is a pure character. And in my experience, I've realized that there's a risk of over-schematization. Whereas each person changes as the energy changes.

– But the character can be used as a frame...

– No, it's not needed. When you have a person in front of you, they are already there, there is no need to give them a 'frame'. If I look at you, I see you, and I can tell you how you are.

– To feel...

– Well, then I tell about you. First, you are a beautiful person, you have good energy. You have expressive eyes. But you have problems with the body. Undress if you want so I can see clearly. That's how I work.

I undress and stand in my underwear in front of Lowen.

– Basically, your energy is good, but in a mess. The lower body is not loaded enough. You need to give your body more energy. And then there's fear in your eyes. But the biggest problem is here, in the backside²⁶. Too tense, see how much tension is here. The only way to do anything is to work on the feet, especially the feet and the breath. I'll show you at the stool.

He puts me on the breathing stool: arms back, open; legs with bent knees.

– You see, the chest is too inflated, when you breathe the energy doesn't go all the way to the hips and pelvis. And when you breathe try to make a sound, aaaaaah. You have to breathe a lot, three four times, and then make a sound like this, a long aaaaaah, open mouth, open throat, and in the end the sound should turn into a cough, which even becomes a discontinuity, and the crying comes. And it's always good. Do you feel the vibrations? Stay with these vibes. You see? Rather than trying to understand with your head, it's better to feel with your body.

I do as he says: the sound grows, the cough comes too, getting louder, the voice becomes discontinuity, and the body shakes harder and harder.

– Vibrations are a therapeutic, healing process. When the body vibrates, it is present. Very well. The body is much warmer now. This exercise can be done all the time, every day, in your own home, and if you live in an apartment, you can turn the radio up loud... It's amazing how fast it works, and you can do it every day.

I sit up again, feeling very warm, vibrations throughout my body and a beneficial sense of energy and vitality. – I feel very good, – I say.

– Here you see. Always do it, remember, in your home. It's important. And you will understand for yourself what is happening. You see, your body looks strange because your

²⁶ In the original – *sedere* (it.), it is rather "buttocks" - what people sit on, "seat". This word seems to be less coarse than ass (It. *culo*). Whether A. Lowen meant tension only in the buttocks muscles or in the pelvis as a whole is a question, but later, on the breathing stool, he tries connects the pelvis as a whole.

personality is split between a small child and a very smart woman. The little girl is soft, she is very sensitive, but also very scared. But the body is your friend, it may be scared but it is your friend. You must be around 45, more or less, right?

I'm 48, but usually nobody understands it, they all think I'm much younger...

– You see, I'm good at reading bodies (laughs again). And it's true anyway, you're much younger, it's that young part of you, that little girl in you.

– Returning to the character, what do you think of the symbiotic character Steven Johnson²⁷ talks about?

– Well, as I said before, I believe that working only on characters today²⁸ doesn't make sense, it's too intellectualistic. Today there are too many who theorize a lot, and then are unable to change themselves. For me, if I see a change in their body then I trust them. Otherwise no.

– Does he have followers, pupils? Are there people who continue and deepen their approach to bioenergetics?

I think yes. But I don't know many of them, and in general, I repeat, I don't trust anyone who doesn't work on themselves first and foremost. You have to see the change first of all in them, in the therapists, otherwise it doesn't count. I'm going to amaze you with what I'm about to tell you: in my opinion, there is only one kind of correct analytic work²⁹. And it is not to say what character one is, but to look carefully at the body and the eyes of the person in front of us, and understand what person he is. Like when I tell you that you are a person who is afraid...

– I know...

– Well, and you have to be able to see it, because if you don't see it, you can't have therapy, it's no use. Even if it's hard to accept your fear. But without this awareness you cannot change or get better. And if a therapist doesn't immediately see how you are, he doesn't understand your eyes, he doesn't see what's happening... In short, people need to be taught to look into the eyes and be able to see fear, sadness, anger. To look at the body, and learn from it.

27 Stephen M. Johnson, PhD is a systematizer, integrator and popularizer of psychological characterology, combining the experience of academic and clinical research. Pointing out that W. Reich and A. Lowen stood at the origins of characterology, he interprets the types of characters as open theoretical and empirical models, and on the basis of the psychoanalytic approach, the theory of object relations, ego psychology, self-psychology, etc. identifies seven such types: schizoid, oral, symbiotic, narcissistic, masochistic, histrionic, obsessive-compulsive. These models, seen through the prism of existential problems, their corresponding disorders and therapeutic tasks, he understands only as descriptions that are useful in practical and methodological terms, helping to understand the diversity of human experience. Author of books written for both therapists and the general public: *Character Styles* (1994), *Symbiotic Character* (1991), *Humanizing the Narcissistic Style* (1987), *Character Transformation: The Miracle of Hard Work* (1985) and *First Person* (1977).

28 The important word here "today", in the original – *oggi*.

29 It's rather funny how delicately A. Lowen proposes a "radical" thesis about the only "one kind of correct analytic work". In his vision, a psychotherapeutic analytic work is not an interpretation based on any complete or correct theory, but a practical understanding of a unique situation by the therapist, based on his constant and many years of work on himself. He expresses this idea for many years, for example, in 1993: "...This is a technique that you can't do mechanically. The secret of this work is in understanding the personality of the patient..." (*The Joy of Life – Surrendering to the Body* by Alexander Lowen <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWcAGYagXFM&t=4742s, 1:19: 02>).

– But is fear something that never goes away?

No, everything can change, everything is in process, it's in transformation. Nothing is forever. The problem is that what we experience as children is more difficult to change because it is structured in the body. That's why the most important thing to do is work on the body, to give it more energy. This is what exercises are for. Thus one can truly understand: in English, not surprisingly, the term under-stand refers to 'standing'³⁰. Isn't that significant?

– How did you develop Reich's exercises?

– Before working with Reich, I was an athletic trainer³¹ and used to exercise every morning. In a certain sense, I was used to working on the body, even if with different aims. Then, of course, I understood the different and far more profound value of bioenergetics compared to mere athletic training. I state this clearly in my exercise book³².

– Are there exercises that are better for certain characters?

– Actually not really. In the sense that everyone has the same problems: everyone has oral or masochistic traits, some more some less. As I said, focusing on character is not the right approach. We need to look at the body, and see where there are energy blocks. Always talking about character runs the risk of getting lost in the mind³³.

– But in his books, Reich talked a lot about character...

– Yes, at first! But even when I did therapy with Reich, between 1940 and 1943-44, Reich always worked with me on the body, we didn't do 'analysis' in the classical sense. And it was ok. We didn't work on my character, which is narcissistic, nor did he work on his narcissism! If you work on the body, you have better results. If I had to write a book now, I wouldn't insist on character, but on the energy dynamics of the body, on breath, on vibration, on grounding. This doesn't mean you shouldn't tell your patients what character problems they have. But they won't be able to change them, just because they know they have them. Those who want to theorize too much do so because they are afraid of being in the body and prefer to be in the head. Since instead there are good body techniques ...

Afterword of the translator

This text in Italian appeared in my Facebook feed in October 2014 (source: <https://www.facebook.com/eldo.stellucci/posts/10204782564392594>, published Oct 14, 2014). I immediately turned to its author with a question, here is our brief dialogue:

– *Tell me, please, Alessandra, what is the history of this interview, what led you to Lowen?*

– *Hello Svetlana, thank you for your words. Briefly, I can tell the story. In 2002, I was still working as a journalist for a weekly magazine, but I was also finishing my studies in bioenergetic. So I decided to go to New York to talk to people after 9/11 and*

30 In the original – *non a caso, il termine under-stand, capire, comprendere, si riferisce allo 'stare in piedi'*.

31 In the original – *allenatore atletico*, he worked as a trainer at a summer camp, see Odila Weigand's article below.

32 Perhaps this refers to *The Way to Vibrant Health: A Manual of Bioenergetic Exercises*, co-author Leslie Lowen (1977).

33 In the original – *fa correre il rischio di perdersi nella mente* (берете на себя риск потеряться в уме).

interview Lowen because I was interested in his work. During this trip, I also had the opportunity to visit the Orgonon and the Reich Museum in Maine. Three very touching episodes...

Later, I found this interview on an Italian site, named *in a quiet place by Gianfranco Bertagni* (<http://www.gianfrancobertagni.it/materiali/psiche/callegari.htm>), and the title of the interview was: “*The point of view of a ninety-year-old sage*” (*Il punto di vista di un saggio ultranovantenne*). Also the details of the publication were: part of the interview was published in the weekly *Soprattutto* on September 6, 2002; another part in *Lifegate's* December 2003 Monthly Magazine. Moreover, I had sought out this text on Alessandra Callegari's new website – <https://www.alessandracallegari.it/intervista-ad-alexander-lowen> (because the old link to the original didn't work anymore).

About the author of this interview. Alessandra Callegari is a diploma philosopher, professional journalist, specialist in communications, travel and holistic disciplines, translator and editor of psychological and literary texts (including books by A. Lowen). She completed a professional training course in bioenergetics and professional counseling at IPSO, the Milan Institute of Psychology of Somato-Relationships. Teaching: Gestalt bioenergetic counseling courses at CSTG in Milan, counseling from SIBiG, the Italian school of biogestalt, bioenergetics at the training courses for bioenergetic theater therapists at the Nonchiamateciattori school, as well as for students of the Faculty of Pedagogy of the Body (her author's website - <https://www.alessandracallegari.it/alesandra-callegari>).

I turned to this interview three times - the first time I just discovered it in 2014. Then I myself was completing my bioenergetic training, and at that time Alexander Lowen was a distant, very authoritative and even authoritarian figure for me, and I tried to extract from the text something new, still unknown. The grounding technique described was my humble booty. The situation when a person comes to interview, then person say: *come on, take off your clothes if you want to know more* – and they continue on a bioenergetic stool – completely corresponded to my impression about the “old school” of bioenergetics. Especially, A. Lowen spoke about everything with great confidence, emphatically stating everything that He could afford from the height of his position and age. Yes, he's cool! This caused respect, but also a desire to keep a respectful distance from all this. Respect and anxiety, but not love; in that time I felt some skepticism, I had desire for change, conformity with modernity ...

Years passed, I remembered from time to time that I have this interesting historical document, and it seems that it is not known in the BA world. I was aware of earlier interviews with Lowen – one of them, done I think by Ron Robbins, was published in *Clinical Journal* (1990). The second interview was conducted by Patrizia Moselli at the International Conference of Bioenergetic Analysis in 1994 (Greece, Corfu) and was published later in the *Clinical Journal* 2004. When I finally returned to this interview at the end of 2021, I opened that it was a completely different reading. How many important details, it turns out, I missed then! And the topics covered have become much more relevant. In addition, the personality of A. Lowen seemed to me much closer, clearer, warmer ... But again I did not have enough time to translate. Finally, at the end of 2022, I re-read it again. And what do you think? It was just about today! I was covered with some kind of energy – I don't know what I could read new in the already known lines, but only I had the feeling that

I “consulted with Lowen” and after that a new resource opened up in the processes of all my difficult clients. He talks about politics, and therapeutic theories very sharp, with deep feelings ... But to whom these words are addressed? Not to idiots who take everything literally, and will not look for the fault of countries and societies, and throw old theories into the trash can of history ... In 2022, I already sense confidence to be on comfort distance to his power and words, and feel love for him.

I can't just call him AL, like those who knew him personally, I'm from a different generation. But, I feel in him not the Father, but Grandfather – with his right to be sharp frankness, and with my right to my position. It's like a secret alliance with him – sometimes we silently look at the crazy modernity or the madness of the Parents from a close position ...

Seems, what he said earlier somehow finds its continuation in this interview. But there are also new intonations and meanings. Here, A. Lowen is the person who no longer in charge of the Institute, and he speaks trusty with someone beyond the BA professional community. He is a private individual and belongs to the whole world. He's out of bounds. He speaks simply, and - it seems - says the most important thing. Maybe this is the secret of my poignant perception of the text: neither he in 2002, nor we in 2022, no longer have time for any nonsense, even for a long discussion of issues of power in relationships, etc. We are facing the ultimate questions – about human and the world, and this point is the meeting place. He already saw things what we have been moving away from oneself long time and need to aware now ...

The task of translating from Italian into Russian and English (that is, translating the translation, since the conversation, presumably, was conducted in English) was not to spoil Lowen's intonations and energy, to preserve the Italian flavor created by both interlocutors. To translate not mechanistically, but by understanding – following the principle of Lowen himself. Therefore, some remarks-comments for readers are quite appropriate. It may be useful to read other materials: the interview of P. Moselli mentioned above, as well as two articles from the *Clinical Journal of Bioenergetic Analysis*: Odila Weigand, *Current Trends on Bioenergetic Therapy, Brazil*³⁴ (2001) and Virginia Wink Hilton, *Reich, Lowen and the IIBA: Facing the Challenge of a Conflict Ridden World*³⁵ (2006), which contain a lot of interesting details about A. Lowen and the history of the IIBA. But you can do it without...

34 <http://www.bioenergetic-therapy.com/index.php/ru/iiba-publications-2/clinical-journals-articles/current-trends-on-bioenergetic-therapy-brazil>

35 <https://bioenergetic-analysis.com/article/view/0743-4804-2006-16-9/pdf>