

Focus on:

Beginning to Read Bodies

Let me say at the outset that what I see in an individual body reading is the physical manifestation of the character defenses, not the essence of the person—the higher self. Core Energetics holds that the higher self is the essence of the individual, the divine in everyone. Though some gifted individuals may be able to see and perceive the core qualities by looking at a physical structure, this is not my subject. The process of discovering, knowing and going into the higher self can only be done via the struggle, pain, terror and shame of knowing the lower self.

For the first couple of years in my Core training I was terrified by the prospect of reading bodies. I was confused, nervous, frightened, and despaired that I could ever learn it. It seemed "magical" that one could look at another's physical structure and be able to see so many truths. I was amazed and awed that others could look at my physical structure and know so many things about me and my struggle.

What I had to learn in reading physical structures was first to *relax*. I slowly began to realize that reading bodies is much like using a road map, a guide, a lighthouse or a libretto: it indicates part of but by no means all of who the person is.

I had to learn to allow (as much as I could) my own body to relax and flow—to allow the energies and structure of the individual whom I

was reading to come to me. I had to soften my eyes, open my breathing, gently ground myself, and try to reach the zen state of no-mind. I had to learn to turn off the constant conversation and clatter in my head.

Some people have unique gifts and abilities that allow them to see energy with their own bodies; others may see or perceive the energy field (aura); and some may see colors with their eyes closed. Many of these abilities may come as a by-product of one's own journey and process.

I want to emphasize that one of the problems with our schemata and classification of the "five basic character types" is one of language. Our language is simply inadequate to convey what we mean, as we are trying to describe in words concepts that are non-verbal, non-linear and non-Newtonian—the essence of a painting, a symphony, the ocean or a sunset.

Keeping this in mind, I think it is useful not to look for "things" in a particular body but rather for "patterns." What are the messages of the body's patterns saying to you? And, as with any skill, it takes patience and practice, and then the two fundamentals of learning and growth will come together: consciousness (technique) and intuition.

My first experience with hospitalized psychiatric patients was in a chronic state mental hospital. The majority of the patients were

psychotic and I went there with the excitement and naivete of any novice: I would instantly be able to "tell" which patients had what diagnosis and to "pick the schizophrenics out of a crowd." I assumed that since many of the patients were frankly psychotic and schizophrenic there would be *obvious* physical manifestations of their emotional state. This was not so.

The error in this approach, of course, is philosophic. I was being a quantitative reductionist, following the Ionians in asking: "How much is there," and assuming that "there ought to be a lot." I should have been a Pythagorean and asked: "What are the forms and patterns"? When I learned that you cannot count the parts and add them up to get the answer (whatever the *answer* is), but rather that you have to experience what the patterns are, I learned, and am still learning, how to read the physical structure of the human body.

Schizoid Defense Structure

The physical pattern I perceive in the schizoid defense structure evokes in me the word/concept *tentative*. There is a tentativeness about existence in this structure. The feet are only tentatively on the ground. The gestalt is one of the only being here momentarily, of "hanging out" to test the waters, so to speak. The stance, posture, shoulders, and expression all convey this tentativeness. There is the feeling that at any moment the person will decide to disappear because it's too dangerous and best to leave. Or, conversely, I sometimes have the impression that this person

only decided to incarnate at the last moment and quickly, before the train pulled out, grabbed whatever body parts were available without time to see if they all matched. This, of course, is impressionistic and metaphorical, certainly not factual. But one of the patterns you may recognize is that somehow the parts don't go together. There is a sense of disproportion—this is a sense pattern and not a measurement. For example, the hands may seem to large for the arms, or too small; the shoulders, which are often narrow and tight, might not seem to fit with the size of the head; the feet may be too large for the legs (I recall Fats Waller's classic song, "Your Feet Too Big.>").

Another prominent pattern of the schizoid defense structure is the "splits." There is a sense of twisting and turning ("Twist and Shout"). This is especially noticeable when the body is in a state of stress. Somehow the image of twisting and turning away, of the grab-bag of poorly matched body parts, and of the tentativeness suggest that the person has a schizoid defense structure.

This pattern, or variations of it, can be heard also in the voice. Again, our language is inadequate to explain exactly what I mean, but there is a hesitancy, a tentativeness (again), and a sense of dysrhythmia. The flow of words is disorderly, forced, unnatural, not easy or flowing. I have the image of a stream with rocks, boulders, tree trunks, and rapids alternating with stretches of almost stagnant hardly flowing water. Of course the "modifiers" (reason, will,

emotion) play a role in the expressive functions of the human animal so this is not a one-on-one correlation.

A very powerful pattern is in the eyes. Once you have experienced the schizoid eyes you will never forget them: they are that powerful and distinct. There is a vacancy, a dullness, and a deadness that can be somehow frightening to experience. They look out vacantly and, even if they are looking into your eyes, you sense that they are looking way off, getting lost in the horizon, lost in space. They are not home and the lights are turned off.

There are, of course, also myriad variations and themes that I have not mentioned. The extremities are often cold and de-energized, and the head carried at a particular or peculiar angle. But I think that if you remember the image of a pattern that bespeaks tentativeness, the unmatched parts, and the readiness to leave, you will sense and recognize this pattern.

Masochistic Defense Structure

I have a lot of this pattern in my own character defense structure so, in a sense, the dice are loaded, but I will do my best. The central image of this structure is *no way*. Picture a large boulder that won't move and you have the masochistic defense structure. Perhaps a better image would be a large boulder in the mud that refuses to move. If you try to push it, you'll slip and slide in the mud yourself and won't be able to get a grip on it because of the mud. In much the same way, people with this defense structure have a dense, packed, heavy,

burdened pattern to their body. They are often packed and heavy with fat and muscle, but even when this structure slims down and loses weight, there is still a feeling of heaviness, an "I won't budge," and a packed in denseness to them.

The animal image I have is sometimes the turtle/tortoise, especially in the manner in which the head is always ready to pull back into the body (shell) or, in fact, *is* always sort of halfway pulled into the shoulders. And like this creature, the body and extremities are generally thick. I have heard the expression that this structure looks like a sausage tied at both ends. Again, this is the pattern perceived, not a tape measure or scale of diagnosis.

There is the unmistakable "tucked in ass," to quote Alexander Lowen, which has often been compared to a dog with its tail between its legs. And, much like a punished dog, there is often a whining or whimpering quality to the voice. Because of the nature of the physical blocks, there is a pattern of coldness in the region of the small of the back which can be quite remarkable at times, so tight is the energetic block. This pattern of heaviness may only be recognizable in certain parts of the body, especially in the thighs and buttocks. The eyes often have a suffering expression.

While the pattern of this structure is towards an abundance of muscle and fat, this does not mean that all obesity is masochistic or muscle-bounded-ness a consistent indication of masochism. (The subject of obesity is outside the scope of this discourse,

but I hope in the future to have some remarks about this fascinating physical and emotional structure from a Core Energetic point of view.) I will only add that there is a different/ee/ to the overweight masochist than there is to other structures which suffer from obesity. Suffice it to say for now that there are often powerful psychopathic issues in many overweight people.

Psychopathic Defense Structure

If the keynote of the masochist is *no way*, then the psychopath (or, to be more accurate, one of the subtypes, the ominous psychopath) could be described by the phrase *my way*. The other subtype of the psychopath, which Andre Leites in his superb article calls the submissive psychopath, might be described by the word "sleazy," for there is a sleazy energy in the secret and hidden manipulation and scheming. The energy pattern of the (ominous) psychopath is what has been called upward displacement: the energy is in the head, eyes, face, upper shoulders and torso. These people have the aura of being enormous, both in terms of their energy and their physical size and appearance. Many people with this structure are, in fact, large. However, closer evaluation will reveal that the huge energy in the upper half is at the expense of the lower half. The legs and pelvis may appear ridiculously small for a person of this size and energy, or may appear withered, especially in contrast to the tremendous aura of energy, the projection of self-assuredness, self

authority, and competence that one experiences in the upper half.

There is a marvelous description of psychopathic eyes in T.S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. Eliot weaves together in powerfully poetic form the psychopathic issues of control, power, and manipulation:

And I have known the eyes already,
known them all—

The eyes that fix you in a formulated
phrase,

And when I am formulated, sprawling on
a pin,

When I am pinned and wriggling on the
wall,

Then how should I begin To spit out all
the butt-ends of my days and ways?

And how should I presume? The sleazy or submissive psychopath may not have so obvious a physical configuration. Often this structure is best delineated by behavior of "sucking up" to people in authority, trying to please or charm them to their face while devaluing their peers and those under them behind their backs. This is a pattern of the submissive psychopath.

Oral Defense Structure

The oral configuration has been compared to an elongated and collapsed balloon. This is an apt and accurate description because, like an empty balloon, it appears void of energy and the bodies usually are slender and elongated, much like a long, collapsed balloon. This is not meant in a pejorative manner, for these bodies often possess much grace

and physical beauty, a certain litheness.

There is often a droning quality to the voice which tends to put you to sleep or otherwise make you feel extremely tired. This is probably an energetic phenomenon: since these people feel they don't have enough energy for themselves, they tend to suck your energy. The helpless look in their eyes is combined with a tendency to slouch and not stand up for themselves. The legs are thin, spindly and tight. There is a peculiar depression in the midsternum (pectus ex-cavatem) but conversely women with orality may have large and pendulous breasts.

It seems that somehow the body is trying to fill up for lack of energetic and emotional nurturing. The overall quality one feels in the presence of the oral is one of weakness, helplessness, passivity. This may be masked with a fierce independence, a defense against this underlying neediness, which tends to collapse during times of stress. The drone quality in oral characters is also accurate in that they tend to enjoy speaking about themselves, and talking in general. The animal image I have of this structure is that of a leech.

Rigid Defense Structure

When I think of this structure, I think of the term *ram rod*, for they do hold themselves up stiff like a rod. The back is especially and remarkably stiff, unbendable, strong, and upright. This stiffness is reflected in the arrogance and pride of the emotional defense system. There is a

haughtiness and a general unavailability about them. While interaction may be in a socially appropriate manner, there is an emptiness, as if somehow they are not there—this has a different quality than in the schizoid structure. The rigidity serves as a defense against being there with their heart.

The bodies are usually well-developed, well-proportioned, harmonious and coordinated. These are attractive and accomplished individuals who have a constantly high energy level (though it does not tend to be held). Many athletes, dancers and people in the performing arts have rigid defense structures.

The term rigid actually encompasses several subtypes and is the equivalent of the obsessive-compulsive, a term used in present day psychiatric taxonomy. What Reich called the phallic narcissist and hysteric is what we would presently call rigid. The emotive response I get from this structure is a certain iciness, distance, and heldness, which probably comes from the central issue of opening (or lack of) the heart energy to others.

Borderline Personality Defense Structure

This is a fairly recent concept in psychiatry. What is currently termed borderline was in the past, according to our schemata, a mixed type. The constant feature that I have noticed, from an admittedly limited data base, is a schizoid component mixed psychopathic and masochistic structures. The splitting in this structure may be subtle and may underlie a

prominent masochistic or psychopathic structure. It is especially noticeable when the individual is in a physical position of stress, such as the "bow."

Conclusion

The character types are simply a classification scheme that is helpful and useful. It does not tell us about the higher qualities of the individual, nor does it offer a cookbook description of recipes on to work with them or what to do. These are road maps of an often difficult terrain. They do not describe concrete things; they do not belong to the quantifiable world; they are a reflection of concepts. Words are a clumsy and inadequate reflection of what we are trying to say. It is less important to be able to classify an individual into various types than it is to see the emotional issues that you are working with in that individual.

I know from my own process that often after an extremely deep personal session I enter into a totally different space. Riding the subway on my way home I may become moved and amazed by this "sacred place" I have found within myself. I look at

fellow passengers and see their issues in an intuitive gestalt. This woman looks anger and resentful because she feels so alone and abandoned; that man looks stiff and unconcerned because underneath he has much pain and feels unloved, unsupported, and unencouraged. This sacred place is beyond character types and classification. It is in this sense that our classification is incomplete and inadequate. This sacredness that we sometimes enter is where, I believe, true insight and empathy live. It is only through the process of opening and letting go that we can reach this place.

I want to caution those who are beginning to learn this marvelous skill of reading bodies to be patient. Continue to work on your individual processes and you will occasionally find yourself in that sacred place where intuition and knowledge come together to help our fellow traveller and sufferer. It is in this place that we truly know and feel that we are such stuff as dreams are made of.

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