

BODY LANGUAGE IN GROUP ANALYSIS

Group Analysis, IX/2, July 1976, p. 107 – 108

Dr. Michael Titze

It was 50 years ago that Alfred Adler told his students they should "close their ears and only observe" when the essential of a patient's character was proved as uncoverable. Adler wanted to say that the expression of a man, his posture, the motorical harmony of the extremities, and so on, can tell us more about a man's real essence than the spoken word. That is why verbalization is controlled and guided far more consciously than "body language" which to a greater extent expresses the unconscious impulses and attitudes. Further on, body language seems to be relatively independent from culture, as ethology has shown us. The spoken word (as a semantical basic unit of language) however, receives its sense from the topical standard of a culture's knowledge that is influenced by the present world. On the other side, body language concerning its core goes back to roots transcending generations and limits of cultures. Ethologists (cf. e.g. Tinbergen) call such roots "instinct residuals".

Which relevance has body language for group analysis? To my mind people who cannot resolve their tasks of life, i.e. who have difficulties in playing the games of the social world, understand human nature badly. They have an insufficient capacity of knowing themselves and others. Firstly, they are not able to judge others objectively and adequately and, secondly, they do not know how they are seen by others. That is why they do not succeed in participating in the social playing-together in a way that is satisfying for themselves and others. Rather, they tend to judge the social activities as unsatisfying, difficult and producing anxiety, and, moreover, they think that the others see them as inadequate and not accepted partners. The sad result of this false attitude is the increasing escape into the social outside, into isolation.

Therefore, it is my primary intention to make the inseparable connection of acting and reacting in a social context evident to the members of my therapeutic groups. Watzlawick once said that one cannot not communicate; he wanted to express that communication is far more than the spoken word as such. The implication for group analysis has to be that verbal communication as the specific form of transmitting *conscious* information is essentially completed by the *unconscious* information which are transmitted by body language. Consequently, it is necessary to make clients conscious of the sense and the importance of such signals and information which they constantly transmit and receive from their social partners. I. e., they should be able to learn to become sensitive not only for the spoken word but as well for the whole human body in its function as a universal transmitter of information. Group experiences show that nonverbal, i.e. unconsciously guided, communications do not always converge with verbal, i.e. consciously guided, communications. In any case: the primary therapeutic intention should be to make the social outsider a flexible and sensitive partner, someone who understands human nature.