

**ANTHROPOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON THE POPULAR IMAGE OF THE
BIOFIELD ENERGY HEALER IN POLAND. HISTORY, TRADITION AND THE
PRESENT-DAY**

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STRESZCZENIE

W swoim artykule autorka analizuje wizerunek bioenergoterapeuty, opierając się na badaniach własnych z obszaru Łodzi oraz zgromadzonych materiałach zastanych, dotyczących całej Polski.

W dobie rozkwitu biomedycyny, zastanawia fakt niezwyklej popularności bioenergoterapeutów i tzw. medycyny alternatywnej. Popularność ta nie jest wyłącznie rezultatem kryzysu służby zdrowia, lecz posiada uzasadnienie historyczno-kulturowe.

Wizerunek bioenergoterapeuty kształtuje również nadzieja chorych na odzyskanie zdrowia, ich pragnienie bycia świadkiem interwencji *sacrum* w ludzki porządek świata, lub wynika ze świeckiej potrzeby widowiska, *show*, które wprowadzi jednostkę w świat głębszych doznań.

Słowa kluczowe: bioterapeuta, wizerunek, tęsknota za cudem, sensualizm, bioenergoterapia, pogłoska

Analiza antropologiczna potocznego wizerunku bioterapeuty w Polsce. Historia, tradycja, współczesność

ABSTRACT

In this paper the author analyzes the popular image of the Polish healer. The analysis is based on her own research conducted in the city of Lodz, as well as on the results of other studies carried out in Poland.

In the era of spectacular achievements of academic medicine, the popularity of healers seems worth considering. It may be caused by social, cultural and demographic factors. According to the author, the image of the contemporary healer is a product of centuries-old traditions, as well as the therapists' ability to adapt their image to patients' needs and expectations.

Key words: healers, energy-healing, longing for a miracle, image, sensualism, biofield energy healing, rumour

HISTORY AND THE PRESENT DAY

Biofield energy healing started to develop in Poland in 1978–1985. At that time it usually took the form of group sessions, called “big meetings”, organized in churches, chapels, stadiums and other large facilities. The prime time of this form of treatment was 1982–1984¹. The second wave of great interest in biofield energy healing came at the turn of the 1980's and 1990's. After the political and economic transition in Poland, it became possible to legalize alternative medicine² schools and surgeries. In 1995 biofield energy healing was registered as a profession and included in service and commercial activity, which led to the development of associations and publishers propagating unconventional medicine and esotericism among the society³.

On the rising tide of intense social interest, some healers gained popularity in the media, e.g. Zbigniew Nowak. Once a month, for nine seasons (till 2005) Polsat TV broadcasted his program entitled “The Hands that Heal”, in which he was healing and teaching how to energize water. The next period of an increased popularity of biofield energy healing was noted

1 J. Rejmer, *Przedmowa do wydania polskiego*, [w:] K. Allgeier, *Cudowni uzdrowiciele. Uzdraviamie mocą ducha i wiary*, Warszawa 1993, s. 10.

2 It relieves therapists from the responsibility which medical doctors have towards their patients. According to the Polish law, a therapist is merely a service provider. The responsibility for the effects of his/her therapy falls on the client, who may simply make a wrong choice of service. Differently from doctors' offices, the therapists' surgeries are exempt from sanitary supervision. In order to open such a facility, one does not need a doctor's licence. It is sufficient for a therapist to register business activity and pay taxes; Zob. T. Mackowiak, *Uzdraviacze*, „Newsweek Polska” 2004, nr 17, s. 86. However, many healers gladly present craftsmanship certificates in biofield energy healing, usually issued by the Crafts Chamber in Katowice, as well as other certificates which confirm that they have completed all sorts of paramedical courses.

3 J. Dreger (red.), *Klasyfikacja zawodów i specjalności T. V. Słownik zawodów i specjalności, zeszyt 5 „Grupa wielka 5” – Pracownicy usług osobistych i sprzedawcy*, Warszawa 1995, s. 62–63.

at the turn of the 20th and 21st c., when festivals of unconventional medicine started to be organized, paramedical publications appeared on the market and paramedical and private healers' services began to be widely advertised on the Internet.

The social dimension of the phenomenon attracted the attention of scientists. The first to study biofield energy healing in Poland were medicine sociologists, who observed Clive Harris' group treatment sessions in as early as the turn of the 1970's and 1980's. In the late 1990's biofield energy healing was also studied by cultural anthropologists. In this presentation the author is analyzing the image of the Polish therapist on the basis of her own research conducted in the area of Łódź, as well as the sources concerning a wider geographical-historical space⁴. The latter includes other authors' and the therapists' own publications. The assessment of the medical effectiveness of biofield energy healing is not a part of this paper. Cultural anthropology – contrary to natural sciences, which include conventional modern medicine – does not have appropriate tools or laboratories to discredit or verify the objective effectiveness of the observed health behaviour and means of treatment used in alternative medicine. As a humanistic science, it approaches biofield energy healing from the cultural point of view. The observed beliefs and practices are treated as a manifestation and product of the health culture in a given community. They have their place in the structure of human thought and behaviour and as such they undergo analysis.

In the times of flourishing academic medicine, the popularity of alternative medicine therapists seems unusual. It might be explained by social and demographic factors. In the economically developed countries, the provision of health care is perceived as a political responsibility and the elementary human right at the same time. The result of the rising social awareness as regards health culture is that the state and health care institutions are taken for granted. The inability to provide adequate medical services is perceived as failing to meet unwritten social commitments⁵. This has become a serious problem in Poland, where the society is aging and people feel forced to try alternative health behaviours. However, the popularity of biofield energy healing is not only the result of the crisis in the health care system, but also has its historical and cultural background.

The socio-cultural reality is highly complicated. Therefore, it is easier and more comfortable to make use of constructs, which will reduce the number of variables to the necessary minimum, simplifying the whole picture or its fragment. It is a typical procedure in all kinds of research. Such constructs are "folk cultures" and "modern cultures".

In social practice, different types of cultures and different ways of thinking coexist within one community.

For the purpose of this discussion we adopt terminology proposed by Ludwik Stomma, who considered folk culture to be a pure type and suggested the term "folk-type culture". Folk-type cultures are cultures dominated by a particular, magical or religious-magical worldview and mythical categorization of the world related to it [Stomma 1986: 147].

The concept of modern cultures refers to modern, technologically developed and secularized cultures, dominated by the discursive way of thinking, in which we can still find elements of mythical thinking. They include contemporary health culture of the Polish people, which oscillates between tradition and modern technological development, between common thinking with elements of mythical thinking and scientific (discursive) thinking. It is also subject to global influences, preserving its specificity, stemming from traditional thinking and behavioral structures with reference to health and sickness, as well as glocalization concerning external issues⁶.

Gradually, in Poland folk medicine has become a cultural relic. However, many beliefs and practices of folk medici-

4 Due to the difficulties in acquiring primary sources (therapists demanded payment for giving an interview, under the pretext of the researcher absorbing biofield energy from them), it was decided that the type of the study would be changed from quantitative to qualitative, and the results would be supplemented with the analysis of secondary sources. The diagnostic studies and research proper included the total of 10 ethnographic interviews (3 interviews with therapists and 7 with patients) and 10 observations of healing treatments. The study was conducted in the city of Łódź. Similar to other Polish cities, this area is a cultural melting pot, where individual health traditions intermingle, contradict one another or coexist, exposed to the influence of the tradition brought by the continuously migrating population of other cities, towns and villages, as well as to the global influences exerted by books, brochures, articles and television programs modeled on foreign programs translated into Polish. It is an area where popular ways of thinking about health and sickness conflict with modern technologies. Moreover, in Łódź, there are many events organized, which promote alternative medicine (including biofield energy healing), such as the Festival of Health and Curiosities (formerly the Festival of Augury and Curiosities). This particular choice of the study area allowed the researcher to expect rich and varied source material.

5 Por. M. Sokołowska, *Granice medycyny*, Warszawa 1980, s. 131-132.

6 Glocalization – the term first used in the business world by Japanese economists in the late 1980s. Glocalization is a process in which a global product is given a different shape in order to satisfy the needs of local consumers. According to the sociologist Roland Robertson, who is credited with popularizing the term in social sciences, in the 1990s, glocalization as regards cultural phenomena, the term refers to the process in which global cultural phenomena are becoming particularized as a result of their local re-interpretation through local cultural conditions (traditions, values, worldview, etc.). R. Robertson *Globalisation or Glocalisation?*, "Journal of International Communication" 1(1) 1994 s. 33-52, R. Robertson, *Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity*, [w:] M. Featherstone, S. Lash, R. Robertson (red.) *Global Modernities*, London: Sage 1995, s. 25-44.

ne have been preserved. On the other hand all forms of modern beliefs and therapeutic procedures which exist outside official medicine (like biofield energy healing), cannot be called folk medicine anymore. What is born nowadays is some new quality with some traditional or mythical elements. In social sciences in Poland, practices of this type are referred to as alternative medicine or complementary medicine. According to Danuta Pękala Gawęcka, we should examine it as it is, without artificially isolating what we consider "traditional"⁷.

According to the paramedical literature, biofield energy healing is rooted in Franz Anton Mesmer's animal magnetism. In the second half of the 20th century, the term "universal fluid" was replaced by "life field" or "biofield". That is how the term "biofield energy healing" was coined (bio + energy + Ancient Greek *θεραπεία* *therapeia* – "care, help, treatment", meaning "treatment with biological energy")⁸.

In biofield energy healing, like in every treatment tradition, we deal with a particular approach to **illness** and man. Man is an energetic being and the **illness** is a result of a disturbed energetic balance, lack of energy in the human organism or in one of its parts⁹. What distinguishes a **therapist** from other people is his/her much stronger biofield. By a touch of his/her hand, the therapist transfers his/her own energy to the patient and removes harmful energy from the patient's organism¹⁰. The mechanism shows affinity to the Chinese tradition of **acupuncture** and **acupressure**, according to which there are certain points on human skin, corresponding to individual organs. Stimulating them with a needle (or the pressure of fingers in the case of acupressure) restores the energy balance in the patient's sick organ and body and makes the ailments disappear. Therapists are aware of that and often stimulate only those acupuncture points which correspond to the patient's given organ or organs instead of the whole organism¹¹. By using these techniques therapists become more similar to the healers of the East, who treat people by pressing, piercing and warming certain points on their bodies, than to the healers treating patients with the touch of their hands¹². What joins the two ways are the holistic view of the world and man, the opinions regarding the nature and etiology of illnesses, as well as the methods of treatment.

THE POPULAR IMAGE OF THE BIOFIELD ENERGY HEALER

Although the traditional social structures, together with their systems of beliefs, myths, rituals and magic, do not exist any more in the contemporary secular European society, the image of a therapist contains elements characteristic of traditional healers, such as **unusual childhood**, the trauma of the therapist's **illness** in the past, **contact with the transcendent sphere**, **sensualism**, **distant healing ability** and the ability to **predict death**, unpleasant **physical sensations** accompanying the healing process, **danger of contracting the illness**, and **healing untreatable illnesses**¹³.

Going back to their childhood, therapists often find there signs of their future abilities and occupation. At the same time they claim that nobody, even they themselves, realized then the significance of unusual events, or that they underestimated them, looking for some rational explanations. For example, when as children they put their hands into a stream, fish immediately swam towards them, flowers grew better in their presence, their scratches and wounds healed better, and their sick friends and family members recovered from illnesses fast, to the great surprise of the doctors¹⁴.

In the adult life, the ability to heal takes different forms. The initial stage of discovering one's own talents may be very difficult, raises many questions, doubts and even fears for one's own mental health. That is why therapists try to hide their abilities from the world. Remembering this stage, they stress their passive attitude as regarded the choice of their future occupation. It is the patients that find them and try to persuade them to use their powers. Guided by deep sympathy for human suffering, therapists eventually decide to come out of hiding and start regular practice. According to Marian Pomorski, violent personal experience may reveal parapsychological qualities in an average person,

7 D. Penkala-Gawęcka, *Folk and complementary medicine in polish ethnological investigations*, "Lud" nr 79, 1995, s. 128, 132.

8 J. Rejmer, dz. cyt., s. 8; Zob. R. R. Ulman, *Bioenergoterapia Praktyczna*, Warszawa 1991, s. 155, 157-158.

9 Z. Rejdák, *Bioterapia i akupunktura otwierają nowe możliwości rozumienia choroby*, [w:] M. Czarnicka (red.) *Materiały na I Symposium Stowarzyszenia Radiestetów w Warszawie: Bioenergoterapia i radiestezyjne metody diagnostyczne w dn. 19 – 20 września*, Warszawa 1981, s. 12.

10 S. Budzyński, *Bioenergoterapia. Tajemnice uzdrawiającej energii*, Warszawa 1991, s. 9-10, 12; S. Nardelli, *W kręgu biopola*, Katowice 1986, s. 32.

11 S. Nardelli, dz. cyt., s. 13, 32, 36; W. Piątkowski, *Spotkania z inną medycyną*, Lublin 1990, s. 116, Interview No. 1/2010. An equally popular method is chakra-therapy.

12 R. R. Ulman, dz. cyt., s. 19-22, 156-157.

13 Naturally, these qualities are not as developed as in traditional cultures, but they correspond well to the traditional tales about healers. These qualities of the image of Polish traditional folk healer are described by a Polish ethnographer Z. Libera in his book entitled: *Medycyna ludowa. Chłopski rozsadek czy gminna fantazja?*, Wrocław 1995.

14 F. Fellmann, *Uzdrowiciel*, Poznań 1992, s. 19-20; E. Wypych, *Uzdrowiciel*, [w:] J. Karmański (red.), *Znachorzy, uzdrowiciele, bioenergoterapeuci*, Warszawa 1991, s. 53; Z. Nowak <http://www.bioenergoterapeuta.pl/cv.html>, 24.10.2004; S. Nardelli, dz. cyt., s. 7, 15, Interview No. 1/2010.

making him/her sensitive radiesthetically or biotherapeutically¹⁵. This brings an association with the **shaman initiation**, in which the candidate's personality is disintegrated and destroyed and the new person – the shaman – is ontologically born. The experience includes, among other things, physical and psychological sensations caused by an **illness**. Let us take the example of Stanisław Nardelli. His abilities became evident in 1978, when he was diagnosed with cirrhosis and released from hospital in terminal condition. Soon after that he did his first healing. When his fame grew in the early 1980's, he started to organize group sessions. Polish paramedical authors wonder how the therapist, so seriously ill himself, managed to heal others. Nardelli supposed that the energy to heal came from the state which he entered during the sessions, when he balanced between life and death, risking his own life. For him it was a very particular, exceptional state. Polish folk culture treated the patient in a similar way¹⁶.

Similar to traditional **Polish folk healers** from the 19th and early 20th century, **the modern healer is closer to God, saints and transcendence**. Many people, both patients and healers, are still willing to look for some supernatural sources of biofield energy healing, which is reflected in what they say, how they behave and how they perceive the therapist¹⁷. In this way therapists develop a sense of being exceptional, chosen for a mission given to them by the transcendence; they assume charismatic or even extreme messianic attitudes, like for example Clive Harris or Stanisław Nardelli, who treated patients up to the point of their own complete exhaustion. They also try to trace the sacral genealogy of their profession (e.g. back to the healing activity of Jesus Christ) or look for a biofield energy healing patron among Christian saints¹⁸. Like in the case of apostles and saints, the healer is just a go-between here, through whom the transcendent world intervenes with the well-defined order of human reality. The identification of the healer with the religious sphere does not have to be rooted in his biography¹⁹, but may result from the patient's religiousness. In the second case, it leads to generating and spreading **sensational rumours** about **therapists - the miracle makers**. Many patients say that during the session they saw a bright, colourful light surrounding the therapist. From the cultural point of view, emission of a glowing light is reserved for saints. However, in biofield energy healing, such reports are interpreted as seeing the bio-aura²⁰. In the case of some healers, the rumour had it that there was not a single illness that they could not tackle. In some stories, the therapist's touch gave the patient his amputated arm or leg back and disabled people threw away their crutches immediately after the treatment²¹.

Through the close contact with the *sacrum*, the modern healer acquires unusual qualities in the eyes of the suffering people and develops **sensualistic attitudes** in them²². One of those is the urge to touch the healer, which was recorded already in the case of Jesus Christ. The extraordinary powers of the therapist, like those of Jesus and the saints, are transferred to all who have direct contact with him, or at least have stayed with him in the same room. Patients touch the therapist, drink energized water or touch the ill places on their bodies with objects touched by the therapists before, because they believe that this will make them healthy. That is why patients who came to group treatments brought shawls, scarves, petticoats

15 S. Nardelli, dz. cyt., s. 81-82; M. Pomorski, *Tajemnice uzdrawiania. Uzdrawianie bez tajemnic*, Tarnów 1996, s. 109.

16 S. Nardelli, dz. cyt., s. 14-15, 22, 43, 62, 107, 112; S. Budzyński, dz. cyt., s. 55; Z. Libera, *Medycyna ludowa. Chłopski rozsadek czy gminna fantazja?*, Wrocław 1995, s. 48, 58-59, 242.

17 It must be remembered that the personalities of the majority of patients and Polish therapists were formed on the basis of the Jewish-Christian tradition, as well as some remnants of the old magical and religious outlook on life, which may affect their interpretation of the world, including the phenomenon of biofield energy healing. However, the therapist is visited by "both, those who believe and therefore are more willing to accept the salutary activity of the »God's go-between« and those who believe the bioelectric current to be a natural quality of the healer's organism", R. R. Ulman, dz. cyt., s. 161. There are also skeptics, led by curiosity or willing to expose the cheating healer/charlatan. The latter are ordinary people who do not suffer from any serious diseases. The belief in the therapist's powers is particularly strong among his/her regular patients, who cannot be helped by mainstream medicine. In this group we may find the religious perception of the healer. It greatly depends on how religious the patient is and how he/she sees the world.

18 F. Fellmann, dz. cyt., s. 34.

19 The personality of healer Franciszek Fellmann was greatly affected by Virgin Mary of Częstochowa. The fathers from the Order of St Paul asked him to paint a copy of this relic. The opportunity to be so close to the original made an enormous impression on him. He believed it to be a landmark in his life, as regarded his future and vocation. Later he always had one of the copies he had painted with him, during the sessions. This relation between the healer's power and the *sacrum* was also noticed by his patients, who did not see his ability as his own inner power, F. Fellmann, dz. cyt., s. 23-34, 98, 182-191.

20 F. Fellmann, dz. cyt., s. 34, 127, 158, 163-167.

21 S. Budzyński, dz. cyt., s. 55; S. Nardelli, dz. cyt., s. 75. There are also some sensational rumours going round about some contemporary healers, e.g. that a dry stick put into the soil by Zbigniew Nowak developed roots and grew to become a huge tree. Such stories are analogous to many legends about saints, in which trees grew out of walking sticks stuck in the ground (e.g. the legend about St Kinga). On the other hand we also observe references to the biography of the therapist, who is a wood technologist by education, and an amateur gardener, E. Wypych, dz. cyt., s. 53.

22 F. Fellmann, dz. cyt., s. 189.

or nappies with them. Putting them to the skin was supposed to remove catarrh, headaches, joint inflammation, or sore throat, bringing the patient identical sensations as those experienced during a direct contact with the therapist (feeling warmth and a tingling sensation)²³. **Sensualism** manifested by the belief in the possibility of accumulating healing powers in inanimate objects is not characteristic of the patients alone²⁴. Some therapists respond to the sensualistic attitudes and needs of their patients, selling different accessories, allegedly energized. The widest choice of such products was offered by Zbigniew Nowak²⁵.

Similar to the traditional **Polish folk healers** in the 19th century, the modern therapist does not have to be in direct contact with the patients to cure them. Treatment, or even making a diagnosis may take place from a distance, and the patient does not have to be aware of it²⁶. The achievements of modern technology, such as photography, telephone, television, VHS tapes or the Internet, play an important role here. They have replaced the direct contact through the patient's excretions, which was necessary in the case of a folk healer's intervention. Looking closer at these media, we can see that they are connected with the image of the healer or patient²⁷. The variety of Zbigniew Nowak's offer, based on his image, shows that many people believe in the potential and effectiveness of such a treatment applied from a distance. This therapist treats a therapy of this sort as prophylactic or additional, complementary to the direct contact with the patient. Patients see it as a substitute of a direct visit, especially if they have to travel a long way to the healer's surgery, which makes it difficult for them to see him more often²⁸.

An important element of distance diagnosing and therapy is the photograph of the patient, less frequently of the healer²⁹. It is similar in therapies applied through the telephone or telepathically, because the therapist evokes the appearance of the patient. If the therapist does not know what the patient looks like, he/she imagines them and then receives the image of the patient's aura or the dysfunctional chakras, responsible for a given illness. After that, using his/her own hands pointed towards the image, he/she defines the location of energy disturbance and the illnesses, radiating in particular ways. Many healers and their patients also believe in the effectiveness of TV sessions and video recordings³⁰.

In traditional cultures, the healer's contact with the transcendent sphere gave him/her the qualities of a fortune-teller, which enabled him/her to find the source of an illness and the remedies against it. Being able to foresee life or death, he/she knew when fighting with the disease made sense³¹. The modern therapist does not use fortune telling or magic, but can foresee the patient's death thanks to the ability to see the aura. "These are the most horrifying moments in my life. I would like to be mistaken in these cases, but unfortunately I never am!" – wrote Stanisław Nardelli about this experience. In the eyes of the healer, the facial features of the future dead person become unclear, blurred by the matte white of the aura, traversed randomly in all directions by strange white sparks³².

Trying to cure an illness, i.e. fighting the flaw of an ailment which belongs to "the other" world, Polish folk healers

23 Tamże, s. 106-107, 110-112.

24 Paramedical literature tries to prove the existence of this phenomenon and explain its mechanism, S. Budzyński, dz. cyt., s. 57; F. Fellmann, dz. cyt., s. 110.

25 T. Maćkowiak, dz. cyt., s. 86; Z. Nowak, <http://www.bioenergoterapeuta.pl/oferta.html>, <http://www.bioenergoterapeuta.pl/index.html>, 24.10.2004.

26 W. Piątkowski *Spotkania z inną medycyną*, Lublin 1990, s. 23.

27 These may be the repercussions of traditional beliefs, in which a person is strongly identified with their image (shadow, reflection, portrait, photography, etc.). It is reflected in magical practices in a given community, based on a belief that the image is a significant part of the portrayed person or that it contains this person's soul. Therefore, anyone who comes in its possession wins control over the person. He/she may for example devour the person's soul or send misfortunes on it, such as bad spells, illnesses or even death, J. G. Frazer *Złota gałąź*, Warszawa 1962, s. 182-183. In biofield energy healing we observe a kind of reversed situation. Instead of sending death and illnesses, the holder of the image can return the lost health to the patient. However, when the patient possesses the photograph of the therapist, he/she may take some of the therapist's energy, or the energy emanating from the portrait has a positive effect on the people nearby. Although we deal here with a different type of culture, we can still notice strong identification of a visual representation with the person depicted on it. This is primarily because the therapist is able to read the patient's ailments from his/her photograph. This is proved by the way in which the diagnosis is made. Therapists claim that their sensations are the same as when they come into direct contact with patients (warmth or cold emanating from the patient's healthy or ill organ). What is more, they can also see the person's aura, which is by nature emanated by animate organisms, R. R. Ulman, dz. cyt., s. 103; Interview No 1/2010.

28 Z. Nowak, <http://www.bioenergoterapeuta.pl/oferta.html>, 24.10.2004.

29 R. R. Ulman, dz. cyt., s. 103; S. Nardelli, dz. cyt., s. 27, 103; Interview No. 1, s. 16-17.

30 F. Fellmann, dz. cyt., s. 105, 115, 122; R. R. Ulman, dz. cyt., s. 100-103, 105-106; Interview No. 1/2010.

31 The will of the supernatural is not questioned. "When a sick person is to die, all remedies are good for nothing – they won't cure him (...). Hence, a part of the healing ritual is fortune-telling in order to see the patient's fortune" – writes Zbigniew Libera, describing the health behaviour in Polish folk culture in the times of folk healers (19th - 20th century). One can find similar views in biofield energy healing, I. Szymańska, *Stucham głosu stycznych rąk*, [w:] J. Karmański (red.), *Znachorzy, uzdrowiciele, bioenergoterapeuci*, Warszawa 1991, s. 46. Zob. Z. Libera, dz. cyt., s. 23.

32 S. Nardelli, dz. cyt., s. 28-29.

put themselves at risk; they risked the unpleasant physical sensations which accompanied removing the illness, were in danger of contracting it, and in extreme cases even risked their own death. That is why they had to cleanse themselves after each therapeutic session. In biofield energy healing, the opinions regarding this aspect vary. The therapists all claim that diagnostic and therapeutic activities are accompanied by certain physical sensations, sometimes unpleasant, such as pain or a piercing feeling in the same places that have been attacked by the illness in the patient. According to Richard Ulman, these sensations are typical of a healer who is at the early stage of discovering his own abilities. Later, the diagnosis brings less unpleasant sensations of warmth or cold. According to Mieczysław Matejczyk and Joanna Cygan, the sensations depend on the type of illness, which makes it easier to diagnose it correctly³³.

The question of contracting the patient's disease raises controversies. According to Franciszek Fellmann and Stanisław Nardelli, if that was possible they would have gone down with serious diseases of the people they healed a long time ago. On the other hand, Marian Pomorski believes that the danger is real, therefore the therapist should wash his/her hands with running water after each session "in order not to »transfer« pathogenic elements from one patient to another and to cleanse him/herself from the »hurtful elements« he/she collected". This method of purifying oneself was also familiar to folk healers. Therapists also use a mental method, based on visualization³⁴.

Differently from folk healers, therapists do not demand absolute belief in their powers and the success of therapy from their patients. For Stanisław Nardelli, the patient's belief is not necessary; otherwise he could not heal animals, babies or unconscious people. However, he claims, it helps in the process of recovery. Franciszek Fellmann is of a similar opinion. According to Marian Pomorski, the patient's negative thinking may develop the illness and thwart the beneficial effects of the healer's activity³⁵. The belief in the therapist's power is strongly present in patients' attitudes. It is evident in the comments of long-term patients, who, led by undying hope, look for a chance to recover from their illness at the therapist's surgery. There were also cases when patients believed in biofield energy healing so strongly that they abandoned the therapy suggested by their physician, which sometimes led to a tragic end. This may result from identifying the healer with the sacral sphere by some of the patients, as well as from the therapists' clever creation of the *decorum* of the sessions and their own image.

Therapists, similarly to folk healers, occasionally offer to treat illnesses which medicine is unable to cope with. In the late 1980's, when the fear of AIDS was spreading among Polish society, Franciszek Fellmann declared that his TV sessions were an effective remedy against this disease. In 2002, when the social awareness of AIDS and HIV had increased, he stopped mentioning it³⁶. Karol Józwiak claims that he is very successful in treating infertility and so called "women's illnesses", which are at present the subject of many health campaigns. Some healers imply that they are able to cure cancer and present their patients' medical tests results to prove it³⁷. Such claims worry the doctors and raise their protests as they see the negative effects of abandoning conventional treatment. It is worth remembering that it was their determination that forced the authorities in the mid-1980's to take administrative and legal action against persons treating people without a medical license³⁸. In order to avoid conflicts with doctors and the law, some healers stress that patients should never resign from taking medicines or seeing the doctor. They are unwilling to use doctor's terms, such as "treat" or "cure", replacing them with equally positive expressions, e.g. "I helped", "I'm helping"³⁹.

Similar to folk healers, therapists have the sense of their own **exceptionality**, which in their case contradicts the sense of **modesty and humbleness**⁴⁰. On the one hand they claim that every person has bio-therapeutic abilities⁴¹. Properly practiced and developed, they may make you a healer. Many therapists share the opinion of Zbigniew Nowak that "feeling this energy and the ability to use it is a gift, an inborn talent (...). Well, many can play the piano, but there was only one Chopin, one Mozart, one Bach"⁴².

33 R. R. Ulman, dz. cyt., s. 103,119; Interview No. 1, 17/2010.

34 F. Fellmann, dz. cyt., s. 81; S. Nardelli, dz. cyt., s. 75-76; M. Pomorski, dz. cyt., s. 122; Z. Libera, dz. cyt., s. 60, 62-63; Interview No. 17/2010; Interview No. 1/2010; Interview No. 16/2005.

35 S. Nardelli, dz. cyt., s. 19, 35, 110; F. Fellmann, dz. cyt., s. 77; M. Pomorski, dz. cyt., s. 123-124.

36 F. Fellmann, dz. cyt., s. 194, Tenże, http://www.ezofest.most.org.pl/ost_wers_prog.htm, 24.05.2002.

37 Z. Nowak, <http://www.nowak.pl/index.php?symbol=dowody.htm>, 24.10.2004.

38 W. Piątkowski, *Lecznictwo niemedyczne w Polsce w XX wieku*, Kraków 1988, s. 56-57; S. Abramowski, *Dotknięcie. Droga do biomasażu*, Warszawa 1990, s. 8.

39 W. Piątkowski, *Spotkania z inną medycyną*, Lublin 1990, s. 101, 102; S. Nardelli, dz. cyt., s. 11, 177; Z. Nowak, <http://www.bioenergoterapeuta.pl/faq.html>, 24.10.2004.

40 K. Józwiak, *Kodeks Etyki*, <http://www.karol.alpha.pl/kodeks.htm>, 23.10.2004.

41 S. Nardelli, dz. cyt., s. 19-20, 29.

42 Z. Nowak, <http://www.bioenergoterapeuta.pl/pytania.html>, 24.10.2004; S. Budzyński, dz. cyt., s. 12; Interview No. 1/2010.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, despite numerous analogies to the figures of traditional healers, the therapists do very well in the contemporary world, using all the modern inventions to their own benefit: press, television (Video and DVD), commercials, the Internet, or the current law. Thanks to them, they can advertise and sell their products, i.e. themselves and their services, in the world ruled by the laws of marketing. The image of a therapist conveyed via the available media is a **commercial image**, meeting the expectations of potential clients – patients, whom conventional medicine does not give hope any more or support them in suffering and illness. In this situation, all that is left is the belief in a miracle and the therapist as the person who can make this miracle happen. Cleverly built **self-image** together with the *decorum* of the sessions are a perfect response to the patients' frustrations with the Polish health service system, which is permanently facing serious financial problems and corruption.

This image is influenced by social and cultural factors, which modify the attitudes of both the healers and their patients. The factors include the process of socialization, which in both groups is based on Western European and Christian values. They establish the cultural perception and understanding of biofield energy healing, as well as the role and the **therapist's image** in both these groups. As a result, the figure of the modern healer becomes a compromise between the cultures of the West and the Far East, between the known and understandable and that which is new, unclear, vague and exotic for an average Pole, brought up in a different religious system. In this new system exotic elements are removed from their own cultural context and put in another one – often becoming shallow and banal. So transformed, they continue to exist but in a changed form. Next to religious aspects and the charismatic personality of some therapists, they are the main provider of mystical experience in the therapist's surgery. Such experience is hard to find in everyday life and a visit to a therapist can be one of the ways to satisfy this type of social needs. Apart from recovering from an illness, man still desires a magical change, wants to experience something unusual, touch upon a mystery, something that will assure him that miracles do happen, people who make them do exist and that it is possible to step beyond the world of human aberration, even if only for a short while, and to personally "touch the miracle".

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