

On the Significance of "Bodymind" Visioning for the Profession and for the Planet



By Barnaby B. Barratt, PhD, DHS

Having accepted her kind invitation to offer the Thursday Keynote at the 2016 USABP Conference, I pondered how to respond to President Beth Haessig's request that I say something that will help bodymind psychotherapists and somatic healers to comprehend, more broadly and more deeply than some do, the crucial importance of their work, and the visions that it might represent. That is, going beyond the healing offered to individuals and small groups who benefit from our professional practices, what is the more general, historical and cultural significance of the "bodymind" movement? Although I have not yet planned my talk, I am considering a free-wheeling exploration of the ways in which healing must address—directly or indirectly, somatically and spiritually—the distinctive human capacity for hatred.

In Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, Menenius Agrippa asks, *Who(m) does the wolf love?* In the somewhat confusing dialogue with Sicinius Velutus and Junius Brutus that ensues, the beloved is clearly identified.

It is the hungry wolf that loves the lamb. As Stanley Cavell (1983) and others have discussed, this implies an intriguing, if not disturbing, thesis on "love", but surely it is also indirectly a riff on hatred.



The Tragedy of Coriolanus:

Actus Primus. Scæna Prima.

The wolf certainly *needs* what the lamb possesses—nourishment. But arguably "love" in the human sense might mean more than this sort of anaclysis, in which we "love" only that which we need to conquer. Here, Shakespeare dallies with ambiguities. Menenius proceeds to equate the wolf with the "hungry plebians" who would "devour" the noble (and well fed) Coriolanus. However, starving peoples, whom Sicinius refers to as "beasts," rarely "love" those of their fellow humans who feed extravagantly off their labors. In such social arrangements, hatred is prevalent. I witness this tragic dimension daily.

I live in Africa, where terrified and envious hatred against the plundering of the rich, against the visible extravagances of North Atlantic peoples, against men who rape, and against adults who abuse the young and the weak, is on the surface of everyday life—unsanitized by Hollywood pablum and the unctuous platitudes of commercialized media. In this regard, the writings of Franz Fanon have not lost their relevance. Yet, if "love" in the human sense does not seem the apt term for that which drives the voracious wolf, neither surely does "hatred." Arguably, animals may eat each other, but do not hate each other. Hatred would seem to be one of our species' signatures. Taking pleasure in hating is, as William Hazlitt

suggested in his 1823 essay, a specifically, and perhaps exclusively, human characteristic. So when, to give just one example, pompous politicians condemn terrorist acts as "inhuman," one might aptly contradict, borrowing from Friedrich Nietzsche, "no, human, all too human."

There are many roots to this human proclivity, which flourish despite the crystalline awareness of so many of this species that our spiritual calling is to live life in *Love*, not "love" characterized by possessiveness and the envious greediness we direct toward the objects of our attachment, people and things to whom we are attached, but *Love* as the mysterious energy of the universe, the hierurgical impulse that pervades all that is and is not. The languages of different cultural traditions diverge, but universal wisdom converges—as Tenzin Gyatso, our present Dalai Lama, never tires of insisting—on the supreme spirit of compassion, that is, *Love*. What keeps us out of *Love*? This is not the place for an exegesis on the origins and the perpetuation of hatred; I am convinced that one profound root of our capacity to take pleasure in hating the "other" (and, on occasion, in hating our "self") is our alienation from the immediate sensuality of our experiential embodiment and thence from the very source of our spiritual being.

Although I have lived and traveled in India, Tibet, China, Japan, Thailand and Laos, I write as a European who resided for over thirty years in the USA and who has now made South Africa his home. From these experiences, it is clear to me that, as I wrote in *Liberating Eros*, such alienation from our sensuality is not only especially endemic in the hegemonic cultures of the North Atlantic nexus — that geopolitical space that Enrique Dussel describes as the global "center"— but in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, it is often rationalized as a key to the achievement of the very inspiration of Love, freedom and joy, from which it actually severs us. Moreover, it is alleged to be crucial to socioeconomic "progress" (to survive and thrive in the world of contemporary capitalism forecloses the possibility of a balanced life in which we listen to the voices of the natural world, including those of our embodied experience).

In the contemporary crises faced by humanity, it seems that ratiocination has revealed its limits (one might say that rationality has almost exhausted itself, if that were not to risk suggesting that we must court irrationality). This is surely a culmination of the modern era that Sigmund Freud might have and perhaps did anticipate. Pure rationality is neither attainable nor desirable but leads to delusions of mastery, in which the voice of that which is "arational" or non-rational within us is repressed. It is surely evident that, as Georg Hegel articulated in his 1807 account of the master/slave dialectic, the goal of mastery, epitomized in the cultural attributes fostered by a globalized socioeconomic system based on accumulation and expansionism (as well as the liberty of those who have to profit from the surplus labors of those who have not) is terminal and ultimately suicidal. Today, genocide and ecocide are all around us. We are, in Slavoj Žižek's catchphrase, "living in the end times." Yet the norms of



"rationality" inform us that there is no alternative to this system that the dream of socialism, for example, has failed. But there is no choice but to choose something other than the current world order. Despite this insight, we continue to avoid facing the reality that *there has to be a different vision of humanity* from that of globalized capitalism (which, by its very structure, causes such horrendous disparities in material wellbeing), from that of the burgeoning of evangelical fundamentalisms and religious intolerance, from that which impels our species toward planetary destruction, and from that which foments the oppression of women, children and minorities. There has to be a vision that prioritizes the ethicality of otherness over those precepts that license the domination, conquest and possession of whatever is other and otherwise.

Central to such a vision is dissent from the prevailing North Atlantic culture that, despite evidence to the contrary, treats the body as other than the mind— a fundamental act of objectification and

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alienation. Such a culture reifies our embodied experience denying, suppressing and repressing its "voice." Our embodiment becomes not the vehicle of our spiritual being, but a "thing" to be dominated and commodified. Thus, the media offers us the "body" as an instrument in the marketplace of fashion and athletics; medicine offers us the "body" as a complex of anatomical structures and physiological functions that just happens to operate in a pre-cadaveric state; and socioeconomics offers us the "body" as a unit of labor, a cog in the machinations of the military-industrial complex (see my 2010 text).

Central to such dissent is the cultivation of radical processes of listening to all that appears profoundly other and otherwise than the circuitous complacency that typically characterizes human self-consciousness— the apparent imperative for our egotism to affirm itself. The possibility of listening to the voices of otherness— the stifled voices of minorities, the oppressed voices of those who are forcibly impoverished and disenfranchised, the condemned voices of the natural world— can thus be seen as essential to our human future. This is perhaps a Levinasian, feminist, deconstructive, and ultimately "leftist" vision. In so many ways, it begins with our listening to that which is within, but which we so often treat as other—the enigmatic and erotic messages of our embodied experience. This is like listening to the repressed unconscious that is unrepresentable but vivaciously active within us, or what Christopher Bollas calls the "unthought known," which we so often keep stifled within us (see my 2013 and forthcoming texts).

Surely it is only from such listening practices— from the very insights and the

lively momentum accrued in the consulting rooms of somatic psychologists and bodymind healers—that radically different sorts of human community can evolve. These might even be communities in which human relations were not grounded on the arrangements of domination and exploitation but communities in which dreams may be shared— communities grounded on something very like Love.

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