

**It's Beyond Words** A series of talks and groups presented by Russell Rose and Myriad

**A Brief History of the Psychological Body.**

I intend today to take you on  
a brief journey through history

Why look into history?

Because what happens in our own  
individual developmental process  
happens first in history.

We weren't, for example, in the least inclined towards *a separate sense of self* until the notion had been, as it were, invented by the species.

It emerged in the species.  
Then it emerged in individuals.  
Then it was conceptualised.

I like this succinct quote from the Jungian Analyst, Erich Neumann in 'The origins and history of consciousness.' 1954; which I 98% agree with.

*“The individual has in his own life  
to follow the road that humanity has trod before him...”*



Why only a 98% agreement?

Because in history there are the occasional trail-blazers, those who are both treading in the footprints of those who preceded them but who are also introducing something new to culture, providing new footsteps for the rest of us to follow.

Sometimes these people are inclined to the divine,  
such as Prophet Mohammed, Jesus of Nazareth, Buddha.

Some stretch the outer edges of collective evolution, such as Jean Gebser, Sri Aurobindo, Albert and Mileva Einstein, Krishnamurti, C.G.Jung, David Bohm, Wilhelm Reich, and so on; establishing a new potential.

There are many others though who, whilst not necessarily bringing something new to thought, manage to crystallise an innovation or a conceptualisation into the cultural lexicon.

Imagine for a moment Mary Wollstonecraft, who in 1792 wrote one of the first books celebrating equal rights for women.

Mary Wollstonecraft was also the mother of Mary Shelley, who wrote the Gothic Sci Fi Horror Story '*Frankenstein*'; about a clever scientist who, for his own vanity, made a man out of fragmented body-parts, and then abandoned him, identity-less, and watched him become a monster of homicidal resentment.

Mary Shelley was married to Percy Shelly, one of the more famous of the Romantic Poets, for whom emotion, sensation, hedonism and love were the most celebrated of human characteristics. A man for whom the psychological-body was deeply significant.



So: Mary Wollstonecraft champions the rights of women, births a girl who will come to recognise the perils of a body-fragmented man, and who will herself love and marry a man who celebrates the psychological-body.

Anyway...back to the moment:

My focus will be mostly euro-centric today. Partly because this is the history and the philosophy that I'm more qualified to talk about, and partly because it is largely from this well-spring, these dark alleys, this quicksand, and these blind-spots that the psychological models that most of us practice have emerged from.

The evolution of the  
the psychological-body

Let's go back to the beginning:  
with what I mean by The Psychological Body.

The body and mind are entirely inter-related, mutually-informative, and mutually-dependent with the formation, expression, inhibition, adaptation and dynamic development of the psyche.

Thoughts, cognitive reflections, and images.

Feelings, sensations, emotions, and body-language.

Embedded patterns of muscular tension and collapse.

Respiration, hormones, heartbeat and circulatory system.

Guts, intuition, energetic presence, tone, prosody, and so on.

The psyche can only really be understood,  
if we begin by understanding it holistically.



## If you doubt this...

Imagine that in this very moment someone has crept up behind you and screamed in your ear.

All of the above-mentioned mechanisms and systems will activate:

- In the initial startle-reflex.
- In any attempt at social-mediation.
- In initiating a fight, flight, or freeze response.
- In returning your system to its normal functioning equilibrium.
- In integrating the experience.
- And in any traumatised, unprocessed memory of the experience.

The entire body-mind system is involved in feeling, responding, unwinding and integrating. Yet most of us give far more weight to our cognitive and reflective functioning than to any other aspect of our psyche.

We continue to privilege thought over feeling, the abstract conceptions of the narrative-mind over the experience of the feeling-body; and can even imagine that they are somehow entirely distinct.

Our minds and bodies have become *split* in our consciousness.

We split our sense of our selves subjectively because we have already done so culturally; and we do of course, as humans, have a huge tendency to split. Not only our heads from our bodies, our mind from our emotions:

We split countries, cultures, and each other, routinely citing our very few distinctions over our very many similarities. For example: Did you know that these languages all share a common root:

Greek, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, German, Rumanian, Celtic, Irish Gaelic, Scottish Gaelic, Welsh, Breton, English, Dutch, Icelandic, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Yiddish, Lithuanian, Latvian, Polish, Slovak, Czech, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Serbo-Croatian, Ukrainian, Russian, Albanian, Armenian, Iranian, Persian, Kurdish, Sanskrit, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Punjabi, Gujarati, Assamese, Romany.

They all originated from the Proto Indo-European people of the modern-day Ukraine and Southern Russia, and the split probably began several thousand years BC.



Once unified, consider how split we have now all become.

An early birth of splitting might be seen in the ancient theory of *atomism*, the belief that the universe is made up of individual atoms that exist in an empty void, and bang around and clump together to make everything.

No longer is the universe enchanted, vitalised, and unified;  
but composed only of distinct bits of matter  
in a soul-less, spirit-less emptiness.

It's the birth of materialism and of reductionism, and the birth of a fragmented understanding of the universe.

And of course, if we understand the universe by fragmenting it then inevitably so must we do with each other *and* with the human psyche.

In Europe this theory began around the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, perhaps with Leucippus, though certainly moving through Democritus and Epicurus.

Uddalaki Aruni, a Hindu Vedic sage preceded them though with this wonderfully intuitive quote from the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC:

*"particles too small to be seen mass together,  
into the substances and objects of experience".*



What an extraordinary example of intuition this is.

Although science might be understood as being the enemy and antithesis of intuition, in fact many scientific leaps begin with it.

Something is often sensed before it is known  
and it is often sensed to be true before it can be proved.

And, usefully for this presentation,  
intuition emerges from the body.

We have a gut instinct, which provides for us information whose route to our senses might be unknown to our cognitive minds.

It's a surprise to many that the belly has a nervous system,  
and one that operates separately from the CNS.

This is The Enteric Nervous System.

The Vagus nerve connects the belly and the brain,  
and *far* more information flows upwards than downwards.



The belly informs the brain,  
not so much the other way round.

# The history of the body

Let's step further back in time, so that we might begin to imagine the emergence of the body in psychological awareness.

And it is with our imaginations that we must begin,  
because the story of the psychological-body  
pre-dates any consciousness of it whatsoever.

Once upon a time  
we were a herd animal.

We were all body, but no mind;  
survival corporeal reflexes  
and not an awful lot more.

Noses, ears,  
snuffling mouths, and  
procreative instincts.

We sniffed and listened and ate and copulated.



The most primitive form of Freud's ID, we were **pre-conscious** bodies.  
Nothing but body, and no knowledge at all that this is what we were.

Our first knowledge of our selves, however thin,  
is represented by early cave-art.

Just imagine for a moment what this means:

For some totally unknown reason the human being,  
distinct from all other creatures, suddenly begins to paint.

Consider this quote:

*“How can a life-form evolved to survive and reproduce, suddenly interrupt the automatic drift of reflex and instinct, to produce meaningful images in pictures, songs, sculpture, poetry, and dance?”*

*Art was an event...in the end art may not be our invention at all...  
Picasso got it wrong: the early humans didn't invent art. Art invented humanity.”*

**J.F.Martel: ‘Reclaiming Art in the Age of Artifice.’ 2015**

Cave art began around 64,000 years ago, so far as is currently known, and initially was simple hand-prints that are believed to be have been mostly made by women.







This is the first seedling emergence of self, right here; as we need, at least to some slight extent, be capable of seeing our selves as an object in our own awareness if we are to purposefully re-present ourselves in pigment.



Why the hands? The hand is the easiest part of the body to bring in front of the eyes in wonderment and fascination, and the easiest of course to print with.



It's the hand too that scrapes food from the ground, from bushes and plants and trees. It's the hand that touches, and carries the child along with the gathered food.





It's the hand that first fascinates the infant, perhaps initially a magical emanation, but then he finds that if he bites it, it hurts; that the hand is him.

He begins to exist in His own awareness, and this emerging sense of separation (and therefore the potential for relationship) is emphasised by his new capacity to explore *the other* and to explore objects with these magical hands.

## Take a Moment:

And spend this moment or two considering your own hands. Look at them. Touch them. Sense them. How do your hands express who and how you are in this world? What is their character?

Do they help, heal, grab, grasp, touch, caress, snatch, hold on, reach out? Are they confident, reticent, anxious, alive or hesitant? Do they take, give, or both?

Who are your hands? And how would you like them to be?

# The Carrier-Bag Theory

A brief aside

Elizabeth Fisher, in '*Women's Creation: sexual evolution and the shaping of society.*' (1979), proposes that the first invention was not the spear, as some later cave-paintings might suggest, but in fact a carrier-bag; in the absence of which the gatherers would have to (inefficiently) return to the cave every time their hands were full.



Yet there are no obvious known examples of the carrier-bag being represented in early cave-art, and we might imagine that the explanation for this absence is rooted in gender.

The spear is an obvious phallic symbol, just as the carrier-bag can be understood to represent the womb; and this suggests pretty strongly that the majority of later cave paintings were probably done by men.

“Look at me. I’ve got a massive spear.”

I shall spare us graphic archaic images of the celebrated phallus.

Suffice to say that it would appear that then, as now, the phallus can be wielded and presented with a pride whose sense of magnificence is not necessarily shared by observers.

I feel quite amused by the image of a group of cave-women rolling their eyes tolerantly as their men continue to celebrate the phallic spear and its occasional offerings whilst neglecting to notice that it is the quieter endeavour of the women and their carrier-bags that is providing the bulk of the food.

The absence of mouths

In a lot of very early cave-art, we can notice the absence of mouths, and this clearly indicates that language wasn't yet of great significance. Eating obviously would have been, but eating is of course rooted in pre-conscious reflex, as are the actions of its counterpart at the other end of the torso.

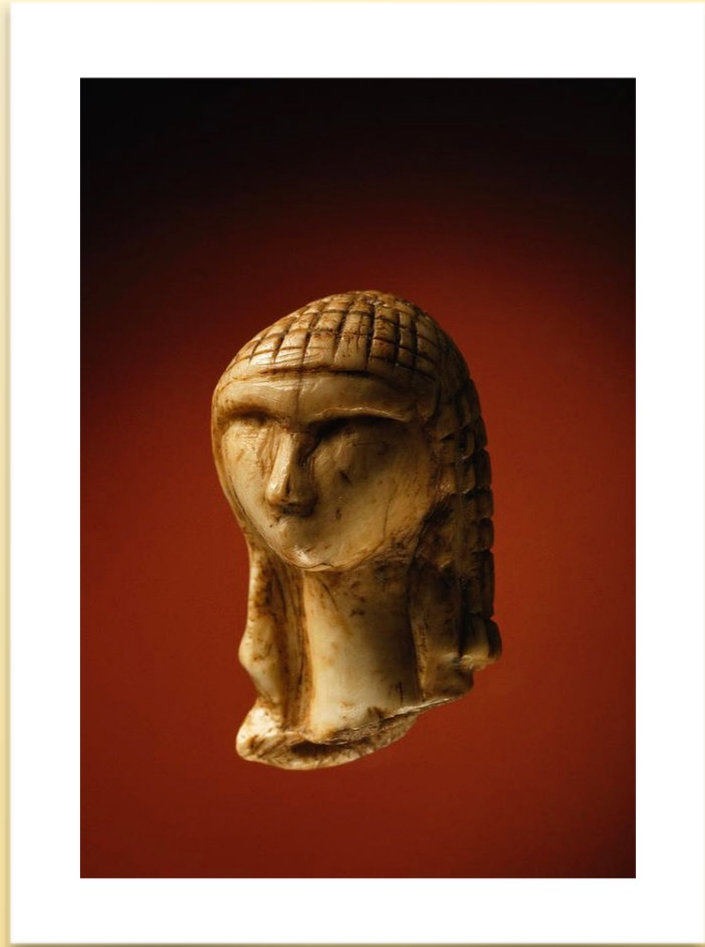


And we don't, after all, have very many cave-paintings that celebrate the bottom end of the alimentary canal.

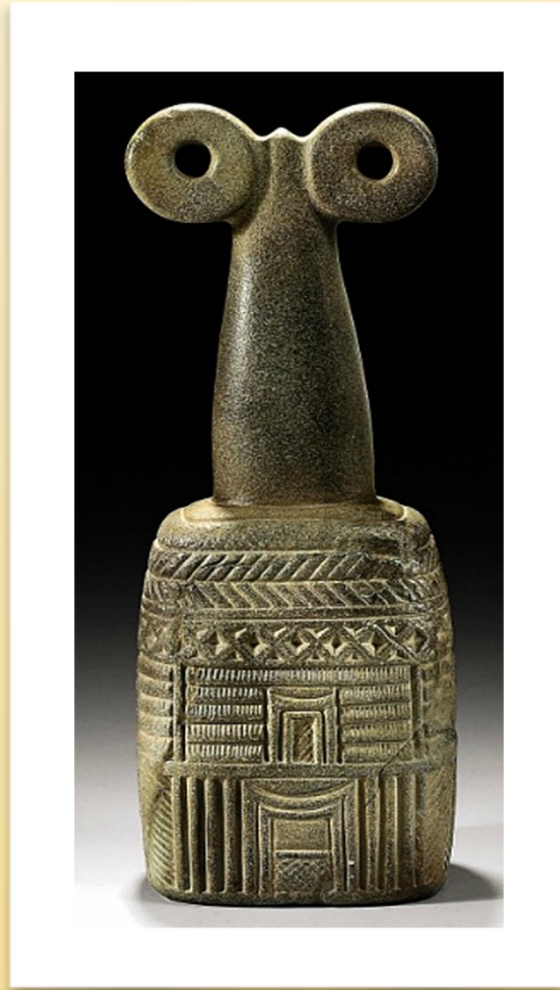
Probably for the best.



## **2: WESTERN AUSTRALIA**



**3: FRANCE**



**4: SUMERIA**



**5: SYRIA**

I'm fascinated by this next piece





**WESTERN AUSTRALIA**





Each physical form has little if any separate space. They're conjoined.

**WESTERN AUSTRALIA**



The only (virtual) individual in this story is the central figure.

**WESTERN AUSTRALIA**





There's an aura about the head, and the eyes are black and prominent, as though this person sees so much more.

**WESTERN AUSTRALIA**



I wonder if the aura suggests a shaman, which most tribes would have had; a bridge between the known and the spiritual worlds. Almost certainly, I would guess, this is the artist.

**WESTERN AUSTRALIA**





This is the only character with a nose, and no-one has a mouth

**WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

The arrival of mouths brought the arrival of  
song, language, and story-telling:

and mouths brought about the birth of myth.

From the Greek, the word *mythology* stems etymologically from *mythos*, which means the story of the people, and *logos*, which means reason or speech: *the spoken story of the people*. However, the root of *mythos*, *mu*, comes also to form words such as mute, evoking the polarity of silence, the capacity for oral tradition alongside the capacity for the inward contemplation of soul from which the imprint of myth might emerge. This is crucial, as it is the silent contemplation that connects to the imprints of the great stories of existence, the patterns that have become archetypes, the dreams of the people that, with the advent of the mouth, would become stories told and re-told.



# Take a Moment

Become aware of your mouth, and contemplate its purpose in your life, how it reveals your character to the world; and consider how it is that you sit in silent contemplation and how it is that you tell your stories of yourself.

Are you someone to brag, to seek sympathy and pity, to compare yourself favourably or unfavourably, to apologise for your existence or to take extra space in the world around you, to exaggerate?

Take a moment to sense your entire self through how it is that you are your mouth.

Moving Forward at Speed

The Ancient Egyptians of a few thousand years BC painted with far more sophistication, but yet we can see that, although separation is recognized, nevertheless everyone looks more or less similar.

They seem separate but not especially distinct.









Character is not revealed by the faces, not emotion nor intention. They seem to me to be in a dream.



The herd has certainly become a community, but not yet a community of distinct individuals.

Psychological individuality has still not arrived.





Interestingly, all but the mummified people have their left foot forward, and this is entirely typical in Ancient Egyptian art and sculpture. Opinions differ, but prevailing is the belief either that the left foot represents the position of the heart on the left of the body and/or that the left foot is trampling the demons.

By leading with the heart  
do we trample our demons?

Probably not reliably, but it sounds good.





The feet are now significant in awareness, as is testified by the depiction of the arch, rendering a considered and accurate presentation of the foot.







The feet are of course deeply significant in the development of the separate psyche, as it is the feet that allow the explorative toddler to cross the mountainous range of the living room alone and wobbling, in the first strides of individuation.

Feet connect us to the earth, spinning  
at the equator at over 1000 mph;  
and to an earth that is spinning  
around the sun at 67000 mph.

Feet can enable a strut, a stomp, a stamp, a stride, a glide.  
They can put their best foot forward, dig in their heels,  
take on the space before them as a colonising warrior,  
or apologise with every unworthy and intrusive footprint.



# Take another moment

This time connect to your own feet. Feel the ground underneath them. Notice the simple fact that the rest of your body extends from your feet, seeking then an alignment with gravity.

Do you feel the ground? Do you stand strong, apologetic, absent? Long strides, short strides? Confident or insecure? Etc. Who are you in your feet?

If It's true that by leading with the heart we trample our demons,  
then the next guest in this story is surely free of hers.

# The Poetry of Sappho

Sappho (6<sup>th</sup> Century BC) was the most famous of the Greek lyric poets, and from her words we can clearly see the seedling emergence of the psychological-body, as she links her emotions to the soma repetitively.

*“That man appears to me to equal the gods who sits before you, and by your side hears your sweet speech and your charming laughter which has put wings on the heart in my breast. When I look at you but once, my speech ceases to obey me. My tongue is broken, a subtle fire creeps under my skin, my eyes see nothing, and my ears begin to ring. Sweat pours down over my limbs, a trembling seizes me from head to toe, I am paler than grass, and I appear close to death. But I can endure all.”*

However, Sappho, as with most of the lyric poets also tends towards the submission that everything that she feels is due to the persuasion of the Gods (rather as did the characters of Homer who preceded her) so we might consider this to be, whilst a spiritual affiliation, unfortunately a subjective disembodiment. It is her role to *endure* what is placed into her life and her body by The Gods.

She has the beginnings of a psychological body,  
but she's not entirely certain that it's hers.

On the other hand, the opening line compares a man favourably with Gods, a highly suggestive and unusual statement, indicating the beginnings of the descent from the polytheistic heavens of Olympus, towards the body of human-kind.



It's been noted from Socrates onwards that the Greek Gods could be inclined to live lives that would be considered unvirtuous and unacceptable in earthly humans; and we might imagine that these Gods were bestowed with the behaviours and attitudes that were the secret but banished wish of a people who were seeking an increasingly civilised world. Or at least the illusion of one.

A collective and projected disembodiment of the shadow-self.

The Gods are given the body, freeing the mind to be explored by the extraordinary philosophical tradition that was already beginning to emerge.

And the bodies of the Gods were usually bestowed with magnificence.

Here are a couple more examples, this time from Archilochus, which suggest the emergence of the individual ego, but again emphasise the un-contestable Gods.

*“Wretched I lie, unsouled by desire, pierced through my bones with harsh pangs, by the will of the Gods.”*

And here he speaks of the divinely imposed life  
that must (again) be endured:



*“Heart, my heart, convulsed with helpless troubles, rise up, defend yourself against the foe, meet them with truculent breast. With firm stance receive the enemy’s onslaught, and neither rejoice openly if the victory is yours, nor crouch at home and wail if you lose. But when life brings joy, rejoice, and when it brings suffering, do not grieve overmuch. Understand the rhythm of life which controls man.”*

And in a final contribution by Archilochus, we perhaps see the first glimpse of a condemnation of narcissism; narcissism being, of course, the pathological deficit of the individualism that would begin to emerge quite clearly in Classical Greece.

*“I do not like a tall general, striding forth on his long legs; who prides himself on his locks, and shaves his chin like a fop. Let him be a small man, perhaps even bow-legged, as long as he stands firm on his feet, full of heart.”*

It would seem that by this era *the heart* especially had emerged into psychological awareness, as its character and attributes are routinely cited.

The heart is an interesting organ for a Body Psychotherapist because, although there remains a cultural detachment from the psychological-body, nevertheless the heart has long been commonly associated with the tribulations and agonies of love.

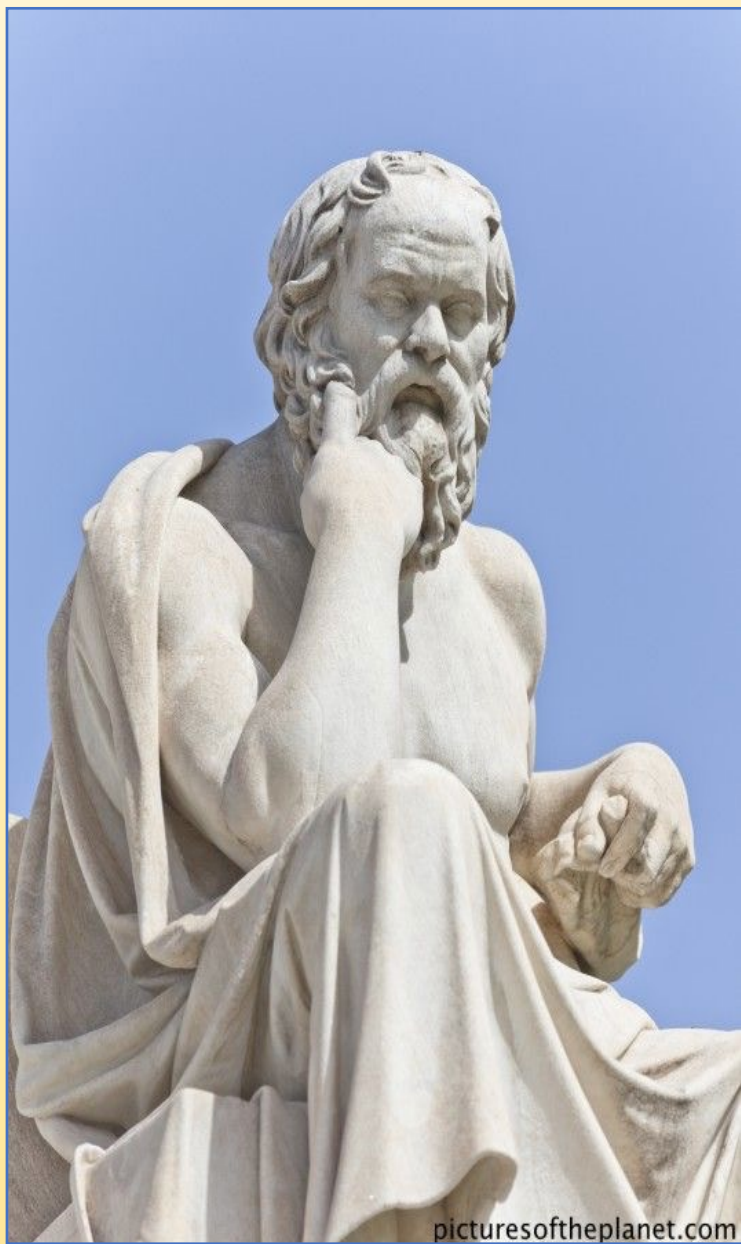
# Take another moment

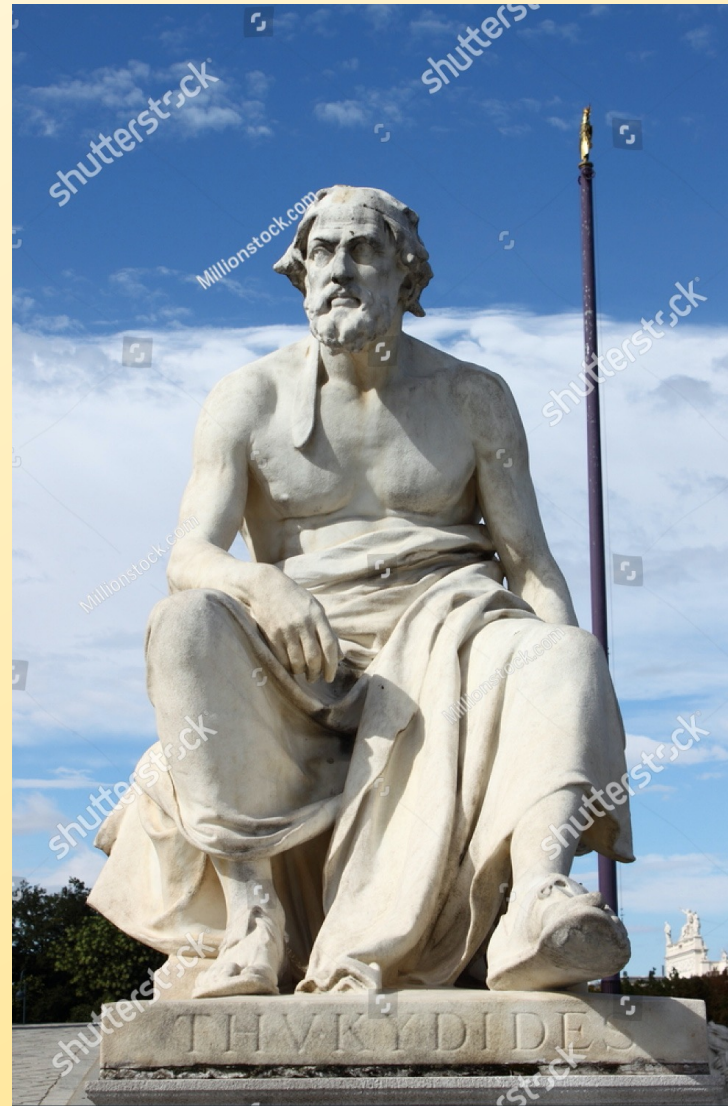
Spend a moment with your own heart. Feel its beat and hear its story. How able is your heart to love and be loved? Does it tend to reach out or stand back, hide away or sell its soul too easily? Does it carry pain and trepidation from times long gone by? What's its story, and what's its character?

# Classical Greece



The statues of Classical Greece increasingly revealed a sense of the individual. The forms were often idealized in their magnificence, resembling their Gods, sometimes unrealistic in that respect, but nevertheless the individuality of features is emerging.





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It's worth noting that the forehead is becoming revealed, typical of the sculpture of this time, and we might imagine that it is the capacity for rational thought that is being celebrated.

And Classical Greece was of course famous for its celebration of philosophy and early science, for the birth of so many ideas that remain potent today.

The suffering body

For quite some time, certainly in the European culture that would come eventually to fuel commonly known psychological models, the body suffered at the hands of God; or at least at the hands of those who considered themselves his messengers.



Jesus of Nazareth, the son of God for some and a prophet for others, had his body notoriously brutalised; his suffering celebrated thence-on as a sacrifice on behalf of humanity.

Some faithful would flagellate to rid their body of sinful feelings, lusts and desires; monks ascetically denied themselves; and various Inquisitions attacked the living body in horrifying ways as a punishment for any deviation from established faithful expression.

The body it seems was despised as the cultural attention rose upwards towards the heavens, away from the paganistic body, perhaps in the belief that the experiences of the flesh were a distraction from the journey of the soul.

For the Neo-Platonists, who were a source of inspiration to The Church, the body was *material form* at the bottom of a transcendent hierarchy that led ultimately to The One, The Divine Source. God.

For certain, the Catholic Church didn't want the populace to find the spirit in the experiences of flesh and earthly life, but in the transcendence into heaven that the church had responsibility and recompense for mediating.

It's worth noting that the Christian-spiritual became transcendent, moving upwards towards an ultimate divinity, and this perhaps speaks of the influence of the masculine; whereas a feminine spirituality can be understood as more immanent, inherent in nature, not hierarchically conceived but more womb-like and containing.

The early Christian churches were in the home, and it is likely therefore that many early Christian priests would have been women, as the home was their domain. But the masculine would come soon to dominate, with their hierarchies, spirals, and the positioning of one Mary as immaculate and pure, and the other Mary as a prostitute; an allegation for which there is not a shred of evidence.



Bodies suffered, but perhaps weren't formally dissociated until the arrival of Rene Descartes (1596-1650), who grievously wounded the psychological body with his famous remark:

*“I think therefore I am.”*

**Discourse on Method. 1637**

This was taken to discount or at least relegate all other indications of vitality: sensations, emotions and intuitions. To discount, in short, *the body*.

The following quotes suggests strongly that this aspect of Descartes' philosophy was built from his own physio-psychological experience:

*“I am, then, in the strict sense, only a thing that thinks.”*

**Meditation on first philosophy. 1641**

*“It is certain that I (that is, my mind, by which I am what I am) is entirely and truly distinct from my body, and may exist without it.”*

**Discourse on the Method. 1637**

*“I can make a probable conjecture that the body exists. But this is only a probability.”*

**Meditations 2. 1641**

As a footnote, it's interesting that in the sixth century BC, Parmenides uttered something similar to "I think, therefore I am." He said:

"Being and thinking are one and the same thing."



At first glance, we might imagine the sentiments of Parmenides and then of Descartes over 2000 years later to be essentially identical. However, there is a significant difference:

Parmenides is being ontological. He is referring to the nature of existence, whereas Descartes pointedly uses the first-person:

“I think, therefore I am.”

Perhaps Descartes *intended* that his own subjective experience be imagined as being that of the species; or else it was simply taken that way.

Either way, both quotes certainly emphasise the cultural movement towards privileging the cognitive over the emotional, the thought over the felt, the mind over the body.

Descartes understood the body to be a simple vehicle for the mind, essentially a machine; which is also how he understood the universe: a machine that has been made by God, the machinist.

Machinery was popular and exciting in that day, and was of course a very accessible way with which to simplify an understanding of life. It's a machine, it's split into little conjoined parts, it's predictable, damageable but fixable.

And we might imagine that Descartes' mind was exactly this machine, that he really didn't feel much in his body at all; and it's amazing to consider that such an incredibly pervasive theoretical position regarding the psyche can emanate from we would today think of as *traumatized thinking*.

So: culturally, we made the body suffer, then turned it into a machine.



# Take another Moment

In what ways do you make your own body suffer?

- Perhaps through indulgence.
- Perhaps through abstinence.
- Perhaps through abuse.
- Perhaps through neglect.

# The Enlightenment

The European enlightenment of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries emphasized reason and rationale, mentality, and the capacity of something to be measured or weighed as an indication of its existential validity.

Power was wrestled from the monarchy and from the church, and given to the rational brain.

Notoriously, of course, and despite the cries for equality and justice, those brains that disagreed risked being removed with a guillotine;

a categorical literalisation of the body-mind split.

One of the great celebrated minds of the Enlightenment was Isaac Newton's, whose mathematical elaboration of the universe in 1687 lasted unchallenged really until Einstein's *relativity* of the twentieth century.

Newton is highly celebrated as a cerebral genius, of course, but he was also an alchemist, fascinated by the belief in a primary unifying religion, indeed a highly devout religious man himself who mathematically predicted the birth of mankind, the return of Jesus, and the end of the world, and was himself highly emotional, prone to struggle, suffering, paranoia, and breakdown.



In the spirit of *splitting*, we forgot most of this. Somehow we managed to celebrate his exceptional cognitive mind whilst imagining that he wasn't deeply guided in his reasoning by the emotion and spirit that beset and often defined him.

Science at that time celebrated empirical evidence and positivistic exactness, and so was inclined to discount anything immeasurable, indefinable, or emotional.

Why though would we do this? Why would we imagine that a person is divided into distinct parts and that this is the way in which a person might be understood?

The answer may lie in neurological evolution.

Right-brain, Left-brain

In his stunning book, 'The Master and his Emissary', Iain McGilchrist tracks cultural change over the millennia with reference to shifts in hemispheric brain function.

The right-hemisphere tends towards context rather than detail, towards timelessness, plurality, unstructured language, systems, and towards the felt senses of the body.

Whereas the left-hemisphere is inclined to detail, structure, precision, reductionism, and dominance; to break things down, to fragment and analyse the parts with an inherent assumption that this will lead to a greater understanding of the whole.

For the left-hemisphere, the truth is the sum of its parts, whereas for the right-hemisphere the truth is greater than the sum of its parts.



For the left, we understand the whole by understanding its parts.  
For the right, we understand the parts by understanding the whole

It seems likely at this time  
that the left-hemispheric brain  
was beginning to culturally dominate.

We can see that this cultural domination began to set itself in stone, in Europe, around about the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, as it was about this time that writing demonstrated clear left-hemispheric preference.

The right-hemisphere prefers writing to be vertical on the page, while the left-hemisphere prefers it to be horizontal. And if the right-hemisphere is to be forced into horizontal writing, then it would prefer it to be written from right to left; whereas the left-hemisphere would prefer it to be written from left to right.

Having for a period been written as the ox-ploughs (boustrophedon), from left to right, then right to left, and so on, by the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC the left-hemisphere had fully achieved its left-to-right-horizontal-goal.

This early left-hemispheric cultural domination returned in force in the 16th and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and, it might be argued, has maintained its cultural domination in Europe ever since.

As we would come to discover in the world of psychology, even the affirmations of neuroscience and physics have not been enough to fully dislodge the left-hemispheric assumptions about psychological process; most apparently, the medical-model positioning that entirely separates expert and patient, as well as mind, body and soul, and remains so ingrained in many of us despite clear evidence that this sectorial splitting is a gross abstraction.

# The Industrial Revolution

The Enlightenment, as we've noted, focused on reason and rationale, and the Industrial Revolution's focus upon machinery, technology, and the criss-crossing of the planet with the telegraph, the railroad and electricity, speaks clearly of the Left Hemisphere's greatest structural fantasy.

The body increasingly became a tool for progress,  
its needs and feelings irrelevant,  
its capacity to partake in back-breaking work  
of sole significance.



In the birth of the factory we have an example  
of the merging of man and machine.

A proto-cyborg.

This of course somewhat suited the needs of capitalism, which would tend towards a disinterest in the body's inclination to access depth of experience, in preference for its capacity for hard labour.

# Take another moment

Consider to what extent you treat your body as a simple vehicle for your mind, a useful tool that you must keep serviced and polished for the various daily tasks; that you carry around as an adornment; or that you ignore into dilapidation and devitalisation.

# The Romantic Poets

These guys attempted a fight-back in the nineteenth century, a protest against the disembodiment of The Enlightenment. They were full of the emotion, imagination, rebellion and passion that they wholeheartedly celebrated: with poetry, culture, alcohol, opium, and often with an attitude of free-love that was, to be fair, *actually* about love as well as sex.

They were a cultural attempt to re-integrate  
the right hemisphere with the left.

The Romantic Poets remind me of the spirit of the Lyric Poets of Ancient Greece; overwhelmed by the poetry of their sensation, though in contrast often devoutly atheist.



Whereas science took hold of the mental faculties at the expense of the body, a number of the protesting Romantics took hold of the body at the expense of the spirit.

Their atheism perhaps prolonged their existential suffering, of course. To cynically see through the manipulations and lies of the church is one thing, but to have no sense of anything transcendent might thereby make life feel to be an utterly pointless experience.

Interestingly, a few of them died very young.

# Psychosomatics

Let me make a brief reference to a relatively unknown German Physician, called Johann Christian August Heinroth (1773-1843).

Although he did unfortunately note a causal link between sinfulness and mental illness, which I think probably remains debateable, he was also the first to mention the term 'psychosomatics'; recognising the psychological link between the body and the mind.

However, this taste of holism inevitably had to run the gauntlet of Rational Modernism's inclination towards dualism and still today there is very much a tendency to use the term 'psychosomatic' dismissively; as a derision.

It's not a *real* condition. It's *psychosomatic*:  
the mind imagining symptoms that *feel* real but aren't real really.



This is extraordinary:

The experience of a physical symptom is discounted because the established medical-roadmap is unable to define or clarify its path of expression.

And, crucially:

Rather than imagining that the established medical road-map might need re-writing, instead the symptom itself is pathologized. It's *only* psychosomatic. It's not to be taken too seriously, and certainly not literally.

This is a breath-taking attack on the felt senses, on the holistic psyche, a gross privileging of objectification over subjectivity, and a frankly narcissistic denial of whatever doesn't fit a pre-existing frame.

Heinroth also defined the psyche in terms of three types: The Uberuns (the conscience). The Ego. And The Fleish (the basic drives): a crystal-clear forerunner of Freud's Super-ego, Ego, and Id; nearly 100 years before Freud took to the stage.

In both Heinroth's and Freud's conceptualisation, we can see clearly the spirit of *sectorial splitting* as an inspiration; the psyche divided into distinct rooms, each with a principle purpose.

In the case of Heinroth, it's interesting that on one hand he *unifies* the body and mind whilst on the other he *divides* and separates the psyche. Two different perspectives of consciousness, co-existing despite their fundamental and mutual antipathy.



# Take another moment

Very simply, I want you to open your mind to the proposition that your entire psychological history is present in this moment, and that it is being expressed across every layer of your Relational Body-mind.

In your body structure and posture, respiratory pattern, energetic presence, and relational dynamics, as well as in your cognitive processes.

Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957)

Although Freud opened up the subject of the *biological psyche*, it was one of his students, Wilhelm Reich, who championed the cause. In the west at least, Reich is clearly the Grandfather of the psychological-body. As such I am going to spend a little time on him here.

I'm going to touch on his childhood, as it's not hard to imagine why he was drawn towards Freud, who would come to be his mentor.

Reich reported that as a young boy he witnessed his mother having an affair with his tutor, had himself some revengeful incestuous desires, and then told his father; who was a brutal man.

Some weeks later, his mother killed herself by drinking cleaning products, and four years later his father died too.

A Truly Freudian Tragedy.

But also a drama of the body. The carnality of the mother and the teacher, of the sexually bewitched young Wilhelm whose own oedipal desire he waylaid by reporting the sins of the mother to the sadistic father, perhaps as a revenge for the mother failing to favour Wilhelm himself; the mother who would come then to punish her body in such an unimaginable display of shame, regret, or perhaps revenge.



The life-insurance policy had become worthless through inflation, but in any case they fled the family-farm and any remaining wealth when a Russian invasion crossed their land in 1915.

After crossing swords with various countries over the years, Reich can be honored for having his books banned and burnt by the German Nazis, who he pathologised in 'The Mass Psychology of Fascism.'

He ended up in The United States of America,  
where he presumably expected to be treated  
far better than he ultimately was.

Reich was imprisoned in America for shipping Orgone Accumulators across state lines. At least, this is the standard story. In fact, he was imprisoned for contempt of court when he insisted that he could only discuss the efficacy of this invention with scientists.

He was imprisoned for demanding scientific validation or refute.

He died in prison of a heart-attack.

The orgone was Reich's word for universal energy, which he believed that he discovered in his laboratory. The Accumulator was a large box made of layers of organic and inorganic material, and did what it said on the tin: it accumulated this energy, concentrated and intensified it supposedly so that it might be used for healing purposes.

A few years ago, I visited Reich's home in Maine, now a museum: his uninspiring laboratory, his various possessions that haven't moved since he died in prison, his frankly disappointing library of middle-American literature.



And a small version of an orgone accumulator. The original full-sized one was on display, but we weren't allowed to enter.

The small one blew my mind.

The intensity of the energetic vibration on my skin was breath-taking, and my reaction was visible enough for the curator of the museum to notice and offer me the opportunity to go into the original.

I don't know exactly what that invention does, but it was certainly powerful, I had no problem believing that it was very good for me, and I did indeed feel that I was connecting to a universal energy.

Reich's work explored various routes with various disciplines, but principle to his psychological theory was the theoretical elaboration of the psychological-body. I'll leave it to Michael Soth to describe this, as I'm unable to improve on his fabulous summary:

“Suffice to say in this context that (Wilhelm) Reich developed a holistic theory of the wound, integrating biology and psychology. Seventy years before neuroscience began to confirm some of these ideas, he described how emotional and psychological trauma affects all levels and systems of the bodymind's functioning, from basic physiology and anatomy through vegetative and autonomic nervous system reactions to the voluntary and involuntary muscles and breathing, including the expression and inhibition of emotion as well as memories, images, perceptions and thoughts. In simple terms: the wound affects and pervades the whole complex system of body-emotion-fantasies-mind - the whole person. This challenges the dualistic notion that if there is a subjective mental experience of pain, the problem must originate and be treated in the mind; that psychological suffering is restricted to the mind and can be cured by insight or the correction of 'faulty thinking’.”

**Michael Soth : How the wound enters the consulting room. 2007**

Hereby, Wilhelm Reich destroyed the Cartesian (of Descartes) dualistic position of a distinct mind and body. They were for Reich, *demonstrably*, various expressions of the same thing.

# Character Structures



Reich greatly elaborated the notion of character types by describing developmental arrest and trauma in terms of muscular and skeletal patterns that are a somatic presentation of psychological history.

Although a number of therapy systems took up somatic character-types, Stephen Johnson is especially notable for his refinement of theory, his astute elaboration of types, and his integration of other therapeutic models.

Johnson specified:

- The Schizoid Character (The Hated Child)
- The Oral Character (The Abandoned Child)
- The Symbiotic Character (The Owned Child)
- The Narcissistic Character (The Used Child)
- The Masochistic Character (The Defeated Child)

Each with their own distinct wounded patterns, conflicts, traits, physical characteristics, transference reflexes and energetic identity. Let's look at a couple of examples (that I've elaborated slightly)

Imagine the long limbs of the Oral Character, either side of a slightly sunken indentation in the chest, that may be understood to reveal the arms of the infant that (over)stretched-out to an under-available mother, only to eventually collapse into an indented resignation, shoulders rolled forward to protect the heart. His body is trapped in the dependence that was never satisfied, weak and under-nourished, limbs thin and without forcefulness. He remains self-piteous, a victim, addicted to oral-substitutes, drawn towards relationships that either maintain him as a needy and unsatisfiable child, that repeat his experience of deprivation; or that are the opposite, a compensated version built from the primary denial of all need.

# Take a moment

Imagine this character, how he looks, and if he reminds you of anyone you know. Notice how you feel in your body. What's your instinctive counter-transferential reaction to this character?

For example: do you feel protective, nurturing, loving, scornful, disgusted, angry, aggressive?

Notice these feelings and expressions in your body.

Imagine the wide, scared eyes of the schizoid character, that take us back to the early moments of this person's life, when the lack of a loving and welcoming gaze instilled a primitive and existential terror. *Will I survive.* His ill-fitting limbs, as though an aggregate of parts, suggests the lack of the caress that travels the segments of the body and 'joins them up' with love. With one foot still within the pre-birth pleroma of universal boundaryless-ness, he verges upon a psychosis that he waylays with supernatural beliefs and experiences that we might understand as delusional, but we might also recognise as being the result of his experience of a wafer-thin veil between himself and the complex energies of nature. This is a person who never feels safe and secure in the real world because he knows that he is unwanted within it, despite any evidence to the contrary.

# Take a moment

Imagine this character, how he looks, and if he reminds you of anyone you know. Are you scared of him, uncertain, suspecting him of madness and instability?

What's your instinctive counter-transferential reaction to this character? Picture him sat in front of you.

Notice these feelings and expressions in your body.

# Holistic Intuition



Although Reich did an awful lot of research, analysis and work, to some degree we might understand his conceptualisations as a systemised concreting of what we already intuitively knew.

We read subtleties of body language intuitively, and have done so since the early days of human existence, as this is how we organised ourselves within groups before we had proper language.

Some of this is explicit and obvious. We might spot aggression, depression, seduction, and arrogance quite instinctively, for example. And when we think about it we can recognise character-types from their body posturing, energetic presence, and from how they make us feel.

Some of this inherent knowledge is reflected  
by folkloric metaphors that link body and emotion:

Heart-broken. Heart-felt. Cold-hearted. Heartless. Gutted. Can't stomach it. Sick to my stomach. Shitting myself. Butterflies in my stomach. Stiff upper lip. Stand my ground. Dig my heels in. Feet taken from under me. Stand on my own two feet. Best foot forward. Puffed chest. Spineless. Straight-backed. Wide-eyed. Eyes wide open. Bright eyed. Dead eyed. Lilly-livered. Toothless. Bared teeth. Stiff Upper Lip. A sharp tongue. Smell a rat. Smell fear. Empty-headed. Full of bile. Having gall. Spitting with rage. Livid. Tongue-tied. Bite your tongue. Swallow it down. Over my head. And so on.

Many of these metaphors reveal our implicit understanding of body-mind process, the role that the body plays in expressing emotion and character traits.

Some of these metaphors testify to an association between body parts and certain emotions. The heart with love, the liver with anger, the spine with courage and pride.

And some are the result of a conflation between early subjective experience and early sensorimotor experience. Warmth and affection, for example. We perhaps call an affectionate person *warm* because as an infant our experience of parental affection would have been engulfing in its warmth to our little bodies.



When it comes to understanding something, we might say that we have *grasped* it, or failed to *grasp* it; and this perhaps relates back to the life of the infant whose early source of exploration towards knowledge was with the hands.

It can hereby be seen that psychological experience is intimately inter-related with sensorimotor process, growing from within and beside each other.

This really shouldn't be a surprise to us. It's how the species developed, and it is how each one of us developed. It is only any kind of surprise because of the body-mind split that is inherent in culture.

It's worth noting that this split was explicitly defined in the seventeenth century by Descartes, a couple of hundred years before Darwin's theory of evolution clearly told us that, alongside whatever spiritual beliefs we may have, those qualities of being a human, such as reason, rationale, and conceptualisation evolved from a far more primitive animal.

The mind evolved *from within* the body.

So: Reich's work, in many respects, positions him as the Grandfather of Western Body Psychotherapy; and his work was continued and expanded by many subsequent psychologies. Bioenergetics. Biosynthesis. Core Energetics. Biodynamic Psychology. The Chiron Institute. And many others.

I could mention many more people, but Gerda Boyesen stands out; not so much because her somatic psychotherapy system of Biodynamic Psychology was so much better formulated than others, but because she introduced the notion of psycho-peristalsis, directly linking the activity of the gut with psychological and emotional process.

She developed a range of hands-on techniques for working with psychological material, and listened, as she worked, to the sounds of the gut through a stethoscope; which in turn informed her quality and form of contact.



I trained in this technique for three years and, despite some initial scepticism, I grew to become deeply impressed with the impact of this model of working; although I personally found that I felt unable to contain a psychotherapeutic process to an extent that I felt comfortable with. I've known other Body Psychotherapy practitioners who have felt the same as me about the containing limitations of Biodynamic Psychology, but also many who don't agree at all.

The psychological-body remained a relatively fringe concept, and these somatic modalities were often derided by the Psychodynamic and Analytic traditions. Sometimes with good reason.

And the disrespect could certainly be mutual:

# Modality Splits

It stands to reason, of course, that if there is splitting in culture then that should be visible between psychological modalities; and, more crucially, that the psychological modalities should lead the way when it comes to integrating and healing these cultural splits.

Traditional Body Psychotherapy opposed the privileging of the mind over the body, of cognition over emotional experience and expression.

This body-mind split was quite rightly challenged,  
but actually ironically perpetuated; though in reverse.

The body was now privileged over the mind.



The repressed emotion was championed as the wounded-child,  
and the ego opposed as though it was simply a repressive parent,  
a bully to be stood up to and broken down.

The Body Psychotherapist could be hereby inclined to becoming habituated into a rescuing or a heroic therapeutic position.

Very attractive positions that have, of course, glaring blindspots that can lead to uncontained ruptures and quagmire stasis; for which we ultimately and ironically needed the psychodynamic traditions to help us to identify, unravel, contain, and work with therapeutically.

So: the body-mind split was perpetuated  
in the unconscious shadow of the attempt to correct it.

We became the problem  
that we thought we were a solution to.

This is a psychological theme:

Furthermore, the imagined solution to a problem tends to carry within it a disguised repetition of the problem it purports to be solving.

We see this in history:

Christian Religion attacked the magic of the pagans,  
but incorporated it in the form of *miracles*:  
magic, but that only deities can perform.



The European Enlightenment pronounced equality, and condemned the murderous Inquisitions of the Catholic Church, but were inclined to guillotine those deemed to disagree.

Rational Modern Science positioned itself as an antidote to religion, yet shared some distinct characteristics; notably that each purported to represent a global truth, as true for one as for all. And the *God* of Christianity was replaced by the *Science* of Rational Modernism.

The Post Modern movement posited that there could not be a superior perspective, that all perspectives were hierarchically equal; effectively stating that the greatest truth was that there was no such thing as a greater truth: a fundamental and disqualifying contradiction.

We might be inclined to consider these examples as aberrations, or to discount the intelligence or validity of movements that display such characteristic hypocrisy.

However, we know from psychology  
that we are inclined to condemn in others  
that which resides in the shadow of our own self.

And we know that we are often exactly  
what we are certain that we are not.

Beware the violence of the pacifist,  
the discrimination of the egalitarian,  
the immorality of the preacher, and  
the neurosis of the psychotherapist.

# Complexity Theory



In the late twentieth century a variety of disciplines began forming a theory of Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS), and this would be disastrous for the reductionist philosophies of Descartes et al.

Simply speaking, Complex Adaptive Systems can't be understood by analysing their parts, but instead the *relationship* between the parts.

Nor can the behaviour of Complex Adaptive Systems be predicted with any kind of accuracy. They are spontaneously self-organising.

Complex Adaptive Systems change and transform in non-linear ways, so that a minor input might elicit a radical output, and a radical input might elicit a minor output.

This is the closely aligned **Chaos Theory**,  
perhaps better known as The Butterfly Effect.

Famously, The Butterfly Effect suggests that the flap of a butterfly's wing in Japan might elicit a tornado in Colorado.

Less is More.

The weather is a complex system, also ecology, the universe  
and, crucially for us, the human being.



Every biological process is a complex system nested within ever-deepening complex systems. A sub-atomic particle within an atom within a molecule within a cell within an organ within an organism.

And the psyche is a complex system; comprising all of the complex systems of the mind and body.

A complex psyche is nested within the deeper complex system of a relationship, of a family, a group, a community, a nation, a species.

Crucially, transformational change in a Complex Adaptive System happens at *the edge of chaos*, on the boundary between order and chaos. In a psyche, this is when the strain between the habitual processes and the new emerging processes is greatest.

The following is a brilliant quote from Michael Soth. Don't worry if you don't understand it immediately. It's complex. If necessary, take hours and days and weeks and months and years to fully embody this quote, because it defines and evokes much that is central to becoming a highly effective psychotherapist.

*“Thus, complexity gives us a more comprehensive and embracing notion that there are many different types of change: linear and non-linear, regressive or progressive, sudden or incremental, overwhelming or organic, chaotic or planned; and it gives us the idea that systemic change might only need a therapist flapping their wings in a facilitative way, rather than pushing a boulder – or a donkey – up the hill.*

*At the boundary between established state and emerging process is the edge of chaos, where things are complex and in flux, the full picture unknown and outcomes unpredictable - like the shapes formed by the turbulences of rising smoke or flowing water, sensitive to the slightest environmental variations. The therapeutic process is similar, and it depends on the subtlety of our perception whether we are able to notice where that edge of chaos is from moment to moment.*

*Rather than imagining that we are directing the boat of therapy across a calm lake in a straight deliberate line, facilitating any kind of dynamic process in any complex system is more like white water rafting - giving an occasional intentional steer at a crucial moment, but knowing that the situation is fundamentally unpredictable. The illusion of being able to control the process is one of the greatest hindrances in the helping professions, and complexity puts that impulse into perspective.”*

**Michael Soth: From ‘Working at the edge of chaos - a CPD Weekend. 2017**

The emerging world of trauma

From the late 1990's onward began a theoretical movement linking trauma and trauma therapy with an awareness of the psychological body. For examples:

Babette Rothschild's 'The Body Remembers.'

Bessel Van de Kolk's 'The Body Keeps the Score.'

Peter Levine's 'Waking the Tiger.'



Suddenly we couldn't talk of trauma without talking of the body.

Body Psychotherapy *in this respect* was ahead of the game. We already had perspectives, tools, techniques, a developed intuition, and of course we were trained to work therapeutically with touch.

And we weren't scared of the body.

In 1994 the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio published 'Descartes Error'. Check this quote:

“This is Descartes' error: the abysmal separation between body and mind...the suggestion that reasoning, and moral judgment, and the suffering that comes from physical pain or emotional upheaval might exist separately from the body. Specifically: the separation of the most refined operations of mind from the structure and operation of a biological organism.”

And this one:

"Nature appears to have built the apparatus of rationality not just on top of the apparatus of biological regulation, but also *from* it and *with* it."

Even reason and rationale, he demonstrated, begin within the biological body. Decisions are made in the body before the narrative-brain knows that they have even been made.

In the same year Stephen Porges introduced his Polyvagal Theory, which elaborated on the sympathetic/parasympathetic understanding of the autonomic nervous system by introducing a third level: the social engagement system, which places an emphasis on the reading and responding to non-verbal communication for affect arousal and regulation.



Allan Schore, the neuro-scientist and psychotherapist has correlated psychology, neuroscience, biology and dynamic systems theory into a complex attachment model, demonstrating the impact of early right-brain to right-brain dyadic interactions on infant neural structures, long-term capacity for emotional regulation, and empathic relating.

We need to make a passing mention here of *mirror neurones*, which are believed to fire both when we perform an action AND when we witness that same or similar action being performed by someone else. Many believe this to be the neural basis of empathy, but this still remains contentious.

# Contemporary Body Psychotherapy

I consider Contemporary Body Psychotherapy, at its best, to be one of the most integrative of the psychological paradigms. By integrative, I don't mean that it has simply borrowed, slotted-in and affixed theories from elsewhere, but has genuinely found union with other modalities.

We've become greatly enriched and matured by object-relations and psychodynamics, for example, and comfortably merge with physics and neuroscience.

We've extended *the body* to include *the relational energy field*, whereby the notion of an entire and distinct separation from each other starts to be understood as an illusion.

Therapeutic moments are co-created, in this third-space, this relational-field, in which anything and everything that we have ever been might emerge unconsciously, take root, and coalesce with the psychological history of the other.

And not just in some kind of pathologised compulsive replay of an embedded traumatic event, but in an unconscious and creative attempt to find healing.



We psycho-energetically co-organise  
Routinely. Habitually. Always.

We are not islands.

This reveals itself clearly in the process of psychological **re-enactment**, which is when the dynamics of a primary relational wound re-appear in both the conscious and, crucially, *unconscious* dynamics between the therapist and the client.

Chronological time is transcended,  
spatial separation is transcended,  
and the body-mind split is transcended.

Sometimes whole characters from the primary trauma re-emerge in the therapeutic relationship. But more usually it's tones of voice and choice of words, body postures and non-verbal expressions, attitudes, dynamic interactions, spontaneous images, felt-experience, energetic presence, respiratory patterns; and so on.

The underlying, emerging and defended story reaches out to us through the subtle bodymind.

And the therapeutic relationship starts to become  
the problem that it thinks it is the solution to.

It's very hard to work transformatively with relational trauma  
without working positively with re-enactment.



And it's very hard to work transformatively with re-enactment without paying close attention to the bodies in the room; and the dialogue between them.

In this last moment or two, it's necessary I think to mention Michael Soth, who many of you know, who I've quoted here a couple of times, and who has gone far further than most in integrating paradigms into a cohesive model of psychotherapy that, at its core, embraces the many conflicted layers of the body-mind-relational psyche. Personally, I'm not aware of anyone who has done it better.

In summary

The psyche most definitely is holistic,  
relational, systemic, and inter-generational.

We are built from a constant flux of dynamic energetic exchange and co-organisation between body and mind, between self and other, and between now and then.

And through an attention to the vibrations and sensations, the energies, images and intuitions emerging from the body we have the potential to access everything that we have ever been, that each other have ever been; perhaps even what the species and the universe have ever been.

However, we really haven't caught up with our knowledge yet, and live instead in the shadows, the blind-spots, and the pathological birth-trauma of seventeenth century European science; whereby our splits and fragmentations become cause for obsession and celebration.

We risk being disconnected from nature, from the cosmos, from the origins, from the spiritual rhythm of life, from each other, and from our selves.



We carve up, fill, and inject the body  
with an embodiment of the celebrated false-self.

And we still struggle with the very basic truth  
that the body is not an IT but an I.

Disconnection is making us anxious,  
panicky, frightened and forlorn.

And our solutions to these problems  
have become the problems that need solving.

**To Finish:**

Your psyche carries in each moment everything that you have ever been, has access to everything that others have ever been, operates relationally, in a system of relationships, and can access the history of the bloodline. It can connect to the Jungian world of The Collective Unconscious, to the enchanted world of synchronicity, and to the archetypes and mythological narratives that have been told and re-told in the dreams of the historical species. It might just be that the universe, and your psyche along with it, is holographic in nature; with everything contained within every aspect of everything.

The narrative mind is an essential abstraction of the sensory depths of your self and the universe, and to connect deeply to the psychological-body as well as the narrative-mind is to open the door to all things.

Take a final moment to note  
how you *feel* about this?

Thank you for your presence.



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