

Nurturance, Soundbonding and Play

Now Jack, you may have heard many a far out Jam Session, you may have thought the roof was comin' in, you may have thought you heard Old Gabe himself riffin' a High Note over "Seventy Six Trombones," But you Never dug anything like these Cats blew!!! They wailed so far out, and so Crazy and so frantic that the Snakes in the jungle picked up on the beat and come stompin' in, had to send out the Snake Guards sayin':

"No Dancin' Tonight Boys, we're just blowin' for The All Hip Mahatma!"

from Lord Buckley's *The Hip Ghan*

By the light of the
Moon he beholdeth
God's creatures of
the great calm.

"Beyond the shadow of the ship
I watched the water snakes:
They moved in tracks of shining white,
And when they reared, the elfish light
Fell off in hoary flakes.

"Within the shadow of the ship
I watched their rich attire;
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
They coiled and swam; and every track
Was a flash of golden fire.

Their beauty and
their happiness

He blesseth them
in his heart

"O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware!
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware.

The spell begins
to break.

"The selfsame moment I could pray;
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea."

from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

"The little child first acts out a preverbal method of knowing with his body and with the first layers or levels of mind. This acting out tends toward rhythmical pattern and continuity, enjoyment of sing-song sounds. Only later can exploratory patterns be given thematic sequence."

Edith Cobb in *The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood*

"In the evolutionary transition from reptiles to mammals, three cardinal behavioral developments were (1) nursing in conjunction with maternal care, (2) audiovisual communication for maintaining maternal-offspring contact, and (3) play."

"The limbic system comprises three main subdivisions subserving different functions. The two evolutionarily older subdivisions closely associated with the olfactory apparatus have proved to be involved, respectively, in oral and genital functions requisite for self-preservation and procreation. The third subdivision, for which there appears to be no rudimentary counterpart in reptiles, has been found to be implicated in parental care, audiovocal communication, and play behavior."

Paul MacLean in *The Triune Brain in Evolution* (1990:16, 17)

"In the evolution of mammals, the development of vocalization and hearing became of the utmost importance for maintaining parent-offspring relationships under conditions of obfuscation."

Paul MacLean in "Why Brain Research on Lizards?"
Behavior and Neurology of Lizards (1978:6)

We, us pre-mammals, faced "conditions of obfuscation" and who knows what else 200 to 240 million years ago; we managed to muddle through. And we mammals are trying to maintain "relationships under conditions of obfuscation" today. Whether the old obfuscation was too many giant ferns and big dinosaurs blocking the view it's hard to say, but parental nurturance, audiovocal communication and play served us well. Today the obfuscation is obviously man made media, technology and schooling so we may not be able to muddle through so easily. Our main enemies and obfuscators are not other plants and animals but simply US – manotsokind.

MacLean points out that "mammal-like reptiles" dominated the planet for 100 million years (late Permian into early Triassic) before the emergence of dinosaurs pushed them to the margins where they persisted until the extinction of the dinosaurs allowed all of us monotremes and mammals (marsupial and placental) to evolve from Therapsid or "mammal-like reptile" species. The Cotylosaurs or "stem reptiles" also branched into birds, crocodiles, rhyncocephalians, snakes, lizards, and turtles; they too co-evolved through the dinosaur era to join us on the other side of that great extinction divide.

So the reptile or "movement brain" that is in the core of each human being goes way, way, way back, perhaps 300 million years or so. Each of us has a "hidden dragon" inside, and a set of movements (ambulating, head nodding, signaling, etc.) and set routines (basking or "hanging out" or "meditating" early in the day, foraging close to home in the morning, midday napping, then foraging further afield in the afternoon) – that embody the "motives" of these ancient ancestors and which we share with all lizards today. We crawl before we walk. And when we dance to "get down," or when we learn a martial art, we rely on the reptile in us to be good at moving. Leapin' lizards! That's us. See you later alligator. In a while crocodile.

When I think about all we share with mammals that differentiates us from reptiles – "parental care, audiovocal communication, play behavior" – I want to weep for our current inadequacies and I wonder if this book isn't the manifesto of a "mammal potential

movement" rather than a footnote to the "human potential movement." With every "advance" of civilization, parental care is not as consistent, not as comprehensive, not as caring, as it used to be. (See Appendix A and Section 1 Chapter 6) Mom and dad both have to work. Or mom and dad are so busy or so rich they hire others to bring up their kids. In the rougher neighborhoods maybe mom is addicted to something or other and dad is in a prison, real or psychic. Many observers would agree that both the quantity and the quality of parental care have been declining across all cultures and classes the past few centuries and especially the past few generations. Media of all kinds have replaced a lot of audiovisual intergenerational primary communication, especially if we think of "communication" as a two way, back and forth, process. The heads on TV talk to each other and at us, kids don't talk back very often, and if they do the heads on the screen do not respond.

The loss of play may be the biggest loss of all. Restoring "play" to its rite-full place in mammalian evolution and human society is why we are born to groove in this particular era. In play we can do nurturing and soundbonding simultaneously. In play we can bless the snakes unawares. In play we are one with infants, puppies, kittens, otters and the "common glad impulse" in all beings. In play we can integrate the triune brain, bring

1) movement, 2) emotions and 3) cognition into joyful lizard-mammal-human alignment! In play we unite our own internal being in order to be united with other beings in interbeing.

In Play Ontology
Recapitulates
Ontogeny
Recapitulates
Phylogeny
Yeah!

In the serious science world this poem is only a partial truth, but in "joyous science" it's still a parsimonious summation. Let me explain. Traditionally, philosophy (loving wisdom) is divided into "ontology" (the wording of being) and "epistemology" (the wording of knowing). Knowing – how we know the world – is the big deal. We want to know all about knowing so we can know it all. Philosophers spend a lot of time trying to keep up with scientists. Being – how we are in the world – was always rather mysterious and neglected by philosophers; our ontology being seriously out of alignment with Nature doesn't make it any more popular or any easier to read the existentialists and phenomenologists. The little slogan poem above begins by saying that how we are in the world rewords, reworks, reperforms, recapitulates how we developed in the womb from a single celled amoeba thru a mollusc stage to a shrimp stage to a salamander stage thru a lizard stage into a shrew-mouse-bat stage and thru all the primate phases of monkey-business into man. "Ontogeny" – the phases we pass thru in the womb – reveals how the families or phyla of the animal domain are phylogenetically related to each other. The old saw was "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny." I added the ontology part because I would like to see children playing this way – dancing like amoebae, dancing the IMP (Trevarten's Intrinsic Motive Pulse) as shrimp, dancing the lizzard greetings, dancing shrews getting the latest twittering news, or dancing from our ways today back into the monkey 'bizniz'.

Is there anything we can do with TV totems like big Barney and Big Bird? Could we help children stop spectating and start enacting the characters they love on TV? Is this a good idea, to make "spurious culture" icons become "genuine" in children's lives?

Can we choreograph the extinguished big birds of New Zealand? Can we "Do the Dodo" differently from the Funky Chicken? Again, is it a good idea to "reclaim," revive and enact species that have already gone extinct?

Can we dance the dinosaur story without a local Ty Rex doing damage to a plant eating Brontosaurus playmate?

What safety rules are needed to let children do the "rough and tumble" play that mammal babies require to survive?

What are the ways to play with evolution? Play with the water cycle? Are there ways to play with movement linked to emotions that will let a child tell a healing story afterwards?

Could we dance "The Ancient Mariner" while a chorus intones some of Coleridge's most famous lines? Is there a way to bless the water snakes "unaware" in Kindergarten?

Could we do Dickens' Christmas Carol as a Japanese Noh play with flute and drums and ghosts of Christmas past, present and future in masks?

There are unlimited local dance-dramas to do in the after-school programs of a million primary schools, that could do so much to integrate the triune brain in each of us.

Will there ever be a multiversity devoted to researching nurturance, soundbonding and play? Because that's where the first Department of Groovology belongs.

Pat Campbell:

Maternal (and paternal) care, audiovocal communication, and play—what a combo for inspiring "life-affirming ceremonials," full manifestations of our human selves, yet aligning us with the behaviors of lizards and mammals in our evolutionary chain. Children crave our care, our responsive ways with them, and every opportunity to play. Music is play, and children will dance and sing their way merrily through the day, if we'll let them. As they are nurtured and reinforced, they will joyfully dance their poems, sing their state capitols, and drum their math tables in ways that will linger long in their memories. Music-making can connect them to all that is important in their young and evolving lives and why not start with connecting to life itself, from the protozoa to the present?

When we are with children, our awareness increases; sights and sounds we have denied or taken for granted are suddenly foregrounded. Kids make us aware of colors, shapes, the way autumn leaves spin, the close-up view of silvery snowflakes, the subtle changes in the fields and forests of early spring. Children hear what we've long discounted and set aside as "background noise," extraneous, and inconsequential. To them, life is mysterious and magical, and very much alive. They tell us "Not so loud", "It sounds like a bird", "I like the growly tone", "Let's move like the fishes", "Slower, like a turtle", and "Faster, like the deer". They have the power to tune us (back) in. We once had the sensitivity of children, the need for play, nurturance, and bonding through sounds and sights that surround us. If we were to look to the children and their wondrous views of the world we might regain our own senses even as we support their years of wonder! As we nurture them, and provide for their exploratory and creative impulses, we have so much to gain. For the deeper we go into making connections with children, the greater the rewards to adults, some of whom have lost their musical imagination somewhere along the way to becoming the profound and serious people they are today.

In childhood it's easy to feel
The eternal suffusing the real,
But as the beholder
Gets steadily older,
It doesn't seem such a big deal.

—*Nigel Andrew*

It is fascinating to watch the interactions of our senior citizens with children. I watched these elder-adults just the other day as a group of sixth-grade boys tramped into their midst as part of their assigned service project at school. Many of the seniors were in wheel chairs, sedentary, ailing (if not it chronic pain), and with time on their hands. They brightened at the sight alone of the half-dozen boys who arrived in their community room for the bean-bag toss scheduled at 3:30 in the afternoon. Along with the nurses' aides, they helped wheel the seniors into a circle and then stood in the gaps so that they could

pass and toss the bags with greater ease. The boys and seniors alike wore red and yellow bib-like banners. Like a game of musical chairs, the bags moved from person to person when the activity director played the CD (with music sounding something like Woody Herman or Glenn Miller), but when the music stopped, the bags were claimed as "points" for the red or blue teams. The animation of the elders was astonishing through it all, and the young boys themselves were lively and yet moving according to the musical character. The game went on for a half hour, followed by cupcakes for all, and then a sing-a-long of group songs led by the senior center's activity director. The seniors sang to "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot", "The Sound of Music", "This Little Light of Mine", "Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair", and "On Top of Old Smokey", and the boys were right behind them, catching some of the words and parts of the melodies while they bounced to the beat. One boy was clapping hands with a little lady in a blue-flowered duster, and another boy was singing while a bright-eyed grandmotherly type waved her hands to him in the style of a conductor. It was clear that soundbonding was going on here, that music was the stuff of playful interaction, with nurturing going both ways across the generations.

- Who is Paul MacLean? Are there other scientists who give us the story of life like Carl Sagan gave us the big bang theory of the universe? Read MacLean, Paul D., 1990. The Triune Brain in Evolution: Role in Paleocerebral Functions. New York: Plenum Press.
- What could science teachers send kids to research that might inspire an after school dance ensemble? Dance of the "living fossils" e.g. Tuatara? Dance the emergence of mammals? Dance the emergence of birds?