

Alienated Aut- and Participatory Pleas-

Toward an Alienation Theory of Autism, PDDs, ADDs, Etc.

I am afraid I have not written anything specifically on dancing. But you may be interested to know that I feel I owe a lot to the fact that I did a good deal of (non-ballroom) dancing as a young man, notably folk-dances and the traditional court dances, from which the movements in many musical compositions take their names: minuet, gavotte, pavane, sarabande, etc. I recall that the first time anything like an experience of participation came to me was while actually doing a certain step in a morris dance.

Owen Barfield in a letter to C. Keil Oct. 24th, 1985

"As we slip into near total technological autism, we cannot hear the great machines as they level the world's forests and dig up and destroy the earth. We cannot hear the cries of animals being abused, slaughtered, or harassed to extinction. We cannot see the suffering of our fellow humans, whether they are the homeless we step over to reach our cars and offices or even despondent members of our own family locked into nearby, but utterly separate cocoons. We do not recognize the banalization and ultimate death of our own will and imagination as we 'amuse ourselves to death.' All in all, the techno-cocoon provides a kind of final anatomy of cold evil, creating a continuous buffer between each person and the many horrific wrongs of our technological system, sins in which we are all complicit and yet blissfully unaware of our complicity. We sit in our cocoons, fully alienated from nature and one another while fully entranced by and engaged with machines. This mass autism is surely unprecedented in both the scope and extent of its alienating impacts. We literally are no longer present to participate in the Creation, the social world, or the spiritual world."

Andrew Kimbrell in *Cold Evil: Technology and Modern Ethics* pg. 24

Autism: something recently discovered and named in the 1940s, and increasing in incidence the past decade or so, afflicting more boys than girls, most menacing in the overdeveloped world. Aut- as in automatic, automated, autonomous, autarchy, author, autobiography, and some other aut(o)- words about self, self-defining, self-direction, self-absorbed. Autism is defined in the American Heritage Dictionary as "1. abnormal subjectivity; acceptance of fantasy rather than reality. 2. A form of childhood schizophrenia characterized by acting out and withdrawal. In this sense, also called 'infantile autism'." This somewhat confused definition (isn't every subjectivity abnormal? how is it possible to be acting out and withdrawing at the same time?) may be in the process of being replaced by a definition of what autism isn't: not social, not interacting, not making eye contact, not curious, not developing normally (shading into PDDs -- Pervasive Development Disorders), not paying attention (shading into ADDs -- Attention Deficit Disorders in older children). Because there are so many degrees and kinds of "autism" and a spectrum of related disorders the statistics vary, but autism estimates were running from 1 in 80 or 1 in a 100 afflicted in parts of USA and UK to 1 in 500, 1 in a 1,000 for some other industrialized countries. But, if we create the most inclusive

statistics adding in the various PDDs and ADDs, counting all those having trouble relating and staying focused, it might be 1 in 4 or 1 in 3 boys showing symptoms in the USA these days. From a groovological perspective almost all the children I encounter as an afterschool drumming-dancing-singing teacher seem "autistic" in the sense of having different kinds of troubles getting into synchrony with each other. There is such a broad spectrum of different ways kids don't get into rhythm, as many ways as there are children I sometimes think, so from a 'born to groove' point of view "autism" or "excess individualism" or "alienation" is certainly a big and pervasive problem that is probably getting bigger and more pervasive day by day.

Some researchers are looking for genetic causes or predispositions to autism and related disorders. Other researchers are looking at pollutants, vaccine preservatives, something in the environment and in baby's bodies from the 1940s to the present. But whatever the genetic givens and the bio-environmental forces at work may turn out to be, and however they may be interacting, there is also certain to be some social or asocial component in autism. This (a)social component could turn out to be very, very small to insignificant, but my guess is that it is either large, or, small but catalytic. Whatever the roles of genetic predispositions and environmental toxins might be, behavioral triggers may play a small but crucial part. An alienation theory of autism, PDDs, ADDs, is worth developing and testing with research agendas so that our knowledge in this area will grow and be useful to researchers working on the genetic and other more bio-environmental factors. At the moment we don't know whether autism, PDDs, ADDs, are preventable and we are still groping for good, better and best treatments for these disorders as they emerge. We need to be sure that research into causes and effects goes forward on all three fronts: genetic, environmental and social.

Alienation has been with us in the West since Heraclitus, circa 500 BC, announced that "Man is alienated from that with which he is most familiar." All over the world we have lost "participatory consciousness" (Barfield, Levy-Bruhl, Bateson). Increased alienation (from nature, from our bodies as part of nature, from labor as a mode of interaction with nature, from society as intermediary between the individual and nature) has occurred with every invention that separates us from each other and from the natural world. Marx and the Marxists, Freud and the Freudians explored the ins and outs of alienated labor and alienated psyches the past century or so, and there came a time about 50 years ago when the word "alienated" was put in front of "intellectuals" so often that it almost became one word "alienatedintellectuals" as if the prerequisite for thinking, knowing, having objectivity, was to become alienated from the world, able to perceive reality, society, even one's self, from a safe distance! One rule of thumb for alienation might be, 'the more artificial or humanly constructed the environment the more alienated the inhabitants' or 'the more fantastic the technology surrounding us the more alienated' or, to bring it another step closer to the dictionary definition of autism, 'the more reality looks like a human fantasy the more alienated people become and the more likely they may be driven to withdraw from and/or act out against that reality.'

Oliver Sacks ([An Anthropologist on Mars](#) 1995:190) states, early in his chapter on "Prodigies," that, "Autism, clearly, is a condition that has always existed, affecting occasional individuals in every period and culture." I have seen no evidence of this. And

Sacks doesn't offer any. My guess is that it was discovered, named, and is increasing inside "high tech, mass mediated, civilizations" where both pollution and alienation are on the increase. I don't think autism existed in the pre-polluted, pre-urban, pre-historic, pre-alienation worlds of classless societies and may have existed only very rarely, if at all, in the hierarchical or feudal worlds around the globe prior to the tech revolutions of the 19th and 20th Centuries. I suspect the answer to "who will teach rhythm to the world of machines and guns?" might just possibly be the same as the answer to the question "what can we do to prevent autism, PDDs, ADDs?"

An alienation theory of autism and related disorders need not be very complicated in order to be tested, developed, refined and ultimately accepted or rejected.

Basic Hypotheses:

Alienation is a factor in causing autism, PDDs, ADDs.

Participation is a factor in preventing autism, PDDs, ADDs.

Corollary Hypotheses:

- 1) the more alienating forces present, the greater the likelihood of autism, PDDs, ADDs.
- 2) the fewer alienating forces present, the less likelihood of autism, PDDs, ADDs
- 3) the fewer participating forces present, the more likelihood of autism, PDDs, ADDs
- 4) the more participating forces present the less likelihood of autism, PDDs, ADDs

Some alienating forces: various kinds of technology, electronic media, TV in particular, cars, isolation and less face to face communication, fear of animals, bugs, nature, whatever maximizes aut-ness or isolation etc.

Some participating forces: playing, dancing, musicking, drumming, dramatizing, acquiring artistic and interactive skills, face-to-face communication, group activities outdoors, love of animals, bugs, nature, whatever maximizes pleas-ure, pleas-ant, pleas-ing experiences and primary communication etc.

When thinking about how to devise experiments, compare samples and do the science of exploring these four hypotheses I would start with the assumptions of the opening Section 1 Wombdrum and Wombworlds chapters and test Corollary #4 with the positive and preventive experiments first. Others may want to start with Corollary #2, or with experiments that combine #2 and #4, and with intervention rather than prevention. Obviously, we don't have to test #1 and #3 very much because 'squares' everywhere are clapping on those beats already. We have a lot of "control freaks" and "control groups" available as needed.

A few of the symptoms on my mind as I developed these simple hypotheses might give us clues as to how to do this "joyous science". One common part of the autism syndrome is "repetitive behavior" or "rocking behavior," infants who roll back and forth in bed, or rock their heads against something, or who repeat motions as if they were machines. Common sense suggests to me that they are supplying a missing groove, inventing a missing "rock and roll" of early childhood for themselves, "self-medicating" in some way. What happens when these pseudo-groove or "in a rut" symptoms are consistently matched by real grooving? Or, following hypothesis #4, could we follow a sample of children who have been rocked to sleep in cradle rockers at least once each day since birth, who have been played with daily by parents going back and forth in rocking

chairs, who have been swaddled and rocked in the arms of diverse singing caretakers? We certainly need some swaddling studies – are infants comforted by an "intermediate womb" in the first weeks or months of life? Would some combinations of swaddling and rocking be preventive? Following hypothesis #2, do children growing up without TV or with less technology, or less isolation, or less time in cars, less time indoors, have less likelihood of developing symptoms?

More facts and variations on the same question:

I'm struck by all the ways that the groove (focus/flow/zone) is both the opposite of most varieties of autism and the golden mean between the poles of "limp/passive" and "overly agitated." Without groove imprinting to meet the profound needs of large cortex and vertical triune brain integration that every neonate emerging from the womb drum must have to survive, could a child become limp, or agitated?

Are autism poles parallel to depressed/manic poles? Is there an opposite of hyperactive? Does "attention deficit" have limp non-attenders and agitated non-attenders? Could we hypothesize that without enough grooving a person can go "slack," or, the opposite, "on the attack"?

Three or four times as many boys as girls. Half as much autism in Germany compared to US/England. Three times as much autism in Japan compared to US/England. So culture could be a factor. And gender styles? I would bet that "dandling" data or parent-singing-dancing-with-babe-in-arms statistics in the first year of life, if collected, might match the 2:4:12 ratio of autism incidence per 1,000 in Germany:US:Japan; more "dandling" and "dandleditties" in Germany, less in Japan, US/UK in the middle somewhere.

Once upon a time all the infants sent to orphanages died of "marasmus." They weren't handled enough and they died. Once they got more human attention, picked up more, carried around, played with, they lived. Simple as that. It's certainly not that simple with "autism," but we could be looking for prevention and cures in the same spirit. Maybe infants need to be handled a lot AND "in time," "in a groove," patted on the back rhythmically when they are being burped, bounced to song or music in laps (dandling) much more, danced with as babes in arms, strapped onto or snuggled up with a singing-dancing adult each day. Or maybe they just need to be carried around by walking adults a lot more in the first days and weeks of life so that fresh out of the wombdrum they experience fully the bipedal groove that distinguishes us as on-the-move, gathering-and-hunting humans (Thom Hartmann) from a lot of other mammals. So much of *taichi* is about the inner structures and figure 8's of bipedal and bilateral yin yang locomotion. So much of the wisdom in Carla Hannaford's books (1995; 2002) is about integrating the triune brain, balancing the brain hemispheres, enhancing mind/body coherence and happiness thru the movements of bilateral symmetry.

It seems obvious to me that we need to do a lot of research on "more participating forces and fewer alienating forces" in the lives of children. See what happens. Combining hypotheses #2 and #4 above: Do children who grow up without television or videos and with plenty of grooving experiences each day develop autism, PDDs, ADDs? Is anyone trying to answer this question?

From a quick cruising of the web there seem to be two social science acronymic approaches to autism being practiced, TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped CHildren) and ABA (Applied Behavioral Analysis). And there are two more experiential and common sensical approaches that fit with this alienation theory quite well, i.e. Stanley Greenspan's "Floor Time" approach and the Option Institute's SonRise program, both of which seem to start with matching the child's actions, joining children in their repetitions, getting into their grooves with them as a way to start moving and grooving toward the basics of "primary communication," the norms of interaction, the skills of music making and dancing in different styles.

- See Kenneth Aigen, playin' in the band: A qualitative study of popular music styles as clinical improvisation (2002 NYU/Nordoff-Robbins Center for Music Therapy) for the most thorough application of groove theory and practice to helping and healing someone with major disabilities.

Pat Campbell:

Oliver Sacks reminds us of the ticking bomb that some children are, in his description of the young lady with automatisms, or tics, or perhaps autism or Tourette's Syndrome, and probably a combination of these challenges, and more. She, and others like her, have found music as one key to unlocking and unwiring these challenges. Sacks writes of his client: "By far the best treatment (of her crises) was music, the effects of which were almost uncanny. One minute would see Miss D. compressed, clenched and blocked, or jerking, ticking and jabbering—like a sort of human bomb; the next, with the sound of music from a wireless or a gramophone, the complete disappearance of all these obstructive-explosive phenomena and their replacement by blissful ease and flow of movement as Miss D., suddenly freed of her automatism, smilingly "conducted" the music, or rose and danced to it." In her case, music set a pace, pattern, rhythm, and flow that took her away from her tics for that while, and gave pleasure to her.

Autistic children, whether handled or dandled (or not), may not show trust, or bonds, or connections with those who love and care for them. Some children with the neurological markers of autism may seem alienated early on in their young lives, challenged by ways of communicating that may be taken for granted by others. Autism is a developmental disorder of brain function that is manifested in a variety of perceptual, cognitive, and motor disturbances. There is no comprehensive theory for explaining it, but music in therapeutic treatments has been useful in increasing their attention spans, developing self-concept and social skills, reducing anxiety and temper tantrums, and training their sensory perception. In fact, some autistic children have shown unusual sensitivity and attention to music, responding more frequently to music than to speech, and performing well in instrumental performance and improvisation experiences. Further attention to the use of music with autistic children as a motivator and even a mode of learning non-musical knowledge and skills may be well worth exploring

- For exceptional detail on autism, see The Neurobiology of Autism, edited by M. L. Bauman and T. L. Kemper, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994. The Journal of Music Therapy features some research articles on the use of music,

including Orff-Schulwerk techniques, with autistic children, while the Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders is another source of descriptions and treatments for autistic children, including music. [[Dori's book, Animals in Translation book?]]

The writings of Oliver Sacks on brain injury and neurological disorders hold fascination for the non-specialist, including Awakenings (1973, London: Duckworth) and The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales (1987, New York: Perennial Library), His study of sign languages among the deaf, Silent Voices (1990) is a "primary communication" classic.