



EDUCATION

Our innate potential



Participating in the creation of ourselves

BY DON DILLON, RMT

Jean-Baptiste Lamarck was on to something. In his 1809 theory of evolution, he postulated as one of his principal arguments; traits acquired by an individual during its lifetime are inherited by subsequent progeny. While initially discredited and ignored in favour of Charles Darwin's hypotheses, Lamarck's theories have engendered new interest given the field of epigenetics, and observations of children born sub-generation to major traumatic events.

Can our endowment of our life experiences, circumstances and perspectives influence our children as much as the endowment of our chromosomes? How might our postures, gestures and

behaviours be influenced by our emotional expressions and our learned sense of self? Author and practitioner, Deane Juhan, explores this and other subjects in his second book, *Touched by the Goddess: The Physical, Psychological and Spiritual Powers of Bodywork*. In a series of essays, Juhan invites us to consider the role bodywork and somatic education play in summoning our innate potential, transforming traumatic experience, and fulfilling our qualities of function, socio-ability, intelligence, and self-actualization as a human being.

Most will be familiar with Juhan from his seminal book, *Job's Body: A Handbook for Bodywork*, where Juhan urges us to take an active role in the formation of ourselves. "Evolutionary sophistication has irretrievably forced humans to be

clever in order to use our heritage for survival. Our somatic education cannot be left to the unconscious unfolding of instincts and reflexes. The rich potentials of our sophisticated biological inheritance necessitate some kind of conscious, exploratory and systematic way – bodywork and somatic education (for example) – of teaching ourselves and our offspring how to successfully use, not abuse, the potent range of physical and mental possibilities contained within us.”ⁱ

In *Job's Body*, Juhan delivers what amounts to the primary subjects of a curriculum in our field: the physiology regarding the body's movement systems, the utility of our sensorimotor system, the effect of touch and the tactile sensation on our behaviour and identity, the nervous system's role in self-regulation, the perniciousness of the chronic stress response, and the complexity of the pain experience.

Juhan likens our struggle today to the biblical Job, whose frustrated attempts lead him to rely on himself and his own sensibilities above all else, to preserve and restore his ravaged health from affliction. "We have been too long in the thrall of 'experts,' both secular and divine, and this has dulled our sensitivities, obscured our choices, atrophied our will to act on our own behalf. We must reengage our subjective awareness and learn to rely much more on what our bodies tell us directly...our own resources are very often our best defence against ignorance, accidents and deceit. And touch and movement are among the best contexts for this learning to take place.”ⁱⁱ

In Juhan's second book, subjects include: the outcomes of bodywork are both subjective and objective; that materialism bends us to excess, while our bodies and minds are honed to self-regulate our impulses; the teaching of healthy, appropriate touch is both a requirement for healthy development and maturity and a defence against exploitation; how facilitated segments hijack the normal excitatory/inhibitory regulatory cycles of the nervous system to exhaust, lower resistance and eventually perpetuate wide-spread dysfunction.

In a body politic increasingly divided, Juhan suggests we benefit from a body-mind in both respects conservative and

DONALD QUINN DILLON, RMT is a practitioner, author, and practice coach. Find him at DonDillon-RMT.com

liberal. Conservative in stabilizing, self-regulating measures to preserve life and limb; liberal in its ability to adapt to stressors, to grow and thrive. While practitioners may cringe from bodywork's associations to hedonistic indulgences, Juhan reminds us the brain naturally seeks pleasure. In this context, hedonic experiences offer positive survival value while confirming life is worth living.

Bodywork seats us squarely as agent of change for ourselves, tapping our body's tacit knowledge through its senses and sensibilities. "Bodywork is one of the most humane and effective means available for generating the streams of full and precise sensory information which compose the largest, most concrete part of self awareness. It is an invaluable tool with which we facilitate the mending not only of our bodies, but those gaps in our objective world view – a world view leading us dangerously far away from our sense of vital participation in our fates."ⁱⁱⁱ

In referencing fate, Juhan denounces the notion we are all on a pointless crash course, marching unwaveringly towards entropic disorder, degeneration, and death. He submits, rather, the physics of the Universe is tuned to the reformation of information, that our molecules will live on into the next evolving form. He points to the coherent and self-regulatory mechanisms that have evolved to produce the current evolution of human being: energy fields, molecules, cell membranes, cell organelles, circulation and chemical messengers (neurotransmitters), connective tissue, and the nervous system. The latter technology offering improvements on the earlier, yet all essential and fully operational in the current, evolved processes that sustain us.

How are the emotions so intimately tied to the control of our muscles? Consider the real estate of the brain, where the neural structures facilitating both emotional expression and movement neighbour each other to facilitate direct, rapid responses as necessary to survival as to social engagement. The hippocampus – part of the limbic system – contains a high concentration of bonding sites for neurotransmitters that communicate with neighbouring structures. The hippocampus is proximal to the optic nerve,

facilitating visual consciousness influential to visceral and muscular reflexes broadly, and also the hypothalamus and hypophysis (pituitary), together orchestrating essential hormonal communications throughout the body. Nearby, the subconscious sensory processing areas, where proprioceptive sensations are assembled into a coherent body image – consider the emotions associated here. The hippocampus is also proximal to the highest processing ganglions of the autonomic nervous system – a confluence of the structures regulating "my current feeling state, my past experience and my autonomic (visceral, smooth muscle) reactions."

Juhan elaborates, "This is the relay station that converts anxiety into ulcers, fear into impotence, anger into flushing, anticipation into sweaty palms, desire into a throbbing heart. It is also the place where the organism's deep biological needs are translated into emotional reactions to events and objects in our perceptual field, greatly enhancing and enriching the formation of behaviours built around acquisition or avoidance – finer and finer distinctions between what is good for us and what is bad. Some of the clearest and most documented relationships between the body and the mind are these correspondences between emotional state and visceral functions."^{iv}

Further, the hippocampus is connected with the upper brain stem and basal ganglia, the highest organizational level of the gamma sensorimotor system – where reflexes are orchestrated to coordinate virtually all skeletal muscle activity. From breathing to swallowing, gravitational reflexes and the development of locomotion patterns of all acquired skills. Juhan asserts it is the "alternative" approaches that have most consciously and intentionally addressed the emotional components of self-organization, perception and behaviour.

Juhan is agitated by the notion health-promoting disciplines incorporating touch are frequently labeled "alternative." Bodywork, he argues, is not alternative to medicine, but expands the human being's capacity to act on its own potency.

Notice the tensional patterns presenting in the muscular sinew of your

subjects daily. Consider how these imprints form as the individual makes their way through the trials and tribulations of life, relying on their brain to feel, process and respond accordingly. "...Because our brain morphology generates a capacity to learn rather than defined stereotyped responses...because our thoughts and feelings and experiences and voluntary behaviours impact our developing bodies in many powerful ways, we continually participate in the creation of ourselves." Juhan continues, "It is commonplace among bodyworkers to observe our flesh as the written record of our lives, faithful in every last detail...we are both the hand and the clay."^v

In more recent years, the myofascial system has gained renewed attention and understanding, with a particular focus in how practitioners affect this ubiquitous, tension-bearing system of the body. Juhan reminds us our plasticity and adaptability come with a high-level of self-responsibility. "Left to its own organic devices, without the exertion of sensibility and will, protoplasm will simply respond to local forces, bad as well as good. We are sol/gel, semi-solid, fluid crystal, and when we are not actively firming ourselves up into functional structures, we are sagging and slipping."

Juhan reminds us our evolutionary development has a shadow side, that we must consider with the highest regard. "Quite possibly the mushrooming of the neocortex from primate to Homo Sapiens was the biggest gamble in all of biological evolution. What is increasingly apparent is the potent and interactive forces it imposes upon our physical being can either reorganize our selves and our world in astonishing new ways, or drive us with our new and uncontrolled powers towards oblivion...our physical and mental contact with the tissue of our lives constitutes our only hand on the tiller."^{vi}

REFERENCES:

i Juhan, D., *Job's Body: A Handbook for Bodywork*, Station Hill Press, 1987, pg 50.

ii Juhan, D., *Touched by the Goddess: The Physical, Psychological & Spiritual Powers of Bodywork*, Barytown/Station Hill Press, 1994. Pg 52.

iii *Job's Body*, pg 19

iv *Touched by the Goddess*, pg 94

v *ibid*, pg 65

vi *ibid*, pg 56