



Body Wise

By Kamalamani

The Body Politic

In May this year I'm co-ordinating a conference, 'The Body Politic'. It is being hosted in London by UK-based Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility (PCSR) as its 7th Psychotherapy and Politics conference. I'm a steering group member of PCSR and editor of its in-house publication 'Transformations'. The idea for this event came to me nearly four years ago, at my first steering group meeting. I envisaged an event exploring creatively, honestly, and constructively what it means to be a body. A body shaped: by the social, political, ecological and economic backdrop and dynamics unfolding throughout our lives; by our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, patterns, actions, and allegiances; by our connection - or lack, thereof - with the earth and other-than-human and more-than-human life. I hope that the keynotes, workshops, and discussions of this event will not only highlight the struggle to reclaim our bodies as our own, within the complex networks of power which we inhabit, but also to celebrate being a body.

So the theme of 'the body in relationship: self-other-society' is timely. It's also starting to dawn on me - to my surprise, if I'm honest - how contentious and stirring a theme this may prove to be. A surprise to me because, working as a body psychotherapist, being a meditator and teacher of embodying meditation, and being interested in what's going on in the world around me, I'm concerned everyday with how society has shaped and continues to shape our incarnation, for good and ill. Yet, we don't - in the UK, at least - talk much in depth about these themes.

Not even in therapists' circles or body psychotherapy circles. It still feels a bit fringe, despite the manifestations of our politicised bodies in the mainstream in the shape of body dysmorphia, addiction to a range of drugs of choice - some more socially acceptable than others, and self-harm, to name but a few. And on a much bigger scale, the shadow of our embodiment, or lack of embodiment, is reflected in the way we are treating the planet, and other-than-human species, eroding our home and the home of billions of others.

I don't want to get too doom and gloom here. Being a body brings moments of bliss: being drunkenly orgasmic, feeling the beat of a drum resonating with our body's beat until we don't know which beat is which, losing ourselves in wild dancing, sitting quietly, wholly, and contentedly in meditation, holding our wrinkled-face new-born after a long, arduous labour, and those ordinary magic moments of the sensuality and connection breaking bread and drinking wine with cherished friends and family.

The experience of being a body can, and is, hell on earth for billions of our global neighbours. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that nearly 870 million people of the 7.1 billion people in the world, or one in eight, were suffering from chronic undernourishment in 2010-2012 (1). 30 million women, children, and men are victims of human trafficking, modern-day slavery, every year (2). In Africa alone, 345 million people lack access to water for drinking, washing, and cleaning (3).

Perhaps these seem like extreme examples, taking place in a far continent, and it's just too much to take in these facts. This is a feeling I know intimately, being flooded with overwhelm or falling into horrified anxiety before switching off in order to cope with the challenges and fullness of our everyday life. Perhaps it's easier to recall clients closer to home. Those people we've welcomed into our therapy rooms who are struggling with substance abuse, are asylum seekers exiled from home, are victims of bullying or domestic violence, are starving themselves, literally, to death, or who have narrowly escaped losing their life in a war zone. How do our bodies respond to these clients? How do we assimilate and digest hearing the sharing of these experiences? What resonates in our own experience? Which prevailing emotions arise? Fear? Anxiety? Tenderness? Compassion? Most likely a mingling mixture.

I'm interested in how we create more dialogue about these themes; how we draw upon our wealth of experience from our own history of embodiment and in witnessing the stories of hundreds of other beings. Perhaps we could speak out a little more? Speaking out, it seems, is not something which many therapists find all that easy which feels a bit of a shame and lost opportunity given



the hundreds of hours each year we spend reflecting on the nature of what it means to be alive and embodied.

This week on the PCSR steering group we've been finalising our flyer for this May 'Body Politic' event. It's been a fascinating process in many ways. Firstly, it's really quite tricky to find images of bodies which aren't airbrushed and made to look 'beautiful' in a very conventional sense. It's not that easy to find photos of ordinary folk going about their lives, much easier to find highly sexualised images. Secondly, the more I thought of the theme, the more I was aware that I would miss or fail to represent a group of people whose lives are severely hampered by body politics: those whose bodies don't conform to the majority: physically, sexually, in terms of skin colour, class, and cast, those who are victims of war and torture. We ended up deciding that it was too hard-hitting to include the corpses of victims of war in Iraq, for example. Some feared such an image had no place in an event advertising an event in the west for psychotherapists. In my mind, it has everything to do with us and UK foreign policy, yet I can see the inherent dangers in further desensitising readers, or worst still, leading them to switch off and not come to the conference to engage

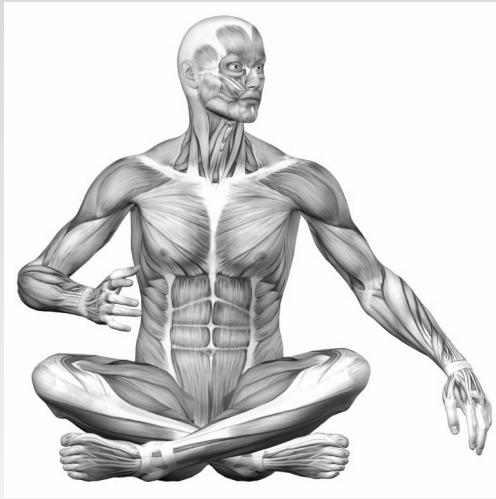
with the debates.

The politics of being a body are going on all the time in and out of our therapy rooms. The use, misuse, and denial of power and potency, consciously and in the shadows. We have, of course, our own embodied prejudices, assumptions, excellences, and these are bound to work their way into our therapeutic work, hence the importance of supervision, peer support, and life with enough

balance. We hopefully know the conditions which have led to the oppression and liberation in our own bodies, and how we contribute to the oppression of others, albeit indirectly. The work we do, leading to greater awareness, also leads to freedom for our clients and those around us.

As body psychotherapists and body workers, it seems to be critically important that we know our own power and potency and acknowledge the impact we have. Not in a big ego way, but in a responsible citizen way. We need meaningful rites of passage so we honour our body-minds in whatever stage of life we are dwelling. We need to know that we are creatures living amongst other creatures, neither better nor worse than the other species with whom we share the planet. Perhaps we need to pay a bit more attention to our relationship with our environment and the wider world. Not just so we stay healthy and grounded, though that's useful, but so we can listen more accurately to our bodies and the bodies of others—learning from the rhythms of our bodies and the seasons. Maybe we need to remind ourselves of the bliss of being a body, remembering we are beings made of flesh, blood, and bones, not consumers as capitalism likes to

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pigeon-hole us, or rational men as economists like to depict us. No, we're flesh and blood, beautifully messy, simple and complex beings.

Maybe in 2014 we can balance who we are on the inside and the outside, although in truth, such a distinction doesn't really exist. Find space to tend to our rich inner world, occupying the space we take up and looking out for our fellow beings near and far.

Kamalamani is an Embodied-Relational therapist, supervisor, facilitator and writer living and working in Bristol, UK. She has been a practicing Buddhist since her early 20s and loves seeing how age-old teachings and practices are relevant to contemporary life. She works at the interface of body psychotherapy, ecopsychology and ecodharma, drawing upon her experiences of being a development worker in sub-Saharan Africa, a lecturer in International Development at the University of Bristol, her current meditation practice and being a child lost

and found in nature. Her first book 'Meditating with Character', published in 2012, explores engaging with meditation through the lens of post-Reichian character positions. She is a steering group member of the UK-based Psychotherapists and Counselors for Social Responsibility (PCSR) and editor of its in-house journal, 'Transformations'. She co-facilitates Wild Therapy workshops with Nick Totton and meditation workshops based on her book. www.kamalamani.co.uk

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- (2) http://www.notforsalecampaign.org/?gclid=CKHVv_Tf_rsCFQMYwwodrRgAwg Accessed 14th January 2014.
- (3) <http://water.org/water-crisis/water-facts/water/> Accessed 14th January 2014.

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powerful they are during this highly formative time in the baby's life.

We currently have a hospital supported clinical trial targeted to discover if the vitals of a premature infant improve while being held by their mother if only the mother is listening to the *Positive Intention Music*™. Preliminary results are showing that every infant so far has shown dramatic improvement. We are about to begin additional trials at another hospital that includes discovering if our music can improve the vitals of premature infants at the

bedside and the impact the music has on the babies when played in the whole NICU. We will also measure the experiences of the nurses and parents as well.

I am amazed and most grateful for that fateful day I sat at the piano and wrote the first song to my grandson. I never imagined that it would lead us toward forming a company that would be so personal and life affirming. I am developing creative projects for premature and newborn babies, toddlers, and especially for their parents. That realization, while writing my daughter's story, changed the direction of my life. I am hoping

that through our work we can help young parents to experience a bond that ensures greater health and well-being in their babies lives and in themselves.

Lisa Rafel is an expert in *Vocal Sound Healing*™, an author/composer/performer and an international presenter on sound and resonance, using intention for healing and transformation, and the benefits of music to enhance bonding/attachment. Lisa founded *Resonant Sounds, LLC* to support the connection between new parents and their babies. Lisa has two children and six grandchildren. You can email her at Staff@lisarafel.com and learn more at www.lisarafel.com ©2014 Lisa Rafel



For more than 25 years, Gary Malkin has composed and produced music for media, including countless soundtracks and musical atmospheres for film, television and radio programming. Using the emotional language of music, he used his music to enhance the impact and create an alchemy between the visual or audio content by ending up with a multi-dimensional experience that was greater than the sum of the parts.