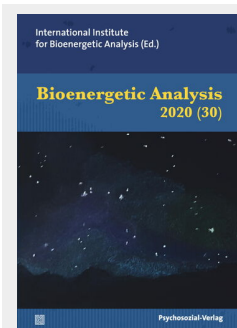


*Garry Cockburn*

## The Face and Body of the Other



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*Reviewers for this issue:*

Garry Cockburn, Léia Cardenuto and Maê Nascimento

*Translators of abstracts for this issue:*

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# The Face and Body of the Other<sup>1</sup>

Garry Cockburn

## Abstracts

The Conference themes of love, healing, connection and authenticity challenge us to articulate how we might make an enlightened response to the eruption of evil, pervasive traumatic suffering, and ecological degradation threatening the world today. We have the resources to do this in our Bioenergetic tradition. Lowen's scientific and sociological vision as expressed in his most important book, *Fear of Life: A Therapy for Being*, is foundational. There, he asserts the primacy of the body and human feelings and the archetypal importance of the Oedipus complex. A modern study of the Oedipus complex can help us more deeply understand how the face and body of "the other" can release us from the paranoia and fear of life so prevalent today and release the power of authentic love and grace that were central to Lowen's life and vision.

*Key words:* archetypal, problem of evil, Oedipus complex, the feminine, "otherness"

### Le visage et le corps de l'autre (French)

Les thèmes de la Conférence sur l'amour, la guérison, la connexion et l'authenticité nous mettent au défi de préciser comment apporter une réponse éclairée au jaillissement du mal, aux souffrances traumatiques généralisées et à la dégradation de l'environnement menaçant le monde aujourd'hui. Nous avons les ressources pour le faire dans notre tradition bioénergétique. La vision scientifique et sociologique de Lowen telle qu'exprimée dans son livre le plus important, *La Peur de Vivre: une thérapie de l'Être*, est fondamentale. Il y affirme la primauté du corps et des sentiments humains et l'importance archétypale du complexe d'Édipe. Une étude moderne du complexe d'Édipe peut nous aider à comprendre davantage en profondeur comment le visage et le corps de "l'autre" peuvent nous libérer de la paranoïa et de la peur de vivre tellement fréquentes aujourd'hui et libérer le pouvoir de l'amour authentique et de la grâce qui se trouvaient au cœur de la vie et de la vision de Lowen.

### La cara y el cuerpo del otro (Spanish)

Los temas de amor, cura, conexión y autenticidad de la Conferencia nos desafían a articular cómo podemos dar una respuesta iluminada a la erupción del mal, el sufrimiento

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1 Keynote Address delivered to the 25<sup>th</sup> IIBA Conference in Portugal, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2019.

miento traumático generalizado y la degradación ecológica que amenaza al mundo de hoy. Tenemos los recursos para hacer esto en nuestra tradición bioenergética. La visión científica y sociológica de Lowen como se expresa en su libro más importante, *Miedo a la vida: una terapia para el ser*, es fundamental. Allí, afirma la primacía del cuerpo y los sentimientos humanos y la importancia arquetípica del complejo de Edipo. Un estudio moderno del complejo de Edipo puede ayudarnos a comprender más profundamente cómo la cara y el cuerpo del “otro” pueden liberarnos de la paranoia y el miedo a la vida que prevalecen hoy en día y liberar el poder del amor y la gracia auténticos que fueron centrales para en la vida y visión de Lowen.

### Il viso e il corpo dell'altro (Italian)

I temi della Conferenza: amore, guarigione, connessione e autenticità ci sfidano ad articolare il modo in cui potremmo dare una risposta illuminata all'eruzione del male, alla sofferenza traumatica pervasiva e al degrado ecologico che minaccia il mondo di oggi. Abbiamo le risorse per farlo nella nostra tradizione bioenergetica. La visione scientifica e sociologica di Lowen, espressa nel suo libro più importante, *Paura di Vivere*, è fondamentale. In esso afferma il primato del corpo e dei sentimenti umani e l'importanza archetipica del complesso di Edipo. Uno studio moderno del complesso di Edipo può aiutarci a comprendere più a fondo come il volto e il corpo dell'altro possano liberarci dalla paranoia e dalla paura della vita, oggi prevalenti, e liberare il potere dell'amore autentico e della grazia che sono stati fondamentali per la vita e visione di Lowen.

### O Rosto e o Corpo do Outro (Portuguese)

Os temas da Conferência sobre amor, cura, conexão e autenticidade desafiam-nos a articular como podemos dar uma resposta esclarecedora à irrupção do mal, do intenso sofrimento traumático e da degradação ecológica que ameaça o mundo atual. Temos os recursos para fazer isso em nossa tradição bioenergética. A visão científica e sociológica de Lowen, conforme expressa em seu livro mais importante, *Medo da vida: uma terapia para o ser*, é fundamental. Lá, ele afirma a primazia do corpo e dos sentimentos humanos e a importância arquetípica do complexo de Édipo. Um estudo moderno do complexo de Édipo pode ajudar-nos a entender mais profundamente como o rosto e o corpo do “outro” podem libertar-nos da paranóia e do medo da vida, tão predominantes hoje em dia, liberando o poder do autêntico amor e graça que eram centrais na vida e na visão de Lowen.

### Das Gesicht und der Körper der Anderen (German)

Die Themen der Konferenz “Liebe, Heilung, Verbindung und Authentizität” fordern uns auf, eine erhellende Antwort zu geben auf die Eruption des Bösen, das allgegenwärtige traumatische Leiden und den Klimawandel, die allesamt die Welt von heute bedrohen. Wir haben die Ressourcen, dies aus unserer Bioenergetischen Tradition heraus zu tun. Lowens wissenschaftliche und soziologische Vision, die er in seinem

wichtigsten Buch *Angst vor dem Leben* ausdrückte, ist hierfür grundlegend. Dort erklärt er das Primat des Körpers und der Gefühle sowie die archetypische Bedeutung des Ödipuskomplexes. Eine moderne Sicht auf den Ödipuskomplex kann uns helfen tiefer zu verstehen, wie das Gesicht und der Körper “der Anderen” uns befreien kann von der heute so vorherrschenden Paranoia und Angst vor dem Leben. Sie kann die Kraft der authentischen Liebe und Anmut freisetzen, die zentral waren für Lowens Leben und Vision.

### Лицо и тело другого (Гарри Кокбёрн) (Russian)

Темы Конференции – любовь, исцеление, контакт и аутентичность – побуждают нас сформулировать компетентный ответ на вспышку губительного, повсеместного травмирующего страдания и экологической деградации, которая угрожает миру сегодня. В рамках нашей биоэнергетической традиции у нас есть на это ресурсы. Научное и социологическое видение Лоуэна в том виде, в котором оно представлено в его самой важной книге *Страх жизни: терапия бытия*, является основополагающим. В ней он заявляет о первичности тела и человеческих чувств, а также об первичной важности эдипова комплекса. Современное изучение эдипова комплекса может нам помочь глубже понять, как лицо и тело “другого” может освободить нас от паранойи и страха жизни, преобладающих сегодня, и высвободить мощь аутентичной любви и грациозности, которые были центральными темами в жизни и видении Лоуэна.

## Introduction

The Conference theme, “The Bioenergetic View of Love, Healing, Connection and Authenticity” is a challenging one when we survey the world today, a world where global warming and degradation of the environment are increasing at a much faster rate than predicted, a world where income inequality has drastically increased in nearly all countries since 1980<sup>2</sup>, a world where the ideal of participatory democracy is threatened by the increasing number of authoritarian dictators who have appointed themselves for life, and where the slide towards “collective paranoia” seems to be gaining momentum.

This world of paranoia and hatred was manifest both on 22 April this year in Sri Lanka with the attack on the Catholic churches and hotels, and one month earlier on 15 March, with the terrorist attack on the Mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand, my home country. The attack in New Zealand dropped many of

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2 World Inequality Report, 2018. Increase in inequality, especially in North America, China, India and Russia, where the top 1 per cent earners have captured twice as much of global growth as 50 per cent of the poorest individuals.

us into what the Maori people call “Te Kore”, the Void, the black emptiness where the soul experiences darkness and death. It is the Maori belief, that it is only the wailing and grief of women that can call souls back out of the darkness and into “Te Ao Marama”, the World of Light, back into the world of feeling joy, sadness and love. And in New Zealand we were blessed by having a Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, whose steel-like strength and motherly grief were instantly recognized as resonating with what is best in human beings, when she said to the Muslim community, “You are us”. And out of Te Kore, the black Void, she called forth an authentic outpouring of love, healing and connection with our Muslim brothers and sisters, not only in New Zealand, but around the world.

## **The Need for the Archetypal**

The crises of modernity that we are facing, especially the darkness as “totalizing” political, consumerist and digital systems take over the world, calls for something deeper in our understanding to stop us all falling into a “deadening sameness” (Holland, 2002, p. 56). We need to open up to the resources that are inherent in the archetypal ideas that Professor Zoja has been discussing in his work.

Carl Jung writes that the Archetypal, the inherited instinctual patterns of the psyche, becomes accessible when the ego functions are disrupted by trauma (Jung, 1911–12, para 631). And now with tragedies like Sri Lanka and Christchurch, where our ego-functioning was disrupted, we can get insights into two areas of experience: firstly, the archetypal darkness of the “collective paranoia” that Professor Zoja has spoken and written about, where “the other” becomes the enemy; and secondly, we get insights into the deep archetypes of love, connection and healing that are beyond ego-connectedness and where “the other” becomes an intimate human brother or sister with whom we identify. As the New Zealand Prime Minister said, “You are us”.

Concerning the dark side of the archetypal, I believe we at this Conference, and in fact people throughout the world, owe a great debt to Prof Zoja who has forewarned us about the phenomenon and dangers of “collective paranoia”. He has shown how the contagious nature of collective paranoia can devour whole societies, and how modernization and globalization increase the number of excluded individuals who have lost contact with “the other” and become vulnerable to paranoia, envy and hate.

This is, no doubt, exacerbated by the social media whose speed and addictive qualities provide an easy platform for connection between hate-filled individuals, as we witnessed in Christchurch. Also, the ubiquity, speed and addictive power of digital computers and cell-phones privileges and overemphasizes our visual sense, eclipsing our somatic connection and proximity to “the other” (Steiner, 2011, p. 10) and blinding us to the deeper rhythms of life within ourselves.

## The Problem of Evil

The eruption of evil and the prevalence of traumatic suffering around the world, both threatens to overwhelm us and challenges us to ponder the faulted and darker aspects of human nature. The problem of evil reveals a deep abyss, or aporia, in human understanding (Ricoeur, 2007, p. 6) as humans have sought for thousands of years to understand the nature of evil. And while theological and mythological frameworks can increase our understanding and give us stories, such as the Garden of Eden and the Greek tragedies<sup>3</sup>, ultimately human evil remains a deep mystery, and even more so on the psychological level.

To understand human darkness, Freud posited a death instinct, and Kleinian psychoanalysts believe there is an inherent destructiveness and aggression in the human infant, a sort of “original sin” (Grotstein, 2007, p. 260). What I would like to say is that we have some resources in our own Bioenergetic tradition to illuminate both the darker and lighter aspects of human nature, and to guide us in our thinking about how we might make a more enlightened response to current crises in the light of our Conference themes of love, healing, connection and authenticity.

The resources I am referring to are the writings and legacy of Alexander Lowen. In the preface to his very first book, *The Language of the Body* he wrote, “Only with humility and candor dare one come face to face with the great wells of feeling which lie at the core of human beings” (1958, p. xiii). And in *The Fear of Life: A Therapy for Being*, Lowen wrote, “the inflated ego of modern man becomes a devil when it is not subordinated to the primacy of the body” (p. 251). Plainly, Lowen’s insights were not just focused on creating a somatic psychotherapy. He had a vision into the promise and depth of what it was to be an embodied human being.

## The Primacy of the Body

Lowen’s wisdom was to assert the primacy of the body and human feelings in the understanding of our personal and social situation, and it is this wisdom that has spoken to each of us and enkindled our commitment to Bioenergetic Analysis. And so his life was dedicated to a passionate understanding of the human situation and the promise of fulfillment that comes from accepting our human limitations and our Fate. Lowen’s wisdom was not based on some gentle understanding of human nature, but was based on the “strongest aggression of the heart” (1958, p. 391), a powerful stance in accord with Reich’s revolutionary ap-

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3 The evils of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are of a nature even beyond the Greek dramatists view of humanity’s tragic situation (Tracy, 1978, p. 213).

proach, and with Freud's courage in shattering the sexual norms of the Victorian age.

I would like to expand on Lowen's assertion of the primacy of the body, his major contribution to the world of psychotherapy. You will recall some of his key statements, such as, "You are your body," "The self for me is the bodily self, the only self we will ever know," and "Doing good therapy is understanding that human nature is the body itself" (2004, p. 243).

We do need to remember that the key resource Lowen used to develop his insight into the primacy of the body was the Freudian inheritance he received through Wilhelm Reich. In his first book, *The Language of the Body* he was able to show how somatic processes underlie the psychic phenomena observed in Freudian psychoanalysis (2006, p. 19). Lowen believed it was essential that bioenergetic analysts understood Ego Psychology, with its focus on the psychic structures of ego, id and superego, the instinctual drives of sex and aggression, and the Oedipus complex. This was in order to fully comprehend the character structure of individuals.

I believe that modern Bioenergetic Analysis has freed itself from the strictures of classical Freudian Ego Psychology by accepting the challenges inherent in the Relational Paradigm that superseded classical drive theory in the 1980's (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983). However, I also believe we may be in danger of throwing the baby out with the bath water, if we throw out drive theory completely and do not hang onto the riches of the Freudian concept of Oedipality. The reason for this is that both drive theory and Oedipality are based on the primacy of the body, and it is the truth of the body and its feelings, not our ego-centred rationality that gives us the most powerful insights into the depths of human nature.

## **The Oedipus Complex**

At this point I am going to focus on the Oedipus complex. I think there are rich resources in this concept that we need to recover. We all know that the classical Freudian Oedipus complex relates to the idea of infantile or childhood sexuality. Freud believed that a child's incestuous sexual feelings for the parent of the opposite sex were linked to murderous feelings towards the parent of the same sex. For Freud, this was resolved by the child suppressing these incestuous and murderous desires under the threat of castration, by suppressing any memory of the Oedipal situation itself, and by identifying with the parent of the same sex. If the child was unable to completely suppress all knowledge of these desires, he became neurotic and unable to fully adapt to the sociocultural situation (Lowen, 2004, p. 4).

We know that Freud named this process after Sophocles' tragedy whereby Oedipus had unknowingly killed his father Laius, and having solved the puzzle of the Sphinx, was rewarded by unknowingly marrying his biological mother,



Queen Jocasta. Paradoxically, it was Oedipus' blindness to his own corruption and his faith in his own cleverness that eventually lead him to discovering the truth; and upon this discovery, he literally blinded himself. Once blinded, he eventually became a hero by placing himself in a sacred grove of trees, where others feared to enter, humbly accepting the necessities of reality, in other words, accepting his fate.

Lowen said that the book *Fear of Life: A Therapy for Being*, was the most important book he had written (2004, p. 123). This book is both a therapeutic study of individuals struggling with the Oedipus complex and also a sociocultural exposition of Sophocles' tragedy about Oedipus. In trying to understand the modernity of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the dysfunctional structures of Western societies that valued power, wealth and control over human well-being, Lowen explores the antithesis between a human being's embodied animal nature which will die and his human ego, a would-be god, that seeks to avoid this fate. This antithesis is recognized as having a positive side, furthering the growth of culture and society. But it also has a destructive side (2004, p. 8). Lowen states that the conflict between the emotional body and the egoistic mind causes an even worse situation, "the fear of life" itself. This profound fear of life can result in psychotic breakdowns in many individuals and fear of a breakdown of the social order itself, and the world coming apart.

For Lowen, then, the answer was a humble acceptance of reality plus the wisdom of submitting through a somatic therapeutic process to the terrors of the unconscious, and the re-experiencing of our already-experienced psychological death (2004, p. 189). This results, he said, in peace of mind and a sense of fulfilment in life (p. 121) which he described in the last chapter of his final book, *Honoring the Body* (2004). Lowen, like Freud, was a philosophic Stoic, in coming to terms with, and fully accepting the bare realities of his existence.

## **Lowen's Use of Freudian and Non-Freudian Ideas**

Lowen's psychotherapeutic understanding of the Oedipus complex as it affected individual's lives, was essentially a mainstream classical Freudian interpretation, which drew largely on the writings of Freud, Fenichel and Reich. But when it came to reflecting on modernity, Lowen used several other intellectual resources to reflect on the story of Oedipus. Lowen was deeply impressed by the writings of the Jungian, Erich Neumann, whom he quotes in several of his books. Lowen does not write much about the feminine, except in relation to his mother who featured in his early therapy with Reich, and his wife whom he loved dearly, but in *Fear of Life* (1980, p. 193) he quotes Neumann's ideas that the female goddesses of the matriarchal order were the rulers of life and death, and that men stood in awe of women and mothers. Lowen, again in relation to the feminine, says,

“Oedipus was blind to the fact that man is the son of woman and must return to his mother the earth, on his marriage bed and on his deathbed” (p. 198). Lowen writes that in blinding himself, Oedipus found peace in the unconscious and in the body by turning against his ego and he returned to the realm of the mother-earth.

I have focused on the power of the feminine in discussing Lowen and the Oedipus story as the classical Freudian Oedipus complex has rightly been critiqued as being male-oriented and phallogentric. As well, the power of the feminine has been underestimated in the Oedipal process, and I will return to these themes later.

Freud, together with Reich and Lowen, were keen to avoid being seen as “mystical” and promoted forms of therapy that purported to be in accord with the scientific norms of Enlightenment rationality. And yet, paradoxically, by placing the Oedipus complex at the centre of their psychotherapeutic endeavors, they opened the way for an examination, not only of the psychological and the sexual, but also of the archetypal and transcendent dimensions of human existence. In other words, they were unwitting visionaries of the real as well as scientists, and they interpreted the meaning of the symbolic to illuminate the issues of their day.

## **Recovering the Scientific and Visionary Perspectives**

I believe we can start to recover<sup>4</sup> both the scientific and visionary perspectives of Lowen’s writings, firstly by recognizing two things, one positive and one negative. Positively, the Freudian concept of oedipality did identify the essential elements in the formation of the human psyche, such as sexuality and aggression. It gave insights into the archaic unconscious core of the psyche as well as the processes of human development and gender identity. However, negatively, the classical Freudian interpretation of the Oedipal complex has been subject to major adaptations and criticisms, and is culturally bound to Western forms of family organisation.

For instance, in the USA, under the influence of Self Psychology, the focus shifted from the myth of Oedipus to the myth of Narcissus, which meant that patient’s problems were no longer seen in terms of Oedipal dynamics, but as the result of primitive damage to the Self in the pre-Oedipal stage. Others, reflecting on their own experiences as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people have identified the Oedipus complex as inextricably tied to the heterosexual norms of gender and sexual identity, which were regarded as being identical categories; and Feminist critics have strongly critiqued this phallogentric and heterosexual normative bias from a postmodern position (Barrat, 2019, p. 10).

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4 Refer Ricoeur’s model of “suspicion and recovery” (1970, pp. 32ff).

In England, adaptations of the classical Oedipus complex, by Melanie Klein in 1945, put the Oedipal complex back into the oral stage of development, linking it with primitive phantasies about the maternal body. A more recent Kleinian, John Steiner, a New Zealand psychoanalyst, based in London, has shown (2011, pp. 100ff.) that Freud's resolution of the Oedipus complex is in fact, a primitive paranoid solution dominated by the wish for revenge against the father, and that more relational solutions are available. In the USA, James Grotstein, a psychoanalyst, has described the Oedipus complex as being much more complex "in depth and duration" than what has been traditionally thought. Grotstein states that the Oedipus story is a mythic legend that underpins our search for truth, freedom from guilt, and radical transformation (2014, p. 269).

As you can see, the Oedipus complex is such a powerful and rich concept that there is a kaleidoscope of views on its meaning and relevance. The reason I am focusing on it is that Lowen identified it as the key story for understanding three things: firstly the psychodynamics of all individuals and their character structures; secondly as the key symbolic story for understanding modernity; and thirdly, for defining a body-oriented therapy as a "Therapy for Being".

Lowen noted that the importance of the Oedipus complex was being ignored in his day. And this is also true for us today when the focus is no longer on it, but rather on the abundant riches of affective neuroscience, attachment theory, trauma recovery and relationality. These new paradigms are essential knowledge and are being incorporated into modern Bioenergetics. But these modern paradigms, while necessary, may not be sufficient to give us ready access into the deeper, darker and richer aspects of the human situation, that is so necessary today. An understanding of the powerful dynamics of the Oedipus complex provided this depth of understanding for Freud, Reich, and Lowen, and still may do this for us today. We need to recover the relevance of Oedipality both for our therapeutic work and for our views on human nature, so that Bioenergetic Analysis is not at risk of losing one of its major theoretical underpinnings. We can help to do this by focusing on the concept of "otherness".

## Recovering "Otherness" in Oedipality

From a therapeutic perspective, Lowen's focus was primarily on understanding the functioning of the Freudian drives on the body and psyche of the individual. As he says in *Fear of Life: A Therapy for Being* (p. 7), "For more than 30 years ... my focus has been and is upon the individual as he struggles to find some meaning and satisfaction in this life."

However, Lowen's primary focus on the individual, I believe reflects a deep aloneness at the heart of traditional bioenergetic analysis. Lowen's focus was on the vibratory body in relationship with itself in the world, not on a body whose

nature is both to be in a relationship with its own desires and to seek fulfilment through relationship with an “other”. He did not seem to fully appreciate the basic existential reality that the individual is constituted by her or his relations with others. This is a perspective we need to more fully incorporate into Bioenergetic Analysis

Paul Ricoeur, the French philosopher, in his book, *Oneself as Another* (1992) asserts that *otherness is not added on to selfhood from the outside*. “Otherness” is a constitutive part of the self’s very being and meaning. For Ricoeur, the *otherness of the body* gives rise to our three greatest experiences at the level of meaning: my experience of my own body, my experience of embodied others, and my experience that I wish to live ethically with and for others (p. 318).

And for the Lithuanian philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas, “the face of the other” creates an asymmetrical indebtedness on my part, an ethical and moral summons to recognize the other’s right to exist, and to recognize that “the face of the other” is a manifestation, an epiphany of the whole world and of infinity (1996, p. 53). The commandment, “You shall not kill”, is for Levinas, a foundational edict arising from “the face of the other”, that opens us up to life itself.

Because this relational perspective was not on the intellectual horizon when Lowen was writing, he did not directly explore or write about this inherent “otherness” of the face and the body, nor about our ethical duty to the other. That was not his focus.

If, today, we can view Oedipal dynamics through the lens of “otherness”, we can help loosen our Lowenian inheritance from its strong embeddedness within classical Freudian drive theory and its focus on the individual and open up our awareness about the significance of the “face and body of the other”. And we can do this if we begin to see the beginnings of Oedipality right back in the archaic and undifferentiated core of the human psyche (Ogden, 2009, p. 54ff.), and start with the central role of the feminine in calling life into being out of the void. This maternal call of love into the dark space is a call to our primordial and archaic psyche to transition into the world of beingness, sensual embodiment and connectedness. And when the infant sees him or herself reflected back in the eyes of a loving mother, the “I” of the infant is transformed into a “me”, as someone who has made an impression on someone else out in the world who loves him or her (Ogden, 2016, p. 173). This sense of a “me” is also the beginning sense of “a self”. This is a profound experience of saying “Yes” to life, “Yes” to being nurtured by an “other”, the pre-Oedipal Mother, whose gazes, caresses and “primary preoccupation” (Winnicott, 1956) lays the foundations for the erotic, sexual self. And it is safe “to go on being”, as Winnicott says (1960, p. 591), because the child now has had an existential experience of themselves in relation to the other.

We need to remember that the pre-Oedipal mother who calls the child into relationship, already has in her psyche her own Oedipal father (Ogden 1996, p. 202), and she is a mother who is already immersed in an Oedipal world of

others. She is also the only one of the three to have an intimate relationship in the flesh with both the father and the child, even if it is expressed differently (Green, 2005, p. 192).

The child's "Yes" to experiencing the sensual embodiment by the feminine, grows in complexity over time as the child begins to meet the "No" of the father. This "No" of the father is initially a "disruptive attunement" (Herzog, 1991) to the smooth, loving attunement of the mother, and attests to the presence of a triangular relationship from the outset of the child's life (Brown, 2011, p. 148) since both homeostasis and disruption are needed for emotional regulation and development. This disruptive "No" of the father grows into a strong prohibition, by the time of the classical Oedipus complex age of 3–5 years and becomes a "No" that signifies that the child can NOT have eternal and exclusive access to the maternal body. This "No" however, also contains the possibility that the child can be in a real relationship with a significant other who is not mother, and also that the mother can be in an intimate relationship without the child (Barratt, 2019, p. 13). The developmental achievement is that in accepting the transformation from twoness into thirdness, the child can develop an embodied grounded sense of their own social self (Barden, 2015).

The acceptance of the Oedipal "Yes" and "No", also ushers in the capacity for self-reflection, for the development of a linguistic (Barratt, 2019, p. 17) and symbolic self, for the development of an individuated gendered sexuality and the capacity for regulated aggression. Most importantly, it opens up the focus to be on the "other" and not narcissistically on the self. All of this places the maturing embodied self into a cultural and social matrix where love, sexuality, mythology, religion, art, poetry, philosophy, science, and psychotherapy, help to disclose the deeper, extraordinary and transcendent dimensions of life.

## Recovering a Visionary Perspective

On the sociocultural level, let's recall that Lowen used the Oedipus story to shed light on the dysfunctional structures of Western societies that valued power, wealth and control over human well-being. This search for deeper meaning remains as true today for us as it did for Alexander Lowen. We need only to look at the rising tide of hatred and paranoia towards others who are different, the vast number of refugees from torture and oppression, and the threat of extinction to a million life-forms<sup>5</sup> on earth.

As Lowen intuitively understood in accessing Erich Neumann's ideas, we need myths, stories and symbols to help us understand the deep coherence and meaning of life (Tracy, 1978, p. 210). As Paul Ricoeur has said, a powerful myth,

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5 UN "Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services". May 6, 2019.

story or symbol gives us a gift of meaning that we need to creatively interpret so that we are not left in silence and confusion in the face of fear and terror but are more deeply embedded in objective reality (1967, p. 348ff). A potent myth, story or symbol should awaken us existentially and restore our relationship with ourselves, with each other and the earth so that we can squarely face into our current reality.

And so, the myth of the Oedipus, based on the Greek tragedy by Sophocles, was a potent symbol that gave Freud, Reich and Lowen meaningful access into the power of sexuality, into the deepest dynamics of human love and hate, into human frailty, forgiveness and redemption, and into Fate, life and death.

Today we may not fully realize, in our fears and confusion at the complexities of modern life, that the Oedipus myth may be living us, and that we need to open our eyes and pay attention.

Professor Zoja, in his book *Cultivating the Soul* (1999, p. 181ff.) provides his own wonderful exposition of “Oedipus The King”. He suggests there is a need to examine the murdered and murderer “other” within oneself. And, like Lowen, he highlights the dilemma we all face in reconciling truth and reason: truth represented by ancient myths and by the mysterious depths of our irrational emotions; and reason represented by the knowledge that we wish to keep perfecting ourselves forever at the expense of our emotions (1999, p. 181).

My sense is that, in reconciling the difference between embodied truth and instrumental reason, we need to keep on recovering, as both Alexander Lowen and Professor Zoja have pointed out, the primacy of our bodies and our feelings, as well as a deep respect for “the other”. And a pathway to this is to reclaim the power of the feminine – and the maternal – in a world dominated by psychopathic male leaders in the political, corporate and armaments spheres. We also need the feminine and the power of love to pull us out of an impending void, “Te Kore”, the world of darkness and death, as the Maori people call it. And we need the good masculine and the paternal power of a loving “No” to help us mature into responsible and authentic human beings, and to fully recognize the face and body of an other, who is not family or friend, but is truly “other”, and hence is identical with oneself. This reflects the wisdom in all religions, to “Love your neighbor as yourself”, and this radical truth must continue to invite us to find a common humanity with all people of different cultures and beliefs.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, what we can say is that the tragedies that are occurring in the Sacred Sites, the fire destroying Notre Dame, the symbolic Universal Mother, and the blood flowing from the ravaged bodies of “the other” at prayer in mosques, synagogues, churches and temples, involving people of all creeds and cultures, in-

dicates that we are facing a crisis of mythic proportions. Perhaps we need to listen even more urgently to the strongly coded messages that Mother Earth and our own bodies are sending us, that 'No' we cannot keep pursuing all of our material desires, depleting the Earth of its resources. Perhaps we need a heightened archetypal awareness that having been revealed as murderers of the Earth, its myriad lifeforms and other humans who are not us, we can like Oedipus, become heroic by seeing the Earth as a sacred grove, which is communally shared by all living creatures. This is not a recall to the Garden of Eden, but a wide-eyed demand to immerse ourselves in the bare reality and necessities we face today, not with stoicism, but with a faith in the power of authentic love and grace that can connect with the face and body of the other, so that both they and ourselves might be healed. So that we can say, like Jacinda Ardern, "You are us!"

In the story of Oedipus, the Oracle at Delphi was consulted twice, and her answers were misinterpreted with tragic consequences. And so this Conference gives us all a chance to gather and interpret the signs of our times, hopefully correctly, through the sensing our own bodies and feelings, and to update the paternal (Zoja, 2018) legacy of Alexander Lowen's insistence on the primacy of the body, so that we can emerge with a clearer vision of what a Bioenergetic view of Love, Healing, Connection and Authenticity means for us today.

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## About the Author

Garry Cockburn, BSW(Hons), NZAP(ACP), CBT, is a local trainer of the New Zealand Society for Bioenergetic Analysis. He was President of the IIBA from 2014–2016. He has published in the *Bioenergetic Journal* and is in private practice in Wellington, New Zealand.

garrycockburn001@gmail.com