

## Shipwreck and Revolution: The Occupy Movement from the Perspective of James Hillman's Work<sup>i</sup>

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*Statue of Liberty Puppet, Occupy demonstration, Washington Square Park, Fall 2011*

When someone we love is dying, their illness and death can become oddly paired with an event happening at the same time. Jim's living into his dying and Occupy Wall Street formed a couplet in me this fall, as I shuttled between Zuccotti Park and Thompson, Connecticut, holding revolution and the death of a father-mentor side-by-side in my heart. If Jim had been well, how I would have loved to take him down to the Atrium on Wall Street where Occupy Movement working groups meet each day and evening.

When you enter the large office building atrium, you see about 15 different groups in circles, with people of all ages and colors talking intensely about nonviolence, food security, arts and culture, healthcare, facilitation of dialogue, sustainability, corporate personhood. Here people are educating one other, hatching their dreams for "another way of being."<sup>ii</sup>

I would have urged him to address a General Assembly at Zuccotti Park. Like other public intellectuals--Zizek, Michael Moore, Chomsky, Cornel West--his voice would have been welcomed. I would want to walk with him and Margot in the Brooklyn neighborhood where occupiers began to live with a family facing foreclosure, forestalling their unfair eviction, sparking a nationwide movement of solidarity between "occupiers" and families losing their homes due to investment speculation in the mortgage market.<sup>iii</sup>

Sadly, we weren't able to make these trips.

Instead, I am left shuttling between his texts and thoughts of the revolution that is now quietly gathering up its energy in the dark of winter in order to burst into life this spring.

In 1991, 20 years before the Occupy Movement, Hillman (1992) declared that we are living “a shipwreck,” that “the world is going down” (p. 228), that “Mother nature is on dialysis,” “that nature is dying because culture is dying” (p. 238). Nothing has happened in the intervening years to prove him wrong. He alerted us to the “decline in political sense” (1992, p. 5), and decried how rare it was that any of us took to the streets to express our upset. “The human being,” he said, “has a political instinct, is by nature a citizen” (2006, p. 372).

He was convinced that the turn to psychotherapy over the last century has led us to retreat to an inner world, where we identify with the child archetype, leading us into a sense of disempowerment, leaving us feeling as though the ills of the world are beyond our capacity to affect them. But, he argued, “[d]emocracy depends on intensely active citizens, not children” (1992, p. 6).

Therapy misled us because it insisted that we take our “negative” emotions into deeper meaning rather than immediate action. Therapy says, Think before you act, feel before you emote, judge, interpret, imagine, reflect. *Self-knowledge* is the point of the emotions ... not public awareness. Know *thyself*; know what *you* are doing before you know the issue, and know the meaning of an action before you act. Otherwise you are projecting and acting out. (1992, pp. 105-106)

The therapy room does not teach the citizen “political skills” or “anything about the way the world works” (1992, pp. 6-7). But, he chided, “we cannot put in order the personal welfare of our souls unless we address the welfare of society” (2006, p. 372).

Therapy, he said, has confused us about the source of our abuse, placing it in the past, rather than in the present.<sup>iv</sup> It misconceived the border between ourselves and others, bowing to the dictates of individualistic ideologies. He wondered if the consulting room could make reparations for its errors by becoming “a cell in which revolution is prepared” (1992, p. 38). To do so it would need “to keep the pores open to what goes on in the empire,” to help us suffer “the decline of the republic” (1992, p. 235). “If psychotherapy doesn’t deal with the [dying of our culture], it’s in a state of denial of one of the root causes of our pain” (1992, p. 225). It is counter-revolutionary.

In the last 20 years of his life, Hillman’s work anticipated the main themes of the Occupy Movement. He rejected the idea that late capitalism’s “free” market economics is a science, a positive step on a developmental scale, or “equivalent with and necessary to political democracy and the American dream” (2006, p. 384). The economy reflects a “monotheistic belief that converts all value into its one bottom line” (p. 384). Business is a crimogenic arena (p. 385). We should be beware of feeling like we *deserve* things, of thinking that our personal security is a noble aim.

In the face of therapy’s manifest failure to correct its myopia, Jim would be happy that the Occupy Movement is forging a different set of opportunities to create cells of revolution across the globe. He would laud their creation of public

spaces where outrage can be expressed and the sources of it determined through shared critical reflection. He would applaud the occupiers' discernment that the border we have been drawing between our self and others--severing psyche from culture, history, politics, and economics -- has been misplaced. "Since the cut between self and natural world is arbitrary," says Hillman, "we can make it at the skin or we can take it as far out as you like -- to the deep oceans and distant stars" (Hillman, 1995, p. xix).

For the self, he said, is the "interiorization of community" (1992, p. 40). "I would be with myself when I'm with others. I would not be with myself when I am walking alone or meditating in my room or in my room imagining or working on my dreams. In fact, I would be estranged from myself" (p. 40). The others I find in myself would not be only humans, but "buildings, animals, and trees" (1992, p. 40).<sup>v</sup>

He would defend the occupiers on several points. Hillman rejected the usual critique that the individual must stand apart, so that he does not identify with the mob and lend his weight to fascism. He wrote,

This kind of fantasy keeps us afraid of community. It locks us up inside our separate selves all alone and longing for connection. In fact, the idea of surrendering to the fascist mob is the result of the separated self. It's the old Apollonian ego, aloof and clear, panicked by the Dionysian flow.

We have to think about community as a different category altogether. It's not individuals coming together and connecting, and it's not a crowd" (1992, p. 43).

The self is "a self *among*, not a self apart" (p. 43). We must devote ourselves to the community where we actually live, giving others the time and care required.

Hillman defends the need for "revolution." By revolution he means: turning over. Not development or unfolding, but turning over the system that has made you go into analysis to begin with -- the system being government by minority and conspiracy, official secrets, national security, corporate power, *et cetera*. (1992, pp. 38-39)

When we put ourselves "in a position where [we] are having to imagine how to do new things. That is revolution" (p. 218). The revolution is "to work on cures beyond *my cures*."<sup>vi</sup> The "therapeutic task" -- the revolutionary task-- is to help develop "the *awareness* of dysfunction in society, in the outer world" (p. 219).<sup>vii</sup>

Critics complain that not enough position statements have emerged from the Occupy movement. William Galston (in Eckholm, 2012), from the Brookings Institute, rails that the occupiers have "gotten the people's attention, and now they have to say something more specific. Average Americans want solutions, not demonstrations, and their patience for the latter won't last indefinitely" (New York Times, 2/12/12). Hillman would speak up on the occupiers' behalf, arguing that legitimate protest can be "empty" (1992, p. 103). This "third way" he calls "*kenosis*. Empty protest."

I don't know how to do the right thing. I don't even know what's right. I have no answer. But I sure smell something wrong with the government....

*Kenosis* puts the emptiness in a new light. It values the emptiness. It says 'empty protest' is a *via negativa*, a non-positivist way of entering the political arena. You take your outrage seriously, but you don't force yourself to have answers. Trust your nose. You know what stinks. Don't try to replace the helpless frustration you feel, the powerless victimization, by working out a rational answer. The answers will come, if they come, when they come, to you, to others, but don't fill in the emptiness of the protest with positive suggestions before their time. First, protest! I don't know what should be done about most of the major political dilemmas, but my gut (my soul, my heart, my skin, my eyes) sinks, creeps, crawls, weeps, cringes, shakes. It's wrong, simply wrong, what's going on here. (p. 104).

Jim would be less concerned with the outcome at the end of the year, than with the fact of our turning out, our turning up: "Pass... on what you love...political action, civil disobedience, *even if you know you're going to lose*. Because the memory of actions taken is an important way that things get passed on from generation to generation" (p. 236).

He wanted a revolution where the aesthetic could ascend, dispelling the anesthetized (p. 128). "[T]he arts often act as the sensitive antennae of social justice and moral outrage, keeping the soul awake to hypocrisy, cant, suppression, and jingoism" (p. 159). If he could have been at any of the street protests around the country last fall, he would have delighted at the giant puppets, the songs, posters, and costumes, the imaginative political actions staged like performance art.

Hillman calls to the would-be elders among us: "Grandfather! Grandmother! Come off the golf courses and cruise ships! ....We have duties before dying, duties to ideals, to beauty and justice and truth and service...we have the sin of avarice on our backs" (2006, p. 387). He calls us to occupy our citizenship, to practice "seeing through" the ideas that reduce us to rounds of self-improvement, leaving untouched the necessary revolution before us.

I will never be able to walk in Zuccotti Park with Jim, but as I walk with other Occupiers I am aware how deeply I am affected by all I learned from him. For those of us who honor his insights into the shipwreck we are suffering and the revolution that awaits us, let us meet in the town square this spring. I'll see you there!

## References

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<sup>i</sup> Remarks offered in memorial at "A Gathering to Offer Tribute and to Celebrate the Life and Work of James Hillman," Pacifica Graduate Institute, Carpinteria, CA, 3/3/12.

<sup>ii</sup> Arundhati Roy, "Confronting Empire," Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2003, retrieved 2/29/12 from <http://www.ratical.org/ratville/CAH/AR012703.html>

<sup>iii</sup> "Perhaps working on my feelings is not more 'subjective' than working on the neighborhood air quality. . . . Perhaps the abuses I have unconsciously suffered in my deep interior subjectivity pale in comparison with the abuses going around me every minute in my ecological surroundings, abuses that I myself commit or comply with. It may be easier to discover yourself a victim than admit yourself a perpetrator" (Hillman, in Roszak, Gomes, & Kanner, 1995, pp. xix-xx).

<sup>v</sup> Indeed, we would find ourselves unfamiliar, as Jung found himself at the end of his life. The self would be a flowing of many things, a surprise, the community coming together through me.

<sup>vi</sup> "And instead of imagining that I am dysfunctional, my family is dysfunctional, you realize...[that] society is dysfunctional. The political process is dysfunctional. And we have to work on cures that are beyond *my* cure. That's revolution." (Hillman, 1992, pp. 218-219).

<sup>vii</sup> I cannot repair it in myself in my own relationships alone, because my problem is social dysfunctions....Where the school isn't right for my kids, where the food I eat is not right, where the air I breathe is not right, where the architecture in which I spend my time assaults me, the lighting and the chairs and the smells and the plastic are not right. Where the words I hear on TV and are printed in the newspaper are lies, where the people who are in charge of things are not right because they are hypocritical and hiding what they are really doing, so how can I ever get it right within my home and within my marriage?" (1992, p. 219).