

Breath in the time of COVID

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I. Breath junkie

I am a breath junkie. Forever worrying about where the next breath will come from. Will I have enough? Enough to get through the night. Enough to walk up a slope. Enough to finish the trail.

Everything is measured in breath. How much breath do I need to walk in the park? How much for a day trip?

My hunger for breath is insatiable. Air hunger—always, always wanting more. Always needing more than I can get.

I suffer humiliation, daily, when I move, so slow, so needy. I humbly bow my head to my sadistic body, meting out blows. I accept silently the myriad failures notched down to a daily tally of catastrophic inability. Can't lift that; can't walk that far; can't keep up; can't join in.

I used to rebel, try harder, get angry.

No more.

Now I know my place. I'm a lowlife breath junkie.

Everything comes second to the breath.

Carel, Havi. "Breath Junkie." *Literature and Medicine* 2020

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BREATH LANDSCAPE

- **Breathlessness:** an invisible symptom affecting a large population of usually older people with common chronic & life limiting illness; leading cause of hospital admissions.....
- **Breathing:** a tool for both *self-regulation* & for building relationship; the *interpersonal breath*

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COVID-19 Guidance

Wash your hands, cover your face, make space.





HANDS FACE SPACE

COVID-19 Guidance

Wash your hands, cover your face, make space.





HANDS FACE SPACE

• Covid-19: breathing & breathlessness becomes an acute & public health concern; breath inequalities...
 • Long Covid: physical, psychological, social and existential concern....

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"EPISTEMIC TRANSFORMATION"
CAREL & KIDD 2020

- We know *what it is like* now to live in a world where it is normal to wear a face mask, avoid crowded places and evaluate respiratory risk (we did not know this before, it is a *new knowing*)
- Epistemic transformation in how we "know" our breath:
 - Fear, Suspicion, Anxiety, Loss, Grief...mis-measurement
 - "Lockdown" "Restrictions" - how does this affect the Lived Life, Lived Body and the Intra/Interpersonal Breath?

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THE INTERPERSONAL BREATH



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SECURE BASE EXPERIENCE

...a psychophysiological state that is co-created:

- Relaxedness, warmth, closeness, feeling soothed/sated, **steady breathing**, reduced heart rate, "all's well", playfulness
- Reduction of negative emotions; shame, low self-esteem, fear, pain etc

The search for the secure base: Attachment Theory and Psychotherapy, Jeremy Holmes 2001

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NEUROBIOLOGY OF ATTACHMENT

Survival tools online from birth:

- A system that will allow me to feel my internal states: *Interoception*
- A system that will allow me to make meaning of my experience - what is safe and what is a threat: *Neuroception*
- A system for expressing my internal states: *Expressive Behaviours/Attachment Cries*
- An attentive, attuned and responsive inter-relationship
- **Basic building block = breathing together**

Q: if we have not experienced this safe foundation, how does this affect our breathing, our 'soma' (symptoms) throughout life?

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RECIPROCITY AS MUSICAL BREATH QUALITIES

• "Intersubjectivity" "Feeling states" "affect attunement" (Stern 1985/98)

- Being in tune (or dissonant)
- Phrasing & flow
- Pitch & volume
- Timbre (sharp, soft, harsh, jarring etc)
- Rhythm (steady, off-beat)
- Qualities of silence (a breath held in fear, Winnicott's "quiet breathing")

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PRACTICE



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BREATHING AS A TOOL FOR SELF-REGULATION AND SELF REFLECTION

BY MINNA MARTIN ET AL 2016

Breathing is a way to open up potential space where the experience of the self in relation to others can become conscious and reorganized. This way, it is possible to reach early non-verbal experiences and memories that are more difficult to reach through verbal work alone. Use of breathing as an information and communication channel means working at the interface between conscious control and unconscious reactions of the autonomic nervous system. By listening to [her] breathing the therapist learns to observe her physical sensations and reactions such as tension, irritation, or overarousal. At the same time, she gets the chance to develop the ability to calm down, which is necessary because working with people presents challenges every day.

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TAKE HOME TIP - GOAL

- Ground body
- Open to the breath
- Allow what is arising to come/change/go
- Let go.....exhale.....
- Come back to the lullaby of your breath
- Kettle boiling/in loo/looking out of window.....

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Journal of MATERIAL CULTURE
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ARTICLE
Exploring the 'thin place' between life and death: Compassion-Focused Relational Music Therapy (CRMT) for terminal agitation in advanced cancer in a hospice setting
 Kate Binns, Corven McGuire and Hazel Cull

Abstract
 In this article, we explore how breathless patients with advanced non-malignant lung disease use their respiratory assist devices. The focus is on the experience of breathlessness and the use of the device. We explore the experience of breathlessness and the use of the device. We explore the experience of breathlessness and the use of the device.

Keywords
 palliative care, end-of-life care, terminal agitation, music therapy, hospice care, breathlessness, respiratory assist devices, patient experience, terminal agitation, music therapy, hospice care, breathlessness, respiratory assist devices, patient experience.

Blogs @ www.lifeofbreath.org

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EPISTEMIC RE-EVALUATION OF BREATH?

- Modern norm is over-fast, restricted, inefficient breathing: out of time/out of breath
- + diseases of ageing
- + Covid = existential breathing crisis

- New understanding of & gratitude for the intra/interpersonal breath? (A "cons-piracy of love through breath")
- Breath as a holistic heuristic?
- Integration of this understanding into clinical practice? (applied)

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REFLECTION... PART 2, MARCH 10TH

- How does working with/witnessing and/or experiencing breathlessness make you
 - Feel?
 - React/do?
- How might you re-evaluate your relationship with your own breath and/or use this to support others?
- Is this idea/concept useful? How?

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Breath-Body-Mind Integration (Foundation level)

Using breath-body-mind techniques for the support and management of loss to reach self-peace, resilience and self-awareness.

Working with breath to live with loss and bereavement. Loss is a common part of life and self-awareness and self-compassion are key to living with loss and bereavement. This is a unique opportunity to explore the connection between breath, body and mind. This is a unique opportunity to explore the connection between breath, body and mind.

Breath-body-mind integration one day training at Sobell centre for education & research

March 26th 2021 online

<https://www.sobelleducation.org.uk/product/breath-body-mind-integration-foundation-level-copy/>

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PG CERTIFICATE IN PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL CARE

Taught by educators and leaders within **Oxford Health NHS Trust** in partnership with **Oxford Brookes University** over two semesters via a series of study days & supported personal study

Level 7 (60 credits)

Application deadline 5th February 2021 for May start

mastersmodule@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk

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FEEDBACK & LINKS

- hyib2@hymc.ac.uk
- <https://hospitalsenses.co.uk/first-and-last-breath-notes-on-a-soundscape/>
- <https://lifeofbreath.org>

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