

Mummies' Groups and other Heretics

R G Barney

Sveiki, whoever you are. It's unlikely we have ever met, so you will forgive me if I am a little unsure of which register to employ. I did receive some advice. It was to engage with you as if I were writing to someone whom I respected and who would carefully read what I wrote. Unfortunately, I don't really know anyone like that, so maybe it's better if I imagine that you are sitting opposite me in my kitchen, and you have that wonderful quality so admirable in the Latvian, namely the ability to sit quietly (maybe a little impassively - always disconcerting to an Englishman) while I embark on a tortuous monologue. And may your God or Gods bless you if this is so: you have the patience of my wife.

Actually, I do know one person who might read what I wrote (in order to pick an argument). And the last time I had correspondence with him was January, which is what... Month 11 of Our Year of Covid? It will help introduce the theme.

He is a colourful type: someone from my island with Latvian wife, anchored in Brussels now: a well-read, polyglot boozier. And being as it was January, our back-and-forth involved the proposed mask mandate for young school kids and the 28,000 or so who'd signed the petition to let the children breathe at school. He informed me that in his opinion the idea of young kids in masks was horrendous, but he'd never admit that to a full-blown flat-earth corona denier. He then went on with the sage advice that working with other parents to provide our kids with an education at home would involve collaborating with "whacko families... angels and microchips and all that".

A few days afterwards, I found myself chatting to a young mother in the entrance of her flat. We had just been doing something illicit, probably (I can't keep up with what is and isn't allowed), and our talk turned to plans for future illegalities. She suggested having our children meet up in xxxxxxx as there wouldn't be, you know, any police or informers. We both laughed about that, a little, but I have to say I began to feel uneasy. There she was: conservatively and casually dressed, neat and blonde and fluent in three languages in a tidy and spacious 10-year old flat. I think she is graduate of Riga's Stradiņa University, and I know she was once an element of the petty bourgeoisie a small business owner, and yet there she was talking as if she were a dissident in a totalitarian dystopia. And not just to me in her flat, but online in a mummies' group, where all manner of links to research papers and conspiracies are shared, as if she were the very caricature to whom my old mate would never admit his feelings about masks on kids.

She and her fellow band of mummies have an enemy. You know who it is. The last time I saw a picture of the guy in their crosshairs, it was quite startling. Mouth agape atop the classic dress shirt and casual jumper, he was in the process of enlightening a BBC journalist who stood in miniature at his feet. Bill, for it is He, you see was being projected onto an enormous expanse of screen as if he were a divine being being beamed into what looked like a church (homely lights emanating from the columned and elegantly arched bays beneath lofty Gothic ceilings), but what turned out to be the Natural History Museum in London Town. Atop him, in predatory profile, there was a skeleton of what looked like some giant flying dinosaur heading beak open for the poor reporter consulting his notes. As if Mr Gates, had summoned a dead species ravenous now for human flesh. Actually it turns out it was the skeleton of a blue whale, which if we are going to continue with the analogy, would mean the reporter was just some plankton to be whisked casually out of existence.

"Bill" called out the reporter in hushed tones that were at once enfolded in the spiritual echo of a mighty but deserted church, "can you hear us?"

Bill could, and gave generously of his time to outline the radical changes mankind will have to face in the coming thirty years. As I listened, it began to dawn on me that the setting of the sermon really had to mean something. I mean it was not a practical place to conduct an interview (the interviewer even apologised for the sound quality), and there was no reason to be there other than it was empty. Why would they do it? Could it be that the scientific, administrative, and technocratic solutions he professes were being cloaked in the garb and posture of a strange new religion? And if this is so, and into the orthodoxy of the current science is being added the stiffener

of an orthodoxy of the divine, then is the fate of these mummies and their fellow travellers not merely to be dismissed as dissidents, whackos, anti-vaxxers and covidiot, but - instead - to be denounced as the latest iteration of the heretics of old: those who refused to acknowledge a truth revealed through divine inspiration?

God knows I am not a theologian, but I recently reread Mark Gaffney's 'Gnostic Secrets of the Naasenes', and I was taken by the Gnostic interpretation of the first great heresy in the Christian church: the Arian controversy. This is not the time to detail something that I don't understand, but after outlining the meaning of immanence, Mr Gaffney declared that although the Church decided firmly that Jesus did not have a human soul, the heresy continued to remain popular because "by affirming the full humanity of Jesus, Arius held out hope for ordinary people. Implicit in Arianism was the Gnostic belief that ordinary Christians could follow in the footsteps of their saviour." Thus, it follows he or she can be saved by emulating Jesus, not by worshiping him.

Are you still there?

Humour me then, please, and see if you can discern any parallels in the democratic appeal of this heresy and the ideology that infused the substrate from which Mr Gates bounded forth in commercial glory, namely the early days of Silicon Valley and the birth of the internet through which the heretic mummies communicate their concerns.

An ultrasound of the electronic agora - that virtual place in which we can communicate without censorship - was taken in 'the mother of all demos' in San Francisco in 1968, where those congregated witnessed the phenomenon of hypertext, the email, and the mouse. Stuart Brand, a leading figure in the back-to-the-land commune movement, assisted in making the presentation. In Adam Curtis's documentary "All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace" he said he believed that those involved "felt like computers had liberated them, and they were going to enable computers to liberate society, civilisation... every damn body. Computers were going to save the world ... it was going to be a power to the people in a very direct sense, and that was an early iteration of the internet, and of Google, and all of that. This was a vast network that was self-correcting."

Once the child was born, he grew in rude health. About thirty years later, Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron claimed in their seminal essay 'The Californian Ideology' that "a loose alliance of writers, hackers, capitalists and artists from the West Coast of the USA [had] succeeded in defining a heterogeneous orthodoxy for the coming age: the Californian Ideology."

Heterogeneous because within it still lived the hippy, non-hierarchical spirit described by Brand and the English professor Marshall McLuhan, who believed that dialogue within the new agora - would supersede the sermon lecture. By the late 90's this had been fused together by a shared technological determinism with Randian economic libertarianism of what at the time was the New Right. From this, the modern behemoth corporations had arisen - their independent libertarian spirit tempered a little of course, by their reliance on state handouts, something Bill's head continued to call for while suspended in the National History Museum.

Back then, in the late nineties, Barbrook and Cameron also noted what they regarded as Silicon Valley fantasies of abandoning the 'wetware' of the human body. This transhumanist dream, together with the California ideology and belief in the coming singularity formed a techno-utopian trinity.

They could only speculate at if, how, or when this dream would be made manifest. Of course, now in 2021, as we enter the Second Year of Covid, we - me, my old mate, groups of mummies, and you, too - should know, shouldn't we? Has an orthodoxy formed around the desires of the powerful movers in this scene? And if it has, what is it?

Recently, I watched a video of Klaus Schwab just to fact-check the conspiracy theorists. He stated that the 4th Industrial Revolution would "lead to a fusion of our physical, digital, and our biological identities." We should listen to him. He not only dresses as if were an intergalactic emissary, but

he is head of the World Economic Forum, whose members are the biggest corporations on the planet.

And here he is, outlining the maturation of technology a techno-dystopian utopian of the nineties would recognise. For this fusion of a trinity of ourselves is firmly embedded in the hegemony of AI and the Internet of Things. It signals an entry into a world in which life free from the web is almost impossible to envisage.

This is a world in which, for example, our phones (for now) can be scanned to bear testimony of vaccination - another crucial fusion, under Gates, of pharmacy and technology. Our bodies, physically, biologically, and digitally combined, can now be more easily tracked and traced, tagged and bagged. This is something, moreover, that on the day I write this, the government of the country of my birth is considering as necessary to obtain access to work, church, and the pub: all of which imposes heavy pressure to conform to the strictures being demanded.

Let's return to the heretics, however. Our mummies' groups and their fellow travellers are still using the old heretical, anti-hierarchical technology to communicate, are they not? Look here they are sharing links to research papers that conclude that ~~original-sin~~ asymptomatic transmission is very rare; that ~~displays of pious submission~~ masks - especially on kids - are ineffective, unnecessary and unhealthy; that young kids hardly ever pass the virus to adults; and that lockdowns and restrictions, based on graphs tabulating the last breaths of human souls in far-away states like North and South Dakota, California and Florida don't seem to have much or any effect on the movements of that which can not be seen.

Well, yes they are using it, for now, though maybe not for long. Our very own TVNET recently gave the floor to Jānis Sarts, strategic communication director at NATO's Centre of Excellence. He discusses, in the context of what he terms 'the slowly approaching new era', the need to regulate the agora to combat the threat of conspiracy theories being spread. Similar, in spirit, to ensuring the congregation don't chat amongst themselves before, after, and during the sermon.

In the meantime, as a local transhumanist recently proposed, a tool could be set up to periodically trawl blogs and posts to find the heresies moanings of covidiot. Although he suggested doing this for charitable purposes, bearing in mind the fate of heretics throughout history, it is not a great leap to envisage some kind of sanction. These mummies could be disincentivized (like a self-optimising programme) from posting what is deemed to be heresies misinformation by ... let's see: maybe not getting 500 Euros per child from the largesse of the now cripplingly indebted nation state?

Okay, I am getting carried away. Maybe you would like a drink? I am going to have one after all that. And at the risk of being shmaltzy, I want to finish by raising a glass to something important.

Do you remember way back in Month 1 or Month 2, when the playgrounds were deemed out-of-bounds to the kids? The municipal police would come with heavy feet and soft voices to shoo the children away. It didn't take long, however, for the red-and-white tape that demarcated the no-go zone to be broken and torn and lie disregarded on the tarmac. Although a few people objected, the kids returned and the police looked through their fingers as they drove by.

I see the same quality in the resistance of the mummies as I do in the disregard for that red-and-white tape, and I am not sure why you have it so strongly here in Latvia. Maybe it's your pagan past? Could it be down to a faith some of you have which is ridiculed in the current zeitgeist? Maybe its seed lies in the distrust of authority and a good nose for encroaching totalitarianism, at least in the older generations. I hope that whatever orthodoxy settles at the core of our lives here, it has this aspect as an essential element. That which clearly lies in the bonds between mother and society and child; that which is currently the most vital of heresies: your local wisdom.

Cheers!