



# EMPTY BOXES

Tom Bender \* NORTH COAST CITIZEN \* 31 May 2007

Sometimes we don't realize how much something has changed until we look through someone else's eyes and discover we're seeing a different world.

I was recently at a presentation on racism at a conference. It was a setup. We were told we were racist because we had white skin. The speaker didn't know us. It wasn't that we were white, it was that *she* was focusing on a surface distinction that she (with reason) was paying attention to. Which may be what racism is. And sex-ism, and class-ism, and religion-ism, and culture-ism.

Those are all just symptoms, to me, of a culture that makes people insecure and needing to magnify small distinctions between themselves and others to feel in some way superior and thus secure. All those things vanish when we connect deeply with others and love, or are grated by, their way-bigger individual inner weirdnesses.

Interestingly, I don't seem to live much in that "ism" culture anymore. We may occupy the same space, but what is central to that culture is peripheral and insignificant in my world. I don't care that much about "outsides" or surfaces. What people wear, the color of their hair or skin; their religion or culture or class. What interests me, what I remember, is their energy, joys, passions, experiences and capabilities. What they value and give. As a guy in a wheelchair once said, "But I'm not crippled *inside!*"

Then I got an email from my editor at Global Intelligencer. They were adding a new section to the newsletter, and wanted to move my economics column to that section. Wondering where I should be, I looked at their layout. At the bottom of the page were nine boxes: arts, society, life & health, environment, science, technology business, fringe, and editorial. So I was supposed to fit in one of those boxes? (Fringe, of course, but they wouldn't let me in that one!)

Suddenly I felt the wrongness of those apparently simple and helpful boxes. Life isn't like that. Everything is part of everything else, and connected. Putting walls in our minds and in our lives between things destroys the connectedness that is vital. Shouldn't there be art in life? Environment in business? What about joy? The sacred?

No. Don't put things in boxes. I don't fit, nobody, nothing does. Life doesn't fit. Boxes are wrong. Unlike other languages, ours is based on nouns - boxes that focus on distinctions or separateness rather than connectedness. That's wrong, and causes wars.

Our culture, based on the rational, and literate in our language, is wrong. Anymore, when someone tries to talk "rational", I can feel them closing off, shutting down, disconnecting their aliveness and connection to the rest of creation. It breaks my heart. I can feel them dying inside.

All of our culture is based on boxes. Economics analytical boxes that "discount the future" and ensure we can't have a good one. The box says there should be a "bottom line" in what we do. As long as I've been working with economics, it only became clear to me recently that there is *no* bottom line in honest economics. No "triple" bottom line. *No* bottom line. Any bottom line is a linear and singular focus. True economics isn't about best bottom line for *anything*.

It's about balance. There's a web that connects any one thing to everything else. Everything we do affects, in some way, everything else. And when you change anything, the web in some directions gets stretched. And it pulls back, or everything shifts a little, and things come back into balance. Everything gets what it needs, everything is accommodated. Nothing gets "maxed". If it can't rebalance, everything collapses.

True economics is dynamic. It welcomes and adjusts to every "new" through thousands of subtle shifts and rebalancing. And the whole is ever-new and alive.

So piece by piece, as we let go of those crazy mind-boxes that don't fit, and shift our lives to ways of being that nurture us better, we create a new world. And after time, we suddenly see it IS different, and way more alive.

All those mind-boxes walling-off connections are really coffins of the soul, prisons of the spirit. And sadly, sadly, it is those dead and disconnected spirits inside those boxes, whose hearts have withered from lack of nurture, who are capable of the atrocities that occur around us every day.