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Ariadne's Thread

/ Philip Franses

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There is a great scene in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* in which the Grand Inquisitor gives the argument to the returning Christ, that people want certainty not revelation. The darkness in the argument is that the nature of existence is uncertainty, so reason has no way to answer back to the claim of certainty that the Grand Inquisitor is presenting. Yet the book does not end with the darkness of this argument but in the exploration of love, taking us into the hope and promise of a future generation.

Something similar is happening with Holistic Science. On the one hand it seems to have fallen into a very unfortunate need for certainty which is anathema to its very foundation. On the other hand there is major movement at its foundations which is poised to give it new life. I am delighted to be co-editing this long-awaited issue with Troy Vine of Humboldt University Berlin and the Field Centre.

Finding Holistic Science in need of renewal, I spent some time looking around for other languages, places, approaches where attention to the whole-part dynamic was being practised. This took me to Stourbridge for the "Experience Colour" Exhibition at Glasshouse College by Lora Nöbe and Matthias Rang with a conference organised by Troy in the summer of 2018. The exhibition showed me how the question one asks determines the form of how colour answers. Newton (or at least his followers) had wanted a story of certainty as to the relation of colour and light. But Goethe showed that one could invert Newton's experiment so that darkness and uncertainty were being interpreted by colour into light. Goethe's approach gave a fundamentally different primary spectrum than Newton's.

As Steiner writes in *Goethe's World View*: 'For Goethe darkness is not the completely powerless absence of light. It is something active. It confronts the light and enters with it into a mutual interaction. Goethe pictures to himself that light and darkness relate to each other like the north and south pole of a magnet. The darkness can weaken the light in its working power. Conversely, the light can limit the energy of the darkness. In both cases colour arises.'

In the autumn of 2018, travelling to Colombia and teaching with Efecto Mariposa, this view of colour was mirrored in a visit to the Gold Museum in Bogota. For the indigenous people of Colombia, gold represented that essence out of which life e.g. deer, shaman or universe differentiated into spiritual identity and knowable form. Gold was the source through which the myth and detail of the world emerged and was told. The conquering Spanish, however, saw only the material wealth and divided it from this spiritual connotation, melting it down into a measureable quantity of gold bars of known value.

In August 2019 I travelled to Liverpool for the 50 year anniversary of the writing of *Laws of Form* by George Spencer Brown. This gathering was a think-tank of how fundamental mathematical and physical structure arises from the potential for nothing to change into something. This attempt to bring the whole-part story into the foundation of mathematics has been given new energy recently by the work of Lou Kauffman. Henri Bortoft in the 1960's had first seen the need for this work when doing his PhD with David Bohm at Birkbeck College, London.

Holistic Science Journal began when I invited Henri Bortoft to a conference on *Paradox* in 2010 held in Italy. He replied that although he could not come, he had written *The Transformative Potential of Paradox* as a contribution we could read out. The article was so profound it needed a journal to hold it! But also a journal was needed to hold such spontaneous outpourings that were not yet exactly formed into something fixed. In the end, Henri did come to the conference at which then the journal was launched formally.

In many ways, the journal addressed a gap between Henri's early scientific work when working as a PhD student with David Bohm and Basil Hiley which never found its deserved platform; and Henri's later work into wholeness of experience through Goethe. In my years of teaching Holistic Science this exploration was taken further with the students that came each year to the course with some of their particular insights making their way to the pages of the journal. In 2013 a special tribute issue to Henri Bortoft (who had passed away in December 2012) was produced. In this issue we asked Basil Hiley to write a tribute, which he did and in which he drew out how he had used the work of Spencer Brown, whom Henri had introduced to the group, to arrive at the basic form of quantum logic.

So it feels fitting that in this issue, Lou Kauffman finds a novel way to lay out and resolve the difference of approach of Henri and his quantum colleagues. The foundation of self-recursion applies equally to Henri's concise way of describing what happens in quantum experiment, and to his colleagues search for mathematical formula to encapsulate the phenomena. Only when description is able to report on the phenomena is the other side of the mathematical form able to build the structure of what is seen.

Dissolving all apparent structure, a new vision returns from dissolution as a dynamic appearing. Just when one accepts that Holistic Science has reached its end-point, the potential in the foundation of Holistic Science finds a form more suited to the challenge of the time.

Life does not exist without death.
Something does not exist
without nothing.

Right:
Ariadne standing naked with
her head turned lower right and
a garland of stars, set within a
niche; Jacopo Caraglio, from a
series of 20 engravings depicting
mythological gods and goddesses.
1526 engraving

