



## ***Becoming Whole***

*Petruska Clarkson*

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**T**hink of an important sexual and loving relationship. Recall the very first time you made love — actually had sexual intercourse; what Jung calls 'the first conjunctio'. Consider all the factors present at the time in that moment. Recall the circumstances surrounding the occasion — perhaps there was haste, deceit, tension, coercion, chemicals, problems with environment, anxiety about interruption or interference, concern about health or contraception, stars, humour, sensual elements such as the smell of fresh mown grass, perfume, fresh sweat. How did you

come together and how did you part? Did it perhaps contain in microcosm all the features of the subsequent relationship as it played out over time? Consider whether most of the important factors that played out in the relationship consequently were already present? Was that an overture which in itself contained the rest of the story?

I have asked these questions of many people in workshops in several different contexts, and almost always every single person — if they really immerse themselves in their particular and unique

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memory — can find a holon that presaged the coming relationship. For most people it is almost shocking how much information there is in the first encounter about all the following chapters — and often even the end.

It is also a counselling truism that if you faithfully record the first interview with any client (or even the first few exchanges) most of the important themes and issues of the subsequent counselling or psychotherapy relationship will be in microcosm anticipated already. How do we explain this?

### *Becoming Whole*

The theme of this conference indicates a growing concern with the process of becoming. Something seems to be happening to our collective psyche which has reinvested the notion of wholeness with an excitement, energy and enthusiasm that is unusual. I believe we are becoming so concerned with the whole at least partly in response to the fragmentation and fracturing of our cultural, political and economic world. We are conscious of the breaking down of certainties at an unprecedented rate. Lyotard called our current cultural condition 'postmodern'. This is a term that captures the sense in which the 'grand narratives' or the great explanatory stories have collapsed. There seems little left to believe in without reservation, cynicism and qualification. As we look back on ninety years of psychotherapy we may well think, like Hillman and Ventura, that 'the world is getting worse'. After ninety years of three major schools and 450 competing minor approaches, Luborsky *et al* have come up with the Alice in Wonderland conclusion

about the effectiveness of different approaches to psychotherapy: 'All have won and all must have prizes'.

Organisationally, as Stacey has shown in *The Chaos Frontier*, it has become impossible for businesses to make long-term strategies. This sense of not knowing what is happening comes across in literature, movies and management journals. There is even a re-drawing of the world map. The Berlin Wall stands broken, barriers between black and white in South Africa are wrenched apart, for good or for ill Mother Russia fragments. Given the pace, the diversity and the unpredictability of changes we are facing at biological, personal, cultural and planetary levels where simple dualities are breaking down, certainties are repeatedly destroyed and the unexpected happens — no wonder we seek wholeness.

The world we live and feel and think in has become chaotic and unpredictable in an unprecedented way. The same ancient dreams for peace and love and harmony continue and the totally new explode them again and again. At the same time as we are facing the vertiginous realities of a constantly shifting ground to our existence, it is only natural that an enormous investment develops in the search for some kind of certainty, panacea or some unassailable, fundamentalist truth. On the one hand we are witnessing the collapse of Marxism, Freudianism; of the old aesthetic. On the other hand we are witnessing the rise of Islam, the defensive beurocratisation of sadism, the rigid institutionalisation that is creeping across the face of the helping professions like a leprous sore obliterating creativity, risk and spontaneity.

## *Opposites in Search of a Whole*

We are trying to integrate the dualities of shadow and light, scapegoat and hero, male and female, the inner child and reluctant adult, psyche and soul. Another opposite in search of a whole is the relationship between the individual and the group. Dana Zohar has pointed out that Freudian psychoanalysis does not consider interpersonal relationships 'its proper business', while Rycroft says that 'This is because psychoanalysis is a psychology of the individual and therefore discusses objects and relationships only from the point of view of a single subject.'

As we know from modern physics the observer is always part of the field. Any attempt to isolate the individual from the others, the group or the collective is implicitly an abstract, conceptual practice. We cannot engage with (or even observe) without affecting it. Even the expectations of experimenters have been shown to influence the speed at which rats learn mazes. How much more so our assumptions and prejudices about human nature in the enclosed intimate space of the consulting room?

Hillman and Ventura write: 'Individuating — the very word — locates that entire wholeness in the individual, apart from the world. But what if that's not so? What if, as you and I have been saying, we're not born whole, and what if the quality of wholeness is not located in the individual but in a community that includes the environment? How does all that, the-individual-as-part-of-community-as-part-of-environment, "individuate"?'

Another theme of part and whole is being enacted in the polarity of nations and planet. I have noticed that, as people become more integrated or whole within themselves, they inevitably start caring more about the rest of the world. A client once reported, 'When I first came into counselling I was struggling with feelings of being a "non-person", powerless and in despair about ever changing my own life. I could not understand why anyone would get bothered about the possible extinction of rhinoceroses in Central Africa. As I claim my own power, my autonomy and being to "own" my life and the repercussions of my existential choices, I begin to feel that those rhinoceroses are my rhinoceroses since they represent my response-able connection to my world.' For the first time the world is connected by communication networks like the neuronal network of a single brain. People like James Lovelock, with his Gaia hypothesis, are exploring the idea that the planet is functioning as a whole organism and that we are all participating spiritually, psychologically and physically.

The ecological connectedness of our world has been dramatically brought to our attention by the way in which, for example, the damage to the ozone layer can affect people in all parts of the world. In the same way, the fallout of Chernobyl can affect sheep in Wales. According to chaos theory, even the fluttering of a butterfly's wings in South America can affect weather conditions in Europe. We are connected with each other through visceral empathy — the fellow feeling which we experience in flesh and blood tissue. Plants can apparently resonate with each other's distress or fear just like healthy,

human infants. It is only when we disconnect from ourselves that we can claim to be innocent bystanders, and try to maintain the fiction that we are disconnected from other people and from the planet as a whole. Gaia is moaning from the poisonous pollution in the seas, the assaults on the vegetation of the forests and the destruction of rare and exquisite species of animals.

As Sartre says, 'Freedom as a definition of a man does not depend upon others, but as soon as there is a commitment, I am obliged to will the liberty of others at the same time as mine. I cannot make liberty my aim unless I make that of others equal in my aim.'

### *The Science of Holism*

Although the idea of the whole has been present in Western cultural thinking since Heraclitus, it has met renewed vitality in the last decade through the emergence of the sciences of chaos and complexity. Theorists and practitioners in these sciences are interested in wholes, patterns and self similarities across scale. From the fragment of a beach to the overall geographical shape of a coastline; from an atom to the solar system; from snowflake to snowstorm; from the tracks of a wave on the surface of the ocean to what happens in a cup of coffee when the cream goes in — these things are full of mystery, as mysterious to us as the heavens were to the Greeks.

The geometric image which encapsulates this perplexing and disturbing world where the greatest creativity emerges from the extremes of chaotic disintegration, is the fractal. The word 'fractal' was coined by Mandelbrot in 1974 to describe

the phenomenon of a repeating pattern — elements of the whole are repeated in every fragment and spiral off each other towards creative evolution.

The Mandelbrot set teaches us that wholes reflect wholes reflect wholes — there is nothing that is not a fully complete whole. In our minds we may have analytic or deductive ways of thinking but each one of our selves encodes our whole being. All the parts are fully present in each whole, evermore. And this is science now.

### *The Ideologies of Holism*

World religions have always tried to facilitate and/or manipulate the human yearning for wholeness. Is this notion of wholeness predicated on the fact that we are originally born whole and we need to live ourselves into our wholeness or is it predicated on the idea that there is something terribly wrong with us (original sin) because of our separateness? The problem with the ideal or the imperative of holism whether it is a mental health or religious one is that it is unattainable. I think that this preoccupation with becoming whole can become another tyranny, another way in which psychotherapy, spiritual journeying, political commitment can become as oppressive as the original repressive and disempowering forces against which they came into being.

I would like to speak against using the ideas of holism to justify another oppression. I would like to oppose some kind of implicit imperative to become whole or an implicit pseudo-hygienic injunction against falling apart. I think in the culture, the psychology and the philosophy of our time we need to make more room

for fragmentation, dissolution, becoming nebulous or gaseous, dissolvent. I think this is also normal, desirable, important. I think we need space — for people to fall apart, for experience to be fragmented, for people to take up unipolar positions, for us to have tolerance, joy and even celebration for the parts of us (and the others) that are not whole.

In these chaotic turbulent places life can perhaps be transformed more profoundly than in the step by step incremental paradigm of the old sciences and the old order which has brought us here to the brink of our own self-destruction. In Gruber's words, 'creativity happens at far from equilibrium conditions'. Far-from-equilibrium conditions are scary indeed, but they can sometimes bring the greatest fertility to birth. We suffer from our childlike, naive wish — even insistence — that somebody out there (daddy, the government, management, God) will provide us with the ultimate answer which will see us through all the confusing turmoil and conflicting realities of our existence.

Too often the idea of becoming whole is associated with a static product — an achieved serene end state. I do not think that this is compatible with being alive human beings or evolving wholes growing through chaotic states and falling into the void when we lose our footing. And then we emerge into a new wholeness which, as regularly as breathing out follows breathing in, becomes destructured, part, piece again. Then once, twice, many more times there is a fall into the abyss, the dark night of the soul, the mythological sea journey from whence we emerge again with an increased sense of inner

wholeness. D.H. Lawrence wrote that it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God, but a much more terrible thing to fall out of them. All creative people (whether their creativity be great public sculptures or the gentling of a child's head at sleep) know these deepest darknesses where creativity or God or enlightenment unexpectedly gush forth. I want to plead for the holiness of the *hole* — the void, the belly of the whale, the *fugu*, the dream chamber in the very heart of the pyramid.

### *Coming Together*

The new sciences ask us shockingly uncomfortable questions about the way we think about ourselves and our world. If something is second nature what is our first true nature? If the unpredictable and the pre-determined are so inextricably intertwined where is the scope for individual autonomy? What are our degrees of freedom? What is the region for compassionate resignation to the many senses in which we are creatures of our culture and of our time? If we cannot know which fluctuations are causing which events and there is at some levels no necessary or logical connection between the size of an event and the scale of its effect — how can we know whether we may not be the hundredth monkey whose small experiment precipitates a whole metamorphic metanoia in the evolutionary process?

If any part of any thing can be used to reconstitute the whole, as any one cell of our bodies contains all the information for cloning the whole of that person — can there ever be such a thing as an unrepresentative sample? If all the information is already present in the here and now, why

wait? If causality is but a notion which describes one single and rather small facet of the multifaceted way in which wholes interact — what nonsense could this make of the ideas of transference or countertransference — does the client come to you to teach you about death or does your preoccupation with mortality bring you client after client dealing with issues of death? Who is doing what to whom and where did it start? Are we indeed the end-products of our childhood in a causal model or are we called towards the whole

which we are to become?

From a holistic perspective we are co-creators, co-responsible and co-temporaneous — we are of the same time, the same tissue and the same event. We can think, if we are all of a piece, that criminals are committing crimes for our shadow and holy saints are purifying themselves for our spirits as we live ordinary or heroic lives for them.

In this same way we are unable not to be responsible.

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## Further Reading

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