

ALIGNED IN THE JOURNEY

The dynamic dance of life: the appearing of a new ground of being

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The need to surrender, once again...

‘Go out on the land, recall the most sacred dimension of your intention for this year at Schumacher and find your threshold. And then cross it and come back.’ These were the words that Bill Plotkin gave us for the final exercise on our first weekend. It evoked a more mysterious and archetypal dimension in the group and especially in me. Trained as a vision quest guide, I am familiar with this dimension related to the hero’s journey by Joseph Campbell in which the crossing of the threshold means fully entering into the adventure (*Campbell 2008*).

And yet, this time it should have a special taste. On my own journey towards wholeness and meaning in my life, I was led to doing a vision quest in which I tasted mysteriousness and the depth of nature. Now, I heard the calling to start the Holistic Science MSc and find scientific ways of exploring the experiences of wholeness I have had and it should mean the entrance into yet another chapter. In the weeks leading up to this, it already felt as if the next big adventure was coming but in the moment with Bill Plotkin I knew it: the moment to leave my ordinary world behind once again had come and all I could do was surrender to the unknown journey ahead. The only thing I could trust was that change would come and something new wanted to enter my life. I needed to allow it to happen.

This new adventure was to send me into a new knowing about the world, where my inner journey and a new way of seeing the world were connected in a particular meaningful symbol. This essay shall therefore bring together this symbol and the way it came into being, on which I will focus first with phenomenology as applied by Goethe and Henri Bortoft, a language for seeing the world

differently, that helps to approach the deeper meaning of the symbol.

The coming into being of the symbol

When I now look back at this moment of surrender to the journey, I can see this moment and the process of the coming into being of the symbol in a new light. Therefore I want to attempt to bring alive again the process of how the central meaningful symbol entered my life. You will see, that it has, framed in the language of phenomenology, the capacity to be the link through which I can bring into expression the mystery I glimpsed in my quest whose flavour has accompanied me ever since. In order to do that, three key moments of this month shall be pointed out. The first step on this new adventure was a session on expressive arts in which the key experience included the task to go out into the natural world, be called by an other-than-human being, in my case a bush with purple red flowers, and imitate its movement with the full body so that we opened up to being taught something about the nature of this being. Afterwards, remembering this movement in our bodies, we were asked to give it a form through drawing, choosing intuitively the right colours. The main impression of the quality of that being was one of fluidity, a constant back and forth in the wind, radiating flashes of light and beauty outward from the centre, where the green of the bush and the deep red of the flower meet.

Remembering the moment of the coming into being of this drawing, I cannot really say that it was a unilateral act of creation. Rather than that, it was more as if this pattern wanted to come into being through me by revealing itself to me in different nuances, in sensory experience, deep feeling and my imagination. I could also say that I was created by the pattern so that it could come into a form instead of me creating it from a pre-existing, fixed form in my mind. When I dive deeper into the moment, I

wouldn't even say that there was a 'me' and 'the drawing' but that it was one deep flowing movement.

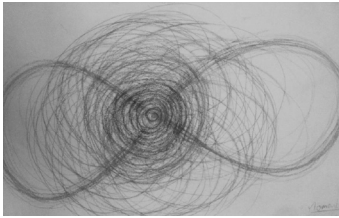


Fig. 1: Image of the expressive arts session

The next key moment along the journey of this first module was a moment of teaching with Patricia Shaw in class, where the same symbol or pattern appeared, but in a different context. We were speaking about the act of communication and how one could regard it in a different light than just saying that there is a clear sender with a fixed message in his or her mind that is then communicated in a unilateral way to the receiver who just needs to decode it. The reason why this standard model seemed insufficient to us was that we, and presumably all human beings, have experienced moments in conversation where both sides know without any doubt that they understand each other – that 'something rings true' (Shaw 2015).

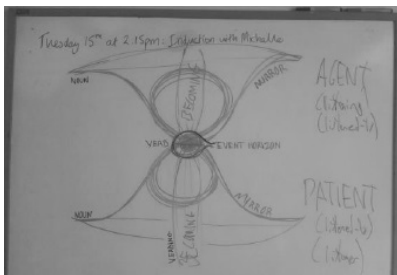


Fig.2: Alex Blanes' drawing in the teaching session

What followed on this statement was an outburst of creativity and insight where multiple students in the class understood a different pattern of conversation. This understanding of meaning suddenly manifested in the room through different people drawing (see fig. 2), describing or, in my case, 'getting' the connection to the same pattern that previously had already appeared to me in the expressive arts session. It was also expressed in a picture by Jamie Perrelet.

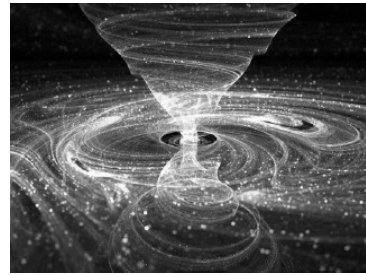


Fig.3: The Space Between : Jamie Perrelet (on the wall of the MSc room)

It was then clear that it is actually 'the space between' (like the title of Jamie Perrelet's picture suggests) in which the understanding of meaning happens which connects the two sides participating in the conversation. This understanding landed in the room with such immensity that it could be felt in the whole body which clearly showed that it was not just an insight restricted to the head. The last striking moment happened whilst I was starting to work on this assignment, looking at the drawn pattern on my wall, and again there suddenly, out of nothing, came a revelatory insight and connection that made me burst into laughter and excitement, puzzled why this obvious connection had not arisen before in this way.

The connection that I suddenly realized is one to the experiences of my vision quest where two main patterns or symbols were mirrored back to me by the natural world or came in dreams or visionary states that, since then, have built the foundation of a sense of identity, my worldview and purpose for my life journey.



Fig. 4 shows the first symbol which is the celtic tree of life

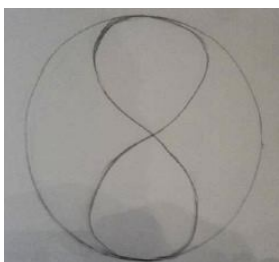


Fig. 5 shows the place where I was fasting, looked upon from a bird's eye perspective.

Here again, there is a stunning similarity to the previous patterns. But more than that, it did not only just appear in this moment but I understood that I had been seeing and exploring this same pattern of the connection and the creative dance between polarities ever since my quest where I have also found it in areas like alchemy, Jungian psychology, myths and spiritual traditions of the east and west.

What do these astonishingly similar patterns mean and how do they fit into the context of Holistic Science and my journey? And how can the feelings, sensory experiences, sudden thought connections, imaginative qualities and intuitive insights that accompanied the coming-into-being of these similar patterns be understood in a new light?

Standard, quantitative science would just regard these experiences as separate events where, just by chance, similar patterns were involved. What is needed is another language for wholeness, another way of seeing.

Learning a new language: Taking on the adventure of phenomenology

Taking on the task of such a new language, I now want to turn to phenomenology to express the fullness of the symbol, in which my inner transformation is reflected equally as a new way of seeing the world. Entering into the adventure of learning a new language for wholeness meant setting the stage for it by having a look at what we are not looking for. This was contrasted right at the beginning of our classes by the comparison of 'systems thinking' and 'dynamic thinking' where the former is mainly concerned with getting an overview of the whole through examining the

interconnectedness of the parts and the latter, in contrast to that, with what Henri Bortoft, as a follower of phenomenology, would call 'authentic wholeness' (Bortoft 2012: 17). This second approach is also concerned with the relationship between the whole and the parts, the fundamental tension that can be found at the ground of reality. What makes the difference is the kind of relationship that is seen between the whole and the parts.

Speaking about dynamic wholeness points to a different relationship between the whole and the parts than it is represented in the systems approach. The relationship that is meant here is an equal relationship where they are both dependent on the other to come into being which means that they are circularly defined as the 'whole [appearing] through the parts [and] the parts [being] identified in the whole'

(Franses 2015: 1). Only through this move, which is also called 'the hermeneutic circle' (Bortoft 2012: 14) and at first seems to be paradoxical, can one avoid the predominance and therefore fragmentation of the relationship between them. If, based on this new perspective, the whole wants to be experienced, it is not through trying to get an overview but through diving more deeply into the parts and there discover the whole that is 'presencing' (coming into presence) in them (Bortoft 2012: 14f).

To actually discover the whole in the parts, it needs another important move, one of attention. What I mean by this is that we experience something, have a feeling or sensory impression and then try to make sense of what just happened by thinking about it. Our attention is focused on what happened, an experience in the past and therefore it is gone and stays there as a fixed event and the only thing we can actually do is think about it. Approaching it this way, it can only be either the whole or the part that we pay attention to and every attempt of circular understanding appears to be paradoxical. Phenomenology, in contrast to this, tries to shift the attention right into the experiencing of what is experienced, into the coming-into-being of meaning, into the present moment where the 'sensory-intuitive mind', and not the 'verbal-intellectual', is the ground on which any

phenomenon comes into being and where its meaning is understood (Bortoft 2012: 57). Henri Bortoft has illustrated this shift by using the term 'upstream', where life or the experience flows towards you and you can be right in the appearing of meaning, in contrast to 'downstream' where you can only think about past and "dead" experiences or analyse a system as a detached observer (Bortoft 2012: 18). Another very helpful expression for this different attitude towards life that phenomenology as the dynamic relation between whole and part requires, is mentioned by Philip Franses (Franses, 2015: 2) as 'that which is not yet set'. It means that we do not focus on fixing a phenomenon because it will always be separated into whole or part, subject or object. Instead, the attention lies in the fluid happening of meaning where whole and part can be seen as one connected movement that is full of possibility.

In going through this shift in the way we see, the seemingly paradoxical happening of two movements at the same time can actually be recognized as just one 'unitary event' (Bortoft 2012: 97f.), in which both, the whole and the part are actualised. This dynamic unity eventually leads to a way of thinking about the relationship between the whole and the parts 'that does not separate [them] into two but at the same time doesn't [let them] collapse into one' (Bortoft 2012: 131). Fully entering into this unitary event means therefore experiencing the 'dynamic depth', as Bortoft (2012: 26) puts it, that each event, each phenomenon, each experiencing of meaning entails. This new foundation for our experiencing of everyday reality now gives us the possibility to explain the multiplicity of life, the multiplicity of forms and beings in the world. Following the fundamental interdependence of whole and parts, it can now be understood that every form contains the reflection of the whole in it and is therefore an expression for the whole becoming itself differently. The example of a tree can illustrate this. All the parts like leaves, branches, stem and roots are necessary to form the wholeness of the being of the tree but at the same time it is also just the whole

being of the tree that becomes itself differently in all the parts. This concept of 'self-differencing' (Bortoft 2012: 71) now leads to a dynamic understanding of multiplicity in which it is not the fragmentation of one whole into multiple separate parts. It is rather the opposite as the discovery of 'multiplicity in unity' (Bortoft 2012: 80), of sameness in the midst of difference, of diving deeply into the unique parts and discovering the unifying whole. Referring to Goethe's study of plants and his understanding of '*Urpflanze*' as the underlying principle of each plant based on a dynamic wholeness of whole and parts, Bortoft refers to it not as being a fixed entity but an 'archetypal movement [that] is the intensive movement of self-differencing [,] "a movement in which it is one and yet becomes different at the same time"'. (Klocek cited in Bortoft 2012: 83)

As a last important step, one has to consider that the dynamic unity of wholeness, as movement, always involves the time dimension. If we were to think about the meaning that appears in the experience as something complete and finished, there would not be the necessity for an ongoing process where ever new meaning happens. On a dynamic ground of being, against the background of the time dimension, it is thus more appropriate to comprehend the meaning that comes into being in any event as unfinished, bearing in it the possibility for the coming-into-being of the whole in the parts in a different way in the future. In this sense, every event of coming-into-being of meaning requires equally an act of understanding so that it is the unitary event of '{meaning/understanding}' (Bortoft 2012: 100). And yet, with every unitary event of '{meaning/understanding}' over time, the meaning of the whole comes more fully into being whilst the parts are more fully moving towards the whole, which Bortoft refers to as 'enhancement in being' (Bortoft 2012: 121ff).

The unitary dance of the journey

To end this exploration I want to use the language of phenomenology to relate the pattern that appeared and keeps appearing to

me, back to the theme of the journey of human beings in relationship with the world. If the dynamic understanding of the relationship between whole and part is taken into consideration, one can begin to view our human life journeys in a completely different light.

Against this new background, the symbol can make visible the deep interconnection between the inner transformation and a dynamic way of seeing the world and ourselves in it. Given that the whole presences in the parts and the parts are on their journey to forming the whole, then there is also a fundamental relationship between our human lives and all of life, between our individual journeys and the journey of humanity, of the earth, of the universe. Because we are from this world and therefore linked to the coming into being of the universe, the earth, the plants and the animals, we share a common ancestry and common journey that led to the world as it is today. In fact, seeing our lives through the lens of phenomenology enables us to redeem the inherent meaning of our lives by linking them to the dynamic view of the dance of whole and parts. To take it even a step further, I want to suggest that the journey to meaning and wholeness itself is the unitary event that includes the time dimension and enables the whole and the parts to self-actualize themselves. In this unitary dance, the two movements happen at the same time: the whole that is coming more fully into being through its self-differencing in the parts and the parts that are moving towards the whole. What this implies is a new dynamic view on the role of human beings in the world and the way that we participate in it. Overcoming the Cartesian separation between subject and object it can now be said that 'our role in this is not that of a subject in front of an object, but that of a participant in an event of appearance.' (Bortoft 2012: 171). By going upstream we can realize now that the journey is one directed towards life so the events on the journey come towards us if we are fully present to when they come into being whilst they are still unfixed and fluid and part of our

conversation with the world. Thus one could also say that the journey, the life story, is the actual result of a constant conversation. Iain Mc Gilchrist emphasizes this by saying that 'we neither discover an objective reality nor invent a subjective reality, but that there is a process of responsive evocation, the world "calling forth" something in me that in turn "calls forth" something in the world.' (McGilchrist 2012 cited in Bortoft 2012: 25)

Now, the whole journey of the first module and the pattern coming into being in various different contexts can be understood against this background. The symbol shows in a visualized way what Mc Gilchrist is talking about, that we as human beings are actually participants in a constant conversation with life. But furthermore, the very way that this symbol came into being – the flashes of insight and sudden connections, the shocks of excitement – are all expressions for the unitary event of {meaning/understanding} happening on this journey that connects the whole and the parts. These events do not follow pure rational logic but rather involve our whole being drawing on the sensory-intuitive mode. Philip Franses expresses it in a beautiful way by saying that in such an event, '*the conundrum, of the whole that appears through the parts and the part that is identified in the whole, is miraculously resolved. And when we see it we feel the miracle. Suddenly everything is fitting together. [...] When we allow the dance between the two, the whole is the origin of the parts in its differencing and the journey through the differences is the ground of the whole. [...] That moment in which all possibilities connect is in the dimension of the identity of being, becoming itself. The dimensions of whole and part fall together into the fulfilled unity of being.*' (Franses 2015: 3)

Through the happening of meaning in these different contexts, the whole has enhanced in being. And, to take the concluding step, I can now see that the whole that has come into being in the pattern is the new dynamic ground of being itself, the basic creative principle of life as the dance between whole and part. I realize now that in order to express the experiences of wholeness that have shaped my life journey, I needed to shift the very ground

on which I was standing, overcoming the illusion of something fixed and moving into a realm of dynamic relationship and balance. It wasn't the case that I simply was not aware of this basic pattern of the dance between the polarities because ever since it appeared to me, it signified my doorway to understanding the world and the human being. But it wasn't until I went through the journey of this first module that I realized that it was the very dynamic ground of life that I had been given by the land. In this process, my understanding of what the word "soul" could mean and the relation to the whole have changed through this symbol coming more fully into being, because, as participants in a conversation with life, soul is, *"the largest conversation a person is capable of having with the world"* (Whyte cited in Plotkin 2008: 36f).

Entering into this conversation requires our own opening, our own transformation. It means that every human being has to go on a journey of individuation, of cultivating the uniqueness of our whole being. This includes our four functions of thinking, sensing, feeling, intuition/ imagination and the journey to the Self in the language of Carl Jung (Jung 1971 CW 6,7; Harding 2013) or our four facets of self and the journey of soul initiation in the language of Bill Plotkin (Plotkin 2008). At the same time the world enhances in being – weaving more of its soul into existence or '[imagining] its own future through us' (Plotkin 2008: 17) – and by that coming more fully alive in our participation and imagination with every unitary event of {meaning/understanding}, with every step we take on our journeys towards our own wholeness and uniqueness as human beings. With every back and forth between us and the world, the reciprocal conversation is deepened

and meaning is invited more fully into our lives. The only way to find the whole is by going deeper into the parts, deeper into our innate wholeness and quality as 'homo imaginens' (Plotkin 2008: 17) and our ability of meaningful conversation with the world around us in its particularity. Goethe has also been trying to emphasize this through his way of science (Bortoft 2012; Holdredge 2013). The calling to shift our way of perceiving and relating to the world can be heard all around us and the adventure of cultivating our own wholeness and discovering our largest, unique conversations with the world is awaiting us.

All we need to do is surrender to the journey.

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