

“ -We are shaped by what we extend ourselves into; our attending and our participation inform our lives. We must be very careful with the objects and actions we present to ourselves and to our children because they change us. The work of art lends shape to passion and to yearning. Works of art are the best containers for yearning because they are so rich, so human, so satisfying on so many levels. Artwork gives serious outer shape to serious inner yearning. If our yearnings are informed by less rich objects, they will go to sleep, will die, or will eventually distort themselves in the harmful expressions that fill the pages of the daily newspaper. ” Humberto Maturana



Sandra Blow RA with her image 'Glad Ocean' (back wall) and 'Deep Blue' co-created during a House of Commons Workshop, Bix Manor 1997 & subsequently presented to the House of Commons team as a gift by Andrew Campbell in 1998

## Creative Suspension

"The thing that struck me most - when you look at them directly and in movement you see what the primitive cave painters saw. Something you never see in a photograph. It is most awe-inspiring, the 'muntu' or spirit is shown in the running of the deer. The deerness that sums up everything and is sacred and marvelous. A contemplative intuition - yet this is perfectly ordinary, everyday seeing - what everybody ought to see all the time. The deer reveals something essential to me, not only in itself, but also in myself. Something beyond the trivialities of my everyday being, my individual existence. Something profound. The face of that which is in the deer is in myself."

Thomas Merton

F. David Peat

The idea of "creative suspension" argues that human institutions attempt to resolve a variety of problems that face them. These are done through a form of internal modeling--through analysis, description and so on. But these institutions are relatively mechanical and simplistic in their operation, they have fixed internal structures, rigid goals and internal values that are retained long after the organization may themselves have changed its basic goals. Such organizations have a strong sense of self-preservation, which adds to their inflexibility and rigidity. They may possess simplistic and limited lines of communication and feedback and they do not allow their human members to make use of their inherent creativity. Often members of an organization are paralyzed by fear, ambition, the desire for recognition and reward, by self-preservation and a conflict between their own values and those of the organization.

How then can a simplistic, rigid organization model a natural or social system that is infinitely faster, more flexible and subtle? The clear answer is that it cannot, its policies, plans and predictions are limited, simplistic and fragmentary. The policies, it implies may produce unpredicted side effects, the cure may generate a cascade of even greater problems.

The solution, as suggested in the paper, is a form of "creative suspension", dissolution of the fixed responses and structures of the organization that allows essential human creativity to emerge. Of course the organization and its rigidities can also stand as a metaphor for the individual and his or her fixed and neurotic responses to life. In either case a "creative and watchful" suspension acts to expose and dissolve inherent mechanistic responses and allows a faster, subtler, more creative organism to unfold.

<http://www.dialogonleadership.org/VarelaArt/art.html>

Arte inspirado por la entrevista con Francisco Varela.  
Testimonio del pintor Andrew Campbell quien se inspiró en  
cada fragmento de la entrevista citada anteriormente

Detail;-) from **How We Become Angels: Thoughts  
Ascending** (Becoming part of Field Eleanor Rosch) 2002  
at Dialogonleadership.org  
Oils, inks and watercolour on superfine paper 29th  
December 2001



"I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world."  
(Albert Einstein)

Extending yourself out [...] could be symbolized by the **Garuda**, a mythological bird that bursts out of its shell full grown -- suddenly and completely there. It looks like a condor with its huge wingspan and its hooked beak and its fierce expression, while its wide-open, piercing eyes look as if they could see the limits of the sky and beyond. Almost never flapping its wings, it glides effortlessly for vast distances, never needing to rest or to find a landing ground. It has no reference point on earth, so it has no bias or stance. It never measures how far it has gone or how far it could go. It just flies on and on, without ever looking back to see where it came from.

## Gentle Action

-I suggested that a new form of creative action may grow out of "creative suspension" But what would be the nature of this action that can successfully deal with the subtle and complex problems that face our planet? I suggest that this is a form of "gentle action", something very different from the actions and solutions that have been posed in the past. Past actions tend to be fragmentary, strong, reactive, imposed within limited domains and can lead to unpredictable results. When applied to sensitive systems they may overwhelm the system's inherent dynamics, when applied to rigid systems they may have little effect.

By contrast "gentle action" is the intelligent, co-ordinated application of very small effects that apply to the system as a whole. Gentle action is non-mechanical and non-local. It arises out of the very essence of the system itself. It is the action that arises out of a watchful suspension, rather than an attempt at domination and control. Since this idea is still in the stage of unfolding it is easiest to deal in terms of metaphors and examples.

Clearly the idea of "gentle action" is appropriate to systems that are highly sensitive to their boundary conditions. Such systems have complex dynamics and any attempt to impose control via some local application of force will result in unpredictable effects. However, such systems can be tuned and adjusted by means of vanishingly small changes in their boundary conditions. The whole key to such gentle change, however, lies in the intelligent and global co-ordination of effects.

It is often said that one cannot change the laws of nature and, in particular, that all our efforts are dominated by the Second Law of Thermodynamics This tells us that any attempt to do work or bring about change must result in some dissipation of useful energy in the form of heat. Or, to put it another way, all spontaneous processes result in an increase in entropy. But while one cannot change a law of nature it is, indeed, possible to modify boundary conditions and reverse this local increase in entropy--living systems from cells to cities do it all the time.

Take, as an example, a stone thrown into a pond. Its ripples spread outward until they make vanishingly small fluctuations at the edge of the pond. (In a similar way light spreads across the universe.) One does not normally see the reverse action--the coming in and amplification of ripples to form a concentrated disturbance at the center of the pond. The reason is that a global co-ordination of very tiny fluctuations beginning at the edge of the pond would be required--defying of the laws of probability and entropy. But, given such gentle action, the intelligent, non-local co-ordination of vanishingly small effects, the rings of disturbance will inevitably move in towards the center of the pond. Entropy will be defied and a very large effect will be the result of the intelligent co-ordination of many vanishingly small perturbations.

Something similar may happen with the operation of memory in the brain. Memory is non-localized. While it may be processed through the hippocampus it is certainly not localized there, or in any other region of the brain. Bite into an orange and electrical activity, initially distributed all over the brain's surface appears to focus, move out again, and refocus into the speech areas.

The word "orange" is uttered. Although no good theory of memory has stood the test of time one could throw out a guess that memory involves the non-local co-ordination of vanishingly small polarizations that are distributed all over the brain. Change these correlations by a vanishingly small amount and some other memory is evoked. Memory, and other aspects brain function, may therefore be based upon a form of non-local, gentle action.

Language too exists in a non-local way. Analysis of meaning in a conversation and dialogue ( See "Language and Science" by Ford and Peat in Foundations of Physics 18,1232, 1988) cannot be properly described as a "flow of information" between physically distinct systems. Rather it is a creative process that emerges out of the system as a whole. Meaning is not localized in space and time but is of a non-local nature. (A proper discussion of this point would take us far beyond the scope of the present article).

Other metaphors for gentle action could be given. This one is from David Bohm. The movement of a ship in response to information on its radar system--it is not the brute force of its engines that determines the course of the ship but the more subtle energy inherent in the electronic signals. So intelligent information gives form to, or in-forms, the overall energy that powers the ship.

In a similar way, I am suggesting, a form of gentle action must be applied to the various problems that face us. Poverty, violence, conflict, the failure of economic theories, the debt between North and South, distribution of foods, destruction of the rain forests, energy intensive industries, climatic change, destruction of species...and many other problems are all entangled with each other. No one can be separated from the others or can be considered in an objective way that does not take into account human values and psychology. What is required is a highly intelligent and co-ordinated action, a human response that is based in creativity, wisdom, intelligence and knowledge. One that emerges out of a state of "watchful suspension". Science and Technology will play their role within this action but they will not dominate it.

Such gentle action is global and "holistic". It arises out of the very nature of the system or systems themselves. Rather than attempting to control or change nature it is a process of intelligent fine-tuning, based upon the assumption that qualitative change can be brought about by small, non-local manipulations of boundary conditions.

Clearly such action goes beyond any simple model, plan or policy. The application of gentle action is a continuous process and involves a constant watchfulness, a form of self-knowledge and sensitivity to society and the whole planet. Once this response becomes a policy or plan then it becomes internally rigid, mechanical and useless. It must grow out of a deep respect for nature and out of values that are not corrupted by all the desires for control, dominance, security and acquisition that have cursed civilization for thousands of years. Its reward may be a chance to save our planet and to live in ways that are more harmonious and rewarding."