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Experiencing Nets of Holism through the Threshold Body

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During my life I have been fortunate to travel widely to parts of our world that, at the time, were not fully open to what was then called the West. I traveled before the world became homogenized and in relation to my writing projects, not as a tourist, and rarely stayed in hotels. At first I did not understand why I was traveling with the existential necessity I was carrying. Nor did I know what that existential necessity was. As time passed, I came to realize I needed to witness how people and other life endure on our chaotic and beautiful planet, a world upon which all life is joined.

As I traveled, I learned that what I had been formally taught as truths often collided with what I was experiencing as I was involved with the life of others. The phenomenon of witnessing life itself while living in contexts physically unfamiliar to me overwhelmed my knowledge by other kinds of truth that issued from within me. Frequently, I needed to release understandings and beliefs that I held. My learning in others’ life spaces became more important than all my academic learning. What I had learned in the different disciplines I studied were valuable mappings that allowed me to access the communities and cultures new to me, but it was only this. I use the word “mapping” and not “map” because I want to bring forward that holistic practice—writing, thinking, making, teaching, doing, being—requires an open-ended intelligence that is always transforming itself in the face of the mappings we learn and the ones we make ourselves.

I hope this chapter shall be a valuable mapping for readers. It cannot be more because what is crucial for the discipline of holism to recognize is that the foundational strength of holism arises from a deep subjectivity, as implied above. It is deep subjectivity that allows us continuously to be open to modifying our internal truths and beliefs; no external factor alone can confirm or disprove them. This places heavy responsibility upon our clarity and our honesty with ourselves in relation to the knowledge and truths in which we believe and out of which we practice. It also requires us to recognize and allow shifts from our certainty. My memory (I have rarely taken a photograph, and do not photograph now) includes thousands upon thousands of fragmented images of how humans endure their fates and these images of my life are imprinted forever with sensations of what humans have offered me of themselves: courage, dignity, hope, wisdom, mercy, compassion, laughter. It is these memories that permit me to write what is below and to confess that when I was a younger woman I did not fully understand at all what now I write.

In writing now I want to believe it is possible to live with more widespread daily sensitivity to each other, even nation unto nation, but how? I shall suggest that holism is a self-healing net, and that we live better when we attempt to approach the deep mystery within ourselves, within every
one, all species, and the abundance of mystery on our planet and in our universe, too. Because I am taking this position, I shall suggest that complete holism is a relationship that depends upon the intimacy of our being together, a relationship that is awareness of how our outer and inner worlds associate with each other in our immediate existential reality. It is this, our experience of the “isness” of the present, rather than our psychic reality that is all-important. The reality of our psychological/cultural minds and emotions is the reality that places conceptual judgments on others and events. Our psychic reality is crucial for the continuity of our daily living, but it is living sensitively within our existential reality, enabled by what I call the threshold body, that allows our inner wisdom to enlarge and become deeper. Inner wisdom is not conceptual and any action it guides us to take (for the sake of justice, for instance) does not arise from judgment but, rather, from seeking a way to bring all into communion.

Visible and Invisible Nets

We live in a time when scientists, through evidential research, are coming to appreciate and understand the wisdom of the Indigenous peoples and of the ancients. The wisdom of Indigenous peoples depended upon recognizing the meetings of outer and inner worlds. Indigenous people in Australia practice dadirri. Dadirri is their word for a quiet listening that depends on a source of awareness within that leads to building of connections in community. In the Greenlandic language there is a word, sila. Sila simultaneously means weather, animal and human consciousness, and the power of nature. No distinction is made between human and animal minds within individuals who can “see” this way. In the third century, Indian philosophers developed a jeweled metaphoric “net of the world” in their attempts to teach about the interconnectedness of all things in the universe. At each point in this net where the threads connected was a pearl that reflected every other pearl, including all that had ever been reflected upon it. This continuous reflecting process of interconnection never ended. Similarly, in order to teach about the interpenetration of macrocosms and microcosms, ancient Chinese philosophers devised a metaphoric statue of a golden lion that, in each aspect of its anatomy, including each hair, was housed another golden lion. This evolution never ceased. In our time, it is common to use the idea of a net for the representation of the complex interconnectedness of various social, physical, and symbolic systems. Most obviously, in our daily life the internet of the world wide web (WWW) manifests for our use through invisible extremely low frequency (ELF) electromagnetic radiation and this enables us to connect with each other and with information.

In the past century, Carl Jung, the psychiatrist who founded analytical psychology, wrote extensively throughout his vast works about the collective unconscious, a non-material structure of the unconscious mind that is shared among humans. In this century, investigations of non-material science are becoming mainstream. A host of researchers show how human thought can influence the thoughts and images and physiology of other beings, including plants, cellular organisms, the molecules of water, machines, and so on. This non-material research is considered by many to be suspect because researchers have no theory to explain the data. By the deduction of science we yet do not know very much about the human consciousness and how its resonance influences the world. Readers may have their own stories of surprising conscious connections (telepathy, presen
tence) between themselves and loved ones, across species, or even specific world events. Through involuntary drawings, I recorded one of these events (Darroch-Lozowski, 2002). But where does consciousness come from? Where is it now as I write or as you read? We do not know. Further, while we acknowledge that electricity and electromagnetism is vital for life, we do not know how all the subtle energies of life and of the materials around us—electrical, electromagnetic, solar, seasonal, cosmic, and others that yet remain unnamed—affect us. These nets of being and of relation, for better or worse, affect us profoundly and we are scarcely aware of how the habits of our minds and the energies of our bodies are always changing as a consequence of their interconnections at a quantum level.
Today, one of the hardest problems for physicists and mathematicians studying quantum systems is that while knowing through their research that all particles in the universe do interconnect, they do not know how these complex connections are made.

Over the past century, in Euro-Western thought, ideational structures of the social sciences have contributed powerfully to the idea of holism as it exists in human communities. These structures (for example, the ego, the id, social class, active will, political alliance, the unconscious) are the foundations for our contemporary necessity of understanding each other and they have created their own nets. They came into being when persons believed that the laws of nature itself were structural and were fixed. At the same time, social and physical researchers were becoming aware that our descriptions of our structures of being and the material structures around us are always fluctuating, moving, and changing their forms. Today and every day, through how we recognize and respond to the streams of signs, messages, desires, and data through which we navigate, we experience these unceasing alterations. Especially data, information, are in the foreground of our lives today. Yet, all that these mappings carry are only intelligible or practicable when seen by a conscious observer and even then are only ways for indicating how we are interacting with reality. Notably, similar to scientific and social theories and religious precepts, data and its subsequent algorithms, sometimes described as “god” of the future, is not an experienced reality itself.

One scientist who continues to investigate the nets and fields of evolution in animals and humans is Rupert Sheldrake, who has proposed a theory of morphic resonance (Sheldrake, 1982, 2009). My summary that follows is retrieved from various posts on his website, www.sheldrake.org. His research is founded upon the concept of morphogenesis, the process by which a biological organism develops its shape. He reminds how, in psychology, we could consider the morphogenetic fields of the mind, developed from interacting with their context of daily living, as contributing to the developmental history of a child, influencing him or her to become what she or he is. Sheldrake’s concept of morphic fields is defined by him as being essentially habits of the mind. They are not fixed, however. He describes how his research attempts to show that morphic fields are subject to natural selection, meaning the more times they are repeated, the more probable they become. It is morphic fields that underlie our mental activities, our perceptions and collective behavior. As well, through intention and attention, morphic fields extend beyond our minds, connecting members of social groups at a distance. Sheldrake hypothesizes that morphic fields at all complexity are self-organizing wholes and that they attract systems under their influence and interrelate morphic units within themselves. They also contain a built in memory given by self-resonance with their own past and by morphic resonance with all previous similar systems. Various morphic fields of thought and values within human history—past, present and emerging—can be identified. I suggest that so far, we, as practitioners in all fields, but especially political ones, are not recognizing the “invisible” net-like and recursive power of morphic fields in our attempts to bring further humane changes to societies.

The Threshold Body and Deep Subjectivity

In physics, what is called the world line is the unique path that an object has as it travels through space and time. Everyone and everything—a moving photon, a growing plant, a child’s development, a living cell, and, yes, a thought, too—has a world line whose history, in theory, can be tracked. These moving world lines interact with each other, connect with each other, and weave through relationships that begin, last, and end. I have been emphasizing the outer and inner realities, the outer and inner nets, in which and by which we live. They all yield circumstances of relationship. Some of the relationships are damaged, while others are not. But their world lines of co-existence all connect and all are threads of the mysterious net of the world. Therefore, we are in relationship with every one and every thing all the time. It is our sensitivity to our felt experience of other world lines, to how we influence them, to how they influence us, that allows humanity and other species and the
universe itself to evolve and expand. The depth of our awareness of our co-existence influences the kind of human beings each one of us becomes.

I devised the term “threshold body” as a metaphor around which to develop my thoughts (Darroch-Lozowski, 1999). A threshold is always a transitional space, a place occupying both sides of a boundary. Humanity stands in a politically and environmentally perilous space at the beginning of this century. We are disorientated as civilizations, too often fearful-at-large, yet live hourly with the hopeful potential to birth something new and humane. If we could fully accept this space—time in history as a threshold space and suspend our ideas and habits of difference (of status, race, gender, all differences between us), this space would be safer.

Our bodies are what markedly separate us from others, and from the world. Yet, each of us has the capacity to be aware of ourselves as a threshold body that can respond to others and the world in a way different from our usual ways. However, it is difficult to be a threshold body because the attributes of ourselves on a threshold are necessarily ambiguous: we are being influenced by what is on both sides of the threshold where we are. Therefore, the attributes of our being a threshold body can be described only by indirect reference. Our edges, or ourselves as a threshold body, are non-manifest because our body-ness is a pause of the entire whole/part of our normal existence. What does this mean? It means that with our attention on the resonance of things that surround us and by withdrawing from our limited boundaries of truths and beliefs, through its continuous reflecting of what is intuitively felt, the threshold body can allow the usual place, self, and inner substantiation of our body to be transgressed by other world lines for the sake of yielding spontaneous and new understanding and creativity. We shall sense, resonate with, this newness within ourselves and understand it, even without words.

A situation in which we all have experienced something akin to the sensations of the threshold body is the one in which we are “wandering” (Darroch-Lozowski, 1999). When we are wandering, we concentrate loosely on what we might pick up in our hand, on what we see. And then, usually, we open our hand or turn our gaze and let what we have found go—to be washed and encountered again by another wind, or sea, or memory, or being. When we wander, our focus is easeful on the detritus of thought and images, as they impinge upon us from what seems to be an infinite space—time. When we wander, our thoughts, perceptions, and sensations in-fold on our past and future memories. When we wander, our perceptual habit orients to that all is, rather than to what all is. Such perceptual reorientation shows that the awareness of the threshold body is different from our usual daily, psychological, social, and political awareness. It is an awareness that recognizes the world is unceasingly in flux, that what is loved in the world—a person, an animal, a mountain, a moon—will change. It is an awareness that carries us to understanding how our purpose to engage with each other is for the sake of our loss to each other. Out of such awareness flows a disposition toward things and toward self that involves a deeper responsiveness and sensitive responsibility. It is a disposition that is not encumbered with attempting to extend our influence and efficacy and possessions.

One day, long ago, when I was in rural People’s Republic of China, I boarded a bus in which every seat was taken and dozens of persons were standing in the aisle. A place was made for me to stand. After a few miles, a young man stood. He had been sitting with a young woman who, it could be seen by all, was taken over by a silent anguish. With no word but with a serious gesture, he offered me his seat. I indicated no, thank you, because of my concern for the suffering young woman he was accompanying. I did not smile. Their situation was too grave. With gesture, he insisted (he said something but I did not know his language) and, finally, I sat beside her, saying nothing to him or to her as I did not wish to intrude upon their serious presences. When I sat beside her, she immediately clenched my hand and did not loosen this tight grip for the next almost two hours. During this time period, I felt my own hand tightening upon hers. Both of us sat quietly looking at our feet and the floor. I could not discern whether her great pain was issuing
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from her body or from her soul—are these separated? I did not think or imagine about the causes of her extremity. I did not speak. I only wanted to be aware of our hands grasping each other’s. The resonance of her body was permeating me, as was my body’s resonance permeating hers, and soon our resonance became unified. *This resonance allowed us to accompany something into itself. Neither of us knew what that was. Nor did it matter. We received the grace of it. That was enough.* When the woman stood to leave the bus, for the first time she and I looked at each other. Stricken, not speaking, we recognized that we did not want to lose each other. Yet we must. The woman’s companion acknowledged our parting and I stayed on the bus because I was not yet at my destination. What was this linking between the woman and me?

I describe the above experience to show how the threshold body allows reaching essences of self, another, or even the other-than-human-world, that are not premeditated and that seem to situate our vision *in that which we are experiencing that is something larger than ourselves.* The effect of the threshold body on our experience is that the gap of being between mind and corporeal body disappears. This is to say our experience widens infinitely, and the boundary between our self’s way of knowing and the coded world’s way of being becomes less distinct. When we are resonant with an “other”, we are not confined to being affected (and sometimes afflicted) from without through the historical, cultural, linguistic complexes in which we can so easily entangle ourselves.

Being in our threshold body allows for simultaneous unification of ourselves as living, subjective systems, for our body’s capacity to understand its own fluctuating diversity, and for the fluctuating variety of our changing environments. We now know that experiential structures necessary for most of our abstract thinking are compelled and confined by our bodily functioning—that is, by our living selves. And it is our living selves that constitute ourselves as subjects of change, not the events in which we are participating or observing.

The threshold body is an intimate body, neither public nor private. The threshold body offers our self to a world without mediation. It represents a union of inner essence and outward phenomenon. It is a state of resonance that transcends the feelings of being or of non-being. All threshold phenomena, including the being of the threshold body, offer two possibilities—sacredness or blasphemy. Thresholdedness is an inherent inside the unique human condition of each of us: it is an inherent we deeply fear because it can endanger us. Elsewhere I have considered this (Darroch-Lozowski, 1990).

The sociologist of knowledge, Kurt H. Wolff, displaced from Germany and Auschwitz, wrote two important books of inquiry documenting his questioning of himself in his attempts to understand history and time (Wolff, 1976, 1989). Twice, years apart, I was privileged to share suppers and conversations with Kurt and, late in his life, we “co-existed” (his word) with each other, now and then, through paper correspondence. It is from him that I began to appreciate that the continuity of our “I-am” consists in our “I-am” beginning ever-again as we connect with other world lines and as we re-see ourselves. The threshold body is aware, instant by instant, of beginning again and again and again. In Kurt’s thought, we must surrender to the world, and when we do there is always a catch. For Kurt, “surrender” meant touching the world. “‘Everything’ is everything within the surrenderer’s awareness . . .” he wrote (Wolff, 1976, p. 201). By “catch”, he meant its cognitive and existential results; in other words, our actions and cognitive love consequent upon our surrendering. I am suggesting that, from our threshold bodies, we may reach this.

In *O Loma!*, Kurt wrote, “Surrender is in touch with what happens. With the fully empty . . . to say this is to run naked through a half-crowded theatre so the spectators have space to stare and stone” (Wolff, 1989, p. 109). He muses how the touch of surrender has to do with the body, that the world becomes touchable in surrender: “And I say ‘surrender’—of course I am naked, running naked through the human theatre—and the spectators stare and stone”, he writes (Wolff, 1989, p. 109).

Emerging from surrender, we are left with fragments of what we learned from being in touch with what happened. Afterward, what remains within ourselves of the experience and what we offer to
others and to the community is the catch of that surrender. We can never know what surrendering can achieve in the world. We are not always able to discern the catch that is returned to the community by such profound surrendering as Wolff describes. Surrender and its catch form their own complex, intricate nets of cognition and feeling that cannot fairly be named or described. Certainly I do not and cannot live in and through the threshold body consciously all the time. But I try to be aware of where I am standing. Yes, even in coffee shops, walking down normal city streets, resting in a meadow, I try. Yes, I fail.

Historically, I began forming the metaphor “threshold body” long before humanity became immersed in our electronic virtual world. Obviously, the place of the threshold body in our world of virtual realities needs to be addressed. In their far-reaching studies that address the origin of humanness, Maturana Romesin and Verden-Zöller (2008) differentiate virtual reality from other experiences that we call “real” by stipulating that the only experiences that can be called real are those that we live understanding how they are coupled with the community in which we exist and how they are dependent upon the media that we use. They write,

No matter whether we are aware or not of what kind of reality we live in in any instant, all the realities that we live affect us in the same way in the emotional dimensions of our psychic existence, because there is no virtual emotional life.

(Maturana Romesin & Verden-Zöller, 2008, p. 202)

When they expand on this, they indicate that all that we live arises from our psychic existence whether or not this takes place in a virtual or a non-virtual reality. They remind that our nervous system is continuously changing “both in our conscious and unconscious, external and internal, relational psychic space” (Maturana Romesin & Verden-Zöller, 2008, p. 202), and that as we live and change congruently with others repeatedly through virtual media, “realities that were initially virtual progressively stop being virtual, and as features of our culture they become part of our biological manner of living and, hence, of the non-virtual reality that we live” (Maturana Romesin & Verden-Zöller, 2008, p. 202). They conclude that the problem is not virtual reality itself but, rather,

whether we do or do not like the psychic manners of existence and cultural transformations that we generate through them. Virtual realities are never trivial, because we always become transformed as we live them according to the emotioning of the psychic space that they bring about in our living . . .

(Maturana Romesin & Verden-Zöller, 2008, p. 203)

There is worldwide discussion now of what the electronic virtual reality has released in humanity and the question remains open with respect to how the communicative and moral habits and the bio-physical evolution of the entire larger morphic and netted field of humanity itself shall evolve.

When I began this essay, I emphasized that all we can know are mappings that give us access to reality, but that they are not reality itself. Yet, I am writing from within a reality, am I not—the reality of my own psychic space? Psychic space is the exceedingly significant reality that gives continuity to our lives, yet it is unceasingly being re-constructed by the routine, repetitive, and creative co-existence that we, as humans, have with everything else, as well as by our instincts and prejudices that usually lie below our consciousness. To assist us in receiving alterations of our psychic space as life proceeds, we need to be intentionally aware of the words we hear and the words we adopt and use. It is languaging, inadequate as so often it is, that allows us to bring meaning to the way the world touches us and reflects our touch upon us back to ourselves. I have written elsewhere about how the action of language and its touch on body makes its saying (Darroch-Lozowski, 1984, 1987).
Surrendering to Experience

On a subtle level, holistic practice requires a discovering within. Discovering within requires focusing and acting in a particular way when we are with another. I have used the threshold body as a metaphor to guide us toward this. Crucially, it requires recognizing the other as being representative of more than as might be identified as a “she” or a “he” or a trans-gendered person or a person of this skin color or that, of this culture or that, or under this stress or that. In other words, we need to accept and respond to another only as a human being representative of a human here-and-now. I was privileged to have Kurt review one of my works before I was acquainted with him and he articulated the above insight in that review. In this review, he also phrased what he considered to be the universal human question: “what must I do from sheer necessity since I am the human being I am”? (Wolff, 1991). We all, at one time or another, sight this question. Yet, we can easily let it fall away or suppress it entirely. We do so because answering it directly leads us to face the ambiguity and threat of being a threshold body. What must we do from sheer necessity, since we are the human beings we are?

Last, within everything, including ourselves, there is mystery. Every mystery, even the mystery of our own lives, holds an enigma. It is within our deep subjectivity and through attempting to live as a threshold body that we can approach the mystery of our own lives and, therefore, begin to understand and accept how our world line is weaving itself into the self-healing net of the world. The philosopher Gabriel Marcel (1950) wrote how the recognition of mystery occurs within ourselves as we interact with our outer world. He wrote:

The recognition of mystery . . . is an essentially positive act of the mind. . . . In this sphere everything seems to go on as if I have found myself acting on an intuition which I possess without immediately knowing myself to possess it—an intuition which cannot be, strictly speaking, self-conscious and which can grasp itself only through the modes of experience in which its image is reflected, and which it lights up by being reflected in them.

(p. 212)

If it were possible for us to be aware enough, would this not also be a beautiful description of the human-and-more-than-human net of our world?

Holism as a self-healing net is continuously evolving outside and within all of us, and everything, worldwide. And it is evolving within its own time. And some of its threads will always be damaged and torn. In closing this essay, I acknowledge the millions of earth’s citizens who are working to make better each other’s plight and our world’s plight on all fronts of ethical concerns—local and non-local—fronts of war, environment, racism, health, food, equality—especially justice for women, aboriginal cultures, and the economically compromised. It is a gentle and undifferentiated joining and surrendering to our experience as we work and play with others that continuously reforms holism as a self-healing net.

Yesterday, on a narrow gravel road, I was driving home from the country at dusk. I passed a harvested field in which a large flock of Canada geese were standing, all in the same upright posture—all facing north—all absolutely still—none feeding. It was as if I had come upon an immense living still-life—charcoal-brown field, hundreds of greyish-brown birds, darkish surroundings, and earth-shadowed ambient air. Mesmerized, I stopped the car—lowered the window—silence, not a breath of air moving—and looked upon this scene. When I slowly began to move the car again, from the ditch on my left a female deer leaped in front of my vehicle—I braked in time—she paused and turned her face toward mine for a few seconds before leaping away. Looking upon each other, we touched each other, and in that instant tenderness filled my whole life.
References