

BLA, BLA, BLA AND DANCE

Entrevista a Agustín Antúñez¹

Question 1. To many people it probably sounds a bit weird to say that you can learn about nature by dancing and drumming. Can you explain? Why should we dance and drum?

All this began with the discovery that, in spite of being almost forgotten and hidden for our western world view, indigenous people have many things that WE MAY LEARN. As my Traditional Mexican Teacher, Temilotzin, said in his interview with Málaga University staff: "WE BRING AN INDIGENOUS PROJECT FOR THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIRST WORLD". After all, we are not only speaking of dancing in the forest. We speak on something very much deeper, about the way to understand LIFE AND THE CONTINUITY OF LIFE, AND THE CULTURE OF LIFE.

Of course to answer your questions is not as if you say: learn English in ten days... I would include a long list of books sustaining our world view, but at the end we could be caught in the same trap we try to prevent, you know..., that is to learn, not only by words, and words, and more words, but also by other ways.

Of course this may sound like a children game... But I think the situation we meet know is so much dangerous that we need to take in account more seriously the ways other cultures, not modern-European have used to learn. There are different ways of knowing, different sciences that work, and not only the modern

European science. Science is, in this way, multicultural. When you are able to keep away the strong eurocentrism that have been feeding you along your long education process, may be you... It is very different that you feel among sami families in a tundra landscape and that you feel, for example, when you arrive at night at the "2001" landscape of Helsinki airport. It seems as if western "progress" try to keep your conscience every time more and more away from Mother Earth. It is sure that, at least, we may say that the way people have been learning about nature don't goes very well. Don't you think so? Do we want from people to learn about Nature? or merely to build a mechanistic model about Nature, where all "pieces" function like a machine? For this last option, it is important that people learn about a "dead" Nature; a nature that do not feel; a nature that we can freely transform, destroy, try to "dominate", because this nature "built" in this way is something apart from us, and can "serve" to us. In holistic thinking it is not to say that we are part from Nature, but that we ARE Nature; and more..., that we cannot speak of two things: we, and Nature; we and Nature are indissociable and at so speaking of them as separate entities we follow constructing the world in a way of separateness, as when people speak of "environment"... The mere concept of environment as that surrounding us, use the same meaning of separateness. (Using this word and this philosophy, the western ecological movement is going out of way, for the good of corporations). It is something not conscious. It is the sacred, when you feel the great "promiscuity" that permeates ALL of us by the energy and material fluxes that constitutes the CORE of the recent and revolutionary and holistic western science we call ECOLOGY.

Of course there's no solution. There are different ways by which cultures can converse

among themselves, if we don't negate cultures, or if we consider them something more than mere decoration objects... Don't worry by your feelings when you heard about dancing in the forests. People at universities are programmed, in general, for to laugh of these things and to follow uglily the no-end way that monolithic thinking try to take us. We are being programmed to worship the computer-based technologies and so on. There is no a clear limit between the ecological way of see and the sacred-indigenous way of seeing. When you are aware of the eurocentrism that surrounds the conception of modern European science, you may see that the sciences of other different cultures are true sciences and not merely "ethnoscience". The way of knowing by dancing in the forest cannot be well explained by words, and neither by written words on pieces of trees (papers). This is the trap.

Question 2. What do you think, would this way of learning be suitable for biology lessons? Should the students be taken to forest to dance instead of sitting inside?

We have the inertia to fall in the dichotomy (black OR white) trap. There are "infinite" steps or possibilities, and not only two. Of course it seems that today university classes in Biology are every time more encapsulated in classrooms or laboratories and receiving so much information... If Biology is a science for survival, students must feel more and be less "infocated", you know... "Termite" people only have some one hundred years inhabiting among concrete and pavement, and this is only in some parts of the Earth. Our true house is really outside these "termite" buildings. And, at least biologists that, in theory, study life and the future of life, could try to connect more directly, (not only thinking, also feeling) with

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the basis of this life that is not in concrete, books or pavement...

Of course it depends on the role society want for biologists. Are they actually biologists or "necrologists"? Why there are so much differences between the expectations of many people before to entry in Biology studies and that they actually find along heir courses. Governments, of course, today are not very interested in supporting holistic Biology courses. Of course students can be taken out to dancing in the forests.

What this article-interview pretend? This is a magazine article that will "compete" with all the many information that the reader will receive. Could I write it as if this article would not go to this big competence "road"? Of course Indian sacred dances are exotic, are very different from other common activities and may produce in the people that make it for first time a sense of shame. It produces in the people attraction and, at the same time, a certain repulsion. It attracts because this consumer society need every time different and new things to consume them. Indian cultures are in fashion. And they provoke repulsion because our Greek - Roman - Christian cultural substrate (many times unconsciously) tend to reject all pagan and heretic ideas and activities.

People say: there is no relation between dance and Biology. University knowledge is encapsulated in smaller and smaller boxes...Perhaps with theatre...? (They say). We could at least imagine in another "revolutionary" way: How to dilute the mind walls of the University, and in a possible future, again all people to the forests!

We are so much handicapped... We cannot survive in our "natural milieu", you know.. We cannot actual survive eating plants or animals in the forests...Instead of the question: Why to go out to dance in the forests? We could ask: Can we

survive outside concrete, pavement and credit cards? No one is alone. And the knowledge... Knowledge is, in Antonia Nemeth words, like a river that is fed by many springs. ALL the knowledge is collective. And in Indian world view, society, or community are global, embracing ALL the life, ALL the Earth, ALL the beings, not only humans, ALL the universe... In European modern culture the feelings of private property begin with Myself, and we say "My body, My ..., My ..., My ...I think, I have, I make, I drive..." as if each of us were autonomous beings that can survive in isolation from the global life community...

In an holistic way, it is very difficult to put here a good image of all this work along these years...Take in account (In Bart Kosko words) that when we speak, we simplify, and at simplifying, we lay. Humberto Maturana, Chilean biologist says: to live is to know, you cannot separate the known from the life. From the last years, the indigenous world was opening to me, beginning with my visits to Morocco, to Himalaya and to the land of the Maya people in Central America. After that, new and repeated visits to Morocco and increased contact with indigenous world through different courses and workshops, and other different information, and, specially, in the last 5 years period, a renowned communication and work through many activities, with Temilotzin, Indigenous Mexican Teacher. This is the way from the indigenous.

What about the way from the western modern knowledge, that is, from the Science? Simplifying, we may say that the modern European world view is built over three "columns": Greek philosophy, Roman Right and Christian Religion.

When I began picking up little pieces of indigenous wisdom it seems firstly to my mind a little like something exotic, very

fascinating, but too very far from previously formed through indoctrination in a solid modern European scientific culture. (In fact this is the way many European people perceive the sacred indigenous dance in their first contact with it, and before to receive a good explanation). Why? Because I went from an "apparently" very different world view. Of course the orthodox schools in modern European scientific culture are very much apart from an indigenous point of view. But the learning all these years in the field of science and biology, has shown to me that out of the orthodoxy, in the History you may find many points in common with (or nearest to) the indigenous. In this way, you become, in a certain manner, more aware of your own indigenous origins and constitution. In this way Indigenous would be every human being aware of inhabiting on and with Mother Earth. All this continuous approach to indigenous was and is accompanied or adjoining to a critic of the orthodox modern European thinking and a tour through other different and non orthodox modern European schools of thinking. I have learned from many people around me, mainly non biologists, in several workgroups interdisciplinary in nature, outside and within the university "milieu". All these have made to me more indisciplined and less disciplinary. It is good for university students to become more interdisciplinary, taking courses different from their main subject.

You may see to elementary schools nowadays, more diverse learning ways are being used. In this way, universities are far from that. Why? In the universities, it seems to be a great appointment to teach so many data as possible. In general the groups of students are big, and the possible learning interactions are reduced. Now they are people that say that the solution for that problem of little

learning interactions in universities will be..... the computers!!! I wouldn't like to speak very much from modern technologies. But you may take in account that drumming and communitary dancing are true technologies (not modern, but very old ones...), and all the traditional indigenous knowledge, like the use of medicinal plants, agriculture, or animal husbandry must be considered as true traditional biotechnologies. The repeated presence of high-damaging viruses in the computers, I think, is a clear warning of a wrong way in the modern technological development.

Our indigenous proposal is suitable for biology lessons? This is not to propose to dance every day in the classrooms in stead of regular lessons. There are many different ways to teach biology. There are different schools in biological thinking. And you have always the concept of hidden curriculum or implicit curriculum. That is the knowledge many teachers take for granted when they are in the classroom. For example, the idea of modern European science is sustained on the idea of "progress". If you try to put into question modern European science, you need to descend to that macro-metaphor or myth, as it is "progress", that send to non-European non-modern cultures-sciences to the

labels: irrational, savage or primitive, backwards in stead of progressive, static in stead of dynamic, undeveloped, valid only locally, "precientific", intuitive. The Gaia theory and Darwinian theory represent very different ways to look life or biology. On the one hand, Gaia is more complex, more holistic, the other, more reductionistic.

Question 3. Tell me about this holistic world view. Can you give some examples of differences between holistic and modern western way of seeing nature?

To try reduce the cause of illness to our genes is an example of reductionism. And we are every day hearing opinions in this way, supporting the Human Genome Project, for example. The same for Genetic Engineering, now appearing as the second green revolution in modern agriculture that is "going to save the world hunger". Or the Economic Globalization: to homogenize all people in their living in the world. Complexity and diversity are in line with holistic worldview. To believe in dichotomies versus to believe in a variety of possible solutions, and not only two. To add always the word "AND". To take in account the context, and not only the pieces under study. All processes

are multidimensional. Nature is very much complex and rich that any model the scientists may build to explain it. To think globally in four dimensions: spatial, temporal-historic, and subject dimension, and your own inner dimension (David Selby). All subjects are interrelated. You may distinguish, but not separate (Edgar Morin). For example, through the "Chitontiquiza" - ritual, cosmogonic and communitary Mexican dance, you may live all the sciences and all the dimensions. In the world of the "Chitontiquiza" you cannot separate the "ecology" (our interrelationships with each other in the sacred human circle of the dance and in the human plus non-human [ecosystemic, cosmogonic, bacterial] one) from the "social" and from the "spiritual". I put quotation marks to indicate that under indigenous worldview these mere words, or concepts, or disciplines, or subjects, lack a sense, because the strong interrelatedness within the worldview.

Of course, when you name the things, or the subjects, you are actually building the (your) world (-view). This is the point of view of constructivist, versus the realist that speak only of one world - one reality.

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