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Bern Porter

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Nick Herbert on: QUANTUM TANTRA

QUANTUM TANTRA IS PHYSICS-ASSISTED DEEP UNION WITH NATURE.

Like the Newtonian physics it replaced, quantum physics grows out of a worldview that sees nature as separate from man, as a dangerous Other to be tamed and controlled by scientists who have decoded her (mostly mathematical) rules. Despite lip service paid to "quantum wholeness" most physicists still view the world as Us versus It, as conscious mind confronting mindless particles. Though their methods differ radically from Newton's, modern physicists regard quantum mechanics as just that, a new type of mechanics--subtle and strange, to be sure--but at base as soulless and impersonal as Newton's gravity-driven celestrial machine.

Despite statements in some quantum texts that Observer and System form an inseparable whole, I know of no physicist that has ever merged with his apparatus. the relationship of the modern scientist to his quantum System is every bit as aloof as that of a pre-quantum Victorian scientist to his pendulum clocks and meter sticks. Despite their nominal belief in the "undivided wholeness" of the quantum world (described especially well by David Bohm), physicists, in the name of "scientific objectivity" hold themselves apart from the nature they are examining and practice dispassionate "observation" rather than merging. Such aloof inquiry results, predictably, in a picture of nature that, despite its quantum strangeness, is essentially dead and lifeless.

Can it be that quantum mechanics has limited itself unnecessarily by thoughtlessly maintaining old mechanistic and separatist notions inherited from its Newtonian past? Feminist critics of science such as Evelyn Fox Keller and Sandra Harding see physics as blinded by "patriarchal biases" and look toward a more clear-sighted "successor science". Can we find a radically new way to approach science that is more in tune with the way the world really is, the way quantum theory hints it might actually be?

"Quantum Tantra" attempts to blaze a new pathway for science by incorporating previously discarded and marginal ways of thinking into a new synthesis. Two non-mechanistic, non-separatist traditions are of particular interest for this purpose: Western alchemy and Eastern tantra. Alchemy is based on the notion of a partially psychic chemistry in which the mind of the alchemist merges with the material cooking in his alembic. Tantra teaches that the universe is not mere motion of dead matter but the sexual play of two divine beings and seeks techniques to directly participate in that holy play. The goal of "Quantum Tantra:" is to initiate an entirely new direction of research by approaching quantum theory and its paradoxes as if they were incomplete fragments of a "successor science" based on tantric and alchemical principles.
For instance, what kind of science would result if we regarded the world not as a collection of dead objects but, in the manner of certain Sufi mystics (practitioners of 'ilm al-qulub or "science of hearts"), as the very body of the Beloved? What could be learned about nature and ourselves if, instead of treating her as an object to be passively observed, we begin looking for ways to "woo her", to become actively involved in natural processes? And suppose our attempts at wooing and deeper involvement were guided, not by vague myths of pre-scientific peoples, but by powerful insights, bold hunches and inspired guesses gleaned from three centuries of math-enlightened physics? What is the deepest kind of union with nature that twentieth-century minds can envision? What is the deepest kind of union we can actually achieve?

Western religion sees the world as a job completed by a lone omnipotent being (traditionally male) long ago in the past, an event in which humans played no part. Practitioners of tantra, on the other hand, consider the world to be created anew each moment, as the love play of two divine beings, Shiva and Shakti, and believe that humans can participate to some extent in that union, in partnership with another being, performing a kind of "cosmic physics" in a soft laboratory of entangled muscle and mind. Which is the better world-myth? Is the universe more like an ancient one-man job or present-moment two-part joy?

Along with much else of deep human concern, science has tamed and sanitized sex as a mere psychobiological process, like breathing or digestion. Sex in the West has been subject to glaring scrutiny, in hundreds of books, thousands of magazine articles and millions of pornographic images, but in spite of massive scientific and media exposure, sex continues to fascinate us with its primitive mystery. Each of us, no matter how sophisticated, senses that he or she could still be sexually surprised.

Mystics of many persuasions, using ecstatic introspection as tool have attempted to examine this world's deep reality from inside and claim, like quantum physicists, that truth at that level strains human powers of description. Most mystics are solitary, but, alongside these one-person paths, a more social way of exploring the inner world in couples and small groups has also existed, a yoga-for-two calling itself "tantra" from the Sanskrit word for "weaving".

Tantra begins with the surprising claim that sex is not only holy, but that it is in some sense a direct participation in the creation of the world, an event which Western science and religion assert to have happened in the far distant past. Tantrikas also claim that the universe results from the playful union of two divine beings and that this divine union can be directly experienced in the sexual act. Through there are many tantras (tantric scriptures) they all agree that the truth of these statements is not to be taken on faith but must be directly experienced. If tantra can be regarded as a science, it is the kind of science that values experiment more highly than words.

Tantric adepts (tantrikas) use sex neither for recreation nor procreation but for exploration of deep reality, as a kind of hands-on, wide-eyed descent into Being. In the past these intuition-inspired sexual explorations of deep inner nature were carried out within cultures that knew almost nothing about the deep structure of matter as seen from without. Likewise our math-guided understanding of outer nature has been achieved in a vacuum of spiritual knowledge. "Quantum Tantra" will for the first time weave these two methods of probing reality together by merging the insights of tantrikas with the insights of physicists. In addition "Quantum Tantra" will explore the possibility of a new style of scientific inquiry based on the strengths of both tantra and physics.

"Quantum Tantra" will explore the possibility of a sacred sexuality enriched by the metaphors of modern physics as well as the possibility of a new tantra-inspired style of doing physics. The central mystery of physics is how possibilities become actual; the central mystery of tantra is deciding what to do next.
Several of his sculptures grace the Sculpture Garden on the Institute 19087-2027. He has written essays on art which will appear in future issues.
INSTITUTE NEWS

During the recent Maine Ice Storm, which made nationwide news, many residents of Belfast were without electricity for up to thirteen days. Shelter was provided for those without heat by MBNA, a Maryland corporation which recently opened a large facility in our municipality. Others struggled along, making do with woodstoves for warmth, and candles, kerosene lamps, etc, for light. Some of the elderly and infirm were put up in area motels.

The Institute was without heat and light for two days. During this time our Director and Editor Emeritus, Bern Porter, fell in the dooryard fracturing his pelvis in two places. He was hospitalized for eight days, and upon discharge has been housebound with limited mobility, and under the care of the Waldo County visiting nurse, a physical therapist, and the Kno-Wal-Lin Home Health Aide service.

In order to provide comfort, companionship, hot meals and sexual diversion 3x a day for Bern during his recovery, editors Natasha Bernstein and Sheila Holtz have returned to the Institute in Belfast for a two-month tenure as Scholars in Residence. While they are here, Bern Porter International comes to you courtesy of the computer facilities of the Belfast Public Library, the copying facilities of Belfast Office Supplies and Services, and the manual Olivetti typewriter of Sheila Holtz. Not to mention plenty of glue sticks and exacto knives!

* * * * *

As we write this Institute News Update, snow falls from the gray and corpulent clouds outside the windows of the Belfast Public Library, creating a picturesque tableau as it sticks to the delicate branches of red-berried shrubs. Nevertheless, the joint is jumping. Belfast must be the most literate town of 6000 in Midcoast Maine! At any rate, the library is certainly well-appointed, due in part, we are told, to generous financial contributions by Stephen King, and MBNA. Sheila has applied for a library card and, in addition to her administrative and clerical functions as co-editor of BPI, she says that her stated goal before leaving Belfast on April 6 is to finish reading all the STAR TREK paperback novels in the library, a collection, by the way, which is considerable! Natasha continues to use the cyber-facilities here to surf the Internet and download information relevant to her studies in BDSM!

* * * * *

Scheduled for publication in the next issue of BPI is the first installment of a serialized interview with Bern, dealing with his take on the Human Genome Project, the latest in a series of great technological innovations brought to by... The Department of Energy! (Yes! The same great folks who brought you... The Atomic Bomb! Nuclear power plants! ETC!) Bern, as you know, worked on the atomic bomb from 1941 to 1945 under the direction of J. Robert Oppenheimer at the DOE facilities at Berkeley and Oak Ridge, TN. These very facilities are now engaged in a multi-million dollar, fifteen-year international science project, which, when complete, will have "sequenced" the human genetic material, or DNA. What does this have to do with energy? Good Question!

At any rate, in the interview we will learn that Bern, as a result of his work in the separation of uranium isotopes to create plutonium, was exposed to varying amounts of radiation. He was, until terminated in 1972 due to lack of funds, a "subject" in a DOE study of the effects of radiation exposure on the human body. Is there a connection here? Is the DOE trying to determine the effect of radiation on human genetic material, and if so, why? Does the DOE hope to use radiation or other methods to alter human genetic material in specific ways, and if so, why? Good questions!

Bern considers himself "an Atomic Survivor." In the course of our Internet research we learned of an Atomic Survivor's organization with a website and a great deal of information for those who have been exposed to health-threatening radiation levels as a result of government activities. Most of these individuals are veterans of the US military who were used as human "guinea pigs" during nuclear weapons testing in Nevada during the 1950's. We will provide updates on Bern's contacts with this group in future issues.
Quantum tantrikas are particularly inspired by a wholly quantum form of connection called "phase entanglement"—the type of connection responsible for the voodoo-like direct influence proved by John Bell to underlie the world's everywhere local phenomena. Three "physics icons" in the quantum tantra book of natural wonders include: a single quantum system entangled in its own mirror image (Drexhage experiment), Bell's much-studied quantum twosome (EPR experiment), and a recently concocted quantum threesome (GHZ experiment) each of which illustrates important features of the peculiar quantum style of connection.

These three examples of matter quantum-entangling with other matter prepare us to think about the more unconventional and exciting possibility of human minds quantum-entangling with matter in new forms of union. These new styles of directly experiencing nature will involve our quantum parts (oscillating possibilities) rather than our computer-like Newtonian parts (actual particles), will involve giving up control, yielding to matter's way, relaxing, being moved by, being penetrated by and taking in nature, letting "nature measure us" rather than "us measuring her", will involve scientists taking turns in the "male" and "female" roles rather than staying stuck in the single pose of "objective observer" (which we can always return to with fresh insights).

Most likely these new forms of entanglement with matter will be practiced first not by conventional scientists but by ordinary people with less old-fashioned conceptual baggage to overcome. Stuck-in-the-past scientists may be the last to enjoy the benefits of this quantum-inspired, physics-assisted deep union with nature. Quantum tantra, with unique labs in every household, may be a true people's science, its wisdom passed on privately mouth-to-mouth.

For a taste/tease of Quantum Tantra, Nick Herbert recommends "The Spell of the Sensuous" by David Abram, Pantheon Books (1996)

http://mail.cruzio.com/~quanta/qtantra.html

MY FATHER        Andrew J. Gay

My father
In the morning
Coming out of the bathroom
Newspaper, thick fingered,
The shit smell
And burnt pipe smell
Together
Woven into his
Rayon bathrobe
And filling the space
Around him.

Boy's Life        Paul Luria

Evenings in my room
I scrutinize
the exotic ads on pulpy paper.
Knives of many blades,
ventriliquism and magic
Charles Atlas biceps.
Simple plans for a racing car
that can be built in my room.
Boy's life
All things are possible.

I remember the homeless man with
his wide, wide wild eyes, yelling
"You got keys?! You got keys?!
There's alot of doors out there!
You got keys?!"  -- C.A. Conrad
Joseph G. Lalli is a visual artist, writer, and summer resident of Maine. His winter address is 113 Deepdale, Strafford, PA.
On February 14th, Valentine's Day we at the Institute celebrated Bern's eighty-seventh birthday. This festive occasion saw the return of another peripatetic [Look it up!] Scholar-in-Residence, Amy Flaxman. Ms. Flaxman has spent time at the Institute working on her manuscript, New Anatomies: A New Literary Study of Henry Miller, which is now complete and ready for publication. For information please write Ms. Flaxman at: Gracie Station, PO Box 1638, New York, NY 10128-0054. Mary Weaver, Scholar of the Institute in the Department of Drama and long-time Belfast resident, was also in attendance. As Natasha and Sheila have always maintained: "Life in Maine is one continuous party!

* * * * *

THE INSTITUTE SCHOLARS

The list of Institute scholars has grown since James Schevill compiled the list for Bern's biography, Where To Go, What To Do, When You Are Bern Porter: the list which we we reprinted in the last issue of BPI. Three new scholars (including your two editorial) have given the following statements about themselves and their work. Scholar Mary Weaver has also offered her statement here.

KETAN BEN CAESAR, Scholar in the Department of Performance Poetry

"My three poetic aspirations: (1) TRANSFORMATION - (brass to gold) Magical renewal, regeneration, expansion of consciousness, a glimpse. (2) TRANSCENDENCE - Mystical rebirth, resurrection, enlightenment, rejuvenation (gold to gold necklace in glittering display case.) (3) ASCENSION - Spiritual evolution with Universal spirit, ethereal feeling a lifting upward from lower to higher, elevation (gold necklace worn by majestic King/Queen.)"

NATASHA BERNSTEIN, Scholar in the Department of Alternative Sexual Lifestyles

"I am conducting an experiential study of the BDSM lifestyle ("Bondage, Discipline, and Sado-Masochism") and the Dominant/Submitive relationship from the standpoint of the submissive. The whole concept of giving one's power -- placing oneself in someone else's hands, for an hour, a day, or a lifetime -- may seem like RISKY BUSINESS, but it really just comes down to an issue of trust. Submission is a minute by minute practice of trusting. During my tenure as scholar I seek to understand this phenomenon by the following means: (1) Direct experience at the hands of veteran Masters. (2) Introspective writing. I am preparing a manuscript, "The Secret BDSM Diaries of Natasha Bernstein" (working title.) (3) Written correspondence with twelve to twenty males with an expressed interest in BDSM. (4) A study of BDSM literature, including information available on the Internet, as well as classic literary fiction. I also seek to understand and integrate the Dominant/Submitive experience in terms of my spiritual practice of Yoga Tantra."

MARY WEaver, Scholar in the Department of Drama

"I am the Director of THE PLAYHOUSE, an actors' studio for participants of all ages. The Playhouse is currently offering creative acting sessions, project workshops, training in stage acting technique and theatre performance, as well as Mime, Dance, and Movement classes. I have taught and produced theatre for twenty-five years. My present focus is a retrospective study of theatre's classic comedy forms. I am attempting to find a form of humor NOT based on pain. (I am always looking for Alice... and redheads!)

SHEILA HOLTZ, Scholar in the Department of Journalism

"As co-editor of Bern Porter International I am honing my administrative, communicative and organizational skills. I am also becoming a wicked good typist. I seek, through BPI, to disseminate the life's work of Bern Porter, his associates and spiritual/artistic heirs, as well as to carry on the tradition of the Institute of Advanced Thinking, founded by Andrew Porter in 1830."

Bern Porter International presents: New Anatomies: A New Literary Study of Henry Miller, by Amy Flaxman, Scholar-in-Residence of the Institute for Advanced Thinking. For more information please write Ms. Flaxman at Gracie Station, P.O. Box 1638, New York, NY 10128-0054
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