editorial

Harnessing the Power of the Net

Ioannis Syrigos

Last year, the Scientific and Medical Network (SMN) celebrated the 40th anniversary of its creation. That's 40 years of bridging the gap between science and spirituality, and seeking answers to questions that tantalise every human being, like the purpose of our existence, the nature of consciousness, perception and cognition, and the possibility of an afterlife. SMN combines the best of these two domains – spirituality explores a transcendent dimension within the human condition and seeks to experience the divine, while science provides the means to theorise, conceptualise, and test hypotheses about the world. The SMN approach is based on the premise that the answers to some of the most vital questions pertaining to our existence can be found through the delicate intermingling of these two domains.

The message of the SMN has broadened considerably since its creation. Our target group has gradually evolved, from an audience primarily interested in science and medicine initially to one that also explores various other fields – such as ecology, philosophy, creativity and the arts. Currently we have more than a thousand members but recently we have been working on exciting plans to reach a much greater number of people. Developments in technology have gone a long way to removing the boundaries that separate us, and our members now come from countries throughout the world, so we need a new strategy for spreading our message more efficiently and effectively.

Today we live in an era of continuous transformation at all levels of human existence, from communications to relationships and ways of doing business. Indeed, the major feature of our society is the continuous and sometimes daunting advances in technology. Every day we hear about new inventions and the changes entailed impact all aspects of human activity.

One of the areas in which technology has vastly transformed our lives is the Internet. The World Wide Web has made the world seem much smaller by enabling people to connect easily at a multinational and international level, without the costly and time-consuming restrictions of travel. The result is that even people on opposite sides of the planet are brought close together. You can now send an email instantly instead of waiting at the post office to mail a letter, you can talk on your phone from the top of a mountain peak, or video-chat with anyone anywhere in the world. The Internet has also given people access to vast realms of information, innumerable resources being available at the click of a button. Communication and dissemination of information have been completely revolutionised.

The SMN has been harnessing the power of the Internet for a number of years already, but until now this has not been a major focus of our activities, since the technology has not been mature enough. But today there is a shift, with more and more people looking to the Internet as a means of communication and source of information. This allows an ever larger audience to access the important resources that we have to offer, bringing together people from all over the world in our common goal of bridging the gap between science and spirituality.

In meeting this goal, we have developed a brand new website that will bring the SMN to the forefront. Among the new features are webinars, instant access to all SMN resources, discussion forums and blogs, an events calendar, surveys, personal webpages, online booking, a fully searchable database of back issues of *Network Review*, and audio and video archives. The website upgrade will increase its usability and help spread the word, making it easier for new members to join online and enabling those who cannot attend events in person to tune into webinars, communicate with other members, share ideas, and get involved in interesting discussions.

The website development will also enhance our involvement in educational activities – in particular, our participation in the Master Course in 'Consciousness, Spirituality and Transpersonal Psychology' run by Les Lancaster, which is now in its second year and has already attracted nearly 40 students. The Local Group functionality will also be upgraded, making it easier for coordinators to customise their group pages so that they attract and appeal to website visitors. Each webpage will be the face of the group in the online community. Group members will be informed about events in their area and may participate in them even if they are not SMN members. This will enable newcomers to learn about the SMN and its work before deciding if they wish to become members.

The Internet has the potential to play a significant role in the positive transformation of society, as it places every corner of the world within our reach, enabling us to know what is happening – both good and bad – in other countries, cultures and religions. It is the new generation which will mould the future of humanity and that future must not be dominated by selfishness, arrogance, greed, violence, corruption, materialistic thought, fanaticism and superficiality, all of which are major components of today's society.

For the first time in history, people are able to unite with one voice, to speak out against injustice and organise positive action to make a change for the better. We have already seen a proliferation of international Internet activist movements, in which small steps are being made to correct the mistakes of the past and ensure a better future. The SMN is not an activist organisation but part of our remit is to question current views and perspectives, and this is not confined to purely scientific issues. However, one of our guiding principles is to seek the truth through objective scientific methods.

The crucial role of the Internet is especially relevant for young people. However, as the SMN expands, we would like everyone to have the opportunity to become a part of this. The new features of the website will allow more people to get involved, from forum moderation, to article and blog posting, website administration, and many other simple tasks. We therefore hope that the new website will disseminate the knowledge that the SMN has to offer in a bigger and better way, sparking interest in the minds of the increasing number of individuals who want to participate in our growing family. If you feel that you have specific Internet skills which could be part of this effort, please email me at *ioannissyrigos@live.co.uk.*

Postscript from Chair

Although I usually write the editorials, I am delighted that Ioannis has agreed to do so on this occasion, since – along with our webmaster Bernhard Harrer – he has played a key role in spearheading the exciting developments described above. He is currently based in Australia but (as expected in the Internet age) this imposes no restrictions on his effectiveness in overseeing these reforms. However, I would like to add a caveat. Adapting to a changing world can be uncomfortable and we are aware that not all our members will be enthused by these developments, preferring the more traditional style of activity that we have followed in the past. I would therefore like to stress that – alongside these developments – the SMN will continue to operate as it always has. Nothing can replace the benefits of direct contact and attending live events. It is just that we are now able to offer new pathways to our resources. Our aim is to preserve the best of the past, while encompassing the best of the future. Perhaps the phrase 'Scientific and Medical Inter-Network' captures this fusion.

Bernard Carr

articles

Learning from Leonardo

Fritjof Capra

Leonardo da Vinci, the great genius of the Renaissance, has been the subject of hundreds of scholarly and popular books. However, there are surprisingly few books about Leonardo's science, even though he left voluminous notebooks full of detailed descriptions of his experiments, magnificent drawings, and long analyses of his findings.

I have been fascinated by Leonardo's genius for several decades and have spent the last ten years studying his scientific writings in facsimile editions of his famous Notebooks. I have written two books about Leonardo da Vinci. *The Science of Leonardo* (2007) is an introduction to his life and personality, his scientific method, and his unique synthesis of art and science.

In my new book, *Learning from Leonardo* (2013), I present an in-depth discussion of the main branches of Leonardo's scientific work from the perspective of twenty-first-century science — his fluid dynamics, geology, botany, mechanics, science of flight, and anatomy. Most of his astonishing discoveries and achievements in these fields are virtually unknown to the general public.

A Systemic Thinker

Leonardo da Vinci was what we would call today a systemic thinker. Understanding a phenomenon, for him, meant connecting it with other phenomena through a similarity of patterns. He usually worked on several projects in parallel, and when his understanding advanced in one area he would revise his ideas in related areas accordingly.

Thus, to appreciate the full extent of his genius, one needs to be aware of the evolution of his thinking in several parallel but interconnected disciplines. This has been my approach to absorbing and understanding Leonardo's scientific thought. Since I have contributed to the systems view of life that has emerged in science in the last thirty years, and have written several books about it, I found it very natural to analyse and interpret Leonardo's science from that perspective. Indeed, I believe that the ever-present emphasis on relationships, patterns, qualities, and transformations in his writings, drawings, and paintings — the tell-tale signs of systemic thinking — were what initially attracted me to his work and have kept me fascinated for so many years.

The Nature of Life

What emerged from my explorations of all the branches of Leonardo's science, was the realisation that, at the most fundamental level, Leonardo always sought to understand the nature of life. My main thesis is that the science of Leonardo da Vinci is a science of living forms, radically different from the mechanistic science of Galileo, Descartes, and Newton, that emerged 200 years later.

Leonardo's art served this persistent quest for life's inner secrets. In order to paint nature's living forms, he felt that he needed a scientific understanding of their intrinsic nature and underlying principles; and in order to analyse the results of his observations, he needed his artistic ability to depict them. I believe that this is the very essence of his synthesis of science and art.

Leonardo thought of himself not only as an artist and natural philosopher (as scientists were called in his time), but also as an inventor. In his view, an inventor was someone