

## **Holistic Science Comes of Age**

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Schumacher College, in association with Plymouth University, launched the world's first postgraduate degree in Holistic Science in September this year. This is a report on how things have gone during the first term of this new venture. First, a brief description of what we set out to do.

The aim of this one year full-time course is to go beyond interdisciplinary studies to a new conception of science. This is based on a recognition that the creativity of nature is expressed through the emergence of coherent wholes with properties that transcend those of their parts. Organisms emerge during evolution with the capacity to heal themselves, maintaining a condition of health that is more than the sum of the activities of their organs; communities of social insects such as ants and bees have developed high degrees of organisation that go far beyond the capacities of the individuals; life on planet earth interacts with physical processes to produce the unlikely conditions that allow the creative evolutionary adventure to continue within the emergent order that Jim Lovelock named Gaia.

We recognise emergent wholes through their distinctive properties, which include qualities - the feelings of good health, the beauty and elegance of a honeycomb, a sense of the sacred in natural landscapes and the harmony of life and earth together. The holistic approach includes qualities and values as well as quantities in our understanding of natural processes, and cultivates the intuition together with the intellect in learning to participate co-operatively with nature. It is also necessary to recognise how historical forces have influenced both conventional science and the cultural roots of the new science that is now emerging. These are some of the components that shape the MSc at Schumacher.

There are two students taking the course this year - HIDEKI ITO from Japan and ROBIN WILDING from South Africa, now resident in the UK. They are the guinea pigs for this new initiative in learning for sustainable living, and we could not have asked for a more receptive, creative and tolerant pair to explore the territory and shape a new science relevant to our age. Hideki has a science degree and experience as a management consultant, with particular interest in seeking a balance between economic and ecological issues. His objective is to become involved in educational activity that spreads the principles of holistic science in Asia. Rob, trained in dentistry, was a Professor of Oral Biology at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa for several years before returning last year to the UK, where he was born. His experience in teaching biology relevant to dental studies induced him to get involved in writing a book which seeks to go beyond the reductionist approach to a more integrated, holistic treatment of biology, pain and healing than is available in current textbooks. The course will help him to achieve this goal, and also influence aspects of his dental practice.

The course involves some history and philosophy of science, to see where we have come from and where to go; a diversity of conventional and new scientific material, holistically packaged; and experiential encounters with natural phenomena based on procedures used by Goethe to cultivate imaginative and intuitive perception. This has occupied us during the first term. After Christmas, Hideki and Rob start on their research projects. Hideki will get involved in research connected with his business management interests, making extensive

use of concepts that come from the tradition of co-operative inquiry. Rob, who is also a musician, is interested in carrying out research on the relationship between quality of birdsong and health of habitat. This is a project that has already begun as a collaborative venture between Stephan Harding and Brian Goodwin at Schumacher College, Edward Cowie who is Professor of Music at the Dartington College of Arts, and the British Society for the Protection of Birds. There are interesting new approaches to the study of patterns in birdsong that Rob will be using in his research, together with the intuitive perception of song quality.

So far, the MSc has been everything we hoped it would be: challenging, exhausting, rewarding, exciting, and fun. It has also turned out to be remarkably coherent, though we have also learned where it is deficient. But we all feel we're onto a good thing and look forward to the next phase of holistic emergence. With over 400 enquiries, it looks like we'll have more than 2 students for 1999/2000!

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