

Editorial - Experiment and Experience

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I am writing these lines in a San Francisco hotel following the final inspiring session of the State of the World Forum, where the Network has been taking part with some round tables on the new vision in science. We will be reporting on this meeting in full in the next issue. The Forum is both an experiment and an experience. It is an experiment in the sense that a group of 750 concerned men, women and young people comes together for five days of intensive sessions and conversations. The outcome, however, is as yet uncertain: can the complex self-organizing system that is the Forum act as a powerful force in the world beyond its formal deliberations? It was also an experience in that there is no doubt about the energy and inspiration generated, but will it be enough, along with other like minded initiatives, to bring about a collective awakening and commitment?

The words experiment and experience both derive from the Latin root *experiens*, meaning to try thoroughly. It is significant that the verb to experiment is now intransitive: one must experiment on something, thus distancing oneself from it, whereas the word 'experience' is direct; one experiences something at first hand. The stem *periri* is related to the word peril, or trial to be passed through at some personal risk. Both experiment and experience may be dangerous. The Forum exists at the margin of chaos and order, and risks have to be taken for it to work most effectively. A number of speakers spoke from their hearts and souls and one could sense the real transformative power that emanated from them. They received standing ovations and inspired others to follow suit in a morphic resonance of moral courage - a word related etymologically to the French word for heart, *coeur*.

Scientists often refer to the importance of a 'crucial experiment' in advancing our knowledge of any given field. I often wonder, though, how many people have really changed their minds or world view as a result of a crucial experiment. If the stakes are high, then so is resistance to a radically new idea and its implications. Far more striking, it seems, is the crucial experience, one that reshapes our understanding and perception. Such experiences give us 'new eyes', enabling us to see the world and ourselves in a new way. The experience in question may not be entirely pleasant, but it is enough to perturb the 'dissipative structure' of our identity so as to bring about a reconfiguration or reorientation within us. It may also enable us to discover hidden resources we did not know we had. Several young people at the Forum recounted horrendous experiences that had undergone in Bosnia, Cambodia, Nigeria, Guatemala and elsewhere. They could have been crushed by such events but had instead responded by committing themselves to working for a better world. You will know that we have a section in *Network* for personal experiences and would welcome your contributions.

If the experimental represents the analytical intellectual capacity and the experiential our intuitive and emotional understanding, the Network seeks to foster both of these complementary approaches to open enquiry. Some of us are more comfortable with one and some with the other, but they need not be mutually exclusive. We try to achieve a balance in our meetings and the guidelines printed in each issue are designed to help create an ethos in which we can explore and exchange among ourselves. When clarity of mind is allied with the power of love and a commitment to constructive action, it is literally unstoppable.

