

● magic
by philip golabuk

When I was a boy, I spent countless afternoons practicing coin magic in front of a small, antique mirror that my mother let me use, so that I could watch my hands as they created the illusion of coins disappearing, reappearing, and passing mysteriously through the solid table top. As I got older, my love for the “secret” behind the appearances grew into a formal study of philosophy at the university, but underlying this was still the child’s fascination with the *modus operandi*, the behind-the-scenes operations that created the great magic trick of the world.

Of course, for sophisticated adults, there is no place for “magical thinking” anymore; that is for children. Many psychotherapists regard such thinking as dysfunctional in adults. For what can it be, to stand ready to believe that magic is real, that “wishing will make it so,” but a hangover of childhood, a failure to recognize ego boundaries, and a denial of adult responsibility?

Field Center students have expressed the same objection from time to time. The argument takes subtle, even scientific forms. Some of these students, their rhetorical skills honed by college or the business world, squint at the idea that was the very soul of Ernest Holmes’s work—that events don’t just happen to us, but emerge into actuality in an exquisite correspondence to our personal consciousness, and specifically those structures of personal consciousness that we call faith, belief, or conviction.

Not surprisingly, the ones who seem most susceptible to this “tyranny of the empirical” are the scientifically-minded, the rationalists, those now often termed “left-brain” thinkers. They want proof. They want evidence that we create our reality, and this is reasonable, as far as it goes. But empirical reasonableless misses the point, and the great sweep of Holmes’s thinking, which sought to right our reversed view of cause and effect that forever positions us as effect and the world as cause. Holmes would have them trade “seeing is believing,” for all its reasonableness, for “believing is seeing,” and experience again, as they did when they were children, that the magic of things is anything but childish.

The child watches the magician pull a coin out of thin air and is amazed, while the adult smiles. Why does the adult smile? He may not know the method, but he knows it is a trick, that coins don’t just appear out of thin air. How innocent, how beautiful, and in a way, how sad that the adult doesn’t realize that the magician, like the coin, is appearing out of thin air each moment, for even a glimpse of this would return the adult to the reality of the magical, the wondrous, the mysterious that seems native to children before they learn that the world is something to take for granted and move against.

Physics is the hardest of sciences, the most akin to mathematics; it has always been regarded as the keeper of the empirical standard to which other sciences should aspire. In the early 1900s, however, something odd began to happen. Physics began to soften.

- As it turned out, something incredible was taking place; physics was converging with metaphysics, discovering in the laboratory at the most intimate levels of the Creation, truths that had been unambiguously expressed thousands of years earlier in the world's great body of spiritual literature. Some scientists went off in the direction of biology, applying a mechanistic model, even to such rarified areas of study as psychology. So, behaviorism appeared on the scene; philosophy spawned logical positivism, and so on. An entire intellectual generation stepped forward steeped in the belief that what was real was ultimately physical, that all causes were material. If there was a "soul," it was a product or by-product of bodily functions. The mind was nothing more than the brain's neurons firing. Meanwhile, physics was coming to a realization so staggering, it would erase the mechanistic, materialist view forever—namely, that even the physical was not physical.

At the level of the quanta and subquanta, there is more space than stuff. The more minutely we examine this gossamer matrix of the physical world, the less stuff we see. Finally, past the quarks and neutrinos, the muons and tachyons and lychons, there is no-thing at all.

There is no-thing, but this no-thing is not nothing. It is a vast, living, holographic force overflowing with its innate generosity into unlimited expression. It is literally in-forming all that is, becoming the rich and varied manifestations that we take so for granted, and doing this with exquisite precision and unfailing dedication, every instant there is. This force is intelligent and resourceful beyond measure; the greatest human genius is only the tiniest fraction of it. This No-Thing is somehow becoming all the stars and planets and solar systems, every cell in the body of every living thing, every microphysical particle, every galaxy, every circumstance and condition, every desire, and it is doing this everywhere, all at once, naturally and spontaneously and gracefully.

Perhaps we will evoke the sympathy of the psychotherapist or the rationalist this much: that he or she will grant that there is something wondrous and even magical about how the ubiquitous quanta keep emerging out of the great No-Thing, assembling themselves dutifully into atoms that somehow know to team up as molecules that in turn construct the tables and chairs and assorted furniture of our physical reality. But, they will insist, a line has to be drawn where the impersonal, physical creation ends and personal life begins. There is magic of a sort, they may allow—but to claim that someone may make use of it—well, that's just going too far. Surely that would be a return to the magical thinking of childhood, and a flight from adult responsibility.

You can see what's happening. It is exactly what happened to the mechanistic view of things over the past half century. Slowly, undone by the shocking discoveries of the new physics, the old biases were left with nowhere to stand. The burden of proof shifted. Why, when we have tested and witnessed and scientifically established the immateriality of the material, when even the traditionally hardest science has put down new roots in mystical concepts and visions, when we have even scientifically proven that the world is much more like a great dream than a great machine and that the consciousness dreaming it is nonlocal, not limited to the bodies it dreams into being—why and

- on what grounds could we continue to insist that this magic that we see all around us somehow stops short of personal experience? And so, we have come to realize: We may miss the magic simply because it is so everywhere, and in our blind allegiance to old models, we have been sitting in the best seats and somehow missing the show.

Perhaps as we head into a new millennium, we need to come to a renewed sense of scientific exploration. The best scientists, like Einstein and de Broglie, Heisenberg, Hawking, and others, had this sense all along. It is, more than anything else, a willingness to notice, to make room for something new to show itself, even if the old model has to be revised, overhauled, even discarded. In the 21st century, we may fulfill what the last half of the 20th century foreshadowed—that seeing must not be limited to evidence alone, because the evidence is shaped by the seeing that beholds it. We are not observers. Like it or not, we are creators. As we take up this joyful responsibility deliberately, with deep acceptance and appropriate gratitude, we may find that the magic, the wonder, the miracle of the everyday was not left behind in childhood. It was standing beside us, biding its time, waiting patiently, all along.

© 2002-2008 by the Field Center. All rights reserved. No part of this article may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the Field Center.