

GUEST EDITORIAL

David Bohm and the challenge of a fragmented society

On the 40th anniversary of *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, one of the main works of David Joseph Bohm (1917-1992), published in 1980, we bring forward the words of this complex North-American physicist, which seem to make more sense than ever amid days as troubled as ours.

According to the author himself, this book is a collection of essays that represent the development of his thinking since the 1960s, when Bohm began to work on the ideas of consciousness and wholeness. In the first sentences of the first chapter, entitled *Fragmentation and wholeness*, Bohm presents us with a great challenge, still current:

It is especially important to consider this question today, for fragmentation is now very widespread, not only throughout society, but also in each individual; and this is leading to a kind of general confusion of the mind, which creates an endless series of problems and interferes with our clarity of perception so seriously as to prevent us from being able to solve most of them.¹

It may not be clear from the extract what David Bohm considered to be the human being's and the society's "fragmentation". This makes the challenge even more valid and even more difficult for us, who, unlike the physicists, are not used to seeing a totality, but only small parts of it. Fortunately, he explains in details what he meant by this concept, and how it seems to affect everything and everyone, from human consciousness to humanity. Bohm comments that:

(...) the widespread and pervasive distinctions between people (race, nation, family, profession, etc., etc.), which are now preventing mankind from working together for the common good, and indeed, even for survival, have one of the key factors of their origin in a kind of thought that treats things as inherently divided, disconnected, and 'broken up' into yet smaller constituent parts. Each part is considered to be essentially independent and self-existent.²

According to his thinking, this division makes us defend our needs and our "ego", or even a group that shares our ideas, from the needs and perceptions of other individuals and other groups with different ideas. Even, rarely, when human beings can see humanity as a whole, they separate it from nature, fragmenting the totality once again. It does not seem to be any different when it comes to human work. No one seems to realize that there is an

¹ David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (Londres e Nova Iorque: Routledge, 1980), 1.

² *Ibid.*, Introduction.

organic network of workers, whose professions and daily choices are intertwined, affecting one other. In essence, this is the way man think totality, *i.e.* in independent fragments.

Bohm even makes it clear that fragmentation is also present in art, science and technology. Knowledge is divided into specialties, considered, in essence, different from each other. In the physicist's words: "People hardly know what is happening in a somewhat different field. And it goes on. Knowledge is fragmented. Everything gets broken up".³ Since researches are spread out in such small parts, it is difficult for an expert to see the whole, and perhaps for scientists and scholars around the world to work together and achieve results.

Therefore, it becomes clear that all the problems, which have been present since long before the 1980s, are, in fact, "endless", since David Bohm's ideas seem to echo, more than ever, nowadays.

Currently, we are dealing with a false appearance of a globalized world, as a pseudo totality. The world appears to be so truly connected that a new virus spreads in a record time, without respecting any frontier. Ironically, we, who have already stepped on the moon, who are in the process of having quantum computers, who can already count on a certain aspect of artificial intelligence at our disposal, are prostrate before a virus that, although quickly mapped, places the world as a whole at its mercy. At the same time, economic impacts affect everything and everyone in a disastrous way, again, showing a certain totality.

However, paradoxically, the world appears to be completely fragmented, not only in relation to protocols of isolation, or in relation to medications created in secret laboratories, or in relation to the actions of national leaders, but also in relation to the perception of the reality itself experienced. This seems to be the fragmentation of the mind referred by Bohm. Once again, people separate into groups and defend their ideologies and their egos in opposition to other groups, other ideologies and other egos, preventing humanity from working together for the common good and for survival.

David Bohm, with his bright thinking, seemed to understand what we have been going through historically since distant times and what we would continue to go through in the 21st century. In an attempt of humanity to organize itself, it would have lost its uniqueness in this search. This was the case with nationalism, which divided the world into nations and established borders, providing the false impression of reality.⁴ Following that, it would not be surprising to note that filters of language, communication, emotions and feelings, would give greater importance to one or another nation, to one or another religion, even creating political polarizations, contributing to a world division already existent:

Indeed, the attempt to live according to the notion that the fragments are really separate is, in essence, what has led to the growing series of extremely urgent crises that is confronting us today. Thus, as is now well known, this way

³ David Bohm, *Thought as a System*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1 and 10.

of life has brought about pollution, destruction of the balance of nature, overpopulation, world-wide economic and political disorder, and the creation of an overall environment that is neither physically nor mentally healthy for most of the people who have to live in it.⁵

Therefore, wouldn't this be the time to exercise what Bohm called "thinking"? He explains: "'Thinking' means that when the thing isn't working, something more is coming in - which is ready to look at the situation and change the thought if necessary."⁶ The physicist further adds that:

The thinking will be more energized because thinking is more directly in the present, because it includes the incoherence that thought is actually making. It may also include allowing new reflexes to form, new arrangements, new ideas. If the reflexes are all somewhat open and flexible and changeable, then it will work nicely.⁷

How can we make this happen? How can we create new ideas and new possibilities free from any personal interference? This is the point. The very fact that human thought is fragmented, loaded with automatisms, entrenched habits, full of subjectivities based on past memories, dividing what should not be divided, creates the endless problems that are seen and makes thinking difficult. This is why there is no hegemony over the best way to handle the crisis we are experiencing or all the other crises of the century. What we do know is that we live in a world of uncertainty and fragmentation. Hence, the unity, proposed decades ago by David Bohm, seems to be deeply missed.

Accordingly, *History of Science*, uniting spheres of thought and of scientific research that have always been seen as independent, invites us to think about the past and the present. Beyond that, it invites us to read more about this author and physicist yet to be discovered, diving into his complex and profound works. It is undeniable that Bohm's words seem to reach not only our decade, but especially the moment when this new issue of the *Circumscribere Journal* (25) is released.

Both the Journal and the Postgraduate Program in History of Science of the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP) seek, in the highest academic standards, to unite the spheres of history, philosophy, science, technology and historiography, providing not only a way to unite the thinking process of the sciences and the humanities, but also a way to think about fragmentation and wholeness in our society.

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⁵ Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, 2.

⁶ Bohm, *Thought as a System*, 100.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 101.

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