

Time to Tildize

by

Scott Kelso

It seems that many aspects of modern life as well as the people who talk about them are in need of tildizing. Take the Gulf oil spill for example. As reported the other day "There's so much noise out there saying the Gulf is dead or the Gulf will come back easily, but the truth is in the middle". Invariably the either/or mode of inquiry fails or is just the first line of attack, posing one idealized alternative against another. This strategy may have served us well in the past, but the issues facing us are far more complex nowadays than the usual either/or approach can handle. It's time to tildize. Tildizing offers us new patterns of thought and action to solve problems, to create and invent. And it's not just fanciful philosophy. The tilde or squiggle symbol (~) is a way to see contraries, opposites and their kin as separable yet mutually related and inextricably connected. If you see the world in terms of contraries, as we often do--us versus them, individual versus collective, nature versus nurture, instinct versus learning, selfish versus altruistic, competitive versus cooperative, integration versus segregation, genes versus environment--or if you overemphasize one extreme over the other, you are not 'tildizing' or using your squiggle sense. The tilde or squiggle sees contraries as complementary. It exposes a basic truth: both complementary aspects and the dynamic relation between them are required for a full understanding of complex phenomena, including ourselves. Light is both wave and particle (wave~particle). Life is both DNA and metabolism (DNA~metabolism). The brain is both integrated and segregated (integration~segregation). Natural selection operates on both individuals and groups (individual~collective). Scientific understanding rests on reconciling reductionism and emergentism. The either/or dichotomy is too restrictive; one without the other makes no sense. An awakened squiggle sense—tildizing-- not only helps us understand ourselves and the many issues confronting us. It's also a mindset that helps us overcome prejudice and intolerance. Take the recent announcement that the city of Derry ~ Londonderry in Northern Ireland (note the tilde) will become a UK City of Culture for 2013. Derry~Londonderry beat out some major competitors in England such as Sheffield and Birmingham, bringing considerable economic benefits to a city that has seen more than its fair share of trouble over the last 30 years. According to the pundits, the squiggle or tilde was the key to breaking 'the culture code'. Had the slash symbol (/) been used, meaning Derry or Londonderry (depending on, as they say, which foot you kick with)

*it would only have perpetuated old wounds between protestant and catholic.
The squiggle recognizes the complementary nature of the city, its roots,
its people and its history. More to the point, the squiggle points to a deep principle of complementarity in
all walks of life. It allows us humans to move forward
intelligently, maybe even wisely. The message on every conceivable front is
clear. Wake up your squiggle sense. It's time to tildize.*



Scott Kelso is the Eminent Scholar in Science at Florida Atlantic University and is a Visiting Professor of Computational Neuroscience at The University of Ulster in Derry ~ Londonderry. He founded the Center for Complex Systems and Brain Sciences at FAU in 1985, an interdisciplinary PhD Program devoted to understanding the brain, from molecules to mind. His research is funded by The National Institute of Mental Health, The National Science Foundation and the US Office of Naval Research. His most recent book, *The Complementary Nature*, co-authored with David Engstrom, is published by MIT Press (ppbk. 2008) <http://mitpress.mit.edu/catalog/item/default.asp?ttype=2&tid=11462> This opinion is based on an invited lecture at the New York Academy of Sciences earlier this year.