

The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group at Albion Beatnik - Oxford

Editorial

The Idea of Play

Philosophy has been considered such a serious and forbidding subject that it could not have a place for thinking about the activity of playing. This is not quite right. The German philosopher and playwright Schiller tried to give a philosophical foundation for playing, based on his reading of Kant. Schiller considered playing a human characteristic that shows we have freedom. He thought that when we play, we feel we are human, and I think he is right. Animals can play but they don't have the degree of freedom and the variety of constructions that humans create in their play. Thinking of the intellectual sphere, I have always been intrigued by the sophistications and details of the game that Herman Hesse imagined in his masterpiece, the *Glass Bead Game*. This example goes also to indicate other human designs in novels, plays or art and literature generally.

If this concept, at its higher level, is not available to animals it is also not applicable to the supreme Being. The Quran, for example, tells us repeatedly that God did not create the world as a plaything. Leibnitz thought this is the perfect world, a claim first made by al-Ghazali. It means that the world is necessary in the way it is and not a contingent fact. God's perfection does not leave room for play. Plotinus rejected the religious idea that the world will come to an end, a destructive end, on the basis that it seems illogical that a creator of such a perfect world would destroy his creation.

Schlegel developed Schiller's point further in two ways. Firstly, he thought that the genius (a human) will always be dissatisfied with human creations because they are not perfect and he will aim at going beyond them. He will always destroy his creations and try something new in the hope of getting to a

better creation. Secondly, he also thought the road to perfection, or the absolute, is never ending, and that the genius has a constant longing which makes him keep on striving to create again, and reach a greater level of sophistication, aiming at the absolute and perfect. There is no guarantee that humans will reach such a level but they should try in a continuous game of making and remaking or a continuous play.

What occasioned this topic is that Muslims everywhere are celebrating the end of their fast with a few happy days. Perhaps all religions have an annual time for celebration. It represents a break from daily routine and the enslavement to work and the everyday basic activities. It is a time to be free for a few days. But in all these religions we also find an annual time for sadness and the sense of the tragic. Human life seems to oscillate between these two limits. Nietzsche has argued that there are two forces for life: The Apollonian force of light and play of figures and creations and the Dionysian force of destruction and tragedy. He thought the task of the Apollonian is to mitigate the sense of the tragic and give us the power to live despite the tragedy. William Blake put it poetically: "Joy and woe are woven fine, A clothing for the soul divine."

But optimism needs to be realistic and based on the recognition of the tragic at the heart of life. If we don't have both senses of life we will end up either being decadent or nihilist and pessimistic. Perhaps the correct position is to take the middle path. The Quran says: 'So that you don't become sad for what you lost nor happy for what you get.' But such a position needs lots of patience and self-discipline.

The Editor



Schopenhauer

Schopenhauer:

Going Beyond Kant

Arthur Schopenhauer has been considered as one of the most influential philosophers of all times. He was significantly influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism and is the only major Western philosopher to draw significant parallels between Western and Eastern thought. We will discuss some of his major ideas that have had considerable influence.

RANJINI GHOSH

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Part 1

Kant's Influence

Kant had said that we human beings can think, know, experience and perceive reality but this depends on our mental and sensory apparatus. What we perceive need not be a physical object but can be anything like music, taste of food, thought, memory or belief. The outer limit of what we

can experience is determined by our sensory apparatus but it does not mean that it is the outer limit of what exists in reality. Hence there is no ground for believing that the total reality that exists coincides with the reality that we are able to comprehend. It is possible that there is a reality which is outside of our understanding which we can never know

because what we know is what is mediated by our sensory apparatus. There are many creatures who have sensory equipment more developed than ours to perceive and experience the total reality. The world we experience must be different from the independent reality and there are two realms, one that our sensory apparatus mediates to us and the other which is completely independent of this. We can only have knowledge of those things as they appear to us. This view is known as Kant's transcendental idealism.

Kant's views were rejected by Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. Fichte believed that there was no hidden reality behind the natural world and that this natural world is the creation of our self which is beyond time and space. That is, I am an immaterial self which is outside space and time.

There are no things in themselves. We create the phenomenal world and there was no noumenal reality of which this phenomenal world is a manifestation. Schelling said that we are not the creation of Nature but Nature is our creation. There is no hidden reality and the natural world is the only one. Hegel saw existence as an evolution over time and there was nothing outside this process of development. Total reality was the growth of the mind or the spirit towards self-knowledge.

All the above-mentioned philosophers were in agreement that the noumenal reality could not be the underlying cause of our experiences in the phenomenal world as postulated by Kant. They pointed out and it was agreed to by Schopenhauer also that Kant contradicted himself in his view of causality.

On the one hand Kant said that causality is a feature of the phenomenal world of time and space, but then how could it be that the noumenal world becomes the cause of the



Kant

existence of the phenomenal world. But as Schopenhauer said even if we accept Kant's view on causality it does not mean that there is no noumenal reality. The only thing one could say is that there was no causal relationship between the noumenal world and the phenomenal. Schopenhauer gave a double-aspect theory.

The noumenal is not the cause of the phenomenal and both are the same thing from different perspectives. Suppose we are looking at a table, it can be said that the table is made up of subatomic particles which are moving at high velocities and this is not the cause of the table. The table is as I see it, while to a physicist it maybe something else.

Kant wrote in his book *Critique of Pure Reason*, 'There can be no doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience.' This was the fundamental tenet of Kant's philosophy but he did not discuss the issue of direct experience



Plato

much. Instead he concentrated on how we can know or experience reality through concepts or categories of intellect. It appears that to him direct experience was like an inferior labourer handing up materials to a superior mind which was using them to manufacture concepts and judgements.

For Schopenhauer, to understand reality as we experience it we must give more importance to our direct experience than to abstract concepts and categories. For Kant reason, thought and judgements were more important in understanding reality than direct experience. Schopenhauer says that perception is the source of all knowledge and universal concepts should be the material *in* which philosophy deposits and stores knowledge but not the source *from* which it draws knowledge. We can truly understand the phenomenal reality through direct experience. It is possible that the deep understanding available to us may not be through concepts but does that mean that it is not communicable?

Schopenhauer believes that it is the function of the arts to convey profound insight which cannot be conveyed through concepts of ordinary communication. Though we can

read a novel or a poem we may not actually understand what it means. A work of art being a symbol can convey a meaning but it cannot truly state its real or hidden meaning. That is to say behind every work of art there is a deeper or a hidden meaning which is not conveyed through ordinary concepts of communication.

Schopenhauer had said that his philosophy was a correction and completion of Kant. He agreed with Kant that total reality could be divided into the phenomenal and noumenal but Kant was wrong about what these were. Kant had



The World as Will and Representation

said that our knowledge of the phenomenal should come from experience but in his whole work he instead concentrated on concepts and categories as means to understanding reality rather than direct experience. For Schopenhauer, what we really experience, know and communicate is more important. He thought that Kant had made mistakes in describing the noumenal as things-in-themselves and he was also wrong in seeing the noumenal as the cause of our perceptions and experiences in the phenomenal realm.

As regards things-in-themselves we see they are plural that is, more than one. But for there to be more than one thing which is different to another we have to presuppose space or time. If an object is to be different from another then they must be in different spaces at the same time or at different spaces at different times. If two objects occupy the same space at the same time then it is the same object.

We know that Immanuel Kant and the author of the book *Critique of Pure Reason* are the same person. We may say that novels or musical compositions do not exist in space or time but if we dig deeper we will see that there is a concept of succession of notes or words. This ordering is important and it distinguishes one work from another. It is like

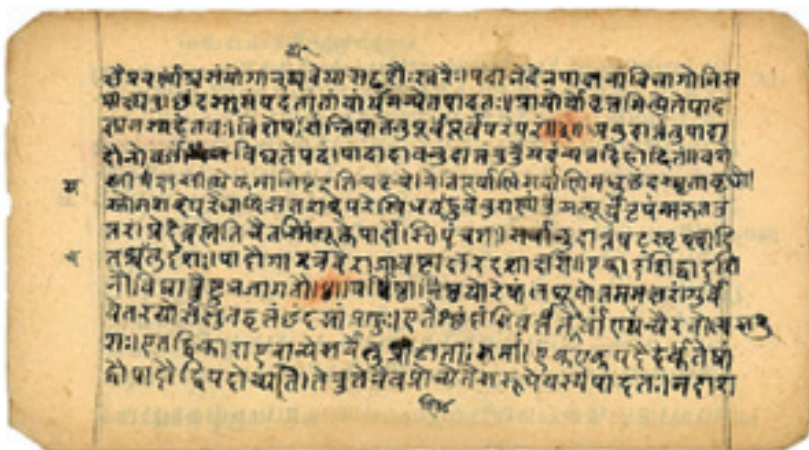
the sequences of DNA. Therefore, the concept of differentiation can only be understood in the context of space and time.

For Kant, the categories of space and time are *forms of sensibility* and they can have no existence in a reality which is without a subject or experience. So, differentiation can only exist in the phenomenal world of subjects and experience and so they cannot exist in the noumenal realm. Hence, there cannot be things-in-themselves which are independent of experience and subject. This means whatever exists outside our realm of experience cannot be differentiated. It is like the concept of One or a single entity. The noumenal is like the One and there is no differentiation in it.

For Schopenhauer then the total reality is undifferentiated, timeless and space-less. We can have no direct knowledge of it but that which comes to us through this differentiated phenomenal reality of objects in time and space. Schopenhauer was influenced in terms of this concept from his reading of Buddhist texts and Hindu Upanishads. There is another argument given by Schopenhauer for saying that we cannot have direct knowledge of the noumenal world.

The very concept of knowledge is dualistic.

There is something to be known and someone who has to know it i.e. the object and the subject both have to be present. If nothing exists and there is something which is undifferentiated then it will not be able to know itself because there has to be differentiation for gaining knowledge. Knowledge exists only in the phenomenal realm since it is here only that we have differentiation, time, space. We can know *about* the noumenal but we can never know *it*. Therefore, we may not have direct knowledge of the noumenal.



Upanishads

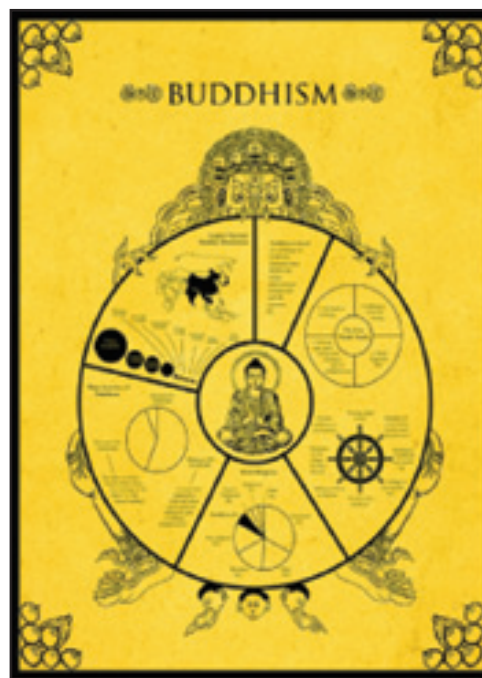
Philosophy

The Better Consciousness

Plato had described the unchanging reality of Ideas or Forms. He considered that understanding the eternal Forms of justice, goodness and beauty was important to gain true knowledge. Schopenhauer was influenced by Kant's conception of the noumenal and Plato's Ideas and concluded that Plato's Ideas and Kant's thing in itself are one and the same thing. He believed that empirical consciousness was limited to space time and causality and was inferior to a better consciousness which human beings should try to have. He considered that the misery of the human condition arose from ordinary consciousness. We should escape from the limits of our knowledge (that Kant spoke of) and try to liberate ourselves from this temporal consciousness and instead focus on the Platonic Idea of the object. He said that the moment we contemplate things of the world *objectively* then *subjectivity* which is the source of all misery disappears.

He was influenced by the concept of *Maya* or illusion in Hindu philosophy which essentially says that the material world of our experience is not something eternal that we can continue to have faith in. The other fundamental doctrine of Hindu philosophy that influenced him was the identity of the individual with the world as a whole. A central theme of his metaphysics has been this denial of an individual's differentiation from the world.

Schopenhauer came to believe from his reading of the Upanishads and other sacred texts of Buddhism that the ultimate reality is One and undifferentiated. The ancient Greek philosopher Parmenides believed *Eros* is the ultimate principle of existence, and this was close to his own concept of the metaphysical will. Plato also postulated that human beings can understand the ultimate reality through their capacity for abstract thought. Plato gave his concept of Ideas to expound that ultimate reality consists of eternal abstract



Buddhism

Forms which are outside of space and time but which manifests itself in individual things. The things of this world are only copies of the eternal Idea.

Schopenhauer called his book *The World as Will and Representation*. For him the concept of the Platonic Idea was knowable but not phenomenal. They were somewhere in between the phenomenal and the noumenal. We can only know them through their manifestation in the phenomenal world. For example, the law relating the pressure of a gas to its volume could be arrived at only by actual observations yet these observations are not the law. The law itself is something abstract like an idea. It exists only through its concrete manifestations. Something which is abstract, universal and independent of time and space can be experienced in the phenomenal world of space and time.

Schopenhauer is trying to understand metaphysically how the One becomes the Many. Scientific laws are like Plato's Ideas. For example, genera and species are like the Ideas of Plato through which individual organisms can be classified and identified. Therefore, Ideas are like the bridge between the noumenal and the phenomenal.

Creativity and the Imagination

Notes of the Wednesday Meeting 30th May 2018

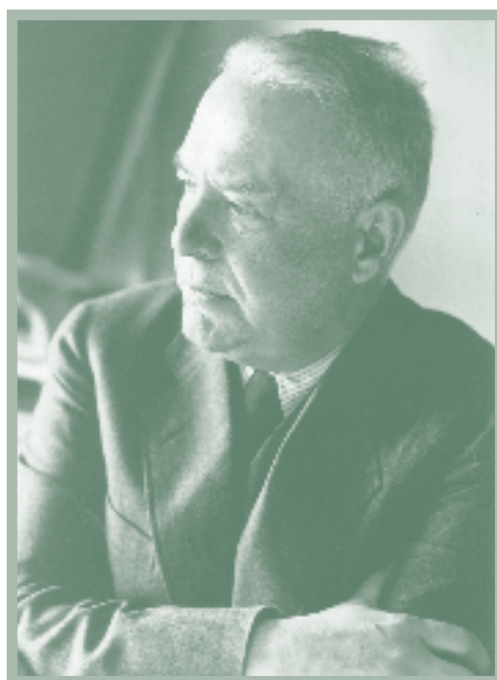
PAUL COCKBURN

The question discussed was: where does creativity, or inspiration, come from? How does it link to the imagination? Two examples of creativity were given – Descartes shut himself in a room with an oven in 1619. That night he had three dreams and believed that a divine spirit revealed a new philosophy to him. Coleridge wrote his poem *Kubla Khan* after having a dream (perhaps opium inspired) in 1697 – he was famously interrupted by a ‘person from Porlock’ and could only remember a fragment of it. Were they inspired? Did they have some sort of a revelation? Were they just creative people whose minds kept working during their sleep?

For any creative work of art, it was suggested, there needs to be ‘the free life and the confining form’, in the words of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (*Biographia Literaria*, II, 235). The energy extends outwards into infinity but the form confines it and gives it the definite shape it takes.

Poets such as Robert Burns speak of the ‘muse’ that inspires them. The Greek goddess or muse of poetry was Calliope. You need to be receptive to external inspiration, and it might be divine. In our modern times with a loss in faith in the West the muse might be ‘transposed’ psychologically to somewhere within us, but still beyond the ego. For Ted Hughes, the poet needs to take an imaginary journey into the depths of the psyche to recover ‘healing energy’ for his tribe.

The imagination plays a major role in the creative process. Coleridge writes: ‘The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM’. In his poem ‘Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour’, Wallace Stevens writes: ‘God and the imagination are one’.



Wallace Stevens

Being in and contributing to a group seem for some of us to be a source of inspiration, there is a group energy we can tap into. Different points of view are creative. As William Blake wrote ‘Without contraries there is no progression’.

This brings us to science. Science is not all rationality, great discoveries in science need the imagination. Kekule for instance discovered the circular structure of the organic compound benzene while dreaming in front of the fire. Previously organic compounds were thought to be based on chains of carbon atoms.

Is creativity for everybody? Maybe we all do have an imaginative capacity, however small. And art is usually a physical activity, connected to the body. In the modern world most people perhaps would not think of art as being transcendent, though they might think it is important.

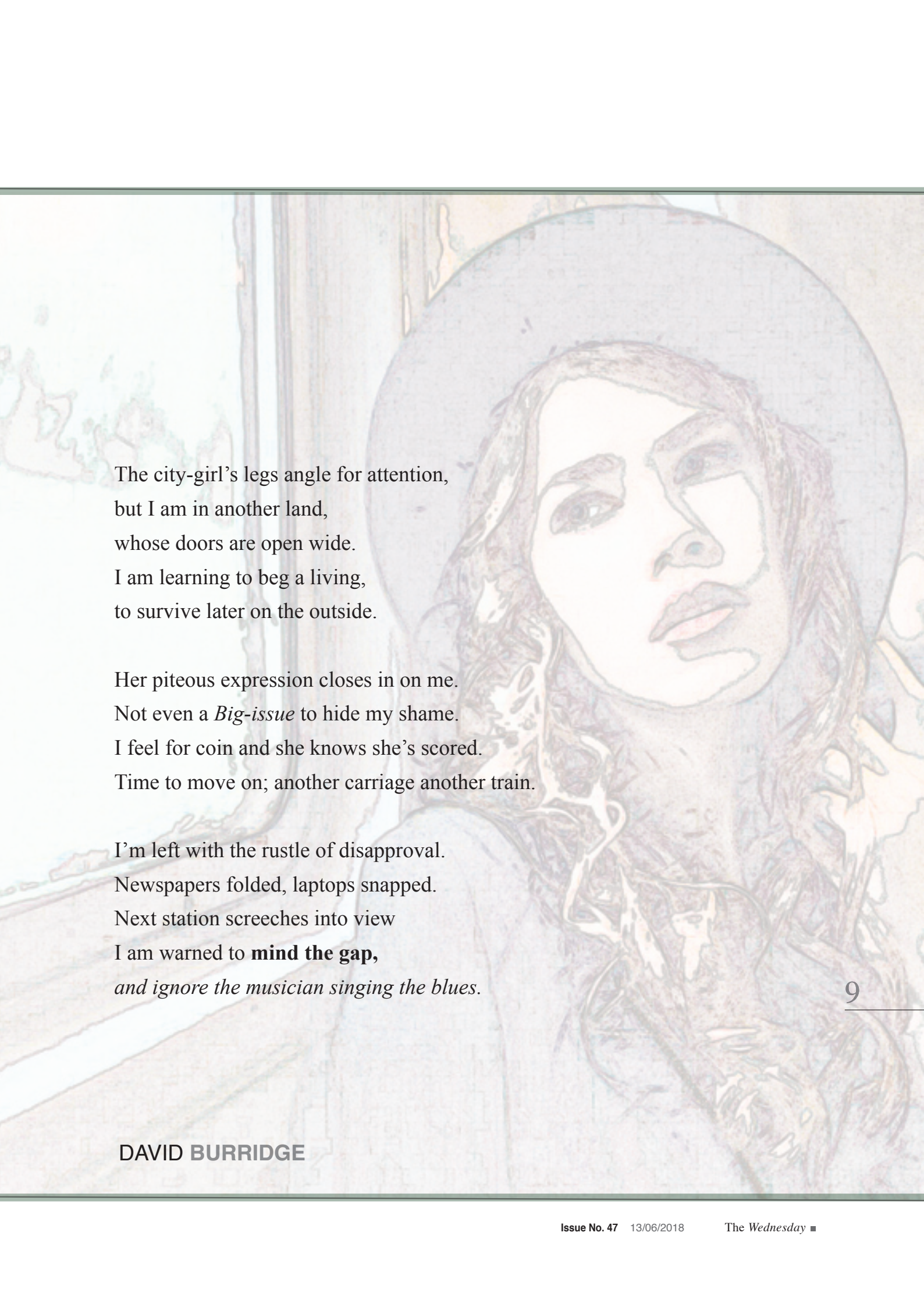
Beggar's Belief

She enters the carriage from the far end,
scarfed and smothered in peasant-dress.
I give up staring at a city-girl's legs
taken by this unbelonging guest.

I imagine a religious sect, abandoned her
here to hand out tracts promising us
cream cheese and warm underwear.
No it's just a scrap of scribble:
Please - something for my Little One!

A swaddled infant placid on her hip.
Already taught not to cry;
essential part of the exercise,
blink smiles into strangers' eyes.

She's systematic between the suits and skirts.
Doesn't linger for the mumbled rejections.
Like all hard selling she knows it's 1 in 10,
that give her daily income.



The city-girl's legs angle for attention,
but I am in another land,
whose doors are open wide.
I am learning to beg a living,
to survive later on the outside.

Her piteous expression closes in on me.
Not even a *Big-issue* to hide my shame.
I feel for coin and she knows she's scored.
Time to move on; another carriage another train.

I'm left with the rustle of disapproval.
Newspapers folded, laptops snapped.
Next station screeches into view
I am warned to **mind the gap,**
and ignore the musician singing the blues.

DAVID BURRIDGE

Ekphrasis

The Use Of Powerful Words As A Tool To Illuminate The Visual

“Painting is poetry that is seen rather than felt, and poetry is painting that is felt rather than seen.”

Leonardo da Vinci

Some people, when presented with a combination of poetry and visual art, reveal that they find somehow new life being breathed into both, which leads them to more actively look and listen. Hearing the words of a poem, then stopping and looking at the complementary art provides an opportunity to focus more intensely and also see both from different angles.

When I create visual art for my poems I sometimes create the artwork first and then think how to express meaning a bit further, bringing poem and visual together in a more thought-provoking way. Powerful words work well in relation to visual art. They put you in a special mood that opens a door to deeper connection and understanding, adding the positive energy of the experience. A poem portrays a picture; a picture illuminates a poem. In fact, given the right circumstances, any art may describe any other art.

It is surprising how much it enriches, when art forms are combined, one highlights the other with the use of multiple senses.

A poem also may enhance the original art and so take on a life of its own through description.

Not only do poetry readings layer words over the experience of looking at art, they also add the element of performance. It is this combination that transforms observers into participants and prompts them to notice things they might otherwise have missed.



Ekphrasis is a concept already known centuries ago by the ancient Greeks. The word comes from the Greek ἐκ *ek* and φράσις *phrasis*, 'out' and 'speak' respectively, and the verb ἐκφράζειν *ekphrázein*, 'to proclaim or call an inanimate object by name', when relating to a work of art produced as a rhetorical exercise, often used in the adjectival form **ekphrastic**. It describes verbally, often dramatically, a visual art work, either real or imagined. According to the Poetry Foundation, 'an ekphrastic poem is a vivid description of a scene or, more commonly, a work of art.'

More generally, an ekphrastic poem is a poem inspired or stimulated by a work of art. It may enhance the original art and so take on a life of its own through its description.

A poem portrays a picture; a sculpture depicts a heroine of a novel; in fact, given the right circumstances, any art may describe any other art, expressing the sentiments of an artist at the moment of his or her creation.

Ekphrasis has been considered generally to be a rhetorical device in which one medium of art tries to relate to another medium by defining and describing its essence and form, and in doing so, relate more directly to the audience, through its illuminative liveliness. A descriptive work of prose or poetry, a film, or even a photograph may thus highlight through its *rhetorical* vividness what is happening, or what is shown in, say, any of the visual arts and in doing so, may enhance the original art and so take on a life of its own through its description. One example is a painting of a sculpture: the painting is 'telling the story of' the sculpture, and so becoming a storyteller, as well as a story (work of art) itself. Virtually any type of artistic medium may be the actor of, or subject of ekphrasis. One may not always be able, for example, to make an accurate sculpture of a book to retell the story in an authentic way; yet if it's the spirit of the book that we are more concerned about, it certainly can be conveyed by virtually any medium and thereby enhance the artistic impact of the original book through synergy.

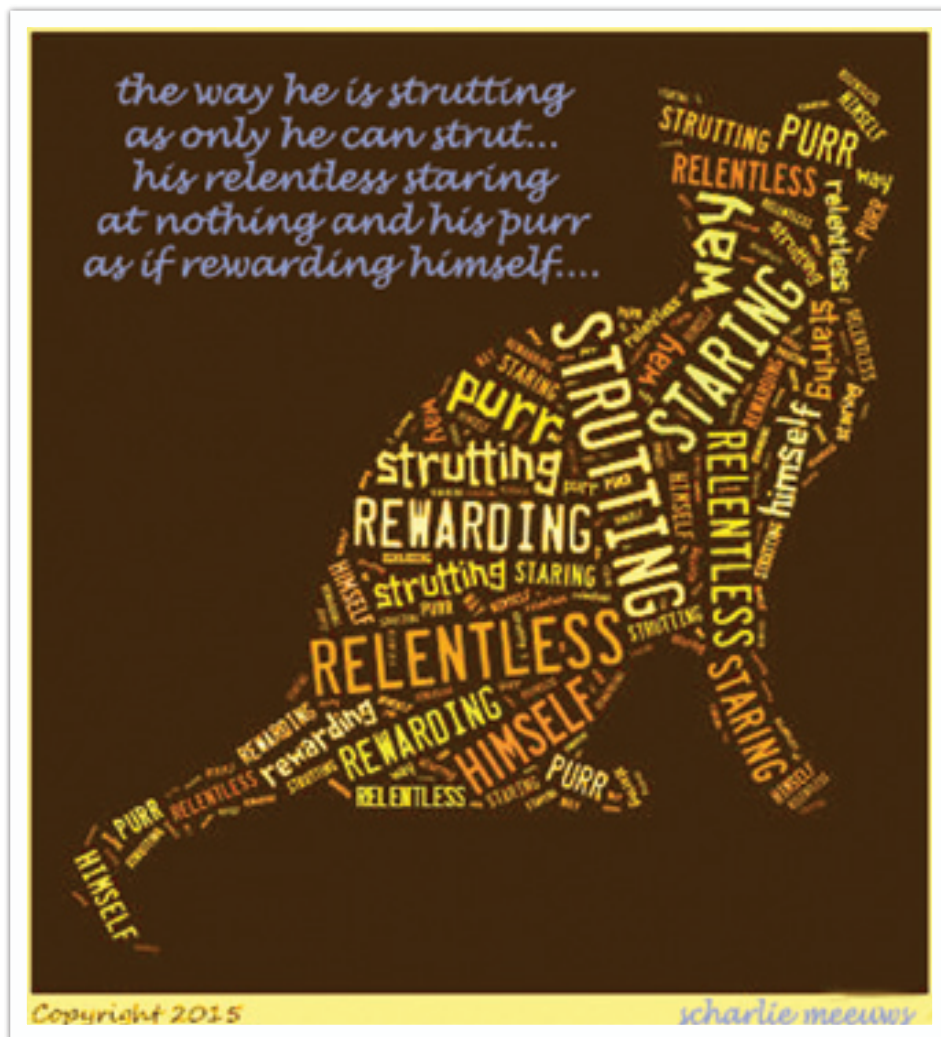
It was this epitome, this template, of the ideal form, that a craftsman or later an artist would try to reconstruct in his attempt to achieve perfection in his work, that was to manifest itself in ekphrasis at a later stage.

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Artists began to use their own literary and artistic genres of art to work and reflect on another art to illuminate what the eye might not see in the original, to elevate it and possibly even surpass it.

The communication of different art pieces is a lovely experience, with which the viewer or listener can create their own dialogue. Each respective art piece influences and, ultimately, changes the other – a good example of how interdisciplinary arts can trigger change.

I am investigating the combination of poetry and visual art – not so much with someone reading aloud, but verse offered with vision. It may be a deeper place for a person to be brought through if they quietly ‘enter in’, when the two mediums are presented together.

The painter Lessi said that painting and poetry are similar in the way that they make 'absent things present'. They also both imitate reality.

In the introduction to his book called *The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, the author J. Heffernan presents a few reasons that increased his interest in the study of ekphrasis. Among his reasons he mentions: 'It evokes the power of the silent image, to the rival authority of language.'

Heffernan considers ekphrasis a rivalry between word and image – and he underscores 'that the dilemma of the text consists in revealing the power of an image while simultaneously keeping this power under control.'

Poetry in conjuncture with visual art for centuries has aptly demonstrated the ability of artists to transmute paints into forms, shapes and feelings. This has always been a source of wonder to me. Equally fascinating is the interplay between art-forms - the way poetry, sculpture, music and painting relate to each other. I feel the relationship between visual art and poetry is a particularly close one. Both come out of a desire to make something new of the familiar, to capture an experience in a living, concentrated way. Both share a harmony, structure, colour and rhythm; in the compositional balance of a painting, one can almost speak of one colour 'rhyming' with another.

**Article, artwork and poetry
by Scharlie Meeuws**

The Wednesday

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Website: Currently unavailable

Published by:

The Wednesday Press, Oxford

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The Wednesday books:

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