

The Wednesday



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group at Albion Beatnik - Oxford

Editorial

The Ghost of Marx

The world celebrated the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx last month. The question that is of interest is not that a person was born, lived and died but what difference he made in his time and after, and what he left to posterity. The fall of the USSR gave the impression that not only was communism dead but Marxism as well. This might be true in the general conception of things but is that true of Marx himself? Do we still have the lively spirited intellectual, journalist, philosopher and political economist or are we left with a ghost?

It is interesting that Marx began the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, with the sentence: 'A spectre is hunting Europe – the spectre of communism.' I can imagine the deep voice of Orson Welles announcing this in a film on Marx as he did with Nostradamus. By the second part of this short book we discover that this spectre is revolutionary and will stop at nothing until it conquers and transforms the world. Indeed, it will correct all the ills of history and will create a new reality where there will be no social contradictions, no classes, no coercive laws nor a repressive state. By the third part of this work, we find out that this is an imminent event that is coming soon and that other visions, even the socialist ones, are utopians. Engel, Marx's co-worker on this text, called it scientific socialism as opposed to utopia (of mainly the French and their translators in Germany).

Before his death, Marx saw that this dream was not as dramatic as he thought and that the revolution could be avoided in more democratic countries. The increasing democratisation and the participation of social democratic parties in the political process would bring changes from within. It's a shame he didn't live long enough to revise his original

vision in a more radical way. He considered his Manifesto an historical document that he has no right to alter but only to add new introductions to the German and Russian editions to allow for their particular situations. The task of revision fell to other thinkers who called themselves Marxists and it is debatable whether they did well or badly.

But what is left of Marx after two hundred years? Marx was a philosopher and activist. Perhaps the activist has gone with the dampening down of the spirit of revolution and the vision of changing the world. This meant that the spectre is no longer frightening to the capitalists but can be domesticated and admitted to the respectability of liberal academia. He also seems to have taken a religious garb as heralding a Messianic vision, as Derrida thought. Furthermore, he has also been presented as articulating a vision of modernity, as a humanist philosopher responding to the mechanical, commodified reality brought about by the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century; a century preceded by a political and social revolution (the French revolution) and was followed in the next century by another revolution (the Russian revolution).

But above all, Marx presented a theory that is wide ranging in its analyses of social reality in its deepest structures (the different modes of productions and social relations) and also thought and philosophy as reflection of that reality (his theory of ideology). Both aspects of his theory had a strong hold during their time and after. But with the ebbing of that theory a big gap has opened in the theoretical field and maybe the ghost is pointing to the future and calling upon us all to articulate a new vision for a new world.

The Editor



The Manifold One

Pythagoras (born 570 BCE) was the first person to call himself a philosopher. He absorbed ancient knowledge traditions and developed a way of life attuned to this wisdom where 'only like can know like'. The life style was intended to clear away impediments to alignment with the divine and cognition at the highest level.

WILLIAM BISHOP

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There is evidence to support the idea of the evolution of human consciousness. Assuming this to be the case it would suggest that the condition of consciousness in ancient times was quite different from our own modern condition, which in principle will evolve further in the future. Heraclitus (535–475 BCE) certainly proposed that change is constant but he may not have thought to apply this to consciousness. Indeed neither would most people today, and yet it is apparent that our world of time and space is subject to a moving world process within its cosmic setting. This seemingly mysterious process however may not have escaped the notice of Pythagoras, who embraced the received idea of reincarnation. Indeed it is said that he had spoken of some of his previous incarnations.

In ancient times, beyond what Karl Jaspers calls the Axial Age beginning in the 8th century BCE, serious knowledge tended to be passed on as oral tradition and by myth and symbol. In very ancient times the visual and imaginative faculties were more dominant than any nascent intellect and because of this it is possible that a degree of clairvoyance was evident in cognition so that arguably knowledge of the 'gods' was actual rather than conjectural. A watershed in the development of consciousness certainly appears evident at the time of the early Greek philosophers around the 6th century BCE. At this time major figures appeared bringing a new impetus and emphasis to human civilization. These include Confucius and Buddha as well as Pythagoras. The 6th century BCE can be considered the

point where the intellect begins to take an active role in gaining knowledge. The heart with its values and morality was still alive in the wisdom of Pythagoras and this is still the case with Plato who learnt much from Pythagoras and appears to be a late representative of the old mythic wisdom stream combined with thought, while his former pupil, Aristotle, brought to bear the power of intellectual concepts, turning the old sense of logos as proportional measure that gives meaning, into logic, the seed of technology.

Meanwhile in 570 BCE on the Island of Samos in the Aegean Sea, Pythagoras was born. As a pioneer of the 'Axial Age' he sought to stand on the shoulders of previous keepers of wisdom. He began his travels early in life and is said to have spent 22 years in Egypt learning from priests and undergoing initiations. He also spent time in Babylon and further afield seeking the sources of ancient wisdom. He was therefore later able to form a synthesis of ancient wisdom and in turn complement this with his own discoveries. When he returned to Samos from his educational experiences abroad he apparently began to establish a school, but soon moved on because of the tyranny of the regional ruler, Polycrates. He then settled in Croton in southern Italy where his reputation preceded him. It was in the more favorable circumstances of Croton that he set up his community.

Pythagoras was the first person to call himself a philosopher, a lover of wisdom. For him wisdom meant not just knowledge but a complete way of life attuned to wisdom where 'only like can know like'. The life style undertaken was intended to clear away impediments to alignment with the divine and cognition at the highest level. Pythagorean wisdom was intended to ground a person in time and eternity, matter and spirit, and this was possible because a human being was understood to be a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm, a part within the continuum of the whole, containing all the principles of the

cosmos. Justin the Martyr (100 – 165) quotes Pythagoras as saying:

"God is one; and he himself does not, as some suppose, exist outside the world, but in it, he being wholly present in the entire circle, and beholding generations, being the regulating ingredient of all the ages, and the administrator of his own powers and works, the first principle of all things, the light of heaven, and father of all, the intelligence and animating soul of the universe, the movement of all orbits."

Pythagoras taught that the relationship between movement and sound in the 'Harmony of the Spheres' exists in the very nature of things and the whole heavens are a harmony of number and proportion. Number (related to vibrational tone) is the fundamental principle. Number was also seen as godlike. 'One' was thought to contain the Unlimited and the Limiting where the product of both is Unity. All numbers then arise from Unity. The first principle was the Monad, which is God the Good, and the origin of the One. The Monad is also the intelligence by which we perceive things, and the unfolding of the Unlimited (even numbers) and the Limiting (odd numbers) reveal number as the essence of all things. In the Platonic dialogue, *Philibus*, we read:

"The ancients who were superior to us and dwelt nearer the Gods, have handed down a tradition that all things are said to consist of a One and a Many and contain in themselves the connate principles of Limit and the Unlimited."

It was through his use of the monochord, a type of long single-stringed instrument, that Pythagoras investigated the tones of the musical scale and discovered the overtone series. These tones are produced within the length of a vibrating string. The tone frequencies of the overtone series reveal geometric progression (1, 2, 4, 8, 16) while their corresponding vibrating string length has a reciprocal

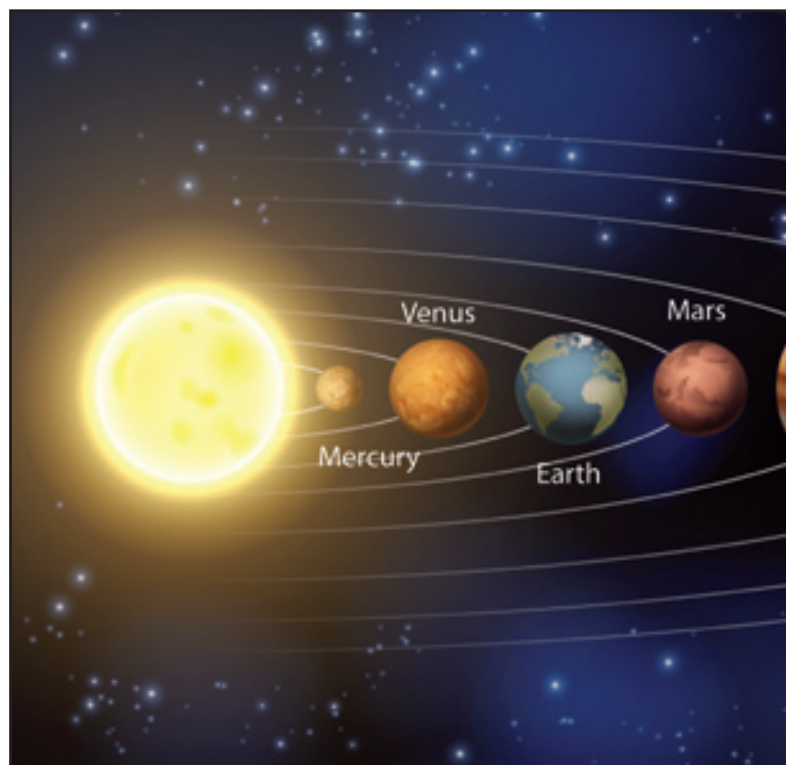
relationship. Adding the two together equals the unity of One. Interestingly, the ear works on the principle of geometric progression so that each doubling in frequency (an octave) is heard as a single step of arithmetical progression (1, 2, 3, 4). Significantly it is the shell-like shape of the cochlea in the inner ear, constructed according to the principle of geometric progression, which achieves this, an illustration of the relation of macrocosm to microcosm. Similarly the eye and the ear can be considered to have a reciprocal relationship where their addition produces a complementary Unity. What can be judged with the eye in terms of measure and quantity for the mind is supplemented in the ear with heard qualities perceived in the psyche. The scientific culture of our day relies essentially on one half of this Unity, on 'objectivity', but takes little or no account of quality due to the human psyche's entanglement in the Whole.

Number is central to the principle of the harmonic proportioning of phenomena. While the whole number '2' splits the given Unity into the duality of two poles, a third term unites them and so reflects again the Unity. This triangular form of the Triad contains powerful creative potential. Each whole number has its own value and quality of being and the first four numbers ($1+2+3+4=10$) were considered to embrace all the possibilities of creation. When arranged in the form of a triangle this was called the Tetraktys. Pythagoreans regarded the Triad and Tetraktys with sacred reverence for the organizational power they possessed.

The fact that number associated with a tone (tone-number) in harmonics can be heard is especially significant due to its link to speech and language by mediation of the rational organizing principle of the logos. The harmonic structure of the cosmos was seen therefore not only to support forming forces but was also seen to be connected with spoken

language where hearing and thinking unite in cognition. Inevitably language gives rise to philosophy, and significantly both the teaching of Pythagoras and the dialogues of Socrates (c. 470 – 399 BCE), were conducted strictly in the spoken word. The composer, Beethoven once remarked that music is the most powerful philosophy in the world. Pythagoras certainly acted as if this were the case. He was well aware, through his own investigations and the tradition from Orpheus, of the power of music not only as an external forming force but of its ability to affect the psyche with its weather-like moods. It was Pythagoras who is also credited with inventing music therapy.

The fundamental law of harmony was seen to apply in all areas of life. It was harmonious proportion that defined beauty in art and governed balanced proportion in architecture as well as defining social justice and truth. A harmonious way of life was one aligned with and in resonance with the divine, the highest principle. Indeed harmonics offered measure



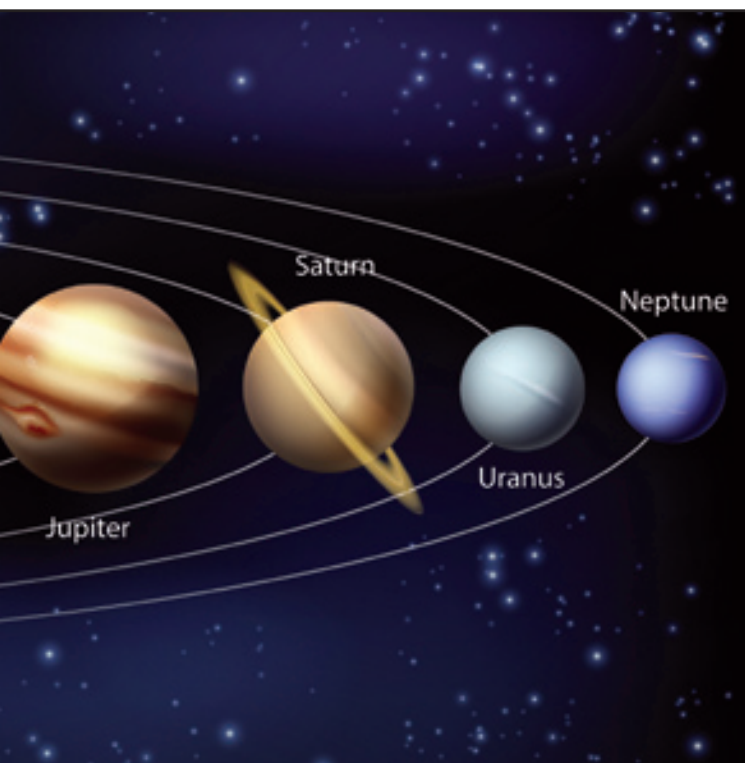
and value while modern science today restricts itself to measure and number, creating laws from this. What it lacks in its one-sidedness is value, which harmonics can contribute. Therefore harmonic value-forms reintroduced to scientific thought could provide a new spiritual structure verifiable by number and the causality of the scientific method. It can be convincingly argued that the holistic viewpoint stemming from Pythagoras is what is needed in today's world because of its inclusive unity of knowledge and its awareness that through consciousness the universe is one single thing, so that all is interdependent and matter and energy are different aspects of one underlying continuum.

In the Pythagorean scheme, Number is regarded as the sovereign and autogenic force that maintains the eternal permanence of cosmic things, and in his introduction to *The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library*, Phanes Press 1987, David Fidler asserts the continuing relevance of Pythagorean wisdom:

"Each atom is a Pythagorean universe, the sight of eternity in a grain of sand, consisting of an arithmetic number of particles, geometrically distributed in space, dancing and vibrating like a miniature solar system to the music of the spheres."

Surely the human being as a microcosm, located between time and eternity, matter and spirit, has the potential to incarnate Eternal principles in Time and in this way to mirror the work of Nature. At a time of factual uncertainty and relative values surely it must seem like a godsend to have the possibility of reinstating the underlying reality of Oneness that unites science, the humanities, religion and human subjectivity, while re-orientating science in a holistic direction with the consequences of helping to save the planet from devastation while rescuing spirit and culture. What Pythagoras had to offer has suffered obscurity in the flow of time, yet in a modern form its sound basis has what it takes to rescue us from an unbalanced, remarkably advanced, technological yet fractured world.

It is interesting what Jacob Needleman has said regarding Pythagoras in his book, *The Heart of Philosophy*: there are two types of ideas, the 'concept', which the intellect deals with, and ideas with a 'higher energy', which can have a transforming effect. Now surely the idea of the harmonic (numerical) structuring of the soul and cosmos is a higher energy idea. Needleman further suggests that 'higher energy' ideas can unfortunately be reduced to mere concepts and that today we have lost the ability to relate to such ideas. Our philosophy only deals with concepts. Well - it took the 'love of wisdom' to recognize higher ideas since they engage the mind and heart and demand self-knowledge. We have our consciousness in a world at present where the manipulation of concepts is the norm in mainstream life, and yet it is not impossible for the glint of higher energy ideas to illumine us.



Harmony of the Spheres

Cognitive Competence and Metacognitive Understanding

There is a contrast between doctrine (cognitive) and wisdom (metacognitive) that can be traced back to the Greeks. The first represents a fully worked out logical analysis while the second is more of an insight that precedes all analysis. It is usually the cognitive (rational) views that are considered important but as the article below argues it is the vision that guides the philosopher that is more important.

LIVIO ROSSETTI

In a previous issue of *The Wednesday* (no. 44) it occurred to me to remind you that Heraclitus has only metacognitive suggestions to offer, first of all the abundance of claims about what people are usually unaware of, and the emphasis on the difference between *polumathia* (a feature of learned people) and *noon echein* (to have an insightful mind). On the other hand, no discovery or sustained theory of his own surfaced and, because of this, he seems to have been a sort of wise preacher, quite different from the great masters of Ionia (Thales etc.).

Curiously enough, the case of Socrates is at least comparable. Those who went in search of his doctrines found (almost) nothing; but those who went in search of his wisdom found a lot, for example the person who began to treat other persons not as 'the public' but as thinking individuals, or the man who introduced into Athenian society a sense of responsibility (eventually of shame) for one's own behaviour. Now the latter are metacognitive contents, and other elements too of his personality also have metacognitive features, e.g. his well-known assertion that one should be much more concerned with one's soul than with one's body. So once more the lack of proper teachings, theories, and arguments ascribable

to him is largely balanced by the offer of sustained metacognitive ideas and messages. The students of Socrates who went in search of cognitive contents probably wasted their time.

What happened in the subsequent history of Western philosophy? I have at least the impression that a combined offer of both cognitive and metacognitive output (competent statements, reasoned conjectures, theories, plus second-order thoughts, general and possibly unverifiable statements equally worth of attention and so on) occurred from time to time, e.g. with Aristotle, Descartes, and Kant. However, this remained a minority feature, since much more distinguished philosophers of the past (Plotinus to Heidegger, Epicurus to Habermas) failed to offer anything comparable. This was not by chance, since ideas feed our minds: a great idea is likely to survive a host of arguments, and from philosophers one expects, primarily, ideas.

At least, something of the sort used to happen in the past. But for most philosophers and would-be philosophers of our time it is normal to consider that they should, rather, provide undisputable evidences that they had already



Heidegger

Indeed, a good scientist is expected to have, in addition to a wide range of knowledge, a sound understanding of what (s)he knows, i.e. a solid competence, other than a number of further metacognitive virtues. On the other hand, one could well maintain that philosophy is an eminently metacognitive wisdom; nevertheless, a good philosopher should be well alerted, know his world very well, and rely on a widespread acquaintance and rich body of experiences, otherwise the danger of arbitrariness could ensue. Nevertheless, it is not such a body of cognitive contents that makes someone a philosopher: these are only necessary preconditions. Indeed, a definite idea of Hume's law, or of what 'transzendente Apperzeption' (transcendental apperception) means for Kant, could pass for mere cognitive contents only at a very superficial level, given the hard work needed in order to come to establish what precisely they mean, what they imply, what they do not mean, and precisely why. This means that what is prima facie a cognitive content usually embodies a lot of metacognitive ingredients (and vice versa). That notwithstanding, scientists are scientists first of all because of what they know or came

to know, while thinkers are thinkers because of the mostly metacognitive contents they are able to offer. And it is interesting to note that our newspapers are full of commentators who suggest how to evaluate, say, the politics of our country, that of President Trump, the trend of our economy, the most recent manifestations of bullying, and what one expects from the next match in the Six Nations Championship. All that too has an obvious metacognitive imprint. Indeed, our newspapers give a vast sample of cognitive contents which are systematically supported by a number of 'enlightening' metacognitive remarks. Besides, how could we live without a reasonable blend of cognitive contents and metacognitive elaborations? And shouldn't it be of interest for philosophers to investigate such a blend?

For these reasons one could well have expected to find an entry on Metacognition in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, the Italian *Enciclopedia Filosofica* (2006: slightly more than 13,500 pages), *Wikipedia* and elsewhere. Unexpectedly, this has failed to happen so far, much as if philosophy had nothing to do with it. But it should! Metacognition is too essential for philosophy to remain in the shadows, because shadows are not without effects. The eminently metacognitive wisdom of Heraclitus and Socrates, for instance, still has to be acknowledged for what it is! And not by chance since I too, educated as I was during a whole life to look for doctrines, and eventually opinions, tenets, *doxai*, am discovering these features just now.

Monday 18 June 2018

(Livio Rossetti was a professor of Ancient Philosophy in the University of Perugia for more than 25 years until his retirement in 2009. He has numerous publications.)

Goethe meets Napoleon

SCHARLIE MEEUWS

When I think of Napoleon, a certain image of a dark haired small and stumpy figure appears in my inner vision. I see a thin-lipped and strong-willed persona, who dominated the world's stage for many decades. Yet I never forget the autobiographical story I read about Napoleon's meeting with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, our German 'Shakespeare', which took place in Erfurt in the year 1808.

Goethe was sixty years old and had been summoned with several other ministers into the Emperor's study, in the morning of that day. After an introduction with Talleyrand amongst others, he describes first-hand his impression of the political giant. Napoleon is sitting at the breakfast table, waving him to approach. He asks his age and then looks approvingly to Goethe calling him a 'well-preserved man'. To flatter the German, he mentions that he is well acquainted with German literature, well versed in Latin and had even translated Horace into French. He talks to him as Goethe's friends would have talked, about understanding things and emotions. He picks out Goethe's most famous novel: *The Sufferings of the Young Werther*, which he criticizes, asking the author

why he had come to a certain conclusion in that story and why it did not seem authentic and natural to him.

Goethe is astonished and admits that this is true and that nobody had noticed it before, as he had written this part to produce a special effect. Later the conversation went on to the subject of French Drama, which often seemed so unnatural, and Goethe again is surprised by Napoleon's sensible remarks and his attention to detail such as 'a criminal judge'. Later he is taken aside and Napoleon talks to him about personal affairs, wanting to know if he is married and has children. In a forceful way he translates the replies into French, gesturing when listening and when the answer is yes, nodding his head vigorously and asking Goethe's opinion on many of the questions that arise.

This was a remarkable meeting of two opposing giants and intellectual equals, who respected and admired each other a great deal. The proof for this is the cross of the Legion d'Honneur, which arrived soon afterwards from Napoleon as a gift for Goethe.



Entrevue Erfurt
by Nicolas Grosse

Creativity Revisited

Notes of Wednesday Meeting Held on 6th June

PAUL COCKBURN

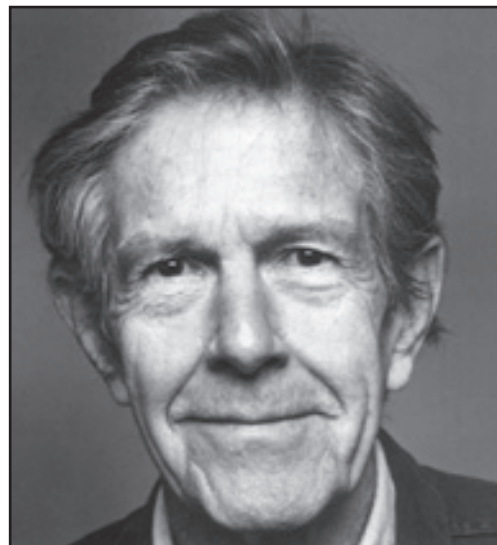
We continued the discussion on creativity we started the week before, based on a paper which tried to analyse creativity in terms of spontaneity, originality, novelty, transformation. One view expressed was that it is unhelpful to analyse creativity in this way, as the actual experience of being creative was key, and trying to describe it rather obscured this. Creativity was a mystical or spiritual process, and by trying to understand it you take away the magic.

In terms of the production of art, sometimes you try to understand, then do it, other times you just do it and don't understand (though you may later!). In artistic creativity we expand the boundaries, push them back. It can make us feel alive. The 'new' can be shocking at first but accepted later. There can also be a psychological conflict within the artist, it can be a struggle.

We tried to understand John Cage's musical work 4:33, which consists of complete silence. In fact the audience listens to the 'background' noise, the sounds in the environment while it is 'performed'. Cage seems to be saying this background noise could be considered music. Another thought: it can be the gaps between words that provide meaning just as much as the actual words!

heroes in them who die tragic deaths. He created powerful art by doing this. It seems we have a need for heroes, but this also means we have terrible sad events like wars and disasters which require heroic actions. As George Eliot wrote: 'Half man's truth must be hidden lie/ If unlit by sorrow's eye'. In recent times literary criticism has tended to debunk heroes; they are often revealed to have tragic flaws.

We moved on to discuss a quote from Sartre's early book *The Transcendence of the Ego*. He writes 'For most philosophers the ego is an "inhabitant" of consciousness..... We should like to show here that the ego is neither formally nor materially in consciousness: it is outside in the world.' Two of us are doing a course on the German philosopher Fichte, and it is interesting that Sartre's quote is in fact echoed in Fichte's philosophy; Fichte maintains the 'I' cannot exist on its own but must be formed in relation to other 'I's in a transcendental manner. There is de facto a community of which we are all a part, a sort of 'super-I' collective.



John Cage

In considering a work of art, is an emotional response required? One member of our group talked of seeing two ballerinas, one of whom was very emotional in terms of her performance compared to the other, and he judged this to be better in terms of impact than the technical artistry of the other. We discussed how Wagner combined his genius as a composer with his philosophy. He matched his music to the Norse myths, and of course the

Art and Boundaries

Notes of the Wednesday Meeting 13th June 2018

PAUL COCKBURN

We started by discussing art, in particular painting. One thought was that art is technique or craft combined with ideas. Ideas alone or craft alone does not work. Using the imagination to make unusual connections is also part of art. One of our number was interested in the 'turning point', where transformations were shown to be happening in an in-between state in mythology, say. What was art a representation of? Maybe beauty? Art is perhaps 'visual jazz'.

We can somehow see something of the artist behind the painting. Artists are often single-minded, not necessarily selfish! To some it is a basic need to create art. Van Gogh pushed the boundaries of art, perhaps he saw 'too much' light. We discussed whether Grayson Perry's art is kitsch – it often makes you smile or laugh, he combines excellent technique and deals with important social issues, but somehow always with a light touch. It will be interesting to see how he co-ordinates the Royal Academy Summer Show this year. There will be a



Van Gough

'room of humour' apparently! Anybody can submit a painting to the RA and a panel of experts choose what will be exhibited – but will applicants have to fit in to Grayson's Perry's style in order to be accepted?

We discussed art and language. It is interesting how a poem can illustrate a painting, and how a painting can illustrate a poem. Language helps us share our subjectivity in relationships. Wittgenstein's work on the limits of language, and the idea of 'showing', was also discussed. People still like face-to-face contact – how much is conferencing software using the internet employed? For some meetings it can eliminate the need for travel.

We moved on to discuss growth and the problems it brings. Why do cities such as London grow and grow, so that more and more people are commuting from long distances to work in London. This is despite the new technology which should make it easier to work from home. Are cities like the personal ego, they just want to expand?

How should the human develop in the light of new technology? We don't seem to be very good at controlling technology. Rather than a hierarchical society with too much power concentrated at the top, perhaps we need a more collective way of operating.

The philosopher Fichte thought that we should discuss social issues, and further that 'reason' should enable us all to agree. In the perfect society we would all individually will what the community wills. In sport, say football, a good team works together in harmony to win, and no-one gets seriously hurt (hopefully).

Night garden

**Out of the darkness all that light outside
seems so much brighter and somehow ablaze,
as the sun settles down, the colour white
changes to orange, then again displays**

**a pale green yellow, till a spell of dark
engulfs the garden in a twilit gloom,
before it turns to grey with a last spark
of dying sunray, only to resume**

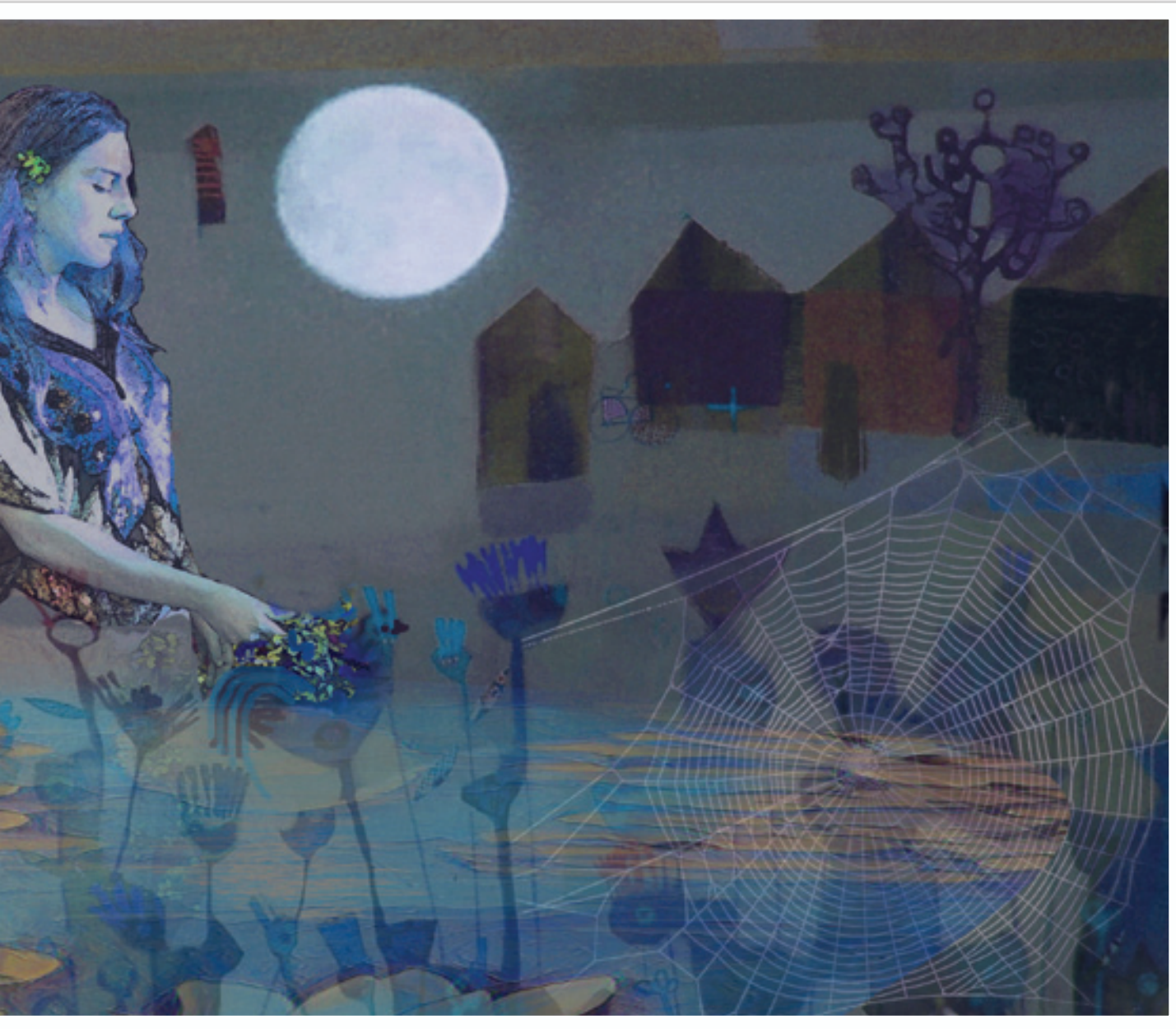
a new state of existence everywhere.

**All birdsong stops. Dusk paints the grasses grey.
Some dark-winged moths dance in the breathless air.
A spiderweb hangs empty of its prey.**

**Night has now fallen, and a moon afloat
crosses the pond, a silent quivering boat.**

Poem and Artwork by Scharlie Meeuws





La Rhune

(A 900 metre mountain in the Basque region)

Railway carries up gulped-at heights,
cargoes of popped bellies, over-lunched bodies.
All seat-sunk waiting to reach *Le Sommet*, without a single strain,
except bony arms leaning and stretching for selfie precision.
Grins to be hurtled from Basque to other planet spots.

Griffin vultures sweep endless reconnaissance for something
small and edible, under the perfect blue pitch, until
seasonal primitives aim them out of the sky.
White *Pottocks* calmly graze on gradients, where
once soldiers slipped or spiked to stand up straight.

A writhe of paths leads to a granite peak then
gaze can take a Pyrenees' sweep. Sightings of black bulges;
burden of proof that *L'Orage* is shortly due.
Suddenly the sun splits through, lightly lifting boot steps.
Hiking is heaven in this perfect view, but we know
Thor's hammer will clout again quite soon.

David BurrIDGE

(Pottocks are a feral breed of ponies found only in the Pyrenees).



The Wednesday

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