



Mystics and Scientists Conference, 12-14 April 2013, Warwick University

The Nature of Inspiration in Art, Science and Spirituality

Edi Bilimoria

If the Nobel molecular biologist and neuroscientist Francis Crick were invited to a whole weekend conference on the nature of inspiration, I can almost hear him retort: 'You, your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will [and certainly your inspiration], are in fact no more than the behaviour of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules [vibrating across your neocortex]. Go forth then, you bunch of neurons and generate inspiration.' 'Alright Francis, have it your way', we would politely respond, 'but some of us have difficulties wrapping our brains, let alone our minds around that one'.

How opportune then, that the theme of our conference in this, our fortieth anniversary year should focus on inspiration. After all, it was the inspiration of our Founders that resulted in the genesis of the SMN in 1973. This was a momentous inspiration, so to speak. But practically all of us have felt and treasured moments of exalted self-surrender when we become suffused in a Presence higher than our ordinary selves. Such elusive moments, however fleeting, seem to displace our personal self-concern in favour of a mystical experience (by whatever name) of unity and a feeling of being at one with the subject of our enquiries, be it in science, music, art or whatever. Our conference, then, was an in-depth and well-rounded exploration of how inspiration operates in art, science and spirituality, but with a slight emphasis on the arts.

In his opening address, the Chairman, **Professor Bernard Carr** gave a brief history of the SMN, outlining the changes and the constants over the years telling us that this was just the second time we were out of our home territory in Winchester since the inception of Mystics & Scientists in 1978; moreover this was the first ever conference to include the arts explicitly.

Programme Director **David Lorimer** then provided the metaphysical and philosophical framework to the creative process. He commenced with a fine résumé of key ideas of the nineteenth century thought movement – ideas that are of course the quintessence of the perennial wisdom (*theosophia*) affirmed by mystics and sages since time immemorial, but which have resurfaced in refreshing modern guise instead of quaint language through great minds like Emerson and Walter Russell as an antidote to the ultra-materialistic concepts then prevailing. David outlined the three primary steps in the creative process: defining the problem, working at the problem, and desisting from work thereby inviting the answer to appear spontaneously as a result of the pre-prepared 'hooks' in the mind; for example, Edison who said that everything that came to him came in flashes. According to Arthur Koestler (who was an SMN member) bi-association or ideas coming in at different angles is a key element of Eureka moments. David then gave us the encouraging and inspiring message of Emerson that we live in the lap of an immense

intelligence and the artist and scientist is the organ of that intelligence expressing and embodying Divine Mind. Ralph Waldo Trine reminds us that the manifest is the working out of the unseen and unmanifest; Thomas Troward affirms that the 'I Am' in me is the 'I Am' in you; and Walter Russell has written about becoming one with Divine Mind in 'The Universal One'.

In a moving tribute to his grandfather, Sir Robert Lorimer, principal architect and designer for the new chapel for the Knights of the Thistle in St. Giles' Cathedral, David stressed that the artist must be a lover of all nature, must revel and feel with the flowers, the birds and the creepy crawlies. The clear, almost stark message of this convincing talk was that, as with the design of the chapel, everything first exists as a thought and in thought before manifestation in time and space. So that which appears on the visible outside (the world) is a projection of what is on the unseen inside; in the words of Charles Haanel: thoughts are causes.

Next a complete change of scene mastered by **Professor Robert Turner**. Armed with degrees and doctorates in mathematics, physics and social anthropology, a pioneer of MRI and functional MRI, and Wellcome Principal Research Fellow and Professor of Imaging Physics at the Institute of Neurology in London, who better to tell us about *Creativity and the Brain*. As his title suggests, the emphasis was on the instrument of inspiration and the creative process. Our brains are for self-adaptation, recording and remembering and function rather like a Bayesian computer (top-down and bottom-up information and interaction with both components employing a Bayesian approach whereby assumptions about parameters are continually updated and revised in light of new data). Evolution represents slow thinking, so to speak; and thinking represents fast evolution. Crazy ideas are the equivalent of mutation or the wild card in the genetic pack. Robert gave us a lucid account of neuronal activity and function, informing us that every neuron enters into the activity of remembering and imagining, and forgetting – and we have as many neurons in our brains as the stars in our galaxy (100 to 400 billion stars according to Wikipedia). We have two kinds of memory: procedural for how we do things and declarative in order to describe.

MRI and fMRI have caused a revolution in brain imaging, showing the plastic changes in brain structure, timescales of changes, what material changes occur when we learn and how memories are recorded. In this sense, we never use the same brain twice. For example the physical changes in a mouse brain were recorded when the creature was learning to adapt with one of its whiskers removed. Furthermore, fMRI has revealed how experience shapes the brain, a case in point being the different brain shapes of London taxi drivers compared with musicians and in the latter case the brain development of string players is different from that of pianists. Notwithstanding all this, the philosophical implications of MRI tracking of brain changes correlating with physiological, psychological and social factors still have a long way to go.

In conclusion he said that we are all potentially geniuses but in order to keep creating we must keep our brains young: after all, the 'brain is a muscle' – use it and it grows bigger (and interestingly, Krishnamurti many decades earlier used virtually the same words in a talk on creativity to scientists at the Los Alamos Laboratory). Responding to a questioner who asked about the role of the heart, Robert said that by 'brain' he meant the entire nervous system, including the heart and of course the head. And when asked what he would pray to God for, Robert replied, 'I would pray to God for Grace; there is only one God'. We were all deeply affected by such a humble and sincere affirmation – a far cry from so many scientists nowadays who seem to 'know it all' (strutting gamecocks as Blavatsky referred to some of the conceited scientists of her day).

We then turned from science to the arts and spirituality starting with *Inspiration and the Challenge of Modern Art to Religious Imagery* by **Professor Lord Richard Harries of Pentregarth**, formerly Bishop of Oxford and now a Life Peer, Honorary Professor of Theology and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. The thrust of his talk was the inspiration and challenge of modern art with especial relation to images of the Christ. The challenge to the artist was how to relate to Christian themes in a rapidly changing twentieth century approach to the contemporary world of art: wanting to belong to the modern world but being ingrained in the past.

Richard showed some beautiful examples of attempts to revivify religious art. Suffering was the main source of inspiration for many artists. For example Jacob Epstein's source of inspiration was the suffering of humanity as focussed in Jesus and he was powerfully affected by the suffering around him in Paris during the First World War. With Marc Chagall, there were scenes of Jewish life including the Jewish mystical tradition along with Christian imagery in a creative conjunction. His 1938 White Crucifixion painting emphasizes the suffering of Jesus and the Jewish

people. Stanley Spencer saw life and people with great intensity. His vision and passion lay in his ability to perceive beauty where others did not, and in contrast to Chagall, his magical vision of life was drawn from ordinary scenes of life, seen in his paintings of Glasgow shipbuilders and bodies rising from a Glasgow cemetery. Graham Sutherland drew inspiration from nature in his native Pembrokeshire countryside and John Piper began as a modernist abstract artist but later took on a remarkable artistic trajectory famous for window paintings as at Coventry Cathedral and the Benjamin Britten memorial window in the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, Aldeburgh. Albert Herbert's paintings look simple but are highly accomplished and imbued with religious feeling like the scenes of Jonas and the Whale. Roger Wagner's paintings depicted a strong religious faith, along with his interest in the modern contemporary world as shown in pictures of Didcot power station and the gas ovens at Auschwitz.

Richard's talk convinced us that, as stated by Anthony Blunt, religious art can only truly emerge from a religious culture, otherwise the productions are just idiosyncratic, or in Henry Moore's terms, a great work of art cannot be produced without a spiritual feeling for life. Even though religious imagery was virtually extinct towards the close of the nineteenth century with traditional religious themes abandoned in favour of artistic endeavours in new directions, several artists during this period did in fact find new inspiration to revitalise religious art despite the Christian faith being rooted in the past.

Ruth Padel is a Greek scholar, poet, author, broadcaster, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, a Council Member of the Zoological Society of London and Ambassador for New Networks for Nature. Unsurprisingly then, her talk *Inside and Outside: Breath, Ear and Eye* was a rich cross-cultural exploration of our relations with both the visible and invisible world outside us. Regarding Greek science and philosophy she reminded us of Anaxagoras's saying that 'appearances are a sight of the unseen'; and that one aspect of appearance illustrated by Plato's cave is 'what is real is unseen'. She then drew some interesting parallels between Greek tragedy and their concept of medicine and the role of the doctor with reference to pre-Socratic ideas and to Asclepius, the god of medicine and healing. Ruth then showed pictures of the physicality of the Greek stage, explaining the function and layout of key elements like the skene, theatron and proscenium. Metaphor and symbols are vital to poets for interconnections and as a complement to linear knowledge; and this was convincingly illustrated with pictures of fungi on trees reminding one of ears and the intertwining of forest tree roots looking like neuronal pathways. We perforce resort to analogies to express the deeper aspects of life.

This was a difficult subject to hold together on account of the



numerous interfaces and connections with the unseen worlds, but Ruth's expressive delivery, amplified by her poetry readings and short film achieved a fine thread of continuity in showing us how we make sense of our internal and external world and our interactions with both worlds in terms of art and science, words and song. There was little doubt that uncertainty and doubt are a vital part of the artistic process and inspiration is cited in relations and 'betweenness', rather than fixed 'insides' or 'outsides'.

A perfect follow-on was **Shakti Maira's** talk *Inspiration in Art: Unfolding, Connecting, Forming*. This was an essentially personal account from a self-made artist with twenty-six one-person exhibitions round the world, exhibits in the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi and in many collections in India and abroad. Shakti opened with an insightful statement: that 'inspiration' is a word nested in other 'i' words like illumination, intuition and ineffable. Buddhist ideas were woven into his art. However Shakti stressed that his art was not entrenched in Buddhism or any art theory or art movement; hence honest and free of religions and art dogma. His paintings depicted this overall philosophy. Starting with his early mind-nature series of paintings when he was a grumpy fifteen year-old teenager he moved on to paintings to show nature as a metaphor of mind. These included scenes of the whispering beauty of mountains, mists and rocks to illustrate the various mind qualities of fluidity and formlessness, flexibility and firmness; as also the elements of fire, air, water and earth. Then a series of paintings to show that humans are not separate from God: indeed, we are all potential Gods since we carry the God-spark, but our realisation of this is prevented by poisons like hate, envy and greed as per Buddhism. The Chikai Bardo series were especially impressive in conveying the Tibetan notion of the bardo as signifying a transition of states. Likewise his depictions of the stages of meditation and the wisdom series when he explained that we must find generosity within ourselves in order to grow spiritually.

We were left with the overriding impression of an inspired artist who was able to connect on many levels with divinity, man and nature, and express the subtle shades of consciousness associated with each mind quality and element of nature with great sensitivity and evocation.

Our last talk *Grace and Effort: Sources of Inspiration Reconciled in Musical Experience* was by **Professor Paul Robertson**, founder and leader of the Medici String Quartet, a Visiting Professor to the Peninsula Medical School and to the Bled School of Management, and an Associate Fellow of Green, Templeton College, Oxford. He spoke movingly but with absolute directness about how his recent serious illness where he had been in an extended coma and close to death had transformed his thinking and attitude in that he had no desire to prove himself and a great need to clear out rubbish, so to speak. A sudden sense of integration was achieved when a

friend at his bedside spoke of correctness in law versus what is morally right: the musical equivalent was the difference between correct notes and musical integrity. As we approach the source of our being, things get closer to each other and moreover we don't need to know everything in order to comprehend everything. It is vital to appreciate the one thing you love, for it is your domain.

The art of life lies in dealing with uncertainty, not just factual correctness. Paul illustrated this with reference to the Pythagorean comma – the small interval (or comma) existing in Pythagorean tuning between two enharmonically equivalent notes such as D-flat and C-sharp and this paradox applied to all cultures. The Indians, Babylonians and Greeks all knew about the significance of paradox, or the gap, and worked with it in their philosophy. The gap is in a sense a portal providing a glimpse into the hidden and unseen side of life – the inner octaves of meaning. The gap is also where free will resides because there are umpteen ways of resolving it. But note that there is a function for both modalities: certainty and paradox. A poignant statement was that we learn most from those who have suffered most; furthermore, everything we do is played out in infinity and carries moral implications. With this realisation Paul said that he found it impossible to be dishonest, but more tolerant of other people's vanities and more emotionally sensitive to music.

Paul's unequivocal message born out of the depths of his personal crisis was that inspiration is the search for meaning at its most intense and an unconditional acceptance of uncertainty (the gap, or the comma) is indispensable not just to the creative artist, but to the art of life. He ended with a performance of a movement from a Bach violin sonata which seemed to focus and integrate all that we learned and experienced over the weekend.

The conference theatre was a nice horseshoe-shaped space, highly conducive to animated discussion and contributions from the floor. These included the importance of self-examination and 'letting go', the need to maintain a balance between thoughts and feeling, or head and heart, and that successful brain therapy should have a strong humanistic element. Finally then, harking back to Bernard Carr's introduction, he said that the arts constituted the third pole explicitly connecting science and mysticism – a perspicacious remark since this is precisely what we all experienced in this conference which, for me, eminently fulfilled our Founders' vision of a Network for exploring truth with rigour, but a plurality of approaches (beyond the confines of orthodoxy) and with respect and friendliness for others.

Dr. Edi Bilimoria educated at the universities of London, Sussex and Oxford, Edi Bilimoria is a Consultant Engineer by profession. He is a lifelong student, lecturer and author of the perennial philosophy and also a classical pianist having studied at the Trinity College of Music and thereafter with international concert pianists.





Annual Gathering 2013 Forty Years of Widening Horizons

Chris Johnson

The 25th Annual Gathering (5th to 7th July) took place once again at Horsley Park, Surrey. Horsley Towers, the mansion within the Park, hosted Saturday night's Celebration Dinner. The SMN was not just celebrating 25 years of annual gatherings, but also the fact that the Network had reached its 40th birthday.

As proceedings began on Friday evening, the SMN Chairman **Bernard Carr** reminded us that the gathering had a twofold intention. We would be looking back and contemplating the last 40 years of the SMN's achievements, as well as attempting to assess where the SMN needs to go over the coming decades. The theme therefore, for the main course of presentations on Saturday, was one of *transformation* – how the SMN might pioneer, or at least contribute, to the transforming of contemporary worldviews, the scientific approach, the medical model in relation to well-being, and the discipline of psychology.

The SMN President, **Peter Fenwick**, began the evening's session of recollection. The founding fathers – George Blaker, Sir Kelvin Spencer, Peter Leggett, and Patrick Shackleton – were praised for their courage in forming the Network in the far less liberal-minded scientific climate of 1973. Careers and personal credibility on the line, they began to form and coordinate a group of professionals who were prepared to question the prevailing assumptions and materialistic beliefs of the scientific and medical fraternity.

Paul Filmore, a trustee of the Network, drew our attention to the Network's book, first published in 1999 to recognise its silver jubilee, *Wider Horizons: Explorations in Science and Human Experience*. The book represents the ethos through which the Network operates – with an open-minded approach to new theories and insights; a rigorous attitude to forming and testing your own set of assumptions and beliefs; maintaining respect and empathy for others; and to cultivate humility, honesty, trust, and humour.

Wider Horizons also contains a collection of profoundly interesting articles that are woven into the themed chapters.

Begun in 1975, the educational initiative named "Wider Horizons" – designed to communicate the SMN's ethos to the next generation and foster discussion on subjects often neglected in mainstream education (spiritual practices, consciousness, meditation, for example), had not been run now for some years; and although **Oily Robinson**, senior lecturer in psychology at the University of Greenwich, attempted to revive the initiative more recently by running a similar course, it too is currently in hiatus.

The mood of disappointment generated by this somewhat disheartening outcome to an initiative intending to stimulate young minds and bring awareness of the SMN's endeavours (and thereby perhaps new blood!) was lifted by news of the success of **David Lorimer's** (SMN Programme Director) recent *Inspire-Aspire* enterprise. Here was a well-received (by mainstream schooling – 75,000 children from 10 to 15 years of age took part) educational initiative that rode on the excitement generated by the London Olympic Games. After identifying with an inspiring figure, sporting or otherwise, young people were encouraged to look within themselves to identify their own qualities (rather than simply abilities), so that

they could better articulate and thus have a better chance of achieving their aspirations.

Friday's reminiscences were commendably concluded by the long-standing member **Di Clift** remarking on how the Network had coped admirably over the years with its experiential difficulties. All part of the SMN's growing pains as it developed into its current mature adult form. This reminded me that the manner in which challenges and problematic experiences are overcome is an indication of how well a personality (in this case, the Network's) is balanced – and therefore capable of accommodating the vagaries of our "shifting" collective consciousness as it continues to evolve in these dramatic times. I shared Di's optimism and excitement for the SMN's future.

Saturday was all about the SMN as Transformers – nothing to do with the Japanese/American toy franchise I hasten to add.

John Clarke, a former chair of the SMN board, led off the day with his contribution to the *Transforming Worldviews* sub-theme. As John pointed out, worldviews are a subject under constant review at the SMN. Examination of the SMN's own overall worldview during the beginnings of the current global economic and political crises led to the production of another important tome in the SMN archives – *A New Renaissance*.

We all have our own worldview – our own way of perceiving reality and interacting with it. German philosophers spent a couple of hundred years attempting to formulate a "universal philosophy," or "universal worldview" – all to no avail. Postmodernism represents the death of this search for a definitive "Grand Narrative" worldview. John quipped that although postmodernism is dead, its soul keeps marching on, and the SMN can lead the search for a more egalitarian, humanistic, and spiritually aware worldview for humanity. We can be the worldview makers, the new storytellers on how we should perceive our realities.

Paul Devereux, an "archeologist of consciousness," then regaled us with his recent studies of ancient "sacred places." He gave a fascinating account of how prehistoric man began to form and communicate his worldview – by using "natural" places in the landscape and an ability to "listen" to the Earth. Paul is currently investigating the acoustic properties of sacred sites and discovering how such phenomena, along with other "natural psychedelics," helped in accessing other "layers" of consciousness – thereby facilitating an expanded worldview.

David Lorimer reminded us that the contemporary prevailing worldview of science in the West is in danger of developing an insidious – certainly defensive, more probably paranoid – stance of pure "scientism." Al Gore's book *The Future* summarises the implications of this narrowing worldview. The concern arose about whether the Western worldview would ultimately be "controlled" by global companies as they continue to coalesce their powers.

When these three presenters were asked to summarise their thoughts on the SMN's role in transforming worldviews,

John said that we could create them, Paul that we should expand the SMN's diverse collection of worldviews, and David that the SMN should continue to provide a forum for examination of them. When opened to the floor, a lively discussion ensued with Paul Devereux adding that the SMN should put together a meta-perspective on the ecology of worldviews. Working on the Ken Wilber principle that any particular viewpoint contains some degree of truth, we may be able to fashion not so much a "new" worldview, more an amalgamation of the ecologically sound variants.

The morning continued after a break with the sub-theme *Transforming Science*.

Bernard Carr, a cosmologist at Queen Mary, University of London, opened by informing us that physics involves two aspects – applied, and theoretical. Applied, through technology, affects our physical lives, whereas theoretical affects our minds – perhaps even our souls. He implored that we get away from science's materialistic worldview, and revealed that through Quantum Physics we are beginning to do so. Once taboo terms such as "anthropic," "consciousness" and "spirituality" (which is still pretty much taboo!) are slowly entering into scientific discussion. Better knowledge on what constitutes the "Mind" will provide the key to exploring spirituality.

Peter Fenwick, wearing his neurologist's hat, kept us abreast of recent progress in neuroscience, now not only interested in the electricity of the brain, but also the blood flow. We are it appears getting a little closer to understanding the functioning of neurological structures, but still nowhere near knowing what causes such structures. Furthermore, we are now aware that *culture* affects the structure of the brain – for example, Japanese brains "process" birdsong quite differently to the brains of other cultures. There is still a long way to go in measuring the electrical and chemical energies at play in the brain, let alone the "subtler" energies (such as "Qi" – *chi*) mapped by the Eastern investigative traditions.

Marilyn Monk, Emeritus Professor of Molecular Embryology at University College London, introduced us to the burgeoning discipline of *epigenetics*, via a synopsis of her professional career as a scientist. Her work had her realise that the "programming" of our genes sits on both sides of the "nature versus nurture" debate. Nature provides us with our unique set of genes, but it is environmental factors that trigger which genes are turned on or off. Epigenetic research tells us that how you live your life, and what thoughts you exercise in your imagination, are the fundamental influencers in the creation of your experience. As far as evolution is concerned, we do this "first" through our thoughts and imagination.

Another interesting exchange of views then took place. Just a few of the subjects aired were; the elusive (to technology) whereabouts of the *Chakras* and whether they may be the conduits of consciousness; whether consciousness (as it appears to be a many layered thing) is reflected in the brain; how emotions relate to our physiology; how the heart orchestrates our cells and how ignorant we are of the functions of the heart's neuro-plexus; and whether the "spirit/spiritual realm" has an electrical property.

The conclusion drawn on this sub-theme was that there is a two-way flow of exchange – we transform science as it transforms us.

After a *hearty* lunch, we moved onto *Transforming Medicine*. **Chris Lyons**, leaving accountancy to become a G.P. forty years ago, defended the medical model with illustration of the advancements made in our general state of health, the conquering of, or at least alleviation from, life threatening diseases, and the improvement of life expectancy. His explanation for why we decry the medical profession of late was a twofold one. Firstly, success has led to new expectations – we thus forget the progress made; and secondly, by its objective nature, medicine turns people into objects. It does so in order to operate efficiently, but at the same time, it neglects the highly important subjectivity involved in addressing a human being. People resent this factor.

Andrew Powell, formally a psychiatrist and consultant psychotherapist, told of his progression of interests – from physician to psychotherapy, through psychodrama and spiritual

release, to Past Life Therapy. He remarked on how Western medicine is steered by treating those that can afford it, how research focuses on the part rather than the whole, and how "spiritually informed" treatments for mental illnesses are a rarity. It should come as no surprise then that the causes of hugely debilitating conditions such as Bipolar Disorder and Schizophrenia are still largely unknown.



Professor David Peters, an advocate of complementary medicine at the University of Westminster, declared that biomedicine (treating the person solely as a physical object) was in a crisis made of costs, care, compassion, and commitment. Complementary medicine on the other hand seems to satisfy our 21st Century

aspirations, being concerned with our subjective selves and seeing itself more of a craft than an industry. Complementary medicine is incomplete though, and using Escher's Op Art tessellation image of birds and fishes as a metaphor, David described how medicine was in a similar state of transforming incompleteness, with new forms appearing out of the fusion between our objective and subjective perceptions.

Referring to Escher's image, he asked us to think about where the objective things (the birds and fishes) come from. Where is their "information source," should we not be looking at the sky and the water as the explanatory source? Complementary medicine involves itself with the flow of information from source; it has a "vitalistic" approach, recognising that life is not reducible to molecular biology. Complementary medicine therefore does its best to "carry the intelligence" that comes with the act of physical creation.

David added that the current crisis in medicine requires us to activate our hearts in order to stay in touch with our humanity. Compassion can be a catalyst in this; we owe it to the crisis to see if we cannot teach compassion. Medicine itself needs to come back to the human story, and not separate its science from our spirituality. The crisis tells us that we need to act now, using both science and spirituality for transformation.

After some debate on the difficulties of obtaining funding for research in complementary medicine, the conclusion from this session was that there was no clear path to transforming medicine at the moment – although the pursuit of compassion may facilitate matters.

Following some tea, **Ollie Robinson** introduced the panel for the final sub-theme on Transformation, *Transforming Psychology*.

Beata Bishop, a renowned transpersonal psychologist, took us through the rising number of fields in psychology. Eastern traditions have made their mark recently (for example, the "mindfulness" approach stems from Buddhist practices), despite Carl Jung suggesting we leave them well alone! Psychiatry appears to have fewer clients these days – perhaps due to the recession, or because of the rise in "self-help" books. Mindfulness looks to be a way forward in psychology, bringing a much-needed awareness of the here and now (where we can find our personal point of power).

Considered as being too focused on left-brain activity (thinking processes), Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), popular as an intervention for over a decade with the NHS, does not always live up to its tag line of "This can make you feel better about life." Beata suggested that contemporary psychology had its good and bad points. "Bad" – the "medicalization" of common human psychological problems (grief, for example) where

drugs are used as a chemical cosh; the “superficiality” of certain approaches (such as Positive Psychology) that attempt to resolve emotional instability through addressing thought processes. “Good” – practices such as Mindfulness, that don’t focus solely on the individual, but bring an awareness of our interconnectedness.

Julian Candy, a retired psychiatrist, informed us that psychiatry was once called “medical psychology.” Since the 1960s, psychiatry had in his opinion, stood still. This was largely due to problems with diagnostics and the pharmaceutical industry. Psychiatry now had a recruitment problem, perhaps because of its uneasy position within medicine and the closing of mental hospitals. Clinical psychology (namely CBT) along with a dependence upon pharmaceuticals, are challenging the profession. It was in danger of falling into the explanatory gap between body and mind. As illustration of psychiatry’s dilemma, Julian revealed that as recently as December 2012, twenty-nine authors contributed to an article (*Psychiatry Beyond the Current Paradigm*) in the *Journal of Psychiatry*, in which they propose that psychiatry should in future forge a place away from the biomedical model of therapy.

John Rowan, a humanistic psychologist and author of more than 20 books, told us how much *Humanistic Psychology* was changing in recent times. The new journal *Self and Society* is a recent addition to the *Association for Humanistic Psychology* (ahpb.org) and aims to be at the forefront of the renaissance in psychology. John promoted the use of “dialectical logic” when addressing the human condition. Whereas formal logic concerns itself with the *forms* of thinking – viewing them as static, isolated entities (as happens in CBT) – dialectical logic studies the intent behind our thinking, viewing it as a developmental process. He also championed the emergence of an eco-psychology, which involves examining our relationship to the Earth and how we can use art and other modalities to connect with “Source.”

Olly Robinson, chipped in with a mention of “wilderness therapy” – where children and young people gain therapeutic benefit from spending some quality time out in nature. He also remarked on the futility of therapy that ignores the social aspect. Society clearly needs some therapy too.

This session concluded that psychology was still in its infant stages, with some of its limbs suffering from growing pains!

Saturday evening’s celebration dinner was a culinary delight and the accompanying entertainment was music to our ears – literally.

World-renowned violinist **Paul Robertson** led a magnificent ensemble of some of the SMN’s musically gifted members. Paul, **Edi Bilimoria**, **Andrew Powell** and **John Clarke** treating us to a medley of pieces by Brahms, Chopin, Schumann, and the inimitable J.S. Bach.

Unfortunately, the day’s inordinate amount of sitting left my buttocks in dire need of massage. Remarked upon the next morning – the amount of time sitting, not my buttocks – it was made clear that this was not the norm for an SMN gathering, simply an inevitable consequence of this particular AGM’s format.

Sunday morning was to do with the AGM’s housekeeping agenda. We raked some old chestnuts around the coals – issues regarding membership numbers, whether the very name *Scientific and Medical Network* might hinder new supporters from joining, and how to keep the SMN’s financial head above water. Development of the website and its operational software were highlighted as the key to attracting new members – currently in hand with **Ioannis Syrigos** and **Bernhard Harrer**. The ability for someone to book and pay for membership and events on line is now fully operational. **Chris Lyons** and **Paul Filmore** went over last year’s financial figures for the SMN organisation and the Trust Funds respectively. In a nutshell, the SMN’s operational losses were very nearly covered by grants given over by the Trustees, and the Trust fund very nearly covered its expenditures with a small income from its investments and gains made (on paper) from those investments.

Peter Fenwick rounded off this year’s AGM with the Members Forum, an opportunity to air one’s concerns. We talked of the need to show our “charitable footprint” in education, the recently initiated MSc in Consciousness and Transpersonal Studies being a case in point. Better links and affiliations (and maintaining them) with like-minded groups was required, and a need to think in a “systems manner.” Providing greater awareness of the Blaker Foundation grants now available from the SMN (to assist in establishing educational programmes) was another topic mentioned.

Lunch ended an enjoyable weekend of transformation at Horsley Park. My mental faculties and mind now liberally massaged, I hastened away to do the same with my buttocks.

Chris Johnson has a psychotherapeutic practice, **Counselling for your Self**, is developing educational programmes under a “spiritual science” umbrella with *NewWorldView*, and has recently published his first book, **Know Your Self**, in a trilogy **It’s About You!**





Curating the Conditions for a Thrivable Planet

Julie Rousseau

Julie Rousseau reports on a conference with an inspiring vision for managing sustainability initiatives on a global scale

In July 2013, the International Society for the Systems Sciences held their annual conference in Vietnam. The location was chosen to showcase powerful local initiatives and to use them to kick-start global systems-focussed action towards a sustainable future.



Hai Phong's conversion to systems thinking

The island of Cat Ba, off the coast of northern Vietnam, was declared a UNESCO biosphere reserve in 2004, in recognition of its extraordinarily high biodiversity. It supports many distinct ecosystems and is home to 3,885 species of fauna and flora of which the 55 mammals include one of the world's rarest primates, the golden headed langur. It is also considered one of the most beautiful places in Vietnam, with lush vegetation, steep cliffs and dramatic views of Ha Long Bay, a place famed for its sheer, forest-clad limestone pillars looming out of the still waters of the bay.

The island is 75% of the size of the Isle of Wight, and about half of this is given over to the Cat Ba National Park. The rest supports a population of some 16,000 people who earn a living from agriculture, aquaculture and an expanding tourism industry. However levels of poverty are high and this tempts people illegally to exploit the resources of the reserve and destroy valuable habitat. Over the past few decades, many international organisations have tried to alleviate various problems using aid and other interventions, however most of the issues these projects attempted to address remain.

All this started changing in 2008, when Cat Ba became the subject of a new type of study, conducted by Vietnamese researcher Dr Nam Nguyen with Prof Ockie Bosch at the Business School of the University of Adelaide, Australia. Bosch is a leading advocate of Systems Thinking, a management approach that tries to unravel the complex relationships that drive the behaviour of systems considered holistically. Previous interventions on Cat Ba had tried to fix components of the socio-economic system, neglecting the broader forces that would collectively undermine those fixes or move the problem elsewhere. For example, infrastructure investments intended to encourage tourism and stimulate the local economy had the unintended consequence of reducing the availability of fresh water for agriculture, causing further impoverishment and conflict. Systems Thinking models all the interconnecting parts of a system and how each influences the dynamic behaviour of the whole, aiming to identify leverage points – areas where small changes can have significant positive impact. It explicitly handles situations where the values and goals of different groups conflict, and can highlight unexpected priorities for effective investment.

The governors of Hai Phong, the State in which Cat Ba is situated, were so impressed by the approach Nguyen and Bosch took that they decided to adopt systems methods to determine management priorities for the entire State, including Hai Phong City, the third largest city in Vietnam. In the process, Hai Phong has become a strong showcase and centre of advocacy for systems methods, making it the perfect place to hold the 57th conference of the International Society for the Systems Sciences (ISSS).



Fish farms in Cat Ba bay

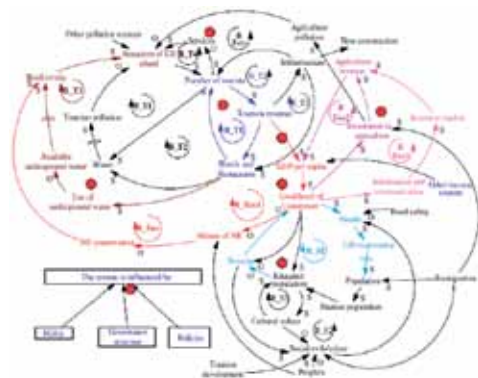


Floating farms near Cat Ba

The conference vision

The ISSS is the oldest organisation devoted to interdisciplinary inquiry into the nature of complex systems, and remains perhaps the most broadly inclusive. Its members include both academics (e.g. in management sciences, engineering, ecology) and professional systems practitioners (e.g. change consultants, business consultants, mediators). Each year's conference theme is set by the incoming president in his inaugural address delivered at the end of the previous years' conference; for 2013 Prof Alexander Laszlo chose the theme "Curating the Conditions for a Thrivable Planet: Systemic Leverage Points for Emerging a Global Eco-Civilization". His vision is to nurture a global working group integrating their efforts via a web-based "Global Evolutionary Learning Laboratory (GELL)", that will share the learning from regional projects such as Cat Ba, extend the concepts and practices of systems thinking and the management of complex societal and ecosystemic issues, and work together on a global approach to curating the conditions for a thrivable planet. Nearly 200 delegates from diverse countries and backgrounds gathered in the impressive Hai Phong conference centre for plenary sessions and five parallel presentation tracks covering a wide range of systems contexts.

Lessons from Cat Ba



Systems model of Cat Ba biosphere reserve (Reproduced from Nguyen and Bosch, 2013, Fig 3 p 108, with permission). Legend: S (same direction), O (opposite direction), R (reinforcing), B (balancing), T (Tourism), Eco (Economic), Env (Environment), S (Social), 1,2,3 refer to loop number, e.g. R_T1 (Reinforcing loop no.1 of Tourism). Double lines through an arrow indicate a time delay.



New rainwater reservoirs on Cat Ba

One conference day was devoted to deep immersion in the Cat Ba case study, including a trip to the island itself, talks in the newly built Cat Ba conference centre, and a tour of the island and surrounding waters. A key element of a systems approach is to identify causal loops that either reinforce or defuse changes. For example, an increase in tourists brings

in revenue that is used to build more hotels and restaurants and attract more tourists – a classic reinforcing loop. Many "quick fix" interventions strengthen reinforcing loops, e.g. by stimulating tourism. Less obvious are the balancing loops, where for example increased tourism brings water shortages and problems with waste disposal that reduce the attractions of the island and drive away tourists. Working with the community, Nguyen & Bosch developed the systems model of the reserve in Figure 3, exposing different types of causal loops, in which dots highlight the key priority areas for systemic intervention. This formed part of a seven-step process known as an Evolutionary Learning Laboratory, which led to the definition of various projects to use these leverage points: on our tour we saw new rainwater reservoirs being built to alleviate the constraints on the fresh water supply, we saw floating fish farms that are now subject to regulations to reduce waste, and heard about ongoing projects for improved waste disposal. We visited the Cat Ba Eco-Lodge, designed as a model for sustainable tourism, and were told about various community partnership initiatives including a Cat Ba environmental certification for products and businesses complying with criteria such as local employment and sustainability. A project is now underway to develop an integrated master plan for the sustainable development of the entire Cat Ba biosphere reserve.



Cat Ba Eco-Lodge

Education through Entertainment

A major factor in the success of this initiative has been the enduring support of the Hai Phong administration, especially the State's Prime Minister, Dr Nguyen Van Thanh, and his deputies. Dr Thanh attended many of the conference sessions, and continues to be deeply engaged in driving the adoption of systems approaches in Hai Phong. One of the first leverage points the administration identified is the supply of people with systems expertise; to this end the Vietnamese government sponsored an international competition for young people playing EcoPolicy, a challenging simulation game that requires players to think systemically. Some 50,000 Vietnamese youngsters took part in the early rounds, leading up to the final playoff between 10 teams from Vietnam and Australia, which was a highlight of the conference. It was hugely encouraging to hear young people talking about how the game has influenced their thinking and their career choices, and to see them actively engaged in the conference sessions.



Eco-Policy game

A World Full of Systems

Other conference sessions reported similar studies aimed at managing other complex systems including the Australian livestock industry, Indonesian beef smallholder farming, and agribusiness in Ghana. Systems approaches to disaster response included a look at the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe and issues around communication during crises. Business focussed sessions included systems perspectives on supply chain management and sustainable manufacturing, with UK contributions from Imperial College London and the University of Cambridge. Technical tracks looked at diverse systems from hybrid electric vehicles to rural satellite telephones in Mexico. Throughout was a focus on social systems and organisations, how to engage communities in managing problem situations, and how differing value systems and levels of empowerment are accommodated when designing interventions. This is an area in which the UK is a world leader, and the University of Hull's Centre for Systems Studies was well represented. Hull systems philosopher and SMN member David Rousseau presented a paper on the philosophical conditions for achieving sustainable outcomes in such interventions. One of the many initiatives launched at the conference was the Collective Intelligence Enhancement Laboratory (cielcolab.com), an online community for further discussion and engagement in follow up activities from the conference – all are welcome to join.

Besides fascinating and inspiring sessions, conference attendees were treated to extraordinary hospitality from our Vietnamese hosts, including Dr Thanh and his Council. They laid on wonderful food and cultural experiences, and a small army of young local volunteers ensured a remarkably seamless operation despite having to move large numbers of people through busy towns for site visits. Hai Phong is



SMN member David Rousseau with ISSS President Alexander Laszlo

a powerful example of the value of systems approaches for holistic management of complex social and environmental systems. With this conference, the ISSS has taken the first steps towards using the story of Cat Ba to inspire more such initiatives in other parts of the world and promoting collective action towards a truly global vision for a sustainable planet on which all living beings can thrive.

References

Nguyen, N. C. and Bosch, O. J. H. (2013), A Systems Thinking Approach to identify Leverage Points for Sustainability: A Case Study in the Cat Ba Biosphere Reserve, Vietnam. *Syst. Res.*, 30: 104–115. doi: 10.1002/sres.2145

Julie Rousseau is a strategy consultant who has used system dynamics modelling and simulation on diverse problems in fisheries management, aeronautics, geo-spatial market research and new business development.



From Spirituality for a World in Crisis to One Spirit Alliance

Marianne Rankin

On June 8th 2013 about a hundred people came together at Kensington Unitarian Church for a gathering to seek a co-creative approach to a new era. Spirituality for a World in Crisis, Working towards a Spiritual Alliance drew together members of a dozen core groups, who had been involved in the planning and they, together with a number of other spiritual organisations were given a platform to explain how they would address the theme of the day.

Janice Dolley, Development Director of the Wrekin Trust and **Marianne Rankin**, Director of Communications for the Alister Hardy Trust and Society for the Study of Spiritual Experience organised and chaired the event. The two speakers were **David Lorimer**, President of the Wrekin Trust; Programme Director of the Scientific and Medical Network; Chief Executive of Character Scotland and Vice-President of the Swedenborg Society and **Dr Greg Barker**, Commissioning Editor, VoiceCouncil Magazine and Visiting Research Fellow, The University of Winchester. Sister Maureen of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University opened and closed the day with meditation.

The groups involved in organizing the event were AHSSE; Anthroposophical Movement; British Teilhard Association; Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University; Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies; EnlightenNext; International Association for Religious Freedom, British Chapter; Scientific and Medical Network; Society for Psychical Research; The Study Society; Wrekin Trust; World Congress of Faiths.

In the afternoon, others such as Spiritual England; Phiroz Mehta Trust; White Eagle Lodge; CANA; Oracle; School of Economic Science, One Spirit Interfaith Foundation and Community of the Holy Fire were also able to speak about their work.

Rarely, if ever, is such a wide range of spiritual organisations brought together and everyone present was aware of a special energy and enjoyed a unique opportunity for connection. The sun shone enough for people to spill outside during the lunch break with plenty of time to meet new people and to catch up with old friends.

The speakers provided a focus for the day. In the morning, David Lorimer gave a very wide-ranging talk *Towards a Culture of Love and Wisdom*, stressing the importance for the future of humanity of harnessing spirituality and love to technological progress. He focused on the essential unity of humanity and the planet, quoting a large number of visionaries such as Huxley, Toynbee, Al Gore, Albert Schweitzer and the Prince of Wales on the need for a new approach. The way forward is clear, expounded by many and now essential for the survival of our world. As expressed by William Ewart Gladstone,

'We look forward to the time when the power to love will replace the love of power. Then will our world know the blessings of peace.'

In the afternoon, Greg Barker recounted his conversations with representatives of the main participating groups prior to the gathering. He had asked them

1. What conviction lies at the heart of your organisation?
2. What challenges are you facing as you look to your future?
3. How can you best meet those challenges?

He stressed the need for spiritual groups to rethink how they operate in order to survive. This is likely to involve engagement in social media. Groups will need to value intangible support by offering something to followers, giving them the chance to get involved before expecting membership. He challenged the organizations to meet young people in particular 'where they are at'.

This suggestion of a radical rethink for the future for the organisations involved in the gathering prompted much lively discussion later in the afternoon. We split up into small groups, each with a note-taker to consider:

1. How can we engage to meet the challenges of a world in crisis?
2. What are the next steps we can take?

A detailed report on the feedback from the groups was collated by Janice Dolley.

Before the end of the meeting Cat Catalyst formed a Facebook group called *Spiritual Regeneration* for people to keep in touch in the future. At the time of writing this has 24 members and has already advertised events by various spiritual groups.

At the end of the afternoon, at the suggestion of Revd Feargus O'Connor, a collection was made for the Red Cross Syria Appeal as a practical spiritual response to a humanitarian crisis. People put their £££s where their hearts and minds were and £343.05p was raised. In a knock-on effect, a member of Feargus' congregation added £500, making a total of £843.05.

Not only did we have an inspiring gathering on June 8th, we also raised funds to help the helpless. This marked a beginning of putting our vision for offering 'Spirituality for a World in Crisis' into action.

A follow-up meeting was held on July 16th at Colet House. The June gathering was deemed a success and the meeting was to discuss how to move forward and to build on the wonderful atmosphere generated. Greater co-operation between groups, sharing on many different levels, particularly locally – from real estate to social media and through mapping was suggested.

Richard Brinton summarized the feedback from the afternoon groups in a paper *Coming together – moving forward*. He stressed the need to avoid spiritual consumerism and suggested that the initial impulse needed to be distilled and deepened through dialogue, nurturing, building community, meditation and giving. Inspired by this event, a conference entitled *Deeper Dimensions in Education* is to be held in Sheffield on March 15th 2014. It will be organized by Anthroposophist

Robert Chamberlain, assisted by Marianne Rankin of the Alister Hardy Trust. They will also work with the Wrekin Trust and perhaps the CFPSS.

Confirmed speakers are Dr Greg Barker, Marianne Rankin and Aonghus Gordon, founder of the Ruskin Mill Colleges of specialist further education and the Field Centre, a higher education institute.

Further information from: Robert Chamberlain robertchamberlain43@outlook.com

A follow-up conference in London will be held on June 28th 2014 at Colet House by kind invitation of The Study Society.

It was then decided to build on the momentum of collaboration and to form a

One Spirit Alliance: Spiritually-minded people and organisations coming together.

A small group will meet in Gloucestershire to plan the next stages, bearing in mind the advice from the discussion groups on June 8th to maintain a loose and flexible approach while providing a focus for the spirit of co-creation that is emerging.

For the more detailed reports of the day by Marianne, Janice and Richard or

for details of how to receive CDs of the talks please contact:

Marianne Rankin mariannerankin@icloud.com

Janice Dolley info@wrekintrust.org

The Empirical Problem

I gaze at length upon a flower

Content to see such beauty clear

But is the flower itself beheld

Or does perception interfere?

And if I tell of what I see

In hope description cites the tale,

What chance the listener will behold?

The telling is of no avail.

And does our selfhood help conceal

Some vital feature rarely shown

Remaining private to the plant

And in our absence never known?

And is it wise to speak of things

If we ourselves don't really know

Though captured by the wonderment

Of plants in blossom as they grow?

Peter Anthony Davis