

SKGR

Self Knowledge Global Responsibility
Two perspectives, one vision



This picture was taken as I flew from one of the northern most communities in the world, Thule. In the midsummer, the land and the people who have made this remote place their home do not sleep. The sun keeps a constant vigil over the melting sea ice and the hunters watch the ocean for signs of that mythically beautiful unicorn creature, the narwhal. Both man and beast's lives are governed by the yearly thawing of the sea-ice. The narwhal must wait for the ice to break up enough for their migration to be possible. Once it begins, the hunters head out on dog sleds to make camp at the cold frontier where the ocean meets the ice floes. Looking out to sea, the hunters watch the water in the distance, listening for the sound of the whale's breath breaking over the surface. They also watch the ice, knowing that if the wind and weather turns, they could end up cast adrift in the Arctic ocean. Man and whale watch the ice, year upon year and wait as the sea-ice patterns become harder to read and life changes in the Arctic circle.



Willow Murton,
BBC assistant producer: *Human Planet*

Image © Willow Murton

Facing the unknown

FEATURES:

- ◆ *Colin Tudge* on why we need to re-think the world from first principles – and start with farming
- ◆ *Pua Hershlag* profiles the visionary banker Felia Salim: Navigating a big bank towards a new era
- ◆ *Rafi Zabor* two musicians
- ◆ The 2010 SKGR Symposium: Voices of change

WELCOME

SINCE ITS CONCEPTION in the spring of 2009, the Self Knowledge and Global Responsibility Project is beginning, at last, to be what it is – if that is not a tautology. We have held two Symposia, the first beginning on the ambivalently auspicious date of 9-9-09. And now this, the SKGR journal: a long time in conception, a long time in the making...

Our remit is wide. Our intention is to go deep. Where connections are being made, explicit or otherwise, between how we understand ourselves and how we act in the world, we hope to highlight them here. Whether a desire for change in the world is discovered to include a need to reflect on one's inner life, or whether a search for contemplative strength is found to be fulfilled in a clear call to action, we hope to give both perspectives space to thrive in this arena.

Self knowledge and global responsibility are two faces of a single vision, an insight of particular relevance in our time and one that we believe is key to human dignity and environmental balance. More than a necessity, it is a source of happiness: potentially fruitful beyond measure.

The ramifications of this vision are genuinely supra-cultural and can be expressed in innumerable ways. We hope to bring some taste of the grand diversity of this creative situation here to these pages.

The first issue is dedicated to one frontier where this vision may be rediscovered: the interface between knowledge and the unknown. We can welcome the darkness and uncertainty of this interface for the rich insights that may emerge from its depths; or we can fear what we may lose by stepping forward into it. The choice is ours.

All our contributors are people of pioneering spirit and I hope the reader will find in the following pages both nourishment and inspiration for their own facing of the unknown in whatever form that takes...

Aaron Cass, editor



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For an online version of this journal and information on the SKGR projects world wide go to: www.skgr.net

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Image © Georgia Cass



Merijn Schepens



Hope is the source of all happiness, hope excites those who are filled with an admiration of virtue to study philosophy and to the idea that by her means they will be able to attain a clear sight of the nature of all existing things and to do things which are in accordance with and consistent with the perfection of those two most excellent modes of life, the contemplative and the practical.



Philo of Alexandria (20 BC – 50 AD)

Navigating a big bank towards a new era

by Pua Hershlag

Felia Salim is an ardent advocate of good governance and a fearless fighter against corruption. Since the economic crisis that shook Indonesia in 1997, she has been active in founding and managing a number of bodies that target this issue: Indonesian Bank Restructuring Agency (IBRA); TIFA Foundation (promoting open society in Indonesia, respecting diversity and honouring the rule of law, justice and equality); Partnership for Governance Reform; Forum for Corporate Governance of Indonesia and the Indonesian Chapter of Transparency International.



Image © Desi Harahap

FELIA SALIM HAS USED a time of crisis to lead one of the biggest banks in Indonesia out of a collapsing corporate economy into a new era of small and medium economy (SME), out of an environment of corruption and into one of good governance. This is a highly complicated, and even dangerous, move in a country that is shifting from an autocratic regime to democracy. Unconventionally, the path along which Felia is navigating her bank passed through remote villages and small huts all over the country. “The system that I apply in my work,” she says, “I have not learnt in a school of economics or from erudite books, but rather from village elders.”

When I first saw Felia I was not aware that she was among the speakers of the Self Knowledge and Global Responsibility Symposium held in September 2009. I saw a diminutive lady with fine Asian features and a warm friendly look. She struck me as a very modest person, nearly shy. Later, when she got onto the podium and started to talk, I was amazed to discover how shallow was my first impression.

Felia Salim’s name is mentioned in the Asean (Association of South East Asian Nations) 100 Index. She is one of the most senior figures in banking and finance in Indonesia. Felia is Vice President Director of the state bank BNI (Bank Negara Indonesia) – one of the biggest banks in Indonesia (and it is important to remember that this country stretches over 17,000 islands and has a population of around 200 million people). Since 2008 she has headed a team that with wisdom and resolution is addressing the old mind-set in the bank and which is changing the face of BNI.

Perhaps at the same time my first impression was quite accurate. It is exactly her unassuming simplicity that constitutes such a central and powerful component of Felia’s story. But a person in her position cannot be just nice and modest. When Felia started to disclose to us the strategy she uses in transforming her bank, she emerged as a very focused person, equipped with clarity as to what she wants to achieve and how she

intends to go about it. The most intriguing feature is that while acting in the tough arena of finance Felia is armed with a unitive perspective and achieves her goals with a soft and flexible power. I wanted to write about this martial art, but to get to the heart of the matter we shall first have to follow Felia’s footsteps and go to the periphery.

From the centre to the fringes and back

Felia’s father was an eminent diplomat and

this is the reason that she was born in Rome, attended kindergarten in Buenos Aires, obtained her Bachelor Degree in Economics and Political Economy in Ottawa, Canada and later proceeded to study Finance and Banking in Cairo. After completing her education she started to work for Citibank in Jakarta and quickly climbed the ladder to reach the position of Vice President. She then left banking and moved to work in a securities firm in Jakarta. These were the 1980s when Indonesia re-ignited its dormant

financial market. There was a lot of excitement as many companies went to the stock exchange; demand was high and money was easy. The fast growth and the intoxicating improvement in conditions of life stemmed from the economic policy prescription known as the Washington Consensus. This is an idea-product of Washington based institutions (the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the US Treasury Dept.). It urged developing countries such as Indonesia to

SOME ECONOMIC / POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Indonesia has a great variety of cultures, ethnic groups and languages, so much so that it is one country only as a concept.

In 1928 the peoples of the three main islands united in response to the colonial status quo and declared the three main aspects by which they were united: one language (Bahassa Indonesia) which is the lingua franca (there are 15 major languages in the archipelago and 150 minor); one country (spread over four time zones) and one nation (united by a common enemy, the Dutch colonialists). In order to give a sense of the geographical spread of Indonesia we could try to imagine a land stretching from the westernmost tip of Europe to the Ural mountains in Russia.

Indonesia declared independence in 1945 and its first president was Sukarno, the leader of the Nationalists. In 1966 General Suharto gained power. His regime was dictatorial and characterised by a strong centralistic government and fast industrialisation. Indonesia is the biggest Muslim country in the world and it has always enjoyed a moderate and tolerant tradition. While it is a secular state according to the constitution it is governed by the belief in one god, without this being determined by any particular religion. However, recently, especially during G.W. Bush’s time in the White House, some elements infiltrated the country with the intention of distancing Indonesia from the west and pushing it towards radical Islam (even though there are no radical Muslims in the

parliament). Since Obama’s election there has been a decline in this trend.

During the 90s Suharto’s bad governance escalated as he enriched himself, his relatives and his cronies. Whilst he had brought prosperity, there had been no social or political development whatsoever. The mismanagement caused ever-increasing unrest among the opposition movements in the country, until in 1997 a big financial crisis shook the markets of South East Asia and decided the matter. The currencies in many countries of the region lost tens of percent of their value and the Indonesian Rupiah was severely hit. The whole financial system collapsed. Following this a great public uproar demanded the end of government corruption and the founding of a democratic regime. Suharto was made to resign in 1998, after 32 years in power. This event marks the beginning of the present era, the “reformation” or democratisation of Indonesia. But Suharto left behind him a problematic heritage. His years of rule left a mark in every area and had consolidated a mind-set that would be very difficult to shake or undo.

After the financial crisis in South East Asia there was a comprehensive awareness of the need for proper management. The entire banking system in the region understood that to finance the corporate sector exclusively was folly and that it was necessary to switch to SME. But, in a bank that was locked into the corporate economy, a wide gulf lay between the

understanding and its actualisation.

BNI – Bank Negara Indonesia (which means ‘the state bank’) has 1150 branches spread across the huge archipelago, some of which are very remote and isolated. BNI was the first national bank, founded in 1946, directly after Indonesia won its independence. This factor has given the bank a strong and proud heritage. Before the crisis of 1997 the bank was leaning on the theory of ‘the trickle-down effect’: the theory that as you build more and more growth, and grow assets, then the wealth trickles down. “But somehow,” says Felia, “this never happened. The bank took money and gave it to the big corporates, thinking that the money will go full circle and trickle down. The system was infected with corruption and of course it never happened.”

Since BNI was the first bank in the state, it didn’t really need to correct mistakes or try hard to market itself: everybody automatically came to this bank. But after the big collapse, the political and the social systems fell and this safe bank was left standing on shaky ground. For ten years it stopped recruiting new workers. The old regimes were still clinging to their interests in the bank and it was in such an environment that another scandal happened in 2003. This caused tremendous financial losses and acute criticism from the media. “It takes years to get rid of a bad name and it is really difficult to gain anew the confidence of the public”, says Felia. At that stage, in 2004, she was called to join the BNI board of directors.



Ultimately there will be no banks, as technology will take over and everything will be virtual. But in the meantime they are here. I thought this crisis could be a golden opportunity to shift gear, something we had been needing to do for a long time



join the free world and open their markets to global competition. The problem was that it was all too abrupt. In these countries the appropriate foundation had not yet been established so that the days of this galloping growth were numbered right from the start.

Those times of wild prosperity and speculative money were Felia's first exposure to greed. She soon could not reconcile this with the values of honesty and integrity with which she had been brought up. At the beginning of the 90s she left a promising career and high salary for a new direction that did not involve finance. She was invited to found Sajeti, an NGO concerned with culture and the environment. The goal of this NGO was to document traditional native wisdom, to interview village elders and learn from insights that had been passed from generation to generation. Felia's father asked her if it would be wise to leave such a good job, but her mother counselled her to follow her conscience. And so it was. Felia started travelling to remote villages in the archipelago. She found herself spending a lot of time in huts, talking to old people, learning from them about sustainability, about human relationship. After two years

she was summoned back to Jakarta and invited to be the director of the Stock Exchange. This was not an easy decision. Felia had enjoyed her journey very much; she had loved meeting with people and encountering different points of view. In her innocence, or in her own words, "in her city arrogance", she had thought, when embarking on this project, that she was coming to help the villagers. She now admits that she got from them much more than they ever got from her. Those things that she had learnt in the villages Felia Salim was very soon going to apply in the toughest of arenas, in the centre of the financial world. With the support and encouragement of the villagers she decided to return to Jakarta.

In 2004 Felia joined the board of directors of BNI. She says that life has been teaching her again and again that a crisis always presents you with new opportunities for learning and maturing. "The banks cannot be eliminated, not yet..." she says. "Ultimately there will be no banks, as technology will take over and everything will be virtual. But in the meantime they are here. I thought this crisis could be a golden opportunity to shift gear, something we had been needing to do for a long time."

In 2008 Felia was appointed Vice President. Now in an influential position she decided it was time to shift gear and introduce an essential change to the bank, from bottom to top. The senior management supported her plan to travel all over the country and get agreement for the proposed change from all the branches, from all the workers, in all the ranks. And so Felia found herself again on the road, this time implementing the wise hints she had acquired years before, on another journey.

Mind-set

The focus of our story is the period in which Felia is heading a special team (130 people) going out to fight a deeply-ingrained mind-set in the bank. The mission they took upon themselves was to transfer the bank from a corporate economy to small and

medium enterprise (small businesses, usually family owned) and later on also to micro-financing, which deals with tiny businesses.

But how does one change consciousness on such a vast scale? How does one overcome tired bureaucracy, a tradition of corruption, a mind-set that had taken root many years before? How do you shift a whole system into a new language? This is a complicated task that cannot be done impatiently or with haste. You need time, even though in senior management time is money.

On the one hand, with the new democracy there was suddenly much more freedom in Indonesia, and in particular freedom of speech. But on the other, the mentality of the workers was fixed, and accustomed to commands issuing down from the top. Indonesian society is conservative and hierarchical, a fact which is reflected in the various languages of the country, many of which have different grammatical forms and usages for each social class. From strong and centralistic, the government had moved to decentralisation, while decision-making had shifted from the centre to the regions. "Which is good," says Felia, "but the nature of man doesn't change overnight. So now we had a new kind of corruption, a decentralised one, which didn't make the job easier!" The people closest to power were replaced by other key players that had exactly the same "bad habits", as Felia carefully phrases it. Now all of a sudden there were thousands of unions popping up. "Also a good thing", she says, "but for a person in a management position this is not at all easy. You find yourself sitting in front of a loud, aggressive group and all it wants is to do away with you, especially when you are a woman. Even the more advanced ones find it difficult to take instructions from a woman." With typical understatement Felia says, "This was a very interesting time!"

In meeting the challenge Felia Salim was helped by spiritual values that seemingly have nothing to do with the business world. Felia, though a very busy person, always finds time for maintaining a spiritual perspective in her

life, doing Yoga and studying Sufi masters with a group of friends. "And the modest lesson I got from the elders in the villages helped a lot in this mission," she says. "I mostly learnt from them to listen and be sensitive, to anticipate the need and the fear in the person opposite me. I learnt to persuade rather than enforce, and above all not to judge." With these refined tools she was about to confront a hermetic structure of entrenched tendencies and deeply rooted corruption.

Simply people

By now it is generally recognised that small-scale economics makes much more sense. Research surveys have shown that the best performing loans are the smaller and micro ones, and not the ones given to the big corporations. It is more rational as a strategy to vary the channels of investments to spread the risk, or, in other words, not to put all the eggs in one basket. When a large corporation with political clout falls down, the whole bank collapses. But Felia knew that in order to bring about a change in structure and even more so, in



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consciousness, her team would have to harness the support of all the branches and their staff of 18,500 workers. "We went out on a campaign of patience," she says. Felia wanted to build a system of risk management and also to improve the bank workers accountability for prolonging loans and credit. And more importantly, she wanted to disperse the dangerous centralism by clarifying the rules of loan making. The issue of corruption was to be tackled by expanding the range of activity of the lower ranking workers and giving them more authority. In the previous system a corporation would have arranged for a loan to be extended in exchange for offering a certain clerk a favour, or in other words, a bribe. It was now necessary to wean the bank from this disease. Though Felia does not make much of it, these changes are still provoking some powerful and dangerous forces within the norm of business in Indonesia. One needs courage to take it on. She implies only that a person has to be very careful when confronting corruption, as the other side retaliates with ferocity. Felia is, however, not shocked by this, "It is a natural human tendency to protect your own interests."

The team zigzagged across the country, travelling from one branch to another. They presented the new direction in numbers and data, but also gave the workers space for expressing doubts and airing grievances. The first target was to build trust, in the banking community, in the new direction that the management was taking. Felia strived to make each worker feel an integral part of the whole movement, to feel relevant to the organisation. The employees needed to see that their own vision was of value. "Because the heart of the matter," she says, "is not the technical change expressed in numbers or ideas – you could pay the best advisor for this and that's it. The most demanding and subtle challenge is in your encounter with people, with what is called the 'human resources, the human capital'. But I have a problem with these terms. It is, after all, simply about people.

"In the villages I learnt to respect and listen to the person in front of me. The previous system was easy for managers: you sent a memo from the top floor and that was that. However, this way you cannot cause such a big organisation to change direction. It is a big ship, a huge tanker. If you want to move it, you have to do it slowly, otherwise the tanker will turn on its side."

Felia claims that she was blessed with an excellent team that shared the vision with her; "Or frankly," she discloses a professional secret, "I was simply more excitable, so I always won the arguments. It helped..." To her colleagues she said, "This is our first year together and nobody will blame us if we lose money. Let's just give time and listen. Let's go across the country, meet people in the branches, let them express themselves."

They met with fear, complaint, feelings of not being appreciated, clinging defensively to the traditions of the bank, in resentment of these new people. "They saw me as an outsider," says Felia.

In order for the changes to be effective in the long run, they had to create an environment of trust. "I learnt a lot about patience. I wanted to jump ahead, but it wouldn't work," says Felia. "We also did all sorts of practical things in the work environment, like putting up a box for grievances, getting a proper allocation of time for maternity leave, addressing gender issues, aspects that have been neglected in the past. We showed that we were adopting a more feminine approach, that we come with a different attitude, a softer one that recognises the natural need in some process before the change ripens. We showed that we cared for the human being." And things started to melt.

After several months of running around they put in writing the new rules, creating an efficient monitoring system against corruption. Writing this document also followed a long process of debate in which, again, the bank workers were included. Felia understood that the declaration should be of a vision that both management and workers

had clarified together so that everybody feels ownership of it. That's why she had not shown the original plan that had been written before the campaign started. That first plan remained in the drawer and what emerged was the common plan that they had all written together. Now the team encountered much less objection and even the unions were able to sit and have a calm conversation with them.

The next phase

This was a different kind of management, one that does not initiate change behind closed doors without getting the green light from the workers to go ahead. After a year and a half of preparing the ground, all the bank people were on board, sailing in the same direction. Only now was the signal given; it was possible at last to invite new recruits into the bank. It was now urgent to teach all the ranks a new language of economy and to modernise quickly in order to compete with foreign banks. Indonesia had adopted a very open and liberal banking system and that had naturally brought about fierce competition. "However, this gave us an extra push, which is good," says Felia.

Now it was also time to change gear in another sense. The management gave the workers key performance indicators to assess the functioning of each worker, of a department and of the bank as a whole, setting financial targets as well as quality ones. Felia felt that they were now in a position to deal more decisively with wrong-doing and address directly any instances of corruption: "You are still making the same mistakes? You are out." "They had a whole year to digest the change", she says. In Indonesia it is generally very difficult to fire people; a person working in a government company is secure for the rest of his life. Employees tend to rely on the unions to put pressure on management and so they don't have to do their best. It would therefore be impossible to survive as a business in the face of the competition, and indeed this prolonged situation had caused the bank to lose its place in the market.

“Was the cut deep enough? Now that things have more or less calmed down, everything there is carrying on like in the past. It seems that they did not learn the lesson and might still waste this crisis

However, Felia's team fired a few people who did not meet the new criteria and, much to their relief, there was no reaction. There was now a generally known and clearly stated standard. The firings were accepted by the bank employees and the unions and were not seen as an arbitrary manoeuvre by the management. The change in mind-set has started to become evident. Felia summarises this achievement with sober moderation: "There is now better monitoring that does not allow bad habits to prosper uninterrupted." Her team encourages workers not to be afraid, but to report cases of receiving bribes, a thing that had never happened before in the history of the bank. More than that, each worker has been invited by the team to sign an integrity pact. Higher ranking employees even signed the document in public. "Somehow this has an effect on people's conduct. But nevertheless," admits Felia, who is not fazed by human nature, "the effect of such a commitment is still very much dependent on having an efficient monitoring system."

As things started to transform, the team also introduced the green issue, another of Felia's passions. Having travelled extensively across Indonesia she had seen the wonderful natural resources. "Unfortunately," she says,

"in the post Suharto era, with decentralisation, there was a massive and fast destruction of our forests. We did not realise that freedom comes with responsibility." As the financial sector had helped to finance this destruction, it needed a change in mind-set in order to move towards a new vision, that of sustainability. Felia says that the traditional indigenous wisdom that she encountered in the villages could teach them about their own lost tradition of resource management. So Felia and her team started by gradually introducing the concept of sustainability, with simple tree-planting ceremonies in all the branches, by looking at the energy bills and then by starting to support geothermal projects.

Another innovation within the same impetus, which is becoming more and more prevalent in the bank's policy, is the promotion of creative industries, the performing arts, writers' festivals etc. It also allocates money for corporate social responsibility (CSR).

A comprehensive change like the one Felia and her team are introducing to the bank is a process that takes years and even decades. Today the whole system is much more reliable. "Of course, it is not perfect," concludes Felia, "but now we have building blocks. I can relax a bit and slow down." When she looks at the conduct of Western bankers after the crisis in 2009 she says, "Was the cut deep enough? Now that things have more or less calmed down, everything there is carrying on like in the past. It seems that they did not learn the lesson and might still waste this crisis."

◆ **Pua Hershlag** is a writer whose works in Hebrew include three biographies and a recently published book of poetry entitled *Buoyancy*.

On first entering the Amazon

by Christopher Ryan

BEYOND THE ROADBRIDGE, down a steep bank at the water's edge lies a long green steel canoe with an outboard motor. Teenage boys are loading petrol cans in the stern. Some Houarani, the local tribespeople, look on, watchers of the isthmus, priestly attendants of this regular ritual, a kind of exchange of prisoners or the arrival and departure of cosmonauts, people entering and leaving worlds. With a certain amount of fussing from all involved, our preparations for waterborne journeying are completed. Then, as helpless and in as newborn perplexity as the baby Moses cast upon the waters of the Nile, our humble ark is pushed away from the bank, and in the midstream the outboard motor erupts into life.

The Tinguino, here a small river, smaller than the Thames at Oxford, is, like every eastflowing trickling rivulet or torrential mountain cascade, a thread of the threads of the Amazon, which enters the Atlantic more than two thousand miles away, where it has become a river with sixty times the volume of the Nile. The Tinguino flows into the Conanaco, which then enters the Curaray, and that joins the Amazon. In the unity of this matter, every drop in becoming the ocean passes many stages and is named by many names. So we pay homage to these local tributaries, as we accept the hospitality of this place, both river and region, collected in the name Amazon, here termed 'el Oriente', the East, indicating its intrinsically unknown nature.

In that moment of departure something is at once lost and something gained. It is leaving the known for the unknown. And nothing but our deepest predisposition

could have prepared us for the moment. The bridge and its chatty little society of Indians and soldiers is silenced by the noise of the outboard. That scene abruptly becomes past tense the instant we round the first bend in the river. We feel a thrill as the air moves strongly against our faces, warm and moist, and full of sweet scents. Beneath us the water becomes a pathway, slow moving and pale-tinted brown, dyed with the silt of the uplands. The trees and plants on either side reach upwards in ambiguous delineation, imaging our route in the unlimited blue, mapping the infinite by our finite journey, a river reflected in the sky.

The Tinguino turns and twists, showing vista upon changing vista, as we penetrate the jungle deeper and deeper. We allow ourselves to be left behind – the selves the world of society has painted upon our souls – and invite instead the self of nature. Here a new penetration. Something in the order of a deep and essential nourishment, and a reawakening of a long forgotten memory, something which every cell of my body now recalls, the original programme, the default setting, and I feel joy. The exhaustion of earlier thin air Andean journeying seems vanquished in this place. I become aware of the jungle now almost as a person, and am filled with an inexplicable sense of what can only be described as 'being' which pervades this place, a being qualified only by a sense of wholeness, of singleness of being, as if the jungle itself was a single entity, a body comprising at once an indivisible unity, and on the other hand, a unity of disparity in the many 'beings' with which it is possessed, as if by faculties. It is a very reciprocal arrangement in which I am not excluded,

unless I were to exclude myself through my own non-acceptance.

And the presence which this total jungle 'being' exudes most evidently, and with such fullness, is generosity. The jungle has become, in an instant as it were, a guardian and dispenser of the being of generosity. Its presence is a well-being which goes beyond quality or qualification in the normal sense, just as the ocean and the sky embody the superlatives which speak of absolutes.

The jungle now appears in my heart as a sacred place. It is inexplicable, but in a few short lengths of river, what had appeared initially as an object to be observed has begun to speak, to converse, revealing instants of its truth, such that I feel completely at home in this unknown. The jungle is a holy place, where holy is a real quality of transformation, between how things appear, and how things really are; where holy is a mirror elevating the seer out of limitations. And the jungle is full of holy beings - not in a pantheistic sense, where the trees and the rocks and the water would represent a variety of supernatural or supernal beings – but in the variety of expression of that singular sacred being of jungle.

These beings now transforming and communicating from the apparent darkness surrounding us are instants of jungle being, announcing 'here am I', here, and here and here, in a joyful, perplexing, riveting, capricious hide and seek between appearance and non-appearance, at once evident, and yet remaining perpetually hidden. Once again we are left with following, following its traces in oneself, beneath this infinite sky, from the mercy of the first rain, until the final meeting in the ocean. Like love, the movement is inexorable. From unknown to unknown, we know it only when it recognises itself in us.

◆ From *Email from Ecuador* by Christopher Ryan

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A night in Jordan

By Narda Azaria Dalgleish

IT IS SATURDAY AFTERNOON, early April 1963, Jerusalem. I suddenly resolve to run away to Tel Aviv. I am inclined to take the nearest route. The fact that a boy from my school attempted the Highway from north Jerusalem last year and was picked up so soon, supports my decision. I choose the railway line from the southeast of the city – the railway, which will come to embody the mystery of my recurrent arrest between extreme contradictions.

With only a few hours of daylight left to make enough progress, I put on a coat, stuff the pockets with pitta bread and an apple, as well as a carefully pulled out and folded centre page of a school atlas, marking the railway line. That's it. No suitcase, not even a small plastic shopping bag for a few essentials. 'I'll show you!' was a protest held pocketed deep down for so long; but now, now I close the door quietly behind me and tiptoe down the steps.

From the edge of our suburb, I walk for the first time down this footpath. If I keep on straight ahead I'm bound to find the railway, then just turn right and keep walking on the tracks. It is beginning to get dark. Jackals start howling nearby – if I run, will they chase me and tear me apart? If I wait, will they leave? I continue, pretending they aren't there, that I'm not shaken with fear. With a heightened sense of focus, I balance myself on each foot, slightly pointed sideways so as not to slip down the hillside. That shining metal is finally in sight, marking my first destination. A heart can change its beat so quickly; this time, from fear to ... is it happiness? ... elated, exhilarated, heading finally towards Tel Aviv. But what is in Tel Aviv? What is it about Tel Aviv?

4 April 2010, Scottish Borders
*Happy Birthday, my boy,
Just a little note to mark the day, 33 years ago, at quarter to four in the morning on the fourth day of the fourth month of 1977, you were delivered by a little old Tel-Avivan nurse. She has just sent your father home and now she's chasing me down this old faded green corridor – "where do you think you are going?" She grabs my arms and turns me back, "I must have a pee," I blurt irritably, shaking off her firm grip. "No, no, no, no, no lady, you don't need a pee," she turns me back again, "unless you want to have your baby down the toilet?" Unanaesthetized on the theatre bed, she lifts my left leg and drops my ankle on her right shoulder, then takes my right foot, places it on her left collarbone and tells me to press against it. I shout, "Anaesthetise me!" I scream.*

"Madam! Do you want to give birth?!" She roars, "Do you?! Then stop shouting and push! Push!" The birds, the birds chirp with such vigour, the day breaks, you cry, I break into an unstoppable laughter, elated with joy, uncontrollable love. Impatient, I want to know you all at once. "Beautiful!" the nurse announces, "Beautiful! Your placenta is perfectly intact! Look here! See?"

I look ahead in wonderment at the majestic Judean Hills, ready to press on towards the unknown when a hitherto dormant question strikes: Is Battir – the Arab village I am soon about to cross – part of Israel, or Jordan? Having travelled this route a few times, I thought it must be like Beit Safafa, where my mother teaches Hebrew. On a wedding day, two years back,

my friend Layla pulled me away from the ceremonial lamb slaughter as I showed clear signs of distress. She took me along a barbed wire fence, then greeted and held hands with a girl on the other side. "Who is she? Is she coming to the wedding?" I asked, "She is my cousin. She can't come to the wedding. She's in Jordan." "What?" I showed distress again. "Oh no, don't worry, don't be afraid!" She explained, "This is one neighbourhood divided by the Mandate – one half in Israel and the other in Jordan, but they're all good people, you know?" She calmed me. Battir must be like that. After all, if that was not the case, what could explain an Israeli train passing through a village in Jordan? Just in case, I walk, or rather, hop on the sleepers between the rails. I have no idea when I'll reach that village. I guess by the time I get there it will be dark and being Saturday evening it is unlikely anyone will be working the plots by the tracks.

I hear the bleating of goats on my left and as soon as I turn I see the silhouette of a man squatting behind a bush. How strange. I'm only twelve years old. Why on earth is he hiding? Just as with the jackals, he's soon out of my hearing and sight. I relax and now walk on the ground on my right – Israel. Then move across and walk on the left side – Jordan? Then back to the middle; is this 'middle' between safety and danger?

Saturday 9 October 2004, I'm checking-in Heathrow's terminal to Tel Aviv without a ticket or a valid passport. No official works in the Israeli Embassy on a Friday, but someone takes pity on me and prearranges for a pass to wait for me at the airport. I still have to explain things to this young Israeli, "My son was blown up by Al Qaeda Thursday night; the funeral is on Monday." Oozing with confidence, I imagine she must have just finished her army service, "Oh, I am so sorry. Was he at the Taba Hilton in Sinai?" I nod, "What is his name?" My hitherto controlled voice mirrors her emotions and begins to crack. "Rotem Moria." "Oh, I know. You mean the guy who went with his best friend to have a pee in the Hotel? Is he your son?" I

nod. My Hebrew, it seems, has also expired. "Say it in English." Her cajoling makes me say more than she asks for. While my suitcase and I are rushed, unchecked, ahead of all the queues, I explain: "I must give a DNA sample to identify all the bits of body which are connected to me, so that the right body parts of the rest of the people can go back to Israel or Egypt. You see, I'm the only one who hasn't given a sample yet." Sympathy ignites my grief so easily. Yet, immersed in a formidable presence of Love, it speaks in me like a continuous broadcasting ... talking me through the terminal formalities, saying, that only it, Love, is real; that it, Love, is the same as all

adoration, beliefs, aspirations, inspirations, however misguided; that it, Love, is the death bed of all polarities, so much so, that it, Love, is the very identity of the murderer, the murdered and me.

Battir with its ancient thick walled stone houses is spread on the rib of the hill on the left. Two farmers approach me. Had I been ten minutes later, I wouldn't have encountered them. Nowhere to run, I walk towards them, a casually innocent air about me, as if I'm on my way to get a bottle of milk from a shop around the corner ... "Assallamu 'alaykum," they smile, nod their heads and stop, blocking my way. "Salaam," I

mirror their gestures. I could understand a bit of colloquial Arabic from home, but speak little. "Where are you going?" They add body language to illustrate the question, reassuring me repeatedly, "Moosh tkhafish". Then they ask why I am walking on my own, where am I from, why am I walking and not taking the train or the bus? Having given up on my vague answers, they consult among themselves saying, "Haram, haram" over and over again to warn of the dangers if I stay the night in the wild. They invite me to come with them and stay the night until dawn, when I'd be better off to continue. I walk with them.

As we climb up this narrow footpath, I lift



Battir

my gaze every now and then; trying to guess which of the houses, dotted amid those curved stone terraces, is theirs. The man walking behind me offers a cigarette. I decline shaking my head. “La’, la’, ‘aqla, ‘aqla,” he says to the man leading the way. Does this make me a good girl in his eyes? Throughout this climb to the house, further up on the other side of the hill, there is not a soul in sight. They bring me into a large room built on top of their flat roof and leave, promising to bring me some water.

The door is unlocked. King Hussein, Faisal and Abdul-Nasser stare at me from the opposite wall, the only pictures in the room. No one in sight, I could sneak out and run. To the left, mattresses are stacked almost to the ceiling. On the other side stands an old cupboard with a radio. A patchwork of carpets covering the floor, a table with three chairs by the door and layers of men’s jackets hiding the hooks on the wall complete the contents of the room. No sign of the men. I open the door and step out hesitantly, not a human sound. Shall I just leave? I go back, sit down and stare back at the images of the famous Arab leaders. I remember that visit to Layla’s house in Beit Safafa. “Why not have pictures of King Hussein and Gamal Abdul Nasser?” She contended. She appeased my worries then, but now ... where are they? Why does it take so long to bring water? I can still get away ...

My host enters, hands me a glass of water. An old woman wearing a long black embroidered dress follows. She drowns me in her arms: “Do you want to eat this, or that, or that?” Not a question asked about the strange circumstances of my unexpected appearance. Oh how I love this woman. One by one men keep coming in. Two mattresses are placed on the floor by the radio and we all sit down. An English teacher talks to me and I struggle, I say little, I have little to say. I write down a note in English and hand it to him “Please don’t tell anyone you saw me.” The woman is back with a very large round brass tray filled with dishes of food. I eat little. The Mukhtar’s countenance is

different. The others ask me about Jerusalem, its market and such like. He whispers something and the teacher nods: “Do you want to stay here with us?” I don’t answer. He observes me carefully throughout the night. “Do you want a Shabria?” They show me a little knife and decide against it lest it gets me in trouble. The man beside me puts some Swiss gold wrapped chocolates in my pocket and takes the pittas out. Oh! What if he does that again and finds the map? Will they think me a spy? I take it out and lay it open on the carpet. Sigh. We compare maps, pitta bread and radio broadcasts. Soon, mattresses are spread over the whole floor. I get the one on the corner, between the watchful eye of the Arab leaders above and the old woman who lays beside me.

I sit on my mattress, place the chocolates on the floor, remove my shoes and slide in quickly, fully dressed; they must be all waiting before they can get undressed, I must not look. The sounds finally settle. I dare move now, I turn and toss, can’t sleep myself off guard. A boy further down the rows practices his English in an endless monotonous whisper; a backdrop to a recapitulating whirlwind of the day’s walk, the people, my confusion ... Why can’t I just let myself off guard? Am I in Jordan? Will they turn me in tomorrow? Why on earth can’t I see the borders? The stiff pillows are too high for my head, shall I remove one or will that insult my hosts? The boy is still memorising audibly. A wave of sadness cocoons me under the blanket. I barely suffocate a crying burst – why can’t I be like him? Why can’t I be normal, like any other student? The Headmaster’s words to my mother yesterday hammer in: “Your daughter is disturbed! I have cautioned her four times this year but she has no willpower over her disruptive behaviour! She’d better ask herself if she prefers to leave school and be a work apprentice, but if she stays she must get help with her homework and see a psychiatrist!” Shall I accept their invitation and stay here? Oh, how many times have I longed to-die-into a

new life – is it here, in Battir?

I couldn’t have had much sleep when one of the older men shakes my foot. He motions for me to get up and follow him. Before we leave he picks up a man’s jacket to cover my head. “Khamsa,” he shows me his open hand, five in the morning, still dark. Judean chill. A train whistle rips the foggy silence followed by its muffled out-of-sync-wheel-rail-clack. From high above, I can now see the roofs of the train’s vertebrated cars meandering its way as if it were a toy. Will he let me go? Down on the tracks he escorts me as far as his vegetable plot. My heart is brimming with such profound gratitude for their hospitality. He insists I should keep the jacket over my head and asks for the last time before we say our goodbyes: “You are no stay here?” One day I must come to thank them in person, I vow to my heart as I walk away.

I want you to know, my boy, that ever since your return, I am in-learning; in-learning how to speak to Love through Love when I speak ... how to peace the parts I call myself, the parts called the world, and how to see them already peaced-upon in the unknown.

◆ **Narda Azaria Dagleish** is a designer and writer who began her first volume of poetry “*I Israel, Ask: A Spritual Response to Love and Death*” after the death of her son, Rotem Moria, in the Al Qaeda bombing of the Hilton Hotel in Saba, Sinai in 2004. She is also an active voluntary editor on the sustainability network, WiserEarth.org

Reflections on facing the unknown

The following specially commissioned short articles were all written by education professionals in response to the question: “What does it mean to face the unknown in the contemporary educational context?” We hope that pieces on education will be a regular feature in this journal and we would be interested in submissions for future publication from students and educators working at every level.



On the importance of not knowing

By Ian Ricketts

*“... I wot not by what power,
But by some power it is”*

A Midsummer Night's Dream

EVEN DEMETRIUS, privileged, arrogant and versed as he supposes in courtly graces, admits, in his moment of illumination, that he does not know. And this is true for each of us, not less but increasingly as life proceeds. And there is comfort in it, for it characterises the wisest: Socrates and Christ put questions to those who listen, because only when tried against experience does man know anything at all and only when he has accepted responsibility for this can his life be truly meaningful.

Speak with a polymath of today's world, like Jonathan Miller, and all his scholarship and understanding is brought to the acuity of his attention, to his not knowing. The temptation for most of us is preparation of a reply, battalions of knowledge that will protect us from the charge of ignorance. We gather facts and strategies to marshal a defence or support a technology. This may happen for reasons of good intent, not only laziness, vanity, ignorance or fear. Somewhere usually, though, fear is at the root of it: fear of being at a loss, fear of forgetting, fear of losing face, fear of another's claim.

Reflect a moment on what happens when the result does not matter, when the subject is central and not ourselves, when ideas are carried alive into the heart by passion and whole bodies of knowledge arise in the memory unbidden. We had not on first encounter consciously recorded these, but they were remembered freely because they were freely heard. The event belonged to life – relish and curiosity and enlargement, the very factors that hold us to life itself. Consider the joy of food and of those we

love: our knowledge and experience of them, their rightness and wonder, give us constant surprise. Knowledge in its deepest sense is the trust we repose in what is forever fresh, forever now. Now cannot be if we think we know in advance. Now depends upon vigilant, generous, unselfsparing, not knowing.

Is the child magnetic to us because of his ignorance or his innocence? Surely it is because of his entire openness to the instant, his fearless unknowing. A child in the man, like William Blake, cannot be forgotten. The most erudite and unillusioned and searching, like Eliot, are clear and each of us, ultimately, must answer to this. There is no hiding place in knowing, no discovery; in not knowing all things are possible:

*We must be still and still moving
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communion
Through the dark cold and the empty
desolation,*

*The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast
waters*

*Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end
is my beginning*

TS ELIOT – EAST COKER: 4.vi.10

◆ **Ian Ricketts** is Senior Acting Tutor at GSA Conservatoire and a working actor himself. His classes at GSA are well known for being about the education of the whole person as much as they are about acting technique.

ELSEWHERE IT MAY BE an asset to know what you are doing – in art it is not. I suppose this is a form of facing the unknown. Which according to dictionary means “turning towards what is not within the range of one's experience or understanding”. This immediately seems an impossibility: if something is beyond understanding, how can I identify the direction to turn to? Maybe by negation. I.e. if it is understood and experienced already, then obviously it is not the right direction of facing? And so I keep turning, rejecting the known, and welcoming the so far unknown, which in turn becomes the known and needs to be rejected again... Otherwise the outcome is doomed to be stale and dead already. This approach needs honest discrimination, and above all fearlessness. In fact, fear is the signpost, the guide leading out of the comfort zone, out of the old and habitual. I like to think of this as standing at an edge, where authorship is irrelevant, where anything can arise, and the unfolding is merely witnessed. Being still and simply watching what comes to the surface of the mind. Where nothing happens, but somehow possibility tips into actuality.

◆ **Evelyn Morrison** is a contemporary artist living and working in Edinburgh. <http://evelynmorrison.co.uk>

Learning not to ‘know’ in counsellor education

By Dot Clark

I AM WRITING these words in black ball-point pen on thick paper covered in small squares. I'm not sticking to the lines and I'm writing fast to keep up with what my head is saying inside. I'm wondering where the process, which produced three pages of scribbled notes a few days ago, will take me as I start to write a first draft. I imagine that, if this has got to the stage of being read, it will be in typeface and in a format that signifies something more formal and ‘knowing’ than its beginning in uncertainty. Text carries the appearance of authority, so it could indicate that I know something and am about to tell you what that is. Yet look at the theme. How can we both, as writer and reader, keep open to the learning happening between us right now, the mutual discovery of meaning as I write and you read? Can we keep remembering that we are facing the unknown together, in this moment? I'll go forward, glancing at my scattered notes on this theme. And you, dear reader, what's your starting point? I guess you have some interest in the question: what are you bringing to our conversation?

What is uppermost for me as I contemplate facing the unknown in education is my experience of training person-centred counsellors in a university setting. The dominant cultural assumption about education is that it concerns knowing; content, authority, the ‘canon’. The heart of the matter in counsellor training is supporting the development of people who don't need to ‘know’, who aren't experts, who can be patient and wait for what needs to emerge, who can be immediate in their presence and in their reflection of the other,

moment to moment, who can welcome the other and trust the other.

How can we learn to tolerate uncertainty? How can we challenge the impulse to ‘help’ someone – as if we knew how to – while valuing the momentum it offers in carrying us each to the other? How can we meet the beginner's anxious ‘need to know’ with writings and ideas and the accumulated experience of others, without the resultant ‘knowing’ being grasped too tightly? How can we welcome and encourage the process of self reflection with lack of defensiveness?

My own best learning as a counsellor was from experiencing again and again the healing impact on another of ‘simply’ listening; witnessing, attending, accepting. I came to realise that that is enough, and also no small thing. However, in the first place I needed a theoretical base to get me into the encounter in a solid enough way for the experience to unfold. Real learning happens as the thinking, the practice and the personal reflection become integrated deep inside. And such a cycle of learning keeps turning. For counselling practitioners, the context of supervision is always there to reflect on the ever shifting process of relating to another.

And how is such learning best supported by trainer or supervisor? By tolerating uncertainty, resisting being ‘helpful’, holding ‘knowing’ lightly, being open, vulnerable, non-defensive and willing to reflect on experience as it unfolds. What this amounts to is trusting the process; my own process, the process between us and the process of the other. This is not about knowing ‘content’. It means holding the authority of

being teacher or supervisor lightly while keeping it in awareness. And how is such learning best assessed? By the learners themselves.

There's circularity in this writing which takes me back to the start. As I write, it sounds like I know what I'm talking about. But I don't know what this looks like in practice until it happens. I can only end with a question to each reader. Where did your deepest learning come from? What supported it? What whetted your appetite for the journey of discovery that led you to trust the space that longs to be informed; that gives you relish for ‘facing the unknown’?

◆ **Dot Clark** has taught economics and banking and is a qualified person-centred counsellor. She is currently Tutor in Postgraduate Certificate in Counselling Studies at Edinburgh University.

Facing the unknown

By Peter Young

IN THE FACE OF an increasingly uncertain global future it seems both relevant and urgent to re-evaluate our relationship to knowledge and to re-frame our attitude to the unknown.

Our real place as human beings is between knowing and not-knowing, just as our present moment of awareness is between the known past and the unknown future. We combine then between the known and the unknown in our being. Yet today we are educated and encouraged to occupy exclusively the area of the known. Our not-knowing has become either shameful or to be conquered. It is a sign of weakness to say that I don't know, and surely it is only a matter of time before all is known, about life, the universe and everything?

But in traditional cultures such an attitude to the unknown is considered overweening hubris. "Know yourself" for the ancient Greeks meant, "know that you are not a god". Arrogance in the face of the unknown is ignorance of our own reality. A change in our understanding is required, so that we realise ourselves to be neither exclusively in the realm of the known, nor in the unknown, but in between the two. Standing here in our being we can begin to cultivate the unknown as a friend.

Such cultivation is through direct contemplative engagement with our own reality, whereby we learn directly from our own source. Through this engagement we can perceive that knowing is not severed from the unknown: it is actually the relationship of the unknown with itself. Knowledge then is an expression of the

unknown in form: it is the unknown emerging into view.

Penetrating deeper, two unknowns emerge distinctly.

One kind of unknown is unknown to me, yet knowable in principle. While I may know very little about a subject I may yet learn about it and then I will know more. I do not know what is going to happen next week, but next week I will find out. Both are in the same general category of the unknown to me due to certain factors but nonetheless knowable in principle. We could usefully shorten this to the relative unknown. It is relative because it is defined by the knowledge of the known, to which it is in relation.

When, however, I realise that I have no knowledge of what the future holds in store I might perhaps use my imagination to reach into it and imagine what is going to happen. I then become prey to what I have imagined. But I can learn to refrain from this natural tendency, perhaps through the understanding and trust that while I do not know what will take place, nonetheless it is known. It is known to itself in the unknown. I also need to bear in mind that the unknown cannot itself be an object of fear. Fear is from my imagination. Rather the unknown revealing itself as knowledge is that which dispels fear.

Here then is the unknown in another sense. This sense touches on the metaphysical place of knowledge, much contemplated by philosophers and intuited by lovers, poets and mystics. This unknown is the mystery underlying all existence which though constantly revealing itself yet remains

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Faced today with the unknowns of global change and uncertainty about our future, the learning of a manner of facing the unknown would appear to be crucial.

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essentially unknown. Referring to this unknown the 9th Century Persian saint and lover, Bayazid Bastami, said, "I drank glass after glass of love, but my throat raged with thirst and was not satisfied."

This unknown is not defined as unknown by what we know of it, but it retains its place, logically and essentially prior to knowledge; it takes on form by revealing itself, not once only but constantly, and forever in a new form. We could name it the Absolute Unknown. This unknown is the source of knowledge, and, being a source and not a quantity, it cannot become exhausted or dried up.

Facing this unknown is not the same as facing the relative unknown, because in the latter I am yet seeking a knowable knowledge, temporarily unknown to me, which is a situation that I hope to rectify. Facing the Absolute Unknown is not like this, as any knowledge that comes from this unknown deepens its mystery and increases the desire for more, without there being any hope of total comprehension.

How then may these two unknowns be related? What connection can we find between the knowable, relative unknown and the ultimately unknowable, Absolute Unknown?

Is it that in facing the relative unknown we will be limited by the knowledge that we are seeking, and only recognise the reality

when it appears in the form that we were looking for? If I am searching for something definite I will recognise reality when it shows itself in that form. If however I am facing the Absolute Unknown I will recognise all the different forms of knowledge that arise from it, as they appear, in whatever relative field.

If so there can be no ultimate distinction between the two unknowns, nor in the facing towards either. Both their distinction and their connection lie in the aim and attitude of the not-knowing questioner. If I want to know this, this is what I will work for until I achieve it. If however I want to know from the Unknown, I will do my utmost to be receptive, awake and listening, and to give up my particular desire to know something definite in favour of what It wants to reveal of Itself.

The known that we know is then a bit like the beak of an unknown dolphin playfully revealing itself from the depths. Many name this 'God'. Others refer to it as life, or being. Yet others as the secret reality of everything, unknown and hidden, now revealing itself as intelligible, tangible, visible, perhaps as a scent, as if beckoning from behind a curtain. As such the Unknown loves, even longs to be known.

Faced today with the unknowns of global change and uncertainty about our future, the learning of a manner of facing the unknown would appear to be crucial. Implied in our agreeing to a not-knowing stance is a return to that essential human condition and birthright, the quality of humility. Far from incapacitating us, humility confers freedom to act in the world even while accepting in our hearts an unknown future.

Whereas, without humility in the face of the unknown what sustainable future could we human beings possibly have?

◆ **Peter Young** is an educational consultant and Principal of the Beshara School at The Chisholme Institute.

Jonathan Hyams is an award winning freelance photographer specialising in images of the resilience and dignity of the human being as witnessed in the faces of marginalised people from around the world. He was a keynote speaker in the Self Knowledge and Global Responsibility Symposium 2010 – **Facing the unknown**. The following three spreads illustrate his extraordinary pictures and the stories that lie behind them...

The stranded nomads of Karamoja

By Jonathan Hyams

THE NORTHEASTERN PLAINS of Uganda are home to the stranded nomads of Karamoja. Semi-pastoralist herders, whose wealth, livelihoods and status are determined by the cattle they own, they were forced to adopt clothing by Idi Amin, who outlawed nudity in the country. Since then, the Karamojong have developed a style of dress characterised by the 'Suka', a colourful drape, and an eccentric collection of hats and jewellery, which result in striking images of a proud and distinctive people.

With a formidable reputation as fierce warriors, the Karamojong are caught in a cycle of armed cattle raids between neighbouring tribes, often trading their livestock for guns and, despite a campaign of forced disarmament by the Ugandan government, they live under the constant threat of violence.

Shunned by the rest of the country and confined to barren, marginal lands, the Karamojong's struggle for survival has recently encountered a new adversary: the region they inhabit is undergoing cataclysmic climate change. Persistent droughts are destroying crops, causing severe food shortages, and causing outbreaks of disease in the cattle so essential to the Karamoja way of life.

These portraits are a testament both to the challenges the Karamojong face, and to their incredible resilience. From the time I spent with the Karamojong, it became apparent to me that the changes imposed upon them and the ways in which they are coping with them, are symbolic of the challenges faced by people all over the world.



Sanlaap, Nerandrapur

MEENAL, 17, is a resident of Sanlaap's shelter home in Nerandrapur where she attends Dance Movement Therapy classes.

In a country of numerous under-classes, women are the social group that singularly suffers the most in India. An insidious combination of patriarchy, feudalism, ethnic discrimination and poverty exacerbate women's marginalisation here as elsewhere, making many powerless to combat the expressions of their subordinate status: feticide, domestic violence, child marriage and unequal access to education. One of the most disturbing manifestations of this deep-seated gender bias has been an increase in the trafficking of young girls for the sex trade.

Sanlaap has worked to combat human trafficking and prevent second generation prostitution in India since its inception in 1987.

Waiting for Peace

AN ACHOLI BOY rests on a tree stump in Acet Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp, Gulu district, Northern Uganda.

For over twenty years, war has devastated northern Uganda. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel force led by Joseph Kony, professes to fight a spiritual war for the Acholi people against the government of Uganda and its military, the Ugandan People's Defense Forces (UPDF). However, the LRA has been responsible for countless atrocities committed against its own community. 1.7 million people, victims of a war driven by fear, have been displaced from their homes and forced into temporary camps to live in severe poverty.

Why we need to re-think the world from first principles – and start with farming...

An invitation to become involved in a 21st century Renaissance

By Colin Tudge

RIGHT AT THE HEART of all human affairs sits agriculture. Indeed if it didn't, about 99 per cent of us would not be here: as hunter-gatherers, we'd be just another species (albeit, probably, a pretty conspicuous one). Agriculture affects everything else, and is affected by everything else. If we get it right, then all the other things we might aspire to – world peace, justice for all, personal fulfilment, the conservation of other species and of the fabric of the world as a whole – would begin to be become possible. We and our fellow creatures could still be looking forward to a long and glorious future. Given a bit of luck (not too many volcanoes and an absolute absence of asteroids) we could and should be seriously contemplating our next million years.

But if we get agriculture wrong then everything else we might aspire to do is bound to be compromised. And we are getting it horribly wrong. So wrong that a billion people – about one in seven of all the people on Earth – are now chronically undernourished while another billion or so suffer the many, often ghastly, diseases of excess. Farming is still the world's biggest single employer but many farmers everywhere are in desperate straits. Suicide is now commonplace among farmers in rich countries as well as in poor, and a billion people are now living in urban slums, which grow by the hour as people are driven from the land. Meanwhile the forests are laid waste, soil erodes, aquifers and rivers are drained, the oceans are polluted and – the

coup de grace – the world is heating up, returning perhaps to the tropical, global floods of the Eocene. Modern-day agriculture is not the sole cause of all this, but it's probably the one that matters most.

Yet it should in principle be easy to feed all the world's people, well and forever. The superpower governments, banks, and corporates who run the world, together with their intellectual and expert advisers, warn us with much wringing of hands that the world population will rise to nine billions by 2050 and that with ever-increasing "demand" – they mean burgers and fried chicken to replace traditional cooking – we will need to increase food output by at least 50 per cent over the next few decades. Besides, they tell us, humanity is also "demanding" more biofuel to keep their offices warm and run their SUVs – and this, apparently, can be achieved only by growing more maize, wheat sugar cane and exotics of many kinds on every spare scrap of land, to turn into "biofuel". All this, they assure us, can be achieved only with more of the industrial agriculture we have already: more

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...if we get agriculture wrong then everything else we might aspire to do is bound to be compromised

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fertiliser and more pesticide, abetted these days by super-high-tech biotech, meaning GMOs – crops and livestock tailored to requirements by genetic engineering.

Yet we already produce enough food to feed present numbers – and with better distribution and a return to traditional cuisines, we already produce almost enough for the coming nine billion. The statistics are clear, the arithmetic is easy. The same United Nations demographers, who tell us that the population will reach nine billions, also tell us that numbers are levelling out. So the population should never exceed nine billion and within a few decades, numbers should start to go down again; not because of famines and war (which reduce population only temporarily, and of course by unacceptable means) but because if people feel secure, and women have some status in life besides being mothers of vast families, and contraception is available, they invariably choose to have fewer children. Global population is still rising but the percentage rate of increase has been going down these past few decades for precisely this reason. By 2050, if the present trend continues, the percentage rate of increase will have fallen to zero – another way of saying that numbers will stabilise.

In fact, all we really need to feed everybody well, and forever, without destroying the rest, is to design agriculture expressly for that purpose. I call this "Enlightened Agriculture" – defined quite simply as "farming that is expressly designed to feed people to the highest standards of nutrition and gastronomy without wrecking the rest of the world". This is eminently possible. We merely need to put our weight behind the best traditional agriculture: agriculture that has been evolving, with help from generations of peasant geniuses, for the past 10,000 years at least (and probably for well over 30,000). Science has a crucial role to play of course, not to replace traditional practice with the methods of industry, but to abet traditional practice. "Science-assisted craft" is what we need.

Enlightened Agriculture also needs a sympathetic economic framework. Of course it does. None of us can do anything if the economy is against us. The economy is what makes human action possible, or impossible. The present economy – the neoliberal, allegedly free but actually corporate-controlled global market – makes Enlightened Agriculture very difficult indeed. It is geared to industrialisation and it requires industrialisation.

For all kinds of reasons, as we will shortly see, Enlightened Agriculture must be labour-intensive: lots of farmers, with their families, and they will need places to live. So we need to re-construct the countryside as a place to live and work (as well as to support wild creatures). Vast estates owned by a few privileged families, billionaires, and finance companies just will not do. We need, in short, to re-construct the agrarian infrastructure. We also need appropriate marketing, for we cannot hope to feed the world well if farmers are obliged, as now, simply to sell their produce at knock-down prices to supermarkets, in cut-throat competition with other farmers worldwide who are trying to do the same. In short, we need to think agrarian: not to re-create the agrarian ways of life of past ages but to create "the New Agrarianism".

Finally, for all this to happen, we need to re-instate food culture, with all possible energy. A whole generation of urban people – in fact we are now into the third generation – have forgotten what food really is, and what it can be. Food, for many, has become pizzas and crisps and burgers and, in the US, whatever can be made out of corn-syrup. This de-culturalisation has been deliberate, and systematic. Elected

governments went along with this; indeed they encouraged it to happen in the name of "progress". In northern Italy, even now, it would be easy to restore Enlightened Agriculture – indeed it's still there – because people at large love good food and appreciate good farming when they see it. In urbanised Britain and the US, and increasingly worldwide, this appreciation has been lost. Indeed it has been actively dismantled. Northern Italy has given birth to the Slow Food Movement. Britain and the US need it far more – but here it has far less influence. People don't seem to see what it's about.

So yes, it would be technically easy to feed everyone well and forever. We have the craft that's needed to do it and although there is much to be researched, we also have enough good science already to help things along, provided the science is used to assist the craft. But we don't have the economic structure or the physical infrastructure or the food culture that would allow good farming to flourish, or to support the right kind of scientific research. Worse, the powers-that-be – big governments, corporates, banks, and those scientists and economists and bureaucrats whom they choose to listen to – are wholly committed



Image © Georgia Cass

to the status quo. They are convinced that hyper-industrial, high-tech agriculture works, despite the evidence; and they actively resist all attempts to replace the status quo with methods and systems that are actually intended to do the job that agriculture ought to do.

To analyse all the reasoning behind all these comments takes a great many words. In fact I am finding that it takes a lifetime. But here is the briefest possible summary of the main points:

The logic of Enlightened Agriculture

In the end, for all our pretensions, we are a biological species living in a biological world. Agriculture of course is an artifice; but if we want it to sustain us long term then we would be well advised to design it along biological lines, in accord with the physical realities of the real Universe. We need our farming to be productive (enough to feed nine billion people); sustainable (able to go on feeding people – which implies that we cannot afford to wreck the world as a whole); and resilient (able to change direction as conditions change, as they surely will). We need a model – to ask what kind of system can be productive, sustainable, and resilient? The model is provided by nature itself, for nature has been productive, albeit with fluctuations, for the past 3.8 billion years, even though conditions have changed spectacularly through that time, from (almost) pole-to-pole tropical to (almost) pole-to-pole ice.

So how does nature do what it does? Answer: by being maximally diverse (there's an estimated 8 million different species now living worldwide, though the number of bacteria could be many times this); by integration (each species in the end has a symbiotic relationship with all others); and by obsessive re-cycling of whatever can be recycled (nitrogen, water, carbon, phosphorus), with no unsustainable input of non-renewables.

So what is the agricultural equivalent of biodiversity and minimum input? The answer

is to be poly-cultural, which means “mixed”; integrated (different crops and livestock playing off each other); and, as far as practical, organic – because the essence of organic farming is its conservatism: using only those inputs that can be renewed and restored. Such farming is inevitably highly complex, which means intricate, which means it needs constant hands-on attention, which means it must be labour-intensive. With complex, labour-intensive systems there are no advantages in scale-up (beyond a rather low threshold) so the individual farms remain small. Thus we need to base our agriculture worldwide on small, mixed, labour-intensive, mainly organic farms -- not as a matter of ideology, or of gratuitous nostalgia, as the pro-industrialists like to suggest, but for reasons of good, simple, basic biology: real science. So here is another irony. The pro-industrialists claim to speak in the name of science but in truth they ignore (or are indeed ignorant of) the science that is truly appropriate.

We can elaborate slightly. As Sir Kenneth Mellanby pointed out in the early 1970s in *Can Britain Feed Itself?* the way to produce the maximum amount of good edible food from a given area of land is to focus on plants and fit the animals in where they can. So we should focus on arable (field-scale crops such as cereals) and horticulture (garden-scale crops); feed pigs and poultry on surpluses and leftovers, and banish sheep and cattle to the hills, marshes, and semi-deserts, and all of them on occasion to the woods. In truth, we do not need to be vegetarians. It is horribly profligate to seek to maximise livestock, which is what the industrialists do. But if livestock is used simply to fill in the gaps between the crops and sweep up the leftovers, as is traditionally the case, then they always add to the overall output and to efficiency.

If we farm along these lines – the farms essentially designed as mini-ecosystems – then we produce a great many plants and not much meat; and since the farms are maximally diverse and we can also forage herbs and fungi and whatever else grows

“...we do not need to tighten our belts, we merely need to take food seriously – to reinstate “food culture”

from the surrounding countryside, the food supply is maximally diverse. So we have “plenty of plants, not much meat, and maximum variety”; and these nine words – “plenty of plants, not much meat, and maximum variety” – summarise all the best nutritional theory of the past 35 years (although in practice this theory occupies entire libraries). “Plenty of plants, not much meat, and maximum variety” also encapsulates the basic recipe of all the myriads of dishes in all the world's greatest traditional cuisines – Provencale, Italian, Lebanese, Turkish, Persian, Indian, Chinese. All are based on cereals, nuts and pulses (the staples) plus a plethora of fruits and other vegetables (whatever the garden and the surroundings produce) with meat used sparingly, as garnish or stock or for occasional feasts.

So there is perfect correspondence between farming that is designed to be productive, sustainable, and resilient; the best possible nutrition (as described by the world's leading nutritionists); and the greatest cooking (as evolved in situ by thousands of local cultures in millions of kitchens over hundreds or years). In short, we do not need to tighten our belts. We merely need to take food seriously – to reinstate “food culture”. In truth, “The future belongs to the gourmet”.

In principle, then, the task of feeding everybody well (without wrecking the rest) ought to be straightforward. Which raises an obvious question:

If it is so easy to feed everybody well, why are we making such a mess of it?

The point of modern, industrial agriculture is not to feed people well and to look after the world as a whole. That had been the point in the decades after World War II. But in the 1970s we first heard the slogan that has dominated world thinking ever since: “Agriculture is just a business like any other”. Even that needn't have been too bad, if business was conceived in its traditional sense, as any kind of exercise in free enterprise. But as the 1970s wore on, neoliberal zeal increased, and business itself was reconceived simply as a device for generating as much money as possible, in the shortest time, in a global market that was intended to be maximally competitive. Some of those who advocated, and advocate, the neoliberal market argue that without money we can do nothing at all, neither good nor evil; and they go on to suggest that the more money we have, the more good we can do and therefore maximising wealth should be good for humanity as a whole.

In practice, though, of course, the money

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that is generated by the labour of the many stays with the few who are in charge. We have been assured that this wealth will “trickle down” to the majority but in truth there are no mechanisms within the market to ensure that this happens. The market is designed to be maximally competitive, which means that it favours the richest and most powerful, and in practice therefore the suppliers who play the market successfully do so not by catering for the poor and the most needy, but for those who pay most.

Entirely unsurprisingly, this past 30 years (and again the statistics are clear) the rich have grown incomparably richer while the poor, who increasingly include the middle class, have become poorer and less secure. In principle, the global market seems bound to result in growing injustice and in practice this is exactly what has happened.

Perhaps – just perhaps – the logic of the maximally competitive global market is good for some industries. Perhaps we get better computers that way. Perhaps it results in better battle-ships, if battle-ships are what we think we need. But for agriculture the neoliberal economy is a disaster. For if you really want to make money in business – any business – then you have to do three things: maximise turnover; add as much “value” as possible and minimise costs. In a global market that is maximally competitive, all of these requirements have to be pushed as far as they can go. This is what is happening. This is what modern agricultural science is designed to achieve. All of these requirements are in diametric opposition to what is required if we truly intend to feed people well without wrecking the rest of the world.

First, maximising turnover in agriculture means maximising yield, so you have as much as possible to sell. This is achieved by maximising the input of fertiliser, and cleaning every square inch of soil with herbicide, and protecting every leaf and ear of corn with fungicide and pesticide. But if we were serious about feeding people we would know that we have enough already – that the shortfalls are very rarely due to lack

of yield per se and almost always due to lack of infrastructure, or to war, or to the kind of economy that requires countries to grow crops for cash rather than to feed their own people.

Now, yield has been increased so much that if we stuck to our traditional cuisines, based as they are on staples (and particularly cereals), it would be all too easy to feed everybody. But then the market would be saturated. Then there would be no point in producing any more. But if you limit the output, you limit the potential profit. If you do produce more when people already have enough, you simply push the price down.

But in agriculture there's an easy solution. Go on growing more and more cereals – but then feed the extra to livestock. The consumers, correspondingly, move away from traditional cuisines to a diet based on burgers and fried chicken. If even the market for meat becomes saturated – well: throw most of the carcass away, and sell only the chops and steaks in the supermarkets. Put the rest into sausages and pet food. So it is that nowadays, half the world's wheat, 80 per cent of the maize, almost all the barley that is not used for brewing, and well over 90 per cent of the soya is fed to livestock, including cattle, which should be raised on grass. In truth, these figures may now be a little out of date, since a large proportion of the maize – the world's third most important cereal after wheat and rice – is now used for biofuel. But biofuel or cattle-feed – it's all the same, economically.

The second way to maximise profit is to “add value”. Don't sell the produce straight to the nearest consumers, to cook in their own way. Do something fancy to it first, and sell it for several times the price. One approach is to whisk the produce across the world to sell it out of season. Another is to dress it in polythene and foil and turn it into TV dinners and the rest.

The perceived need for “value-adding” accounts for the global increase in meat production. To some extent, perhaps, people “demand” meat – especially when the traditional cuisines that made such sparing

use of it have been pushed aside. But to a much greater extent meat has been sold, sold, and sold again these past few decades, because it's a way of adding "value" to crops that in traditional cuisines used to feed us very well – but all too cheaply.

But the third requirement of modern agribusiness – to reduce costs, and then reduce them again – is the most disastrous. We see this in Britain, which together with the US has led the "developed" world in the race to plug itself in to the neoliberal economy. The greatest cost in traditional agriculture is labour and labour, in Britain, has been cut and cut again. Now only about one per cent of Britain's workforce works full time on the land. The agrarian economy and the ways of life that went with it are all but gone. People have been replaced with agrochemicals and big machines, all paid for by bank loans. This of course is universal: to a significant extent the economy of modern Britain is one great debt – the interest paid by all of us on bank loans, if not on our own then on the loans of others who supply us with our daily needs, including our food. Our boom economy never was a boom. It was one big loan. Now we don't really have a crash. It's just that the lenders have lost their faith in our ability to pay them back. Quite reasonably, because we can't. But we should never have got into this mess in the first place. Our agriculture is caught up in the mess. But Britain, ever the global leader and still imperialist, has been frantically persuading the rest of the world to follow our example. Apparently what we have is "progress", which we "demanded". The mess is just one of those things.

Frenetic cost reduction in agriculture is extremely dangerous. Britain's livestock have suffered an almost uninterrupted succession of foul epidemics since the 1970s – BSE, foot-and-mouth disease (twice), and swine fever – and been at least threatened by avian flu and swine flu. The government and their experts claim that they had it all well in hand but in truth we escaped from even worse by the skin of our teeth. At one point one of Britain's leading epidemiologists claimed that

BSE could kill 100,000 people in its transformed form of Creutzfeld-Jacob Disease (CJD), but this does not seem to be happening; and bird flu and swine flu could easily have been much worse than seems to be the case. It isn't clear why they aren't. Foot and mouth disease and swine fever do not directly threaten human beings at large but they do cause immense distress in animals and among rural communities. All this can be traced to cut-price husbandry.

The vast estates of monoculture and all the high-input high-tech that goes with them – all the trappings of industrial agriculture – also reflect the perceived need to cut costs. That is what our modern agricultural science is really intended to do: cut costs by cutting labour. To accord with the demands of biology, the world needs intricate, integrated, poly-cultural systems. But such systems perforce are labour intensive, and so we use our ingenuity and wealth to sweep them aside.

Worst of all, though, is the impact of agricultural industrialisation on the world's workforce. In India, and in developing countries as a whole, 60 per cent of people work on the land. The number working on the land in India is greater than the entire population of the expanded EU. If India

“*The number working on the land in India is greater than the entire population of the expanded EU. If India followed Britain's example, then half a billion or so would be out of work*”

followed Britain's example, then half a billion or so would be out of work. In the world as a whole, two billion-plus would lose their livelihoods. Agriculture needs a lot of people, while no other industry is remotely in sight that could realistically employ such numbers.

If you try to point out all this to the scientists and the economists who inform the powers-that-be, they will tell you not to be silly. What they are trying to do, they insist, is "realistic". Enlightened Agriculture is pie-in-the-sky, an idle dream. Apparently in this extraordinary world of ours it is more realistic to gear our lives to the abstraction of money, now reduced to zeros on a computer screen, than it is to seek to adjust our enterprises and our lives to the physical and biological realities of the planet, and to our own human needs and aspirations. How strange. How could such a state of affairs have come about?

How did we get into this mess?

Charles Darwin in the mid-19th century claimed that life is one long competitive struggle which obliges all of us to behave selfishly. Moral philosophy became necessary to temper this innate biological tendency. In truth, although Darwin was surely right in so many respects, he was surely wrong to suggest life is just a struggle. In truth, nature is more cooperative than it is competitive. If it was not, there would be no ecosystems, indeed no life at all. The best survival tactic for human beings is not to do their neighbours down, but to collaborate. Good Darwinian thinking (a properly modernised version of Darwin's own thinking) predicts that most people should be nice, because niceness is most likely to succeed. This indeed is what we observe. Most people prefer kindness to cruelty, peace to conflict and are more than happy to leave others alone so long as they are left alone themselves.

In short, the problem is not that most people are not nice and need to be kept in check by superior beings. It is that some people – a minority – truly desire to be

powerful, but they are most unlikely to achieve power simply by espousing the modest sociality that comes naturally to most of us. Some modest and sociable people do sometimes have power thrust upon them but in general, the people who achieve power are those who really want it. The same applies to wealth. Power goes with wealth, each feeds into the other. Most people are content just to have enough: to house and educate their children; spend time with friends and family; do the things in life that they truly find interesting and satisfying and look forward to a reasonable pension. Few actively desire to be positively rich. But a few do – and they perforce are the ones who are most likely to become rich. On the whole, the active desire to be powerful and rich does not correlate particularly well with the simple predilection to be a nice person. But isn't by any means the whole story. Most people in high places are nice. I have certainly had some very jolly chats in the House of Lords and been pleasantly entertained by captains of industry. This, in a way, is more disturbing. How is it that nice people, often very intelligent, so often align themselves with systems of governance and of economics that are so obviously destructive?

Logistics plays a huge part, this time in the form of the positive feedback loop. Until the 1970s research for British agriculture was carried out mainly in government, meaning publicly, owned dedicated institutions, which fed their findings to farmers via the government's advisory service. The research scientists, and the advisers, were truly interested in improving the country's (and the world's) food supply, preferably by the simplest possible means. They were content to work for salaries, security and the knowledge that they were doing a worthwhile and extremely interesting job. The general philosophy was summarised by the late Sir Kenneth Blaxter, then director of the Rowett Research Institute at Aberdeen, when he told the Royal Society (of which he was a Fellow):

"It seems wrong that the science related

to producing food has to be used in a competitive fashion: the essence of science is its universality, and freedom from hunger should be the birthright of all mankind".

From: "Options for British Farming" in *Agricultural Efficiency* (The Royal Society, 1977).

Since the 1970s, with the growth of neoliberalism, agricultural research has increasingly been controlled by private industry, which means by corporates, who in turn depend upon private banks to keep them bankrolled. Corporates are obliged above all, and indeed solely, to make money. That is what they are for. They have a duty to their shareholders to do this, and nothing else. It is not the job of private food or agro-chemical companies to feed the world. It is their job to make as much money as possible out of growing and selling food. They do not therefore finance the kind of research that would make it easy or possible for a small farmer to grow beautiful crops with the absolute minimum of inputs. They would disappear from the map if they did this. So they finance the kind of research, and only the kind of research, that obliges farmers to invest as much as possible in agro-chemicals, pharmaceuticals, machinery, and the rest; and so produce food that is as cheap as possible to grow and can be sold for as much as possible. Scientists in turn can find employment if they are prepared to do such research: agro-chemicals, GMOs, and the rest. Those who simply want to make the world a better place, notably by helping traditional farmers to solve their day-to-day problems, are lucky to be paid at all. Our elected government, meanwhile, uses our money to finance basic research which the corporates then use for their own purposes; and this is taken in some circles to demonstrate that research is still "objective" after all.

So we have another positive feedback loop. Corporates pay for the kind of science that produces the kind of technologies that will help make the corporates richer, so they can finance even more of the same kind of research; and people at large, in the form of taxpayers, keep the pumps primed by

“*... after all, those who raise doubts about GMOs must be "anti-science", which in these times is the ultimate heresy – even though the detractors include some eminent biologists*”

financing basic research. Scientists who are prepared to pay the corporate game stay employed, and indeed can become very rich, and finish up advising governments; and anyone who suggests that things might be done differently is sidelined. It is easy enough to demonstrate, with a few deft statistics, that the detractors are a "minority", who by inference represent some lobby, probably crankish. Self-evidently, after all, those who raise doubts about GMOs must be "anti-science", which in these times is the ultimate heresy – even though the detractors include some eminent biologists. Economists are obliged to play the same game. Either they work for some corporate, or some bank, or a government of the kind that is in effect an extension of the corporate and/or bank, or they are obliged to live as mavericks and take pot luck.

But logistics is not the whole explanation. Many of the scientists and economists who get sucked into the system really do think they are doing the right thing. Many who are clearly very bright really do think that GMOs are the way forward, and/or that the market can solve all our problems. Why do so many people who are intelligent, and nice, and highly educated, and unimpeachably motivated, get it so wrong? After all, since the system they subscribe to is failing so conspicuously, it surely must be very wrong indeed.

To answer this, we have to dig deeper.

A matter of mind-set

In truth, although the intellectuals and experts who so cheerfully support the status quo, and make it possible, are highly educated, they are also badly educated. Our present educational system is itself locked in to the positive feedback loop. It is designed, or has evolved, to produce the kind of people know and believe the kinds of things that can keep the system going. It is not intended to produce people who can stand outside the system and criticise it.

Present-day education tends to be over-specialised. Chemists are produced who know no biology and who do not appreciate the essential differences between the disciplines. Biology should be rooted in natural history, a knowledge and appreciation of living creatures. But a whole generation of “biologists” has been produced who don’t know a frog from a toad. All they know is DNA and how to shift bits of it from one organism to another by “genetic engineering”, the jewel in the crown of biotechnology. There are scientists of all kinds who know no philosophy of science. Scientists and economists are produced who know no history and do not realise the truth of the line in Ecclesiastes, that there is no new thing under the sun. Western civilisation as a whole has become ultra-materialist. This of course is the key to its military power and its short-term success, but it also means that moral philosophy has become very crude and has been reduced in powerful circles to an exercise in cost-effectiveness; and the concept of metaphysics has been written out all together. Some have hardly heard the word at all and few know what it implies. Our heads, including or perhaps especially the heads of our intellectuals, are stuffed with ideas and prejudices that just aren’t true, that in truth are fantastical; and fantasy is a shaky foundation for serious endeavour in the real world.

To be specific, it’s remarkable how few modern agricultural scientists – the kind who enthuse about GMOs – have any worthwhile knowledge of traditional

farming. They take it to be self-evident that because some GMOs in carefully contrived circumstances can produce enormous yields, that GMOs must therefore offer the way forward in all contexts, for the whole world. It never enters their heads that yield is not usually the main issue; and even if it was, then traditional agriculture can always do what is required, if given a helping hand. (It’s worth noting in this context that although the Green Revolution that began in the late 1960s and into the 1970s used some advanced breeding techniques, it was not an exercise in genetic engineering, as has often been implied). Similarly, a generation of economists has grown up that thinks that the world began in 1980 when the neoliberal market truly began to come on line, not apparently realising that free markets have been tried before in farming and have invariably ended in disaster. (In the 1840s, for example, the Irish starved as the potatoes rotted in their fields even though the granaries were stuffed with oats, the most nutritious staple crop of all. For the oats were contracted out to the English, for their horses, in accord with the economic dogma of David Ricardo, whose theory of “comparative advantage” says that the best crops to grow are the ones that can be sold to foreigners for the highest price).

Some of the most prominent of today’s scientists, too seem to have no knowledge of the philosophy of science. The 20th century did not, as anticipated, bring to fruition the 18th century Enlightenment dream: of science as the path to omniscience and high technology as the route to omnipotence. Instead it showed us that all the theories of science are rooted in uncertainty: all are hypotheses, best guesses, waiting to be knocked off their perches; and that maths, the ultimate arbiter of truth in science, relies on axioms that are themselves, at times, arbitrary. As the coup de grace, the late 20th century brought us the concept of nonlinearity, showing that the simple cause-and-effect relationships that underpin Newtonian mechanics, which has been the great paradigm of science, are abstractions.

In the real world, cause and effect is a statistic concept, a matter of probabilities. Living nature, with which farmers aspire to trade, is nonlinear in spades. We cannot treat an ecosystem like a laboratory bench – or at least, we do so only at our peril.

Overall, many present-day scientists, economists, career politicians and other such people have not thought through, or been exposed to the ideas that would enable them to think through, what is really meant by good and evil. They can explain the universe convincingly in material terms – all those books on evolution and the Big Bang – but they have systematically skirted around the fundamental question, “How come?” This question of course lies beyond science, within metaphysics which many have been brought up to believe died out in the Middle Ages. So for those unfamiliar with any kind of metaphysical principles, materialism and the simple Darwinian punch-up, summarised by Herbert Spencer as “survival of the fittest”, is all there is.

Yet, such is the structure of our hierarchical society, such is the emphasis on wealth and influence, that the people who have become the powers-that-be are convinced that neo-liberalism and high-tech are the ways forward; and every other point of view is somehow nonsensical; and everyone who does not subscribe to the modern view is out of date, or elitist, or just plain stupid, or has some other sinister agenda. So:

What’s to be done?

We – humanity – are in a very strange position. Technically, it should be easy to solve our most pressing problem, which in truth is the most pressing problem of the whole world: how to feed ourselves well (all of us!) without wrecking the rest. But it has become hard to do this, and perhaps impossibly so, because of layer upon layer of prejudice and nonsense not within people at large, but within our own elected governments, and the corporates and banks who keep them in power, and the intellectuals and experts on whom they rely.

So before we can truly tackle the relatively simple technical problem of feeding ourselves (without wrecking the rest) we have to fight our way through layer upon layer of bureaucracy, law and financial shenanigans that is designed, or has evolved, to reinforce a power structure which at best is seriously misguided and at worst, at least here and there, is seriously corrupt. How?

First, it’s clear that if we, humanity, seriously do want to feed ourselves without wrecking the rest, then we have to take matters into our own hands. We cannot achieve the kinds of changes the world needs simply by reform, by asking the powers-that-be if they would kindly change their ways. The powers-that-be, as they now are, do not understand the issues; and insofar as they do, they prefer to ignore them. Step-by-step, gentle reform can succeed only if there is a logical, step-by-step path that could take us from where we are to where we want to be. But there is not. Tesco cannot be transformed into the kind of market the world needs without simply ceasing to be Tesco, with shareholders to serve. Some reform is possible and worthwhile. We might persuade government to rescind some of the ludicrous knee-jerk laws it has introduced in the last few years, for example, such as the present ban on feeding swill to pigs, which traditionally was among their principal feeds and *raison d’être*. But they simply are not in a position to install the kind of systems that the world really needs.

Revolution won’t work, either. It is not going to happen and even if it did, it would be most unlikely to produce the kinds of outcomes we need. All political action is nonlinear in its effects – you can never predict how it will turn out – and the outcome of revolutions is even more uncertain than most, because the collateral damage is so great and events move so fast. So let’s not dwell on revolution.

Yet there is a clear way forward. Renaissance. People who give a damn in all walks of life just have to start doing things differently, despite the status quo. In agriculture, this means small, mixed, organic,

integrated farms set up by whatever means that sell their produce locally to sympathetic communities. It means cookery classes, to restore traditional cuisines. It means land-owners making land available to the next generation of would-be farmers, which the world so desperately needs. In fact it needs all the initiatives that my wife, Ruth, and I are now trying to identify and bring together within our Campaign for Real Farming. (www.campaignforrealfarming.org)

In truth there is no shortage of excellent initiatives. The aim is to bring them together, to form a “critical mass”. Then, between them, they would provide the overall structure that would enable Enlightened Agriculture to become the norm. Then we would have our renaissance: what our good friend Tim Waygood, who farms in Hertfordshire, calls “Agrarian Renaissance”.

But the ideas that are needed to bring the many initiatives together need further development. We need to achieve a coherent philosophy, not a creed or another dogma for followers to sign up to, but a worldview that holds together and everyone can feel comfortable with. So now, 2011, Ruth and I are hoping to establish the College for Enlightened Agriculture, to pin down and develop all the ideas that are needed to create the coherent philosophy. We must spread the intellectual and intuitive net as wide as possible; to include everything from the details of backyard chickens and cooking to high-flown science, economics, moral philosophy and metaphysics. In the long term it would be good to have a bricks-and-mortar college, with its own model farm. In the almost immediate term it should be possible to link up with existing organisations to do a great deal of what needs to be done: in carrying out the necessary research, in all fields; in running seminars; eventually perhaps in running courses, linked to university MSc curricula. At present the College for Enlightened Agriculture exists only in virtual form, as an interactive website embedded within the campaign website. But with modern IT, a great deal can be achieved by the website alone.

A new worldview

In truth, the Renaissance that the world now needs must embrace all aspects of life. We need a new, coherent worldview that is rooted in all the existing disciplines and the ways of thinking that go with them. It needs deep roots in science, in moral philosophy, in metaphysics, in religion, in economics and history and political theory – and indeed in literature, for as George Eliot once commented, “In fiction we can get so much closer to the truth”; and artists in general express and make explicit what is otherwise difficult to get at. So in principle, the kind of education that is needed to develop the required worldview could work outwards from any point. Coherence is the thing. But I am suggesting that agriculture would be a particularly good place to begin: firstly because I am personally interested in agriculture and because we are establishing the College; but also because it really is at the centre of all human affairs. It is the thing that we absolutely have to get right; the thing that affects our worldview on so many different fronts simultaneously; and is so affected by everything that happens and by our attitudes.

So this, as I see things, is where we are. If you are interested in the Campaign for Real Farming or the College for Enlightened Agriculture, please write to us. The world needs re-thinking from first principles, starting with the core pursuit of agriculture, and this time round the thinking has to be done by humanity at large. So the more people who get involved, the better.

◆ **Colin Tudge** is a biologist, writer and broadcaster. His books include: *Consider the Birds: Who they are and what they do*, *Feeding People is Easy*, *The Secret Life of Trees and So Shall We Reap: The Concept of Enlightened Agriculture*.

Allowing the magic to find its own voice

by Willow Murton

I AM TAKING YOU BACK to the Brazilian Amazon with me. We are three days on a speedboat from the nearest town and many more in local canoes. We have come to film a sequence for the BBC series Human Planet with the Matis hunters who are famed for their blowpiping prowess. It's our first morning and it has not begun quite as hoped. Arriving at our boats to film with our small group of hunters, we are met by the whole village, all ready to join us in any boat that they can fill with our limited fuel. An hour's difficult negotiations later, we are down to one overloaded boat. Granny, grandpa, a pack of dogs and several other unknown hangers-on crowd into the speedboat with the six hunters, two boatmen, myself and Pete, the cameraman ... oh and six two metre blowpipes and sheathes of deadly poisonous darts for which there is no known antidote. Just six minutes from a hit to death. The cameraman looks nervous. It is his first filming trip in the jungle. I am not entirely sure he is enjoying it... When we get to where the Matis are to hunt, no sooner are we out of the boat and into an ants nest than we are off in quick pursuit of monkeys. The Matis can identify the animals by their calls, which they then mimic as they track them. We are soon in a swamp, thighs in thick mud, spiky vegetation and unable to move or film. Pete shoots me another uncertain glance. A torrential downpour falls on us, the camera fogs up. Pete sinks further into the swamp. A bushmaster, the most poisonous snake in the region, is found metres from us and quickly killed with a machete. Pete is a little pale. Monkeys! The Matis are off again, crashing, splashing through

the jungle. We cannot keep up, only just able to save the camera from sinking into thick, thigh-high mud. Monkeys jump above us, the hunters take aim with their blowpipes, darts go everywhere, falling down in a lethal shower about us. In the frenzy, one of the hunters chops down a tree to shake a hiding monkey, it crashes down a metre from us, just missing Pete's head. A boat driver joins in the circus and fires a shotgun over our heads. Pete turns to me and asks, weakly, is it all going to be like this? And honestly, I don't have the answer ...

Filming in remote locations is a constant process of adaptation and anticipation of the unknown. From the safety of the office, I do all I can, practically, to prepare. It all starts with a vague map and an unfamiliar placename which becomes a mark on a map, a beginning. Research means speaking to anyone who has ventured into the same region of jungle, tundra or desert. I gather information like talismans – the names of good boat drivers, the nearest hospitals, the hotels without bed-bugs, do's and don'ts ... you never know what may come in useful.

Next, the logistics of an expedition. I do all I can to plot the unknown: choosing the safest, the fastest, the most cost effective route to location; satellite phones are hired; medical kits checked; itineraries drawn up and supplies bought. I phone charter planes in the middle of jungle for insurance documents and pilots' licenses and find out what value an insurance company puts on a life. The essentials are ordered: rehydration salts, thermarests, hammocks, thick socks, headtorches – whatever is needed for emergency and a little simple luxury on location. I write a lot of lists.

You try and second guess what you may need: waterproof/dustproof everything, the right hat and shoes (not just a fashion preoccupation – sandals in the Arctic are not the best footwear) the correct camera and sound kit, enough batteries, a back up plan... And then you imagine yourself, tired and three weeks in, and wonder what will make you look out on the Amazon rainstorm, the Arctic blizzard, the Saharan dust storm and smile in wonder rather than exhaustion. One cameraman I know hides chocolate in all the camera boxes to be found later at low moments, or for trade for the best seats on the boat/plane. Everyone has their own survival tactics...

I begin writing risk assessments which contain lines such as "Danger – getting attacked by reindeer whilst going to the toilet. Action to be taken – carry a big stick and don't turn your back..." or "Danger – getting hit by poison dart with no known antidote. Action to be taken – always stand behind the blowpipe". We have been trained in remote location medicine and in hostile environments; been on courses that teach you how to put a drip in someone's arm, how to cope with kidnappers and what to say if a gun is against your head...

And then there is the film itself. Storyboards, scripts – all ways of trying to shape the unpredictable, to make us feel that we may just have a little control... reassuring but at times a hindrance because the greatest moments, on and off camera, are those that have not been drawn or written out. They are the magic.

Before reaching location, I try to remove the unknowns. I meet the crew, find out what the presenter drinks, what makes the cameraman laugh, what's the soundman's favourite chocolate. We look after each other on location. We make friends. I speak to people until this unfamiliar place becomes somewhere that I can see in my mind, imagine on film. I colour it in. All this preparation; and yet everyone knows arriving on location, it all changes and so does your role. On this last series, I have been everything from director to soundperson; a fishwife chopping up old dead piranhas for bait; a negotiator between the

“Really the preparation is a diligently thorough denial of our own lack of control of events. However, once you have made friends with the unknown, you needn't fear it, you can welcome it

”

BBC, government institutes and indigenous chiefs; been a helicopter copilot, a jimmy jib operator, translator, tea-maker and igloo-builder.

Really the preparation is a diligently thorough denial of our own lack of control of events. However, once you have made friends with the unknown, you needn't fear it, you can welcome it. Being open to the opportunities that arise in this way means making a film which is as informed and also as bold as possible.

There are always some unknowns that you just don't want to face on location. There are the technical unknowns, the ones that gaffa tape and turning the camera on and off don't solve. Like when we returned from that first day's hunt, sat down to watch the footage and everything was a rather vivid shade of pink; or the time when deep in the jungle, the night before flying off on an exclusive and very complicated helicopter filming shoot, the cameraman looks at the tapes that I have given him and asks where the correct ones are. Or the time that all the camera equipment froze in the Siberian tundra... I could go on but I am starting to feel a little nauseous, because these are the unknowns that I really dread and though I learn a little more every time, I don't entirely welcome the lessons...

What about when it's the story and not the equipment that just isn't working out quite as you planned? We are on our way back to the Rio Negro in Brazil. The cameraman and I

have come to finish filming a sequence about the effect of the water level rising on the lives of a family here. This is to be the final dramatic rain soaked and flooded finale to the film. We have prepared, written the risk assessments, bought our ponchos and storyboarded the scene of our family stranded in the misery of the rains, no food and afloat surrounded by caiman and hidden dangers beneath the dark surface of the water. It sounds fantastic. It will look spectacularly dramatic. The cameraman has hidden his supply of chocolate, we head off on our boat journey. We arrive at a scene of Amazon idyll. There is no rain, there are no hungry faces and no chaos. Children jump from the trees into the water, paddle their way to school by canoe, fish from the kitchen window. The families live in happy harmony with the flooding river it seems and for a full week, we film only around twenty minutes of rain and lots of relaxed and smiling people. What to do with the pressure of finishing the film with the drama it needs? I lie on my cabin bunk and look out on the flooded forest. I turn to what I do know and to those whom I know. I try to find that inner voice, instinct, and I listen to the voices of those around me that I trust, the friends and local people. I also listen to what the universe may be telling me... and together we come up with our options.

My inner voice says be truthful to what you see and not to a storyboard which was your own creation and imagination of the world. The voices about me say look at the dark beauty of the scene, the sunshine over the flooded village and the defiant happiness of the people's spirit. The cameraman says that he can only film what he can see anyway. And the universe, well, maybe it's saying that actually surviving in this remote part of the world is less about the skills you have to hunt turtles and fish and fearing the rising waters and more about having a spirit that can survive the incredible floods and still continue to smile and sing. Isn't humanity's resilience and resourcefulness something to celebrate? Maybe we should not fear the unknown, stop controlling the stories that we tell ourselves of the world and allow for the magic to find its own voice and images, be humble.

And on all these travels with the unknown, there is something else that the wonderful unknown demands: humour. Another Amazonian example for you. We are back with our friends, the Matis. It's our second day of filming. Things are going much better... we are in a small dug out, sitting at the back, with just our six hunters in front of us. Pete and I smile at each other. We have a good feeling about today... The Amazon jungle calls out to us from the riverbanks, lush and green. We turn back to each other and as we do, I notice that all six hunters are now a violent shade of red. Their hands smear the last of the annatto seeds onto their faces and they turn around and smile at us, offering the shells. There is no word in Matis for continuity and there is no way of getting the red dye off before the hunt. Pete and I do no more than laugh to ourselves. What more is there to do? It will all be fine. I am sure. We film our first hunt and it goes well. We return to the village, happy that at last things are working and plan to do a few more shots of the hunters getting ready and colouring themselves with the dye, to explain why they are all suddenly a bright shade of red. Except...on return, we are told that no-one in any of the Matis villages can use the annatto until all the chiefs in all the villages agree and after at least a month as a mark of respect to a Matis man who has died.

There are many more ridiculous twists in this tale but it all ended as it was meant to, a little red in parts, more swampy than planned but safe from falling darts and happy in the insights that the unknown gave. There is no knowing what will happen next and so you only have the embrace of the present moment, humble submission to its gifts and surprises and trust that everything works out as it should.

◆ Willow Murton is assistant producer for the forthcoming BBC documentary series Human Planet, having previously worked on Amazon and Tribe, also for the BBC.

Voices of change

The 2010 SKGR Symposium held at Chisholme House in the Scottish Borders; some reflections.

by Aaron Cass

A View from the Hill

Picture an 18th-century mansion with a large Capability Brown style lawn and haha; sheep on the adjoining field and woodlands around; marquees like white ships on a green sea... and through the ornamental half moon of silver birches, under a huge, forbidding grandfather of a Douglas Fir, a flotilla of six yurts gently breathing out lazy smoke trails from their chimneys are gathered around a fire pit. 150-plus people from four continents, including 10 key note speakers: milling with cups of coffee, then disappearing into one or other of the tented structures for meditation or mealtimes or conversation or music. Later they are on the lawn all moving together in a session of Qi Gong, un-self-conscious following without words. In another moment a long trail of people, conversing in pairs or small groups, walk over the moor into unfenced heather and up onto Chapel Hill, a trig point from which you can see twenty miles in every direction on a clear day. It feels like seeing to the edge of the known universe, in the same way as looking at the stars does; humbling and elevating in the same moment.

To stand on the hillside facing Chisholme House, watching the comings and goings and listening to the sounds, would give a passing observer a sense that this Symposium was about much more than sharing ideas...Is that an opera singer I can hear?

The SKGR Symposium is for big subjects, and the potentially melodramatic title 'Facing

the Unknown' is in keeping with this. Last year the title was 'Towards a unified Vision' On both occasions the speakers are the kind who want to address big questions. The languages of their particular disciplines are a way to uncover the underlying issues shared by all and that is possibly the only criterion for attendance. For this symposium is not simply about big ideas, it is about the possibility and process of uncovering those ideas together. The idea that is uncovered together, enhanced by very diverse inputs, is certainly bigger and usually better for being collectively sought and received.

The science of not knowing, the art of not knowing, the way of not knowing

You might ask yourself, "How can a neurophysicist, MRI Pioneer and Director of the Max Planck Institute in Leipzig (Prof. Robert Turner) share a platform with an artist and eco-builder (Michael Buck) who makes spherical log piles and Cob Houses?" What is the connection between architect Jane Carroll's "A brief history of inner space" and Peter Young's beautifully titled "Befriending the Unknown", a contemplation on who we think we see when we look at a person in a landscape? Taking Professor Turner's title turned out to be the way forward. "We never use the same brain twice" he declared with some glee. The brain is constantly changing: its physical substance can actually be transformed by work and new neural pathways can be formed by intention.

This is both very encouraging and daunting. It means we are responsible for the quality of our consciousness and that we can change the way we think through practice. This proved to be an important thread. Peter Young's 'Befriending the Unknown' was precisely about the practice of changing our relationship with the unknown so that it become a source of nourishment rather than fear. Michael Buck gave a practical demonstration, through his description of building a Cobb House, of how close at hand

Image © Georgia Cass



Image © Jamil Ahmad



This log-pile was built over the three days by everyone putting a log on as they passed... a triumph for the incremental.

and available is everything we need, if we change our perspective and stop seeing the universe as something perpetually short-changing us. All the presentations concerned change, internal or external or both at once, and suggested explicitly or implicitly that change is the reality of things.

Connections like these arise in the conversation and not from a preconceived agenda. They are an act of will made possible by presence and listening. The aim is not to find a mystical overview that correlates diverse ideas and images, nor an over arching platonic solution or super theory. It does not attempt to marry science and spirituality or economics and art or to blur any real distinctions. Quite the opposite. Each discipline has its own rules and dynamics, none of which diminish the single and shared reality they address. The Symposium is about the pleasure of witnessing the diversity of expressions and the unifying principle at once. For the participants it is, at some level, an exercise in sheer appreciation, the only art that can really be called universal. The unifying experience is the hearing itself, the receptivity of each person present. It is not a particular idea or belief about reality. 'Befriending the Unknown' demands such an approach and understanding this was essential preparation for the following day.

The Action of not Knowing

Chaired by the inimitable Scilla Elworthy, three-times Nobel Peace Prize nominee and possibly the best chairperson I have ever seen, this was a gathering of very diverse but

globally concerned younger people all in the midst of their careers: Maja Goepel, Director of Future Justice at the World Future Council in Brussels; Arif Hasiyim, Al Gore's climate change project representative in Indonesia; Willow Murton one of the directors of the new BBC series Human Planet; Jonathan Hyams, award winning photographer with a social justice agenda; Saskia Bruysten, CEO of the Grameen Creative Lab and Aliya Ryan, a former indigenous rights activist working in Peru and now a supervisor on the Beshara School's six month intensive course. Each had only 15 minutes to present their work and how it related to facing the unknown. The compression of such vital and busy lives and such big themes into such a short time gave real energy to the presentations. And it was a very different energy to what one might expect at a Symposium.

I have looked at various events that might be comparable to the SKGR Symposium and I find that most speakers are over a certain age. Partly this is because we want to hear from experts and to be an expert you generally need a decent amount of experience in your field. Amen. But there is an imbalance. In a way the relative obscurity of the SKGR project has been a blessing. It cannot get Mohammed Yunus to come and speak but it can get a young person who works closely with him, Saskia Bruysten. Bruce Parry may not be available but Willow Murton, who worked with him on Amazon, is. This means we are hearing from people who are in the thick of it but also still in the process of being formed, and that makes them more like their audience.

The younger generations tend to sound like they are sharing their experience rather than making statements. Some of their subjects too are new: Future Justice, Social Business, Climate Change Education, etc. All this combines into a sense that you are actively participating in something that is in the making. That is very different from being told how it is or what to do.

What came across from this extraordinary group was an inspiring blend

of humility and courage. It is perhaps unsurprising that such accomplished people should naturally see that their work in the world, and for the world, includes a fair degree of self-scrutiny and a huge portion of not knowing. Years ago making the connection between self knowledge and global responsibility might have seemed counter intuitive. Now it is virtually inherent, not only in the kinds of work that Maja, Arif, Willow, Jonathan, Saskia and Aliya do, but even more so in the way they go about it.

Facing the Unknown

The real test in an event like this is how the conversation goes. Day three. How do you have a conversation with 150 people from such diverse backgrounds? We had heard from the experts, we had heard from those in the middle of their careers, now the floor was open and far greater attention would have to be brought to bear. Now everyone is responsible for what is talked about and how.

Image © Willow Murton



It was not easy even with such a well-intentioned body of people. Those who thought themselves familiar found themselves at the edges; those who genuinely did not know how this is “supposed to go” suddenly became central. You can feel when something that is said acts as a seed or a stone. Perhaps it is the collective intention, the fact that we had been together for three days: eating, walking, listening to music, meditating. Nourishment at every possible level. We wanted to arrive somewhere together in the end and it seemed that we began to uncover a thread.

The thread was about the fact that whether you are engaged in a process of contemplative reflection and practice, or whether you are working for some apparently exterior change like helping people out of poverty, there is, for the awake person, a need to acknowledge both dimensions. Both are essential to human dignity. In the end it is not even self knowledge and global responsibility as two possibilities, but rather as two faces of a single consciousness. It doesn't even matter which you emphasise as long as you don't exclude. Facing the unknown in practice, then, is refraining from such exclusion.

This was a tangible insight that could feed endless conversation. Most notably, the diversity of those who spoke verified that this was no specialist matter. Many of the staff and ‘behind the scenes’ volunteers attended this final session. One of them, a thirteen year old girl who had been clearing and laying tables for three days, joined in

Image © Georgia Cass



with a statement to the effect that whether you look inside or outside they are connected, no priority but both. This fitted perfectly with contributions from one of the foremost MRI scientists of our day, a girl who works in a bookshop in Idaho, a political analyst for the Euro in Frankfurt, a climate change activist from Jakarta, a busboy from the Chisholme kitchen, the Director of Future Justice in Brussels, the Chisholme estate manger, the Principal of the Beshara School, a person-centered counsellor from Edinburgh University, an Israeli writer and translator, a musician... and others no less luminous.

When the conversation flows with such a broad body of experience in play, where age and upbringing and level of conventional education are no longer criteria for participation, the glib acknowledgement that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts becomes a palpable reality and no longer a cliché. There is happiness in being together as one and many at once, perhaps a reminder of what it actually is to be human.

It doesn't have to last for long, just long enough to know that it is real and that it is possible. And that it could happen again. If the brain can restructure itself according to intentions, it must follow that once something enters the consciousness as being possible, then it is on the way to being probable. New neural pathways are at first explored, then worked on by reiteration, then at last established as if it all were quite “natural” and had always been that way.

This is only a beginning. We are not there yet and more application is required. Cultures that don't face the unknown die. If new ways of being are at first forged by an insight, established by practice, and finally lived as if they were completely natural, this may take time and another symposium or two at the very least.

Voices in the Dark, Lights in the Sky

A week before we had no idea what we were going to do on the last night. One of the key organisers had in his bag some sky

lanterns he had bought for his daughter's birthday but which they had forgotten about. We looked on the internet to try and buy a couple of hundred for the Symposium but the budget wouldn't stretch. Nice idea. And then, What the hell, we'll find the money somehow. He pressed the 'buy' button.

Just when one might have thought it was over – the talks finished, conversation turning to the prosaic, the prospects of traffic jams and Monday's work, the faint dread that things might go back somehow to the way they were before this extraordinary gathering of souls, there they were: the sky lanterns emerging from the open door of the big marquee like bioluminescent children from a deep ocean oddity. A few at first, and then in a continuous stream as more people gathered to assist the in the collective midwifery. Each person – delegates, speakers, organisers, musicians, cooks, opera singers, housekeepers, children, electricians, busboys, gardeners and violinists – 175, shadows virtually indistinguishable from one another except for the trace of firelight on their faces. Each one tentatively carried one of these strange, faintly dangerous, petro-luminescent heralds of joy out onto the large dark lawn and nurturingly launched it upward.

Like the conversation on that last day they were tricky to handle, paper and flame so close. But most survived the launch, more than would in nature had these been the births of some simpler species. Accompanied by oohs and aahs and out-awesomed thought-stilling silences, they gently floated star-ward to be caught by a heavier, further travelled breeze which whisked them off Hawick-bound and ever up. They formed urgent, changeable, oddly meaningful constellations against the milky way as they drifted off – not drifting at all, but with an unknown though not unknowable purpose, like the early, still emerging, prototypical clusters of a new astrology. Or perhaps something closer to the earth, like dancers finding their positions in the dark as the orchestra tunes to middle C in a ballet never performed before. Or is that us?

Then as if the event itself were arranging its own conclusion, the arias started. People who had imagined it was over with that magnificent buffet, worthy of an Odyssean return, wandered back and stood around the three singers – soprano Kirsten Morrison, mezzo Lisa Byrne and counter tenor Peter Shipman – as they sang arias all the more beautiful for the darkness of the scene where the voice is all and penetrates everything, and all that is many tends to oneness. And they sang, solo or in duos or all together – the Flower duet from *Lakme*, Handel's Place danger Around Me, Caccini's Ave Maria, O del mio dolce amor, songs from *Così fan Tutti*, *Carmen*, *The Magic Flute*, *Rondine*, *Tales of Hoffman* and more...

The previous night they had been joined by Tenor Glenn Tweedie and Baritone Oliver Gibbs and had performed Kirsten's own composition: a 40-minute opera *Songs of Alchemy* which depicts John Dee's famous conversations with the four archangels. It is a story about man's search for ultimate knowledge and the dangers that befall those of impure intention, dramatised with a *Dies Ire* accompanied by projections of holocaust and famine. Very powerful. Now the archangels Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael were here again but as human voices, their bodies now corporeal and dark without their blue

glow-stick haloes and white lab coats. Less a fall from heaven than a conscious descent into the trysting place, the earth. When you stand that close to a professional opera singer you really feel the visceral nature of the art, the transformation of the body into a sheer resonance that includes you and yours.

And all the while the sky lanterns continued onward in a steady stream, following each other or following what each other followed: patterns of the unknowable. And Jupiter, 4.6 billion years old, shone motionless in the centre of an un-mooned, starry sky. One by one the sky lanterns rose in greeting and then momentarily orbited as if petitioning his higher purpose, his more ancient wisdom. On this night Jove the Just was a week away from his closest point to the earth during 2010, a distance of 368 million miles. But it felt like no distance at all.

So as the lights went up and the voices ascended, it seemed as if the whole thing was a grace descending upon us all. How is it that the finest aspirations, in their completion, always feel like a gift, bestowed beyond the merits of effort, like a glass held up to toast and filled to overflow.

◆ **Aaron Cass** is editor of the SKGR journal and a director of the SKGR project.



Image © Aliya Ryan

Cape Hatteras, Summer 1992: Functional Brain Mapping by MRI

by **Bob Turner**

Here by the lighthouse, no hurricane today.

The steady gentle rain pools in the road,

Giving my inner vision open play,

*Remembering when the photic goggles
glowed:*

Remembered light! The replay of my brain,

*Beyond surprise, beyond imagination,
showed*

*Such secret changes, strangely clear and
plain,*

*Lit by the paths in which my brain's blood
flowed.*

*“Light breaks where no sun shines”;
my mind*

Is known, is public in this simple act.

Marina's lighthouse penetrates the rind

Of my tough skull; thought is become a fact.

I see my seeing now, beside the sea

*Whose waves still break and thunder
inside me.*

◆ **Robert Turner** is a Director, Department of Neurophysics, Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences, Leipzig, and Honorary Professor, faculty of Physics and Earth Science, University of Leipzig.

Mairi Campbell

ON THE SECOND EVENING, with the world outside turning to an orange clouded purple twilight, we gathered in the Pavilion, glass of wine in hand, to listen to Mairi Campbell: the award-winning Edinburgh singer and violin player whose voice has such a natural beauty it catches one completely by surprise. Here is a purity of tone that makes whatever she sings sound natural and true, with the sweetness of spring water rather than sugar or honey. There is experience in this voice too, but it has not been roughened, only humoured. And her phrasing, aided by her husband Dave Francis's superb and emotionally intelligent lyrics, is by turns dramatic, comic, poignant and wise. After a day of sometimes hilarious, sometimes harrowing, stories from around the world, listening to Mairi and David's exquisite sound melted the heart away, or perhaps melted what had accrued around it of anxiety and expectation. Extraordinary.

We heard, among others, a song written by Dave and sung a cappella by Mairi called 'The Piper and the Maker'. This was a traditional style story ballad about a famous piper, who is persuaded by a mysterious pipe maker to play a newly-made and particularly fine set of pipes. As he plays the piper discovers that the tunes pour out of him and his new pipe as if from an infinite resource, and are the best he's ever played. So extraordinary is the music that he eventually asks the maker if there is some magic involved. The Maker's reply is simply that it is the player who makes the pipes what they are. At the end of this you realise, of course, that it is both. A treasury of expression



Image © Willow Murton

awaits the piper who befriends the unknown.

◆ For music from Mairi Campbell go to: www.the-cast.org.uk



Jo Sandelson

Two musicians

by Rafi Zabor

YEAH, THAT'S ALL RIGHT, come in, young man. That a saxophone case you're carrying? Sit down, sit down, no I don't know your name, uh-uh, but if you don't mind my asking, could you play that thing for me? I used to play that horn too, the soprano, and the tenor too, no, but I don't remember any of it since I got the AI's. They got to tell me about it all the time. No, you just play, young man, don't mind these two. They looking after me, these two fine people. I was living in the street before they come along. You don't mind them, just play me something on that horn, if you'd be so kind. No, I don't reckonize your name.

But you knew my father. He played with you a few times, here and there, in Chicago, New Orleans. I grew up listening to your music on records. I love what you do.

That's the funny thing, like I tell you I can't remember none of it. My mind's right clear some days but I can't remember any music they tell me I played those years. Not a note.

I have some with me here, on my computer.

On your what?

I can play you some of the music you recorded on this.

Some kind of little radio television, huh. Good, you do that, but do me a favor play me a little bit on that soprano horn first thing. Back in the day wasn't too many people playing that soprano horn but I liked it. I liked it. They tell me I liked it.

You played it beautifully. You were great.

I don't know anything about that. Just play me something pretty, I'd like that, I would ... Ohh, that's so beautiful, that's beautiful

music, young man. It touch my heart. You say I know your father? He was a fine man, a fine teacher, I can hear it. I don't remember him but I can hear it now. And I can see you.

Can I play you something of yours? I've loved this record since I was a child.

Sure, you can do that, go 'head ... Oh, oh, oh, oh, I never heard that, I never heard that. You say I made that? Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh ... Excuse me, young man, I don't mean to be cryin on you like this. You, you, you, young man, now don't you cry too, you're a fine young man, you play that horn so nice, you got nothin to cry about, and I've very much enjoyed, it's very kind of you to come visit me, so don't you be crying too. Now, now, now. Yes, yes, before these two fine people found me, young man, I was living out there on the street with nothing and now I'm all right, God bless them, I have a room and they taking care of me but I don't remember playing music in my long life, I just don't remember none of that ever at all.

◆ Rafi Zabor was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. He wrote about music for many years, then published his novel *The Bear Comes Home* in 1997. It won the PEN/Faulkner Award for fiction in 1998. *I, Wabenzi* was published in 2005. He has been all over the map but still lives in Brooklyn.