

# The Weekly WoKer

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## 1 Welcome to the Weekly WoKer

Welcome to Volume 4 of the Weekly WoKer, the first weekly newspaper for WoK Forums. Inside this edition you will find:

- A brief editorial piece offering my personal view of what has happened this week
- An overview of the week's activities, including descriptions of any exciting events that might have taken place outside of the usual schedule
- The first in a series of interviews with WoK participants
- 'Piet's Page,' a weekly column by forums mayor Piet Hut
- Next week's schedule

## 2 Letter from the Editor

2008 has started off strong for WoK Forums. Since resuming full activity on January 5 we have

- Seen another presentation in the series from Steven Tainer
- Held a new years party
- Initiated the new weekly reading group
- Constructed a new room in Qwaq specifically for the reading group, the Reading Room

- Established a growing ten person core group of participants
- Accelerated our expansion into Second Life
- Excavated a little bit deeper into questions about the working hypothesis
- Launched a new kind of dialogue between Steven and Piet in the Wiki

You will hear about all of these developments in this issue. You will also hear about ways that we are continuing to grow, and how you can get involved. My suspicion is that our expansion for the new year is only beginning.

### **3 Tainer gives fifth of presentation series on contemplative background of the working hypothesis. ‘Candy is dandy but liquor is quicker,’ says Ogden Nash.**

On Saturday, January 5 WoK Forums formally resumed operations after the holiday break with the fifth of Steven Tainer’s presentations on the contemplative background of the working hypothesis. Andrew McGowan, Johanna Okker, John Florio, Leonore Wigger, Patrick St-Amant, Piet Hut, and Sean Murphy were in attendance.

The scheduled topic was ‘Nirvana.’ While in previous presentations Tainer gave talks accompanied by powerpoints and followed by questions, for this presentation he took a more dialogical approach.

After first briefly rehashing the previous week’s talk, Tainer initiated a dialog about how literally one should take certain statements (how literally or loosely), using traditional statements about Nirvana as an example. He stressed that two critical terms in the original working hypothesis, ‘IS’ and ‘completeness,’ are both nonstandard, and that insights regarding these terms do not fit into our ordinary ways of thinking. He continued to say that we view the world with a mind that stays hidden, and that it is quite difficult for an individual person to expose all of the different ways in which we might take a limited view of things, but he said that through interaction it might be possible.

With regard to the relevance of nonstandard insights, Tainer said that from a traditional perspective Nirvana is not a separate, preferred alternative to being human—it is the essence of being human, and the ground of crucial human faculties like ethical understanding.

## **4 New Years party full of prospects for the future**

On Sunday, January 6, Bob Magrisso, Karen Sobel-Lojeski, Piet Hut, and Steven Tainer convened for a new years party in the colloquium room. The conversation was reportedly excellent even though the flavor of the hours'dourves was negligibly present.

The discussion turned primarily to the question of the effects of virtual reality on children and society. All participants present were deeply concerned about the potential dangers, but all participants also saw many fascinating new opportunities, and agreed that the continuing proliferation of virtual communication is most likely inevitable. Given the inevitability of the move towards virtual realities, the conversation then shifted to discuss how we might optimize the influence of virtual worlds, exploring and encouraging the positive aspects while pointing out and warning against the dangers.

## **5 Monthly-book/weekly-reading group begins**

On Monday, January 7, Doug Carmichael and Steven Tainer gave the first in a series of presentations on Remi Brague's *The Wisdom of the World*. Andrew McGowan, Karen Sobel-Lojeski, and Piet Hut were in attendance.

The presentation noted that understanding the word 'world' is nontrivial, and stressed the interrelatedness of conceptions of the world and of human beings. Participants also discussed the relevance of an understanding of 'the world' to grounding ideas like law, ethics, fulfillment, etc., and the relationship between Brague's approach in the book and the working hypothesis approach.

The next discussion will take place on Monday, January 14 at 10PM in the reading room. Participants need not have read the book, though they are encouraged to do so.

## **6 Hut, Tainer launch dialogue series on the working hypothesis**

Piet Hut and Steven Tainer have launched a series of dialogues on the Wiki about the working hypothesis. To access the dialogues (and the rest of the Wiki), go to <http://www.waysofknowing.net/wiki>.

## **7 Second Life growth accelerates in the wake of the establishment of QSL**

WoK's presence in Second Life has taken off since the new year with the establishment of QSL - the Qwaq - Second Life Liaison. Meetings take place Mondays at 10 AM ET, Tuesdays at 5PM ET, and Wednesdays at 10PM ET in the lounge at Spaceport Bravo, which can be accessed via the following slurl (Second Life url): <http://slurl.com/secondlife/Spaceport%20Bravo/163/187/59>

The WoKer would like to make a special acknowledgement to Second Life's Kat Lemieux (in real life Katherine Prawl) for her invaluable help in facilitating the development of WoK in Second Life.

## **8 QSL members tour Chernobyl**

Participants in the QSL meeting of Wednesday, January 9 had a special opportunity to go on a tour of a replica of Chernobyl in Second Life, courtesy of Second Life's Maxwolf Goodliffe. The replica represents many months of research and construction, and was originally built to raise money for Chernobyl charities.

## **9 Real life astronaut makes appearance in Second Life**

Astronaut Ed Lu made an appearance in second life at the invitation of forums mayor Piet Hut, drawing a crowd of more than a dozen avatars. In 2003 Lu had phoned Hut from the International Space Station, beginning the conversation saying, 'guess where I am?' so in response Hut called Lu from the Second Life replica of the station, beginning the conversation the same way, and then delivering the invitation for Lu to come into Second Life.

For more information, and a screen shot courtesy of Bruce Damer, please see the International Spaceflight Museum blog at <http://slispaceflightmuseum.org/drupal/>

## 10 Working hypothesis discussions continue in garden, woklab

The past week has seen vigorous discussion of the idea of the working hypothesis, both in the regularly scheduled working hypothesis discussions in the garden and in woklab. The discussion kicked off with Heloisa Garman's January 6 proposal on the listserv that we begin to work with some specific experiments, and then continued with contributions from Andrew McGowan, Bob Magrisso, Doug Carmichael, Jan Schwindt, Marc Hoffmann, and Piet Hut. Topics ranged from the role of language in our investigation to the relationship of koan practice to working hypotheses to how to prevent 'The Working Hypothesis' from becoming a buzz-phrase. Please see 'Piet's Page,' below, for some commentary on our discussion from forums mayor Piet Hut.

## 11 New core established, growing

The week also saw the establishment of a ten person core group of WoK participants. The group consists of Doug Carmichael, who leads the weekly reading discussions, forums mayor Piet Hut, Steven Tainer, your humble correspondent, and six additional participants who have agreed to lead working hypothesis discussions on a rotating basis. These leaders have taken the title 'MC,' which MC Jan Schwindt explained in the following way, 'In hip hop, drum'n'bass and other music styles some rappers self-ironically call themselves "MC," which is a shortcut for "Master of Ceremony."' The first six MC's are: Bob Magrisso, Heloisa Garman, Jan Schwindt, Karen Sobel-Lojeski, Patrick St-Amant, and Sean Murphy.

We would like to emphasize that the establishment of this group is just the beginning. Please feel free to send an e-mail to forums mayor Piet Hut ([pieta@ias.edu](mailto:pieta@ias.edu)) if you are interested in playing a more active role in the development of WoK Forums—we would love to hear from you!

## 12 This Week's Schedule

For the regular forums calendar, please see:

[http://www.waysofknowing.net/VR\\_Stuff/VirtualEventsSchedule.html](http://www.waysofknowing.net/VR_Stuff/VirtualEventsSchedule.html).

## 12.1 Saturday, January 12

Steven Tainer will be in retreat, so he will not be giving a presentation in Qwaq. But he will be back Saturday, January 19th at 5PM ET.

## 12.2 Sunday, January 13th

At 5PM ET, Dr. Karen Sobel-Lojeski and Steven Tainer will be giving a joint presentation in the Colloquium room on the subject of ‘Risks and benefits resulting from immersion in virtual worlds, and the relevance for the working hypothesis.’

In the presentation, Karen will concentrate on the theme of inviting us to visualize the impact of virtual environments on children, and then transferring the understanding of likely types of impact to ourselves as adults. Steven will follow up with related observations and discussion of how ‘environments’ figure in contemplative practice and the working hypothesis. Karen and Steven will both discuss the relevance of some of these issues for the case of science, and how it can contribute to the development of new ways of knowing. If you would like to prepare for the Sunday talk by reading the New York Times piece that inspired parts of it, see:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/31/business/31virtual.html>

## 12.3 Monday, January 14th

At 10AM ET there will be a QSL meeting in Second Life at the following slurl: <http://slurl.com/secondlife/Spaceport%20Bravo/163/187/59>

At 10PM ET the discussion of Remi Brague’s *Wisdom of the World* continues in the Reading Room. Participants need not read the book, though they are encouraged to do so.

## 13 Piet's Page

Next week, we will start a new format in our chats in the Garden about working with the working hypothesis (wh). With three sessions each week, and six MCs, we will cycle through six different approaches twice a month.

Questions that keep coming up are: what is the working hypothesis, is there one form or several forms of wh, what is the motivation for working with the wh, and how do we go about it? These are natural questions, and I have tried to address them in one form or another over the last two years, ever since Steven and I started talking about the wh, as the material on the WoK web site shows.

At the same time, I have tried to refrain from giving a simple answer. I don't want to play the role of a teacher or evangelist, coming up with a new set of prescriptions, commandments, dogma, or anything like that. I want to follow the mode of scientific research: a group of people comes together, agreeing among themselves that an existing paradigm isn't good enough to explain the observations, and try to come up with something new. In such a situation, scientists are groping in the dark, working in a fog. They don't start off saying: here is a crisp new well defined working hypothesis. They have nothing like the crispness of the ten commandments or the eight-fold path or anything like that to work with. Instead, they brainstorm together, putting the problems on the table, walking around it, discussing it, and try to find new angles. And not for just one hour a week, that wouldn't work; they struggle with it over days and weeks or months, intensely.

So in our case, too, I really would like to follow the scientist's model. Instead of me telling you what I see as the wh and how to work with it, let me try to convey to you what I see as the spirit in which to work, given my scientific background, and the goal that I see for us to work towards, loosely speaking, given my interest in contemplative practices, an interest I share with Steven. And let us then together come up with tentative definitions and descriptions.

If I were to give any definition at all, I could try the following, similar to what Jan and I offered, after a discussion we had a few months ago:

The nature of reality is such that it cannot be captured in words, but it is radically different from what the pragmatic person sees as inherently limited and radically different from what the idealist sees as something to be achieved in the future.

Let us try to work from the outside in, using our experience as a guide, to see whether we can meet in the center, starting from our diverse individual understandings. Thank you all for joining us in this great adventure!

## 14 Quote of the Week

Celery, raw  
Develops the jaw,  
But celery, stewed,  
Is more quietly chewed.  
– Ogden Nash