

The Weekly WoKer

A. McGowan, Printer

February 3, 2008

1 Welcome to the Weekly WoKer

Welcome to Volume 6 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 second installment in a series of interviews with WoK participants
- 'Piet's Page,' a weekly column by forums mayor Piet Hut
- Next week's schedule
- A Special Contest!

2 Letter from the Editor

The events over the course of the last week suggest that the parabolic growth we experienced during the first few weeks of the year has settled into a rhythm and is now continuing at a stately pace. WoKer activity analysts find this state of affairs encouraging, given that in other sorts of economies parabolic growth is usually a bubble that inevitably bursts, leading to a recession, as we may be about to experience in the United States. But we here at WoK are not bound by the harsh rules of reality, working as we do in a virtual environment, so it seems that our growth can

continue in its present manner indefinitely, and it is in fact this kind of growth that our analysts predict, though of course on a shorter time scale we may experience various bubbles and minor recessions with time.

One such minor recession may occur when, as Piet has mentioned in the wok-forums listerv, the grant that is supporting me as the editor of the WoKer, the WikiWhatever, the Qwaq Doctor, and various other offices, expires at the end of February. In recent weeks we have seen extraordinary contributions from the six Working Hypothesis Discussion MC's, as well as by Doug Carmichael, who has led the Monday Reading Group with Steven Tainer; we look forward to other participants joining our core group in the future.

As for the particulars, over the course of the past week we have:

- Successfully continued the rotating MC (Master of Ceremonies) system for the working hypothesis chats
- Seen a remarkable presentation from Zenon Pylyshyn about the distinction between knowledge and understanding
- Held the third of our discussions about Remi Brague's *Wisdom of the World*
- Continued our expansion into Second Life
- Added several interesting items to our web-site
- Continued our new kind of dialogue about the working hypothesis between Steven and Piet in the Wiki

In the course of these events we have uncovered several important distinctions. The first, which we highlighted on Saturday during Steven's Working Hypothesis talk, is that while the Saturday talks have been focused on the original challenge of the completeness working hypothesis¹, the participants in the working hypothesis discussions have used a variety of formulations and conceptions. The discussion of this disjunction proved quite fruitful, and has continued. The second distinction, which we highlighted during the followup we held Thursday to Zenon Pylyshyn's Sunday Guest Lecture, is between comparing the details of science and contemplative traditions and looking for a perspective that is broad enough to accommodate both traditions in a lived way. It is the latter that is the principle aim of Qwaq: to offer a perspective in which modern human beings can understand aspects of reality

¹See <http://www.waysofknowing.net/PracticeIntensive/WorkingHypotheses.html> for details

traditionally covered by both science and contemplative traditions without resorting to some kind of split personality or ontology.

As your editor I am very much looking forward to following up on both of these distinctions, and several others. I have the feeling that I imagine mining engineers must feel when they strike a vein of gold, or that oil drillers must feel when they successfully drill a big well: that the outflow is just beginning, and that with the proper work it will continue to produce a bounty.

3 Interview with Bob Magrisso, Part 2

This week we have part two of our interview with Bob Magrisso, which covers his artwork and his experience in Qwaq:

Andrew: I'd like to turn our attention now to this gallery you have created in Qwaq, in your office, and the artwork we see here. When did you begin making these collages?

Bob: I started doing the collages probably in the early 80's. And there are maybe one or two here from that era. Most of these were probably done in the 90's and some in the last few years.

A: What is the inspiration for these collages?

B: Each one is a kind of meditation. Each one takes many weeks, or months even. I put things in, take them out, think about them, etc. Each one is a very long meditation. What is left is the final product, but the process is very involving.

A: So it's kind of a collage in time as well as space.

B: Yes, making all kinds of internal connections, discoveries, etc.

A: Is the expanse of your sources of inspiration broad, drawing on your whole life experience and interest?

B: I would say so. Though I am very attracted to certain images—deep space photographs, and the photographs of the earth from space. These are my expression of a cosmic feeling and in these I am trying to expand on my reference frame. This is partly why I thought they would be appropriate in the WoK context.

A: Would you like to say anything in particular, except for our contest with lightbearers?

B: This one here called 'Mandala.' This was an early one, but it expresses some basic orienting images for myself. It includes some of the basic archetypes of father, mother, child. The father is Jung, the mother Mother Teresa, and the baby is connected to the earth. by an umbilical cord. There is a little poem, called 'The Unfinished Evolution.' It says: The human soul is one soul / still unborn / as one. Gandhi, Saturn, and a lama photographed by Thomas Merton are also all prominent.

It is a kind of mystical vision, but not my own personal vision. This is humanity uniting as one, rather than always being in conflict.

A: Wonderful. And of course we would like to invite anyone reading this to take some time to come see what you have done here with this space. But moving on to a different topic, how would you characterize your experience in WoK Forums so far?

B: I find it very stimulating. It gives me new angles to look at my own inner work—my daily meditation practice—and it has been very inspirational, in some ways, because I would like to somehow combine a scientific spirit with a meditation practice more overtly than it has been. That’s one thing. The second thing is that Steven’s lectures have been particularly valuable because I have never heard anyone who had such a good philosophical grounding and such a deep contemplative experience, who is able to articulate that inner experience in such an expansive way. Steven is a rare person who not only knows philosophy but lives it, in an almost ancient way, the way philosophers used to be when they actually lived what they talked about. Interestingly, I’ve never met him in ‘reality’ so this is just my impression through the forums!

A: How do you see the effects of building this community in a virtual space?

B: The main thing is that it’s unbelievable that I can tune in on some times in the week at no cost and speak to other people from other parts of the world who are interested in a fairly uncommon topic. To be able to connect with the people here is just incredible. It would be even better to actually meet people in real life in a more relaxed way, but rather than looking at it that way I see the plusses, which far outweigh the minuses. In fact it is the plusses that would make me actually want to meet the people in person, and I have never done anything like this before. I never have had any involvement in virtual worlds. Some of our Cafh meetings are on conference call or using Skype, but not in virtual reality settings.

I was originally skeptical. What is going to be the difference between a virtual reality and a conference call? And I see that the virtual reality gives you a sense of being together that you don’t get in a conference call. Maybe it is the way my brain is tricked, but it does give me a feeling of connectedness that is different from the conference calls.

A: And has the virtual reality setting provided any leverage for your contemplative practice?

B: The answer is yes, in the following sense: I recognize maybe more clearly than ever that reality is more of a construct of my brain/mind than ‘the real thing,’ whatever that might be (chuckles). That is, without going into any detail, I perceive even more clearly that what I experience comes from the transformed input of my nervous system and that what I take for ‘reality.’ is a kind of virtual reality. I think

it heightens my sensitivity to that. There is some kind of meta-something about using a virtual reality that makes you realize your mind is a virtual reality. It's like a meta-teaching—a meta-lesson. It's quite a contrast to my daily experience, which is pretty up-front examining human beings. There is nothing virtual about it!

A: How was it, to create this office? What kind of reactions have you seen?

B: I have these images in my computer, so it wasn't hard to do once I figured out how to import things and put them on the wall. It was fun. Every artist wants to show their work, and I've had a number of shows, but not that many. It seemed like a fun thing to do. And it seemed to me that these images are in the spirit of the WoK subject matter.

A: Do you feel like building this office has been a way to facilitate a level of communication that wouldn't otherwise be possible in electronic media?

B: Yes. I am very image oriented, so I like to look at things, but I was hoping out of this some deeper connection and communication might occur.

4 Announcements

4.1 Special Contest!

The WoKer would like to pass on a challenge from Bob Magrisso: to identify all of the figures in 'Light Bearers,' one of the collages in his office. The reader of this paper who successfully identifies the most figures from the painting will have the honor of the next interview in this paper. The prize is also exchangeable for one thousand pounds sterling, its estimated monetary value.

4.2 Tainer Updates WoK Web-site

Steven Tainer has added several wonderful additions to the WoK web-site, including:

- The first installment of the Working Hypothesis Dialogues between Piet and Steven in the Wiki
- Transcripts of Steven's in-world talks
- A link to sound files of Steven's talks at the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery
- A link to Piet's first Second Life interview

5 Upcoming Events

5.1 Saturday, January 26 at 5pm ET

Steven Tainer will continue his series on working hypothesis background in the Colloquium Room. This time he will discuss basic features of the traditional koan approach to transmitting central aspects of contemplative insight. This will be one of the last presentations in his series, which ends in mid-February and will be replaced by a direct, experiential group exploration based on his own (very easy) variant of dream yoga.

5.2 Sunday, January 27 at 5PM ET

Marc Hoffmann will be speaking this week in the Colloquium Room, providing a ‘three months later’ view of his retreat experience last Fall and reentry in the ordinary hectic workaday world. Marc will also describe in more detail how the retreat was actually structured. Marc sent out the following summary of his talk:

‘Retreat is a central process on the Buddhist path and is viewed as pivotal means of deepening and stabilizing one’s meditation practice as well as clarifying one’s understanding of reality. Using my recent 3-month solitary retreat as an example, this talk aims to describe the Buddhist view of retreat and my own motivation for going, offer a glimpse of my retreat experience, and share some initial reflections about how the retreat experience has impacted my life in the past few months since re-entering the world.’

5.3 Monday, January 28 at 10PM ET

Our Monday evening Reading Group in the Reading Room will continue to concentrate on the book *The Wisdom of the World*, by Remi Brague. After a couple more meetings we will move on to another reading.

5.4 Virtual Events Schedule

Working hypothesis discussions and Second Life meetings continue; for the schedule please see: http://www.waysofknowing.net/VR_Stuff/VirtualEventsSchedule.html

6 Piet's Page

This last week has seen a lot of activity in the other Qwaq organization that I am running, in parallel with WoK Forums, the one called MICA, for Meta Institute for Computational Astrophysics. With the help of several people from Qwaq, we managed to get the results of some simple star cluster simulations up in a Qwaq Forum. We started with a few snapshots of a group of stars, and then found ways to show an actual animation, with the stars swarming in space, moving around their center of mass.

And in the same week we visited another three-dimensional display of stars, namely a model of the stars that are closest to the Sun, our immediate neighbors in our corner of the Milky Way galaxy. This was a Second Life display created by Troy McConaghy (Troy McLuhan in Second Life), and shown by him to our QSL group, the Qwaq - Second Life Liaison. In both cases, we as avatars could walk through the snapshots and animations and inspect the positions and orbits of individual stars.

For me this was such a thrill, to see the subject-object divide drop away between scientists and their object of study. Instead of you sitting in front of a computer screen, staring at a simulation depicted at the other side of the glass, here you are with an embodied sense of presence, right there in the same world as the stars! It is a bit like a fairy tale, or a good children's story like Lewis Carroll's sequel to Alice in Wonderland, *Through the Looking Glass*. In a virtual world, instead of entering a planetarium and taking your seat to look up at the simulated sky, you flight right up and into the sky mingling with the heavens.

All this made me wonder what the implications could be for our WoK group. When we are working with the working hypothesis, we can use our own life as a lab, and while we are meeting in the virtual world of Qwaq, we enter a kind of software lab within the lab of our life, experimenting with different modes of being present and of communicating. How far can we draw the parallels between the use of a lab in science and in contemplation? What are the parallels between lifting the subject-object divide in MICA and Second Life, and contemplative notions of going back to what can be found before the subject-object split gets seemingly solidified? I don't know, but I hope to find out more about it all!

7 Quote of the Week

Did you ever wonder if the person in the puddle is real, and you're just a reflection of him?

– Calvin and Hobbes