



Practical Thinking

Art and the Marketplace

by Robert Brusic

A famous art collector is walking through the city when he notices a mangy cat lapping milk from a saucer in a doorway of a store. He does a double take, because he knows that the saucer is extremely old and very valuable. Masking the glint in his eye, he offers a hefty price for the cat to which the owner agrees. On his way out he casually offers an additional couple of dollars for the saucer, saying that it would save him from having to buy a dish for his new cat. "Sorry," the owner says cagily, "but that's my lucky saucer. So far this week I've sold thirty-eight cats."

Some people, like the store owner, claim to be ignorant about art. Others, like the buyer, like to see art as an investment. Still others just claim to like art for art's sake. That is, one can appreciate a work of art (a painting or a sculpture) on its own terms because it gives the viewer a sense of delight or satisfaction without moral, didactic, or utilitarian purpose: I know what I like, I like what I like, and that's all there is to it. Many like art for reasons that go in different directions: art for inspiration, edification, or civic enhancement (the reasons for maintaining art museums); art as propaganda (as in the arenas of politics or advertising). Some doubtless take a deep plunge and view art for insight into and appreciation of the past; others may take a shallower dive and see art as a way to decorate the walls of a corporate office or a motel room.

In the midst of these divergent uses for art, does art have specific economic value? Some, like the cat and saucer buyer, would argue in the affirmative, seeing art as a commodity to be bought and sold. This is doubtless true, at least in part, for those who run auction houses like Sotheby's or Christie's. Lots of money (whether for appreciation or investment) trades hands in the art market. Museums, because they must make financial ends meet, certainly have a stake in the economy. Blockbuster exhibits (like the recent Louvre show at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts) attract large crowds who pay hefty admission fees; attendees also bolster the economy by shelling out hard cash for pretty catalogues, kitschy T-shirts, and arty coffee mugs.



This 1658 painting by Rembrandt, "Portrait of a Man...With ArmsAkimbo." recently sold at auction for \$33.2 million.

The new owner is Stephen A. Wynn, a casino owner in Las Vegas. At its last public sale in 1930, the painting sold for \$89,000. The previous record for a Rembrandt painting at auction was \$28.6 million in 2000.

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One can clearly see a relationship here between art and the economy. David Brenneman, the Curator of European Art at the High Museum in Atlanta gave a talk on the “Louvre and Masterpieces” exhibit at the MIA on October 18, 2009. While addressing matters of connoisseurship, he readily admitted that masterpieces (like the Mona Lisa, Venus de Milo, and the Winged Victory of Samothrace) were of seminal economic importance to the Louvre. These works provide the cultural lure for hundreds of thousands of visitors and, in his words, provide the “economic engine” for the museum. Further reinforcing the relationship between economics and esthetics, Brenneman noted the importance and popularity of a television show like “Antiques Roadshow.” The dynamic of looking for valuable antiques in ones basement or attic provides a thrill and a significant economic incentive for people to seek and find.

Public art, not just in museums

Beyond the business of buying and selling, however, art and economics have always had a significant relationship. For example, one thinks of the requirement some states have that a certain percentage of a public project’s budget (often about 1%) must be spent on art. It is widely recognized that art in public places such as municipal buildings or airports adds value (and perhaps beauty) to the project; it is said that public art also contributes to education and community-building.

Fabian Winkler, a professor of art and design at Purdue University has remarked: “Public art has always been a great way to connect with people, especially people who artists usually cannot reach because they are not likely to visit a museum or gallery. Without public art, something is missing in the community. Living without art is like living without good health; it’s fundamental to one’s well-being.” (from *Purdue University’s News*, September 15, 2008) Clearly art and the economy are intertwined, creating what might be called esthetic capital.

That esthetic capital has a place in the Capitol of the United States, as reported by the *New York Times* (October 7, 2009). President and Mrs Obama, it was reported, selected 45 artworks to decorate their new home. The vaults of Washington museums were opened, lending works by Mark Rothko, Ed Ruscha, and Alma Thomas, the highly regarded African-American painter. One can speculate that these works of art will create an esthetic ambiance and perhaps play an indirect role in matters of hospitality, policy, and economics as the Obamas entertain and influence visitors to the White House. The inclusion of a painting by Alma Thomas, a black woman, is of

particular significance, for her presence on the walls in the White House symbolically sends a message to the larger culture in the United States.

Directly or indirectly art has significant economic consequence in other ways—art theft, for example. Art theft is big business. That claim is reported in Simon Houpt’s book, *Museum of the Missing*. “Interpol, the international association of police agencies...believes the market for stolen art and antiquities is third on the list of worldwide illicit activities, right behind drugs and arms trading. Estimates range from \$1.5 billion to \$6 billion annually.” (page 12) One can, of course, lament the cultural loss of these stolen and destroyed works of art; at the same time, however, one is also free to gasp at the extent of the economic impact of art theft.

In other, more salutary ways, one can take notice of society’s investment in the arts. People, at some expense, do attend concerts and dramatic productions. Such cultural activities not only mean employment for performers; but they also help sustain attendant commercial establishments. Museums develop extensive programs for school children to visit and view art. The hope, of course, is that such endeavors will have long term educational (and economic) effect as children grow and mature. Hospitals consider art to be one important part of the healing process. The halls and rooms of hospitals display art because it makes good sense in terms of therapy. And of course one might cite the significance of art in such places as the Minnesota State Fair, where several art sites invite participation by the citizens of our state: the Fine Arts Building, the Grain Art display, and other areas of creative activity. These works, perhaps, provide a degree of inspiration as folks amble on to the next helping of cheese curds. While not necessarily remunerative, these displays are nonetheless important to the artists and the viewers. No one among the throngs of visitors would deny that the perduring presence of the arts has an impact on culture and commerce.

It is never enough to view art as an isolated pleasure in the cathedral-like precincts of a museum. Art provides esthetic capital that touches on health and well being. It is a vital part of education and societal development. And, for better or worse, art has an inescapable connection with economics. A good piece of art brings a satisfaction that cannot necessarily be measured in dollars and cents; but neither can art and economics be separated. The pleasure art evokes for both the creator and the viewer can spill over into economic spheres of life. After all, we know what we like; and, by golly, in various ways we are willing to pay for and be touched by what we like.

Physics Encounters Consciousness

by Bill McTeer

Editor's note: This year the Scholars hosted regular meetings with speakers. Since many new ideas were discussed during these meetings, it seemed expedient to make the meetings the focus of this issue. What follows are reflections on the meetings, which took place (and will continue to take place) at Hosmer Library in Minneapolis on the last Saturday of most months.

Dr. Richard M. Fuller, Emeritus Professor of Physics and Liberal Studies at Gustavus Adolphus College, is a brave man. On February 28, 2009, he presented for MISF on a topic that elicits strong responses from most people who spend a little time thinking about it: What is the relationship between consciousness and physics? The talk, titled "Physics Encounters Consciousness," brought out a standing room crowd at the Hosmer library. There were believers, mystics, skeptics, and non-believers, all with their own viewpoints. Dr. Fuller spent half the time setting the stage with his own observations and half responding to audience observations and questions.

Dr. Fuller's observations looked at how Quantum Mechanics and complexity theory interact with the concept of consciousness. The first issue he discussed relates to the Quantum Mechanics concept of "superposition of states." There are famous experiments that show that a Quantum Mechanical object whose exact state is unobserved behaves as if it exists in all possible states simultaneously. The multiple states "collapse" into one specific state only when an observation is made. Thus, poor "Schrodinger's Cat," whose life depends on whether a radioactive atom has decayed, is "both dead and alive" until an observation is made, at which point it becomes one or the other. Superposition behavior becomes even weirder when experiments are constructed such that several objects have "entangled" states that are logically interdependent. The observation of any of the entangled objects results in the states of all of the entangled objects assuming states consistent with the one observed, even if they are widely separated.

Einstein found the implications of superposition and its collapse to be deeply unsatisfying. He is quoted as saying that "God does not play dice with the universe" and disparaging "spooky interaction at a distance." He and some other theorists felt that the existence of such odd rules meant Quantum Mechanics theory was incomplete and that the behavior seen was in fact a surface effect of hidden variables. Einstein often debated with Nils Bohr trying to expose inconsistencies in this so-called

Copenhagen Interpretation. For his part, Bohr never asserted that the Interpretation describes how things really work, merely that using it provided consistent and verifiable predictions.

In any event, the role of the "observer" is an intrinsic part of Quantum Mechanics interpretation. Collapse to a definite state occurs only when an observer gets knowledge of the state of an object. Many scientists see an inherent relationship between consciousness and the "observer." If this is the case, it follows that the universe we see is created by consciousness.

Mechanisms of human consciousness

Dr. Fuller then offered some thoughts on the mechanisms of human consciousness. The workings of the nervous system have been extensively studied. Neurons receive sensory impulses and transmit them to other neurons in a network, eventually resulting in impulses that cause some sort of action. The network of neurons reconfigures itself over time, but there is nothing inherent in the preceding



Dr. Richard Fuller addresses the MISF meeting at Hosmer Library February 28, 2009. Photo by George Anderson

description that implies anything other than cause and effect without self-awareness. For Dr. Fuller, the aspects of neural processing that can in principle lead to non-deterministic behavior are the gaps called synapses between neurons and the overall complexity of a large nervous system. Synapses behave in a non-linear way and are small enough that Quantum Mechanical effects are significant. Even so, animals with only a few neurons show no sign of being conscious. Some theorists feel that the complexity of a higher nervous system leads to consciousness, due to new behaviors that can "emerge" when any system becomes

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sufficiently complex.

This leads to a circle, in which Quantum Mechanics creates consciousness, which itself creates the concrete universe by causing probabilistic superposition to collapse into a definite state. Literally, “I think, therefore I am.” These pathways are a little “spooky,” to steal Einstein’s word.

Finally, before taking questions, Dr. Fuller mused about the implications of these thoughts. Are we as individuals part of a larger whole? Is consciousness separable from the physical individual?

Questions and observations from the attendees were varied—there is only space here for a partial summary:

Q. Why do you think people concern themselves so much about whether other living things are conscious? A. It is probably some reflection of religion. In some areas it is difficult to disentangle science and religion. (As an aside, Dr. Fuller mentioned that when he was actively teaching at Gustavus Adolphus, he was occasionally asked about teaching “Lutheran Science,” a contradiction in terms.)

Q. Is the universe conscious? A. It depends a lot on what you mean by the question. If consciousness is an emergent property of complex systems, the universe is the most complex system we see.

Q. Is there a conflict between the notion of a participatory universe and the classical laws of nature? A. It depends on what properties you measure. Classical laws of nature deal with situations where Quantum Mechanical probability effects are very tiny.

Q. If consciousness is emergent, was it present at the Big Bang? A. Complexity is at the heart of the issue. Maybe consciousness needs neurons, maybe it doesn’t.

Q. Is the whole notion of emergent properties of complex systems just a fudge to describe situations where we don’t know enough detail? A. As science progresses, our understanding of phenomena changes. In some cases now classified as emergent and chaotic, we may find that there are causal laws at work. In others, it appears that we won’t.

Q. Einstein is famous for “thought experiments” like those you use in your presentation. Can’t thought experiments come to erroneous conclusions regarding the properties of consciousness? A. Thought experiments are always subject to a lot of “grayness.”

Q. Can free will be explained by natural phenomena? A. Free will is critical to consciousness issues. The Quantum Mechanical Uncertainty Principle allows but doesn’t

require or explain free will.

Q. What evidence do we have for Quantum Mechanics effects in the synapses? A. In classical physics, for an electron to move from one place to another it must go through the intermediate places. However, in synapses some electrons “tunnel” from here to there without ever being anywhere in between. We may learn more about this behavior with magnetic imaging.

Q. How does self-reflection fit with consciousness? A. This is a good question, but it is not clear how far we

Human Systems Dynamics

by Phil Dahlen

Dr. Glenda Eoyang, the founding Executive Director of the Human Systems Dynamics Institute, was the guest speaker at the monthly meeting on Saturday, March 28. Her talk, “Human Systems Dynamics: Complexity and the Pragmatism of Time,” identified many complex dynamics in ourselves, our family, our neighborhood, and our community.

Dr. Eoyang noted that human dynamics are far more complex than anything found in physics, since the variables continually change. She said that human dynamics were complicated enough without adding more to their complexity by presenting theories that needed to be simplified.

When describing human systems dynamics, Dr. Eoyang compared Common Sense Time (represented by a right arrow) with Pragmatic Time (represented by a figure similar to the outline of an hour glass that has been turned on its side). When dealing with Common Sense Time, she said that it is assumed that everything remains the same and it is a question of speed versus clarity. When dealing with Pragmatic Time, it is assumed that there is conflict, evaluation, diversity, personal development, warfare in the future, and other applications.

Dr. Eoyang compared Organized, Self-Organizing, and Unorganized planning. Organized planning is like a machine in which conditions are familiar, predictable, reducible, replicable, and stable. Self-Organized planning is like a dance that is constantly changing, irreducible, not replicable, emergent, interactive, with a familiar whole, but including surprising parts. Unorganized planning is like a lot of gas that is constantly surprising, totally ambiguous, unpredictable, and unstable.

Organized Interventions get and maintain control by means of policies, procedures, team building, visioning,

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clear goals, and branding. A situation may demand more control and predictability, and a more active response and adaptation.

Self-Organized Interventions may depend on a need for increased control, decreased control, standing and watching, or jumping and participating.

Unorganized Interventions strive to make sense of chaos by telling stories, collecting history, gathering data, containing anxiety, building relationships, and enjoying innovations.

When performing Adaptive Action, you ask yourself what you will do to shift the conditions for self-organizing. Containers will hold the system together until patterns form. You can shift the containers so that they are more organized by having fewer, stronger, and smaller containers. Or, you can shift them so that they are unorganized by having more, weaker, and larger containers.

Dr. Eoyang included additional details in her presentation, which was followed by a lengthy question and answer period.

Life After the Bailout: Transition to Resilience

by Lucy Brusic

The MISF meeting on April 25 featured a conversation with Tom Dukich titled “Life after the Bailout: Transition to Resilience.” Dukich, a widely read philosopher, made two major points.

1. Everything is interconnected. You cannot deal with or change things in isolation.
2. It is important to understand the system that you are attempting to change, and philosophy is key to that understanding.

During his 90-minute talk, Dukich demonstrated these points by quoting liberally from an extensive bibliography of philosophical works.

He opened with a quote from Gandhi: “Live as if you were to die tomorrow and learn as if you were to live forever.” He took this quote to mean that people (and civilizations) have to strike a balance between temporal flux and permanence. Several times during his discussion, the speaker came back to the necessity for balance between change and stability.

Charles Mackay (*Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, 1841) and William Edward Hartpole Lecky (*History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*, 1865) were among the first to document the history of superstition, anti-rationalism, government tyranny, and their effect on world history and thinking. Alfred North Whitehead continued Lecky’s work in *Science and the Modern World* (1925) and *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect* (1927).

Dukich quoted extensively from Whitehead to show that our current situation is not unprecedented and that change always poses serious problems for culture:

Major advances in civilization are processes which all but wreck the preceding civilization. (*Symbolism*)

It is the business of the future to be dangerous. We

confuse security with civilization. (*Science in the Modern World*)

Stability is inconsistent with civilization. The Great Ages have all been unstable ages. (*Science in the Modern World*)

From a philosophical standpoint, Dukich views life as a totality in which one problem cannot be solved without impacting other problems. Global warming, economic breakdown, and over-population are all related as problems. The best solution is the one that has the lowest cost in terms of human life, trauma, and stress to the overall system.

Quoting from Ivor Leclerc (*Philosophy of Nature*, 1986) Dukich feels that today philosophy is faced with the necessity of a thoroughgoing rethinking of its categories. This rethinking will affect science no less deeply than did the rethinking that took place in the seventeenth century.

Philosophy makes a difference

In order to demonstrate that philosophy and a philosophical point of view make a difference in understanding the world and modifying its systems, Dukich stepped back to the work of Walter Shewhart (*Economic Control of Quality of Manufactured Product*, 1931). Shewhart used philosophical and anthropological work by William James, A. N. Whitehead, and others to solve quality control problems at the Hawthorne Plant in Chicago. In the 1930s the Hawthorne Plant, manufacturing telephone poles and telephones, was having serious problems with quality control. Shewhart brought sociological and anthropological thinking (much of it based on work by the Society of Fellows at Harvard) to bear on the problem and came up with the idea of Total Quality Control Management through the “placebo” effect.

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The Japanese had picked up on the work of Shewhart before World War II and asked him to come to Japan after the war to help them in their recovery. Shewhart's protege, W. Edwards Deming, was sent instead. Deming wrote a book called *Out of the Crisis* (1982) in which he described the recovery. It involved a new theory of knowledge, which moved capitalistic leadership from lawyers and capitalists (who might have sabotaged changes) to engineers (who presumably had knowledge about how things worked.)

Analogies from agriculture

At the present time, we are using analogies and philosophy drawn from agriculture to explain and discuss economics. For example, Wendell Berry (*A Continuous Harmony*, 1970; *The Unsettling of America*, 1977) talks about the interconnectedness of everything as the Wheel of Life. The concept of the Wheel of Life, as opposed to a straight line, is explicit in Shewhart's statistical method.

We also talk about a sustainable lifestyle as permaculture. Dukich quoted from E. F. Schumacher (*Small is Beautiful*, 1973) to the effect that agriculture and industry are essentially different. Agriculture deals with life, with producing things from living soil; industry deals with man-devised processes that work reliably when applied to man-devised non-living materials. The manufacturing industry is an offensive against the unpredictability of man. Because humans are not designed to be perfect, but to be able to survive in spite of imperfection, civilization requires a balance between industry and agriculture.

At this point Dukich introduced an elaborate analogy from nature to explain the process that he sees going on in civilization. Scientists have found that butterflies have two sets of DNA: one in the chrysalis stage, another in the adult phase. The caterpillar (except for the brain, the heart and the hind gut) disintegrates into a mass of jelly and the second set of DNA kicks in to create the butterfly. In Dukich's mind, societies right now are becoming social jelly from which humanity will rebuild and reform. Dukich sees a potential for humanity to rebuild society in a fundamentally new way; it is not just a matter of bailing it out.

Dukich went on to try to explain that the answers do not lie in technology; we need to be both creative and imaginative. Citing an unpublished speech given by Albert Einstein in Argentina in 1925, Dukich explained that we need both creativity and intuition. Einstein said, "In science there are always two goals: a quest for enlargement and a quest for systematic unity. The relationship between

laws and experience is not simple." Science can arrive at logical answers, but no scientific method can deduce a law from observation. "The transition from observation to law requires an act of creativity. Imagination is more important than knowledge."

Dukich went on to cite James P. Carse (*Finite and Infinite Games*, 1986) to the effect that no machine has spontaneity within itself. A machine must be designed, maintained, and fueled by its creator. On the other hand, organic growth (in a garden) cannot be forced. It has a vitality of its own, which the machine does not have. The key is intuition balanced by rationality.

When asked what his advice would be for President Obama, Dukich laughed and returned to his basic theme, "The world's an awfully big system. If you do not understand a system, don't tamper with it. You can make it worse."

Children as Pawns

When Dennis Shapiro a businessman, education writer and former Minneapolis school board member, and veteran reporter Scott Russell spoke to the Independent Scholars Forum, May 30, they described a discouraging twenty years of attempts to improve the Minneapolis public schools. Their talk was titled "Children as Pawns."

As Shapiro and Russell explained the situation, Minneapolis tried in 1987 to set in motion a plan to assure the well-being of the school children of the city. At the end of twenty years, it does not appear that much has been accomplished.

One should not assume that the failure is for lack of trying. Many good programs have been begun, but certain factors make it very difficult to measure or even intuit success. In part the problem is that nothing is organized or easily accessible: there is no database of what has been done; there is no coordinated plan. Some of this problem occurs because each new superintendent comes in with a new plan and starts over again.

In addition, programs designed to assist school children cannot find continuing funding. As we know, it is fairly easy to get money for pilot projects, but not easy to scale up the projects. Furthermore, there is little collaboration between various organizations. What cooperation does exist, does so because of long personal relationships that make it possible to cooperate. An example is the Safe Schools: Healthy Students project in which both leaders have been in their jobs for 10 to 15 years.

Another issue is that of measuring success. Schools are

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under great pressure to show that dollars make a difference, but the only measurement that seems to count is success on tests. It is very hard to measure other factors. Other things could be measured and evaluated.

Both men felt that all of the initiatives were very good plans, but it was very hard to check if they were working. Community support for students seems to be a key. Parents need a consistent relationship with the system. Both speakers also identified a problem of class—in that most of the students in the Minneapolis public schools are African-Americans who generally do not have consistent home-based support.

Audience questions revealed a consistent undercurrent of puzzlement about what schools were supposed to do. The role of the public school used to be train citizens. Some members of the audience wondered if present-day schools, particularly charter schools, have this aim as a goal.

Beyond the Knowledge Wars

For the first member meeting of current school year, September 26, Harry Boyte gave a talk, “Beyond the Knowledge Wars.” Boyte is a Senior Fellow at the Humphrey Institute, founder and co-director of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship, and a member of the graduate school faculty at the University of Minnesota.

The thesis of Boyte’s talk was that the cult of the expert is a sign of disfunctional times. Experts are expected to be detached from their research, in order to be objective, so that they do not research things about which they have passionate feelings.

For a review of *Three Cups of Tea*, a book about community organizing, see page 8.

Boyte is particularly concerned about the effect of this detachment at the University of Minnesota. He described the U in the 1930s when it was a great civic institution and one of the intellectual sites in the Twin Cities, taking as its responsibility the broadening of its education base to include “poor kids” and people from rural areas. He cited particularly the case of Extension Agents who were told that the “community’s knowledge is more important than your own.”

By the 1970s, when Boyte ran a research project, he found that scholars at the U were dispirited and detached from the real world. This enervation led to less civic engagement and impoverishment of scholarship as a whole. This trend

has more or less continued to the present day with the recent abolition of General College.

Boyte would like to find some way, probably through community organizing, to regrow the civic culture of institutions. He wonders how we can change our culture to foster cooperation; how we can foster a public culture at the U (he sees tenure as inimical to this); and how we can foster cooperation between institutions.

Unfortunately, as one can divine from the last three statements, the problem is quite complex. “Unless you understand complexity, tampering with a system makes it worse,” says Boyte. Nonetheless, the strongest priority in the Twin Cities is to see change in education.

Bobbing for Poems

The October meeting of the Scholars, which took place on Halloween, was a poetry reading event featuring the poems of Morgan Grayce Willow, Jim White, Naomi Cohn, and Donald Winters. These poets read from their works and members of the audience were invited to read favorite poems as well.

Willow, who is a poet and essayist, read a poem by Mark Strand, “Keeping Things

For a review of *Between*, Morgan Willow’s new book of poetry, see page 9.

Whole” and one by Louise Bogan, “Medusa.” She concluded with her poem “Medusa Revisited,” from her new book *Between*.

White, who worked for the Great Northern Railroad as well as teaching at MCAD, read a poem by James Stevens “What Tom Said in the Pub” and a work by his wife, Emily White, “Autumn Snowfall.” He also read a poem he had written “Why My Picture is Not on the Post Office Wall.”

Cohn, who is a community organizer and fundraising writer, read several of her own poems, likening writing poetry to composting. She read “Ant’s Wisdom on Financial Markets,” “First Quarter Profits Down in Oldest Profession,” and an excerpt from “Everyday Poems for City Sidewalks” called “Losing.”

Winters, whose background includes a PhD in American Studies, read his work, “Hemingway’s Key West Fire Sermon,” “Dreams,” “Big Sleep,” “Hunting Beach,” and “Mornings Are Like That.”

Willow also brought a grab bag of poems that audience members were invited to read.

Healing of Memories in AA

The final meeting of 2009 for MISF members took place November 28 at Hosmer Library. Maria Swora, a social anthropologist and member of the Scholars, spoke on “Healing of Memories in AA.” About 20 people attended the meeting.

Swora, whose doctoral dissertation was on a similar topic, began by giving a brief background on the history of the AA fellowship. It was founded in 1935 in Akron, Ohio, by two men, Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith, who found that telling each other their stories was a way to control the disease of alcoholism.

From this meeting, which was rather by chance, the AA organization has developed into a world-wide organization. Although recognition of a higher power is part of the twelve steps, AA itself is not a religious organization. Swora reviewed the 12-steps that are fundamental to AA, focusing especially on steps 4 and 5 (inward restructuring) and steps 8 and 9 (outward restructuring).

The reason she focussed on these particular steps is that they deal with the way in which memories serve to structure and heal in AA meetings. (She did her research in Rochester, New York, where some AA meetings are open to observers as meetings in the Twin Cities are not. Thus she was able to draw conclusions by observing participants at open meetings.)

Swora’s talk focussed on the idea that alcoholism is a “disease of forgetfulness.” Drinking helps people forget pain and shameful memories, but the result of alcoholism is that memory problems disturb social functioning and lead to an incoherent and chaotic life course. In effect, alcoholics fail to accumulate coherent memories of their lives.

The AA agenda of “story-telling” is a way for an alcoholic to begin to create “a coherent life narrative”; by telling their story at meetings, they can begin to create a meaningful past for themselves, take responsibility for the damage they have caused, and start to repair and amend relationships. According to Swora, it takes about a year for a recovering alcoholic to “get their story straight.”

Swora pointed out that although alcoholism is a disease of forgetfulness, AA is a community of memory. Commemorations of anniversaries for an individual, for a chapter, and for the national organization organization are very important. A major celebration occurs every summer in Akron.

Book Reviews

Three Cups of Tea: One man's mission to fight terrorism and build nations—one school at a time by Greg Mortenson. (Viking: New York, 2006) 336 pages

Three Cups of Tea is a book covering the chance 1993 meeting of a mountaineer/military veteran with the isolated villagers of Korphe, a small town high in the Karakoram Mountain Range, in northeast Pakistan. Greg Mortenson, lost and nearing the end of his reserves, receives food, shelter and ultimately a mission when he notices the poverty of the residents who nevertheless freely share their meager food stores and homes with a stranger.

Observing village boys scratching out their school lessons in the dirt and noticing that girls were excluded from even these rudimentary schools, he answers a young girl’s request to attempt to return someday to help the village build a school for all the children.

In 1996, Mortenson returned to Korphe, Pakistan, with funds to work with the village elders in constructing the town’s first school building. Requests for assistance in building schoolhouses soon spread and Mortenson formed an organization, the Central Asia Institute (CAI), to assist in the planning and construction of rural schools.

Three Cups of Tea, written with the assistance of journalist David O. Relin, chronicles the persuasion and planning that accompanied the Korphe school construction project, and the subsequent spread of school construction projects throughout the entire region. By 2004, Mortenson had crossed the border into Afghanistan, opening an initial school building there.

Today, the Central Asia Institute has completed 91 schoolhouses in Pakistan serving 19,000 students (three-quarters female) and an additional 39 schools in Afghanistan (including tent schools in refugee camps) serving over 39,000 Afghan children, mostly girls.

In the last few years, Mortenson’s work and writings have come to the attention of world leaders and the general public as evidenced by the widespread success of his book and lectures. In recent articles, Mortenson notes, “Young women are the developing world’s greatest agents of progress. Just one year of schooling will dramatically raise a girl’s later economic prospects, and where girls get to fifth grade, birth rates and infant mortality plunge. Teaching girls to read and write reduces the ignorance and poverty that fuel religious extremism and lays the groundwork for prosperity and peace. In military parlance, educating girls

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is a “force multiplier...the flame that burns at the center of my work, the heat around which I cup my hands, are the stories of girls whose lives have been changed by education.”
reviewed by David Juncker

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Between, by Morgan Grayce Willow. (Noden Press: Minneapolis, 2009) 84 pages

As a college student, many years ago, I joined a group of friends for a social gathering at a cabin in the wintery north woods of New Hampshire. At one point in the evening I was commissioned to walk out onto a frozen lake and not return until I had a bucket of water to make coffee. Carrying a shovel,

an ax, and the bucket, I hiked to the middle of the lake. Once there, I gazed for a long time at the brilliant starry sky and the shadowy surround of trees. Eventually, I broke the silence by shoveling a circular patch of snow and attacking the ice with the ax. I was surprised how thick the ice was, for it took dozens of strenuous strokes to get to the water beneath. When I did, I was equally surprised at the spurt of water that was released from below. Never did ice cold water feel or taste so good. And, later, the coffee was tasty as well.

This wintery scene, locked deeply in my memory box, surprisingly, came to mind as I read Morgan Grayce Willow’s poem “Thirteen Takes on a Minnesota Night.” Granted, Minnesota is not New Hampshire. But an evocative poem about winter and ice has the power to call forth memory and association, especially in the opening lines of the poem:

Under moonlight pressing
dark, soundless lines in snow...
Nothing but wilderness around.”

I felt I had been given permission to open that box of memory, having also read “All That Fiddle,” where the poet encourages:

Use poetry for holiday
gift-wrapping...
Use poems to clear away

clutter in your mind. Use them
as greeting; save money
on cards. If your camera
is stolen, let poems
be snapshots,
souvenirs from trips.
Search poems for fitting words
as you stand beside a grave.

Willow’s poetic admonition might cause someone to use one of her poems while actually standing beside a grave. “How to Meet Death” might be the one, or perhaps “Furthest Limit,” which invites us to ponder

and to notice
the continual
farewell.

Her poems are not always easy to understand. Even a second or third reading might leave one perplexed. But reading poetry is not for the speed reader. The unhurried effort often gives insightful rewards. For example, “Jesus on the Calendar” allows the reader to reflect on a tapestry depicting a suffering Jesus. The poem unfolds to image Jesus’ fingers “callused from handling fishing nets”; I had always thought that Jesus was a carpenter. The shift in imagery in the final part of the poem suggested something fresh about Jesus; and it brought me back once again to a frozen lake and a warm memory:

The calendar in this Minnesota
fishing town revolves around
his heart and the lake ice.
The bait shop across the street
does brisk business on Sundays.
I suspect he wouldn’t mind.

The forty-two poems in this book (plus Willow’s translation of a verse from the Tao Te Ching) make for a thoughtful and reflective collection. If one is unable to hear Garrison Keillor read his daily poem on *Writer’s Almanac*, then readers are encouraged to try Morgan Grace Willow’s volume of sensitive poems. She concludes her collection, appropriately, with “Last Words Ghazal.”

The pocket of the universe is lined with words
Time pleats, an accordion of space, number and words...
The poet appeals to the ever-present eye.
Is this faith, that poets get the last word?

reviewed by Charles Cubrimi

We Need More Scholars

When I became president of the Minnesota Independent Scholars a year and a half ago, I had several goals. The most important one was to increase the amount of face-to-face time between members. I also wanted to raise our profile on the internet and to increase our membership.

With respect to the first goal, we have implemented a series of monthly meetings which meets at the same time (the last Saturday of the month at 10:30 a.m.) and in the same place (Hosmer library in south Minneapolis). We have also added a History Study Group (see below) and established at least one social-only event (no programs; just good conversation) per year. These events, I think, have been very successful.

With respect to raising our profile on the internet, we can now be found on Meetup.com and our major events are announced on Craigslist.com and other sites. And, of course, we still have our website, <www.MNIndependentScholars.org.> This web presence has increased our attendance and even led to a few new members. We intend to do more, and we have an active committee looking at all the possibilities. I have great confidence that further developments in this area will be coming before too long.

Unfortunately, the goal of increasing our membership has not been met. We were, and still are, an organization of around fifty members. The members we have picked up from our online efforts have only made up for the attrition any such organization as ours experiences. But we have also not yet directly addressed this problem with any new ideas, so there is still some optimism that we can succeed in growing.

Three areas to do more

While we do have some laurels to present to ourselves, we are certainly not resting on them. In all three areas we want to do more. We would very much like to start some new Study Groups and schedule more programs. We not only want to put ourselves on more online sites, but would like to have some online discussion groups. And of course (no laurels here) we want more members.

In order to do this we need, not surprisingly, more volunteers and more money. The former is the most important. We need volunteers to coordinate the Study Groups, to monitor our online endeavors, and to help find and schedule our programs. We do, of course, have some very hard-working members on our staff now. The danger, as always in a small

organization, is burning out these volunteers and having even fewer able hands available.

Right now the MISF board of directors is working on our 2010 budget. Like just about everyone else, our income falls short of what we want to do. We did get \$200 in donations (plus about \$7 in matching funds) in the recent Give to the Max Day through GiveMN.org. While this money helps a great deal, we may have to review the decision we made a few years ago to drop our membership fee to \$25 in order to make it more attractive to be a member.

If there is something you are interested in volunteering to do for MISF, you can contact me or any member of the board of directors and let us know. The field is wide open. And if you have friends or acquaintances who might be interested in joining MISF, be sure to give them a sales pitch. We can provide you with brochures if that would help. Often the problem we run into is that prospective members shy away from the word "scholar." "I'm not a scholar," they may say. Please tell them they don't have to be a scholar to be a member of MISF. If they support the idea of independent scholarship, they meet our membership criteria. Of course, they also have to be able to listen, examine, deliberate, consult, reason, evaluate, conclude, challenge, and justify. Among other things.

Curt Hillstrom <curthillstrom@hotmail.com>

History Study Group

The newly organized History Study Group has had a busy fall. We began by reading *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* by Stepehn E. Toulmin. Then we read *Dangerous Games: The Uses and Abuses of History* by Margaret MacMillan, and then *Descartes' Bones: A Skeletal History of the Conflict Between Faith and Reason* by Russell Shorto.

Now we have decided that it is more fun to study a character or an event, with each person reading whatever biography or source they can find on the subject. In December we read about the Englishwoman Gertrude Bell (1868-1926), about whom several biographies have been written in the past few years. In January we will be reading and talking about the 1862 Dakota Conflict. New members are welcome in this group, which will meet again Saturday January 23 at 10 a.m. at a local library.

If you would like to be on the email list for this study group please let Curt Hillstrom <curthillstrom@hotmail.com> know. Information is also available on our website

Editor's Note

When David Juncker, Kathie Simon Frank, and I sat down last March to plan this journal, we assumed that the economy would be the driving issue for the year. Thus we agreed to write a long article covering Tom Dukich's talk and I commissioned my husband, Robert Brusica, to write our lead article on art and the economy. I asked various members of the Scholars if they had something they wanted to write about the economy, and, while many had things to say, no one was willing to commit to paper. Thus the issue languished for a while.

When, however, driven by a year-end deadline, I sat down to put this issue together I found that the Scholars had generated some provocative thoughts about things other than the economy in our monthly meetings. So I decided to write an account of each meeting; I am grateful to Bill McTeer and Phil Dahlen for covering meetings that I could not.

Some unsettling resonances sound in these accounts. Three of our speakers—Harry Boyte and Dennis Shapiro and Scott Russell—criticize our society (at least in Minnesota) for neglecting the education of a whole invisible class of people, that is, African-Americans, rural residents, and poor people. Both talks emphasized that we have failed to bring this group into the educational system at anything more than a very basic level—and sometimes we haven't even done that. This problem is an old one in American society; even in post-revolutionary America (which was probably less class conscious than we are, certainly did not have so many immigrants, and presumably wanted everyone to be able to read the Bible) towns were extremely reluctant to vote to tax themselves to build schools. Unfortunately, now as then, the rewards of paying for education are neither immediate nor obvious. Art is more attractive to an investor than public education; see the sidebar on page 1.

The second theme that emerges clearly in these talks (see Fuller, Dukich, Shapiro and Russell again, and even Eoyang) is that our society and its systems are very complex. We cannot easily fix one part without disturbing and perhaps breaking another part. Our failure to educate all (or at least more) citizens dooms us to inept repetition of old and sometimes not very good solutions.

Nonetheless, I take heart from the wisdom of people like Ghandi and Einstein who could see that a better future would emerge out of the chaos of their own times and endeavors. I also take heart from books like *Three Cups of Tea*, reviewed by David Juncker, which seem to say that a pragmatic approach can lead to positive change. Morgan Willow's book *Between*, as reviewed by Charles Cubrimi (a pen name), also suggests that not everything (such as poetry) needs to be justified economically.

I am happy to be able to include also in these meeting resumes an outline of the poetry reading in October and of Maria Swora's very engaging talk about AA.

MISF will continue this pattern of meetings. Our first three meetings in 2010 are announced on the next page. I can always use reporters; it would be good to increase the writing pool. Please let me know if you can help.

Lucy Brusica <lucy@brusica.net>

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Deadline for the next issue is June 1, 2010. The material in this journal is copyrighted to the authors. It may not be duplicated in any form without permission.

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Upcoming MISF meetings

The details of our January, February and March meetings are still being determined except that they will feature programs on Minnesota history. Here is what we have so far:

Saturday, January 30, 2010. We will feature a talk by Charles Samuelson, Executive Director of the Minnesota ACLU. He will talk about civil liberties.

Saturday, February 27, 2010. Nancy Powell, a MISF member, will talk about nineteenth-century church history in southeast Minnesota.

Saturday, March 27, 2010. Barbara Sommer, also a MISF member, will talk on the civil rights actions by Minnesota's black community leaders to support opportunities for Minnesota's young black men to serve in the Civilian Conservation Corps.

MISF meetings take place on the last Saturday of the month at Hosmer Library, 4th Avenue and 36th Street, in Minneapolis. The doors open at 10 and the talk begins at 10:30. Coffee and cookies are served. Everyone is welcome. The meetings are free and open to the public.

Further details about these meetings and the Philosophy and History Study Groups is available on our website, <mnindependentscholars.org>.

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