

ART , WATER AND FLUID THINKING

Dr Peter Stafford
Ph:0893361567
petersta@cyllene.uwa.edu.au

The Sun does not move'.

Leonardo Da Vinci

When one considers the problems of Aristotle, one is astonished at his gift of observation, and at all that the Greeks had an eye for; only they err in being over hasty, for they go directly from the phenomenon to the explanation, thereby producing very inadequate theoretical conclusions. This however, is a general mistake even today

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1)

Water can not be grasped in the same way as other things in the world. It is a master of concealment, withdrawing from so many phenomena, appearing in that which it simultaneously transforms in the colours of the heavens, for example, or the reflection of a shore on the surface of a lake. Often the more intensely it participates in a particular phenomenon, the more hidden it remains. A moisture free atmosphere would mean certain death to all living creatures, a parched earth disintegrating to dust.

"Understanding Water", Andreas Wilkins et al.(2)

This approach to the current water and environmental crisis goes beyond problem-orientated, piecemeal, band-aid solutions. It proposes instead the necessity for a comprehensive and radical "new thinking", a new "water consciousness, that humanity must attain if the earth is to stay alive.

Theodore Schwenk, " Water the Element of Life" (3)

We've had a shocking decrease in runoff of water into our dams, so up until 1974 onwards, the average runoff was about 338 gigitalitres...from 1974 onwards it was 164, so almost exactly half what it had been. And the really scary thing is that for the last seven years, since 1997, its been down by another third. In other words, right now were getting about one third as much as we used to get in the dams before 1974

Jim Gill Chief of Western Australian Water Corporation 21August 2004

During the last 9 years average inflow of water into our dams has been 120Gigalitres But so far this year we've received about 14 Gigalitres which means that its our driest year on record. We need to save every drop. So please turn off your reticulation...For other easy ways you can be waterwise visit www.Watercorporation.....

Water Corporation Advertisement Fremantle Herald September 9th 2006

Introduction.

I began writing this paper with the intention to explore how we see water. In the same stuff we both baptise and flush our nasties away. It is obviously many things to many people at different times in a diversity of places. That is both its wonder and its curse. Like whales, trees and people it is both revered and abused. But on the whole I think water itself is given short shrift as, unlike living beings; it is generally thought to be a neutral figure in an otherwise living picture. I believe that our current 'treatment' of water is in many ways a reflection of how we experience it. If our experience of water is 'restricted' then we will in turn respond to it, treat it, in kind.

In Germany and in Japan a lot of interesting work is being done by scientists who are researching its information carrying capacities and I wanted to further explore this area as a means of understanding the 'wisdom of our elders'.(4) However, I found myself, by chance, writing about a Leonardo painting and a local Water Corporation advertisement. Unlikely bed partners, but I am one to follow a hunch. I thought I might get away with this odd coupling if I made the form and content of the paper itself even odder- stash the strange fruit in an even stranger garden. It occurred to me that Leonardo and the Water Corporation (W.C.) share many similar interests; the natural world, obtaining commissions, invention, medical experiment, prophecy and the inspiration of public perception. I thought it interesting to bring them together and see what happens. I even went so far as to imagine Leonardo running the W.C. (After all he

dreamed up all sorts of canals and water wheel bits and pieces) Our water cared for by a religious mystic and prophet of water! What if?. Why not! “You want us to be waterwise why don’t you employ a genius and set the example”. Well, that he is only present in the imagination, is a minor hiccup, and whilst not too many people in the W.C. look to Leonardo for guidance, he at least makes it into the Hydropolis conference registration brochure where he offered me some advice. “You’re an artist go with your intuition and I’ll send messages through the water”. (Emoto only gets frozen pictures I got a complete theme for an essay)

So the following paper is presented partly as a meandering artwork, partly with accompanying exercises in the seeing of seeing, partly as a divinational experiment, and (only) partly as a discursive thesis. It is shot through with wildly diverse metaphors, stories, personal observations and theoretical presumptions. I want to evoke the imagination around an insight rather than prove the validity of a perspective. As such, I am taking liberties that my academic training would not permit in this context, but that which my life as an artist, insists upon me taking,- especially since I believe words, frozen signs, will inevitably fail to encapsulate the mystery that we don’t seem to see- there in so humble an everyday substance as water. .Something far more all-encompassing, some form of holistic picture is called for, and that can only be begun to be imagined. I am no Leonardo and I wrestle with the complexity and contradictions of the world.(See note 4) Indeed, it is through my own long and arduous struggle to transform my seeing, that I now know how it was to ‘not have seen’. I well remember once standing before the “Mona Lisa” and being very bewildered, but mostly bored. I could empathise with a group of Australians lying irreverently on a nearby couch with their thongs on feet, on legs, pointed perpendicular in the air. That was funny, whilst Mona was just an opaque mystery. I did not then see what Leonardo saw- the mysterious atmosphere, the psychological weather, the enigmatic mist that surrounds the smile. All that has since changed and I hope I can now, following in the footsteps of Leonardo, offer some insight into how an artist sees what he sees, when he sees water. I trust that you the reader can somehow bring together in your own way, the flood of liquid metaphors in the kitchen sink below. This is, after all, the work of the imagination.

This paper is basically about how imagination gives rise to meaningful seeing. Water is the archetypal metaphor of the imagination and if we awaken to it, then we may also awaken to our own inner imaginative genius- a kind of little Leonardo. If we can become aware of how we see and what limits seeing then we are on the way to an unfolding of mystery and a mighty transcendence of the Aussie thong. It is a cliché, but true enough that artists need to be more exacting with their expansive imaginations and scientists need to become more imaginative in their reductive ‘exactings’- The two should speak occasionally. Leonardo is the able man in-between here.

Finally, at the risk of passing from the liquid into the gaseous state, I offer you a carrot. I promise that if you read this paper through to its gripping conclusion, you will discover a few things concerning Leonardo, about which that pirate Dan Brown, obviously, has no idea.

Lastly, the endnotes are included mainly for those who want to travel further downstream with, or dive deeper into, the story at a later time. They will tend to disrupt the flow if continually referred to whilst reading the main text.

Seeing as an Artist Sees

Exercise: I would like you to just for a moment close your eyes and see in your mind’s eye a shallow, fast flowing stream into which is placed an upright fixed beam. Can you now pay attention to how the water in your imagination flows immediately behind this obstruction....



SLIDE: Leonardo sketches of flowing water with notes backwards left to right.

As artists, Leonardo and I like to see the world as a miraculous artwork. From where I stand this may be self evident, but I recognise that every other person on the planet is free to see it how they chose. I understand that the same world has many faces and like clouds reflected upon the ocean surface is always in the process of transforming itself. We all perhaps remember a time when as a child the world seemed utterly magical and then a later period when this same world lost some its charm and became a little greyish. Years spent both working as an artist and living with art's rich history has taught me that the character of our inner lives deeply influences the quality of our experience of the outer world. We all have interior weather patterns that colour our experience and hence seeing. Artistic representation can reveal both the surprising plasticity of seeing and the range of individual perspectives that may be brought to what is a universal 'ground'. We each are responsible for how we see the same world. Whether a tree is just a green thing standing in the way, or a living being that moves us to tears depends on what we bring to the experience of it. "As a man is, so he sees", wrote the artist and poet William Blake.

Artists like Blake are often thought to be masters of fantasy and illusion, Romantics, heads in the clouds, trippers, you've met the type. (Worse, contemporary members of this profession, sometimes forget themselves and give the impression that their art might somehow transform the world- or at least awaken some of its wiser inhabitants with its prophetic vision. Remember, Hitler started out as a self pro-claimed member, but quickly realised no-one takes an artist seriously- especially the Jewish art school professors who, unfortunately, sent him packing. Whilst I happen to believe that the artistic vision has the potential to assist in transforming the way in which we treat the water and world, few are listening. (In any case we fiercely individualistic artists rarely agree as to what exactly this vision is- let alone what it may or may not do) Leonardo however, is fashionable at the moment, so I'll let him speak through me and thereby maybe notch up a little credibility.

What is not widely known about the artistic vision is its potential capacity to engage what Goethe termed 'exact imagination'.⁽⁵⁾ This way of seeing engages the active imagination so as to 'meet the living inner forces of nature which are not otherwise immediately evident to 'everyday' experience. With the exercise above, I hope you have got at least some insight into the extraordinary imaginative powers, necessary for an artist like Leonardo, to hold the complex stream of water's motion in his mind's eye. This is no mean feat. Such seeing has affinities with both the 'visions' of religious mystics and indigenous shamans. The artist however, has the cultural freedom to give a unique expression to this vision, which can then stand as an initiatory path for others. In seeing the genius seeing into a deeper realm, we may choose to be inspired to extend our own seeing. Certainly Blake has taught and inspired me to trust

that there are always deeper mysteries that are waiting, there ready to unfold, if we would but work to open the eyes. An artist like Blake sees signs everywhere in the world,- metaphors that have a story character. They are there for those who can take the time to experience this reality. Indeed, from an artistic point of view, reality is at base metaphorical and so brimming with meaningful relationships and purpose.. For guidance one just needs to dedicate one's seeing towards that end and the signs show up regularly enough.

I am thinking that its been a while since I painted my totem animal the pelican. Fifteen minutes later, I step outside into my not so strange garden. I look to the oak tree (it doesn't move me to tears) and then to the sky- a water bird, this lone pelican, directly above me now, spirals toward the interior of the thermal's vortex and is lifted higher. (proof that I'm qualified to channel Leonardo)

Leonardo- Seeing the Universal Waters

The first sign that showed up to guide me in writing this paper was a quote from Leonardo in the Hydropolis convention registration brochure:

Take thought when you are speaking of water that you first recount your experiences and only afterwards your reflections.

I recognised this as a phenomenology of seeing that resonates with the exact imagination of Goethe (who comes along a few hundred years after L.d.V.). Not only is Leonardo able to directly penetrate into water's genius, he can, in kind, think about how this experience will be later reflected (upon) in the mind. Like Goethe, in the quote at the head of this paper he also knows that it is a mistake to rush from the experience to explanation. Each artist knows that a concept (the basis of an explanation) is a frozen or compressed living imagination On viewing these sketches of flowing water by Leonardo, we recognise that he had learned to hold the experience of the phenomena within his mind's eye so that it palpably lived within him. He was not just copying the 'picture' before him. rather it was expressing itself through him. (As L.d.V. is doing through me)

When we view water we first have an immediate physiological perception of it in time and motion. A corresponding imagination brings a conceptual framework to this raw perception enabling us to identify/recognise the scene. That is to say, we imaginatively bring a concept to a perception to make sense of what would otherwise be an undifferentiated mass. Should the concept harden and lose its fluidity, its ability to evolve with new experience, then the things seen, the percepts, in effect, dry up. Put simply, that which becomes habitual, becomes ordinary. The concept obscures the perception. (I ask my father why people think water is such uninteresting stuff and he immediately replies that its because its on tap) Most importantly, in such an instance, we are generally not aware of what has happened in our thinking and look to change the outer world before we question what's up with the inner weather patterns.(Oddly, since Dad started meditating, he seems more willing to dabble in idle philosophical speculation of this sort.)

Active thinking, bringing our concepts to life in the imagination, allows us to live into the creative motion of waters ubiquitous journey around the universe.(6) There is a profound art to seeing this way, but there is also a 'mind trap' ever ready to wrest the life from the living picture. (For Blake,- 'mind forged manacles'). When asking how an indigenous seer can experience the presence of the Rainbow Serpent in the waters of the Swan River we must in turn ask what conceptual 'filters' do we carry such that we don't see it. Further we should acknowledge the seer's kinship with the likes of the two giants of Western 'genius status', Leonardo and Goethe, for they have not rushed from the living imagination into the frozen explanation.(7)

In "H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness", Ivan Illich describes a broad shift in the cultural perception of water across the centuries.(8) The once sacred waters of soul purification and renewal, which were perfectly fitted to the baptism of life, have become

in our time the economic resource of techno-industrial society. Flowing across the landscape of time, water has gone from its hallowed place as a purifier to its function as a convenient cleaner, a crude commodity. There has been a shift away from its association with the inner soul life and that life's spiritual evolution (birth/transformation/renewal) toward a purely exterior technical function. (Conscious incorporation of water in rituals to inaugurate life phase transitions becomes in our time the automatic hosing down of the truck before setting out on the road- the difference in ritual content being the pollutants that end up in the ocean as a result- the most unconscious bit of the casual ritual)

I believe Leonardo had intuited the nascent beginnings of this entropic transition at work, not in the world, but in the mind.(9) This realisation by Leonardo was extraordinary for the time. (In his time flooding was more likely than drought and "The Matrix" was yet in the womb, so he would have been hard pressed to clearly envisage the ecological consequences of the mind forged manacles.) Certainly his work transcended both its era and culture and his desire to keep experience to the foreground of one's thinking (about water) is a prelude to Goethe's realisation of the 'exact imagination'. (The poet and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge's organic imagination would be the English counter-part to this process)

We can grasp something of Leonardo's exemplary capacities if we ask ourselves how he experienced the living world. In so doing, we will also come closer to understanding what he means by 'first recounting the experiences' prior to conceptual reflecting. To this end, we can find clues to his extraordinary 'vision; within his life's story itself. Life as an artwork. (As a man is, so he sees).

For example, Leonardo once wrote a letter outlining his various talents to a potential employer, the Milanese despot Ludovico Sforza. In his appeal, Leonardo describes himself as a military expert and weapons designer and further provides whole catalogues of oddments he can design to waylay the enemy. Almost as an after thought, he mentions that he is quite a good painter and sculptor as well. In fact he was initially employed by the Duke as, a musician and singer. Leonardo the entertainer brings along to the court a lute which he has designed with a sound box made from silver cast in the shape of a horse's skull. Herein, we get a feeling for the artist's utterly exceptional range of thought, creativity and interests. (Actually, he's probably over-qualified to run the W.C.)

In all of life's infinite array of expressions, Leonardo saw the active workings of metaphor, as it was interwoven and enlivened via polar tensions, musical scores, archetypal forms, the colours of the soul, the creative workings of the spirit and so on and on. Seen in this light, it is not unreasonable to expect that the man's experience of water, to which he dedicated a greater part of his life, was positively oceanic. It can well be imagined that, if he saw water to be both the carrier of a living force and the mediator of life and death, then it was also it that taught him to see.(10) Leonardo planned to complete no less than 15 volumes of work on water. Indeed, water held an unending fascination for him to the extent that he believed it to be the driving force of the universe. He even went so far as to predict that he might solve the mysteries of creation by studying the laws of water's movement through earth and air. For Leonardo, water was the driver of nature and in keeping with this vision he attempted to capture its imagined grandeur in a veritable symphony of diverse situations and forms.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Leonardo's character was his ability to draw together what are usually mutually exclusive 'temperaments'. He worked with both a detached objectivity and a deep sense of reverence. He was passionate and deeply empathetic toward both people and the natural world- he bought birds to set them free, just as he loved the endless eccentricities of both noble and fallen humanity. Yet at the same time, he designed military weapons (most of which, he once remarked, caused more damage to the users than the enemy). Leonardo effectively, created a bridge between the aboriginal and the modern, the scientist and the artist, the feminine the masculine, the right and left hemispheres, and finally the spirit and the material. To

draw upon local metaphors and apply them to the subject at hand, I would say that he both could see and feel the living Rainbow Serpent even as he strove to discover the universal laws behind its particular hydrological rhythms.

In Leonardo, we find an artist who has so completely married his soulful experience to his cognitive thinking (reflection) that he is able to guide his audience- would they but activate the imaginative forces to travel with him- toward the miraculous.

Local Waters, Looking into the Heart of the Matter

At this point there is an artificial fork in the river and we are back home confronting the insides of a local community news paper- the one that just slips in under the No Junk! warning in the letter box. This advertisement caught my eye and I thought... Leonardo! I guessed there was a metaphorical relation to the theme at hand in there somewhere, ...A watershed...just have to 'see into it', and lo...

This next sign, having appeared during the writing of this paper, seemed to be an ideal image to both present an argument and demonstrate the synergistic character of seeing.

I hope that you the reader will at this point allow me to take you on a brief and very simple phenomenological exploration of this picture before I say anything more about it. Please now take some time and as you look at this image try and also listen to how the it resonates throughout your whole body. You might focus on different aspects of the picture and try to sense where specifically these elements give rise to sensations, feelings and so on. (PAUSE)



SLIDE Water Corporation Advertisement.

To successfully travel with what is basically a simultaneous, inner and outer looking, much practice is required. It is extremely difficult to stay with the experience as Leonardo recommends, since no sooner have we recognised the figures in a picture, than a raft of associations flood in via the intellect and its 'on-board' concepts. These ideas tend to draw us into the head and away from the e-motive 'bodily' qualities that all images unconsciously trigger. The act of sketching out the 'scene', as we artists are

inclined to do, in fact counter's the usual intellectual bias. I have often found the best way to deeply engage with a scene or image is to sketch or paint it. In this way we re-flesh the experience through a kind of parallel activity.

As a preparation for what I want to say about the picture I'd like to now guide you through what I will call (in a round-about borrowing from Blake) a three-fold vision. In the process, I trust that you will then get a sense for the inner genius at work when we see.

Firstly, I would like you to feel into the image and meet with the mood of the cloud. (This may move you to tears) Where do you feel this aspect of the image?. Next I would like you to take up the implied force of the action (press). In undertaking this force try and gauge from where in the body this impulse originates? Now I would like you to consider the ideas that this complex of images suggest - whatever you think is the meaning, your meaning, how others might read it, and its intended meaning for the W.C. etc. Where in the body does this 'thinking' or reflecting upon, take place?.

Herein, you have most likely experienced a feeling for the cloud with the heart,- the rhythmic circulatory system. Next, you probably sensed the movement of the press in the gut or metabolic system. Finally, you would associate thinking or ideas with the head or nervous system. Alternatively, the correlations might be cloud-lungs, press-heart. You may have also noticed that these bodily regions have their own particular rhythms and that they are variously accessible to our awareness.(11) Having briefly experienced the image on three levels we can now relate a discussion about the picture back to your actual phenomenological experiences. This 'relating' will happen mostly unconsciously but it means that the concepts I want to present can be synergistically linked to prior conscious experience. Bear in mind also, that the capacity which brings this three-fold vision into a synergistic whole is in fact the imagination. To reflect upon a perception, the intellect must overlay a conceptual structure as a kind of frozen model, whilst the imagination-metaphorically associated with the heart- intuitively the whole complex of percepts in living time.

The accompanying text from the Water Corporation is quoted in full at the head of this paper above, the gist of it being we need to be water wise. In a recent newspaper article Jim Gill, the Water Corporation chief states that Southern Western Australia's climate change appears at this time to be more severe than anywhere else in the world. This is the driest winter on record.(12)

So here, in this simple image is, albeit in a very truncated fashion, a picture of our shared story in which the oldest place on the planet, with the oldest surviving line of indigenous culture, with currently the highest economic growth of any state in the world, is leading the climate change race. Of course all these factors can be seen as interrelated aspects of the same story, but again this depends on how one has chosen to experience the grand narrative. Certainly the age of the landscape determines its environmental sensitivity and lack of robustness just as an economic boom means more technological pressure on the landscape. Likewise, how we read this press, this cloud and this message says much about our individual relation to water. The cloud (nature) may just be a white thing standing in the way, or it might be a powerful metaphor for the current condition our environmental and social circulatory system.(12)

The Aliens have a Flying Press!!!

As an artist, I see stories everywhere and signs that assist me to read not only my own progress but that of the wider world. Much of humanity has long seen water as the great mediator, or universal translator, of the secrets of life. As Illich points out, in virtually all societies prior to Western Modernity, water was sacred. Indeed, we may even recall the Christ in the Gospel of St John speaking to Nicodemus: "Unless you are reborn through water and the Holy spirit you can not enter the kingdom of heaven". When I think about, feel into, and sense the active intention that this image of press and cloud presents, a story naturally arises. An Aboriginal or Greek myth might tell this story with an eagle (head/ideas) and a Bull/ancestor (will or gut forces) molesting a Lion or a warrior /hero. The Water Corporations public relations and marketing arm

presents us (albeit unconsciously) with contemporary metaphors rather than mythic figures which, to my mind reveal a chapter in an archetypal story about the state of humanities 'progress'. (Whilst advertising is vastly more simplistic and mono-dimensional than so-called high art, the unconscious mythic scenario is nevertheless present in a dessicated form.) I see the press as a metaphor for mechanical thinking which has latched onto the cloud- the figural part of a circulatory or hydrological cycle. The underlying feeling is one of desperate grasping at scant resources. Or, perhaps more to the point, it is also a picture of the forcing of nature to submit. Certainly on the surface, the image is banal ('I wandered lonely as a cloud'... should have watched out for a flying press?) but at a deeper level its implications are as serious as the water crisis itself. (14)

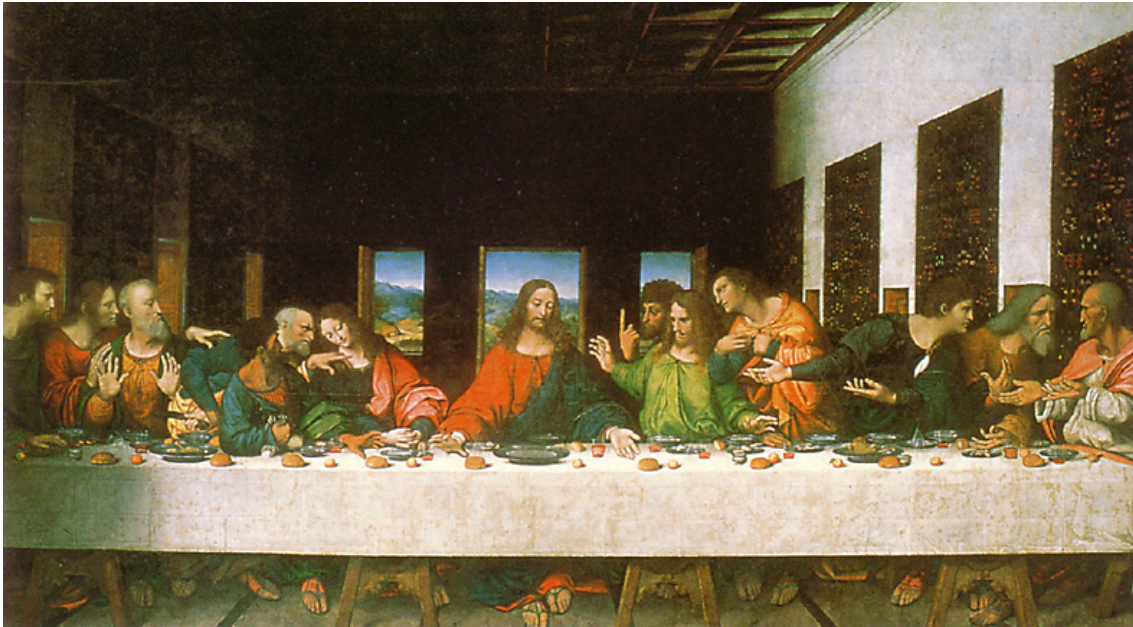
The press is a fixing agent. It is a dead, cold, fundamentally entropic technology, chosen, no doubt, to give an aesthetically neutral image of both 'industry' and the intensive care support system upon which what is left of the hydrological cycle depends (See endnote (13)). The cloud on the other hand (not withstanding Wordsworth), is a single aspect or one face of water, its other being its uncanny ability to elide (or escape) all images, equations laws, concepts and theories, that would fix or press, its rhythmic countenance. I need not remind the reader about its miraculous qualities including its 41 different quantitative anomalies all of which actively, (and ultimately mysteriously), support the emergence of organic life from dead matter. The intellect may not be too impressed with all these 'bits' when analysed individually but the imagination is, because it sees them as aspects of one whole living story. (Try copying the "Mona Lisa" and you will discover how all the bits miraculously come together over time, indeed a religious experience may be in the offing)

So here we have in this Water Corporation designed image the articulation of a quantitative problem (thus far, minus 106 Gigalitres) that is to be addressed by technological means (water mining, desalination and recycling)

The character of technological solutions is such that as the press gets tighter the circulation is even further restricted and so further pressing (technology) is applied. (Until the 'patient inevitably gives up the ghost after the heart undergoes the final attack).(13) Looked at as a metaphor amid the greater story, this image allows us to feel what is elsewhere happening to creeks, soaks, springs, lakes, streams, waterfalls, rivers, trees, plants aquifers,- indeed all living beings. The circulatory system, aka the hydrological cycle, is being slowly, but with increasing persistence, restricted. This is felt in the heart and from the artist's point of view the heart has a wisdom that the head can not fathom. To the head, the heart might indeed be just a complicated pump.

But let us return to Leonardo's advice to not lose sight of our experience of water. Can we really say that we have the time and inclination, or even the means to experience water in all its qualitative dimensions? Does a water crisis of such dimensions not give us cause to rethink? And if our experience is felt to be restricted do we not need to revisit it and question the assumptions and ideas we may have imposed upon our experience? Perhaps it is not simply a case of saving water but rather of changing our thinking to accommodate a more fluid water consciousness. The press may be a perfect metaphor that illuminates (albeit unwittingly) the mass experience of what is actually happening to water. Could we relate ourselves to what are water's more life-full qualities, its e-motional body and in so doing find more apt metaphors to picture our relation to water? Born of a renewed vision we might begin to consider how we could assist the (half) hydrological system to again circulate and revive its natural capacities, and so, at least begin the restoration of a healthy life sustaining rhythm. This would truly be a great work of 'art'.(16)

Water, Leonardo and Public Art



SLIDE: Leonardo's Last Supper

The German artist Joseph Beuys always insisted that we are all potentially artists since we each have an innate capacity for creative thinking. (Little Leonardo's everywhere-imagine it!) This needs to be qualified, in as much as he more than any artist, was aware of the need to cultivate the exact imagination in every undertaking. This meant becoming newly conscious of every act, whether peeling a potato or planting thousands of trees as an artwork, -both of which he did (the trees presenting less of an archival problem). Beuys saw humanity and its shared evolution as an artwork, a social sculpture. Humanity can potentially sculpt its future through the consciousness-raising enterprise of reworking human relationships into shared 'artworks'. In the same way that an artwork is imaginatively sculpted, so too, could consciousness, be shaped and so evolve via active and imaginative dialogue.

Whilst the world may be a miraculous artwork, our public art is in many ways the most immediately evident microcosmic expression of the quality of our social sculpture. Again, this art form is derived from out of a plethora of perspectives and experiences just as its reception is as equality multihued.(17) In our time there is no consensus of opinion as to how and why art matters or as to which art should grace the social imagination in the public domain. I believe that as a society we are just as confused about art as we are about water. The short shrift is metered out to both art and water in equal measure.

So, to Leonardo...I personally have found that a dialogue with art history has helped me to see more clearly where we are in the grand unfolding world story. Having first gained a sense of where we have come from, by getting a sense of the evolving character of seeing, one is better placed to see the deeper levels of what may otherwise seem a surface reflection. For example, I see in a seminal work such as Leonardo's "Last Supper" a rich expression of the active workings of social sculpture. Indeed, I would like to propose that it be seen as an archetypal model, against which and through which, we can think about the contemporary role and condition of public art. Moreover, I think it demonstrates how a single image, an imagination, can encompass a universe of integrated social and spiritual metaphors that have much in common with the miraculous qualities of water.

In this classic depiction of the moment when the Christ reveals to his disciples a betrayal, Leonardo presents his viewers with a series of streaming effects. With the Christ as the still point at the centre, a wave-like radiation is sent out on either side of him that flows from individual to individual. Each disciple responds in his own characteristic way. The emotive gestures range from Peter's typically choleric anger, through to the insular, taciturn moods of Judas and John, both of whom are the bearers of two different secrets, secrets that each alone shares with the Christ.

The Saviour's right hand faces downwards towards the wine. This most likely signifies a drawing of the spirit down from 'heaven'.(or from out of the spiritual realm) Conversely, his left hand faces upwards signifying an alchemical lifting of the material (bread) toward the spiritual realm. Whilst every disciple's gesture obtains to a convincing realism or pictorial objectivity, each individual's bodily stance can also be associated with one of the 12 star constellations of the zodiac. For example, Phillip is seen standing with his hands gesturing toward his chest as if to say 'surely you can not think that I would betray you'. In so doing he is the only one of the group to completely expose his stomach region which symbolises the constellation of Virgo. All outward gestures and emotive, inner soul impulses are related as if by a liquid flow to the centre of the one coherent picture-the Christ. All perspectival lines (a frozen Euclidean structure) lead the eye to the triangular form of the Christ, the metaphorical centre of which is the heart (or sun) of man.

The scientist Theodore Schwenk suggests that, 'In the human heart, form and movement are interrelated, uniting space and time in a rhythmical process. The organ, a form in space is simultaneously a movement in time. This organ is like a vortical centre of suction to which the blood rushes with ever increasing speed from the periphery, thither to return again, slowing down and spreading out. It is an image of a planetary system with a sun like centre of infinite dynamic force. The speed in the centre of a vortex tends to become inconceivably great: but that speed is not possible on earth hence suction', (*or levity*).(18)

Schwenk further describes how the heart's rhythmic processes are a reflection of the streaming character of water in which the most fundamental flow form is the vortex.(19) Leonardo's "Last Supper" is a profoundly complex, occulted presentation of that same process seen by the artist everywhere throughout water's universal cycle. Star wisdom is received into the human heart (Christ as the archetypal sun centre radiating the levity of spirit) where it is transformed (from water into wine, blood into spirit) and sent back transubstantiated. (Leonardo believed that the blood was the carrier of the spirit) This is both a schematic depiction of the Neo-Platonic idea and a brilliant embodiment of the macrocosm's perfect reflection in the human being as microcosmic 'sun'. Herein, an intellectual idea is imbued with great depth of feeling and is further 'fleshed out' with a grand archetypal story. Of course, the Christ is the central sun around which the 12 smaller 'levities' constellate; Stars- Sun-Christ-Disciples (everyone else) Disciples- Christ-Sun-Stars.. But since, as William Marks shows us, water is a mediator and traveller across the entire universe, we might also see this image as a metaphorical and humanised picture of the cyclic journey of water itself from macrocosm to microcosm. (A significant amount of water actually comes in from outer-space) Christ makes the ultimate sacrifice so that a rebirth of consciousness 'arises'-a transformation of our relation to the material world. Water sacrifices itself to dilute and balance all of our death bringing activity even as it overcomes the gravity that would otherwise press in on both the brain and the journey of the foetal child.

Marks further tells us, that, there is no known way to measure the age and cosmic range of water.(20) Water connects all living things and births all living beings. No 'dead' substance could do this. Yet water is neither dead nor alive, it is the neither/nor, both and, the interface, the mediator between the mutually dependent cycles of life and death. Ultimately it overflows across all stagnant concepts. It is 'the imagination' which thaws the intellect and offers a renewal, a way beyond the winter of the heart's discontent In the end it is we who are responsible, we who individually chose to conceive of it as we will. Water, the most selfless of all substances, may yet prove to be our greatest teacher.

In conclusion I would like to rejoiner the cycle with an extract from a poem by T.S. Elliot entitled "Burnt Norton": (from the collection "Four Quartets")

At the still point of the turning world.
 Neither flesh nor fleshless;
 Neither from nor towards;
 at the still point, there the dance is,
 But neither arrest nor movement.
 And do not call it fixity,
 Where past and future are gathered.
 Neither movement from nor towards,
 Neither ascent nor decline.
 Except for the point, the still point,
 There would be no dance,
and there is only the dance.

(21)

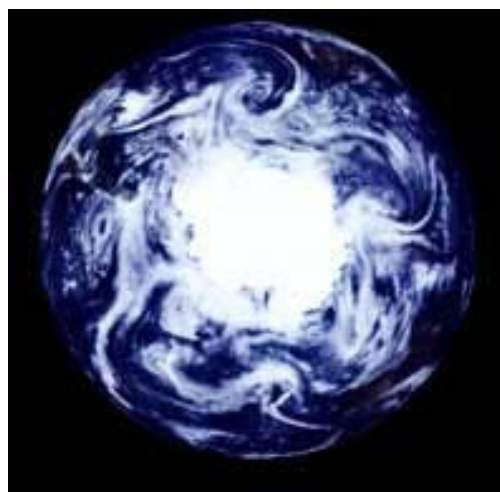


Image of Antarctic polar wind vortex

ENDNOTES

- (1) Goethe, Johann, Wolfgang, von, "Goethe on Science", Selected by Jeremy Naydley, Floris Books, Edinburgh, 2000
- (2) Wilkins, Andreas, Jacobi, Schwenk, Wolfram, "Understanding Water", Floris Books, Edinburgh, 2001
- (3) Schwenk, Theodore, "Water the Element of Life", Trans; Marjorie Spock, Anthroposophic Press, NY. 1989
- (4) I recently met a German priest who works aside a scientific research institute attached to a University in Stuttgart. There, they research, amongst other things, the effects of mobile phones on saliva structure. I asked the priest why they weren't more public about their controversial work and findings and he replied that the head scientist said people are not mature enough yet to accept the findings. This was a kind of omen for me since when locally I see mobile phone towers attached to public drinking water towers (Coolbelup) and further think of fluoridation (Banned in immature' Germany- stopped by public demonstrations in most of Europe) of electromagnetic radiation, asbestos in pipes, all that, its obvious to me that the 'fairy in the creek' will not be part of mainstream hydropholis thinking for some time yet.
- (5) I am of necessity forced to present this complex process in shorthand here. Exact Imagination for Goethe arises when one is able to accurately re-create the living life cycle of an aspect of the natural world in the imagination. One can picture the living story world. This is a science and is vastly different to the sheer artistic 'fancy' which is usually associated in the popular mind with the word imagination with its romantic origins in art and literary history. For an excellent overview and explanation of Goethe's imaginative seeing, see; Bortoft, Henri, "The Wholeness of Nature", Goethe's Way of Science, Lindisfarne Press, New York, 1996s
- (6) Marks, William, F., "The Holy Order of Water", Bell Pond Books MA 2001 Marks details the incomparable span of water's presence from to child's tears to within the tails of comets and the interior of meteorites and on to its life supporting role around the sun. This book is worth reading for the author's life's journey (with water) alone.
- (7) Similarly, when an indigenous elder describes Perth as a cemetery with lights, we might also ask what he perceives as being absent. Whilst there is a lot of joy in seeing meaning everywhere there is also a lot of pain and incredulity when one realises that others don't see it. My sense it that part of the confusion that still persists to day in our two cultures has to do with the fact that it rarely occurs to mainstream white culture that the indigenous people can not see how we do not see what should be obvious. One culture grounds thinking primarily in stories, the other (especially at the masculine pole) in concepts. One way of coping with this confusion is to just apply the mind forged manacles (alcohol is an effective 'veil') and try to fit the inner landscape to the mechanistic sight. This inevitably does massive soul damage.
- (8) Illich, Ivan, "H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness", Marion Boyers Pub, London, 1986
- (9) By entropic I mean (in my role as recreational scientist) a tendency toward an irretrievable loss of order in a system. I am thinking metaphorically about the way in which when water becomes a cleaner it must take upon itself (selflessly) the 'waste' products of our one sided creativity. This relentlessly increases its entropic character- its ability to sustain and give birth to life. Our technologies virtually all actively promote entropy in a vast array of systems- if not in their function (solar power) then in their making and disposal. (Over 70,000 synthetic chemicals, all busily brewing up unknown compound 'complexes', are all there to be diluted and

'washed away' by water- or, more to hand,(in English measures) roughly 7300 gallons of water, 139 pounds of waste 2,300 kilowatts of energy were required to build the computer. I'm writing this paper on.) On the other hand, it is interesting to note that some scientists have thought about art as having a negentropic potential. For example see: Riedl, R., "Energie, Information and Negentropie in der Biosphere", cited in Op Cit., `Schwenk, p. 86 The overall functioning of the biosphere promotes an increase of entropy, a quite extravagant one, at the cost of the flow into cosmic space of solar energy. However, local processes can create ordered patterns, such as are found in rotifers, in sonnets, or the Mona Lisa's smile...One can call a living system a reservoir or storage place for negative entropy of wholly unimaginable proportions

(10) To put this in another way- it is like saying the spirit that flies the bird comes alive in the artist's inner eye and teaches him to see flying-which as we know from his drawings he was able to see like no-one else. It should be noted that whilst many seers experience the universal experience of being 'flown' it is only the unique vision of the individual that brings a unique quality to its re-presentation.

(11) A generalised schema of this might go something like this: The head thinks quickly but fixes the concept, the heart circulates the feeling although it is less immediate to awareness and finally in the will or gut there is slower, dimmer but never the less life-full energy. Thus if in a mythological story there were animals symbolically portraying this three-fold seeing we might see a bird or rodent-head, lion-heart, and bull/whale-Will. Their interaction may thus indicate a 'holistic' phenomenology that is also a picture of the life of the whole body.

(12) This is even more shocking when considered against the fact that up until 1974 the dam collection averages 338 Gegalitres. (There is a non-linear relation between catchment run-off and rainfall)

(13) The water scientist Victor Schauburger, were he around to see it, would describe our current system as being in 'intensive care',- definitely pressed and under the pump. What once was a natural hydrological cycle, is operating with the aid of machines on a truncated half-hydrological cycle (Schauburger's term for when only the above ground part of the circulation is operative) and that is undergoing massive entropic interference. If the machines were switched off the whole system would collapse since only a small proportion of water is now supplied from catchment run off and ground water levels have, not surprisingly, dropped dramatically.(This has become self-evident at the microcosmic level with Lake Jandabup and various cave and lake systems being only kept alive by pumps) Schauburger, 'criticised our present view of how nature works as untenably mechanistic, which he said is one of the main reasons why we are in such a mess. Our culture thinks of Nature as being like a big machine that can be manipulated and its resources extracted for our own greed, rather than a creative system that has a purpose'. Batholomew, Alick "Hidden Nature", The Startling Insights of Viktor Schauburger, Floris Books Edinburgh, p.43

(14) Pressed for sure, one thinks of the analogous image supplied by that great materialist scientist Francis Bacon, inventor of the frozen chicken, who once urged his fellow scientists to 'chase nature to her cave and force her to reveal her secrets'. Goethe thought it better to simply charm her- to wit, she would willingly reveal her secrets. Not surprisingly each scientist saw the same natura differently – no prize in guessing for whom the spirit danced.

(15) It seems to be a rule of thumb that if we have a problem caused by technological 'solutions' in the first instance, we apply new technological fixes which inevitably cause more unforeseen problems themselves because the original balanced system is being thrown further and further out of whack with each new 'solution'. In the mean time, older problems are often only band-aided. Indeed, in a recent article in the West Australian, The headline reads 'Recycled water key to climate change' and presents an accompanying image of the desalination plant under construction at the Kwinana industrial complex. The article gives the impression that the technical means that 'solve' the local problem are somehow all there is to ending the problem whereas these mean can also be seen as a further compounding of that same problem if considered in the greater context. In fact some of the income that funds the building of local technological systems is surely derived from mining revenue from ore sent to China that will be used to build massive greenhouse creating machines. Think locally act globally!

(16) I think of such an undertaking as a Hobbit situation. Even to begin to think of the scale of the problem-i.e., the US producing more greenhouse daily than Western Australia in a year - is a bit like being handed a ring you don't really want and being told it has to be taken back to a very nasty place. But, psychologically speaking, the hero's journey might be about first gaining the vision to see the problem and realise that the village will no longer exist unless some small group- that little constellation in the psyche that is most fragile- take it upon themselves, despite the overwhelming material odds, to leave 'home'. Whilst the intellect can effortlessly see the reasons why not to, sometimes the wisdom of the heart has no choice but to set out- and in so doing re-vision the onboard conceptual picture.

(17) Contemporary art has few unalienable guiding principles and its iconic goal posts range from a urinal (Duchamp) to the planting of 7000 oak trees (Beuys) The dialogue around public art, its quality, quantity, purpose, funding, reception etc is one important indication of how the social sculpture is progressing. Its health might be thought of in terms of its currently perceived role and status in the social circulatory system. (Many of its limbs- art education for example- are just up the hall from the half-hydrological cycle in intensive care) In this sense I think there are interesting parallels between our 'seeing' of public art and our perception of water which can only 'flow' here within the limits of this paper as a tacit undercurrent in the overall story.

(18) See Schwenk, Theodore, "A Sensitive Chaos", Pub Rudolf Steiner Press, East Sussex, 2001,p.91 Almost all technologies are explosive and employ straight motion whilst in the vortexes of natural systems such as water there is an implosive effect wherein a still point is created at the centre that actually overcomes the gravitational forces. (This is how fish can stay in the same place without barely moving in a fast running stream and how tornados lift houses) This vortex effect avoids resistance whereas in explosive combustion technologies there is an increase in temperature and resistance that is fundamentally against all living things.

(19) The significance of this formation throughout the natural world can not be overstated, Indeed, our current climatic crisis has much to do with a tremendous wind vortex over Antarctica which has been disrupted by the plight of the ozone hole. Dr David Jones chief analyst of the National Climate Centre at the Bureau of Meteorology stated that "we can not just look at natural variability or greenhouse climate change in isolation- we have to factor in ozone". ABC Catalyst 18 September 2003

(20) Op.cit. Marks, W., "The Holy Order of Water"

(21) The synergy between this poetic extract and "The Last Supper" was pointed out to me by Gerry Josephson, he being a more highly evolved Leonardo channeller than I.