

S.R. Weber

THE ESTHETICS OF DANCE

What I want with my paintings and photos of ballerinas
and dancers in contemporary dance

A summary of many recent thoughts and conversations in Q&A form

Booklet





On this page: Dancer Monica Herstad, educated in ballet and in butoh, photographed by SRW

For copyright information about the material in this booklet, please read page 3.

On front page: excerpt of SRW painting, inspired by photo of DNBS dancer in Oslo in connection with DNBS's article on the *Vaganova* method

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www.norskesites.org/photo

which refers to the photography of S.R.Weber (also author of this text) and with links further to SRW's paintings.

Cfr also www.norskesites.org/steinweber

The photographer of the photos in this booklet is S.R. Weber, who uses the painting signature SRW, also author of this booklet. SRW is also the painter behind the two paintings which are digitally represented in this booklet (the cover is detail of a painting). These are in acrylic and of size 50cmx50cm. For each of my photo in this series herStay Dance and Monica Herstad has done choreographing and styling and in some of these photos, she is the dancer and model. For more info about the context herStay has created within which these photos fit, consult www.herstay.net and links from there. The photographs I have taken in a herStay context include also these dancers and performers: Kyoju Bae, Raya Doshnanova and Katarina S Henriksen. herStay Clothing in photos of the latter two is by Tone Saastad.

For new dance photos and other photos

see the quality photo magazine freely published on the net in PDF form at www.industrialbabes.com entitled

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CONTENTS OVERVIEW

1. What Does Art Do To Us?
2. Can Art Have Something To Do With Meditation?
3. Dance, Beauty And Photography
4. Music, Art, And The Muses Through Art History
5. Education, And The Discipline Of Learning
6. The Secret Of Painting
7. The Love Of Dance
8. Can Quantum Biology Teach Artists Anything?
9. What The Pre-Raphaelitic Brotherhood Was Up To
10. Art, Dance And Economy

Note. I'm a 'conversationalist'. As I think reality is, by and large, infinitely greater than all we can say about it, I find that writing the results of conversations I've recently had in the form of an article or essay only makes sense if I fill it up with remarks about caution, about how approximate all this is compared to the real thing. But when I reconstruct conversations, I find that they might protect the easy-goingness and so they pretend less, and can be written more easily and snappier without saying too dogmatically what reality is all about. --SRW



herStay performance GRAZIA
 A Monica Herstad performance inspired by various Ibsen moments
 herStay performers: Monica Herstad, Kyuja Bae, Katarina S. Henriksen,
 Cathrine Bothner-By, Ine T. Hogstad, et al. Photo: SRWeber

Oslo Beijing Stockholm Rome Copenhagen London

Above: poster (c) herStay 2016 in which two SRW photos have been used

1. What Does Art Do To Us?

Q. What is art?

A. I think that art is part of what we humans do, and what we allow ourselves to experience, to bridge daily life with something entirely beyond our selves. Nature can do that; does do that, quite often. Say, you have been working much, or for some reason or another you have had to spend a couple of days mostly indoors. And the next day you are so lucky that you are able to get to a sunny beach with sparkling fresh water, a clean smell in the air --waves shimmering with uncountable glimmers of gold, and some folks are splashing about, looking bronzed and fit--and you may find yourself taken away from yourself as it were. You bow to the beauty; your mind, upon returning to your home, is freed of things, and you can look with fresh eyes on everything. Now that is Nature--and, in smaller or even greater ways, that's how the human experience of Nature becomes meditative. This type of experience doesn't always present itself, though. Nature may be cruel and harsh; the ideal beach scene may be much other at times; and when many things have to be done, it may be hard to get the time to experience Nature at its best just when one most needs it.

So here, I think, art in all its forms come in. It is, like Nature, sometimes providing something that can take us "away from ourselves". A painting can do this, on occasion--when light strikes it in a certain ways, and its deeper features comes to light in ways that can't ever fully be replicated by digital means--and it's size, its quiet but sometimes majestic presence,--it may be just right for you, and you find that it lifts your mind above the clouds of the city, so to speak.

Q. Why is it that this happens? How come art can lift us up like this?

A. Before we go on, let me point out that art is also much other. Some do it for own therapy, for instance, while others do it to provoke or evoke emotions, perhaps for political change; or to cement a certain established political system; or to make a point about technical expertise; or to while away with something that presumably brings in some cash; or to try and effect a healing effect on a particular person; and for a dozen more such rather subjective reasons. So to me, what is art concerns the sense of life as a whole,--the phrase by Albert Einstein, the scientist, comes to mind. I don't remember it exactly but the gist of it connected to a sense of cosmos, a feeling of cosmos. "Cosmos", the great order. The sense that life makes sense. He saw the scientific enterprise in the same light. That speaks of a grand mind. I don't think art should be about some people's ego.

Q. But more about this relationship between art and Nature --Nature at its best. Is then Nature art? Or is art trying to mimick Nature?

A. The easiest answer is that any 'mimicking' or 'imitation' isn't gonna work out. Let photography imitate a scene, that's all a camera can do and all it should do. Art must somehow, no matter how startling scenes we are

exposed to via the senses, come from within.

The word 'Nature', as we have used it here, indicates a naturally occurring phenomenon. Or you can say, it is made by God and his muses, it's part of the sense of the grander order of existence. When we are making art, we are allowing something of the same process to operate through us, through our fingers, as it were. But just as not any Nature will be a mind-enlightener, so will not just any artistic type of expression do. It's something that the artist must get the knack of, by hard work over a long time; and even then, only some of the productions of any artist make maximum sense for any given individual, and then only in certain moods of minds.



SRW photo of Kyuja Bae



SRW photo of Katarina S. Henriksen

2. Can Art Have Something To Do With Meditation?

Q. The way you speak about what art can be--what it can do to you when you meet it, and even when you make it,--it sounds like a meditative state. Does art have anything to do with meditation?

A. Yes, absolutely. Now notice that the tendency in our societies to divide life up in bits--this one is about money, that one is about love, this one over here is meditation--you follow?--that type of division may have some virtues, some values, but sometimes it can be very radically misleading. I mean, it is of value that when you read about how to fix an engine, in an engine manual, it doesn't scoff over the engine bit lightly and spend time spelling out the favourite cooking recipes of the fans of this engine instead. You really want to concentrate on a subject sometimes, and you may have to be selective. So that works for a number of practical areas.

But when it comes to meditation, as I see it, we can't just divide it up and make of it a category as easily as that. And, indeed, to fix an engine you may have to have a great sense of contact with yourself, you may want to, may need to, have a quality time and a sense of overview and good order. And a connection to your own instincts, your gut. So, the author of Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance--you know, the famous novel from the 1970s by Robert Pirsig--suggested, in the "I" voice of the book, that the first chapter of a maintenance manual for a good motorcycle should have in it stuff about getting grounded in a good quality experience of relationship to the engine. He spoke of 'gumption': that type of 'shoot from the hips' direct sense of what's right which sometimes comes more easily when one has spent time with also wild Nature.

And whenever you look to science about the brain and our bodies, you find that the mysteries pile up: there are waves in which scientists in the main may pretend that there aren't all that many mysteries; that they can easily foresee the day when such as a human body can be produced in a human factory. And as I see it, it is only when people are totally out of touch with facts that they can even go vaguely near the assumption that human bodies can be produced in a factory like soaps and computers can. It's not just quantum biology. That's just a hint of it. The human body is, as I see it, a mystery that we must categorise in the highest, most sublime way. We must say of it that it is a divine mystery. And that's also why we must be willing to go far to connect to intuition as to our handling of our own bodies: for science, with all its discoveries, know so little of these our bodies and of our brains. So very, very little. Awareness of that ignorance, awareness of the ignorance in science, is a key to the spiritual life, which doesn't mean that one automatically believes in everything that science doesn't believe in.

But you were talking about meditation. So, what is meditation? To sit very still, very upright, yet relaxed, and have focussed attention? Is that it?

Q. Yes, wouldn't you say so? At least as a start. And then it can spread into things we do in the next hours.

A. Well, yes. You kindle the fire of meditation, as it were, by getting into a meditative state. It can be after

coffee and cookie, it doesn't have to be after forty hours of fasting or anything like that. It can be, before, during or after exercise, also of the tantric kind. It can be as a moment of utter peace with yourself in Nature, perhaps while sunbathing. To connect to the Sun is not merely a question of getting a bronzed look. It's much, much more than that. All the organising fields of your body thrive in that exposure--even if it is sometimes only to your face, or via sun-lamps.

Yet I feel that meditation comes back--and even deepens, sometimes,--in the middle of great work, or when listening to great music, or in dance, or in meeting or making good art, or in watching a beautiful face. Or in any experience --and here we musn't pompously filter out sex and say that that's a completely different issue and merely a form of entertainment or the like. The meditation takes place more in the brain, perhaps, but it is of the same nature as that which takes more place in the genitals. So when you explore meditation, you explore not merely how to kindle it in the morning or afternoon or so, but also what it means to relate to it throughout the day, not in every minute, but sometimes.



SRW photo of Monica Herstad

3. Dance, Beauty And Photography

Q. Is there something timeless about ballet? How does the more modern, or, as some would prefer, more contemporary dance forms compare to classical ballet--and is there a timeless esthetics? Or is it just a cultural definition?

A. This is the type of questions that I have often explored and I supposed I really began explore them when I asked one who has both education, the highest possible, in classical ballet and who had then turned to the post-Hiroshima Japanese form of dance called butoh, by means of her great master Min Tanaka. What Monica Herstad replied and how these further conversations developed I do not now remember in detail, but it went into the series of explorations into beauty also in painted art via my contact with Frans Widerberg, whose elongated muselike beings in space seemed to partake in much the same beauty as we can find in some forms of dance (perhaps more meditative and still and contemporary dance than ballet in his case; yet without the gravitational pull).

It is, perhaps, a life quest, for each human being, to explore something of the beauty concept and it's only by respecting the possible infinity of explorations here that we properly have the greatness of mind with which we can approach it here and now. I mean, there's no final word on the matter--not Fibonacci with his 1, 2, 3, 5, 8 series which approach the 1.618 golden ratio so much found in divinely inspiring paintings; not the theory, by Thomas Aquinas, Spinoza and one of the medieval Archbishops of Canterbury, and many others, also in classical Indian thinking: that the God concept is the concept of the highest perfection. And that the best a human being can do is to trust this perfection concept and ask what one can do to honor it and have some approach to it, positively speaking.

But I'm wavering from your question. Is dance as ballet the supreme? There's a likelihood in any human discipline, including classical ballet, that it is tainted by its time and culture; and yet it's clear to me, radiantly clear, that the lines and arches and gracefully as if weightless postures of the well-trained human body--much of all that --is touching something beyond all time and common to the best of art. Modern or contemporary dance, or however we phrase it, should respect that core, not develop away from it as if beauty is solely in the eye of the beholder.

Q. Well, does contemporary dance 'develop away' from the beautiful core of ballet?

A. I have seen the same greatness exhibited in contemporary dance; I would go further, I have seen something exhibited there that ballet may not easily touch. But according to some of the leading ballerinas and choreographers (incl. Tamara Rojo), ballet isn't static at all, but learns from whatever it 'comes into touch with'.

Q. You mean, there has been something shown in nonballet dance that touches the form of beauty that you would like to see in dance, that highest form you're talking about?

A. Well, something like that. You can tell if you have a

meditative mind, that dance, when you don't feel it's sloppy work, but harmoniously prepared by people who are fully tuned in to do it from the core of their being, and who naturally exhibit a fountain of grace, so to speak, such dance does something to the mind the way a fantastic and surprising experience of wild Nature sometimes can. That one can find in the motions and postures associated with ballet--and in butoh and in other forms of more modern dance. That essence, if you like, escapes any easy definition. It exists, and it does its work in society. Is it fully captured in any style of dance? I think not. I think ballet has something to teach all other forms of dance--and that's for sure. Also, in terms of personal training, ballet can be a foundation for less obviously harmoniously structured dance forms, that one then takes up later on. The total dance performance is perhaps one that is neither ballet nor not ballet, but which plucks with great care and a feeling for essence the right vocabulary of postures and gracefully combines it all. In this, there's also the constant question of prearranged structure or choreography versus improvisation and what we can do to enhance the quality of the parts that have much improvisation in them.

When I photograph dance, I try to let go of all pre-conceived ideas of what the dance ought to show. There's a certain degree of dialogue between the living photographer holding a camera and the dancers, when it happens in such settings as allow a direct contact. The camera may be felt, through the fingers, to as if develop a 'will of its own', or rather one can say it's about trusting a certain 'magnetism of the fingers', to move and catch glimpses of God-knows-what, in tremendous quantities.

Q. Then it requires a gut instinct to pick from those quantities afterwards?

A. Correct. Exact. And also much time, much much time. It's out of respect for the photography session but also out of respect for the dancers, for all involved, stylists etc, that one finds the best photos, the ones that may fit not just an immediate purpose of use but which are shining as if with their own innerness (if that's the word I want). So those photos go to an archive--and the rest are discarded. Loads of photos, dozens, for each good photo, are discarded. They aren't kept and so you as photographer contribute to good energy, not accumulating the debris of photo sessions. This cleaning-up after a photo session is part of the work, part of the creativeness. As a result, --well, it should speak for itself. I think part of the clue is to subject the photos to a kind of esthetical awareness. How to build it up and maintain it in daily life so that you have that awareness when you act as a photographer is part of the quest of a holistic life-style or a life in wholeness. Part of what we are exploring here in these texts. I think here computers have a value, for they allow fresh impulses as to photographic results to be quickly and economically conveyed. I don't think videos have the same effect--at all! Videos are hypnosis. A photo can be the opposite--a mind-opener, a recharger. And so even more for really good paintings, for they are with you in a unique way--there's only one of each, and they are always affected in what they radiate by your own presence and the light in the room or the light outdoors and so on.



SRW photo of Monica Emilie Herstad

4. Music, Art, And The Muses Through Art History

Q. Classical ballet has, of course, been associated, at least in the popular culture, in many people's mind, with classical music; but of course the picture, when you look more closely at it, is extremely varied. When one looks at your website you speak favorably of the notion of 'muses', and this word is of course the same word as 'music'. Could you comment on all this?

A. Yes, for sure. The word "muse" is one of the loveliest in the English language, it has survived the many changes of English and carried through a sense which is not all that far from its original Greek sense, a couple millenia back and further. So you find the word 'muse' not only designating higher, graceful, slender females of a superior beauty capable of doing things beyond what mere mortal men can do, as inspiration for every sort of art in humanity, but also it is, as you point out, the root of words like "music" and "musical" and even "amusement". Now if you happen to be a believer in God you are open to the idea of higher beings, invisible to our naked eyes because they exist on a more subtle or sublime or etheric level of reality. So God's own personal assistants, we might say, are his muses; at least, if you choose to believe a little bit in the ancient Greek scenario, and interpret the head of the gods, Zevs, or Zeus, as also the source of the more christian, monotheistic God concept as the Latin "Deus", then the goddesses are more conveniently spoken of as muses, or angels, or archangels. These words vary. But they are of course greatly interesting for artists longing to convey a glimpse of what they feel might be the peak of beauty and grace and goodness to humanity. This is true not just in painting and music but you see it also, for instance, in the writings of J.R.R. Tolkien with his Lord of the Rings.

You meet these beings also in the paintings of the PRB, the Pre-Raphaelitic Brotherhood, made some time before Tolkien wrote his works, both in Great Britain; and of course the Romans left their marks on the British isles and thereby there's a direct Greek element in what was, in the beginning of the 20th century, the British Empire. In the Greek element, we find direct connections, as many German writers have pointed out, to most of the other major ancient traditions of the world, and in particular to ancient Indian cultures of Sanskrit. So we find a whole series of cultural connections, and these connections we find that such mythologists as Joseph Campbell have dug deep into. In any case, whether you personally have a faith in muses and God or lean toward a view in which you have taken these things with many spoons of salt, you may still rever music, find that music heals and creates energies and can carry you along in dance and create an atmosphere, as it were, where you are able to focus on what you need. When the music is right.

Q. Is that because of how the brain is built? That music goes somehow straight in?

A. Well, yes, it may be also because of the fields of what I personally, in my own super-model theory which has in it an understanding of physics, call organising fields. I have more technical terms for it there, but these fields are not merely an outcome of matter, but rather they some-

how underlie matter, also the matter of our brains. And these may be vibrational, not just having shapes, but they have features of vibration and so there may be a way in which music can and does affect them directly. And you may be free to interpret this to mean 'affect your soul directly'. By 'soul' I mean the sense of being alive within, the experiencer, that which is capable of feeling and having awareness together with forming insights and new thoughts.

Q. Do you use music during painting and photography?

A. Obviously, yes, all the time. Now what I find highly fascinating about music which is post-classical and that typically involve female voices in the late 20th century is that these are quite often singing in ways that imply a sense of liberation from the earlier entrenchment of women and of the tantric in the earlier styles of society we had prior to the industrial revolution. I mean, much music was composed on the order and payment of leaders to hail them or imply a hailing of them. When Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart didn't want to do that kind of music anymore, but penned notes towards a more revolutionary attitude, his support was cut, and he died in poverty and perhaps partly as a result of this political awakening in him. Now what I particularly find important in the ancient Greek culture, as compared to the antisexual phase that Roman/Vatican/Lutherian takes on christianity has led to, is that an ancient Greek attitude towards sexuality as part of the divine can infuse even christianity and the understanding of the Jesus character with something that is more friendly towards the liberation of women seen in the 20th century. This liberation involves a courage to set aflame, as it were, the tantric regions of the genitals and let the voices carry the vibrations also of these; and find notes and rhythms and the breaking with rhythm that matches this. In turn, this suggests new and more daring forms of ballet, and of course it invites new forms of paintings as well; and can infuse any photography session with a rich sense of possibilities, when one has prestine beauty as aim.

This theme, of music, is a big one. Let's explore it more from other angles also later in this booklet.

Q. Okay.

5. Education, And The Discipline Of Learning

Q. What is the proper education in the arts?

A. When you say 'arts' some of us might think of the cultural history, before the word 'art' was made into the type of concept we saw the first gigantic beginnings of in the 20th century. The plural form 'arts' could really mean any type of skill or crafts. That is not to say that who we today consider great artists, like the musician and composer J.S. Bach, wasn't considered great before the word 'art' came into its full flourishing. But rather he was considered a composer and musician first, and the word 'artist' became a celebrated concept only much later; so that one could apply it to oneself with pride, and do honors to the ancient masters in various fields by saying that they were great artists.

Once the concept of art became great and celebrated, society wanted to give the joys of being an artist to its youth and did so by creating educational institutions and formalised degrees. Some of these combined the earlier form of art education via the personal discipleship to a master in a field by hiring in, as art professors and teachers, some of these masters--inasmuch as they let themselves be hired in.

Q. And gradually art education became more and more theoretical and formalised?

A. In some places it did. Now these institutions vary greatly. In dance, for instance, only a tremendous discipline, a willingness to view dance as a dedication and to push it through as an ascetic way of life with its own great rewards but not the sometimes easy rewards of a superficial life, is enough to create the radiance of the mastery that the ballerina must show in the young adult girl. She has had discipline and teachers for years and it comes through in her every movement. Now that is an example of a discipline in which the formalised education may have the advantage of providing a uniform structure and a sense of coherence and wholeness.

In a similar vein, we can see that democratic societies also allow a variety of education places to arise--not just ones shaped according to a dry book-reading approach to what art is all about. And so some of these places are very theoretical, while others are practical but lack the presence of magnetic masters in the field, while some lucky few places have somehow managed to bridge all aspects of the brain and also have contact with successful masters in the area, with a success that comes from great and noble work, not just for reasons of overdone hype in society.

So, how does learning take place? The dancer uses a variety of feedbacks, including computer camera and mirror and so on, to find out how it is looking; whether the face is perfectly relaxed even as the muscles are pushed to the nearly intensely painful in an apparently effortless stretch and rise. And the teachers of dance provide further impulses, suggestions of what to be aware of, what ideals to pursue, and also, in between it all, how to handle certain strains that may arise--the necessary discipline in eating habits, for instance; or to moderate drugs and alcohol; and to overcome various fears of being

at a stage and in front of an audience. All these things which are so intensely near a dancer's daily training life.

In addition, there's the learning one does at one's own, when one is by oneself: this is intensely a part of all education, and, for not few in the history not just of art but of all humankind, some of those who have made the greatest leaps have pushed themselves hard and managed to click the 'self-learning' switch into the 'on' position.

Q. Can anyone do this?

A. Well, children are adept at it. They learn all the time --and laugh; some statistics showed that children may easily laugh about 300 times pr day. That's a brain state. It's a mind wave. The playfulness wave--which allows also the storage, deeply, of new movements, of new perceptions, new patterns, new rhythms, new gestalts, and so on. The relaxed and playful mood of mind. Then, as the child grows up, there may not be the adult or older child to comment about what's right and wrong all the time; and so one must give oneself comments--sometimes criticize, sometimes congratulate; and with an insight into this process; with ideals that are high, perhaps coming from a study of how the masters are doing things; perhaps also coming, as if by hypnosis, from being in the presence of great masters and then just having a sense of knowing, afterwards, how these would react if they saw or heard such-and-such.

So being self-critical, but also, when called for, self-congratulatory, on a foundation of playful awareness and daily regular contact with a varied set of great impulses and also great efforts in a field; over the years, this is how one gets into such mastery as one has the talent to get.

Q. This sounds as something only few institutions can provide.

A. Well, yes. Some can provide it. They can also provide a motivation to go on despite money worries and what not. And so they are invaluable. But naturally, society mustn't ever decline into merely looking at papers to judge who is an artist. It's not about namedropping. It's about a quality judgement.



Avenuege painting 50cm x 50cm by SRW

6. The Secret Of Painting

Q. Is there a secret as to how to paint dancers well?

A. Oh yes. Just spend a decade at drawing and painting every day and have lots of meetings with some great ones in both fields in the meantime; add to that talent, luck and intuition, and you've got it. Simple as that ;)

Joke apart, I think as with music--if I may leap into a related subject, and come back..?

Q. Go ahead!

A. Thanks. With music--let's think of what we may mean by words or phrases such as House, Dance, Trance, Club, Electronica, and how these and other forms of music from rather late in the 20th century and early in the 21st century are importing features of all branches of music from reggie through pop to classic: one of the things that some of the best pieces of music are doing is that the music creates its own seemingly natural world, as it were. Things, the voices, the notes of music, just happen, but they happen within a context. Some speak of 'ambient' music, too: the music flows in and around itself and does so without too much sense of the artefact. Look at any great painting, in particular what can be called of the 'impressionist' kind, and it is certainly a world onto itself. It has decided on a style--as it were, a font--and sticks to it; and events play upon this style as waves on water. Right?

Q. Some speak of the fractal geometry of nature. How a cloud may look like itself in its bubbly edges that it is hard to tell whether it is near or far away. Same with water waves. Rock formations. And such. Is that something of what you mean?

A. Yes, absolutely. The fractal stuff is part of it. Now I happen to have my own views about mathematics and its equations and I look to another type of formalisation than that--I have my own formalism, G15 PMN, which is a whole art school in itself, in a way--and so I use the word 'fractal' consciously poetically. To indicate such as a similarity or texture within the music-scape or sound-scape or landscape--and interesting contrasts that also resonate. These words make sense if you look at any grand piece of Nature, at least in your mind, if you also think about such words, knowing a bit of their definition in a normal English dictionary. That's the sense in which I want to use the word 'fractal', even though its source is technically in terms of some equations. This can be given, as many people have shown, a totally liberated meaning in terms of computer languages, without having to call on any of the original equations. Indeed, one of the folks I call a 'mentor', even though the quantity of meetings with him was not that great, David Bohm, wrote, with David Peat, about the idea of 'generative orders', inspired by just this, and showed how one can make crystal-like shapes simply by pen and paper, repeating a triangle-like edge shape at smaller and smaller scales as modification to the same initial form.

Where were we?

Q. Well, I asked about the secret of painting.

A. Oh yes, you sure did. Now, when I make a canvas--which is something that, though slightly time-consuming even given good tools, I find to be an important part of the painting process--I already find myself beginning to think about what texture will come out of it. Thinking texture means that you want, as you develop the stuff on the canvas over some time,--not just one painting at a time, you follow, but you can have several,--then suddenly it takes on its own story and own depth. At least it seems like it does. You follow what I mean when I say 'texture'?

Q. Is it like a fractal on the canvas, that the paint gives rise to similar shapes and so on?

A. Yeah, but it is more that you feel the canvas is no longer there like an object. It is rather having its own life. Now I found the almost mesmerizing presence of the famous Norwegian painter Frans Widerberg in his large ateliers as he worked on many paintings at the same time living what he said when he pointed out, to me: when you have a masterpiece coming up, you can do what you want, it can't be hurt. That wasn't the exact words, but that was the gist of it. He also spoke of 'communion' with his paintings. And they really took on a life on their own though in the beginning they seemed to be looking for it. One of his key themes was that of 'not knowing'. As I see it, he did what I call 'muse impressionism' and his painting floating beings were sort of dancers in space; these are though my words, the way I use it--contemporary impressionism, if you like. The challenge is to realize that a fluctuating and as if uncertain line can be as indicative of certain life as a certain line--if not more, sometimes. The 'not knowing' of what is going on permits a laughter, a change of perceptions, a feeling as if there is light in the process, light that must have its own say and we shouldn't try to force a form into being if it doesn't come by itself. And yet, if it comes by itself, it may be hard work (I add) to get it right, fully right, as right as it deserves.

In all this, I also feel, a painting should be made for people who are in need of its presence and energy and who relishes in its presence and--notably--who may want to have more, and different paintings after a while. A painting is like a battery. You put it up on the wall to charge yourself from it; and then, some seasons later, you may want to let it come to new places, and you go after a new one. Perhaps reselling and so on. So the paintings get charged up by this change of scene as well. That also means that we shouldn't paint so as to try to put full 'paradise perfection' into every one of them, if you know what I mean. The hint and the glamour of the muses should be there, but we put perhaps clothes on them and make them more like mere manifest human beauty and we do so with some consciously careless strokes or elements of postures here and there so that the painting isn't "arguing against reality", that it isn't competing too much; and with the clothes, and such, you don't get too worked up on the perfection of the bodies and so on but can get on with the business of living your life!

Q. If all this is the secret of painting, then it seems that there isn't any secret in the sense of easy way to it.

A. Well I just want to say that with all my interest and,

if I may immodestly point it out, my fairly absolute knowlegde of programming, that if I had found a way by the PC to create the same intensity of experience that a living analog painting on the wall can, I would have done so. Rather, I find that the PC complements it, but it is enormously important to regard that the analog painting process has in it features of real life and its love and its esthetics and dance that are in principle impossible to capture in any digital form, whether as photography or manipulation or photography. And never ever, if I may point it out, be fooled by a photo of a painting into a belief that you now much about the painting by watching the photo of it. If the painting is any good, that is.

7. The Love Of Dance

Q. Why do you love dance?

A. Have you noticed how hard it is to answer that question for anything that you really love for its own sake? I mean --just to take an example--suppose you love the books of the light-hearted novel writer and master of comedy in the 20th century, P.G. Wodehouse. One of the characters you find in many but very far from all his about 100 books is the "Jeeves" character.

Q. Yes, the clever servant who always rescues Bertie Wooster from entanglements and such.

A. Exactly. Now suppose you said, "I love Wodehouse's books BECAUSE of the Jeeves character." But surely that's not the whole reason, or you wouldn't much take to the many books of his without the Jeeves character. And so for each particular thing about these books. If you extract it, you reduce the rest. And so it is with dance. I have experimented here. In this free world, it's easy: is it only because of the expressions? You can find much the same expressions of the faces in other places. Is it only the fact that the dancers are so well-trained? But athletic well-trainedness is not the sole property of dancers. Well, what about the graceful arch of the high-wristed foot in the ballet stretch? It's wonderful, like Jeeves in the Wodehouse books, if you forgive the comparison, but surely you can find that arch, if that's what it's all about, for instance in fashion magazines. Flexibility? The scene? You see, you can't pick it apart and you can't give any reason if there's really a passion for the whole, a passion without fear or greed.

Q. I hear what you say but surely there are famous choreographers who say that ballet or dance is great because of such and such. A well-known male choreographer pointed out that ballet involves the highest form of eroticism, and that's why he cared so much about it.

A. I beg to differ. I think I can understand how he can come to say such a thing, and, mind you, I'm not one of your petty moralists who wish to brush everything sexual under the carpet; I believe of myself that I'm liberal-minded and then some. Also, I don't believe in the sharp categories (we've already talked about that, I think). But dance is different than that and more than that, though it may include it, does it include it.

Q. Can you give an example?

A. Well, great dance is a physical meditation, a shared social meditation, because when you watch it--and I don't mean watching a digital screen with a series of photos made by one of these video cameras, but you are in the audience and you are seated, or you are standing, and you watch dancers and listen to the music. It's a state of mind of wholeness.

An example? Well, I favour sitting still in meditation in between the doings of things in daily life. In this way --and perhaps through the sayings or prayers or what we call it--mantras, we can say--that we bring into it, we

can call on deeper resources, and we get into a sense of undivided existence. These are funny words, but they make sense when you push ahead with meditation for a while. Now there's no doubt--no doubt at all!--that such a state of mind also allows an erotic energy and inspiration and capacity to gather and be present so that you can call on it in the actions after it. Right? So the erotic is part of meditation. But it's absolutely clear, is it not, that meditation is different from and more than the erotic? Right?

Q. Right. I see that. And in the same way with dance?

A. Exactly. Now this ties in with music. (I think we promised to go more into the theme of music earlier on in these conversations.)

Q. How?

A. If you have noticed it, you can select music according to what you are going to work with, and who you are going to work with, so as to create a background motivation that is suitable for the tasks ahead. So some forms of music propell speed and practical superficiality, for instance; while others take you deeper and let you reflect and go into contemplative moods; some forms of music, perhaps mixed with radio or such, may provide a balming effect within which one can very easily have a nap; while other music again can be effective for physical training, yoga, martial arts, whatever, or the stamash that combines these --and so music can be seen as a mechanism by which we in a technologised society can have an easier way regulating what we're doing. We work on our brains, minds, souls, feelings, perceptions when we consciously select music to fit with what we're doing. Now, one of the things I have personally explored quite a while is what happens when you take a sensual piece of music of the electronica or house or trance form, vaguely speaking, and chop up the rhythms here and there; and blur over some of the parts of music that most stand out, so it get's slightly more what Brian Eno would call 'ambient'. This I think has great relevance for dance, for ballet, modern, contemporary, whatever we call it--to explore what happens to dance when we no longer insist on the mechanically perfectly repeated rhythm. You follow? This is the arrhythmic.

Q. The arrhythmic. Is that when rhythm is transcended?

A. Exactly. The 'a' is as in 'amoral', meaning beyond morals. The arrhythmic is beyond rhythm.

Q. Isn't that making it very difficult to dance after it? The category of pop music called 'dance' is, in contrast, often full of hard rhythm, even more mechanical-sounding than normal.

A. I'm aware of that, but let's remember the commercial aspects of all this: such easy-going pop music is meant to be pumped out so that people who have their attention on the drink in their hands, and on conversation, are going to feel impelled to move to it. When we speak of going far into new peaks of the dance that well-trained dancers dance, according to new styles of choreography, with new mixings of bits of improvisation with structure, then we must ask: can we invoke more clearly something of that which goes beyond the mechanical by letting the music more

flow than guide, and let the dancers move according to a sense of oscillations that come from within.

Q. It sounds like a form of dance that's more complex to view.

A. But that I totally agree to. It may even be that, commercially speaking, one may have to be careful about invoking it too much and too early in a dance on a stage, and moderating it even more if the audience is less inclined to understand it. But to experiment with it and gather a know-how about what it means to transcend rhythm appears to me to be important. I sometimes refer to HMMH for this type of blend, which can be precoded or made on the spot by means of a mixer--Harmonious Messy Mix House-dance. That sort of brings in all the themes--the house-dance style of contemporary pop music, the freedom to mix and mess about it, but with an underlaying intent of harmony.

Q. Say once more why this type of thing is important.

A. Why the arrhythmic is important?

Q. Yes, why is the arrhythmic important. When it comes to dance.

A. Because in any important pursuit in humanity, there's the danger of a thing becoming a habit. We mustn't be as computers. Computers, however cleverly programmed they are, tick according to a computer clock, performing instruction after instruction, in a sequence for each processor. This ticking off of instructions, and acting according to strict rules, can be impressive but there's a sensitivity in life that's beyond all this. And somehow life must be consciously entrained into all the greatest forms of art, dance inclusive.

8. Can Quantum Biology Teach Artists Anything?

Q. It may seem to some of us that you have perhaps gone more deeply into quantum mechanics than most; and there are at present books and even mainstream scientific journals who speak about the new upcoming quantum biology; does anything of this has in it something for artists?

A. Oh yes, definitely, obviously, clearly. There's no doubt that science is a provider of impulses that are, through many levels of imagination and speculation, eventually filtering into worldviews and visions of the human being, of Nature, and of life, which in turn will affects artists,--painters, dancers and so on--very deeply indeed. They can't help it: it's a question of reflecting over the total human state. A contemplation of Nature is not only pure contemplation in the sense of pure perception; it is always to some extent affected by the underlying concepts we have of Nature, and of ourselves, and so on. And all this enters into our feelings of society, of the value of human life, of the point of art, and so on. And I feel that art has a great point to it, and that this is especially so when we are not so woolen-headed that we are confined to an atheistic or mechanistic reductive idea of the world. The world is far far beyond whatever humans can think. Now, in all this picture, we have hints in various branches of science. It's a very long story but if you like I can give some glimpses of it that could be relevant to your question. Do you want that?

Q. Don't make it too complex.

A. Okay, I won't. Let me then say (as I think we have pointed out earlier in these conversations, in this text), that for the most part in the 20th century, physics dealt with subatomic energies and so by means of concepts which were rather wierd and fuzzy, wavelike and with features going even faster than the speed of light. Very peculiar features were found there. Then, we had the biologists, trying to put the human body (and other living beings) in a box, and this box was supposed to be explainable without any much reference to quantum physics at all.

Q. How could this be? When quantum processes are guiding the particles that also make up our body?

A. Well, in some connections the quantum processes sort of cancel out; the field, we might say, is fragmented, so that you can get a more machine-like effect out of the whole. As an image, a metaphor, imagine that inside particles of sand there are all sorts of mysterious processes but they don't upset the overall shape and weight of each grain of sand. Right? And then, when you build a sand castle, you can push and pull on the sand and add water and it'll behave much according to very simple rules; nothing wierd about it.

Q. So the biologists built a sand-castle theory of the human body?

A. Wait, not so fast. There were this and that scientist who felt that things ought to be done differently. Erwin

Schroedinger was one of them. David Bohm was another. Some of the more daring proposals, considered ridiculous by mainstream journals, came from Rupert Sheldrake, a british biologist; but it is clear that his type of theory can be seen as an intimation of a future form of quantum biology and no scientist with respect for science as process should laugh at such theories as Sheldrake's so-called "morphogenetic" fields. He may have been a bit careless in the formulations, and also not interested enough in quantum theory earlier on to combine the two in any interesting way, but the gist of his notion is that the living organism can connect both itself and to other beings by means which go beyond push-pull, beyond cause and effect, beyond the machine. And that point is perhaps, a bit by bit, beginning to become credible to at least some serious scientists working in biology, but by pathways which to many are surprising. It's a long long story but I just give some snapshots. Follow so far?

Q. I think so.

A. Then, a number of developments between the 1970s and now, into the second decade of the 21st century, lead to an understanding that a number of processes in biology may be somehow requiring very complex quantum theory to be understood at all--for they are, in part, much more efficient than they otherwise would have been without it. Each of these examples are rather tiny and not without a world-shaking implication seen in isolation: but they could suggest, if they continue to be understood in this way in mainstream science, that there is a fantastic amount more to be discovered, and which may even bring us to the point where we see that present quantum theory come altogether short to account for it. I try to suggest this without sounding too easy about it, being aware of how carefull mainstream scientists wish to be, to save their careers and what not.

The examples seen so far, and most discussed in journals such as Nature, include:

- * some forms of the breathing processes in living beings
- * some forms of bird navigation during long journeys
- * parts of how energy is transferred when sunlight is shining on green blades and this is utilised by plants
- * features of how the sense of smell work

And, more excitingly, perhaps, but with less evidence as yet--though some laboratory research in the favour of it:

- * possibilities of relating EEG brain waves to some quantum coherence found in microtubules, which are structures found in plenty in all brain neurons

When you look into these examples you find that the concepts of biology, through biochemistry, is pretty much put to their limits; so also are the measuring instruments and methods; and so also is the understanding of quantum theory or physics or mechanics or however we phrase it.

The wierdest part of quantum theory is quantum coherence but it is common to regard this as one of three forms of wierdness--the second being entanglement, the third being tunnelling. But these are really all variations of quantum coherence. This involves faster-than-light, or superluminal, organising of energetic processes over possibly great distances, at least as compared to the subatomic level. The tunnelling phenomenon involves that such fields coordinate the movement or dancelike flow of such as electrons or fields of energy so that they don't collide but find their pathways elegantly and fast.

Q. Alright, I might get a glimpse of something of this when you describe it. But if you drop the scientific way of talking, what does all this mean to artists?

A. This: that all life may be a vibrational interconnected flow of energy entirely beyond the notion of machine. I say this not out of quantum theory, nor out of what may come to be regarded as quantum biology: but out of an intuition that quantum phenomena are merely the beginning of a series of explorations humanity is doing into features of reality that ultimately are found to be part of a living, nonmechanistic process. That all is alive: and you can give it any flavour you like, in your mind, whether you believe, as some buddhists, in a pantheistic soup, or as eg christians, in a God and angelic beings, or muses, in additions; or any of the other flavours. We are talking of beginning to see the interaction points between life as something stable and explainable in spots and life as something beyond all explanation and in interconnection with all events in the universe. If that doesn't suggest something to artists, I don't know what could!

Q. I see what you mean!

9. What The Pre-Raphaelitic Brotherhood Was Up To

Q. Has anybody in the past of painters had a real sense of the wholeness of Nature as you see it?

A. Yes. Spotwise, at least. I think that one of the most interesting events in all art history--I say 'event', for it was too short-lived, and too few painters were involved that it amounted to much more than that--was the PRB.

Q. PRB being the Pre-Raphaelitic Brotherhood. Well, why them?

A. Now let's imagine the scene of mid-19th century. We're talking of a priestly, Victorian British empire, in which art which had a religious stamp on it had a greater chance of getting around, also commercially; and in which such art as the famous Raphael had produced several centuries earlier was regarded as a kind of ideal by some. If you study photographs of these paintings--with all the respect for what the paintings may exude beyond the photographs--you can understand why the handful of painters making their cleverly named brotherhood considered that Raphael and those following him were doing things sometimes more by "rote" than according to heart; and that Nature offered more mysteries than those which fitted the official priestly symbolism. You know the word "rote"?

Q. Explain it. What is rote?

A. It means habit, repetitive, mechanical. Like when people are shot when they don't know a bible text of some sort by rote. Literal. Mind-dumb idiotic repetitions. That's the kind of idiocy that is by some people regarded as proof of a holy, moral attitude. "Rote" means that there's no mind in it, no creativity. And, by coincidence, when we speak of computers we speak exclusively of what can, at some level, be reduced to a series of so-called "rote procedures".

Q. Machine-like.

A. Exactly. So that's why I mentioned the literalist attitude to religion, it's ridiculous approach to insight into theology. Let's brush that away. In any case, the PRB wanted to look to more creative, more insightful descriptions, by heart, of Nature, and with a less rigid, less habitual, less superficially cartoonish description--also of the holy. You see, these folks weren't saying that religiousness is all false. Quite on the contrary. They were rather like Tolkien, who, not that many decades later were writing stories some of which may well be imagined to come out of a steering at some PRB paintings after having read a dash of early P.G. Wodehouse. Tolkien, like these folks, believed not just in God but in the divine mysteries entwined in all Nature. And so these guys, wrapped up in the sense of nature-mystical romanticism, forced themselves to take the stance that we don't know much about life, about Nature, about cosmos, but we have a sense of something, and we have an adoration for the beautiful female and for the divine mysteries surrounding the virgin and all that--you see their starting-point? Of course, only decades later atheism came

into fashion and sort of brushed away Nature mysticism as a clinging to a view that was too near the priestly view to be correct; but, as I think you know I'm trying to point out, atheism is a rather childish take on reality.

Q. Now suppose I read all this what we're talking about, and still feel inclined to something like atheism, but have an open, scientific attitude and wish to hear exactly why it is wrong. I know we have talked about this in earlier conversations, but, from scratch as it were, what would you say?

A. Hm. Let's imagine that you say that you are an atheist. Right?

Q. Okay, I'm not. But let's say I am.

A. And then you are saying, make me disbelieve it if you can.

Q. Yes. Something like that.

A. But let's then look into the meaning of the word "atheist". What do you mean by it?

Q. That the world can be explained without a reference to any God or creator or such, I think.

A. But there's more to "atheist" than that, isn't there? An atheist is not only denying a God, but in fact is saying that what is--this reality--is but a set of particles and forces operating on particles that are near one another. That sort of stuff. Push-pull. Cause and effect. By some sort of lucky coincidence life comes about --that's what atheism really is saying, isn't it?

Q. Yes. You are right.

A. So, an atheist is probably a 'darwinist' in this sense: that reality, life, human beings, are not results of an overarching design process, but rather, by millions of years of chance events, certain patterns arise--survival of the fittest, genes and their random mutations--and so on, and by this process such as the human being comes into being. Isn't all this typically what we mean by "atheism"?

Q. I think so.

A. Now, then, there are various things we could say to this. One of them goes like this: I have personally experienced, as a computer programmer, how little comes out of randomness and chance, even when repeated much more than mere millions or billions of time. And what we've seen in each decade since Charles Darwin brought out his theories, is a growth in the understanding of the subtle finesses of life. It is fantastically well organized. What goes on in the simplest leaves of grass defy human explanation. It appears that there are processes so finely tuned even in grass that it seems to me to be a rather peculiar leap of imagination to assume that a mere set of millions or billions or, for that matter, a billion billion years, could give rise to these things. If one has a simplistic understanding of life, coupled with an equally simplistic understanding of randomness, I can see how one might feel the atheism is a great idea. But I think it is a pretty tough argument, bordering on

extreme, severe unlikeliness, purely from a scientific viewpoint, as I understand the findings, personally.

Q. What about intuition? Can it say something about atheism is right or not?

A. Exactly--but what is intuition if you're an atheist? You follow? It isn't much then. It is mere chance bubbling up from the subconscious activity of the neurons or the like. The artist who is an atheist probably sees the brain as machine and wouldn't mind blending in a little chemicals to get 'altered' perceptions. When it comes to someone who conceives of Nature more like the PRB folks, you have a radically different take on intuition--and one that, after all, artists would love to have. Don't you think?

Q. Yes. Yet one doesn't change worldview easily.

A. That's true. One doesn't change a culture--and atheism is for some people perhaps a culture--by throwing around some standard arguments. Yet it can happen that you get a sudden insight into your own thought processes--that this or that is something you hadn't quite thought about. And though it is a subtle thought, it may lead to a deep change; and weeks, or seasons later, another thought of the same kind may add itself to it; and at some point--you follow?--there may be a radical change of outlook.

10. Art, Dance And Economy

Q. What is money?

A. There are two views of money. One is that money came from below, and the other is that money came from above.

Q. What do you mean?

A. Let's take the 'from below' view first. According to this view, first the planet was a soup of particles; then the particles became little organisms; eventually human beings came; and when they started to grow crops and what not they had the bright idea of counting them, and bringing in some marks on some stones or the like to keep the supply houses in order. Some marks for this person, some for that; and gradually, money as an abstract item arose, independent of any concrete reference. That's from below.

Q. And from above?

A. That's a wholly different story altogether. It couldn't be more different. Here, we look to the root meaning of the English word 'money'. And of course we find that it refers to an epithet of the Roman version of one of the consorts of Zeus, the king of the gods, the one god that probably can be said to be the original idea behind monotheism. In this view, then, money is part of the energy that God surround himself with, and associated directly with beauty, the beautiful girl, the divine glow and glory of the Olympic beings who shaped the universe and who made human beings in their image, or as shadows of their infinitely greater beauty. You see, in this view, money isn't invented in the stone age or after; rather, it's part of the inspiration, the fun, the joy, the pleasure and the seductiveness we associate with the playfulness of the origin beings. It's a divine inspiration.

Q. Speaking of divine, not every spiritual person has always regarded money positively..

A. ..obviously not!

Q. ..for instance, St Paul wrote some rather terrible words about it, which is part of the Christian bible.

A. But then, St Paul, who was he? Merely a great writer. He wasn't Jesus, and according even to the bible he never even met Jesus except in visions and all that. So he's a preacher; the only difference between this St Paul and any typical charismatic priest of modern times is that St Paul lived some decades after the Jesus character. So it's something of a mystery to me why those who claim to believe so much in Jesus go to this particular writer rather than pray for direct intuition. In any case, that's him, and that's only one take on money. No doubt he wanted to point out that greed for property, wealth, all that, is typically associated with the ugliest of actions that we see in humanity--when these things are threatened and when belief and faith in nobler virtues aren't strong enough to set people free from attachment.

In any case, I think that the view of money that this Paul or Paulus character is exhibiting is pretty much the 'from below' view of money. And this is typical of the rather unjoyous take on life that characterises the least interesting parts of the particularly Christian part of the bible. They had too much of the stout Roman in them, and too little appreciation of what the Greek myths could open up in them, of insights into art, life, awareness and the divine. That, at least, is as I see it.

Q. So you view money as something associated with pure energy?

A. Indeed I do. Like light, it may be misused. Anything we can handle can be misused. But in its origin, it's something liberating--not just to get, but to give, when done in the right spirit. You give money when you get inspiration in return; not just what you need, practically but speaking of all the other things. The real economy, the real interesting economy, is not just in household articles, not just in borrowing money to get properties and to keep on properties and rent them out and all that, but the money associated with the genuinely 'useless' things, yet vital for human joy. That's where art comes in --and then money is a direct servant of the art. You have spare time and you have spare money and you see that there is this wonderful art event, beauty, grace, audience, people have put on a bit of extra nice clothing, there's a gathering, there's the expectation, the shared experience--all these things are involved in inspiration; and this is not merely a habitual thing, but something in essence innovative, fresh. Money in this sense is serving genuine development in human consciousness.

Q. To take this view of money is nice, but in a world with what seems to be more people than good jobs, it's also a name for a tough reality.

A. It's tough, yes. There can be no denial of that. What I think is right is though to realize that for those who are so lucky that they can combine a great talent with concentrated work--to produce paintings, to partake in gracious dance, whatever--they can be alive to the higher meanings of money; it's part of the artistic current and flow to be aware of this; it's part of the natural luxury of being when there's a degree of comfortable economy for a plurality of people relating to a field of unfoldment that money is shared so that these experiences come around to people. There's great fun in it; there's a twinkle in the eyes around that type of relationship to money; and I think that for those who have a reasonably safe grounding in how they handle money--not basing too much on loans and so on--and where they have obvious talents, and a willingness to concentrate, to work on what they are working on, or educating themselves in, as a dedication--that it can literally pay off to be aware of money in this dancing way, the way of enthusiasm.

Q. But then there's also the question of calculations, and austerity in expenses, and getting a balance.

A. Quite so. And so it pays off to have a relationship to numbers, to order, to arranging one's thoughts, giving oneself time to sort things out and finding a kind of meditative order in how one plans; and to find out what types of promises one can make and fulfill and to avoid

the promises that one cannot live up to--at least, as much as possible, and after learning about these things. We all have learning to do about these things; there's always more to learn. That's part of the beauty of money.

Q. There's a tendency in some parts of society to speak of injustice in how some people reap in much for things that more anonymous people get little for.

A. Yes. A signature may be worth millions, for instance; but when prices are determined by hype in societal circles that must be seen more like a game, a temporary game, rather than actual evaluation of the items involved. It's like the stock market: when many talks highly about the stock, the stock appreciates in value, no matter what it refers to, up to a point. I think that while such games have some interest--a slight bit of the same happens in currency trading, which I dabble a bit with for fun--there is also the idea of quality in work, and that quality time giving to good work in which one has put both talents and carefully cultivated experience and learning time, should have a meaningful payment, reflecting all this. When you find a price through thinking through what goes into doing or making something--for instance a painting--then you can reach different, more meaningful type of price--in the sense that it lasts longer, and outlives flashes of hype.

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SRW photo of Raya Doshnanova