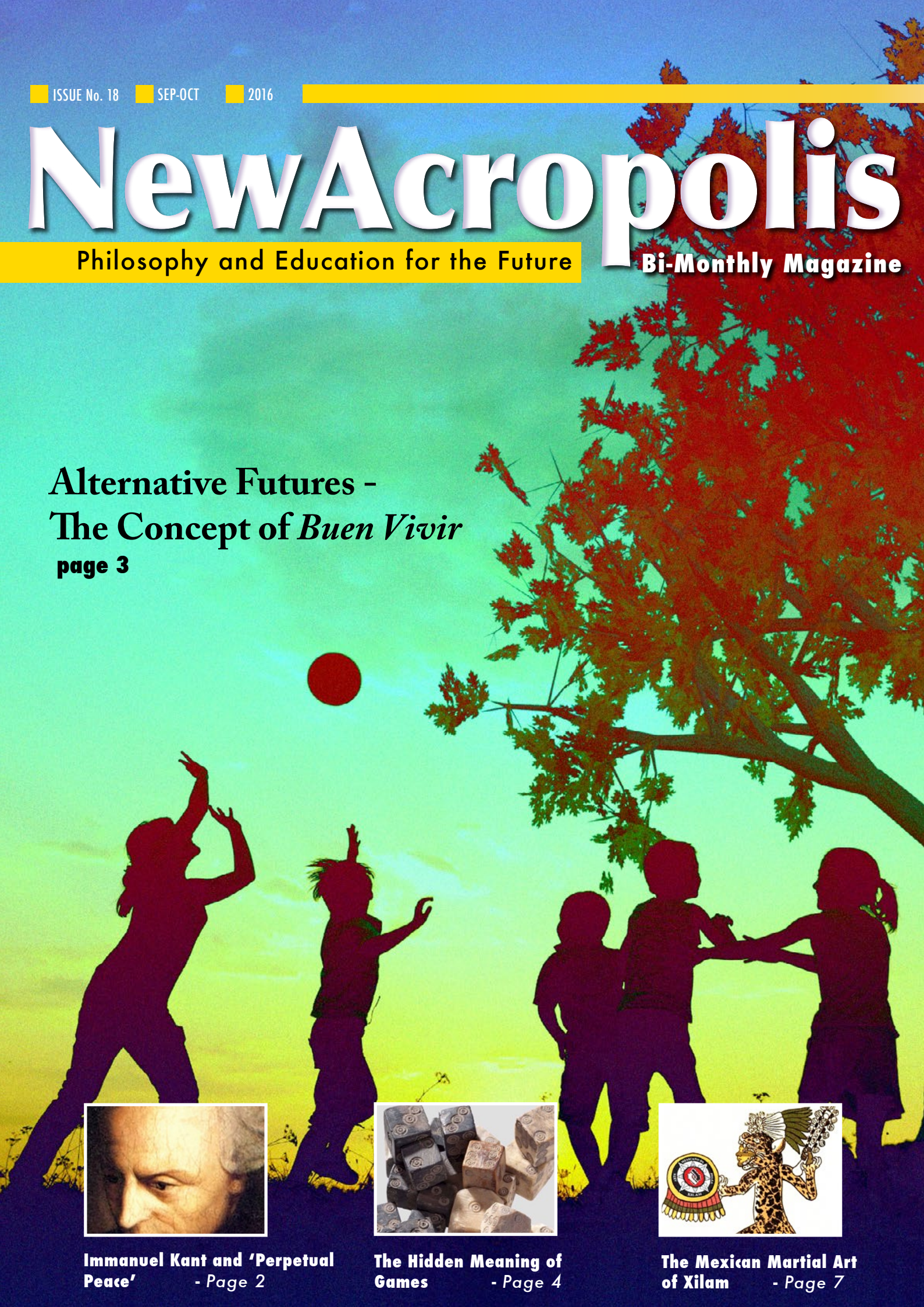


NewAcropolis

Philosophy and Education for the Future **Bi-Monthly Magazine**

**Alternative Futures -
The Concept of *Buen Vivir***
page 3



Immanuel Kant and 'Perpetual Peace'
- Page 2



The Hidden Meaning of Games
- Page 4



The Mexican Martial Art of Xilam
- Page 7

What's Inside

Editorial
page 1

Immanuel Kant and
'Perpetual Peace'
page 2

Alternative Futures – The Concept
of Buen Vivir
page 3

The Hidden Meaning of Games
page 4

Hilma Af Klint: Painting the Unseen
page 5

King Lud
page 6

Ancient Mesoamerican
Philosophy: Lessons from the
Mexican Martial Art of Xilam
page 7

Quantum Physics and the Power
of Consciousness
page 8

Upcoming Events
page 9

EDITORIAL

Utopias. What's your view about them? Some consider them an impractical illusion; others a dangerous cause of monstrous evils, while others think that utopias are in fact necessary and have been driving forces in history. With the 500th anniversary of the publication of Thomas More's seminal book *Utopia* this year, the concept is somehow 'in the air' and invites us to reflect on it.

Thomas More made up the word 'utopia' as a pun on two Greek words: *Eutopia*, meaning *good place*, and *Outopia*, meaning no place. This is, of course, a very clever description since it indicates that this perfect place is at the same time located in no place, which means that it doesn't exist.

Although he founded a whole literary tradition of utopian novels, the idea of a utopia, or a perfect society where everyone is happy, is not new and in fact has a long history. It is interesting to see that the earliest descriptions of a perfect society placed it in the distant past of a Golden Age whereas later versions dreamt of it in the distant future.

With the development of modern science and technology, utopias were inspired by the possibilities these offered. However, more recent and contemporary writers have mostly written about future dystopias like Huxley's *Brave New World* or Orwell's *1984*.

Both utopias and dystopias are a mirror of the ills plaguing the society of their time. Utopias dream of a world where all these shortcomings are remedied and they can therefore inspire change. Dystopias also reflect the ills of their time and project them into the future. They can serve as a warning of how it could all end up if we don't pay heed and just watch passively how things take their course.

Sometimes, utopian dreams turn into dystopian realities, as happened with the communism of Stalin or Mao Tse Tung. At other times, they simply fail. Maybe this is why we are so wary of 'big ideas'. But it would be wrong to dismiss utopias completely.

On the contrary, we need to nourish our ability to dream of a better world that does not yet exist in order to build it, step by step. There are so many ills in our own society that need to be addressed. There are enough possible nightmare scenarios with increasing global warming, growing fanaticism, artificially enhanced human beings, etc. that we should really be aware of in order to find the strength to change the course we are currently taking.

We actually need the imagination of utopians to creatively shape history and lay the foundations for a better tomorrow. As someone said: "Utopia translates as no-place. But it is not a destination, it is a direction." Without utopians, women would still not be able to vote and black people would still not be allowed to sit next to white people on the bus. The perfect world does not exist, but a better one is possible.

Sabine Leitner

About Us

NEW ACROPOLIS is an international organization working in the fields of philosophy, culture and volunteering. Our aim is to revive philosophy as a means of renewal and transformation and to offer a holistic education that can develop both our human potential as well as the practical skills needed in order to meet the challenges of today and to create a better society for the next generation.

For further details please visit : WWW.NEWACROPOLISUK.ORG

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Immanuel Kant and 'Perpetual Peace'

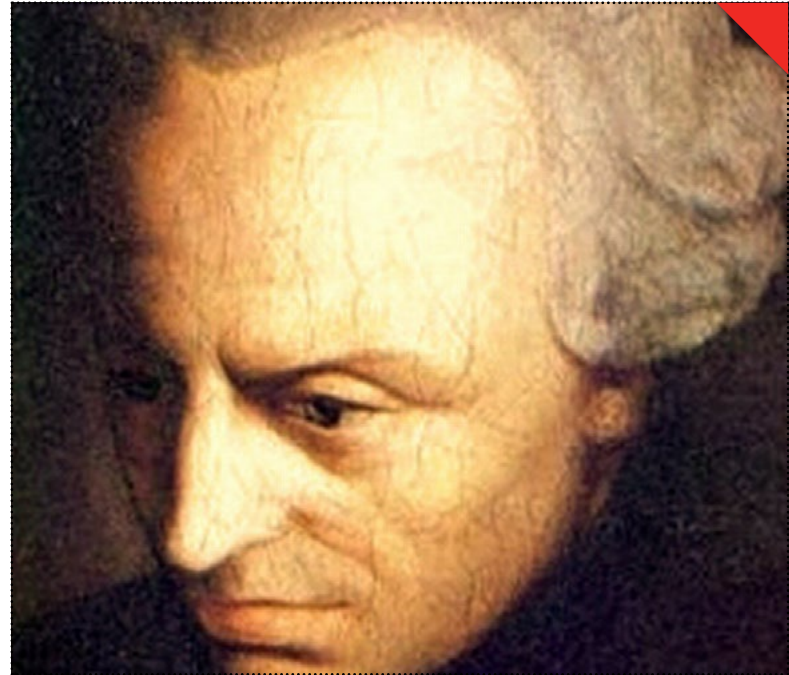
In the last decade of his life, at the end of his professorship at Königsberg (today Kaliningrad), the philosopher and founder of German idealism, Immanuel Kant, wrote a short essay entitled 'Perpetual Peace'. He was writing during the War of the First Coalition (1792-1797), so on the one hand the work was a response to current events. But it is also a coherent structure that reveals the essence of Kantian philosophy. However, as the author noted in his sarcastic introduction, it is just a philosophical scheme or theory, which has no effect on pragmatist politicians, who follow their own ways and despise the theorists. The ultimate conclusion of his argument is that perpetual peace *per se* is achievable and he shows how. It is especially interesting in view of the fact that for the next 150 years Europe was almost in 'perpetual war'.

The work consists of six preliminary articles, three definitive articles, two supplements and two appendices. In the first section he lays down some prior stipulations, which are necessary to create a perpetual peace. One of them is that a peace treaty should not be a temporary solution, as it would then only be a ceasefire and the possibility of continuing with the war would be implied. If we look back on the 20th century we can see the truth of this statement. Furthermore, he says, 'No Independent States, Large or Small, Shall Come under the Dominion of Another State by Inheritance, Exchange, Purchase, or Donation.' Kant claims that the State is not just a land or property, but a fellowship of people. Another of his conditions is to put an end to standing armies, because they threaten other states. He would also block the accumulation of treasures and the build-up of national debt. The strongest demand in this section is that states should not intervene in other states' constitutions or governments.

In the second part, where he sets out the definitive articles, his aim is to highlight some analytical conclusions that are necessary to secure a perpetual peace among nations. His first definitive article says that 'the Civil constitution in every State shall be republican,' otherwise the citizens have no rights to decide whether they want to enter into a war or not. In republican states, which are based upon the liberty of men, the people will not let the government plunge into war, as it demands too much effort and sacrifice. Closely related to this is the second article: 'The right of nations

shall be founded on a federation of free states.'

In the third article of this chapter Kant emphasizes the importance of mutual trust. 'The Rights of men as Citizens of the world in a cosmo-political system shall be restricted to conditions of universal Hospitality.' The term hospitality here means that any person who leaves his country for another should be treated as a guest



not an enemy, but he cannot expect further rights (e.g. permission to reside). In this way, Kant believes that distant continents may enter into peaceful relations with each other and the human race could be brought nearer to a Cosmopolitan Constitution.

In the supplements, he meditates on the paradox of war. War separates people and disperses them over the Earth, but it also unites them, because mankind becomes tired of the uncertainty, suffering and havoc that war creates. In this section he underlines the role of philosophers, as Plato did: 'The maxims of the philosophers regarding the conditions of the possibility of a public peace, shall be taken into consideration by the States that are armed for war.' But he is sober in his view that neither kings will be philosophers, nor philosophers will be kings, because the possession of power inevitably corrupts the free judgment of reason. In the Appendices he emphasizes that morality and politics (theory and practice) should not be separated and honesty is the best policy. Morality is in tune with politics only if governance is transparent and public.

Istvan Orban

Alternative Futures – The Concept of *Buen Vivir*

For those who love nature, care about justice and sometimes despair about the state of the world, but want to do something to change things for the better, a hopeful new movement has arisen in South America. It is called 'Buen Vivir' which literally means 'Good Living'. It derives from the term *Sumak Kawsay*, which means a 'full life' in the indigenous Quechua and Kichwa languages of Peru and Ecuador. One definition of this concept is "a way of living in harmony within communities, ourselves, and most importantly, nature" (www.pachamama.org). Indigenous peoples have been living in accordance with these principles for thousands of years.

In the face of the collapse of the utopia of communism and the precarious state of its long-time rival – liberal capitalism – *buen vivir* offers a proposal for an alternative future for humanity. Whereas the subject of well-being in the capitalist system is the individual, *buen vivir* asserts that the rights of the individual should be subject to those of peoples, communities and nature. A defining characteristic of *buen vivir* is harmony – between human beings, and between human beings and nature. Indeed, one of the key elements it adds to the equation of human well-being is the concept of the Rights of Nature. Rather than seeing nature as a source of wealth, whether for individuals or the state, *buen vivir* sees Nature (with a capital N) as an entity of value in its own right. This is what distinguishes it from and sets it at odds with the current concept of 'sustainable living', which sees sustainability from a predominantly human perspective.

From the standpoint of *buen vivir*, man does not own nature, land or resources; he is only their steward. The concept of property – essential to Western law – is replaced in *buen vivir* by the concept of responsible stewardship. Likewise, *buen vivir* goes deeper than the socio-economic approach of the Occupy movement and other similar grassroots movements that seek to take back control of the economy from current political institutions.

In Ecuador and Bolivia, the Rights of Nature have been written into the Constitution. Closer to home, in Switzerland, animals, plants and other organisms have had their rights to dignity constitutionally recognised since 2000. In the US, there have been judicial moves to grant legal personality to plants and 'inanimate objects' such as rivers, which would allow them to sue corporations if their integrity is threatened. Other initiatives to adopt the concept of ecosystem rights have been taken in various parts of the world, from Nepal to Turkey. In India, we find the concept of 'ecological Swaraj' and in South Africa that of 'Eco-Ubuntu'.

How has it worked out in practice? Critics of its application in Ecuador have pointed out that the Constitution allows the government to relax the *buen vivir* regulations if it is in the national interest to do so, and does not require the informed consent of communities in the case of controversial developments. The Ecuadorean government has also continued to approve projects by foreign extraction companies even though they violate the Rights of Nature.

I think it is natural that the practice



of a new idea does not always match up to the theory, but this in no way invalidates the idea itself. What is encouraging about this concept is that it represents a revolutionary return to a truly natural way of thinking. Indeed, it is only by starting from the premise that Nature is a living being, and therefore worthy of respect, and even veneration, that humanity can hope to restore balance to the environment. The shift of mental position from the ownership of nature as property to the stewardship of nature as responsibility could be the beginning of a new age for humanity.

The question still remains about how such a momentous change could come about on a global scale, in view of the enormous geopolitical obstacles that stand in the way. But as history shows, the twists and turns of destiny are often unpredictable.

Julian Scott

The Hidden Meaning of Games

In this brief article, I want to highlight the spiritual value of games – such as board games or card games – and their relationship to divination.

Even though we have forgotten their hidden origins, it is worth remembering that games have always had a very important function in the inner life of the human being. It is said that to play is a social as well as a recreational human "need". But this "need" doesn't have to be confined to the human dimension only. As Hindu metaphysics teaches us, the universe itself is a great play (*Lila* in Sanskrit) which implies the presence of a cosmogenetic "need".

In playing games, two major factors seem to coexist: the factor of skill and the factor of fate or chance. The first can be related to what is 'known' and to the 'mastery of oneself' and the second to what is 'unknown' and beyond our control (what is, so to speak, in the hands of the gods). As we delve deeper and deeper into the meaning of certain games, we find that they contain both an initiatory quality – related to initiation and the unfoldment of spiritual qualities, and a divinatory dimension, in which the casting of lots is an integral part of man's attempt to 'disclose' the will of the gods.

Strange as it may sound, ancient patterns of labyrinths can be related to initiatory 'games' and, interestingly enough, there still survive some board games with spiral designs which recall those initiation journeys through a labyrinth. As an example I can mention the Egyptian board game of *Mehen* (dating back to 3000 BC), the Minoan *Phaistos* board game (c. 2000 BC) and the more 'recent' *Game of the Goose*, whose true origins are unknown (we know that it re-surfaced in Italy during the Renaissance).

Going back to the divinatory element of a game, what is the most essential piece in many board games? The dice, which together with their 'ancestor', the knucklebones, are one of the oldest types of divinatory 'game'. Interestingly, Plato ascribed a foreign origin to the game of dice and named the Egyptian God Thoth as its inventor.

In the game of *Senet* (discovered at a burial site in Egypt dated to around 3500 BC) the movement of the pieces on the board was based on the throw of a kind of dice. In India we find the casting of dice in the ancient hymns of the Rig-Veda and in the epic of the Mahabharata. In the latter, the dice represent instruments of karmic necessity, where the Pandavas, by losing their kingdom, become agents of moral redress. And in the Hebrew Bible, we also find several instances when lots were cast as means of determining God's mind.

The various forms of early divination probably led to the production of some symbolic cards and some scholars have argued that the transition from dice to playing cards happened in China. Even though the actual origins are unknown, the presence of certain religious-magical images and designs points to a sacred origin. This is why, in India for instance, we still find decks of playing cards portraying 10 suits representing the 10 incarnations of Vishnu. In Tibet, we find the *Tsakli* cards, employed in many empowering rituals, transmission of esoteric teachings, visualizations and funerary rites. It is also worth mentioning the popular but still mysterious Tarot cards (or *Book of Thoth*), from which most of the European decks of playing cards are derived.

In short, whether through dice, board games or playing cards, the *divinatory* (the power to foresee and to be inspired by a god) *playfulness* of the human being remains forever alive.

Agostino Dominici



Queen Nefertari Playing Senet, Tomb of Nefertari, 13th century BC

Hilma Af Klint: Painting the Unseen

Earlier this year the Serpentine Gallery held an exhibition described by the Telegraph as “a sense of unfathomable mystery”.

Hilma Af Klint, a Swedish born female painter who began producing work in the early 1900s, is beginning to be recognised as the first artist ever to have produced a piece of ‘abstract art’. Prior to her discovery, abstract art was considered to have begun famously with Wassily Kandinsky’s watercolours in 1910.

“The pictures were painted directly through me, without any preliminary drawings, and with great force. I had no idea what the paintings were supposed to depict; nevertheless I worked swiftly and surely, without changing a single brush stroke.”

This is the description Hilma gave in one of her meticulously catalogued sketchbooks describing her series ‘Paintings for the Temple’ – a collection of 193 pieces, some of which are 3 metres in height.

The curator who put on her show at the Moderna Museet in 2013 explains,

“The overall idea is to convey the knowledge of how all is one, beyond the visible dualistic world. The temple to which the title refers does not necessarily relate to an actual building but can rather be seen as a metaphor for spiritual evolution.”

Hilma Af Klint was a Theosophist and, later, an Anthroposophist. At that time, the Western world was seeing discoveries proving the existence of things beyond the tangible, such as Wilhelm Conrad Roentgen’s discovery of X-rays in 1895 and Hertz’s discovery of electromagnetic

waves shortly before. The worlds of both science and art were inspired by the notion of observing new forces and hidden realities in nature.

Unusually for a professional painter, Hilma never intended to show any of these ‘abstract works’ during her lifetime. It was her request that the work remain unseen until at least 20 years after her death, which came in 1944.

As a classically trained painter with a formal education at art school, during her working life Hilma was known for producing botanical drawings and realistic landscape paintings.

A paradoxical relationship may be said to exist between Hilma’s professional botanical drawings and her hidden, abstract paintings. In her professional drawings Hilma applies a scientific approach, neither adding nor subtracting detail to the naturalist landscapes and botanical drawings that she produces. In her abstract, otherworldly creations, we see a reflection of this diligence and consistency in the symbols that she uses to repeatedly depict the themes of unity, of duality and of male and female forces.

It is hard perhaps for us today to grasp the enormity of Hilma’s story. Producing the first piece of ‘abstract art’ as a female painter at the turn of the century is a remarkable feat. She painted in a way that had never been done before and set marks upon canvas for which there was no precedent.

It has taken much longer than 20 years for Hilma’s work to be seen and recognised as important within a wider artistic canon. However, if Hilma’s intuition was correct and the world is now more open to a universal principle of unity and a deeper understanding of duality in nature, then perhaps we are approaching a time of inspiration in humanity for further discoveries of the hidden forces in nature.

Siobhan Farrar



King Lud

Where does the name London come from? There are many versions. One of them takes us back in history to pre-Roman times to the legendary King Lud. According to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* and other medieval manuscripts he ruled in the first century BC.

King Lud rebuilt and fortified his beloved city – Caer Lud, or Lud's Fortress – which later became London, in such a way that “no city in all foreign countries to a great distance round could show more beautiful places.” He was also buried near the city's gate – known to us as Ludgate.

We learn more about King Lud when reading Welsh stories about Lludd of the Silver Hand. The legend tells that during his prosperous reign three plagues befell the kingdom. The first was the invasion of a tribe with magical powers that caused great economic losses. They could also hear every word spoken on the wind, thus making any plan to defeat them impossible. The second was a horrible shriek heard everywhere each May-eve. Its source was unknown, and its power was so strong that every living creature was left completely powerless. The third was the disappearance of all the food from the royal stores. No one in the kingdom remained untouched by these troubles.

King Lludd asked for advice from his wise brother, the ruler of the neighbouring kingdom. They conversed through a bronze tube so that the wind couldn't carry any of their words. The king understood the causes and knew what to do. The invaders were defeated by a special poison that was harmless for the natives. The second plague was the noise of fighting dragons. After the end of their fight, they fell down from the sky in the form of piglets in the centre of the kingdom that Lludd founded in Oxford. The king had them buried in a stone chest beneath a mountain. The third plague was instigated by an invisible giant whom Lludd fought and defeated himself. The giant swore allegiance to the king.

Apart from some historical keys of interpretation, the legend describes the process of rebuilding a kingdom: defining the boundaries – not land, but people – solving inner conflicts and re-establishing justice.

Today we can see the statue of King Lud along with the statues of his two sons in St. Dunstan-in-the-West. It was made in the 13th century and bears the marks of time. Whether real or legendary, King Lud lives in history and reminds us of care for the beloved city.



The statue of King Lud in Fleet Street, London

Ancient Mesoamerican Philosophy: Lessons from the Mexican Martial Art of Xilam

The relationships between martial arts and philosophy are commonly associated in Asian systems like *Tai Chi Chuan* (*Taijiquan*) through their adoption of Buddhist, Confucian and Daoist concepts including *qi*, *yin-yang* and mindfulness. In Western combat sports, philosophy is employed for ethical considerations of violence and (self-)harm from an academic, medical and political standpoint, as seen in boxing and mixed martial arts (MMA). However, as readers well know, philosophy is not only a discipline and practice from the “West” and the “East” – it is a global phenomenon, just like ways of fighting and self-defence.

An often overlooked philosophy originates in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica – which constitutes central and southern Mexico, along with parts of Central America. This civilisation had its own religion (and corresponding philosophy), diet, architecture, farming techniques, ideology, and military and civil fighting systems. Although much of the religion-philosophy was eradicated during the period of conquest and colonisation, elements are being rediscovered and reconsidered in a more liberal and tolerant society. In post-colonial times following centuries of a Westernisation process, there are small groups interested in the wisdom of ancient Mesoamerican civilisation, which included the infamous Aztecs and the mysterious Maya.

The Mexican martial art of *Xilam* (pronounced shi-lamb), is a noteworthy example of a social movement that attempts to restructure this seemingly lost philosophy. Xilam draws upon specific elements of the pre-Hispanic worldview to structure a human development system. The term Xilam literally means “to remove or to peel away the skin”, which is a metaphor for the gradual removal of one’s ego, external labels and socially learned barriers, like age, ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality, in order to find one’s true self. Taking the notion of the warrior as a guiding point, Xilam teaches students about pre-Hispanic culture and philosophy in an unconventional manner: through the body in motion. This contrasts to mainstream education on the pre-Hispanic cultures via academic books and original colonial sources. Instead, Xilam uses some of the Aztec deities as concepts to guide self-development, and is somewhat controversial in its rejection of some common assumptions about Mesoamerica. In order to accomplish this ambition, Xilam is developed along seven levels, each corresponding to an indigenous Mesoamerican animal: the snake, the eagle, the jaguar, the monkey, the deer, the iguana and the armadillo. Students learn parts of native languages for technical terms, and are

encouraged to study these animals and indigenous tongues in their free time in order to understand the etymology and message behind what they are learning.

Moreover, the system stresses the scientific nature of this metaphysical philosophy. The number four divides many concepts in Xilam: the stages of life (childhood, youth,



Aztec warrior

adulthood and old age); the main compass and physical reference points in which the practitioner first learns to move; the *tezcatlipocas* (embodied warrior energies of Quetzalcoatl, Huitzilopochtli, Xipetotec and Tezcatlipoca) that are harnessed over the years of training; the elements of earth, wind, sun and water, and the colours that form the symbol and uniform of Xilam (black, white, red and blue). Meanwhile, the number twenty is used for all exercises and drills, as this is the counting system found in the Nahuatl language, which also corresponds to the digits and joints of the body.

Essentially, Xilam is inspired by the ancestral philosophy that is based on the measurement of time through astrology and the calendar system. It is a result of a lifetime investigation by *maestra* Marisela Ugalde and her team of specialists, and is supported by the Mayan horoscope, pre-Hispanic dance and rituals that attempt to keep this ancient philosophy alive: not just in dusty archives, but in the flesh and bones of a new generation of practitioners.

Dr. George Jennings is Lecturer in Sport Sociology/Physical Culture at the Cardiff School of Sport at Cardiff Metropolitan University. He will be giving a talk on Xilam at New Acropolis on 12 September (see Upcoming Events)

Upcoming Events



PHILOSOPHIES OF EAST AND WEST



Philosophies of East and West 16-week course

Philosophy means love of wisdom (*philo-sophia*) and is an active attitude of awareness towards life. In this sense, we are all born philosophers, with an innate need to ask questions and with the intuition that there are answers to be found.

And yet, most of us have little knowledge of philosophy. We have never had the chance to learn about the vast heritage of ideas that have sustained, inspired and guided humanity throughout history.

This 16-week course will introduce you to the major systems of thought of East and West. They are arranged under three subject headings: Ethics, Sociopolitics and Philosophy of History.

COURSE CONTENT

Understanding yourself

Introduction to Ethics ;
Major concepts of the philosophies of India, Tibet, Ancient Egypt and Neoplatonism.

Living together in harmony with others

Introduction to Sociopolitics ;
Major concepts of the philosophies of Confucius, Plato and the Stoics.

Being part of something greater

Introduction to Philosophy of History ;
Microcosm and Macrocosm ;
The cosmivision of traditional societies.

COURSE STARTING DATES

Wed 28 September

Tues 11 October

Thurs 3 November (all at 7:00 pm)

Course Fee: £140 (£105 concessions)

Please visit our website for more details

Mon 12 Sept, 7 pm

Talk: Mesoamerican Philosophy: Lessons from the Mexican Martial Art of Xilam

Speaker: George Jennings - **ADMISSION £5 (£3 concs.)**

Tues 18 Oct, 7 pm

Talk: Utopia: history of an idea and its relevance for our times of change

Speaker: Sabine Leitner - **ADMISSION £5 (£3 concs.)**

Thurs: 29 Sept, 7 pm

Sacred Dance: Philosophy / Aesthetics / Relevance

Speaker: Miti Desai - **ADMISSION £5 (£3 concs.)**

Thurs 17 Nov, 7 pm

World Philosophy Day: Can morality be taught? Aristotle's advice on how to promote moral education, wisdom and happiness

ADMISSION £8 (£5 concs.) - refreshments included

Thurs 6 Oct, 7 pm

4-week course: the Language of Symbols
Course Fee **£45 (£35 concs.)**

For more details see our website - www.newacropolisuk.org