

DAILY BREAD

“Grain of Hope : Slice of Heaven”

HARVESTING ART: ST JAMES’S PICCADILLY

Art? Not nature? An old question
now we have been taught that a dishcloth artfully
placed
in a gallery space is turned to exhibit,

what might we say about this box of wheat
planted just before lockdown?

We never thought
London itself would change to a gallery
turned inside out, as if the ornate facades
of Piccadilly were the interior walls
of the Royal Academy, bordering a space
cleared, with a few sparse pieces.

We never expected
this gallery hush in the streets.

We never foresaw
that a London bus with just one passenger
would halt in an almost empty Regent Street
like a temporary installation.

And never
did we think we would position ourselves
deliberately, curating our own bodies
and distances, or that when numbers grew,
the streets would host a Lowry: figures isolated
in close company, heads turned away
to avoid breath-contact.

And the wheat itself
alone in a courtyard cleared of its stalls,

its throngs, its intricate crafts: a space

emptied for looking

for contemplation
of one subject

2.

An act of looking, not just by the artist
who sees the world anew, but by the viewer;
every work of art is re-made
each time that it is seen and passes through
a different consciousness:

this wheat is watched
by lone growers sowing in a place
that for a while became a secret garden
no-one else could share;

viewed from afar
on lit screens; viewed by locked-down eyes
which peer out through windows;

turned to thoughts
by minds battered with Covid news
and growing deaths.

All the while,
not knowing that they exist in a fearful stillness
stretching from Copenhagen to Delhi,
from Cape Town to Sydney;

the plants live

their own wheat-lives; they rise and form ears,
receiving human watering like rain,
unaware they are ‘wheat’, and seen as a crop;
having no idea that their colour at one stage
is called ‘green’, or how that word resonates
with human hopes:

In a planet colonised
and smirched by our own greed, we contemplate
this separate being; a mystery

that my nets of woven words could never touch
let alone encompass.

Diane Pacitti, 2020



The practice of science has always been culturally determined, a function of the observer/scientist and their times. The act of looking has history, and science encompasses a whole family of world views. This does not mean a free-for-all to pick and choose evidence on the personal or political breeze: science consistently speaks of what is true for all of us. But as well as being the great reductionist, science is both participative and cosmic, engaging with phenomena in relationship with each other and with us.

Goethe, rooted in the philosophies of antiquity, had much to say about the practice of science a century after Newton put everything in its place. While Blake railed against the strictures and straitjacket of the new physics, Goethe understood science as poetic and inter-subjective, and named his practice ‘delicate empiricism’. This included imagination as analysis, and ‘inhabiting’ a phenomenon.

‘Goethe’s approach consisted in trying to understand (a phenomenon) in its own terms, and in terms of how we actually experience it arising in nature. (He) believed that we should study our world and nature as people at home in it.’¹

His protégé Alexander von Humboldt, the most famous forgotten scientist of recent centuries – went on to knit the world together, to see a holism and lay the groundwork for modern understandings of ecology.

Another century on, and Edmund Husserl, originator of phenomenology articulated ‘a plea that science, for its own integrity and meaningfulness, must acknowledge that it is rooted in the same world that we all engage in our everyday lives and with our unaided senses.’²

In the 20th century, independent scientist James Lovelock in collaboration with Lynn Margulis developed Gaia theory, postulating that the earth as a whole is a self-regulating complex entity in which living organisms and inorganic aspects influence each other and evolve together.

‘For me Gaia is a religious as well as a scientific concept, and in both spheres it is manageable.God and Gaia, theology and science, even physics and biology are not separate but a single way of thought’³

Philosopher Mary Midgley is convinced that ‘Science can only be created by those who are thoroughly imbued with the aspiration towards truth and understanding.’⁴

The pandemic has compelled us into different, more remote (or perhaps broader?) perspectives.
Where this takes us remains to be seen.



1. ‘Goethe on Science’ Naydler and Bortoft
2. ‘The Phenomenology Reader’ Moran and Mooney
3. James Lovelock in ‘Science and Poetry’ Mary Midgley
4. ‘Science and Poetry’ Mary Midgley

Upper. The St James’s’ Community wheat was sown on Sunday 15 March 2020 in a purpose-made planter in the church courtyard; one week before the Coronavirus Pandemic Lockdown. This photograph was taken on 8 April, just a few days before Easter, as the wheat was springing.

Lower. The St James’s wheat being harvested on 2 August 2020 on Lammas Sunday (The Feast of Loaf Mass). It was then dried and is being stored until it can be milled and baked, to make our Eucharistic loaf. It will be eaten together at our Sunday Morning Communion post-pandemic.