



What's the point of  
The Realisation Festival?\*

*Jonathan Rowson*

Perspectiva is a registered charity operating as a collective of scholars, artists, activists, futurists and seekers who believe credible hope for humanity's future lies in forms of economic restraint and political cooperation that are beyond prevailing epistemic capacities and spiritual sensibilities. We work to develop an applied philosophy of education for individual and collective realisation in the service of averting societal collapse; and to cultivate the imaginative and emotional capacity required to usher in a world that is, at the very least, technologically wise and ecologically sound.

You can find more about Perspectiva at:

[systems-souls-society.com](https://systems-souls-society.com)

*\*Disclaimer: The thoughts that follow express the viewpoints of the Director of Perspectiva in attempting to clarify the charity's role in the festival, particularly in relation to its educational value and public benefit. This reflection was written in consultation with colleagues and the wider organising committee of the festival, but they do not necessarily agree with all of it; the document expresses a personal view that has been emerging as the festival has been taking shape over the last two years and only crystallised after much of the programme for 2021 was already in place. It should therefore be read with respect to the aims of the festival as a whole as a long-term venture and partnership. The ideas are relevant to the first iteration of the festival and will be explored there to some extent, but the document is offered in the spirit of providing underlying rationale, not as a constraint on planned ideas or activities for the event in July, nor something that has been tacitly or explicitly endorsed by speakers or participants.*

# What's the point of The Realisation Festival?

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*realisationfestival.com*

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*'Virtually every time I push my clients to go deeper with their gathering's purpose, there is a moment when they seem to wonder if I am preparing them for World War III. Yet forcing yourself to think about your gathering as stand-taking helps you get clear on its unique purpose' - Priya Parker*

*'I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' - Alasdair MacIntyre*

*'Nothing ever becomes real till experienced' - John Keats*

*'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has' - Margaret Mead*

### Background and Bildung

The Realisation Festival is a three-day non-profit event about the soul, by which we mean the experience of being human; and it's for the benefit of society, by which we mean it is grounded in a gravity of purpose that goes beyond individual attendees and is befitting of this historical moment. We call it a festival of unlearning and reimagining because the programme has been conceived and designed to help participants collectively experience 'the post-conventional imperative'. We believe the overarching early 21st century conundrum is not so much about problem solving or policy innovation, but primarily a challenge of perception and imagination. The most fundamental task is to help each other to reorient our life, work and sensibility towards a view of the world that is post-tragic (hope on the other side of despair) post-growth (new societal purposes) post-rational (ways of knowing that transcend and include the intellect), post-exploitation (reflective about the uses and abuses of power) and post-tribal (togetherness in a world of love and power; an expansive 'We' is sought, but neither presumed nor coerced). The event stems from a partnership reflective of the combination of support and challenge

required for any transformation in outlook or disposition; it is hosted in the comfort and beauty of St Giles House, with an exacting programme of activities and discussions designed and curated by Perspectiva. The focus is on what happens over three days in July, but much of that will be recorded for wider dissemination, this is the inception of a new tradition, and there will be satellite events between festivals. What follows gives a little more back-story to the event, and why we believe it has a promising future.

*Bildung is a Germanic term with English and Greek roots and Nordic and American fruits. The word does not sit comfortably in English, but it means something like transformative civic education.*

The festival arose from an alliance between Perspectiva, a charity that works on the relationship between systems, souls and society in theory and practice, and the twelfth Earl of Shaftesbury and associates, who wish for St Giles House, with its rich history of philosophy and social reform, to be of generative public value today. The idea of Bildung is the pattern that connects, a concept of transformative civic and aesthetic education derived from the writings of the third Earl of Shaftesbury that profoundly influenced European thought for centuries but has been relatively neglected in the UK and developed in Perspectiva's recent writings and activities.

Bildung is a Germanic term with English and Greek roots and Nordic and American fruits. The word does not sit comfortably in English, but it means something like transformative civic education. The direct translation is 'formation' and the original includes elements of education, enculturation and also realisation; the sense of fulfilling one's nature or purpose in response to the challenges of a particular historical and societal context. The composite meaning of the term is difficult to break down into elements without losing its permeating reference, and grasping the concept requires a particular way of seeing the relationship between the individual and society and a related view of learning. Bildung entails a dynamic world view that values independence of mind and spirit grounded in ecological and social interdependence.

If Bildung has a single intellectual forebear, it is probably Jon Amos Comenius, Czech philosopher and theologian who lived from 1592 to 1670 and declined the offer to be President of Harvard University; he is considered by many to be the father of the idea of universal or democratic education. Comenius' genius lay in grasping that since learning is as natural as breathing or eating or sleeping, education

should be seen as an aspect of nature's formative process; and since nature is often experienced as sacred, and we are part of nature, an organism's lifelong disposition to learn is the wellspring of meaning and purpose in life. A healthy society that is attuned to nature and other sources of intrinsic value depends upon making this educative process the axis upon which society turns. Comenius was writing, as we are, in a time between worlds; in his case at the beginning of modernity, in ours as we grapple with its end.

The Third Earl of Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley-Cooper, was born a year after Comenius died and was the first to emphasise the importance of 'inner Bildung', our inner formation, not merely for its own sake, but because the nature and quality of our inner formation (and realisation) is reflected in 'outer Bildung' in the systems and structures of society, and their nature and purpose. What makes this notion different from a more generalised emphasis on flourishing or virtue development is that the active ingredient of Bildung is not about nice-to-have character traits like humility or honesty, but a deeper inquiry into how we know, a thorough metapsychology concerned with the combined experience of perception, emotion, thinking, valuing, meaning-making and embodied skill that Shaftesbury grasped as being generative of the formation of society.

A century and a half or so after the third earl's death in 1713, the Nordic countries of Denmark, Norway and Sweden developed an institutional practice of Bildung which was historically a form of self-organised civic education through the creation of folk schools by 'schoolmen', namely pastors, wealthy farmers, professors and wealthy members of the bourgeoisie who wanted to contribute to the education of the lower classes. By 1900 there were about 100 in Denmark, 75 in Norway and 150 in Sweden, all programs lasting three to six months, and focussed on small-group methodologies for 20 to 40 people, in which conversation, the Socratic method and the relational process between people were as important as any instruction received. The schools entailed practical lessons in farming for peasants in anticipation of technological change, indirectly creating skilled workers in the new industrialised economy, but primarily giving people a sense of identity, political awareness and meaning-making capacity, they would not otherwise have had.

What sets Bildung apart is that these schools were driven by teachers with a sense of calling, with lessons set in nature and designed for individuals to evolve emotionally, spiritually, morally, and intellectually, with communities and institutions pro-actively created for this purpose. This solidaristic and eudemonic spirit, combined with the cultivated sense of responsibility towards their country, may have been instrumental in building the high levels of social trust that underpin the prosperity and wellbeing of those countries today. Around the same time, Bildung came to American soil from along with the German Idealist philosophy and the German system of higher education. The so-called American Renaissance (1840-1890) and related transition to American ascendancy in culture and world influence coincided with a general infusion of Bildung as a cultural ethos.

Today, there are calls for a reappraisal and re-enactment of Bildung from many quarters, including the growing European Bildung Network that Perspectiva is part of. The case for Bildung is strong, but in a busy and distracted world that doesn't always know what it needs or wants and why, how can the case for Bildung best cut through?

## Realisation

Realisation is our anglophone rendering of Bildung. The term works better in English while providing some creative scope to refashion and revitalise the 'offer' of Bildung for the unfamiliar and unper-suaded. Realisation has three related meanings in this context and all of them are consistent with Bildung:

Realisation as the simple but often profound 'aha' experience of becoming aware of something or beginning to understand it, for instance I realised it is too late.

Realisation as the philosophical or spiritual (eudaimonic) sense of realisation of the self, a lifelong process of more fully becoming who we are meant to be in our societal and historical context.

Realisation as making ideas manifest, for instance to realise the ambition of electrifying the UK's energy supply, or realising a personal dream of opening a pancake cafe.

The Realisation Festival is an agenda-setting and community creating venture, and the touchstone and flagship for a broader range of activities and satellite events relating to Realisation, which connects to the intellectual heritage of St Giles and is also one of the main thematic strands at Perspectiva. The festival organisers include trustees of St Giles House and Perspectiva and we are in the process of creating The Realisation Foundation CIO to govern the festival and related activities for public benefit. The festival taking place on July 8-11th 2021 aims to be the first of many, and the inception of a new tradition that builds a community of interest and inquiry around it.

The main event takes place over three days, initially for around 100 people including speakers, facilitators, organisers, and participants carefully selected to ensure network diversity of all kinds, whole-hearted participation and convivial conflict. While there have been challenges in the first year in contending with COVID constraints and finding the optimal process, in principle we can have more than 100 participants and we will always seek to have a festival that creates and strengthens three kinds of networks:

*Bonding*: People who are already know each other building trust through shared experience and becoming closer.

*Bridging*: People from very different backgrounds and professions finding common purpose and unexpected sources of insight and support.

*Linking*: People with forms of power and influence, including journalists, policymakers and business leaders, bringing the purposes of the festival to bear in their professional contexts.

While ticket prices may appear high, they are relatively modest for an event of this kind and are set at cost rather than for any profit or surplus. We also provide a bursary scheme. A significant proportion of participants, up to twenty, can apply to attend at no cost or reduced cost, supported by Perspectiva.



## Unlearning and Reimagining

We call it a festival of ‘unlearning and reimagining’ to highlight that the festival is not about ‘learning’ or ‘new ideas’ as such, nor is it even about ‘enjoying’ or ‘networking’ as a festival might conventionally be expected to be. As good hosts we will of course do all we can to ensure those attending have an exciting and meaningful and rewarding time, but there is a sense in which the festival asks something of all who join it. People are there not merely as consumers of content and experience but also as the ‘committed citizens’ Margaret Mead alludes to in the quotation above.

The purpose of the festival is difficult to summarise in a way that is immediately recognisable and relatable, because the point is to offer and attempt something different. The aim is to reckon with our historical moment in the context of what *Perspectiva* has elsewhere described as ‘the pickle’, but which can be thought of more generally as what the pandemic meant for what matters and how we should live, climate change as an enduring emergency, consumerism as an inadequate *modus operandi* for collective living, and our need to perceive and understand the purpose of human life differently. The festival is therefore about coming together to take stock of the ways we are feeling, thinking, achieving and being, and consider what follows if they are not suited to the needs of our time.

The festival has a deliberate shape, and is designed to bring together the experience, consciousness, wisdom and feeling of all participants, both speakers and attendees. The process reaches over the course of the long weekend, beginning with a deliberate recognition of arrival, then on the first full day assessing the global predicament and its seriousness, on the second full day turning to soulful, imaginative and beautiful responses commensurate with the challenges, before on the final day, gathering again to absorb, integrate and ask: what next? The invited speakers have active passions and diverse ways of reckoning with the challenges of today, with a clear eye for the inner dimensions of issues felt at the individual, cultural and social level. The programme will bring these cross-cultural perspectives together, and is informed by activities and conversations imaginatively engaging with nature, spiritual traditions, intellectual critique and political awareness.

Everyone who is attending is invited to participate across the whole weekend, in a mix of large and small groups, formally and informally, so as to share insights, expertise, embodied workshops, food and entertainment. For example, there are no keynote presentations as such, but panel contributions and responses, which will enable participants to hear from writers on, for instance, the depth of the climate crisis and practitioners of alternative ways of doing politics, to explorers of the spirituality of place and times, and activists wrestling with the psychological complexities of the struggle for a better world. Music and humour, improvisation and the place itself will all be part of the effort to stir up the energy that can assist us to recharge and reorient ourselves, tap into the wellsprings of being, and hopefully carry that renewal back into the world for the benefit of others.

### The post-conventional imperative

The team of organisers is varied and we have different ways of expressing the purposes of the festival. One of the main ways to describe the purpose of the festival in general and the programme in particular, is that it is about helping participants to begin to collectively experience and grapple with what we think of as ‘the post-conventional imperative’, and provide a supportive atmosphere to consider how to bring that experience to bear in shaping our networks and communities beyond and between festivals. The post-conventional imperative is about the necessity and urgency of collectively reimagining who we are and what life is for, with five main points of emphasis:

*Post-tragic (hope on the other side of despair)*

*Post-growth (reconceiving societal purpose)*

*Post-rational (ways of knowing beyond intellectual limits)*

*Post-exploitation (reflective about the uses and abuses of power)*

*Post-tribal (togetherness in the context of power and love)*

In a little more detail:

The Post-Tragic sensibility was explored in recent Realisation satellite event for Perspectiva, featuring Mariana Partington and Zak Stein. One way to think of it is as ‘a station of the self’ in which we move from pre-tragic (all is well, every problem can be solved) through tragic (all is lost, life is dark and despair abounds) towards post-tragic in which we transcend and include tragedy into a fuller and richer and ultimately more real and meaningful view of life.

*Why contend with tragedy at all? Because tragedy is the meaning and mattering of life. The more life matters, the more vulnerable we are to tragedy.*

Why contend with tragedy at all? Because tragedy is the meaning and mattering of life. The more life matters, the more vulnerable we are to tragedy. The concept applies beyond the self to society as a whole. The pandemic wrought tragedy in abundance, the enduring emergency of climate change is tragic and widespread human addiction and distraction through surveillance capitalism is tragic because – individually and collectively - we urgently need to concentrate on what truly matters and how we should therefore live.

The Post-Growth imperative is about finding a sound social and ecological basis for enduring prosperity so that as many people as possible can live what Roberto Unger calls ‘larger lives’. Post-growth thinking is about reconceiving the purpose of the macroeconomy, but at a personal level it is about thinking of related features of life including ourselves as consumers, whether we work too hard, what time and wellbeing means to us, and what we care about most.

In this sense post-growth thinking is not so much economic or political as meta-economic and meta-political, it opens up discussions about underlying societal purposes and what kinds of viable futures we might look forward to creating together. There are many thinkers in this space already, but Professor Tim Jackson at the University of Surrey is one of them – he is aware of the relevance of Bildung in this context and invited me to write the essay on the relationship between Bildung and Sustainable Prosperity. There is still a place for economic growth in specific places and circumstances, and there are other ways to grow that matter, but to be ‘post-growth’ is part of facing up to where we are in 2021 when we have already transgressed several ecological and social boundary conditions that destabilise the world.

The Post-rational inclination is about recognising the limits of the intellectual function in its ability to grasp what is happening in the world today, while also respecting ways of knowing that are not antithetical to reason, but attempt to work alongside it, including insight and intuition and imagination and various forms of somatic and metaphorical and relational ways of knowing.

We are now in a world of what Timothy Morton calls ‘hyperobjects’ that are both everywhere in principle and nowhere in particular, and these include climate change, artificial intelligence, and the pandemic. Our contexts and complexity and technologies and degrees of interdependence are such that we are caught up in a world that even the most knowledgeable and wisest people cannot in principle understand. As we all try to figure out the perennial question ‘what should I do?’ the sources for that answer will not be purely rational, which is partly why the festival speaks of ‘beauty, imagination and calling’ – alternative touchstones to orient ourselves towards meaning and purpose.

The need to be post-exploitation refers to a reckoning with history, with power, with class, with race, with patriarchy, with colonialism, and with coercion of all forms. The long history of St Giles House includes both slavery (for example the first Earl had plantations in the Bahamas and in South Carolina until about 1713) and the abolition of slavery (the seventh Earl, along with William Wilberforce, was a strong proponent of the abolition of slavery and other social reforms in the nineteenth century). Slavery is the rawest and most brutal form of exploitation, and enforced servitude is still widespread today in many forms.

The Realisation Festival is committed to a meaningful and genuine reckoning with how colonial history still informs the present. We believe that this discussion is an essential part of the unlearning and reimagining that informs the gathering. For instance, exploitation can be relatively subtle and includes conscious and unconscious bias against people of colour; it also includes the unpaid mental, emotional and domestic labour undertaken mostly by women that is often taken for granted. To consider exploitation systemically, Roberto Unger’s definition of a progressive is helpful: “someone who wants to see society reorganised, part-by-part and step-by-step, so that or-

dinary men and women have a better chance to live a larger life'. By larger life he means a "a life of greater intensity, of greater scope, and of greater capability'.

*The post-tragic disposition naturally gives rise to an acceptance of limits that informs the post-growth imperative.*

The post-tribal injunction is about recognising the problem of political polarisation and epistemic filter bubbles and facing up to the fact that humans cannot continue to be tribal but nonetheless have to be. This perspective implicates technology and the underlying business models of social media, but it is also about our complicity in that and opportunities to create alternatives.

There is a deep and adaptive human need to belong, and belonging is meaningless unless it is somehow circumscribed, for instance by place or people or purpose. And yet, it is equally true that we need to expand our circles of belonging more than ever, perhaps to encompass the whole globe of eight or so billion people. And we have to try to do so in a way that is not warm and fuzzy but ultimately lame, and that means not being naïve about competing commitments, power imbalances, competitive pressures, incommensurate values and other features of life that inevitably undermine collaboration. We need a kind of post-tribal tribalism that recognises 'We work' is one of the most fundamental challenges of our time. It is hoped that by combining an aristocratic context alongside a set of democratic imperatives, the post-tribal challenge will be a particularly intriguing part of the setting.

In all these cases, 'post' is mostly about transcending and including rather than opposition as such. And of course, these five perspectives mutually inform each other. The post-tragic disposition naturally gives rise to an acceptance of limits that informs the post-growth imperative, which in turn depends upon forms of social imagination that arise from post-rational ways of knowing and give rise to the desire for forms of life that are post-exploitation and which create cultural and institutional possibilities that make it more likely we can become post-tribal. The post-conventional imperative is in a sense the unlearning aspect of the festival, to help make way for the re-imagining which has beauty at its heart.

## Beauty, Imagination and Calling: The Enduring influence of The Third Earl

The inspiration for the festival is drawn from the beauty of the building and grounds of St Giles House but more profoundly from the idea of beauty in one of its major figures. The Shaftesbury name is well known, and primarily though not solely due to the social reform efforts of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper who lived from 1801 to 1885. While by no means uncontroversial in his own time or relative to liberal standards of today, the seventh earl used his influence to campaign on behalf of the mentally ill, young chimney sweeps, miners and slaves. He was an inspiring figure and a speech given by the Archbishop of Canterbury on the centenary of his death speaks to the fact that his funeral was attended almost entirely by the poor.

While that campaigning spirit of social reform is part of the atmosphere, the primary historical influence on the festival comes from a prior Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, born in the latter stages of the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> The third earl seeded ideas that influenced the genius of philosophers as diverse as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Adam Smith in the eighteenth. During his own lifetime, he was as well-known as the British empiricist, John Locke, who was his tutor. But Shaftesbury disagreed profoundly with his master in ways that directly inform what makes The Realisation Festival different.

Locke's philosophy has shaped much of the world today. Empiricism is the idea that the only thing truly trustworthy is what we know via the senses. When a scientist or politician insists that they 'have the evidence' today, they are parroting Locke's legacy. This approach has its value, but it has also led to a mechanical experience of life, interpreted as a complex network of causes and effects. Do this and that happens. The purpose of such knowledge is primarily to gain control. It equates science with power and views nature as a resource to be probed and plundered.

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\* The section that follows borrows heavily, with the author's permission, from Mark Vernon's essay about the third earl for The Idler magazine (No.71 Mar-Apr 2020)

Shaftesbury utterly rejected this reductionism. He sought a different foundation for his convictions and found one in the aesthetic. He saw that beauty is not an add-on, an optional extra that brings colour to otherwise dry laws and descriptions. Rather, it is precisely that which enables us to see those laws and descriptions in the first place (in fact, it is at work inside them). Shaftesbury discerned that nature herself is elegant, simple, beautiful. Science would fail if she weren't. The role of the imagination is to enable us to discern the operations of nature. 'Harmony is Harmony by Nature', Shaftesbury wrote. To put it another way, our intelligence is a conscious expression of the intelligence that surrounds us. So, instead of science being a means of controlling nature, it can be a means of learning to relate to nature. Human beings can know that their genius and nature's genius have a kinship. They arise from a common origin.

This aesthetic sense of nature proved to be generative, but was more or less ignored in the UK. Instead, it went to continental Europe and catalysed the minds of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Alexander von Humboldt. These two early scientists used their imaginations and saw that nature is shaped by harmony and resonances, sympathies and symmetries. They studied it with their souls as much as their senses. As a result, Humboldt gave birth to ecology and Goethe developed the fundamental perceptions that Charles Darwin knit into the theory of evolution.

Curiously, Shaftesbury did make an impact in Britain, though it was on Adam Smith's work on morality (rather than economics) who gleaned from the Third Earl the simple but profound point that human beings have a moral sense. And the key point is that that moral sense is another aspect of beauty, informing an inner compass or ethical eye that can tell right from wrong. Our challenge is to cultivate it. Of great relevance for our festival is that Shaftesbury became convinced that human freedom lies in this disposition of mind. Become fanatical or narrow-minded and you lead a fanatical and narrow life. But if you learn to see the world expansively, to join in with its artfulness and dance, then you are not only more likely to make good ethical choices but to enjoy life by experiencing the world aright. 'Tis not a Head merely, but a Heart and Resolution which must compleat the real Philosopher', he wrote.

Shaftesbury suffered extensively from ill-health and died relatively young, but his faith in beauty sustained him. It helped him want the whole of his life, especially the hard parts, lest he become a slave to them. Other virtues assisted him, not least humour, which he realised needn't be sarcastic but can take delight in life's vicissitudes. He wrote about how it can cut through masks and fears and free us. Our times are troubled. We seek to reassert control. But Shaftesbury suggests another way. Seek the inner liberty that can't be taken from you, he advised, because it is the freedom enjoyed by the sun when it rises and the bird when it flies. Trust what beautifies life and life will become beautiful to you.

Beauty evokes and inspires imagination, which is ultimately necessary to figure out what a viable future for humanity might look and feel like. While the end of the world is a mere act of imagination – an event characterised by stock imagery and widely portrayed in cinema, capitalism has become a defining feature of our collective imaginary – a shared social construction that circumscribes our relationship to imagery and our imagination. Moreover, the impact of social media (there are approximately two billion Facebook users and 1.5 million regularly using YouTube) might be that because we pass each other so much of the same imagery, our imaginations are becoming less individuated and more collectivised, such that the renewing power of the individual imagination is at ever greater risk of being subsumed by the collective imaginary. And perhaps the reason we appear to be struggling to see and think beyond our imaginary is partly because we don't take the imaginal realm – our psychic, mythic and archetypal resources – seriously. Indeed, we may need our theories of change to be premised on something like what Cynthia Bourgeault calls 'imaginal causality', which taps into a source that is deeper than ideas and values and habits, and powerful enough to change them fundamentally. To get to that kind of sensibility we need to gather together differently, which is what we are trying to do with the festival.

As indicated, *Bildung* began in the Nordic countries through a kind of calling, and there is a case for each of us becoming more receptive to our calling today. The idea is not that we need to 'find ourselves' but rather that through the experience of beauty and the practice of imagination our sense of possibility should expand, such that it becomes clearer to us how we might live larger lives.



## The Festival's Role in Helping to Overcome Immunity to Change

Most non-profit organisations have a theory of change. Perspectiva works instead with a theory of overcoming our endemic and pervasive immunity to change. Enduring or transformative change is rare and difficult; by that we are referring to our grasp of the underlying processes of how things change and capacity to shape them, and creating conditions in which we can actually reflect on the meaning and value of change rather than merely act it out as one of many sources of a deeper inertia. We are also interested in influencing underlying values and perceptions, reaching the 'generator functions' of society, and potentially shifting the collective imaginary that informs our idea of what is normal. Immunity to change manifests in the old French saying 'plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose'. Deep change is hard because we perceive the world through a whole host of unarticulated competing commitments and hidden assumptions, all of which arise from a broader cultural context that we are sometimes barely aware of.

Set against the challenges of the post-conventional imperative mentioned above, and informed by Perspectiva's other recent research on the range of meta-crises that lie within our main social, political, cultural and economic challenges, it is simply necessary to accept that there is often a trade-off between how tangible your work is and its scope to be transformative. Perspectiva does not seek to solve discrete problems like feeding the hungry or providing homes for the homeless as some charities do. That kind of work is of course valuable, especially to those in need, and the impact is extremely tangible, but by itself it offers no influence on root causes, so the problems recur. Nor do we work for policy change as such as some think tanks and larger NGOs do. In those cases, you might eventually get to some root causes, for instance through a universal basic income or land or housing reform, but that impact is quite rarely achieved and to get there you need to be aligned with prevailing political trends and policy achievements that are vulnerable to changes in administrations. Donald Trump leaving the Paris agreement on climate change is one example. The many impacts of Brexit is another.

In his essay, 'Spirituality and Intellectual Honesty' (2014), the German Philosopher Thomas Metzinger offers a thought that encapsu-

lates the deeper challenge Perspectiva is working on, and which The Realisation Festival is designed to speak to directly.

*Realisation, understood as Bildung for the 21st century, is not merely desirable but absolutely essential.*

‘Conceived of as an intellectual challenge for humankind, the increasing threat arising from self-induced global warming clearly seems to exceed the present cognitive and emotional abilities of our species. This is the first truly global crisis, experienced by all human beings at the same time and in a single media space, and as we watch it unfold, it will also gradually change our image of ourselves, the conception humankind has of itself as a whole. I predict that during the next decades, we will increasingly experience ourselves as failing beings’.

Failing beings? Time will tell. If there is hope, it lies in Metzinger’s premise — ‘the present cognitive and emotional abilities of our species’. Those abilities of our species are not fixed, but they are in a sense held in place by our broader assumptions about human nature, life’s meaning and societal purpose. We know, as well as we know anything, that human beings can grow and change for the better, but we are up against systemic inertia. Education broadly conceived is how we transform for the better, and the philosophy of education is about the ‘why’ and the ‘what’ of that ‘how’, which becomes applied when we decide to start making sense of it in relation to ‘who’ ‘where’ and ‘when’. That’s the conceptual space that the festival seeks to occupy.

We need to respond to the emergency, yes, but there is also a crisis with inner and outer dimensions, and layers of complexity that cannot be wished away. The challenge is less about maintenance and more about renewal. Fundamental questions about who we are, and what and how we need to know, have to be at the heart of the social enterprise of politics, economics and culture — which is why we need an applied philosophy of education, which is where Bildung comes in, expressed as Realisation. In what follows I make the case almost as a logical argument, to see more clearly the questions to which the festival is an answer. The case is clustered into five main points, all of which have several aspects.

1. Realisation, understood as Bildung for the 21st century, is not merely desirable but absolutely essential. It’s even a matter of survival. What we are trying to draw attention to is something subtle,

neglected and imperative. As indicated, the realisation in question is not merely the ‘aha!’ moment when you realise the nature of what is going on and what has to happen, but also the purpose or telos or entelechy of our lives that follows from that, and in the sense of making things happen as a result, and seeing them realised.

2. This pattern of realisation – new contours of understanding and experience giving rise to a sense of metanoia or transformation or shift in perception has an experiential basis. That experiential basis is at the root of significant shifts in our sense of meaning and purpose is typically ignored by civil society and policy makers, but it is not a mere detail. It’s the very heart of the matter in dealing with the world’s major challenges today. Realisation is partly about the “aha” that arises from being in the present moment. This is partly because change happens in the present, not the past or the future, which is typically a conjecture based on present understanding. But it is also because realisation admits of a type of time that is not Chronos, as in clock time, but Kairos, as in a critical shift of perspective that happens at a particular moment in time. This is often precipitated by a reckoning with a crisis, be that personal or social - crisis here meaning a turning point. So, in this sense, too, the festival does not make realisation happen but is ready to be a container or place for it to be received and developed. The quality of presence the gathering will facilitate is, therefore, crucial.

3. That experience, the recognition of the necessity of realisation is fragile and easily lost through inertia, habit, identity protection, distraction and competing commitments. Allowing oneself to experience the need for realisation and following through on what it means requires non-ordinary contexts, and perhaps also Sangha-like community support because we not only have to shake up our habit energy, but also contend with feelings that are socially, emotionally and politically challenging for many and may entail loss and change. That experiential basis for transformation has many different dimensions and is to some extent a matter of grace and fortune, while in other ways it is about determination and tenacity. The point of the festival is not ‘to make the experience of realisation happen’ but to elicit and in some ways even to conjure it as far as possible; to recognise and reaffirm the importance of realisation in the creative activities and atmosphere that helps it come about. The enduring

recognition of the need for realisation and the capacity to follow through with it personally, culturally and institutionally is more likely to arrive through a collective setting, where ‘the post-conventional imperative’ is shared. To optimise scope for learning and support and challenge and opportunity, that collective should feature bonding, bridging and linking networks.

4. Big ideas need big images and big places to capture and hold the imagination. That means the collective setting has to be in some sense psychoactive and socially generative. We have such a place and believe it fits the purposes above. The idea (Bildung/Realisation), the people (Bonding, Bridging and Linking networks), the place (St Giles House) and the (Perspectiva-led) programme based on the post-conventional imperative and the invitation to beauty, imagination and calling are the main active ingredients of the festival, which together are designed to create a generative experience that is transformative in an enduring way. We see these all as key aspects of an approach that seeks to move beyond mere critique to vision and method for a different kind of society.

5. We expect the resulting transformations to vary in degree, intensity and duration, but we don’t see them as merely ‘nice to haves’ – they are essential aspects of social change that the festival is designed to elicit. The kinds of transformation we have in mind are shifts in assumptions about other people, shifts in perspective on the purpose of one’s life, shifts in urgency and priority of activity, shifts in one’s sense of what matters most in life, shifts in sense of possibility, shifts in imaginative capacity. How measurable is all this? How might we evaluate it? Over what kind of time period would we expect it to have an effect? We will have an on-site qualitative researcher to gauge candid responses to the festival at the time, and to follow up afterwards to see in what ways the impact endured. We will also have direct metrics of online videos watched, and self-report diaries completed at the end of the festival. The critical test is whether people end up doing something differently as a result of attending, and it may take up to three to five years to keep track of that.

Our collective Vision is that The Realisation Festival becomes an annual event with four seasonal satellite events either at St Giles, in other locations or online, to keep the growing community of interest and inquiry together. There may also be educational materials created as a result that Perspectiva would share and teach as part of its charitable offering. The ambition is bold, but it is a worthy successor to the social change efforts that have emerged before from St Giles House and we will only be able to continue to do it on a non- profit basis with philanthropic support or other donations.



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