MEETING THOUGHTS, VISIONS AND SPECULATIONS *

A DESTRUCTURED CONGRESS

A. FACILITATIVE GUIDELINES

1. This is your congress. You are making it happen. How it evolves depends on choices you make from moment to moment and from day to day. Not choosing is also a choice.

2. There are others here with very different priorities, expectations and contributions. Are you sure you know what they bring and how it relates to where you are and where you would like to be? Are you sure you are making it easier for them to know how your energies and concerns relate to theirs?

3. Each has something important to contribute. But few of us are particularly skilled at doing so. Are you sure you are not over-stressing what you feel to be most valuable - at the expense of other themes? Who is going to give you the helpful feedback you need? Will you appreciate it when it is given?

4. The congress may at some time appear too unstructured to you. Check the symptoms and suggestions listed below. Remember that some people feel oppressed and constrained by order and procedure - they have had too much of it and it has not taken them where they believe they want to go. They tend to feel that nothing meaningful is happening. They prefer more spontaneity. They may have a point of which you are not aware.

5. The congress may at some time appear too over-structured to you. Check the symptoms and suggestions listed below. Remember that some people are not as secure and independent as you are. In addition they find that a fair degree of structure takes them where they believe they want to go, and lack of it takes them nowhere. Maybe they have a point of which you are not aware. Process is not everything.

6. How can you balance your preferences against those of others without leaving the congress apart? What is your creative response to this dilemma? Remember that how you respond to the congress situation is probably an intensified model of how you respond to the outside world. Maybe you can learn from your own frustrations.

7. Periods of more or less structure should ideally compensate and balance each other - that is how the congress "breathes". The whole problem is to ensure that it alternates in a smooth manner between the two extremes, rather than being blocked at one extreme or being subject to other irregular or exaggerated rhythms. (It is a manifestation of the group yin-yang cycle, with all its problems and potentials - how can we become collectively aware of the Tao of the congress situation?)

8. This congress is not just an occasion on which to focus on how transformation can be brought about elsewhere and sometime in the future. The congress here-and-now and as a whole is a powerful transformation process in its own right. To the extent that we are aware of it, and of how we function in it, we can obtain many insights of significance to us personally and collectively, and for the world around us. Its power as a transformation process depends directly on our ability to enter, through ourselves, into the harmony of the congress processes - whether in their structured or unstructured forms.

9. As you become aware of the congress process, you will quickly be able to improve upon this set of notes. Wherever you are coming from, you have your own unique insight which can facilitate the congress process.
Thoughts and Visions

B. IF THE CONGRESS APPEARS TOO OVER-STRUCTURED

Symptoms
1. Everything seems to be wrapped up in a pre-arranged timetable which governs your behaviour for the whole day — and no one seems to want to know how you feel about the timetable.
2. You feel you spend your time listening instead of doing, listening to a specialist on this or that — and you can only express yourself in a workshop at a scheduled time, according to someone’s special method.
3. Everybody you meet seems to talk only about the events on the programme — and you are starting to feel programmed by these events.
4. You feel your head is under pressure, even if you find yourself sometimes talking to a few people who are exploring the same thing as you are, then see whether there is something you want to do together — maybe others would like to join you. Find out how to communicate your interest to them — with or without the help of the organizers. Make a space for yourself.
5. The organizers do not appear to have a clear idea of how to handle the situation and are unconcerned by this. Worse still, there seems to be felt as undesirable by the majority.
6. The congress is starting to feel less like fun and more like drudgery. You feel under pressure not to miss the next event in case it constitutes an important breakthrough. You feel under pressure to achieve something.

Suggestions
1. You can go for a walk outside, visit the town — or stand in the sun if you can. It is one way to escape — and to meet other people who are exploring the same thing as you are. There will be others. In other cases, you can ask them how they can help you to do something that strikes a responsive chord.
2. Continue talking over coffee, instead of feeling under pressure to participate in the next event on the programme. There will be others.
3. If a speaker or a group is boring you, then leave the room. Take a walk, meditate, have a coffee. Maybe there is something that will strike a responsive chord. But you don’t want out of it?
4. If you find yourself talking to a few people who are exploring the same thing as you are, then see whether there seems to be something really creative.
5. If someone looks interesting or says something that strikes a responsive chord in you, then make contact with the person in whatever manner is appropriate. Its communication between participants which is the essence of a congress, not communication at participants for the glory of the speakers and organizers.
6. If someone really does seem to be making an exaggerated use of everyone’s time, then suggest that all those interested carry on (then or later), whilst allowing others to break off. You have the right to say this, whereas the organizers may feel obliged to be less direct to eminent persons.

C. IF THE CONGRESS APPEARS TOO UNSTRUCTURED

Symptoms
1. No one appears to have a clear idea of what is going on now or what is going to happen at some later time. The written programme is ignored and unseen events suddenly come into being planned and unplanned events are cancelled or postponed.
2. You do not appear to have control of the situation and are unconcerned by it. Worse still, there seem to be several groups of organizers without a clear relationship between them.
3. Some participants do not behave as is normally expected. They fail to attend the principal events and instead organize their own activities. This distracts other participants and affects the focus of the congress.
4. Nothing seems to be achieved everything is treated superficially, even humorously. The groups refuse to focus their activities on substantial products. There is no effort to reach conclusions or recommendations. No one is preparing a report and there is therefore no adequate record of what has occurred and of any insights which have emerged.
5. Proper respect is not shown to eminent speakers who have made the effort to come and share their insights, experience and understanding. Their time is wasted.
6. The participants seem to be more concerned with whether they are enjoying themselves than they are with the success of the congress as a whole. They are unacquainted with the efforts and interests of the organizers.

Suggestions
1. Make constructive, explicit suggestions to the organizers or to the group in which you are participating. Justify the need for greater order, respect for the need for greater order, respect for an agenda, and use of a well-defined procedure.
2. Suggest casually to strangers that they should participate in or support an event which is about to start.
3. Encourage any initiative to produce minutes or a report. Volunteer to assist the rapporteur, or take the position yourself.
4. Make comments to speakers to compensate for any casual handling they may have received from the group with which they were involved.
5. Focalize the activities of a group to carry out a particular task or activity which sufficient participants find of interest. Invite one of the key persons to speak to the group. Arrange for several such meetings.
TAO IN LARGE GROUPS

1. Just as in the case of a person, a large group of people is very upset if faced with a situation in which nothing is required or laid on. It is very threatening for attention is then given in a manner which disturbs many conventional perspectives. Strange energies are released.

2. In order not to be faced with such an embarrassing confrontation, the space is filled with activities as a focus for attention. This simultaneously eases the tension and blocks out the patterns of energy associated with it. Clearly focal activities are required in a large group - if only to give expression to some of these patterns of energy - because we are not yet able to bear the collective attention to unstructured activity and silence for more than a few moments. We do not know how to handle such situations.

3. We tend each to have different preferences for turning our backs on collective silence. Some possibilities are:
   - Listening to an inspiring speaker, who may even tell us about the importance of some aspects of silence and the need for awareness of it.
   - Dance, music and song, which may give beautiful outward expression to some of the patterns and textures of energy sensed in that silence.
   - Discussion, encounter and dialogue about ideas, feelings, projects and 10,000 other important matters which are all more or less harmonious and concerned with the reflections of some of the patterns encountered and not dealt with.
   - Group meditation or prayer, supplied if faced with a situation in which we are not yet able to bear the collective attention to unstructured activity and silence for more than a few moments. We do not know how to handle such situations.

4. The above remarks are not meant as a criticism of the value of the various activities in which we engage. Such activities are absolutely necessary to give expression to whatever we sense in silence - we apparently have no other means of giving form to our environment and of transforming it to reflect greater harmony. On the other hand, when we collectively flee from exposure to the tensions of that silence, by filling our congress timetable with a multitude of activities to absorb our attention and to release us from that tension - then we diminish the value of those activities and of the congress as a whole. The quality of the energy is then less than it might have been.

   Thirty spokes share the wheel's hub; It is the centre hole that makes it useful.
   Shape clay into a vessel; It is the space within that makes it useful.
   Cut doors and windows for a room; It is the holes which make it useful. Therefore profit comes from what is not there. Usefulness from what is not there. (Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Random Books, 1972)

5. The question then is one of balance. How much of the challenge of collective silence can we usefully take before needing to balance it by giving appropriate form to whatever it conveys and by using the transforming process to absorb the energies released?

6. What does this mean in practice? A congress usually has to have an opening ceremony by which it relates itself to the temporal powers which have given it space and brought it into being. This may have to be followed by one or more programme events to satisfy a sensed need for an immediate justification for the existence of the congress. Neither of these is vital, and prolonging the series of events of the second kind constitutes a deliberate avoidance of the moment of challenge - particularly if it is immediately followed by fragmentation into smaller groups to explore special interests. The more such events there are before the moment of challenge, the more the congress is defined and determined by such events rather than by what emerges from a collective confrontation with silence. In such a way, the congress becomes embroiled in predictability and the participants are programmed by preplanned events. There is no risk - everything is secure because no fundamental change can occur. From the organizers point of view, only what was planned in the past will occur in the present - the synergistic potential of the moment is blocked out in favour of linear extensions of what already exists. From the participants point of view, they will only be exposed to what appears in the printed programmes. They will not be challenged by the totally unexpected and will not be expected to call any of their beliefs into question or to test them to any degree. Although informed and entertained, they will leave the congress as they came - safely untransformed.

7. What could constitute a confrontation with silence and the tensions to which it gives rise? Consider how the following situation might evolve. All the participants gather together in the meeting room at the appointed time. But no structure or agenda is available, nor is there anyone who takes responsibility for the sessions according to some preconceived notion of any desirable procedure or outcome. Will the result be chaotic? That depends on whether one considers one's fellow participants to be irresponsible sheep in the absence of a leader or of any agreed agenda. (A similar situation arises in unstructured small groups - and there is now a lot of experience of how to handle them as an experience. This needs to be developed for larger groups.)

8. Suppose that the gathering of people can be thought of as a rich collection of energies of which the participants can become aware. This awareness may emerge if a deliberate effort is made not to fill the space with prescribed speeches, proposals, music, discussion or other events, including structured meditations. If people do not have such forms and cliches as a focus for their awareness, tensions will emerge to fill the vacuum. People will become nervous, irritable and embarrassed, whether at their own situation or the response of others - they will want something to happen. They will want somebody to make it happen. They will want to confront real problems and to avoid wasting...
Thoughts and Visions

1. In fact each well-intentioned effort to structure the period is a subtle way of closing off the response to the here-and-now by substituting an excellent form of doing or achieving something real. People will align themselves with the proposals that reflect their own personality biases - there will be increasing pressure to break up into small groups to pursue such special activities which re-form and legitimate the pre-existing biases. The longer the group as a whole stays together, the greater such pressures will become. The tensions will increase - possibly quite dramatically as superficial levels are seen for what they are. Can the tensions be channelled appropriately? What response will each kind of tension call forth as the energies of the group play off against each other and bring out new levels of harmonies? How will the various levels of « negativity » get handled, contained and transformed?

11. In this way the congress programme is born from the coalescence of collective interaction and structured as a dramatic response to the interplay of energies sensed in that context. It will contain intellectual, emotional, physical, spiritual and other components - but their relation to one another will be more real and meaningful than if they had simply been inserted into a schedule of congress events by an organizing committee (however sensitive the members might be).

14. Perhaps the ultimate value of this approach is that individual congress events can come to be seen as punctuating the continuing and underlying creative silence from which they are born - rather than assuming that awareness of that silence necessarily emerges through engaging in one or more of those activities.

15. If the congress is not able to penetrate to this sense of the whole, then it has failed to demonstrate a level of awareness significant for wider social transformation - it is the precondition for collective risk which is the pre-condition of fundamental change. Without it we are only able to point a finger in the direction we believe we ought to go.

16. There is of course the paradox that the above points lay out the programme or procedure for yet another trip - in following this suggestion, you are therefore lured away from your own centre in exactly the manner which it is hoped could be avoided. How can you overcome this paradox, other than by ignoring this suggestion?

Borobodour Unesco/Mireille Vautier.
A CONGRESS AS A MEDITATION

1. A person can be conceived as a scattered jumble of thoughts, emotions and activities. An early stage of mediation aims to introduce increasing harmony into this jumble. Central themes emerge, each with their own rhythms – and eventually each of these separate themes is blended into an even larger theme. This is the process of alignment or alignment.

2. A congress can also be conceived as a scattered jumble of thoughts, emotions and activities – each advanced and protected by different coalitions of participants. One aim of a congress could be to introduce increasing harmony into this jumble. The problems and processes of doing so are surprisingly similar to those of personal alignment, although at a different level.

3. A first concern is the physical well-being of the entity. Does it suffer from any illnesses? Is it diseased in any way, has it been appropriately nourished, in its posture well-balanced? (There are many parallels between the illnesses of a person and the illnesses of a congress). One aim of a congress is to introduce increasing harmony into this jumble. Central themes emerge, each with their own rhythms – and eventually each of these separate themes is blended into an even larger theme. This is the process of alignment or alignment.

4. A second concern is with the psycho-motor coordination of the entity. Is its breathing deep and regular, or shallow and a-rhythmic? Can it alternate smoothly between yin and yang, between passivity and activity, etc.? Or is it stuck in some particular mode or condition. Are there exercises it should perform to ensure that all elements are appropriately related: breathing exercises, bio-energetics, postures, Tai Chi, etc. (What are the processes a congress could usefully hold to improve its energy flows? What would the Tai Chi movements of a congress be – what energies are to be sensed as moving and where? Do collective rituals and funny offer any clues?) Should the two major factions engage in some equivalent of Aikido in order to sense the nature of their opponent within themselves - and to reaffirm the dynamic nature of the whole of which they are together an expression? (Maybe that is what they do anyway, but unconsciously and without a sense of relationship?)

5. A third concern is with the appropriate control and expression of emotions. Are there emotions which are expressed into the unconscious or whose expression is being stifled? From what do they arise and to what do they lead? How can these energies be brought to flow naturally within the entity? How can they be channelled and transformed? Should we be looking for an application of acupuncture to the entity?

6. A fourth concern is with the appropriate organization of concepts. Are they adequately integrated into a significant synthesis? Are there fundamental contradictions or inconsistencies? Can the challenges and paradox of duality be overcome to provide a re-interpretation and re-configuration of the entity’s relationship to its larger environment (the Knower versus the Known). What images can be used as a guide to helpful reflections?

7. In its maturity, as a conscious meditation, the congress constitutes a chaos into which energies can be focused and through which they can flow. This is not just a beautiful image and our difficulty in comprehending its real nature is well-matched by our difficulty in reaching and attaining this level of consciously integrated focus. (Such synthesis is to analysis just as such synthesis is to analysis – to the extent possible - the nature of the whole, as comprehended beyond the verbal framework, is the focus of attention. Is this period appropriately safeguarded and are its fruits appropriately used to nourish the life of the entity?)

8. The whole jumble of events of a congress is thus but a surface manifestation of an entity struggling to be. The confusion arises from the efforts of the parts and factions seeking to control the whole according to their various perspectives (as a sub-personalities). But this very selflessness is a necessary process in the development of the self-awareness of the parts prior to relating harmoniously to each other in order to be able to express the whole. The challenge is to have a sufficiently strong vision of the nature of the whole to ensure that the preliminary stages of alignment – with all the ‘likes’ and ‘dislikes’ – do not absorb the attention of the participants, so completely that the entity as a whole does not get a chance to come to maturity in the time available.

9. In its maturity, as a conscious meditation, the congress constitutes a chaos into which energies can be focused and through which they can flow. This is not just a beautiful image and our difficulty in comprehending its real nature is well-matched by our difficulty in reaching and attaining this level of consciously integrated focus. (Such synthesis is to analysis just as fusion is to fusion – and we do not yet have access to fusion energy, despite much research on the required configuration to bring it about).
Thoughts and Visions

1. There is widespread familiarity with city maps, road maps, maps of continents and maps of the world. Most people know, and have to know, how to find their way from one place to another using maps - even if they have never been there before.

2. In the Middle Ages, few people knew anything about maps. In fact they had the status of secret documents whose dissemination could be dangerous to national and trading interests. Furthermore, they were always drawn with the country’s capital city at the centre, and everything else as if they were on a periphery - out to where ‘monstros’ - ‘dangerous tribes’ and ‘unknown dangers’ were marked. And of course the Earth was flat in those days - if one went too far in any direction one would ‘fall off’. We find this level of understanding quaint and amusing.

3. In many ways, however, the mental maps each uses to locate and interrelate the multitude of groups, schools of thought, and belief systems, bear a strong resemblance to the Middle Ages maps. Our own group is of course centrally located - or as we believe are. The maps we use show groups whose interests are in some way related to our own - they are marked as neighbouring locations at varying distances, according to the degree of difference we feel from them. (Maybe communications are good and we have highways marked to such locations; or perhaps they are on good and we have mountain ranges with difficult passes, psychologically closed by bad weather.) Further away of course are those with whom we feel from them. (Maybe communications are good and we have highways marked to such locations; or perhaps they are on good and we have mountain ranges with difficult passes, psychologically closed by bad weather.) Further away of course are those of which we are only slightly aware and who engage in practices which we see with disfavour or even suspicion and hostility - particularly if their attractiveness or impact has an effect on our own traditions and undermines the influence of our own local antiquity. Or perhaps such groups attempt aggressively to extend their feudal domains to include our own territory. And of course, even further away on other continents, are groups known only by hearsay, which engage is absolutely incomprehensible and barbarous practices - and beyond them is the perimeter of our psychological world.

4. We are ‘flat-earthers’. If we travel too far in any direction away from the known civilization from which we each come, we believe we will encounter dangers which will place our very being at risk.

5. Maybe it is time to try and interrelate our various local maps in order to produce a map of this world. Maybe we should also attempt to portray on it adequately the locations of groups which engage in activities which are really distant from our own. Which is the group most distant in preoccupation from our own? Which is the group most distant in preoccupation from our own? What does ‘distant’ mean? Where do we need to mark distinctions by mountain ranges, by deserts, by seas or by oceans? Where is it hot, cold, wet or dry, and how do conditions change with the seasons? Why are ‘remote’ people ‘suspect’ of ‘pure’ people? Why are we suspicious of people who dwell in hotter, colder, wetter or dryer climates?

6. Is it not peculiar that we cannot see over the horizon? Could it be that our psychosocial world is in fact round and not flat? Is there any truth behind the funny tales brought by long-distance travellers? How would we react to anyone claiming to have travelled ‘around the world’? Would they be condemned as heretics and insane - by whom and why? How would we navigate around the world - what compass would prevent us travelling in circles and getting lost?

7. It is not a complicated exercise for a diverse group to attempt to outline such a map from the reports of all the travellers present at a congress. It would only be rough, but it could quickly be improved upon. It could be printed on the surface of a globe. As such it would be of immense help to those who would like to travel and benefit from experiences in other parts. Such a globe is a powerful symbol in its own right. Maybe there are whole New Worlds to be discovered. (And hopefully we will not attempt colonization, conquest or extermination of the natives).

8. But if our world is round, is it stationary with respect to whatever is beyond it? Is there a ‘vortex’ - are we all these taxes brought by long-distance travellers? How would we react to anyone claiming to have travelled ‘around the world’? Does the sun rise everywhere, or is it our world which moves with respect to the sun? Are there other suns with other worlds?

MAPPING: WHO’S WHERE?

1. Quite distinct personality types are represented at a congress - and the work assembled and the work the assembly of the theme of the congress, the more marked the differences between these types.

2. With each personality type is associated a particular form of behavour - with its special weaknesses and strengths - which map well with specific aspects or tendencies in the congress process. We are not very sensitive to this phenomenon - in fact we each tend to respond to the behaviour of other types in a rather simplistic (but logical) manner determined by the type to which we ourselves belong.

3. Each personality type reflects an aspect of the whole. This is fairly obvious. Less obvious is the function performed by each type within the whole. So that within the context of a congress, each group of personality types contributes in some unique way to the life and activity of the congress. At the same time, however, an aspect of each such contribution may well be to restrain, to stimulate or to transform the contribution of one of the other groups present. Any such activity may be undertaken as an automatic reaction (perhaps provoked by a righteous perception of ‘impossible’, ‘wasteful’ or ‘depressing’ or ‘behavioural’ - suspicious of ‘plans people’? Why are we suspicious of people who dwell in hotter, colder, wetter or dryer climates?

4. The difficulty lies in comprehending the nature and validity of the role of each type - and thereby being able to determine where conscious support or restraint is desirable to facilitate the evolution of the whole. We tend to view the activity of other types in relation to our own central focus - a kind of ‘flat earth’ mentality, rather than an awareness of ‘functional roundness’. We cannot see over the horizon created by the viewpoint to which we cling.

5. There are some clues to the range of personality types, and in each case there is some indication of their likely weaknesses and strengths. It is however less clear which types tend to interact with which other types; now, and under what circumstances. Such ranges may contain differing numbers.
3. « Communication at » takes place and « Communication between » takes place. « Communication means many things to many people - and each tends to view the priorities of others with little appreciation. Consequently the effectiveness of each is undermined and the evolution of the whole is seriously impeded. Care must therefore be taken at a congress that the right mix of communication processes occur - and that there is an awareness of the strengths and limitations of each.

4. « Communication at » takes place when a congress is held, and « Communication between » takes place when each participant has sufficient communication space to interact with others so that there is a meaningful exchange of ideas and the communication to evolve for all concerned. The communication may be based on an interplay of ideas (discussion groups), of affectivity (encounter groups) or of physical movements (dance). This process (which may be assisted by audio-visual systems) is successful provided that there is a degree of shared commitment, otherwise it may lack depth or focus. This limitation is increased if an appropriate balance is not found between ideas, affectivity and physical movement - and there is seldom consensus among participants as to where that balance point should be.

5. « Festive communication » takes place when the emphasis is placed on the enjoyment of participants and the fun and celebration of being - as opposed to the previous situation where the emphasis is on achieving something, if only greater understanding. Its limitations lie mainly in the distinctive power of its very attractiveness, which may upset the balance between the other forms of communication.

6. « Communication by » takes place when the priority is placed on recording an event or reporting on it in order to involve others (in distant places or at later times) in the significance of what is occurring. Use is necessarily made of audio-visual recording equipment. This process is vital in order to multiply the impact of the energies assembled and released, and to provide access to others who were unable to participate. Its limitation is that it is very often treated as an end in itself and consequently interrupts or distorts the communication process of a congress - to the point of turning the event into a staged production for consumption elsewhere and everywhere, but not in the here-and-now. The media product becomes an image of what the organizers would have liked to have happened and hopes their constituencies will believe did happen. By its very nature, it may only focus on superficial, recordable happenings.

7. « Communication for » takes place when the concern is to integrate or to express what energies there are and how they are interrelated - how are energies passed between personalities of different types; what transformation does each attempt, and how are the dynamics ordered? (How is the ball of Chi energy passed around a highly diverse group?)

8. Only when we have a clearer understanding of these dynamics can a congress consent from being a « two-cylinder, dualistic engine » to being a twelve-cylinder, multi-stroke engine » - with all the power for movement that that implies. Only when a congress becomes an exercise in collective self-awareness will it be able to develop fully its self-healing potential. That is to say that congresses will always face the challenge of handling the energies of strong, partially blocked personalities (and who is not partially blocked?) and until the collective group awareness can respond appropriately to such blockages, such a challenge may significantly disturb the evolution of the whole.