

# Recontextualizing Social Problems through Metaphor \*

*Transcending the "switch" metaphor*

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## 1. Introduction

This paper is based on the assumption that it is useful to question whether the many existing approaches to social problems and global management, however successful, are sufficient to the challenge of the times. Individually they may indeed be necessary and adequate to particular challenges, but there is every possibility that they may collectively be insufficient to the larger challenge. It is possible to adopt an optimistic attitude in order to safeguard the personal and institutional investment in such approaches. There are however sufficient dissenting views to suggest that it is at least worth devoting some effort to the exploration of much more radical approaches.

For space reasons, the paper will not outline some of the major constraints on global management and innovative approaches to it (Judge, 1987). Conditions, such as the following, have been noted by many authors in different ways: complexity (whether for management or modelling); incommensurability of many policy concerns; limits to comprehensibility by the human mind (possibly even the comprehensibility of appropriateness); multiplicity of perspectives concerning any issue or response; information overload; urgency; policy time constraints in relation to electorates; incommunicability of complex insights to those who must vote on them; irresponsibility, in some measure, of most social agents; corruption and deceit of many social agents. For the purposes of the subsequent discussion these can all be usefully treated as design constraints.

Experience of past development decades indicates that implementation of desirable institutional innovations is likely to remain limited however much lip service is paid to them. Part of the difficulty would seem to lie in imaginal deficiency on the part of both the innovators and of those to whom the innovations must be made credible. There is merit therefore in exploring radical approaches to ways of configuring the conceptual elements which are the basis for any social innovation — and relating them to the forms

of imagery currently favoured (for good reason) by politicians.

Within this context the paper endeavours to envisage the next credible steps that might be taken to provide a more fruitful imaginal framework to sustain more appropriate personal and institutional responses to the challenges of the times. The core question is whether initiatives can be recontextualized or reframed — using more powerful metaphors — in such a way as to offer new insight and greater degrees of freedom.

With this objective in mind, the term "metaphor" is used broadly to denote any conceptual device which facilitates transfer of meaning associated with a phenomenological pattern in one domain to that in another. The term is therefore used as though the range of such devices constituted a continuum, however they might be distinguished or grouped by different schools of thought. The emphasis in this paper is on the relevance of this approach to very practical challenges (e.g. unemployment, drug abuse, overpopulation, etc). A more analytical approach has been taken in earlier papers (Judge, 1987, 1988).

This paper is part of a long-term exploration of the significance of information collected on the networks of some 20,000 international bodies described in the *Yearbook of International Organizations* (UIA, 1989), and on the 10,000 "world problems" with which they claim to be concerned, as described in the *Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential* (VIA, 1986). The latter includes a section on metaphors, with 80 examples.

## 2. Sustainable Development and the Individual

The image of an appropriate policy for the future is currently being carried within the international community by the term "Sustainable development", reinforced by the recommendations of the Brundtland Commission Report (World Commission, 1983). This concept is now the integrative carry-all for many more specific policies, which it is hoped can be interrelated through it in a fruitful way — despite the apparent contradictions between some of them (e.g. environmental conservation and industrial growth).

Policy discussion of "Sustainable development" deals

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with macro-issues, despite the fact that the problems are not only experienced by institutions and governments as administrative and political challenges, but also by individuals personally faced with unemployment, environmental degradation, illness and the like. Such discussion thus cultivates a "top-down" perspective, although individuals tend to have a "bottom-up" experience of them. If the top-down policies did not call for a change of attitude on the part of individuals, such policies might prove adequate to the challenge. But since such changes of attitude are called for, a focus on the bottom-up perspective is appropriate.

In the macro-perspective of sustainable development, it is the sustainable development of human society that is the focus. But the kinds of sacrifices and life-style changes that are called for raise the question as to whether attention should not also be devoted to the nature of the sustainable development of the individual — especially in a period when discussion of "human development" is coming into fashion within the international community. It is indeed possible that the sustainable development of society may be impossible where the sustainable development of the individual is impeded.

In the following sections the role of metaphor is explored in sustaining the development of the individual faced with problems such as unemployment, discrimination, drug abuse and insecurity, and, as a special case, in relation to the opportunity of sexual intercourse and its consequences for further increase in population.

### 3. The implicit "switch" metaphor

Much has been said in recent years about the inappropriateness of conventional western mind-sets in responding to the complexities of the environment. Particular criticism has focused on "dualistic" and "linear" thinking. "Holistic" approaches are advocated as more desirable alternatives, but unfortunately without any insights into the practicalities of their implementation. Metaphor may be helpful in this respect — far more than through the above distinction based on the "line" and "hologram" metaphors.

Consider the implicit switch metaphor which governs much of our thinking concerning major problems of society:

- unemployment : an individual has a job, or does not have a job.
- ignorance: an individual is educated or uneducated.
- violence : an individual is subject to violence or is not.
- illegality and criminality : an individual is acting illegally or is not.
- illness: an individual is healthy or is not.
- corruption: an individual is corrupt or is not.
- uncleanliness: an individual is unhygienic or is not.
- discrimination: an individual is subject to discrimination or is not.
- ~ environmental exploitation: an individual wastes resources and degrades the environment or does not.
- substance abuse: an individual is addicted to drugs (over-eating, smoking, alcohol, etc) or is not.

Many advocated policies are explicitly designed to "switch" individuals from one condition to the other in each case (e.g. from "on" to "off") — from an undesirable condition to a desirable one. And once such a transition has been accomplished, the object is to prevent backsliding into the undesirable condition. The switch metaphor is a

simple device through which ambiguity can be avoided (Levine, 1985).

Ironically this switch metaphor is also implicit in the thinking of those who identify most closely with a holistic, non-linear, appropriate and sustainable alternative. For them it is a question of how to switch from the inappropriate to the appropriate - and stay there.

It would be a mistake to consider that this metaphor is "just a way of thinking!" without any concrete implications. Much legislation is designed around whether a person is in Condition A of Condition B of some such switch, with immediate consequences in terms of social security benefits, various forms of aid, and varieties of social sanction. An extreme example, the apartheid policy in South Africa distinguishing between "white" and "non-white", became administratively feasible following a seemingly innocent census in which people were requested to identify their racial group.

### 4. Ambiguity

It is important to recognize the extent to which this switch metaphor is natural to western modes of thinking. It is debateable how meaningful such polarities are in other cultures, or within many sub-cultures of western societies (Maruyama 1980, Hofstede 1980). Indications of this are to be found in the ambiguity of attitudes towards corruption in non-western society — and even in western society. If comprehension of the issue is more complex than that implied by the switch metaphor, and if the dynamics associated with each problem dimension call for a more complex description, then unquestioning use of the switch metaphor constitutes a real danger at this time (Judge, 1986).

The issue of smoking is an extremely valuable illustration of many dimensions of individual and collective response to the challenges of these times. It is a neat metaphor of the experiential ambiguities in discovering a more appropriate relationship to these challenges. It is especially valuable because it offers us a framework within which to discuss much more charged or controversial issues such as overpopulation and environmental degradation. Consider:

- an illustration of switch thinking in public policy — legislation on smoking vs. non-smoking (and ways of circumventing such restrictions in restaurants and the workplace)
- a major source of tax revenue for governments — can governments afford to recommend against it?
- the struggle of the individual — whether to smoke, how often to "smoke, whether to "stop"
- the fashionable image of smoking — macho, cool, sophisticated, a shared experience, low-key bonding, etc.
- the health aspect — the risk of lung cancer against the challenge of gaining weight
- as a stimulant and tranquilizer — what alternatives are available for mood adjustment
- as a means of self-assertion — imposing a style and subjecting others to its waste products; revolting against parental and other authorities.

Using this metaphor, it is much easier— especially for smokers — to understand the ambiguity of governments and industrialists in restraining their exploitation of the environment. For industrialists "sustainable development" then lends itself to other interpretations far from those of conservationists, for example "sustainable competitive

advantage". It is not simply a matter of the inherent logic of switching from unsustainable policies to sustainable ones. The assumption that industrialists will willingly espouse environmentally-friendly sustainable policies seems extremely naive in this light, even when all the arguments are clearly evident — as the partial results of "health warnings" to smokers illustrate. Can any smoker genuinely expect industry to stop air pollution through smokestacks?

### **5. Imaginal deficiency**

The previous section illustrates how individuals and groups escape into ambiguity to capture the wider reality on which the options of the switch metaphor have been imposed. There are obviously more degrees of freedom than are implied by the switch metaphor. People have direct experience of those opportunities even though they may be poorly articulated into sets of categories.

In the light of such arguments it is useful to explore further on the assumption that the inadequacies of existing strategies are partly due to poverty of the imagination — namely to imaginal deficiency at the policy level. The question to be asked is whether there is some pattern to our thinking — such as reliance on the switch metaphor — which effectively limits the complexity of the policy options which tend to emerge, especially at the international level.

The concern of this paper is that, perhaps more crucially, the question should be asked whether such imaginal deficiency is not a prime handicap for those most vulnerable to the problems of our times — unemployment, illness, etc. It is well-recognized that rich use of imagination is made by those in underprivileged circumstances, whether in the form of visual imagery or metaphor, and irrespective of educational background. So it is not imagination that is lacking. The question may be rather:

- whether that imagination is appropriately harnessed in response to the challenges
- whether the imaginative form is appropriate to any new response to those challenges
- whether external forces (educators, experts, officials, priests, media, etc) do not actively de-legitimate the effective use of that imagination.

There are many signals that calls on resources are such that relatively little can, or will, be done for those in underprivileged circumstances — to say nothing of looming problems of widespread famine, pollution, global warming, etc. Behind the scenes there is considerable doubt concerning the efficacy of conventional forms of aid. Of the 5 billion people in the world, 4.2 billion are considered "unbankable" by western economists. Invisible social revolutions are taking place in the Third World through articulation of informal economies (De Soto, 1989). In these circumstances, people need to be encouraged to rely on their own resources — rather than live in pious expectation that all will be solved "by the year 2000". And there is the nasty possibility that the prevailing wisdom in the international community is a direct inhibitor of the kinds of creativity which would enable them to do so.

### **6. Governing metaphors**

At a time when there is much discussion of new paradigms, quantum leaps, breakthroughs and imaginative alternatives, it could be useful to explore collective and individual behaviour in search of the implicit metaphors by which they may be governed — or govern themselves

(Judge, 1987). Such exploration tends to take the form of identifying the "belief" or "value" systems within which people operate. And in these terms there has been concern in the international community as to ways of communicating more appropriate value systems — especially those enshrined in human rights convention. There are also many constituencies actively promoting particular belief systems.

Whilst promotion of belief and value systems opens opportunities for some, the track record of this approach does not suggest that it will make a difference in time. They also tend to be presented in relatively diffuse texts that call for special education processes before the full benefit can be derived from them. At the other extreme are the slogans favoured by politicians and politically oriented groups. In this case the difference made, if any, tends not to reflect the complexities of the situation — thus engendering further difficulties.

There have been suggestions concerning the existence of "root metaphors" governing particular world views. Such root metaphors have also been noted in relation to images of social organization (Morgan, 1986). There is currently much emphasis, in the case of particular corporations, of identifying or designing an appropriate "corporate culture". In the past at least, great emphasis has been placed on family mottoes (at least amongst the western aristocracy). Such mottoes were also developed by guilds. In some non-western cultures totems have played an even more powerful role in providing a metaphoric view of the world (Cowan, 1990). In various religious traditions, phrases based on particular metaphors are used to guide personal transformation, often through meditation.

In the light of the recognized cognitive function of metaphor (MacCormac, 1985), these examples suggest the possibility of encouraging more active use of metaphor by individuals in order to creatively "redesign" their cognitive environments so that new opportunities become apparent and acquire legitimacy. The role of metaphor in scientific and artistic innovation suggests that equivalent uses of metaphor are possible in the realm of social innovation.

It should be quickly noted that there are clearly limitations to any metaphor and that it is easy to get trapped in an inappropriate metaphor — or rather in a metaphor which is inappropriate to the circumstances. Current entrapment by the switch metaphor might be an example. The challenge is therefore to provide contextual metaphors which enable people to shift around within a set of metaphors, where each is appropriate to different conditions (Judge, 1989b). This is especially important when it is becoming increasingly apparent that no one explanation, theory, model or paradigm can encompass the complexity within which people have to navigate. It would therefore be a mistake to imply that any particular metaphor can encompass more than an aspect of the reality with which people have to deal.

Given the increasing problems of the educational system, typified by the increasing number of functionally illiterate adults, it is necessary to look to other means of disseminating such metaphors. Of greater interest than such "dissemination from the centre" is the desirability of finding ways to encourage people to select or design their own metaphors using material natural to their own culture and sub-culture, in fact it is more a question of enabling people to harness the social innovation potential of metaphors with which they are already familiar.

Metaphor is widely used by politicians to communicate policy options — both amongst themselves and to their constituencies. However it is used simplistically and in a rhetorical manner divorced from the written articulation of the policy and its implementation in practice. The metaphors currently favoured do not reflect the exigencies of sustainable development or the dynamics between the advocates of competing policy alternatives. It has been suggested in earlier papers that governance could be more effectively based on processes facilitating the emergence and movement of policy relevant metaphors, their relationship (as comprehensible meaning complexes) to more conventional forms of information, and their reflection in organizational form.

The merit of this vision of governance — whether of a society, a group, a family, or as "self-governance" — is that it does not call for an improbable, radical transformation of institutions and programmes. Rather it calls for a change in the way of thinking about what is circulated through society's information systems as the triggering force for any action.

### 7. *Transcending the switch metaphor*

In the light of the above arguments it should be possible to look anew at many of the conventional problems with which people are obliged to deal personally. This process should be legitimated by the probability of detecting forms of response by individuals which are not captured by the categories that the switch metaphor reinforces. The existence of additional categories, however confusedly they are currently understood, would then call for richer, and less mechanistic, metaphors to capture the relationship between them. The issue is, as Mark Twain succinctly put it, "If your only tool is a hammer, than all problems look like nails". The principal tool of the international community would appear to be the switch.

Before considering the implications in response to real problems, it is appropriate to note the constructive criticism by Kinhide Mushakoji of what he calls "binary" approaches in science and disciplines affected by its methodology. "By the very nature of scientific logic which is binary, intellectuals tend to form bi-polar structures with two opposed camps rally under two paradigmatic banners. The polarization often takes place even within each of the two poles which then divide themselves into sub-poles, and so on... An inter-paradigmatic process should be able to break the bi-polarity of the intellectual community by introducing a third pole in the dialogical process... The role of such a pole is to introduce extra-paradigmatic considerations (into the discussion) and to break the dichotomic argumentation bringing into the discussion innovative ideas." (Mushakoji, 1978). Edward de Bono had advocated the use of a special term "po" to accomplish precisely this (de Bono, 1973).

But Mushakoji goes on to draw attention to the "logico-real" problem of the relationship between the logical and the reality levels. He suggests that catastrophe theory can help to shed light on the different logical positions in the morphogenetic space by relating the continuous reality (i.e. *signify*) to the discrete set of concepts (i.e. *signifiant*). This leads him to advocate a four-fold non-formal logic model to provide a logical basis for inter-paradigmatic dialogues. Such a logic emerges from another Japanese scholar, Tokuryu Yamauchi (Yamauchi, 1974) who interre-

lates oriental thinking based on "lemmas" with occidental thinking based on "logos". Lemma concerns the modalities according to which the human mind grasps reality, rather than how human intellect reasons about it. Mushakoji sees the lemmic approach as offering a breakthrough in response to the static ontology of the West.

The tetralemmic model Mushakoji describes stipulates the existence of four lemmas: (a) affirmation, (b) negation, (c) non-affirmation and non-negation, (d) affirmation and negation. Here (a) and (b) both belong to formal logic, whereas (c) and (d) are unacceptable to it, although they are necessary in theoretical physics. "Only an acceptance of the third and fourth lemmas can allow a full representation of the contemporary world problematique in its totality since contemporary world reality is full of cases where a mere affirmation or negation does not make sense".

As has been noted elsewhere, it is unfortunate that Mushakoji has limited his concern to representing or grasping reality for the purposes of revolution in thinking. This does not respond to the problem of how to intervene in that reality on the basis of any such conceptual revolution — the vital preoccupation in furthering human and social development. And yet the four lemmas lend themselves to such an action-oriented interpretation as the basis for a more general "action logic" discussed elsewhere (UIA, 1986).

Following Mushakoji's lead concerning catastrophe theory, essentially what we could usefully explore is the possibility of enabling people to recognize how they redefine the morphogenetic surface on which they function. The switch metaphor is associated with a surface with two focal positions (attractors or wells) separated by a "col" and surrounded by impracticable "mountains". The challenge is to modify that topography to offer a multiplicity of alternatives — including the original positions.

The nature of this challenge has been well explored from a somewhat different angle by Edward de Bono, especially in his most recent book *I Am Right, You Are Wrong* (de Bono, 1990). The title is intended as an illustration of the thinking trap in which western-inspired cultures are caught. He clarifies the challenge admirably — making very extensive use of metaphors, but without referring to them as such. But although he stresses the importance of such insights for a more appropriate response to the crises of these times, his emphasis is on the need to teach people to think in more fruitful ways.

De Bono has been very successful in introducing his methods into the educational systems of a number of countries — especially in the Third World — although he is criticized by others for claiming to have "the answer". Whilst he would argue that such criticism is a symptom of the thinking trap, it is also a symptom of a dimension of the problematique with which his approach fails to deal, namely the failure of conventional "delivery systems" to reach more than a circumscribed audience. It would be naive to expect that people in villages would read his books, or respond appropriately to educators who have followed his courses. The renowned lags in the education system following any innovation are measured in decades.

Hence the need to rely more on existing insights, which do not call for "informing" people through initiatives, and on communication systems such as those through which rumour and humour travel. The speed of such systems is renowned — even across continents and even in Third World countries. And the challenge is not so much to

deliver insights from a centre "of excellence", through such processes, to various peripheries, but rather to encourage the cross-fertilization of insights moving between "peripheries".

### 6. *Paradoxical context*

Before exploring some possibilities for fruitful metaphors, it is useful to recognize the paradoxical context within which the present challenges have emerged (Barcl, 1989). This can be summarized by the following :

(a) Many conventional solutions to problems are themselves problems — at least to some constituencies. Examples include: conservation, aid, divorce, abortion, unemployment, benefits. And conversely...

(b) Many problems are themselves solutions to other problems. Examples include: drug abuse, corruption, unemployment, starvation, war.

(c) Many solutions are advocated in a form which effectively make them somebody else's responsibility. A solution can be "safely" advocated provided some other group has to provide the resources to carry it out. And conversely...

(d) People tend to recognize as important those problems which are beyond their current means to resolve. Problems tend to get defined at a level of abstraction beyond that at which institutions or individuals are competent to deal with them (cf. the "Peter Principle" of career advancement).

Such avoidance mechanisms are important to personal and institutional survival. Too close a proximity to a problem — with full recognition of one's own responsibility for its continued existence — is destructive of existing behaviour patterns with which one's identity is associated. An appropriate metaphor might be that of the Gorgon of Greek mythology — the sight of whom froze people to stone. But unless we understand how we are part of a problem, we cannot understand the nature of the solution required.

In this context explanations (however insightful), recommendations and prescriptions (however innovative and resourceful), and proscriptions (with whatever degree of authority), are of limited value — as the track record of the past decades has illustrated. The situation is getting worse.

Such a paradoxical context calls for paradoxical, counter-intuitive, strategies of a different quality (Gordon 1978, Hillman 1983, Seltzer 1986), such as might be suggested by "setting a thief to catch a thief", the "Zen of problem solving", and the lateral thinking of de Bono. In the case of the Gorgon, one device used was a mirror-like shield which allowed the Gorgon to be seen, and approached, without looking at it. Such a shield is not that of the rational mind (which cannot handle the complexity of our personal involvement in the problem), but rather of the imaginative mind (which can dance imaginatively with the horrors for which we are in some ways responsible).

In a situation in which prescriptions, even if insightful and appropriate, cannot be disseminated effectively to those who need them (despite hopeful technocratic scenarios of satellite education), it is not explanations and recommendations on which we can rely. The "resource delivery system" is inadequate (as rising adult illiteracy in industrialized countries indicates) and it is very probable that what we think ought to be delivered is in fact inappropriate. Geoffrey Vickers, an early doyen of the policy sci-

ces, noted that "a trap is a function of the nature of the trapped" (Vickers, 1972). As a consequence it is to be expected that our society should be trapped by the very nature of the intellectual mode which is most dominant and on which we most rely - what Konrad Lorenz has described as "technomorphic thinking" (Lorenz, 1988). The switch metaphor is a typical product of such thinking.

But it is possible that evoking imaginative responses might allow people to redefine their problems in ways which open new opportunities to them. Evocation rather than explanations or prescriptions — although all should occur where feasible.

### 9. *Problems as metaphors*

As has been noted by a number of authors, part of the thinking trap is perceiving the challenge as being one of "problem-solving". To avoid this it is useful to reframe the approach by asking what a problem is "trying to tell us" — or, better still, is the problem as understood in effect a metaphor for something we would prefer not to understand? From this perspective "institutionalized" problems may in effect be a sort of metaphorical euphemism — a package which it is better not to unwrap. For problems are not only nasty in themselves, they are also nasty in what they imply about ourselves — however saintly we might wish to appear as disinterested change agents, victims or innocent bystanders. Through this approach the problems themselves may be able to tell us something about the way forward.

It would be totally presumptuous to assume that much could be accomplished along these lines in a paper like this by a single author. The following is therefore intended merely as a biased indication of a fruitful line of inquiry. Examples might include:

(a) Substance abuse (including drugs and alcohol): Is it too trite to suggest that substance abuse is signalling a desperate need for different modes of thinking, feeling and experience than those sanctioned by a society governed by antiquated thinking patterns which have been only too effectively institutionalized in "acceptable" modes of work and leisure? Again, since many in key positions in such institutions also use drugs or alcohol "to relax", what should be learnt from the level of stress — and schizophrenia — at which the prevailing mode of thought is requiring them to function? Is substance abuse not effectively offering a remedy for the imaginal deficiency and mechanistic patterning characteristic of "acceptable" individual and collective behaviour? And consequently would not substance abuse become less necessary if society acknowledged more imaginative opportunities? What is the incidence of substance abuse in cultures whose languages make very extensive use of metaphor? Too what extent is it useful to perceive our relation to the prevailing thinking pattern as a form of "addiction" - a habit that we do not know how to kick, even if we wanted to?

(b) Unemployment (including underemployment and absenteeism) : it is no longer fruitful to argue that a significant proportion of unemployment is simply due to laziness, reluctance to learn new skills, lack of initiative or lack of opportunities — whatever truths these may imply. Is it possible that the prevailing mode of thinking is inhibiting peoples ability to imagine new forms of action of value to others, encouraging people to perceive existing employment opportunities as worthless both to themselves and to

others, as well as impoverishing the manner in which people consider what to do with their lives? Is unemployment telling us that much of the work on offer is not worth doing — and that much which is done is pointless? This would certainly be consistent with many criticisms of the consumer society and of industrial exploitation of the environment. Perhaps it is also saying that what we value doing, or are obliged to do, is not appropriately valued (as "work") in an economic system governed by an inadequate mode of thinking. This would certainly be consistent with the debate about the economic value of housework. Contrasting employment with recreation (as opposed to unemployment) is somewhat ironic in that unimaginative leisure opportunities are increasingly incapable of offering "re-creation" — despite the degree of economic investment in them. Is the level of unemployment also indicating that we really do not know to what society could usefully devote its human resources? Worse still, is it indicating that we have dissociated the challenges to human society from opportunities for "work" because of the way such challenges are perceived within the prevailing pattern of thinking?

(c) Ignorance (including functional illiteracy): is the level of ignorance, even in industrialized countries, telling us that much of the information on which that judgement is based is not worth learning? This concern has certainly been expressed in debates about existing curricula. Is it suggesting that for their psychic survival people are educating themselves along pathways which are not considered meaningful, or indicative of intelligence, within the prevailing pattern of thinking? This is suggested by the immense resources devoted to music and to "alternative" therapies and belief systems. Is it suggesting that people feel deprived of an imaginal education, faced with the formal (even rote) learning so frequently considered most appropriate (especially "to the needs of industry")? This is suggested by the enthusiasm for graphics, cartoon books, science fiction, fantasy and the archetypal portrayal of cult figures in music. Is our concern with the ignorance of many concealing the fact that those with most expertise and power are really quite ignorant about how to navigate through the current crises and those on the horizon?

(d) Homelessness: Is the lack of appropriate shelter, even in industrialized countries, indicating that with our current pattern of thinking we are ineffective in our ability to provide, construct, or acquire cognitive and affective frameworks to shelter us appropriately from the turbulence of the times? This would be consistent with concerns about alienation in modern society. It would also follow from the recognition that many traditional frameworks and belief systems have been torn down or discredited. Even where people are well sheltered, it is often in houses or apartments which reflect an impoverishment of architectural imagination as reinforced by unimaginative building regulations and construction economics. Are our imaginative lives so impoverished by the media that the ability to provide a hospitable "interior decoration" for our psyches has been degraded?

(e) Illness: Disease as a metaphor has been explored, especially by Susan Sontag. Nevertheless the preoccupation of the World Health Organization with "Heath for all by the Year 2000" fails to address the increasing prevalence of stress, neurosis and personality disorder — especially in industrialized countries. Just as the range of individual diseases provides admirable metaphors for a taxonomic study of the world problematique, so it might also be used to

explore the diseases of the imagination and of imaginal deficiency.

(f) Hunger (including malnutrition): At the time of writing some 4 million people are threatened with death by starvation in Ethiopia alone. Is this problem not signalling the existence of a subtler and more widespread form of deprivation — a malnutrition of the psyche and a spiritual hunger which we are even less capable of addressing? This would be consistent with concern about the artificiality and superficiality of experience offered in the emerging "information society" or "global village" — and with the desperate attempts to increase the level of "realism" by increasing the quantity and degrading quality of violence portrayed in the media. To what extent are our imaginations appropriately nourished at this time — despite the surfeit of imaginative material (junk food?) available and to come?

(g) Wastage (including environmental degradation): Is our insensitivity to the processes of wastage and pollution, for which we are individually responsible, signalling the existence of an indifference to the "salubrity" of our imaginative lives? This would be consistent with the concern expressed by some non-western cultures and constituencies at the indifference to "spiritual purity". There is little consensus on what is or is not healthy for the psyche — just as we are no longer clear, with the increasing scope of pollution, to what extent which foodstuffs are safe. The depletion of natural resources associated with wastage calls for reflection on the possibility that western-inspired culture is depleting its psychic resources in ways that we have yet to understand? Can the imaginative resources of a culture be depleted to a point of "bankruptcy" and how can such resources be conserved and "recycled"? Do empires fall through imaginative failure?

(h) Corruption (including crime): A major criticism of the development aid process is that the resources are diverted away from those most in need, despite agreements to prevent this. Various forms of bribery or "commission" are a common feature, even in industrialized countries. In any position (including intergovernmental agencies), people endeavour to obtain perks and privileges for themselves, for relatives or for friends — whether this is limited to pilferage of office supplies, extended into the imposition of a "socially acceptable taxation" (or "sweetener") on any transactions which they control, or developed into a full-blown criminal activity. What can be learnt from this degree of self-interest and the associated rule-breaking propensity? Is this an indication that people cannot survive within the mechanistic regulations which emerge from the current pattern of thinking — or at least choose not to do so, and feel free not to do so when possible? This would be consistent with the admiration for people who can get things done despite the rules, because they are capable of imagining more subtle opportunities. To what extent is corruption associated with a more creative world view — as reflected in the term "creative accounting".

### *10. Reframing problems: the case of "overpopulation"*

The previous section has indicated how problems may be seen in a new light by exploring the implications for the sustainable development of the individual — through the individual's eyes. This provides an integrative focus which

is absent when such problems are projected onto the global level, where mutually exclusive perspectives retain some measure of credibility. But, however valuable, it is not sufficient just to see such problems in a new light. The key question is whether they enable some new approach to them. The ultimate test is the case of "overpopulation", which many would argue to be at the origin of the problem outlined above.

There are many well-known difficulties in approaching this problem as opposed to those above:

(a) There are strong constituencies which do not consider overpopulation to be a problem in the first place. These include religious groups, such as the Catholic Church, with a vested interest in increasing the number of people of that faith, as well as countries which believe that their own population does not reflect their desired importance, either in absolute terms, or because of declining birthrate, or because of a threatened reduction in the influence of one ethnic group due to the high reproductive rate of some other ethnic group.

(b) There are strong constituencies which view with suspicion any suggestion, especially by outsiders, that their birthrate could be restrained or reduced. This may be seen as a violation of their rights, as catering to the interests of the outsider group, or as an effort to deprive them of the socio-economic benefit of children in the form of labour, income, and social security in old age.

(c) There are strong constituencies which view prevention of conception and/or termination of pregnancy with repugnance (the abortion issue, etc).

(d) There is a very strong consistency which views any discussion touching on the intimacies of sexual relationship as improper and to be avoided.

(e) The above factors reinforce the tendency of politicians to avoid such a controversial issue or to dramatically de-emphasize it — as evidenced by the fate of international population programmes under the influence of President Reagan.

#### *Family planning and sexless euphemisms*

Because of all the above factors, even discussion of the "overpopulation" issue takes place through euphemism and indirection. This is compounded by the tendency, reinforced by intergovernmental agencies, to discuss problems through terms denoting programmes to solve them or through the values enhanced by solving them. Examples include: the "peace" and "youth" problems, literacy (instead of illiteracy). In this case we have "family planning", "demography", "fertility", "population dynamics", etc. Programme agencies favour this approach because it lends itself to upbeat reporting concerning their programmes, whatever relationship they have to the problems. Academics favour it because it emphasizes theoretical and methodological issues, irrespective of their relevance to any substantive problem.

Use of such sanitized terms to refer to an extremely charged issue may undoubtedly be appropriate under many conditions — just as any reference to sexual relations tends to be avoided in the presence of children. It is questionable whether the discussion can be confined in this way in attempting to respond to the problem in a more innovative way. The sanitized terms, which are in effect euphemisms when they are not deliberate avoidance mechanisms, can be viewed as a sort of "metaphorical dissection". The term used provides an uncharged metaphor through which

to view an uncontroversial aspect of the problem. In this sense metaphors are being used to distort perception of the problem.

In discussion of the population issue there is in fact remarkably little discussion of sexual relations (especially the individual's perception thereof) - as though one had almost nothing to do with the other. This is all the more remarkable given the importance of sex in the media and especially in advertising — and, much more explicitly, in worldwide warning campaigns concerning AIDS. Advertising has made an art form out of metaphorical references to sex — reinforced by visual metaphors in product design and packaging. In contrast, and paradoxically, there is a sexless quality to "family planning" which impedes any imaginative response to the issues involved — especially to those aspects exacerbated by advertising, given the natural interest in sex.

This sexless quality is rendered even more unrealistic to the popular imagination given the widespread and extensive use of sexual metaphors in informal discussion. This is most remarkable in many job situations, including those at the highest level — as President Richard Nixon demonstrated in his choice of expletives. Such metaphors are a basic characteristic of management dialogue in most corporations, as well as on the shop floor where things get done. Some people make use of them in every sentence. For example, other than its use as a simple expletive, "fucking" ("screwing", etc) is widely used to articulate an attitude to a group (another department, clients, competitors, etc) to whom one is doing something or by whom one is being manipulated.

The question which merits exploration is how the tremendous amount of psychic energy articulated (however inappropriately) by this metaphor is related to the "fertility" issue. Is it that the use of this basic metaphor for "doing" or "being done to" channels — as a form of sublimation — some of the energy which would otherwise go into sexual intercourse? The contexts in which the metaphor is used must certainly feedback onto the perception of sexual intercourse.

The challenge of "family planning" and "contraception" is that these are essentially processes of "not-doing" and as such do not excite the imagination — except to those inclined to philosophies of inaction (and action through inaction). It is questionable whether the metaphors for such processes are sufficiently meaningful in competition with the richer sexual metaphors. It could be argued that the "contraception" issue involves only the prevention of contraception, not the prevention of sexual intercourse, and therefore does not detract from the energy of sexual relations. This brings into focus the core issue of whether "contraception" calls for any modification in the attitude to sexual relations in order to be successfully implemented by those gripped by a variety of powerful metaphors of sexual relations. Specifically is there a possibility of discovering metaphors which would enable people to articulate their attitudes to sexual relations in a manner consistent with the objectives of "family planning"?

#### *Sexual intercourse as a metaphor*

It would be presumptuous to hope to explore here this central theme in literature, psychoanalysis and advertising techniques. But some questions can be touched upon as they relate to the "overpopulation" issue.

In social conditions widely characterized by turbulence, insecurity, savage competition for resources, deprivation and the like, the privacy and intimacy of sexual intercourse creates a world in which individuals can experience a sense of security, caring and personal value, whilst at the same time offering them opportunities for imaginative self-expression and enjoyment away from the censure of wider society. It is a world in which they have a real opportunity to fulfil their desires, to experience a sense of personal integrity and to repair the psychic damage suffered in daily life. But as a metaphor this "world" also encodes many of the problems and dilemmas of the "sustainable development" of wider society — the macocosm mirrored in microcosm. It is a world in which one partner may seek to dominate and subjugate the other, a world of resources which may be exploited until they are depleted beyond any measures of conservation, and a world in which the frustrations of wider society may be given a new, an often crueler, focus — often without any court of appeal. The shared intimacy may decay into alienation.

It is into this world that "family planning" endeavours to insert "contraception". But little is said concerning the implications for the psychic life of the individual. The matter tends to be discussed and described using plumbing metaphors, in "practical, down-to-earth" terms. And undoubtedly this may be totally appropriate for those of unimaginative temperament who believe that problems can be "fixed" with an appropriate device — or for those who are so desperate that they will use anything provided it works. It is not clear that this approach is appropriate to others, and especially to those for whom contraception acquires some symbolic significance. In this sense it is useful to consider how contraception can function as a metaphor. Understanding its potential, and limitations, as a metaphor may suggest other approaches. Lines of investigation might include:

(a) Preventing, or aborting, completion of a process: With the increasing mechanization of society, and the increasing fragmentation of fields of activity, there are few integrative processes of which people are personally aware. The processes to which people are exposed in society are increasingly embedded in bureaucratic procedures, manufacturing cycles or information systems. Most processes are subject to "production deadlines" — including academic research. There are few opportunities for process completion, which it could be argued are vital to the psychic integration of the individual. Even in manufacturing there is increasing recognition of the merit of allowing people to personally complete a process (e.g. assembly of a car). For those for whom the significance of the sexual process is not limited to the act, but includes the socio-biological consequence (and possibly religious implications), to what extent does contraception become a metaphor for a restraint which is increasingly intolerable in an alienating society?

(b) Rechannelling sexual energy: Does contraception have no effect on sexual energy and the way it is channelled? It can easily be argued that it is a liberator of sexual expression. It is less clear how it affects the quality of that expression. It is possible that exploring the limitations of the "channel" metaphor, and that of contraception in relation to it, might suggest a more appropriate approach. The use of such mechanistic metaphors, of the same class as the switch metaphor discussed earlier, inhibits recognition of less polarized insights into the movement of sexual

energy (such as through diffusion or resonance processes, for example). The standard argument that access to a television at home reduces fertility needs to be explored in this light. What function is the television exploring and how is it affecting the imaginative life in relation to the need to fulfil sexual desires? Is the television an example of a wider class of opportunities for the movement of sexual energy that obviates the need for sexual intercourse? What is the function of dance and partying in this respect? Do these suggest the existence of processes which are metaphorically equivalent to intercourse, but diffused beyond the confines of the switch metaphor (making-it, or not)?

(c) The "developer mentality" of family planning: The community of international development agencies seldom accords attention to the "developer's" view of development — by which land, for example, is "developed" when it is "cleared" of unproductive trees and wildlife, drained of unnecessary surface water, and segmented by access roads permitting construction of any required buildings. In arguing for greater literacy for women, UNICEF indicates that four years of schooling enables women to plan smaller families, to space the children for the better welfare of all, and to make use of preventive health care. It is quite unclear what effect the rationality of such procedures has on the imaginative life of those who accept them, and whether any resistance to them arises from a repugnance analogous to that of "romantic" conservationists towards the initiatives of developers. To what extent is psychoanalytical expertise used in population programmes?

The above possibilities raise the question of whether other kinds of metaphor might prove more appropriate as a way of articulating the imaginative life of sexually active people. Or rather, whether they have access to other metaphors which conflict with those implicit in their perception of contraception and "family planning". And how a greater proportion of sexual energy might be expressed through activities which are metaphors for sexual intercourse — a concern close to the interests of advertising agencies endeavouring to market products which effect this transfer. Can the objectives of "fertility reduction" be served by a transfer of this kind. In this light something as simple as more cafes (social "intercourse") and dances might achieve more than strenuous attempts to extend family planning programmes — however ridiculous this might appear to those seeking a technical fix.

As with the other problems, discussed above, it might then be possible to move on to the metaphoric implications of the global dimensions of "overpopulation". Somehow the proliferation of the species has become an absolute good. The action of any inhibitory feedback mechanism has itself been inhibited. The same phenomenon may be seen with the proliferation of information and products — and any form of creativity. All such processes could be explored as metaphors of a human attitude in which withholding or holding back is inhibited. This suggests the need to discover attractive metaphors for "withholding", but without becoming trapped in the switch metaphor. An early, and perhaps inadequate, example is the increasing fashionability of "soft" sex (as opposed to penetrative sex), as a result of the rising threat of AIDS.

The creative value of exploring such metaphors of relationship is well illustrated by a study of metaphorical theology, namely of possible new metaphors of a person's relationship to God (McFague, 1983). The justification is a similar one.



## 11. Conclusion

This paper evokes the possibility of shifting the centre of reference from which we respond to the challenges of our times. Currently it is associated with explanation, recommendation and proscription — flowing from centres of authority to those who ought to respond for their own good. Without denying the value of such expertise and the associated resources, circumstances suggest that more might be accomplished by shifting the centre of reference to the imaginative level to which most people have access. Reality will not be effectively trapped by rhetoric governed by the switch metaphor. That metaphor, as with any tool, remains very useful but richer metaphors are needed to carry more complex patterns of activity. Thus sustainable development itself may become more realistic if understood as a sustainable ecology of development policies — rather than as a naive attempt to "have one's cake and eat it too" (Judge, 1989a).

A world in which metaphor came into its own as a con-

tinuing articulation of a dynamic reality would constitute a direct challenge to the imagination — transcending the procedural and methodological red tape which currently disempowers any attempt to effectively harness the energy of individual and collective imagination. Recognizing the need for discipline and rigour, these should not however function as conceptual contraceptives.

A world governed explicitly through metaphor — rather than implicitly as at present - would offer new possibility for unity and diversity, and for a new relationship to problems, however they can be most fruitfully understood. Metaphor is not "the solution". It is not a "silver bullet" to ensure the final demise of all our ills. But it does create a bridge between the creative imagination and the fields of technical expertise which we have been unable to use effectively either in isolation or in relation to other disciplines. Metaphor has the power to reframe our use of such resources — for better and for worse. To break out of our conceptual totalitarianism, let a 100 metaphors bloom!

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