16th August 2009

Reframing Global Initiatives for the Future
in the light of past experiments

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Introduction
This is a brief reflection on how it might be fruitful to approach the possibility and organization of future global initiatives in the light of learnings from the past. Of particular interest is the possibility of informing such reflections with the more challenging insights from the sciences, namely to endeavour to take account of general formalizations and reframings of methodology. Also of interest is recognition of the role of aesthetics in rendering any such organization attractive, engaging, memorable and coherent.

To repeat the same thing over and over again, and yet to expect a different result, this is a form of insanity.

The significant problems we face can not be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them
[Albert Einstein]

Background
This exploration derives in part from reflection on the detection in the literature (notably of international organizations and constituencies) of the following sets:

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Towards a generic description

The current situation might be described generically in terms of sets (of which the above are indicative):

- **problems** and problematic situations facing society:
  - detected, or perceived, by various constituencies
  - continually emerging
  - some persistent over a long period (as "legacy problems")
  - perceived as interacting in various ways, possibly aggravating the challenge
  - variously understood as urgent, secondary or irrelevant

- **remedial strategies**:
  - implemented, or advocated, by various constituencies
  - continually emerging as proposals
  - some having been used over a long period (as "legacy strategies")
  - perceived as interacting in various ways, possibly undermining each other
  - variously understood or contested as priorities
  - variously evaluated as having been proven to be inadequate to the challenge

- **patterns of organization**:
  - implemented, or advocated, by various constituencies
  - continually emerging as proposals
  - some having been used over a long period (as "legacy modalities")
  - perceived as interacting in various ways, whether complementary or destabilizing
  - variously understood as best practice, tried and true
  - variously evaluated as inadequate to the challenge, etc

- **disciplines, methodologies and "ways of knowing"**:
  - implemented, or advocated, by various constituencies
  - continually developing with advancement of knowledge and experiment
  - some having been used over a long period
  - perceived as interacting in various ways, whether complementary or destabilizing
  - variously understood as best practice, tried and true
  - variously evaluated as inadequate to the challenge, etc

- **individuals**:
  - variously informed, enthusiastic, dedicated and engaged with the above
  - continually changing their engagement in the light of personal knowledge, learning and experiment
  - some having been engaged in particular initiatives over a long period
  - interacting in various ways, whether creatively or otherwise
  - variously understood as key actors, dependable, qualified, creative, etc
  - variously evaluated as inadequate to the challenge, etc
  - variously associated with particular cognitive preferences and biases

- **values**:
  - identified, upheld, advocated, or embodied by various constituencies
  - subject to continual reframing and articulation
  - some having been upheld as fundamental over a long period ("legacy formulations")
  - perceived as interacting in various ways, possibly engendering fundamental dilemmas
  - variously understood as essential, tried and true
  - variously evaluated as devalued by tokenism, problematic (even dangerously so), etc

- **operational constraints**, notably
  - information overload and information underuse
  - limited attention span in the face of competing contextual distractions
  - challenges to effective dissemination
  - challenges to individual and collective memory, especially long-term
  - claimed lack of resources
  - claimed lack of authoritative recognition or support
  - subject to being undermined by other initiatives, possibly deliberately

- **attractiveness** (as attractors)
  - variously related to creative aesthetic representations, embodying inherent elegance, etc
  - subject to being perceived as boring, alienating, outdated, etc
  - subject to being considered inherently attractive to some, namely the extent to which the enthusiasms of constituencies,
fuelled by their particular insights, are effectively trajectories through communication space that are very limited in their attractiveness to others, however much it is claimed that their appeal is “universal”

- subject to questionable efforts to enhance attractiveness by "spin", disinformation, etc
- potentially dissociated as creative attractors through dependence on music, art, etc

- undeclared factors (“dark matter”) and non-transparency:
  - issues and constraints about which it is not convenient to be explicit
  - undeclared commitments and hidden agendas
  - personality and "pecking order" issues
  - the extent to which psychosocial dynamics is reliant on stimulants, anti-depressants, and psychoactive drugs -- strikingly highlighted by recent research indicating the prevalence of cocaine alone (Traces of cocaine found on up to 90% of dollar bills in American cities, The Guardian, 17 August 2009)
  - etc
  - etc ?

Clearly, with respect to any such set, there is a marked tendency (in undertaking any initiative) to attempt to distinguish as limited a number of elements that can be claimed to be credible, whether:

- \( P \) priority problems, \( S \) priority strategies, \( V \) key values, \( O \) key organizations, etc, typically with \( P, S, V \) and \( O \) not greater than 7 (plus or minus 2) following the classical argument of cognitive psychologist George Miller
- qualities or characterizations of elements of each set, as indicated in each case

Arguments for such constraints are typically made in terms of: coherence, communicability, comprehensibility, criticality, and the like (Representation, Comprehension and Communication of Sets: the role of number, 1978)

Towards a higher order of abstraction?

Sets such as those above lend themselves to a far more generic and abstract treatment. This moves beyond questions such as:

- what is a "problem" or an "issue", or what is problematic?
- what is a remedial "strategy" or "solution", and how is the appropriateness of remedies to be understood?
- what is a "value", and how to distinguish "positive" from "negative" values?
- etc.

In more generic terms these are all to be understood as conceptual entities distinguished and bounded by cognitive processes. How such entities are clustered into classes ("problems", "strategies", etc) is a subsequent issue, in contrast with the recognition that there are entities potentially susceptible to being distinguished as different types. Clearly there is the question of how to take into consideration whether one class of entity can be unambiguously distinguished from another, namely whether there is in practice (for different observers) a form of blurring of boundaries whereby:

- some strategies are framed as problems (an obvious example being abortion)
- some problems are framed as strategies (as in provocation of violence to enable a desired strategy)
- some strategies are framed as fundamental values (as, for example, marriage)
- some fundamental values are framed as problems (as with pacifism)
- etc.

This highlights the psychodynamic context within which initiatives emerge, namely the manner in which they attract adherents and agreement and provoke alienation and opposition. It is this dynamic which is especially challenging with respect to any "global" initiative purportedly designed to elicit universal agreement and mobilization of support

A crude early attempt was made to explore and address some of these challenges in relation to the processes of the project on Goals, Processes and Indicators of Development (of the United Nations University) published as Patterns of Conceptual Integration (1984):

- Representation, Comprehension and Communication of Sets: the Role of Number (1978)
- Patterns of N-foldness: Comparison of integrated multi-set concept schemes as forms of presentation (1980)
- Beyond Method: engaging opposition in psycho-social organization (1981)
- Liberation of Integration through pattern, oscillation, harmony and embodiment (1980)
- Concept Factors in Concept Scheme Integration: GPID as a case study (1980)
- Integrative Dimensions of Concept Sets (1981)
- Beyond Edge-bound Comprehension and Modal Impotence: combining q-holes through a pattern language (1981)
- Distinguishing Levels of Declarations of Principles (1980)

Potential of new modes of thinking

At a time when there are calls by the eminent for "new thinking", the challenge of ensuring coherence, viability and comprehensibility of any initiative in a dynamic context could now benefit from the recently emergent insights of the sciences of complexity as indicated in:

- In Quest of Mnemonic Catalysts -- for comprehension of complex psychosocial dynamics (2007)
- Imagining the Real Challenge and Realizing the Imaginal Pathway of Sustainable Transformation (2007)

More generic mathematical approaches to the organization of the Periodic Table of Elements (Denis H. Rouvray and R. Bruce King, The
Mathematics of the Periodic Table. Nova Science Publishers, 2005). These suggest (if only as a guiding metaphor) the possibility that the propensity to distinguish sets of different complexity may be partially determined by a form of periodicity related to collective learning processes. This offers a way of thinking about:

- the first order tendency to distinguish ca. 7 problems, values, etc -- with more complex sets only subsequently recognized.
- the potential dynamic between those attaching primary significance to any one element of such a set with respect to those favouring attention to any other

Such possibilities have been tentatively explored in:

- Periodic Pattern of Human Knowing: implication of the Periodic Table as metaphor of elementary order (2009)
- Towards a Periodic Table of Ways of Knowing -- in the light of metaphors of mathematics (2009)

There is also a strong case for endeavouring to make use of other exciting discoveries in mathematics:

- Psycho-social Significance of the Mandelbrot Set: a sustainable boundary between chaos and order (2005)
- Potential Psychosocial Significance of Monstrous Moonshine: an exceptional form of symmetry as a Rosetta stone for cognitive frameworks (2007)

A related possibility is to undertake a more systematic approach to a comprehensive set of questions (as mentioned above), notably as they may be associated with "cognitive catastrophes":

- Conformality of 7 WH-questions to 7 Elementary Catastrophes: an exploration of potential psychosocial implications (2006)

A question-based approach also helps to take account of question avoidance (Question Avoidance, Evasion, Aversion and Phobia: why we are unable to escape from traps, 2006).

Challenge of selection and organization

Within the above context, new formulations of possible initiatives are then highly conditioned by:

- problems: how the complexity of the problem set is reduced:
  - by explicit or undeclared assumptions, possibly relating to competence and resources
  - by considering some as self-evidently a priority, and others necessarily to be excluded as irrelevant
  - by clustering and hierarchizing, or otherwise organizing the set systemically
  - according to the size of the set which can be encompassed by any initiative
  - in consideration of past experience with regard to framings of problems
- remedial strategies: how the strategic options are determined to be viable, selected and organized
  - by explicit or undeclared assumptions, possibly relating to competence and resources
  - by considering some as self-evident in the light of past experience, and others necessarily to be excluded as irrelevant
  - by clustering and hierarchizing, or otherwise organizing the set systemically
  - the size of the set which can be embodied in any initiative
  - consideration of past experience with strategic viability, namely what worked and what did not
  - challenge of responding to new strategic proposals
- patterns of organization: how appropriate organization is determined and comprehended:
  - extent of (possibly unquestioning) reliance on extant approaches and previous patterns
  - evaluation of inadequacies of past approaches
  - consideration of possibly risky alternative approaches (as with the "open source" paradigm)
  - elaboration or recognition of alternative "business models"
  - recognition of advances in knowledge suggesting alternative patterns (complexity sciences, etc)
- disciplines, methodologies and "ways of knowing": how relevant insights and methodologies are determined
  - whether a wider spectrum of disciplines is necessarily to be considered relevant to some degree
  - how such methodologies can be usefully brought into play
  - challenge of dominant methodologies, especially where these have been less than successful in the past
  - consideration of interaction between methodologies in the light of past challenges to such dynamics
- individuals:
  - what triggers engagement as opposed to alienation and boredom
  - what is expected of engagement
  - how to distinguish and handle input that may be variously appreciated by others
  - how to handle the variety of cognitive preferences, biases and value commitments
- expectation of an "audience":
  - who is it hoped will "hear" about the proposal and "get the message" -- and why
  - what is it expected that such an "audience" should then do -- and why

Enabling a viable strategic window: "executive decision-making"

Given the impossibility of taking into account the total range of factors, a radical decision has to be made in rendering viable a strategic initiative. A "cut" has to be made through the complex of possibilities to create a zone of communicable credibility and coherence.
This raises questions of:

- how inappropriately simplistic is such a "cut" in practice -- or rather appropriate for what and whom, in contrast with inappropriate for what and whom.
- what is sufficient for whose expectations and therefore:
  - potentially attractive to an acceptable constituency
  - potentially alienating to a wider constituency (that may consider it unacceptable)
- how "heavy" does the pattern of organization need to be to be of requisite complexity to encompass the challenge
- who is to be "impressed" by the initiative -- what "audience"
  - intergovernmental initiatives -- why (have they demonstrated "hearing capacity" or "uptake capacity")
  - other international bodies
  - individuals
  - etc

Whilst any initiative can be assessed as problematic in its adequacy to the challenge, a favourable spin can readily be placed on it by applying the meeting principles of Open Space Technology:

1. Whoever comes is the right people: this alerts the participants that attendees of a session class as "right" simply because they care to attend
2. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have: this tells the attendees to pay attention to events of the moment, instead of worrying about what could possibly happen
3. Whenever it starts is the right time: clarifies the lack of any given schedule or structure and emphasizes creativity and innovation
4. When it's over, it's over: encourages the participants not to waste time, but to move on to something else when the fruitful discussion ends

But again, it may only be subsequent circumstances which will determine whether such rules ensured adequate focus and outcome.

The reality, to be recognized and encompassed in some way, is the extent to which "global strategy space" is effectively populated, if not over-populated, by strategies emerging from some form of "subunderstanding" of the turbulent dynamics they variously claim to address -- as described by Magoroh Maruyama (Polyocular Vision or Subunderstanding? Organization Studies, 25, 2004, pp. 467-480).

**Game-playing, gerrymandering, astroturfing and globallooning**

It is typical of many strategic initiatives that they are undertaken:

- without recognition of learnings from the history of past initiatives, even though many of those engaged in the new initiative may have participated in previous exercises of questionable success (George Santayana: Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it)
- on the assumption that by "being positive" and avoiding consideration of typical constraints -- framed as "being negative" -- all will be well
- ignoring other similar initiatives with which they effectively compete for resources, possibly such as to render both non-viable
- failing to recognize the extent to which any initiative (and its policies) is partially determined by personality factors and past "history" in relation to those associated with similar initiatives

Additional processes of concern are:

- **political game-playing**: whether characteristic of organizations and bureaucracies or more subtly evident at the cognitive level in terms of definitional game-playing
- **definitional game-playing**: taking the form of what might be termed "conceptual gerrymandering", whereby the boundaries of entities and systems are subject to processes analogous to gerrymandering in the political sphere, in order to reinforce and extend domains of cognitive influence (Definitional Boundary Games and De-signing the 21st Century, 1995; Category Manipulation in Global Dialogue, 2000)
- **astroturfing**: a technique deployed in relation to any initiative by its opponents such that it is no longer possible to determine whether views expressed in relation to the initiative are genuine or propaganda in support of hidden agendas. As in an example offered by George Monbiot (Climate denial 'astroturfers' should stop hiding behind pseudonyms online, The Guardian, 8 July 2009), fake "concerned citizens" claim to be worried about a conspiracy by governments and scientists to raise taxes and restrict their freedoms in the name of tackling a non-existent issue. A public relations company is paid to create a fake grassroots (astroturf) movement, composed of people who are paid for their services. They lobby against government attempts to regulate the industry and seek to drown out and discredit people who draw attention to the issues the corporations want the public to ignore (see also Eliane Glaser, Touching up the grassroots: belief in ordinary voices is exploited by PRs and politicians skilled in the dark art of astroturfing, The Guardian, 4 June 2009; Suzanne Goldenberg, Oil lobby to fund campaign against Obama's climate change strategy, The Guardian, 14 August 2009).
- **globallooning**: as the inflation of expectations, effectively ensuring that initiatives "take-off" and "fly", but with little reflection on their viability or consequences (Globallooning -- Strategic Inflation of Expectations and Inconsequential Drift, 2009)

Little reference is made to the "dark arts" and "dirty tricks" concealed beneath a cloak of non-transparency -- obscured by motherhood appeals to the highest values as fig leaves. Some indication of their scope is indicated in:
Abuse of Faith in Governance: mystery of the unasked question (2009)
Global Strategic Implications of the "Unsaid": from myth-making towards a "wisdom society" (2003)
The Art of Non-Decision-Making -- and the manipulation of categories (1997)
Effective Response to Crises: impeding psycho-conceptual factors and clarification of approaches (1992)
Limits to Human Potential (1976)
Wrecking an International Project: notes from a saboteur's vade mecum (1972)

The scope of such dynamics has perhaps been best summarized by Stafford Beer in his adaptation of Le Chatelier's Principle (even prior to his dramatic experience in the Chile of Allende) -- relevant to any discussion of complex adaptive systems:

Reformers, critics of institutions, consultants in innovation, people in short who "want to get something done", often fail to see this point. They cannot understand why their strictures, advice or demands do not result in effective change. They expect either to achieve a measure of success in their own terms or to be flung off the premises. But an ultra-stable system (like a social institution)... has no need to react in either of these ways. It specializes in equilirial readjustment, which is to the observer a secret form of change requiring no actual alteration in the macro-systemic characteristics that he is trying to do something about. (Stafford Beer on Le Chatelier's Principle as applied to social systems: The Cybernetic Cytoblast - management itself. Chairman's Address to the International Cybernetic Congress, September 1969)

Misrepresentation of interactive feedback processes

Of considerable interest is the manner in which specially designed web facilities are presented, promoted and extolled as participative, interactive processes through which insights and feedback are solicited from as wide a range of people and constituencies as is feasible. As discussed separately (Misleading feedback solicitation: implications for democracy and consensual strategies, 2009; "Listening to everyone" and considering "all the feedback", 2009; Designing out options and feedback, 2009), it is becoming increasingly evident to what degree these are exercises in tokenism, whether deliberate or not. Typical features are:

- complex menus, analogous to the complexity of telephone call-centre menus
- sophisticated login features to enable potentially invasive tracking (or subsequent filtration)
- automated "enthusiastic" responses, reminiscent of the falsity of courtesy phone practices
- written or verbal commitments to follow-up, with no evidence of this (for whatever reason)
- non-transparent relation between listing of feedback responses and incoming communications (dramatically exemplified by the Blue Peter competition-rigging scandal at the BBC in 2006)
- intentional public listing of feedback communications as a means of implying responsiveness -- with limited intention to take account of feedback content (beyond its indicative use for polling purposes)
- effective displacement ("outsourcing" from the organizational centre) of interaction with those attracted by the initiative, to avoid any need to engage with the content of their communications -- whilst proclaiming the activity that it represents
- failure to acknowledge the incapacity of any interpretative centre to process volumes of feedback for decision-making -- other than by tokenistic selection or use of pre-defined options unrepresentative of that process

The increasing sophistication of such facilities points to the emergence in the very near future of automated strategic initiatives in which the selection of issues, strategies, values and the like, is undertaken by algorithms without any need for "leadership" or human coordination. This raises the interesting question as to the point at which the Turing Test can be applied to determination of the distinction between such a facility and a human organization.

Acknowledging collective conceptual impotence

It would seem that it is indeed possible to scope out possibilities to enable new initiatives that are more viable and appropriate to the complex challenges of the future. However it is increasingly clear that their is a lack of capacity to determine their feasibility or to experiment with their viability on a smaller scale or through simulations. Faced with an under-resourced turbulent future, the reasons for this are becoming of greater interest, especially the insights they offer into the dynamics which undermine such initiatives even if they can be implemented.

Clues to the poorly articulated challenges of conceptual impotence are to be found in:

- **politics**: here the matter tends to be framed in terms of the "lack of political will to change", whatever that may be held to mean (cf International Organizations and the Generation of the Will to Change: the information systems required, 1970)

- **intellectual property**: as exemplified by major pharmaceutical breakthroughs, access to new insights is automatically restricted by pricing such as to restrict their distribution to maximize benefits to the few (cf Future Coping Strategies: beyond the constraints of proprietary metaphors, 1992). Potentially more problematic is the extent to which bad science is engendered by "ghostwriters" to that end, as noted by Ben Goldacre (Hit and myth: curse of the ghostwriters, The Guardian, 8 August 2009). Such tendencies tend to be partially reflected in conceptware and groupware. There is every possibility that the world will be held to ransom, and dangerous delay, if some vital technical breakthrough is patented to achieve such blackmail.

- **high-resource, high-profit bias**: the solutions that attract interest and funding are typically those primarily characterized by a
requirement for high investment with which high returns can be generated by some means (including designing in cost overruns, etc.). A striking example of this is the promotion of geo-engineering as the fallback response for climate change (Geo-engineering Oversight Agency for Thermal Stabilization, 2008). This is typical in offering a means for existing corporate structures to deploy existing resources on issues framed as purely technical requiring little “new thinking”. By contrast any complex psychosocial challenge is simply avoided as failing to offer such returns.

- **inhibited dissemination of possibilities**: new ideas regarding new initiatives, irrespective of their potential value, are effectively killed at source rather than being carefully garnered to stimulate their further development and integration with complementary possibilities. This is exemplified by the fact that despite the rapid development of open source technology (Wikipedia, etc), there is relatively little demand for a collective facility within which to juxtapose disparate new possibilities -- a Wiki-solutions or Wiki-strategies. Any initiative towards such a facility is immediately subject to some of the dysfunctional constraints noted above (cf Global Solutions Wiki, 2009).

- **avoidance of complexity**: a prime requirement is that any insight, notably as embodied in a theoretical model, should be readily explicable and comprehensible to those who are called upon to decide upon its use -- irrespective of the dangers of oversimplification of requisite complexity. The main exceptions are military/security applications and the financial markets. In the first case alleged threats can be exaggerated to make a convincing case, accompanied by impressive demonstrations of destructive power. In the second case the prospects of profits can be made evident. The striking failure of the use of models in the latter case has been demonstrated in 2008 and can be readily used to excuse future failure to make use of complex models in other areas.

- **dearth of "new thinking" in institutions**: despite calls for "new thinking" most institutions would be highly challenged to cite new ideas they were considering -- significantly different from those they had previously cultivated. The lag in the recognition and uptake of new thinking is strikingly exemplified by the response of international governance institutions to internet, web and videoconferencing technology -- as they became available from the 1970s. Would such bodies now be able to produce a credible checklist of current "new thinking"? Would UNESCO with its knowledge society mandate? Would governments? Would universities? What is the capacity of the European Commission to detect and encourage initiatives, like Google or Linux in their early stages -- or the web itself? Or of the "international community" -- given the frequency of appeals to it for solutions? Even in the world of financial investments, as noted by Steve Johnson (Top executives 'hinder improvements', Financial Times, 21 June 2009): A lack of vision by senior executives is hampering the ability of fund management houses to adapt to change, according to their own employees.

Within such a context, it is appropriate to explore the possibility of the Emergence of a Global Misleadership Council: misleading as vital to governance of the future? (2007). The response to the financial crisis of 2008 has demonstrated with exceptional clarity the incompetence of leadership in anticipating such a catastrophe and in deriving learnings from it capable of informing "new thinking" relevant to the future. That the implemented solutions should be based on increasing the debt to future generations -- notably by the dubious practice of "printing money" -- is a measure of that incompetence, or of the depths of an underlying cynicism (emphasized by use of the term "quantitative easing").

As separately discussed (Dysfunctional disengagement from abundance, 2008), methodologically there is a fundamental challenge to how the problems of the 21st century are to be framed to elicit appropriate engagement. This has been articulated in various ways by various authors, perhaps most succinctly summarized by Jennifer Gidley (The Evolution of Consciousness as a Planetary Imperative: an integration of integral views. Integral Review, 5, 2007) to the effect that:

> However, the growing awareness of a potential planetary crisis has highlighted the significance of finding new ways of thinking, if humankind is to move through our current complex challenges. This critical imperative appears to be mobilizing researchers from a wide range of disciplines to broaden the notion of evolution of consciousness beyond its biological bounds.

Gidley points to a range of authors that highlight the need for "new thinking" and the inadequacy of old methodologies. Another relevant critique is that provided by Steven M. Rosen (Topologies of the Flesh: a multidimensional exploration of the lifeworld, 2006). Especially in an earlier work (Dimensions of Apeiron: a topological phenomenology of space, time, and individuation, Value Inquiry Book Series, 2004) he highlights the manner in which the richness of psychosocial engagement with the world has been completely undermined by formal discourse -- an "ellipse of the lifeworld" in his terms. Ironically, in a period of sensitivity to the challenges of "resources" and "energy", this view is echoed by other authors with respect to a lost sense of "abundance". Others concerned with this topic include:

- **Paul Feyerabend** (Conquest of Abundance: a tale of abstraction versus the richness of being, 1999)
- Sallie McFague (Life Abundant: rethinking theology and economy for a planet in peril, 2000)
- **David Abram** (The Spell of the Sensuous: perception and language in a more-than-human world, 1997) who observes that the concealment of the sensuous realm in pre-Renaissance experience was less lucidly focused than the mode of awareness that succeeded it. The decisive separation of subject and object served the interest of creating sharper understanding, a greater capacity for reflection and intellectual achievement; in that way it helped to fulfill humankind’s potential

### Avoidance of simulation

There is very little question of using simulations to test hypotheses -- especially strategic possibilities -- despite their proliferation in the videogame industry. The misuse of intellectual tools to deal with complexity has been appropriately discredited (Pablo Triana, *Lecturing Birds on Flying: can mathematical theories destroy the financial markets*, Wiley, 2009). However it is not a question of "throwing the
baby out with the bathwater”. The academic deprecation of the simulations encouraged by those of The Limits to Growth (1972) merits careful attention (Graham Turner, A Comparison of ‘The Limits to Growth’ with Thirty Years of Reality, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, 2008).

It is appropriate to note the development of the Joint Simulation System initiated in 1995 (Kari Pugh and Collie Johnson, Building a Simulation World to Match the Real World, The Joint Simulation System, January-February 1999, p.2; James W. Hollenbach and William L. Alexander, Executing the DOD Modelling and Simulation Strategy: making simulation systems of systems a reality, 1997). This has seemingly now morphed, via the US Total Information Awareness program, into the Sentient World Simulation (SWS) and will be a “synthetic mirror of the real world with automated continuous calibration with respect to current real-world information” with a node representing "every man, woman and child". As with the European FuturIcT project (The FuturIcT Knowledge Accelerator: unleashing the power of information for a sustainable future), these would however seem to avoid providing a node for every perceived problem, insight, advocated strategy, or value.

Presumably it is from the misuse of models, and the mindset ensuring that their use is avoided, that most is to be learnt for the future following the crash of 2008 and the questionable policy responses to it. There is no lack of studies suggesting the need for such learning:

Recent and more general studies of relevance to the neglect of such questions, now highlighted by the financial crisis, include the following:

- Jared M. Diamond. Collapse: how societies choose to fail or succeed. Penguin, 2005
- Joshua Cooper Ramo. The Age of the Unthinkable: why the New World Disorder constantly surprises us and what we can do about it. Little, Brown and Company, 2009

John Llewellyn (It's possible to subtract mathematics from economics, The Observer, 16 August 2009) offers valuable insights into the misuse of valuable competence in sophisticated mathematics. He notes:

No wonder that some of the cleverest scientists are prone to saying that the economic system is too difficult for them to understand….No wonder also that economic theorists seek to obtain, and economic teachers seek to convey, basic insights from theories that make sweeping, simplifying assumptions in order to illuminate how parts of the system may function….But while mathematics is the language of much science, the use of mathematics does not make economics a science; and nor is mathematics always the best tool for dealing with the additional complexities that constitute the real world.

The theme is the focus of the studies of Triana (2009) and Taleb (2007). More recently, in the light of the questionable remedial strategies to the crash of 2008, as a risk engineer Nassim Nicholas Taleb (Cameron dare not copy Obama's disastrous economic policies, The Observer, 16 August 2009) remarks:

Be careful, too, of the so-called science of economics. Economists have been no better in their predictions than cab drivers. We have an "expert" problem, in which the expert provides you with misplaced confidence, but no information. Because we think, correctly, that the dermatologist, the baker, the chemist are true experts (they know more about their respective subjects than the rest of us), we swallow the canard that the economists at the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Bank of England and the US Federal Reserve are also experts, without checking their record. This reliance on faux experts is, for the most part, what got us here. Now it is continuing with the build-up of government deficit and an increased reliance on flimsy forecasts….This problem with experts was particularly acute when it came to the "risk models" on which bankers built those positions that turned sour. So it is that you are coming under pressure to provide more regulation. Alas, the need for more regulation is a myth.

The prime illustration is of course the “successful” misuse of the innovative formula of David X. Li with regard to the Gaussian copula function, alleged to be at the root of the overconfidence of the global financial community in taking the high orders of investment risk which led to the global financial crisis of 2008, and its consequences. It is admirably described by Felix Salmon (Recipe for Disaster: the formula that killed Wall Street, Wired, 17.03, March 2009) -- or on the title page of the issue as The Secret Formula that Destroyed Wall Street. As Li had indicated in 2005 "Very few people understand the essence of the model" (Mark Whitehouse, Slices of Risk, The Wall Street Journal, 12 September 2005). A second description is offered by Kevin Drum (The Gaussian Copula, Mother Jones, 24 February 2009).

The question is how to make what use of what mathematics -- as the science of complexity -- to explore the strategic challenge and to render coherent possibilities meaningful, notably the possibilities of topology (cf Simulating a Global Brain: using networks of international organizations, world problems, strategies, and values, 2001; Assessment: Global modelling perspective, 1995). Where are the simulations to test the many alternatives advocated -- with the acid test being those relating to conflicting territorial claims? Where are the comprehensible simulations of the opposing proposals of political parties -- as with current debate concerning national health systems? Where are the simulations -- of a necessarily higher order of complexity -- that might reconcile apparently incommensurable proposals? How might "solutions" of a higher order be rendered comprehensible and resistant to over-simplistic caricature?
Strategic groupthink?

Clearly any intellectual "incompetence" is of a rather special kind for a civilization than can send orbital vessels to Mars. The nature of this incompetence is of course now analyzed with respect to the financial crisis of 2008, as noted above. More interesting is whether the incompetence is more general than a particular form of crisis can highlight. In fact analysis of a particular crisis may effectively obscure essential learning relating to other potential crises, as discussed separately (Systemic Crises as Keys to Systemic Remedies: a metaphorical Rosetta Stone for future strategy?, 2008). The incompetence may lie in the quality of focus -- as with that on "climate change" obscuring detection of the "elephant" (Climate Change and the Elephant in the Living Room, 2008; Climate of Change Misrepresented as Climate Change, 2008).

The emerging acknowledgement that the strategy with regard to enabling freedom in Afghanistan is "stuck" suggests the merit of recalling the policy scud age of Geoffrey Vickers (Freedom in a Rocking Boat; changing values in an unstable society, 1970): A trap is a function of the nature of the trapped. This points to the possibility that there is a groupthink problem more fundamental than is comfortable to assume. This would then recognize the following as being potentially part of the same pattern:

- assumptions relating to the financial system, as mentioned previously
- assumptions relating to climate change, as mentioned above
- assumptions relating to development aid, as recently highlighted
- assumptions relating to weapons of mass destruction that were offered as the primary justification for intervention in Iraq
- assumptions relating to the superiority of military strategy with respect to Afghanistan

The question is to what other arenas is this generic pattern applied uncritically. Perhaps:

- assumptions regarding geo-engineering as a viable response to climate change
- assumptions regarding GM crops as a viable response to the food crisis
- assumptions regarding plateau-ing of population growth with increasing development

In the light of understandings from the financial crisis, the situation in Afghanistan merits careful reflection. How is it, following the historical experience of the British and the USSR, that US-led strategy should succumb to the same pattern -- despite an historically unprecedented, unconstrained application of military resources (incorporating the highest technologies) against an archetypal "backward" culture, literally living in caves in one of the most desolate areas of the world? More astounding is that each new general in charge (necessarily at the top of the profession) made excessively optimistic declarations regarding early success.

It would appear that global civilization is handicapped by a form of groupthink of unsuspected dimensions. The challenge is to apply more assiduously, and more generally, the insights of some of the authors cited above -- notably with regard to "Black Swans" (Nassim Nicholas Taleb, 2007). As he indicates:

What is a Black Swan? It is a low-probability, high-impact event that, because of its rarity and the instability of the environment, cannot be scientifically evaluated in terms of risk and return. Although Black Swans are rarely predicted, they are retrospectively seen as having been anticipated, which makes us overestimate our abilities to see them coming. Black Swans can emerge as a result of our intellectual arrogance and our ignorance of our limitations. Some elements of the future are simply beyond our grasp. Much of history has been dominated by Black Swans, both positive and negative.

Whilst his focus is on the fact that these deviations are the main reason economic theories and forecasts do not work, the question is to what degree over-simplistic models or mindsets are applied to complex reality in determining appropriate strategy -- and how this is to be recognized in The Unconscious Civilization (1995) as documented by John Ralston Saul. This is the challenge noted by Karen A. Cerulo (Never Saw It Coming: cultural challenges to envisioning the worst, 2006).

The trap of intellectual incompetence, as demonstrated in (mis)use of the Gaussian copula in the case of the financial markets, is that such thinking tends to be accurate and appropriate a (statistically) significant portion of the time (say 90% even) -- and an unpredictably disastrous failure on the remaining occasions (namely 10%, say). This is more comprehensively demonstrated in the case of meteorological forecasts -- as charmingly described with respect to UK summer weather in 2009 (Rain puts dampers on 'barbecue summer', The Guardian, 29 July 2009). Labelling such criticism as "grossly unfair", Michael Fish (Blame the headlines, not the Met Office, The Guardian, 29 July 2009) indicated that the actual forecast was for a 65% chance of a summer of warmer weather.

The more general issue is that strategy is not a matter of "weather" but of "whether". What current strategies are currently based on models predicting 65% probability -- with their protagonists likely to claim any failure of their prediction as "grossly unfair"? Those relating to overpopulation, for example, raise fundamental questions.

Enabling metaphors

Given the context and its constraining dynamics, it is appropriate to infer that viable responses are unlikely to emerge from the conventional pattern of rational articulations which has characterized proposals of the past -- and those currently presented by institutional authorities as the most credible. Whether or not this is the case, there is an argument for exploring alternative approaches empowered and enabled by other modes of knowing.

A symposium of the wise, to celebrate the sesquicentennial of Boston University (Lance Morrow, Metaphors of The World, Unite!, Time, 16 Oct. 1989, p. 96) selected a tessellation as the metaphor that best captured the spirit of the times -- perhaps unfortunately in that it is typically understood as two-dimensional when the challenge may well be greater (Ron Atkin, Multidimensional Man: can man live in 3-dimensions? 1981), most obviously in the resolution of complex territorial claims (And When the Bombing Stops? Territorial conflict as a
In that light, is the question of determining a viable strategic window a matter of:

- identifying generative metaphors capable of enabling initiatives in general, in the light of constraints and possibilities...
- but not single metaphors, rather a process of creatively eliciting useful metaphors...
- but not a series of singular metaphors, rather an evolving network of complementary metaphors?

Is the challenge to work with sets of complementary metaphors understood as functioning together somewhat as the resonance hybrid so fundamental to the coherence of organic molecules in chemistry?

The argument here is that metaphors:

- facilitate communication and comprehension across disciplines and "ways of knowing" -- and between generations of the differently informed
- are a suitable product for those of wide experience with access to insights from a variety of disciplines (but relatively disinclined to engage in "heavy" conventional projects
- constitute a resource light initiative with the potential for high multiplier effects
- allow for very effective engagement of both sciences and arts
- now benefit from considerable recognition regarding their:
  - role in cognition
  - relevance to policy formulation
  - comprehension across cultures
- have the potential of being able to respond to the complexity of the strategic challenge of the dimensions outlined above
- enable more complex challenges to be presented succinctly
- have the potential of facilitating dialogue where dialogue is currently not viable

Whilst this focus does not preclude other approaches, it is characterized by being organizationally "light" in a context where "heavier" approaches readily encounter obstacles that are only too well-known.

**Reframing opportunities for the individual**

The emerging global situation is such that it is increasingly unclear to what extent any collective initiative will respond to individual aspirations and needs. This is most immediately evident in the desperate pursuit of jobs following the incompetent leadership leading to the financial crash of 2008 -- as discussed separately (In Quest of a Job vs Engendering Employment: escaping economic disempowerment through enabling metaphors and software, 2009).

The challenge for the individual would appear to be how to reframe the "received ideas" (through which it is expected that the world should be understood and organized) into a form which is personally sustainable rather than "sustainable" as conventionally promoted. In contrast with collective radical initiatives characteristic of politics, this implies a radical cognitive reframing by the individual -- irrespective of how it may, or may not, relate to collective understandings. This has been variously argued under the following titles:

- **Engaging with Globality through Knowing Thyself: embodiing engagement with Otherness** (2009)
- **Declaration of Universal Independence: delinking from detachment through radical questioning** (2009)
- **Stepping into, or through, the Mirror: embodying alternative scenario patterns** (2008)
- **Walking Elven Pathways: enactivating the pattern that connects** (2006)
- **My Reflecting Mirror World: making my World Summit on Sustainable Development worthwhile** (2002)
- **Opportunity: Metaphoric revolution for the individual** (1995)
- **In Quest of Radical Coherence: a group design initiative** (1994)
- **Being the Universe -- a Metaphoric Frontier: co-existent immanence of evolutionary phases** (1999)

Whereas the strategic challenge is conventionally framed as the "battle for hearts and minds" of others -- to ensure their acceptance of one's own agenda -- the challenge may be more fruitfully framed as the battle for one's own psychoactive engagement with one's environment. This challenge merits reflection in the light of the conclusion of Donald Michael (On the requirement for embracing error. In: On Learning to Plan and Planning to Learn. Jossey-Bass, 1973, p. 131):

> Changing towards long-range social planning requires that, instead of avoiding, exposure to and acknowledgement of error, it is necessary to expect it, to seek out its manifestation, and to use information derived from the failure as the basis for learning through future societal experiment. More bluntly, future-responsibility societal learning makes it necessary for individuals and organization to embrace error. It is the only way to ensure a shared self-consciousness about limited theory as to the nature of social dynamics, about limited data for testing theory, and hence about our limited ability to control our situation well enough to expect to be successful more often than not.

**Previous commentaries on aspects of the challenge**

With respect to new modes of organization:

- **Consciously Self-reflective Global Initiatives: Renaissance zones, complex adaptive systems, and third order organizations** (2007)
- **Conversion of Strategic Bullets into Global Accomplishment: clues to a crowning initiative based on effective partnerships** (2009)
Eliciting coherent comprehension of the challenge through aesthetics

It is appropriate to acknowledge the capacity of Kenneth Boulding (Ecodynamics: A New Theory of Societal Evolution, 1978) who repeatedly sought to encapsulate the complex insights of an international gathering into poetic form -- typically included in their proceedings. Given the number of leaders of governments who have claimed skills as poets, or claimed to appreciate it -- including Barack Obama -- there is a case for exploring the cognitive entanglement between Poetry-making and Policy-making (1993). In addition to the possibilities noted above (extended to music and song), such might include Ensuring Strategic Resilience through Haiku Patterns: reframing the scope of the "martial arts" in response to strategic threats (2006) and Poetic Engagement with Afghanistan, Caucasus and Iran: an unexplored strategic opportunity? (2009).

It is appropriate to note the extent to which music, song and rap engage the world where it would be difficult to claim that current approaches to governance attract the attention of more than a small minority. The latter have very low credibility indeed compared to the world of music. It is by its aesthetic patterns and rhythms that the majority are variously and participatively engaged. The presentations and claims of governance are boring and dangerously irrelevant -- as illustrated by the crash of 2008 and its consequences and injustices.

The challenge might be framed as that of how to "marry" Beauty and the Beast (Poetry-making and Policy-making: Arranging a Marriage between Beauty and the Beast, 1993). In this respect, it is appropriate to note that the German Research Institute for Applied Knowledge Processing (FAW), under the direction of Franz Josef Radermacher, reinforced an articulation of the challenge of responding to complex social problems by the use of a set of 12 songs in The Globalization Saga: Balance or Destruction (2004) -- as the CD accompaniment to a book (Balance or Destruction: eco-social market economy as the key to global sustainable development. Vienna,
The issue however is not what aesthetic articulation is appropriate but rather whether aesthetic framings of global initiatives can be widely and participatively elicited and developed -- as suggested by the Wikipedia model and separately discussed (Participative Development Process for Singable Declarations: applying the Wikipedia-Wikimedia-WikiMusic concept to constitutions, 2006).

Furthermore it is not simply a question of an appropriately emotive articulation but rather one which embodies through its structure the feedback loops fundamental to understanding the systemic characteristics of the challenge -- as admirably done in the classical Biochemists' Songbook. The question is why such has not been explored in the case of Agenda 21 (1992) or to give informed engagement in the climate change agenda.

There is a case for considering what might be requisite aesthetic components -- what might be memorable, fruitful design. Perhaps appropriately interlinked:

- verses on the problematique
- verses on the resolutique (strategic perspective)
- verses on the imaginatique (psychoactive attractors)
- verses on the ludique (game-playing)

A prime concern could be to move beyond reliance on singular strategic use of the "vision" metaphor (Strategic Challenge of Polysensorial Knowledge: bringing the "elephant" into "focus", 2008; Polysensorial pattern-breaking, 2008; Topology of Valuing: psychodynamics of collective engagement with polyhedral value configurations, 2008).

Two examples of an articulation of the challenge are presented below -- building in this case on the design of classical poems but without attempting to interweave such threads. Whilst laudable, they might then be appropriately criticized from a design perspective as "not fit for purpose" -- in terms of enabling future strategy.

| The Charge of the Light Brigade (1854) by Alfred, Lord Tennyson | La Belle Dame sans Merci (1884) by John Keats |
| Adaptation and commentary (2008) in response to the War on Terra (prior to the financial crash of 2008) | Adaptation and commentary (2009) in response to the challenges of Gaia, as La Dame (offering a perspective on the predicted collapse) |

with apologies to the authors of the original poems

The Charge of the Light Brigade

Half a league, half a league,  
Half a league onward,  
All in the valley of Death  
Rode Fortune's 500.  
"Forward, the Light Brigade!"  
"Charge those for change!" we said:  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the five hundred.  
"Forward, the Light Brigade!"  
Was there anyone dismay'd?  
Not tho' many did know  
Someone had blunder'd:  
Their's not to make reply,  
Their's not to reason why,  
Their's but to do and die:  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the five hundred.  
Plotting to right of them,  
Plotting to left of them,  
Plotting in front of them  
Imagine'd and monger'd;  
Storm'd at with claim and blame,  
Boldly they rode and well,  
Into the jaws of Death,  
Into the mouth of Hell  
Rode the five hundred.  
Flash'd all their savoir faire,  
Flash'd as they spun the air,  
Denying alternates there,  
Charging emergence, while  
All the world wonder'd:  
Plunged in industrial smoke  
Right thro' constraint they broke;  
Terraist suspects  
Red'd from their savage stroke  
Shatter'd and sunder'd.  
Then they rode back, but not  
Not the five hundred.  
Alternates to right of them,  
Alternates to left of them,  
Alternates behind them  
Imagine'd and monger'd;  

La Belle Dame sans Merci

O What can ail thee, citizen,  
Alone and palely loitering?  
The sedge has wither'd from the lake,  
And no birds sing.  
O what can ail thee, citizen!  
So haggard and so woe-begone?  
The squirrel's granary is full,  
And the harvest's done.  
I see a lily on thy brow  
With anguish moist and fever dew,  
And on thy cheeks a fading rose  
Fast withereth too.  
I met fair Gaia in the meads,  
Full beautiful -- a faery's child,  
Her hair was long, her foot was light,  
And her eyes were wild.  
Plotting to right of them,  
Plotting to left of them,  
Plotting in front of them  
Imagine'd and monger'd;  
She found me roots of relish sweet,  
And honey wild, and manna dew,  
And sure in language strange she said --  
'I love thee true.'  
She took me to her elfin grot,  
And there she wept, and sigh'd fill sore,  
And there I shut her wild wild eyes  
With kisses four.  
And there she lulled me asleep,  
And there I dream'd -- Ah! woe betide!  
The latest dream I ever dream'd  
On the cold hill's side.
Storm'd at with claim and blame,
While faune and flora fell,
They that had fought so well
Came thro' the jaws of Death
Back from the mouth of Hell,
All that was left of them,
Left of five hundred.

When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
All the world wondered.
Honour the charge they made,
Honour the Light Brigade,
Noble five hundred.

I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
They cried -- 'La Belle Dame sans Merci
Hath thee in thrall!'

I saw their starved lips in the gloam,
With horrid warning gaped wide,
And I awoke and found me here,
On the cold hill's side.
And this is why I sojourn here,
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.