Enveloping Development through Cognitive Enactivism

engaging with climate change by changing apprehension of climate

Introduction

The financial crisis of 2008 and its aftermath has intensified the debate regarding the assumptions underlying development and growth at a time when much is made of the potential of climate change on a resource challenged planet. There is little collective conviction regarding the conventional responses to these situations as variously advocated -- and concern that, however well they appear to respond to immediate challenges, such solutions may not prove viable in the longer term.

There is therefore a case for exploring more unconventional possibilities. The question is how such explorations are to be enabled and acquire credibility -- and for whom.

Veloping?

One speculative response was framed as an exploration of "veloping" (Veloping: the Art of Sustaining Significance, 1997). This was justified in the following terms:

After many years of exposure to claims and injunctions regarding "development", a certain weariness sets in. So many examples of "development" have become soulless disasters -- as tourism to the most distant parts of the planet rapidly makes evident. It could be argued that 'development' has been a prime cause of environmental degradation. Where it has reduced earlier constraints, it has encouraged further increases in population. It is claimed that development is the prime strategy to reduce birthrates. But little attention is paid to the fact that those amongst whom it is reduced then draw many times more heavily on non-renewable natural resources -- especially over succeeding generations. The United Nations has compromised itself through failing to distinguish what the property "developer" does from what some would claim to be genuine development. Why are there only "developers" and no "developees"? Does any remaining credibility of development derive from the cultivated ambiguity between what "developers" want (and intend to get) and what "developees" naively assume they are going to achieve as a result?

It raised the possibility of "veloping" with the following argument:

If the process of "development" is such a dubious strategy, maybe it should be asked whether the prefix "de" could be most fruitfully associated with that of the "de" in "degrading" or in "destruction". What is the elusive present condition which is the subject of "degradation", "destruction" or "development"? Is it possible that the sustainable process we should be exploring is better captured by "veloping" rather than "developing"? Veloping would then be the art of recognizing and sustaining the significance of what we already have. 'Developing', in contrast, is the process whereby some people claim that things would be better if everybody subscribed to a particular strategy which is guaranteed to take them to better places -- it is those who make such claims who do best out of the process.

Engaging with the environment

There is widespread sensitivity to engagement with the environment, variously understood. This is necessarily expressed in a variety of ways, not necessarily mutually accommodating:

- gardening
- commitments to the farming tradition
- enthusiasm for the wilderness
- appreciation of nature
- aesthetic representation of nature
- deep ecology and ecosophy
- extreme sports
As one of the more ultimate experiences of otherness, the quality of this engagement in any given case is necessarily elusive ("Human Intercourse" "Intercourse with Nature" and "Intercourse with the Other", 2007). Such engagement is nevertheless a basic inspiration for many to the extent of experiencing any "development" of it as violently invasive -- a form of rape.

A form of surrogate engagement with the environment may also be understood to occur through representations of it. This may take place through aesthetic representations, photography, documentaries or virtual recreations. Of particular relevance to the argument here is indirect engagement through increasingly immersive simulations and interactive gaming (Playfully Changing the Prevailing Climate of Opinion: climate change as focal metaphor of effective global governance, 2005). This will become more widespread through development of 3D movie experiences (****) and experimental wrap-around environments (allosphere).

**Reframing the cognitive interface with the environment**

Whilst the subject engagement with the environment is not questioned by those who experience it, this has in no way affected conventional framing of the environment with respect to its "development" or its "conservation". This framing is reinforced by the objectivity of the natural sciences -- irrespective of the sense of "wonder" individual scientists may claim personally to experience. This objective framing is fundamental to corporate and institutional approaches to developmental and environmental strategies. As such it is naturally reflected in legislation and the definition of property and its ownership.

It is in terms of this framing that current challenges are emerging and are understood -- whether it be issues of resources, environmental degradation, pollution, or climate change.

There is no lack of arguments for another mode of apprehending the environment -- emerging from quite different disciplines. Examples include:

- abram

In addition to such arguments, more recent research is questioning the very nature of individual human identity in ways that imply the possibility and need to reconsider the adequacy of the foundation for the conventional objectivity on which "development" and "conservation" are based. (bunting **** illusion. Some of these arguments are consistent with those on which various indigenous communities have long based their individual and collective identity (Posey ****).

Such research reinforces the argument for investigating the psychological underpinnings of sustainable development, as previously explored (Psychology of Sustainability: embodying cyclic environmental processes, 2002). This also raises issues about previously unquestioned assumptions regarding the nature of "appropriateness" in relation to sustainability (Comprehension of Appropriateness, 1986).

**Dysfunctional psychosocial dynamics**

Whilst there are indeed arguments worthy of a great deal of attention in relation to reframing the current approaches to "development" and "environment", it is also clear that the promotion of these arguments -- or opposition to them -- is embedded in a fairly primitive psycho-social dynamic. This is often violently obvious at the local level in the struggles between "developers" and "greenies". It is obvious at the global level in the impoverished discourse between agencies representing "development" and "environment" -- notably within the United Nations system. It is perhaps most obvious in the quality of discourse between the annual gatherings of the World Economic Forum (as promoters of the globalization which resulted in the financial diaster of 2008) and the World Social Forum.

Little has been envisaged to reframe such combative discourse, as argued elsewhere (cf All Blacks of Davos vs All Greens of Porto Alegre reframing global strategic discord through polyphony? 2007). It offers a classic example of "us-and-them" mindsets (Us and Them: Relating to Challenging Others, 2009). "Us" is right and "Them" is wrong. The inadequacies of such discourse are of course brought into sharp focus with respect to the issue of climate change.

It would appear to be extremely unlikely that the challenges that these mindsets bring to each other will be even partially mitigated by the outcome of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (Copenhagen, 2009). Each is convinced of its own unqualified rightness and appropriateness. The only satisfactory outcome for each would be that the other would be converted to its understanding -- namely a "conversion" in the language of the faith-based discourse of much contemporary governance. To that end each undertakes what amount to missionary initiatives to persuade the others, and their followers, of the error of their ways. The track record of success in this respect is as problematic as that of inter-faith discourse between religions -- and the violence that it has failed to address with any adequacy (where it is not tacitly or deliberately encouraged).

**Whose world is it?**

An intriguing possibility for anyone to reframe this situation is through the question of whose world it is that one experiences. Answers might include:

- the United Nations, claiming to speak on behalf of "We the peoples...". But the UN has little effective claim in practice whatever the assumptions made in its resolutions
- the individual governments of the world, at least with respect to their sovereign territory. But such a claim has little relevance to the world one apprehends on a daily basis and certainly does not include the Sun and other phenomena which are indifferent to such boundaries
• a government claiming to be the world's superpower with the capacity to destroy it at will from any of hundreds of military bases around the world. But such a claim is in practice merely boastful and is of little meaning to daily experience of the world
• media corporations through their capacity to reframe, if only by implication, to whom the world belongs -- possibly the celebrities who might seem to own it through the attention they command. But this framing is only of significance to the extent that one accords attention to it.
• religions through their claim to be gatekeepers to the transcendental "owner" of the world. But again, especially in the light of their incapacity to agree amongst themselves regarding such claims, they are of significance only to the extent that one accords attention to them.
• Gaia, as a representation of the systems of nature defining the world and its capacity to sustain life. But as a representation, Gaia is effectively the responsibility of those who attach meaning to such a systemic view.
• property entitlement may be claimed and asserted through conventional processes, whether in the form of territory, mineral rights or intellectual property. But such claims are themselves variously contested as epitomized by the various claims on Jerusalem, plant resources, downloaded music, etc.

Many of these, if not all, imply the possibility that in an important sense the world one experiences is one's own -- or that one is free to lay claim to it on one's own terms. Whether other's are aware of that claim or take account of it in any way may not be significant. In an important sense, one may even design processes associated with their acknowledgement or rejection of such a claim into the dynamics of the world one claims as one's own.

The point might be made by the Australian Aboriginal activist, Burnum Burnum, who landed in the UK in 1988, on the 200th anniversary of Australia. He erected the Aboriginal flag at Dover, claiming the UK for the Aboriginal people -- as had James Cook claimed Australia on behalf of the Crown in 1770. As one commentator notes: Could this happen today? If some people tried to become the owners of some land by raising a flag and saying 'I own this' could they? Both claims are in different respects nonsensical, with whatever suffering they are associated.

But, like the Aborigine, one is free to make the claim for oneself. In effect one may rightly claim the world according to one's own worldview, as is the case of the Aboriginal relationship to the land they have inhabited for some 40,000 years.

In this sense the current mismanagement of global society by a nebulous "international community", and by those it claims to be its agents, may be framed as an extreme example of misappropriation of property. Like the Aborigine one is free to lay claim to that world in whatever way proves meaningful. In a significant sense one's ownership of the world has been appropriated and reframed by a range of bodies to whom one has given that right -- perhaps only unconsciously -- or who have simple taken it without consultation (as was the case with the Aborigines, despite specific orders to James Cook to the contrary).

But, if one chooses to take on that responsibility, this necessarily includes responsibility for both the assets and the liabilities. Specifically one then acknowledges responsibility for the problems of the world.

"My world" vs the "Conventional world"

It is of course the case that my claim on the world is readily framed as ridiculous within the tissue of conventions through which ownership of property is defined. The question is how ridiculous has become the tissue of conventions and the rule of law in a global society that is in such a mess, as previously discussed (A hype of Faith in Governance: mystery of the unasked question, 2009; Emergence of a Global Misleadership Council, 2007). Of course much is optimistically made of hopeful strategic outcomes. However their articulation has now itself become a symptom of mismanagement (Credibility Crunch engendered by Hope-mongering: "credit crunch" focus as symptom of a dangerous mindset, 2008; Globallooning -- Strategic Inflation of Expectations and Inconsequential Drift, 2009).

In addition to the Aborigines, many experience the claims on their own world by authorities -- governments, corporations, disciplines and belief systems -- to be ridiculous or at least questionable. This might be even an increasingly predominant view amongst the younger generation. Those in the later years of their lives might also see the presumption of such authorities to be questionable, irrelevant, or possibly simply a charming cultural aberration.

Authorities have an increasing problem of credibility -- whatever means they have at their disposal to extract lip service from the peoples of the world. They seemingly have very little to offer other than "more of the same" and "business as usual". Any "new thinking" tends to be narrowly focused on technical innovations (subject to patent) and essentially irrelevant to contextual social issues.

Reframing the problems of "my world"

The challenge to authorities is exemplified by the Earth Summit, namely the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992) and implementation of its Agenda 21 and the Framework Convention on Climate Change. The level of inadequacy was evident at the follow-up Rio+10 Earth Summit 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002). The United Nations Climate Change Conference (Copenhagen, 2009) will see the formalization of the climate change convention -- already recognized to be highly problematic with respect to a problem variously framed as the most important to be faced by humanity.

The Johannesburg event offered one possibility for reframing the challenges of "my world", as previously articulated (My Reflecting Mirror World: making my World Summit on Sustainable Development worthwhile, 2002). These were considered under the following headings

Challenges to governance of my world
Problems of my world
Rainmaking in Joburg: making my Rio+10 worthwhile
Mirrors of my world
Ownership and possession

Conventionally it is assumed that there is a very clear understanding of property, ownership and right of possession, appropriately articulated in legislation and international treaties [more]. This is of course repeatedly challenged in practice by cases such as:

- boundary and territorial disputes (see checklist), notably as claimed by autonomist and secessionist movements.
- encroachment of settlements
- ownership of sacred sites, notably in the case of Jerusalem
- mining and forestry rights
- fishing rights
- overflying rights
- infringement of patent rights
- copyright infringement, notably with respect to the images of people and locations
- radio frequency allocation
- marital and parental rights

These may well be associated with particular cultural understandings embodied by dominant powers in a "universal" system of laws. Again the case of indigenous peoples in general, and Australian Aborigines in particular, constitutes a continuing challenge to such assumptions. Their problematic nature has been extensively articulated by Darrell Posey (**). The case of marital and parental rights offers a wider challenge through the framework of various religions.

The worldview of many indigenous peoples highlights an attitude in which the environment is not owned and possessed as property but is best understood as a stewardship relationship -- which some conventional hereditary landowners claim to emulate to a degree. The nature of this relationship is not necessarily obvious from within a conventional mindset and it can be a mistake to assume that this is the case.

There is also a certain charm to the manner in which overflying and fishing rights are widely challenged by migrating species.

However a stewardship relationship is understood it implies a degree of responsibility whose range of dimensions may be ignored within conventional understandings of property ownership. This is most notably the case with respect to intellectual property, as discussed separately (From Patent Rights to Patent Responsibilities: obligations incumbent on owners and licensors of intellectual property, 2007).

Given the subtleties of the understanding of indigenous peoples, at least in some cases,

| Classic Zen tale illustrative of the challenge of engaging with the environment through oneself in order to remedy imbalance |
| A rainmaker is invited to come to a rural village, to bring rain -- for the village is experiencing drought. The rainmaker requests a cottage far from the village, and asks not to be disturbed. Three days later, rain and snow fall on the village. The rainmaker explains that he did not bring the rain. As he had felt immediately infected by the imbalance of the village people upon arrival, he took refuge to balance himself -- naturally balancing the outside world through that process -- and it rained. |

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

For further updates on this site, subscribe here.