Humour and Play-Fullness

Essential integrative processes in governance, religion and transdisciplinarity

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This exploration is dedicated to a friend, John E Fobes (1919-2005), former Deputy Director-General of UNESCO and co-founder, with Art Buchwald, of the Association for the Promotion of Humour in International Affairs (APHIA).

Introduction

The following exploration follows from a concern that modern civilization is boring itself to death trying to manage change -- and compensating for its inadequacies with respect to the challenge by indulgence in distractions and substance abuse. There is a need for radical reframing -- of a playful nature. Essentially the argument is that "no play equals no engagement" -- at least of any sustainable form. It was previously developed in relation to climate change (cf Playfully Changing the Prevailing Climate of Opinion: Climate change as focal metaphor of effective global governance, 2005).

Both humour and play are taken "seriously" here in the light of their recognized role in transcending the boundaries constraining innovative change processes in government, religion and transdisciplinarity. Given the marginalization of humour in the patterns of such formal contexts, a dynamic vital to their role in society is endangered -- especially with the increasing tendency towards faith-based governance. The emphasis is placed on the nature of the subtle relationships of higher dimensionality that become apparent through humour -- when otherwise they would tend not to be perceptible. As in any creative process, the emphasis is also placed on the ways of playing with patterning possibilities, rather than being excessively attached to particular patterns.

The potential of the dynamic attitude associated with humour is explored here as a means of sustaining the level of playful engagement in innovative change processes. This is contrasted with the tendency to quench enthusiasm through commitment to inflexible patterns that are increasingly unsustainable. The epistemological challenge of this paradox of detached engagement is seen as usefully modelled by the
Recognized role of humour in politics, leadership, religion and creativity

See Annex

The current recognition of humour is explored under the following headings in order to provide a context for the subsequent discussion of the potential significance of humour understood as an essential integrative process in governance, religion and transdisciplinarity:

- Varieties of humour
- Research on humour
- Marginalization of humour
- Recognized role of humour in conventional political processes
- Recognized need for humour in leadership and management
- Recognized need for humour in religion and spiritual development
- Recognized need for humour in religion and spiritual development (Christianity)
- Recognized role of humour-playfulness in the media
- Recognized role of humour-playfulness in creativity
- Recognized role of humour in philosophy and cultural studies

Humour symbolism -- the "Laughter of the Gods"

The "gods" in various pantheons may be understood as the comprehension by humans of a set of fundamental styles of creativity and destruction. To the extent that they are held to embody fundamental values recognized by humans, they might be described in terms of chaos theory as "strange attractors" (cf Human Values as Strange Attractors: Coevolution of classes of governance principles, 1993). The complex ways in which such "gods" are then experienced as interacting may indeed be described as "playful".

Various deities have traditionally been held to symbolize humour -- indicative of a fundamental creative role it may play in psychocultural insights and especially in the management of cognitive patterns:

- **Lud** (or Lod) was a Celtic god of humour, believed to be the origin of April Fool's Day, who allowed ordinary Celts to play tricks on their revered druids.
- **Pan**, god of humour, love and confusion, expressing the dual characteristic of this god of the woods (a jester who provokes laughter and terror simultaneously), whilst also encompassing the Greek term "Pan", meaning "All".
- **Uzume**, ancient Japan's shaman-Goddess, is credited as being the one to entice the sun Goddess, Amaterasu Omi Kami, out of the cave where she had hidden. She encourages the nurturing of wholeness with laughter through which perspective is gained on the humour in all of life's challenges.
- **In ancient Egypt:**
  - **Bes** is believed to have been the god of humour in ancient Egypt where five categories of humour were distinguished: political satire, scatological and vomiting humor, jokes concerning sex, slapstick, and animal-based parodies.
  - It is alleged that Egyptians believed that the world was created by the first Egyptian God through laughter (B Sanders. Sudden Glory: laughter as subversive history, 1995). A connection between music and the divine is quite clear in Egyptian beliefs. The god Thoth divided the world into spheres with his sevenfold "laughter", from which the seven basic sounds (vowels) and the seven strings of the lyre derive. [text]
  - **Geb**: Father of Osiris, Seth, Isis, and Nephthys. The laughter of Geb was said to cause earthquakes. As "the Great Cackler," he was represented as a goose, and as such was said to have laid the egg from which the sun was hatched. In his honour, the royal throne of Egypt was occasionally known as the "throne of Geb".

Trickster gods play an important role in world myth and religion (see selected bibliography). As documented by Joseph Campbell (The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 1988), they can be liar, cheat, joker and fool -- without pity on their victims. These roles can be understood as challenging existing patterns -- and are therefore understandably problematic where there is undue attachment to such patterns. As shapeshifters, tricksters often disguise themselves in a variety of human or animal forms -- again an indication of their ability to evoke new patterns through undermining those older ones on which there may be excessive dependence. They epitomize disorder and destruction for that reason. Examples of such trickster deities include:

- **Loki** in the Teutonic pantheon
- **Hermes/Mercury** (also the patron of thieves and merchants)
- **Coyote** in Native American mythology, who teaches mostly by a wry sense of humor.

Despite the challenge that they bring to the status quo, trickster gods are also understood to bring humour and joy. Their sense of humour, as for example in the case of the Sumerian god Enki, may break the wrath of other gods -- as with Enlil in the Sumerian pantheon. The trickster is an archetype that has been extensively studied by depth psychologists, following the work of Carl Jung (On the psychology of the Trickster figure, 1956). As both a mythical figure and an inner psychic experience, the trickster embodied the urge for unremitting exposure to privation and torture as well as an approximation to the figure of a saviour -- the negation of the hero archetype, somehow managing to achieve through stupidity what others fail to achieve by concentrated effort. The trickster brings the possibility of transforming the meaningless into the meaningful -- the propensity for enantiodromia (namely transformation into its opposite). Jung saw the trickster as related to the shadow -- a summation of all the inferior and unconscious traits of character.
The belief in the "divinity" of distant "gods" has been with divine complementing this dynamic response of the gods to presumptuous imbalance by what amounts to "presumptuous" imbalance introduced into birthplace. Discussing Friedrich Nietzsche, Pierre Klossowski Nietzsche, polytheism and parody notes his view of divine laughter as being evoked by what amounts to "presumptuous" imbalance introduced into divine order:

"When a god wanted to be the only God, all the other gods were gripped by mad laughter to the point of 'dying' of laughter. For what is the divine if not the fact that there be several gods and not God alone?" Laughter is here the supreme image, the supreme manifestation of the divine reabsorbing the articulated gods [les dieux prononcés], and articulating the gods through a new burst of laughter; for if the gods die from this laughter, it is also "from this laughter which bursts forth from the ground of all truth" that the gods are reborn.

Complementing this dynamic response of the gods to presumptuous imbalance is a recognition of a tendency for the gods to be "bored" with divine equilibrium:

- For Friedrich Nietzsche: "Against boredom, the gods themselves struggle in vain."
- For Soren Kierkegaard (Either/Or, 1843): "The gods were bored, and so they created man. Adam was bored because he was alone, and so Eve was created. Thus boredom entered the world, and increased in proportion to the increase of population. Adam was bored alone, then Adam and Eve were bored together; then Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel were bored en famille; then the population of the world increased, and the peoples were bored en masse."

The belief in the "divinity" of distant "gods" has been transformed in modern society:

- from a secular perspective, the functions of the "gods" in the eyes of many have been embodied in the mighty in their societies. Presidents of countries, of multinational corporations, or of religious movements, are recognized metaphorically as having many of the powers and attributes of gods. Such recognition may be evoked, or sought, by the leaders of smaller groups. Such gods tend to "play with the rules" that govern ordinary mortals -- at whose constraints they may well laugh.
- by extension, ritual activity in relation to gods has also been transformed into ritual activity in relation to major institutions (whose headquarters may even resemble temples architecturally). This is especially evident in relation to the major and minor intergovernmental institutions to whom god-like functions and responsibilities have now been attributed (eg FAO, food; WHO, health; UNESCO, knowledge; WMO, weather; IMO, sea; etc), possibly to the point of being embodied in logos. The game-playing characteristic of this community may well be described as playful interaction amongst the "gods" -- even accompanied by laughter at the tragi-comic condition of ordinary people.
- pantheons are now reflected in the belief system cultivated by the fashion industry as an exemplification of contemporary style, heavily protected as trademarks. A Hermes scarf may even be contrasted with the Hijab as an outward manifestation of modern belief [more]. Other deities, if not all, have been coopted as a focus for belief in corporate products: Poseidon (baseball cap),
Erebus (down jacket), Nyx (sunglasses), Agalaia (garments), Thalia (pants), Aphrodite (clothing), etc. Even Nike derives from the ancient Greek cult of Athena Nike. The interplay of the gods might be said to be literally "embodied" in competitive individual styling.

* some computer and internet strategy games now embody the interplay of gods from selected pantheons. Players have to acquire favour to support the mythical elements requiring that new strategies must be developed for resource gathering, especially considering that favour is gained differently in distinct pantheons [more [more]

* from some particular existential perspectives, individuals may themselves be urged to recognize themselves as "gods". This notably follows from scriptural injunctions, as with the biblical: "Know ye not that ye are gods...?" (Psalms 82:6; John 10:34). Many religions encourage their followers to recognize the divinity they embody. Their laughter at the condition in which they find themselves may indeed then be understood as a form of "laughter of the gods".

Humour as a playful reactive response to the tragic incongruity of the world

Humour is much used in reactive response to incongruities, notably in relation to collective initiatives -- especially by authorities -- in their response to challenges in society. Such incongruities may even be seen as ways in which the gods play with humanity in the world they have created -- with reference to the "laughter of the gods" at the inadequacies of human response. Such laughter may even be seen as a call to play.

There are three main sets of theories regarding humour [more]. These may be described as:

* Superiority theories: In this case the focus is on framing others as deviating from the norm in ways so as to enhance the cohesiveness of the group that shares that view. It can be used by dominant groups in deriding their inferiors, or by those dominated in mocking the behaviour of their superiors. This might be compared with views characteristic of colonialism and of adherents to many belief systems in response to non-believers.

* Relief theories: In this case humour is understood as a release of tension under awkward circumstances. This might be compared with the deployment of remedial or developmental strategies.

* Incongruity theories: As the currently most favoured variant, humour is here focused on any form of incongruity. This might be compared with the sensitivity associated with any sense of injustice or inequality.

In every domain, the world is faced with fundamental, unresolved incongruity, whether articulated as strategic dilemmas or as the laughable consequences of strategic initiatives. Humour also serves a vital function of bringing into collective awareness the dangerous incongruities that remain unacknowledged in formal discourse (cf Global Strategic Implications of the Unsaid: from myth-making towards a wisdom society, 2003). This is reactive humour.

Even though it has been established that humour is a cognitive tool for dealing with incongruity, there is great irony in the fact that society is as yet unable to develop that humour to reframe fruitfully those strategic dilemmas and contradictions. Humour tends to be used reactively in response to circumstances and not proactively and strategically in order to transform them.

Given the valued role of humour in the domains noted above, what is most curious is the transformation of the creative, playful "meta-process" into the static, stilted forms with which they are commonly associated:

* from the playful humour of parliamentary debate into alienating, unreadable texts -- free of any humour

* from the transcendental role of humour in relation to spiritual experience into alienating dogma -- free of any humour

* from the humour, often intimately associated with scientific creativity, into formal peer-reviewed presentations -- from which humour is necessarily excluded

It would seem that there is a fundamental commitment to making the regulatory framework of the world (in which people are expected to live) as boring and alienating as possible -- after those who designed it have had their fun. This might be understood as an emulation of the behaviour of the gods and the humour they supposedly derive from the ability of the ordinary person to live in the world they have created.

This transformation from a dynamic to a static emphasis may be usefully modelled by the operation of fusion reactors. Energy is created if the plasma can be kept out of contact with the materials of the container wall -- to avoid being "quenched". It might be argued that most of humanity experiences society as "quenched".

Seriousness and humourlessness

The argument here is, if humour is so significant to parliamentary debate, why does none of this humour translate, in any way, into the legislation produced by such bodies? Why is the product of such debates so humourless -- inherently boring to many?

This argument is supported from an unsuspected source, namely copyright law. As recorded by Patti Waldmeir (Parody in humourless jeopardy, Financial Times, 27 April 2005):

If the point of law is to tame the state of nature, the point of copyright law, surely, is to make it fun to live there. Copyright law is not just about money -- it is about creating the things that make life worth living. One of those things is parody, a known antidote to modern life. But now US copyright owners seem intent on creating a vast new humour-free zone in America, by pursuing parodists through the courts. Each of the last two presidential elections spawned a big anti-parody lawsuit, but the phenomenon is not just limited to political jokesters: the sense of humour failure on the part of copyright owners has hit literary parodists as well.
During the "Velvet Revolution" in Czechoslovakia in 1989 humour was used to attack the Communist party leadership. Commenting on the humourless British elections of 2005, Ukrainian novelist Andrey Kurkov (Is it time for a British revolution? Guardian, 26 April 2005) argues, in the light of the Ukrainian "Orange Revolution" in 2004-5, that:

The Germans never laughed at Hitler and neither did the Soviet people laugh at Stalin... More recently Ukraine laughed at outgoing president Leonid Kuchma. It was precisely humour that won the day in the Ukrainian presidential elections last year. Political satire, hard-hitting, witty leaflets and computer animations which parodied Ukrainian political life played a role in the eventual outcome that has yet to be properly evaluated.

Elsewhere (Issues too Important to be Left to Specialists: Selected web resources, 2004) many sectors are identified where the issues are effectively "too serious" to be left to those who claim to deal with them seriously. Is it possible that some of the issues are effectively too important to only be dealt with seriously and that calling upon humour is an important strategic initiative?

The case is often made that politicians and government officials take themselves too seriously. Curiously even the Wall Street Journal has described the US presidents Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter as being utterly humourless [more]. Is this confirmation of the statement by Thomas Hobbes: "They that are intent on great designs have not time to laugh"? Whether the translation of their design into practice is laughable, is another matter.

Dictators and tyrants are typically described as humourless. Conrad Hyers (Holy Laughter, 1969) says, "A common trait of dictators, revolutionaries, and ecclesiastical authoritarians alike is the refusal to laugh at themselves or permit others to laugh at them." In a poem, Volodimir Barabash (Humour can be Divine) goes further, making the point that: "Dictators build their strength upon / The people who are humourless".

As argued by Simon Barnes (The Times, 7 April 1999):

But so much of daily life is organised by the conspiracies of the jokeless: the dehumanisers, those who dread perspective, balance, thought. Lord deliver us from the humourless.... The humourless always win.

In an original form of "action humour", this challenge has been taken seriously by social-philosopher / guerilla-artist Noël Godin through his international pie-throwing network (the "International Patisserie Brigade"). This aims to "assassinate through ridicule all world celebrities who take themselves spectacularly seriously". He notes:

There are a thousand forms of subversion; all of them are interesting, but few, in my opinion, equal the convenience and immediacy of the cream pie.

In the light of opinions of the wise throughout history, is the pretense that humanity can respond effectively to its challenges through seriousness alone to be taken seriously? In this light, consider these points from Oscar Wilde:

- Anyone who takes himself too seriously always runs the risk of looking ridiculous; anyone who can consistently laugh at himself does not.
- Seriousness is the only refuge of the shallow.
- Life is too important to be taken seriously.

From such a perspective, it is worth noting the efforts of the Aachen Carnival Celebration Club which has awarded, since 1950, a Medal for Combating Deadly Seriousness, officially designated as "humour in office". In practice this means the relaxed, jovial absence of ponderous gravity. It is a quality that is capable of even bringing out the human traits in the most inveterate bureaucrat. Most of the more than 40 award bearers are politicians, diplomats and lawyers.

**Essential catalytic and dynamic qualities of humour-playfulness**

**Epistemological significance**: There is a marked tendency to consider humour in terms of its importance to the relief of tension, to sustaining (challenging) relationships, to maintaining a sense of perspective, to offering a contrast to pessimism, to demonstrating one's humanity, and the like -- or to its positive (or negative) effect on those involved. Such appreciation obscures the existential and epistemological significance of humour celebrated by the Caribbean surrealist philosopher Rene Menil (Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean, 1996) in an essay on Humour: Introduction to 1945 -- of which Ralph Dumain states:

He brilliantly stresses the epistemological significance of humor. He explains how humor expresses our highest standards in contrast with our paltry condition, how it affirms our highest ideals while releasing us from the weight of finitude upon our spirits, how it negates mundane actuality by the power of imagination. Sixty years ago, humor was an important part of the spiritual and cultural resistance against fascism. I am convinced it is the only true art of our time; only humor can adequately express the world aesthetically and reflectively in which we live today. [more]

Friedrich Nietzsche held the view that: "we should consider every day lost on which we have not danced at least once. And we should call every truth false which was not accompanied by at least one laugh." This is echoed by an attitude of neurolinguistic programming according to Robert Dilts (Modeling and Epistemology Too: the art of pragmatic epistemology -- NLP: Cult, Field or Footnote, 1997),
Humor is a pervasive feature of human life which crosses racial, cultural, sexual, and class divisions. Yet its nature is elusive. This elusiveness should have piqued the philosophical imagination; its perverseness should have demonstrated its philosophical importance. However, it has generated relatively little theoretical interest. We find that surprising. An analysis of humor could pay handsome dividends. Practically, it could inform aspects of the current debate over political correctness. Theoretically, it could illuminate discussion of significant issues in epistemology, the philosophy of mind, and ethics.

They note that other theorists have offered typologies of humour, typically based on motives for humour or its psychological benefits. They focus rather on identifying "central features of paradigmatic instances of humor -- features which, although perhaps absent from marginal cases, are vividly present in most cases, and certainly present in those which are of crucial interest to philosophers". They consider that building on incongruity theories to be most fruitful. These are all based on the idea that the meaning of a comic text is less important than the collision of meanings, determined by competing interpretative contexts -- termed "matrices" in the comic theory of Arthur Koestler.

LaFollette and Shanks base their argument on the recognition that:

Humor is possible only for agents whose belief systems manifest hierarchical cognitive richness….For humans even simple beliefs are best understood not as isolated entities but as part of a pattern or network of beliefs.

They distinguish between first-order beliefs and beliefs about them:

These higher-order beliefs largely constitute the hierarchical cognitive richness we think essential for an adequate account of humor. Philosophers have always been especially interested in higher order beliefs concerning the reliability of our first order beliefs. Here, however, we wish to focus on other roles of higher-order beliefs -- roles more central to an understanding of humor. Higher-order beliefs enable us to move beyond our immediate conditions to predict what will happen and what might happen. They permit us to predict not only what might happen in real life, but also in imaginary lives…. They empower us to identify patterns which might be relevant in these circumstances and to determine which of the alternative patterns is more likely. Put differently, these higher-order beliefs structure our first-order beliefs bringing some of them to the focus attention while relegating others to the periphery. This power of higher-order beliefs to shift patterns of beliefs in and out of focus is essential for healthy functioning.

They see beliefs like points in an "epistemic space" which have complex arrays of connections with other points in that space:

The various patterns of belief are interconnected collections of such points. These patterns provide us with a wide array of perspectives from which to view and interpret events of interest. Within that space there is no privileged "absolute" perspective, but a multiplicity of relative perspectives. Our second order beliefs structure, rank, and evaluate these patterns and perspectives in the various contexts in which we find ourselves. This is the fertile ground from which humor springs. Humor is inherently relational -- no event, person or thing is intrinsically humorous. It is context dependent.

**Flickering dynamic:** Humor is then dependent on the ability to view a subject matter from multiple perspectives -- provided there is appropriate "psychic distance" or perspective offered by the higher-order beliefs in order to determine "to which patterns of our first order beliefs we currently attend -- and which other patterns might be relevant in that context". LaFollette and Shanks stress:

However, it is not merely that we can see these different sets or even that we have the appropriate psychic distance. We must also be able to move the focus of our attention rapidly back and forth between some subset of these alternate patterns. This "flickering" in the focus of attention -- this active oscillating between these different but related belief sets -- is humor. Humor is not something passively witnessed. Like thinking, it is something in which the subject participates. Thus, to have a sense of humor on a given occasion is to be disposed to engage in the activity of flickering between different patterns of belief. Our second order beliefs determine which subjects (i.e., patterns of belief) are (or are not) candidates for humor (i.e., patterns between which we can flicker). Psychic distance provides a space within which to flicker.

Most importantly the authors stress the dynamic quality of humour associated with such "flickering":

The tendency to confuse flickering with shifting is understandable. It doubtless stems from talk of "a sense of humor" which sounds suspiciously like "a sense of sight". Certainly humor does involve our ability to see alternative perspectives. But it has a dynamical component which transcends the mere recognition of perspectival multiplicity. Someone with a sense of humor has a disposition to a certain type of cognitive behavior -- the flickering -- which constitutes the humorous response to appropriate stimuli.

The dynamic aspect is also stressed by Peter Collins (Humour and Related Experience: Towards an Integral Appreciation, 2005):
 Unlike most standard forms, which aim at a somewhat fixed static view of reality, humour has an inherently dynamic rationale that enables the rapid switching of structures and states. Therefore -- as well as providing a most welcome means of releasing emotional tension -- appropriate humour has the capacity to play a truly constructive part in the challenging of fixed assumptions and the generation of unexpected new insights.

Humour in this sense may be understood as a catalyst for the emergence of higher forms of order. It opens the possibility of higher-order questions (cf Engaging with Questions of Higher Order: cognitive vigilance required for higher degrees of twistedness, 2005)

**Humour-playfulness and higher dimensionality**

The above theory of LaFollette and Shanks goes beyond that articulated by Arthur Koestler (The Act of Creation, 1963) regarding the "bisociative" pattern underlying all varieties of humour -- namely perceiving a situation or event in two habitually incompatible associative contexts. References to Koestler's insight tend to emphasize the static, structural nature of the link. The relationship indeed causes an abrupt transfer of the train of thought from one framework to another governed by a different logic or "rule of the game". And, owing to their greater inertia and persistence, when certain emotions cannot follow such leaps of thought, discarded by reason, they are worked off along channels of least resistance in laughter. Elsewhere Koestler expressed this as follows:

> The abrupt transfer of a train of thought from one operative field to another leads to its separation from its original emotional charge. An idea or situation seen in a sudden new light casts off its affective shadow. This sudden dissociation of intellectual and emotional state, the rupture between knowing and feeling, is a fundamental characteristic of the comic (Insight and Outlook, 1949, p.65).

In an insightful study of the traditional concept of humour (hāṣya) in Sanskrit literature, as articulated by Abhinavagupta, Sunthar Vsvavalangam (Abhinavagupta's Conception of Humor (hāṣya): the aesthetics and semiotics of the Indian clown, 1983) reviews G I Gurdjieff's Theory of Laughter, noting:

> Koestler's bisociation is only cognitive: emotion is spilled when its corresponding field is suddenly replaced by an incompatible field. Gurdjieff's "bisociation" is also emotional: the collision of opposing fields is paralleled by the mutual neutralization of contrary emotions. Reduction of Koestler's bisociation to a specific mode of Gurdjieff's, which is more relevant for the Indian conception of hāṣya.

The author articulates an understanding of the network of bisociations and a higher-order perspective on them:

> Our critique of the incongruity-resolution theory of humor as applied to comic riddles... provides the principle underlying such transposition: the intricate network of bisociations, imbricating apparently incompatible domains and planes of reference so as to constitute the brahman-enigma, can only render the connections (bandhu) highly incongruous to the exoteric gaze thus provoking hāṣya, which however reveals itself to be a mere semblance to the esoteric gaze that restores the hidden coherence by resolving these incongruities on a plane other than the aesthetico-literary one. [more]

In clarifying the role of humour (hāṣya) in rule transgression, the author further stresses the dynamic of the relationship together with its transcendence of polarization:

> So intimately is hāṣya linked, by its very structure, to transgression that ultimately any kind of comic behavior... comes to symbolize the liminal situation where the esoteric valorization of taboo-violation intrudes into the purview of an exoteric gaze determined by the system of social interdictions that it has interiorized.... Unless this dialectic is recaptured in its dynamic movement, the curious conjunction of extreme purity and impurity, chastity and sexual transgression, brahmin and outcaste, total devotion to the hero and characteristic betrayals, and so on, privileged position... and scapegoat function, and so on, will remain forever insoluble and a stigma on the creative skill of the Sanskrit poets.... [more]

LaFollette and Shanks, through their emphasis on "flickering", highlight the nature and context of those dynamics -- and the essential sense of perspective. Such flickering might even be understood as a waking cognitive analogue to rapid eye movement (REM) characteristic of dreaming -- perhaps to be renamed in this case as "Rapid Epistemological Metamorphosis"! This might offer a way of framing the Australian aboriginal understanding of the Dreamtime.

Aspects of this understanding are evident in the study by Mark Weeks (Laughter, desire, and time. Humor, 15-4, 2002, pp. 383-400):

> Because the initial eruption into laughter is a sudden exit from our experience of temporality and consciousness, when we begin to reflect on the event or on the comical experience that induced it we feel that we have been "away". As we re-enter the temporality of thinking/discourse we find ourselves again at a remove, separated from the extra-temporal moment of laughter: "no sooner do we begin to think back, nachzudenken, than we discover that it is already 'over' [Samuel Weber. Laughing in the meanwhile, 1987]. This irrecoverable absence, I would suggest, is what gives laughter its seemingly transcendental aspect and leads to the quasi-mystical value ascribed to it by writers... [Georges Bataille. Inner Experience, 1988]. Residing outside discursive temporality, laughter can seem to be beyond signification.
The above description of epistemic space, and the dynamics between belief frameworks with which humour is associated, together provide a context to note some other possible higher dimensional features of this space that may be vital to deriving operational benefits from humour (as discussed subsequently):

- **Present moment**: Humour brings into focus the present moment in contexts in which linear thinking may prevail to the exclusion of any other perspective. Such contexts are typical of "project logic", with respect to both strategic initiatives and to research programmes -- as well as being significant in practice of religious ritual. Humour introduces a degree of curvature into such linear frameworks that centres on the significance of the present. This curvature provides a healthy integrative perspective on what is readily perceived as a grid-like organization of life experience -- possibly exhaustingly alienating.
- **Surprise**: Humour is strongly associated with an element of surprise, whether anticipated under conditions of uncertainty, or unanticipated.
- **Talking to "others"**: Humour offers a mutually acceptable means through which to communicate with others, whatever the distinctions of culture, education or social background. This may extend to communication between the actively hostile or mutually threatening.
- **Reframing**: Humour, notably through the use of metaphor and allegory, is able to reframe understanding of a situation so that its significance can be more effectively shared from a more integrative perspective previously obscured.
- **Challenge**: Humour can challenge unexamined assumptions, received ideas and groupthink. This may take the form of a radical "mise en question" of those holding those assumptions or ideas
- **Self-reflexiveness**: Humour can encourage fruitful self-reflection, especially any tendency to be taken too seriously or to take oneself too seriously.
- **Transboundary**: Humour can fruitfully challenge the validity or utility of boundaries, between people, groups, or ideas. It can open appropriate gateways between bounded zones, or clarify when they should be closed. It may also be used to create boundaries.
- **Reconfiguring patterns**: Humour may be valuable in the creative process of reconfiguring patterns in support of new modes of organization.
- **As a meta-game**: Humour may provide a mode of game-playing communication that is valuable as an alternative to the embedding of such game-playing in more formal relationships, or where communication is not always possible between formally distinguished zones.
- **Transcendental context**: Through the various forms of recontextualizing humour makes possible, this may be extended to include existential and paradoxical perspectives that cannot be effectively integrated into conventional discourse. In this respect it may be a vehicle for profound insight and wisdom, otherwise only accessible under unusual circumstances.
- **Recovery of "lost" dimensionality**: Through the sense of perspective humour offers, it ensures the recovery of "lost" dimensions and realms vital to psychocultural thriving. In this way if counteracts the cognitive "compaction" and collapsing into one dimensional ("paper cut out") patterns characteristic of a "flatland" of lower epistemological dimensionality.
- **Tentativeness**: Humour may have a tentative, exploratory quality, responding spontaneously to the possibility of the moment.

### Humour as playing with patterns

Humour may be understood as the playful rearrangement of patterns -- or as associated with that rearrangement. This may be done purely for comic effect -- laughter for its own sake. Whether or not it is "at the expense" of some party, it may fail to construct any new mode or enable any new form of action. It is however possible to envisage a form of humour that would deliberately trigger insight. This is the case with certain traditions of spiritual tales recognized as teaching stories. The question is the extent to which this could be developed for other sectors -- and what kind of insight it could carry.

What forms of humour would trigger and sustain insight into new modes of sustainable development? What pattern language would need to be developed to open this possibility? Should the "goodness of fit" -- the moment of their "clicking into place" -- of the elements of a pattern be in some way associated with humour?

How can humour be used to facilitate the dynamics of interplay between patterns of lower dimensionality? How can it ensure a better "fit" between configurations of such patterns?

### Humour-playfulness as a characteristic meta-game

It could be argued that, although humour continues to have a vital role in the various sectors identified above (in the Annex, this role is dissociated from that of the sectors themselves. Indeed, as explored elsewhere (Playfully Changing the Prevailing Climate of Opinion: Climate change as focal metaphor of effective global governance, 2005), these sectors may each be characterized as a form of game-playing, accompanied by various types of meta-game. In these terms, humour may then itself be understood as a meta-game:

- **Humour-playfulness as the meta-game of governance**: This is evident in the ways humour is used about governance (even by parliamentarians and bureaucrats) but is not a characteristic of governance. Much of governance is perceived as "laughable", but humour is primarily used -- if it is used at all in governance -- as a means of easing tensions and possibly of marginalizing the concerns of protestors through news management. It is used as a weapon in defence of unimaginative agendas rather than as a creative device to reframe challenges and opportunities.
- **Humour-playfulness as the meta-game of religion**: Again this is evident in the ways humour is used about religion (even by religious leaders) but is not a characteristic of religion (with the exception of some spiritual traditions). Much of religion is necessarily perceived as "laughable" by nonbelievers, but humour is primarily used -- if it is used at all by religions -- as a means
• **Humour-playfulness as the meta-game of disciplinary endeavour typical of the sciences:** Again this is evident in the ways humour is used about scientific or other disciplines (even by their practitioners) but is not a characteristic of those disciplines. The preoccupations of the disciplines are often perceived as questionable by nonbelievers or the ill-informed, but humour is primarily used -- if it is used at all by the sciences -- as a means of facilitating communication and possibly of marginalizing the concerns of those advancing non-mainstream perspectives.

In each case, humour-playfulness may be used in a defensive response to alternative perspectives. As such it may be part of the dynamic of groupthink [more].

Elsewhere (cf Playfully Changing the Prevailing Climate of Opinion: Climate change as focal metaphor of effective global governance, 2005) the practice of "playing with the rules" (as opposed to "playing within the rules") is discussed in relation to playing "meta-games". A distinction is made between meta-games understood mathematically and meta-games as notably understood (and deplored) in internet gaming. The relationship is also noted of "meta-games" to the "infinite games" so fruitfully explored by James P. Carse (Finite and Infinite Games: a vision of life as play and possibility, 1986).

**Potential of humour-playfulness in the incongruity of dialogue between intractables**

Radical differences of perspective are a characteristic of society. They may be understood to engender and sustain many of the social problems and the failure to respond effectively to them. They may be valued, in principle, for the fascinating diversity and richness they represent.

These differences are the core material in much entertainment (eg talk shows, dinner speakers, comedians, satirical commentary, cartoons, etc). The differences can indeed be handled with humour, whether or not it is "at the expense" of one of the parties. When the differences are "serious", such humour may however be deemed quite insensitive and inappropriate.

The question is whether humour then has an unexplored potential role to play when dialogue is impossible -- when it is considered to have broken down or become unfruitful (cf Confusion in the Moment of Dialogue, 2004). What kind of humour can be introduced into such situations to increase the dimensionality of the discourse and open up new avenues of communication between the parties?

Dramatic challenges in this respect are evident in:

- inter-generational communication: in situations when young and old can no longer communicate in any meaningful way, notably within a family (as when adolescents are experienced by their parents as "alien")
- inter-ethnic communication: as is typical of neighbourhoods in many modern cities
- communication with "terrorists" or "fundamentalists": where both parties consider themselves absolutely justified in the rightness of their own perspective and the wrongness of the "alien mentality" of the other

It is interesting that the conventional response to failure of dialogue is to increase (by incredible proportions) the investment in security systems and to render suspect, or even to criminalize, any efforts to discover new modes of dialogue. There is a case for seed money to explore ways of reframing such dialogue to draw on the multidimensionality of humour -- especially when the respective parties retain a sense of humour.

The potential of humour-playfulness in such problematic conditions of dialogue is that it can play with possibilities without premature closure -- allowing each to test the boundaries of the other.

**Potential of humour-playfulness in methodological reframing of transdisciplinary incongruities**

Despite the above sensitivity (see Recognized role of humour-playfulness in creativity in Annex), although there are interdisciplinary studies of humour (notably published in the Humor: International Journal of Humor Research), there do not appear to be any studies of the role of humour in facilitating interdisciplinarity or transdisciplinarity.

In introducing a conference, Jill Forster (Linking Thinking, 1996) indicated:

Much educational literature, both general and gifted, recommends that educators encourage students to look for relationships among ideas. Far less of the literature explains specifics for achieving this or its researched need. In both synthesis and analysis one is finding connections, making things relevant, seeing similarities, transferring information from one context to another.

John Paulos (Mathematics and Humor: a study of the logic of humor, 1980) develops a mathematical model of jokes (joke schema) using ideas from catastrophe theory -- seeing laughter as the sign of a "cognitive catastrophe". Of the seven catastrophe types identified by René Thom, this approach uses only the three most elementary catastrophes (fold, cusp, and swallowtail). Paulos argues that a joke-teller uses under-specification to construct an uneven landscape that supports multiple trajectories, and guides the listener on that trajectory which ensures that a surprising discontinuity will be experienced. This metaphor of discontinuity allows incongruity to be modeled via the mathematics of catastrophe theory [more].

Paulos also indicates that "in the spirit of Gödel's theorem (and with considerable looseness), we can state the following: There is no theoretical account of humor that is not itself (on a higher level) somewhat funny and therefore incomplete." (p. 55). There appears to have been little follow-up to this work. A sophisticated exception, using the double cusp, is the work of Robert de Marrais. Ministrations Concerning Silliness, or: Is "Interdisciplinary Thought" an Oxymoron?, Noesis: online journal of the Mega Society, 2001). See also
As a philosopher Peter Rickman (*The Philosopher as Joker, Philosophy Now, 1999*) clarifies the role of what is perceived as humour amongst philosophers:

Many philosophers - contrary to a widespread prejudice - have a sense of humour. Democritus was called "the laughing philosopher"; Plato was often suspected of talking tongue in cheek; the ponderous Kant had a sly sense of whimsy, and Nietzsche sparkled with wit... So to explore the resemblance of philosophy to jokes may illuminate the philosophic enterprise. We may start with the recognition that philosophers find themselves compelled to misuse or twist language a little to make their point. They want us to look at what we take familiarly for granted with fresh eyes to make distinctions we had neglected, to see similarities we overlooked...

When philosophers take liberties with language to make their distinctive points they are not frivolous. Language because it serves primarily practical purposes is not designed for examining its own practice or the practices it serves. Here lies the link to jokes which are meant to shock us by ignoring, misusing or defying the convention which governs our speech and thought. The capacity at the basis of both philosophy and jokes - to challenge one's own treasured assumptions or to make distinctions which cut across time-honoured classifications, is a unique characteristic of our minds and lies at the heart of originality and creativity... Jokes share with philosophy the characteristic of being, in a sense, meta-activities, i.e. second level responses or reflections on what we normally do. Forced to move against the grain of normal usage, they thrust upon us unexpected links and so make us look again at what we took for granted.

The philosopher Paul Feyerabend (*Against Method, 1975; Farewell to Reason, 1987; Conquest of Abundance: a tale of abstraction versus the richness of being, 1999*) was articulate in his challenge to conventional disciplinary methodology. In a period with increasing need for integrative perspectives using all its epistemological resources, can society afford to depend on rigid disciplinary formalism in achieving a coherent conceptual approach to its condition?

**Potential of humour-playfulness in governance of strategic incongruities**

Despite the above sensitivity (see also "Recognized role of humour in conventional political processes" in Annex), there do not appear to be any studies of "intercultural humour", or "inter-ethnic humour" -- although there is a significant study of a Ghanian inter-tribal relationship (Joseph Yelepuo Wegru, *The Dagaba-Frafra Joking Relationship*). There are of course comparative studies of humour between cultures or ethnic groups (cf Christie Davies, *Ethnic Humour Around The World: a comparative analysis, 1996*) -- but not of humour associated with their interaction. The same tends to be true between political parties and ideologies. Where is the humour than could help to reframe fruitfully the relationship between "right" and "left", between "mainstream" and "alternative", between Israel and Palestine?

Although it is recognized that humour is significant to political processes and parliamentary debate, it is most curious that there is no effort to transform into strategic initiatives the subtle insights made evident by humour. Instead it is those initiatives that themselves have a marked tendency to become laughable on implementation. Additionally it is worth reflecting on the degree to which humour "at the expense" of another party during political processes is translated into dysfunctional strategies "at the expense" of those so framed.

Given the significance of humour to political and parliamentary processes, it is also worth reflecting on the extent to which governance as currently known bears a strong resemblance to a joke that has had to be explained, because those who could have usefully appreciated it do not understand it. In this sense government is a joke "fallen flat". Elsewhere (*Aesthetics of Governance in the Year 2490, 1990*), in reflecting on the nature of governance in the distant future, great emphasis was placed on the potential role of many of the arts (theatre, dance, song, etc.), but not on humour. How then might humour come to play a more significant role in governance?

Part of the challenge lies in the nature of the relationship between the "rules of the game" (as articulated in legislation, directives and proposals) and "playing with the rules". The distinction has been explored elsewhere (*cf Playfully Changing the Prevailing Climate of Opinion: Climate change as focal metaphor of effective global governance, 2005*) notably in terms of understanding of the role of any meta-game. The processes of the meta-game of governance are obvious in the corridor and back-room manoeuvring, commenting on the game. This may indeed be facilitated by humour.

The question is whether the quality and nature of the humour, as currently understood, is adequate to the challenge of catalyzing new forms of order that can be appropriately embodied in legislation. The challenge is central to "new thinking' and innovative "paradigm shifts" to reflect the higher dimensionality required to reframe dangerous tendencies to simplistic legislative measures. The challenge has been formally described in the cybernetic Law of Requisite Variety.

The need to explain new legislative measures through appropriate public information programmes -- in a period of radical suspicion of news manipulation -- extends the challenge of governance. A particularly evident difficulty is the complexity and technicity of legislative proposals -- as with the proposed European Constitution. Elsewhere (*Structuring Mnemonic Encoding of Development Plans and Ethical Charters using Musical Leitmotives, 2001*) it was proposed that consideration be given to embodying such texts in music and song to increase their memorability and comprehensibility -- and to ensure recognition of systemic links between their parts through aesthetic devices.

Given the current levels of political apathy and alienation, it is worth exploring how humour might be used to similar ends. Many branches of government are required by current media pressures, and the need to justify themselves, to produce press releases. Typically the content has to be severely adapted in their preparation to ensure media use. Typically, despite such efforts, the content is of marginal interest at best to the intended audience -- unless associated with some "human interest" scandal.
Consider the further possibility that, in addition to any press release, each branch of government could be encouraged to produce other communication products. Important messages could be carried by song -- just as advertisers have sought to do for corporate products. More relevant to this theme however is the possibility that they be challenged to embody their current initiative in humour that invites widespread dissemination because of the integrative insight it offers. Trends in this direction are already evident in some safety campaigns -- as well as in political campaigning.

Is there a case for exploring the possibility of a G8 summit requiring that each participant encapsulate their position in some form of humour -- and that the concluding declaration be embodied in humour worthy of dissemination worldwide? Is there not at least a possibility that this might reframe the debate and the strategic dilemmas associated with it? Is this not to be preferred to "serious" proposals which are treated as "laughable" for good reason?

What would such humour seek to achieve beyond communicability? The purpose would be to embody succinctly a message of higher dimensionality and memorability -- that would lend itself to being passed on, with catalytic, multiplier consequences. This potential is a feature of memetic reproduction. The potential of such devices is to some extent evident in famous quotations that are used to enhance the wit and wisdom of political speeches. The question is whether innovative legislative proposals could be carried by humour -- other than as a means for opponents to frame them negatively.

**Potential of humour-playfulness in reframing interreligious incongruities**

Despite the above sensitivity (see also Recognized need for humour in religion and spiritual development in Annex), there do not appear to be any studies of "interfaith humour" or "interreligious humour" -- possibly for reasons identified by Vassilis Saroglou (Religion and sense of humor: an a priori incompatibility? Theoretical considerations from a psychological perspective, 2002). Again, there are of course comparative studies of humour between religions -- but not of humour associated with their interaction. And there are of course many jokes of the form: "a priest, a rabbi, and a mullah were discussing ...". But where are the jokes reframing the relationship between fundamentalists and those that appear to undermine their faith -- or between "crusaders" and "jihadis"?

As highlighted earlier, humour has a much debated role within some religions. Perhaps the fundamental theological issue is whether deity is to be understood as finding the conflict between the religions as "humorous" to any degree or only "serious". In a period with increasing tendencies to "faith-based governance", do anti-humour doctrinal positions imply increasingly humourless governance?

What are the vital cognitive links which humour might activate? As the founder of psychosynthesis, Roberto Assagioli (Smiling Wisdom) argues:

Humour is quite simple and involves uncommon usage or other possibilities within language. Alignment with hearing other components and seeing other possibilities explains aspects of mystic interpretation and understanding equated with madness. People who are crazed or intoxicated make links between disassociated components. They have created links that are not there. The mystic has also created a link between disassociated components and is able to recognise their value. If involved or ensnared by the meaning, they enter a condition of ecstatic involvement or intoxication. If not overly involved, a more detached condition known as sobriety comes into being.

For Sam Keen (Hymns to an Unknown God, 1994):

The deepest spiritual traditions have always recognized that the sacred and the profane, like wisdom and folly, walk arm in arm, and therefore true piety must be seasoned with irreverent laughter.

But, beyond the laughter, what subtler features of subtler humour might support more fruitful interfaith dialogue? The challenge to the rational mind is explored in relation in the following Sufi perspective:

Some mystic traditions use jokes, stories and poetry to express certain ideas. Allowing the bypassing of the normal discriminative thought patterns. The rationality that confines and objectifies the thinking process is the opposite of the intuitive, gestalt mentality that the mystic is attempting to engage, enter and retain. By developing a series of impacts that reinforce certain key ideas, the rational mind is occupied with a surface meaning whilst other concepts are introduced. Thus paradox, unexpectedness, and alternatives to convention are all stressed. That is what makes us laugh.

The most easily understood and accessible aspect of spiritual humour being the aspect of 'mind component referral'. By illustrating certain areas of the persona as characteristics of behaviour, they become apparent and are exposed. A solution to a point of impasse may be expressed to the subconscious and in recognition the mind, if receptive, may engage this resolution.

It is possible to analyse music and understand aspects of its effect and usage. So too with humour. However just as with music and art, explain the joke too much and you kill it. The life of a jokes humour is dependent on how and what is heard. What is consequently made of it is dependent on the capacity and comprehension of the listener. [more]

Peter Collins (Humour and Related Experience: Towards an Integral Appreciation, 2005) reinforces this sense of a relationship between humour and spiritual insight:
Indeed, as I hope to make clear, the underlying nature of humour bears a very close relationship to authentic spiritual understanding. So the proper recognition of the creative capacity of humour is ultimately inseparable from appreciation of the nature of the mystical process itself and can only find fulfilment through pure spiritual attainment. Thus from one perspective, the stages of spiritual development - especially more advanced - represent a deep refining of the capacity for humour. Looked at from an equally valid standpoint, authentic spiritual integration of the personality cannot be maintained in the absence of an appropriate sense of humour.

Is there any possibility of collective enlightenment from interfaith discourse characterized by humour? The comments of M. Conrad Hyers (The Ancient Zen Master as Clown-Figure and Comic Midwife. Philosophy East and West, 1970) suggest possibilities:

In his review of Mel Gibson's controversial movie The Passion of the Christ (Icon Productions, 2004), Gabriel Vahanian (No Christ, No Jesus) refers to the views of André de Peretti (Essai sur l'humour du Christ dans les évangiles. 2004) that "Christ" indeed belongs to the realm of language rather than to that of a rather indecent and self-infatuated history. Humour as a sifting device between the factual and the receiving sides. In keeping with this:

Humor consists in meaning what one does not say and in saying what one does not mean, for example, the plumber exclaiming "Excuse me, Sir" as he enters the bathroom and sees a lady. Jesus' statement "Whoever sees me, sees the Father" is to be seen in the same light. If so, on what grounds are the factual and the receiving sides to be sorted out? .... What, then, is the import of the distinction between factual and receiving sides, especially if humor is to be taken (though with a grain of salt) as some kind of hallmark of language? .... Truth is a fiction, but it is a fiction of language, it is not a remnant of the past, but a harbinger of the future. It does not rely on or lie in history so much as on and in language. As does humor, which loses its salt as soon as the twin realms of the subject and the object are confused with one another simply because one does not and cannot happen without the other. Facts are in and of themselves stubborn. They are mute.

The greatest incongruity in relation to the interfaith context, is the sustained and often violent nature of groups who each claim to be inspired by a beneficient or peace-loving deity. A. Roy Eckardt (Divine Incongruity: comedy and tragedy in a post-Holocaust world, 1992) comments on Reinhold Niebuhr (Humour and Faith, 1946):

The intimate relation between humour and faith is derived from the fact that both deal with the incongruities of our existence. Humour is concerned with the immediate incongruities of life and faith with the ultimate ones. Laughter is our reaction to immediate incongruities and those which do not affect us essentially. Faith is the only possible response to the ultimate incongruities of existence which threaten the very meaning of our life.

For Eckardt, it is in the ontological dimension, in the thrust toward being, that valuable clues towards the nature of humour in relation to faith are to be found - clues that are possibly of direct relevance to the interfaith challenge. As clues he identifies ten "proto-jokes" from which he considers that all other humour derives:

1. The most original or first Proto-Joke (or incongruity) is Being-Amongst-Nothingness. How could there be such an incongruity as this? How could it be that there is something rather than nothing? How could it be that there is nothing where something has been? Here, perhaps, lies the Urgrund, the ultimate ground of all human comedy (as of all human weeping) not to mention public performances of magic, a first cousin of comedy. In the game of peek-a-boo the very small child already apprehends something of this primordial joke.
2. The second Proto-Joke is Order-versus-Chaos or perhaps rules versus anarchy. In the name of chaos, one immediately recalls the classic movies of the Marx Brothers.
3. The third Proto-Joke is The-Absence-of-Any-Say-in-One's Birth. No one asks to be born. Accordingly, the human being is, with every creature, left with the task of making the best of things, and one way to do this is to laugh. There is also weeping, making the worst of things. And there is resignation allowing oneself to be pushed around by the great world.
4. For all creatures, humans included, the fourth Proto-Joke is Death-Amids-Life. Stephen Leacock contends that humor stems finally from "the incongruous contrast between the eager fret of our life and its final nothingness.
5. The fifth Proto-Joke is the "Is-versus-the="Ought"-the eternal incongruity between the world and people as they are, and the world and people as they could, or may, become. It's at this place that human suffering and humor so often confront each other. William Hudfitt discerns the secret of human laughter/weeping in humankind's being struck with the differences between things as they are and things as they ought to be.
6. The sixth Proto-Joke, tied very much to the fifth, is Self-abnegation-versus-Self-centeredness-the will (instinct?) to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of others, counteracted by the urge (instinct?) to sacrifice others for the sake of ourselves.
7. The seventh Proto-Joke is The Humm-Thrust/Wish-to Partake of or-Relate-to-Infinity. This is why so much in religion is comical-or why, put somewhat more forcibly, religion is a special kind of joke.
8. The eighth Proto-Joke is Body-in-Justaposition-to-Spirit. Thus, the same human voice that in one moment self-exaltingly pronounces upon the world's "eternal verities" may in the next moment be coughing itself to pieces.

Potential of humour in communication with extraterrestrials, aliens and terrorists

There is an implicit assumption in the currently fragmented condition of society that the "unreasonable" other parties -- with whom effective dialogue has not proven possible -- have no sense of humour. Or perhaps that their sense of humour is inappropriate, in bad taste, and necessarily to be condemned outright.

It is therefore worth generalizing the challenge and exploring the hypothetical question of extraterrestrial humour and the nature of humanity's potential encounter with it (cf Communicating with Aliens: the psychological dimension of dialogue, 2000). The fragmented cultures of the world tend to pride themselves on their particular sense of humour. Is it possible that extraterrestrials would find humanity so unsophisticated in its humour as to be effectively humourless -- even deadly boring -- by galactic standards? Might this aesthetic inadequacy be a reason for their failure to enter into communication? (cf Raymond M. Smullyan. Plane Without Laughter, 1980). Or are crop circles an effort at extraterrestrial humour?

Is it possible that extraterrestrial humour might be used as a vehicle for forms of complex communication that cannot be carried through the linearity of conventional language? Alternatively, might it be that humour is used (as in the best of French repartie calling for the most vigilance) as a fundamental feature of a dialogical martial art -- a form of verbal aikido. Aliens may envisage "humour-playfulness space" as a complex analogue to a multidimensional board game along the lines envisaged by Nobel Laureate Herman Hesse (The Glass Bead Game, 1943). Perhaps the galaxy associates "civilization" with views similar to those of Peter Ustinov: "I was irrevocably betrothed to laughter, the sound of which has always seemed to me to be the most civilised music in the world."

Verbal aikido is already recognized as a technique of redirecting a conversation with a difficult person in the direction one wants it to go - not responding in kind but rather accepting what is heard, blending it into a point that both parties can agree on and then redirecting the energy to find agreement or a better solution (cf Thomas F. Fischer. Verbal Aikido: techniques for managing verbal attacks, 2004).

Again, as "neophytes" would humanity offer the slightest interest to "black belt" galactic interlocuteurs -- given its propensity for what might amount to "stone age" forms of dialogue? Perhaps extraterrestrials recognize that humanity is as yet incapable of protecting itself from galactic-style laughter -- given the insight that: "Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand" (Mark Twain). Humour may well have been developed into a cognitively "deadly" memetic weapon by extraterrestrials -- somewhat as anticipated by the Monty Python Most Deadly Joke in the World. Perhaps, without knowing it, humanity is indeed the greatest joke in the galaxy. Is it possible that there is a galactic "Richter Scale" for the potential impact of a joke on a planetary culture?

More relevant, and far closer to home, are the "aliens" associated with immigration or with the generation gap in many families -- for which humour offers a mode of communication.

Integrative framework of humour-playfulness

-- Pattern A: Four "humours" in the classical tradition
-- Pattern B: Pattern of interrelationships
-- Pattern C: Archetypes
-- Pattern D: Holistic dynamics
-- Pattern E: Mathematics of humour?
-- Playfulness -- the interplay between patterns

Pattern A: Four "humours" in the classical tradition

It is instructive to recall that "humour" as currently understood emerged in the West in the 19th century. Prior to that, there was a marked tendency to associate it with the classical understanding of four humours (deriving from Galen) as descriptions of psychological temperaments, particularly as they related to conditions of physical health. As noted by D. Griffith (Ancient Humour. Queen's University, Department of Classics):

Given all the spit, snot, blood, semen, vomit and so on that leeches out of the body, ancient physicians were pretty sure that the body's four elements must all be liquid, so they called them chumoi in Greek or humores in Latin. The latter word is related to our "humid" and "aqueous humour". The four humours are phlegm (... spit), bile (... stomach acid), blood ... and black bile... If you were healthy, you had an equal measure of these four juices, and so a good temper(ament), using that word in the sense of "measure", as in J. S. Bach's Well-tempered Klavier.

If things got out of wack and one humour came to be more abundant in the body than the others, you were sick, and were said to be "humorous". The physician treating you would try to restore the balance of the humours, usually by draining out some of your blood by cutting one of your veins or by applying a leech.
Griffith notes:

Vestigially, the theory of humours survives in such expressions as: "ill-humoured", "good-humoured", "black with rage", "in a black mood", "yellow with jealousy", "green with envy", "yellow-livered", "red with remorse", and so forth. And we still use "sanguine" or "melancholy" to describe certain temperaments.

The four humours were associated with the classical four elements to give correspondences that can be summarized in the following table [more]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dry / Hot (choleric) sensation (yellow bile)</th>
<th>Fire Hot</th>
<th>Hot / Moist (sanguine) intuition (blood)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dry</td>
<td>Ether</td>
<td>Moist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>Moist</td>
<td>Water</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cold / Dry Melancholic intellect (&quot;black bile&quot;)</th>
<th>Air</th>
<th>Moist / Cold Phlegmatic emotion (&quot;phlegm&quot;)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cold / Dry</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cold / Moist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(cf other variants: Piet Guijt, 2005; HJ Eysenck, 1958; also the American Indian medicine wheel)

A relationship of the elements and humours to the eight modes of classical Greek music offers further insights into the playful connotations of humour [more]. Such a modal perspective is a feature of Byzantine and Gregorian music [more], as well as of contemporary musical theory [more more].

**Pattern B: Pattern of interrelationships**

Taking account of the perspective of various religions, an operating understanding of the relationship between various forms of humour currently recognized can be presented in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humour at expense of subordinate external other</th>
<th>Humour at expense of any perspective</th>
<th>Humour at expense of dominant perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Mockery of others, not unbelievers)</td>
<td>(Humour of &quot;supreme&quot; against &quot;inferior&quot;)</td>
<td>(Humour of authority)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Humour of &quot;supreme&quot; against &quot;inferior&quot;)</td>
<td>Humour challenging subordinate internal patterns</td>
<td>Mutually enhancing humour from external perspective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outer ring: The various forms of humour clustered within this ring are basically those "at the expense" of external others:

- in an inferior position (as in the top left hand zone), characteristic of humour by authority figures (and notably the God of the Old Testament). This is typical of the scornful mockery by elites of those who are less wise or less privileged in some way, especially those failing to believe in what is right or appropriate -- humour at the expense of "losers". (cf Psalms 2:4: 'He that sitteth in the
heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision"; Proverbs 1:26: "I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh"; Book of Praise: "He laugheth them to scorn.").

- in a superior position (as in the bottom right hand zone), typical of humour at the expense of those in authority. This is typical of the "back-room humour" of employees, foot-soldiers, or low-status relatives. The "laughter of unbelief" and of unbelievers -- alienated from authority -- is associated with this category of humour. (cf Luke 8:33: "And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead").

- including both source and target of the humour (as in the bottom left hand zone), typical of cynical dialogue that is to the credit of none involved. It is symptomatic of any inability of a group to "get its act together". In its most exaggerated form this would be the laughter of the mentally challenged -- Charles Darwin's "idiot laughter" [more]. In a religious context, the "laughter of the fool" is therefore associated with this category of humour (cf Ecclesiastes 7:6: "For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity"; Proverbs 14:13: "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness").

- none involved (as in the top right hand zone), typical of innocent, non-derisive humour -- a gentler humour shared "with" others rather than "at" their expense. This is characteristic of meetings of peers where a good time is experienced by all as a result -- a type of "win-win" situation. It is associated with the most mundane manifestation of the "laughter of salvation" to the extent that the community in which it takes place has such commitments (cf Luke 6:21: "Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh").

The upper-left quadrant might be understood as corresponding to the innocent or non-tendentious humour identified by Freud (1905) in contrast with the tendentious humour of the other quadrants -- being essentially aggressively hostile and/or sexual. With respect to the contrast between humour of the top left and bottom right quadrants, a helpful distinction is made by Argyris Archakis (Constructing identities via humor, 2004). In the first case humour criticizes the "other" behaviour, whereas in the second humour serves as a correction mechanism of in-group behaviour in a rather covert manner. In both cases, the target of humour reinforces the existing bonds among group members, while bringing the evaluative dimension of humour to the surface. According to Francis H Buckley (The Morality of Laughter, 2003) of the two main theories explaining laughter, the Positive Thesis asserts that this is due to feeling superior to the butt of the joke (whether or not this is so), whereas the Normative Thesis asserts that those laughing are actually superior to the butt of the joke. In this mode humour enables people to see faults and avoid them, or to note virtues and reinforce them. At best, humour within the outer ring serves a function protective of identity. To some degree humour, especially in the form of a targetted joke, is used as a weapon to that end.

Middle ring: The various forms of humour clustered within this ring are those "at one's own expense", "at the expense" of internal (rather than external) "others" -- rather than taking oneself too seriously. It challenges mindsets and constructs of the mindsets generating the humour:

- in an inferior position (as in the top left hand zone), characteristic of humour challenging patterns of personal behaviour, sub-personalities and idiosyncrasies. This corresponds to the ability to laugh at one's foibles and errors -- on reflection.

- in a superior position (as in the bottom right hand zone), typical of humour at the expense of one's conscience or principles. This corresponds to an ability not to take oneself too seriously -- self-deprecatory humour.

- both the source and the target of the humour (as in the bottom left hand zone), typical of humour that questions cherished beliefs -- possibly when locked into patterns of neuroses or psychoses. This corresponds to an ability to face, through the humour, the vanity of one's own assumptions.

- none involved (as in the top right hand zone), typical of innocent humour associated with the joy of being alive and seeing the humour in everything ("seeing the funny side").

In terms of the study of Argyris Archakis, the emphasis here is on "self-targeting humour" (and its function as a discourse strategy used for identity construction). This can be interpreted as an index of either lack or presence of self-confidence and self-esteem -- an ambivalence that renders it a very effective device for identity construction [more]. Rather than the isolated joke of the outer ring, it is an underlying "sense of humour" that is characteristic of this middle ring.

Central ring: Here the types of humour, separately characteristic of each of the four quadrants, are in dynamic interplay -- perhaps to be understood as associated with laughter of the "salvatory" type (cf Dudley Zuver, Salvation by Laughter, 1933; John Dart, The Laughing Savior, 1976; Peter L Berger, Redeeming Laughter: the comic dimension, 1997). The distinction in the outer rings between "external" and "internal", between "at" and "with", is no longer primary. This interplay might be most fruitfully illustrated metaphorically by the dynamics of the quadrille dance (with five figures, in common time, four couples of dancers being in each set), a musical quartette (especially engaged in improvisation), or the quadrille of four horses and riders performing a series of synchronized movements [more]. These movements illustrate the systemic interweaving of the following dynamics:

- the dynamic of the dominant, with humour subordinating the (positions of) others
- the dynamic of the subordinate, with humour challenging the (position of) the dominant
- the dynamic of the humour through which (the positions of) all are challenged
- the dynamic of the humour through which (the positions of) all are reconciled and enhanced

In terms of the containment of plasma in the fusion reactor metaphor, and the avoidance of "quenching", these dynamics are associated experientially with dimensions undetected by the UNDP Human Development Report:

- "keeping one's spirit up" (in contrast with "loss of spirit", broken spiritedness, depression)
- "keeping one's sense of perspective" (in contrast with loss of perspective)
- "keeping one's sense of humour"
- "getting it" (in contrast with "losing it")
The spirit characteristic of this inner ring may be illustrated by: Gordon W. Allport: "So many tangles in life are ultimately hopeless that we have no appropriate sword other than laughter"; Lin Yutang: "It is important that man dreams, but it is perhaps equally important that he can laugh at his own dreams"; or Hermann Hesse's reference to ultimate humour as "the laughter of the gods." which has no "object" -- being borne of humour that "renounces without renouncing," and "possesses without possessing" (Steppenwolf, 1929). This might be understood as a fifth form of laughter -- distinct from that of each of the four quadrants above.

As a holistic mathematician, Peter Collins (Humour and Related Experience: Towards an Integral Appreciation, 2005) provides useful comments on the emergent insight from the moment-by-moment dynamic of the central ring. In his words:

The great philosopher Immanuel Kant said that what causes laughter is "the sudden transformation of a tense expectation into nothing!" The tensest expectation arises from the contrast between our contingent existential nature and the ultimate meaning of life.

So therefore the greatest joke is truly the realisation that ultimately there is nothing in life (that phenomenally exists). Indeed the great mystics are those who get this "joke" most clearly (which then serves as a continual source of joy). However the opposite side of this joke is that through accepting nothingness (i.e. emptiness) we can thereby enter into full union with Spirit where all our hopes are realised. So from this transcendent aspect, life indeed is -- literally -- a deadly serious business. So before we can enter into eternal life (in full union with Spirit) we must die to all that is not Spirit (through detaching desire from what is merely phenomenal).

Thus to fully realise the joke and live (in light and joy) we must first die (in grief and anguish). Indeed this is a process that must be continually renewed from moment to moment. So the ultimate experience of union is not of joy (where all sorrow ends) but rather a deeper type of joy (which embraces all sorrow). Thus the purest form of mystical union is a continual living (in Spirit) and dying (to all that is not Spirit) which is renewed from moment to moment. Then at each moment one dies (in grief and anguish) to be gloriously reborn to new life the same moment (in joy and happiness).

As Collins makes clear, corresponding to the various forms of humour noted earlier might be equally distinct forms of sorrow or depression -- exemplified by the so-called "dark night of the soul" [more].

**Pattern C: Archetypes**

An archetype may be understood as the original model of which all other similar persons, objects, or concepts are merely derivative, copied, patterned, or emulated -- of which they are in some manner isomorphs. In the case of depth psychology, archetypes are innate prototypes for ideas, which may subsequently become involved in the interpretation of observed phenomena. For Carl Jung, for example, they are a form of psychological organ, directly analogous to the physical, bodily organs: both being morphological givens for the species; both arising at last partially through evolutionary processes [more]. The principal archetypes distinguished by Jung are: The Self, The Shadow, The Anima, The Animus. These might be understood as a four-fold pattern similar to the tables above. Particular forms of humour might be characteristic of each. The negative destructive form, for example, might well be associated with The Shadow.

Symbolic figures, drawn from modern or ancient myths, constitute more specific archetypes. The deities of a culture may perform archetypal functions. Such archetypes include:

- The Hero
- The Trickster
- The Great Mother
- The Wise Old Man

Particular styles of humour might be associated with deities of a particular kind. The Trickster, as noted earlier, performs an ambiguous transformative function (of enantiodromia) associated with that of The Shadow. The Trickster may be constrained with The Hero. There is an extensive literature that explores archetypes and personality types -- with which types of humour might then be associated.

**Pattern D: Holistic dynamics**

An exceptionally insightful articulation of the relationship between different forms of humour is provided by Peter Collins (Humour and Related Experience: Towards an Integral Appreciation, 2005). He distinguishes four humours and relates them to the quadrant schema of Ken Wilber (An Integral Theory of Consciousness, 1997) -- as the diagonals:

| Table D: Representation of the 4-humour system of Peter Collins |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| **Positive**         | Humour C: reverse humour | Humour A: conventional humour |
| **Negative**         | Humour B: negative of conventional humour | Humour D: negative of reverse humour |

For instance:

**Diagonal (A/B):**

- **Immanent aspect of experience**
  - The Hero
  - The Trickster
  - The Great Mother
  - The Wise Old Man

The great philosopher Immanuel Kant said that what causes laughter is "the sudden transformation of a tense expectation into nothing!" The tensest expectation arises from the contrast between our contingent existential nature and the ultimate meaning of life.

So therefore the greatest joke is truly the realisation that ultimately there is nothing in life (that phenomenally exists). Indeed the great mystics are those who get this "joke" most clearly (which then serves as a continual source of joy). However the opposite side of this joke is that through accepting nothingness (i.e. emptiness) we can thereby enter into full union with Spirit where all our hopes are realised. So from this transcendent aspect, life indeed is -- literally -- a deadly serious business. So before we can enter into eternal life (in full union with Spirit) we must die to all that is not Spirit (through detaching desire from what is merely phenomenal).

Thus to fully realise the joke and live (in light and joy) we must first die (in grief and anguish). Indeed this is a process that must be continually renewed from moment to moment. So the ultimate experience of union is not of joy (where all sorrow ends) but rather a deeper type of joy (which embraces all sorrow). Thus the purest form of mystical union is a continual living (in Spirit) and dying (to all that is not Spirit) which is renewed from moment to moment. Then at each moment one dies (in grief and anguish) to be gloriously reborn to new life the same moment (in joy and happiness).

As Collins makes clear, corresponding to the various forms of humour noted earlier might be equally distinct forms of sorrow or depression -- exemplified by the so-called "dark night of the soul" [more].
For Collins, though all of these types of "humour" are present in typical adult development, they tend to remain separate and somewhat unrelated to each other (as argued above with respect to the middle and outer rings of the earlier table). "Proper appreciation -- and more importantly experience -- of their complementary nature requires the more advanced stages of contemplative spiritual development where all aspects are ultimately harmonised in a continual humour or disposition that is permanently sustainable". It is in this sense that his focus might possibly be understood as an exploration of the dynamics within the "central ring" in the earlier table. A particular strength of his approach is the embodiment of sorrow (or despair) as a feature of the dynamics of humour -- normally understood in a positive sense -- by explicitly relating it to attachment to particular phenomenal forms. Humour then is woven into the dynamics of attachment and detachment.

Collins stresses the relationship between immanence and transcendence in the above pattern. "Through immanence we are enabled to appreciate our humanity (as grounded in the phenomenal world of form). Through transcendence we are correspondingly enabled to go beyond limited appreciation of such humanity through a deepening of spiritual awareness (that is ultimately empty of all phenomenal form)".

Collins distinguishes the four humours as follows:

- **Humour A**: Entails the sudden collapse of a false notion of transcendence leading to a discrete immanent injection of spiritual light into experience. Thus for example the appreciation of the standard joke always requires the death of a certain kind of conventional expectation (brought about through the paradoxical juxtapositioning of reference frames) together with the spontaneous momentary experience of a new life of joy (i.e. laughter). One key limitation is that it tends to be strongly identified with phenomenal symbols (usually of a very concrete nature). "I have nothing to declare but my genius" (Oscar Wilde)

- **Humour B**: Entails the sudden mourning of an immanent loss thereby revealing a present lack with respect to one's capacity to successfully transcend the situation; what is conventionally referred to as sadness. However because of detachment from the particular phenomenal circumstances through which these feelings are conventionally mediated, again such sorrow can take on a more universal quality. Negative humour however always entails an existential loss with respect to such immanence.

- **Humour C**: Leads to a sudden discrete injection of transcendent light into a given situation. Leads to a more serious and deeply meaningful form of experience. In excess this can be associated with a darker mood where in taking life too seriously one is no longer able to enjoy oneself. An ability therefore to keep finding deep significance in events (despite external circumstances). "We are all in the gutter but some of us are looking at the stars" (Oscar Wilde)

- **Humour D**: Unexpected events that threaten to undermine one's existing sense of transcendence. Ultimate spiritual transcendence -- where one becomes detached from all phenomena -- then provides the greatest degree of true control. Because advanced spiritual development requires the radical surrender of limited ego attempts at control, one can then adapt more creatively to unexpected changes in circumstances without feeling unduly threatened.

Collins contrasts his approach with that of Wilber, relating them as follows:

Incidentally, because of their inherent dynamic nature i.e. combining both physical and psychological aspects, these humours cannot be properly represented in Wilberian four-quadrant terms. I have long argued for an eight-sectoral approach. Whereas in some respects four of these sectors (i.e. horizontal and vertical polarities) are similar to Ken Wilber's four-quadrant approach, the other four sectors relating to diagonal polarities are properly required to explain the relationship of the four "humours". The very basis of the diagonal polarities is that they relate directly to psychophysical interactions, which can only be ultimately harmonised through pure spiritual awareness (where transcendent and immanent aspects are identical). Thus the diagonal polarities have a double definition in terms of form (i.e. complex psychophysical interactions) and emptiness (transcendent and immanent spiritual aspects).

With respect to the dynamics of the humours, Collins notes:

- Diagonal dynamics (in the case of A/B): By contrast, at the more advanced stages of contemplative development, where the transcendent and immanent aspects are integrated in mature fashion, both types of humour can be psychologically harmonised in a continual stable experience (with little direct need therefore for outward physical expression)

- Though these four "humours" would tend to interact in various ways -- as they are dynamically complementary -- in conventional experience, severe limits exist on the degree of integration that can take place. This is due to rigid identification with the phenomenal circumstances through which they are mediated. Therefore the value of higher spiritual development is that, in eroding undue attachment to phenomenal symbols, it thereby leads to a much greater refinement with respect to the four "humours" thereby enabling integration with respect to their complementary features.

- The true source of humour lies in the permanent tension as between human desire in all its forms (with its limited pretensions) and ultimate Spirit, which is truly empty (in phenomenal terms). So the deeper source of humour lies in the realisation of all human folly to build castles in the air (when in truth nothing phenomenal ultimately exists). And it is the acceptance of this folly that such human pretensions (i.e. false transcendence) are dissolved.

As suggested earlier, it is the quality of the interplay between these humours that acquires greater significance in more mature responses. For Collins: "The essence of this charm is that it combines opposite characteristics in a continuous harmonious manner that always seems appropriate for the occasion". It is effectively the dance between different forms of attachment and detachment.

**Pattern E: Mathematics of humour?**

Reference was made above to the study of John Paulos (Mathematics and Humor: a study of the logic of humor, 1980) that develops a mathematical model of jokes (joke schema) using ideas from Rene Thom's catastrophe theory (see Table F) -- seeing laughter as the sign
of a "cognitive catastrophe". Elsewhere (Towards a logico-mathematical formalization of "sin": Fundamental memetic organization of faith-based governance strategies, 2004), the various forms of sin have also been explored as existential catastrophes.

| Table E: Juxtaposition of elementary catastrophes and archetypal morphologies (Thom) |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| State variables in system (corank) | Codimension of strata | Singularities "catastrophes" | Organizing centres | Dynamics | Substantives | Archetypal morphologies |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Minimum | 0 | V=x² | Being | Object | Manquer | Durer |
| Fold | 1 | V=x³ | Being | Edge, End | Ending | Beginning |
| Cusp | 2 | V=x⁴ | Becoming | Fault | Capturing, Separating | Engender, Unite |
| Swallowtail | 3 | V=x⁵ | Agitate | Split, Crack | Rejecting | Crossing |
| Butterfly | 4 | V=x⁶ | Give | Pocket | Sending | Receiving |
| Hyperbolic umbilic | . | V=x⁷+3y⁴ | Cresting wave | Arch | Collapse | Cover |
| Elliptic umbilic | . | V=x⁷-3xy² | Penetrate | Needle, Hair | Piercing | Filling |
| Parabolic umbilic | . | V=x⁸+3y⁴ | Eject | Mushroom | Lance, Pinch | Link, Open |

The different forms of "catastrophe" (fold, cusp, swallow tail, butterfly, elliptic, hyperbolic, and parabolic), summarized in the table above, could clarify the dynamics of these relations even further (cf Navigating Alternative Conceptual Realities: clues to the dynamics of enacting new paradigms through movement, 2002). The challenge is to relate "attachment" and "detachment", associated with humour dynamics, to the forms of the catastrophes to which they give rise. To the extent that humour can be understood as a form of progressive "encroachment", further insights from catastrophe theory have been discussed elsewhere ("Catastrophe as the outcome of encroachment", 2004).

In the light of the emphasis in humour studies on the "target" (cf Arigiris Archakis. Constructing identities via humor, 2004), a formal approach may be taken to interrelating humorist and target. The method, in its most general form, was first explored by Edward Haskell (Generalization of the structure of Mendeleev's periodic table, 1972) to map pairs of interacting biological species in terms of the nature of their transaction or "game". This gave rise to a "coaction cardioid" discussed elsewhere (Cardoid Attractor Fundamental to Sustainability: 8 transactional games forming the heart of sustainable relationship, 2005). The approach has also been used as the basis for distinguishing "playing" from "gaming" (Playfully Changing the Prevailing Climate of Opinion: Climate change as focal metaphor of effective global governance, 2005). Given its emphasis on dominant and subordinate relationships in system control, its application to humour could take the following form:

| Table F: Set of 9 possible humour situations based on effect on dominant and on subordinate |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Y = "Dominant" ("Control component") | X = "Subordinate" ("Work component") |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Positive | Neutrolysis (humour benefits dominant at expense of subordinate target) 0,0 | Neutrolysis (humour benefits dominant with no effect on subordinate) 0,0 | Neutrolysis (humour benefits dominant with no effect on subordinate) 0,0 |
| Neutral | Neutrolysis (humour demeans subordinate with no effect on dominant) 0,0 | Neutrolysis (humour benefits dominant with no effect on subordinate) 0,0 | Neutrolysis (humour benefits dominant with no effect on subordinate) 0,0 |
| Negative | Neutrolysis (humour demeans both dominant and subordinate) 0,0 | Neutrolysis (humour benefits dominant with no effect on subordinate) 0,0 | Neutrolysis (humour benefits dominant with no effect on subordinate) 0,0 |

Peter Collins (Humour and Related Experience: Towards an Integral Appreciation, 2005) also briefly considers a mathematical treatment of categories of humour from the perspective of holistic mathematics.

As explored in an editorial of The Times of India (Mathematics and the Calculus of Humour. 20 November 2002):

Like mathematics, humour is a blueprint for an alternative reality... Mathematicians like Gödel have suggested that the "reality" of numbers (2+2=4) is itself suspect, riddled with inexplicable worm-like "loops" that make a mockery of the firm ground of mathematical certitude we so confidently tread. All right. So mathematics is a "funny" business. But how does it relate to humour? I'd say the two spring from a common matrix: they both provide a view of things other than as they seem to be. The world is not the sum of all things but only the sum of all sums, says the mathematician.

Don't look now, but you've just made a pun, adds the humorist. Implying that even as the mathematician was playing tricks with numbers, numbers have been playing tricks with him. The make-believe world of magic is where mathematics and humour meet.
In real life, a cat whose head is twisted round will die. In cartoon films, a cat's head can get twisted round and set right simply by the hyper-logic of twisting it round in the opposite direction. The child claps with delight. He knows the cartoon is not "real"; he cannot go twisting cat's heads with impunity. But the cartoon's surreality appears more logically appealing than "reality". After all, why should there be dead cats? Why should there be death? And what to do about it? Turn it the other way round so it goes away?

**Playfulness -- the interplay between patterns**

Formal structures, whether institutions, beliefs systems or disciplines, tend to be based on particular patterns. This attachment to particular patterns is to be contrasted with the possible playful rearrangement of patterns (such as those above) that is characteristic of creativity in all its forms. This is best illustrated by the patterns evident in the traditional childrens' kaleidoscope -- now available in a variety of forms as interactive web applets (see: Permadi, Brown, Georg, Zefrank, Plank, Evergreen, as well as the basis for a 3D variant). Using four changing patterns in an applet, David E. Joyce makes a point pertinent to the identification here of the pattern "most appropriate" to the ordering of varieties of humour: Multifaceted Perspectives: the value of a common stock as viewed by four investors.

The visual effects of a traditional kaleidoscope are of course based on a form of visual illusion. How to build structures based on alternative patterns and how to transform into them is of course another matter.

The nature of this "playfulness" has of course been expressed in the mythical interplay between the deities of every pantheon -- in forms adapted for human comprehension. Works such as the Mahabharata are popular celebrations of this interplay. Any analysis of the games that gods play with each other in such contexts offers useful insights.

In considering the relationship of playfulness and humour, Vassilis Saroglou (Religion and sense of humor: an a priori incompatibility? Theoretical considerations from a psychological perspective, 2002) notes:

> Besides incongruity, playfulness is considered as a supplementary condition for humor. In order to be perceived as humorous, incongruity needs to be perceived in a secure, playful framework.... More generally, humor shares many aspects with play, although some differences exist between the two...

A previous essay (cf Playfully Changing the Prevailing Climate of Opinion: Climate change as focal metaphor of effective global governance, 2005) explored the role of playfulness in contrast with game-playing -- and the nature of the excitement to which it gave rise. It is this excitement that is also characteristic of the humour associated with playfulness. Such playfulness, like humour, is fundamental to the creative process -- to the tentative appreciation of the significance of any apparently emergent order. The dynamic of both playfulness and humour requires an ability to dissociate from any particular emergent pattern in order to explore others. In this sense both humour and playfulness may be understood as exercises in detachment. As argued by Vassilis Saroglou:

> As a consequence of the above characteristics of humor, we can consider its non-engagement in action....Similarly, one may consider that the specific relationship humor holds with truth is also colored by the lack of any engagement. Raskin has recently argued that "truthfulness -- a commitment to the literal truth of what is said under any circumstances and in any mode of communication --should be seen as counterindicative of the sense of humor"

Expressed differently, humour becomes the gateway (or conduit) for insight -- through another dimension -- between dimensionally gated mindsets (cf Dynamically Gated Conceptual Communities: emergent patterns of isolation within knowledge society, 2005). This corresponds to Vassilis Saroglou's argument that from a systemic perspective, humour may be considered as a way to get out of a closed and structured system [more].

The outer and middle ring above might be considered as corresponding to a form of polarization, which is effectively transcended in the playful humour dynamic of the central ring. This matches the observation of Vassilis Saroglou:

> Moreover, humor seems to be located in an area beyond the distinction of good and evil: it implies an "arrest of moral judgment"... (This does not mean that laughter and humor have no ethical and social-ethical consequences.) In addition, humor implies an "arrest of affective judgement"..., a kind of "momentary anesthesia of the heart".[more]

Such perspectives, and the nature of the dynamic of the inner ring above, suggest a need to understand how "fullness" has in effect to be "played" in order to emerge, and become active, as a higher form of order in the moment (cf The Isdom of the Wisdom Society: Embodying time as the heartland of humanity, 2003). Musicians have to perform their various roles in order for the coherence of a symphony to emerge. In contrast with the legislative product, perhaps it is how the "fullness" is played in celebration of the cosmic plenum [more] that is the key to the appropriate dynamics of "plenary" assemblies? It is perhaps the associated understanding of a "ground of being" that is missing in reflection on sustainability.

As discussed elsewhere (Knowledge Gardening through Music: patterns of coherence for future African management as an alternative to Project Logic, 2000), the epistemological engagement with this ground of being is explored by Antonio de Nicolas (Meditations through the Rg Veda. Shambhala, 1978 ) with respect to the four complementary languages of the Sanskrit Rg Veda:

> Therefore, from a linguistic and cultural perspective, we have to be aware that we are dealing with a language where tonal and arithmetical relations establish the epistemological invariances. Language grounded in music is grounded thereby on context...
dependency; any tone can have any possible relation to other tones, and the shift from one tone to another, which alone makes melody possible, is a shift in perspective which the singer himself embodies. Any perspective (tone) must be "sacrificed" for a new one to come into being; the song is a radical activity which requires innovation while maintaining continuity, and the "world" is the creation of the singer, who shares its dimensions with the song.

The dynamic of humour, in its most fundamental sense, is intimately related to this "sacrifice".

If you want to tell people the truth, make them laugh, otherwise they will kill you. Oscar Wilde

Conclusion?

The points made above are all suggestive of possibility -- alluding to the potential of how humour might be drawn upon in ways that are either new or neglected in relation to the challenges of the times. Of necessity, in terms of the argument, such possibilities may well not lend themselves to more formal description. The linearity of such description is, according to this argument, of a dimensionality too low to constitute an adequate vehicle for communication purposes. As is well-recognized, if the joke has to be explained the humour loses its essential experiential properties. This points to the possibility that the systemic links vital to the coherence of society may not lend themselves to adequate articulation in formal texts.

A brief checklist may however point to areas for further investigation regarding the higher-dimensional connectivity potentially catalyzed by humour -- and the resulting ability to enable comprehension of patterns of feedback loops vital to sustainability:

- the role of poetic associations in activating a gestalt (cf Poetry-making and Policy-making: arranging a marriage between Beauty and the Beast, 1993)
- resonance effects in sound -- and especially music (cf Structuring Mnemonic Encoding of Development Plans and Ethical Charters using Musical Leitmotivs, 2001)
- dramatic organization of commemorative ceremonies to ensure "re-membrance" (cf Engaging Macrohistory through the Present Moment, 2004)
- illustrative demonstrations of emergent order from chaotic systems
- mathematical modelling of psychic energy transitions and pathways associated with humour in bisociative thinking (cf catastrophe theory, the periodic table as a pattern of transitions in potential)

Although such topics may appear abstruse, it is worth recalling how much is now made of the highly abstract notion of "image" in presenting political personalities and strategic concepts -- and how much is invested in building and sustaining an appropriate image. Curiously "sustainable development" has no coherent "image" associated with it -- however much it might be said to be a feature of the Zeitgeist. What can be said of the "image" of the future as cultivated by the United Nations or the G8 in their various declarations? What is the carrying capacity of such images?

With respect to the traditional ambitions for a comprehensive 'single image' to map the conceptual world, Chris Mullen (Yung-hsien Chen's Images of the Absolute, 2002) notes:

Many cultures have sought to tell the great truths in ways that transcend the spoken word and the written word. Be it the theatricalities of ritual or the mechanics of the picture, the telling of truths by the path of the Visual is a challenge demanding of great power and ingenuity, particularly, as we are told, we are today awash in a sea of images…. One ideal shared by several cultures was the Single Image in which the entirety of the World's knowledge could be layered and coded, to be glimpsed, assessed and used by the viewer as a series of revealed interconnected references. The single illuminated page might encode the Four Elements, Time, Space, Nature and the Four Humours, unblushingly ambitious and bold in narrative concept…. The tradition of the Image bearing a full load of meaning (often concealed, or explicable only by the adept) was continued in the Seventeenth Century by the Emblem Book which provided a set of pictorial constants, references to abstractions and combinations of abstractions that made it possible for a shared pictorial language to act as coinage between nations and the artists of nations.

Perhaps the dynamics of humour can provide a higher dimensional template more appropriate to the times than the statics of such a Single Image.

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