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Strategic Jousting through Poetic Wrestling

Aesthetic reframing of the clash of civilizations

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Introduction to the joust

This is a response to the disconnect between noble efforts to elaborate "global plans" and their irrelevance as experienced at the grass roots level -- in contrast with the energy and enthusiasm evoked by popular engagement with traditional poetic wrestling and various forms of competitive sport. These are of course considered to be without relevance to the elaboration and implementation of the "global plans".

The possibility explored here is that both constitute a form of strategic jousting. However with respect to global plan elaboration, supposedly in the popular interest, the joust does not constitute a particularly attractive spectator sport -- whatever the local implications of the outcome. The associated debates are essentially boring -- if not quintessentially so. In the case of poetic wrestling -- whatever the ludic form -- its popular attractivity and comprehensibility are essential requirements.

The question explored here is whether there is any scope for interweaving these two styles -- or whether the game they together constitute is already in progress, as schemas competing for popular engagement. The focus here is on the possibilities suggested by "poetic wrestling" or "poetic jousting" as continues to be practiced in many traditions, possibly enhanced by musical accompaniment or taking sung form. Its potential relevance to major strategic issues has been explored in detail in *Poetic Engagement with Afghanistan, Caucasus and Iran: an unexplored strategic opportunity?* (2009). Given the parallel popular fascination with sport, epitomized by the recognition of "wrestling" and "jousting" as metaphors, the strategic implication of such sports is also considered.

The focus is on organization of gatherings, whether face-to-face or virtual, to enhance the strategic relevance of such engagement.

Range of participants

Typically those attracted to the process would attach particular importance to the spirit of their discipline and the larger significance of what its practice carries and communicates -- especially in a grounded connection with real people and their sense of cultural identity.

Participants might therefore include representatives of:

- **poetic improvisation** and jousting traditions as noted in *Poetic Engagement with Afghanistan, Caucasus and Iran: an unexplored strategic opportunity?* (2009), including:
    - *balagtasan* (Philippines); *kabigan* (Bangladesh), *Kantan Chamorita* (Mariana Islands)
    - *contrasti* (Sicily), *zajal* (Lebanon), *chjamí è rispondi* (Corsica), *quintillas* (Spain),*cantigas ao desafio* (Portugal), *griot* (West Africa); *guslari* (Slavic); *bertsolariak* (Basque); *pytaris* (Crete) , *spiritu pronto* (Malta), *cantadori* (Sardinia), *glosadores* (Balearic Islands)
    - *decimas* (Ibero-America); *decimistas* (Cuba), *cantores* (Puerto Rico, San Domingo, Ecuador), *payadores* (Argentinia), *cantadores* and *repentistas* (Brazil), *troveros* (Mexico), *payadores* (Uruguay), *galeronistas* (Venezuela)
    - flyting (notably in Scotland) as a public contest of extravagant insults, often structured in the form of a poetic joust (similar to African American practice of freestyle battles and the historic practice of the dozens)
    - etc

- **sporting disciplines**, where the strategic spirit of the sport lends itself to readily comprehensible metaphor in verbal jousting
    - wrestling, given that "poetic wrestling" is already recognized as an appropriate metaphor
    - martial arts (including fencing):
        - *aikido*, whose insights have been articulated in poetic form (*Doka: The Poems of Ueshiba Morihei -- Insights for a Modern Way of Life. Furyu: The Budo Journal*, Winter 1996) and even incorporated into regular training, although it remains unclear whether such insights could be used in poetic engagement with a potentially hostile opponent.
        - *katas* are the detailed choreographed patterns of movements practiced either solo or in pairs, whether in traditional theater or more commonly in the martial arts. Of relevance to improvised debate, at the higher levels of martial art, serious injury is prevented only by a high sensitivity of both participants to important concepts. These include timing and distance, with the kata practiced at high speed. This adjustability of kata training is found in other Japanese arts with roles of attacker and defender often interchanging within the sequence.
    - sports (especially ball-games such as soccer, volleyball, etc)
        - passing patterns of interaction in various sports: as recognized and analyzed in some ball-games, notably soccer. The fact that the justification of any focus on "passing patterns" would be comprehensible and relevant to any cafe or pub discussion of sport -- or a beach scene of frisbee or juggling -- suggests the opportunity to give enhanced credibility to strategic dialogue and its improvement in response to issues that are of concern to all. Such patterns are echoed and enriched to some degree in the aesthetics of poetic interaction, where "the ball" needs to be passed between different "voices" to sustain a larger and more complex pattern.
        - military sports as practiced at the Military World Games and under the auspices of the International Military Sports Council
    - etc.
- unusual traditions of debate:
    - formal procedure of academic disputation by "wranglers", prior to adoption of the written examination
    - adversarial religious debate (Mary M. Garrett, Wit, Power, and Oppositional Groups: a case study of 'Pure Talk'. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 79, 1993, 3; *The `Three Doctrines Discussions' of Tang China: religious debate as a rhetorical strategy. Argumentation & Advocacy*, 1994)
    - salon conversation (Jaida n'ha Sandra, *The Joy of Conversation: the Complete Guide to Salons*, 1997; Lee Hoffman, *Salon Dialogue : For Successful Results*, 1998)
    - Paris style debate (France)
    - extemporaneous debate
    - Karl Popper debate (Eastern Europe)
    - televised religious debate in Arabic (Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson,*New Media in the Muslim world: the emerging public sphere*, 2003)
    - etc.

The intention is to bypass conventional strategic participation of the "usual suspects" and their monologues. In addition to those cited above, of particular interest, as examples of strategically relevant extremes, are:

- the avid audience for narco ballads in Colombia, despite their being officially prohibited (Juan Forero, *In Colombia, Songs Too Hot for the Mainstream Sizzle Underground*, *Washington Post*, 4 November 2006; James M Klatell, *Colombia's Narco-Ballads Songs Pay Tribute To Drug Traffickers And Warlords*, CBS News, 22 July 2006; Toby Muse, *Colombia's 'forbidden rhythms' depict underworld*, *USA Today*, 25 September 2005; Chris Summers, *Mexico's Forbidden Songs*, BBC News Online, 3 October 2004)
- the role of rapping in the USA (notably its origins in the home city of the new president of the USA)
- the inspiration rap has constituted for poetry slams (originating in that same home city)
- the traditional role of invective poetry in Arab cultures
- the role of Pashto tappas commonly found in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and North West Frontier Province of Afghanistan -- precisely the area considered the most challenging by NATO's. UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). They are generally sung on the occasion of weddings, possibly as a two-person duet, and deal with any topic: love, passion, anger, hate, wars, history, heroes and villains.

Self-organization and self-regulation

An important feature of the process and any associated gathering is the manner in which it is both self-organized and self-regulated -- in contrast to the challenging needs for heavy-handed "organization" of conventional events with their logistical and other associated hassles.

Of key significance is the cybernetic implication of any audience and the manner of its attentive participation -- enhancing and constraining spontaneous creative communication as appropriate. An important criteria is the aesthetic appeal of any such communication, notably the degree to which grand-standing is appreciated or curtailed. Vital to this process is the collective judgment that any contribution is enhancing the whole rather than constituting an isolated solo performance, however brilliant. In this sense contributions are encouraged to the extent that they engage with the pattern of other contributions and contributors -- in appreciation or counterpoint. Some relevant issues are discussed elsewhere (*Proposal for an Exploratory International Conference: Poetry-making and Policy-making*, 1993)

In contrast to conventional gatherings of strategic significance, active audience participation is "designed in" -- rather than being "designed out" into alternative (even distant) locations, possibly subject to severe (even repressive) security restrictions.

For the process of self-regulation to work and to facilitate the emergence of unforeseen patterns of order, any contribution must

necessarily be complemented or offset in some way. This is exemplified in dance where the role of a "partner" acting in a complementary or even challenging "opposing" manner is essential to the interest of the whole. This is also evident in musical group improvisation (jamming) or dance (jam circle). Jamming is itself recognized as a valuable metaphor for group innovation (John Kao, *Jamming: the art and discipline of business creativity*, 1997).

Aesthetic criteria

The ultimate constraint is then any degradation of aesthetic appeal -- whether with respect to use of time or excessive stress on a particular mode.

The variety of aesthetic styles represented in some way therefore constitutes a challenge as to how they interweave in support or opposition to each other. This is the challenge of "fusion", variously interpreted in music and poetry gatherings.

Such a challenge is conventionally resolved by the selection of contributions into a programme (and out of it). Typically this constrains the number of contributors, necessitates their isolation in parallel sessions, and inhibits the emergence of any larger sense of the relationships between them -- notably with respect to any "harmony" or "discord" in aesthetic terms. The event becomes a victim of forms of grid-based, multi-track programming.-- dependent on combinations of room-space and time with little aesthetic appeal as a whole.

Despite the unconstrained use of resources for the most important global strategic events, their aesthetics are typically focused on decorative arrangements, ceremonial honorifics, munificent receptions and dinners, and artfully posed group photographs. Preparation of the location of such events is appropriately compared to a face-lift, cosmetics and dressing up. None of these has very wide appeal -- to the extent that others are enabled to have any experience of them. Put bluntly, such events are boring to a wider audience, and their output -- as comminiques or "statements" -- tends to reflect this no matter how strategically vital it is claimed to be.

The underlying aesthetic of conventional gatherings -- the degree of coherence of the substantive dance in which their participants engage -- is not visibly communicated.

It is for such reasons that a quite different approach is to be taken.

Web-enhanced communication

Whilst the encounter between creative contributors and participants respects the tradition of such encounters in popular culture, every effort can be taken to benefit from new technology to enhance the associated processes, extend the range of contributions and ensure involvement from remote locations.

Face-to-face setting: This is of course typical of traditional poetic jousting and wrestling. Increasingly however such jousts may be recorded on video, possibly immediately broadcast to a television audience, as well as uploaded to a video-sharing site such as YouTube. Increasingly those physically present (in an audience) may interact with each other through mobile-enhanced processes like Twitter. It should be noted that a strong case is made for the power of the face-to-face experience when it is possible to share it in one physical location.

Extended face-to-face setting: This is the natural consequence of broadcasting the face-to-face gathering in some way. Again, whether present or absent, participants may increasingly interact with each other through mobile-enhanced processes like Twitter.

Virtual setting: In effect, especially through sites like YouTube, the set of poetic jousts then exists in a timeless zone of cyberspace from which they may be accessed -- even in years to come. A geographically focused event may of course also be reactivated in a virtual world arena like Second Life. Such a setting implies that participants may subsequently interact with the gathering, whether or not their contributions are (optimally) distinguished and dissociated from the original set.

Virtual enhancement: By some degree of switch in the centre of focus from a particular geographical location to a virtual one the face-to-face gathering may engage active virtual participation. This may even come to predominate -- or may be used to create a context from out of which particular face-to-face physical gatherings are engendered. In effect the capacity of YouTube to enable individuals to upload their own creative contributions to a poetic joust means that these may be actively drawn into the aesthetic pattern of interactions of the joust.

Self-organizing design: With the possibility of increasing the number of contributors and encouraging the creative involvement of those who might otherwise be framed only as spectators, there is a real challenge of ensuring that the self-organizing process works to sustain the emergence of a pattern that is of greater significance than its parts. Obviously there is a concern at the possibility that the process might be undermined, whether deliberately, inadvertently, or simply as a consequence of juxtaposition of contributions perceived as problematic in terms of particular aesthetic preferences. Overload is a particular issue requiring processes that position appropriately large numbers of contributions such as not to obscure emergence of the pattern as a whole. The fractal organization of the Mandelbrot set suggests possibilities in this respect (*Psycho-social Significance of the Mandelbrot Set: a sustainable boundary between chaos and order*, 2005).

Substantive and aesthetic integration

Coherence: The key issue is how the disparate elements are drawn together into patterns of coherence that have substantive and aesthetic characteristics. The challenge here is the varied understanding of any such coherence and of how any balance might be found between such understandings. If only as a metaphor, this might be considered the core problem of aspirations to alternative patterns of governance as evidenced by the efforts to form alliances and coalitions or to engender a more coherent focus to gatherings such as the

World Social Forum. For some, for example, such coherence would even be considered perfect as it is -- or the absence of "coherence" an aesthetic preference.

This challenge of coherence may itself be reframed as an illusory false problem if it is the variety itself that is to be valued -- if only aesthetically and irrespective of the implications for governance. In this sense any "integration" is of a quite different form from that conventionally practiced and sought -- and exemplified by global "plans" or the single-eyed vision of a creative "Cyclops" (*Cyclopean Vision vs Poly-sensual Engagement*, 2006; *Strategic Challenge of Polysensorial Knowledge*, 2008).

Beyond binary logic: However, if some greater integration is accepted as a challenge to creativity -- whether aesthetic or substantive -- the question is how to break out of the limitations of the binary logic within which such a challenge is readily framed. Here the insight of Eastern logic is helpful, as adapted from the quadrilemma of Kinhide Mushakoji: A, no-A, A-and-not-A, neither-A-nor-not-A (*Global Issues and Interparadigmatic Dialogue: essays on multipolar politics*, 1988). This framework may be reformulated as:

- coherence
- non-coherence
- coherence and non-coherence
- neither coherence nor non-coherence

Implicit in this elaboration are the following

Comparison of aesthetic and substantive coherence		
	aesthetic	substantive
coherence	aesthetic coherence	substantive coherence
non-coherence	aesthetic non-coherence	substantive non-coherence
coherence and non-coherence	aesthetic coherence and non-coherence	substantive coherence and non-coherence
neither coherence nor non-coherence	neither aesthetic coherence nor non-coherence	neither substantive coherence nor non-coherence

The "validity" of an aesthetic form of coherence in the absence of substantive coherence (as in the content of lyrics) is succinctly indicated by the Italian phrase: *Si non e vero, é ben trovato* which might be usefully rendered here as *If it is not true, it is nevertheless appropriate*. Presumably, as in governance, the reverse may also apply in that it may not be "aesthetic" but it may nevertheless be "necessary".

Clearly any such framework may in turn be further elaborated, provided that its comprehension is facilitated, notably through the mnemonic strengths of aesthetics, especially those of musical harmony (*In Quest of Mnemonic Catalysts -- for comprehension of complex psychosocial dynamics*, 2007). Briefly, aesthetic harmony enables the psychoactive engagement with more complex patterns than is possible with checklists and grid patterns engendered by binary logic.

"Web 2.0": Although there is much confusion as to what exactly is denoted by Web 2.0, it is useful to assume that it represents a combination (if not an integration in practice) between applications such as: social networking, open source directories, tagging, and the the like. At present these facilitate the discovery of content of potential interest -- sustaining and developing networks of relationships with that content. A desirable degree of coherence may then be satisfied through such interaction.

In terms of aesthetic criteria, these may be satisfied by formation of groups around particular aesthetic preferences.

Enabling emergent aesthetic coherence

A further step may be taken by adapting the Web 2.0 applications.

Recording: Whether traditional material (poems, aphorisms, lyrics, fables) or spontaneously improvised material, each may be embodied in a Wiki-type entry potentially associated with a video recording (as in YouTube).

Tagging: Each item may then be open to tagging or ranking for interest -- whether public or restricted -- as is the practice in a variety of social bookmarking applications (Delicious, etc; list of social bookmarking sites)

Linking: Each item may also be open to indication -- whether public or restricted -- of its relationship to other items. A range of such links might be envisaged, possibly including:

- similar to, of the same kind as...
- derivative of, namely inspired by...
- implied by...
- development or elaboration of...
- complementary to...
- counterpoint to...
- denial of...
- denied by...
- superceding...
- superceded by...

This process may to some extent be partially facilitated by semi-automated applications currently under development by Google, such as quote matching and image labelling .

Emergent order: Through such logical-aesthetic linking, items are progressively pulled into an emergent order. In the case of Google search facilities, this currently results in a purely linear Page Ranking in relation to given search criteria. The challenge is to ensure the emergence of non-linear patterns, meaningful both aesthetically and substantively. This is in some measure achieved in certain mapping applications -- as noted in *Complementary Knowledge Analysis / Mapping Process* (2006) but more particularly through the Global Sensemaking initiative. Metaphorically it might be exemplified by the emergence of Chladni patterns, whether for violin or guitar (*Chladni Patterns: examples of integrated, multi-set concept schemes*, 1984).

Experiments towards such emergent order have been made with the online content of the *Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential* -- focusing primarily on visual patterns but with some effort towards their sonification (*Interactive Hyperlink Map: auto-generated, self-organizing link visualization*; *Communication between Network Visualization and Music*, 2001; *Polyhedral Pattern Language: software facilitation of emergence, representation and transformation of psycho-social organization*, 2008).

Aesthetic "bridging" to coherence: Such experiments have however focused on substantive content -- with a minimum of "design" to facilitate comprehension. There is the strong possibility, because its interpretation lends itself too readily to the binary logical stress on "true" or "false", that any transcendence of this unfruitful divisive dynamic is only viable through aesthetic recognition of patterns of complementarity. The question is the balance between the requirements for "logical/scientific" correspondence and those for "aesthetic/symbolist" correspondence (*Theories of Correspondences -- and potential equivalences between them in correlative thinking*, 2007).

These criteria go beyond those noted elsewhere (*Complementary Knowledge Analysis / Mapping Process*, 2006) or currently envisaged in the applications profiled on the website of Global Sensemaking which identifies a range of tools for dialogue and deliberation on wicked interrelated global problems.

The question is then to what extent any web-based application can enable such aesthetic bridging -- bearing in mind the range of motivations of different "audiences" with respect to:

- extant content:
  - primarily interested in extant substantive content (possibly only that of "authorities")
  - primarily interested in extant aesthetic content (possibly only that of "well-known artists")
- supplementing content
  - primarily interested in adding substantive content
  - primarily interested in adding aesthetic content
- reactive/contrarian contributions
  - primarily interested in adding substantive content in reaction to other content
  - primarily interested in adding aesthetic content in reaction to other content
- interpretative contributions
  - primarily interested in substantive significance of aesthetic contributions (as a source of substantive coherence)
  - primarily interested in aesthetic significance of substantive contributions (as a source of aesthetic coherence)
- political/strategic contributions
  - primarily interested in political significance of aesthetic contributions (in support of a strategic position)
  - primarily interested in political significance of substantive contributions (in support of a s strategic position)

"Data mining": Applications to enable data mining are fundamental to knowledge management and the operation of search engines. Current emphases necessarily give low priority to the subtleties of pattern recognition from an aesthetic perspective. There is of course considerable research on pattern recognition in relation to images notably of faces and fingerprints for security purposes. Applications have been developed, notably by Amazon, to indicate related books the reader might find of interest, on the basis of patterns of purchase by other clients.

Such approaches avoid the aesthetic challenge -- perhaps as the only viable means of enabling associative links through a form of implicit tagging. The question is how readily such applications could be usefully adapted to associate poetically expressed content -- if only in anticipation of future developments. Possibilities are discussed separately (*Global Quality Navigation System (GQS): participative enhancement of aesthetic discovery*, 2009)

Conclusion

The above pointers suggest that there is indeed scope for further exploration, if only to conclude that "poetic jousting" is occurring at grass roots level anyway and that "strategic jousting" is what in effect occurs anyway at the global level -- and that there is little merit in seeking any cross-fertilization between them.

It is curious that both "poetic jousting" and "strategic jousting" have been largely marginalized as skills of interest to very particular audiences that do not interact -- or whose interaction has not been meaningfully enabled. This lack of interaction is of course symptomatic of a profound disconnect that is potentially dangerous in relation to the credibility and engagement with any form of global governance -- especially by traditional cultures appropriately resistant to "harmonisation through globalization", according to dominant and increasingly commodified western values.
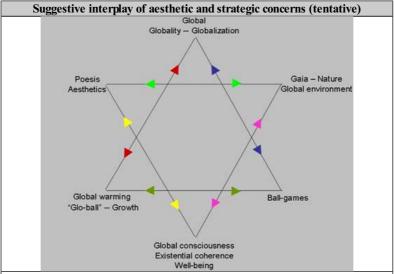
Missing is a degree of recognition of the value of traditional styles of debate with an aesthetic component, notably as characteristic of Arab and Chinese cultures -- especially with respect to challenging religious issues. The focus is on "presidential debates" in which aesthetics are minimized and with little awareness of other options.

An interesting question is the extent to which poetic wrestling can be enabled between those using different languages -- without making

extensive use of interpretation. However, given that effective communication depends to a high degree on body language and other signals unrelated to content, it is probable that "poetic wrestling" could filter out contributions that did not meet aesthetic criteria. The issue of conceptual content could then be left to later rounds. The dilemma in this respect of competitors in the Eurovision Song Contest suggests that use of original language may be as good as that of a dominant language such as English.

Most intriguing is the far more ambitious challenge of whether such aesthetic jousting and wrestling can engender a global "epic" -- avoiding the route whereby such an epic is commissioned and designed by a single artist. Could the *Mahabarata* or the *Ring Cycle* be engendered in this way?

Arguably however, the epic is already being engendered -- we are all actors in such an epic -- even though our specific roles may not given "good seats" from which to see the emergence and evolution of the whole epic.

Suggestive interplay of aesthetic and strategic concerns (tentative)

Possible interpretation:

- **upward pointing triangle**: explicit arenas of globality, whether as "globalization", as problematic consequences of growth ("global warming"), popular focus on ball-games worldwide. Each implies a quite distinct type of explicit integrative focus involving competition, most intriguingly with the manner in which any "ball" is treated in strategic competition, perhaps symbolically echoing understandings of globality
- **downward pointing triangle**: implicit arenas of globality, whether as the integrative experience of nature, the aesthetic inspiration it offers, or a personall sense of integrative well-being
- **opposite points**: there is a particular tension to each of the three, whether external/internal globality, nature and its exploitation, aesthetics and ball-games. It is the latter which is the focus of the argument above -- as a means of rendering comprehensible strategies relevant to the dilemmas posed by the other two
- **lines between points**: from a systemic perspective it is possible that these are usefully to be associated with more complex processes which are as much explicit as implicit, objective as subjective, collective as individual

Earlier use of such a figure gave rise to the commentary: *El-Attractor -- Timeless Complex Dynamic* (2007)

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