Introduction

Beyond descriptions of the problematique of change processes (as described in Annex 1: Distinguishing Levels and Patterns of Strategic Obsolescence), and of the problematique itself, lie the questions of how to transform the situation -- with which I have to deal in my world.

"Peak meaning": As but one of the challenges to which society is called upon to respond, "peak oil" points to the complex implications for the governance of oil-dependent economies. The potential for collapse of those economies may however be associated with another more fundamental form of collapse, namely the "collapse of meaning". Such a collapse -- following the "peak meaning" of globalization -- would be associated with a radical loss of confidence in the institutionalized articulations "oiled" by global meaning. The difficulty in recognizing the potential for such collapse may be intimately related to the difficulty in acknowledging the possibility of the collapse of the monetary system that is so emblematic of one form of confidence on which society is dependent. And yet many national governments have gone bankrupt in the past, and many specialists have highlighted warning indications that the global financial system could collapse.

Institutional credibility: The problem for institutions and authority structures is that, having indulged so heavily in news management and "spin", they are now completely unable to prove with any credibility claims they may choose to make. How is the integrity of independent evaluators to be proven when so many have been bought in the recent past -- or persuaded by false claims regarding "national security" priorities? Hence the democratic deficit. At the time of writing this has been exemplified by assertions by the Director General of MI5, Eliza Manningham-Buller, that it was currently tracking 30 major terrorist plots in the UK involving 1600 people (BBC News, 10 November 2006).

To what extent do such claims serve overt or covert political agendas? (cf Promoting a Singular Global Threat -- Terrorism: Strategy of choice for world governance, 2002). As with claims traditionally made by the Pentagon, how many "plots" is it necessary to detect in order to justify increasing the budget of the security services by x%? The validity of claims made by medical, and big science, researchers is similarly impossible to establish.

Irrelevance of authority structures: Authority structures are acquiring the significance of the "beef eaters" guarding the Tower of London -- covered with medals and awards and empty of contemporary relevance other than for tourists, the gullible and their victims. Such assessments are only reinforced by the incompetence and ballooning budgets associated with the management of mega-projects.
claimed to be visionary. Institutions and their initiatives are increasingly drained of independent meaning.

Cognitive engagement: This creates a context in which descriptive patterning is not enough. Whereas the map may indeed not be the territory, it may constitute a trap if it is not recognized that its value is intimately related to the map-making process of the map-maker (cf The Territory Construed as the Map: in search of radical design innovations in the representation of human activities and their relationships, 1979 ). Its significance, and how it is used, derives from the value the map-maker attaches to it.

Beyond the arguments for the social construction of reality, whether enhanced by positive thinking or not, the question that emerges is the degree of personal cognitive engagement now called for. The process of effectively delegating or projecting responsibility onto external authorities and initiatives is increasingly questionable. As the collapse of many social safety nets is now demonstrating, the capacity of such collective initiatives to respond appropriately in my world is becoming increasingly questionable -- and this capacity would appear to be diminishing further. The expectation that proposed initiatives will meet needs in the future is as problematic as the budget estimates now made for well-circumscribed projects.

The following "stages" should be understood as pragmatic clusters that emerged from the author's reading of seemingly relevant literature -- with the many reservations for which this may call. Many other such interpretations -- with fewer or more "stages", of greater or lesser subtlety -- are possible in the light of various metaphors and schools of thought, as for example summarized elsewhere in terms of the "rebirth" metaphor (Varieties of Rebirth: distinguishing ways of being born again, 2004). In particular the metaphor of a linear sequence of "stages", implying a "ladder", is itself to be considered questionable (as discussed below). One interesting example is the classic Zen set of 10 Ox-herding Pictures (Kubota Ji'un, Ten Ox-herding Pictures with the Verses Composed by Kakuan Zenji, 1996)

Stage 1: Enjoining

This stage is characterized by appeals for action on the part of others, possibly made as part of any emergent leadership process. This may take the form of declarations and resolutions -- typically of the international community, or made on its behalf by world leaders.

It may include various forms of promotion and proselytization framed in terms of positive thinking, whether or not this serves mainly to sustain a facade of competence and appropriate timely response.

Stage 2: Exemplifying / Enabling / Empowering

To the extent that the previous stage is perceived to be inadequate, various processes may emerge to trigger action on the part of others:

- a focus on motivation and empowerment processes.
- a focus on facilitation processes, providing the infrastructure to enable others to act
- action by those taken to be exemplars (or promoted as such), possibly associated with some manifestation of leadership on their part. This may be closely associated with the action of elites, possibly through semi-secret societies. However it may also take the form of direct action, through demonstrations and the like, or as the action of "developers".

These respond to the problematic status of many initiatives, to the democratic deficit, and to the challenge of apathy associated with loss of meaning. The challenge of such processes is they are only successful to the extent that individuals are able to reframe the reality with which they have to deal in order to provide themselves with a sense of power and capacity to act effectively. These forms may also be framed in terms of positive thinking.

Stage 3: Imaginative world-making

Persuasion: Distinct from the empowerment of others characteristic of the previous stage, are degrees of persuasion that effectively involve the creation of an alternative reality or world view, if only for specific purposes. Examples include:

- public relations skills in reframing the image of a product, a place, a service or a lifestyle
- news management ("spin") and propaganda, most evidently in order to justify government policy, especially in relation to military action
- the process of "talking it up", characteristic of politicians, through which people are encouraged to see their circumstances otherwise -- now enhanced by dubious techniques of news management and "spin"
- traditional popular celebrations and rituals highlighting alternatives patterns of relationships
- "psyching up" in order to engage in a challenging activity
- efforts by artists to enhance the ability of people to see the world otherwise, to detect other patterns in everyday life

Constructivism: The previous stage evokes a challenge to the imagination. If the "imperfections" are a consequence of errors of perception, cognition, insight and understanding, how might the world really be, could I but see it so?

This accords with the philosophy of "as if", promoted by Hans Vaihinger (Philosophie des Als Ob, 1911). It also accords with the approach advocated by George Kelly (The language of hypothesis: man's psychological instrument, 1964/1969) in the form of personal construct psychology through which people are encouraged to try out different constuctions of events in order to see what might happen when they act "as if" these constructions are so. A more recent articulation is in terms of constructivism, especially in relation to constructivist psychotherapy (cf Richard E Watts, et al) and constructivist epistemology (cf Paul Watzlawick, Invented Reality: how do we know what we believe we know? 1984).

Re-reading: This stage focuses on the capacity to engage imaginatively in "re-reading" the world as a script (Principles of Re-reading and Rapplication, 2001) -- seeing it otherwise in order to be otherwise within it (Being Other Wise: clues to the dynamics of a meaningfully sustainable lifestyle, 1998). One example is the experimental application of this approach to the accounts of two
international conferences to enhance their significance (Transdisciplinarity through Structured Dialogue: beyond sterile dualities in meetings to the challenge of participant impotence, 1994; Gardening Sustainable Psycommunities: recognizing the psycho-social integrities of the future, 1995). Another example is the reframing of an experimental community initiative (Renaissance Zones: experimenting with the intentional significance of the Damanhur community, 2003).

Other approaches include:

- the philosophical exploration of everyday objects (Roger-Pol Droit, How are Things? A Philosophical Experiment, 2006)
- perceiving otherwise through new insights into perception (cf Jeremy W Hayward, Perceiving Ordinary Magic: science and intuitive wisdom, 1984)
- questioning the metaphoric frameworks through which it is possible to perceive the world (cf Walking Elven Pathways: enactivating the pattern that connects, 2006)

Virtual worlds: The emerging significance of this approach on a global scale is to be seen in the exploding enthusiasm for the collective imaginative creation of virtual worlds in which individuals can engage through avatars of their own imagining (cf Imaginational education: Game playing, science fiction, language, art and world-making, 2003). Now in its early phase, it is intricately associated with "massive multiplayer online role-playing games" (MMORPG), namely the many role-playing games (RPGs) in which a large number of players interact with one another in a virtual world. The most recent variant is Second Life -- notably recognized by the business press and multinational corporations (James Harkin, Get a (second) life. Financial Times, 17 November 2006).

Perhaps anticipating this development, Max Borders, et al (Experimental Politics: ways of virtual worldmaking, 2001) expect that MMORPGs will soon evolve into online societies of political and economic interest. It has been suggested that avatars may soon be able to travel from one such virtual world to another -- integrating or "federating" the virtual worlds with possible significance for strategies in the real world (cf Playfully Changing the Prevailing Climate of Opinion: Climate change as focal metaphor of effective global governance, 2005).

Concerns are now widely expressed regarding the proportion of time that people increasingly spend in such constructs rather than in the "real world" -- in the "first life". Such concerns highlight the distinction between a computer-enabled virtual construct and one in which the senses phenomena of the "first life" are reframed and interrelated in some fundamental manner -- irrespective of whether such reframings can be facilitated, augmented and sustained in a virtual environment, which may indeed prove to be the case.

Aesthetics: A different take on these matters is the aesthetics of "world-making" as most notably promoted by Nelson Goodman (Ways of Worldmaking, 1978) who reviewed the ways in which worlds could be created through the arts. For him the creative use of metaphor:

"typically involves a change not merely of range but also of realm. A label along with others constituting a schema is in effect detached from the home realm of that schema and applied for the sorting and organizing of an alien realm. Partly by thus carrying with it a reorientation of a whole network of labels does a metaphor give clues for its own development and elaboration... A whole set of alternative labels, a whole apparatus of organization takes over a new territory... and the organization they effect in the alien realm is guided by their habitual use in the home realm. A schema may be transported almost anywhere. The choice of territory for invasion is arbitrary; but the operation within that territory is almost never completely so... which elements in the chosen realm are warm, or are warmer than others, is then very largely determinate. Even where a schema is imposed upon a most unlikely and unengamal realm, antecedent practice channels the application of the labels." (The Languages of Art; an approach to a theory of symbols, 1976 p.72-74)

This points to the role of metaphors as vehicles for travel through imagined worlds (cf Metaphors as Transdisciplinary Vehicles of the Future, 1991; Aesthetics of Governance in the Year 2490, 1990).

Mindscapes: Of particular significance is the cognitive complexity or diversity of any world made by such means. Clearly MMORPGs are increasing in complexity through the design choices made by participants. Seemingly as yet to be considered are preferences for different epistemological "mindscapes" as extensively explored by Magoroh Maruyama (Mindscapes, social patterns and future development of scientific theory types, 1980; Mindscapes in Management, 1994; Michael T. Caley and Daiyo Sawada. Mindscapes, Creativity and Ecosophy. The Trumpeter, 2000), by Michael Caley (1994, 2000) and others (Systems of Categories Distinguishing Cultural Biases, 1993). In a multi-media computer enhanced environment, perhaps these should be termed "mind skins" as a cognitive development of user-chosen "browser skins".

Such studies are a strong reminder that behaviours within MMORPGs are currently strongly influenced by the dominant culture through which they have been generated. Maruyama notably stresses the need for "polyocular vision" (Polyocular Vision or Subunderstanding? Organization Studies, 25, 2004, pp. 467-480) to span the epistemological variety of such cultures -- and others to be foreseen in outer space (Magoroh Maruyama and Arthur Harkins (Eds). Cultures beyond the earth: the role of anthroplogy in outer space, 1975). A number of authors have clarified the challenge, although their views have not been reconciled (cf Systems of Categories Distinguishing Cultural Biases, 1993).

Of particular value are new insights into the profound significance of traditional ways of knowing as a means of engaging with the environment (cf Darrell A. Posey (Editor). Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity: a complementary contribution to Global Biodiversity Assessment, 1999). The challenge has been the subject of successful dialogues with Australian Aborigines in terms of distinct "campfires".

Delusion: An individual can of course effectively imagine a world as a consequence of some form of mental dysfunctionality. From a psychiatric perspective a delusion is defined as a false belief based on incorrect inference about external reality that is firmly sustained.
Consider the following prominent problems

I endeavour to is better not to unwrap. Problems are not only nasty in themselves, they understand? From this perspective "institutionalized" problem is "trying useful to challenge the thinking trap of "problem-solving". The approach As discussed elsewhere (policy-making on an array of operational terms prefixes that characterize it? Pro-ject, ob-ject, sub-ject? (cf of language conducive to project logic? Is this intimately dependent on different kinds of projection -- through the range of structuring Is this all to be understood as a device to reproduce a reality and one's sense of identity in it? Is it facilitated and determined by features of language conducive to project logic? Is this intimately dependent on different kinds of projection -- through the range of structuring prefixes that characterize it? Pro-ject, ob-ject, sub-ject? (cf New Paradigms via a Renewed Set of Prefixes? Dependence of international policy-making on an array of operational terms, 2003) and "targets" (cf Missiles, Missives, Missions and Memetic Warfare: navigation of strategic interfaces in multidimensional knowledge space, 2001)

As discussed elsewhere (My Reflecting Mirror World: making my World Summit on Sustainable Development worthwhile, 2002), it is useful to challenge the thinking trap of "problem-solving". The approach to problems may then be reframed by asking myself what a problem is "trying to tell me" -- or, better still, is the problem as understood in effect a metaphor for something I would prefer not to understand? From this perspective "institutionalized" problems may in effect be a sort of metaphorical euphemism -- a package which it is better not to unwrap. Problems are not only nasty in themselves, they are also nasty in what they imply about myself -- however much I endeavour to occupy the moral high ground as a disinterested change agent, victim or innocent bystander.

Consider the following prominent problems in my world:

1. Poverty: I am exposed to a great deal of poverty in my world -- and I consider myself relatively impoverished compared to many. My concern about poverty tends to focus on objects that I do not have -- even when I do not need those things to enable me to achieve a degree of well-being. Somehow my well-being is intimately related to things that I do not have -- even when I have most of the things that many in my world only dream of having. And of course, once I obtain the things I feel I am lacking, I find that there are other things that I lack which still define me as poor in my own eyes. Is it possible that what I, and my world, really suffer from is some poorly diagnosed chronic poverty of the spirit?

2. Hunger (including malnutrition): I am constantly hearing that millions of people in my world are threatened with death by starvation. I am able to keep this challenge at a distance -- despite the pictures in the media -- but it is a constant drain on my spirit. All is definitely not well. Is this problem signalling the existence of a subtler and more widespread form of deprivation -- a malnutrition of my psyche and a spiritual hunger which I am even less capable of addressing? This would be consistent with my concern about the artificiality and superficiality of experience offered in the emerging "information society" or "global village" -- and with the desperate attempts to increase the level of "reality" by increasing the quantity and degrading quality of violence portrayed in the media. Do I now need a "murder-a-night to feel alright"? What does this say about my sense of superiority towards the public hangings in times gone by? To what extent is my imagination appropriately nourished at this time -- despite the
surfeit of imaginative material available? What are the foodstuffs and vitamins of the spirit? What is the nourishment for the spirit that I am unable to cultivate and harvest? Is this a skill now lost to my world?

3. Disease (and pain): There are many kinds of disease in my world with many suffering chronic pain. Beyond the physical pain are the many forms of mental illness, stress, neurosis and personality disorder -- especially in the "industrialized" parts of my world. Why am I so unhealthy? The many types of disease are useful indicators of the different ways in which I tend to fail to come to terms with my world -- and of the remedies that I seek as appropriate. Why, for example, do I invest so much in supporting the curiously dysfunctional dynamics of a pharmaceutical industry and a medical profession that are so well-nourished by disease? The question is whether such diseases are effectively diseases of my imagination and of my imaginal deficiency. To what extent is the illness and pain in my world a consequence of my inappropriate thinking and framing?

4. Substance abuse (including drugs and alcohol): Surely the substance abuse in which I engage is signalling a desperate need on my part for different modes of thinking, feeling and experience than those encouraged by a society I have created for myself -- now governed by antiquated thinking patterns which have been only too effectively institutionalized in "acceptable" modes of work and leisure? Again, since many that I have set up as role models in key positions in such institutions also use drugs or alcohol "to relax", what should I be learning from the level of stress -- and schizophrenia -- at which the prevailing mode of thought is requiring them to function? Is my substance abuse not effectively offering a remedy for the imaginal deficiency and mechanistic patterning characteristic of "acceptable" individual and collective behaviour? And consequently would not substance abuse become less necessary if my society acknowledged more imaginative opportunities? What is the incidence of substance abuse in the other cultures of my world whose languages make very extensive use of metaphor? To what extent is it useful for me to perceive my relation to the prevailing thinking pattern as a form of "addiction" -- a habit that I do not know how to kick?

5. Unemployment (including underemployment and absenteeism): Unemployment is a major concern in my world. It is no longer fruitful to argue that a significant proportion of unemployment is simply due to laziness, reluctance to learn new skills, lack of initiative or lack of opportunities. Is it possible that the prevailing mode of thinking, that I encourage, is inhibiting my peoples' ability to imagine new forms of action of value to others, encouraging many to perceive existing employment opportunities as worthless both to themselves and to others, as well as impoverishing the manner in which they consider what to do with their lives? Is unemployment telling me that much of the work on offer in my society is not worth doing -- and that much which is done is pointless? This would certainly be consistent with many criticisms of the consumer society and of industrial exploitation of the environment. Perhaps it is also saying that what I value doing, or am obliged to do, is not appropriately valued (as "work") in an economic system that I have allowed to be governed by an inadequate mode of thinking. This would certainly be consistent with the debate about the economic value of housework. Contrasting employment with recreation (as opposed to unemployment) is somewhat ironic in that unimaginative leisure opportunities are increasingly incapable of offering "re-creation". Is the level of unemployment also indicating that I really do not know to what I could usefully and meaningfully devote my resources? Worse still, it is indicating that I have dissociated the challenges to human society from opportunities for "work" because of the way such challenges are perceived within the pattern of thinking that I have allowed to prevail?

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

7. Homelessness: Many people in my world lack adequate shelter. Is the lack of appropriate shelter, even in my "industrialized countries", indicating that, with the current pattern of thinking that I have allowed to prevail, I am ineffective in my ability to provide, construct, or acquire cognitive and affective frameworks to shelter my people appropriately from the turbulence of the times? This would be consistent with concerns about alienation in modern society. It would also follow from the recognition that many traditional frameworks and belief systems have been torn down or discredited. Even where my people are well sheltered, it is often in houses or apartments that reflect an impoverishment of architectural imagination -- as reinforced by unimaginative building regulations and construction economics. Is my imaginal life so impoverished by the media that I engender that the ability to provide a hospitable "interior decoration" for my psyche has been degraded? Have I lost the ability to understand how to create "hearth" and "home"?

8. Wastage (including environmental degradation): Is my insensitivity to the processes of wastage and pollution, for which I am personally responsible, signalling the existence of an indifference to the "sahubrity" and "sanitation" of my imaginative life? This would be consistent with the concern expressed by some of my non-western cultures and constituencies at the indifference to "spiritual purity". There is little consensus on what is or is not healthy for the psyche -- just as I am no longer clear, with the increasing extent of pollution, to what extent which foodstuffs are safe. The depletion of natural resources associated with wastage calls for reflection on the possibility that my western-inspired culture is depleting its psychic resources in ways that I have yet to understand? Can the imaginative resources of a culture be depleted to a point of "bankruptcy" and how can such
9. Crime (including corruption): A major criticism of my development aid process is that the resources are diverted away from those most in need, despite agreements to prevent this. Various forms of bribery or "commission" are a common feature, even in my "industrialized countries". In any position (and notably in intergovernmental agencies), my appointees endeavour to obtain perks and privileges for themselves, for relatives or for friends -- whether this is limited to pilferage of office supplies, extended into the imposition of a "socially acceptable taxation" (or "sweetener") on any transactions which they control, or developed into a full-blown criminal activity. What can I learn from this degree of self-interest and the associated rule-breaking propensity? Is this an indication that my people cannot survive within the mechanistic regulations which emerge from the current pattern of thinking I have engendered -- or at least choose not to do so, and feel free not to do so when possible? This would be consistent with the admiration for people "who can get things done" despite the rules, because they are capable of imagining more subtle opportunities. To what extent is corruption associated with a more creative world view -- as reflected in the term "creative accounting"?

10. Inequality and injustice: Inequality is a major feature of my world and is a source of much protest. The few are privileged in relation to the many. But this inequality seems indeed to be a reflection of my own attitudes, for I do indeed treat some features of my environment as of greater significance than others -- and would not know how to do otherwise. I am indeed partial in my preferences, notably with respect to the attention that I accord to one person rather than to another. This treatment may indeed be said to be unjust. But how could I give attention equally to everyone, if only because of my obvious handicap in being confronted more frequently by the few that are near me -- in contrast to the many that are elsewhere, who might rightly complain to be unjustly treated in consequence? Is there some more fruitful way of responding to those who are apparently less significant to the dynamics of my world -- and of responding less enthusiastically to those who seem to make my world more meaningful?

11. Immorality: There are many standards of ethics and morals in my world -- and various efforts to form them into a universal standard. They are put forward as guidelines for behaviour that would be minimally harmful. And yet my various proponents of such different value systems continue to engage in the bloodiest conflicts in defence of their respective frameworks of "harmlessness". What are these competing frameworks that I engender? Why are the universal frameworks so unmeaningful to those who identify with more specific frameworks? Why is no universal framework that I have engendered an adequate vehicle for the diverse individual and collective identities in my world? Why do such frameworks somehow negate the diversity that I would claim to value?

12. Unproductivity: A prime concern is with economic productivity and the relatively unproductive nature of my "developing" countries and regions -- all according to monetary criteria. My "countries" are now traumatized by the need to increase productivity and "market share" in competition with each other. This is considered to be a healthy characteristic of my world -- although clearly the hope that any country could increase its market share, as more countries become productive, is clearly illusory in the extreme. It is also curious that the more productive countries need less productive countries in order to remain competitive. Given the extent to which many in my world are having to become reconciled to being "unemployed", and therefore "unproductive", it is unclear why I have to be so convinced of the vital importance of productivity -- or why I have to tolerate such a degree of frenetic activity in my world. Is it so impossible for me to engender a more graceful way of sustaining the movement of energies within the world?

13. Insecurity (and violence): Concerns about personal and collective security are a major feature of my world. Many have reason to fear violence from others. Why is it that I entertain myself so frequently by exposure to dramatized representations of such violence -- which are so characteristic of the products of the cultures of my world, especially as reflected in the media? Why is it that security is so closely associated with boredom and that risk is so closely associated with feeling alive? Do I engender violence in my world to inject a sense of life and risk -- whatever the price? Why is it that I can tolerate the exposure of some to high levels of violence and insecurity -- perhaps deploring it, but certainly without evoking any effort to remedy the situation? Does the insecurity of others, and the violence exacted upon them, obscure from my awareness my own profound sense of insecurity and the violence that I so casually need to do to others, if only through my agents?

14. Nuclear proliferation: Many have pointed to the degree of risk associated with proliferating nuclear power stations and weaponry. A chain of accidents could trigger complete disaster to life on my planet. Is this some form of ultimate existential risk with which I choose to stimulate my world and my sense of reality -- in order, paradoxically, to feel alive? Does the nature of the risk carry learnings that would be of most value to a more insightful mode of life?

15. Degradation of the environment (including ecosystems and species): There is widespread recognition that the environment of my world is being severely degraded and may well be close to collapse. Ecosystems and species that I have engendered are being annihilated by those whose livelihoods depend upon them. Healthy ecosystems are being "poisoned" by lethal pollutants, genetically modified organisms, and introduced species -- that somehow I accept. How is it that, despite lip service to the contrary, I am so tolerant of this process? Is it that my ability to be conscious of the full richness of biodiversity is highly constrained? Consequently is the loss of this or that ecosystem (or species) essentially irrelevant to the dynamics of the reduced ecosystem (with its minimal range of species) of which I am most directly aware? Is this somehow a measure of my own impoverishment -- reflected in the concrete jungles that are increasingly the habitat of my awareness? How is it that I have lost any sense of the irony of importing exotic species (provided that they behave) to populate artificial niches in such concrete
16. **Over-exploitation of energy resources**: A great deal of energy is necessary to keep the industrialized parts of **my world** operating coherently. Basically I unashamedly use any energy I can get -- and without regard to whether there is enough for the neighbours and children that I have engendered. I am extremely reluctant to impose any constraints on that lifestyle and the sense of identity that is sustained. However I am dimly aware that there are other parts of **my world** -- from which a significant proportion of my energy is obtained -- and that they cannot possibly achieve the energy intensive lifestyle on which the coherence of my daily life depends. I am also dimly aware of the highly problematic situation I am creating for future generations. Unfortunately I am effectively a vampire -- with an unrestrained tendency to flatulence.

17. **Disinformation and spin**: **My world** is now almost entirely governed through media spin. Any conceivable viewpoint can be solicited from the highest authority -- appropriately rewarded -- including denial that there is any spin. Whilst only a proportion of the "evidence" is now obtained through biased research, bribery or torture, I no longer engender any authority to be trusted to distinguish "truth" from "lie" in **my world**. Consequently all authoritative pronouncements I engender are now suspect. Ironically those who benefit most from such spin now despair at the lack of collective trust in their affirmations.

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**Stage 5: Embodying**

The previous stage emphasizes the process of seeing myself and my preoccupations as reflected in the phenomena of **my world** -- perhaps to be understood as a distorting mirror. These phenomena offer a rich array of mnemonic carriers for aspects of myself. Their interrelationships highlight relationships between aspects of myself. But there remains a sense of externality -- an "arm's length" involvement. The subjectivity mirrored by objectivity in no way questions the substantive nature of the externality.

A subtler approach may however be taken. Rather than considering the array of phenomena as an array of mirrors in which I can see a reflection of myself, they may be "enminded" or "embodied" as extensions of myself in **my world**. A distinction might be made between "enminding" and "embodying" where the former is understood as taking on a form of cognitive "exo-skeleton". This possibility is explored elsewhere (**En-minding the Extended Body: enactive engagement in conceptual shapeshifting and deep ecology**, 2003). The argument there relates to how one can relate to animals, for example, as exo-skeletons. Many conceptual models (which are regularly used and promoted) could also be understood as cognitive exo-skeletons or cognitive prosthetic devices.

Any such "exo-skeleton" or "prosthetic device", whether physical or conceptual, typically gives rise to a sense in which the user readily identifies with it through a form of projective identification. Drivers of vehicles, bulldozers, cranes, or unmanned spyplanes, effectively extend their senses into the devices to the point of identifying with them to some degree. Further extension of this capacity raises the question as to the possibility of identifying with the environment -- of "becoming it" in some way. Aspects of this possibility have been explored elsewhere (**Being the Universe -- a metaphoric frontier: co-existent immanence of evolutionary phases**, 1999).

Such an understanding of embodiment is distinct from the arguments made by others (cf Francesco Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Roach, *The Embodied Mind: cognitive science and human expression*, 1991; George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy In The Flesh: the embodied mind and its challenge to western thought*, 1999). They point to the manner in which cognition is conditioned by the human physical body.

Here however the argument is that cognition can be fruitfully considered as conditioned by the environment as a whole, the planetary body and the universe -- since all are cognitive constructs fed by the senses. A number of authors have explored this direction (Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature: a necessary unity*, 1979; David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: perception and language in a more-than-human world*, 1997; James Cowan, *Mysteries of the Dreaming: the spiritual life of Australian Aborigines*, 2001; Henryk Skolimowski, *The Participatory Mind: a new theory of knowledge and of the universe*, 1995). This approach might be seen as challenging the much cited notion of Alfred Korzybski (*Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics*) that "the map is not the territory" (cf The Territory Construed as the Map: in search of radical design innovations in the representation of human activities and their relationships, 1979).

The term embodiment is especially appropriate since, with the experienced driver of an especially sophisticated vehicle -- or a computer -- the emphasis is on the experiential nature of the cognition rather than on objective awareness of the instrumentality through which the vehicle is controlled. In the case of fighter pilots, achievement of this state may be explored under the term "cognitive fusion". It is clearly associated with the so-called "flow experience", namely a mental state of operation in which the person is fully immersed in what he or she is doing. It is characterized by a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity (cf Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow: the psychology of engagement with everyday life*, 1998). This is consistent with arguments by Francesco Monico (*The Space of Flows, Planetary Collegium*, 2005):

("topics," or "links" that, coming into contact with one another, result in a "harmony of the contrary." The Space of Flows, generally defined, is the exact moment of human action in which the dimensions of reason are created by a dynamic movement rather than a static object.)
A further consideration, to which the notion of flow points, is the fluidity and continuity of such embodiment. There are many appropriate metaphors.

Stage 6: Engendering through non-action

An appropriate form of "non-action" has long been a fundamental feature of the approaches advocated by the wise for personal worldviews and for collective governance -- especially within eastern philosophies. The attitude is one characteristic of nondualism, which also features in some western philosophies and mystical traditions. The corresponding term in Sanskrit (advaita) refers to the identity of the Self with the Whole. This is consistent with a further development of the understanding presented above in the arguments regarding embodiment.

A strong case has been made for the contemporary relevance of such an attitude by Willis Harman (Rethinking the central institutions of modern society: science and business In: Futures, 25, 10, December 1993, pp. 1063-1069; Global Mind Change: the promise of the last years of the Twentieth Century, 1988). As it might be superficially understood, this attitude can however readily be considered irresponsible, as explored elsewhere (The Quest for the Socio-Economics of Non-Action, 1993).

In Taoist philosophy, a corresponding term is wu wei, understood as "without action" and typically associated with the paradox weierwu wei, namely "action without action" or "effortless doing". These are fundamental to traditional approaches to governance in China -- "The world can be ruled by letting things run their course; it cannot be ruled by interfering". As a further development of the "flow experience" discussed above, the aim of wu wei is to achieve a state of perfect equilibrium understood to be associated with an irresistible form of "soft and invisible power" over all that is experienced -- through identification with the flow of that experience.

As fundamental to Chinese culture, this understanding may become of major global significance with the increasing role now claimed by China, and as suggested by Susantha Goonatilake (Toward a Global Science: mining civilizational knowledge, 1999)

Stage 7: Perfection of what is: intelligent design?

Coinherence: The understanding and forms of action associated with "acting without acting" could be further developed in terms of the paradoxical recognition of the "perfection of what is" (that features in some mystical traditions) in contrast with the "agonizing urgency of social transformation" and attachment to "what should be" (as typical of most international agendas). For example, in God the Sufi sees the perfection of all that is within the reach of human perception -- knowing that God is above human reach. As argued by James S. Cutsinger (The Yoga of Hesychasm; Lecture at St John's College, Santa Fe, May 1996):

And yet heaven is not enough. Heaven is a prison for the Sufi, say the mystics of Islam, for who wants the garden when there is also the Gardener? Theophanis agrees. There is more than illumination in the spiritual journey. We are not to rest satisfied with a contemplation of the splendor of God nor with an appreciative spectator's place, however joyful and permanent, in the Divine proximity. A tenth step remains: a coinherence or union with the Supreme Reality itself. For as the hesychast sees it, the only truly endless perfection is the perfection of what is intrinsically endless or infinite, namely, God. It is therefore into this Infinite that human nature will eventually be drawn at the very top of the ladder.

Lexical categories relating to perfection: In such a context, questions can be usefully raised as to whether "perfection" is intended here:

- as a noun, descriptive of a state or condition to be recognized, or
- as a verb, descriptive of a process. Does it then offer a sense of recognition of -- and/or in the sense of participating in -- an ongoing process of perfection of that which is recognized, with which one may identify or
- as some hybrid beyond the cognitive constraints of any set of conventional lexical categories (which may differ between languages or have different properties)

Intelligent design and identity: To the extent that such perfection is associated with what is now termed "intelligent design", further questions are usefully raised in terms of the dimension of time, namely whether the design:

- was done (to perfection) "in the past", and is therefore conditioning present and future experience
- (is being) done "in the present", as an ongoing perfecting process of emergent order, implying a degree of co-creation with any observer
- (is to be done) "in the future", as some form of strange attractor on which present experience, include that of any observer, converges to perfection
- all (or none) of the above, namely only to be understood in atemporal terms as a form of "implicate" perfection (cf David Bohm, Wholeness and the Implicate Order, 1980)

All such questions challenge the notion of the identity of the designer -- as distinct from the design or the identity of those aware of it (or of the designer). As the "connector of dots" which make any design comprehensible to my limited intelligence ("Eureka, I have understood"), to what extent am I in fact cognitively engaged in the design process -- if not responsible for the design as I see it, and as a reflection of my identity? To what extent is the "intelligent design" which I can comprehend, especially with its imperfections, specifically "my design"? To what extent is the "Eureka-Ah-Ah" process of "realization" in effect a process of engendering "reality" -- my reality?

Imperfection: Such issues of course raise the classic question of the role of imperfection in relation to such perfection. One approach to this is through the Japanese aesthetic recognition that true perfection lies in the harmony of imperfections.
Setting imperfections within a larger understanding of perfection provocatively challenges the comprehension of such problems as:

- **elitism and inequality:** This classic challenge is variously justified in terms of the superior qualities and skills of elites (in the interests of society as a whole), appropriately rewarding skills (notably to encourage their competitive emulation for the health of society), dynastic arguments (including those justifying castes), etc.

- **dishonesty:** This is the challenge of justifying misinformation and disinformation, whether to children ("Father Christmas"), to friends ("to avoid unnecessary embarrassment"), to the public ("for their own good"), to statutory authorities (as with Blair and Bush, in relation to weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, because of their profoundly righteous commitment to "faith-based governance"), or as a characteristic feature of Realpolitik diplomacy to advance national interest ("lying for one's country").

- **delays:** This is the challenge of justifying typical lags and tokenism in response to seemingly urgent issues (disaster relief, genocidal conflicts, pollution, endangered species, global warming, starvation, AIDS) as in some way "necessary" or appropriate - - perhaps in contrast to the inappropriateness of "knee jerk", "fire-fighting" or "interventionist" responses, perhaps because the consequences are to be serenely and fatalistically appreciated as the non-viability of various forms of "basket-case" ("It is written...").

- **corruption:**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Perfection in progress -- Iraq as a &quot;work of art&quot;?</th>
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<td>An American general in Baghdad called Iraq a &quot;work of art&quot; in progress yesterday in one of the most extraordinary attempts by the US military leadership to put a positive spin on the worsening violence. (Julian Borger, <em>Iraq a 'work of art in progress' says US general after 49 die</em>, <em>The Guardian</em>, 3 November 2006).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In response to criticism regarding progress in Iraq, following a month in which a record number of people died (3,709), Major General William Caldwell, the US chief military spokesman, argued that: &quot;Every great work of art goes through messy phases while it is in transition. A lump of clay can become a sculpture. Blobs of paint become paintings which inspire&quot;</td>
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Such problems may all be "creatively" framed as systemic solutions -- part of the compensatory and remedial dynamics on the planet ("Gaia at work" in ensuring sustainable development of a kind). Together these challenge the understanding of perfection and how such imperfections are to be "allowed" and considered "appropriate" -- *on my planet*.

**Sudden or gradual enlightenment:** The temporal dimension is fruitfully combined with the issue of (im)perfection in two contrasting positions in Chinese Buddhism, well-characterized by distinct schools of thought. Philosophically both perspectives are based on a belief in the intrinsic purity of mind, which, while pure in its self-nature, is soiled by adventitious passions (cf Paul Demiéville, *The Mirror of the Mind*. In: Peter N Gregory (Ed) *Sudden and Gradual: approaches to enlightenment in Chinese Thought*, 1991):

- the gradualist approach, insists that effort is necessary to rid the mind of these foreign impurities, expressed through the metaphor of wiping and polishing a mirror;
- the sudden approach to awakening considers only its essential purity, hence the refusal to recognize the existence of any impurity needing to be removed.

The corresponding, mutually challenging, verses are:

- *The body is the tree of the awakening; The mind is like a clear mirror. Be unceasingly diligent in wiping it and polishing it, So that it will be without dust.*
- *Awakening entails no tree at all, Nor does the clear mirror entail any material frame. The Buddha-nature is eternally pure; Where could there be any dust?*

Ironically the contrast between the two is modelled by contrasting attitudes by any owner to a personal computer -- as a technological surrogate for the mind. For some, diligent effort is required to keep it clear of spam and viruses through daily security upgrades. For others, there is no such need. The difference in attitude might also be explored in the light of a Club of Rome study on learning. This contrasted "maintenance learning" with "innovative learning" (cf *Societal Learning and the Erosion of Collective Memory: a critique of the Club of Rome Report: No Limits to Learning*, 1980).

Any approach to "enlightenment" is of course significantly challenged by intervening experiential processes of "endarkenment", whatever the belief held about any "mirror" (*Enlightening Endarkenment: selected web resources on the challenge to comprehension*, 2005).

**Stage 8: Grounding alternative realities**

Typically alternative realities have been embodied and grounded in intentional communities down the centuries. In relation to the challenge of the times, some of these may be usefully understood as regenerative "renaissance zones" (cf *Challenges of Renaissance: suggestive pattern of concerns in the light of the birth metaphor*, 2003; *Renaissance Zones: experimenting with the intentional significance of the Damanhur community*, 2003).

The argument above raises the question of how a participant "embodies" the preferred reality within any community and the extent to which that reality is "grounded", whatever that may be held to mean. It might be asked whether any particular cognitive bias underlies the use of the body metaphor in recognizing that countries typically have "capitals" and organizations have "headquarters". Countries may indeed have a "heartland". Both may use "seat" -- but neither uses "headquarters" or any reference to their engendering capacity (irrespective of possible understandings of "arsenal"). Curiously there is now a movement by government towards the creation of business "incubator zones".
Is there a case for a new kind of "centre of embodiment" through which the world is imaginatively engendered and sustained -- beyond initiatives such as universities, monasteries or "ecosteries"? Although it does not emphasize any engendering capacity through non-action, *ecosity* does connect the meanings of "ecosophy," "ecology," and "monastery":

- "Ecosophy" implies a comprehensive sense for, and sensitivity to, ecological processes, functions and communities of the Earth.
- "Ecology" implies interrelationships and interconnections, symbiosis, community and complementarity, as well as the study of these relationships.
- "Monastery" implies a place where spiritual discipline and practice are a central purpose.

It is to be assumed that efforts will be made to ground and sustain alternative realities in new forms of virtual world -- whether or not the enabling symbolic and mnemonic triggers are meaningful to the uninitiated.

A particular challenge, whether with a physically or virtually grounded reality, is the nature of the dynamics that sustain it. This is the challenge of the dynamics within any sufficiently diverse community, and notably one from which others expect fruitful insight. Possibilities in this respect have been explored elsewhere (Council of the Whys: emergent wisdom through configuration of why-question dynamics, 2006; Tank-thoughts from Think-tanks: constraining metaphors on developing global governance, 2003).

*What we need to understand may only be expressible in a language that we do not yet know*

### Stage 9: Silence: the unsaid and the unsayable?

**Beyond explication:** As the author of *Science, Religion and the Meaning of Life* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), *Mark Vernon (Face to Faith, The Guardian, 25 November 2006)*, argues from the experience of St Thomas Aquinas that God is only apprehended when words at last fall silent, to suggest that:

> God is unknown. His silence was not a rejection but the culmination of his work. Today, it seems, many believers forget that the first and last thing that can and should be said about God is that God is unknown.... reason is the key to wisdom not because it shares all understanding, but because it exposes understanding's limits.... Many philosophers and theologians have testified that the truths of existence are beyond expression. So words about God must be spoken, but ultimately only so a point is reached at which they stop. The final stroke of Aquinas's genius, then, was not crafted by his quill, but was conveyed by his silence.

The arrogance of much religion, in offering simplistic explanations of "God" (after millennia), is however matched by that of science (after centuries, if not decades). The latter (perhaps exemplified by *Richard Dawkins, The God Delusion*, 2006) fails to allow for the degree to which current understandings of reality may be reframed in 100, 1,000 or 1,000,000 years -- by the "scientists" of the future, perhaps to be superseded by another mode of knowing (eg *Towards Conscientific Research and Development*, 2002; Authentic Grokking: emergence of Homo conjugens, 2003).

Whilst religion has a remarkable track record of duplicity and denial (eg the case of *Galileo Galilei*), science has become remarkable for a game that could be described as duplicitous by religion. Every time fundamental physics encounters an obstacle to coherent explanation of the universe, it simply increases the dimensionality of its framework to increase its degrees of explanatory freedom -- without any foreseeable possibility of proof (as with the 10, 11 or 26 dimensions of string theory and its many flavours). Any supporting experimental evidence adduced is based on results of increasingly low probability of occurrence requiring equipment of incredibly high cost to have any probability of reproducing them.

Yet every claim made by religion is scorned by science as involving the "supernatural" (typically understood as involving more dimensions than are readily evident to the senses), since it is not subject to proof according to the current methods of science. Setting aside the psychiatric definition of delusion (noted above), to what extent might future history consider that contemporary science suffered from delusion in relation to the nature of the appropriate explanation of reality pursued as a Theory of Everything?

Of course scientific research allows itself to be totally complicit in the development of highly destructive weaponry. And yet it is religion that provides the justification for its use.

**Secrecy:** Curiously much the same could be said about the essence of human community about which so much is written. The possibility remains that collective reality, as described, is a Potemkin reality sustained in part by a variety of secret and semi-secret interests that may themselves only have vested interests in their particular understanding of the whole (*Globalization within a Global Potemkin Society*, 2000; *Roger Bartra, The Imaginary Networks of Political Power*, 1992).

Beyond simple conspiracy theory, a demonic view may also be explored (*Global Civilization of Vampires: metaphor of governance via demons and vampires on spin?*, 2005). A less charged view involves the simple recognition of how much in society remains, perhaps necessarily so, unsaid (*Global Strategic Implications of the Unsaid: from myth-making towards a wisdom society*, 2003)

**Radical coherence:** What might then be the nature and dynamics of the "radical coherence" to be explored in the grounded reality of the previous stage (cf *In Quest of Radical Coherence: a group design initiative*, 1994)? It is to be expected that it would be dependent on a fundamental reframing of conventional engagement with space-time -- with here vs there, with past vs future, and with subject vs object (cf *Max Deutscher, Subjecting and Objecting: an essay in objectivity*, 1983). Traces may be inferred in the experiential distinctions made in faith-based governance contexts between evidential knowledge, belief and engagement. This was noted at the highest level in a much-cited article by Ron Suskind (*Without a Doubt, The New York Times*, In The Magazine, 17 October 2004) regarding an exchange with an aide in the decision-making circle of President Bush:
The aide said that guys like me were "in what we call the reality-based community," which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality." I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. "That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality -- judiciously, as you will -- we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do."

Such principles are echoed by the aphorisms of secretive societies, such as: know, dare, and be silent (cf The Deafening Silence of Those Who Know Nothing, 1998). Ironically the latter might also be the slogan of secret services, organized crime and terrorists.

**Dynamic sets of values:** Notions of "shared basic values" are increasingly cited by politicians as fundamental to the challenge of clashing civilizations and of multicultural communities -- but, ironically again, without ever seemingly being able to cite either a coherent list of these values or how they function together as a dynamic system of checks and balances.

One sense in which the dynamics of silent engagement can be inferred is through removing the prescriptive stress of traditional conservative injunctions associated with sets of values and virtues -- and then exploring their significance for coherent movement in a space of higher dimensionality (cf Ron Atkin, Multidimensional Man; can man live in 3-dimensional space?, 1981).

**Comprehension of dynamic gestalts:** Despite appearances, riding a bicycle, not having seen one before (ridden or not) is far from obvious -- whatever the set of instructions. As with the instructions for driving any vehicle, which are necessarily unable to convey the gestalt of skills and attitudes required to drive, such values offer clues to the dynamics of collective engagement with reality (cf Navigating Alternative Conceptual Realities: clues to the dynamics of enacting new paradigms through movement, 2002).

Apparent conflicts between the checks and balances offered by different sets of values are then best modelled by the dramatically (if not shockingly) different attitudes to vehicle driving in different cultures -- as variously noted by anthropologist Edward T. Hall (The Silent Language, 1959; The Dance of Life: the other dimension of time, 1983). There is an irony here given the common root of "conduct" (as in behaviour), "conductor" (as in music), and the "conduct" of a vehicle driver (conducteur in French).

This approach offers a much less deterministic way of understanding "family values" by recognizing, in controlled movement (exemplified by a family of trapeze artists), the need for:

- a set of family roles as the primary means of distributed storage of psychoactive memory -- beyond the capacity of a single "individual"
- "re-membering" the family as vital to enabling and enhancing "individual" action through a "community"
- respecting the "old" as a reliable font of experience on low frequency challenges and opportunities (exemplified in elephant herds)
- engendering and cultivating the "new" as a guarantee of competitive advantage in a sustainable future
- enabling effective knowledge transfer and retention over time

Such a systemic context offers a dynamic reframing of the viability of the set of Confucian values in providing coherence in China over millennia of social turbulence and upheaval. It increases the significance of the use of family relationship metaphors -- as a vital dynamic rather than a rigid structure -- in articulating the possible transformations in the Chinese Book of Changes (I Ching) between complementary conditions. Again, this is well-illustrated by the high-risk interweaving of roles of a family of trapeze artists. Such seemingly paradoxical pointers to understanding of an inexplicable gestalt are evident in other traditions (cf Esther De Waal, Living with Contradiction: Benedictine wisdom for everyday living, 2003).

"Ladder-making": As noted earlier, identification of any set of "stages" (as above) is, to an important degree, an arbitrary act of creative design and experimentation. This is the case both with respect to any sense of a linear sequence of such conditions and with any other preferred configuration (cf Magoroh Maruyama, Mindscapes in Management, 1994; Antonio de Nicolas, Habits of Mind, 1989).

The challenge would seem to be to recognize an adequate diversity of conditions through which to order (and engage with) experience such as to be free to detach from each and from the pattern of experiences as a whole (cf Ashby's Law of Requisite Variety).

Discovering an appropriate design -- "connecting up the dots" -- may have "puzzling" elements exemplified by Rubik's Cube (originally Rubik's "Magic Cube") -- as a contemporary variant of the challenge of the original Chinese Lo Shu magic square (9-fold Higher Order Patterning of Tao Te Ching Insights: Possibilities in the mathematics of magic squares, cubes and hypercubes, 2003).

Metaphorically this might be described as the art of "doffing" and "donning" cognitive frameworks to get the best "fit for purpose" -- as is so freely and creatively achieved with clothing (whether as a decorative expression of identity or as protection against the elements) or with avatar attributes in virtual worlds. This metaphor highlights the issue of universal frameworks and those who advocate and impose them. These are then to be seen as cognitive "uniforms" with the many questions these then raise, notably in relation to the dangers of groupthink. These dangers are also recognized in terms of misplaced concreteness, reification and unquestionable dogma. Any set of instructions, however admirable, is quite distinct from the understanding of how to ride a bicycle.

In the traditional sense of a linear progression of stages, Jacob's Ladder has long been a favoured metaphor. But, as described, by Giles Lane (Jacob's Ladder, Proboscis, 1997):

The topologies of dream and reality meet on the rungs of Jacob's Ladder: a terrain of constant migration, of mediation between the mundane and the spiritual. These topologies are not the banal maps that guide us to pre-ordained destinations -- but allow us to become lost, to throw off the mantle of representation in favour of a more proximate investiture of being.
"Configurative withdrawal": As noted elsewhere (The Isdom of the Wisdom Society: embodying time as the heartland of humanity, 2003), mytho-poetic folk legends, and modern fictional explorations, serve to sustain and echo the archetypal insights in many cultures relating to elder "ancestral" races who "withdraw into the stones" -- or to those that may have been "trapped" therein, like Merlin and the proverbial genie in the bottle. 

One archetypal example is that of the Celtic Daoine Sidhe, who are claimed to have withdrawn in this way -- after living as the highly cultured Tuatha Dé Danann "in the age before this one" [see extensive web references]. Their withdrawal "below the surface", or "underground", into an "invisible realm", "beyond the veil", could well be understood as an effort to describe their unusual relationship to space-time and to the conventional objective world whose surface they live "behind" -- "fading into the hills" and into the fabric of reality (all reminiscent of the branes of string theory).

The description of them as "gods and not gods" and "something in between" is consistent with a form of transcendence of duality reinforced by attribution to them of magical powers -- akin to those associated by Buddhists with achievements on the Diamond Way. This same "in-betweeness" is evident in their creation myth describing them as born of the union between the great Creatrix (Dana) and the stars themselves -- again reminiscent of the Vajrayana goal of identification with the bonding of "light and void".

Most curiously, one of the most popular and best known Christian hymns has as its opening lines: Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee [more | more]. To what extent is this process evident in the profound psycho-cultural association of peoples with "their land" -- as with the many indigenous peoples, like the Australian Aborigines, for whom it is the very essence of their identity? (see Darrell A. Posey (Ed), Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity, 1999). For some Aborigines their "ancestors" indeed "are" now embodied in the topography of their land.

It is curious how widespread are the tendencies to invest cultural memories in commemorative stones, configurations of stones, or tombs -- before which silence is often appropriate, possibly due to the unique degree of holiness they recall (as with the Kaaba in Mecca). It is also curious the heavy resource investment in massive entombment of leaders in cultures of the past -- hopefully as a means of overcoming the temporal constraints of death. A widespread related phenomenon is the psycho-spiritual investment in cairns of stone beads (also made of other substances) for mnemonic, symbolic and magical purposes (cf Designing Cultural Rosaries and Meaning Malas to Sustain Associations within the Pattern that Connects, 2000).

How should any "withdrawal" of an ancient civilization into stones (composed primarily of silicates) be compared with the progressive embodiment of all of that is significant in modern civilization into computer silicate memory (characterized by its phase transition properties) -- with some people already set on "uploading" their own personalities? (Robert A. Freitas Jr, Mind Uploading, 2002) [more | more | more]. The elites of some countries have long made provision to withdraw into secret underground bunkers in the event of crisis [more | more | more]. Some Christian fundamentalists see this as appropriate preparation for the final battle of opposites at Armageddon.

"Rock" vs "Water"?: Perhaps there are clues to more appropriate dialogue within "centres of embodiment" through the interplay in nature between "rock" and "water", rather than in favouring one over the other as suggested by Edward de Bono (I am Right you are Wrong -- from this to the New Renaissance: from Rock Logic to Water Logic, 1990). But what about the forms of interplay suggested by the other "elements"?

An intriguing lead is that offered by the use of sound in sustaining the sacred -- from temple chants to "singing the land" (notably by Australian Aborigines). The role of vibration in that interplay has been given force by investigations into "vibratory revitalization" of the "memory of water" (Masuro Emoto, The Hidden Messages in Water, 2004), especially following interaction with stone silicates in watercourses [more | more | more]. Any such fundamental role for vibration would of course be consistent with its significance as the basis for string theory. The dynamic forms suggest the possibility of new, and necessarily "more fluid", patterns of dialogue.

There is however the tragic possibility that the "songs" of many species in process of extinction by human activity may well have an as yet unrecognized function in revitalizing both stone and water in ways vital to human well-being -- if only metaphorically. Whales may indeed in some way be "singing the sea".

Antenna and gravitas: Are configurations of stones to be fruitfully understood as a necessarily massive form of detector, as required by current research into gravity waves? It is ironic that the term gravity should derive from understandings of the quality gravitas -- sharing a common origin with guru in Sanskrit. Should any process of "withdrawal" into such a configuration, if only the symbolic courtyard of a monastery or a university, be understood as identification with a detector of some form of universal gravitas? What is received under such conditions -- through psychoactive identification with the Earth?

How does this relate to experiential identification with the hara (Karlfried Graf Durckheim, Hara: the vital center of man, 2004 Peter Wilberg, Head, Heart and Hara: the soul centres of West and East, 2003) and the role of haragei (Michihiro Matsumoto, The Unspoken Way Haragei: silence in Japanese business and society, 1988)? The hara is of course of profound significance in Japanese culture -- in relation to the death ritual of seppuku (hara-ki) and its appropriate aesthetic framing through haiku (cf Ensuring Strategic Resilience through Haiku Patterns: reframing the scope of the "martial arts" in response to strategic threats, 2006).

"Petrifying terror"? There is an easy assumption that comprehension of more fundamental forms of reality, about which nothing can be meaningfully communicated, is totally unrelated to any existential sense of terror. The reverse may in fact be the case because of the disruptive implications for any sense of coherent identity -- and what is thereby called into question. Any such sense of reality may not only be essentially terrifying but also "petrifying". Curiously there is also the widespread drive to "get stoned" -- in part to numb the existential experience of terror in modern life.

Respectively "locked into stone" in relation to one another (having effectively been exposed to the Medusa's head of Greek mythology), this may be a contributing factor to the petrification of different positions in interfaith dialogue (cf Thinking in Terror: refocusing the interreligious challenge from thinking after terror, 2005). Religions face the tremendous irony of a two-fold terrifying challenge -- one at
the core of their understanding (however successfully terror is denied by stressing its opposite) and the other in their relation to other religions (exemplified by the terrorism it evokes in all parties).

Are those carried into the "fabric of reality" -- into "the stones" -- engaged in a process that may hold a key to the "invisible" character of the ubiquitous "unspeakable, inexplicable, unlocateable terror" to which religion may refer. Can the theoretical advances in the fundamental sciences regarding the nature of reality offer cognitive guidelines and templates through which dialogue can transcend the dualism separating the perspectives of religions?

Pointers are, for example, offered by physicist David Bohm (Wholeness and the Implicate Order, 1980) and his subsequent deep involvement in dialogue processes [more], by the philosopher Karsten Harries (Infinity and Perspective, 2001), or by mathematician Ron Atkin (Multidimensional Man; can man live in 3-dimensional space?, 1981). If the various flavours of superstring theory can be shown to be but different ways of comprehending the same reality by the M-theory insights of those such as Edward Witten (Magic, Mystery and Matrix, 1998), where is the theological research being undertaken that might offer analogous integrative understanding relating to the major mutually antagonistic religions?

Precious stones: "jewels and duals": Given the symbolic importance attached to precious stones, notably within any priesthood, to what extent does the configuration of their facets model an antenna-like function in relation to the focusing of the "light" of attention? Curiously facet is also a fundamental concept in the organization of knowledge.

As the most precious stone, the light-refracting facets of a cut diamond may then point to the possible relationship between the contrasting insights of different ways of knowing -- perhaps implicitly celebrated by the Diamond Way school of Buddhism (cf Patterning Archetypal Templates of Emergent Order: implications of diamond faceting for enlightening dialogue, 2002).

Engendering "seeds" -- and their dissemination: An alternative Earth metaphor for any withdrawal/configuration process -- a "woody" biological one -- is that of configuring a seed into which generative essence is embedded in some way, as in a "seed thought". This points to the potential of ("uploading") memetic DNA and of "seeding" the future. How is the whole encompassed through "wrapping up" the cycles of life experience into a seed pod -- a pattern of seeds? In what ways are universities and intentional communities a failure in this respect?

Should the pattern of "seeds" in the "seed pod" be in some way isomorphic with the pattern of mindscapes? How is reality then configured in the expectation that any form of dissemination will be fruitful? (cf Minding the Future: thought experiment on presenting new information, 1980)

What are the assumptions associated with the two-dimensional surface, whether paper or screen, that is typically used in the dissemination process (see discussion in Beyond the plane: form and medium in terms of the calculus of indications, 2006)? And the assumptions regarding the socio-economic system into which they are inserted? (cf Jacques Attali. Noise: the political economy of music, 1977/1985). How is the possibility of any receptivity to be framed? Why is receptivity to be assumed? Who is the audience within any such framing? How questionable is any tendency to convince, expect agreement, or react to disagreement, or be engaged by such processes? Is this merely an indulgence in self-justification or a critical, if poorly understood, dimension of processes of self-reflexivity and time-binding?

Transcendental dynamic?: Any pattern of "seeds" implies a potential dynamic. The question is how the nature of this dynamic can be communicated or implied such as to evoke and focus cognitive engagement. A traditional mnemonic device has been the use of a configuration of interacting deities (or "holy" figures) -- portrayed through stories -- to which some form of respect is variously due. Each then functions as a regulator with respect to a particular domain. Understood as a psychoactive system, these ("wholly" entities) offer an integrative psychodrama with which to identify through belief -- as a means of holding an ongoing dynamic.

A typical example is that of the set of 12 deities of classical Greece -- together forming a dodekatheon. The question is how their diversity evokes a complementarity of insights appropriate to ordering and focusing (like a jewel) a dynamic understanding capable of transcending the specifics associated with any one of them. Should any such set of "deities" be understood as one means of comprehending, through a degree of isomorphism, the nature of the (10, 11...12?) interwoven dimensions of superstring theory fundamental to reality? How can such understanding be rendered appropriate to governance of the world -- my world?

Knowing mystery, knowing silence
Keeping to the middle way of the Tao
Through purity, stillness
Roaming the palaces of the gods
Through solitude, quiet
Guarding the mansions of virtue
Times differ, circumstances change
The Way of man never varies.

[Michael Nylan and Nathan Sivin. The First Neo-Confucianism: an introduction to Yang Hsiung's "Canon Of Supreme Mystery"]