



# laetus in praesens

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## Openness and Closure in Pattern Language

### Geometry versus Resonance

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Pattern of ways of knowing

Fruitful "marriage" of modes

Focus on the brightest "stars" and stellar evolution

Closure, openness and complementarity

Decisive illusion and cyclic engagement

### Pattern of ways of knowing

This forms part of a more general discussion, where relevant references are located ([Way Round Cognitive Ground Zero and Pointlessness: embodying the geometry of fundamental cognitive dynamics](#), 2012; see alternative [table of contents](#)). Such considerations offer the tantalizing implication that the very "organization of knowledge", through distinguishing "disciplines", may come to be understood as a complex pattern of "ways of knowing" -- beyond the relatively arbitrary "objective" clustering of the library sciences or of the academic professions.

This was the assumption underlying the experimental [Functional Classification in an Integrative Matrix of Human Preoccupations](#) (1982) used to order the [Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential](#). Given its claim to be the discipline with most insight into "relationships", there is an extreme irony to the fact that such insights are not brought to bear on a more fruitfully meaningful ordering of the many "branches" of mathematics itself, as separately argued ([Missing "map" of mathematics: a self-reflexive "periodic table"?](#) 2009). Is it from the patterns of mathematical order that the most powerful insights are yet to be obtained, as separately argued ([Towards a Periodic Table of Ways of Knowing -- in the light of metaphors of mathematics](#), 2009)?

### Fruitful "marriage" of modes

In seeking a "marriage" between the "geometric" and the "resonant", the challenge would seem to lie less in the detailed articulation and more in how understanding "holds" and engages with the features of the environment -- which the natural science disciplines distinguish so rigidly for purposes of study. There is then a case for revisiting the traditional distinctions and relationships, as understood metaphorically, between "earth", "air", "fire" and "water" -- as they might relate to insights from those disciplines. It is remarkable that the traditional pattern arguably offers a greater degree of widely comprehensible coherence to environmental relationships than does the quarrelsome relationship between the academic disciplines. It is in this sense that features distinguished in the "environment" may be fruitfully explored as a "mirror" of human awareness ([My Reflecting Mirror World: making my World Summit on Sustainable Development \(Johannesburg, 2002\) worthwhile](#), 2002).

Of particular concern is the lack of preoccupation within those disciplines for any more fruitful "transdisciplinary" comprehension of their relationship with one another as "ways of knowing". Curiously any success in the quest for a Theory of Everything would merely make clear how many "things" were naively excluded from it -- especially those of a "phatic" nature, framed thereby as "nonsensical externalities". Such a theory does not embody any concern with the learning pathways between the ways of knowing -- and how their interweaving might be vital to recognition of the feedback loops so important to sustainable governance ([Interweaving Thematic Threads and Learning Pathways](#), 2010).

### Focus on the brightest "stars" and stellar evolution

In contrast with insights mined from the preoccupations of fundamental physics (with the very small and short-lived), there is an irony in this respect to the significance of those borrowed from the very large and long-lived, namely from astrophysics ([Towards an Astrophysics of the Knowledge Universe? from astronautics to noonautics](#), 2006).

Whether in strategic gatherings, or in gatherings of physicists, "stars" are a focus of attention -- especially the "brightest". Some topics could be said to be avoided like "black holes" or "dark matter". The "gravity" of their pronouncements may be felt -- recalling the origin

of the term in *gravitas*. As noted above, the temperature of discourse may be significant -- especially in "heated" exchanges. It is of course the case that "stars" may be recognized as exploding upon the scene like supernova, whilst the visibility of others may diminish over time, perhaps imploding and becoming spent -- as with any "model", beautiful and elegant, or otherwise.

Efforts to formulate a Theory of Everything -- through such gatherings -- would treat any psychosocial processes as totally irrelevant, despite their role in the recognition of Nobel laureates. Astrophysics frames the physical processes in terms of the [Hertzsprung-Russell diagram](#). -- a major step towards an understanding of [stellar evolution](#) or "the lives of stars". A corresponding insight is offered into the "careers" of concepts, within the strategic universe of the United Nations, by [Johan Galtung](#) (*Processes in the UN system*, 1980), as quoted separately with respect to *Meaningful opportunities and the movement of meaning* (1988):

- a fresh concept is co-opted into the system from the outside... The concept is broad, unspecified, full of promises because of its (as yet) virgin character, capable of instilling some enthusiasm in people who do not suffer too much from a feeling of *dé-vu* having been through a number of concept life cycles already....
- the organization receives the concept and it is built into preambles of resolutions; drafters and secretaries get dexterity in handling it.... The concept thus moves from birth via adolescence to maturity, meaning that it has been changed sufficiently to become structure and culture compatible....
- from maturity to senescence and death is but a short step: the concept thus emasculated can no longer serve the purpose of renewal as what was new has largely been taken away and what was old has been added in its place - except, possibly, the term itself....
- a fresh concept is co-opted into the system from the outside, e.g. one that has already been through its life cycle in another part of the UN system. For the rest read the story once more.

If such a strategic concept is understood to be a "point" in knowledge space, mixing metaphors in the light of Galtung's comment, it might be asked whether attention should be given to the "half-life" of any strategic point -- especially those recognized as "hot topics". The question also relates to the extensive [research on anomalies](#) by [Charles Fort](#), widely quoted to the effect that: *I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while.*

## Closure, openness and complementarity

**Closure:** There is an interesting sense in which geometric metaphors are about enclosure of "space", itself significant according to the epistemological arguments of [Hilary Lawson](#) (*Closure: A Short History of Everything*, 2002). The aspiration of physicists could be seen as a device to enclose space and time such as to preclude any new thought on the matter -- reminiscent of forms of "lock-in" and [escalation of commitment](#) (familiar in decision-making processes), [technological lock-in](#), or [customer lock-in](#) (familiar as a marketing strategy).

Use of metaphors of resonance would seem to offer understandings of openness resistant to closure, premature or otherwise, as implied by questionable efforts to "grasp" reality (*Beyond Harassment of Reality and Grasping Future Possibilities: learnings from sexual harassment as a metaphor*, 1996). Religions would seem to be susceptible to the same pattern in any use of geometrical metaphors to define the simplistic "hierarchical" organization of "Heaven". In summarizing the quest for eternal happiness associated with "Heaven", further insight is offered by Shimon Edelman (*The Happiness of Pursuit: neuroscience can teach us about the good life*, 2012) in stating: *when fishing for happiness, catch and release.*

**Openness:** The complementary roles of closing and opening have been explored by [Orrin E. Klapp](#) (*Opening and Closing: strategies and information adaptation in society*, 1978). Much has been made in recent years of an "open society" and of an "open source" approach to knowledge management -- in contrast with previous enthusiasm for closure, and continuing advocacy thereof (as epitomized by [ACTA](#)).

**Complementarity:** This complementarity is usefully understood by recognizing the extent to which what is circumscribed by geometric metaphors has characteristics likely to be deprecated by critiques (and history) as effectively a [transitional object](#), [comfort object](#), [security blanket](#) or [sotorial device](#). The manner in which attachment to them is eventually phased out (as the passing "fashion" of a period) highlights the nature of resonance. Any theory or plan of action is then, in principle, a form of transitional object ([Giovanni Francesco Lanzara](#), *Capturing Transient Knowledge in Design and Innovation Processes*, 2006). Designing closure into it is then to render it fundamentally inadequate. because of the manner in which contextual feedback processes are ignored as "externalities" -- later to be recognized as significant.

## Decisive illusion and cyclic engagement

The concrete decisions, so desperately sought as a consensual response to global challenges, might indeed be made at a moment in time. They are however reframed and undermined by the dynamics of the context, as discussed separately (*The Consensus Delusion: mysterious attractor undermining global civilization as currently imagined*, 2011). In that sense the weighty resolutions of international organization may be understood as "transitional objects" -- if only as being designed to "comfort" their constituencies for a period, raising the question of global governability (*Ungovernability of Sustainable Global Democracy? Towards engaging appropriately with time*, 2011).

As [Peter Drucker](#) once said, the most profound and unforeseen changes over a generation are those associated with changes of values -- completely reframing how things are comprehended. The challenge has been well described by [John Ralston Saul](#) (*Voltaire's Bastards: the dictatorship of reason in the West*, 1992; *The Unconscious Civilization*, 1995), but most succinctly as a form of *Le Chatelier's Principle* by [Stafford Beer](#) (*The Cybernetic Cytoblast: management itself*):

Reformers, critics of institutions, consultants in innovation, people in sort who "want to get something done", often fail to see

this point. They cannot understand why their strictures, advice or demands do not result in effective change. They expect either to achieve a measure of success in their own terms or to be flung off the premises. But an ultrastable system (like a social institution)... has no need to react in either of these ways. It specialises in equilibrial readjustment which is to the observer a secret form of change requiring no actual alteration in the macro-systemic characteristics that he is trying to do something about (*Chairman's Address to the International Cybernetics Congress*, September 1969).

The question is whether metaphors enabling cognitive engagement with phases and resonance merit greater attention in responding to the strategic challenges of cyclic processes, whether business cycles or the [adaptive cycle](#), as the ultimate challenge of governance articulated by [Thomas Homer-Dixon](#) (*The Upside of Down: catastrophe, creativity, and the renewal of civilization*, 2006). Is the controversy associated with the unconventional recognition of [morphic resonance](#) an indication of its relevance to demonstrably inadequate "models" of global governance, as argued by [Rupert Sheldrake](#) (*The Presence of the Past: morphic resonance and the habits of nature*, 1988; *The Science Delusion: freeing the spirit of enquiry*, 2012)?

**NB: See separate presentation of relevant [bibliographical references](#).**



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