



laetus in praesens

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World Futures Conference as Catastrophic Question From performance to morphogenesis and transformation

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Introduction

Imagining a future conference from the program

Conferencing: Outside Inside or Inside-Outside?

Fantastic realities of experiential space-time

Conferencing of a higher order: a Quest or an Inquest?

Deconstructing conference communication processes to elicit meta-discourse

Conference communication specifics meriting attention

Questioning as cognitive portal to the future

In quest of the most deadly question

Enabling morphogenesis and transformation through catastrophic questioning

Markings: ¿ Question ∞ Answer ?!

Conferencing as putting identity to the question

Conclusion

References

A more conventional appreciation of the event described here is provided by Aubrey Yee (*The World Futures Studies Federation celebrates 40 years -- Bucharest 2013, Journal of Futures Studies*, September 2013, 18, 1, pp. 107-112)

Introduction

How to engage with the conference of an organization held in the same academic facility as on the occasion of its foundation 50 years previously -- in this case that of the [World Futures Studies Federation](#) in Bucharest (2013)? The question has a particular poignancy for a writer involved in the processes of its original creation -- meeting the remaining handful of those from that time.

As another from that era remarked to the conference, many of the themes raised echoed strangely those of that time -- especially given the manner of their articulation in the same auditorium.

The challenge of engagement can be associated more generally with the slow evolution of conference organization over that period. Especially in an academic setting, the traditional focus is given to keynote speakers, panels, questions and answers, specialized sessions, and the like. Papers may, or may not, be made available. Communication is constrained by visibility of projections, and the usual constraints on speaking and question time -- and their abuse. Appropriate consideration is required for the eminent. There is a comfort in the sense of timeless continuity -- irrespective of crises to come -- an implicit assumption that that has been the nature of conferences over millennia, and will so be into the distant future.

There is a sameness because the mode of organization, and the behaviour cultivated, have changed little over that period -- despite remarkable transformations of information technology. Seemingly communication technology is used primarily to support the modality of times past rather than enabling new forms of communication and interaction -- and the emergence of new and more integrative insight. But what would these look like, if they were to be enabled? How might they be recognized -- by whom -- and would they be fruitfully appreciated? What do people variously expect from engaging in a conference about transformation for the future in troubled times?

It was with such "meta-questions" that the writer endeavoured to engage in the Bucharest event -- without seeking any formal role, and without any predefined objective. As a personal quest, in addition to honouring the past and its heroes, what might be the "meta-learning" to be gleaned from such an event in the present -- and how best to interact fruitfully with others?

The style of this speculative conference exploration follows from earlier variants in relation to other events: *A Congress that Dared the Unthinkable: report on the First New Age Congress* (Florence, 1978); *Transdisciplinarity through Structured Dialogue: beyond sterile dualities in meetings to the challenge of participant impotence* (Lisbon, 1994); *Gardening Sustainable Psycommunities: recognizing the*

psycho-social integrities of the future (Findhorn, 1995); *Enacting Transformative Integral Thinking through Playful Elegance: a Symposium at the End of the Universe?* (Luxemburg, 2010).

Imagining a future conference from the program

Just as the lived reality of a conference has a sameness over time, there is a sameness to the organization of conference programs as distributed on paper (or electronically). Again this derives in part from the use of newer information technology to replicate program presentations of the past -- use of spread sheets to enable a tabular representation indicating plenary and parallel sessions over time and in the spaces available. Could it be otherwise? Is that not the most efficient modality, given that the software offers few alternatives -- and those that might be possible might well be a challenge to the comprehension and convenience of some participants (and of the organizers)?

Visually any program matrix is strangely reminiscent of the view of a block of apartments from the entrance driveway. The apartments may well have terraces with (or without) greenery and/or variously coloured curtains and blinds. With such an image, can a conference be imagined aesthetically as one in which the apartment dwellers -- as *dramatis personae* -- call to those in the entranceway, promoting their respective themes and the value of more intensive exposure to them? Perhaps several apartment dwellers appear successively on the same balcony?

Together this image of an array of apartments suggests a form of "marketing" of the whole -- curiously enhanced, as a form of opera, if the appeal of each is imagined as being sung (with accompanying gesticulations). Framed in this way it may be asked how the aesthetic integration of the whole is "composed" and "conducted" over time. However there is also the question of how -- as a participant and member of the audience -- one engages with the "opus". Does one have a role, through such imaginings, of participatively "composing" and "conducting" the experience, if primarily for oneself?

Benefitting from visual media, another approach to envisaging the complex pattern of relationships of a conference from the program is to map images of speakers and themes onto symmetrical polyhedra in three dimensions -- capable of being variously transformed through folding, unfolding and rotation -- as was done for a conference of the [International Peace Research Association](#) (Leuven, 2008), as separately indicated (*Polyhedral Conference Representation as a Catalyst for Innovation*, 2008; *Polyhedral Representation of Conference Dynamics: integrative configuration of panelists, dialogues, topics and threads*, 2008).

The following exploration is inspired by the insight as to why "we are our own metaphor", as formulated by [Gregory Bateson](#) in concluding a conference on the effects of conscious purpose on human adaptation (cited by [Mary Catherine Bateson](#), *Our Own Metaphor: a personal account of a conference on the effects of conscious purpose on human adaptation*, 1972; also *We Are Our Own Metaphor*, *Whole Earth*, Fall, 1999). The insight reflects Bateson's association with [second order cybernetics](#) -- hence his appeal for the conference to recognize its own operation as a metaphor of the challenge it was intended to face.

The question is then how a futures conference can understand itself as being a metaphor of its capacity to respond to the challenges it chooses to envisage -- and how that plays out for the individual participant collaborating in the enaction of the conference. What are the resonances between any "outside" and "inside" with respect to both conference and participant?

Conferencing: Outside-Inside or Inside-Outside?

Bucharest has been known as the Paris of the East. A cluster of hotels for participants was located a 20 minute walk from the university conference facility. For the writer, as an inveterate walker, this was an ideal setting in the middle of summer.

Although equipped with multiple maps, navigating the meandering back streets of great architectural charm proved to be an unusual challenge. Streets were not necessarily signposted and any signposts tended to be pointed ambiguously. Major streets (of lesser attraction) had a tendency to change their names along their length -- all streets being typically named after (unrecognizable) historical personalities, rather than according to any grid-based numeric system. Reconciling streets to maps was not as straightforward as is normally the case -- notably because of the scale of the maps in relation to the smaller streets.

The consequence of this experience over several days was one of an unusual degree of disorientation within a context of the utmost charm. The villas on the streets had seen better days, but had acquired a high degree of charm and mystery through the manner of their survival over time. Whether they were fully inhabited or not was itself a mystery -- set as they were in gardens with a tendency to be overgrown and uncared for. Many could be assumed to have been haunted -- especially those with empty windows. Together these images offered echoes of romantic novels -- perhaps even evoking gothic fantasy, as with the [Gormenghast series](#). Appreciation was further tinged by echoes of the horrendous psychosocial influences of the [Ceausescu era](#) (1967-1989), the widely promoted Dracula theme, and their potentially sinister implications.

The experience was further enhanced by the inhabitants of the area, variously walking the streets or hanging out. "Paris of the East" is an appropriate descriptor given the elegant beauty and dress of many of those encountered -- reminiscent of the models of Paris but with a far more natural air. Interaction with them in seeking directions offered the further challenge that the advice charmingly offered might well involve walking in the opposite direction to that assumed to be correct -- whether or not the advice was indeed correct and the question had indeed been understood.

The daily experience suggested a curious resonance with the preoccupation of the ongoing "futures" conference. Possible correspondences included:

"Alleyways" of communication?	
Bucharest alleyways	Conference "alleyways"

streets	advocated strategic "ways"
meandering streets variously intersecting	meandering themes variously intersecting
nameless hidden alleyways	unnamed hidden themes
unidentifiable street locations (in an urban labyrinth)	nameless meeting room locations (in an architectural labyrinth)
uncertainty regarding questionable directions	uncertainty regarding questionable directions
confusing (walking) directions (from A to B)	confusing (strategic) directions (from A to B)
personality-focus street naming	personality-focus associated with strategic "ways" ("My Way")
charming physical environment	charming psychosocial environment
splendid villa design	splendid model design (whether theoretical or strategic)
unkempt villas -- in various stages of decay	unkempt strategic models -- in various stages of decay
unkempt villa gardens	environmentally insensitive models
evident degree of socioeconomic poverty	evident degree of psychosocial poverty
general disorientation (for some)	general disorientation (for some)
inspiringly elegant individuals encountered	inspiringly elegant models encountered

As experienced, and imaginatively explored, such potential correspondences suggest the alternative questions as to what extent:

- the essential articulations of the conference mapped conventionally and fruitfully onto the **"outside" world** within which the event was embedded -- in their effort to determine the "futures" of that external environment
- the disparate subjective personal experiences of the external environment held insights through which to perceive the variety of "models" and "ways" presented in the **"inside" world** of the "futures" conference -- and assumed to be of personal implication

In contrast to the potentially destructive "global revolution", so widely feared and anticipated, such questions imply the paradoxical possibility of a cognitive "global introversion", as separately argued (*World Introversion through Paracycling: global potential for living sustainably "outside-inside"*, 2013).

Disorientation -- perhaps understood as nonlinearity -- clearly offers a linking theme. Of course this could be avoided by taking the major thoroughfares -- typically linear and busy, and lacking much of the aesthetic charm of the back streets. However, as in the back streets, requests for confirmation of direction might require travelling in the opposite direction.

As a "model" of the insights offered by "futures" studies and its experts, the correspondences are suggestive in terms of the comprehension those insights are expected to elicit amongst those in the wider world. Especially relevant, in the light of recent disclosures regarding the systematic profiling of individual identities within the supercomputers of the PRISM collaborators, is the implication that **the locus of one's identity is now "inside" to a greater degree than it is "outside"** -- understood in terms of the legal-security framework defining "existence". Given this form of "world introversion", where then is the future to be understood -- inside or outside?

Fantastic realities of experiential space-time

Any interpretation of the challenge of "outside inside" also merits consideration in the light of the widely cited tale of the [butterfly dream](#) of [Chuang Tzu](#) (aka Zhuangzi):

Once Zhuangzi dreamt he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know he was Zhuangzi. Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Zhuangzi. But he didn't know if he was Zhuangzi who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Zhuangzi. Between Zhuangzi and a butterfly there must be some distinction! This is called the Transformation of Things.

The dream is held to be the most celebrated ever to be recorded in the history of Chinese philosophy ([Kuang-Ming Wu](#), *The Butterfly as Companion: meditations on the first three chapters of the Chuang Tzu*, 1990).

Are the back street meanderings in Bucharest then to be considered as a dream of the participant -- as a butterfly? Or is the experience of the conference that of a participant who had dreamt that he was a butterfly? How to distinguish between the two given their respective flutterings of thought?

Given current radical reframings by physicists of space-time, especially intriguing are the commonalities in the conflation of space and time experienced "within" the conference and "without". A futures conference is necessarily concerned with "time", and multiple understandings thereof, as experienced in different "spaces" -- with space and time inextricably entangled. In navigating the meandering alleys of the conference environment, traversing any space necessarily implies time -- to a degree that experience of them is strangely conflated. Rather than "when is the future", the question may also be framed as "where is the future" -- especially when endeavouring desperately to locate the relevant conference !

The architecture and environment of Bucharest bear a strange resemblance to that of Buenos Aires -- often termed the [Paris of the South](#). With respect to a futures conference, it is then appropriate to note the many reflections on the nature of time of surrealist author [Jorge Luis Borges](#) (*A New Refutation of Time; The Secret Miracle*) from Argentina. As a librarian, these tales are intermeshed with those on the organization of "space" -- and the associated organization of knowledge (*The Two Kings and the Two Labyrinths, The House of Asterion, The Immortal*). The resonances between "outside" and "inside" evoked above are in sympathy with his preoccupation with mirroring (*Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*) and with its implications for engaging with the future (*Stepping into, or through, the Mirror: embodying alternative scenario patterns*, 2008).

As noted by Larry Rohter (*Borges's Buenos Aires: a city populated by a native son's imagination*, *The New York Times*, 14 May 2006):

For any admirer of Borges, to wander about Buenos Aires is to collide with the products of his fervid imagination. His birthplace beguiled him, and he especially loved to walk its streets aimlessly, but he also complained that it had "no ghosts" and decided it was his task to populate the fast-expanding immigrant boomtown with his own phantasms. "In my dreams, I never leave Buenos Aires," he once wrote, though his dreams often were anguished ones, as expressed in one of several poems called "Buenos Aires":

*And the city, now, is like a map
Of my humiliations and failures...*

Tragically, as a consequence of [The Dirty War](#) (1976 to 1983) in Argentina, Buenos Aires became only too well populated with the "ghosts" of the ["disappeared"](#) -- subsequent to much of the imaginative writing of Borges.

The dilemma of the butterfly dream is consistent with what is termed the ["Borgesian conundrum"](#) -- named after Borges -- and defined as the ontological question of "whether the writer writes the story, or it writes him" or her. Such considerations enlarge the possibilities of any more conventional approach to futures studies -- introducing an experiential dimension potentially associated with lived reality, as argued separately (*Living as an Imaginal Bridge between Worlds: global implications of "betwixt and between" and liminality*, 2011). Does the futures conference participant "write the story" -- or does it write him, or her? Is this dilemma reflective of a larger reality? **Should people frame their reality according to convention -- or are they free to explore a fantastic reality**, as separately argued (*Reinventing Your Metaphoric Habitat*, 1992)?

As noted by the *Wikipedia* profile with respect to the *The Garden of Forking Paths* (1941), Borges presents the idea of forking paths through networks of time, none of which is the same, all of which are equal. Recurring use is made of the image of "a labyrinth that folds back upon itself in infinite regression" so we "become aware of all the possible choices we might make.". The forking paths have branches to represent these choices that ultimately lead to different endings. Borges saw man's search for meaning in a seemingly infinite universe as fruitless and instead uses the maze as a riddle for time, not space.

Whether "outside" or "inside", a futures conference offers the experience of multiple feedback loops -- variously experienced -- with the possibility of closure being increasingly illusory (In French: *des boucles multiples -- sans que l'on puisse boucler la boucle*). Can it be said to be "haunted" by "ghosts" of the past -- and potentially by those to come? Will "futures" be obliged, like many in Bucharest and Buenos Aires, to come to terms with a "Dirty War" and a "Ceausescu"?

Borges' mix of fact and [magical realism](#) may well be more consonant with the media-enhanced worldview of the young -- imaginatively permeated as it is with blockbuster disasters -- than with the realities articulated by the conventions of futures studies. The concern is then how is that imagination cultivated (*Imaginal Education: game playing, science fiction, language, art and world-making*, 2003). One example is the preoccupation of the unusual [Imaginary Society](#) (or *Société Imaginaire*). This was founded in 1984 and has been sustained by the initiative of the Batuz Foundation as a grouping over 500 artists, writers and scholars from around the world (*The Imaginary Society*, *International Herald Tribune*, 4 January 1995).

Conferencing of a higher order: a Quest or an Inquest?

Denial of the psychosocial and the experiential: In the fifty years since the founding of the World Futures Studies Federation the insights into space-time by physicists have become ever more fantastic -- contrasting in an extraordinarily counterintuitive manner with the conventions of thinking in other disciplines. This has been echoed both in the arts and in the experiences by which many are so readily enthralled.

In her own presentation to the Bucharest conference, [Jennifer Gidley](#), as current President of WFSF, stressed the significance of the "megatrends of the mind" as being a vital complementary focus to that on the tangible realities which have been the main preoccupation of futures studies over the years (Jennifer Gidley, *Megatrends of the Mind: impact on today's young people*, 2012). Her particular interest has been in developing the field of "post-formal psychology".

At the event, it was notable in the various historical allusions, dating from the Mankind 2000 conference (Oslo, 1967), that the future of consciousness and its psychosocial implications was effectively forgotten. This had first become evident in the reinforcement of the focus on tangibles by the Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth* (1972) initiative -- setting aside the subtler suggestions of [Hasan Ozbekhan](#). Also forgotten was the deliberate embedding of the "human development" dimension in the subsequent [Mankind 2000](#) initiative instigated by [James Wellesley-Wesley](#). He had facilitated the organization of the Oslo event, Robert Jungk's role in futures studies, and the early operation of the WFSF secretariat. The theme is strikingly evident in an earlier "non-futures" initiative of its president (Jennifer Gidley, *The Evolution of Consciousness as a Planetary Imperative: an integration of integral views*. *Integral Review*, 2007).

Curiously at the Bucharest event, matching the abstract formulations of physics, was an indicative presentation of that history by [Jenny Andersson](#) (*A History of Futures Studies*, 2013). This exemplified the disassociation of the conventions of the "social sciences" from any vital human implication with which the young might now identify experientially. The "bifurcations" of futures studies in reaction to such framings, partially marked by the history of the Club of Rome, have been noted elsewhere (*Club of Rome Reports and Bifurcations: a 40-year overview*, 2012). These included the contrasting cultural focus of the [Club of Budapest](#) and the initiative of Mankind 2000 to publish an *Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential* (1976-2000). The latter specifically profiled the manner in which future [human development and transformations of consciousness](#) were variously imagined -- to complement its profiling of tangible

world problems and remedial global strategies.

Could the Bucharest event then be framed as a desperate last-ditch preoccupation with the tangibles of convention in a world whose malleable reality is increasingly experienced as paradoxically surrealistic and fantastic -- one in which many conventions are challenged as no longer "fit for purpose"?

Evolution of futures discourse: The question may be explored in terms of the evolution of futures discourse over the past five decades -- potentially framed by the question as to the future of conference discourse as it might now be envisaged over the next five decades or into a more distant future. In cybernetic terms, **can conventional conference discourse be caricatured as "first order" or of "low dimensionality"**?

Implied criticism can be readily dismissed as questionable, biased and unfruitful. How then to name the preferred patterns of present conference processes in order to discuss how they might be complemented by "second order" conferencing -- or a conferencing of an even higher order, appropriate to the "pattern that connects" (*Walking Elven Pathways: enactivating the pattern that connects*, 2006; *Hyperspace Clues to the Psychology of the Pattern that Connects*, 2003)? One of "higher dimensionality" -- more "fit for purpose", given the challenges of the times? How might such reflections be informed by the cybernetics of human cognition, as variously explored?

How is it that meta-discourse is effectively meaningless within conventional discourse -- seemingly unable to carry conventional meaning of relevance? What form might "meta-discourse" then take with regard to the future?

Metadialogue: Various understandings of meta-discourse, have been noted as follows in a discussion of *Engaging with Globality through Cognitive Crowns* (2009), as a development of the argument for **argument mapping** and **critical discourse analysis**:

- On the basis of recent developments in constructivism and social constructionism, Jürgen Hargens and Uwe Grau (*Meta-dialogue, Contemporary Family Therapy*, 16, 6, December, 1994, pp. 451-462) describe the structure of meta-dialogue in detail. They propose an approach that takes self-recursiveness seriously. Meta-dialogue is understood as an extension of reflecting teams and reflecting positions. Therapists are seen as experts in interviewing (questioning, asking, and reflecting) and clients as experts for their different domains (their lives).
- For J. G. Burgoyne. *Learning from experience: from individual discovery to meta-dialogue via the evolution of transitional myths*, *Personnel Review*, 24, 6, 1995, pp. 61-72(12) learning from experience assumes particular importance at times of fundamental transition because inherited learning becomes irrelevant or misleading. The current fundamental transition is seen as being from work for the production of knowledge to work for the production of identify/meaning (mentofecture to spiroculture). The accompanying transition in terms of learning from experience is then from individual discovery of personal and environmental realities to collective meaning making. A process of meta-dialogue is proposed as an approach to facilitating learning from experience in a way appropriate to the times. Meta-dialogue then involves sharing and reaching an understanding of the ways in which beliefs under discussion in dialogue can be believed to be true or useful.
- For the American Philosophical Practitioners Association (*Group Facilitation*, 1999) the facilitator plays a role in third-order meta-dialogue. This may be requested at any time by participants who seeks clarification about a rule or any other matter governing the dialogue as a whole. The facilitator is then responsible for answering meta-dialogical questions but may also initiate a meta-dialogue at any time, if in his judgement some procedural point requires clarification. Thus the facilitator of a Socratic dialogue is then to be understood as like the conductor of an orchestra: he has no explicit voice in the score, but has a meta-voice in conducting the performance.
- Maurice A. Finocchiaro (*Arguments, Meta-arguments, and Metadialogues: A Reconstruction of Krabbe, Govier, and Woods. Argumentation*, 21, 3, September 2007, pp. 253-268) responds to presentations (notably by Erik C. W. Krabbe) at the Fifth Conference of the **International Society for the Study of Argumentation** (2002) defining a metadialogue as a dialogue about one or more dialogues, and a ground-level dialogue as a dialogue that is not a metadialogue. He defines a meta-argument as an argument about one or more arguments, and a ground-level argument as one which is not a meta-argument. Presentations at the Third ISSA Conference on Argumentation (2002) showed that fallacy criticism consists of metadialogues, and that such metadialogues can be profiled in ways that lead to their proper termination or resolution. Finocchiaro describes five types of meta-arguments and considers the possibility of others.
- In the light of the set of dialectical rules for opening and closing metadialogues, proposed by Krabbe (2003), in which the permissibility of moves in a ground level dialogue is being discussed, Jan Albert van Laar (*The Dialectical Approach to Argument and Argument Criticism*, 2003) discusses the possibility of starting a metadialogue at a level n -- and a metametadialogue at level n+1. Such a dialogue forms a discussion that corresponds with ideal discussion behaviour as the discussants themselves view it: it does not contain any violation of a discussion rule, or so the parties themselves think. These dialogues are regulated by the rules for (complex) persuasion dialogue. However, different rules must regulate the discussion that contains the possibly inadmissible moves and the metadiscussions about potentially inadmissible moves
- Peter Houtlosser1 and Jan Albert van Laar1. *Metadialogues: Krabbe's Immanent Dialectic Argumentation*, 21, 3, September, 2007, pp. 205-208

Given such explorations, there is clearly a case for argument mapping and critical discourse analysis in conferences regarding the future. A valuable parallel may be drawn with the analysis of "passing patterns" in various sporting disciplines and the use of dance notation. The question is how insights are to be obtained (preferably in real time) from representation of dialogue in process, as separately discussed (*Complementary Knowledge Analysis / Mapping Process*, 2006).

It is astounding that greater sophistication is applied to the analysis of patterns of interaction in various sports than is applied to the patterns of dialogue at vital strategic gatherings (Jochen Voss, *The Mathematical Theory of Juggling*, 2007; Ben Beever, *Guide to Juggling Patterns*; Mark Weston, *Passing Patterns*, 2006; Athalie Redwood-Brown, *Passing patterns before and after goal scoring in FA Premier League Soccer*, *International Journal of Performance Analysis in Sport*, 2008; Association for Soccer Education and Teaching, *Passing Patterns and Small Sided Games*, 2008; Alan Reifman, *Network Analysis of Basketball Passing Patterns II*, 2006; Patrick Riley, *Coaching: Learning and Using Environment and Agent Models for Advice*, 2005). The approach has been adapted to message passing in complex organizational networks. The situation is all the more curious given the widespread metaphoric use of "ball" in strategic dialogue -- as in the "ball is in their court".

Deconstructing conference communication processes to elicit meta-discourse

Meta-discourse necessarily calls for a capacity for self-reflection -- possibly explored in cybernetic terms (*Consciously Self-reflexive Global Initiatives: Renaissance zones, complex adaptive systems, and third order organizations*, 2007).

Dialogue: A conference is above all a context for "dialogue". There have been multiple explorations of dialogue over five decades. There are many techniques (many franchised) and many facilitators (franchised or otherwise). Traditional modalities of indigenous peoples have been highlighted with a degree of respect. Computer technology has been extensively developed to enable dialogue -- using various combinations of hardware, software and **groupware**. Different "formats" have been explored for the broadcast media.

Possibilities of enhanced audience participation have been enabled, experimentally and otherwise. An experiment in **participant interaction messaging** had been conducted a decade previously at a WFSF Conference (Turku, 1993) .

Why then is dialogue, especially in a conference environment, only modest in its fruitfulness? Have participants come to accept a pattern of lower expectations -- and to rate the outcome as satisfactory? The concern may be given focus by asking to what extent the preoccupations of the conference, with respect for strategies for the "outside world" are consciously applied to the "inside world" of the organization of the conference itself, as separately discussed (*Internyet Nescience? Self-referential upgrading of obsolete Internet conference processes*, 2013).

Constraints on emergence of discourse of a higher order: Consideration could be given to nine constraints in particular:

- **Dependence on particular metaphors:** It is remarkable the dependence on a particular style of metaphor in relation to futures studies. This is most notably with respect to the "vision" metaphor so valued with respect to "envisaging" strategies and policies for the future -- highlighted by the focus on "foresight". As discussed separately, there is little consideration of metaphors based on the other senses, despite their vital importance to navigating a complex environment, and despite use of them by politicians (*Metaphor and the Language of Futures*, 1992; *Sustaining Higher Orders of Policy Consensus through Metaphor: towards a new language of governance*, 1992).

Even more intriguing is the seeming lack of capacity to frame the process of shifting between metaphors in appropriate response to circumstances (*Cyclopean Vision vs Poly-sensual Engagement*, 2006; *Strategic Challenge of Polysensorial Knowledge bringing the "elephant" into "focus"*, 2008). Futures studies reinforces the constraining dependence by regular presentation of a report by the Millennium Project on the *State of the Future* -- implicitly emphasizing the "static" dimension over the "dynamic", as separately argued (*Dynamic Transformation of Static Reporting of Global Processes: suggestions for process-oriented titles of global issue reports*, 2013).

- **Avoidance of explicit recognition of relationships:** Curiously a conference environment, or field of study, is characterized by **implicit** recognition of relationships alone. There is little **explicit** recognition of the pattern of relationships between people or themes -- most notably in the history of a field. The techniques are of course available in the form of social network analysis and citation analysis, to which analysis of "meta-data" for security purposes has recently been added (*Interweaving Thematic Threads and Learning Pathways*, 2010). These are not however used in ways to enhance the dialogue process.

There is little interest in why one person is (or is not) in communication with another, or why one theme is held to be related (or not) to another -- except perhaps as a question of "intelligence" and "security" concern. The matter has been addressed in a pioneering experiment by **Stafford Beer** (from the perspective of management cybernetics) and by **Gordon Pask** (from the perspective of conversation theory) within the context of the silver jubilee conference of the **Society for General Systems Research** (London, 1979), as described separately (*Metaconferencing: discovering people / viewpoint networks in conferences*, 1980). Given the considerable evolution of technology, how is the reluctance to record and visualize the points and links made during the conference process to be understood -- constituting as it does an emerging template potentially enabling fruitful evolution of that process?

- **Unrecognized cognitive geometry of a conference:** What is the implicit "geometry" neglected in a conference process, as suggested by the making of "points", development of "lines" of argument, clarification of the "boundaries" of fields -- possibly in terms of a "sphere" of influence and through a "volume" of discourse? Why the stress on "ex-planation" and the formulation of "plans" -- both implying a form of two-dimensionality? How do these frame and enable "centres" of identity and the process of eliciting meaning?
- **Constraints on time constraints: space/time challenge of conference organization:** A conference necessarily poses a challenge of space-time management. This is a question of resource management, most notably with respect to limited attention time and information overload -- potentially complicated by the dynamics between frames of reference and those variously

associated with them.

- **Preoccupation with agreement and consensus:** Dialogue is constrained by achieving consensus, eliminating or overriding disagreement, possibly inspired by the sense of rightness conferred by a (democratic) majority view. The possibility that the complexity of issues (and the manners in which they are understood) may preclude consensus, is then a consideration to be avoided, as separately discussed (*The Consensus Delusion: mysterious attractor undermining global civilization as currently imagined*, 2011; *Ungovernability of Sustainable Global Democracy?* 2010).

There is little ability to focus on the possible viability of structures and processes based on disagreement and misunderstanding (*Comprehension: Social organization determined by incommunicability of insights*, 1995). Technically this is known as **q-analysis** (Ron Atkin, *Combinatorial Connectivities in Social Systems; an application of simplicial complex structures to the study of large organizations*, 1977). This is consistent with the possibility of partial comprehension (*Towards the Dynamic Art of Partial Comprehension*, 2012). There is no sense that patterns of consonance and dissonance, to employ a musical metaphor, might be of value to an understanding of an ecology of thematic agreement and disagreement (*Through Metaphor to a Sustainable Ecology of Development Policies*, 1989; *Enhancing Policy Forums through Ecological Metaphors*, 1988)

- **Inherent insecurity reinforcing excessive control:** This inhibits those open processes which enable serendipity in dialogue -- thereby favouring predictability and reducing collective learning and creativity. The possibility may be framed differently by asking whether the preoccupations of the conference themes are in any way applied -- self-reflexively -- to organization of the event itself, as noted above (*Intenmyet Nescience? Self-referential upgrading of obsolete Internet conference processes*, 2013).
- **Absence of systematic evaluation of events as a source of learning:** It is extraordinary to note the lack of explicit attention to monitoring an event, especially its communication processes, in order to derive learnings from it of benefit to organization of future events. This is as evident in the organization of global summits, UN mega-conferences, or those of futures studies. Nor, typically, is there any explicit evaluation of the conference process after the event. The pattern is to respond implicitly, if at all, to criticism by other parties. The pattern contrasts markedly with that of the **Institute of Cultural Affairs**, which held lengthy multi-week events involving hundreds of people -- monitoring the process on a daily basis and reorganizing the program of the following day if required.
- **Indifference to the integrity and coherence of the emergent outcome:** Participant contributions, singularly or in groups, are naturally separated in space and time by the original program organization -- which may evolve over the course of the event. Beyond the relationships between points made, there is typically little attention to how a larger pattern of significance may be detected as emerging -- a pattern of integration of an even higher order (as indicated above). How does the segmentation of the program in space-time evolve in consequence? Can the program segments be understood as frames of reference shifting in relative to one another, a condition potentially to be inspired by a "special theory of relativity" (*Einstein's Implicit Theory of Relativity -- of Cognitive Property?* 2007).
- **Remedial capacity and deliverability:** Dialogue readily indulges in modes in which any constraints on the deliverability of envisaged strategies is avoided -- in the light of the track record of past efforts. Little attention is given to remedial capacity in the attention given to articulation of strategic problems.

Conference communication specifics meriting attention

In considering the possibility of meta-discourse, attention could be given to:

- the "zones" of participant interaction from plenary, through face-to-face dialogue, to internet enabled variants -- and whether they functioned appropriately to that end
- forms of potentially constrained communication, such as:
 - telling / lecturing, possibly precluding any response from the audience -- or indifferent to it
 - asking, possibly without hope of a meaningful response -- or the desire for it
 - listening / watching, in anticipation of learning, as the recognition of acquisition of new insight, perhaps of a surprising nature
 - promoting / selling, as the intentional presentation of an initiative with an implicit or explicit desire for acceptance -- possibly irrespective of the openness to such presentations
 - advocating initiatives and beliefs to be performed or upheld by others
- who communicates meaningfully (or unmeaningfully) with whom -- and why?
- is any preoccupation with telling one's truth appropriately constrained within the conference context in the light of who needs to hear it in a quest for collective coherence?
- how does importance and authority play out fruitfully within the conference context?
- what consideration is given to the ignorance of others. especially that engendered elsewhere by the creativity within the conference itself?
- what is conceived and emerges from the process, immediately or thereafter?
- how is communication facilitated or inhibited, especially in an intercultural environment?
- what is the extent, nature and influence of the unsaid (the *nondit*) ?
- is there an absence of "insight capture" processes in the enthusiasm for "dialogue" -- and why?
- how relatively bored / interested / surprised / alienated are particular participants and why?

- how is the outcome of the event communicated to a wider world, especially with the use of other modes?
- what answers engendered rapidly prove to be premature?
- what doubts does the event raise?
- what is the degree of follow up on promises and contacts made?
- how is disagreement integrated into the coherence of the conference outcome?
- are constraints on resources, notably shortage of time, effectively used as a weapon of domination?

Questioning as cognitive portal to the future

Meta-discourse through questioning : The curious cognitive role of a question merits particular consideration with respect to a conference -- especially in the light of the space-time constraints noted above and the quest for a "higher order" of discourse, namely a potential "meta-discourse" or an integrative "meta-narrative". Factors to be considered include:

- radical nature: questions can be fruitfully understood as going to the root of a matter, circumventing the superficial
- encompassing paradox: questions can be used to encompass paradox in ways which are a challenge for conventional discourse,
- integrative potential: questions can pull together and configure a multiplicity of factors and dimensions -- without getting lost in their articulation
- succinct: questions (being succinct) typically circumvent the constraints of space and time typical of a conference communication process
- learning: question can elicit learning through encouraging reflection, especially if the "answer" (or its very nature) is elusive
- paradigm shift: questions can necessitate a shift in perspective -- to a new place -- or a reframing, capable of resolving or embodying the tension they engender
- recognition of patterns: in transcending conventional discourse, questions engender a perspective from which functional and dysfunctional patterns can be recognized -- which may be undetectable otherwise

Given the above, **does the conference as a whole constitute a question -- or does it formulate a question, implicitly or explicitly?**

Varieties of question: The *Wikipedia* entry on [questions](#), indicates the 17 types of question articulated by [Jamie McKenzie](#) (*A Questioning Toolkit From Now On: the educational technology journal*, 7, 1997, 3) as follows:

Essential Questions	Subsidiary Questions	Hypothetical Questions
Organizing Questions	Probing Questions	Sorting and Sifting Questions
Elaborating Questions	Unanswerable Questions	Inventive Questions
Telling Questions	Planning Questions	Clarification Questions
Strategic Questions	Provocative Questions	Divergent Questions
Irrelevant Questions	Irreverent Questions	

McKenzie argues for the special value of "essential questions" in education. as well as stressing the need to orchestrate and combine these types. Of interest to the argument here is whether and how any combination of these would isolate what might be termed the "transformative questions" fundamental to "change" -- and how these might be distinguished from those associated with less radical forms of "education", as discussed separately (*Higher Education ∞ Meta-education ?* 2011).

In an associated journal article, McKenzie lists the ten characteristics (below) that set "truly great questions" apart from the mundane and the inconsequential.

Ten characteristics of a truly great question (Jamie McKenzie, <i>A Truly Great Question, The Question Mark</i> , 9, 2013, 6)	
It provokes curiosity and a sense of wonder.	It frustrates.
It eludes facile, simple answers.	It evolves, twists, dances, changes shape and teases.
It requires ingenuity and imagination..	It challenges, dares and defies.
It demands persistence.	It illuminates.
It calls for versatility.	It delights.

Can a futures conference be recognized as having asked a "truly great question" -- or as having been framed with that possibility in mind? Or is there a marked tendency to ask questions of a form which encourages distraction and a focus on detail -- "trivial pursuit". How is a balance found between the divergence embodying valuable diversity and the convergence necessary to whatever might engender transformation?

Questioning conventional belief: In a world characterized by the (bloody) consequences of faith-based governance -- notably engendering suicide bombing -- there is a case for exploring questions in relation to the belief system which may be challenged (or reinforced) by them. The study by [Jerome H. Neyrey](#) (*Questions, Chreiai, and Honor Challenges: the interface of rhetoric and culture in Mark's Gospel, Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 1998) is particularly valuable in this respect. Neyrey associates questions with the ancient use of "chreiai". Given the current value attributed to "tweets" (on Twitter), a *chreia* could be variously understood as a pithy, insightful statement, question or anecdote -- especially valued for its educational function, and the wisdom it might embody (perhaps as an aphorism).

For educational purposes in that past period, *chreiai* could be subject to changes of voice and tense in Greek, for example. Their subsequent elaboration into a formal eight-paragraph essay is reminiscent of a form of "8-fold way" and of the process of crafting a *haiku* with its evocative and challenging significance (*Ensuring Strategic Resilience through Haiku Patterns: reframing the scope of the "martial arts" in response to strategic threats*, 2006).

Neyrey organizes his exploration as follows (*comments have been added*):

- Questions in Ancient Literature -- *understood as points for dispute (in debate, controversy, quarrel or puzzle)*.
 - Questions in forensic rhetoric -- *stated, with answers, such as to achieve special rhetoric effect, with questions possibly functioning as weapons*
 - Questions in philosophical discourse -- *such as to elicit truths already known to the person questioned, or to ridicule the quality of answers otherwise given*
 - The Literary Genre: "Questions and Answers"
 - Questions in education -- *where the formal purpose is the direct transfer of information*
 - Questions and entertainment -- *through their use in competitive sparring, whether the questions are friendly or hostile, agreeable or disagreeable*
- Questions and the chreia -- *typically characteristic of point-scoring in debate*
- Questions and honor challenges
 - The agonistic nature of society in Antiquity -- *strangely reminiscent of the manner in which permanent warfare with "others" is now engendered by the US principle of "you're either with us, or against us"*
 - The rationale for conflict: perceptions of limited good -- *resulting in the flourishing of envy, with few claims going unchallenged*
 - Challenge and riposte: choreographing honor claims -- *with questions serving as challenges and answers as ripostes*
 - The responsive chreia and the typical honor challenge -- *effectively embodying both question and answer*
- Questions in responsive chreiai in Mark: challenge and riposte
 - Responsive chreiai provoked by challenging questions -- *with questions understood as being designed as a test by an adversary, to place the other "on the spot"*
 - Responsive chreiai which answer a question with a counter-question -- *an effective counter in the terms of martial arts*
 - Rhetoric: responsive chreiai vis-à-vis and culture: challenge-riposte -- *a context in which deliberate provocation can be countered through an honorable initiative*
 - Telling winners and losers -- *most notably when the loser is silenced by the question*
- Conclusions and further questions
 - What do we know if we know this? -- *noting how questions "function more often than not as competitive, even hostile weapons intended to inflict major damage. Questions score points, draw blood, and shame opponents"*
 - Further questions

Recent initiatives: It could be argued that the methodology of the metaconferencing exercise (indicated above), as employed by Beer and Pask (1979), effectively invited participants to submit "*chreiai*" to elicit responses from each other. In their invitation, regarding the required submissions, they indicated:

- What statement? That is for you to decide. It should be something relevant to the purposes that brought us all here. It could be a declaration, a comment, a question, an injunction, or something else that you want to put down. But it should be something you regard as important
- Watch out for motherhood statements. In case anyone present does not know this trick: make sure that the negative of the statement would find defenders. If not, you have made an empty utterance.

A continuing, widely publicized, use of questions is that of the [World Question Center](#) of [The Edge Foundation](#), which formulates an [Annual Question](#) to elicit responses from its associates. These are then variously compiled and published. As with the recommendation of Beer and Pask, the questions asked are far from taking the form of "motherhood statements".

The Ultimate Question? The focus offered by a question, in contrast to the problematic consequence of any answer, is notoriously illustrated by Douglas Adams (*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, 1978-80) with respect to the [Answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything](#).

This now merits special consideration, given recent disclosures regarding the appetite of the US National Security Agency and its collaborators in seeking to absorb immeasurable quantities of personal data into supercomputers -- through which the actions of everyone in the world can now be predicted by models and simulation. For Adams, the "Ultimate Question", as formulated by a group of hyper-intelligent pan-dimensional beings, required that the supercomputer [Deep Thought](#) be specially built to provide an answer. In the summary offered by *Wikipedia*:

It takes Deep Thought 7.5 million years to compute and check the answer, which turns out to be 42. Deep Thought points out that the answer seems meaningless because the beings who instructed it never actually knew what the Question was.

When asked to produce The Ultimate Question, Deep Thought says that it cannot; however, it can help to design an even more powerful computer that can. This new computer will incorporate living beings into the "[computational matrix](#)" and will run for ten million years. It is revealed as being the planet [Earth](#), with its pan-dimensional creators assuming the form of mice to observe its running.... Lacking a real question, the mice decide not to go through the whole thing again and settle for the out-of-thin-air suggestion "How many roads must a man walk down?" from [Bob Dylan's](#) song "[Blowin' in the Wind](#)".

Whether the analysts of the NSA matrix are to be compared to hyper-intelligent pan-dimensional beings -- or mice -- is a question for the future.

In quest of the most deadly question

Deadliness? Is there a question that could shake humanity out of its dream state -- or is the dream state a form of impotence engendered by unconscious recognition of that question? Are deadly questions particularly characterized by being unasked, as separately discussed (*Strategic Implications of 12 Unasked Questions in Response to Disaster*, 2013)?

The characteristics of a "deadly joke", or a "killer joke", have been highlighted by a comedy series in *Monty Python's Flying Circus* as the *Funniest Joke in the World*. This develops the concept of the "most deadly joke" -- a joke that is so funny that anyone who reads or hears it promptly **dies from laughter**. This speculatively suggests an "ultimately" transformative role of humour, as otherwise explored (*Humour and Play-Fullness: essential integrative processes in governance, religion and transdisciplinarity*, 2005). The "most deadly" framing is also to be found in relation to questions.

In its Annual Question of 2006, the Edge Foundation sought answers to the question *What is your most dangerous idea?* -- with responses compiled into a book (John Brockman, *What is Your Dangerous Idea? Today's Leading Thinkers on the Unthinkable*, 2007). Although a valuable indication, there is clearly a distinction to be made between a question understood as being **dangerous for "others"** (rather than oneself), one which is primarily **dangerous for "oneself"**, and one which is **dangerous for both**, and -- more fundamentally -- for any sense of their relationship.

Of less relevance, but suggestive of how the mind is "sharpened" by a "deadly question", Neyrey (1998) notes:

... Plutarch describes a most deadly question contest between Alexander and the Gymnosophists. Because they were "reputed to be clever and concise in answering questions," Alexander put difficult questions to them, with the proviso that "he would put to death him who first made an incorrect answer" - a pleasant evening was had by all!

Although seemingly of little relevance, it is readily forgotten how deadly to the questioner may be any question implying disbelief in a faith defined as unquestionable -- only too evident in the history of Catholicism and the potential consequences of **apostasy** in Islam.

Governance: With respect to governance, for example, Jos C. N. Raadschelders (*Public Administration: the interdisciplinary study of government*, 2013) argues in relation to "most deadly":

From an academic point of view the crisis of the practice of government concerns the question: What exactly is public administration? How is government demarcated from the private sector and how is it situated between state and society? What differentiates government from other societal organizations? With respect to the study of public administration, the academic crisis concerns the epistemological basis of the study. How can we acquire knowledge about public organizations? How can we, for instance, relate organizational theories to public organizations? How can we relate our theories about human action to the practice of governing? And the most deadly question of all: to what extent is our knowledge *scientific* or interpretative? The existential crisis of government basically concerns its moral authority, while the existential crisis of the study is about whether it ought to be an independent (inter) discipline (versus political science, business administration, and so forth). (p. 24)

Self-reflexivity: The sense of "most deadly question" is also recognized with respect to employment interviews as that by which the job seeker is asked of his or her weaknesses:

To avoid job seekers, the most deadly question that HR department wants to ask you is about your weakness. Most of the time, job applicants will try to visualize themselves as a competent, professional and suitable candidate for the positions with significant strengths and skills. No one would want to disclose their weaknesses, which may instantly mark you as "Don't hire me". (Huang Mac, *How to answer "What is your weakness?" in a job interview?* 24 April 2013)

This points to self-reflexivity as being characteristic of the "deadliness" of a question. This can be understood otherwise when a potentially undeserved "favour" is required from a potentially indifferent source. The question may then be characterized as what one needs to do to deserve or ensure a favourable response. Variants are evident in romance, begging, or -- for the religious -- in seeking favours from God. As expressed by:

The most deadly question that a man can ask is the question we ask when we begin to sense that we need something from God: "What shall I do to win God's favor?" Well, there is nothing to do, Paul says. If it depended upon doing, if you were going to accomplish what had to be done to deliver you, this is what you would have to do: You would have to climb up into heaven and bring Christ down from heaven. You would have to go down into the grave and bring Christ up from the dead. Now, who can do that? Obviously, all that needed to be done was far beyond our ability to do it. The great word of the gospel is that it has all been done. (Ray C. Stedman, *How Far Away is God?* 2010)

In cybernetic terms, self-reflexivity is seemingly framed otherwise through the distinction of second-order and third-order cybernetics -- in contrast to the prevalent focus on first order responses. A case can be made for the vital role of higher order modalities to enable and sustain transformation, as noted above (*Consciously Self-reflexive Global Initiatives: Renaissance zones, complex adaptive systems, and third order organizations*, 2007).

Requisite "death" or "sacrifice": The quest for transformative change might then be understood as the quest for the "most deadly question" which could enable appropriate change. This helps to frame the sense in which transformative change is "deadly" in

that it necessarily requires a form of "death" of an old pattern -- the pattern to which identity has hitherto been attached. Change of that quality is then essentially a transformation of identity. As variously expressed in the literature of religions, this is an existential "death of the old self" (*The death of the Old Self, Sermons and Articles*; Lisa Petrilli, *Why Death of the Old Self is Critical to Leadership*, 29 October 2012). **What is the question that "kills off" the old self?** This understanding is echoed in various forms of psychotherapy and self-development.

There are clearly forms of change of pattern of lesser degree. Not being "the most deadly", however, it is questionable to what degree these are as transformative as is sought, or as may be necessary for survival. The "most deadly question" is of course a way of framing intuitions regarding the required change, as variously suggested by the following:

- **individual behaviour**, through which an individual is "reinvented" and "made anew" -- as is variously implied in personal image management and conversion of faith
- **group modality**, potentially that of a body (such as the World Futures Studies Federation, for example) -- or a United Nations (long seeking "reform")
- **a nation**, as might be suggested by "what is the most deadly question for the USA at this time" -- given its crisis of international credibility?
- **a belief system**, as might be addressed to the warring Abrahamic religions, especially in the light of the sectarian violence they engender
- **civilization as a whole**, as might be considered essential to viable navigation of the **adaptive cycle** by which civilization is otherwise likely to be destroyed, as argued by **Thomas Homer-Dixon** (*The Upside of Down: Catastrophe, Creativity, and the Renewal of Civilization*, 2006).

What is the "deadly question" which would enable human civilization to "fly"? To what does civilization have to "die" to enable that modality? The potentially radical nature of the question is suggested by commentary on **Suzuki Shosan** by **Winston L. King** (*Death Was His Koan: the samurai Zen of Suzuki Shosan*, 1986).

Existential deadliness: Despite the admirable framework offered by Neyrey (above), and his recognition of the often "damaging" nature of questions (presumably essential to their deadliness), his argument does not appear to encompass the "deadliness" which could be associated with the Zen *koan* and its use in Zen spiritual training. As a form of questioning, it is used in that context as a mode of inquiry to elicit the "Great Doubt" -- building up strong internal pressure (*gidan*), towards its resolution through cognitive transformation variously to be understood in terms of "enlightenment".

Extremes of doubt and uncertainty can be readily surmised to be a necessary prelude to transformation. Various *koans*, or sets of *koans*, may be used to this end, most notably a collection of 48, known as the *Mumonkoan* (*The Gateless Gate*) -- as provocatively discussed separately (*Configuring a Set of Zen Koan as a Wisdom Container: formatting the Gateless Gate for Twitter*, 2012). Such a framing would seem to be appropriate to the nature of the global cognitive crisis, and the associated sense of "pointlessness" in the face of "nothing".

Is there a case for recognizing and honouring the "Great Doubt" potentially cultivated in a conference process? Perhaps the suggestion that it might seek to exist or to meet again? An existential "sunset" provision?

Collective transformation: In the quest here for transformatively "fruitful deadliness" transcending any focus on the individual, some indication is offered by the use of a Zen *koan* in an unusual conference seeking to reframe its organization. As described separately (*A Congress that Dared the Unthinkable: Report on the First New Age Congress*, Florence, 1978):

After considerable discussion it was unanimously agreed that the meaning of the event in all its ramifications could best emerge if the core group ceased to 'organize and schedule' and just 'stepped back' in order for the Congress to become aware of itself as a whole. Instead of scheduling events for the following day or thereafter, it was simply agreed that one person would 'focalize' a general meeting, if sufficient participants gathered together in the plenary meeting room on the following morning. It was agreed that even the registration desk would be manned in an unscheduled manner by volunteers responding to the need. Such volunteers explained the change which had occurred in case participants did not wish to register. The workshop sign-up sheets were to be removed from the display wall.

Once this decision was reached there was truly amazing expression of joy amongst those who had been responding frenetically to artificial pressures and needs which did not correspond to the values which had brought them together in search for new structures and processes. The 'organising group' dissolved itself with statements such as: 'At last we have a Congress'. The nature of the group's attitude to this decision at the critical moment it was taken is illustrated by the Zen tale told at that time:

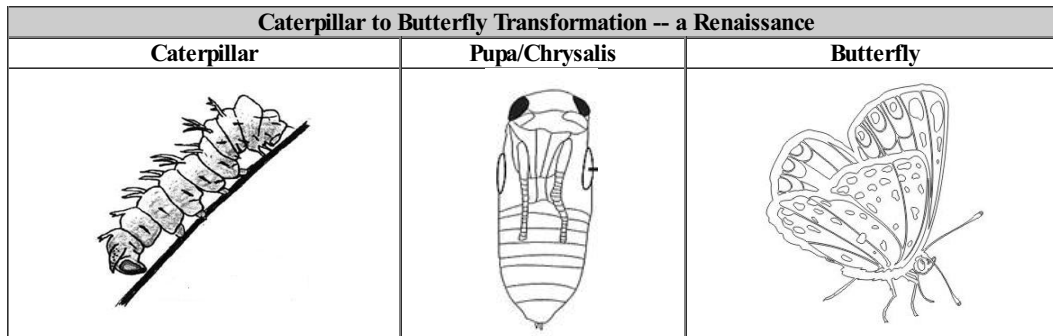
Three disciples of a Zen master were each asked to explain the nature of a beautiful ancient vase. The first and the second were each absent a year and returned with complex statements - which were rejected. The third smashed the vase with one blow - and thus achieved 'satori'.

The further development of the event was then separately described (*Emergence of Integrative Processes in a Self-reflective Assembly*, 1978).

Enabling morphogenesis and transformation through catastrophic questioning

Morphogenesis of a butterfly: A remarkable illustration of transformative change is provided by that undergone in the well-recognized lifecycle of the butterfly -- from caterpillar, via pupa, to imago. The widespread calls for "change", and the sensed need for it, could be explored metaphorically in terms of the pressures and tensions, felt within the butterfly, that elicit the necessary "rewiring" of its instinctual behavioural patterns and metabolic processes. For any institution, what is the "deadly question" to enable the transition from "caterpillar" to "pupa", and from "pupa" to "imago" -- through the "death" of the preceding modality?

As discussed separately (*Animating the Representation of Europe*, 2004), the necessary institutional metamorphosis for the 21st century has been explored by John Elkington (*The Chrysalis Economy*, 2001) through this caterpillar-to-butterfly metaphor from the insect chrysalis -- the stage in the life cycle of lepidopterons when, within a self-spun cocoon, rapacious (and somewhat ugly) caterpillars undergo a sensational re-configuration of both form and function, to emerge as delicate (and often beautiful) butterflies (or moths if their particular genes so dictate). For Elkington, the transformation is not achieved without radical shifts in the nature of the animal that involves "self-digestion" before metamorphosis is possible. He uses insights from this metaphor to illuminate many aspects of corporate transformation.



Using the same metaphor, Edgar Morin (*Vers l'abime*, *Le Monde*, 1er janvier 2003) argues:

La métamorphose de la chenille en papillon nous offre une métaphore intéressante : quand la chenille est entrée dans le cocon, elle opère l'autodestruction de son organisme de chenille, et ce processus est en même temps celui de formation de l'organisme de papillon, lequel sera à la fois le même et autre que la chenille. Cela est la métamorphose. La métamorphose du papillon est préorganisée. La métamorphose des sociétés humaines en une société monde est aléatoire, incertaine, et elle est soumise aux dangers mortels qui lui sont pourtant nécessaires. Aussi l'humanité risque-t-elle de chavirer au moment d'accoucher de son avenir.

Curiously there is some metaphorical recognition of a requisite degree of transformation to enable an organization or project to "fly". With respect to organizational transformation, there are many related jokes concerning earth-bound "turkeys" in contrast with "eagles" able to fly.

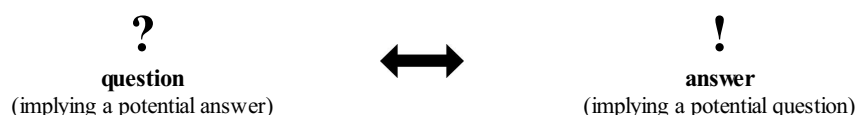
Morphogenesis and catastrophe: Understood in more generic terms, such transformation is a theme central to the work on [catastrophe theory](#) of René Thom (*Structural Stability and Morphogenesis*, 1972). As a topologist, he himself applied his insights to [semiotics](#) through an exploration of "semio-physics" (*Semio Physics: A Sketch*, 1990).

The argument here concerns the nature of a question as a form of "cognitive catastrophe" through which an existing pattern of understanding is transformed to enable a new pattern to emerge. As discussed separately, it might even be hypothesized that Thom's set of seven elementary catastrophes correspond in some way to the seven characteristic "WH-questions": who, where, which, what, why, when, and how (*Conformality of 7 WH-questions to 7 Elementary Catastrophes an exploration of potential psychosocial implications*, 2006). It might be said that there is a distinct "feel" to each such form of question (*Cognitive Feel for Cognitive Catastrophes: Question Conformality*, 2006).

The "deadliness" of a question, as explored above, is then to be understood in terms of the sense of an impending catastrophe through which morphogenesis occurs. A question, especially understood as a *koan* eliciting "Great Doubt", then anticipates the requisite cognitive catastrophe for transformation.

Markings: ¿ Question ∞ Answer ?!

There is a curious cognitive focus on question and answer -- considered somewhat simplistically -- with little implication that some other (possibly paradoxical) sense might be required to extend the patterns they constitute:



Use of the exclamation mark, as an indication of an "answer", can be mnemonically associated with the classical exclamation *Eureka!*

Animation suggestive of alternation between "question" and "answer"



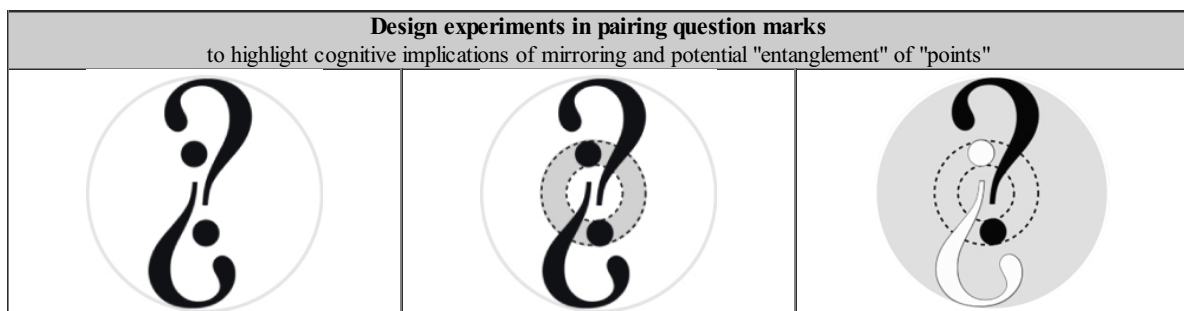
Marks: The role of "marks" has been given special significance in the seminal work of [George Spencer-Brown](#) (*Laws of Form*, 1969). "Markings" has been given other significance as the philosophical reflection of [Dag Hammarskjöld](#) (*Markings*, 1963).

The reflection could be taken further by considering the actual "geometry" of the [question mark](#) as a "vehicle" for emergence of further insights -- notably by pairing it with the [inverted question mark](#) used to open interrogation in some languages (for example, ¿*Qué hora es?* meaning *What time is it?*). Of related interest are other variants: the [percentation point](#) (or rhetorical question mark), the [irony mark](#), and the [mirrored question mark](#). The cognitive experience may be further articulated by pairing with an [exclamation mark](#) -- as in the [interrobang](#).

These are all indicative of qualities of the cognitive uncertainty, surprise and discontinuity in the threatening anticipation of the "nothingness" of a "meta-context" out of which a new pattern may emerge. The paradoxical relation to an "answer" -- collapsing the tension of a question (as a "wave function") -- is suitably indicated by the infinity sign separating question and answer in the title above -- with its associations to the cognitive paradox potentially held by the [Möbius strip](#) (*Psychosocial Work Cycle: beyond the plane of Möbius*, 2007). As with many "answers", the inadequacies of that offered may elicit further "questions".

Such pairing has been used experimentally in a related argument (¿*Defining the objective ∞ Refining the subjective ?! Explaining reality ∞ Embodying realization*, 2011; ¿*Higher Education ∞ Meta-education ?* 2011). This is consistent with the existential ambiguities associated with the experience of borderlines and "nothingness" (*Living as an Imaginal Bridge between Worlds: Global implications of "betwixt and between" and liminality*, 2011).

The pairing below derives from a separate argument (¿*Embodying a Way Round Pointlessness?* 2012) which highlights the potential significance of the double spiral ([Euler's spiral](#) or [Clothoid](#)) in relation to the unconscious or "netherworld" (*Designing Global Self-governance for the Future: patterns of dynamic integration of the netherworld*, 2010). The pairing as presented below echoes the form of the double spiral. However the pairing would also seem to be appropriate to the cognitive challenge of "nothingness" -- given the existential questions it raises.



Discontinuity: Of particular interest is the implication of the (catastrophic) discontinuity in the design of the question mark itself -- between the semi-circular portion and the "point", possibly with an intermediary linear portion in some typographical representations. In its singular form, the circle is incomplete and highlights the dilemma of how to complete it -- or the point of doing so.

The semi-circular portion, through its very incompleteness, also suggests a form of openness. This contrasts with the separate point suggestive of closure. As a whole the question mark then suggests a pathway from closure to openness, or vice versa. However, although this pathway may embody a degree of linearity, the shape as a whole implies a degree of twistedness or trickiness -- often associated with questions calling for counter-intuitive insight (especially riddles). To the extent that the exclamation mark implies assertion of an answer characterized by "linearity" (from which ambiguity has been eliminated), the "twistedness" is absent (*Engaging with Questions of Higher Order: cognitive vigilance required for higher degrees of twistedness*, 2004).

Pairing with the inverted variant highlights the relevance of a form of cognitive "netherworld" -- the "dark side" of the question -- calling for consideration to achieve a degree of completion. This highlights the existence of a complementary "point" -- perhaps a [counterpoint](#) (as fruitfully explored in terms of musical harmony).

The two "points" may then be understood as implying a "hidden" cognitive relationship as suggested by the middle image. Metaphorically this could be understood as a form of cognitive "wormhole" of different dimensionality. Its nature is suggested by the cognitive experience of humour, surrealism and surprise, as noted above.

The wormhole, as the connection between "point" and "counterpoint" of the paired questions, might be usefully understood as a form geometrically analogous to an Euler spiral. This suggests a way of thinking of a wormhole through "semantic hyperspace", as might be explored in terms of the work of René Thom, as discussed separately (*Semiophysics?*; *Archetypal morphologies*).

Beyond rational thinking: The pattern of three images above is delightfully reminiscent of the pattern of the classical symbolic representation of Tao (below) and the cognitive challenges it implies (*Snoring of The Other: a politically relevant psycho-spiritual*

metaphor? 2006). Comprehension of it is again notably enabled by the curious "questions" characterized by the Zen *koan* -- the paradoxical meaning of which cannot be appropriately understood by rational thinking but may be accessible through intuition or lateral thinking.



Conferencing as putting identity to the question

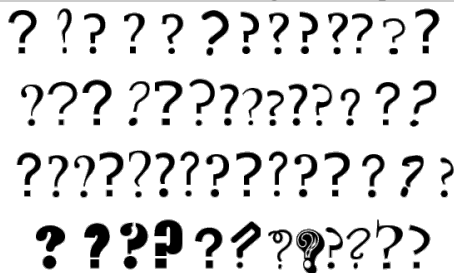
The proposed "marks" for question and answer can be suggestively represented as below to indicate the confusing range, orientation and relationship of questions and answers typical of a conferencing context. More generally, it is typical of personal experience in quest of coherence -- too many question and too many answers.

Suggestive "mapping" of questions and answers characteristic of a conference



The collection on Google images suggests many ways on which thought is given to questions -- or ways of representing the challenge of a question. Of particular interest is the range of other typographical formats for the question mark as available from illustration software. What are the kinds of ways in which it is considered meaningful to represent the distinctions between questions aesthetically? Examples are given in the image below.

Indicative set of alternative designs of the question mark

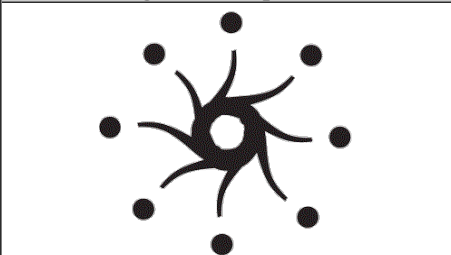
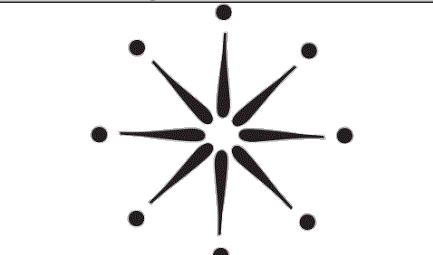


The eight images which follow are presented as mnemonic devices indicative of contrasting cognitive conditions implying contrasting forms of "integration". They can of course be variously imbued with significance and are variously suggestive of alternatives.

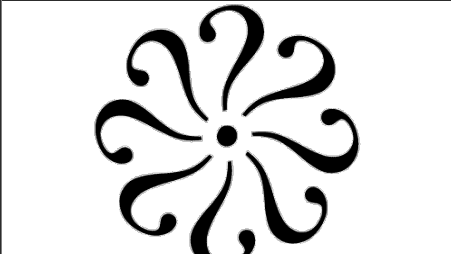
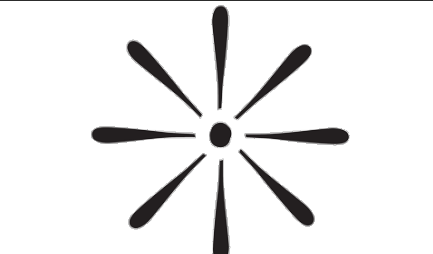
One approach to ordering the disorderly pattern (such as that above) might take the following form -- with questions or answers variously oriented and configured such as to occupy a common centre, highlighting an array of cognitively unintegrated (closed) spaces characteristic of each orientation.

Configuring questions and answers	
Configuration of questions ?	Configuration of answers !

A contrasting approach might take the following form -- a configuration around an empty centre, variously oriented, but again highlighting an array of cognitively unintegrated (closed) spaces characteristic of each orientation. That on the left (as with the previous pair) could be usefully presented with the question marks distinctively coloured to indicate a degree of rope-like interweaving.

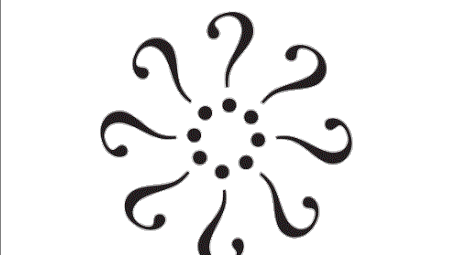
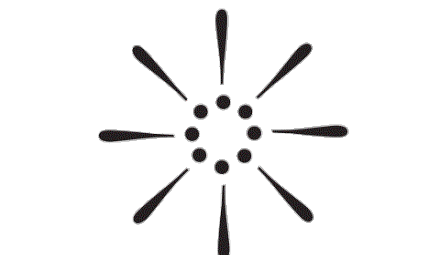
Configuring questions and answers	
Configuration of questions ?	Configuration of answers !
	

Another contrasting approach might take the following form -- a configuration around an occupied centre, variously oriented, but with the implication of cognitive integration of those closed spaces evident above.

Configuring questions and answers	
Configuration of questions ?	Configuration of answers !
	

The two images immediately above suggest a confluence -- whether of questions or answers. That on the left emphasizes the sense in which the conference can "put itself to the question". The pattern of questions acquires a coherent "explicit" focus or centre. This could be consonant with the experience of a participant. The confluence of questions might however also recall those characteristic of the "enhanced interrogation" to which some are exposed.

The image on the right suggests the sense in which the conference engenders a coherent "explicit" answer variously adapted to contextual circumstances -- an "eightfold way" in that instance. For the individual, the confluence could however correspond to that expected of someone who has renounced "unreasonable" questioning in favour of the preferred explicit "answer" imposed by the social context.

Configuring questions and answers	
Configuration of questions ?	Configuration of answers !
	

In these variants, the centre is "empty" suggesting a potentially healthier "implicit" focus -- in contrast to the "explicit" case in the pair above.

Visualization can of course be taken further through a dynamic alternating between all the cognitive conditions suggested by all the images above. The following is indicative of one exploration into which images from above could be integrated.

Animation of possible elements of a question-based meta-narrative
(tentative exercise)



The animation endeavours to interweave phases of the questioning cognitive condition -- a sense of the learning pathways, including the challenge of any aspiration to encompass globality. As a mnemonic device, can it be used to "carry" a variety of forms of significance, and their transformation -- perhaps contrasting worldviews, scientific and spiritual insight, as well as the psychology of comprehension?

In its intangible, implicit, "transcendent" form this is contrasted with use of the "lower" point as a mark of the specifics of tangible explication. Arrows are used to suggest various directions of quest and receptivity to input -- including critical self-reflexivity. The "tail-eating" snake, formed by the circular arrow at one stage, is suggestive of one modality of potential integration.

Greater use could have been made of the exclamation mark as indicative of transitional answers of various kinds in the course of the process. At best, such an animation is reminiscent of the classic [10 Ox-herding images](#) of Zen. Appropriately it might be understood as echoing, if faintly, a cognitive process of invagination (*Engendering Invagination and Gastrulation of Globalization: reconstructive insights from the sciences and the humanities*, 2010).

Conclusion

Any conference aspiring to formulate an answer for "others" elsewhere must necessarily find any "realistic" answer called into question - as with this statement itself. This is the dilemma posed by linear formulation -- the exclamation of Eureka undermined by a question framed "otherwise".

Is the future then to be understood as "real" -- or as a "surreal", counter-intuitive reality? Is there any sense in which it is resistant to being "objectified" and "grasped", as might be suggested by the challenge of sexuality (*Beyond Harassment of Reality and Grasping Future Possibilities: learnings from sexual harassment as a metaphor*, 1996)?

As with the use of a shield by [Perseus](#) in the legendary [encounter with the Gorgon](#), to offer a mirror via which to engage with potentially disabling horror, the conference is called to "be the question" in some paradoxical transformation of its envisaging capacity. This appears to require putting itself to the question -- a second order cognitive dynamic, as previously explored (*Stepping into, or through, the Mirror: embodying alternative scenario patterns*, 2008). The requisite complexity can be framed through imagination (*Imagining the Real Challenge and Realizing the Imaginal Pathway of Sustainable Transformation*, 2007).

Recalling the introductory citation of Gregory Bateson ("We are our own metaphor"), is a world futures conference to be considered the medium or the message? But then:

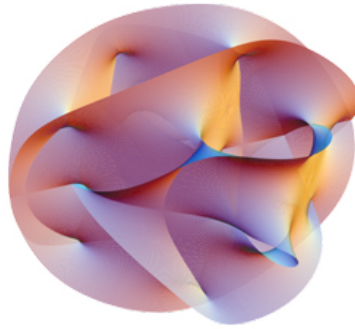
- If a world futures conference is the answer, what then is the question?
- If a world futures conference is the question, what then is the answer?

How could a world futures conference be "other wise", given the cognitive challenge of otherness ("*Human Intercourse*": "*Intercourse with Nature*" and "*Intercourse with the Other*", 2007)? Could the conference then best be understood as an embodiment in time of both question and answer -- and potentially of neither through transcending that binary framing as a strange form of cognitive catalyst? (*Strategic Embodiment of Time: configuring questions fundamental to change*, 2010).

Any conference participant is necessarily complicit in this process as an active agent -- faced, like the conference, with an identity dilemma (*Am I Question or Answer?* 2006) -- perhaps provocatively represented by: ¿ **who am i** ; or even ¿ **am i** ; The "outsideness" of the conference can then be understood as taking the form of a catastrophe -- a complex topological surface enabling movement and transformation through the challenge of the question it constitutes. The requisite attitude is strikingly anticipated in the skills sought and acquired by the aerobatics of individual skateboarders and surfers.

A very elegant speculative rendering of that surface is suggested by a representation by physicists of a "[Calabi-Yau space](#)" (as below), and separately discussed (*Global Brane Comprehension Enabling a Higher Dimensional Big Tent? Strategic implication in encompassing nothing and coming to naught*, 2011). **Why is it assumed that the "question/answer" required of a world futures conference be less complex than such a manifold?**

[Calabi-Yau manifold](#)
(larger version in *Wikipedia*, from *Scientific American*, November 2007)



The cognitive "insiderness" of the individual is then dynamically engaged with any sense of "outsiderness". This is most readily portrayed using such paradoxical forms as the Möbius strip or the Klein bottle, as argued by [Steven M. Rosen](#) (*Topologies of the Flesh: a multidimensional exploration of the lifeworld*, 2006; *Science, Paradox and the Moebius Principle: the evolution of the transcultural approach to wholeness*, 1994) and separately discussed (*Intercourse with Globality through Enacting a Klein bottle*, 2009).

The quest of the times -- faced with the possibility of an inquest on civilization -- may then be framed as a quest for more powerful metaphors of requisite complexity (*In Quest of Mnemonic Catalysts -- for comprehension of complex psychosocial dynamics*, 2007). Hence the value of cognitive engagement of the young as implied by skateboarding and surfing aerobatics. How might these then reframe the question asked by [Jacques Attali](#) (*Demain, qui gouvernera le monde?* 2011), as discussed separately (*Tomorrow, Who Will Govern the World?* 2011).

Ironically the form of the question "mark", and its relation to associated cognitive "marks", seems to offer readily accessible clues. Their geometry can be used to imply a cognitive vehicle or conduit, as so remarkably articulated by [George Lakoff](#) and [Mark Johnson](#) (*Metaphors We Live By*, 1980), and the work of Ronald Atkin (*Multidimensional Man; can man live in 3-dimensional space?* 1981), as separately summarized (*Comprehension: Social organization determined by incommunicability of insights*).

The question mark, as framing the challenge of the future for a conference or an individual, is strangely suggestive of a quest for the paradoxical cognitive "closure" implied by the symbolism of [Ouroboros](#) -- the "tail-eating snake". This image offers a valuable indication of the existential challenge of the second order perspective which a conference can most fruitfully enable through meta-discourse -- an image which might then be playfully described as that of a "tale-eating snake", in eliciting a sense of the subtle "pattern that connects". In the words of Gregory Bateson again:

The pattern which connects is a meta-pattern. It is a pattern of patterns. It is that meta-pattern which defines the vast generalization that, indeed, it is patterns which connect. (*Mind and Nature: a necessary unity*, 1979)

And it is from this perspective that Bateson warns: *Break the pattern which connects the items of learning and you necessarily destroy all quality* (1979, pp. 8-11).

With respect to the emphasis on the quest for more powerful metaphor in this exploration, the remark of [Kenneth Boulding](#) is indicative of the nature of the requisite "closure" embodying an appropriate quality of "openness":

Our consciousness of the unity of self in the middle of a vast complexity of images or material structures is at least a suitable metaphor for the unity of group, organization, department, discipline or science. If personification is a metaphor, let us not despise metaphors -- we might be one ourselves" (*Ecodynamics: a new theory of social evolution*, 1978).

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