

February 1994

A CONFERENCE TOWARDS SPIRITUAL CONCORD

AS A

METAPHOR OF SPIRITUAL CONCORD

Meetings Thoughts, Visions and Speculations

Rendered searchable by OCR, but recognition errors may prevent this in some cases. PHP variants (incomplete tables) via <http://www.laetusinpraesens.org/docs90s/94spirco.php#4>

Anthony J N Judge
Union of International Associations
40 rue Washington, B-1050 Brussels, Belgium (Fax: (32 2) 646.05.25)

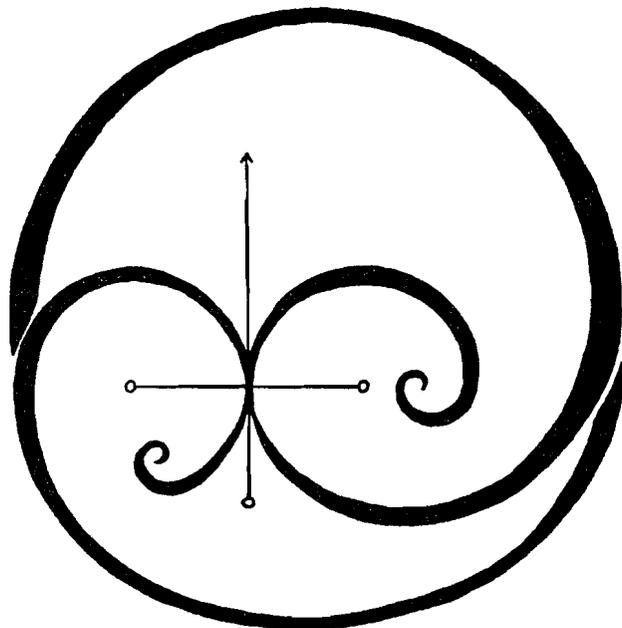
MEETING THOUGHTS, VISIONS AND SPECULATIONS *

A DESTRUCTURED CONGRESS

A. FACILITATIVE GUIDELINES

1. This is your congress. You are making it happen. How it evolves depends on choices you make from moment to moment and from day to day. Not choosing is also a choice.
2. There are others here with very different priorities, expectations and contributions. Are you sure you know what they bring and how it relates to where you are and where you would like to be? Are you sure you are making it easier for them to know how your energies and concerns relate to theirs?
3. Each has something important to contribute. But few of us are particularly skilled at doing so. Are you sure you are not over-stressing what you feel to be most valuable – at the expense of other themes? Who is going to give you the helpful feedback you need? Will you appreciate it when it is given?
4. The congress may at some time appear too unstructured to you. Check the symptoms and suggestions listed below. Remember that some people feel oppressed and constrained by order and procedure – they have had too much of it and it has not taken them where they believe they want to go. They tend to feel that nothing meaningful is happening. They prefer more spontaneity. They may have a point of which you are not aware.
5. The congress may at some time appear too over-structured to you. Check the symptoms and suggestions listed below. Remember that some people are not as secure and independent as you are. In addition they find that a fair degree of structure takes them where they believe they want to go, and lack of it takes them nowhere. Maybe they have a point of which you are not aware. Process is not everything.
6. How can you balance your preferences against those of others without tearing the congress apart? What is your creative response to this dilemma? Remember that how you respond to the congress situation is probably an intensified model of how you respond to the outside world. Maybe you can learn from your own frustrations.
7. Periods of more or less structure should ideally compensate and balance each other – that is how the congress « breathes ». The whole problem is to ensure that it alternates in a smooth manner between the two extremes, rather than being blocked at one extreme or being subject to other irregular or exaggerated rhythms. (It is a manifestation of the group yinyang cycle, with all its problems and potentials – how can we become collectively aware of the tao of the congress situation?)
8. This congress is not just an occasion on which to focus on how transformation can be brought about elsewhere and sometime in the future. The congress here-and-now and as a whole is a powerful transformation process in its own right. To the extent that we are aware of it, and of how we function in it, we can obtain many insights of significance to us personally and collectively, and for the world around us. Its power as a transformation process depends directly on our ability to enter, through ourselves, into the harmony of the congress processes – whether in their structured or unstructured forms.
9. As you become aware of the congress process, you will quickly be able to improve upon this set of notes. Wherever you are coming from, you have your own unique insight which can facilitate the congress process.

* Document distributed at the New Age Congress, Florence, February 1978 (see review in *Transnational Associations*, 1978, n° 5, pp. 266-270).



New Age Congress symbol : Design, Sempas Community.

B. IF THE CONGRESS APPEARS TOO OVER-STRUCTURED

Symptoms

1. Everything seems to be wrapped up in a pre-planned timetable which governs your behaviour for the whole day – and no one seems to want to know how you feel about the timetable.
2. You feel you spend your time listening passively to a specialist on this, or someone skilled at that – and you can only express yourself in a workshop at a scheduled time, according to someone's special method.
3. Everybody you meet seems to talk only about the events on the programme – and you are starting to feel « programmed » by those events.
4. You feel your head is under pressure, your body is uncomfortable and basically you just don't feel free. You need air.
5. The congress is starting to feel less like fun and more like drudgery. You feel under pressure not to miss the next event in case it constitutes an important breakthrough. You feel under pressure to « achieve something ».
6. The speakers mostly seem to be on ego-trips (and you don't feel you ought to be responding this way, because they are very eminent per-

sons). But they appear to be consuming your time and energy.

7. The organizers seem to be more concerned that the speakers and workshop leaders should have their place in the sun than they are with how you feel about it all now.
8. There seem to be some really nice people around but you never get a good chance to meet or talk with them.

Suggestions

1. Go for a walk outside – visit the town – either by yourself or with someone who also looks as though a view of the outside world would make more sense. Rebel a little – it may lead you into something really creative.
2. Continue talking over coffee, instead of feeling under pressure to participate in the next event on the programme. There will be others.
3. If a speaker or a group is boring you, then leave the room. Take a walk, meditate, have a coffee. Maybe there is music somewhere. Its your congress. Just what do you really want out of it ?
4. If you find yourself talking to a few people who are exploring the same thing as you are, then see whether

there is something you want to do together – maybe others would like to join you. Find out how to communicate your interest to them – with or without the help of the organizers. Make a space for yourself.

5. Speak to any of the focal persons and ask them how they can help you to do whatever you think that you are there to do. Make some constructive suggestions. Maybe they can introduce you-to someone going the same way. If they cannot, then ask them why not. That is part of their function. Maybe they need some feedback in order to be able to modify the programme.
6. If someone looks interesting or says something that strikes a responsive note in you, then make contact with the person in whatever manner is appropriate. Its communication **between** participants which is the essence of a congress, not communication **at** participants for the glory of the speakers and organizers.
7. If someone really does seem to be making an exaggerated use of everyone's time, then suggest that all those interested carry on (then or later), whilst allowing others to break off. You have the right to say this, whereas the organizers may feel obliged to be less direct to eminent persons.

C. IF THE CONGRESS APPEARS TOO UNSTRUCTURED

Symptoms

1. No one appears to have a clear idea of what is going on now or what is going to happen at some later time. The written programme is ignored and unforeseen events suddenly come into being – planned events are cancelled or postponed.
2. The organizers do not appear to have control of the situation and are unconcerned by this. Worse still, there seem to be several groups of organizers without a clear relationship between them.
3. Some participants do not behave as is normally expected. They fail to attend the principal events and instead organize their own activities. This distracts other participants and affects the focus of the congress.
4. Nothing seems to be achieved – everything is treated superficially, even humorously. The groups refuse to

focus their activities on substantial products. There is no effort to reach conclusions or recommendations. No one is preparing a report and there is therefore no adequate record of what has occurred and of any insights which have emerged.

5. Proper respect is not shown to eminent speakers who have made the effort to come and share their insights, experience and understanding. Their time is wasted.
6. The participants seem to be more concerned with whether they are enjoying themselves than they are with the success of the congress as a whole. They are unappreciative of the efforts and interests of the organizers.
7. The group as a whole is too tolerant of initiatives of individuals to change the orientation of events – even when this seems to be felt as undesirable by the majority.

Suggestions

1. Make constructive, explicit suggestions to the organizers or to the group in which you are participating. Justify the need for greater order, respect for an agenda, and use of a well-defined procedure.
2. Suggest casually to stragglers that they should participate in or support an event which is about to start.
3. Encourage any initiative to produce minutes or a report. Volunteer to assist the rapporteur, or take the position yourself.
4. Make comments to speakers to compensate for any casual handling they may have received from the group with which they were involved.
5. Focalize the activities of a group to carry out a particular task or activity which sufficient participants find of interest. Invite one of the key resource persons to speak to the group. Arrange for several such meetings.

TAO IN LARGE GROUPS

1. Just as in the case of a person, a large group of people is very unsettled if faced with a situation in which nothing is required or laid on. It is very threatening – for attention is then given in a manner which disturbs many conventional perspectives. Strange energies are released.
2. In order not to be faced with such an embarrassing confrontation, the space is filled with activities as a focus for attention. This simultaneously eases the tension and blocks out the patterns of energy associated with it. Clearly focal activities are required in a large group – if only to give expression to some of these patterns of energy – because we are not yet able to bear the collective attention to unstructured activity and silence for more than a few moments. We do not know how to handle such situations.
3. We tend each to have different preferences for turning our backs on collective silence. Some possibilities are :
 - Listening to an inspiring speaker, who may even tell us about the importance of some aspects of silence and the need for awareness of it.
 - Dance, music and song, which may give beautiful outward expression to some of the patterns and textures of energy sensed in that silence.
 - Discussion, encounter and dialogue about ideas, feelings, projects and 10,000 other important matters which are all more or less harmonious and complete reflections of some of the patterns encountered in that silence. Some may even attempt to give concrete form to very comprehensive patterns – as a better foundation for social organization.
 - Group meditation or prayer, supported by techniques and procedures which may be deliberately designed to orient and align us with that silence.

Each of these sets up a context which encourages us to believe that the silence is something that we can have access to by doing something – by making an effort according to an advocated procedure. By orienting ourselves to the advice of enlightened persons, we avoid taking responsibility, simultaneously blocking out any sense of our own degree of enlightenment. In this way we are protected by a subtle attitudinal barrier from the energies of silence. Like

the dog chasing its tail, such activities keep us very busy and we have a continuing sense of accomplishment.

4. The above remarks are not meant as a criticism of the value of the various activities in which we engage. Such activities are absolutely necessary to give expression to whatever we sense in silence – we apparently have no other means of giving form to our environment and of transforming it to reflect greater harmony. On the other hand, when we collectively flee from exposure to the tensions of that silence, by filling our congress timetable with a multitude of activities to absorb our attention and to release us from that tension – then we diminish the value of those activities and of the congress as a whole. The quality of the energy is then less than it might have been.

Thirty spokes share the wheel's hub;
It is the centre hole that makes it useful.
Shape clay into a vessel;
It is the space within that makes it useful.
Cut doors and window for a room;
It is the holes which make it useful.
Therefore profit comes from what is there;
Usefulness from what is not there.
(Lao Tzu, Tao The Ching. Random Books, 1972).

5. The question then is one of balance. How much of the challenge of collective silence can we usefully take before needing to balance it by giving appropriate form to whatever it conveys and by using the transforming process to absorb the energies released ?
6. What does this mean in practice ? A congress usually has to have an opening ceremony by which it relates itself to the temporal powers which have given it space and brought it into being. This may have to be followed by one or more programme events to satisfy a sensed need for an immediate justification for the existence of the congress. Neither of these is vital, and prolonging the series of events of the second kind constitutes a deliberate avoidance of the moment of challenge – particularly if it is immediately followed by fragmentation into smaller groups to explore special interests. The more such events there are before the moment of challenge, the more the congress is defined and determined

by such events rather than by what emerges from a collective confrontation with silence. In such a way, the congress becomes embedded in predictability and the participants are programmed by pre-planned events. There is no risk – everything is secure because no fundamental change can occur. From the organizers point of view, only what was planned in the past will occur in the present – the synergistic potential of the moment is blocked out in favour of linear extensions of what already exists. From the participants point of view, they will only be exposed to what appears in the printed programme. They will not be challenged by the totally unexpected and will not be expected to call any of their beliefs into question or to test them to any degree. Although informed and entertained, they will leave the congress as they came – safely untransformed.

7. What could constitute a confrontation with silence and the tensions to which it gives rise ? Consider how the following situation might evolve. All the participants gather together in the meeting room at the appointed time. But no structure or agenda is available, nor is there anyone who takes responsibility for the sessions according to some preconceived notion of any desirable procedure or outcome. Will the result be chaotic ? That depends on whether one considers one's fellow participants to be irresponsible sheep in the absence of a leader or of any agreed agenda. (A similar situation arises in unstructured small groups – and there is now a lot of experience of how to handle them as an experience. This needs to be developed for larger groups.)
8. Suppose that the gathering of people can be thought of as a rich collection of energies of which the participants can become aware. This awareness may emerge if a deliberate effort is made not to fill the space with inspired speeches, proposals, music, discussion or other events, including structured meditations. If people do not have such forms and crutches as a focus for their awareness, tensions will emerge to fill the vacuum. People will become nervous, irritated and embarrassed, whether at their own situation or the response of others – they will want something to happen. They will want somebody to make it happen. They will want to confront real problems and to avoid wasting

time. Some will answer this call and will make proposals and comments – whether critical or ingeniously constructive. Can the group collectively respond by consciously allowing such happenings (like riding a wave) and yet seek to sense beyond this level of manifestation ?

9. It is a meditation, for there is pressure to be aware of the underlying process – and yet it is not, since there may be vigorous discussion between those representing different energies. It is a direct response to the here-and-now. It can be very threatening to all concerned – to the participants, who do not know what is happening or why they are there; to the speakers, who believe that the time could be better spent in sharing their insights; and to the organizers, who justifiably feel called to respond to expectations and to protect the framework of the congress. But it is precisely by placing themselves at risk, individually and collectively, that the group can bring forth more appropriate forms and energies than would be possible if all conformed to pre-established procedures which are never called into question – even when such timetables include « spontaneous happening periods ». (With apologies to A N Whitehead : « To be dangerous is the business of a congress for the future » and « The major advances in civilization are processes that all but wreck the society in which they occur »).
10. In fact each well-intentioned effort to structure the period is a subtle way of closing off the response to the here-and-now by substituting an excellent form of doing or achieving something real. People will align themselves with the proposals that reflect their own personality biases – there will be increasing pressure to break up into small groups to pursue such special activities which reinforce and legitimates the pre-existing biases. The longer the group as a whole stays together, the greater such pressures will become. The tensions will increase – possibly quite dramatically as superficial levels are seen for what they are. Can the tensions be channelled appropriately ? What response will each kind of tension call forth as the energies of the group play off against each other and bring out new levels of harmonies ? How will the various levels of « negativity » get handled, contained and transformed ?
11. In this way the congress becomes its own live laboratory, cutting to the essence of the many issues raised by the process of collective human transformation and blended consciousness. Where will it lead ? That depends on how much energy the

group can contain and transform. Why should it lead anywhere ? Because collectively the group probably contains (like a hologram) most of the resources and skills needed to take it wherever it collectively wants to be. The real question is why we are afraid to dare ? To what do we wish to avoid being exposed – especially when we « know » the answer is « ourselves ». Why do we have so little genuine confidence in each other or the power of the moment ? Why do we always seek to be by engaging in anything which distracts us from the joys and agonies of direct confrontation with being ?

12. As each special interest group defines itself through the interplay and build up of tensions, to the point where it felt it had to break away and do something, this would be a measure of the whole group's ability to contain the energies it represented. However, any special activity would then be sensed as having been born (or torn) organically from the energies of the whole. The sense of the whole encountered in the dramas of such birthing processes would be retained by all throughout the congress – whether or not any attempt was made to collectively re-enter the sense of the whole.
13. In this way the « congress programme » is born from the crucible of collective interaction and structured as a dramatic response to the interplay of energies sensed in that

context. It will contain intellectual, emotional, physical, spiritual and other components – but their relation to one another will be more real and meaningful than if they had simply been inserted into a schedule of congress events by an organizing committee (however sensitive the members might be).

14. Perhaps the ultimate value of this approach is that individual congress events can come to be seen as punctuating the continuing and underlying creative silence from which they are born – rather than assuming that awareness of that silence necessarily emerges through engaging in one or more of those activities.
15. If the congress is not able to penetrate to this sense of the whole, then it has failed to demonstrate a level of awareness significant for wider social transformation – it is the preparedness for collective risk which is the pre-condition of fundamental change. Without it we are only able to point a finger in the direction we believe we ought to go.
16. There is of course the paradox that the above points lay out the programme or procedure for yet another trip – in following this suggestion, you are therefore lured away from your own centre in exactly the manner which it is hoped could be avoided. How can you overcome this paradox, other than by ignoring this suggestion ?



Borobudur Unesco/Mireille Vautier.

A CONGRESS AS A MEDITATION

1. A person can be conceived as a scattered jumble of thoughts, emotions and activities. An early stage of meditation aims to introduce increasing harmony into this jumble. Central themes emerge, each with their own rhythms – and eventually each of these separate themes is blended into an even larger theme. This is the process of attunement or alignment.
2. A congress can also be conceived as a scattered jumble of thoughts, emotions and activities – each advanced and protected by different coalitions of participants. One aim of a congress could be to introduce increasing harmony into this jumble. The problems and processes of doing so are surprisingly similar to those of personal attunement, although at a different level.
3. A first concern is the physical well-being of the entity. Does it suffer from any illnesses; is it diseased in any way; has it been appropriately nourished; is its posture well-balanced? (There are many parallels between the illnesses of a person and the « illnesses » of a large group).
4. A second concern is with the psychomotor coordination of the entity. Is its breathing deep and regular, or shallow and a-rhythmic? Can it alternate smoothly between yin and yang, between passivity and activity, etc? Or is it stuck in some particular mode or condition. Are there exercises it should perform to ensure that all elements are appropriately related: breathing exercises, bio-energetics, postures, Tai Chi, etc (What are the postures a congress could usefully hold to improve its energy flows? What would the Tai Chi movements of a congress be – what energies are to be sensed as moving and where? Do collective ritual and liturgy offer any clues?) Should the two major factions engage in some equivalent of Aikido in order to sense the nature of their opponent within themselves – and to reaffirm the dynamic nature of the whole of which they are together an expression? (Maybe that is what they do anyway, but unconsciously and without a sense of relationship?)
5. A third concern is with the appropriate control and expression of emotions. Are there emotions which are repressed into the unconscious or whose expression is being blocked? From what do they arise and to what do they lead? How can these energies be brought to flow naturally within the entity? How can they be channelled and transformed? Should we be looking for an application of acupuncture to the entity?
6. A fourth concern is with the appropriate organization of concepts. Are they adequately integrated into a significant synthesis? Are there fundamental contradictions or inconsistencies? Can the challenge and paradox of duality be overcome to provide a re-interpretation and re-configuration of the entity's relationship to its larger environment (the Knower versus the Known). What images can be used as a guide to helpful reflections?
7. Once the above matters have been attended to – to the extent possible – the nature of the whole, as comprehended beyond the verbal framework, is the focus of attention. Is this period appropriately safeguarded and are its fruits appropriately used to nourish the life of the entity?
8. The whole jumble of events of a congress is thus but a surface manifestation of an entity struggling to be. The confusion arises from the efforts of the parts and factions selfishly to control the whole according to their various perspectives (as « sub-personalities »). But this very selfishness is a necessary process in the development of the self-awareness of the parts prior to relating harmoniously to the other parts in order to be able to express the whole. The challenge is to have a sufficiently strong vision of the nature of the whole to ensure that the preliminary stages of alignment – with all the « likes » and « dislikes » – do not absorb the attention of the participants so completely that the entity as a whole does not get a chance to come to maturity in the time available.
9. In its maturity, as a conscious meditation, the congress constitutes a chalice into which energies can be focused and through which they can flow. This is not just a beautiful image and our difficulty in comprehending its real nature is well-matched by our difficulty in reaching and attaining this level of consciously integrated focus. (Such synthesis is to analysis just as fusion is to fission – and we do not yet have access to fusion energy, despite much research on the required configuration to bring it about).



Photo : Boroboudur Unesco/David Davies.

MAPPING : WHO'S WHERE ?

1. There is widespread familiarity with city maps, road maps, maps of continents and maps of the world. Most people know, and have to know, how to find their way from one place to another using maps – even if they have never been there before.
2. In the Middle Ages, few people knew anything about maps. In fact they had the status of secret documents whose dissemination could be dangerous to national and trading interests. Furthermore, they were always drawn with the country's capital city at the centre, and everything else at the periphery – out to where « monsters », « dangerous tribes » and « unknown dangers » were marked. And of course the Earth was flat in those days – if one went too far in any direction one would « fall off ». We find this level of understanding quaint and amusing.
3. In many ways, however, the mental maps each uses to locate and interrelate the multitude of groups, schools of thought, and belief systems, bear a strong resemblance to the Middle Age maps. Our own group is of course centrally located – or so we believe. The maps we use show groups whose interests are in some way related to our own – they are marked as neighbouring locations at varying distances, according to the degree of difference we feel from them. (Maybe communications are good and we have highways marked to such locations; or maybe they are not so good and we have mountain ranges with difficult passes, periodically closed by bad weather.) Further away of course are the groups of which we are only slightly aware and who engage in practices which we view with disfavour or even suspicion and hostility – particularly if their attractiveness or impact has an effect on our own traditions and undermines the influence of our own local aristocracy. Or maybe such groups attempt aggressively to extend their feudal domains to include our own territory. And of course, even further away on other continents, are groups known only by hearsay, which engage in absolutely abominable and barbarous practices – and beyond them is the perimeter of our psychosocial world.
4. We are « flat-earthers ». If we travel too far in any direction away from the benign civilization from which we each come, we believe we will encounter dangers which will place our very being at risk.
5. Maybe it is time to try and interrelate our various local maps in order to produce a map of this world. Maybe we should also attempt to portray on it adequately the locations of groups which engage in activities which are really distant from our own. Which is the group most distant in preoccupation from our own? What does « distant » mean? Where do we need to mark distinctions by mountain ranges, by deserts, by seas or by oceans? Where is it hot, cold, wet or dry, and how do conditions change with the seasons? Why are « mountain people » suspicious of « plains people »? Why are we suspicious of people who dwell in hotter, colder, wetter or dryer climates?
6. Is it not peculiar that we cannot see over the horizon? Could it be that our psychosocial world is in fact round and not flat? Is there any truth behind the funny tales brought by long-distance travellers? How would we react to anyone claiming to have travelled « around the world »? Would they be condemned as heretics and insane – by whom and why? How would we navigate around the world – what compass would prevent us travelling in circles and getting lost?
7. It is not a complicated exercise for a diverse group to attempt to outline such a map from the reports of all the travellers present at a congress. It would only be rough, but it could quickly be improved upon. It could be printed on the surface of a globe. As such it would be of immense help to those who would like to travel and benefit from experiences in other parts. Such a globe is a powerful symbol in its own right. Maybe there are whole New Worlds to be discovered. (And hopefully we will not attempt to colonize, convert or exterminate the natives).
8. But if our world is round, is it stationary with respect to whatever is beyond it? Is there a « sun » we all see but to which we each give a different name? Are there some regions where the sun's light is diffused through a thick cloud cover, or regions of permanent darkness where the sun never rises? Does the sun « rise » everyday, or is it our world which moves with respect to the sun? Are there other suns with other worlds?

REDISCOVERING THE WHEEL I :

Types of person and congress processes

1. Quite distinct personality types are represented at a congress – and the wider the appeal of the theme of the congress, the more marked the differences between the types.
2. With each personality type is associated a particular form of behaviour (with its special weaknesses and strengths) which may well reinforce specific aspects or tendencies in the congress process. We are not very sensitive to this phenomenon – in fact we each tend to respond to the behaviour of other types in a rather simplistic (dualistic) manner determined by the type to which we ourselves belong.
3. Each personality type reflects an aspect of the whole. This is fairly obvious. Less obvious is the function performed by each type within the whole. So that within the context of a congress, each group of personality types contributes in some unique way to the life and activity of the congress. At the same time, however, an aspect of each such contribution may well be to restrain, to stimulate or to transform the contribution of one of the other groups present. Any such activity may be undertaken as an automatic reaction (perhaps provoked by a righteous perception of « irresponsible », « stimulating » or « depressing » behaviour on the part of the other) or as a conscious exercise in handling or transforming energies.
4. The difficulty lies in comprehending the nature and validity of the role of each type – and thereby being able to determine where conscious support or restraint is desirable to facilitate the evolution of the whole. We tend to view the activity of other types in relation to our own central focus – a kind of « flat earth » mentality, rather than an awareness of « functional roundness ». We cannot see over the horizon created by the viewpoint to which we cling.
5. There are some clues to the range of personality types, and in each case there is some indication of their likely weaknesses and strengths. It is however less clear which types tend to interact with which other types, now, and under what circumstances. Such ranges may contain differing numbers

of types, for example: intuition, thinking, feeling, sensation (Jugian).

Even larger numbers may be obtained from other symbol systems or by the elaboration of those above.

6. However many types one chooses to distinguish, the difficulty remains to render the interplay between them meaningful in the context of the congress as a whole. We usually focus our attention on one type (our own) and its relationship to another (whether of attraction or opposition), rather than attempting to comprehend

how the different types interweave to celebrate the whole.

7. It would be useful to try to determine what energies there are and how they are interrelated – how are energies passed between personalities of different types; what transformation does each attempt, and how are the dynamics ordered? (How is the ball of Chi energy passed around a highly diverse group?)

8. Only when we have a clearer understanding of these dynamics can a congress convert from being a «two-cylinder, duality engine» to being a

«twelve-cylinder, multi-stroke engine» – with all the power for movement that that implies.

9. Only when a congress becomes an exercise in collective self-awareness will it be able to develop fully its self-healing potential. That is to say that congresses will always face the challenge of handling the energies of strong, partially «blocked» personalities (and who is not partially blocked?). But until the collective group awareness can respond appropriately to such blockages, such challenge may significantly disturb the evolution of the whole.

REDISCOVERING THE WHEEL II: Congress communication – why, what and for whom.

1. A congress is a nexus of communications. It is a communication event. A congress powerfully concentrates and partially records the communications which occur naturally between the people who happen to be drawn by the event. When such enhanced communication is stabilized at a new level, transformation of the group is achieved.

2. Communication means many things to many people – and each tends to view the priorities of others with little appreciation. Consequently the effectiveness of each is undermined and the evolution of the whole is severely impeded. Care must therefore be taken at a congress that the right mix of communication processes occur – and that there is an awareness of the strengths and limitations of each.

3. «**Communication at**» takes place when a resource person, namely a person with relatively greater experience of a topic, informs many people concerning the topic. This process may be assisted by microphone/loudspeaker, interpretation, and other audio-visual systems. It is very efficient if the resource person avoids ego-tripping. Its limitation is that it necessitates organizing the participants as a passive captive audience thus unable to engage in the variety of other activities to which they may be strongly drawn. It is a large consumer of people's attention time.

4. «**Communication between**» takes place when each participant has sufficient time and space to interact with others so that there is a meaningful exchange which allows the communication to evolve for all concerned. The communication may be based on an

interplay of **ideas** (discussion groups), of **affectivity** (encounter groups) or of **physical movements** (dance). The process (which may be assisted by audio-visual systems) is successful provided that there is a degree of shared commitment, otherwise it may lack depth or focus. This limitation is increased if an appropriate balance is not found between ideas, affectivity and physical movement – and there is seldom consensus among participants as to where that balance point should be.

5. «**Festive communication**» takes place when the emphasis is placed on the enjoyment of participants and the fun and celebration of being – as opposed to the previous situation where the emphasis is on achieving something, if only greater understanding. Its limitations lie mainly in the distractive power of its very attractiveness, which may upset the balance between the other forms of communication.

6. «**Communication to**» takes place when the priority is placed on recording an event or reporting on it in order to involve others (in distant places or at later times) in the significance of what is occurring. Use is necessarily made of audio-visual recording equipment. This process is vital in order to multiply the impact of the energies assembled and released, and to provide access to others who were unable to participate. Its limitation is that it is very often treated as an end in itself and consequently interrupts or disturbs the communication process of a congress – to the point of turning the event into a staged production for consumption elsewhere

and elsewhere, but not in the here-and-now. The media product becomes an image of what the organizers would have liked to have happened and hope their constituencies will believe did happen. By its very nature, it may only focus on superficial, recordable happenings.

7. «**Communication for**» takes place when the concern is to integrate what is communicated into some common information framework in order to facilitate or improve future social action or social change. The priority is therefore on operationalizing the information for policy, management or similar purposes. It may even involve use of computers and data networks. This process is vital as a means of anchoring complex insights so that they may be effectively shared and used to effect change. Its limitation is that it requires a detachment from the meaning of the information handled which may in fact obscure that meaning and prevent the information from being used in the manner intended. The operational attitude may even constitute a barrier to the collection and discussion of that information at the congress.

8. «**Attunement**» takes place when participants draw together to commune in silence with whatever they sense – within or beyond themselves – as guiding their actions. It is a vital process to ensure that a degree of creative harmony pervades the congress and interrelates whatever incompatibilities appear to emerge. Its limitation lies in a tendency to use it as a panacea for all ills and a substitute for any other form of communication – especially those involving concrete action or a response to opposition. ■

8. *Energy sources and sinks* : Some may choose to see the event in terms of sources of different qualities to be cultivated, energy receptacles to be created and maintained, and energy sinks or traps to be avoided. The whole event may be seen in terms of gathering and using chi energy.
9. *Community* : Some may prefer to experience the event as an experience in « instant community », enriched by the presence of children, old people, the handicapped, etc.
10. *Imagery and dance* : Such a gathering can also lend itself to comprehension as a pattern of aesthetic images, or as a dance of energies.
11. *Group formation* : For some there will be ways of using information which could make of the whole gathering a gigantic experiment in forming and reforming groups until the most mature groups emerge suitably empowered and able to relate appropriately to other groups emphasizing other energies.
12. *Socio-political analysis* : The gathering will lend itself to description and interpretation in terms of power politics and societal dynamics.
13. *Abstract forms* : Some may wish to see the gathering as energies patterned onto more abstract forms :
 - Spiral
 - Hierarchy
 - Network
 - Tensegrity
 - Mandala
- Matrix
- Torus
- Polyhedron
- Knot
14. *Symbol systems* : Some may be attracted by seeing the interweaving energies at the gathering in terms of a particular symbol system such as astrology, the I Ching, any pantheon, etc. These could even be used to identify imbalance in the energies represented, blockages in the evolution of the event, or threshold tests and challenges.
15. *Catastrophe theory* : The transitions in the event may be best understood by some in the light of the mathematics of catastrophe theory.
16. *Drama* : The gathering should be dramatic, and some may want to participate in it in such a way as to heighten the dramatic effects and the significance of the event as a whole.
17. *Psycho-cultural analysis* : The forms and expressions of the gathering can be seen in psychoanalytical terms with necessary archetypal confrontations.
19. *Group healing exercise* : The gathering may be seen as a body to be healed and rendered whole.
18. *Ecosystem* : The various perspectives and processes may be best mapped by some onto an image of some environmental system with different species interacting, procreating and developing somewhat at the mercy of the elements.
20. *Information processing device* : The whole gathering may be interpreted as a complex bio-mechanical computer processing different types of information, storing it, and forming it into various images of the whole -- possibly with some final output.
21. *Taoist group meditation* : The gathering may also be understood as a collective meditation.

Conclusion

Clearly the above points merely help to clarify what we need to know in order to be able to organize such an event. What could it achieve and would it be worth organizing? Given the uninspiring alternatives for collective action at this time, it may be that this event would attract the « creatively mad » people whose interaction could break new ground and point the way to a creative response to the world's current condition. Hence the subtitle of this document. Initiatives of this kind are useful social experiments in their own right, especially when compared to the sterility of current intergovernmental conferences. But whether such experiments are actually undertaken or not, the collective exercise of working out what features and processes could usefully be embodied in them can help to sharpen our awareness of the nature of the psychosocial design problem that we face.

MATURING MEETINGS (*)

1. Meetings, and particularly international meetings are a vital feature of society. Considerable efforts have been successfully made to increase the efficiency of meeting organization/operation through the use of management skills, communications technology and specially conceived buildings.
2. Despite the ease with which meetings are held, and the increasing number of « innovative » events, there is rising concern that many of these do not fulfil the expectations of participants and of those whose future depends upon their outcome.
3. The fundamental problem seems to be associated with the fact the apparent success at « processing » agenda items, participants viewpoints and documents results only in an apparent or superficial consensus whose impact if any, is frequently limited to one of short-term public relations. The meeting out-

come is such that the collective empowerment is minimal as is the enablement of the participant. Seen in this light *current meeting procedures themselves constitute a principal obstacle to social change* at least for those meetings in which this is a preoccupation.

4. The challenge would therefore appear to be to elaborate a new conceptual framework within which a meeting may be perceived. For unless a new attitude to the meeting process can be elaborated, it seems highly probable that concealed inherent weaknesses will continue to undermine and erode the value for social change of any meeting outcome. In a very real sense *meetings model collective (in)ability to act and the (in)effectiveness of collective action*.
5. An important question then is how to mature the power of a meeting to :
 - reflect the complexity of the external environment in an ordered manner (representation), to reflect about that environment (conceptual processes), and to reflect about itself (self-reference or self-reflexiveness).
 - focus the variety of perspectives represented, without destroying it in some simplistic formula of superficial consensus.
 - transform the issues presented, and the organizational groups which take responsib-

ility for them, into new configurations of operational significance.

- act, or empower those represented to act, in the light of the level of understanding achieved during the meeting.
6. The task is therefore to discover the nature of the « complete meeting » of the future, through which a new order may be brought into being. Such investigations are not concerned with large-group meetings or conferences which are :
 - organized according to *procedures* considered reasonably satisfactory by most of those directly involved, possibly on the basis of experience of previous meetings in the same series.
 - deliberately structured, by the instigators to achieve a certain *objective*, irrespective of the individual preoccupations of those who choose to participate under such circumstances.
 - conceived around a pre-defined set of *topics*, irrespective of any other topics which may emerge during the meeting as common to a number of participants present.
 - deliberately unstructured, as an environment for spontaneous exchange between participants, but without any concern that such exchanges should lead to the emergence of some larger pattern.

(*) Extracts from Large-Group Conferences; maturing their reflective, focusing and transformative power, especially in conditions of social upheaval (Introductory report for Commission IV of the World Forum of Transnational Associations. Brussels, 1980)