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These deliberately speculative papers are an attempt to break out of the usual pattern in which both participants and organizers appear to be trapped in thinking about conferences and in comprehending their full potential.

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.

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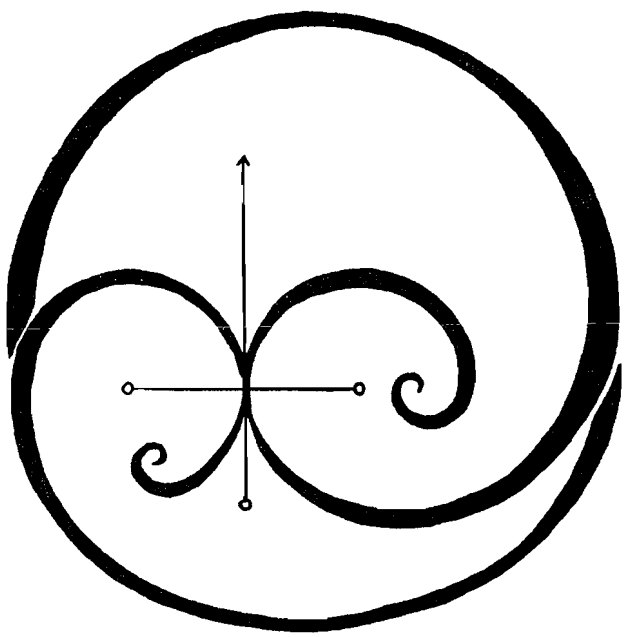
* Document distributed at the New Age Congress, Florence, February 1978 (see review in Transnational Associations, 1978, n° 5, pp. 266-270.



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 persons). 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 spreak 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 perferences 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 windown 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 Tsu, 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 ?

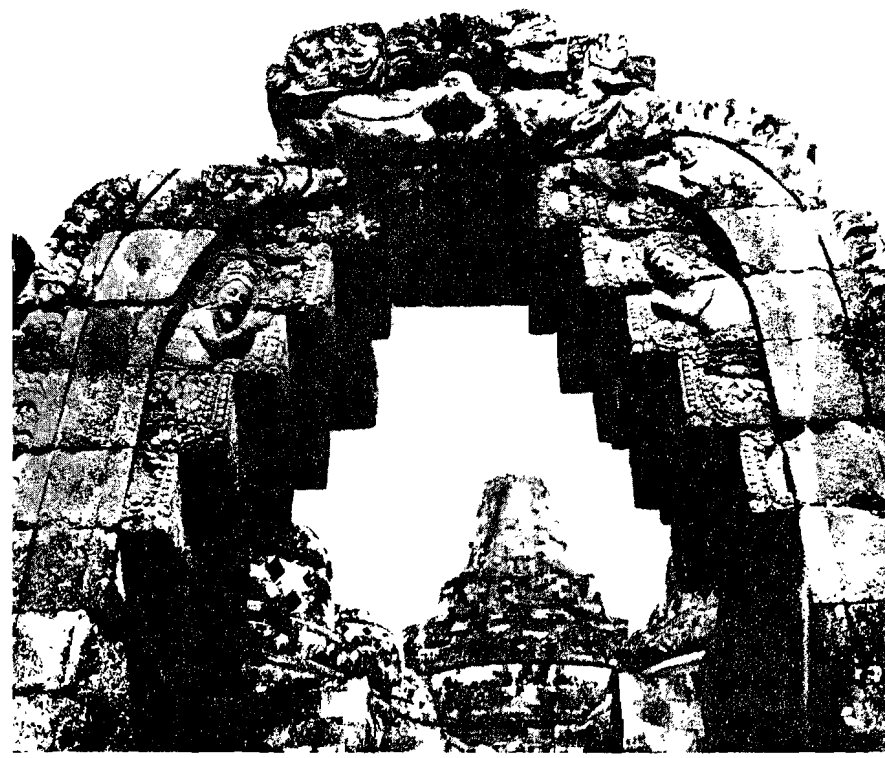
6. What does this mean in practice ? A congress usually has to have an opening ceremony by which it relates itself to the temporal powers which have given it space and brought it into being. This may have to be followed by one or more programme events to satisfy a sensed need for an immediate justification 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 dramaticaly 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 – especialy 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 ?



Boroboudur 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 enquivalent 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 is 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 WEEL 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 » of « 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 recorders 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 blance 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 distrubs the communication process of a congress – to the point of turning the event into a staged production for consumtion elsewhere and elsewhen, 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 orocess 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 if 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. ■

Togetherbound : a gathering of the mad

Report of a brainstorming meeting (Stuttgart, 1981) on the possible design of large-scale, high-risk/high-return, creative events for social transformation.

Introduction

Why : The time has come for an ambitious large-scale event which calls upon all the personal skills and energies we can collectively bring into focus. The challenge is simple : ourselves together – in the form of a wide range of concerned people of every perspective, whatever the degree of opposition or harmony, rationality or irrationality. The processes will be carefully designed to facilitate the expression and weaving together of these contrasting modes of operation : discovering the subtle pattern which connects what we each consider vital.

We intend to create an empty central space into which the unexpected can be born. But this is essentially a self-organizing event, despite the careful attention which will be given to processes. Much will be left to the responsibility of participants acting in the light of the spontaneous inspiration of the moment. This is a high-risk creative experience for those who believe this to be the price of real collective breakthrough.

The event should be the most exciting and testing you have ever attended : part work, part fair, with joy and despair, drama and paradox – truly a healing dance of life in its deepest and most ambiguous sense. For those committed to change, it could be the most significant. The event will not only be a catalyst for change, it will be an expression of it. Things will not be the same afterwards – especially for those who participate.

Why not : The past decades have given rise to many collective events quickly forgotten. People have gathered under every banner, in search of solutions to every problem. Achievements have been minimal and essentially cosmetic – little has been learnt from past failures. Proposed conventional gatherings and campaigns are now viewed with weary suspicion – creative people avoid them in despair.

A new approach is required which harnesses and transmutes the very energies which have distorted and underminded the processes and outcomes of past events – bland exercises in cautious rationalism or emotionalism. It is not enough to rely on personal transformation, exercises in group consciousness or on the passive belief that « all will be well ».

We have roles to play. But our very fear of action prevents us from learning how to rise beyond the polarities by which we are frustrated, trapped and rendered impotent. The times call for inspired actions of a new kind that bring us face-to-face with all dimensions of our fear of change. In our ignorance, we must be collectively challenged before we can sense the dimensions and rhythms of the unfolding drama in which we can find roles to play.

Unless an event is collectively daring, it cannot avoid the superficial and evoke the energies for significant change and tangible outcomes – it becomes merely another charming celebration of impotence.

Context of the event

1. Background

Society has accumulated many problems and skills. Many projects have been initiated to bring the skills to bear on the problems with the support of adequate resources. Those who have participated in this mode, whether internationally or at the grass-roots level, sense the inadequacy and selfdefeating nature of our best efforts. A different type of action is called for.

2. Future

We sense the dimensions of our past failures and the values we want to embody in the future. There are inspirations and visions for the future but they lack clarity and adequate form and are not tempered by the fire of realism. The key to our difficulty is that they are usually in conflict amongst themselves. The vital link to possible action in the present by real people is lacking. This is the bridge which needs to be built.

3. Present

We are stuck in a dangerous behavioural rut, both collectively and individually. We need a special kind of crucible within which to bring our skills, problems, resources and visions into focus in order to embody a viable new approach. The proposed gathering is conceived as such a crucible.

Essential qualities and characteristics of the event

1. The key to the success of the event, through the release of a new level of participant energies, is that **the gathering will not be pre-programmed and pre-packaged.** As has been frequently demonstrated, this blocks vital initiatives and forces participants into a passive « consumer » role excused from any action. They are then unable to take responsibility for new action in the here-and-now – a root cause of present societal impotence. Participants need to understand that they are also key resource people.
2. This degree of freedom demands **considerable innovation on the part of the organizing group** if the event is to be of more significance than a fair, however rich the experience. Indeed, if the organizing group cannot demonstrate innovation, it is unlikely that they could facilitate participant innovation.
3. The key to the problem of channelling the participant energies freed by the absence of pre-programming lies in :
   (a) **giving participants access to a pattern language** by which any group can quickly restructure part of the event according to the inspiration of the moment. One of the preparatory tasks of the organizing group is to clarify many elements of this pattern language so that participants have a vehicle of communication and a rich range of possibilities to work with, an understanding of the roles they can play, and how they might go about it. The pattern language should continually evolve as a result of participant initiative during the gathering.
   (b) maintaining at least some **well-defined channels of communication to focal groups** which can help to ensure the immediate preparation and implementation of desired patterns.
   (c) ensuring the presence of a highly flexible (computer-supported) information system to guarantee **maximum communication between participants at all times.** (This is in contrast with communication **at** participants).
4. Corresponding to the here-and-now self-organization of the event, it is vital that **skills of any kind represented at the event should in some measure be focused to the benefit of the event as a demonstration of their significance.** The gathering is society in microcosm. If its potential cannot be released in the present, and if its ills cannot be healed in the present, then those skills have little of significance to offer against the

ills of the outside world, now or in the future.

5. In order to interweave the wide range of often incompatible participant energies and perspectives – however complementary they may be in principle – **the gathering must itself be comprehensible in very different ways.** Each participant should be able to explore it in his or her own terms, however « fanciful » they may appear to others. One of the tasks of the gathering might well be to evolve far more creative and dynamic images of such a gathering and its interplay of energies. Many participants would then be equipped to perceive society as a whole in an entirely new way – to move beyond (and transmute) the sterile images inherited from past decades.
6. The gathering will be significant to the extent that participants are different and succeed in bridging their differences synergistically. **Participants will not only differ in their concerns but in the background or maturity with which they approach those concerns. Each has blindspots, including the organizing group.** The effects of ignorance on the dynamics of the event will have to be used creatively (in the spirit of eastern martial art responses to the « enemy » who is my shadow).
7. Whilst many will be satisfied by simply encouraging the free interplay of a broad range of participant initiatives, more can be accomplished by **encouraging participant sensitivity to the balance of the event as a whole as it evolves.** What energies are called for to contain and counter-balance the excessive expression of others, or to enhance those inadequately expressed ? How can concern for the whole be given form without jeopardizing diversity of expression ? These are real-time exercises in strategy, analysis, synthesis, and meta-patterning.
8. The concern for balance can itself become sterile, whether sought in « rational » or « aesthetic » terms. The powerful dynamics of the opposing (complementary) forces involved call for **a profound shift in perspective** if they are to be reconciled, to interact creatively, and to give birth to some viable new form. The « dance » of these processes can only be comprehended and guided in and through the essential drama of the moment if the gathering has achieved some measure of collective self-awareness. Description at this level becomes a matter of metaphor and poetry.

Number of participants

There are two approaches to the number of participants that could be attracted to this gathering :

1. **Fixed target :** This is the conventional approach and creates the risk of falling below the target figure if marketing is unsuccessful or other factors intervene, or exceeding the figure if marketing is « too successful ».
   The magic number envisaged by this approach is 50,000, which has the merit of being ambitious and striking the imagination.

The fool : an enigmatic catalyst

« The fool, who was sitting beside the fire, heard these words, leapt to his feet, came before the King, and skipped and danced for glee, saying « Lord King so God save me, your adventures now begin, and often you will find them perilous and hard »

— Perceval or the Story of the Grail

Joker : messenger from the unconscious

The « Court » Jester and « Foolishness »

The court jester, the clown, the fool or the buffoon, is a mythic figure representing the inversion of the powers of the king (as the possessor of supreme powers) — or as his alter ego He is therefore often the victim chosen in folklore as the substitute or foil for the king in rites whereby the people respond frankly and unceremoniously to such powers

Court jesters were first recorded in the courts of the Egyptian pharaohs and were in vogue up until the 18th century in European courts, salons and taverns (*). They were often physically mishappen, if not also psychically disturbed. Ideally they were a powerful reminder of the distortion of the human condition — more immediate than the photographs disseminated via the media of today Additionally, due to the freedom from censure and responsibility for their actions which they were accorded, they were able to mirror, parody and mimic court situations in such a way as to bring out truths which would otherwise be collectively and carefully ignored. They were often masters of song and dance, and could be a dramatic foil to pomp, superficiality and falsehood of any kind. As an ambiguous and often androgynous figure, the jester could function as a powerful social catalyst — for good or for ill, depending upon the response of those by whom he was surrounded.

The fool is an enigmatic symbol of the point of crisis when the normal or conscious appears to become perverted or infirm, and in order to regain health and well-being is obliged to turn to the dangerous, the irrational, the unconscious and the abnormal. As such, the fool is to be found on the fringe of all orders and systems, outside all conventional categories, processes and social rules He is the bridge between the conscious and the unconscious (and between the attributes of the right and left hemispheres of the brain) — a reminder that, after having failed in our effort to order and understand the universe in the light of our intellect and instinct, there nevertheless remains another way.

Eliminating the jester from the court is as risky as allowing him to play his role. For if « foolishness » is not given a channel through which to express itself, it seeks its own channel anyway. Parliamentary and international assemblies, particularly those in which each is conscious of the high purpose and seriousness of his role, run a considerable risk of incorporating distortion into their proceedings and results because of an inability to accept what a jester would reveal. (Political cartoons offer a partial remedy, but they lack the significance of being accepted as part of the proceedings and thus have little affect on them)

It requires greater maturity on the part of all participants, especially the chairperson and principal speakers, to play their parts in the face of such instant feedback, in the absence of children at international assemblies, who can say whether our international emperors wear any clothes ?

J J.

The question is at what target number does the risk start to increase significantly without increasing the significance of the event. Also, at what figure does the risk of « significance erosion » start to increase due to the presence of higher percentages of « hangers on » who are not able to contribute positively to the dynamics of the event – or are they part of the challenge ?

2. **Flexible target :** Using this approach the target figure would be treated in probability terms and « hardened » as the event approached and infrastructure commitments had to be made.
At this stage a significant event could be envisaged anywhere in the range 500 to 50,000.
Note that these figures are relatively modest in terms of present day « instant » refugee or pilgrim camps (e.g. in India).

Location

Because of the political, infrastructure, travel and other considerations, care must be taken in the choice of location. Ideally a valley is required in which tent or other temporary shelters can be put up and serviced.

An important dilemma is obtaining a magically attractive location (lakeside, etc) without the associated risk of leaving it an ecological disaster. In this connection other alternatives are a desert location (with mountains) or an abandoned military base, provided that travel and services can be organized. Given that the event is designed to respond to the disagreeable conditions of the present, it may be preferable to hold it in an area which can be re-energized by the event if it succeeds. The apparently attractive alternative of profiting from some magical site could well be seen as a further attempt to exploit the beauties of nature and a failure to make creative use of our own psycho-social resources.

Finances

A. **Sources :** There are a number of sources of financing which can be considered singly or in combination :

1. **Participation fee**
- useful to select participants who really want to be there and to guarantees the grass-roots nature of the event
- does not respond to fund requirements in advance of the event unless a pre-registration fee scheme is used
- no guarantee that the traget numbers will be reached.

2. **Concession fees**
- useful for catering or related services
- does not respond to early fund requirements
- may be a constraint on flexible target participation
- may be unavailable if the location is too distant from a city base.

3. **Corporate donations**
(in funds or kind)
- may be useful for some material requirements and possibly for advertising the event
- may respond to early fund requirements
- may involve constraints or create image problems for the event.

4. **Individual donations**
- most attractive for organizers but most difficult to ensure in sufficient quantity
- most awkward in the event of financial loss.

5. **Foundations**
- increasingly difficult for innovative large-scale events, except in special cases.

6. **Media and other rights**
- very attractive if the event is a success
- very unreliable if there is risk involved in organizing the event.

7. **National or local government**
- attractive if possible, although it may affect the image
- may only be available after the event has acquired momentum.

B. **Marketing :** The key to the success of this operation is defining a sufficiently vital « package » to attract the various sources of funds noted above.

1. *« Psychological holiday »* (Togetherbound...)
The gathering could be very successfully developed and marketed to individuals (and groups) as a holiday of a very different kind (excitement, risk, renewal, sense of mission, festival, « discover the future », etc.). As such the travel industry would do much to make it know as an option. People could consider it under a holiday budget rather than as a special expense. It belongs then in an identifiable category as a (psychological) adventure holiday (cf. Outwardbound courses), but with a highly innovative flavour.

2. *Social experiment*
Even if marketed as a psychological holiday, the nature of the event would also allow it to be « marketed » to foundations and governments as a selforganizing social experiment in instant community building. The degree of innovation is relevant to many research issues and would provide a field day for researchers. Universities might even « buy into the project » in order to conduct and observe experiments in that environment, on the Skylab formula. The experiment could be described as a way of self-organization in the ever present refugee camps. As such it might well be of interest to civil defense agencies or even as an exercise requiring army support (as a simulated refugee camp). It could also be described as an organizational experiment in response to mass unemployment and social alienation – a problem about which governments are increasingly anxious. As such, some governments could well be interested in financing the presence of people from their own country. It could also be considered as an experiment in conflict resolution within a large community and therefore attract funds from « peace » sources.

3. *Hardware/software experiment*
The event could be analyzed in terms of the possible use of :
a) innovative hardware : low-cost dwellings (domes, etc.), energy systems, sanitation systems, catering, information systems, etc.
b) innovative software : especially computer programmes to help people to work together, focus their concerns, and generally empower them to act.
Such possibilities could well attract corporation support or assistance.

4. *« Discover the future » campaign*
With the three elements described above, a credible campaign could be launched to attract funds from individuals who believe that the experiment is worthwhile and likely to bear fruit, even though they have no intention of participating.

5. *Media rights*
Given the four elements above, the event could be sold to the media reasonably successfully.

Planning and financial risk management

It is vital that planning and financial arrangements be envisaged in terms of « fail-safe » procedures which minimize financial risk. This means that the budget should **not** be designed in fixed terms but as a function of the number of participants. Budgetary items should be plotted in terms of different target probabilities. Clearly there will be « fixed costs », but many of these will increase stepwise with increments in the number of participants.

Legal arrangements

Careful thought should be given to legal arrangements, liability, etc. Possibly several different corporate entities should be created to handle different aspects of the event and its preparation :
- a foundation or trust to receive certain funds for disbursement
- an association of participants and interested persons to express and clarify some policies
- a corporation to market the event and its products
- other bodies as required : travel agency, etc.

Towards a Pattern Language for Participants

This section gives a very provisional outline of the « windows » through which any participant might choose to perceive the gathering and the possibilities for action there. In its final form, distributed to participants, each item here would have attached comments and advice as a kind of « how-to-do-it » or « recipe » book, open to subsequent amendment by participants themselves.

A. MEETING PATTERNS (Organization and Services)

« Pattern » is a suggestive general term to describe any particular (and usually familiar) way of organizing the flow of energies in a gathering. Patterns can be combined into a network within a « pattern language ». Some of the resulting arrangements are « better » than others, and the challenge is to find arrangements which enhance the hidden quality which makes them « feel right » in a given set of circumstances.

B. PATTERN PARTICIPATION (Roles)

Many of the above patterns are « activated » only by the presence of people playing appropriate roles. People may take up these roles irrespective of the formal reason for their participation in the gathering and their performance may be more significant for the gathering than their concerns (see below). These roles may in fact be considered as sub-patterns in their own right.

C. PATTERN CONCERNS
(Contributions, etc)

People participate in events because of « concerns » about which they wish to give, receive, or share, or which they wish in some way to advance or promote. These concerns colour the energy content of the patterns through which they are expressed.

The term « pattern language » is taken from a recent series of books on this question by designer Christopher Alexander
- The Timeless Way of Building
- A Pattern Language
- The Oregon Experiment
(Oxford University Press, 1975-1979).

D. PATTERN PERCEPTION
(Images and strategies)

In a complex gathering people need to have some image through which to make sense of the event as a whole and of where it is going, and to help them to decide on how to participate in it. Whatever the images used they are needed to give a sense of continuity and context. Different people prefer one or more different images :

1. *Structure :* The gathering may be « objectified » in terms of any of the following :
   - Agenda
     Critical pathway
     System diagram
   - Programme matrix
     Event timetable
     Programme « tracks »
2. *Risk :* Participants may prefer to assess their participation in terms of « risk tracks ». Some may be entirely conventional low-risk lecture/discussion type events. Others may be designed to make the participant take or defend a position as a person. Others may involve the participant in some personal transformation process. And some may be high-risk experiments which may fail as experiments do, providing lessons for the future.
3. *Ceremonial and celebration :* The gathering may be decided as a grouping of sub-ceremonies culminating or constituting some macro-event. This may involve, or be see as, the high point of a pilgrimage with associated festival activity.
4. *Games :* The gathering may be described as a pattern of interlocking games, whether recreational, therapeutic or « serious » in intent. An underlying objective may be the emergence of qualitatively superior games (e.g. in the style of Hesse's Glass Bead Game).
5. *Topic tracks :* The gathering may also be objectified as a complex set of interweaving topic (« concern ») tracks as is often done in convent onal conferences.
6. *Quest :* The gathering may be attractive to some when interpreted as a mystical quest or an exercise in collective alchemical marriage
7. *Learning pathways :* To those oriented towards education, the gathering may best be understood as a complex set of interweaving learning pathways.

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1. **Macro-patterns**

Conference	Exhibition	Brainstorming	Carnival
Fair	Court	Songfest	Show/Music hall
Market/Bazaar	Festival	Games	Majlis
Agora/Forum	Lecture	Holiday camp	Dance
Symposium	Pilgrimage	Contest	Happening
Workshop	Passion play	Public blessing	Procession
Demonstration	Ceremony/Ritual	Celebration	Retreat
Drama show	Panel session	Discussion	Audio-visual
Reception	Sharing	Group meditation	

2. **Micro-patterns**

Talking to speaker	Coffee table discussion	Distributing papers
Speaking to group	Swapping information	Receiving documents
Sharing with another	Lobbying/Persuading	Show and tell
Protesting	Having fun	Meeting new people
Learning	Changing	Non-verbal experience

Speaker	Musician	Organizer	Wise person
Listener	Creative artist	Lobbyist	Networker
Jester	Performer	Caterer	Mediator
Facilitator	«Accompanying person»		Handicapped
Writer	Game organizer	Adviser	Fan
Therapist	Child	Old person	Appreciator
Devil's advocate		Fixer	Material arranger
Priest	Ego stroker	Presenter	Discussant
Sympathizer	Agent provocateur		Ritualist
Strategist	Improviser	Animator	Chairperson
Rapporteur	Note-taker	Super-star	Security person
Interpreter	Critic		

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1. **Theoretical concerns :** as respresented by the intellectual disciplines of which, ungrouped, there are some 1,800.
2. **Substantive concerns :** namely societal problems and conditions, typically including :

Population	Unemployment	Energy	Illiteracy
Inflation	Refugees	Environment	Human rights

3. **Aesthetic concerns :** especially their expression and involving others in that expression :

Music	Poetry	Theatre	Textures
Song	Art	Dance	Perfumes

4. **Intangible experiential concerns :**

Prayer	Power	Risk	Other negative values
Meditation	Humour	Renewal	Other positive values

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 been 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-mechancial 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 even . 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 outcome 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 is 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 responsibility 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 « compleat 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)

CONFERENCE TRANSFORMATIONS

- *Maturing the reflective, focusing and transformative power of large-group conferences, especially in response to conditions of social upheaval.*
- *Extracts from the introductory report prepared by A.J. Judge for Commission IV (Meeting sociology, dynamics and practice) of the World Forum of Transnational Associations (Brussels, 1980).*

INTRODUCTION

1. Meetings, and particularly international meetings are a vital feature of society. They are a principal means whereby different perspectives are « assembled », « meet » or touch each other, possibly following a period of separation (« reunion »). Through such occasions resources are brought together to bear on a question of common concern (« conference ») or they may provide the environment in which unrelated questions can emerge spontaneously (« Forum »).

2. 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. The organizational skills have been professionalized and are available as a commercial service, whilst the quantity of meetings has given rise to a whole « conference industry » of significant economic importance.

3. Despite the ease with which meetings are held, and the increasing number of such 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.

4. Some efforts have been made to move beyond a concern for the « mechanics » of meeting organization in order to facilitate those processes which are more congenial and significant to participants. These innovations have been for the most part experimental or implemented under special conditions and are primarily applicable to small groups. The majority of meetings has been little affected, if at all.

5. The fundamental problem seems to be associated with the fact that the apparent success at « processing » agenda items, participants viewpoints and documents is matched by only an apparent or superficial consensus whose impact if any, is frequently limited to one of short-term public relations. The meeting outcome is such that the collective empowerment is minimal as is the enablement of the participant.

6. Seen in this light **current meeting procedures themselves constitute a principal obstacle to social change** at least for the meetings in which this is a preoccupation.

7. The challenge would therefore appear to be to elaborate a new conceptual framework within which a meeting may be perceived. This should highlight the hitherto hidden dimensions of the problem and clarify more appropriate options. 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.**

8. 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 responsibility 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.

9. The task is therefore to discover of nature of the « compleat meeting » of the future, through which a new order may be brought into being.

CLARIFICATION

*1. This collection of topics, and the exploratory process with which it is associated, is **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.*

2. Attention is only given to the « mechanics » of meeting organization (covered in the many books available on such matters) in so far as they directly affect the psycho-social dynamic of the meeting.

3. This topic procedure provides a means of collecting together ideas which may be helpful in different ways to different people according to their meeting experience. It is to be expected that a given participant will find some portion of the topic sheets to be partially or totally irrelevant to perceived needs.

4. This collection does not attempt to elaborate any single solution to the problems identified or to advocate a particular approach. Alternative methods are already in use for some of them. Reference to these will be made whenever appropriate to the case of large-groups (i.e. in excess of 15 to 30 persons).

*5. So little attention has been given to the psycho-socia dynamics of large-group meetings (particularly of the international, interdisciplinary variety), that many of the topics can only be identified and explored **tentatively** or even **speculatively.** None of the remarks should therefore be considered conclusive. The major concern is to stimulate open-ended reflection - accepting the necessity of risking error. Hopefully this may facilitate a breakthrough into a new understanding of participation in large-group meetings and **practical possibilities for their improved organization in the future.***

*6. This is **not** an « academic » exercise. It is an effort by participants in international meetings (including concerned academics) to explore whatever knowledge, experience and insight seems useful to the improvement of the conference process.*

ENVISIONING THE PERFECT MEETING

1. In recent years many people have deplored the inadequacies of the visions of society in the future. It is argued that credible visions offer a vital guideline to long-term policy. Clarifying such visions is a useful focus for debate. As a central process in society, meetings also merit this form of concern. Indeed if the problems inherent in meeting cannot be solved, is it possible to move toward any better society ? What could constitute a perfect meeting in the future ? Adequate images of such ideal meetings can guide reflection on present inadequacies and on how they may be overcome. The following points identify aspects which can be usefully borne in mind.

2. **Inter weaving resources :** Rather than the present emphasis on isolated participant contributions, the emphasis will be on interrelating contributions to form a pattern whose form evokes further contributions thus bringing about an appropriate balance of perspectives. Representatives of each discipline or approach will strive for better ways to evoke that pattern. Lengthy contributions (in time or on paper) will become secondary to the contribution of specific ideas, values, facts, problems or relationships. Those which significantly improve the emerging pattern will be valued most.

3. **Pace :** Rather than the present hectic exercises in maximizing « communication », many meetings or sessions will bear a greater resemblance to a public game of chess or go. Periods of silence will be interspersed with brief contributions to the emerging pattern on whose evolution all are reflecting.

4. **Status and reward :** Rather than status being accorded or acknowledged by protocol and « prime time » privileges, it will be self-evident from the record of the relative significance of the contributions made to the emerging pattern. This will be the prime source of personal satisfaction.

5. **Process :** Rather than the simplistic overt processes of present meetings (made possible by a complex of covert processes) the range of processes will be understood to interweave as they do in a complex but healthy ecosystem – of which there are many types.

6. **Maturity :** Rather than the present possibility of immaturity in a meeting of the most eminent, the maturity level of the meeting will be a matter of explicit concern and many will have skills to evolve the meeting beyond the characteristic traps of the present.

7. **Roles :** Rather than the limited range of roles in present meetings, those of the future will be characterized by a rich variety of supporting, guiding, informing, facilitating roles. The potential of a meeting may well be judged by the « participant/supporting role » ratio (cf. the teacher/pupil ratio in schools) as well as the number of « jargons » between which « interpretation » is provided.

8. **Modes :** Rater than the limited range of modes now permissable in a given meeting, it will be possible for a meeting to move flexibly between many modes according to the energy requirments of the participants – and without losing a sense of coherence.

9. **Conceptual environment :** Rather than the crude (lack of) awareness of meeting conceptual dynamics, participants will be much more conscious of the « species » of each contribution made, the effect it can have on the evolution of the conceptual environment, and the constraints on its viability.

10. **Physical environment :** To those involved in such perfect meetings, the negative effects of the many subtle and less subtle design factors in present conference centres will be obvious. Conference environment design will focus on enabling the many aspects of conceptual pattern formation rather than « processing » participants and inhibiting synthesis. Flexible settings will adapt to the changing conceptual environment.

11. **Technology :** Aside from the already evident move towards « electronic meetings » between distant participants, much greater use will be made of technology to enable spontaneous communication **between** participants (rather than **at** them), to represent graphically the pattern emerging from the contributions made, and to facilitate synthesis whilst protecting variety.

12. **New challenges :** Because the environment will enable collective reflection on much more subtle questions than at present, new challenges will emerge – possibly to be recognized as of greater (or more fundamental) significance than the often simplistic preoccupations of present meetings.

INTEGRATIVE FAILURE

1. Although integrative skills may be successfully applied to a situation their elusive nature can be partially defined by the ways in which such skills may fail or be used to conceal abuse.

2. **Reduction in variety :** A simple way to ease the integrative problem is to reduce the diversity of elements present in the situation using an argument for standardization and against any « hodge podge » mixture of elements. This of course eliminates some minority interests. In the extreme case of destructive or « meltdown » synthesis, all variety is eliminated.

3. **Reduction in quantity :** By eliminating a significant **number** of the elements, the problem may also be eased. The argument that can be used is that they are well-represented by the variety of elements that remain and that any « proliferation » of elements is disorderly. In practice this results in the absorption of some elements by others, such as in the case of minority groups.

4. **Simplification :** Subtleties and nuances, possibly defended by specific minority groups, may be ignored. Interconnecting webs of relations can be ignored.

5. **Tokenism :** Emphasis may be placed on the image or desirability of synthesis in order to conceal inability to achieve any steps towards it.

6. **Temporary synthesis :** In a dynamic situation it may be possible to achieve some measure of integration in the short-term by ignoring factors temporarily absent or only emerging over longer time cycles.

7. **« Coloured » synthesis :** A significant degree of synthesis may be achieved, but from a particular viewpoint or in terms of a particular mode, approach or strategy. The narrowness of such a synthesis, coloured by the perspective of those who achieve it, may be difficult to communicate within the framework established by that synthesis.

8. **Enforced synthesis :** In some instances, as with a dynamic set of minority interests, a form of integration may be imposed by constraining the dynamics (although without reducing the number or variety of the elements).

9. **Dogmatic synthesis :** An impression of synthesis may be achieved by stating frequently and forcefully that it has been achieved and thus eroding expectation that a greater degree of synthesis is possible.

10. **Laissez faire synthesis :** By reinterpreting the nature of synthesis or integration, it may be deemed to exist under any circumstances as the pattern of interaction amongst the elements. No intervention is required, although if undertaken it would merely add to the pattern of interaction.

11. **Agglomerative synthesis :** Appropriate integration may be assumed to have been achieved simply by ensuring the juxtaposition of the various elements or viewpoints. This corresponds to the use of the prefix « multi » (e.g. in multidisciplinary). In books reflecting such a multidisciplinary synthesis, it is the binding which provides the synthesis, given the absence of any relationship between the constituent disciplinary chapters.

12. **Comparative or cross-referential synthesis :** Integration may be assumed to have been achieved by recording comparisons between the perspectives or elements. This often corresponds to the use of the prefix « cross- » (e.g. in cross-cultural).

13. **Cross-impact synthesis :** Integration may be assumed to have been achieved by taking into account the constraints and feedback loops emerging from other disciplinary perspectives. This may correspond to use of the prefix « inter- » (e.g. in interdisciplinary). Note however that it is only with the emergence of a new level of order that a synthesis breakthrough may be said to have occurred (this may correspond to the use of the prefix « trans- » as in trans-disciplinary).

INTEGRATIVE SKILLS

1. Although during meetings there is much discussion of « integration » and there are many attempts at producing a « synthesis », the skills called upon seem to be poorly understood, hard to communicate, and very difficult to put into practice. It is therefore useful to note very different domains where integrative skills are practised successfully, even if it is not immediately clear what can be learnt from them for use in a meeting environment.

2. **Design and composition :** This is the process through which creative intuition influences the selection of **elements** and the manner and proportion in which they are to be balanced – what is to be put together and how. In each of the following the configuration of elements tends to relate to an emergent focal point :

2.1 Composing music.
2.2 Painting a picture.
2.3 Flower arrangement (Ikebana).
2.4 Landscaping.
2.5 Building and community design.
2.6 Interior decoration.
2.7 Designing a meal (or menu).
2.8 Putting together a group a team, or an evening party.
2.9 Writing a novel.

3. **Managing dynamic situations :** This is the process whereby the relationships between a complex set of **given elements** is kept in focus. Examples are :
3.1 Juggling.
3.2 Leadership of a group (including use of charisma).
3.3 Production of a show.
3.4 Conducting a military compaign.
3.5 Controlling a chemical plant.
3.6 Scheduling railways, deliveries, etc.
3.7 Making a party « go » (hosting).
3.8 Conducting an orchestra.
3.9 Gardening.

4. **Analyzing complex situations :** This is clearly oriented to understanding whatever can be analyzed irrespective of whether this leads to broader synthesis. Examples are :
4.1 Operations research.
4.2 Systems research.
4.3 Cybernetics.
4.4 Management research.
4.5 Political analysis.

5. **Communicating synthesis :** This is the process whereby a sense of wholeness or unity among diverse parts imparted to others, even if only as a symbol or token of what may later be achieved in practice.
5.1 Environmental appreciation (« One Earth »).
5.2 Art education.
5.3 Art of speaking.
5.4 Political commentator.

6. **Embodying synthesis :** Whereas each of the above is in some way a manipulation of synthesis, however necessary, there seem to be instances where a person acts as the focal point for synthesis and is so perceived by those whose interests are reinterpreted and focussed in this way. Examples are perhaps :
6.1 Spiritual leaders (including saints, gurus, and charismatic evangelists).
6.2 Political heroes (including statesmen, military and revolutioary leaders).
6.3 Cultural heroes (including pop-stars, film-stars).

INTERDISCIPLINARITY

1. The need in meetings to interrelate the approaches of different disciplines, in order to understand a social problem situation and to be able to recommend appropriate remedial programmes, is now increasingly recognized. The « inter-disciplinary » approach in now in fashion and an essential element in many requests for programme funds.

2. On closer examination, however it is possible to discover that this requirement, far from constituting any form of progress, is only the symptom of the pathological state of knowledge at this time. The specialization without limit of scientific disciplines has resulted in an increasing fragmentation of the epistemological horizon.

3. Specialists cannot be asked to testify in meetings with regard to the unification of the sciences, or an « integrated » action programme, insofar as these specialists by their vocation and training are ignorant of, or deny, this very unity. Even those who profess to stand for the unification of the sciences cannot always be trusted, for each one of them would be satisfied in defining his familiar point of view, and more or less justifying his own individual presuppositions.

4. Teaching and research institutions reinforce the above separation through administrative procedures which tend to eliminate communications with institutions associated with other disciplines. This is reflected in conference programme events sponsored in parallel by such bodies. The division of intellectual space into smaller and smaller compartments, and the multiplication of institutions which assume the management of each such territory, results in the formation of a feudal system which governs the majority of scientific teaching and research entreprises and is clearly reflected in the organization of meetings.

5. When an « interdisciplinary » approach is used in a meeting, it most often consists in bringing together specialists from different disciplines, in the simplistic belief that such an assembly would suffice to bring about a common ground and a common language between individuals who have nothing else in common. The reports or results of such meetings neither achieve, nor attempt to achieve, any synthesis – other than the purely spatial juxtaposition of viewpoints and constraints, and subsequently, a judiciously worded editorial overview for the published proceedings.

6. Few of the societal problems which give rise to large conferences at this time can adequately be handled within any one discipline. Such problems result from the interaction of social, economic, technological, political, religious, psychological, biological and other factors. Understanding requires an integration of the relevant disciplinary perspectives. Such integration however must be much more than the synthesis of results obtained by independent unidisciplinary studies conducted **prior** to the meeting. The synthesis, to be useful, must come before the unidisciplinary commitments have been made and the conclusions frozen, without having been tempered by exposure to other constraints. This should be the true function of an interdisciplinary « meeting » – to act as a « transformative crucible » from which a new perspective emerges and is tempered in a number of stages. If the result is merely an agglomeration, then no transformation has taken place and the process has failed.

7. Where such interdisciplinary synthesis does take place, however, it is most successful between two closely related disciplines. Such integration is decreasingly successful as the number of disciplines involved increases. This is matched by a rapid **decrease** in the sophistication of the synthesis and a reduction in expectation of its benefits by those involved. A « synthesis » of results in itself dangerous in a meeting if it is superficial, but nevertheless succeeds in removing the stimulus to greater collective effort.

8. The difficulties are increased when the disciplines are of a different nature, have fundamentally different methodologies, or focus on very different subject matter. As the variety of disciplinary perspectives increases, so does the tendency of each subgroup to perceive the activity of others as being of marginal relevance or importance.

9. The challenge in meetings is to face up to the failures of the past (particularly those disguised as successes) and to find new ways

of interrelating the intellectual resources available in order to guide significant change.

MEETING FOCUS : a description.

1. In a discussion an individual may be rebuked for not « keeping to the point ». In a meeting this may refer to relevance to a point on the agenda. It is the agenda which is used to focus the meeting process, although when there is a **programme,** focus may only be achieved through the agendas of individual sessions or possibly through a concluding plenary session. What is focus in a meeting and what is its significance, especially in relation to the aim or objective of the meeting ?

2. **Imposed focus :** A meeting may be convened to focus on a particular concern decided in advance. In such a case those present and the points raised will be clearly related to that concern, although perhaps not in the view of all present. Focus is thus a question of establishing and maintaining the relationship of a variety of subsidiary concerns to one central concern, even though the proponents of particular subsidiary concerns may not recognize each others relevance to that central concern.

3. **Emergent focus :** A meeting may be convened in the hope that a point of common focus will emerge as a basis for interlinking a variety of partially (or un-) related concerns. The problem is then to facilitate its identification and emergence.

4. **Multiple focus :** Whether imposed or emergent, it may be a question of a multiple focus, rather than a single one. There may be no intention, desire or ability to relate the multiple points of focus to one another or to a single underlying concern. This may be reflected in a variety of unrelated points in an agenda or meeting programme.

5. **Degree of focus :** Whether a matter of ability or intention, the meeting may resist any classification or sharpening of focus in preference to a diffuse focus or none at all. An unfocused meeting may be viewed as more creative or effective under certain conditions, or perhaps all that is feasible. Note that focus may be achieved without any verbal acknowledgement of its nature.

6. **Aims, objectives and goals :** Although it is possible to make useful distinctions between these, it is their difference from focus which should be noted. Each of them is in one way or another an intention or desire as opposed to the definite achievement characteristic of focus. But focus is also a precondition for them, in that it interrelates the relevant elements necessary for their achievement, whether any subsequent action is taken or not. In this way a meeting can focus on its objective, for example or may fail to do so because its ability to focus is inadequate.

7. **Focus and transformation :** To achieve whatever transformation it intends, a meeting must bring the resources it has assembled to bear, bringing them appropriately into focus. This establishes the critical quantity or variety of factors necessary to the transformation. Focus ensures that the configuration of factors assembled will direct the energy of the meeting participants appropriately, rather than allowing it to dissipate ineffectually. Individual actions are then mutually reinforcing rather than nullifying. Depending on the nature of the meeting, focus may also be required to disseminate or contain the energy released by the transformative process.

8. **Strategy and process :** Focus may be brought about by an appropriate strategy for a process from the prior unfocused condition – a focusing procedure. Such strategy may even be considered the time dimension of focus.

9. **Structure and focus :** One method of ensuring focus is through the conventional hierarchical structure of executive and other programme committees and officers, culminating in the meeting president. The weakness of this approach results from the limitations of the simple hierarchy as a means of appropriately channelling and interrelating the information flows associated with interrelated topics. This is especially true when the hierarchy also has to perform protocol and other non-substantive functions which prevent either the executive director or the president from ensuring a substantive synthesis, even if they were able.

10. **Focus and configuration :** Where hierarchical ordering of the meeting programme or lines of responsibility no longer suffices to contain the complexity of the subject matter, a programme matrix may be used. When this is inadequate more complex configurations are required (e.g. critical path and network diagrams). There is however a major constraint in that focus is no longer possible if the complexity exceeds the ability of participants to comprehend. And in order to maintain comprehensibility the configuration of issues must contain elements of symmetry and pattern to reinforce memorability and communicability. Whilst it is not necessary for all participants to comprehend the whole configuration, there must be sufficient overlap both to maintain connectedness and to prevent loss of confidence in the chain of overlaps linking the most distant parts of the configuration.

11. **Focus and the individual :** The adequacy of the configuration depends on the quality of the participants and the extent to which its features engage their attention and energy. The greater the variety reflected in the configuration, the greater the potential, but also the greater the risk that participants will only be engaged partially or superficially and that the focus will be trivial. Powerful focus is achieved when the meeting configuration matches to a significant degree the psychic configuration of the participants. Participants respond to finding their own condition reflected in the meeting configuration, and the meeting reflected within themselves – it is this resonance which energizes the meeting. Any action through the meeting is then directly consistent with the individual's own development and calls upon all the participant is able to contribute because of the manner in which that contribution results in personal growth through the meeting. The meeting configuration thus reinforces connections which enable focus and transformation at a new level of significance, both collective and individual.

FOCUS : a checklist

1. Below are listed, in no particular order, different aspects of focus or processes which tend to occur when a meeting is in focus.

2. **Checklist :**

2.1 Category transformation : a condition of focus should permit a reordering of the categories governing the meeting (or the organization of its subject matter) into a less procrustean pattern corresponding more appropriately to the reality encoded.

2.2 **Organizational transformation :** in a condition of focus the organizational units or sub-divisions whereby it has been brought about can be reformed into a pattern more appropriate to the functional categories.

2.3 **Problem sensitivity (resolving power) :** a condition of focus permits problems (otherwise considered identical) to be appropriately distinguished.

2.4 **Problem subtlety :** certain all-pervading subtle problems can only be detected in a condition of low « noise-level » characteristic of focus.

2.5 **Stabilized overview :** focus is a necessary condition for a stable overview of the meeting's domain (possibly as a meta-dimension) otherwise viewed as a multi-facted image.

2.6 **Contribution of the seemingly irrelevant :** only in a condition of focus can the contribution of otherwise « irrelevant » resources to the balance of the whole be understood.

2.7 **Hospitable to divergent perspectives :** a condition of focus is hospitable to otherwise « divergent » perspectives.

2.8 **Sensitivity to new options :** the reduction in « noise-level » associated with a condition of focus permits new options and directions to emerge.

2.9 **Transformation of collective self-awareness :** the condition of focus facilitates the emergence of a collective sense of identity at a new level of integration and immediacy.

2.10 **Transformation of personal awareness :** a condition of focus enhances the processes of personal transformation in each participant and in relation to the here-and-now.

2.11 **Energy containment and release :** a focussed configuration is able to contain and anchor the synergy normally dissipated during a meeting (possibly as a temporary state of enthusiasm or euphoria).

2.12 **Emergence of simplifying perspectives :** a condition of focus enables simpler descriptions of complex conditions to emerge, possibly as appropriate metaphors.

2.13 **Empowerment :** a condition of focus empowers the meeting to act at a new level of significance in the light of emergent values.

2.14 **Risk :** a condition of focus, because of the radical nature of the transformations which are then feasible, is also a condition of high risk. Such risk is a necessary « investment » (in the sense of « nothing venture; nothing gain »).

LOSING FOCUS

1. The nature of focus may be partially understood from the various ways in which it may be lost during a meeting. These are the processes which may be guarded against although they are not necessarily independent.

2. **Loss of immediacy :** Participants may lose any sense of immediacy and allow discussion to focus on questions which erode their sense of urgency and responsibility. The assumption that necessary action can be taken on some other occasion, possibly by others, gradually holds sway.

3. **Attention absorption :** Topics become a focus for attention for different participants to the exclusion of any understanding of the context from which they emerge and by which they are linked.

4. **Attention span :** The complexity of the topic is such that participants do not have the patience to attend to any discussion of its intricacies and thus fail to comprehend it. This situation may be aggravated by poor verbal presentation, particularly when an audio-visual presentation would be clearer and quicker.

5. **Topic change too rapid :** When the meeting is switching between supposedly related topics, this may be done too rapidly for the participants to retain any permanent understanding of their connection.

6. **Topic change too slow :** Time spent by participants in treating one topic may be too great to retain adequate understanding of the previous topic. In this way they lose sight of the whole and may in fact become bored with excessive detail if they are not unnecessarily fascinated by it.

7. **Loss of connectedness :** Participants, for any of the above reasons, may lose understanding of the web of relevance interlinking the different topics under discussion. Conceptual fragmentation holds sway and most topics appear irrelevant to the participants major interest.

8. « **Topic twigging** » **:** Topics may be explored with such enthusiasm, that issues are broken up into sub-issues, sub-sub-issues, etc without any control over how to maintain the connection between such « twigs » or branches and the trunk of the « tree » from which they spring.

9. **Games and traps :** Discussion of topics may become enmeshed in various games and traps from which participants find it impossible to extract themselves. Such « sub-routines » may divert all energy from the fundamental or underlying issues.

10. **Superficiality :** The focus of the meeting may be trivialized by unnecessary enthusiastic interventions which do not take participants forward.

11. **Disruption :** The « noise-level » of the meeting may be such that no focus may be shared amongst participants.

12. **Polarization :** Discussion of the focus may provoke some participants to advocate a counter-focus, thus dividing the meeting.

13. **Energy drain :** The structure and processes of the meeting may be such as to drain participant energy rather than enhancing it. This weakens any focus which is still possible.

FOCUS SUBTLETIES I (public relations)

1. Although strong criticism can be made of the conventional use of « public relations » techniques in meetings, especially when crudely done for simplistic purposes, skilled practitioners are sensitive to dimensions otherwise ignored. It is this sensitivity which can contribute considerably to the « magic » of whatever occurs in a condition of focus.

2. The major problem of public relations as applied in meetings is that it is conceived in terms of the **priorities of the meeting sponsor or organizer.** A major concern then is to stress at all cost the qualities and significance : of those responsible for the event, of the event itself, of the participants, and of whatever is achieved. The techniques are necessarily so pervasive in their application that they cloak every facet of the event in a concealing garb of seeming glamour and significance. This of course serves to « paper over any cracks » in the arrangement, effectively turning each moment of the meeting into a piece of theatre, however flimsy the sets. Participant awareness of the reality, as it contrasts with the image, generates cynicism and is counter-productive.

3. One feature of this problem is the tendency to reinforce the status quo and to conceal weaknesses and conficts which can provoke and justify healthy change. (Existing categories are effectively treated like icons requiring appropriate praise and decoration).

4. Another feature of this problem is dependence upon the « showmanship » strengths of PR techniques to provide « **attention grabbers** » **to absorb the time of participants.** These may extend from glossy audio-visuals through sumptuous feasts to tourist attractions. This leads to a simplistic conception of meetings, and a total disrespect for participants and the issues on which they supposedly hope to act. Sad to say, many meeting sponsors are evaluated by their peers in terms of « how good a show they put on » and the meeting market is such that it is unlikely that they would fail by underestimating the level of sophistication of participants.

5. Another feature of this problem is the stress on the impact on participants of « messages » fired at them as « targets » in the **marketing « communications » approach** which has given birth to most public relations techniques.

6. Despite these present defects, the practitioners are nevertheless especially sensitive to **configuration, place, timing, non-verbal stimuli and their effect on image.** The question is whether these skills can be employed in the interests of participants and their concerns, rather than as a manipulation of them.

7. The question is **how can meeting participants themselves engender collective sensitivity to these dimensions,** correcting continually for any excesses. The process of building up and focusing significance collectively is one known through the rituals of less artificial cultures with a more organic response to a happening. It would appear that the « civilized » conscious emphasis on rational discourse in meetings has left them exposed to manipulation of any unconscious emotional needs which would otherwise provide a healthy equilibrium. How can the power of any such emotional arousal of the imagination be consciously evoked by participants to meld their perspectives together more effectivily – to « get their act together » and get the meeting into focus ? The « primitive » approach, the « PR communicator » approach, and the « small group process » approach are extremes, each with important clues and dangerous traps.

8. The clues suggest the importance of articulating, « feeding » and reinforcing images (which well up and breed within the meeting) by an almost rhythmic alternation between different information modes, sensed to be in some comprehensible configuration. If harmoniously balanced through a timed progression of intensity, the meeting will then « take off ». If not, the significance leaks away, leaving an empty, brittle shell of programme elements.

FOCUS SUBTLETIES II (meeting magic)

1. Occasionally, perhaps under special circumstances, meetings « come together » and « take off » as if by magic. It might be called serendipity. There is very little indication of why this comes about of how it is to be described objectively. It can happen when every

care has been put into arranging the meeting and selecting the participants, or it can happen under extremely non-ideal circumstances. The following notes indicate some possible directions for further reflection on the question.

2. **Indirection :** In such a case then seems to be a strength in defining the central point of focus by discussions which use it as an **unspoken** reference point. The totality of tangential dialogues is then facilitated by this approach, whereas « going to the heart of the matter », and efforts to render it explicit, effectively only introduce perturbation and fragmentation. (Note that non-directiveness, being the non-imposition of a line of discussion, is only loosely related to indirection in this sense).

3. **Paradox :** There usually seems to be a strong element of paradox in such cases, or at least a tolerance of it and a suspension of judgement. (The meeting could almost be considered a collective reflection on a Zen koan).

4. **Incompatibility :** Associated with paradox is a context which permits incompatible perspectives to be « bracketed » and held in complementary juxtaposition. It is the shared attitude underlying this contextual awareness which provides a subtle interface between the perspectives.

5. **Attunement :** The magic tends to occur when participants are attuned to each other or empathize with each other, possibly stimulated by a quota of antipathy which provokes a search for a more fundamental level of harmony (cf. the use of this concept in certain group meditation techniques).

6. **« Chemistry » :** As in the previous point, when the right mix of participants is present, they react in unpredictable ways to produce interesting transformation for all concerned. (The « recipe » analogy may also be used).

7. **Aesthetic elegance :** There seems to be a special economy and proportion of structure and process which can only be described in aesthetic terms.

8. **Drama :** Relating to the previous point, there is often a sense of evolving and mounting drama, engendering appropriate events at each stage. There is a collective awareness of how each event is charged with significance.

9. **« Invisible hand » :** Relating to the previous point, at certain moments events seem to be guided by an unseen hand, so well do they emerge spontaneously and fall into place unplanned. There is a strange « rightness » to the flow of events.

10. **Non-action :** During the course of such meetings, deliberate actions usually tend to be of less significance or else their significance emerges totally transformed in relation to the original intent. The more participants can approximate to the Taoist attitude of non-action, the better the event for all concerned (cf the adage : « Don't push the river. Guide the canoe »).

11. **Non-conscious :** Relating to the previous point, participant appreciation of the event depends on ability to « let go » and « flow with the stream of things ». This seems to call upon instinctual and intuitive aspects of personality, appropriately blended by the participant (cf. the Japanese concept of hara). It should perhaps be contrasted with unconsciousness and « stream of consciousness » monologue.

12. **Humorously quixotic :** In contrast to the heavy quality of conventional meetings, such events have an underlying thread of humour strangely blended with wisdom (cf. the Sufi tales of Nasruddin). This also serves as a very powerful and rapid means of conveying an explanation.

13. **Innocence :** The flow of such events tends to evoke a childlike innocence and sense of wonder in participants, which is to be contrasted in conventional meetings with the defensive attitude towards ignorance, a pervasive cynicism, and childishness under certain circumstances.

14. **Magical shifts of perspective :** Characteristically in such meetings, apparently insignificant events brought about in an unforeseen manner can trigger major shifts of perspective (cf. the Zen tales concerning achievement of satori).

CONFIGURATIVE MODELS I (socio-structural)

1. Focus emerges as a consequence of an appropriate configuration of perspectives, people or groups within a meeting. To assist the exploration of the possibilities associated with configuration, it is appropriate to note different kinds of configuration in use in other domains in the hope that they may offer clues to its significance in meetings.

2. **Socio-structural configurations :**

2.1 Orchestra, with stationary groups of musicians/instruments, usually forming an incomplete circle around the conductor.

2.2 Auditorium, with seats ordered by row, aisle and tier, usually in a semi-circle facing a stage area, but occasionally surrounding the stage (e.g. colosseum, sports arena, circus) or interpenetrating the stage (e.g. some avant-garde theatres).

2.3 Parliament, with seats arranged and allocated in terms of the parties and a perception of their relationship to each other (e.g. facing each other) and to the government (e.g. facing the podium).

2.4 Temple or cathedral, with participants arranged in relation to a symbolic focal point before which one or more intermediaries may officiate; minor chapels may be located within the temple or disposed around it in an appropriate configuration. Special significance may be attached to location and orientation.

2.5 Fortress or castle, with elements appropriately arranged to ensure successive lines of defence in order to maximize the protection of what is most valued. Importance is attached to the strategic location and the relationship to the surrounding terrain.

2.6 City, when planned as a whole from the start may be specially divided into zones appropriately (often symmetrically) arranged in relation to each other according to their function and the lines of communication required. Usually located in relation to natural resources or a transport nexus.

2.7 Battle plan, whereby opposing generals locate the different functional units of their respective forces both in relation to one another and to the opposing force, in order to favour respective strategies. Special attention is given to terrain, logistics and the training and morale of participants.

2.8 Table design and seating, whereby an attempt is made to reflect the status of the participating parties (e.g. in negotiations or mediation) or at functions requiring careful attention to protocol.

2.9 Ritual, dramatic or dance movements, in which participants continually, modify their relationship to each other, possibly to bring about a sequence of changes in the overall pattern they constitue. Some forms are completely pre-determined, others are partially or completely improvised. In some forms all participate all the time, in others they may be absent for the part of the sequence in which their role is most stressed, or when it is stressed by their absence.

CONFIGURATIVE MODELS II (energy processing)

1. Focus emerges as a consequence of an appropriate configuration of perspectives, people or groups within a meeting. To assist the exploration of the possibilities associated with configuration, it is appropriate to note different kinds of configuration in use in other domains in the hope that they may offer clues to its significance in meetings.

2. **Energy-processing configurations :**

2.1 Antenna, for which the constituent elements are precisely located in relation to one another to constitute a configuration

(often parabolic) to focus incoming electromagnetic radiation for subsequent processing. The orientation of the configuration as a whole is vital to its operation, as in the case of the microwave receiver or the radio-telescope.

2.2 Magnetic « bottle », whereby a configuration of precisely located magnets is used to contain plasma in such a way that its temperature may be maintained at over one million degrees for a period of seconds in order that fusion can take place (as an alternative source of energy to nuclear fission). It is only through the use of magnetic forces that the plasma may be kept from destroying any material container.

2.3 Reactor, in which particular attention is given to the configuration of heating, cooling, agitating, input and output elements, in order that an optimum transformation of materials should take place. This applies as much to the simple crucible, although the precision and symmetry of the configuration is most evident in nuclear reactor design.

2.4 Mirror configurations, as used for focussing sunlight in certain solar power furnances, or alternatively for directing light as in search-lights and lighthouses.

2.5 Optical systems of lenses, as used in telescopes and microscopes.

2.6 Acoustical configurations of walls and baffles, as used in an auditorium, required to ensure the balanced distribution of sound and the elimination of unwanted echos.

2.7 Electric motor or generator, in which electricity is used or generated by the controlled movement of one configuration of elements in relation to another due to the effects of polarized forces operating in phase.

2.8 Factory complex, usually designed with special attention to the transfer of energy and materials to processing locations which are therefore appropriately arranged in relation to each other. Usually located in relation to natural resources, a transport nexus or associated factories.

CONFIGURATIVE MODELS III (symbolic)

1. Focus emerges as a consequence of an appropriate configuration of perspectives, people or groups within a meeting. To assist the exploration of the possibilities associated with configuration, it is appropriate to note different kinds of configuration in use in other domains in the hope that they may offer clues to its significance in meetings.

2. **Symbolic configurations :**

2.1 Monument or memorial, whereby architectural or decorative elements are disposed in relation to some central focal point. Such elements often reflect aspects of the central theme of the monument. In the larger memorials a considerable degree of symmetry is usually to be found.

2.2 Memory devices, whereby items to be remembered are associated with or « impressed upon » some easily remembered configuration such as the elements of a memorial, the features of an ornamental garden, a suitable pantheon, etc. The items may then be « recovered » by progressing through the configuration in whatever order is appropriate.

2.3 Mandalas, whereby a complete set of complementary figures are disposed symmetrically in relation to one another around a central focal point in order to indicate both a succession of possible experiences and a progression to more or less fundamental levels of experience. Each such experience is understood as essential to the harmony and evolution of the whole. Mandalas, or their equivalents, are used as attention focussing devices in different cultures.

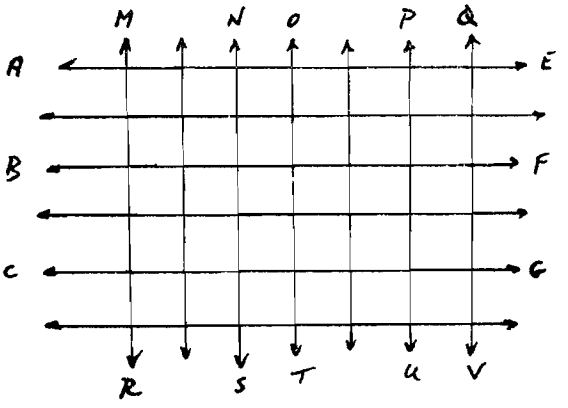
2.4 Symbols, such as a crown, a chalice or a stupa, which may be viewed as a configuration of elements constituting a « receptacle » for energies, qualities or attributes thus held in balance.

SELF-CONSTRAINING CONFIGURATIONS I (energy disspation)

1. In organizing a meeting there is concern that it should be sufficiently « stimulating » to attract and maintain the interest of participants. There is however also a concern that any « controversy » should not exceed what can be contained by the meeting structure and processes. A low risk meeting therefore runs the risk of being boring and without significance. The question is whether this dilemma can be understood in a new light in order to be able to organize interesting and significant meetings, whilst minimizing risk of their being torn apart.

2. Consider, as one extreme case, **what needs to be done to avoid all controversy.** The relationships **between** the participants, the topics or the meeting sessions need to be such that only supportive, reinforcing information is exchanged between them but none which challenges, denies, accuses, limits or questions assumptions. If any such challenges are effectively transferred to the relationship between the meeting and the **external** world, the meeting can maintain its positive harmonious nature. This could be called exporting or projecting problems, inconsistencies or contradictions.

3. For this to be possible however, no **effective** link should be established between those participants, topics or meeting sessions which would draw attention to such contradictions by the nature of their interaction. This can best be illustrated by a grid, reflecting



(according to its size) the variety of participants, topics or meeting sessions. In it supportive information of one kind is transferred, for example, towards the meeting boundary at B; whilst another kind is transfered towards F. Only by confronting B and F (or Q and V), which is avoided in the meeting, would the challenge they constitute be evident. In the meeting the challenge between them (at any particular grid location) is minimized. Expressed differently, every effort is made to ensure that feed back loops are not completed. (Or alternatively, the meeting is perceived as a grid on an infinite plane).

4. This approach ensures that energy is effectively drained into or absorbed by the meeting environment. There it merely goes to reinforce any positive or negative images of external problems or organizations. It does not enhance the ability of the meeting to get to grips with such problems or its own. The meeting is essentially escapist, dumping its own problems on the environment. A grid configuration is a de-motivating, energy-dissipating pattern, not an energy conserving pattern. For this reason care should be taken when basing meetings on **linear** agendas, coding or classification schemes.

5. Consider now the opposite extreme in which **conflict is intermalized and challenge is accepted as an integral feature of the meeting.** If the meeting is not to be torn apart the opposing participants, viewpoints or meeting sessions need to be held in relation to one other by a configuration which distributes the stress evenly throughout it. This calls for the completion of all feedback circuits and the juxtaposition of integrative (harmonizing) and dissipative (challenging) forces at every point throughout the configuration.

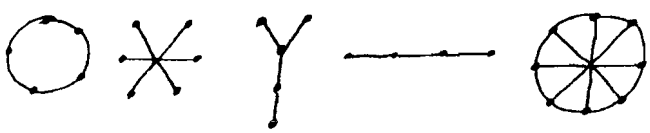
Such configurations are not constrained by the environment, as in the previous case. They are self-constraining. **Energy is not dissipated; it is conserved as synergy.**

6. It is such self-constraining patterns of curvature which provide the focus which is absent in a « planar » meeting. The question is how to « foldup » a grid into an appropriate configuration. (This is discussed elsewhere in relation to non-linear agendas).

SELF-CONSTRAINING CONFIGURATIONS II (communication patterns)

1. To understand how different configurations may emerge, it is useful to look at the variety of communication patterns which may be characteristic of a meeting. At one extreme, for example, participants, viewpoints or conditions interact more or less randomly with no detectable pattern or order. This is characteristic of « idea fairs ».

2. One approach to the possible patterns in a large group is to review the well-studied communicaton patterns in small groups of 3-6 participants. These are described as the circle, the star, the Y, the line, and the starred circle :



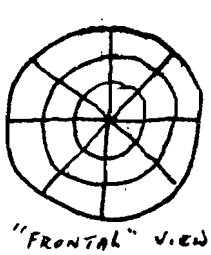
Although these patterns have been examined in groups of participants, **they may also be characteristic of groups of groups,** or groups of themes, or the relationship between meeting sessions. For example, the star pattern emerges when all participant groups (or themes), except one, are related to that one but not to each other. Each pattern has well-recognized advantages under certain conditions.

3. Another approach is to see the large group as a complex, but reasonably stable, network of relationships between participants, themes or meeting sessions. Social networks are studied by the discipline of social network analysis.

4. Another approach is to imagine all participants, viewpoints or meeting sessions as being represented as points on the surface of a simple stretched rubber sheet. If they are located, such that lines of communication drawn between them cross to a minimal extent, then the meeting pattern as a whole may be viewed as a particular deformation of a regular grid. For example, if stretched in one way, many of the lines of communication might converge on one point as in the star pattern (above). Or several such points of relative convergence might emerge. Alternatively, by stretching the sheet so that a single space emerged in the centre, all the communication lines between points would be pushed into an approximate circle around it, creating the circle pattern (above).

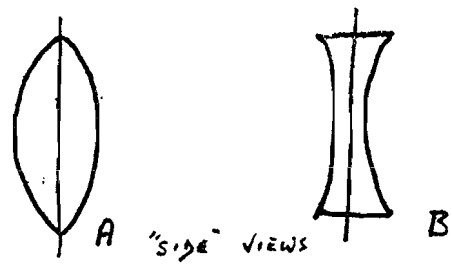
5. The grid deformation approach which has been briefly outlined above may also be associated with a possible application of catastrophe theory to an analysis of meeting events, structural stability and morphogenesis (see elsewhere).

6. But even if a highly ordered communication pattern is achieved, such as :



this does not necessarily mean that it can focus usefully in terms of any objectives. It may simply be an efficient way of dissipating energy generated at the central point (see elsewhere).

7. Supposing however that, in this case, a « counter-grid » or « counter-pattern » is delineated in the same way for the **problems** with which the elements of the communication pattern are confronted. This problem pattern could simply be the reflection of the other (effectively generated by « reflection » within it on the percevied problems and how they are linked). But if the one pattern « comes to grips » with the other and is « constrained » by it, a balanced configuration could emerge in one of two forms (A or B).



8. These forms clearly link with the optical analogy (discussed elsewhere) being of the form of convex (A) or concave (B) lenses. This analogy draws attention to the significance of the fact that, constrained into curvature in this way, the focal point, previously « at infinity », is brought closer to the lens according to the degree to which the configuration is constrained into curvature (being at the centre of a spherical configuration, as the limiting case).

MEETINGS AS MODELS : description

1. It is normally assumed that meetings are either concerned with issues in wider society (the **external world**) or constitute an environment or vehicle for interaction between persons or viewpoints (or possibly a mixture of both). Both perspectives fail, in an important respect, to focus on the meeting itself. They treat the meeting as a vehicle or device but fail to consider the significance of the structures and processes constituting the vehicle, whether as a result of forces emerging within the meeting or during its planning stages.

2. Meetings may usefully be viewed as models of the **reality of the forces and perspectives in the wider external society** as comprehended within the meeting. This is only partly acknowledged in concern for the representivity of the meeting. This concern only reflects an awareness, from a particular perspective, of who or what should be represented at the meeting. The meeting structures and processes reflect more than the simple list of participants or themes, they reflect their possible relationship in the light of the constraints imposed on the meeting. As such they constitute a map of the external reality, significant in its own right and especially because of any detectable limitations.

3. In a different sense a meeting also provides a **convenient « surface » onto which concerns may be projected.** As such, some meetings may be treated as new opportunities to redefine and concretize « the good, the true, and the beautiful », following the failures of previous attempts. (The series of U.N. substantive conferences may be usefully examined in this light).

4. The **problems of the external world** are also reflected in the decisions and compromises required to organize the meeting. Clear examples arise from policies (or their absence) on : handicapped participants, interpretation budgets, travel budgets, privileges, space and time constraints, use of recycled paper, etc.

5. Aside from such technical problems, the **more fundamental societal problems** can also emerge to some degree in embryonic form in the meeting environment, if only as analogues. Examples are : limitations on the human rights of participants; alienation, structural violence; problems arising from the multitude of participants each concerned to populate society with their particular perspectives; intellectual or emotional undernourishment of partici-

pants in the meeting process; problems associated with the different levels of education/experience of participants, and the constraints imposed by everpresent ignorance; overconsumption and privileged use of resources. In each case the forces contributing to the problem may be observed.

6. Given the central role of meetings in society, they may also be seen as the **focal point from which arise programmes, organizations, information systems** (including periodicals, bibliographies, etc.), and recognized problems. Such societal artefacts emerge, « peel off » and acquire separate identity partly because of insensitivity to the significance of the meeting and avoidance of the issues it raises. In this sense such artefacts are an escape from the immediacy of the issues raised by the meeting and a delegation of action to others beyond the here-and-now. A loss of vitality and information content goes with this loss of immediacy.

7. Meetings also usefully model the **capacity of those assembled to interweave their perspectives and skills within a viable whole** – a whole capable of encompassing creatively the problems to which those same perspectives give rise. In this sense failure to bring about a new level of significance within the meeting is a strong indication of the limited relevance of the assembly to wider society.

8. Following from the previous point, meetings can be used by participants as a social micrococosm within which the significance of emergent insights can be tested. As such they are extremely **valuable laboratories which have the immense advantage of being immediately accessible to those participating.**

MODELLING MEETINGS : analogies and metaphors

1. It is easy to get locked into a conventional pattern of reflection about meetings. This blocks the opportunity offered by many analogies to highlight alternative or complementary perspectives. These can be useful in suggesting more fruitful approaches, if only under special circumstances.

2. **Games and contest :**

2.1 **Medieval tournament :** Participants may be viewed as knights gathered for a tournament. Each bearing a heraldic coat of arms representing his qualities and territorial origins – to be defended at all costs. Contests are ritualized under an elaborate code of honour.

2.2 **Miss Universe contest :** Issues are paraded before eminent panelists who discuss their qualities before ranking them and selecting the « issue of the year ». The whole process being immersed in a sea of public relations and other interests.

2.3 **Martial art :** The struggle between issues or their representatives may be viewed in the light of the « holds » and « throws » of Eastern martial arts (aikido, judo, etc.). In these the supreme achievement is to use the enemy's energy to defeat him, and ultimately to see the enemy as but a reflection of oneself.

2.4 **Market-place :** The production, exchange and consumption of perspectives may be seen in terms of the dynamics of the market and the economic laws governing supply, demand and marketing considerations.

3. **Physical processes :**

3.1 **Thermodynamics :** The social processes in the meeting may be viewed in terms of the relationships between « pressure », « volume », « temperature » and various measures of energy stored and released.

3.2 **Magnetothermohydrodynamics :** The challenge of assembling the different participant orientations into a coherent configuration, generating and focussing the associated energies, and reaching a new level of significance, may be seem in the light of a fusion approach to plasma in a magnetic bottle.

3.3. **Meteorology :** The condition of a meeting may be viewed in terms of meteorological phenomena : wind, fog, heat, cold, visibility, precipitation (rain, snow), clouds, warm/cold fronts, wind patterns, etc.

3.4 **Geology/topography :** Participants and their interests may be viewed as geographical features (continents, islands, mountains) isolated or linked by seas, rivers, rifts, etc.

4. **Biological and chemical processes :**

4.1 **Chemistry :** The « chemistry » of a meeting may be explored as the sequence or pattern of reactions taking place at a certain rate, possibly in the presence of catalysts. A meeting may also be seem as a « chemical soup » within which new varieties of complex molecules may emerge under certain conditions.

4.2 **Biochemical and metabolic processes :** The range of possible meeting processes may be seem as constituting a map of pathways whereby various kinds of essential transformation take place with the assistance of specific enzymes.

4.3 **Environmental genetics :** The viewpoints represented and emerging at a meeting may be seem in terms of species and gene pools linked and isolated by food webs and ecological niches, but subject to genetic drift and mutation. Such environments may be poor, vulnerable, or in process of enrichment. Meetings may be seems as ruled by the « law of the jungle ».

5. **Agriculture and food processing :**

5.1 **Horticulture and gardening :** A meeting may be seem as a garden of flowers, vegetables and other species (with « a hundred flowers blooming »). The challenge is to care appropriately for these species : to water, to cover, to prune, to weed, to encourage or reduce certain insects, etc.

5.2 **Cooking :** A meeting may be viewed as a menu of dishes amongst which participants select. Balance is important both in selecting the dishes an individual consumes (the art of the gourmet) and in combining the ingredients whereby a dish is prepared (the culinary art).

5.3 **Diet :** A meeting may be viewed in terms of the dietary regime appropriate to participant nourishment, namely the quantity of carbohydrates, protein, and vitamines, interpreted as various kinds of information. The question of « calories », « exercise » and « obesity » may also be raised.

6. **Physical constructs :**

6.1 **Architecture :** The structural and functional divisions of a meeting may be viewed in terms of architectural analogues, from the simple one-room hut to the complex cathedral, fortress or palace. This raises questions of design and practicality of layout.

6.2 **Tensegrity :** This recent advance in architectural possibilities (and the basis of the geodesic dome) suggests new ways of balancing configurations of opposing forces in a meeting.

6.3 **Circuits :** The variety of components in electric, electronic and fluidic circuits suggest ways of combining well differentiated modes of participant information processing.

7. **Social activities :**

7.1 **Orchestra :** The challenge of interrelating participant view points to produce a new balance between harmony and dissonance may be seem in terms of an orchestra.

7.2 **Theatre :** The possibilities of drama, dramatic tension, the roles of actors, and the audience relationship have often been used to describe meetings.

7.3 **Dance :** The rhythmic interweaving of dancers may also be used to describe the rhythm of meeting processes and participant interaction.

7.4 **Temple ritual :** The meeting as a ceremony of celebration of the values to which the participants subscribe may be seem in terms of temple processes with extremes of sacrifice and communion accompanied by ritual chants.

8. **Psycho-physical processes :**

8.1. **Respiration :** The meeting may be viewed as composed of cycles of in-breathing and out-breathing of information in the light of

yoga attitudes towards the ultimate significance of such processes.

8.2 **Meditation :** The meeting may be viewed as an exercise in collective meditation and group consciousness, with all the consequent problems of physical, emotional and mental alignment.

8.3 **Alchemy :** The various alchemical processes explored by psychoanalysts may be used to model the progressive transmutation of the crude (material) perspectives initially present in the meeting.

MEETING SELF-IMAGE, SELF-REFERENCE AND SELF-REFLEXIVENESS

1. It seems obvious that the participants at a meeting should be collectively aware of the meeting as a whole and be capable of collective consideration concerning its significance. (This is even built into resolutions of the form « The conference, recognizing... »). But frequently such acknowledgement is purely formal and disguises the lack of any coherent collective self-image.

2. This point may seem subtle, trivial or irrelevant but its importance has been very effectively demonstrated in the case of the individual. Whilst an individual may appear to be well-defined, if only physically, the sense of self-identity is acquired only through a long process of maturation. And during that process the individual constantly claims a sense of identity whose relative superficiality is only comprehended in later years.

3. In the absence of mature sense of self-identity, it is to be expected that the collective actions of the participants will tend to be unbalanced, overreactive, unnecessarily defensive and generally immature. In extreme cases this may conceal a deep sense of collective insecurity, however it is disguised. The depths of this may be illustrated by the following classic description for the case of an individual :

« Even when one felt that what was being said was an expression of someone, the fragment of a self behind the words or actions was not Julie. There might be someone addressing us, but in listening to a schizophrenic, it is very difficult to know « who » is talking, and it is just as difficult to know « whom » one is addressing... One may begin to recognize patches of speech, or fragments of behaviour cropping up at different times, which seem to belong together by reason of similarities of the intonation, the vocabulary, syntax, the preoccupations in the utterance or to cohere as behaviour by reason of certain sterotyped gestures or mannerisms. It seemed therefore that one was in the presence of various fragments, or incomplete elements, of different « personalities » in operation at the one time...

With Julie it was not difficult to carry on a verbal exchange of a kind, but without her seeming to have any overall unity but rather a constellation of quasi-autonomous partial systems, it was difficult to speak to « her ». However... even this state of near chaotic nonentity was by no means irreversible and fixed in its disintegration. She would sometimes marvellously come together again and display a most pathetic realization of her plight. But she was terrified of these moments of integration, for various reasons. Among others, because she had to sustain in them intense anxiety; and because the process of disintegration appeared to be remembered and dreaded as an experience so awful that there was refuge for her in her unintegration, unrealness, and deadness. Julie's being as a chronic schizophrenic was thus characterized by lack of unity and by division into what might variously be called partial « assemblies », complexes, partial systems, or « internal objects ». Each of these partial systems had recognizable features and distinctive ways of its own. By following through these postulates, many features of her behaviour become explicable.

The fact that her self-being was not assembled in an allover manner, but was split into various partial assemblies or systems, allows us to understand that various functions which presuppose the achievement of personal unity or at least a high degree of personal unity could not be present in her, as indeed they were not.

Personal unity is a prerequisite of reflective awareness, that is, the ability to be aware of one's self acting relatively unself-consciously, or with a simple primary non-reflective awareness. In Julie, each partial system could be aware of the processes going on in another system which was split off from it. For example, if in talking to me, one system was « speaking », there seemed to be no overall unity within her whereby « she » as a unified person could be aware of what this system was saying or doing.

In sofar as reflective awareness was absent, « memory », for which reflective awareness would seem to be prerequisite, was very patchy... The absence of a total experience of her being as a whole meant that she lacked the unified experience on which to base a clear idea of the « boundary » of her being. Such an overall « boundary » was not, however, entirely lacking... Rather, each system seemed to have a boundary of its own. That is to say, to the awareness that characterized one system, another system was liable to appear outside itself... It was only « from the outside » that one could see that different conflicting systems of her being were active at the same time. Each partial system seemed to have within it its own focus or centre of awareness : it had its own very limited memory schemata and limited ways of structuring percepts; its own quasi-autonomous drives or component drives; its own tendency to preserve its autonomy, and special dangers which threatened its autonomy. She would refer to these diverse aspects as « he » or « she », or address them as « you ». That is, instead of having a reflective awareness of those aspects of herself, « she » would perceive the operation of a partial system as though it was not « her », but belonged outside. She would be hallucinated ».

(R.D. Laing. The Divided Self; a study of sanity and madness. London, Tavistock, 1960, p. 214-7).

4. A widely evident characteristic of lack of collective self-awareness in meetings is the tendency to separate totally the **substantive** issues which are the concern of the meeting from the **administrative and procedural** issues which determine the meetings ability to focus on them. In the case of meetings concerned with social systems, this amounts to a form of schizophrenia in which the participants collectively perceive themselves as divorced from the social system on which they comment. This attitude may also be reflected in any associated bodies or programmes which are organized such that the need or possibility of their own transformation does not emerge from the **substantive** investigations with which they are concerned, except possibly as an **administrative** postscript in the light of administrative criteria. This situation can be caricatured by the example of a meeting, in a smoke-filled room with unopend windows, on the subject of « environmental air pollution », during which participants fail to reflect on their own condition, their unwillingness to act (to open the windows), and the significance of this attitude for their substantive concerns.

5. A number of factors contribute to a sense of collective identity :

5.1 A collective awareness of the range of processes to which the meeting is subject, namely the types of interaction which occur and the conditions or states into which the meeting may be drawn, whether usefully or uselessly.

5.2 A collective awareness of the context of the meeting, the uniqueness of the meeting in relation to that context, and the contribution to change within the contextual environment.

5.3 A collective sense of the limitations of the meeting as a whole and in terms of the abilites of its component groups, and the illusions to which they tend to be subject. This includes an acceptance of its finite nature and its necessary termination.

5.4 A collective recognition of the developmental potential of the meeting, namely the ways in which the meeting processes can become more mature and the possibilities that will thus be opened up for action more appropriate to circumstances.

6. There is much to be said for the Delphic « Know thyself » and the Biblical « Physician, heal thyself » as applied to a meeting. From this collective awareness of the meeting as a whole emerges a new ability to respond to social conditions.

« A man may have a sense of his presence in the world as a real, live, whole, and in a temporal sense, continous person. As such, he can live out into the world and meet others : a world and others experienced as equally real, alive, whole and continuous...

The individual, then, may experience his own being... as diffentiated from the rest of the world in ordinary circumstances so clearly that his identity and autonomy are never in question... as having an inner con-

sistence, substantiality, genuineness, and worth; as spatially coextensive with the body...

Such a basically ontologically secure person will encounter all the hazards of life, social, ethical, spiritual, biological, from a central firm sense of his own and other people's reality and identity. It is often difficult for a person with such a sense of his integral selfhood and personal identity, of the permanency of things, of the reliability of natural processes, of the substantiality of others, to transpose himself into the world of an individual whose experiences may be utterly lacking in any unquestionable self-validating certainties... (such as) an over-riding sense of personal consistency or cohesiveness ».

(R.D. Lang. The Divided Self. p. 40-3).

CONSCIOUS GROUPS : a stage beyond group consciousness ?

1. It is useful to distinguish between (a) the awareness an individual may have of the group of other individuals with whom he or she interacts, namely « group consciousness », and (b) an awareness by a group as a whole of itself and its activities, namely a « conscious group ». The first is necessary to enable individuals to respond appropriately to each other within a group. In a group this awareness may only be significantly developed in a small minority of individuals. The second arises when the individuals are collectively and simultaneously aware of the pattern of those interactions between the group members. In this case the majority of individuals have a group conscious awareness, and it is the synergetic effects of their interaction which introduce the new level of significance.

2. Little is known about conscious groups and what they could achieve. There are clues in the statements of members of a football or a commando team who are instinctively aware of one another's movements. The same may be said of an integrated dance troupe. But such examples are purely physical. How would it be to participate in a group which was physically, emotionally and mentally attuned ? Statements from members of some intentional community groups suggest that they are moving in that direction. Perhaps traditional religious communities (e.g. monasteries) could report occasional achievements in this respect.

3. When learning to ride a bicycle, we have to deliberately correct excessive responses in order to maintain balance – until such correctional moves are made instinctively. In a conscious group, excessive responses resulting in energy disequilibrium are also smoothly corrected by an integrated response within the group – whereas this would normally only be achieved through a series of uncoordinated procedures, characterized by a heated mix of rational and irrational argument and expression, leading to changes of an almost spastic quality.

4. Consider the clues implicit in the following description of an experiment in avant-garde music :

« Correspondences are based on the principle of mutual psychological reactions and attempt to « join » the four participants with each other and to make them increasingly dependent on each other. There are four levels :

(1) The music material is entirely fixed, but the choice of instruments is left open.

(2) Each musician possesses only incomplete instructions, in order to be able to play, each musician must search for missing material in the performance of the neighbour (pitches from the first, length from the second, etc.) and react to it in different ways : imitate, adapt himself to it (if need be further develop), do the opposite, become disinterested or something else (something « unheard of »).

(3) The composed material is completely substituted by the description of the possibility arising from the reactions of the performers to their neighbours.

(4) On the last level, it is left up to the performers whether to cease playing or to continue » (Vinko Globokar, Drama and Correspondences. Harmonia Mundi 20 21803-A. Comment on recording).

5. A sign of the emergence of a conscious group – from the point of view of anyone involved – is that each is moved to act in the « right » way at the « right » time, although there does not appear to be any central coordinating agent or any explicit design. The actions of the whole are very much greater than can be comprehended from the individual actions. How each awareness interpenetrates the others is not yet clear. The « eyes » do not understand how they are related to the « feet » or the « hands », and the right and left « feet » do not understand how their movements harmonize through their opposition to each other (a yin-yang cycle) to move the body forward. A similar situation arises early in the growth of a child.

6. The prime characteristic of a conscious group is its awareness of itself and its place and rhythm in the scheme of things. Within itself it mirrors an awareness of how its environment is organized. Each action on the environment is paralleled by an equivalent displacement of energies within itself. There is a « magical sympathy » between the outer and the inner worlds. It is through this inner/outer attunement that the group is able to increase considerably the amount and range of energies that it can handle and focus in order to transform itself and its environment as it evolves into a greater identity.

7. Participation in a **conscious conference** would be a dramatically uplifting experience. But how are we to allow our « instruments » to respond in their respective ways to the « tune » which enfolds us ? And how would it be if such a conference was itself made up of a number of conscious small groups, each attuned to a particular aspect of the whole ?
(Extract from a document at a New Age Congress, Florence, 1978)

PROBLEM DISPLACEMENT

1. Frequently a social problem can be eliminated to the satisfaction of all concerned in a conference on the question, by eliminating the particular set of symptoms by which it was recognized and which gave rise to the call for remedial action. Resources will be marshalled to that end and considerable pride taken in whatever is achieved.

2. Action of this kind often merely ensures that a new set of symptoms emerges in some **other** social domain about which participants feel no need to express concern. The new set may well be considered more acceptable, possibly because the symptoms with which they are unfamiliar do not appear to be so serious as those to which they are highly sensitive for professional or other reasons.

3. The new symptoms may be less easy to focus on as the basis for an effective campaign for remedial action. Some time may also be required before the new set of symptoms can be effectively recognized.

4. It may in fact be very difficult for an organization to see that its programmes merely **displace** a problem into the jurisdiction of some other body – whose own actions will eventually result in the problem being displaced back again or into the jurisdiction of a third body.

5. Institutions may deliberately « move » problems through a network of jurisdictions as a way of legitimating their own continued existence.

6. Such displacement may be difficult to detect because one set of symptoms may be apparent in legislation (e.g. legal discrimination), but when eliminated may then take on an economic character (e.g. economic discrimination), and then a cultural character, etc.

7. Such discplacement chains may loop back on themselves and develop side chains which are difficult to detect since each organization is only sensitive to the problem symptoms in its own domain and considers symptoms of the same problem in other domains to be acceptable or of secondary importance.

8. This situation makes it difficult to compare the presence or absence of problems in different geographical areas because of the different forms its symptoms take, the acceptability of some forms in some areas, or the lack of sensitivity to them.

9. The challenge is to find ways of preventing meetings from becoming « problem transformation/displacement processes » which effectively « export » the problem to another sector.

PARTICIPANT PREFERENCES FOR DISTINCT CHANGE STRATEGIES

1. People tend to move or drift through the social system into those groups and organizations which are engaged in the change processes most congenial to them. As individuals develop they may reach stages when a given change process and its organizational support seems unfruitful or unsuited to their desire for self-expression. The individual needs fresh fields to conquer, a new life-style or a new mode of work. The development of the individual implies life-style mobility and organizational and social change. Social change and development requires development of the individual to adapt to new challenges. This is also the case in meetings.

2. The difficulty is that society currently sanctions movement **within** organizational and career systems but not **between** them. The individual is therefore forced into one particular mode of self-expression for his whole working life unless he wishes to run the risk of being labelled a grass-hopper or dilettante, or of being viewed as an ignorant outsider (a « foreigner ») in the systems into which he attempts to move. Participants are faced with this difficulty in conferences which have groups emphasizing distinct modes.

3. Within one system an individual can of course develop other modes of self-expression but only as **secondary** modes within the constant and overriding primary mode (e.g. as an **executive** in the **business** system, an individual can move from a high technology corporation to a commercial art corporation; the switch from science to art is contained within the unchanging **management** framework).

4. The problem in conferences is therefore whether it is possible to provide an organizational setting in which an individual can develop secondary modes of expression and allow any of them to become primary for any desired length of time in response to the flow of the meeting.

5. The problem is complicated by the very radical nature of the differences between approaches to change advocated or undertaken in meetings, as well as between the corresponding modes of expression of the individual engaged in them. There does not appear to be any systematic listing of **change strategies** but the following list is an indication of the variety.

1. political action
2. scientific and technological development
3. economic and financial development
4. education, training
5. art, music
6. architectural and machine design, urban planning
7. religious faith, prayer
8. social engineering, social development
9. philosophical or esoteric understanding
10. behavioural and perceptual modifications by drugs
11. public information, media, propaganda
12. community development
13. drama, theatre
14. organizational development
15. legislative action
16. military or police action
17. direct action, violent civilian protest
18. personal encounter, dialogue, sex
19. self-exploration, meditation
20. mediation, negotiation
21. manual labour.

6. Ironically, the proponents of a particular form of change tend to perceive it as the only viable or significant form (e.g. to a political activist everything of any significance is political). They are unable to detect the manner in which their action is counter-balanced, checked, contained or even undermined by the other forms of change. Similarly it is not possible to determine **how such different strategies can be blended harmoniously together** into a mix which can ensure appropriate change. No body has a mandate to attempt this, and no integrative discipline exists to legitimate such an approach.

PARTICIPANT INTERACTION MODES

1. Meetings as a whole, or groups of participants within a meeting, may give preference to one or more modes of interaction possibly at different stages of the meeting. This effectively determines the style of the meeting and may either attract or alienate certain participants.

2. Primarily verbal modes :

2.1 Fact-oriented : The stress is on stating information (often quantitative) considered to be factual, querying such facts, comparing them, and extrapolating from them to domains about which fewer facts are known by those present.

2.2 Affect-oriented : The stress is on the expression of emotional opinion concerning different experiences and facts. Participants may be emotionally aroused by the repeated reinforcement of certain opinions.

2.3 Concept-oriented : In this mode, categories of fact and experience are compared, criticized, re-ordered, possibly with only incidental reference to the referents.

2.4 Doctrine-oriented : A set of beliefs shared by participants may give rise to statements reaffirming and justifying them, as well as extending their application to new domains. This includes interaction about legal and procedural matters.

2.5 Value-oriented : Statements stressing the qualitative importance of particular approaches to any of the above.

2.6 Action prescriptive : Here the stress is on what should be done, usually in the light of any of the above.

3. Primarily non-verbal modes :

3.1 Physical sharing : feasting/drinking, dance, physical games, group exercises.

3.2 Emotional sharing : drama, song, music, group empathy exercises.

3.3 Intellectual sharing : conceptual « resonance » of participants (« on the same wavelength »), usually stimulated by occasional words; drama, music.

3.4 Status affirming : actions which reinforce the importance of a participant and of those who articulate the beliefs or doctrines he shares.

3.5 Communal celebration : partially ritualized collective affirmation of values, and renewal of participant belief therein.

3.6 Action : shared work, whether constructive or destructive.

PARTICIPANT DIFFERENCES IN PRE-LOGICAL BIAS

1. At the basis of the personality of every person or group active in a meeting, it is useful to recognize a set of pre-rational temperamental biases which are reflected in the aesthetical, theoretical, value and action preferences and in the preferred mode of discussion. The preferred mode of each individual or group may be positioned somewhere along axes of bias such as the following.

2. **Order vs disorder,** namely the range between a preference for fluiditity, muddle, chaos, etc. and a preference for system, structure, conceptual clarity, etc.

3. **Static vs dynamic,** namely the range between a preference for the changeless, eternal, etc. and a preference for movement, for explanation in genetic and process terms, etc.

4. **Continuity vs discrete,** namely the range between a preference for wholeness, unity, etc. and a preference for discreteness, plurality, diversity, etc.

5. **Inner vs outer,** namely the range between a preference for being able to project oneself into the objects of one's experience (to experience them as one experiences oneself), and a preference for a relatively external, objective relation to them.

6. **Sharp focus vs soft focus,** namely the range between a preference for clear, direct experience and a preference for threshold experiences which are felt to be saturated with more meaning than is immediately present.

7. **This world vs other world,** namely the range between a preference for belief in the spatio-temporal world as self-explanatory and a preference for belief that it is not self-explanatory (but can only be comprehended in the light of other factors and frames of reference).

8. **Spontaneity vs process,** namely the range between a preference for chance, freedom, accident, etc. and a preference for explanations subject to laws and definable processes.

9. Such prelogical biases may be at the base of choice of life-style, discipline, policy, mode of action, mode of presentation of information, etc. To the extent that people have very different profiles in terms of these axes, every particular meeting position, viewpoint or programme will have only limited appeal.

10. The challenge is to design meetings which are hospitable to all these biases in order that any outcome will be significant to those in the outside world who share them. Meetings are usually « successful » when participants share a set of biases and are a « frustrating failure » when a wider spectrum is represented. In neither case is the problem of overcoming such differences recognized, nor is the validity of any bias respected if it is represented by a minority. It is not surprising therefore that the results of « successful » meetings have little impact on those whose biases were not blended into their outcomes.
(Adapted from · W T Jones. The Romantic Syndrome; toward a new method in cultural anthropology and history of ideas. The Hague, Martinus Nijhof, 1961).

PARTICIPANT PERSONALITY NEEDS AND PROBLEMS

1. Wherever individuals groups or institutions work to remedy social problems, there is an inability of all concerned to admit openly the psychosocial needs of the individuals and groups involved. It is only in informal discussion, and in the absence of the concerned individual, that there is frank discussion of how to confer a sense of prestige by suitable juggling of organizational procedures and positions, appropriate use of flattery, etc.

2. The facilitation of individual « ego trips », for example, is often an absolutely essential condition for their further support of a meeting or project. Even when two organizations or initiatives should be merged in the light of all available information, this will be opposed (behind-the-scenes), by the personalities involved, unless their status needs can be fulfilled.

3. Such concerns, whether for a person individually, or for a group as represented by an individual, are basic to all social action. When they are not even recognized in behind-the-scenes planning, they are recognized tacitly in the dynamics of interaction with the person in question.

4. The inability to handle these matters in open debate severly inhibits the manner in which organizations or meetings can function. Even in crisis situations, discussion of action to be taken during a meeting will not occur until these other matters have been satisfactorily resolved through behind-the-scenes manoeuvering. Frequently it is questionable, even in a crisis situation, whether a given individual is not more interested in the recognition accorded to himself or his group than in any substantive matter which may be discussed.

5. Organizational action of any kind (and even in response to crises) may be perceived primarily as providing a legitimate opportunity for appropriate conference and organizational ritual to satisfy the psychosocial needs of the individuals and groups involved. The situation is particularly serious when the personality needs are neurotic or border on the psychopathic. There are many well-documented examples of this amongst national leadership, and in the leadership of groups represented in conferences or having responsibilities during them. Such matters cannot be discussed in open debate.

6. Clearly the priority accorded to these needs, and the inability to give explicit recognition to them in organizational documents or debate, despite their fundamental importance to organized action emerging during conferences, constitute a constraint upon the full realization of human potential. This is the case both because it distorts the manner by which a person develops through action within an organization or meeting, and because it distorts the manner by which an organization or meeting is able to act.

PARTICIPANT ENTRAPMENT I : alienation of committed activists

1. Each generation produces a number of well-qualified individuals concerned with one or more social problems and prepared to commit themselves, and possibly their careers, in an effort to achieve a significant impact upon them. Such people frequently instigate or function actively in meetings.

2. As in any occupation, some years are spent learning the dimensions of the problem and the possibilities for action, especially in a conference environment. Thereafter, however, many of them find themselves forced into positions of compromise. In an effort to stick to their original values, they come into conflit with conference structures and resource realities which often prevent anything more than token action.

3. They are encouraged to be patient and find that patience changes little. They find that those activists who have preceded them, and continue to attend meetings, lapse easily into cynicism or are satisfied with minimal change. They find that those who are similarly inspired, and who should be their allies, are frequently hostile and suspicious of any form of cooperation of more than a token nature.

4. Some become aware that even when their recommendations are fully accepted in a conference, and implemented by some organizational system with apparent success, the system in effect nullifies such achievements by adjusting itself so that other different problems emerge. There is then no end to such a chain of displaced problems, many of which are as much internal to the system of meetings and organizations as they are external foci of the action of a meeting or an organization.

5. These situations finally lead to a withdrawal (or « loss of faith ») of many of the committed activists.

6. This withdrawal takes place **without** transfer of acquired experience and insight to others who might later be able to overcome the dynamics of entrapment. There is no accumulation of learning. Those who know about the dynamics are often unable to speak about them, or have lost the desire to do so. Those who do speak about them are frequently ill-informed and merely provoke a repetition of learning cycles.

7. This withdrawal may well take the form of a refusal to participate in meetings in which their insight would be invaluable. They may argue that « large conferences are a useless waste of time ». Such

conferences then become meetings of the uninitiated with all that implies for their outcome.

8. Some withdraw partially and are willing to attend conferences if they are given some significant role in their organization, or as speakers. As such they may be totally indifferent to the impact on participants of the conflicting views disseminated by themselves and their colleagues of the same frame of mind.

9. Other eminent individuals attend conferences but remain silent in order to allow time for the uninitiated participants to interact and learn from the experience. Again this may prevent their experience from being appropriately reflected in the outcome.

PARTICIPANT ENTRAPMENT II : repetition of learning cycles

1. In many social domains, reflected in conferences, time and a variety of collective experiences have created amongst those concerned an awareness of which actions are feasible, viable and useful and which are not. Such collective learning is difficult to transfer to others in such a manner as to enable them to understand the (usually relatively sophisticated) dynamics which limit the value of seemingly obvious positive actions.

2. Since there is a certain turnover of organizations, groups and individuals concerned with the problem in that domain, and represented at relevant conferences, those entering a meeting for the first time tend to initiate proposals, recommendations and programmes which past experience has shown to be a waste of resources or of otherwise limited value. They will however have difficulty in recognizing this and will attribute past failure to ineffectiveness of those involved at that time.

3. The consequence is that any group (possibly of institutions) with experience extending over several « programme generations » always has latecomers who are drawn together at a meeting in support of projects which constitute the **repetition of a learning cycle.** Such cycles must play themselves out in order that the latecomers may acquire the understanding as to why those particular actions are of limited effectiveness. They will however then be repeated when the number of newcomers again becomes great enough to make it difficult to redirect their attention during a meeting from such seemingly obvious courses of action – particularly when the obvious corses attract good press coverage with its immediate pay-off.

4. This repeated fragementation of groups and the use of resources in support of ineffective programmes clearly limits the ability of meetings to respond adequately to any problem situation. it is also discouraging to those who have already acquired, through such learning cycles, the necessary knowledge base from which more effective programmes could be designed.

5. However, it is also the desire of the latecomers to apply their creative energies without regard for past experience which leads to the acquisition of new knowledge.

6. The situation is such that it is seldom possible to blend both forms of knowledge in a meeting in an effective response to the problem situation.

NON-LINEAR AGENDAS AND LINEAR THINKING

1. There is increasing expression of regret at the prevalence of « linear thinking ». By this is meant any ordering of concepts which is sequential between (or within) subdivisions but contains no loops linking non-proximate elements in the sequence. Such linearity constitutes a method of ordering experience which is recognized as crude in relationship to the complexity of the environment.

2. Linear thinking is reinforced by many of the conventional responses to constraints on presentation of information :

- The necessarily linear sequence of : words in sentences, paragraphs, sections, and chapters in documents. (This is only slightly modified by the device of parallel columns of text).
- The linear schemes for numbering subdivisions of any structured document or thesaurus.
- The sequential ordering of words of a speaker at a meeting.

3. The agenda of a meeting conforms to this pattern of linearity in the sequence of agenda items. Even the use of parallel sessions or sequences of sessions maintains the linearity. There are no particularly satisfactory procedures to ensure cross-fertilization between sessions and convergence on new levels of significance or synthesis.

4. An interesting alternative to the conventional representation of an agenda, items with a linear sequence having a beginning and an end, the line may instead be considered to be circular, such that the end joins the beginning. The agenda items are then associated with points on the circumference through which the meeting necessarily progresses sequentially.

5. This raises the interesting questions :

- Should the subdivision of the circumference into agenda items constitute a complete set as implied by this approach – thus « exhausting » the topic ? And does it, if only by an « other matters » item ?
- Should the last element in any such sequence link back to the first – « closing the loop » ? Or is the relationship between the beginning and the end unclear and, if so, why ?

6. For more complex agendas, with distinct themes considered to be complementary or in some way related, one circular sequence may be subdivided for each such principal theme. But rather than separating the circles, they may then be represented as overlapping, such that the related agenda items in different thematic circles are at the points of overlap. Since such circles necessarily overlap at two points, one can indicate the priority of theme A over B, and the other the priority of theme B over A – necessary conditions for functional interweaving.

7. In order to move beyond this simple representation of non-linear interconnectedness, the communication links between **non-adjacent** items, necessary to preserve the topology of the representation, may then be inserted. This permits the agenda to be represented as a 3-dimensional configuration of functionnally related items in which the necessary relationships to maintain the integrity of the configuration are explicitly indicated.

8. This procedure has the advantage of challenging any simplistic comprehension of the verbal description normally used to identify individual agenda items. Then the meaning to be associated with such descriptors emerges to a greater extent from the position of the items within the configuration. The latter also raises useful quetions about the relative importance of agenda items possibly leading to the combination or subdivision of some of them.

9. Clarifying the non-linear relationships between the agenda items can guide conceptualization and action concerning the relationship between meeting sub-division (into groups, commissions, etc) and any attempt at synthesis in plenary.

10. Configurations of the kind described may also be considered as representing functional subdivision by subdivision of a spherical surface area rather than a line. From this point of view, the implications of subdivision by triangulation (the basis of topographical survey techniques), rather than by linear subdivision, should be considered. The former respects relationships, the latter ignores them.