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Climate Change and the Elephant in the Living Room

in quest of an endangered species

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This exploration was engendered by the approaches to climate change articulated in sessions of the general assembly of the World Academy of Art and Science (Hyderabad, 2008).

Introduction

The debate on climate change has offered many occasions for reference to the proverbial "elephant in the living room". Climate change itself has been seen in this way as an unmentionable feature in a context of efforts to ensure "business as usual". Indicative examples include:

- discussion of the biased coverage of the BBC by John Vidal (*The BBC can't win on climate change*, *The Guardian*, 10 July 2007)
- discussion with regard to understanding of the issues by children in the ProgressiveKid (*The Climate Change Elephant*, 24 March 2008)

Now that "climate change" has become an acceptable topic of discourse, the concern in what follows is the identification of any elephants in the living room with respect to climate change discourse -- namely topics that are implicitly recognized but cannot be formally acknowledged. The expression helpfully illustrates the possible dimensions of the challenge of overpopulation -- that it is so easy to ignore in common discourse. The argument builds on a detailed earlier study (*Institutionalized Shunning of Overpopulation Challenge: incommunicability of fundamentally inconvenient truth*, 2008).

The approach is to consider a range of such elephants and to clarify understandings of the "art of not seeing", notably in the light of "negative hallucination". These considerations are used to clarify the nature of possible elephants in the discourse on climate change.

Examples of other elephants in the living room

It is first appropriate to note the range of different elephants that have been so identified by different constituencies, whether or not they are to be recognized as a "herd" of the same species. Examples include:

- **global financial crisis**, as indicated by the Prime Minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd, when chairing a session on climate change at the Progressive Governance Summit (London, April 2008)
- **recession**, ignored by the focus on the credit squeeze -- as reported by the Australian *ABC* program (18 September 2008)
- **indebtedness**, whether in the form of housing mortgages (as in the case of the subprime issue), personal debt, public debt or foreign indebtedness, has been described in terms of the proverbial elephant
- **capitalism**, as submitted by the Anarchist Media Institute (Joseph Toscano, *Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (Green Paper): Capitalism -- the Elephant in the Living Room*) with respect to the Australian Government's Green Paper on carbon trading
- **ethics**, as suggested by J. Cassell (*The elephant in the living room: ethics as a screen for covering one's butt*, *Critical Care and Resuscitation*, 7, 2005, pp. 244-245) with reference however to the social "climate" in which doctors and hospitals are deathly afraid of being sued.
- **corporate social irresponsibility**, as analyzed by Herbert Girardet (*Surviving the Century: facing climate chaos and other global challenges*, 2007)
- **growing gap between the haves and have-nots** has been named as the elephant in the G8 living room (Melvin Rhodes, *The G8 and the Elephant in the Living Room*, *World News and Prophecy*, 4, August 2001, 7)
- **nuclear power**, considered both as an elephant in the living room and a white elephant (*Giant elephant joins anti-nuclear protest*, *Scotsman*, 23 September 2006)

Cognitively much more challenging are such elephants as:

- **intellectual self-censorship**, notably as analyzed by Craig Calhoun (*Sociology in America: a history*, 2007) with regard to the intellectual "climate" of the McCarthy era and the study by Samuel Stouffer (*Communism, Conformity and Civil Liberties*, 1955)
- **sexual abuse by clergy**, as reviewed by Richard Lennan (*Is the Church past its use-by date? Seeking hope in the midst of crisis*, *Compass*, 36, 2002, 2) with regard to the "climate of distrust"
- **combat trauma from closeup killing in warfare**, as analyzed by Rachel M. MacNair (*Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress: the psychological consequences of killing*, 2002) and described by Lieutenant Colonel Elspeth Cameron Ritchie as 'the dead elephant in the living room that nobody wants to talk about.'
- **subsidized corn/soybean/feedlot**, preventing emergence of more natural ecosystems (Daniel Imhoff and Jo Ann Baumgartner, *Farming and the Fate of Wild Nature: essays in conservation-based agriculture*, 2006)
- **unidentified flying objects**, in a commentary on UFO disclosures by Whitley Strieber, Ralph Metzner of the Green Earth Foundation (*The Elephant is Stampeding in the Living Room*, 1 April 2007) includes reference to the "doubly denied double elephant", namely UFO/Alien presence and official cover-up of this.
- **political parties having kept citizens from voting** on a massive scale in some "democratic" countries, notably the USA.

These examples highlight the possibility, as in the wild, that elephants may be invisible to some but readily detectable to others. More challenging is the implication that the "elephant" invisible to one group may be readily visible to another and that each group has its own "elephants" of which it is consciously unaware. This was one inspiration for the profiling of thousands of "world problems" in the World Problems Project -- where each was typically acknowledged as challenging by one international constituency and considered irrelevant (if not nonsensical) by others.

Elephants in the climate change discourse: deforestation and population

Significant attention has been given to deforestation as such an elephant, especially tropical deforestation:

- as reported by Daniel Howden (*Deforestation: the hidden cause of global warming*, *The Independent*, 14 May 2007) and by Martin Wright (*Flying clouds the real climate culprit*, *BBC News*, 22 January 2008)
- as discussed by Andrew W. Mitchell, Katherine Secoy and Niki Mardas (*Forests: The Elephant in the Living Room of Climate Change* In: *Forests First in the Fight Against Climate Change: the VivoCarbon Initiative*, 2007) as part of the Global Canopy Program

Overpopulation, and the associated challenges of overshoot, are also so recognized. However it would appear that their degree of invisibility as elephants renders them more than unusually difficult to detect in official discourse, as discussed elsewhere (*Institutionalized Shunning of Overpopulation Challenge: incommunicability of fundamentally inconvenient truth*, 2008). Examples include:

- Paul R. Ehrlich and Anne H. Ehrlich (*The Dominant Animal: human evolution and the environment*, 2008, p. 140) remark:

> Human population growth has been so prodigious in recent centuries that it has also become a major driver of environmental deterioration. in the extent of pollution, consumption of nature's resources, and destruction of habitats needed by other species. On top of other effects, population size is also the "elephant in the living room" on the issue of global heating, for if the size of the human population were only half what it is today, the chances of avoiding a climate catastrophe would be much better; many fewer people would be emitting greenhouse gases into the atmosphere; many fewer people would be crowding onto vulnerable coastlines. These and many other issues vital to the future of civilization are inextricably connected to trends in population size.

- Jim Stinson (*The Environmental Threat in the Living Room*, *OpEdNews*, 19 May 2008) notes:

> Limiting population is the environmental elephant in the living room: everyone pretends it's not there. Just a single generation of couples world-wide with an average of one child each would help the environment far more than all other efforts combined. Doing this, or even cutting the world population in half wouldn't solve our problems completely, but it would sure make them solvable.... But maybe population control can take a lesson from global warming. That is a truth so inconvenient that many still won't accept it and no one wants to make the sacrifices necessary to deal with it. Nevertheless our noses have been rubbed in this inconvenient truth so long, so loudly, so forcefully that we are at least coming to acknowledge it. We are admitting, however reluctantly, that yes, there is an elephant in the living room after all.

- The point has been made by Sovereignty, a UK-based independent advocacy group (*Population: the elephant in the living room*, 2006) in citing thre Science Editor of the Independent, Steve Connor (*Overpopulation is main threat to planet*, *The Independent*, 7 January 2006)

Challenge of tracking living room elephants

Collective cognitive conspiracies: Eviatar Zerubavel (*The Elephant in the Room: silence and denial in everyday life*, 2006) clarifies why truths known to all are ignored. Zerubavel shows how such conspiracies evolve, illuminating the social pressures that cause people to deny what is right before their eyes. Each conspirator's denial is symbiotically complemented by the others', and silence is usually more intense when there are more people conspiring -- and especially when there are significant power differences among them. He concludes by showing that the longer the "elephants" are ignored, the larger they loom in people's minds, as each avoidance triggers an even greater spiral of denial. Significantly he concludes:

> Ironically, it is precisely the effort to collectively deny their ubiquitous presence that makes "elephants" so big. As soon as we acknowledge it they almost magically begin to shrink. And only then, when we are no longer collude to ignore it, can we finally get the proverbial elephant out of the room.

Zerubavel seemingly fails to compare such conspiracy "not to see" with the conspiracy to see something that is not necessarily there, as in groupthink (*Groupthink: the Search for Archaeoraptor as a Metaphoric Tale*, 2002).

Bounded awareness: From the perspective of business decision-making, Max Bazerman and Dolly Chugh (*Decisions Without Blinders,* Harvard Business Review, 84, January 2006, 1) argue that "bounded awareness" is what stops managers from seeing the elephant in the living room:

> Bounded awareness can occur at various points in the decision-making process. First, executives may fail to see or seek out key information needed to make a sound decision. Second, they may fail to use the information that they do see because they aren't aware of its relevance. Finally, executives may fail to share information with others, thereby bounding the organisation's awareness.

Inattentional blindness: It is also relevant to note the constraints of time in relation to memory of the sensing of any "elephant", given that any detectable pattern -- visual or oherwise -- may be transient or episodic in nature. Such inattentional blindness has been well demonstrated by the so-called "invisible gorilla" video experiments (D. J. Simons and C. F. Chabris, *Gorillas in our midst: sustained inattentional blindness for dynamic events*, *Perception*, 1999; Arien Mack and Irvin Rock, *Inattentional Blindness: an overview*. *Psyche*, 1999; Tanguy Chouard, *Memory bottleneck limits intelligence*, *Nature*, 15 April 2004). Further comments on the matter by Arien Mack (*Inattentional Blindness: reply to commentaries*. *Psyche*, 2001) are especially interesting in distinguishing the phenomena of Inattentional Blindness (IB), the Attentional Blink (AB), and Change Blindness (CB), each of which has been attributed to inattention, and has been vigorously investigated. A focal question addressed is whether they are failures of perception or of memory.

Blind spots: This term is of course used technically to refer to the physiological blind spot, the specific scotoma in the visual field that corresponds to the lack of light-detecting photoreceptor cells on the optic disc. It is also used to refer to the blind spot within a vehicle from which surrounding areas cannot be seen, notably while looking forward or through either the rear-view or side mirrors in an automobile.

Metaphorically it also used to refer to any subject about which a person or group is prejudiced or ignorant. It is in this sense that the challenge of detecting an elephant in the living room might be understood.

Camouflage: As with tracking elephants in the wild, it may be useful to consider the extent to which any in the living room might be well-camouflaged. Metaphorically this understanding might be helpful in considering whether an elephant is effectively hidden behind a screen of "foliage" (or even a "fig leaf") on which attention is more readily focused. This would notably be the case when the "foliage" was a different matter of concern.

Un tram peut en cacher un autre: This French warning to those crossing tram lines offers an instructive metaphor in the recognition of challenges. It might be loosely translated here as: One systemic crisis may conceal another. It may even herald its arrival.

This possibility has been reviewed by suggesting that the financial crisis of 2008 -- previously well-disguised -- could be used as a template through which to understand how future crises might currently be hidden behind less cognitively challenging matters of concern (*Systemic Crises as Keys to Systemic Remedies: a metaphorical Rosetta Stone for future strategy?* 2008).

Invisibility of elephants due to "negative hallucination": the "art of not seeing"

Negative hallucination is the active erasure of a perception; it produces a gap in reality, or a vague impression of unreality. It was first recognized by Sigmund Freud (*Psychical (or Mental) Treatment*, 1890). Later (*Delusion and Dream: An Interpretation in the Light of Psychoanalysis of Gradiva, a Novel by Wilhelm Jensen*, 1907) described it as "the **art of not seeing** and not recognising. people who were actually present" in the following terms:

> Harold, who, according to the girl's arraignment, was endowed with negative hallucination, understood the art of not seeing or recognizing people, and must from the beginning have had unconscious knowledge of what we do not discover until later.

Freud later posited that negative hallucination has a sort of logical anteriority relative to positive hallucination -- speculating in 1924 that when an unbearable reality cannot be perceived, a delusion appears to close the perceptual breach. His insight has provided a focus for studies such as the following:

- M. F. Basch (*Interference with Perceptual Transformation in the Service of Defense*. *Annual of Psychoanalysis*, 2, 1974, pp. 87-97.
- P. B. Neubauer (*Disturbances in Object Representation*. *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 42, 1987, pp. 335-351).

The most recent summary of the challenge of negative hallucination has been provided by Andre Green (*Key Ideas for a Contemporary Psychoanalysis: misrecognition and recognition of the unconscious*. Psychology Press, 2005, pp. 217-218) who comments:

> ...negative hallucination is the non-perception of an object or of a perceptible psychical phenomenon. It is thus a phenomenon involving the erasure of what should be perceived.... Freud gives us a glimpse of a whole psychic constellation at the origin of hallucinatory production. The latter results from a dual action based on an interface:
>
> -- On its external side: an undesirable, unbearable, or intolerable perception leads to a negative hallucination which translates the wish to reject it to the point of denying the existence of the perceived objects
>
> -- On its internal side: an unconscious representation of a wish (abolished) presses towards consciousness but finds itself hindered from doing so.... Although Freud does not say so explicitly, negative hallucination plays an essential role in the concept -- difficult to conceptualize -- of the repression of reality

"Not seeing", in the form of shunning, has of course long been a feature of social and religious discrimination as discussed elsewhere (*Learnings from variants of shunning*, 2008). Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu (*Wylder's Hand*, 1864) offers a classic example from literature: "Captain Lake knew very well and gracefully practised the art of not seeing inconvenient acquaintances in the street."

Of much greater potential relevance are the forms of "not seeing" associated with the reports of "first contact" between "discoverers" and indigenous inhabitants. The argument is that the latter cannot "see" the "discoverers" because they do not have a framework (other than possibly one from myth) into which to place the experience. This is no doubt relevant to any human contact with aliens as discussed elsewhere (*Communicating with Aliens: the psychological dimension of dialogue*, 2000) However it raises the important possibility that the terrifying encounter with any living room elephant might be subject to similar processes of occlusion.

Symmetrical vision: beyond the self-delusion of optimism, positive thinking and hope-mongering

The possibility of individual and collective self-delusion with respect to the challenges of society has been explored elsewhere (*Being Positive Avoiding Negativity: management challenge of positive vs negative*, 2005; *In Quest of Optimism Beyond the Edge -- through avoidance of the answering process*, 2008; *Credibility Crunch engendered by Hope-mongering: "credit crunch" focus as symptom of a dangerous mindset*, 2008).

Karen A.Cerulo (*Never Saw It Coming: cultural challenges to envisioning the worst*, 2006) argues that people are by and large optimists -- better at imagining (or remembering) best-case scenarios than worst-case scenarios. Cerulo considers the role of society in fostering this attitude and the kinds of communities that develop this pattern of thought, or do not, and what this says about human ability to evaluate possible outcomes of decisions and events.

Cerulo introduces her argument by making the following point with regard to positive thinking:

> In the *Art of the Deal*, Donald Trump offered his readers the secret to his success: "Its been said that I believe in the power of positive thinking. In fact, I believe in the power of negative thinking... I always go into a deal anticipating the worst. If you plan for the worst -- it you can live with the worst -- the good will take care of itself."

The focus of Cerulo's argument is articulated as follows:

> Many would argue that the challenge stems from emotional or psychological forces. For some, envisioning the worst may be frightening, even terrifying. Others may see the exercise as too morose and find the task unreasonably depressing and void of all hope. Envisioning the worst may even prove disabling for some, with dismal ideas keeping them from productive action. To be sure, one cannot deny the psychoemotional pitfalls of imagining the worst. But I suggest that there are additional factors at play.

> Building on theories and ideas forwarded by both cultural and cognitive sociologists, I argue that the inability to envisage and specify the worst is, in part, a sociocultural phenomenon. I contend that the worst can become a blind spot, obscured or blurred by a variety of routine and patterned sociocultural practices -- practices that, despite any single individual's intentions, can veil the worst and make it difficult to define.

In her study Cerulo reviews a wide variety of settings in which the worst is hidden from view and investigates the sociocultural practices that sustain this perceptual gap. A notable contribution is her view that "positive asymmetry" is a dominant mode of thinking but, as such, not to be considered as exemplifying deviant or clouded thinking:

> Positive asymmetry is a powerful convention of quality evaluation. It is a way of seeing that foregrounds or underscores only the best potentials of people, places, objects and events. I argue that this biased perspective is embedded in many groups and communities. Further, it can be found in a broad array of sociocultural contexts and historical periods.

Cerulo provides a helpful review of the advantages and disadvantages of "negative asymmetry" characteristic of doom-mongerers and their defensive stance against the possible worst -- raising the question as to whether cultural change can occur, asking:

> Or are we doomed to accept the stance of positive asymmetry, continuing to be blindsided by incidents of the worst?

She then makes a case for a desirable alternative, "cognitive symmetry", arguing that the innovation sufficiently strong to spur cultural change may be found in the establishment of "symmetrical vision". A symmetrical vision of quality would then provide for an equal presence of best and worst. To that end she provides detailed comments on three steps towards this condition:

- acknowledgement of the bias towards positive asymmetry
- development of new evaluative practices
- consideration of the structural settings in which cognitive and cultural change is best implemented

The condition Cerulo identifies might be fruitfully compared with that recognized in cybernetics with regard to appropriate collection and consideration of both positive and negative feedback regarding the condition of a system, as discussed elsewhere (*Being Positive Avoiding Negativity: management challenge of positive vs negative*, 2005). The question is whether any such system is appropriately defined to take account of anomalies and surprises of the kind so helpfully analyzed by Nassim Nicholas Taleb (*The Black Swan: the impact of the highly improbable*, 2007). The challenge is especially daunting in a civilization characterized by the kind of "unconsciousness" analyzed by John Ralston Saul (*The Unconscious Civilization*, 1995).

Elephant as metaphor of the unconscious

David Brooks (*Teaching the Elephant*, *New York Times*, 3 December 2006) provides a summary of current use of the elephant as a metaphor of the human unconscious -- the automatic processes in contrast with the conscious intentional parts of the mind:

- he cites Jonathan Haidt (*The Happiness Hypothesis*: *finding modern truth in ancient wisdom*, 2005) for whom the elephant is the unconscious part of the brain, the amygdala and other regions; it produces emotions and visceral reactions, as well as processing information and forming intuitions.
- he cites Malcolm Gladwell (*Blink: the power of thinking without thinking*, 2006) describing how the elephant can pick up and process information, and even draw instant conclusions before the conscious mind is aware of what it is seeing
- he notes Daniel Goleman (*Social Intelligence: The New Science of Social Relationships*, 2006) describing how elephants talk to each other while scarcely involving the corresponding conscious minds in the conversation; fear, laughter and other emotions can sweep through crowds before the individuals in the crowds understand what's going on.
- he sees the elephant as the repository of tacit knowledge, acknowledging the insight of Robert Sternberg that tacit knowledge is procedural -- knowing how, not knowing what.

For Brooks:

> The elephant doesn't acquire its knowledge from self-conscious study. The elephant absorbs information from the environment. The neural architecture of the brain is shaped by experiences and habits, often during the sensitive periods early in life. This way of dividing the self is beginning to have a powerful influence on education policy and urban policy, and across a whole range of other practical spheres.

Insights into elephant invisibility from technical metaphors

Counter-measures: Beyond passive forms of camouflage, there is a case for exploring more "proactive approaches" to camouflaging that which is to be avoided -- possibly by the use of decoys or distractants of some kind -- as argued elsewhere (*Countermeasures: camouflage and decoys*, 2008).

Just as the "stealth" traditionally required by trackers is used metaphorically in relation to military initiatives, its use with respect to the behaviour of living room elephants is worthy of consideration, if they are to be successfully tracked. Such tracking may indeed require approaches that could be described metaphorically as "beneath the radar".

Potentially a source of greater anxiety is the manner in which any psychosocial challenge -- as a living room elephant -- might indeed

engage proactively with observers to ensure that it remains invisible, perhaps through processes at the observer-elephant interface analogous to catalysis.

Invisibility cloaks: Long envisaged by science fiction, the possibility of rendering objects invisible in some form is now considered feasible in the light of current research -- a matter of special interest to the military (*Military Seeks Invisibility Cloak*. *Wired*, 25 May 2006; *Plan for cloaking device unveiled*, *BBC News*, 25 May 2006).

The technology has been developed by teams involving J. B. Pendry (*Controlling Electromagnetic Fields*, *Science*, 23 June 2006, 312. 5781, pp. 1780-1782; *Metamaterial Electromagnetic Cloak at Microwave Frequencies*, *Science*, 10 November 2006, 314, 5801, pp. 977-980). The keys are special man-made "metamaterials" designed as a "cloak" to steer light and other forms of electromagnetic radiation around an object, rendering it as invisible as something hidden in a hole in space. The metamaterial can be designed to induce a desired change in the direction of such electromagnetic waves through modifying its structure rather than its chemistry.

There is presumably a case for exploring the conceptualization of this technology to determine whether its principles might apply in analogous manner to living room elephants.

Comprehending complexity: As discussed elsewhere (*Systematic analysis of incommunicability*, 2008), a valuable insight into incommunicability has been developed in the formal mathematical work of Ron Atkin (*Combinatorial Connectivities in Social Systems; an application of simplicial complex structures to the study of large organizations*, 1977). His insights have also been communicated in more accessible form (*Multidimensional Man: can man live in three dimensions?* 1981). Significantly they derive from work on communication within academic groups within a university.

The stress of Atkin's work on q-analysis is appropriately on facilitating communication of greater complexity. It clearly applies to the concealment of any higher orders of complexity relative to the comfort zone of the observer, as also discussed elsewhere (*Social organization determined by incommunicability of insights*) in the following terms -- where "hole" and "object" are effectively mathematically defined "living room elephants":

> Generally speaking it seems that action (of whatever kind) in the community can be seen as traffic in the abstract geometry. This traffic must naturally avoid the holes (because it is impossible for any such action to exist in a hole). The holes therefore appear strangely as objects in the structure, as far as the traffic is concerned. The difference is a logical one in that the word "q-hole" describes a static feature of the geometry, whilst the world "q-object" describes the experience of that hole by traffic which moves in that geometry.
>
> This suggests new ways of comprehending the nature of a problem. As an "object" this phenomenon is an obstacle to communication and comprehension and obliges those confronted with it to go "around" in order to sense the higher dimensionality by which it is characterized. Communications "bounce off" such objects. As a "hole" this phenomenon engenders, or is engendered by, a pattern of communication. It appears to function both as "source" and "sink". Atkin suggests that, in some way, which is not yet fully understood, object/holes act as sources of energy for the possible traffic around them. From the initial research it would appear that such objects/holes are characteristic of communication patterns in most complex organizational systems. It seems highly probable that they can also be detected in any partially ordered pattern of communication. "Societal problems", "human needs", and "human values" merit examination in this light from the perspective of different languages and modes of socio-economic organization.

This is a powerful formalization of insights into "living room elephants" -- from which communications might indeed be said to "bounce off", as implied by "shunning" (*Institutionalized Shunning of Overpopulation Challenge: incommunicability of fundamentally inconvenient truth*, 2008).

Atkin's work also points to the possibility of a "dumbing down" communication technology which would elicit premature closure -- as in groupthink. He in fact suggests how a set of academic committees might be managed by ensuring that their central focus is such a "hole". This reduces sensitivity to the connectivity associated with the more complex pattern (of "dots") by which the elephant would become visible. It could readily be argued that the use of such "dumbing down" processes are already well established in institutionalized media -- acting, somewhat curiously, as agencies of elephant conservation (as though the elephant represented an endangered species).

The formalization offered by q-analysis might also serve to highlight the existence and nature of higher order questions (cf *Engaging with Questions of Higher Order: cognitive vigilance required for higher degrees of twistedness*, 2004; *Question Avoidance, Evasion, Aversion and Phobia: why we are unable to escape from traps*, 2006; *Conformality of 7 WH-questions to 7 Elementary Catastrophes: an exploration of potential psychosocial implications*, 2006). The living room elephant might then be understood as a locus or nexus of a set of unasked questions of such a higher order.

Le Chatelier's Principle: From a cybernetic perspective, complex systems can be understood to oppose their own proper function, articulated as a principle by Stafford Beer (*The Cybernetic Cytoblast -- management itself*. Chairman's Address to the International Cybernetics Congress, September 1969):

> Reformers, critics of institutions, consultants in innovation, people in sort who "want to get something done", often fail to see this point They cannot understand why their strictures, advice or demands do not result effective change. They expect either to achieve a measure of success in their own terms or to be flung off the premises. But an ultrastable system (like a social institution)... has no need to react in either of these ways. It specialises in equilibrial readjustment which is to the observer a secret form of change requiring no actual alteration in the macro-systemic characteristics that he is trying to do something about.

The issue in the case of climate change discourse is the systemic role played by any living room elephant in such secret systemic adjustment.

Optical lenses and mirrors: In the widespread use of strategic "vision", it is perhaps natural that humans seek to navigate their psycho-social world using metaphorical analogues to the optics of the biconvex lens in the mammalian eye. Especially intriguing is the sense in which science, and the strategies it reinforces, effectively makes metaphorical use of convex lenses (typical of corrective spectacles), whereas other possibilities may emerge if consideration is given to biconcave lenses based on the hyperboloid.

Of related concern are the "optical" properties of the "mirror" appropriate to more mature human engagement with the environment as discussed elsewhere (*Self-reflective Embodiment of Transdisciplinary Integration (SETI): the universal criterion of species maturity?* 2008). In this sense strategic "vision" is necessarily reflected, to a degree, in the environment as a desirable (possibly essential) feature of viable self-reflexive organization (*Consciously Self-reflexive Global Initiatives: Renaissance zones, complex adaptive systems, and third order organizations*, 2007). Any shadowy "elephant" might then be said to be effectively embodied in the strategic approach.

Elephant detection: the traditional case of "7 blind men"

The above-mentioned analysis by Ron Atkin raises fundamental questions as to the degree of intellectual dishonesty, however unconscious, that is associated with the emerging knowledge society. Ironically Atkin's basic research was done on the communication processes within and between the academic committees of his own university. It identified the manner in which such communication circulated around core issues without ever addressing them -- or even recognizing them. Communication circulated around the "elephant in the living room".

This fruitfully recalls the traditional Eastern tale of the blind men and the elephant -- widely recognized as "the elephant metaphor" -- with each recognizing distinct parts of the elephant and claiming knowledge of the animal as a whole from that part alone, as might be considered typical of academic disciplines. This story has been delightfully woven into a metaphoric tale about the nature of such an elephant in a contribution to the Climate Change Blog (6 May 2007) of the *ClimateArk.org*, by Steven Earl Salmony:

> Is there even a remote possibility certain activities of the human species now rampantly overspreading the surface of Earth could soon become so dominant as to precipitate the mass extinction of biodiversity, the pernicious destabilization of the climate and the irreversible degradation of Earth? Perhaps noticing the magnitude of the human influences resulting from a rapidly growing human population (6.7 to 9.2 billion human beings in the first half of the twenty-first century) upon the natural world is like finding a proverbial 'elephant in the living room.'
>
> No one can say how so large a creature ever got into our planetary home. Its very presence does not make sense. Even so, every human being on the planet can see some part of the leviathan-like creature. Some people see a gigantic tusk or a tail. Others see its head or some part of its massive body. Because the creature is so big that no one person can see the whole of it, we are free to believe and mistakenly conclude it simply cannot be real, not really.
>
> If we simply agree to make the choice to deny its existence within our home, then we can ignore that which, in any case, cannot be completely seen by anyone. Henceforth, there is no reason to talk about the elephant. There is also no point in discussing either human limits or Earth's limitations to support the elephant.
>
> And not surprisingly, if we continue to ignore the elephant in our living room long enough by not talking about the potential threat it poses to a sustainable future for our children and coming generations; to biodiversity; to the viability of ecosystems; and to the integrity of Earth, as one of the world's most prominent, visionless political leaders (gesturing by throwing up his hands toward the sky in dismay) recently put it, 'We'll all be dead.' An unannounced, unwelcome and unacknowledged elephant lives among us……and can be seen, even now, in the offing as a potential threat to human and environmental health.

The point might be more pungently made by extension of the original tale to that of the Arthurian pursuit of the Questing Beast, whose existence and health could only be confirmed by its fewmets -- perhaps to be understood as the preoccupation of the demographers of the time.

Elephant detection: the use of other senses

The point was made earlier that strategic discourse, as with respect to climate change, is almost entirely reliant on metaphors of "vision". There is a case for considering the use of complementary metaphors based on other senses, given the need for such complementarity in navigating most environments (*Metaphor and the Language of Futures*, 1992). In the case of invisible elephants, the question is whether they can be detected by other senses.

- **smell**: in addition to their visibility, the fewmets mentioned above might also be detected by odour. Elephants do indeed have a distinctive odour which might render them detectable in the context of any discourse. Given the methane production of ruminants, it is appropriate to ask whether similar emissions might be associated with elephants. However they are not ruminants, having a digestive system similar to horses which is relatively inefficient; they exude some 2000 litres of methane every day. In public discourse, reference is of course occasionally made to the sense that proposals do not "smell right" -- or even "stink" -- possibly indicative of a form of elephant detection. The "cognitive body odour" participating in any discourse may also disguise that of any elephant (*Epistemological Challenge of Cognitive Body Odour: exploring the underside of dialogue*, 2006).

- **touch**: the use of this sense was indicated above with respect to the 7 blind men. In public discourse, however, reference is more frequently made to the sense that proposals do (or do not) "feel right", possibly indicative of a form of elephant detection.

- **taste**: the sense of taste, in contrast to tastelessness, is occasionally mentioned in public discourse, but it is less evident that it is indicative of elephant detection.

- **sound**: reference is frequently made in public discourse to proposals that sound right or wrong, confused with statements regarding whether they are "sound". Again whether elephants can be said to be detected by sound is unclear. The possibility may be greater if sound is generalized to include vibration -- given its use with respect to good or bad "vibrations" -- and the use of this mode by elephants (Mark Schwartz, *Looking for earth-shaking clues to elephant communication*, *Stanford Report*, 1 June 2005

The use of any non-visual sense is typically questionable for conventional strategy development, although not so in the case of marketing strategy -- potentially offering pointers to navigation of the future. Thus Catherine McCormack (Extra Sensory Branding. *Voyeur*, October 2008, pp. 55-60) describes sensory branding as a somewhat recent phenomenon in the world of marketing -- transcending traditional models of advertising in order to deliver multi-sensory, multi-dimensional experiences that communicate brand values on an experiential level, namely beyond sight and sound. Understood as a form of "neuromarketing", marketing specialists like Martin Lindstrom (*Brand Sense: build powerful brands through touch, taste, smell, sight, and sound*, 2005) argue that sensory experiences are real, difficult to fake, and therefore recognized as authentic. Simply defining a brand visually is seen as outdated -- perhaps as outdated as some formulations of development strategies. Sensory branding is about activating all the senses. Detecting living room elephants may require such an array of senses -- as with any sustainable strategy that takes them into account.

Implications of "seeing the elephant"

Strategic implications: The orginal metaphor of the 7 blind men, noted above, is widely used in the analysis of contemporary security situations, perhaps most notably by Hans Binnendijk and Richard L. Kugler of the Center for Technology and National Security Policy of the US National Defense University in an attempt to reconcile the evolving international system, and America's role in it, as seen through the eyes of more than fifty authors (*Seeing the Elephant: the U.S. role in global security*, 2006). The metaphor has been seen as relevant to the coordination of initiatives subsequent to military intervention, understood as "consequence management", namely the post attack actions needed to prevent further suffering and restore basic government services" requiring "a symphony of effort from many federal agencies" (Mark A Lee, *Seeing the Elephant: consequence management policy for the Department of Defense*, School of Advanced Military Studies, 2001).

From a similar perspective, the tale is used by Peter Marber (*Seeing the Elephant: understanding globalization from trunk to tail*, 2009) to demystify globalization, analyzing megatrends and interconnections of the 21st century, in order to suggest how the USA might reassert its leadership in the new global arena. However, the tale has also been used as a contribution to the People's History of the Battle of Seattle against the WTO (Chris Carlsson, *Seeing the Elephant in Seattle*, 2000). Such uses all imply that the elephant is more readily seen than it might be wiser to assume.

Interdisciplinary implications: The same metaphor has been used with respect to integrating disparate threads of information relevant to a more complex multidisciplinary understanding -- perhaps analogous to climate change -- as in a study by Gerrit-Jan Knaap, et al. (*Seeing the Elephant: multi-disciplinary measures of urban sprawl*, 2006) which illustrates its concern with a poem by John Saxe (2004):

So oft in theologic wars,
The disputants, I ween,
Rail on in utter ignorance
Of what each other mean,
And prate about an Elephant
Not one of them has seen!

The challenge of "seeing the elephant" has been usefully articulated with respect to the legal fiction of the corporation and the treatment of an organization as a "legal person", as in the words of Dan R. Dalton (*Seeing the elephant: an organizational perspective on corporate moral agency*, *American Business Law Journal*, 22 June 1996) citing various authors:

> What is this "artificial being, invisible, intangible and existing only in contemplation of law,"... this entity with "no soul to be damned, and no body to be kicked?"... It has been likened to a machine... described as an "intentional system"... and dismissed as a legal fiction... which serves as nothing more than a "nexus of contracts" among those human beings whose activities cluster around it.... Is it nothing more than the sum of its parts... something less than the sum of those parts... or a real entity with characteristics of its own that are not derivable through such simplistic exercises in addition and subtraction?... Is it a moral, as well as legal, person with all, or at least some, of the moral duties and rights that we attribute to human persons?... Before we subject such a "person" to "the law's ultimate threat,"... the criminal sanction, should we require proof of the same level of moral culpability that we commonly require when human persons stand in the dock?

Experiential implications: In this context it is appropriate to note another sense in which an elephant may be seen. Referring to the reality of combat experience in Iraq, according to Joe Galloway (*What It's Really Like Over There*, *Military.com*, 23 June 2004), old soldiers in the American Civil War coined a phrase for any green soldier who survived the first taste of battle: *He has seen the elephant*. This might be seen as an appropriately ironic contrast to earlier use of the phrase to describe the myth of the California Gold Rush (1848-55), its alien and exciting experiences, and the unimaginable wealth to be gained (Joyce Badgley Hunsaker. *Seeing the Elephant: the many voices of the Oregon Trail*, 2003). The study by Joseph Alien Frank and George A. Reaves (*'Seeing the Elephant': raw recruits at the*

Battle of Shiloh, 2003) has been rated one of the best explorations of the psychology of soldiers going into battle. Such considerations highlight the probability that there are other harsh realities that are the subject of essentially superficial conventional discourse -- precisely because the elephant has not been "seen" in any sense.

Existential implications: Curiously the challenges of "seeing the elephant", as identified in the studies cited, recalls a cognitive challenge analogous to that of the "7 blind men", namely that of the traditional "10 ox-herding pictures" of Zen (D.T. Suzuki, *The Ten Oxherding Pictures from The Manual of Zen Buddhism*). In the latter case, however, a graded series of 10 stages in ability to relate to the ox is carefully articulated. The challenge of "seeing the elephant" might even be compared to the first such stage, with only an implication of the challenges of the later stages -- perhaps as understood to some degree by John F. Burns and Richard J. Orsi (*Taming the Elephant: politics, government, and law in pioneer California*, 2003) in explicitly referring to activity subsequent to the initial Gold Rush use of the phrase. These stages were tentatively reframed in a commentary on the *Integration of perceived problems* (in the *Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential*) under the headings:

1. Undisciplined exploration of the problematique
2. Recognizing traces of the problematique as an integrated system
3. Focusing on the problematique as a whole
4. Encompassing the problematique
5. Orienting the problematique
6. Using the problematique as a vehicle for sustainable development
7. Transcending the realm of the problematique
8. Disappearance of both humanity and the problematique
9. Expression of essential humanity
10. Human intervention in the world

There is a sense in which these stages are to be understood as a progression towards "seeing the elephant" as the "pattern that connects", as articulated by Gregory Bateson (*Mind and Nature: a necessary unity*, 1979):

> The pattern which connects is a metapattern. It is a pattern of patterns. It is that metapattern which defines the vast generalization that, indeed, it is patterns which connect.

And it is from this perspective that he warns in a much-cited phrase: "*Break the pattern which connects the items of learning and you necessarily destroy all quality.*" The cover of *The (Updated) Last Whole Earth Catalog* (1974) carried the phrase: *"We can't put it together; it is together"*. But, combining these understandings, it is not a question of whether the connectivity is "there". Rather it is a question of whether it can be given the meaning necessary for it to be sufficiently comprehensible to carry the quality and coherence with which it would be appropriate for it to be experientially associated.

Metaphoric cause for reflection

Given wide use of elephant in metaphor, it is useful to explore the human-elephant interface, notably in contrast to its proactive development in some non-western cultures:

- **White elephants**: as engendered by dysfunctional discourse, perhaps to be understood as a memorial to what might have been achieved by integrative, grounded dialogue; this degree of potential integration is suggested by the much-valued symbolic role of white elephants in some non-western cultures

- **Pink elephants**: "seeing pink elephants" is perhaps indicative of the only condition in which living room elephants are currently recognized -- typically outside the context of formal discourse. It is therefore interesting how feasible "seeing the elephant" is considered to be, notably in relation to challenges of security (as highlighted above).

- **Elephant care**: the traditional, life-long care of working elephants in some non-western cultures is perhaps indicative of the kind of healthy proactive relationship that it might be appropriate to cultivate in response to living room elephants -- possibly to be seen as consistent with healthy psychological relationships with the unconscious "shadow"

- **Working elephants**: some non-western cultures have engaged with elephants in such a way as to develop a remarkable working relationship prior to dependence on western technologies, suggesting that how the function of living room elephants is integrated into grounded collective discourse is worthy of further reflection

- **Ceremonial elephants:** elephants in some non-western societies have been fruitfully integrated into ceremonies of status and symbolic ritual -- especially in Hindu cultures where an elephant is held to symbolize a principal diety (Ganesha) in ways that are unfortunately deprecated by Christianity (Krishnan Ramaswamy, et al., *Invading the Sacred: an analysis of Hinduism studies in America*, 2007). The socio-economic development of India is however compared by Gurcharan Das (*The Elephant Paradigm*, 2002) to a wise elephant, moving steadily and surely towards the future. Such richer insights, combined with those of Susantha Goonatilake (1999), may point to unforeseen roles that may be played by India -- seen to be at a global focus of both climate change and population issues.

- **Hunting and war elephants**: the role of elephants as a means of engaging with dangerous opponents, notably in the case of war elephants, has been well recognized (John M. Kistler, *War Elephants*, 2006). This suggests that the strengths of living room

elephants might be engaged in other ways.

Somewhat ironically, it is of course appropriate to recognize the destructive impacts of elephants on wilderness areas as a result of their overpopulation in areas progressively constrained by deforestation by humans -- perhaps a case of the "human in the elephants' living room"? The response has of course been the promotion of elephant culling programmes in the interest of conserving both elephants and wilderness areas -- with the further irony of enabling elephants to be seen in their natural habitat as a feature of tourism. Is there therefore a case for promoting the culling of living room elephants?

Proactive response to living room elephants: "big game hunters"?

The political implications of the challenge of living room elephants in the USA have been variously explored. As a cognitive scientist, George Lakoff (*Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate: the essential guide for progressives*, 2004) argues that much of the success of the Republican Party could be attributed to a persistent ability to control the language of key issues and thus position itself in favorable terms to voters. He outlines in detail the traditional American values that progressives hold, but are often unable to articulate. Columnist Ryan Sager (*The Elephant in the Room: Evangelicals, Libertarians and the Battle to Control the Republican Party*, 2006) uses the metaphor to discuss the conflict for control of that party.

The metaphor has been differently used by Paul Bailey (*Think of an Elephant: combining science and spirituality for a better life*, 2007) to show that individual perception has its own potency, namely that individual consciousness has its own charge, and such awareness has its own power of connection. In this sense observation actually does have its own power, its own energetic influence.

An extraordinary use of the elephant metaphor in the USA has been in Operation Yellow Elephant -- effectively the identification of an elephant in the living room of the Republican Party. This is designed to provoke college student members of that party into doing more to tell the world about their patriotic work in promoting its agenda, especially with respect to the war in Iraq and against those who oppose it. It notably encouraged those students, seemingly suffering from a reluctance to put their beliefs into practice, to immediately volunteer for military service and fight courageously in the war for which they had so courageously lobbied -- especially given the infantry manpower shortage. The metaphor plays on the use of the elephant as a symbol of the Republican Party and the hard realities (noted above) with respect to "seeing the elephant" -- and perhaps with the early mythology of the California Gold Rush.

An even more complex play on metaphor is highlighted by responses to the study of Paul Courtright (*Ganesha: Lord of Obstacles, Lord of Beginnings*, 1985) which argues, after applying Freudian exegesis to the mythology of the Hindu elephant deity Ganesha, that his trunk represents a "limp phallus" -- delightfully exemplifying the experience of one of the "7 blind men". This resulted in considerable controversy in the USA, as variously noted (Rajiv Malhotra, *Limp Scholarship and Demonology*, 2003; Vidya B Gupta, *A Middle Ground in the Ganesha Controversy*, 2004), to which the compilation by Krishnan Ramaswamy, et al.(*Invading the Sacred: an analysis of Hinduism studies in America*, 2007) has provided an extensive response. Curiously, however, the elephant is also the central symbol of the US Republican Party, itself highly dependent on the Christian fundamentalist constituency -- active both in orchestrating the campaign against Hinduism in the USA, against any constraints on the reproductive freedom of the erect phallus, and in support of deforestation (Paul Rauber, *Elephant Graveyard: how the Republican Party is handling environmental issues*, 1996). It would appear that the elephant does indeed function as a symbol for a complex and poorly recognized nexus of systemic processes in both East and West, rendered even more curious by its association in both cases with wealth.

Elephants as a potential security threat

Whilst the use of elephants in physical combat is no longer relevant, despite its significance in the case of Hannibal (247-183 BCE), it is appropriate to give some consideration to the hypothetical role of appropriately controlled invisible elephants in the civilizational clashes that might characterize the emerging knowledge society. They might indeed have a role in policies of structural violence and cultural violence (Rafael Leyre, *Cultural violence: when shortage is endemic, violence becomes cultural*, 2007).

The work of Ron Atkin (described above) is suggestive of ways in which "holes" in communication space might be embedded and controlled, possibly by those with hostile or manipulative intent. As "elephants", such "holes" might function as vehicles for subversive strategies -- of the kind that the intelligence services delight in promoting in fulfillment of their own agendas. Clearly terrorists of the future might discover ways to control such vehicles, effectively as the "tanks" of future memetic warfare (cf *Metaphors as Transdisciplinary Vehicles of the Future*, 1991; *Missiles, Missives, Missions and Memetic Warfare: navigation of strategic interfaces in multidimensional knowledge space*, 2001; *Tank-thoughts from Think-tanks: constraining metaphors on developing global governance*, 2003).

It is too conveniently assumed through the metaphor that the "living room" is an essentially static environment and that the "elephant" is itself static, if virtual. However the emerging knowledge society already points to the existence of dynamic contexts (*Dynamically Gated Conceptual Communities*, 2004). More problematic is then the possibility that any supposedly "domesticated" elephants "caged" within those contexts may reach some tipping point and go on an uncontrollable rampage -- reverting to nature -- as may prove to be characteristic of predicted periods of climatic disaster and internal threats to security.

More speculatively, living room elephants might be the vehicle of choice for extraterrestrials engaging with human society, whether out of curiosity (as tourists) or in fulfillement of their own agendas -- perhaps symbiont mahouts? Aspects of the challenge of such engagement have been explored elsewhere (*Communicating with Aliens: the psychological dimension of dialogue*, 2000). But of course, as a metaphor of the unconscious, it could usefully be argued that, most ironically, it is the living room elephant which is the "mahout" that "rides" any conventional discourse on climate change -- perhaps appropriately to be framed as a "dark rider" of social change, as explored elsewhere (*The "Dark Riders" of Social Change: a challenge for any Fellowship of the Ring*, 2002).

Recognizing the herd of elephants in the living room of climate change discourse

As noted above, it would appear that the most invisible elephant in climate change discourse is population and its continuing increase. The extent to which this elephant is ignored is detailed elsewhere (*Institutionalized Shunning of Overpopulation Challenge: incommunicability of fundamentally inconvenient truth*, 2008).

Of particular interest in relation to population is the manner in which ecological footprints are calculated, and their presentation as tools for personal footprint assessment on the web. The factors taken into consideration might be said to be well-crafted to avoid exposing people to the embarrassment of more pointed questions. Examples include:

- **technological dependencies**: given the aspirations cultivated by the development process for access to a wide range of technologies (appliances, transport, information, etc), and the resource consequences from increased wealth, footprint calculations typically omit the implications of many such dependencies. This is significant when compared with the concerns cultivated by movements for voluntary simplicity and downsizing lifestyle needs. P. R. Ehrlich and J. P. Holdren (Impact of population growth, *Science*, 171, 1971, pp. 1212-1217) developed the formula:

  Impact = **Population** x **Affluence** x **Technology** (I=PAT)

  to measure impact. Where: "Affluence" is a measure of "material throughput" or per capita consumption. "Technology" is the environmental impact per unit of energy used to produce material throughput.

- **family size**: given the consequences for its ecological footprint of each new addition to a family, options relating to family size preferences in such calculations tend only to be treated in passing, if at all. Excessive reliance is typically placed on assumptions regarding reduction in average family size as a a consequence of development, notably irrespective of religious beliefs in this regard, even in the most developed countries (see, for example, Jim Davis, *Human population and ecology*, 2006). Curiously the debate on climate change excludes all consideration of the right to unconstrained procreation -- literally "come hell or high water" -- and the obligation for society to adjust to the consequences..

- **euthanasia**: in a society increasingly concerned with the consequences of longevity, aging populations and sustainable provision of safety nets, no consideration is given to the kinds of factors associated with what might be termed "life planning" preferences, in contrast with the attention increasingly given to articulation of a "living will". The issue is potentially of great significance given the aspirations and expectations for prolonged lifetimes as a result of medical advances in the decades of the immediate future.

- **abortion**: in relation to family size preferences, the highly controversial issue of abortion preferences is typically excluded from footprint calculations -- even though it is perceived by families, and notably women, as one means of controlling their need for resources.

- **over-eating**: whilst care is taken to distinguish between the consequences of meat eating and a vegetarian diet, there is little attention to the volume of food consumed per capita -- even though the question of "food miles" may be considered in relation to food preferences. This is curious in a society which is otherwise extremely concerned with over-eating and diet and their implications for obesity, especially in the young. The issue of the disproportionate quantities consumed in "developed" countries, compared to those aspiring to that condition, is typically not considered. There is perhaps even a case for exploring the extent to which some effectively "embody" the elephant that they otherwise ignore.

- **flatulence**: whereas this is a major factor in the official debate on carbon emissions in New Zealand (where 45 million sheep and 10 million cattle in New Zealand constitute some 90 percent of that country's methane emissions) and to a degree in the EU (*EU quota likely for flatulent cows*, *BBC*, 1 March 2000), no consideration of this factor is evident in relation to humans, especially if they switch to a more efficient vegetarian diet. Clearly the challenge is far greater in the case of ruminants -- or elephants (as noted above) -- but it is appropriate to ask how many humans are equivalent to one ruminant with respect to such emissions. Given that methane emission from ruminant livestock is currently estimated to be around 100 million tonnes of methane each year, namely the biggest man-made methane source (after rice agriculture), from a systemic perspective consideration can appropriately be given to the flatulence by domesticated animals per capita of dependent humans. Humans should take ownership of the faltulence for which theor copnsumption is responsible -- even though that faltulence has been "delegated" to another species. Given the degree of individual identification with vehicles, it is also systemically appropriate to extend the notion of flatulence to personal vehicle emissions (Stanley I. Hart and Alvin L. Spivak, *The Elephant in the Bedroom -- Automobile Dependence and Denial: impacts on the economy and environment*, 1993).

Of particular relevance in relation to ecological footprint calculations is the mindset engendered by the focus on the footprint as computed **now** (**for the present**). As a metaphor, "footprint" is typically associated with the visible past, not the hypothetical future. Little consideration is given to the implications of choices made **now** for any progressive increase in the calculated footprint over time -- notably over decades **into the future**. This is especially significant in the case of family size preferences since each addition to the family (for which the calculation is made) will gradually increase the family footprint over time as the consumption of resources by the child increases. Naturally, when the child reaches adulthood and engenders further children, the increase in the footprint (as calculated **now**) may be exponential **into the future**. Exposure to such information is naturally unwelcome.

It would appear that the focus is on achieving change in superficial patterns of consumption on the assumption that more fundamentally challenging factors can thereby be ignored. This is not to deny efforts by the Global Footprint Network to publicize the fact that, at the

current rate humanity is using natural resources and producing waste, it will require the resources of two planets to meet demands by the mid-2030s (*Living Planet Report*, 2008).

Recognizing the shadowy roundtable in the living room of climate change discourse

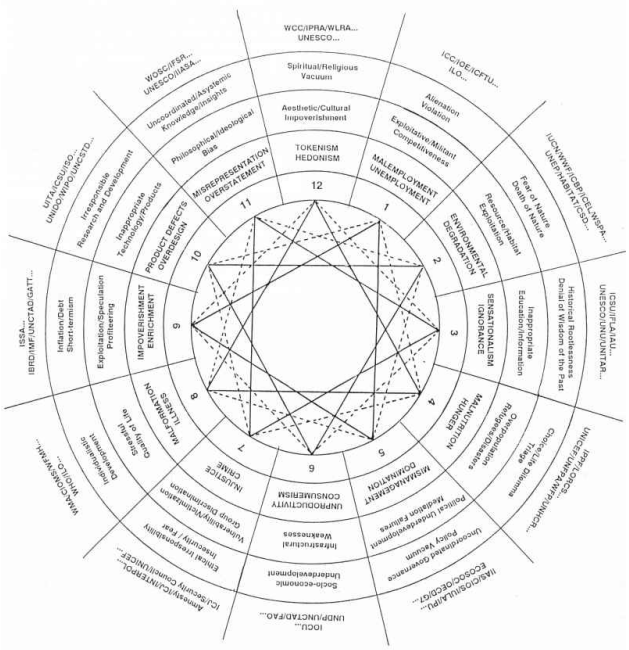
Exploring further the "living room" metaphor, in an effort to focus on the existence of any hidden "elephant", the question might be asked as to "who" might be understood to be seated there, possibly at a suitable roundtable for a climate change dialogue. Presumably the "seats" are to be understood as occupied by various systemic functions -- appropriately represented by agencies or individuals. For the purposes of the exploration, the number of seats is arbitrarily fixed here as the archetypal 12. Systemic determination of the appropriate number of seats is a more fundamental issue most challengingly highlighted by how tuning systems are selected as appropriate in music. More pragmatically the challenge is highlighted by the appropriate number of ministerial portfolios in government and how secondary ministries are clustered within them for strategic purposes. These issues are considered in more detail elsewhere (*Representation, Comprehension and Communication of Sets: the Role of Number*, 1978; *Functional Classification in an Integrative Matrix of Human Preoccupations*, 1982).

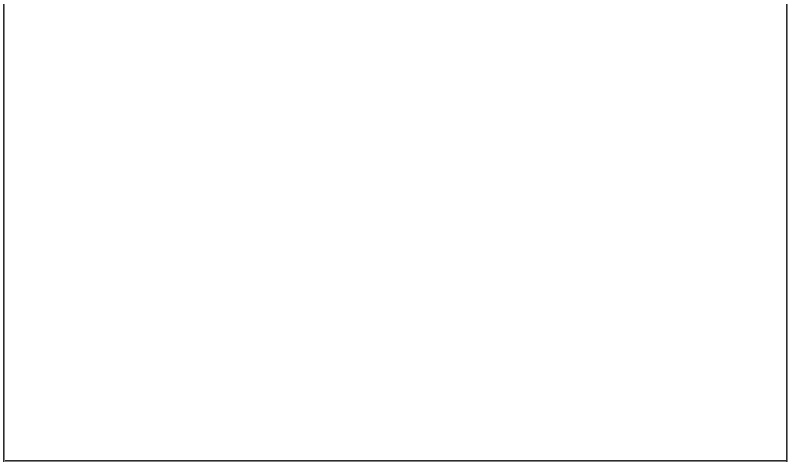
There would seem to be a case for associating in any such exploration "climate change" and "climate of change" -- given the manner in which the first is used as a metaphor for the second and the manner in which the latter may constrain any development with respect to the former. The metaphoric use of "climate" is significant in the examples (above) of non-climate change references to living room elephants. This approach is also relevant in relation to the need to change the "climate of opinion" (*Playfully Changing the Prevailing Climate of Opinion: climate change as focal metaphor of effective global governance*, 2005). Such considerations are also relevant to concern with the "climate" of confidence -- as in the 2008 financial crisis (*Systemic Crises as Keys to Systemic Remedies: a metaphorical Rosetta Stone for future strategy?* 2008).

Possible living room roundtable of climate change discourse (indicative only)

(derived from *Pattern of Meeting Participant Roles: shadowy 'roundtable' hidden within every meeting*, 1993
-- which offered a commentary on each distinct role, and its relationship to other roles)

- Central seats at the round table represent the most tangible problems engendered by participants in meetings according to the style, capacity or limitations of each
- Outer ring indicates some key intergovernmental and nongovernmental bodies challenged by each perspective -- although some focus more on specific patterns of relationship.
- Parts of the international community now struggle to reconcile particular triangular relationships whilst ignoring others (eg UNCED 1992 Earth Summit focused on 2 - 6 - 10, and GATT Uruguay Round on 1 - 5 - 9).
- Climate change, in a context of sustainable development, calls for an understanding of the dynamic interplay of checks and balances between all meeting participant roles.





A tentative diagram of this kind might be used more specifically to discuss the participants in climate change discourse (using the "seat numbers") as a means of identifying any particular understanding each might claim regarding any invisible elephant and its degree of relationship (or not) to that of those in other seats:

1. Climate (of) change and (mal)employment / migration
   mobility / adaptability / appropriate employment >> simplicity / downsizing / time / to where should one move
   elephant is inertia and dependence on habitual employment
2. Climate (of) change and environmental degradation / energy insecurity
   call for less damaging / lower energy -- ahimsa, radical
   elephant is failure to recognize one's own damaging behaviour -- the structural and cultural violence one engenders
3. Climate (of) change and (mal)education / ignorance
   more vigilant / better informed >> conceptual toolkit >>> akido
   elephant is dependence on conventional thinking (in-the-box) and resistance to more radical (self)knowing
4. Climate (of) change and food (in)security
   other forms of nourishment
   elephant is dependence on conventional modes of nourishment and resistance to other modes of nourishment
5. Climate (of) change and (mis)management / corporate irresponsibility
   other forms of organization >> self-reflexive
   elephant is conventional business as usual and constrained self-reflexivity
6. Climate (of) change and (under)productivity / consumerism / trade
   other productivity / other consumption / other exchanges
   elephant is failure to recognize other modes of production and exchange
7. Climate (of) change and security / (in)justice / crime
   elephant is conventional understanding of security and crime
8. Climate (of) change and public health / disease / urban infrastructure
   elephant is conventional understanding of disease (vs memetic, etc)
9. Climate (of) change and exploitation / income inequality
   elephant is dependence on conventional exploitation
10. Climate (of) change and (in)appropriate technology
    elephant is dependence on conventional understanding of technology
11. Climate (of) change and political (mis)representation
    elephant is unexamined assumptions about collective engagement and delegation of responsibility
12. Climate (of) change and cultural impoverishment
    elephant is unexamined assumptions about existential engagement with reality

Of particular interest in this approach is the sense in which each functional seat is additionally (if not primarily) concerned with its own metaphorical form of "climate" and the manner in which it may be changing. It is within such climates that the range of other living room elephants, identified above, are recognized. It is in this sense that "climate change" itself becomes a metaphor -- possibly of more immediate significance to a given sector than any preoccupation with the physical form, as noted with respect to the financial crisis of 2008 (*Systemic Crises as Keys to Systemic Remedies: a metaphorical Rosetta Stone for future strategy?* 2008).

Insights of greater relevance to future crises might be obtained by extending the 2-dimensional representation of the above diagram into a 3-dimensional polyhedral form (*Towards Polyhedral Global Governance: complexifying oversimplistic strategic metaphors*, 2008; *Polyhedral Pattern Language: software facilitation of emergence, representation and transformation of psycho-social organization*, 2008).

Systemic relationship of functional "climates" in climate (of) change discourse

The diagram raises the issue of the interrelationship between all distinguished "climates" -- in this case 12 -- as the systemic "global" context within which the physical form of climate change may be variously discussed, if participants can move beyond the challenge faced by the "7 blind men" (as noted above).

Of particular interest at the time of writing, during both the financial crisis and strategic challenges of climate change, is the manner in which notions of "climate" have become so systemically fundamental -- which merit comparison with issues relating to population:

Complementary understandings of "climate"		
Financial system	**Climatic system**	**Population dynamics**
hype ("hot air"), hope-mongering	global warming	cultivation of climate of optimism regarding desirability of progeniture
excessive confidence	unrestrained energy/resource use	unrestrained population increase
risk taking, mis-selling, indebtedness	imprudent use of resources	promiscuity, unsafe sex, economically unsustainable families
credibility crunch, loss of confidence	resource constraints, challenge to "business as usual"	sexually transmissible diseases, autoimmune deficiency (HIV/AIDS), reduction in fertility
credit crunch, freeze, risk aversion, principled objections to constrainig regulations	constraining regulations, economic objections to regulations	"safe sex" precautions, anxiety regarding "exchange of bodily fluids", principled objections to constraints
market turbulence, "financial hurricsanes" and maelstorms, panic	hurricanes	social unrest
meltdown	rising sea levels, ocean current inversion, tipping points?	population collapse?

The concern in the original use of the above diagram in 1993 was the "shadowy" dynamics of any intersectoral meeting -- the dynamics determined by the "unsaid" as later discussed (*Global Strategic Implications of the "Unsaid": from myth-making towards a "wisdom society"*, 2003; *Varieties of the "unsaid" in sustaining psycho-social community*, 2003). It is within this shadowy context that any "elephant" is presumably to be found -- or possibly even a "herd" of 12 such elephants corresponding to the perspectives from each of the seats at the living room roundtable.

Whether in relation to the climate of change or to climate change, there is a case for exploring ways of thinking about the systemic interlinkages between any set of selected functions -- as with the archetypal 12 of any roundtable. Previous exercises have focused on:

- strategic alternatives (*Planetary Challenge of 12-fold Strategic Marriage: bonding "Empire" + "Alternatives", "Global " + "Local", and "Behavioural" + "Depth psychology"*, 2003)
- cognitive languages (*12 Complementary Languages for Sustainable Governance*, 2003)
- experiential modes (*Varieties of experience of past-present-future complexes*, 2001)
- dialogue modes (*Typology of 12 complementary dialogue modes essential to sustainable dialogue*, 1998)
- complementary strategies (*Typology of 12 complementary strategies essential to sustainable development*, 1998)
- learning/action phases (*Characteristics of phases in 12-phase learning / action cycles*, 1998)
- decision-making styles (*Varieties of Decision-making Arenas and Styles*, 1991)

These may each be understood as indicative of a single set of "cognitive modes" of engagement with contextual reality -- necessarily a very subtle challenge to collective understanding. Each is associated with a "climate" of change -- or engenders such a climate -- constrained by a hidden "elephant". As defined in Atkin's terms, the inertial power of this "elephant" is intuitively recognized in collective despair with regard to engendering the "will to change". To the extent that the 12 elephants function as a herd, they might then be understood as being at the core of any systemic challenge regarding global preoccupations such as the appropriately transformative response to climate change -- or even to discourse about it..

Framed in this way, however, it is the operation of these modes as interacting cognitive modalities that is of interest. As indicated above, the identification of 12 such modalities is somewhat arbitrary. Other approaches might favour 7 or 16, or some other number. Examples of a 16-fold approach include:

- dialogue styles (*Varieties of Dialogue Arenas and Styles*, 1997)

Further insight may be gained from the analysis made by Arthur Young (*Geometry of Meaning* (1978) of learning/action cycles linking such modalities as phases. This was a basis for a number of the 12-fold approaches indicated above (as indicated in their commentaries).

Conclusion

Current approaches to halting climate change, especially rising sea levels, have been variously compared to the legendary tale of King Canute commanding the seas to go back (*Coastal erosion: the wisdom of Canute*, *The Economist*, 22 May 2008; *Restoring the Wild Coast of King Canute*, *Innovations Report*, 8 October 2007; *Climate Change: we need the 'Canute factor'*, *OneClimate.net*, 11 February 2008; Paul Newby, *Climate change, sea level, King Canute and the sacred flame*, *The Photogrammetric Record*, 22, 2007, 117, pp. 3-9; Paul Brown, *Canute's tidal warning finally sinks in*, *The Guardian*, 25 January 2003).

It might be argued that global strategies in response to many other challenges have proven to be equally ill-founded.

The challenge to be faced in both cases would seem to be better understanding of the living room elephants that undermine effective discourse regarding such strategic challenges to global civilization. There is a need to engage more effectively with such elephants which so effectively inhibit efforts to engender the necessary will to change.

It would appear however that the "invisibility" of such elephants within conventional cognitive modes, characteristic of policy discourse, is an indication that they call for subtler cognitive styles -- possibly as intuited in appeals for "new thinking" and a "paradigm shift". For this reason the current crises, with the collapse of the financial system, should not be too readily assumed to indicate that the

"alternatives" variously promoted are appropriate to the challenge. Their effectiveness may be equally undermined by unforeseen elephants -- whether or not of a different species.

By neglecting the elephant in the living room in the current climate change discourse, communications and proposals are necessarily systemically superficial -- displaced into a political comfort zone that is only slightly inconvenient. **Downstream consequences** are assiduously treated on the assumption that the **upstream causes**, and their progressive increase, can be ignored -- an approach possibly to be understood as an example of nonscientific causal reasoning (termed magical thinking). The case has been strongly argued by the former Permanent Head of the Department of Science of Australia, John L. Farrands (*Don't Panic, Panic: the use and abuse of science to create fear*, 1993). The volume of remarkable discussion of the technicalities of emissions and carbon trading is then to be seen as a measure of the lack of ability to apply that degree of focus to the engendering process of population growth -- ironically based on its own form of emissions (and trading in "bodily fluids"). This is a remarkable Freudian slip worthy of psychoanalytic concern. As has been noted, such displacement bears a strong resemblance to the earlier trade in "indulgences" (*Global Market in Indulgences: extending the carbon trading model to other value-based challenges*, 2007). The emerging pressures for a technical "quick fix" need to be challenged as another form of such displacement, as argued elsewhere (*Geo-engineering Oversight Agency for Thermal Stabilization (GOATS)*, 2008).

One readily recognized missing dimension in such policy discourse is humour -- otherwise much valued across cultures and as an integrative process (*Humour and Play-Fullness: essential integrative processes in governance, religion and transdisciplinarity*, 2005). The focus here on the unrecognized living room elephant would then justify an association of humour with it. It is therefore appropriate to note that the Hindu elephant deity Ganesha (mentioned above) is renowned and appreciated not only as a font of wisdom but for a sense of humour -- notably having been engendered by laughter. Humour might prove to be the neglected key to creating the climate of desirable social change -- especially within the culture of India, possibly itself perceived to be the elephant in the living room of discourse on population and climate change. This again points to the merits of the arguments of Susantha Goonatilake (*Toward a Global Science: mining civilizational knowledge*, 1999). Appropriately the value of getting in touch with one's own "inner elephant" is now widely appreciated by adults as well as children (Laurent de Brunhoff, *Babar's Yoga for Elephants*, 2002). The larger challenge is with respect to groups and collectivities.

There is therefore a strong case for interrelating the approach to discourse on **climate change** with that on the **climate of change** -- especially with respect to a desirable inter-sectoral approach to the **climate of opinion** in different sectors. As suggested, it would seem that there is much to be discovered with respect to "mental climate" in enabling more appropriate cognitive approaches to elicit strategies with greater possibility of success.

It is such subtler cognitive approaches that would appear to be the key to adaptive resilience in the face of collapse -- as usefully identified by Thomas Homer-Dixon (*The Upside of Down: catastrophe, creativity, and the renewal of civilization*, 2006).

Faced with the challenge he identifies, climate change may in fact be the solution to human negligence -- and not the problem. In that sense, if we do not understand how we are part of the problem, we may not be able to understand the nature of possible solutions that may be appropriate. Humanity's invisible "elephants" appear to be poorly acknowledged processes within its collective consciousness that are a challenge to new, and more effective, forms of cognitive engagement. It is perhaps not for nothing that the elephant is associated with long memory and wisdom -- in a society where these are increasingly threatened and eroded in their collective forms (*Societal Learning and the Erosion of Collective Memory*, 1980). As noted by Andrew C. Revkin (*On Elephants' Memories, Human Forgetfulness and Disaster*. *New York Times*, 12 August 2008):

> It is the human condition to deny a disaster happened. It helps get over the shock and move on. It is what separates us from elephants. We have to get in touch with our inner elephant. That requires opening the door to behavioral science when addressing sustainability.

A successful quest for these elephants, as an endangered species, may postpone a future inquest into the fate of humanity as an endangered species in its own right -- as prefigured by Jared Diamond (*Collapse: how societies choose to fail or succeed*, 2005). In either sense, the significance for humanity of any legendary "elephant's graveyard" then merits some reflection.

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