Walking Elven Pathways

Enactivating the Pattern that Connects

Introduction

Metaphoric entrapment and impoverishment?
Words of power vs Motherhood statements?
Dynamically-gated envisioning communities?
Finding and walking "elven pathways"
Tangibility vs Hyperlinking
Enactivating "the pattern that connects"
Enactivating the "lost language of the elves"
Engaging oneself and the world: a divine marriage?
Embodying the world -- the search for radical coherence?
Embodying the universe?

Reference

Introduction

There is widespread concern with envisioning the future in some form. Many processes and events are organized to do so. It is the focus of many books and documents. Some are elaborated at the local level, or for particular communities, others at the national or even the international level. Such endeavours may be undertaken by governmental bodies, think-tanks or multinational corporations -- in addition to those by associations of every kind.

The following exploration is not concerned with the justifications for such processes but with asking whether the approach is necessarily engaging with the most useful questions at this point in time -- or asking them in the most appropriate way.

Metaphoric entrapment and impoverishment?

Much has been usefully made of the role of metaphor in framing understanding, relationships and policy initiatives. Suppose that many of the major challenges to the future of modern society, and to individual fulfillment, were to be seen as arising from the inadequacy of the metaphoric language through which we seek to communicate about them and effectively create new realities. There is certainly evidence for this. Political discourse seeking to reconcile opposing perspectives could benefit from richer frameworks. Inter-disciplinary discourse between academic realms is severely handicapped by the absence of any effective language. Inter-faith dialogue is in a pathetic condition at a time when conflicts based on religion are a major concern.

In that sense to what extent have we entrapped ourselves by excessive reliance on the "vision" metaphor? It is clear that we benefit and depend on other senses for effective movement around our world. To the extent that we use all the senses metaphorically to describe capacities to navigate our social, knowledge, strategic and spiritual environments, are we neglecting our capacity to "hear" the future, to "smell" it, to "feel" it, to "taste" it?

We are happy to talk about a "vision" for the future -- as framed by powerpoint and billboard visuals. But there is a quality of unreality to billboards of which we are rightly suspicious, having been exposed to the contrast between the promotional literature of urban development and the sterile emergent reality of urban sprawl. But what is the "sound" of the future -- as implied by worldwide enthusiasm for music? Or will it be a case of universal noise pollution? How will the future "smell" -- or will it "stink", as do some of the strategies "envisaged"? How to describe the "feel" of the future -- the excitement beyond any "feel good" sense? Will it "feel" like home -- or be totally alienating? And for those with educated palates, how might they want to express their sense of the "taste" of the future -- or will it echo the bland sameness of fastfood franchises? The process of tasting, through "drinking in", has been associated with the process of grokking (cf. Authentic Grokking: Emergence of Homo conjugens, 2003).

What is the role of "listening to the future" in relation to envisioning it -- given the credibility attached to the predictive power of prophets, "channellers" and others capable of hearing the "timeless" voice of divinity, or listening to the "voices of the future"? In Quaker meetings
importance is attached to listening to the "sense of the meeting". The process of "deep listening" is advocated for CEOs [more]. The poet David-Michael Cook asks the question; "When will we start listening to the voices of the future?" [more] How is it that so much significance is attached to the role of "keynote speakers" -- and so little to the role of "keynote listeners" in endeavouring to detect the "sense of a meeting" (as in the Quaker decision process).

Corresponding to sensing the future through "foresight", is there a neglected "forehearing", "foresmelling", "forestasting" or "foretouching" of the future -- to say nothing of any "sixth sense" capacity in this respect? Are there traps in failing to recognize the contrasting insights from different questioning modes about the future: the future as "what", the future as "where", the future as "which", the future as "when", the future as "who", the future as "how", and the future as "why"? Is the future a noun or a verb?

Such sensitivities may contrast to a high degree with the "vision" that emphasizes a form of control -- "supervision", "overview" -- perhaps to be exemplified by the military metaphor of "target acquisition". Is the future distorted by use of the sporting metaphor of a "goal" to be achieved, implying a game to be won -- in contrast with the infinite games so ably advocated by James P. Carse (Finite and Infinite Games: a vision of life as play and possibility, 1986) [more more]. Does the implication of a common "objective" inhibit the emergence of any meaningful intersubjectivity? The associated naming of the envisaged future, and the defined path to it, is to be contrasted with the much-quoted first line of the Tao Te Ching; "The way that can be named is not the way".

In favouring the vision metaphor, we readily forget the strategic deficiencies of vision in comparison with other senses, namely the challenge of sensing "around corners", "in the dark", or "over the horizon". These have their metaphorical equivalents. Why do we forget the defects to which eyesight is subject -- in addition to total blindness -- especially given that many of the "visionaries" depend on spectacles to compensate for shortsightedness, longsightedness, astigmatism, colour blindness? These also have their metaphorical equivalents in "envisaging" the future. There is no requirement that visionaries have their envisioning "eyesight" tested -- indeed there is no test analogous to that done by opticians. Nor is there any obligation for any necessary corrective spectacles to be worn when envisaging the future -- despite the dangers to which this may give rise when visionaries are at the helm. Can their 20/20 vision always be assumed?

A further irony of the vision metaphor is that it is primarily associated with the "head". This exemplifies the extraordinary extent to which collaboration between groups and sectors is inhibited by entrapment in seemingly isolated metaphors -- as illustrated by the antagonism between the academic, so-called "language of the head" and the "language of the heart" of many alternative communities. This battle between the "heartless heads" and the "headless hearts" has lost sight of the metaphoric underpinnings that establish a context in which both head and heart are vital organs -- but are themselves insufficient for system functionality.

The long-recognized role of sensing the future "in my bones" or "in my guts" is exemplified by the haiku poet Matsuo Basho who would "enter into the object, the whole of its delicate life, feeling as it feels. The poem follows of itself." (Shinkichi Takahashi, Afterimages: Zen Poems, 1972). Also relevant are the insights of David Abram (The Spell of the Sensuous: perception and language in a more-than-human world, 1997).

The argument is therefore that we need a multi-sensual approach to the future -- as increasingly echoed by enthusiasm for multi-media communication. The latter also stresses user "interactivity" based on the range of senses -- another implication for knowing the future?

Also of particular relevance is the implication of the associated thinking styles (cf Fiona Beddoes-Jones, et al. Thinking Styles: relationship strategies that work, 1999) determining peoples' cognitive and linguistic preferences and levels of flexibility in terms of 26 ways of thinking or dimensions -- suggesting the variety of ways through which the future may be sensed (see also Systems of Categories Distinguishing Cultural Biases, 1993).

Vital insights into the "sensory thinking" fundamental to understanding of autism have received considerable attention as a result of the work of Temple Grandin (Unwritten Rules of Social Relationships: decoding social mysteries through the unique perspectives of autism, 2005). Given her widely publicized success in the field of animal welfare, and to use an appropriately distasteful metaphor, it is worth considering whether inappropriate human responses to the future could be better understood through the insights from her own autism that she was able to apply to the condition of animals being driven to slaughter. Another pathology that could offer insights into potentially dysfunctional relationships to the future is that of the various forms of amnesia -- understood here as the incapacity to "remember" an imminent future (cf Pointers to the Pathology of Collective Memory, 1980). Switching metaphors again, perhaps the challenge is to move beyond a collective tendency to face a vision of the future like a rabbit caught at night in the headlights of a rapidly oncoming vehicle -- on the way forward!

**Words of power vs Motherhood statements?**

As noted by Edward de Bono (Wordpower: an illustrated dictionary of vital words, 1977), certain words are selected by society for purposes which verge on the magical. They have "spell-binding" power. The international community, and those concerned with social issues and transformation, also tend to attach particular importance to certain words. They are now part of the language of social change through which all initiatives are discussed. As a consequence their significance and relevance as transformative agents goes unchallenged. Many of these words have a metaphorical dimension. Some, such as globalization and sustainability, have been called "megametaphors" (Timothy W. Luke, MegaMetaphorics: Re-Reading Globalization, Sustainability, and Virtualization as Rhetorics of World Politics, 1999). As metaphors they often demonstrate the challenge of metaphorical impoverishment and the impotence of approaches to change that derive from such conceptual dependency.

The past decades have sought to make every use of the power associated with "positive" words in order to cultivate attractors around which we could collectively consense and cohere. Great emphasis has been placed on the search for "common ground", "agreement", "togetherness", "peace", "equality", "universal values" and the spread of "democracy". Stress has been placed on "cutting edge", "leadership", "paradigm shifts", "change", etc.
At what point do we ask whether the focus on such understandings should be examined more closely? Has their efficacy, as understood, been sufficiently and appropriately tested? Will "more of the same" ensure the emergence of that which we sense to be desirable for the future? Should promotion of such understandings not be set in a wider context in which, to employ a musical metaphor, they are challenged by contra-puntal themes to elicit overtones that may carry more powerful meanings? (cf In Quest of Uncommon Ground: beyond impoverished metaphor and the impotence of words of power, 1997; Being Positive Avoiding Negativity: management challenge -- positive vs negative, 2005)

**Dynamically-gated envisioning communities?**

Increasingly social groups, typical of the diversity of civil society, might be usefully understood as forming into psycho-social analogues of the "gated communities" that are now emerging in affluent suburbs. Whilst in the latter case it is for security reasons to sustain a particular lifestyle, in the psycho-social case it would appear to be a question of sustaining a particular belief system or worldview -- and in this case a sense of a desirable future. They might be described as "dynamically gated envisioning communities" -- existential vehicles designed and maintained to travel into a predetermined future. The process is being reinforced by the rapid commercialization of the web and the creation of exclusion zones -- gated communities in cyberspace. (cf Dynamically Gated Conceptual Communities: emergent patterns of isolation within knowledge society, 2004)

The curious feature is that by opting for this mode, each can associate with a future of a particular flavour, feel or vision by a process of self-selection. Failure to buy into this understanding simply ensures exclusion. Such communities may be large or very small -- as in the case of the personal "cocoon". They may overlap in many ways. Of course this condition poses a real challenge for issues of relevance to the future that are common to many communities -- or where one community is effectively exporting problems for which others are obliged to care. How to design and build meaningful bridges between such communities -- especially since the fragmentation they represent is also a fragmentation of our individual psyches into isolated sub-personalities?

**Finding and walking "elven pathways"**

In the social sciences a distinction is now made between the bonding between those within communities and the bridging that exists between communities. Bonding is of course vital to the social integrity of any group. The challenge is the relationship between distinct groups -- the necessary bridging between those distinctions. The challenge is obvious in multi-ethnic communities and the extent to which they tend towards ghettoization -- effectively into "dynamically gated communities". The challenge also exists between disciplines, belief systems, political persuasions, aesthetic preferences, sporting preferences, etc.

The concern here is with bridges -- other than the most tangible -- between distinct communities, modes of thought, or other preferences. Whilst the more tangible ones are evident in sharing of facilities, intermarriage, etc, the less tangible ones tend to be indicated only through vague terms such as "spirit of tolerance" that offer little operational guidance. With what subtle language can such bridges be more clearly described -- especially since the different communities tend to be associated with different languages or jargons through which their future is articulated?

A possible generic term for these intangible walkways is "elven pathways". Elves are common to the mythology of the founding countries of the European Union (and the culture of many permanent members of the UN Security Council) and have come to constitute a significant part of the imaginative literature and games in cultures around the world -- whose myths have corresponding entities. As with all myths, it is the contemporary significance of elves as carriers of certain qualities that is of importance -- rather than the degree to which they exist or have existed "in reality". The closest "real-world" counterparts to the elves are said to be the Tuatha Dé Danann of Ireland -- a people ageless, heroic, skilled in the arts, and of wistful beauty, doomed to pass from the world, "withdrawing into the stones" and remaining only as a memory to those who come after through the fairy traditions that have delighted generations. [more]

Is it possible that the same will be said in the distant future of the heroic visionaries and cultural creatives of the current era?

Some of the characteristics of "elven pathways" may include (in no particular order):

- **aesthetic associations**: these are the core of design (interior decoration, clothing design, landscape design, building design, etc); they are also evident in other arts (poetic associations, musical associations, dramatic associations, etc). Such associations are based on principles of harmony, proportion and surprise that have long been studied. They enable understanding to travel pathways between seemingly unrelated contexts -- possibly set in opposition as complementaries. These aesthetic associations constitute the pathways across the abyss of difference. Those engaged in this way have a sense that they are engendering the future through innovative design.

- **lateral thinking associations**: these are now well-recognized as essential to breaking "out-of-the-box", to thinking creatively, notably in strategic situations to bring about a desired future

- **humorous associations**: however understood, these tend to offer unforeseen (even mischievous) links between contrasting domains. Humour "works" through providing a degree of credibility to such associations. Their subtlety for the humourless is recognized in the challenge of "getting the joke".

- **creativity**: whether associated with aesthetics, invention or strategic thinking, creativity depends on making probable and possible the improbable and the impossible -- through giving form to unforeseen patterns. The emergence of the worldwide web exemplifies the manner in which new thinking pathways have totally transformed global communications -- as well as the understanding of globalization and the emerging knowledge society.

- **intuition**: however inexplicable, this is a well-recognized factor in creativity of all kinds. Through intuition unusual associations may be acknowledged as meaningful -- and emerging patterns may first be sensed

- **appropriateness**: this may be understood as a design criterion, expressed as the "goodness of fit", but may possibly be as subtle as a particular well-timed gesture -- prompted by intuition
**resonance**: this may be understood in terms of sensed "vibrations" (eg "good vibes") amongst people or groups between which such a "connection" could not have been predicted. Between individuals it may be profoundly significant, as with encounters described as "love at first sight" -- or some other form of recognition. Any such mutual recognition may be the basis for building more tangible relationships

**symbol and myth**: the nature of several of the intangible associations above may be intimated in the patterns of associations in symbol or myth that may well be fundamental to the sense of identity of an individual or a group. Reference to such devices may reinforce the credibility of aesthetic associations and any sense of appropriateness.

**nature and wilderness**: these of course exemplify subtle relationships and the varying extents to which they are recognized, by the most modest gardener or the deepest ecologist.

In his seminal study, Erik Davis (TechGnosis: myth, magic and mysticism in the age of information, 1998/2004) argues that of all the godforms characteristic of classical Greece, Hermes is the one that would feel most at home in the wired world of today -- as ruler of the trans-temporal world of information exchange. Many of the characteristics of Hermes as highlighted by Davis are of relevance to any understanding of "elven pathways":

Apollo can be considered the god of science in its ideal form: pure, ordering, embodying the solar world of clarity and light. Hermes insists that there are always cracks and gaps in such perfect architectures: intelligence moves forward by keeping on its crafty toes, ever opening into a world that is messy, unpredictable, and far from equilibrium. The supreme symbol for the fecund space of possibility and innovation that Hermes exploits is the crossroads... Crossroads are extremely charged spaces. Here choices are made, fears and facts overlap, and the alien first shows its face... Crossroads create... "liminal zones": ambiguous but potent spaces of information and threat that lie at the edge of cultural maps. Here the self finds itself beyond the limits of its own horizon...

Hermes embodies the mythos of the information age not just because he is the lord of communication, but because he is also a mastermind of *technē*, the Greek word that means the art of craft.... Hermes the messenger helps us glimpse the powerful archetypal connections between magic, tricks and technology....

This excluded middle is where the postmodern Hermes is born: a sacred ironist or a visionary skeptic, dancing between logic and archaic perception, myth and modernity, reason and its own hallucinatory excess. And it is precisely this tension, and not some abdication of critical intelligence, that now leads so many intelligent and curious minds to conspiracies, alternative histories, paranormal phenomena, and pop science fiction.

The designer innovator, R Buckminster Fuller (Critical Path, 1981) offers one possible description of "walking eleven pathways" in this introduction to a checklist of eight personal lifestyle operating principles that he adopted:

Since nature was clearly intent on making humans successful in support of the integrity of eternally regenerative Universe, it seemed clear if I undertook ever more humanly favorable physical-environment-producing artifact developments that in fact did improve the chances of all humanity's successful development, it was quite possible that nature would support my efforts, provided I were choosing the successfully most efficient technical means of so doing. Nature was clearly supporting all her intercomplementary ecological regenerative tasks -- ergo I must so commit myself and must depend upon nature of providing the physical means of realization of my invented environment-advantaging artifacts.

**Tangibility vs Hyperlinking**

It is perhaps useful to think of bridging relationships as being of varying degrees of tangibility -- from the most evident to those of greatest subtlety -- as concentric circles of progressively greater diameter. The "elven pathways" are those characteristic of the middle and outer circles -- of higher order connectivity (in mathematical terms) or of much higher valency (in chemical terms). These are pathways perhaps detectable (if only intuitively) to many -- but difficult to tread collectively or to explain credibly to those most focused within a gated envisioning community (namely in the circles of smaller diameter). Venturing onto such subtle pathways calls for **multiple intelligences** -- rather than only a single one.

An interesting approach to giving weight to links that are improbable to conventional modes of thought has recently been taken by the global online bookservice Amazon. It has enhanced its description of each book by listing the "SIPs" it contains (if any), namely the **Statistically Improbable Phrases** that render the book distinctive as providing bridges between cognitive domains..

More generally the worldwide web offers a means for all to provide hyperlinks between domains of concern -- highlighting associations that might otherwise be neglected or ignored. Far less obvious are the strangely unsuspected relationships between mutually dependent species in the natural environment -- with which elves are so closely associated in myth.

Much has necessarily been made of the named rights of individuals to tangibles (food, health, etc) and to intangibles manifest over time (freedom of information, freedom of religion, etc). Little attention has focused on the rights to what Christopher Alexander has discussed as the "quality without a name" (Timeless Way of Building, 1979). In A Pattern Language (1977), Alexander has done much to clarify what would here be termed the elven pathways fundamental to providing a subtle sense of a desirable "place to be" or a "sense of place" - - of feeling "at home". Industrialized society has however come to recognize aspects of its importance under the term "quality time" or in the increasing difficulty for top corporations to retain valuable executives. But the point was made long ago by the realization that "man cannot live by bread alone".

The challenge is how to move (or dance) along the elven pathways -- across the evanescent bridges between particular ways of knowing
and their communities. This dynamic may be the essence of "quality of life" without which development is essentially meaningless -- to all but the "gnomes". It might even be said that to "de-fine" such pathways within conventional modes of thought is to remove from them all that is "fine" in the quality of life that people seek.

Such mythopoetic concerns may be fruitfully contrasted with those of the complexity sciences and their preoccupation with autopoiesis. By extension, their mathematical language easily refers to hyperspaces, multidimensionality and parallel universes -- with significant expectation that a Theory of Everything will be discovered, notably to reframe understanding of the "future". These concerns are far beyond ordinary comprehension, as highlighted by mathematician Roger Penrose in calling upon non-visionary senses with respect to the future of mathematical insight:

"...the more deeply we probe the fundamentals of physical behaviour, the more we find that it is very precisely controlled by mathematics. Moreover, the mathematics we find is not just just of a direct calculational nature; it is of a profoundly sophisticated character, where there is subtlety and beauty of a kind that is not to be seen in the mathematics that is relevant to physics at a less fundamental level. In accordance with this, progress towards a deeper physical understanding, if it is not able to be guided in detail by experiment, must rely more and more heavily on an ability to appreciate the physical relevance and depth of the mathematics, and to 'sniff out' the appropriate ideas by use of a profoundly sensitive aesthetic mathematical appreciation."

(Roger Penrose, The Road to Reality: the complete guide to laws of the universe, 2005, p. 1026)

Such views are typically questioned in "gnomish" contexts (cf Robert Matthews, Nothing is gained by searching for a 'theory of everything', Financial Times, 3-4 June 2006).

Clearly there is a case for what might be called "hypercomprehension" (explored elsewhere in terms of "cognitive fusion": Enactivating a Cognitive Fusion Reactor: Imaginal Transformation of Energy Resourcing (ITER-8), 2006). It could be argued that understandings of "hyperdimensionality" have long been embedded in traditional works of wisdom (cf Hyperspace Clues to the Psychology of the Pattern that Connects in the light of 81 Tao Te Ching insights, 2003). The associated paradoxes, recognized in "crazy wisdom" literature, are clearly related to a form of counter-intuitive "twist" (cf Engaging with Questions of Higher Order: cognitive vigilance required for higher degrees of twistedness, 2004) -- perhaps the "curling" of higher dimensions hypothesized by physicists. Is this subtle degree of connectivity to be associated in some way with understanding of elven pathways -- as exemplified by elvish predilection for riddles? Are the domains and degrees of subtlety of these pathways usefully, and precisely, indicated by the outer fringes of the Mandelbrot set (cf Psycho-social Significance of the Mandelbrot Set: a sustainable boundary between chaos and order, 2005)?

The major challenge to comprehending the dynamics of an emergent future -- and its "embodiment" -- points directly at the traditional role of symbol and myth in holding complex insights in a manner that lends itself to various levels of comprehension, as required. The challenge of the unceasing proliferation of knowledge and wisdom about how to think about possible futures is then to be understood how to package it into integrative symbols that can be "grocked" rather than detachedly "observed". It is only through embodying the knowledge that its dimensions can be interrelated and travelled.

Enactivating "the pattern that connects"

The above remarks may be considered further from any focus on a "vision" of the future. They have been advanced to reframe the limitations of the optical commitment to "focus" and "vision" -- notably by implicitly questioning any prematurely closed understanding of the spacetime locus of "future". Emphasis has instead been placed on connectivity -- not in a descriptive sense but rather in the sense of being able to travel the associative pathways between the islands of more definitive ways of knowing. As with the troubadour travelling between the medieval courts, how can such subtle connectivity be given credibility to those for whom the elven pathways are too fragile and risky -- perhaps to the point of insubstantiality and evanescence? How can they be offered the opportunity to move between the gated envisioning communities?

The troubadour exemplifies an aspect of the methodology celebrated in a Buddhist precept: Laying down the Path through Walking. This might be understood as an act of imagination -- possibly to be described as "magic". Francisco Varela (Laying Down a Path in Walking: essays on enactive cognition, 1997) has notably explored this process -- giving rise to the approach now termed "enactivism" (cf Francisco Varela, et al. The Embodied Mind: cognitive science and human experience, 1991).

The enactivist approach to "laying down the path" may be usefully contrasted with a common practice of "lying about the path" one is walking -- whether to oneself or to others. Both may be contrasted with a distinction now made between "faith-based" and "reality-based" decision-making at the highest level as noted in a much-cited article by Ron Suskind (Without a Doubt, The New York Times, In The Magazine, 17 October 2004) regarding an exchange with an aide in the decision-making circle of President Bush:

"The aide said that guys like me were "in what we call the reality-based community," which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality." I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. "That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality -- judiciously, as you will -- we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do."

Such a perception of "laying down the path" offers an interesting insight into emerging understanding of the nature of a gated envisioning community. The view is confirmed by Gary Younge (Never mind the truth, The Guardian, 31 May 2004):
Politics has, to an extent, always been about the triumph of symbols over substance and assertion over actuality. But in the case of Iraq this trend seems to have reached its apogee, as though statements by themselves can fashion reality by the force of their own will and judgment. Declaration and proclamation have become everything. The question of whether they bear any relation to the world we actually live in seems like an unpleasant and occasionally embarrassing intrusion. The motto of the day both in Downing Street and the White House seems to be: "To say it is so is to make it so." These people are rewriting history before the ink on the first draft is even dry.

Perhaps, in contrast to such "perversions", the significance of the pattern of elven walkways has been well-identified by Gregory Bateson (Mind and Nature: a necessary unity, 1979) in making the point that:

"The pattern which connects is a meta-pattern. It is a pattern of patterns. It is that meta-pattern which defines the vast generalization that, indeed, it is patterns which connect."

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 we can give it the meaning necessary for it to be sufficiently comprehensible to carry the quality and coherence with which we wish to be experientially associated.

As recognized down the centuries by indigenous peoples, the "pattern that connects" has to be enactivated through individual and collective engagement -- periodically, as in the case of the Australian songlines that have to be ritually "sung" to "refresh" them. As with such traditions, do the elven pathways effectively have to be sung into existence by those prepared to walk them? Is it through this process that the future is engendered? "Walking" of course offers a powerful metaphor of alternation between engagement "of the left" and "of the right" -- perhaps essential to any cognitive movement along elven pathways (cf Transdisciplinarity-3 as the Emergence of Patterned Experience: transcending duality as the conceptual equivalent of learning to walk, 1994).

The elven pathways have to be "walked" in this way to keep them alive to ourselves and to our culture. It is not they that run the risk of becoming non-existent, however, rather it is our inability to recognize their existence that endangers the quality of our own lives, our sense of identity and the survival of our own culture.

**Enactivating the "lost language of the elves"

There is a major disconnect between the boredom -- for many voters -- of the "reasonable" social projects that emerge from intergovernmental programmes and the excitement of unusual "irrational" triggers to the imagination (eg Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, Da Vinci Code, etc). To these, billions are increasingly attracted. The "demonic" winner of the Eurovision Song Contest in 2006 may well be the closest thing to an elven oracle that has appeared to widespread popular approval -- supported by EU public funding. Such examples, including Live 8 (2005), could be usefully recognized as symptomatic of the disconnect between institutionalized soullessness and the integrating myths that globalized society calls into question and denies -- myths that are nevertheless echoed in (multi-)media fantasies of widespread appeal.

Recent history suggests that it would be highly dangerous to dismiss such phenomena as trivia. The best cautionary example is perhaps the capacity of Adolf Hitler to integrate a violent political agenda with Germanic myths and music. The subtle integration of Christian fundamentalist "end times" myths with an American faith-based foreign policy in the Middle East offers a quite different example. Is there a "lost language" -- "of the elves" -- to be rediscovered in order to enable people to travel the walkways of their culture? Perhaps a language to give meaning to the vital challenges of the time? A language that could embody all that is notably lost in the costly multi-lingual babelization of institutionalized communication required for international policy-making? It could be argued that the dominant languages of the world do not embody the capacity to highlight those pathways with sufficient credibility so that they can be walked in practice -- rather than only faintly recognized and honoured through incidental poetry and music. (cf From Information Highways to Songlines of the Noosphere: global configuration of hypertext pathways as a prerequisite for meaningful collective transformation, 1996).

**Is there now a case for inventing a language to give greater credibility to the subtle relationships vital to sustaining quality of life?** The process of elaborating its characteristics might even result in the recognition that many already "speak" it and -- as with the misrepresentation of the "discovery of America" by Europeans -- that it is already a language understood by many, however poorly. Such a "lost language" may actually be related to some form of deep racial memory -- offering an explanation for the manner in which its significance can be triggered by certain symbols and works of art (as well as dreams).

For example, as author of Lord of the Rings, J R R Tolkien, developed Quenya ("the Ancient Tongue") as one of several "languages of the elves" (now notably sustained by the Elvish Linguistic Fellowship of the Mythopoeic Society), as well as many associated languages. Many others have invested in the creation of artificial or constructed languages.

Long before the development of the virtual world Second Life, Erik Davis (1998) argued succinctly:

Tolkien's work proved the point he himself made in his essay On Fairy Stories. A great author of fantasy "makes a secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what it relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside." Like designers of virtual worlds today, Tolkien knew that successful secondary worlds were
not wild flights of fancy, but products of creative method and potent technology -- what Tolkien described as an "elvish craft" capable of suspending the disbelief of "both designer and spectator".

Many of the dominant visions of future "development" are elaborated under the influence of the [Gnomes of Zurich] -- a euphemism for the ultra-secretive, powerful businessmen that supposedly exert a high degree of influence on the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (as part of the [Washington Consensus]). Curiously, following initial political use of the term in the UK in 1956, it was used for Project Gnome in 1961 -- the first of 28 Peaceful Nuclear Explosions (terminated in 1973) with the objective of developing nuclear explosives for peaceful applications through excavation of craters.

It might therefore be argued that such visions are first articulated in a "gnomish language". This might be understood to imbue such visions with the heavy, dwarfish cunning of gnomes of misery, secretive temperament focused on the earthen resources of the mundane world. The challenge is to provide carriers for other qualities -- as addressed in part by Tolkien in articulating a lighter, subtler language of the "High Elves" (Tareldar) and the "Elves of Light" (Calaquendi). It is most curious to note that a certain understanding of various "elves" and "gnomes" forms part of the jargon of the international investment world (cf Andrew Beattie, Elves and Gnomes: a fairytale world of investing, 20 May 2003) -- currency traders are also referred to as Gnomes of Zurich.

In the light of such arguments, perhaps the options for the future should first be elaborated and debated in a more suitable elvish language -- only then to be translated into the various languages favoured by the United Nations. Preference should therefore first be given to a language emphasizing a dynamic reality rather than a static one (in contrast to the preference for reports on the State of the World, the State of the Union, or the State of the Environment -- or for the "statutes" of an organization, or even for nation "states").

Given the "gnomish influence" of the past, perhaps currently unresolved challenges, such as popular agreement on a "Constitution" for the European Union, could be addressed by understanding such agreements in dynamic terms -- treating the "Constitution" as a verb rather than as a noun, perhaps in song rather than text. The elvish language required should therefore be one in which verbs were dominant rather than nouns -- perhaps according to what languages were languages, to benefit from harmonic resonances. Perhaps the challenge of the identity of "Europe" could itself be understood dynamically as a verb -- or an overtone -- rather than as a noun. Any reform of the United Nations, or its global strategies, could also benefit from such an elven approach -- with the singability of their basic texts being held as an indicator of both their requisite complexity and their popular comprehensibility.

Any such shift from an inherently "static" approach to a dynamic one could well enable a greater political will for sustainable change -- in contrast to implementation of remedies that are quick, simple and judged by hindsight and history to have been disastrously wrong. Much of the currently landed policy-making is indeed made by neglecting subtle relationships and feedback loops -- effectively denying the relevance or existence of elven pathways. The limited efficacy of such strategic thinking is subsequently made evident by the new problems engendered as a consequence of this negligence. Future reality is then disastrously, if not catastrophically, evoked -- a reminder of the subtle checks and balances associated with elven pathways, and the power they subtly represent.

Engaging oneself and the world: a divine marriage?

Is there yet another trap to such "de-scription" of a possibility? There is an implication that realization of such possibilities -- such as the (re)discovery of a lost language -- is dependent on consensus on collective action by powerful others, appropriately funded. But "de-scription" obscures our individual capacity to create such a "script". In particular it neutralizes our capacity to become that script -- to become the "writing on the wall", that effectively creates the wall in the moment.

In this context, the sceptic's case for despair, despite the availability of the world's wisdom, has been beautifully articulated in the classic poem of Omar Khayyám (1048-1131) containing the much-cited verse:

The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

The whole poem is effectively an excellent "de-scription" of the trap for many. As noted by an early policy scientist, Geoffrey Vickers: "A trap is a function of the nature of the trapped" (Freedom in a rocking boat: changing values in an unstable society, 1972). The poem clarifies, but obscures, that which is entrapped by the de-scription -- namely the "script" reader, buying into a status as a victim of circumstances on the "wheel of life and death". Identifying with the writer, however, one is then free to "de-pict" a different reality -- and able then to "move on" to engender a different future. This is dependent on detachment from any particular writing of the "moving finger" one embodies.

Missing from any such framing of the role of detachment is the complementary process of "engagement". In engendering the future, and relating to it, there is a need to engage both with oneself and with the world -- and to ensure (as "match-maker") an engagement between the two. This might be understood as the prelude to a "divine marriage" -- a "marriage made in heaven" -- by which the future is then engendered.

A reframing of the challenge, based on such engagement, can be applied to a number of the core challenges of governance -- but especially to how one governs the use of one's own energy. In this respect, it is both curious and tragic how collective progress has been intimately associated with individual disempowerment. Consider the following possibilities for the future of dynamic relationships of an individual to the world:

- **employment**: the status of being "employed", with all its associations (in contrast to being "unemployed"), is now subject to recognition by national tax authorities. Without such recognition people cannot legitimately describe themselves as employed
irrespective of how their time is used -- an issue only recently acknowledged in the case of homemakers and carers, for example. The perversion is perhaps greatest in the case of a peasant farmer who, being "unemployed", may be assumed not to be "working". A contemplative monk, for example, cannot currently be considered to be engaged in meaningful work any more than a person caring for their own garden. Both are however free to frame the situation otherwise in working to elaborate their own future. (cf Sustainable Occupation beyond the Economic Rationale: Reframing employment, non-profit-making and voluntary, 1998)

- **education**: whether a person is to be considered "educated" is similarly determined by "certification" through which "qualifications" are confirmed by society as having been acquired (irrespective of any deception). An individual is however free to pursue a variety of experiences framed as constituting an education, through which qualities and maturity are acquired -- relevant to the individual's own comprehension of a desirable future. (cf Attitude Entrainment: Communicating thriving skills and insights, 2004)

- **energy**: as might be expected, society frames "energy" in "gnomish" terms typically relating to energy that can be derived from the earth (coal, oil, geothermal, water, nuclear, etc) and primarily by large corporate enterprises. Only reluctantly is recognition accorded to sources of energy more freely available (biomass, solar, wind). Legislation may typically inhibit individuals from obtaining energy of their own accord. More problematic is the complete failure to recognize the forms of psychosocial energy on which individuals and communities may be dependent for their survival when utilities fail to deliver -- notably in disaster situations. Individuals are however free to empower themselves through recognition of their own personal energy, possibly enhanced by that of others, as the primary factor in their survival and thriving. (cf Reframing Sustainable Sources of Energy for the Future: the vital role of psychosocial variants, 2006)

- **economics**: society typically focuses exclusively on the transactions with and between corporate entities -- constraining those between individuals. Little recognition is accorded to initiatives like local exchange trading systems (LETS) that frame themselves as complementary to any broader system. Typically legislation may inhibit or prohibit such initiatives -- especially in the case of complementary currencies. Individuals are however free to frame their situation differently, if only in barter mode or in the exchange of "friendly favours" -- below any institutional radar. (cf Sustaining a pattern of alternative community initiatives: based on their differences from the conventional economic rationale, 1998)

- **entertainment**: whether challenged by the problems of survival, or faced with how to cultivate an enhanced quality of life in the midst of plenty, the opportunities for entertainment are becoming increasingly commodified. This creates a high degree of dependency on society and a significant problem of isolation for many (notably the elderly). This process marginalizes those forms of entertainment that do not call extensively on economic resources. Individuals are however free to reframe their understanding of meaningful entertainment -- notably by cultivating their exploration of "elven pathways". In this context, understood as "re-creation", entertainment offers the opportunity of "re-invention" to the individual. (cf Humour and Play-Fullness: essential integrative processes in governance, religion and transdisciplinarity, 2005)

Similar opportunities could be detailed with respect to the future of contextual relationships, in contrast with the dynamic relationships above. Briefly:

- **environment**: preoccupation with the "environment" has been reframed by society to lie beyond the scope of the individual. The individual is however free to frame the environment, whether immediate or distant, as a cognitive extension of awareness -- the future of which then calls upon their own creative initiatives (cf My Reflecting Mirror World: making Joburg worthwhile, 2002)

- **security**: this has now been framed as a collective challenge, despite the personal sense of insecurity nevertheless experienced by many. Again individuals are however free to frame their security situation otherwise, as is creatively and courageously explored by many in borderline situations (cf Alternative Approaches to Security: towards well-being and psychological dimensions of sustainability, 2004)

- **shelter**: the lack of shelter, meeting standards promoted by the building industry, has been framed to undermine the sense of dignity that is strikingly characteristic of many in marginal situations -- in marked contrast to the lack of dignity of many in dwellings framed as acceptable, however alienating. The challenge is further misrepresented by tendencies to relocate people away from their traditional homeland with which the meaning in their lives is intimately associated. Individuals are however free radically to reframe as "home" any context they inhabit -- as many have learnt to do in a society of high mobility and problematic personal circumstances.

- **health**: this has now been framed by society as a matter of dependency on health services and pharmaceutical products. Legislation is formulated to inhibit any other approaches to care -- whether or not health needs can be met with dignity by society in a timely manner. Again individuals are free to understand health in a more holistic manner (or not) and to recognize the efficacy of any remedy they choose.

In engaging with oneself and with the world, it is through one's own understanding of the engagement between these complementary understandings that the divine marriage is to be achieved. There is of course scope to frame oneself as the "innocent beauty" and society as the "ugly beast". It is also possible to favour the alternative scenario of oneself as "sinner" and society as "benefvolent". As in any courtship, both have their place in the dynamic prelude to the divine marriage. The challenge may well be best understood in mythopoetic terms (cf Poetry-making and Policy-making: arranging a marriage between Beauty and the Beast, 1993).

**Embodying the world -- the search for radical coherence?**

The "pattern that connects" can indeed be understood as an imposed reality -- a subtle "de-scription" of collective reality to which one is obliged to sub-scribe as a player in another’s script -- a trap, however delightful. But it may also be understood as a pattern that one creatively engages -- empowered as the writer of one's own script, using one's preferred metaphors. This is consistent with the newly recognized freedom to frame God through different metaphors, to explore a variety of possible relationships (cf Sally McFague, Models of God: theology for an ecological, nuclear age, 1987). As to whether this is mere illusion, Kenneth Boulding responds:
Our consciousness of the unity of the self in the middle of a vast complexity of images or material structures is at least a suitable metaphor for the unity of a group, organization, department, discipline, or science. If personification is only a metaphor, let us not despise metaphors - we might be one ourselves. *(Ecodynamics; a new theory of societal evolution, 1978)*

In this radical sense, all psychosocial constructs can be considered one's own "intellectual property" in an existential sense. They do not belong to others, except as gifted through one's own acquiescence. Of course, from their perspective and within their community, these constructs may well be understood otherwise -- if one allows for that reality in one's own script!

There is therefore a sense in which one invokes one's environment and one's world -- if not the universe itself. One can indeed choose to "be the world", sustained by a meaningful relationship to its diversity. The "pattern that connects" is then a pattern that exemplifies one's identity and through which one is expressed -- hence the title of the book by Gregory Bateson through which the phrase was introduced: *Mind and Nature: a necessary unity* (1979). The "divine marriage", following the various forms of one's engagement (noted above), then engenders a world -- a world that one embodies oneself.

However there is a dynamic implicit in this description. It is not a static condition. The "moving finger" continues to write and -- as with breathing -- new insights inspire and refresh, before being allowed to expire to leave place for the even newer. Substance is given to the reality of an "other" before that significance is withdrawn -- even "sacrificed".

One approach to understanding the "lost language" of pattern-shifting in such a process reality can be obtained from insights into the 4,000 year-old chanted hymns of the Rg Veda of the Indian tradition (as discussed elsewhere). A very powerful exploration of this work by a philosopher, Antonio de Nicolas, using the non-Boolean logic of quantum mechanics, opens up valuable approaches to integration. The unique feature of the approach is that it is grounded in tone and the shifting relationships between tone. It is through the pattern of musical tones that the significance of the Rg Veda is to be found:

> Therefore, from a linguistic and cultural perspective, we have to be aware that we are dealing with a language where tonal and arithmetical relations establish the epistemological invariances... Language grounded in music is grounded thereby on context dependency; any tone can have any possible relation to other tones, and the shift from one tone to another, which alone makes melody possible, is a shift in perspective which the singer himself embodies. Any perspective (tone) must be "sacrificed" for a new one to come into being; the song is a radical activity which requires innovation while maintaining continuity, and the "world" is the creation of the singer, who shares its dimensions with the song. (Antonio de Nicolas, *Meditations through the Rg Veda*, 1978, p. 57)

Through such processes, there is not only a dance between the creative capacities of a multiplicity of communities, but also in the changing degree to which one gives weight and substance to such externalities in one's script. It is these processes that engender the future -- perhaps to be understood as an "open source future", collectively constructed as with "open source software". Such an "open source future" is to be contrasted with efforts to get everyone "singing from the same hymn sheet" in subscribing to what might be termed a single-standard "microsoft future" (cf Eric S. Raymond, *Cathedral and the Bazaar*). In an "open source future", everyone has the opportunity to be "Bill Gates"!

**Embodying the universe?**

It is one thing to argue that humans can "be their own world" to sustain its "patterns that connect", but how meaningful is this in relation to the extraterrestrials, from whom a visit is expected anytime? (cf current setting of *The Paradigm Clock*). Should they be expected to share our "vision"? How are they to be designed into one's script? How to understand the "pattern that connects" the stars? Curiously, as developed by Tolkien, the High Elves were known as the People of the Stars. Ironic if the aliens were to exhibit elven qualities -- being recognizably "fey" and enamoured of riddles!

Suppose that a holistic organization of the universe were to be taken seriously. What might this mean? It could mean that every distant physical body was in some way fractally "represented" on this planet. How might this work? Suppose this "representation" was not so much physical as psycho-physical -- namely involving non-physical dimensions. Modern physics is very free with its need to have up to 11 dimensions to explain matters beyond the three-dimensional.

Within some such broader framework, each person, through their psycho-physical makeup (how they perceived and dimensioned their universe), might then carry a unique patterning "keyed" in some way to distant stellar bodies. The point that merits reflection in relation to "keyed" lies in the experience of how one encounters another individual. One can gain a sense of a quite unique configuration of forces or energies that constitutes that individual's universe. One can, to some extent, look into that person's universe. This process may be tantamount to using the person as a "stargate".

If each of us is effectively bonded to a distant stellar body, then much of our individual daily experience on this planet is interpreted through the configuration of forces conditioned by the "stellar" bond particular to each of us. We may be psychically as close to such apparently distant parts as being a "hair's breadth away"; we may have much of our being elsewhere. We may each of us be seeing and experiencing this world as "aliens". When we encounter another person, do we meet "as stargates" -- each pulling or distorting the significance of the encounter in terms of the psycho-physics of distant parts of the universe?

People may therefore already be able to travel the universe in a most important sense, and many may be engaged in doing so -- whilst physicists reinforce an expectation that we are all dependent on their ability to develop faster than light travel sometime in the future. Within you, or in collaboration with others, you may have a more powerful manipulator of psycho-physical space than all the particle
accelerators and cyclo-synchrotrons put together. You may be being deprived of that awareness by the emphasis of the scientific establishment on the cost and dangers of such gadgetry and the sophistication required to operate them safely! Note the embarrassment relating to cold fusion -- maybe we can all do surprising things "at room temperature"?

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