



laetus in praesens

Alternative view of segmented documents via Kairos

23 April 2003 | Draft

Complementary Patterns of Meaningful Truth and the Interface between Alternative Variants

-- / --

Part 2 of [Renaissance Zones: experimenting with the intentional significance of the Damanhur community](#)

[Meaningful truth: Truth about truth](#) | [Seductive truth](#) | [Probability theory of truth](#) | [Styles of truth](#) | [Engagement with truth](#) | [Games of untruth](#) | [Scope of truth and coherence](#) | [Group think and self-reference](#)
[Logic of interface dynamics](#) | [Reactive responses](#) | [Paradoxical exceptionalism](#) | [Experiments in alternative truth handling](#)
[Degrees of explanation: Levels of explanation](#) | [Transparency and necessary misrepresentation](#) | [Security / protection](#) | [Misdirection](#)

Meaningful truth: varieties of coherence

The assumption is easily made that there is only a single form of truth. However in the complex global society of today, this is not the case.

Truth about truth: The contasting understandings of truth are helpfully explored by Walter Truett Anderson (*The Truth about Truth: de-confusing and re-constructing the postmodern world*. 1995) whose central point is that:

...we are in the midst of a great, confusing, stressful and enormously promising historical transition, and it has to do with a change no so much in *what* we believe as in *how* we believe it. (p. 2)

In endeavouring to summarize the views of a range of authors, Anderson indicates that this transition has four main dimensions:

- self-concept: transition from a "found" identity fixed by social role or tradition to understanding of self in terms of a "made" identity
- moral and ethical discourse: transition from an inherited "found" morality to a "made" morality forged out of dialogue and choice -- a relativism as characterized by constructivists, ironists or postmodern humanists with respect to the "ever-shifting ground of our own socially constructed cultural worldviews"
- art and culture: transition from a dominant style to endless improvisation, thematic variation, and eclecticism calling upon all the world's cultural symbols
- globalization: transition from restrictive stable boundaries to fluid boundaries recognizable as social constructions that may be freely crossed

In concluding, Anderson asks:

What is it that people are discovering now? Ernest Becker said people are discovering "the fictitious nature of the action world", developing eyes to see that "flimsy canopy" that hangs over human life. Others say people are discovering the symbolic universe, the socially constructed nature of reality -- or, simply, culture. People are constructing maps that enable them to find something new and different about the powerful symbolic structures that shape our lives: We are beginning to see all manner of things -- values and beliefs, rituals, ideas about childhood and death, traditions, interpretations of history, ethnicity, even the idea of culture -- as inventions. This discovery itself, now being made by people all over the world, becomes a part of our common ground. It is central to an emerging understanding of the human condition, and also a central part of a new global culture which is, in a sense, a culture about cultures. (p. 241)

He then argues:

So, as it turns out, we have not one Enlightenment project, but three: a Western one based on rational thought, an Eastern one based on seeing through the illusion of Self, and a postmodern one based on the concept of socially constructed reality (p. 243)

It could be argued that at Damanhur the community navigates skillfully between these different projects.

Seductive truth: Anderson might also have included the view on truth of Jacques Attali [*Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, 1985], as explored [elsewhere](#).

The exploration of the nature of an appropriately meaningful truth ("an answer") must take into account a most important phenomenon. That is that few groups, projects, or schools of thought have difficulty in discovering and promulgating a truth or answer. The difficulty for society as a whole arises from the conflictual relationship between such answers, or their denial of each other as irrelevant, out-of-date, erroneous, or unworthy of consideration. In the words of Jacques Attali (#2) concerning remedial ideas about the current crisis:

"Au-delà des problèmes que pose toute sélection d'idées...voici l'essentiel: si tout ce savoir n'est encore aujourd'hui ni synthétisé, ni assimilé, s'il reste un lieu d'affrontement et d'anathèmes, c'est parce qu'il charrie une image du monde d'une intolérable fixité; et que tout groupe social trouve intérêt à en occulter certains fragments pour tenter d'asseoir sa domination." (5, pp. 10-11)

Perhaps the most important feature of this phenomenon is that every effort is necessarily made to ignore it, to deny its significance, but especially to avoid exploring non-trivial routes beyond the barrier it constitutes to social development. As Attali continues:

"Face à l'immensité de l'enjeu, faut-il alors cesser ce combat rudimentaire entre un vrai et un faux, mettre un terme à cette dénonciation de la parole de l'autre? Et avoir le courage d'admettre que plusieurs discours peuvent être simultanément vrais, c'est-à-dire peuvent valablement interpréter le monde?" (5, p.11)

Attali notes in passing that the multiplicity of truth is also encountered in physics (for example the wave vs particle theory of light). Clearly, as he proceeds to demonstrate, the problem lies in the way truth is to be understood. He distinguishes three senses (5, pp. 11-14):

- a. A theory is true if it can be articulated according to the rules of formal logic, and if its consequences can be verified empirically by any observer. This is the most common scientific criterion of truth, and is that used by establishment institutions of every kind in every society. It gives rise to difficulties if some of the consequences it implies are contradicted by experience. The institutions are then obliged to construct a representation of the world which denies any possibility of its own negation.
- b. A discourse is true (and therefore scientific) if it provides a useful mode of communication for a group in its struggle for power. Unanimity is then forcefully imposed rather than emerging from agreement with a universal rational structure.
- c. A discourse is receivable, and thus true, the moment it produces an understanding of the world for those articulating it. Unanimity is achieved neither by pure logic, nor by force, but by the virtue of seduction. As with beauty, and because it is intimately related to it, truth is not in itself universal. Truth is aesthetic.

Attali compares these three forms of truth in physics with mechanics, thermodynamics, and relativity theories. The equivalents he suggests in economics are regulatory theories, theories of value production, and theories of the organization or management of violence (especially of the non-physical variety), each with their appropriate modes of organization. The first two may be equated with capitalist (most general sense) and marxist (theoretical) approaches. It is the third approach, or basis for world order, which needs to be defined.

As Attali stresses, it is necessary to recognize that the reality of the world, whether in physical or psycho-social terms, is **too complex to be encompassed by a single mode of discourse**. The real cannot be separated from each necessarily partial view of it. It is in fact the multiplicity of views of the world, with all their differences and ambiguities, which renders the world tolerable to the majority, permitting each to develop his own understanding and to manage the violence done to it by others.

"Aujourd'hui cette multiplicité est difficile à préserver. C'est que les deux premiers mondes de la science ont proné, l'un l'universalité, le second la force: ni dans l'un, ni dans l'autre il n'y a place pour la tolérance. Aussi, toute société qui accepte de se représenter le monde selon une seule de ces deux classes de discours s'oblige à l'uniformité. Elle ne peut laisser vivre le troisième sens du vrai, et le voilà inévitablement contraint au mensonge et à la dictature: tout ordre qui élimine l'esthétique comme langue et la séduction comme parole implique inévitablement la dictature." (5, pp.15-16)

Just as in physics the three approaches continue to have their domains of validity, so it should prove to be in the realm of psycho-social organization. The human being has three brains, the third being essential to mediate between the conflicting functions of the other two. The key question is then what kind of organization is implied by this third order of truth such that it could be of any significance for social development? Failure to take account of this question can only result in an answer of essentially limited value.

Probability theory of truth: The Russian statistician, V V Nalimov (*Realms of the Unconscious: the enchanted frontier*, 1982) provides a remarkable synthesis, drawing on the entire range of knowledge (including elements of semantics, natural and social sciences, mysticism, and the arts) in an effort to understand how the human mind perceives the world. The methodology is borrowed largely from physics (as capable of tolerating paradoxes within its own theories), with considerable attention to the role of metaphor and the function

of human imagination in capturing manifestations of consciousness and unconsciousness.

His primary ontological position is that the world is an open one, the outcome of processes that are probabilistic in nature and constantly the domain of novelties and uncertainties. The language in which one captures aspects of reality is itself polymorphic, metaphorical, and constrained by Godelian principles of undecidability. [\[more\]](#)

Styles of truth: It is useful to recognize the essentially different styles of truth associated with science, religion, politics, military and business, for example. Although it might be argued that each "discipline" or "profession" is so distinguished by offering a distinctly meaningful approach to truth and coherence, as explored by Paul Feyerabend (*Against Method*, 1975). It is little wonder that communication between them is challenging. Each offers a different sense of meaningful coherence and has different degrees of tolerance of ambiguity.

In relation to ambiguity, truth can also be usefully related to fluidity or flow:

- truth dependent on stasis, namely on the fixity of boundaries and procedures (perhaps characteristic of fundamentalism)
- truth dependent on dynamics, namely on the skills and coherence (even élan) in navigating contrasting truths (exemplified in "surfing", whether literal or metaphorical)
- truth dependent on authenticity, namely the form of truth suggested by the phrase "Man can embody truth but he cannot know it" (W B Yeats; *Golden Dawn*)
- probabilistic theory of truth (V V Nalimov)

Engagement with truth: The forms and styles of truth discussed above draw attention to the contrasting ways in which people can seek to engage with truth and meaning:

- extraction of truth: typical of science, interrogation (possibly to be understood in terms of the harassment of reality)
- control of truth: typical of the censorship and secrecy policies of authorities (government, priesthoods, professions, etc)
- resonating with truth: typical of an aesthetic or celebratory perspective (including extremes such as the ritual of Aborigines to "sing to the land")
- seduction by truth: typical of a marketing or a romantic perspective
- embodiment of truth: as valued in traditional village elders or wherever "wisdom" is recognized
- possession by truth: as typical of those obsessed with particular perspectives (conspiracy theorists), or in the case of phenomena of possession

Whether any of the above is "true" then depends on one's relationships to truths and what one does (or intends to do) with such truth, on what (or into what) one can project one's truth -- and especially if it cannot be contained within one framework.

One of the most famous anagrams of all time was constructed in the Middle Ages. The unknown author contrived it as a Latin dialogue between Pilate and Jesus. Jesus' answer to Pilate's question "What is truth?" is phrased as an ingenious anagram of the letters of that very question: Pilate: *Quid est veritas?* ("What is truth?") Jesus: *Est vir qui adest.* ("It is the man before you.")

The effort by physicists to entrap and control truth in a Theory of Everything is best framed in the words of Alvin Toffler (*The Third Wave*):

Even the most powerful metaphor is capable of yielding only partial truth. No metaphor tells the whole story from all sides, and hence no vision of the present, let alone the future, can ever be complete or final. The recognition that no knowledge can be complete, no metaphor entire, is itself humanizing. It counteracts fanaticism. It grants even to adversaries the possibility of partial truth, and to oneself the possibility of error.

As pointed out by Donald Michael (*On Learning to Plan and Planning to Learn*, 1973) regarding "On the requirement to embrace error":

More bluntly, future-responsive societal learning makes it necessary for individuals and organizations to embrace error. It is the only way to ensure a shared self-consciousness about limited theory to the nature of social dynamics, about limited data for testing theory, and hence about our limited ability to control our situation well enough to be successful more often than not

Games of untruth: Social processes depend in part on the meaningful integration of "untruth" in different ways:

- marketing: this may well depend on judicious revelation and concealment of truth in order to close the deal with the customer for the product or service; competing belief systems must increasingly use such techniques. the extreme form is of course the confidence trick (tiger)
- bluff in games: lying in one form or another (by commission or omission) may be an integral feature of many games
- relationships: many relationships depend on a complex mix of truth and untruth, revealing and concealing matters which nourish and safeguard the bond
- humour: the combination of truth and untruth is fundamental to many forms of humour
- performance assessment: use of misdirection
- politics: the making of electoral promises, "in good faith", is basic to politics -- as are the subsequent broken of promises, or the denial that they had ever been made as described
-
- ?netted / spiked by the truths / metaphors of others
- ?tantra

Scope of truth and coherence: The viability of any truth may be distinguished as follows:

- for self: namely a truth that one holds personally, possibly unbeknownst to others, that provides a sense of meaning and coherence
- for group: namely a truth that one shares with others (such as "common values") that provide coherence and purpose to the organization of any such group
- for others: namely a truth widely shared (possibly claimed to be "universal")

Group think and self-reference: A major challenge is to distinguish the conditions in which:

- a shared truth provides valuable coherence that is vital to the functioning of the group, from
- a shared truth provides a dysfunctional form of coherence that precludes the group from responding appropriately to its environment

The second can be pejoratively defined as "group think" [more]. But to what degree is any group dependent on a form of "group think" for its coherence? When does this become dysfunctional? In both cases a group may give higher priority to information originating and circulating within the group (self-reference, self-citation). Many schools of thought may be described somewhat pejoratively as "mutual citation networks".

The danger is that they then develop mechanisms for blocking out and denying the significance of other information, as delightfully characteristic of the *Archaeoraptor* case (*Groupthink: the Search for Archaeoraptor as a Metaphoric Tale*, 2002). There is an irony to this case in relation to time travel, because *Archaeoraptor* represents the evolutionary transition link from flight by reptiles to that by birds.

Logic of interface dynamics

The interface between two radically different styles of logic must necessarily prove extremely challenging to the continuity and comprehensibility of any communication in society. This has been best described by mathematician Ron Atkin (*Multidimensional Man*, 1981) [more]. A major difficulty is to distinguish between the coherence of an alternative perspective (which may well appear incoherent) and a perspective that is inherently incoherent (even though allowance may erroneously be made for difficulties of comprehension). Such challenges are notably evident in the case of fundamental physics and cosmology, of which it has been said that it is not a question of whether, as remarked by Niels Bohr, a theory is "crazy" but of whether "it is crazy enough"

- The point of philosophy is to start with something so simple as not to seem worth stating, and to end with something so paradoxical that no one will believe it. (Bertrand Russell)
- We are all agreed that your theory is crazy. The question which divides us is whether it is crazy enough to have a chance of being correct. My own feeling is that it is not crazy enough. (Niels Bohr)

The situation is complicated by the category manipulation practiced both by those advocating or engaging in social experiments -- and by those opposing such experiments. Both engage in definitional games of various kinds. The ensuing dialogue about the merit of social experimentation is therefore highly confused. This confusion is exploited by establishment forces to inhibit further experimentation. The repression of experimentation then reinforces the perspectives of those critical of the status quo. (see *Social Experiments and Sects: Beyond category manipulation by advocates and opponents*, 1997)

Reactive responses: The typical set of social processes and [controversies](#) at any such interface may include :

- mutual incomprehensibility of language or jargon
- accusations of dishonest fiscal practices
- problems relating to regulations (planning, construction, social security, standards, local currency, telecommunications, energy, etc)
- problems associated with official belief systems, typically religions
- demonization (as "evil") in the light of particular religious beliefs
- scapegoating as a cause of other problems
- opportunity for media exposés, amplified and slanted by media bias
- problems associated with entrenched academic disciplines and concerns about pseudo-science
- problems associated with conventional medical practice, health standards, and concerns about medical quackery
- concerns about privacy vs transparency
- accusations of unsavoury sexual practices
- vengeful betrayal by disgruntled participants

As a social experiment Damanhur has evoked many of these standard contextual responses in the past. Its unconventional emphases have attracted much attention from the Italian government, the Catholic Church [more], the media, and local authorities (see Jeff Merrifield (*Damanhur: the community they tried to brand a cult*, 1999). The point is made that social experiments with alternatives are effectively an expression of dissatisfaction with mainstream approaches -- easily framed as a dangerous threat to established mainstream structures. Curiously it was only official recognition of the quality and amount of art work in its Temple of Mankind that prevented the underground complex from being destroyed.

There is however every effort to condemn and stigmatize such experiments -- especially when they can only be undertaken on the margins of society on the initiative of enthusiastic groups with their own resources. The classic statement in this respect is that of Henry Kissinger in November 1970 in justifying the destabilization of Allende's experiment in Chile in order to prevent the emergence of any credible alternative model to that advocated by the USA. Cuba continues to be framed as a threat simply because it is so radically

different from the USA.

Paradoxical exceptionalism: It is not the case that a single logical framework characterizes conventional society. Paradoxically most of the arguments raised in criticism of experiments in alternative modes of thinking do not apply to a range of "acceptable" logical frameworks that may be strikingly different from what is assumed to be a mainstream perspective. The philosopher Paul Feyerabend comes closest to reconciling such discontinuities

How is it that "sects" are considered problematic in comparison with belief systems that include:

- supernatural notion of "miracles"
- supplication addressed to secondary invisible beings (angels)
- belief in unnatural processes such virgin birth and resurrection
- elitist process of beatifying influential members (often with unseemly haste)
- systematic indoctrination from an early age ("if they are young enough")
- regulation of process of marriage, choice of partner and sexual activity
- restriction of personal names to those associated with its own history and mythology
- central symbolic focus on a process of torture (of which the contemporary equivalent might be the electric chair)
- possibility of "rapture" or of being "born again" (as distinct from any concept of "initiation" or "enlightenment")
- infallibility in discernment of "good" and "evil"
- use of idols and amulets in the process of worship
- manipulation of the senses through music, chants and incense in order to psych-up a group (hooliganism?)
- regular consumption of the founder's body and blood (whether "literally" or "metaphorically")
- symbolic marriage of women disciples with the founder
- attribution of powers to relics of key figures
- approval of self-flagellation
- disparagement of beliefs previously held (as with the decision on [reincarnation](#))
- intimate involvement with particular political tendencies themselves subject to indictment (Christian Democrats in Germany and Italy)
- pattern of secret sexual abuse of vulnerable (minors, women, etc) by priesthood
- misleading proselytizing and fund raising techniques (in breach of advertising standards)
- luxuries and privileges accorded to leadership despite vows of poverty

At the time of writing, at Easter at the end of the war in Iraq, these issues are especially poignant as explored by Rev Dr Giles Fraser ([Easter's hawks and doves](#)):

The Easter of the hawks insists that sin always has to be balanced, or paid for, with pain....The idea that human salvation is premised upon the torture and murder of an innocent life is one that has systematically weakened the capacity of European culture to set itself against cruelty.... For this established religion, based as it was on the practice of cultic sacrifice, was a way for the community to launder its own proclivity for violent reciprocity.... Jesus does not oppose the brutality of his treatment by an equal and opposite show of force....Despite this alternative tradition, the punitive voice of Christianity continues to exert considerable influence on public policy, not least in the US. Here a retributive doctrine of the cross is the key link between fundamentalist Christianity and rightwing politics. (*Guardian*, 18 April 2003)

"Anti-sect" initiatives are most assiduous in detecting dangerous systematic flaws ("evil") in others but tend to treat their own extraordinary behaviours and beliefs as specially sanctioned (see [Apologetics research resources on religious cults and sects](#)). Any failures are treated as unfortunate exceptions rather than part of a pattern only too evident to others.

It is a relief to hear, again at the time of the post-Iraq Easter, from such as Rev Dr Martyn Percy ([New beginnings in an empty tomb](#)) that the challenges of handling truth remain paradoxical even for Christianity:

In recent years, theologians, bishops and church leaders have found themselves in difficulties affirming what the resurrection is, and what it might mean. For some, the litmus test of orthodoxy has to be a literal affirmation in the historicity of the physical resurrection of Jesus. Anything less is deemed to be dangerous and heterodox. For others, the gospel accounts can only be the best that language could do to convey an event that was, almost by definition, beyond words....So the resurrection stories are packed with paradox, not persuasion. It seems that God's style is not to give proof but to pose questions. We are left with clues, not conclusions....The resurrection stories play with the borders and boundaries of our sense of reality....The followers of Jesus are invited to write a resurrection conclusion with their own lives. (*Guardian*, 19 April 2003)

Experiments in alternative truth handling: Setting aside alternative schools of philosophy, insights into sustainable alternative approaches to handling truth may be partly obtained from work on new religious movements [[more](#)] and on intentional communities [[more](#)]. Examples include [[more](#)]:

- [Findhorn Community](#) (Scotland): Founded in 1962 as a spiritual community whose work is based on the values of planetary service, co-creation with nature and attunement to the divinity within all beings. Noted for its work with nature spirits and its belief in angels (for a comment on a critique of Findhorn see [Misleading Insights into Sustainable Community](#), 1996)
- [Auroville](#) (India): Founded in 1968.
- [Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University](#) (Rajasthan)

- Tattvajana Vidyapith (Mumbai): Established as a postgraduate college in 1956 in relation to the Swadhyaya community (see *Challenges to Learning from the Swadhyaya Movement*, 1995)
- Pitjantjatjara community (Central Australia): traditional Aboriginal community (see [Dancing through Interfaces and Paradoxes: group alchemy](#), 1997; [more](#))
- Lindisfarne (New York / Crestone):
- Whidbey Institute (Washington): Founded 1993 as a transformation of the Chinook Learning Community
- Schumacher College (UK): Founded 1991 on the conviction that a new vision is needed for society, its values and its relationship to the earth.
- Barefoot College (Rajasthan, India): Trains "barefoot" teachers, doctors, solar engineers, hand pump mechanics, designers, chemists, communicators, construction engineers and accountants. It has created a non-formal education process for children, youth, and adults which assists students to develop and maintain sustainable communities.
- Osho / Rajneeshism (Poona): Founded 1964.
- Maharishi University of Management (Iowa): Founded in 1971.
- Goetheanum (Dornach): Founded in 1923 by Rudolf Steiner as the Free University of Spiritual Science.
- Institute of Cultural Affairs (Chicago): [[collective research](#)]
- Esalen (California)
- Falun Gong
- Ananada Marga
- Centre for Alternative Technology (Wales): Founded 1973.
- Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man (Fontainebleau): Founded 1922 by G Gurdjieff [[more](#)]
- Community of Pythagoras (Croton):
- Florentine Academy

In the case of Australian Aborigines, for example, it has been proposed that intermediate ways of knowing are necessary to facilitate the shift between such extremes -- as with the decompression stages required for deep sea divers (see *Sustaining a pattern of alternative community initiatives: based on their differences from the conventional economic rationale*, 1998)

It is curious that the increasing amounts of research undertaken on "new social and religious movements" seems not to give rise to:

- recommendations for more balanced or more viable communities and movements
- suggestions for more innovative and interesting kinds of communities and movements

The concluding proposal of this paper for facilitation of "Renaissance Zones" is a partial response to this.

Degrees of explanation

The previous section on the logic of interface dynamics raises the question of how meaning is to be transferred from one logical framework to another -- across barriers of incommensurability. One example of the challenge has been popularized in books such as *Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus* (1992).

There is a curious feature of the term "explanation" in that it is apparently concerned with taking understanding out of the "plane" of reality in which it is operational. Hence the particular stress on embodiment in this paper.

Levels of explanation: Any educational system makes use of levels of explanation, most evident in the progressive refinements of the explanation concerning the nature of atoms -- from early school to the level of the latest challenging theories of fundamental physics and chemistry. When tourists are provided by Australian Aborigines with explanations of their cultural space, these explanations are explicitly recognized as being "children's stories". Other levels of explanation are only available through integration into the culture. The *Jataka Tales*, *Aesop's Fables* and *Nasruddin* stories are designed to serve simultaneously as children's stories and as carriers of deeper systemic insights for those who can distinguish them.

It is fair to say that most explanations of democracy could be usefully understood as "children's stories". "Civics 101" does not explore such issues as vote buying, abusive campaign financing (and corporate links), carpet bagging, gerrymandering, intimidation of elected representatives, bribery, stacking committees, etc. The undignified haggling associated with the appointment of directors of intergovernmental agencies, and the extent of the privileges accorded their personnel, are also reserved for initiates.

Given the levels of secrecy that initially prevailed at Damanhur regarding the Temple complex, it is quite possible that the levels of explanation about the community to visitors may also be "children's stories". There may well be other levels of explanation. What visitors are shown may effectively be a museum of where the community was some time in the past -- rather than where it is in its current understanding of the significance of what it is undertaking.

It is possible that levels of explanation are associated with the level or quality of dialogue through which meaning is transferred [[more](#); [more](#)]. Such levels have been distinguished, although the notion of "level" has itself been criticized by feminist scholars. Some branches of freemasonry, for example, distinguish up to 33 levels. Many other secret societies have explanations associated with a variety of initiations. Workers at Damanhur have a tradition of referring jokingly to "33" units of work -- whether metres of rock shifted, or some other measure.

Transparency and necessary misrepresentation: In a period in which the secrets of many traditions have been published over the past decades, it might be asked why any group should choose to be less than transparent. This relates to the astonishment that indigenous groups continue to make such radical distinctions between: the language of men and that of women; the language of the young and that of adults; and the languages of particular totemic groups. This astonishment fails to recognize the degree of secrecy characteristic of the

modern world: secret formulae (Coca Cola), military secrets, privacy secrets, secret societies (freemasons), secret archives (Vatican), etc. Some of these are a legacy of trade guild secrets. Why then should any groups be especially open to inspection by outsiders?

It is then understandable that a group should defend itself from destructive criticism through misdirection and misrepresentation -- perhaps reinforcing the tendency of visitors to apply conventional categories to Damanhur phenomena where unconventional categories, however challenging, would be more appropriate. The focus may be on first order credibility to satisfy the curious. Superficiality may be used as a decoy to misdirect visitors, or render them indifferent.

In an experimental environment there is also the fact that many explanations may be tentative rather than definitive. Some "truths" being explored may be "quenched" through being subject to simplistic explanation. Some artists are notoriously reluctant to show or discuss unfinished work because of the negative effects of such a process on creativity. The emphasis may be on creative speculation -- elusively combined with a degree of "looking in the mirror" for the source of any patterns given a degree of credibility.

To what degree is the publicly available understanding of Damanhur maintained, deliberately or inadvertently, as a form of Trojan Horse concealing other agendas? To what degree is it a matter of having the eyes to see and the capacity to read everything that is openly presented through symbols?

In the *Gameplayers of Zan* the "shadow-play" protecting the distinct integrity of the culture is described in the following terms:

The whole thing with us, the entire culture, the way we perceived, everything was engineered to convince all outside observers that there never could be such a thing [as a space-time craft] of the people. A vast prestidigitation that also had to fool the magician as well, or at any rate most of him. And of course it was successful...So successful that even our own imagine it to be no more than a child's fable; so successful that the disguise has taken root on its own, and now guides the inner long-range plan as well. The values of the disguise have now permeated the real plan. (p. 367)

Security / protection: Damanhur might be termed a "gated community", but the gate is kept open or unlocked. One group of members is responsible for its security and protection -- and for vital firefighting duties in its wooded surrounds. They place emphasis on a preventive attitude deriving from their alternative worldview -- reinforced in the case of the Temple complex by a large black dog, Cerberus?! The gates are understood to be "magical gates" for example. As with secret societies like the freemasons, the community might also be understood to be protected by being "conceptually gated".

The best protection may be in the disparate nature of what is visible to visitor's eyes. The apparently disconnected elements (artwork, sculpture, etc) can easily evoke indifference as "non-sequiturs" [Atkin, 1981]. It is the pattern that connects that may be neither visible nor comprehensible. The best protection is through allowing visitors to interpret what is shown to them as being laughable nonsense, inviting mockery.

At Damanhur, an interesting example of the challenge is provided by the selfic technology it markets as therapeutic bracelets. Any printed circuit board from a computer or TV would be equally mysterious to the average person. An explanation of the circuitry on such a board would be equally incredible. A different example is provided by "bone pointing" amongst the Australian Aborigines or the "evil eye". Foreigners may choose to laugh at the process, but even the sceptical who live in the area would adopt a precautious attitude on any final judgement.

Misdirection: People exposed to new levels of knowledge are frequently tested for their understanding of that knowledge in a "fail safe" mode based on misdirection. The Damanhur Temple has a multiplicity of secret doors and staircases -- some controlled electronically. Many societies, secret or otherwise, use social misdirection to determine whether someone is part of the in-group or an outsider. Similarly spiritual misdirection may be used, as exemplified by the methods of G I Gurdjieff.

Exposure to the symbolic artwork of Damanhur can also constitute a form of misdirection if its operative dimension is meaningless -- because it cannot be read. The aesthetics can be contemplated and appreciated as such, but this appreciation may have very little to do with why it is there -- as with the aesthetics of the console of a vehicle, or of a control room. In the case of Damanhur this is the reverse of the challenge of the Parthenon in Athens -- now appreciated for its austerity and purity of line, when at the time it was swathed in colour. It is like admiring a woman without cosmetics, although in reality it was through cosmetics she normally encountered the world.

Jay Merrifield (1998) clearly stated that at Damanhur "straight answers" were not necessarily available to "straight forward questions". But as the above suggests, meaningful answers cannot necessarily be given in the language in which the question is asked. This is especially problematic if the questioner has no knowledge of the language in which the answer can be given. How should an inherently non-linear perspective be communicated as an answer to a question from a linear mindset?



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

For further updates on this site, [subscribe here](#)