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# **THE DAILY THINGS WE DO: TOWARDS GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP**

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## *INTRODUCTION*

*Daily experiences are only fragments in the life of an individual... Yet almost everything that is important for social life unfolds within this minute web of times, spaces, gestures, and relations. It is through this web that our sense of what we are doing is created, and in it lie dormant those energies that unleash sensational events. (Melucci 1996: 1)*

**I**n seeking to promote thinking and behaviours that are open and tolerant of difference and plurality, and thus supportive of developing a universal dialogue towards a culture of peace, I believe it is useful to consider what I term the 'reciprocal and fractal' nature of humans. Melucci's pairing of the daily experiences of individuals with social life and the unleashing of sensational events highlights both reciprocity and fractality. The English poet, Phillip

Larkin (1988) in 'The daily things we do', evocatively describes reciprocity between the habits of living and the self-creation of individuals:

*The daily things we do  
For money or for fun  
Can disappear like dew  
Or harden and live on.  
Strange reciprocity:  
The circumstances we cause  
In time gives rise to us,  
Becomes our memory.*

Fractality, a concept drawn from the complexity sciences (Mandelbrot 1977, Kuhn and Woog 2007), describes entities having characteristics that are simultaneously apparent at many scales of focus, such that in some way in viewing a part, we are at the same time viewing the whole. Poetically, William Blake (1994) describes a series of fractals in his 'Auguries of Innocence':

*To see a World in a Grain of sand  
And a heaven in a Wild Flower  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour...*

Carl Jung suggests a fractal relationship between the human psyche and the structure of the universe:

*Our psyche is set up in accord with the structure of the universe, and what happens in the macrocosm likewise happens in the infinitesimal and most subjective reaches of the psyches. (Jung 1989: 335).*

People as individuals and aggregates can be described in fractal terms:

*In human beings as in other living creatures, the whole is present within the parts; every cell of a multicellular organism contains the totality of its genetic patrimony, and society inasmuch as a whole is present within every individual in his language, knowledge, obligations and standards. Just as each singular point of a hologram contains the totality of information of that which it represents, each singular cell, each singular individual contains holgrammatically the whole of which he is part and which is at the same time part of him. (Morin 2001: 31).*

Recognising the reciprocal and fractal nature of the relationship between individual people (as citizens, participants, members) and aggregations (involving multiple sites of belonging, be these global, national, sectarian, generational and so on) informs my exploration of styles of thinking and behaviour opposed to developing a culture of peace. I consider these styles of thinking and behaviour as giving rise to the daily things we do at the level of the individual as well as to the sensational events that impact at the global level. Similarly I take a fractal approach in proposing characteristics of a mindset common to foundational, fundamental and totalitarian thinking. Foundational (philosophical domain), fundamental (religious domain) and totalitarian (political domain) habits of thought all exhibit characteristics of closed thinking, of intolerance to difference and pluralism.

Though the terms foundational, fundamental and totalitarian are used in various ways, for the purpose of this paper, my concern is to say only enough to make clear my perspective that each exhibits closed styles of thinking. Each constitutes a style of monism that provides relief from the uncertainty of plurality. Foundational philosophising, assumes foundational knowledge is possible, and that this provides a secure basis upon which to build all other theories (Thiel 1994, Wolterstorff 1993). Thus a foundational mindset aspires to certainty and singularity of perspective. Fundamental religious beliefs hold to foundationalist assumptions about the justification of true belief. The commitment however is to an authority beyond any foundation within the scope of reason. Fundamentalists see their authoritative source as providing certainty of knowing 'the truth'. Closed thinking results, as where it is believed there is only one truth, there can be no place for tolerance towards uncertainty and plurality. Totalitarianism, in investing all power and authority in one place, and in having one clearly defined goal, constitutes a form of *anti-pluralistic monism* (Montuori 2005: 20). Beyond the political domain, totalitarianism as a mindset is focussed on eliminating ambiguity, complexity and difference (*ibid*).

The paper will explore at two fractal levels, local (pertaining to individual persons) and global (denoting various aggregations), something of the manifestation and implications of a foundational/fundamental/totalitarian mindset. Finally I conclude with suggestions for how universities may support the development of more open and tolerant patterns of thinking and behaviour.

*FRACTAL (1) LOCAL INTERACTIONS – MINUTE WEB OF TIMES, SPACES, GESTURES, AND RELATIONS*

*Declare your colours, join us, and submit to our initiation rights to adulthood each side said. No, I thought, I don't have to choose. To choose is to deny, to miss out. I'd rather not belong than choose. You have to belong, both sides said, and that means choice and sacrifice. No, I said, my sacrifice is not to belong. When you say or imply that, both sides eye you with a bit of contempt. Gutless, they say. Lonely, I say. (Varga 1994: 228).*

Surviving the holocaust as a baby in Hungary, Susan Varga moved to Australia as a small child. Her book 'Heddy and me' is as much a personal story of translocation and finding one's place in the world, as a profound meditation on ideas of nationalism, prejudice, love and loyalty. It is interesting to speculate about her resistance to such ubiquitous pressure to join or commit to a group, a philosophy, religion or political stance. How was it that she felt freedom, even to choose loneliness? In so doing she is showing originality of mind and openness to complexity, uncertainty and plurality. Her situation is indicative of our global situation, where peoples of different backgrounds and views mix together in multifarious ways. Unfortunately however, experience of complexity, uncertainty and plurality often results in lessening tolerance for choice, and in inclination towards singularity of perspective.

With fractal (1) the focus is people as individual beings and their minute webs of interaction. Using the language of complexity, it is the *local interactions* of persons as individuals that are of interest. I want to consider here why it is that so many people find difficulty in being open to complexity, uncertainty and plurality.

Psychologists and others (philosophers and sociologists) suggest that all people are engaged throughout their lives in balancing a basic tension between protecting themselves as individually differentiated beings while at the same time maintaining their relationship and identification with others (Crapuchettes 1997, Scheff 1990, Hendrix 1988, May 1983, Jung 1971, Buber 1958, Tillich 1952, Freud 1933). I find consideration of this tension useful in understanding something of the impetus and character of *local interactions* where people engage in patterns of thinking and behaviour that are intolerant of, and closed to,

difference and pluralism. Cognisance of the antecedence of these patterns can be helpful for universities as they seek to develop dialogue towards mitigating conflict and promoting a culture of peace.

Drawing on the existentialist approach of May (1983) the basic tension described above may be circumscribed in terms of characteristic principles where all individuals are seen as:

1. Centred in themselves.
2. Needing to affirm and preserve their centeredness (Tillich's (1952) courage to be) and therefore will find ways of shrinking the range of their world so as to protect and preserve the centeredness of their existence from threat.
3. Needing to go out from their centeredness to participate with other beings, without losing centeredness.
4. Living with anxiety, being self-consciously aware of and vigilant against threats to their being which includes not only fear of physical death but terror of annihilation through participation with others.

On this basis we can understand patterns of thinking and behaviour that are intolerant of, and closed to difference and pluralism (the foundational/fundamental/totalitarian mindset) as strategies employed by individuals to shrink the range of their world so as to protect and preserve their sense of centeredness from perceived threats to existence.

It becomes important then to ask what is needed for individuals to feel they can safely go out from their centeredness and participate with others without imminent loss of being?

Before addressing this question, I want to explore a little of the second fractal level, that of a 'global' level, denoting various groupings and aggregations of human beings.

### *FRACTAL (2) CREATING SENSATIONAL EVENTS*

Histories of civilisations are replete with stories and evidence of clashes between human declamations of ontological, epistemic and axiological certainty.

These are usually thought of as cultural and religious differences, embodying the *weltanschauung* or world-view of the era. Moving from the impetus for individual patterns of thinking and behaviour as outlined above, cultural and religious differences and variety in worldviews amongst civilisations, can be understood in part as outcomes of myriads of psychological balancing acts and associated miniature local interactions.

With the contractions of time and space of contemporary globalisation, we experience the irritating presence of other cultures and religious beliefs as inescapable. Now more than ever before, certainties collide about us with few, especially constructed and temporarily manifest, opportunities to escape difference and plurality of perspective.

Civilisations or cultures have long been recognised as complex, as attested, for example, by E. B. Tylor's 1871 definition, used as a base definition in cultural studies:

*Culture or Civilisation, taken in its widest ethnographic sense is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man [sic] as a member of society (Cohen 1995: 84).*

The 'wholeness' of civilisations as 'complex wholes' has become questionable.

I believe the same types of self-preserving inclinations as discussed above (fractal (1)) can be seen to operate at the level of social systems, as differing civilisations and cultural groups self-organise their ways forward in our exceedingly uncertain, ambiguous and complex era. Declamations of epistemic, ontological and axiological certainty are manifestations of attempts to maintain identity and reduce uncertainty.

While fractal (1) offered a psychologically informed reading of *local interactions* characterised by patterns of thinking and behaviour intolerant of, and closed to, difference and pluralism, the focus of fractal (2) is with *social systems*. The argument is that, from a complexity perspective, as local interactions give rise to social systems, we can expect there to be similarity between the character of local interactions and the overall character of the social system. I use *social system* as a general descriptor purposefully, to indicate all

possible units of belonging, from immediate and intimate through to macroscopic, as well as associated styles and levels of intensity of social bonds. From within this array, it may be in 'communities' as those instances of social system characterised by deep, familiar and co-operative ties between members (most closely resembling Durkheim's (1915) idea of *social solidarity*), that indications of fractality may be read most clearly. It is worth noting too that such communities today are *communities without propinquity, in which community and spatial proximity are de-coupled* (Faist 1998: 221).

Drawing on Montuori's *anatomy of the anti-pluralist, totalitarian mindset* (2005: 18), and organised around the four characteristic principles of humans as introduced above, the ways that governments and other 'leadership' groups both exhibit, and promote within group members, closed and intolerant thinking and behaviour will be briefly indicated. In this way I aim to make apparent something of the fractal relationship between local interactions of individuals and the interaction style of the larger social systems of which the individuals are a part.

I suggest that:

1. *Social systems are centred in themselves.* Governments, religious, sectarian or other authoritarian leaders find ways of shrinking the range of the experiences and perspectives of members (reducing complexity) in order to protect and preserve certain manifestations of the system. One way is by moving towards singularity of perspective with its necessary corollary, elimination of dissent.

*Those in positions of power (and authority) seeking compliance to a singular view can create conditions that affect the nature of the social system's discourse as much as the psychology of individuals. Conditions can be created whereby any form of dissent from the established 'correct' or orthodox view is variously considered as unpatriotic, heretical or worse. In this way discourse and collective thinking processes become simple, black-and-white processes of conformity (Montuori 2005: 20).*

A desire for simplification (and thus the imagined preservation of the social system) may also be expressed through *a bottom-up response that embodies totalitarian thinking and discourse, and demands a totalitarian response from*



*leadership* (op. cit: 21). Here people demand of authorities that they quell uncertainty; that they ‘tell’ people what to think or believe.

2. *Social systems affirm and preserve their centeredness.* Manifestos, statements of theological orthodoxy, gatherings in celebration of like mindedness (such as commemorative events), or participation in other rituals of belonging (showing a flag, barracking at a sporting match or even choice of language) all serve to reinforce a system’s sense of what it is.

3. *Social systems need to go out from their centeredness to participate with others, without losing centeredness.* In an interconnected world, participation with other social systems is as inescapable as it is inevitable. Social systems constantly overlay and intersect, are transient and emergent. Going out from centeredness to participation with other social systems constitutes ongoing negotiation and re-evaluation of notions of system identity and boundaries. Consider for example, how this is seen in the activities of local, national and international constituents in forums such as UNESCO and its associated committees and sub-groups.

4. *Social systems live with anxiety, being self-consciously aware of and vigilant against threats to their being.* Rites concerning membership (including such things as swearing oaths of allegiance or signing documents committing to certain behaviours and beliefs) enacted at many levels of the social system are one example of vigilance against threats. Conferring or refusing citizenship rights, or making public declarations ‘we stand for ...’ are other such examples.

Characteristics (3) and (4) can be viewed as an ongoing tension in social systems, between maintaining sameness and participating in emergent developments. This is evidenced at many levels, from families participating with other families, to international cooperative ventures involving corporations, religious groups or nations.

The question concluding discussion of fractal (1) may now be re-phrased: What is needed for social systems to go out from their centeredness and participate with other social systems without fear of imminent loss of identity?

Bringing together insight into something of the impetus guiding local interactions and concomitantly, the ‘sensational events’ of social systems, a

pattern of self-protection manifesting as intolerance to difference and pluralism becomes apparent. The 'daily things we do' clearly become those circumstances that 'give rise to us', the social systems within which we are immersed, in a convergence of self and social system emergence.

What then is needed to break out of this pattern of perceived need for protection from 'the other', culminating as it does, in the reciprocal emergence of individual and social system intolerance to difference and pluralism?

### *BEYOND 'BARBARIANS AT THE GATE' PATTERNS OF THINKING AND BEHAVIOUR*

When the 'daily things we do' are shaped by a foundational / fundamental / totalitarian mindset that is guided by need to protect the sense of self or the social system from the terrors of a pluralistic world, the unleashed 'sensational events' are dire indeed. Closed thinking and intolerance to difference at the individual level spirals inevitably into large-scale conflict. This results in multiple sites of fracture, (interpersonal; national, ethnic and religious etc) and broad scale disconnections dividing humanity.

'Barbarians at the gate' thinking results when people's attitude is so closed to difference and plurality that all others (those 'not one of us') are viewed as barbaric and uncivilised.

This section of the paper focuses on considering how university education may contribute to promoting thinking and behaviours that are open and tolerant of difference and plurality, and thus supportive of promoting a culture of peace.

While not operating in an overtly psychological or therapeutic role, it is my view that universities can contribute to ameliorating the individual's attitude to difference and plurality as a threat to his/her being; and through this, sensational peaceful events may be unleashed at the social systems level (fractal (2))

Universities, I contend, should be active in fostering within staff and students alike, *a contemplative habit of mind* (Russell 1935) whereby openness to complexity, uncertainty and plurality might flourish. By a contemplative habit of mind I mean a habitual way of thinking and behaving characterised by awareness and understanding (appreciation) of one's self and others. This way of

being, informed through intellectual, emotional and spiritual attentiveness, facilitates inner resources (self-awareness, self-esteem and self-responsibility) enabling openness and tolerance to difference and plurality. I suggest two guiding principles for education in fostering a contemplative habit of mind. These guiding principles I see as constituting the inherent stance, and therefore thinking and behaviour of all people involved in the university community: academic and non-academic staff and students. Each principle relates as much to experiential and practical modes of learning as it does to propositional learning. It is not enough that each be formally ‘taught’ within a set curriculum, but more importantly, the principles should inform ‘the daily things we do’, in all forums relating to the life of the university.

1. Support people as inner-directed, unique human beings. In the realm of teaching this means encouraging students to have an image of themselves as knowing subjects (not merely recipients of ‘objective’ knowledge) and as spiritual and ethical beings. It means encouraging an inner life and supporting the individual’s *courage to be* (Tillich 1952). For this development of a rich interior life an attitude of spaciousness is needed, both in terms of time and an internally felt freedom from tyranny of circumscriptions of others. Understanding something of one’s own inner complexity will enable appreciation of complexity and uncertainty within the world.
2. Support broadening individual conceptions of belonging and interconnectedness. As British philosopher Bertrand Russell (2006: 26-27) argued in 1915:

*The world at present is full of angry self-centred groups, each incapable of viewing human life as a whole, each willing to destroy civilisation rather than yield an inch. The antidote, in so far as it is a matter of individual psychology, is to be found in history, biology, astronomy, and all those studies which, without destroying self-respect, enable the individual to see himself in his proper perspective. What is needed is not this or that specific piece of information, but such knowledge as inspires a conception of the ends of human life as a whole: art and history, acquaintance with the lives of heroic individuals, and some understanding of the strangely accidental and ephemeral position of man [sic] in the cosmos – all this touched with an emotion of pride*

*in what is distinctively human, the power to see and know, to feel magnanimously and to think with understanding.*

Contemporary Canadian philosophy, Richard Rorty (1999: 238-239) links the development of such a broadened self-image with an anti-authoritarian philosophy, a philosophy not based on foundational, fundamentalist or totalitarian assumptions:

*This kind of anti-authoritarian philosophy helps people set aside religious and ethnic identities in favour of an image of themselves as part of a great human adventure, one carried out on a global scale.*

In my view, curiosity, kindness and humility will be developed through learning arising from a combination of inner growth (soul work) with learning about others and one's place in a broader, interconnected world. This combination will work towards wisdom rather than mere 'cleverness'. Near the beginning of World War II, the actor Charlie Chaplin made 'The Great Dictator', a film dealing with the terrors of totalitarianism. His speech at the conclusion of the film is apposite to the point I am making:

*Our knowledge has made us cynical, our cleverness hard and unkind. More than machinery we need humanity. More than cleverness we need kindness and gentleness. Without these qualities life will be violent and all will be lost. You are not machines; you are not cattle. You are men; you have the love of men in your heart...*

Curiosity, kindness and humility act as antidotes to foundational, fundamental and totalitarian habits of thought, and as such constitute new values necessary for participation in a crowded and pluralistic world. Curiosity, kindness and humility are characterised by open thinking and tolerance to difference and pluralism. Being curious we ask why and how questions. Being kind we think and act with empathy towards others. Having humility we respect the views of others and do not assume eternal certainty with regard to our own ideas, beliefs and knowledge. Taking a fractal and reciprocal approach, it is clear that future directions in our global society depend on individuals, ordinary world citizens, and our moral positions, our openness to difference and plurality.

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