

Cosmopoesis: Navigating the strangeness of planetary realisations

MARCUS BUSSEY

The world is becoming strange to itself! This strangeness is the result of 1, the surprise of becoming increasingly self-aware of our human embeddedness in the evolutionary unfolding of the Cosmos and 2, the terror that this new consciousness inspires in many today. Giri's reflections on roots and routes is an important step towards articulating the multiple and rhizomic nature of this strangeness. In the Hebrew story of Adam and Eve and their awakening, they are surprised to find themselves naked. That story points to a similar surprise and terror as Adam and Eve stepped out into a strange world of the 'natural'. To cope with this strangeness and surprise, human beings awoke to culture and so the Western story of the struggle between culture and nature was born.

Separation is a key element in that narrative. Today, however, our surprise and terror is born of the growing awareness of relation. Separation lies at the heart of our old story. It is comfortable and reassuring yet it comes at a heavy cost. Relationship, that sense of being connected to a greater whole, offers us new possibilities for re-enchanting and healing this world. Relational consciousness lies at the heart of Dussel's (2017) reading of the transmodern condition that Giri evokes. This condition of transmodernity is premised, Giri tells us, on 'a process of rebirth, [a] searching for new paths for future development' (Giri 2017:5). Just as Adam and Eve are born into culture, and thus become human, we are experiencing a rebirth into the relational awareness that preceded that awakening. And what do we become? What possible futures lie before us? The array of ethnic, nationalist, and transnationalist violences afflicting the world community today are all attempts to answer these questions. The point is that we are on the cusp of a new human paradigm, or what Thomas Berry (1990) would call a 'new story'.

Taking inspiration from the observation of physicist Michio Kaku that we live in a participatory universe and that 'the universe does have a point: *to produce sentient creatures like us who can observe it so that it exists*' (2005: 351), the approach I take to Giri's (2017) poser is to suggest the concept of cosmopoesis, which is a mimetic extrapolation

of Maturana and Varela's (1980) notion of autopoiesis. Cosmopoesis refers to the dialogical, reflexive nature, of the unfolding of the cosmos. In this reading, the Cosmos knows itself through its creations. This is a strange idea but it is rich in possibilities. The cosmos is our home, and ultimately the *root of all our roots* and the *setting for all our routes*. The multitude find voice in this cosmic setting and the self-generation – *Cosmopoesis* – that unfolds is a human tale of becoming and awakening in which temporality itself is shaped according to sets of narrative assumptions (Dator 2017). My reflection describes how this evolutionary narrative has been framed by four thinkers, Eric Chaisson, Ray Kurzweil, Henryk Skolimowski and Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar. This is a deliberately macro approach in which the many reside in the one. Evolutionary narratives enable us to think more effectively about the role of the local in the grand processes of the universe.

Macro Perspectives on Strangeness

Modernist ethnic and nationalist self-interest seek to universalise the local; transmodernist interests seek translocal dialogical spaces from which this new, or neo-human paradigm can emerge. Casting this process, as Giri and Dussel do, within the narrative structure of rebirth and anchoring it within the discourse of relational consciousness opens this reflection to a series of co-creative developments that are occurring simultaneously in various fields under the banner of evolutionary models. Strangeness comes when systems face discontinuity. A transformed space emerges when *relational regimes* change. The result is a surprise of some kind. For instance, in the cosmology of Eric Chaisson (2006) (Fig. 1) we find a map of evolution that moves from the physical to the cultural. Each shift in his evolutionary narrative comes as a surprise. The discontinuity, however, is obscured by the elegance of the system he proposes. For Chaisson, each shift involves a new level of complexity preceded by a tipping point that inaugurates a new set of relationships in the ordering and utilisation of energy. His macro-evolutionary narrative captures much that is understood about the world today. Yet it does not really help us to understand how or why each step occurred.

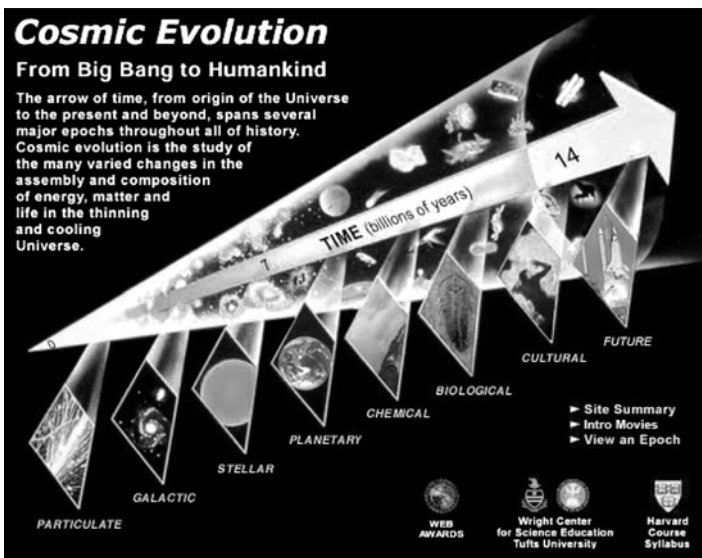


Fig. 1: Chaisson's Cosmic Evolution

Techno philosopher, Artificial Intelligence guru and inventor Ray Kurzweil (2006) (Fig. 2) takes technology as his benchmark for evolution and posits a series of epochs with some similarities to Chaisson's work. He sees systems generating tipping points in which new levels of complexity trigger shifts in consciousness. His focus on technology helps us understand how complexity around capacity leads to these tipping points, but he leaves the question of the inner workings of consciousness untouched. He offers us insights into 'cultures of technology' to understand and anticipate future trajectories. We can see that strangeness here correlates with novel sets of relationship within technological systems. This strangeness spawns creativity and the capacity to think oxymoronically as, for example, in Kurzweil's best seller *The Age of Spiritual Machines*. To understand the conditions around which transformation occurs, Kurzweil talks about the importance of timing. For him, anticipatory consciousness – a future capability – is both empirically and intuitively informed and timing is

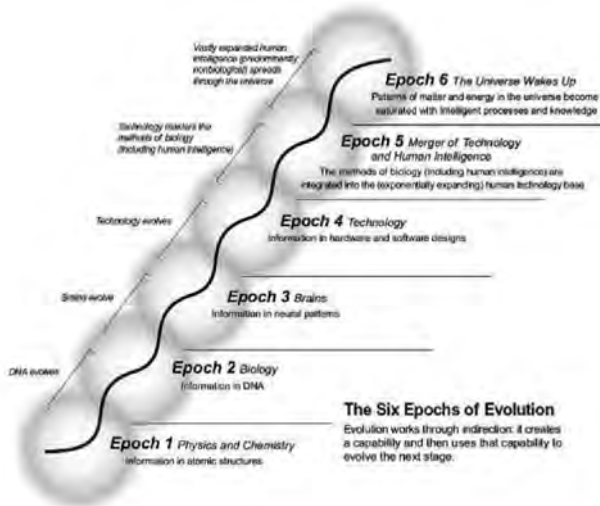


Fig. 2: Kurzweil's Six Epochs

These stages are useful in understanding how the narratives of becoming are being expressed in the domains of cosmology and technology. Strangeness comes as new levels of complexity and reflexivity emerge in the process of Cosmopoiesis. The eco-philosopher Henryk Skolimowski (2010: 4-10) however simplifies this narrative into four steps (Fig. 3). In so doing, Skolimowski offers a bridge between Western science and Eastern, particularly Vedic, understandings of reality. Taking Light as his starting point in the Big Bang, he moves through various plays on 'synthesis' in which consciousness is ordered around 1. the synthesis of light (photo-synthesis) in the creation and maintenance of life, 2. The synthesis of words (logo-synthesis) in the creation and maintenance of consciousness, and 3. The synthesis of consciousness as we make our way towards the divinity (theo-synthesis) from which we came. This is a process of 'becoming conscious' in which the co-creativity of the cosmos-human drama is enacted cosmopoetically. For Skolimowski, self-realisation is the driver behind transformation: 'Evolution', he notes, 'made various experiments in order to see which were the best ways leading to more intensive life, more versatile life, to the life of increased self-realisation' (ibid: 6).

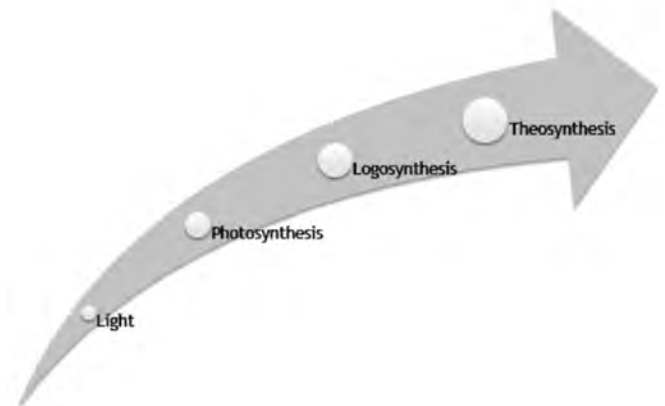


Fig. 3: Skolimowski's Model

To move from this insight, in which consciousness as a self-organising principle of inflected complexity is the driver of transformation, to our final example of evolutionary narrative is a small step. Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar (2006) articulates a Tantric evolutionary approach based on the ancient 'Brahma Chakra' cycle (Fig. 4). For Sarkar the individual and the collective are engaged in a dance of self-realisation. This involves two stages. The first stage, called *saincara* in Sanskrit, witnesses consciousness exploding into form via the material universe. The second stage, called *pratisaincara*, involves the materiality of the physical world becoming increasingly self-aware. Thus we have the physical non-living world creating the context out of which life emerges. Life, then, becomes more complex and ultimately cultural and self-aware in the sense that Skolimowski understands it.

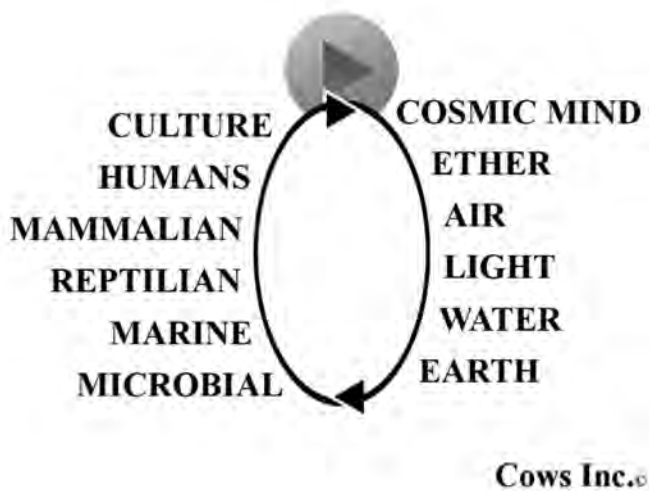


Fig. 4: Sarkar's Brahma Chakra

Ultimately, for Sarkar, this is a co-creative process in which personal self-realisation is dependent on the individual's relationship to the whole (1982). At the social level, self-realisation becomes co-realisation as the individual comes to understand their relationship with both their local and cosmic communities as the basis of their becoming. This awareness demands of them a practice of spiritual pragmatism and critical spirituality (Bussey 2000) in which self and other co-create the quality relationships necessary for long term co-realisation. For both Sarkar and Skolimowski, the transition from stage to stage is built into the ontological nature of their models which are never entirely physical. For both of them, form and consciousness co-evolve. The driver is a longing to know oneself. It is expressed in Sarkar's words as a 'longing for the Great' – the Cosmopoesis of becoming is driven by a spiritual yearning not simply by energy relationships (see Bussey 2016).

Of course, self-awareness is clearly present in both Chaisson's and Kurzweil's work, but it is cultural and cognitive in nature. Absent also from their models is any notion that rebirth might be immanent. Theirs are purely linear models. What is interesting, however, is that Skolimowski's model is implicitly cyclical and Sarkar's model explicitly cyclical rather than linear. The West prefers the linear even when faced with the non-linearity of post-normal science (Ravetz 2011). For both Skolimowski and Sarkar the kind of human being involved in this journey is a physically, socially and spiritually driven entity with new levels of humanity being expressed through increasingly relational consciousness. It is possible within such models to posit rebirth and a new Renaissance in consciousness. For Chaisson, increasing levels of complexity in energy regimes are the driver, whilst Kurzweil is more specific, identifying capability, ultimately expressed via technology, as the key evolutionary principle. Each thinker in these examples

frames evolution according to their epistemological and cultural lens. Each gives us insights into the evolutionary processes Giri is pointing to when he discusses the nature of roots and routes.

Roots and Routes

How to grapple with these two interwoven terms, therefore, depends on where one places oneself in relation to the macro-perspectives offered above. There is not much room in the models of Chaisson and Kurzweil for exploring the nuances that Giri proposes around rebirth, hospitality, dharma and 'a new politics and spirituality of *sadhana* and struggle, compassion and confrontation'. The world historian David Christian (2004), who draws heavily on Chaisson, proposes 'collective learning' as the vehicle by which we come to understand ourselves. Collective learning creates the cultural space for the struggles that Giri is sensitive to. However, it does not carry the energy of a concept such as *dharma*. Dharma pertains, as Giri notes, to one's unique mode of expression (Mukherjee 2014: 72).

This expression is both universal – the dharma or essence of human beings is to become ever more, hence all are filled with an inner calling to express – and also specific, the dharma of a particular human being or group is to realise this universal urge *in the local*. Such consciousness of one's dharma is essential, yet it is not given by a theology, or ideology or even a culture to determine what one's dharma is. *Dharmic awareness* arises out of interaction with one's world and also out of one's inner capacity to reflect and meditate on the nature of *Being*. This is a meditative *sadhana* of co-realisation as Giri acknowledges. *Sadhana* can simply mean 'meditation' but it really refers to the effort one makes in the world to achieve a sense of unity, balance and excellence. Beyond this effort, we find the neo-humanity under discussion in this symposium. This neo-humanity, explorations of new forms of being human, calls for an awareness of our *cosmic connection*. At the Cosmic level our roots are one and indivisible – as Carl Sagan (2000) notes, we are all recycled star dust. Interestingly, for Skolimowski we are beings of light and for Sarkar we are beings of Cosmic consciousness. Each thinker in their own way points to this underlying unity behind the diversity. But this does not help us in a world where roots are geopolitically and ethnically defined. In such a world, difference is more important than sameness. Sameness, in such a world, is to be read as an attempt to gloss and numb the pain of separation.

The strangeness that comes out of a recognition of Cosmic sameness, and the Cosmopoesis this implies, is too much for many. It challenges fundamental identity parameters. It sponsors the array of ethnic and specist

fundamentalisms tearing at the world today. So challenge them we must. The local identification of self with a language, a culture, an ethnic group allows us to situate ourselves in a way we can manage. It is the comfort of the Mother. Yet, as we grow to adulthood we need to thank our mothers and move on to wider horizons than the lap of the local. This moving on is filled with risk and suspense. It is not a denial of who we are at the local, it is an evolution to ever broader identity horizons which involve, as Giri notes, a search for 'new categories of reality, living and realisation'. In this process the Cosmic rediscovers the local in all its richness and uniqueness.

References

- Berry, T. 1990 *The Dream of the Earth*, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco.
- Bussey, M. 2000 'Critical Spirituality: Neohumanism as method' *Journal of Futures Studies*, 5, 2: 21-35.
- Bussey, M. 2016 'The Hidden Curriculum of Futures Studies: Introducing the futures senses', *World Futures Review*, 8, 1: 39-45.
- Chaisson, E. 2006 *Epic of Evolution: Seven ages of the cosmos*, Columbia University Press, New York.
- Christian, D. 2004 *Maps of Time: An introduction to big history*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Dator, J. A. 2017 'Editorial: Time, The Future, and Other Fantasies', *World Futures Review*, 9, 1: 5-16.
- Dussel, E. 2017 'Transmodernity and Interculturality: An interpretation from the perspective of philosophy of liberation', in A. K. Giri (ed) *Research As Realisation*, Primus Books, Delhi.
- Giri, A. K. 2017 'Cross-Fertilising Roots and Routes: Ethnicity, socio-cultural regeneration and planetary realisations', *Social Alternatives*, 36, 1: 5-10.
- Kaku, M. 2005 *Parallel Worlds: The science of alternative universes and our future in the cosmos*, Allen Lane, London.
- Kurzweil, R. 2006 *The Singularity is Near: When humans transcend biology*, Viking, New York.
- Maturana, H., and Varela, F. 1980 *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The realization of the living*, D. Reidel Publishing Co, Dordrecht, Holland.
- Mukherjee, A. 2014 'Rabindranath Tagore on a comparative study of religions', *Argument*, 4, 1: 69-79.
- Ravetz, J. R. 2011 'Postnormal Science and the maturing of the structural contradictions of modern European science' *Futures*, 43, 2: 142-148.
- Sagan, C. 2000 *Cosmic Connection: An extraterrestrial perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Sarkar, P. R. 1982 *The Liberation of Intellect: Neohumanism*, Ananda Marga Publications, Calcutta.
- Sarkar, P. R. 2006 'Neohumanism in Evolutionary Context.' In *Neohumanist Educational Futures: Liberating the pedagogical intellect*, in S. Inayatullah, M. Bussey, and I. Milojevic, Tamkang University Press, Taipei.
- Skolimowski, H. 2010 *Let There Be Light: The mysterious journey of cosmic creativity*, The Wisdom Tree, New Delhi.

Figure References

- Fig. 1: Chaisson, E. J. (2013) Website Version 7, Harvard College Observatory https://www.cfa.harvard.edu/~ejchaisson/cosmic_evolution/docs/splash.html (accessed 20/04/2017).
- Fig. 2: Dawson, R. (n.d.) 'The best visuals to explain the Singularity to senior executives' http://rossdawsonblog.com/weblog/archives/2009/08/finding_good_im.html (accessed 20/04/2017).
- Figure 3: Bussey, M. 2017
- Figure 4: Bussey, M. 2017

Author

Marcus Bussey is Senior Lecturer in History and Futures at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia. He is a futurist and researcher with the arts Research in the Creative Humanity's Centre and also a member of the university's Sustainability Research Centre. He works on cultural processes that energise social transformation. He uses futures thinking to challenge the dominant beliefs and assumptions that constrain human responses to rapid cultural, social and technological change.

Marcus has co-authored with Professor Richard Slaughter *Futures Thinking for Social Foresight* (2005). He has also co-edited two books with Sohail Inayatullah and Ivana Milojević – *Neohumanist Educational Futures* (2006) and *Alternative Educational Futures* (2008). In addition he has edited *Tantric Women Tell their Stories* (2007) and published a book of poetry *Clare and Francis* (2012). Marcus has held fellowships at Nanyang Technical University, Singapore and Tamkang University, Taiwan. He is currently Discipline Head of History and Program Leader in Futures Studies at his university. Marcus is on the editorial boards for the *Journal of Futures Studies*, *Foresight*, *On the Horizon* and *Social Alternatives*.