From the Pursuit of a Goal to the Navigation of Becoming

A short essay on exploration, complexity and the iterative nature of meaning

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"The answer is not always the end of a question.
Sometimes it is the beginning of a better one."

Much of modern scientific, educational and organizational thinking is built around the pursuit of a defined objective. We choose a goal, establish a path, optimize our actions and evaluate the result. This logic is extraordinarily effective when the objective is stable, the relevant variables are sufficiently known, and the context can reasonably be treated as fixed.

But complexity changes the situation.

In a complex and evolving world, the context is not merely the background against which an action takes place. It participates in the process. Moreover, the observer is not necessarily unchanged by the journey. What we learn may transform not only our next step, but also the way we understand the question with which we began.

The distinction explored in this essay is therefore not simply between **success and failure**, or between **planning and improvisation**. It is between two different ways of understanding pursuit.

A first model treats pursuit primarily as movement toward a relatively fixed goal:

$$\boxed{Pursuit\ of\ a\ fixed\ goal}$$

A second model treats pursuit as an evolving trajectory:

$$\boxed{Pursuit\ as\ an\ evolving\ trajectory}$$

In the latter case,

$$\boxed{search \rightarrow approximation \rightarrow new\ search}$$

In this case the result is no longer necessarily an endpoint. It may become the condition for the next transformation.

This distinction is particularly relevant to **exploratory research**. Exploration begins precisely where the map is incomplete: where unexpected observations can modify the question, where the context evolves while the investigation proceeds, and where a meaningful result may be not the confirmation of an anticipated answer, but the emergence of a better question.

The purpose of this essay is therefore not to replace goal-directed research with an indefinite search. Rather, it is to examine what happens when **the object of inquiry, the context and the researcher evolve together**. In this situation, navigation may become more appropriate than optimization, and trajectory more informative than endpoint.

The conceptual distinction between these two meanings of *pursuit* is developed explicitly in **Appendix A, "From Goal Pursuit to Exploratory Trajectory."** The appendix also clarifies the relationship between the established literature on goal pursuit and the broader, exploratory meaning proposed here.

Seen from this perspective, the movement from linear to nonlinear thinking, from continuous processes to transitions and events, from complicated systems to complex ones, and from isolated individuals to individuals embedded in evolving social contexts, is not a collection of unrelated oppositions. It is part of a larger question:

> **What happens when the trajectory itself becomes part of what we are trying to understand?**

And this is where the M4–Poiesis perspective becomes relevant:

$$\boxed{M_1 \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow M_3 \rightarrow M_4 \rightarrow M'_1}$$

A transformation does not necessarily close the process. **What emerges from one stage becomes the condition from which the next stage can emerge.**

There is a simple image that has shaped much of modern education, management and social organization: **choose a goal and organize the path toward it**.

The goal is assumed to exist somewhere ahead, relatively fixed. The task is to find the shortest, safest or most efficient route toward it. Each step can therefore be evaluated according to its contribution to the final result. This is the logic of optimization.

Metaphorically, it resembles the **"gold rush"**: there is gold somewhere; the important thing is to identify its location, mobilize the necessary resources and minimize the distance between oneself and the prize. The model is extraordinarily powerful when the destination is stable and the environment can be sufficiently controlled.

But what happens when the **sea itself is in waves**?

1. From the gold rush to navigation

A ship crossing a calm sea can be directed toward a fixed geographical destination. Its trajectory can be calculated, corrected and optimized.

But a sailor navigating a sea in waves does something fundamentally different.

The destination may remain the same, yet the **effective trajectory cannot be fixed in advance**. Wind, currents, waves, visibility and the condition of the vessel continuously modify the situation. The sailor does not abandon the destination; rather, navigation becomes an iterative process of **observe – interpret – correct – continue**. And sometimes something even more subtle happens.

During the voyage, the sailor changes. Experience modifies perception. New information changes the interpretation of the environment. The original map may prove incomplete. What seemed to be the destination may reveal itself as only an intermediate landmark.

Thus:

$$\boxed{search \rightarrow approximation \rightarrow new\ search}$$

The result is no longer necessarily a point. It becomes a **trajectory**.

2. The hidden assumption of the linear paradigm

Much of our socio-economic and educational organization tends to operate as if the world were sufficiently close to a system of continuous, predictable functions.

- Define the objective.
- Measure the initial condition.
- Determine the parameters.
- Optimize the path.
- Evaluate the result.

This logic has enormous practical value. It has produced engineering, industrial organization, modern management and much of our technological civilization. The difficulty appears when we apply the same logic to systems in which **the observer, the context and the object of inquiry are themselves changing**.

A person entering a process of genuine exploration is not the same person who reaches its end. And the context encountered at the end is not necessarily the context assumed at the beginning.

Therefore:

$$\boxed{initial\ condition \neq final\ condition}$$

not because the initial condition was wrong, but because **the system has evolved**.

3. When the explorer changes the question

Suppose I begin with a question Q_0. I search for information, formulate a hypothesis, perform an experiment and obtain a result.

In a linear paradigm, the result is expected to close the problem:

$$Q_0 \rightarrow A_0.$$

In an exploratory paradigm, something else may happen:

$$Q_0 \rightarrow A_0 \rightarrow Q_1.$$

The answer does not necessarily terminate the process. It **generates the next question**. And the next question may modify the meaning of the previous answer.

Thus knowledge becomes **iterative:**

$$Q_0 \rightarrow H_0 \rightarrow E_0 \rightarrow Q_1 \rightarrow H_1 \rightarrow E_1 \rightarrow \cdots$$

The apparent inefficiency of this process is precisely what makes it generative. From outside, it can look like indecision: *Why are you changing the target?* From inside, however, the target has not simply been changed. **The observer has changed together with what has been observed.**

4. The paradox of exploration

This produces a strange psychological effect.

A person trained to value predictable results may experience exploration as failure. If the initial objective is not reached, the process appears inefficient. If the question changes, it appears that the original question was badly formulated.

If the researcher discovers something unexpected and follows it, it may appear that he has deviated from the plan.

Yet this "deviation" may be precisely where discovery begins. The explorer does not necessarily lose the path. **The path is being generated by the encounter with reality.**

This suggests a fundamental distinction:

$$\boxed{optimization\ of\ a\ trajectory \neq generation\ of\ a\ trajectory}$$

The first assumes that the relevant space is already known.

The second accepts that exploration may transform the very space in which the search takes place.

5. M4–Poiesis: the result becomes a condition

This is where the M_4–Poiesis perspective offers a useful conceptual image.

The sequence: $M_1 \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow M_3 \rightarrow M_4$ can be read as a passage from:

$$Measure \rightarrow Motion \rightarrow Morphe' \rightarrow Meaning.$$

But the important point is that **Meaning does not necessarily close the sequence**. It can become the condition for a new manifestation:

$$M_1 \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow M_3 \rightarrow M_4 \rightarrow M_1'$$

The prime on M_1 is essential. M_1' is not the same M_1 with which we began. The system has passed through transformation. The result of one transformation becomes the condition of the next.

This is the poietic character of the process: **what has emerged becomes capable of generating what follows**.

6. From linearity to recurrence

We therefore encounter two different ways of imagining evolution.

— **The linear image:**

$$A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow D$$

The objective is known. The path is optimized. The endpoint validates the process.

— **The exploratory image:**

$$A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow D \rightarrow A'$$

The process returns to the domain of departure, but not to the same state. It is closer to a spiral than to a straight line:

recurrence without repetition

The system returns, but it returns transformed. This distinction may offer a simple way of introducing a much broader family of conceptual contrasts:

Linear paradigm	**Exploratory / complex paradigm**
objective	trajectory
prediction	anticipation
optimization	navigation
continuity	transitions / events
fixed context	evolving context
complicated	complex
object	relation
matter	matter + meaning
individual	individual-in-context
answer	new question
result	transformation
repetition	recurrence with transformation

These are not mutually exclusive categories. The linear model remains indispensable wherever conditions justify it.

The issue is **knowing when it ceases to be sufficient**.

7. From complicated to complex

A complicated machine may contain thousands of components and still be predictable because its components and relations are sufficiently specified. A complex system is different because interactions can modify the state of the system itself. The distinction might be expressed heuristically as: *complicated→many parts*, whereas: *complex→ many interacting relations+evolution.*

And once evolution enters the picture, the observer cannot always remain external to the problem. This is especially evident when we move from **inorganic matter to living systems and noetic phenomena**, or from the individual to society.

- A stone does not reinterpret the experiment in which it participates.
- A human being does.
- A society does.
- A culture does.

And therefore, the trajectory itself can become part of the phenomenon.

8. Education: from producing answers to cultivating explorers

Perhaps the deepest consequence concerns education. A system organized primarily around competition tends to reward what can be compared: grades, rankings, certificates, measurable competencies, predefined outcomes. This naturally privileges the **predictable result**.

But knowledge does not advance only through predictable results.

It advances because someone notices an anomaly, asks a question that was not on the curriculum, follows an unexpected connection and discovers that the original map was incomplete.

The educational challenge is therefore not to abandon goals, discipline or evaluation.

It is to cultivate, alongside them, the capacity to **navigate the unknown**. The essential competence becomes not merely: *Can you reach the answer?* but also: **Can you recognize when the answer has opened a better question?**

9. A different meaning of success

In this perspective, success in exploration cannot be measured only by distance from the original objective. It must also be measured by the **quality of transformation produced along the trajectory**.

A successful exploration may therefore end without the answer originally sought.

It may instead produce:

- a better question;
- a new distinction;
- an unexpected connection;
- a new experimental protocol;
- a new representation;
- or a new domain of inquiry.

The apparent failure of the original objective may thus become the beginning of another trajectory.

$$\boxed{result \rightarrow new\ condition \rightarrow new\ exploration}$$

And perhaps this is the deeper meaning of an exploratory culture:

> **We do not explore because we already know where we are going. We explore because the journey changes what it means to know where we are going.**

In that sense, the explorer is not merely someone who travels toward a destination.

The explorer participates in the emergence of the destination itself.

$$\boxed{Search \rightarrow Approximation \rightarrow New\ Search}$$

Not a failure to arrive. A different understanding of what it means to **arrive**.

Appendix A

From Goal Pursuit to Exploratory Trajectory

A conceptual clarification

A.1. Pursuit of a Fixed Goal

Definition

A *pursuit of a fixed goal* is a process in which a desired outcome is specified in advance and the actions of the individual or system are organized toward achieving that outcome.
Schematic representation:

$$\boxed{G_0 \rightarrow A_1 \rightarrow A_2 \rightarrow A_3 \rightarrow \cdots\ G_0}$$

where G_0 remains the reference objective while the actions A_i are adjusted in order to reduce the distance between the current state and the desired state.
The central question is: **How can we reach the predefined goal more effectively?**
This is the conceptual basis of optimization, planning and much of conventional goal-directed behavior.

A.2. Adaptive Goal Pursuit

A more dynamic formulation recognizes that pursuit takes place within changing internal and external conditions.

$$G_0 \rightarrow A_1 \rightarrow R_1 \rightarrow A_2 \rightarrow R_2 \rightarrow \cdots$$

The goal remains relatively stable, but the **trajectory is continuously adjusted in response to feedback**. The central question becomes: **How can we reach the goal while adapting to changing conditions?**
This is already much closer to dynamic systems and self-regulation.

A.3. Pursuit as an Evolving Trajectory

Here we make the conceptual step needed by the essay.
In exploratory inquiry, the outcome of an action may modify not only the next action but also the **meaning, formulation or scope of the goal itself**.

$$\boldsymbol{G_0} \rightarrow A_1 \rightarrow R_1 \rightarrow \boldsymbol{G_1} \rightarrow A_2 \rightarrow R_2 \rightarrow G_2 \rightarrow \cdots$$

Thus:

$$\boxed{G_{n+1} = f(G_n, R_n, C_n)}$$

where C_n represents the evolving context.
The central question is no longer: **How do I reach the goal?** but:
What does the emerging trajectory reveal about what the goal itself might become?
For the purposes of this essay, this is what we mean by:

$$\boxed{Pursuit\ as\ an\ evolving\ trajectory}$$

A.4. The crucial distinction

We could then put the distinction in one compact table:

	Pursuit of a fixed goal	**Pursuit as an evolving trajectory**
Goal	predefined	emergent / revisable
Context	constraint	active component
Trajectory	optimized	generated and transformed
Feedback	corrects action	may transform the goal
Result	endpoint	new condition
Success	goal attainment	generative transformation
Question	"How do I get there?"	"What is becoming possible?"

And then the important caveat:

The second model does not invalidate the first. Fixed-goal pursuit is appropriate whenever the goal and relevant conditions can legitimately be treated as sufficiently stable. The distinction becomes important when the object of inquiry, the context, or the observer changes during the process.

A.5. Relation to M4–Poiesis

This is where I would make the appendix connect explicitly to the main essay, but **only at the end**.

The exploratory trajectory can be represented as:

$M1 \rightarrow M2 \rightarrow M3 \rightarrow M4 \rightarrow M1'$

where the transformed state does not simply terminate the process. It becomes the **initial condition of a new cycle**.

Thus:

$$\boxed{result \rightarrow new\ condition}$$

rather than:

$$\boxed{result \rightarrow closure}$$

And this gives us a particularly concise formulation:

> **In a fixed-goal paradigm, the result closes the trajectory. In an exploratory paradigm, the result may transform the trajectory into a new one.**

A.6. One final distinction I would add

There is a danger that *evolving trajectory* could be misunderstood as simply **"changing one's mind"**. It is not.

We should distinguish:

$$\boxed{goal\ revision \neq goal\ abandonment}$$

A goal may evolve because the investigation has generated information that was unavailable at the beginning. Thus, the change is not necessarily a failure of persistence. It may be a consequence of **learning**.

And perhaps the most elegant formulation is: $\boxed{Persistence\ without\ rigidity.}$

The explorer persists in the **inquiry**, even when the formulation of the question changes.

fixed goal	⟶	evolving trajectory
optimization	⟶	navigation
continuity	⟶	transition
complicated	⟶	complex
object	⟶	relation
individual	⟶	individual-in-context
result	⟶	new condition

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