

‘The Ginkgo Meeting’  
Vienna Complexity Hub  
September - 2018

Organised by  
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The ambition of the singular ‘Ginkgo Meeting’ is to investigate what true understanding is. We are bringing together a host of curious, talented and creative individuals from very diverse fields for an experiment to explore what happens when a spectrum of minds are focused on a single unbounded part of reality.

Our chosen subject is the Ginkgo Biloba tree (see below). It does not matter if you have little or no knowledge of this tree. We could have chosen anything; however, this little tree with its interesting history that still holds mysteries, offers a suitable starting point that we have struggled to better. We are interested to discuss how we might approach the process of developing a full and broad understanding of this plant: We’ll explore the tree and its history. We use the tree as a focal point for a vivid investigation of how understanding is composed of myriads of facets.

We expect to have contributions in many formats: Speaking, performing or other approaches. We won’t emphasize technicalities but aim to make our discussions meaningful to a mixed audience including the general public. The presentations will be kept strictly within 20 minutes. The presentations may e.g. be based around the words of a good poem to capture the essence of important ideas resonantly and succinctly. We are looking forward to producing a small richly textured book of the event.

Presenters will be from fields as diverse as music, robotics, history, particle physics, literature, biology, architecture and dance. We aim to form a wonderfully multi-disciplinary, speculative and curious event; recognising that many minds and perspectives are needed even to begin to capture our rich experience of a small part of reality.

### **Objectives**

The conference is an experiment:

1. To investigate what happens when diverse minds with multiple viewpoints, models, laws and languages come to focus on a single entity and its constituent processes.
2. That probes how each individual perceives the relationships and interconnections between entities and processes and more broadly, how we conceive of the world.
3. To take stock of the opportunities, challenges and limitations of complexity science.
4. To inspire new ways of thinking and broaden horizons for both speakers and other participants.
5. That asks “what can we learn for science and life?”
6. That reignites existing affiliations and brings new ones together.
7. That celebrates the complexity view.

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*The Ginkgo* or Maidenhair Tree is easily identifiable with its unique fan shaped leaves and inhabits cities across the world. It is a living fossil having origins on earth in the times when dinosaurs roamed.

It has tremendous longevity of up to 3,000 years and at maturity may be 40m high and its trunk 4m in diameter. Its water and nutrient carrying systems are able to survive our dirtiest cities, and a nuclear bomb.

In autumn its leaves of pure gold can be shed overnight in an almost simultaneous act. Howard Nemerov wrote about this in his exquisite poem - ‘The Consent’. Confucius would give lectures under a Ginkgo tree and Goethe wrote about it as a symbol of love, individuality and oneness.

There is no other leaf formation like this on earth, it is its own species. The fanning bifurcated structure of its leaves embodies the notion of taking a multifaceted view of any-thing.



Images: The ginkgo biloba tree, by Henry Irving; Ginkgo leaf in autumn.