

# PARADIGM IN PROGRESS

The Real Global Emergency – An Essay in Hope

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# Paradigm in Progress - The Real Global Emergency

## An Essay in Hope

*For Jean Houston and Ken Wilber with thanks*

### *Danses:*

The past year was not just one of economic turmoil. Across our increasingly hot and crowded planet people are reacting in sundry, yet mostly conventional ways, to the effects of global heating.

Politicians, too, are feeling the heat. And with good reason. Ensnared in past dogma, beliefs and practices, politicians of every persuasion, along with legions of their advisers, have failed to comprehend what is actually going on. Plagued by hesitation, denial, attention-seeking, propaganda, bickering and blame, this has to be the greatest break down of politics yet witnessed.

The reluctance and inability of governments to act decisively or in unity sets humanity on a catastrophic course. Such spectacular abdication of leadership, so transparent during the recent climate change negotiations in Copenhagen, not only puts civilization at risk. It threatens the very survival of our species on this planet. It is a veritable *danse macabre*.

Consider this...

*Eleven of the past fourteen years have been the hottest on record. The Nepalese leadership recently held a cabinet meeting on Mount Everest in order to draw attention to rising temperatures that have dramatically reduced snowfall over the roof of the world. The government of the Maldives held a cabinet meeting underwater to highlight the threat of global warming to the low-lying Indian Ocean nation. In Bolivia, glaciers that hold the nation's water supplies are rapidly dwindling. The Arctic is melting so fast the ice cap is likely to have disappeared by the end of the century. Even East Antarctica, long stable, is now losing ice.*

*Elsewhere drought, floods, earthquakes and fires wreak havoc. Deforested peat lands in Indonesia are drying out and burning. The future of the Amazonian rainforest is similarly endangered. In parts of Australia drought, once cyclical, is now a permanent condition. Rivers everywhere, including the mighty Ganges, an inextricable part of India's physical and cultural landscape, are drying up, leaving only desiccated earth and dust bowls.*

*The marshlands between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, fabled site of the Garden of Eden, a land so rich in soil and water that it would quench the needs of its dwellers throughout eternity, emits the unmistakably pungent stench of a dying ecosystem.*

*Meanwhile the massive floods that killed hundreds of people in the Philippines this past summer and the recent earthquake in Haiti, which is thought to have killed over 170,000 people, are becoming the norm. Nor are such extreme weather events confined to the tropics or the polar regions. Agriculture in the United States has been ravaged this year by droughts in Texas and California, heat waves in Louisiana and Nebraska, floods in Minnesota and torrential rains in Illinois.*

*In Venice, a major trade hub and maritime power in the middle ages and still one of the most idyllic cities in the world, the number of permanent residents is hovering at around 60,000, having halved during the past fifty years. Why? Because Venice is sinking into its own foundations. Bangkok too, once romantically known as the Venice of the East and my home for the past five years, is sinking into coastal mud at the alarming rate of up to three*

*centimeters each year. Marine life, too, is being killed indiscriminately. Only 10 per cent of all large fish (both open ocean species including tuna, swordfish, marlin and large ground fish such as cod, halibut, skate and flounder) remain in the sea. Toxins and pollutants combined with current rates of ocean acidification could potentially deprive future generations of all wild sea food.*

*On every continent desperate nomads are migrating further and further from traditional homelands, many of them inhabiting the vast urban metropolises which are now home to over 50 per cent of the world's population. As many as 200 million people are destined to become climate migrants by 2050, destabilizing the global economy in a process that will inevitably result in escalating poverty, inequality and conflict.*

*Excuses and rationalizations for delay, along with assertions there are more pressing problems, are simply no longer credible. Climate change will ravage the planet and destroy our prosperity, security and any hope for a safe future, unless we come together to take rapid, effective action.*

*On the other hand perhaps we are already past the point of no return. The speed at which the arctic permafrost is melting is alarming. If warming caused by increased methane emissions locks the region into a destructive cycle that forces temperatures to rise even faster, this factor alone could overwhelm all efforts to tackle climate change.*

### **Alarms:**

As far as I can tell the former statement is no exaggeration but, on the contrary, a fairly measured assessment of our current predicament. Furthermore its content and tone reflect the dominant media 'meme' vis-à-vis climate change - a meme that is increasingly typical of the perspective projected onto such subject matter through articles, books, websites, television news, cinematic fiction, plans, activism and conferences. Containing a range of disquieting facts, statistics and opinion, it seems to provide indisputable evidence that climate change is serious and unavoidable.

It is also representative of the scenarios saturating our perceptions; choking confidence, playing to our fears, doubts and superstitions in ways that abandon any sense of a better future. In this specious state almost everything about the past (including, of course, the socio-economic platform required for fabricating modern lifestyles) takes on a utopian perspective. Regrettably this nostalgia for the past, though seductive, merely engenders apathy: instead of aspiring to fresh goals we do everything in our power not to lose that which we had. Energy dissipates right there!

As a consequence zero-sum games remain the actuality. Entangled in a transition we never intended and never thought possible, one that threatens to depose some of our most fundamental tenets and over which we have seemingly less control by the day, we are traumatized by an ominous sense of foreboding and the ennui of uncertainty.

Instead of embracing an energizing potential for renewal, especially the possibility of attending to inequities generated by increasingly predatory forms of capitalism, we descend prematurely into melancholy, grieving for the sacrifices to come and striving to avoid the pain of disassociation.

In most cases that just means carrying on with life – turning a blind eye to worsening forecasts and devastating events, doing what we can to protect our own parochial interests, and all the while putting our trust in promises of further economic expansion and growth when that is clearly the root cause of our current mess. How absurd!

In these circumstance is it really any wonder vast numbers of citizens just switch off, get angry, or try to deny the laws of nature staring us in the face? Why should it surprise us when individuals search for ways to evade discomfort and to conserve, or even improve,

their present life-style? Should we continue to belittle and censure those who simply hanker for the conspiracy theorists to be correct and the scientists wrong? Is it not human nature that we should turn our backs on a future seemingly devoid of any optimism or joy?

There are far more inspiring alternatives to the enervating cynicism, uncertainties and increasingly shrill revelations of impending disaster that flood our daily lives. Stories that offer hope and intentions that chronicle a brighter future for all. Human civilization is certainly in a state of transition. Indeed I believe we have reached a developmental crisis point - one that necessitates a redefinition of what we interpret to be *progress*.

Yet while we can only analyze past transitions, the future paradigm still remains ours to invent. Along with technological revolutions, socio-economic crises offer exceptional opportunities to move to higher levels of evolution. We just need to be able to “see” the promise of societal renewal with greater clarity and conviction, which is why *context* (the framework within which we make meaning) becomes so vital.

Contextual conditions both establish and reflect dominant belief systems in the culture. An appreciation of context becomes particularly critical when so many of the ideas and institutions defining our culture appear to be breaking down. This is the case today.

Possibly the most profound transition in history, one that has taken literally hundreds of years so far and is still far from completion, was the move away from pious notions of an infallible ‘maker’ or supreme being, to the concept of scientific materialism. Here it is the physical world that really matters. This shift required discarding deeply imprinted fears and fallacies. Unsurprisingly it led to the modern obsession with material goods and the acquisition of personal wealth. But evolution cannot stop there.

We must now move beyond even that phase of understanding. Among the most vital of contemporary principles is the rejection of the idea of the world as a physical machine. The transition towards a new society instilled with such a fundamental ontological shift appears most likely to lead to a new holistic consciousness that integrates both science and spirit. Yet the practical realities of governing a global population of seven billion people still lag behind conceptions.

In the past at least part of the problem has been our inability and/or unwillingness (as individuals and communities) to engage with really big issues such as climate change in any meaningful or constructive manner.

Our inclination to turn over decision-making to others for example (whether to dictators, monarchs, professionals or councils of elected representatives) was deemed pragmatic. In reality it represented a disquieting social apathy – a deeply ingrained passivity that is extremely difficult to overcome. What is more it often allowed corruption, misconduct and oppression to thrive, to which we then turned a blind eye for fear of attracting still further repression. Many communities still suffer from that indifference today.

With the advent of today’s sophisticated communications systems and online social media, however, there can be no excuse. People are able to speak out and air their concerns, wielding power in ways that were previously out of the question. Today, the voice of each citizen can be heard. Individuals can contribute to a global community of mind (a collective intelligence for change) should they wish to do so. Indeed some commentators argue the case that it is increasingly impossible to remain quarantined from such participation, given the potency and insidious nature of new social media.

In attempting to address the inevitable impacts of climate change through mitigation and adaptation, the application of such crowd-sourced intelligence, supported by all the innate wisdom and expertise we can muster, is vital. But whereas collective intelligence urges the immediate deployment of smart technologies, a shift to clean energy, and the

rapid phasing out of toxic products and practices, wisdom entreats us to pause; to change the conversation and thereby to pose questions that are currently not part of the debate.

As far as I am concerned some of the more important questions we should be pondering are not even on the agenda. While the greatest threats to the environment seem to be that nothing is done, that the wrong things are done too quickly, or that too little is done too late, the greatest threat to our social well being is that we act without wisdom.

For the most urgent questions for humanity no longer focus on the causes of global heating or to what extent humans are to blame, but how we can lessen the damage, what can be done to delay the more serious consequences, how we can tread more lightly on this planet and, above all else, how we should react in order to preserve for future generations what is uniquely beautiful and inherently precious about our world.

So far our response to these questions has been depressingly inadequate. On deeper, more spiritual issues, such as how we can accelerate our capacity to adapt to the laws of physics in ways that enable more sustainable relationships, with each other and with the Earth, there has been a deafening silence.

Here are a few of the key reasons, by no means comprehensive and in no particular order, and what we might do about them. They range from the detailed assumptions underlying cognitive discourse and activism to the meta-language and morphology of how the current global system is able to persist.

### *Distractions:*

Global heating is but one *canary in the coal mine* of modernism - a disturbing symptom among many indicating a civilizational and environmental pathology in an acute state of distress and, quite possibly, collapse. Life-threatening certainly, and constantly deteriorating, it nevertheless distracts us from the main game.

Additional signs of breakdown range from unparalleled demands being made on Earth's physical resources by an escalating population and continuing disparities between less privileged and more affluent individuals and communities, to a scarcity of potable water, conflicts driven by religious and ethnic differences, the rising costs of food production, ingrained social and economic inequities, demands for energy that cannot be met, as well as rules and conventions that exacerbate division, competition and conflict within society.

What these intertwined symptoms actually denote is a messy unraveling of the industrial paradigm and mindset; the end-game of a complex dynamic between three life-critical systems: energy, economy and environment. Adding further to our quandary is the fact that various amplifying feedback mechanisms are now accelerating this end-game out of our control. This has been largely brought about by the comprehensive failure of a set of organizing principles originally intended to maintain some semblance of order in the juxtaposition of (industrial) development and (social) compliance.

This unraveling is only peripherally connected to the issue of climate change, in that global heating is merely an emergent quality of the way the system has been designed to operate. Change the design (or, more importantly, the intentions informing that design) and we solve the problem of global heating - in addition to resolving many other related concerns. While we are preoccupied with discrete issues, however, especially when our tendency is to converge around explicit targets, an attachment to the goal itself assumes greater import, dragging us even further away from any deeper intentions.

At present every visible symptom seems to point to fundamental design flaws in the beliefs and frameworks used by the developed world to create wealth and maintain a

quality of life the rest of humanity once envied - but now expects as a God-given right.

Together, these symptoms jeopardize both the highly sophisticated nature of our society as well as its more pragmatic capacity to produce and distribute life's necessities. This threat can also be perceived as a collision between fate and desire. In that context, risks appear to have emerged as a direct result of the way we think - about our needs, our rights, our aspirations and our interactions, particularly relative to each other and to the planet. We must think again. Differently this time. Not only through a different lens but also from a higher altitude. And collectively. Indeed to avert the imminent chaos that would be brought about by extensive societal collapse we will need to review current assumptions and practices by addressing four imperatives:

- Reimagining our collective purpose - particularly ensuring that prosperity, well-being, equity and justice are rights to be inherited by all human beings and not just a few wealthy individuals and corporations
- Separating private ownership from shared assets (like the sky, scientific knowledge, silence, the Internet, forests, oceans, ecosystems and our cultural heritage and traditions, for example) thus ensuring protection and management of our common wealth
- Reinventing current patterns of production and consumption by focusing on shared sufficiency rather than upon selfish excess
- Restoring functionality and beauty to our lives within limits determined by natural laws over which we have no control.

Essentially these four imperatives equate to society's new bottom line. They are non-negotiable. The real difficulty is that they require us to find ways of *integrating* and *transcending* current praxis in order to address more fundamental issues than just climate change.

That is easier said than done of course - as is proving to be the case every day. Global heating has become a melodramatic distraction we can ill afford. While most scientists generally concur it is vital to lower concentrations of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere (quite possibly below 350 parts per million if we are to avoid potentially disastrous consequences) and that the technologies to achieve this are readily available, the overall know-how, motivation and enthusiasm for change remains predictably naïve and parochial.

Political processes continue to stall because of corruption, greed, self-interest and the traditionally competitive nature of international negotiations. The mass media vacillate and polarise. Industry leaders sit on the fence, denying culpability, defending current investment decisions, threatening governments with mass job cuts and lobbying for as little change as possible. Investment banks shrewdly manipulate conditions to their advantage - new carbon markets potentially offering billions of dollars in profits. Meanwhile, on the edge of public awareness, numerous activists, each with a slightly different agenda, repeat their doom-laden mantras, confusing the general public who are already fearful and fatigued by the overwhelming uncertainties before us.

For the time being all pretence of leadership has been replaced by an oligarchy hell bent on milking every last drop of life from the industrial system even as it crashes. The lack of a compelling and appropriate vision and of a unified global purpose, together with the necessary collaborative will and mechanisms needed to escape the gravitational pull of the past, is deeply indicative of a society lacking the resilience, imagination and consciousness required to adequately transform its state of being.

Over the past few centuries our civilization has advanced incredibly and in so many different ways. Today, those of us fortunate enough to be living in the developed world enjoy levels of material well-being and life-styles that were simply unimaginable even a few years ago.

At the same time much of what was once fresh and beautiful about humankind has ossified into a rigid shell; homogenous, pitiless, seemingly devoid of any compassion, wonder or love. Bloated from excessive consumption, exhausted by pointless conflict, we await a crisis that enables the blueprint of a new society to emerge from the *imaginal* cells of our deepest communion, like the metamorphosis of a chrysalis into a butterfly.

It is quite feasible that global heating is that emergency - or will swiftly become so if government inaction persists. As we well know from catastrophe theory, all crises offer us a plethora of possible ways forward. In the context of climate change there are a few critical paths that lead to a better future for humanity as a whole. Others, and I fear these are the pathways we are intent on pursuing, chart a course that lock-in current divisions and convictions – especially the paradigmatic impulse linking progress to continuous economic growth and development.

So what *do* we imagine when we speak of a “better” future? What inspires us about this future? And how does it stack up with what we already have and what we believe we may be about to lose?

### *Spells:*

Our cultures and lifestyles are dominated by popular myths - contagious fabrications packaged, spread by word of mouth and reiterated endlessly by the media. Myths are by far the most insidious and pervasive influence on our society. Affecting just about every aspect of our daily lives, these fictions shape assumptions and motivations which then determine how we think about ourselves, our activities, our relationships and our aspirations.

In essence myths determine what we believe, how we think and how we behave. They also control our decisions (albeit unconsciously) concerning what gets made, what gets seen and what gets heard.

One of the most enduring myths, relentlessly upgraded and refined by a creative elite, and promulgated by the image machinery of marketing and advertising, is the relatively contemporary dream of a society where affluence, freedom, comfort, health and well-being are universal attributes. This myth bolsters the emergent global psyche driving material progress and economic growth. Realistically it is also the chief cause of obesity, social addictions, illegal migration, people trafficking, bureaucratic red tape, war, youth alienation, drug dependency, civil unrest, psychological disorders, violence and even terrorism.

Gradually, unavoidably it seems, captivated by relentless consumption and a reckless quest for more and more of everything, we are all losing our minds to this spell.

Awareness of this predicament presents us with a moral dilemma. Founded upon the agency of uninhibited production and consumption, such a utopian view of society is now utterly at loggerheads with the need for us to live together within the limits imposed by nature; to be guided by moderation, sufficiency, less energy and possibly even zero growth. Zero growth, especially, is a concept utterly alien to human ambitions and inventiveness. It seems to be incompatible with any sense of progress. Yet that is the essence of the problem we face.

At least since the industrial revolution, possibly before, we have been conditioned to identify progress in concrete terms. By and large material wealth (together with its entourage of by-products emphasizing status, style, experiences, gadgets and technical wizardry, in addition to the speed and persistence needed to acquire these of course) is what we gauge, compare and value. Ironically, although there is an emerging consensus among psychologists that individual happiness and contentment is what most of us

genuinely desire, the factors that might reasonably be expected to provide such fulfillment (collegiality, kinship, reciprocity, peace, the time to do simply nothing, read a book, or walk along the seashore, for example) tend to be valued far less.

Measures commonly employed by governments, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) are widely regarded to be symbolic of a successful economy and hence of a prosperous country. Our collective consciousness remains captive to these viral fictions of economic preeminence, particularly when they become the primary topic of conversation on dedicated television channels like Bloomberg TV or the Islamic Finance TV Network.

But by raising an abstract concept (the economy or markets, for example) to a position above that of tangible human enterprise, where financial frameworks and processes are intended to galvanize, enable and support such endeavors, we have laid bare the desolate nature of contemporary existence.

Thus we commit our lives to accumulating wealth as an end in itself, hardly ever taking the time to fathom how we could use the fruits of our labor more effectively. If this void is typical of individuals and their families then it is an emptiness even more apparent at community and societal levels. As a species we seem to have no higher purpose these days other than to keep making money, accumulating additional possessions that we then throw away, and consuming more and more stuff.

It does not take the brain of an Einstein to know that this is the paradigm we need to change. Some of us are anxiously biting at the bit, eager to change things for the better on any number of fronts. Others may need time to be weaned off current addictions and their underlying assumptions. Quite possibly they have more to lose – or are allowing principles of scarcity, rather than of abundance, to dictate their worldview.

A new society is struggling to be born – of that there can be no doubt. It needs to be as enchanting as the old as well as triumphing over prior fears, anxieties and phobias. Resilient, too, and environmentally sustainable. But this new society is contingent upon changed intentions and reinvented outcomes. That means designing it collaboratively and with renewed purpose.

Purposeful design (or *deep design*) targets our collective neural system, exciting our emotions, imagination and aspirations in the fulfillment of a *new* promise to replace the *old*. It is akin to aligning our interior psychological states (in terms both of individual and collective conditions and convictions) with the exterior infrastructures, artifacts, architectures and systems we want to construct.

Integral in nature and displaying a natural integrity, *deep design* entails the embodiment of new *values* (enacted through every strata of society - from individuals to institutional and community governance and management structures) and the composition of new *myths* (narratives reflecting the advantages to human beings, natural ecosystems and future generations ) to reflect new and enlightened *circumstances*.

As for those who bear the responsibility for letting go of a paradigm that has brought so much to so many in terms of material wealth and prosperity, we demand compensation: for that which we seek must shine with an intense beauty, a liberated civilization where we are able to relate to each other within an ethos of abundance, while assimilating and surpassing the economically-driven, rationally-controlled world of timetables and targets we still find so hard to set aside.

### *Metrics:*

The science of climate change is concerned with the concentration of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere; particularly carbon dioxide, methane and carbon monoxide, along with airborne soot particles. In excessive amounts, greenhouse gases

have the effect of raising temperatures so that they directly impact life on Earth.

Greenhouse gas emissions are the result of several factors, including natural events as well as human activities. Consequently our efforts to create a safer climate should not focus on the chimera of using legally-binding targets to reduce emissions, though the debate seems to have been reduced to that lowest common denominator. Emissions targets and timetables have become the primary focus for negotiations.

Yet numerical targets count for very little if they are not related to actual performance and do not truthfully reflect a deeper purpose. Goals and targets can actually assume a significance that deflects us from the realization of our innate purpose. Failing to distinguish between *targets* with *purpose* can endanger the entire undertaking and lead to greater confusion.

Whereas we live out our intentions, goals and targets are simply signposts to fulfilling those intentions. Becoming too attached to measures can actually blind us from seeing what is changing that might require the recalibration of our goals. Over-attachment can also encourage the manipulation of circumstances to our advantage if we begin to fear that the targets we have set are not achievable.

In other words, authentic meaning will only manifest through policies and activities designed from a profound knowledge of the climate system, and the causes governing actual systemic patterns and events, working in harmony with our deepest ideals and intentions. We currently lack both conditions: we have no shared vision for the future of humanity, nor do we possess a sufficiently profound knowledge of natural systems. As a consequence alignment between the two is impossible.

Even our most erudite climatologists are ecologically illiterate to the extent that even the effect of cloud formations on global heating continues to bewilder them. Nor is our current digital modeling capability sufficiently advanced to be able to account for the impact of clouds on climate. Picking arbitrary targets in dynamically complex systems is equally futile. I can only conclude that there are far too many volatilities impacting the global climate system to be sure that the most relevant target has been chosen.

Multilateral government negotiations have failed to produce any meaningful agreement (and by that must be included the acclaimed Kyoto Protocol) since a gathering in Berlin in 1995. That was when discussions switched from focusing on agreed procedures to the setting of common targets.

Kyoto was based on targets and timetables for annual emissions reductions. No attempt was ever made to provide a mechanism for equalizing the efforts made by each country over time. This turned out to be an appalling oversight. While Kyoto seemed feasible in principle, and the degree of international consensus was an extraordinary achievement, the accord gave rise to a marked increase in emissions. As a result today's emissions far exceed the most pessimistic forecasts when the Kyoto Protocol was negotiated in 1997.

Clearly the growth in greenhouse gas emissions in each country depends on any number of factors - including size, demographic, access to natural resources, economic structure, rate of growth, level of economic development and the degree to which policies focus on energy efficiency, for example. Consequently the amount of effort required to reduce emissions varies dramatically from one country to another. It is illogical to attempt to negotiate common effort from so many nations when so much divergence and variety typifies the whole.

If a consensus of nations is deemed necessary (and I query whether that might not be a delusional quest at this stage of society's evolution) the entire negotiating framework must shift from the setting of national targets and timetables to broad principles for action in addition to measures for equating the marginal cost of reducing emissions across countries. This will require:

1. A massive investment in systems of human activity that are adaptive, energy efficient, sufficient for our needs, and benign in their impact on the environment
2. An international agreement to keep carbon prices within an acceptable price “collar” [ideally through a carbon tax, a global emissions trading mechanism, or cap and dividend arrangements].

Naturally, individual states should be free to enact policies most relevant to their unique circumstances. But on one condition: that a price is put on carbon and that price remains verifiable under international rules.

With any luck such a scheme would allow us to avoid the bureaucratic shenanigans witnessed in Copenhagen - likely to be replicated in Mexico in 2010 unless common sense prevails. It would also do away with the likelihood of political grandstanding, points scoring and rent-seeking by those wishing to profit from the imposition of convoluted policies that promise a great deal but deliver absolutely nothing of significance.

### *Games:*

As the world drifts ever deeper into crisis the machinery of government moves even more cautiously and with excruciating lethargy. *Urgency* is not a term commonly heard, least of all understood, in the bureaucracy’s lexicon. Of course there are reasons for this.

Traditionally the political process, and therefore most political argument, has been about balancing competing interests, where each position offers more or less equally legitimate alternatives. Eliminate the passion of conviction or ideology and most political decisions actually boil down to a matter of preference.

It is true that unambiguous moral issues will occasionally emerge. But mostly there is a valid range of views and subsequent options for and against specific policies. Which is why, sooner or later, we are persuaded to come to some sort of compromise. This agreement can then be enshrined in law until such time as alternative, more powerful interests emerge, or new knowledge demands a revision of the existing point of view.

Given this ingrained ritual it is hardly surprising that governments everywhere are attempting to deal with climate change as if it were just another matter of preference – a political problem, with an economic outcome, requiring specific choices to be made. But this time we are not dealing with a political problem. Climate change is different from any other issue with which our diverse political systems have had to deal over the centuries. It is unyielding and dynamically complex – a human emergency on an unprecedented scale.

Firstly, climate change represents the first universal threat to our civilization and quite possibly to our species. In terms of choice there are really only two significant options. We can rapidly cure our addiction to fossil fuels - difficult to do, but possible. Or we can consign future generations to destructive, long-lasting changes in the Earth’s climate system. The latter “Mad Max” scenario could well lead to millions of climate refugees, a total collapse of society’s conventions, civil disobedience and conflict on a scale that is unthinkable.

Secondly, climate change has not been imposed upon us by some external force or alien species. It is of our own making, having arisen from the way we live our lives and the manner in which we have elected to satisfy our material needs.

Western civilization has deliberately chosen a path of unlimited growth. Indeed the *growth = progress* mantra is so deeply ingrained in our subconscious we find it almost impossible to conceive of a world of zero growth. Intuitively we know our passion for unlimited growth is reckless. Indeed our greatest fear is that it may lead to our

extinction. Yet we persist with business as usual. It is as though our normally rational disposition has imploded in a form of collective psychosis. And this blindness to alternatives is being led by those who are also blind to reality.

Thirdly, unlike political opponents, this particular rival has no interest whatsoever in the next election, or the one after that. Climate change cannot be worn down, corrupted, ridiculed or persuaded to change its mind. This time we are up against the immutable laws of physics. There can be no bargaining, no last minute deals, no heroic rescues.

Fourthly, in spite of irresponsible humbug and propaganda designed to confuse and misinform, this issue is becoming less open to question by the day. The worst fears of scientists who, for decades, have cautioned us to heed the signs of climate change or suffer the consequences, are now obvious for all to witness. In this regard there are a few unavoidable tenets we need to take more seriously:

- The burning of fossil fuels creates greenhouse gases, especially carbon dioxide, that trap heat in the Earth's atmosphere. Clearly the simplest way to reverse that heating is to stop burning fossil fuels. Governments can help by taxing carbon, which would eventually put old smokestack industries out of business. But this is not happening. Instead, governments of every persuasion continue to squander public money on "clean coal" and similar fantasies. Such barely concealed servility by governments in the face of aggressively melodramatic posturing from the powerful coal and oil lobbies merely delays the inevitable.

Taxing carbon would undoubtedly result in a huge outcry from industrialists who will do everything in their power to prevent such a tax. There is now sufficient evidence, however, to conclude that we will be forced to take this action at some stage. It would be far cheaper to do it sooner rather than later.

- Most peer-reviewed scientific analysis considers any concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere greater than 350 parts per million to be unsafe and therefore incompatible with life as we know it. As I write this we are already at 387 parts per million and climbing.

A recent study by a consortium of European think-tanks showed that the various offers currently on the UN negotiating table add up to a world in which the atmosphere contains 650 parts per million of CO<sub>2</sub> with an associated temperature rise of around 2.7° Celsius. This will be compounded still further if increased temperatures in the arctic continue to melt the permafrost, thus allowing methane to escape faster than before.

- Technologies that can help us disentangle and solve the issue of climate change are not science fiction. They exist today. What has been mostly lacking in the developed world is the capital investment required to fund the scaling-up of these technologies (particularly those used to generate power from the wind and sun) and the will to bankroll new "green" industries. In China on the other hand, political leaders are pouring billions of dollars into clean energy as well as taking whatever action they can to make extraction of their vast coal reserves cleaner.

In the case of more democratic innovations, in particular those not protected by patent and therefore freely available for anyone to use, what was previously lacking was the knowledge of how simple, clean, technologies could be deployed at relatively low cost. With the emergence of the Global Innovation Commons that is no longer an issue.

- Although most media attention (and blame) habitually focuses on the nation state and the protracted negotiations undertaken within the framework of the United Nations, the most radical policy changes are more likely to emanate from

regions, cities and communities as concerned citizens increasingly take matters into their own hands.

In this regard it is essential to take into account that today's globalised world is not managed by the UN, nor by the flawed governance model that it represents and even less by a single nation state. The new reality is a multi-polar world of entwined relationships and alliances where social movements can ignite spontaneously, local groups can inspire global interaction, and numerous parties can unite in a vital cause.

- As in the most pitiless of war games we remain unaware of just how long we have to take action. Nature has not specified a precise time limit. Most scientists agree it cannot be long. Perhaps a decade. Two at the most. We also know that the challenge will get worse and far more costly to rectify each year until, at a certain point, the global climate system escalates out of control. At that point any action whatsoever will be far too late.

For these reasons, and others mentioned only in passing here, the conversation must not be allowed to descend into a dispute between reformists and conformists, between the wealthy and the underprivileged, between east and west, north and south, or between differing ideologies.

Climate change is a universal consequence that affects everyone. It is not a political problem, nor are only certain nations or group of nations culpable. On the contrary, climate change is a civilizational question. It is a universal matter affecting those of us alive today as well as future generations. Consequently it must be solved by everyone.

It is this last imperative that is probably least understood. For while we dally, waiting for politicians and bureaucrats to agree on what should be done, orthodox leadership archetypes turn ever more sour. The myth of the hero-leader, spawned out of warfare, big business and competitive sport, nourished by our insatiable fascination with fame and celebrity, sounds its death rattle. In its place the genesis of a narrative based upon entirely fresh assumptions about leadership gasps for air, reaches for the future and struggles to take its first tentative steps.

### *Assumptions:*

All human thought and pursuits are based on sets of embedded truths – assumptions regarding what is right or wrong, good or bad, fair or unjust. Assumptions give rise to values sets; emotional rules to which we (mostly unconsciously) adhere and that inform our life decisions. While there appears to be a set of universal moral impulses (for example that people have certain rights, that it is wrong to hurt people and that it is good to relieve suffering) many values differ from one culture to another, sometimes quite considerably.

The raft of fundamental assumptions, and subsequent values, being used by climate change negotiators, and that consequently form the basis for national and international policy frameworks and agreements, are tacitly accepted as being universally applicable. Although this is considered self-evident it is also clearly wrong. They are missteps in the dance.

Many assumptions, too, are deeply flawed. Examining these flaws helps elucidate why extravagant international efforts (like the recent UN circus in Copenhagen where 8,473 officially registered delegates from 191 countries ran around in a whirlwind of frenzied activity) seem to flounder and fail.

Each set of flawed assumptions highlights at least one facet of a belief system being brought to bear on the issue of how to address the climate change emergency. Each one,

too, illustrates the veracity of Einstein's famous dictum: that nothing will be resolved by using the thinking that gave rise to the problem in the first place.

The unavoidable conclusion is that if our thinking and our thought processes do not rapidly become more mature, more sophisticated and more conscious of our internal functioning and biases, we can be certain that the issues with which we grapple today will deteriorate and our worst nightmares will begin to unfold. Here are a few examples of what I mean:

### **1. Norms**

I am personally most perturbed by disparities in cultural values and norms that, when not accepted and appreciated, lead to heated discussion, dispute and eventual disarray.

In Copenhagen, for example, it was clear that the Chinese delegates were unprepared for the faster-paced discussions introduced into the process by the Americans during the final two days of the meeting. Irrespective of the intentions behind such a move (and my strong suspicion is that the US negotiators knew precisely what they were doing) the Chinese are not culturally inclined to engage in such hasty decision-making.

Then again, the extreme points of view put collectively by developed nations on the one hand and undeveloped nations on the other were grounded in a time-related (i.e. past-future) continuum that was hardly considered and therefore remained unresolved. It was actually no surprise that a binding agreement remained out of reach with such a fundamental collision of values.

### **2. Numbers**

The second set of assumptions that troubles me has to do with our fixation on numbers. We are in thrall to the culturally-charged *mimetic* quality of "sacred" numbers that can then be used to attract and sway public opinion by signifying a particular thought. We become strangely attached to these numbers, often forgetting the overarching intent that led to our choice in the first place.

Such is the case with 350 (parts per million) in current climate change vernacular. Since its adoption by the influential NASA scientist James Hansen as a critical point of reference for the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, the number has assumed an emotional significance far beyond its actual scientific meaning. It has even spawned an online community entitled 350.org.

I have no doubt that our emotional attachment to this goal (or any similar goals for that matter) is a fundamental mistake. When it dawns on communities around the developed world that reaching 350 ppm will demand sacrifice and a massive change in lifestyles, we will see business leaders, governments and regulators begin to manipulate things to their advantage. But if 350 ppm is a problematic number, then numbers generally are an issue, especially large numbers.

Large numbers are generally considered potent. They tend to denote great significance. For a while now the UN has been seeking a global consensus, which is why around 21,000 people actually attended the formal event of COP15 in 2009. Summit organizers, along with the architects of social movements, often assume they must appeal to as many representatives from as many constituencies as possible to be taken seriously. If thousands of individuals are drawn to a particular event we imagine it must be pretty important; taking for granted that any agreed outcome is more likely to be implemented without further impediment. In other words we consider the strategic leverage of the crowd to be greater than with smaller numbers. This is a fallacy.

Consider the grand logic of a series of escalating climate change conferences convened with the sole purpose of inspiring relevant action from every man, woman and child on the planet. The consensus around this global community of mind would be so instantly catalyzing that prudent strategies for reversing global heating would be deployed in every country and without opposition of any kind. Our rational nature likes to suppose that with such unambiguous clarity the issue of global heating might simply go away.

Regrettably there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that would be the case. In fact such widespread understanding could just as well result in despair, confusion, fatigue and mayhem, especially where the resources needed to enable change are non-existent or in short supply. History shows that societies in crisis often leap from calm reaction to outright panic. It would almost certainly give rise to even greater resistance from those with vested interests in maintaining the status quo. And the sheer numbers of people trying to enact change, each in their own way, would probably result in confusion and social disorder on a scale that is terrifying to imagine.

So although some numbers matter a lot, others do not matter at all. In the context of climate change what really matters is not the numbers of people who are convinced we have a problem but that those people who have the authority and financial clout to do something about the crisis embrace diversity, act out of unity, and in ways that wisely benefit the entire human family.

Throughout human history and across all cultures, from the rise of the Spartan and Mayan empires and the bankrolling of the European Renaissance by the Medici, to Mao's cultural revolution, the impact of Surrealism on contemporary art, and the astonishing economic success of the Republic of Singapore since independence, it has been relatively small numbers of people who have initiated, inspired and funded massive change.

Thus in any complex adaptive system, and particularly in the interface between human design and the natural environment, it is not the sheer number of agents that is critical for change, but strategically chosen "acupuncture" points that release new energy, are easily scaled-up and capable of tipping the system into a different state. That is smart thinking and that is what we should be aiming to do vis-à-vis climate change.

### **3. Science**

The third set of assumptions has to do with our naïve appreciation of the science of global heating. For example, notions that we can stabilize the climate at some point; that we can exceed and then pull back to lower concentrations of greenhouse gases; and that we can accommodate 2° Celsius (or more) of warming through adaptive policies are naïve in the extreme.

These assumptions have no foundation whatsoever in the way the Earth's climate system actually behaves. Accordingly not only is the substance of current political debate virtually meaningless, the policies being pursued by developed nations are so at odds with the scale and urgency of the changes demanded by the science as to be derisory. They reflect a childish belief that global heating can be averted by good intentions and wishful thinking.

### **4. Money**

The fourth set of flawed assumptions has to do with money – explicitly the financial and political costs of creating a carbon-constrained future, and the prevalent use of orthodox debt-based capital markets as the model for handling investment.

While the developed world (led by the likes of the US, Canada and Australia) attempts to avoid acting harshly by putting limits on their traditional coal, oil and gas industries, developing economies (like Brazil, India and China) attempt to steer new benefits to

their own constituencies through so-called “green” investments. This has resulted in tensions that are noticeable in every critical topic being negotiated. At an international level the dilemma appears quite straightforward: to what extent are individual states prepared to cut their emissions and how willing are more affluent nations to help poorer countries adopt cleaner energy and adapt to rising temperatures and extremes of climate?

At more profound levels, however, these issues are compounded, reaching into the core of our innermost convictions, touching every aspect of *how* we attribute value - and to *what*.

Value, economic or otherwise, still tends to be framed within an unchallenged, almost condescending, conviction that US-Eurocentric models, systems and institutions signify a pinnacle of human achievement. From national Reserve Banks to investment houses everywhere, economic and monetary strategies are mostly used to bolster and restore functionality to the existing system. Underlying assumptions and beliefs are unaffected. For example many, otherwise well-meaning politicians, seem to believe that the solution to poverty is to create even more consumers. But current patterns of excessive human production and consumption are precisely the cause of so many of today’s problems. There are too many of us consuming too much too fast. Clearly a fundamental reframing is required.

Those most threatened by deep-seated changes to our civilization are the conservative patrons of economic industrialism - those inclined to preserve existing conditions and institutions. They already sense the fragilities in old empires. They see shifts they cannot comprehend. They hear the relentless message that their ideology is wrong, immoral even, and that adapting to the impacts of climate change will require much more than just the conventional functioning of capital markets, or corporations, or governments. Increasingly they cannot find even the briefest pause for breath in all the confusion. And their reaction, unsurprisingly, is to fight for all they are worth, propping up with even greater enthusiasm those things that delivered wealth to them in the past.

But this will not do. Ultimately the role of money and investment in society has to be remodeled. The issue of financing clean energy, for example, cannot be resolved by resorting to trade-offs (where effort is being mostly directed through short-sighted policies such as cap-and-trade or its like) but through *integrating* and *transcending* poles of thought in order to arrive at a new consensus, thus effectively reinventing competitive advantage and common benefit. In this regard, co-design, cooperative and open source innovation models, hold out new hope for different kinds of exchange in the future.

## **5. Futures**

The fifth set of assumptions relate to (a) what can be done to avert a future that is ostensibly inevitable, yet destructive of all we hold dear, including the widespread panic that is likely to ensue if that occurred, and (b) how we actually navigate to where we want to go instead of feeling helpless victims of an inexorable force that is driving us over a cliff.

Over the past few decades futures studies have advanced our thinking and capability to design better, more integral, futures. Now is the time to harness that knowledge, rather than to turn our backs on it, using it more effectively to help transform our thinking. There are two critical aspects to using foresight techniques effectively...

Firstly, trying to plot a linear course from a dynamic present to a world-changing future can be a beguiling speculative exercise, but in practice it is bound to fail – especially when we focus solely on the external world of physical materiality but pay no heed to our inner worlds of deeply-held values and convictions.

Secondly, the human condition has become far too complicated to fully comprehend and to chart with existing tools, although it is not the long view that is so much the problem as the immediate future. By that I mean the next decade or so. Being caught up in such a convoluted *here and now* makes any attempt to map short-term future options (at least from our currently prevailing perspectives and altitude) out of the question.

So we become bogged down by the sheer variety and density of factors, forces and trajectories, some obvious but many barely perceptible. Inundated by this data overload (much of it noisy, contradictory and bewildering) we unintentionally infer a chaos from which it is increasingly difficult to extricate ourselves with our sense of rationality intact. In other words we remain trapped within prisons of our own invention.

Future studies teach us that because of this pervasive complexity in both our outer and our inner worlds it is vital to come to some kind of broad understanding and agreement as to our paramount purpose and intent before resorting to the reassuring routine of detailed planning. But finding such strategic purpose also requires uncovering common ground for collaboration, being clear about our shared aims, and articulating the most critical and desirable goals from an array of latent options.

We know that broadly defining a compelling future, one that is healthier, sustainable and more abundant than present actualities, is critical to progress being made. That means envisaging alternative futures, accompanied by a degree of consensus that it is technologically achievable, socially desirable, politically prudent, economically feasible and mutually beneficial. Only when that work has been done can we confidently stand in that future, commencing the work of designing viable future-to-present pathways and resourcing local activities that can be leveraged to meet shared aspirations.

Regrettably the majority of in vogue models, methods, practices and initiatives tend to result in rather aimless and uninspiring goals. Too often they lack foresight and clarity around a shared purpose - other than that of avoiding adversity or known problems. And even when that purpose is transparent they habitually neglect expressions of viable pathways to achieve a satisfactory endpoint.

## **6. Dimensions**

Finally we are still using a set of assumptions regarding the speed and scale of change that is archaic. As climate change takes hold, altering major patterns of human activity in any number of predictable and unforeseen ways, the need to comprehend the non-linear nature of change in complex systems becomes crucial.

We are all familiar with, and have become somewhat unperturbed, by linear change. As long as one comprehends the most critical variables, and is able to monitor the impact of these variables in the system, it is possible to predict the outcomes from almost any sequence of events.

Most government and corporate plans are predicated on linear goals and processes. Indeed the entire discipline of project management is based on principles of linear cause and effect. I suspect the relative comfort we have with linear change is encouraged by the apparent certainty we feel (sometimes even an inevitability) when reviewing past patterns and events. Looking back it all seems to make sense. But the realities we are facing today are not nearly so neat.

Non-linear change, undisciplined and wildly unsettling, is disconcerting precisely because we cannot be certain of anything any more. Analyzing the past does not help while forecasting becomes potentially hazardous. In such situations we struggle to know what to do next. Unfortunately the impacts of climate change on our civilization will be linear and non-linear - both expected and surprising.

For example, convention has it that carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere, and therefore global temperatures, will increase gradually. This in turn gives rise to the

expectation that we will be given sufficient notice to tackle problems before they spin out of control. That presumption is valid when dealing with linear change in a simple system. But the changes we are beginning to encounter are likely to be increasingly abrupt, erratic and massively disruptive.

Disruptive change does not trace orderly and predictable curves. This is why disruptive change within complex adaptive systems like the Earth's climate require a different kind of comprehension altogether. Within this situation, even assuming that environmental sustainability itself remains a debatable issue, it is inexcusable to suppose that the UN, state governments or even city councils are capable of managing the ecology *and* the economy by command-and-control edicts in the manner they might otherwise exercise within their normal policy environments. This destructive delusion has no basis in reason.

Climate skeptics who resort to using limited sets of data to support their arguments are actually blind to reality. They can hardly be blamed for seeing the world in terms of perfunctory flows and outcomes. We are all taught to believe this is how things work. But to take their views seriously is to join those few eccentrics who still believe the world is flat.

### *Contredanses:*

All of the above distractions, habits, myths, maneuverings and ways of seeing our global predicament are, I believe, serious missteps in the dance of societal renewal. It should be perfectly clear that each exposes an element of evolutionary risk. A few are extremely hazardous to the future of human life on this planet.

In the same way that paleoclimate records show evidence of abrupt climate changes, it is increasingly possible that official policy reactions to climate change may themselves be abrupt, hasty and ill-considered. After decades of governments failing to act, public sentiment is almost at fever pitch in some quarters. A backlash could be on the cards, in which case the repercussions could well force government policies into radically compressed timeframes.

Such spontaneous cultural tipping points, often triggered by a dramatic series of events, has led to revolutions and wars in the past. The possibility of that happening in this case should not be summarily dismissed.

Reprisals may already be brewing. Copenhagen was perceived to be a flop (even if that is not entirely the case) after which public trust in the process took a nosedive. Strident comments from respected commentators branding political inaction "treason" and a "crime against nature" were increasingly heard. Influential journalist Elizabeth Kolbert described "a technologically advanced society choosing to destroy itself" while James Hansen and Rajendra Pachauri, generally regarded as two of the world's leading climate scientists, concurred that the combined lack of urgency and political will could well doom our planet.

Meanwhile, that same planet is noticeably pushing back against human folly. Extensive droughts, fires and dust storms in Australia; widespread flooding in Asia, terrifyingly rapid melting of land ice in Greenland and Antarctica; earthquakes in China and Haiti; and mosquito-borne illnesses like Dengue spreading to regions previously untouched. Recent soundings show that the oceans are rising and becoming more acidic, while the Earth's average temperature was higher in the past decade than at any time in the past century.

Critical questions remain: When will we react collectively to the need for a low-carbon future? Will it be in time to prevent further human catastrophes? When we react will it

be out of wisdom or from panic? Are we headed for a pivotal point in evolution when we collectively and intentionally confront conventional wisdom? Do we have the will and the imagination to establish new rules for the betterment of society as a whole? If so will these need to be forcibly generated or will they emerge from a more conscious ethos of deep design and appreciation for each other and our environment? And if we should choose to continue with our customary incremental lethargy will our species be capable of surviving the challenges to come?

We must understand that there can be no simple nor single answer to such fundamental questions. No global treaty, charismatic statesman, technical innovation, international carbon emissions framework, transformed belief system or reformed practices will solve every issue facing us. It would be naïve to think so. Nor can we rely on celebrity politicians, philanthropists and business leaders, however influential, wealthy or powerful, to do what needs to be done.

From the rice farmers of Vietnam and the street vendors in Soweto to bankers on Wall Street, entrepreneurs in Shanghai and Emirs in Dubai, it is incumbent upon each one of us to contribute to the emergence of new thinking and new ways of being for body, mind and soul, in whatever ways we can each be most effective.

Yet as Jean Houston so wisely points out, there is also “an obligation of great faith that such discrete actions can add up to a whole that will shift the destructive trajectory” upon which we are currently set in more beneficial and plentiful ways.

Over the past century, breakthroughs in knowledge have repeatedly affirmed our universal reality as a dynamically complex, vital, abundant and interconnected whole. Quantum physics illustrates so exquisitely an abiding truth: that science and spirit are one and that we are intimately connected to each other, as well as being inextricably entangled with our environment.

Every so often we recall this primordial echo of a memory lost in the interstices of contemporary life. We instinctively sense such innate affiliation each time we hold a new-born baby in our arms, watch the sun set over the ocean, or walk in a forest after rain.

Yet most of our cultural, political and socio-economic structures behave as if this were not the case. Having been designed to operate like giant cogs in a Newtonian clockwork machine they are immovable, out of touch with reality, the result of an array of invisible cultural beliefs we have mistaken for reality.

But there is hope. People all around the world are awakening to the realization that our society can no longer afford to indulge such outdated worldviews. They know that in order to deal with the multidimensional crisis we are now facing, in ways that create better futures and a planetary civilization more attuned to nature, it is critical we act (and act wisely) on new realities. That necessitates (a) discarding a range of primitive fears that tether us in past ways of knowing, (b) catalyzing a compelling energy to help bring forth more enduring and holistic narratives of humanity, and (c) elevating and deepening our current discourse for invention and co-evolution.

Our starting point must surely be some shared view of utopia. Alas we have no authentic or abiding vision of what this world and its inhabitants could be, so splintered have our lives and aspirations become. A new story is paramount.

As the world turns on its dark side we are no longer able to rely on the ancient myths of Eden or the indigenous Dreamtime. They are not enough. The various covenants offered by religions are not enough. The genius of art and philosophy is not enough. Science, mathematics and psychology are wanting while politics and economics are utterly inadequate. Even the power of contemplation, of reflective practice, and even new practical solutions and initiatives, though essential, are hardly satisfactory.

So what *will* work?

Seers like Jean Houston and Ken Wilber agree, nothing short of *everything* will really be sufficient to hit the reset button of history. We will need to bring to this *everything* a compassion, accord and wisdom sufficient to release the conceptual, creative and moral passion required to explore new ways of being and relating.

Moreover we will never reach our desired destination by fighting existing realities. It is a waste of energy. There are simply far too many people with vested interests lining up to stop paradigmatic progress in its tracks. As the great inventor Buckminster Fuller was fond of saying: *to change something we must build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete*. Devoting more time and attention to what we want to create, rather than what we can sensibly leave behind, does not mean we can neglect the problems currently besetting us. But it does imply much more energy has to be given to the world we are attempting to bring into being.

Those more enlightened beings among us are already discerning a clear code emerging of how we can begin to imagine and design viable future pathways accessing *everything* – all human knowledge and instinct. This code, (which I have frequently referred to over the years as the “C” society for reasons that are self-evident) is triggered and sustained by connectivity, cognitive capacity, cooperative action and complexity - as in diversity, inclusion, sufficiency and mutation rather than the stifling processes typically caused by uniformity, segregation, excess consumption and mindless preservation.

Who can doubt that this moment in history is unique? Of course exceptional times call for exceptional responses and not simply more of the same. Yet uniqueness of the type now warranted invariably emanates from altogether higher levels of intentionality – from a civilizational consciousness intensely focused on *integrating* and *transcending* past paradigms and poles of thought.

An elemental distinction between civilizations is whether they accentuate the spiritual or the physical realm. Within pre-literate societies these were (indeed are) identical. In our society science and spirituality, as well as our internal and external worlds, are striving to unite once again. What is evolving today, though, is not the individual but the living organism of humanity. Yet until we fully comprehend we are all part of a single living ecosystem, that we are all intimately connected to the Gaian biosphere that gives us life, and that cooperation and not competition is the key to our future existence, we will most likely continue to butcher each other and despoil the planet, like destructive cells in an autoimmune disease. So how should we encourage the dawn of a new wisdom?

In the obsolete paradigm of scientific materialism, an intense belief in *matter* prevails. Cartesian convictions that the universe is a machine, both visible and palpable, diverts attention away from the imperceptible and the unseen. Hence we become seduced by material comfort and possessions. In this paradigm the acquisition of material goods signifies accomplishment. So those that hold fast to these beliefs continue to mine the earth, fell the forests and pollute the air and the oceans in a degrading scramble for yet more and more material wealth. In this reality the logic is obvious: the more stuff we have and the more we own, the more successful we are thought to be.

We now have evidence that this paradigm is an illusion. New knowledge acquired just over a century ago rejects such a belief system out of hand. Quantum physics show us that the invisible domain we had learned to ignore is in fact the salient sculptor of the physical realm we venerate. But there are other false belief systems to which we still adhere.

The basis of Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, for example, that life originated from random mutations and is dependent upon a struggle of the fittest for survival, is at best only half true. Today we know better. The fine balance between competition and

cooperation within and between species is mostly determined by environmental characteristics. In temperate conditions competition tends to thrive. In cold conditions, however, cooperation becomes essential.

Thus cellular biology tells us that the entangled web of life on this planet (the biosphere) is impelled by cooperation and community. In essence, our competitive struggle has been futile and anti-evolutionary, trapping us in hostility and confrontation with each other and our environment. Yet the original theory still endures, influencing Western culture in so many different ways.

When a society accepts specific answers to recurrent questions from a particular body of knowledge, they commonly turn to that same source for other truths about reality. In the Middle Ages people asked the local priest or to the Church to help them resolve problems in their daily lives. Prior to that it was the village shaman or the witch doctor. When science eclipsed religion we turned to scientists and technologists for the answers. Now it is time to turn to the custodians of integral thought. To more holistic, more integrated, states of being.

Within the context of holism, awareness, intelligence and connection are keys to the deeper design of a unified society living in harmony with its environment. Similarly, those belief systems that perpetuate current conditions, exacerbate problems like global heating, that cherish competition and that permit us to pollute and destroy the very things we need to survive, will only go away when we realize we are part of an intricate and delicate web of life.

This understanding, this wisdom of cooperation, is the philosophical vacuum without which international negotiations and attempts at reform or reinvention are bound to falter and fail.

Ideally the creation of a unified and unifying vision for civilizational renewal should be high on the agenda, indeed the most important mission, of our global institutions. It is not. International representative bodies are incapable of conversing at that level, least of all are they capable of enabling a momentary stay in all the noise and confusion.

Trapped in past paradigms, their utter powerlessness in the face of complexity merely fuels public consternation. And as our united nations are anything but united, their efforts mostly confined to propping up what has been and their shrill utterances increasingly hollow and self-serving in a multi-polar world, a new form of intentional community will need to embark upon this particular mission. In this regard I remain optimistic.

I envisage a new resonance and connectedness emerging from a truly inclusive people's assembly - an association of children, elders, men and women who are deeply conscious of the more systemic, longer-term issues, facing us and who have a desire to guide humanity in imagining, composing and enacting better futures. Essentially this assembly would need to comprise people drawn from all cultures and beliefs; entrepreneurs, social artists and innovative thinkers dedicated to unshackling the human spirit through deep design.

Such a diverse assembly would explicitly and implicitly connect the most exceptional minds around the world, irrespective of ethnicity, age, gender or role, and in ways that liberated new wisdom. In so doing they would serve as *imaginal* cells in the evolution of a new society.

An assembly of this nature would learn to model a genuinely integral praxis for society. It would articulate and legitimize innovative concepts such as the global commons. It would reinvent econometric evaluation, proposing policies intended to create and distribute wealth more equitably. It would reboot our dominant leadership archetype from the "leader as hero" model of the past to the "citizen steward" of the future. And

through deep collaborative inquiry, dialogue and reframing it would seek to reconstruct everything from the media to education to civic engagement in an effort to liberate (rather than to oppress) knowledge.

Most likely it would not trumpet its work for all and sundry to criticize and deride. Gradually though, through a quietly coherent shift in consciousness, it will surely help give birth to the civilization we most desire, awakening in communities everywhere memories of our true nature and potential as creative beings inhabiting an abundant planet capable of providing for us all.

And so while high level discussions and international accords will continue, as they must, to provide a platform for incremental change; activists and social enterprises generate more people committed to fund and enact various good causes; and nation states carry on protecting their interests as best they can, those that perceive today's crisis as the means for casting off what no longer serves us well, must take steps to fill the void that will otherwise exist in the renaissance of genuinely new ways of being.

What is the future for our civilization? How can we begin thinking like a species instead of like self-interested individuals? What do we have that we value in common? What will it take to achieve an authentic community of nations? Above all else, what will it feel like when our systems of governance, finance, production, education and health care all work in concert with one another rather than in competition?

These are such critical questions to ponder as we take the first tentative steps of a new consciousness. In the past few years we have blindly undermined our capacity to shift the acquired, yet damaging, beliefs imprinted within our cultures for something far more sustainable and fulfilling.

It is now time to cast off that old paradigm, re-vitalizing and empowering ourselves, in order to advance towards a new and more compelling reality.

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Thonglor. Bangkok  
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