

GLOBAL TRANSFORMATIONS AND THE END OF THE NATURAL:  
Towards a Communicative Response to the Future  
(A Map, a Warning, and a Vision)

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Something I learned many years ago from cultural historian William Irwin Thompson is that all scholarship is autobiographical, so let me begin with my biases. Born in Pakistan and raised in Europe and Asia, with the last two decades in Hawaii, my approach to issues is often global. Having never lived in one place for long, and having seen human suffering in all places, I focus more on transformation than stability. Finally, as someone who is in some ways homeless, the future is my resting place. The future has become a home, a place unlike the current dominating modes of nationalism and instrumentality rationality. I look forward to the future. I believe it will be better for the majority of the world. I think that our actions today can help create such an alternative future. Finally, like many of you, I have gone through many stages in my relationship to technology. First, I understood it uncritically as a tool. Influenced by Marshall McLuhan and Jim Dator, I began to see that it is a tool that shapes us: we create technology rather than it creates the possibilities of us. I now see it as an expression of different civilisations, of culture, of gender. Different cultures will produce different types of technologies depending on how they see nature and "man." At the same time, technology in itself is a culture, a particular way of knowing.

While change has always been dramatic, the science and technology revolution make it particularly momentous. In this speech, I will focus on the transformations--technological, economic and epistemic--we are undergoing. These are important for us to understand, as I believe the future, while an open space, is not an empty space. Our images, our history are already creating it, colonising it. The issue is can we change or transform the trends we believe are disastrous for humanity? If so, how?

To begin with, thinking about the future is not necessarily predicting what specifically will happen. It is, however, about developing the capacity for social foresight, for understanding the context and depth of the changes we are undergoing. For some futurists<sup>1</sup>, we are in the midst of a 50 year transformation, the end of the Cold War. For others, we are in the midst of 500 year transformation, where the world that emerged at the end of the middle ages--modernity--is now under threat, is now on the verge of a fundamental transformation. For still fewer futurists, this is more than the end of the modern era, but part of a deeper transformation, it is the bifurcation to a planetary culture--the end of patriarchy and tribalism. For some this big jump is technological: robots, genetics and outer space; for others it is essentially spiritual: meditation, Gaia, and a universal renaissance.

Essentially these changes irrespective of depth are global, universal. However, when we talk of globalism, it means more than merely the weakening of the nation-state and the strengthening of capital, but indeed about the transformation of our relationship to self, other,

and technology. Globalism is also much more than the homogeneity of culture, the Los Angelization of the Planet (although this is part of the story), it is about root changes in nature, truth, reality, and Man. In my view, it is a rupture with the past. For the Green movement, a historical movement, I believe, the victories of the past--recycling, reforestation, the inclusion of the environment in all social and political discussions--while praiseworthy pale in front of the challenges ahead. **The issue is, can genetics, cyberspace, space travel--postmodernity and the future--be greened?.** Or will the hard fought struggles to see nature as alive, as having rights unto itself, be wasted as cybernature becomes more appealing than evolutionary nature? Will technology finally remove nature leaving it only virtually available?

#### FOUR-M THEORY

Let me phrase this discussion in more colloquial language, what I like to call the "Four M Theory." The four figures that represent this transformation of the postmodern are: Michael Jackson, Michael Jordan, Mickey Mouse and Madonna. The musician-artist Michael Jackson is important in that he has understood best that the self is artificial. His response to waking up in the morning and not liking one's nose, is not to enter a deeper level of self, but to simply change one's face. Jackson creates his own futures by recreating his own features. One's physical features are no longer a hindrance. Equally important is the American basketball player, Michael Jordan. His return from retirement brought hundreds of millions of dollars of equity into stocks that sell him. What is unique about Jordan is his ability to jump. When it appears he is going to land, he continues to soar. He is the metaphor for modernity, for the linear progress of history, for the view that liberalism will continue its march onward and upward. Nothing can stop it, liberal capitalism will raise earth to heaven. But to realise perfection, one must deal with difference. Mickey Mouse solves this problem. He, as the icon of Disneyland, represents the perfect grin.<sup>ii</sup> Happiness without struggle, the totally controlled but managed environment. The perfect happy state, endless, effortless, and without any renunciation. Is the future than the world as a grinning mouse? Is the future one where we exist only as corporate names, that is to say, children see mice as mickey, Disneyland having appropriated the rodent.

More than the rodent, Disneyland (and Coke) have appropriated global unity. We must remember that as we leave Disneyland singing "It's a small world after all," it is the large American Express placard that meets us. "Don't leave home without it" we are told. Of course, we cannot, since home has been commodified. There is no place where we can escape capitalism. Like American culture, it is ubiquitous. It is Coca-cola that stands proud above the planet, proclaiming our planetary culture, succeeding where the world's religions have failed. And on the earth, it is Disneyland that has become the official fantasy in response to the reality of the modern nation-state. But at what level is Disneyland the reality (the controlled world) and the fractured previously sovereign nation-state the fantasy?

Madonna is as important as Jackson but while Michael Jackson is still a modernist, crassly changing his features, and Mickey Mouse, appropriating our romantic visions of our pastoral pasts, Madonna is truly postmodern. She understands that image is everything, that there is no essential self, that we are but impressionistic selves. She has also understood that at the end of the millennium that even as we turn to the new age world of crystals and rainbows we also revert to sado-masochism, to labia piercing, and sexual gratification without love or responsibility.<sup>iii</sup> However, as of late, I have had to drop her from the 4-M theory as she has opted for the biological cycle, for a return to life as real--she has become pregnant. Childrearing, more than anything, will make the postmodern leave his/her world of reality as illusory to reality

as day-to-day survival. The dazzle of image cannot contend with the reality of morning sickness or dirty diapers (unless of course one can replace pregnancy with genetic reproduction and have dirty diapers cleaned by hired help).

A possible replacement for Madonna is Benetton. More than any other corporation, they have understood that while Coca-Cola is the global symbol of planetary culture, many liberals undeniably feel guilt at the impoverishment of the Third World created by the coca-colaisation of the planet. Benetton's strength has been the ability to use guilt for more sales. Using advertisements that point to the paradoxes of culture, that include the Other, the West can now perceive itself as more inclusive by shopping at Benetton. Benetton was the first to enter Sarajevo after the Dayton Peace accord. Now Europe could feel better about allowing concentration camps, UN-watched genocide, and the rape of thousands of Bosnian muslim women. Benetton is the redemption of deep Western guilt.

This is the nature of the world we live in. But where are we heading towards? I see us going through three layers of transformation: (1) epistemic transformation in how we know the world, nature and ourselves, (2) structural transformation of the world political and economic system, and (3) short-term crisis. Let us first examine the current, short-term crises.

### CURRENT CRISES

The short-term crises include dramatic **shortages of drinking water** for the majority of the world. Of course, since most of us do not live in that part of the world, who cares? The crisis will become so--as with all crisis--once the Western middle-class cannot find clear water to drink. We can anticipate water wars. The reasons for this crisis is our industrial lifestyle as well as the view that big is better. Among others, P.R. Sarkar has developed ways out of the bigness scheme of change, advocating small scale systems, ponds, and reforestation so as to reclaim our ecological history.

The second crisis is **intergenerational**. While caucasians at the end of the 19th century represented 50% of the world's population, by the middle of the 21st century, they will represent less than 10%.<sup>iv</sup> Quite a turn around. For example, in California, it will soon be 50/50 caucasian/hispanic-asian.<sup>v</sup> However, the caucasian population will be mostly older and employed while the hispanic will be younger and unemployed. Friction, depend on it! California's scenario will be globally played out, with the Third World being young and the First World being old. Age wars (conflated with race, wealth and geography) is the forecast if presents trends continue. To survive we will need cultural and economic systems that see people as resources, who can physically, mentally and spiritually contribute to society, and not as unemployed dregs that only consume valuable non-renewable resources.

The third crisis is **transformations in China**, possibly through its breakup, the Balkanization of the Great Wall, if you will. This could lead to a south-west Muslim China, a Northern communist China and a south-east capitalist China. Alternatively, China could continue to internally consolidate its power, and have occasional forays outward--Hong Kong, Taiwan, and even India could be under threat.

### STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS

Sovereignty:

At a deeper level are structural transformations to the interstate system, in predatory capitalism, and global governance. While the nation state has not withered away, certainly it

cannot claim the allegiance it once had. Neither pollution nor capital respect state boundaries. International organisations, regional associations, and world treaties and unions become daily more important. It appears it is only the passport office that can manage to protect local conditions from globalism. For even as capital is free to travel worldwide, labor must still pay for airline tickets and visa fees. And if one is from impoverished areas, then travelling upwards to OECD nations is all but impossible save for a select few with skills needed in the First World.

The nation-state, while once an elegant solution to tribalism, to difference, has only managed to delay the issue of larger governance system. Unities exist in the context of an unequal global interstate system. Democracy, liberalism, and individuality might be fine nationally but certainly are too radical globally. Nations might have order within but anarchy is still prevalent outside of them.

The challenge then is to move to a new systemic level, a bifurcation to global governance. Unfortunately, in this post-communist period, instead of becoming increasingly open and transforming to a new level of unity, we have regressed, slinked back to tribalism. Local leaders have used past wrongs, the fear of the Other, as a ruse to consolidate power. Barbarism has come back with a vengeance, making many wish for the stability of nation-states, however inequitable they can be to local communities, to minorities. A police-state after all is stable.

The paradox is that the economy is now global but politics remains national. Activism at the level of the nation-state in changing human conditions is difficult since labor and ideas are bounded. Leftist, green, and other transformative strategies do not succeed at the national level since nations merely export their problems. Reducing deforestation in one nations merely means that corporations move to another country. As Hazel Henderson writes: "Countries with well-regulated, human labor markets and social safety are uncompetitive as corporate employers move out." <sup>vi</sup> To tame capital, labor must become global, or localism must become strengthened. However, localism, while somewhat able to deal with issues of community, identity, can also be contaminated by racism. Difference is not tolerated since community is culturally or racially defined. Globalism, on the other hand, commodifies difference using it to continue the march of capital. Ideas appear to be free, as information gurus want us to believe, however, ideas often flow directly from the West to the South, it is rare that flows of news, entertainment, and significance both ways. We do not have dialogical relations. <sup>vii</sup> This does not mean that their cosmologies exist in isolation to each other; rather, travel, international conferencing, "development" the lure of Western education and the flux of yogis, sufis, and zen roshis Westward, all have began to create cultural fusion at many levels, beginning the irreversible (let us hope) process of creating a global civil/spiritual society. However, while not successful at a grand system level, the counter-culture movements--the anti-capitalist movements, the non-governmental organisations--have began to threaten the citadel of continued economic growth, have began to call into question the universality of the West and of the tyranny in the Third World, that is too easily passed off as post-colonial socialist critique.

#### Emerging crisis in predatory capitalism:

Capitalism, historically successful, because of its ability to adapt, to create destruction, is in the midst of moral crisis. Capitalism is based on the belief that hard work leads to rewards. That if there is inequality it can be explained by effort. Those who are poor are lazy. This link between work and success is being undone at many levels. At the level of the stock markets, the question remains, why work when riches can be earned on the speculative markets, through

gambling? Global casino capitalism has begun to undo the moral basis of capitalism. Indeed, Robert Henry Nelson believes that the social movements concerned with justice have undone the positive contributions of greed, have undone the importance of wealth accumulation.<sup>viii</sup> Without the moral justification for capitalism, it will collapse as an organising system.

Economist Ravi Batra also argues that the system will collapse but for different reasons. He believes that as more and more money goes into speculative markets, it is only a matter of time before the system collapses. The ratio of the financial economy to the real economy (f/r) begins to widen-- indeed, currently 90% of the trillion dollar daily markets are speculative not trade or investment-based<sup>ix</sup>--leading to unsustainable (and false) growth. The communist solution, of course, was not much better. Then, the State pretended to pay and labor pretended to work.<sup>x</sup> In comparison, Third World bureaucracies suffer not from a high f/r ratio, but from a deficit of moral capital. Why work hard and save when jobs are given to those with the correct genetic connections or those close to the ruling junta. Corruption, while easily rationalised, as a filing fee, devalues a culture's self-worth, leading to deficit of the soul (and to the rise of the religious right).

The global financial system merely fuels greed and inequity, not development, and not challenge. The result is a global economic and cultural imbalance. What is needed is not a recovery of the relationship between greed and growth but the creation of a world cooperative economy, where agricultural, industry and services are balanced, where wealth between regions is better balanced, where moral stories of cooperative behaviour have as much currency as stories of instant "scratch and win" millionaires.

The nation, the local, and the global capitalist system, while apparently eternal are in the midst of a dramatic structural transformation. These changes on the daily level often go unnoticed but taken together they point to massive shifts in identity, economy and governance. Let us hope that changes that result from grand imbalances do not lead to a global depression but a global transformation.

#### Global Governance:

The final level of structural transformation are changes in global governance. With the bi-polar world less possible now--unless China reemerges and claims superpower status in opposition to Europe and the US, the possibilities are either for a world with many hegemon or a system of global governance. The many hegemon system will see the US as a major player continuing to spread its influence over the rest of the Americas (and the world); in addition, we will see Europe over Africa; India over South-Asia, Japan over South-East Asia; and China over itself (however defined). Alternatively, the crisis of the nation-state and capitalism could see the development of a world government in the form of a new United Nations. Johan Galtung argues for a four house system:<sup>xi</sup> a house of nations, a house of corporations, a house of social movements and a house of individuals, direct democracy. Houses would be interlocked with the house of nations gradually weakening as zones of identity move from nation to globe. Central to this model is the realisation of a new type of leadership, of a spiritual/servant leadership and of legal accountability of current State leaders. Transparency International and other movements are partly about this, the spread of a worldwide accountability movement.

We certainly cannot be sure which direction the world capitalist system will head in, however, along with the nation-state, it appears in terminal crisis.

## EPISTEMIC TRANSFORMATIONS

But our argument today is that these while significant changes do not adequately speak to the magnitude of the current transformation. What is occurring is a fundamental change in how we know ourselves.

To begin with, technology is redesigning human evolution itself. Susantha Goonatilake's<sup>xii</sup> metaphor of technology bypassing culture to recreate the lineage of evolution is fitting. Imagine a hand, he asserts, wearing a glove, writing with a pen. The hand represents the stability of evolution, our body constant over time; the glove represents culture, our meaning systems, our protection, our method of creating shared spaces and creating a difference between us and nature; and the pen, technology, representing our effort to create, to improve, to change culture and nature. While the traditional tension was between technology and culture with evolution "stable", now the pen (technology) has the potential to turn back on the hand and redesign it, making culture but technique, a product of technology. Thus the traditional feedback loop of culture and technology with biology the stable given is about to be transformed. Equally stunning are the potential impacts of virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and robotics.

There are four levels to this epistemic transformation. The first is: *transformations in what we think is the natural or Nature*. This is occurring from the confluence of numerous trends, forces, and theories. Genetics contests the biological order. Soon it may be possible to produce children in factories. With the advent of the artificial womb, women and men as biological beings will be secondary to the process of creation. The link between sexual behaviour and reproduction will be torn asunder. But it is not just genetics which changes how we see the natural, theoretical positions arguing for the social construction of nature also undo the primacy of the natural world. Nature is not seen as the uncontested category, rather humans create natures based on their own scientific, political and cultural dispositions. We "nature" the world. Nature is what you make it. There is no longer any state of nature. Feminists have certainly added to this debate, pointing out that they have been constructed by men as natural with men artefactual. By being conflated with nature, as innocent, they have had their humanity denied to them and tamed, exploited, and tortured just as nature has.

But it is not just nature that is now problematic but natural rights as well. Arguments that rights are political not universal or natural, that is, that rights must be fought for also undo the idea of a basic nature. The view that nature should have rights, as an argument against exploitation, also assumes that rights are fought after. The view that the non-living should also have rights, as with robots, and the humanly created, as well contests the idea of natural rights. Finally, nature is seen as romanticised. For example, Hawaii's forests are seen as natural, as stable, as always. But almost all of Hawaii's trees are recently planted, after the sandalwood trade led to massive deforestation. Hawaii's natural environment is very much a human-created environment. Thus, nature as eternal, as outside of human construct, has thus come under threat from a variety of places: genetics, the social construction argument, and the rights discourse.

Related to the end of nature are *transformations in what we think is the Truth*. Religious truth has focused on the one Truth. All other nominations of the real pale in front of the eternal. Modernity has transformed religious truth to allegiance to the nation-state. However, thinkers from Marx, Nietzsche, to Foucault from the West, as well as feminists and Third World scholars such as Edward Said have contested the unproblematic nature of truth. Truth is considered class-based, gender-based, culture-based, personality-based. Knowledge is now considered particular, its arrangement based on the guiding episteme. We often do not communicate well since our worlds are so different, indeed, it is amazing we manage to

understand each other at all.

Multiculturalism has argued that our images of time, space, and history, of text are based on our linguistic dispositions. Even the library once considered a neutral institution is now seen as political. Certainly Muslims, Hawaiians, Aborigines, Tantrics, and many others would not construct knowledge along the lines of science, social science, arts and humanities. Aborigines might divide a library--if they were to accede to that built metaphor--as divided by sacred spaces, genealogy and dreamtime. Hawaiians prefer the model of *aina* (land), the Gods, and genealogy (links with the everpresent ancestors). Not just is objectivity under threat, but we are increasingly living in a world where our subjectivity has been historicized and culturized. The search is for models that can include the multiplicities that we are--layers of reality, spheres with cores and peripheries.

P.R. Sarkar, for example, takes a gracious view to the question of philosophical differences arguing that ideologies represent different layers of the individual and cosmic mind.<sup>xiii</sup> The Other then is not wrong, as with the classical and modern position on the nature of truth, but represents a limited perspective. Shrii Sarkar's effort is to make the truth ineffable and allow for materialistic and spiritual definitions. The spiritual inspires us forward but does not enter history or nation, no one can own or claim it. Postmodernists, however, see all truth claims as discursive, based on our situation in institutions, history, and discipline. Language is central in this shift, as it is seen not as a neutral mediator of ideas but as opaque, as participating, indeed, in constituting that which it refers to. It is not so much that we speak languages, but that languages create our identities. We language the world and language constitutes what it is that it is possible for us to see.

In any case, One Truth, that is religious and scientific fundamentalism has been assaulted. Can we move towards an ecology of mind, where many ways of knowing, where truth as claimed by differing traditions is honoured, dialogued? That is, once truth has been decentred, and all perspectives are allowed, what then? Can we create a global project that unites yet respects multiplicities?

Central to the end of the grand narratives is a *rethinking of what we consider as Real*. Our view of the real is being shaped partly by technology, specifically virtual technology and its promise. Cyberspace has become a contender for the metaphor for the future of reality. By donning a helmet, we can enter worlds wherein the link between traditional, or natural physical reality and cyber/virtual reality are blurred. Will you be you? Will I be me? As we travel these worlds, will we lose our sense of an integrated self? Where is the reality principle in these new technologies? What of human suffering and misery?

Zia Sardar, for one, takes a critical view of virtual realities. "To escape his utter loneliness, his inability to relate meaningfully to nature or other cultures, even his own society, Western man seeks union with the only thing that he sees as redemptive--technology. Postmodern relativism provides no other root of escape."<sup>xiv</sup> In cyberspace, fragmented selves are created that search for quick food, quick time, and quick salvation. Truth becomes what ever is immediately there. The real is what can be created by desire. Whereas for Buddhists, the task has been to extinguish desire, for the West, the project is to totally fulfil desire, reality is what you want it to be. Desire is truth.

The environment as a place of rest, as beauty, as a source of inspiration, as a living entity of itself, then becomes secondary. Whereas philosophers have deconstructed it, cybernauts have captured and miniaturised it. Why do we still need to protect wildlife when it can be virtually rendered, we can now meaningfully ask? Since we will not be able to perceive the difference between the natural and the technological, wouldn't it be better to use the environment for

development then? The virtual environment, let us remember, comes without insect bites, without bush fires, without fear.

However, as futurist Tony Stevenson points out, what of chaos, the unexpected, the idiosyncratic, and non-average behaviour?<sup>xv</sup> And what of the impacts of the new technologies on our physical and mental bodies? If we increasingly constitute our brain through the metaphor of the computer, as nodes and networks, to be turned off and on what will happen to more spiritual, mythic, definitions of mind?

Paradoxically, as the real becomes increasingly metered and sold, as reality ceases to be embedded in spiritual and sacred space, becoming instead commercial real estate space, others have begun to argue that the ideational is returning, that the pendulum is shifting again. Echoing Sorokin's idea of the need for a balance between the sensate and the ideational, Willis Harmon argues that the physical world is only one layer of reality. The spiritual world is another. What is needed is a balance, a move towards global mind change. Rupert Sheldrake with his idea of morphogenetic fields, Sarkar with his ideas of microvita (providing the conscious software to the hardware of the atom), De Chardin with his idea of a noosphere, all point to the notion that we are connected at a deeper layer, perhaps at the level of Gaia. Lynn Margulis takes this to the cellular level reminding us that it is cooperation that succeeds at this minute level.

Materialism as the global organising principle is under threat from post-rational spiritual perspectives, the new physics, and macrohistorians that believe the historical pendulum is about to shift again.

Reality is thus changing. The old view of reality as only religious or the modern view of the real as physical are under threat from the postmodern view that reality is technologically created and from the ecological view which sees the real as relational, an ecology of consciousness, where there is no one point, but all selves are interactively needed.

The final level of deep *transformation is in what we think is Man*. Whether we are reminded of Foucault<sup>xvi</sup> arguing that man is a recent, a modern category, and that his image will disappear like an etching on sand, about to be wiped away by the tide, or if we focus on the emergence of the women's movement as a nudge to man as centre, man as the centre of the world is universally contested. While the enlightenment removed the male God, it kept the male man. The emerging worldview of robots--what Marvin Minsky of MIT calls "mind-children"--cyborgs, virtual realities, cellular automata, the worldwideweb, microvita as well as the dramatic number of individuals who believe in angels, all point to the end of Man as the central defining category.

We are thus witnessing transformations coming through the new technologies, through the worldviews of non-Western civilisations, through the women's movement, and through spiritual and Gaian perspectives. All these taken together point to the possibility but not certainty of a new world shaping.

Let us say this in different words. We are witnessing the end of modernity. What this means is that we are in the process of changes in Patriarchy (I am male); Individualism (I win therefore I am); Materialism (I shop therefore I am); Dualism (I think therefore I am); scientific dogmatism (I experiment therefore I know better or I have no values thus I am right) and Nationalism (I hate the other therefore I am). This is however a long term process and part of the undoing of capitalism. All these connect to create a new world, which is potentially the grandest shift inhuman history. We are in the midst of galloping time, plastic time, in which the system is unstable and thus can dramatically transform.

The good news is that transformation is quite possible. The bad news is that previous

efforts to transform inequitable, unjust, imbalanced systems have often failed since change-oriented movements can be easily accommodated, or in the process of revolutionary change, agents tire, or the system provides incremental change by exporting structural problems to others. William Irwin Thompson, however, points out that we can no longer export problems to the Other, victims are becoming scarce. Our problems have become global, knowledge of them is shared and the interactions between events known--the famous butterfly affect. While traditional systems were stable since heredity and status kept the system afloat, modern systems are growth oriented and thus to survive export problems: to nature, to the periphery, to rural, to women, to children. The most vulnerable bear the burden. However, globalism as defined as the awakening of the spiritual, of the multi-culturalism, of a planetary civil society contests this export. New technologies, even as they play out the dark side of postmodernity, as Sardar argues, also allow social movements to better make their case, to inform others of immediate injustice, to organise against the brutality of national governments.

However, it would be a mistake to believe that postmodernity is the end of history. Postmodernity has a cost of entry. It is primarily for the rich. It is individualistic and unbounded from history. And even while it gives voices to other cultures by undoing the hegemony of Western modernity, it does so not in the terms of others--nature, culture, community, all become discards. Cyberspace, for example, gives the appearance of community, yet without responsibility--there is no face to face interaction. In communities there is responsibility since one must live with the other, in virtual worlds one can simply turn them off. There is no challenge, no spiritual growth, no working through different positions, no compromise, and eventually no relation as I-Thou. Empty selves in search for immediate gratification become the norm, argues social psychologist Greg Hearn.<sup>xvii</sup>

As mentioned earlier, through the purchase of Benetton or Body Shop products guilt can be alleviated, through plastic surgery, non-acceptance of one's body can be resolved, and through genetics non-acceptance of one's history can be resolved. It is the total fulfilment of desire. And yet, as Gandhi points out, if it took the resources of one India to fulfil the development needs of Britain, how much of the planet will it take for the development needs of India and China, if they follow the postmodern path.

Desire becomes central then in understanding the future of the planet. Again, while Buddha sought to extinguish desire, Sarkar takes a different view. Believing the capitalist view of desire a malady, and the Buddha too pessimistic, Sarkar seeks to transform the desire for the material, for the parochial, for one's own ethnic or territorial groups into sentiments of planetary unity and then to ananda, or endless bliss. Desire is limitless and thus must be harnessed. Desire can lead to social transformation, to extinguish it stagnates society. But to allow it to move without limits--as in upper limits of wealth accumulation--creates the mind of a mad monkey, running in frenzy from one object to another (imagine this metaphor in the virtual realities to be). The project is to channel desire into projects for the general good, to discipline desire, to use it as an attractive force for a global humanity.

But while some hope for a balanced society, where desire leads to the greater good, this vision of the future is not the only possibility. There are at least four visions ahead that are shaping our actions.

## SCENARIOS OF THE FUTURE

The first scenario is the *Artificial Society*. This would be the end of environmentalism as we know it and the technologization of the self. The goal would be full unemployment with technology working so that humans could rest and play. But more than artificial it is about the end of the distinction of technology and artificial such that we would no longer have a category called Nature. It is the postmodernity where all is possible and history is packed in virtual museums, eternally available but never realisable. The environment in this scenario ceases to exist since it is no longer a separate category.

The second scenario is *The Communicative-Inclusive Society*. This is deep spiritual ecology, with rights of all, and the self as cosmic. Technology is considered part of humanity's expansion but at issue is power and control, who owns and what values are used to design technology. Equally central is the metaphysics of life: desire as channelled expression, as creativity, creating new forms of expression as opposed to filling a fundamental emptiness. Essentially this is a communicative society, where communication between humans, plants, trees, animals, angels, and technology are all considered legitimate. The central project is a dialogue between civilisations, nature and the divine through which a good society (and not the perfect society of linear developmentalism) can be created. A good society embraces its contradictions, a liberal democracy in search of a perfect, contradiction-free society attempts to eliminate them.

The third scenario is *Business as Usual* or Incrementalism--It is appropriation of the Other through the idea of the melting pot, or shallow multiculturalism. Dominant issues are daily power issues, for example, in Australia of the republic versus monarchy argument. New technologies provide impetus for the expansion of capital, giving capitalism fresh air. Technologies are considered culturally and gendered neutral tools. As the gun lobby says, people kill people, not guns. Communication is merely used for instrumental purposes not for reaching shared goals. The environment is a resource to be used for growth.

The last scenario is *Societal Collapse*--The position is that man has gone too far, that Earth will strike back with earthquakes and tsunamis. Globalism has created a system out of control, only stock market collapse through perhaps cybercurrency fraud leading to a softer slower pace of life can rend things in balance again. The most likely immediate future is a global depression and the timing will be myth related, that is, at the end of the millennium.

While the trends point us in possible future directions and the scenarios give us pictures of the future, they tell us nothing about the structure itself of transformation, about the limits of leadership of individual will. They overly privilege individual agency at the expense of the structures that bound the possible. What then are the limiting structures that both bind and enable our social transformation?

## STRUCTURE OF TRANSFORMATION

In general, while there are a range of positions on the structure of history and future, the linear, the cyclical (pendulum) and the spiral are dominant.

From the linear perspective, global transformations continue the onward march of the rationality of the enlightenment, with the task of achieving the good society now merely a challenge for engineers and accountants, the issue of ideology having been sorted out by the victory of liberalism, of the science and technology revolution. History is not a problem, the future can be invented by great individuals, as long as the State and tradition stay out of the way.

From the cyclical perspective, current global transformations spell a period of the great reckoning, when excesses are destroyed, when ecological stability, when Nature returns. The cyclical view focuses on how particular systems deny the values of other systems; materialistic perspectives, for example, ignore the role of the transcendental. Overemphasis on individualism denies the importance of community, of the group. By ignoring the richness of the real, neglected dimensions return. The longer we avoid the settlement, the more painful and harsher the return of the cycle will be.

From the spiral perspective, global transformations are part of the process of creating a new world, parts of which will be recognisable from past structures, and parts of which will be fundamentally new. For example, new hot interactive electronic technologies challenge the coolness of print media returning us to the orality and multiple ways of knowing of premodern eras. But the type of community they create is dramatically different from classical localised cultural systems. The spiral model of history asserts that there can be progress and tradition.

At the level of political systems, there can be a world empire (where political power and economy are united); a world-economy (where the economy is united but politics national); or mini-cultural systems (where politics, economy and culture are self-contained, where the system is self-reliant). Each system has a cost. The empire channels wealth upward through force, the world-economy through trade and development, and cultural systems keep wealth local and society isolated. What is needed is a global political system where collectivities are based on bio-regions (and other eco-cultural factors) and economies flourish at local levels without acceding to narrow culturisms and racisms, where global means the highest, most expansionary values of humanity.

The individual versus the collective is the other delimiter. Liberal systems focus on the self while fascist systems focus on the larger group at the expense of the individual (and other cultures). Rare are systems that honour both, or find ways for each to enhance the other.

Transformations must be understood then in these various structural contexts. Nonetheless, the challenge is through human action to steer transformations toward values of the good. Our actions while bounded by history can in times of transition be profoundly far reaching. And opportunities can be missed, allowing inhumane systems to continue. What then should we do? What are the range of possible responses.

## RESPONSES

(1) One response is *Enantiodromia*; that all efforts to transform are doomed since we become what we struggle against, what we hate. Our shadow side comes out more as we try and distance our selves from it. History but is reversal. To rationally plan the future is a mistake, chaos and disorder are the natural states. There really is not much we can do but attempt to get a glimpse of the cosmic forces we are engaged in. This is the time of myths--of progress versus nature, of self versus the other, of the tribe versus the planet. As the drama unfolds, we should sit back and watch, as if we were at a Greek drama. Let us hope that this time the Gods do not have a tragedy in store for us.

(2) Another response is *Inner transformation*. The main thing to do is meditate, to take care of one's own family, to shop less. To live simply. Life is cyclical anyway--and controlled by the Cosmos--things will take care of themselves.

At the same time, the good actions of many, of numerous individuals engaged in meditation--synchronously and asynchronously--can lead to a critical mass of consciousness.

There can be abrupt spiritual transformation. While not all will become spiritual, we can hope society will be more open towards the more subtle dimensions of existence.

(3) The third response often emerges from inner transformation. Here we join others in *social movements*. While humans cannot do everything, there are specific areas in which differences can be successful. By finding one's passion, we focus on a particular dimension of the critique of modernity. We can join the environmental, the feminist, the consumer, the anti-nuke, the meditation, and the cooperative movement. **The task is not to conquer the state but to rethink power and politics**, to move hearts and work on local detail levels to empower each of us. Neither prince nor merchant nor warrior but the interconnected humanity and planet is the operating myth.

Their potential success of these movements lies in their globality--linking rich and poor, West and South. When social movements are only local, then they only export problems from one region to another. Nuclear testing will go on elsewhere or tree killing will happen in the next nation. Ultimately, a think globally and act locally strategy improves one's own condition but not that of the other.

The larger response is the creation of global civil society. For the consumer movement this means putting information on all products in terms of how it impacts animals, women, the Third World, as well as the aggregate distribution of wages. The challenge is to link these movements and create an alternative to predatory capitalism or authoritarian Statism. Clearly this has been what the alternative UN global forums have been about.

(4) A deeper response then is *Local Globalisms and Global Localisms*. What is required are social movements that are both universal and local at the same time. To survive in cross-cultural environments, efficiency cannot be the goal. They must be based on chaotic flexibility not on bureaucratic hierarchy. What is needed are myths and stories of illumination linked by unity of purpose not by institutional infrastructure. We must remember that it is between order and disorder that new ideas, forms of consciousness emerge, new forms of organisation prosper. If we overly focus on order we end up with the iron cage of modernity; if we overly focus on disorder we have lack of coherence, wasted effort, and movement burn-out. Finally, movements should be outside of the imperium, reflecting the view of other cultures and worldviews. Indeed, most important are non-Western movements that are global in scope.

(5) Useful in creating new movements and as a worthy goal in itself is the *Search for new metaphors*. What is needed are new stories of where we came from and where we are going. Cellular cooperation, Shiva Dancing, Gaia are all excellent beginnings. Metaphors are important in that they deal with the ecology of our mind, with our unconscious frames. Metaphors inspire and create alternative futures. However, we must remember that all stories come from grand crises, from temporal ruptures, from human suffering and transcendence. Merely hoping for a story that unites all stories eschews culture and history. Stories must dialogue but not find their own bases eliminated. The metaphor, for example, that Sarkar uses is that of a global garden where each civilisations, finds its flowers flourishing--each exhorts the other.

(6) We must deconstruct the present as well as our own alternative politics. We must be sensitive to the *politics of language*, of power. We need to see all truth claims are power moves, seeing language as discursive is the strategy. We need to see the present as a victory of a particular paradigm or discourse and not as an essentialist or Platonic sense of immovable eternity. This perspective makes the present less rigid, more malleable. The environment too must thus be destabilised and recovered from instrumental renderings. Seeing language as political allows us to see why it is that national policies toward better environment,

multiculturalism, and more cooperatives fail, and symbolic words announcing change succeeds. By deconstructing how power uses history and idealism for its own expansion, we will be less impressed with quixotic words, with the rhetoric of ego-politics.

## THE MANY LEVELS OF TRANSFORMATION

There are thus many levels of transformation. At one level is the epistemic level. This is changing the way we know, attempting to transform civilisation, changing the categories from which we know. Part of this is the creating of new myths, new stories of meaning, that inclusively and rationally speak to the many selves we are becoming, to our emerging planetary civilisation.

At another level, this is about cultures recovering themselves, the categories they lost from modernisation. Central to this project is the role of the First Earth people, the indigenous groups, who represent amodern history. That is, we must inquire into futures from Islamic, Buddhist, Tantric, Confucian and others' perspectives, asking what can the defeated offer to the future.

At yet another level crucial are gender relations, particularly in fairer treatment to women. This of course as Western feminists have finally understood must include issues of class and culture, there is no final Western feminist solution. We must ensure that new technologies include women's concerns, especially the new genetic technologies.

Creating a new global civil, a global communicative, society to counter tyrannical and secretive power, whether at the feudal level, the corporate level or the State level is a critical dimension of creating a new world system. Without which, social movements will remain only locally effective and ultimately harmful in global social transformation. The challenge is to create a global community that is multicivilisational and grows through a value-oriented ethical science.

On a more personal level is alchemical transformation, ontological change, achieved through spiritual practices, where we actually become different, attaining *satori* and *samadhi*. The key is to link meditation with social change, wherein meditation becomes part of the process of undoing injustice, of interrogating the colonised mind. Certainly for there to be a new globalism that does not take us back to the vision of Michael Jackson, Michael Jordan, Mickey Mouse, Madonna and Benetton, to the Coca-Cola-isation of the planet, all these different levels of transformation must be simultaneously pursued. Fortunately this is happening, a new global ethics is forming. The future of the environment, of the planet, depend on it.

Let us all hope for a local environmentalism that is linked to deep global spiritual ecology, intertwined to the emerging global communicative society--to the global ecumene, the noosphere which has strong but layered levels of governance. Let us imagine such futures and through our responses help create them. Let us not be like Yang Chu, who weeping at the crossroads, said, "Isn't it here that you take a half step wrong and wake up a thousand miles astray?"<sup>xviii</sup> Instead let us take a half a step in the right direction and be part of a global awakening.

## Notes

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- iii. Ruth Ostrow, "Show Time," *The Weekend Review--The Australian* (October 21-22, 1995), 3.
- iv. For some data along this line, see Wolfgang Lutz, "The Future of the World Population," *Population Bulletin* (Vol. 49, No. 1, June 1994). Non-Western nations could account for 86% of the world's population in 2030. See, Staff, "World Population Growth," *The Futurist* (Vol. 29, No. 1, January-February, 1995), 44.
- v. For more on this, see Steve Murdock, *An America Challenged: Change and the Future of the United States*. Boulder, Westview Press, 1995. Also, Brent Nelson, *America Balkanized: Immigration's Challenge to Government*. Monterey, Virginia, American Immigration Control Foundation, 1994.
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- vii. Muneo Jay Yoshikawa, "The Double-Swing Model of Intercultural Communication between the East and the West," in D. Lawrence Kincaid, ed., *Communication Theory: Eastern and Western Perspectives*. San Diego, Academic Press, 1987, 319-329.
- viii. Robert Henry Nelson, "Why Capitalism Hasn't Won Yet," *Forbes* (November 12, 1991), 104.
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- x. *Ibid.*, 7.
- xi. Johan Galtung, "Visioning a Peaceful World", in Glenn Paige and Sarah Gilliat, *Buddhism and Nonviolent Global Problem-Solving*. Honolulu, University of Hawaii, 1991.
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- xvi. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*. New York, Random House, 1973.
- xvii. Greg Hearn, "The Killing of Time, the Death of Solitude, and the Packaging of the Soul." Paper presented to the 1991 Conference of the Australia Communication Conference, Sydney, Australia. Research Paper, the Communication Centre, Queensland University of Technology.
- xviii. From the Confucian Hsun-tzu, quoted in Yehezkel Dror, "Fuzzy Gambles with History," *The Futurist* (Vol. 26, No. 4, July-August, 1992), 60.

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