

A Contextual Framework For Creativity In the 21st Century – *Guidelines for Building Eco-futuristic Communities*

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Executive Summary:

Human civilization has moved beyond the tribal and urban levels to achieve a global level of self-awareness. As a species, the human race has become the major determining factor in the well-being of the planet. Previously acceptable modes of thinking and acting no longer provide adequate guidelines for responsible long-range actions. People are becoming aware that we live in a universe that is structured by autopoiesis, thus each element and individual participates directly in the cosmos-creating process. The Universe's ordering principle involves continual differentiation coupled with re-integration of this diversity into dynamic systems. In this worldview, the Universe contains a communion of subjects rather than merely a collection of objects. Therefore, *social processes* that utilize inclusive modes of participation are emerging to insure that comprehensive decisions and foster full-filled lives for all citizens and species. Revitalized *interior disciplines* among a widespread body of the population are evoking a reconnection with the natural world and an expanded appreciation of the numinous qualities of every moment. Finally, a fresh approach to the finite resources of the planet, and a clear understanding of the process that created them, will promote a mutually enhancing relationship between human society and the *external manifestations* of the world.

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The historical mission of our time is to reinvent the human – at the species level, with critical reflection, within the community of life systems, in a time developmental context, by means of story and shared dream experience. – Thomas Berry

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Introduction – Hearing the Planet’s Pain

In July of 1960, I made my first trip into the southern region of the United States. My high school youth group from Michigan was headed to a work project in Alabama when our bus stopped at a service station for a much-needed break in the journey. When I got to the restroom, I discovered that instead of the two alternatives I had anticipated, in fact there were three restrooms – men, women and colored. This struck a deep discord in my sensitivities and eventually opened a window of understanding. The more I examined the culture in which I lived, the more I realized that people of color were being mistreated by white people. When I looked in the mirror I was reminded that I was a white people, that my race was in fact a part of the problem of oppression. This sense of injustice shaped my decisions and actions for the decades that followed as I participated in a movement of transformation dedicated to including all races in the social process.

In the summer of 1975, some of my female acquaintances asked me to be a part of a delegation to make a presentation to the senior management of our organization requesting them to change the words to the songs we were singing and to rewrite our symbolic rituals in gender neutral language. These women helped me to see that by the words we were using, we were subtly putting women into a second-class citizenship role. The more I paid attention to what people were saying and doing, the more I realized that phrases like “all *men* are created equal” was sending a subconscious, if not direct, message that *women* were not fully welcome on the leading edge of societal creativity. When I looked in the mirror I was reminded that I was a male; that my gender was actively participating in exclusive practices that limited the creativity of the human population. This realization caused me to make changes in my own ways of thinking and speaking, to change my patterns of relating to my wife and to work actively with others likewise committed to including both genders in all aspects of the human endeavor.

By 1990, my wife and I were raising questions about the major emphasis of the second half of our lives. We once again tuned our sensitivities to hear the contemporary sounds of pain. Our readings and experiences helped us to see and hear the cries of our planet itself. Signs of the effects of acid rain on the European forests, rampant consumerism that was depleting non-renewable resources and forecasts of global warming helped us understand that the very systems that had sustained human life for eons were being compromised by the creatures who relied most heavily on them for their future well-being. When I looked in the mirror, I was reminded that I, too, was a human being and was, therefore, a part of the species that was mistreating that which gives it life. This awareness has shaped the course of our lives for the last several decades. The magnitude of the changes in worldview and actions that will be required of our species so that the all creatures and the planet itself may thrive together is gradually becoming apparent.

The framework for this transition in the structure of embodied consciousness will be laid out in the remainder of this paper – this outlines the transformation of worldview required in the 21st Century. In order to understand the depth of the changes that are required, we must back up and

try to comprehend how global society got to our present condition. This approach resembles that of the motorcycle riding dare devil attempting to leap across a raging river. He must start as far back as possible and begin gaining enough speed to carry him over the gorge so that, hopefully, he can land safely on the other side.

The first section of this paper traces the journey of human civilization from its earliest beginnings up to the 21st Century in order to see the progression of consciousness that has led us to this present moment. The second section will outline four intellectual tools that are required for understanding the scope of the change in worldview that is required for the species-level transformation that faces the planet. The third section will paint a new picture of reality, a worldview adequate for making the decisions, at the personal and international levels, necessary for creating Eco-futuric Communities around Planet Earth. The fourth section provides some clues as to the directions to proceed and describes six of the sources of wisdom that are likely to assist in the project at hand. Four questions are provided, in Appendix B of this paper, as guidelines for evaluating particular projects in terms of their overall viability for making a positive contribution to the quality of all life on the planet.

Part I – Our Universe’s Journey to Reflective Self-consciousness

Possibly as many as 4 million years ago, some members of the primate family living on the edges of the tropical forests of Africa began conducting novel experiments that would eventually allow their descendents to walk on the surface of the moon and to photograph passing comets and distant galaxies. By mastering the art of walking on two appendages and training the other two to carry food and manipulate objects, these early ancestors of the human family dramatically expanded their creative capacities. The physical changes that resulted from their upright posture combined with the consequences of not having to use their mouth for carrying food from hunting ground to hearth provided the potential of vocal developments that would eventually lead to languages capable of expressing sophisticated feelings and detailed analyses. As the years turned into millennia, this mode of civilization expanded around the globe and developed ways of surviving in diverse climates and ecological niches. Though few, if any, remnants of this order of consciousness remain, we can imagine the tenacity and ingenuity required to explore, adapt to and thrive in conditions ranging from desert to snow field when no textbooks and teachers existed save the sounds of the wind, the waving of the trees and the behaviors of the animals encountered on the journey. These early members of the human species accepted the challenge of **Expanding the Habitable Spaces** for future generations.

Though new places for exploring have continued to beckon humans up to the present day, some of the earliest descendents of the upright walking primates elected to settle in one place or the other and to become intimately familiar with their particular locale. Aboriginal rock paintings in Australia indicate that as much as 40,000 years ago bands of people were creating maps of the water sources and food supplies that surrounded them. Cave paintings in France from similar periods portray the animal life of the area in graphic detail. These early civilizations developed a conscious framework in which all aspects of the perceptual and experiential world co-existed in an undifferentiated reality. This might be called the *Synonymous Worldview* since the people and their surroundings ebbed and flowed with vital simultaneity. While most of these cultures thrived in isolation from each other, goods and ideas certainly moved from place to place between bands of like-minded people. Stronger tribes overwhelmed weaker ones especially as

some groups learned to handle fire and others tamed animals for household and communal use. Remnants of some of these aboriginal civilizations have survived through the 20th Century and the insights of others have been carried on through songs and stories imbedded in the traditions of subsequent cultures. Members of the human community during this era mastered the art of **Thriving within the Cyclical Wholeness** of the vibrant universe.

Probably independently and nearly simultaneously along the fertile river valleys in Mesopotamia, Northern India and China, approximately 5,000 years ago, members of some of the wandering bands self-consciously settled down and began enhancing the growing patterns of their crops so as to dramatically improve food production. Many of the old rules of social organization became out-dated as towns and cities developed and entire sections of the population were completely removed from the food production needs of society. The details of this process are well documented by many authors including Jared Diamond in “Guns, Germs and Steel”. The over-all well being of these societies required sophisticated regulatory systems to insure that all the inhabitants benefited and that food supplies, manufactured goods and social orientation flowed from place to place. Classes of people skilled in handling this task emerged and the locus of wisdom shifted from the trees and the wind to the elders and the sages. The mysterious forces resided well above or far below the earthly planes. This *Separated Worldview* became institutionalized as time progressed and the religious organizations took responsibility for the spiritual dimensions and the governments controlled the social aspects. By the beginning of the 21st Century this mode of human society encompassed the globe and provided the dominant conceptual framework for most societies. Human society had successfully created a **Hierarchal Mode for Social Progress** on Planet Earth.

However, like the waves on a stormy sea, as the foamy crest of one pounds the shoreline and the remnant of the preceding one recedes in the undertow, the energy begins to gather for the next onslaught. Communication technologies developed from unbridled curiosity and utilized to control expanding industrial processes led to widespread access to television and commonly available interchange via the Internet. Ask a group of people trained in the hierarchical mode of society today how many of them have e-mail addresses; compare this with how many of their grandmothers had e-mail addresses. This gap in the size of an individual’s network of associations makes those of the present generation further from their grandparents than their grandparents were from their ancestors from centuries earlier. Furthermore, space technology initially developed as a defense mechanism among potentially warring nations provided stunning photographs of the earth rising above the surface of the moon and in so doing heightened the sense of the oneness of everyone dwelling on the fragile blue marble. Within the otherwise dominant culture of the early 21st Century, some people are beginning to grasp the deep interrelationship that exists among all facets of the living and non-living worlds. This new *Synchronistic Worldview* transforms old modes of acting and understanding. Those on the leading edge of social development are creating new **Forms of Participatory Creativity** that insure the inclusion of all races and species in the on-going creativity of the cosmos by building Eco-futuristic Communities.

In the early decades of the 21st Century, Planet Earth finds itself at a juncture of unbelievable proportions. Never before in its 4 billion-year history has a single species had the capacity for affecting the planet’s overall vitality and long-term prospects in the way that the human species has acquired. Factories producing items to satisfy the wants of a single species now make the air unbreathable not only for the users of the manufactured goods but also for all other animals and

plants within thousands of miles of the worst offending facilities. The fires of industrial development required by the proponents of the consumptive mode of social progress are utilizing fuels that can never be replaced. Water resources are being drawn upon near the limit of their capacities. The energies required to combine more oxygen and hydrogen into water are available only within events on the magnitude of exploding stars. The human predicament is compounded by the suspicion that the current situation cannot be resolved from within the present conceptual framework. Writers like Thomas Berry, in his book “Our Great Work”, are beginning to describe the new modes of thinking, being and acting in what he calls The Ecozoic Era – a time when the universe is viewed as a communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects. The Universe itself becomes the primary frame of reference and the final source of knowledge in a worldview adequate for living in the 21st Century.

Part II – Four Theoretical Keystones of Contemporary Knowledge

The educational curricula of recent centuries have focused on describing a mechanistic world in which individuals played their assigned part in response to commands from their superiors. Unfortunately, many (or most) of the skills necessary for moving beyond the Earth’s present environmental and social crises cannot be obtained from this human-centric hierarchal perspective. In the late 1880’s, a British mathematician, A. Edwin Abbott, wrote a fictitious little piece called “Flatland”. The story relates the encounters of a two-dimensional nation with the three-dimensional sphere. An erstwhile pentagon who only knows North/South and East/West movements and has no conception of up/down motion hears a voice from a place he has no language or experience to describe. A sphere hovering above the pentagon’s plane touches the plane near the pentagon who thinks a spot is speaking. As the sphere lowers itself and becomes an enlarging circle the pentagon is amazed by its rapid growth. The rest of the story relates the journey of understanding as the pentagon becomes the only person in Flatland to comprehend the existence of a dimension other than the two they already know. This process of trying to express extra dimensional activities in a less dimensional context has hampered thinkers in recent years especially when they have tried to express the impact of spiritual powers within sociological realms.

As the intellectual community grappled with the concepts of progress, they generally presumed that change occurred in a generally smooth course moving toward some foreordained conclusion. Good actions were those that seemed to move societies closer to these ideal forms. Careful observation of the human experience shows that change and growth are neither smooth nor directed in predictable directions. Thomas S. Kuhn presented a seminal analysis of the growth of scientific knowledge in a book entitled “The Structure of Scientific Revolutions”. As exemplified by the Copernican revolution in astronomy, the conclusions of new patterns of thought cannot be deduced from, nor predicted by, the calculations of previous paradigms. The religious thinkers of many perspectives, the common thinking of the general citizenry and the scientific understanding of leading scientists agreed that the earth was the center of the universe. However, the more detailed the calculations that were performed on the motions of the wandering stars, the more complicated pictorial diagrams that were required to explain the structure of nearby space. In a leap of understanding, Copernicus put the sun at the center and set the other planets revolving around it. Though imprecise at first, later work showed that the new paradigm provided a much better description of reality than would ever be possible from previous models. In a similar manner, society has come to a point where the current intellectual

framework is becoming incapable of describing the varieties of human experience and for accurately evaluating the options for future actions.

A large proportion of the body of knowledge of the physical world is based on the conceptual work of Sir Isaac Newton and the rest of the European scientific community in between the 16th and 18th Centuries. They described a machine-like reality driven by complex actions and reactions. When Descartes added the intellectual justification for completely separating the spiritual and material realms, the floodgates of analysis were opened in all dimensions of society and the natural world. By the beginning of the 20th Century, however, Albert Einstein and his contemporaries were moving beyond the atomic particle picture of reality to understand the quantum nature existence. When Einstein's work got combined with Heisenberg's descriptions of the Uncertainty Principle, leading scientists were beginning to suspect that final, precise and predictable measurements and predictions cannot be made at the smallest levels of matter. The creative role of chaotic moments has recently been documented at all levels of the natural world – from supernova to atomic interactions. Since many of the social norms had been predicated on the orderly progression of the natural world, these, too, have been called into question both in management training programs and leadership development schools.

Spurred on by the pictures from the Hubble telescope and other deep-space probing craft as well as a host of personages from other scientific disciplines, cosmologists, including Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry in their book "Universe Story", are popularizing their description of an autopoietic universe in which all parts of the present actively participate in creating each future moment which lies as yet unknown in the present. By carefully observing the Universe at both the cosmic and microscopic levels, contemporary researchers are detailing the ways in which the self-generated creativity of the Universe moves toward ever increased diversity as the expanding complexity of subsequent generations leads to wider differentiation. Yet, within the increasing differentiation, a deep communion remains as all of the various parts remain in intimate relationships with each other, carrying memories of the past and anticipating the future. By self-consciously participating in this autopoietic reality, the human species assists the Universe in taking its next major step into a future.

Part III – A Comprehensive Framework for Profound Understanding

During the later part of the 1970's, the Institute of Cultural Affairs involved thousands of people from around the globe in a research process designed to understand the fundamental dynamics of the social process. As the diagram in Appendix A shows, the *social processes* include *economic* activities, *political* structures and *cultural* patterns. Any time a collection of like things get together, whether they are colonists setting out to a new land, a group of people starting a business, a family or a herd of animals, they create a society with some degree of sophistication. Each society develops a culture that gives significance to the work of its participants. Within this cultural framework, individuals gain the *wisdom* they require to effectively participate in the society. A certain *style* of action emerges that distinguishes this group from others and enables members to accomplish the aims of their organization. As a society takes on an identity of its own, a set of *symbols* are developed that enable communication, as well as remind members of their common identity and their interrelationship with the world of which they are a part. Similarly, every society develops *economic* activities that provide the necessary resources for their growth and sustenance. All organizations, from atoms to nations, require regulatory

mechanisms, *political* structures that control, regulate and care for the well being of all members of the society. To understand any group is to understand the dynamics at play within its realm, to know which are weak, which are strong and which are in transition.

In his book, “A Brief History of Everything”, Ken Wilbur proposes that all aspects of reality possess an ‘interior’, an ‘exterior’ and a ‘social’ dimension. Whereas western society has tended to emphasize the social processes, the Eastern traditions have done considerable work to understand the interior spaces. By using a model similar to the one discussed previously for the social processes, the Institute of Cultural Affairs and its sister organization, the Ecumenical Institute, described the *solitary* aspects, the *corporate* skills and the *transparent* happenings of the *interior disciplines*. In order for any individual to participate in a society, or for any society to participate in a larger reality, certain skills for *corporate* interaction are required. A longing for *involvement* is necessary to provide the willingness to sublimate some individual freedoms to the larger needs of the group. Each member of the group requires a certain *detachment* from the fruits of their own actions in the context of the larger whole – the person who first makes a suggestion must allow it to be tempered and modified as the final implementation evolves. Lastly, a sense of intense *focus* emerges as the energies of disparate entities converge on a common point. One sees the fruits of corporate skills in winning athletic teams when smooth goals are made against committed opposition. A strong *solitary* dimension allows an individual entity within a group to maintain its own identity, to provide its unique perspective and insight, without becoming a mirror image of the other members of the group. Eventually, all boundaries between this and that, between other and I disappear. This *transparent* perspective informs all actions and insights and empowers profound living within all aspects of the Universe.

Most of the educational systems, religious traditions and social forms in recent centuries have ignored the innate value of the *exterior manifestations* of the Universe. Western economic models have treated the natural world primarily as resources for producing goods to meet consumer demands. Eastern religious thought generally tends to denigrate the natural world to a lower level than human consciousness, seeing things as distractions from spiritual progress. These reductions have fostered a great deal of the environmental degradation being experienced at the present time. Finding ways to again include this aspect of reality in our calculations and decision-making will provide an important way to redress many of the issues that currently elude resolution. *Energy* flows throughout the Universe and within every element therein. When energy gets organized, *matter* becomes manifest. Matter plays an increasingly significant part in shaping the future of the Universe as it takes on various *functions*. At its primal level, energy unleashes *chaos*. As energy becomes focused, it achieves *power*. Visible energy emanates *light* as a contrast to the non-energized darkness.

The previous description of reality as consisting of interior, exterior and social dimensions can be applied to all entities, individuals and groups from the smallest atoms through people of all races to nations and galaxies. All these manifestations embody, to some degree or another, each of the above elements. Yet, as the diagram in Appendix A shows, all these different aspects emanate from a single source, much like a rainbow of colors is displayed from the light of the sun passing through a tiny dew drop. When a person truly understands the social dimension of the universe, when all the laws, policies and care structures transform from pressures into dynamic manifestations of a loving universe then a conscious being sees that the entire universe is filled with boundless *care* into a compassionate wholeness. Sometimes in a surprising moment, sometimes after years of disciplined work, all the churning and ferment of a person’s

interior settles like the sea before the morning breeze. When the interior dimension of reality becomes transparent, pure *consciousness* fills the individual, silence becomes radically intensified. Likewise, when all the exterior manifestations of reality shift from isolated events into embodiments of the wonder-filled Universe, then one realizes the wild *mystery* that flows throughout time and space. When existence turns into pure consciousness and the boundless care fills every experience and every particle and person shows their mysterious center, then the continuous oneness of the Universe becomes one's personal friend and *tranquility* pervades being. Becoming a personal friend with the oneness of the Universe is possible for any member of any species – the mystics of all traditions have known this for centuries, increasing numbers of people are learning this in the 21st Century.

Part IV – Practical Implications for Building Eco-Futuric Communities

Watching television, reading the newspapers and breathing dirty air directly inform people of the pressing problems of our era. While many isolated changes can be implemented to redress each of these issues, the long-term, system-wide solutions will remain illusive when relying on previous hierarchal models that focus exclusively on the social aspects of reality. Historically, social organization has been based on the assumption that a right way of acting was determined in the heavens and that wise people could discern this wisdom and regulate the populace (see [Engine of the Universe](#) in “The Rocks Sang Om” by F. N. Stover). New modes of inclusive participation are now clearly required in order to make wise decisions. Furthermore, not only must the needs, wants and values of the human community be included in social decisions but also those of other species. The hawk who lives in the treetops and the deer wandering in the forest, too, have species-specific rights that must be taken into account, along with the needs of the poor and the wealthy, when deciding the acceptable pollution levels of factories or the number of trees to be felled for a new housing development. Two very helpful resources can be drawn upon when initiating the task of revitalizing the social processes of organizations. Within the **international business community**, a wide variety of management consultants are promulgating practices and forms designed to enhance the learning capacity and tolerance for change and diversity within organizations. These concepts can provide valuable tools for all organizations, families and nations. Quite specifically, the Institute of Cultural Affairs has spent a more than a quarter of a century creating a ***Technology of Participation (ToP)***®. These methods have been tested at all levels of social structures and have proven themselves effective in bridging the gaps between social classes and cultural backgrounds and thereby allowing people with diverse ideas and worldviews to build plans for working cooperatively.

The human interior disciplines have typically either been ignored, reduced to practices designed to sustain social conventions or isolated from the social and exterior realms. Widespread recovery of authentic interior prowess holds an important key to redressing the pressing issues of our time. Within each of the major religious traditions of our time, saints and sages of previous eras have taught and written about the deep connection between individuals and the natural world as well as the comprehensive social responsibilities that are tied to profound experience. Yet, these voices have not been the dominant ones in their individual traditions. Furthermore, contemporary science and the global marketplace have shifted the experiential context for most people so dramatically that previous wisdom seems irrelevant. However, any work focused on empowering the interior dimension can draw on the practices, constructs and insights of mystics of all persuasions and backgrounds; the **eastern spiritual disciplines** provide especially well

developed practices in this arena. For several centuries, societies, and their related understanding of human propensities, have depended primarily on male characteristics for everything from making decisions to resolving conflicts. Heeding **women's sensitivities** regarding appropriate behavior patterns and their interpretation of present conditions will provide an essential counterpoint to conventional wisdom.

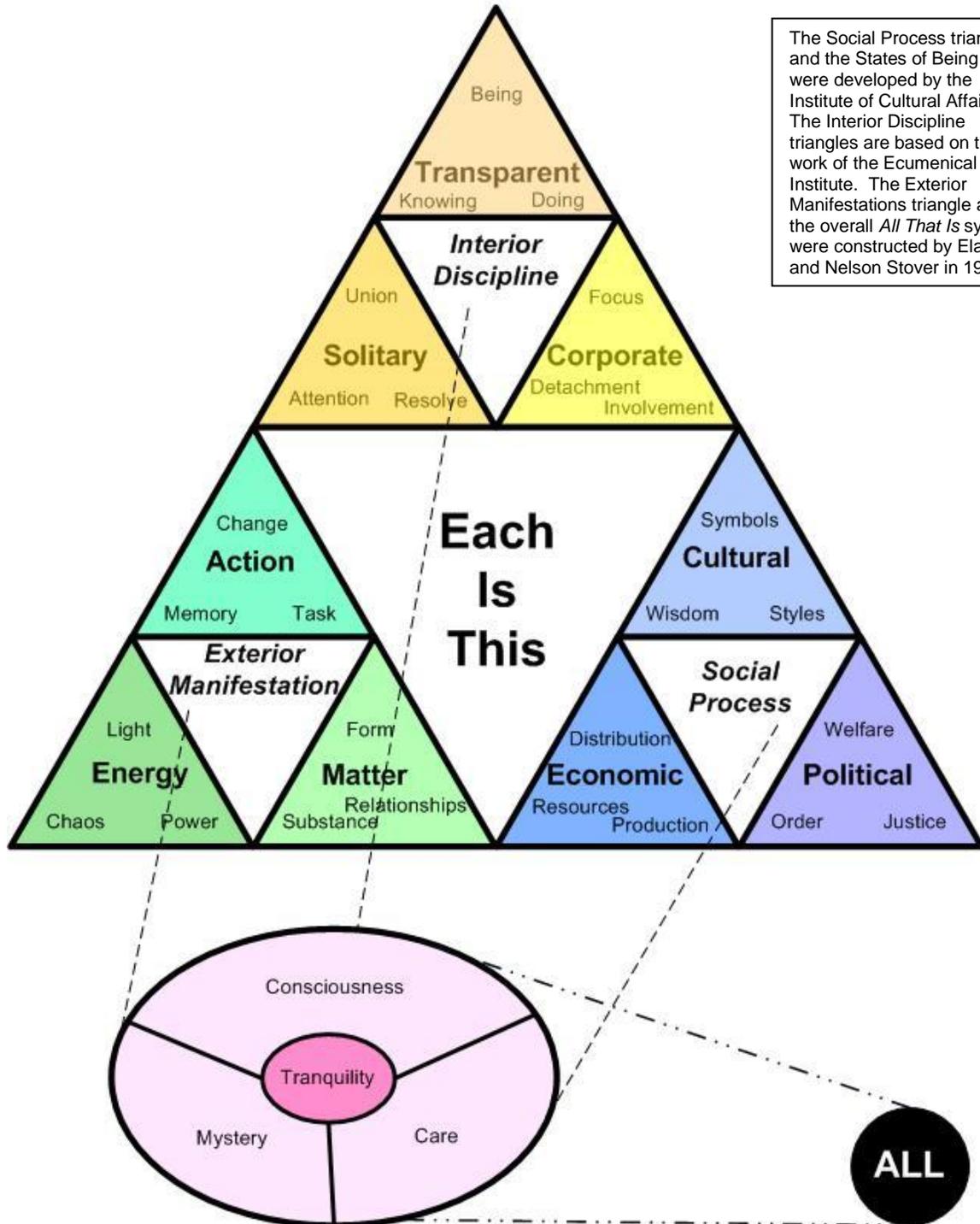
In order to move to a responsible mode of relating to the finite natural resources of the planet, new levels of understanding are required by the masses of the population. While the atomistic and mechanical approaches of the scientific community have been able to produce sophisticated computing equipment and medicines to solve a wide spectrum of diseases, the **traditional aboriginal understandings** knew the inherent nature of things in ways that still elude modern science. Before these civilizations are completely overwhelmed by economically driven development, those committed to bringing about a new level of harmony between the natural and social realms will need to find ways to revitalize this ancient wisdom within a universal context. Around the globe, organizations are springing up in response to the **environmental concerns** both related to location specific questions and to popularize and document larger global patterns. The work of these groups is providing important contextual information and practical avenues of responsible action useful in the process of creating long-term patterns of social behavior.

Citizens of every era have had their own particular great works to undertake. Those who showed up in the first great wave of civilization succeed in spreading the human species around the globe. Those who arrived in the second wave observed carefully the patterns of the world around them and learned to flourish in whatever part of the natural environment they appeared. The third wave heightened the Universe's consciousness and creative skills unimaginable to previous generations. As we enter the 21st Century, a new destinal undertaking faces human civilization. Thomas Berry, in his book "Our Great Work", states: The historical mission of our time is to reinvent the human – at the species level, with critical reflection, within the community of life systems, in a time developmental context, by means of story and shared dream experience. Future generations wait to see the fruits of our efforts.

When a spider envisions a web between two tall trees, it begins by floating across the intervening space trailing a fine filament. With the gap so bridged, it travels back and forth along its gossamer thread to strengthen the pathway. This paper has been envisioned as the initial bridge between the emerging cosmological understandings and a practical formulation of an effective operating context for the Ecozoic Era. Hopefully, others who follow will benefit from this effort and find ways to live in thriving Eco-futuristic Communities

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All That Is



The Social Process triangles and the States of Being circle were developed by the Institute of Cultural Affairs. The Interior Discipline triangles are based on the work of the Ecumenical Institute. The Exterior Manifestations triangle and the overall *All That Is* system were constructed by Elaine and Nelson Stover in 1999.

Diagram by F. Nelson Stover
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Appendix B

Four Questions to Evaluate Projects and Actions

1. How well does it interweave the nine essential elements of a creative Planet – the three social processes, the three interior dimensions and the three external manifestations?
2. To what extent does it utilize the six sources of contemporary wisdom listed in bold in Part IV?
3. In what ways does it journey people toward the four experiences of transparent existence *italicized* in the last paragraph of Part III?
4. How does it manifest the historical mission of our time as described at the conclusion of the paper?

Personal Notes:

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