Cultural Reconstruction in the Post-Modern World

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Prologue

> *He looked around him as if seeing the world for the first time. The world was beautiful, strange and mysterious. Here was blue, here was yellow, here was green, sky and river, woods and mountains, all beautiful, all mysterious and enchanting, and in the midst of it, he, Siddhartha, the awakened one, on the way to himself. All this, all this yellow and blue, river and wood, passed for the first time across Siddhartha's eyes. It was no longer the magic of Mara, it was no more the veil of Maya, it was no longer meaningless and the chance diversities of the appearances of the world, despised by deep-thinking Brahmins, who scorned diversity, who sought unity. River was river, and if the One and the Divine in Siddhartha secretly lived in blue and river, it was just the divine art and intention that there should be yellow and blue, there sky and wood - and here Siddhartha. Meaning and reality were not hidden somewhere behind things, they were in them, in all of them.*
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> Hermann Hesse, *Siddhartha,* New Directions, 1951.

Introduction

The world is a highly structured, interconnected system. It has a number of features, or qualities, which have been obscured by the limitations of scientific/industrial worldviews. Metaphorically speaking, there is evidence of a radical 'flattening' and simplification of view which disrupts our attempts to achieve coherence and leads to the familiar litany of global problems: the global problematique. This paper considers five aspects of a non-reductionist paradigm: hierarchicality, participating consciousness, a global systemic view, temporal balance and reflexive awareness. These may be 'post-modern' in the most constructive sense - that is, of foreshadowing new cultural and human possibilities. The paper suggests that the most compelling options involve the transformation of human consciousness. This is a true meta goal which would not only permit the resolution of many otherwise insoluble problems but an unprecedented recovery of meaning and significance.

Fragmentation, narrowness and the subversion of meaning

The mode of consciousness which has become 'normal' over the last two centuries contains certain contradictions. One is that it is narrowly focussed upon the here and now. The not-here and the not-now have come to seem remote and unreal. Yet to live is to be immersed in a web of interaction embracing past, present and future.

This short-sightedness recalls the classical concept of hubris, or unjustified pride. Unfortunately, the price of hubris is nemesis, or destruction - a fact already well understood by the collective unconscious. One of the distinguishing features of the present century is the outpouring of apoclyptic imagery in literature, art and the mass

media.[1] Literal 'Hells on Earth' have become fully imaginable (many would say likely) because Western cultures, mediated through the systematic distortion of inadequate epistemologies, create their pre-conditions each day. However, many futures can be envisaged which lead in other directions.[2]

To put it briefly, the Western/industrial worldview based on certainty, predictability, control and instrumental rationality has become fractured and incoherent. Many core values and beliefs have decayed and are perceived as empty, threatening, problematic. Moralists and conservatives like to prate about moral decline and the loss of standards. But the problem is much deeper. For *this* worldview is coming apart in a context of five billion people, some of whom are equipped with world-shaping (or world-destroying) technologies. Many of the less fortunate are destroying whole ecosystems simply to survive. *The single most notable consequence of the industrial era may be that the planet's capacity to support life is being steadily eroded.*

The Newtonian/Cartesian synthesis constructed a way of looking at the world which permitted later generations to mistakenly believe that they were 'masters of nature', separate from, or above, natural processes. We are learning the hard way that that is simply not true. But instead of looking ahead at what this implies for the future, our economic, political and educational systems remain caught up in the business of reproducing an obsolete past. Short-termism is not just jargon for a concept applicable to business and investment; it penetrates our public and private lives too.

Evidence for the extent of the damage is extensive.[3] It includes: mass alienation from natural processes; the over-hyping of technology (especially information technology); thin and unliveable notions of the present; the marginalisation of images and proposals concerning sustainable futures; and reductionisms like the emasculation of education into training and confusion of data with both knowledge and wisdom. In these conditions there is an enormous increase in existential anxiety and a growing sense that something important has gone wrong; that something essential has been subverted. Following Frankl I suggest that an important part of the problem is a systemic frustration of the will to meaning (in contrast to the more usual focus on a will to power or will to pleasure).[4]

In the discussion which follows I use the notion of 'hierarchicality' to re-establish a number of important qualitative distinctions and to metaphorically reclaim a richer, more differentiated world. A further step is to look at other complementary understandings which support and extend this process. I want to suggest that the sense of fragmentation, breakdown and *loss* of meaning which pervades post-modern cultures can be resolved. Since we actively construct the world through our categories and ways of knowing, the following discussion can contribute to a *recovery* of meaning and coherence. In this way a more adequate frame of reference can be established for many purposes, including the theory and practice of education.

Four hierarchical frameworks

1. Schumacher: Levels of being

In *Guide for the Perplexed* Schumacher suggests that our ancestors' view of the world was broadly hierarchical.[5] That is, made up of four distinct levels: mineral, plant, animal and human (Figure 1). If one begins at the lowest level and moves upward then

one clearly sees emergent qualities. This is a central concept of hierarchicality and it will play an important part in the later discussion. Here it is obvious that, for example, in moving from the level of plants to humans the qualities that emerge are consciousness and self-awareness. Between each level there is an 'ontological discontinuity' or qualitative difference in the level of being. This means that the distinguishing qualities of one level cannot be reduced to a lower level, though they must be congruent with it. Thus life is different from and greater than non-life, consciousness is different from and greater than (vegetative) life and self-awareness is different from and greater than (unreflective) consciousness. In other words 'there are differences in kind, and not simply in degree, between the powers of life, consciousness and self-awareness'.[6] It follows that while, in some sense the higher incorporates the lower, from the viewpoint of the lower the higher is always mysterious or occluded. Mineral cannot regard vegetable, vegetable cannot know animal, animal cannot aspire to human reflexivity. *Hence the 'rules' of existence on any level are level-specific and the higher the level, the greater the complexity and the more new rules will apply*. If this scheme is followed, each level is open-ended above and below. Thus, according to Schumacher, 'the most important insight that follows from the contemplation of the four great Levels of Being (is that) at the level of man there is no discernable limit or ceiling'. In his view self-awareness is 'a power of unlimited potential'.[7] I'll return to this point below.

2. Fraser: Integrative levels of time

Fraser's *magnum opus* is *Time As Conflict*.[8] In this work he shows that time cannot be understood as the simple, linear movement of events from past to future implied by Newtonian models. Instead he suggests that time has a microstructure of distinct levels, each corresponding to a particular Umwelt, or world of reference. Figure 2 attempts to summarise some of the main features of this elegant and suggestive framework.

The atemporal Umwelt is one of undifferentiated existence. It is 'a universe of purely relativistic energy, containing only photons, gravitons and neutrinos.[9] Here there is nothing which can be identified with the features of time, no succession, duration or interval. The prototemporal Umwelt is a step a step nearer to the one we recognise but space and time are not clearly separated. Instead, 'histories and group actions ... are interchangeable, as are things and events. Connectivity among events is that of controlled randomness, hence probability is the paradigm of physical law'.[10] The eotemporal world is one of 'pure succession, with no direction of time and no nowness'.[11] This is the world, or universe, as studied by astronomers, cosmologists and theorists of general relativity. But Fraser maintains that our notions of 'futurity, pastness and presentness' cannot be derived from this inanimate world. 'No physical process', he writes, 'can determine Umwelts higher than the pure succession of the eotemporal'. In other words, higher integrative levels have their own qualities which are only partially determined by their physical base.

Biotemporality identifies the world of life. It is here that 'the necessary inner coordination of living matter inserts a meaningful present into the pure succession of the eotemporal world'.[12] Furthermore, it is life which creates the directionality of time: 'no arrow of time can become explicit except through the autonomy of life', declares Fraser.[13] It is the 'totality of life' which creates and defines a collective present. Life itself supports mind which is congruent with Fraser's highest Umwelt, the nootemporal. This is the familiar world of culture, of meaning, imagination and the symbolic

transformation of experience. Here the mental present is established at the peak of this hierarchy. Yet since the former 'has no definite boundaries', order and unity are induced by 'that artificial narrowing of our interest which we call attention'.[14]

Some of Fraser's general comments about this scheme echo and extend what has already been said above. First, 'each of the major levels must be described in different, level-specific, languages'. Second, 'the laws of each integrative level leave certain regions of their world unregarded, hence *undetermined*. It is from the undetermined regions that the regularities of the next higher level arise', (emphasis aded). Third, 'level-specific laws are unpredictable from Umwelts lower than the one to which they apply and are inexpressible in terms of lower languages'.[15] I will suggest below that these ideas have important implications for the present discussion, not least in the way that they help to explain why more advanced stages of consciousness and being tend to appear obscure or mysterious.

3.Wilber: Ways of knowing

Wilber has probably done as much as anyone to re-establish the grounds for a comprehensive paradigm of knowing and being.[16] He has covered an enormous amount of ground by way of developmental psychology, anthropology, consciousness and religion. In each of these areas he has found evidence of hierarchical structuring principles and many distinct levels. It's not possible to outline his work here so I will refer only to his simplest account of ways of knowing, which has three main levels.

Wilber takes his lead from St. Bonaventure who distinguished between an eye of flesh 'by which we perceive the external world of space, time, and objects'; an eye of reason 'by which we attain a knowledge of philosophy, logic and the mind itself'; and an eye of contemplation 'by which we rise to a knowledge of transcendent realities'.[17] He comments that though the wording of this account is Christian, 'similar ideas can be found in every major school of traditional psychology, philosophy and religion'.[18] The eye of flesh corresponds to the gross world experienced through the senses. It is an empirical way of knowing of which number is the paradigmatic method and empirical science the product. It operates upon the realm of nature. The eye of reason is more subtle and it corresponds to the inner world of ideas, images, meanings and concepts. This is a way of knowing whose method is theory, whose subject is history and whose goal is philosophical and psychological insight. The eye of contemplation is more subtle still. Its method is direct perception of suchness; its goal is spiritual wisdom and its realm is transcendence. These distinctions are set out in Figure 3.

Several points stand out here. The first is that contemplation cannot be reduced to reason, nor reason to the senses. Each is ontologically distinct. To take the lower for the higher is to commit *a category error*. To put it differently, the truth of ideas cannot be seen by the senses. The reality of direct perception cannot be seen by reason. Or as Wilber puts it 'sensation, reason and contemplation disclose their own truths in their own realms and anytime one eye tries to see for another eye, blurred vision results'.[19] I doubt if there could be a more concise critique of industrialised culture. For this culture, based on the simplifications of the Newtonian synthesis, validates number and theory over direct perception. It commits a double category error and obscures the most crucial area for future development. This pinpoints one major reason why the culture has lost its coherence and why many attempted solutions to problems do not work. There are very often no effective solutions at the level at which they are experienced. It is often

only by understanding the underlying hierarchical structure and the creative potential of the problem or conflict that a conscious decision can be made to transcend the level upon which the problem first manifests. The difficulty is that this option has itself been obscured by the 'flattening' alluded to above.

4. Habermas: Theory of cognitive interests

Some consider Habermas to be one of the most influential philosophers of the late twentieth century. Be that as it may, he certainly produced an impressive body of work. One small part of it is his account of 'human cognitive interests'. This has immense value as an interpretive framework which permits us to reflect on social processes in a new and penetrating way. The approach is similar to Wilber's in that it is an account of ways of interacting with the world while Schumacher and Fraser tied their work to what they believed were constituent aspects of the world itself. This raises epistemological issues which I cannot pursue here. The point to note is that hierarchicality seems to operate in both realms.

Figure 4 gives an outline of Habermas's theory. In this account, the technical interest relates to 'work' and the empirical/analytic sciences which are concerned with production and control (i.e. the application of technical rules to instrumental problems). The practical interest concerns human interaction. Here the concern is not with control, nor with technical processes, but with communication and understanding which are grounded in language and culture. The main concern is to clarify the conditions for clear and unobstructed communication between participating subjects. These are seen as interpretive tasks which require hermeneutic skills. The third and 'highest' interest is the emancipatory interest. This relates to questions of power and the universal drive for emancipation and freedom of action.[20]

Habermas does not attempt to denigrate the technical interest *per se* since our civilisation is dependent upon the maintenance of effective and efficient technical processes. Rather, he is set against its over-extension into areas which are illegitimate for it - as, for example, when decisions about a new technology are made on the basis of 'can it be done?', rather than 'should it be done?'. A major concern within the area of the practical interest is that there are so many factors (such as power, ideology, marketing and direct exploitation) which impede and prevent true communication taking place between individuals and groups. The issue at stake is that of defining the conditions under which communication can be optimised. This is clearly not a technical question but one which relates to the richer and more complex world of human intersubjectivity. (We may note in passing that, contrary to what the proponents of 'artifical intelligence' would have us believe, the term 'communication' may only have a residual meaning when applied at the technical level.) The emancipatory interest is engaged in the critique of domination, repression, mystification and institutional inertia. It tries to define the conditions within which people can create an authentic existence for themselves.

The scheme is less clear-cut than the others but the same general features can be observed: distinct levels with different rules on each, open-endedness, simple procedures for detecting category errors and an in-built counter to reductionism (the taking of the higher for the lower). Such concepts are important if our culture is to explore the creative possibilities contained within conflict and breakdown.

Figure 5 attempts to summarise the structures discussed above. Each writer covers broadly comparable ground. Notice, however, how Fraser stops at the nootemporal level, believing that there is no higher level from which to contemplate it.[21] Similarly, while Schumacher explicitly states that no upper limit can be discerned at the human level, Habermas stops at the emancipatory interest, completely missing the primacy of the arts of contemplation.[22] Yet this is just what one would expect given the narrowness of the Newtonian paradigm. Very many human possibilities have become unavailable in that context. When Ruth Benedict observed that 'no man ever looks at the world with pristine eyes ... he sees it edited by a definite set of customs and institutions and ways of thinking' she could hardly have foreseen how savage the editing would become.[23] Yet despite the very many 'horizontal' extensions of view through science and technology, a narrow, instrumental view of the world has never been fully convincing, not least because it leads back, finally, to the inert eotemporal desert.

Taken together, these writers establish a strong case for re-establishing a qualitative dimension of human experience. Here, then, are the beginnings of a different paradigm. One that:

* provides an explicit basis for refusing reductionism;

* provides insights into the underlying sources of global problems;

* suggests that much effort is wasted in the restricted exploration of problems on a taken-for-granted level instead of a more fluid and open movement between levels;

* explains why many phenomena appear mysterious in their original terms (since higher integrative levels tend to appear mysterious or paradoxical in the language and view of the lower);

* helps us locate the potential within conflict and crisis for reconceptualisation and renewal;

* suggests that interdisciplinarity may be a structural necessity within fields like education and curriculum studies; and

* reveals the possibility of future options for Western societies based on shifts toward higher levels of integration and consciousness.

To establish a principle of hierarchicality is to take a significant step toward a new, life-affirming, paradigm. I now want to look briefly at four complementary notions which contribute toward the same end: participating consciousness, a global systems view, temporal balance and reflexive awareness.

Participating consciousness

Berman's account of the way that Cartesian dualism and the Newtonian synthesis served to underpin the disastrous conceits and exclusions of the industrial world view is

one of the best available.[24] He suggests that the recovery of participating consciousness may be one of the routes toward a more credible and sustainable epistemology. To a hard-headed scientist or engineer this will seem a soft and imprecise notion. Yet it is possible to prove empirically that we are indeed all participants in a seamless web of relationships (both physical and otherwise).[25] So it is the narrow view which is of questionable legitimacy, not the wider one. The latter serves to re-connect us to the world which we have never left. The illusion of separation which was fostered within the mechanical world view has been deeply damaging. Moreover, the manipulation of the outer world has always involved the manipulation of persons as well.[26] So it is possible to draw a direct line from the underlying epistemology to its external manifestations within a culture obsessed by marketing and control.

It's of considerable significance that most earlier and less technically sophisticated cultures understood these dangers. One of the clearest examples is the much-quoted letter of Chief Seattle to the president of the United States in 1855. The letter is often reproduced as an evocation of a pre-industrial sensibility, but it is more precisely a description and critique of the enormous negative impact of Western rapaciousness upon the natural world and the then prevailing norm of participating consciousness. There is nothing the least romantic about this. When the chief wrote 'All things are connected. Whatever befalls the Earth befalls the sons of the Earth' he was referring to a universal truth, not a culturally specific one. When he rhetorically asked 'what is it to say goodbye to the swift and the hunt, the end of living and the beginning of survival?' it was no mere platitude. For with the costs we are now observing that is just what is at stake.

Berman suggests that knowledge is not primarily cerebral but sensuous, involving the whole range of human capacity. While he does not adopt a specific notion of hierarchicality he clearly depicts the radical narrowing of perception and possibility which accompanied the scientific and industrial revolutions. He writes: 'in the seventeenth century we threw out the baby with the bathwater. We discounted a whole landscape of inner reality because it did not fit in with the program of industrial or mercantile exploitation and the directives of religion'.[27] This process was certainly obscured by the immense practical success of rational intelligence and sheer technical power. But the human costs have been immense.[28] Even without the environmental costs, the subversion of human potential which this process has entailed would, on its own, make it necessary for us to re-negotiate the Faustian bargain.

The way forward is not simply to reject instrumental rationality, empiricism or technology in any simple-minded way but, rather, to situate each of them in their wider context. This sounds reasonable enough but the suggestion therein is radical. It is that rather than approaching knowledge in the usual narrow ways - through subjects, disciplines and specialities - we look for ways of *beginning* from this wider, broader context in space and time. If participating consciousness is to be more than a folk memory or a romantic dream it needs to be grounded in ways of knowing which are adquate to the tasks at hand.

A global systemic view

According to Laughlin and Richardson 'the lack of systems consciousness is ... the single greatest danger to this planet'.[29] Without it we cannot comprehend the consequences of our actions, nor anticipate their effects.

A global view is the smallest frame within which to view human affairs. Anything less lacks the capacity to deal with the interconnectedness and systemicity that characterise the global system. Such a view would not have been possible a few short years ago but with the development of ecological, systemic and holistic perspectives it has rapidly become practicable. Furthermore, at the (admittedly low) level of data (as distinct from knowledge or wisdom) such a view is technically supportable. For example, every classroom and home could have access to remote sensing via. satellite on a real-time basis. That this has not yet happened is a consequence of the way that the agendas for info-tech (IT) have been subverted by vested interests and obsolete frameworks of understanding.[30] As in so many other areas, a highly sophisticated technical capacity exists but the consciousness directing it remains preoccupied with power and control.[31]

It is not merely that the nation state in its monolithic form is obsolete. Many of the institutions and power structures which took shape in the industrial era may be reaching the end of their useful lives. Yet they persist in enforcing and sustaining radically limited interests rather than universal ones. For example, the systematic application of merchandising recommends the misleading strategy of self-absorption to millions, and millions have believed it. The dynamic and impertive so created owe nothing to a fragile, interconnected world and everything to the abstracted nullities of money, profit and power which Lewis Mumford described so lucidly two decades ago.[32] This is a system which feeds upon itself, devours its own children and is parasitic upon the shared foundations of life. Yet, properly understood, it also offers a powerful stimulus for rising above the compulsive escapism of cultures in crisis.

Many technical fixes have been put forward for dealing with social and ecological breakdown but it is becoming clear that solutions are increasingly unavailable upon the level at which they are experienced. The lack of global systems consciousness cannot be rectified merely by installing computers and fine-tuning the economy. The answer to television is not media education but a recovery of human identity and purpose. The most significant step would be a qualitative shift of human consciousness beyond the present limitations of mental/egoic life to more universal concerns which are both global and long-term. Before discussing this further I want to touch on two further areas.

Temporal balance

I've written elsewhere about the drawbacks of Western linear time - its unidirectionality, narrowness and fractured, unliveable present.[33] The whole edifice of this notion of time reflects an obsession with measurement, the empiricist's particular conceit. If empiricism and measurement were merely to occupy their legitimate place in the overall scheme (at the level of rationality and technical operations) there would not be a problem. But since they have become universalised their correspondingly underdimensioned epistemology has been read upon the whole world, not least of all through time.

But Western linear time cannot represent, model or sustain for us the rootedness of our origins in the past, our very broad cultural present or our deep participation in many of the structual continuities of the future. It overlooks the fact that a globally-distributed culture equipped with powerful technologies (some of which have greater cumulative impact than many long-term geological and climatic processes) already occupies a very

broad span of space/time. The dislocation between existing structures and processes and their conventional representations places severe limits upon the coherence of the Western worldview. It serves to sanction and obscure the unabated assault upon the planet's ecology and resource base. That's partly why we are now receiving such uncompromisingly powerful messages from the global environment (the greenhouse effect, threats to the ozone layer, desertification, for example).

If we look back in time it would appear that we are a race which learns (slowly) by experience. Were we limited to that very risky learning strategy then global catastrophe would be inevitable. We would have to experience it to prevent it. So we need other strategies. Strategies for modelling, envisioning and negotiating images and projects which support sustainable futures. This needs to be a central concern of education at all levels.[34]

In the heady years of post-war expansion it suited the powerful to sponsor an ideology which harked back to the past for its inspiration and rationale. But in present conditions it is very clear that we require credible models, coherent visions of a wide variety of futures in order to guide our choices in the present. There's a very large gap between the frequently-mentioned 'speed of change' and the imaginative capacity to articulate credible future alternatives. A survey of scenarios for Australia's future ended by stating that 'the literature search failed to uncover a single major scenario which argued for a positive strongly optimistic view of Australia's future toward 2000'.[35] Yet by opening up the futures dimension (beyond the technical/instrumental imperatives of forecasting and planning) we can move out of the isolation and alienation of the minimal present and re-negotiate futures worth living in. Within a wider, extended present there arise many possibilities that invite criticism, selection, reconceptualisation and choice.[36] In this way the perceptual field may be extended such that we do not need to experience catastrophe before we act to prevent it. Once again, this corresponds to a shift in consciousness toward higher, more inclusive levels.

Reflexive awareness

The step back from viewing the world naturalistically ('as it is') and viewing it reflexively (as constructed through experience, linguistic codes, cultural signs, etc.) is a small but difficult one. It asks us to relativise what we each perceive to be situated, to problematise what seems to be real, to acknowledge that there is no fulcrum, no foundation and no ultimate certainty.Yet much flows from this single step.

The belief that words simply 'mean what they say' and that texts and discourses passively reflect a 'real' world is a deeply held and comforting one. Yet the comforts of realism are illusory. They obscure the ideological uses of language and the many ways in which language mediates experience. To begin to engage in a more dynamic and open process does involve giving up a certain degree of comfort and certainty. Yet what is gained in return is very substantial: greater freedom from ideological and linguistic traps, breadth of vision, the ability to 'speak one's own word', direct access to fundamental negotiations of meaning.[37] Individuals who know that they are not simply in the position of passively decoding finished structures of meaning, but actively interpreting and negotiating them, can also feel deeply involved in the process of cultural reconstruction and renewal. If they are free to reinterpret texts, it is but a short step to reinterpreting inherited traditions and normative views of desirable futures. Nor is this merely an individualistic quest.

Over the last decade or so there have developed a number of self-reflexive methodologies which support an active and dialectical stance. They include interdisciplinarity, general systems theory, deep ecology and some forms of textual analysis.[38] My own notion of critical futures study also draws on work of this kind and attempts to render some of it into forms suitable for educational use.[39] The latter include the teaching of futures concepts and methodologies, simple techniques for engaging in negotiations of meaning, ways of dealing with students' fears and workshops for inventing liveable futures.[40]

Such methodologies and approaches support views of the world in which we recognise our embeddedness in a series of contexts. We begin to see only too clearly that our understanding of reality is dependent upon *the quality of the models* used. Problem solving is no longer about making small, isolated changes. It is about participation and intervention in mutually-interacting webs and processes. In this sense, solutions tend not be 'right', but elegant. And, as Fisher notes, 'the contexts of elegance are dependent upon the illumination that enables us to see them'.[41] As ever, the threads which create the world lead back to us.

Cultural discourse and consciousness in transformation

If, as I've argued, the true metaproblem concerns the fractures and dislocations in our ways of understanding, and if real solutions are frequently not available on the level at which they are first experienced, then what does this suggest for educational discourse?

I've discussed worldviews as if they were relatively autonomous structures of meaning. But of course, they are not. Worldviews are perhaps better understood as emergent features of a particular structure of consciousness. Conventional discourse tends to assume an atemporal view and hence to reduce human consciousness to a static frame. That is, a frame which is finished, settled, not in movement. But a careful reading of the cultural record suggests that, like everything else, our consciousness has not only emerged from a process but *is* a process with a past and future. Such a process is inherently unpredictable.But if it were possible to envisage higher stages of consciousness, would it not imply other, perhaps more viable, worldviews? This is certainly the conclusion of those who have looked at the evidence.

The kind of cultural editing which has occurred within Western cultures has either ignored or misrepresented the higher levels of a qualitatively differentiated world. It has made them appear mysterious or esoteric, the realm of gurus, mystics or charlatans. In fact they are simply part of a wider pattern. Just as a clock is more than the sum of its parts and a living organ is more than the sum of its cells, so the more highly evolved manifestations of human consciousness reach transcendent levels. Accounts of these processes suggest very strongly that higher levels of awareness tend to be inclusive rather than exclusive. They reach out to broader spans of space and time and have therefore become essential in healing the planet, creating peace and moving toward new stages of civilised life.[42]

Wilber has outlined a structural basis for such shifts and is able to show how different forms of knowledge fit into their own hierarchy.[43] Transcendent knowing occupies the highest level not because it is 'better' but because it is more highly differentiated. It does not involve a rejection of empiricism or rationality but rather an understanding of

where their appropriateness lies, of where they fit. In losing this scheme of vertical differentiation, our culture has cut itself off from some of the most potent sources of value and meaning. One result is that problems (of power, ownership and conflicting interests) genuinely appear iresolvable. They *are* irresolvable in their origninal terms. Yet lasting solutions can rapidly appear in a vertical movement which transcends and incorporates lower-level contadictions.

Figure 6 suggests that human consciousness is emergent from the pre-personal ground of undifferentiated oneness with nature. The present level of advanced mind is an enormous achievement. But the whole thrust of human development goes beyond this toward states of clarity and integration which have been foreshadowed by great spritual leaders.What would a society grounded in such higher forms of consciousness look like? One can only speculate. However, Wilber suggests some possible aspects of a 'wisdom culture' which extrapolates from the known characteristics of highly-developed men and women. (Figure 7)

The work of transpersonal psychologists, as well as the accumulated wisdom sometimes known as the Perennial Philosophy, also confirm that new worlds of significance lie beyond the mundane.[44] Schumacher pointed out the necessity of there being within the knower something which was adequate to that which is to be known. He called this 'adequateo' and it has become a collective necessity within educational discourse, as elsewhere. It cannot be overemphasised that insight depends upon the richness of the structures that enable it.

Recovering meaning

I've suggested that meanings are never closed and finished, but open and negotiable. There's never a final interpretation because we never reach a final perception. A thousand travellers may pass the same stone, but only one may pause to admire it. Meaning is derived from an active process of involvement and participation. It is drawn out, created, constructed by the work of focusing, attending and signifying. The principle of adequateo relies upon the ability of people to re-create their world by renegotiating perceptions and meanings. David Bohm shows in part how this process works.

His account of what he terms the 'implicate order' suggests that the whole is enfolded in any part and accessible through it. Moreover, 'meanings are...capable of being organised into ever more subtle and comprehensive over-all structures that imply, contain an enfold each other in ways that are capable of infinite extension'.[45] It is consistent with the account given above that at this level of integration new qualities emerge. One of the latter is the direct perception of intrinsic value and sensuous participation in the universe.

The direct perception of intrinsic value immediately affects the framing of economic and environmental issues, facilitating numerous higher-order resolutions.[46] Sensuous participation transcends the mind-matter dichotomy. As Bohmn notes, 'if you go to the infinite depths of matter, we may reach very close to what you reach in the depths of mind'.[47] When adequateo is informed by higher awareness, the instrument of knowing may literally create new realities. This is a pivotal insight.

If the central problem is indeed that of narrowness, of epistemological crassness, then the shifts sketched in here may support the recovery of meaning upon which renewed cultures can be founded. The attaining of adequateo in that sense is, perhaps, a primary task of our time. It suggests that we begin to take the notion of higher consciousness very seriously indeed. For it is this (rather than new tools or technologies *per se*) which leads on to new human and cultural possibilities. Laughlin and Richardson provide a fascinating view of possible future developments in their notion of *Homo Gestault*. It is a vision not merely of what we can *have,* but what we may *be*. Figure 8 lists some of the possible attributes of *Homo Gestault*.[48]

Such visions are of immense value in serving to counterbalance the usual preoccupation with technical evolution and development. They represent a significant departure from the stale conventionalism of much educational thinking and can begin to inform necessary shifts in theory and practice; for example, shifts away from standard subjects and stereotyped forms of teaching and learning toward experiential, reflexive and meta-level frameworks of meaning. Grumet has shown how the use of one of the self-reflexive methodologies mentioned above (i.e. autobiography) can be used to create new avenues for critical awareness.[49] Many other routes already exist to higher awareness and higher creativity.[50]

In short, the tools are there. They have been tried and tested. They are waiting to be taken up and used more widely.

Conclusion

Western cultures ae in a state of continuing crisis not primarily because of commercial greed, not because they are ungovernable, and not because of technologies or patterns of social organisation. Explanations of this kind are relatively superficial. The crisis arises most profoundly from inadequate ways of knowing and the consequent confusions between different integrative levels of existence; that is from reductionistic epistemologies and category errors. That is why we have reached the era of ‘irreversible effects’ in which social learning takes place in a context of severe ecological and climatic change.

Yet there exist within each culture all the potentials needed to empower other lines of development. They are accessible through clarity of insight, through deepened perception, creativity and certain forms of spiritual practice. All reveal new possibilities precisely because they progressively refine the instrument of knowing itself. As the latter changes, so does the wider world of which it is the most highly developed part.

Many are becoming aware of the fractured and incoherent character of the Western worldview. Fewer are aware that the mere extension of present trends leads on to futures few would wish to live in. But where the simplifications of the Newtonian paradigm end, exactly there, a whole new world of significance begins. This is so not only because modern physics has changed our view of reality, but also because so many have had direct experience of higher states of knowing and being, and have left us their accounts.[51]

Though it has been widely overlooked there remains a persistent thread throughout most cultures and spiritual traditions which suggests that we are all and always immersed in a stream of knowing in a world brimming with immanent meaning. Since

language cannot fully encompass those realms, the descriptions may appear paradoxical. From within the desert of empiricism that is the end of the story. But the account I have given above suggests that in any particular context the higher may not be noticed from within the lower and certainly cannot be explained by it. Thus, far from sustaining an adequate worldview, the tired rationalism now solidly embodied in educational discourse around the world, itself represents a radically limited frame to read upon an interconnected world rich in hierarchical truths.

Higher awareness is refined, peaceful, compassionate. It is not under threat. It does not need to consume the world nor destory it. It recognises, with Siddhartha, that 'meaning and reality (are) not hidden somewhere behind things, they (are) in them, in all of them'.[52]

The widespread recognition of such insights will not be quickly achieved. It is a distant goal. Yet the lines of development which it implies can energise very many changes in the here-and-now. The structures discussed above are steps on a long journey, a journey for education, as for the wider culture.

It is a journey which leads up and out of the abyss toward new stages of personal and cultural development.

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Note

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[9] Ibid p. 30.
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[15] Ibid p. 26.
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[31] Wilber, 1983; Slaughter, 1987a.
[32] Mumford, 1971.
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[34] Slaughter, 1986.
[35] Barr, 1988.
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[37] Slaughter 1987a.
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[39] Slaughter, 1984.
[40] Slaughter, 1987c.
[41] Fisher, 1987, op cit., p. 11.
[42] Wilber, 1983.

[43] Ibid 1983.
[44] Huxley, 1945; Slaughter 1987.
[45] Bohm, 1985, p. 75.
[46] Fisher, 1987.
[47] Bohm, 1985, p. 90.
[48] Laughlin and Richardson, 1986,; Fromm 1978.
[49] Grumet, 1981.
[50] Harman and Rheingold, 1984.
[51] Huxley, 1945.
[52] Hess, 1951, p. 32.