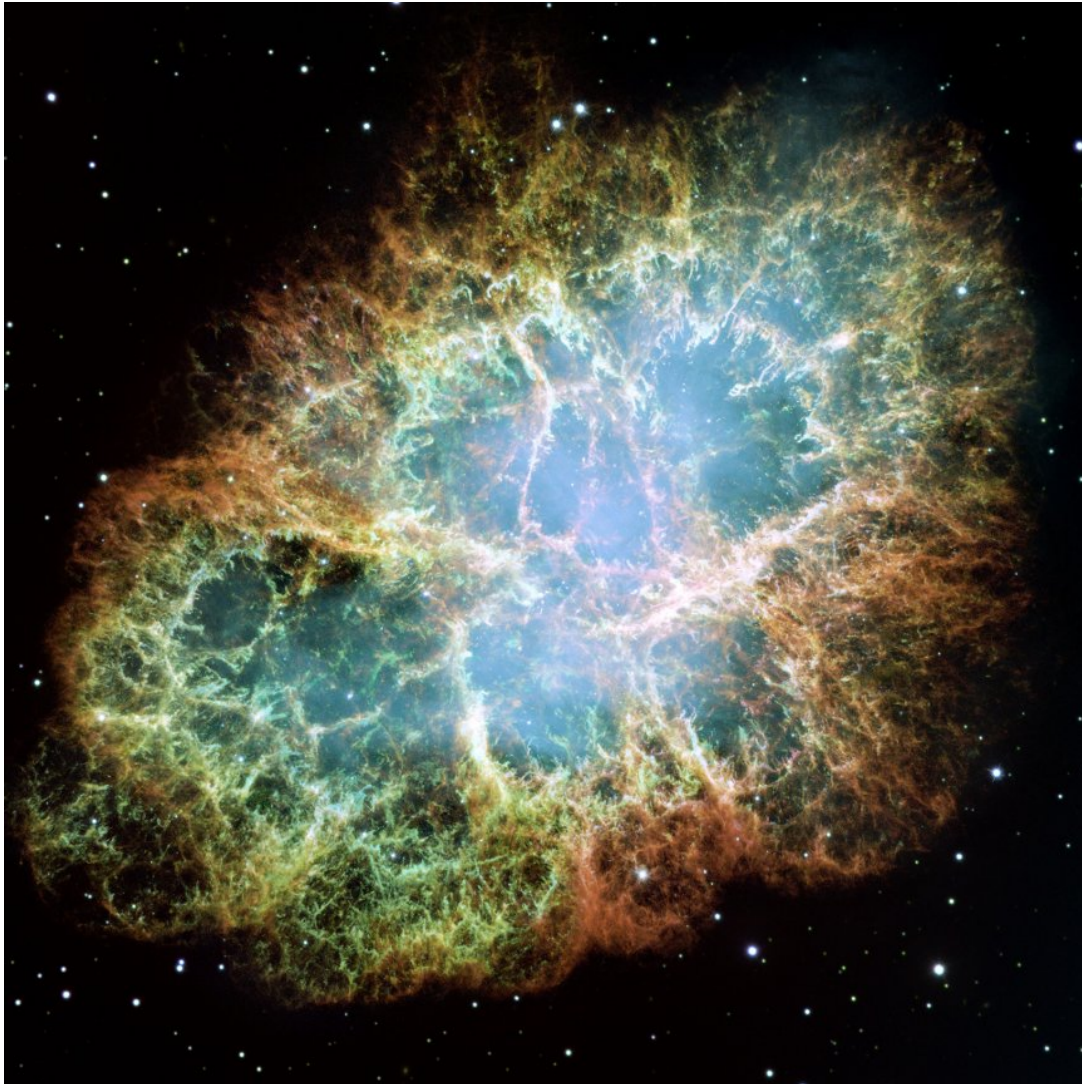


The Land, Water and Conservation Summit March 19, 2016, University of Rhode Island

Toward a New Story -- A Cosmology for Organizations, Healing and Creativity

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TWO QUESTIONS.....

Q WHERE ARE WE IN THE UNIVERSE? AT WHAT JUNCTURE ARE WE IN HISTORY? WHAT IS THE DEFINING CIRCUMSTANCE, AND HENCE THE MISSION, OF OUR TIME?

Q IS THERE AN IMAGE OF THE UNIVERSE, A VISION OF THE COSMOS, THAT CAN RENEW OUR HOPE, WORK, AND MANNER OF ORGANIZING IN 21st CENTURY?

ON STORIES



How important stories are to our existence!

We humans continually interpret and reinterpret our being in diverse and ever more graphic ways.

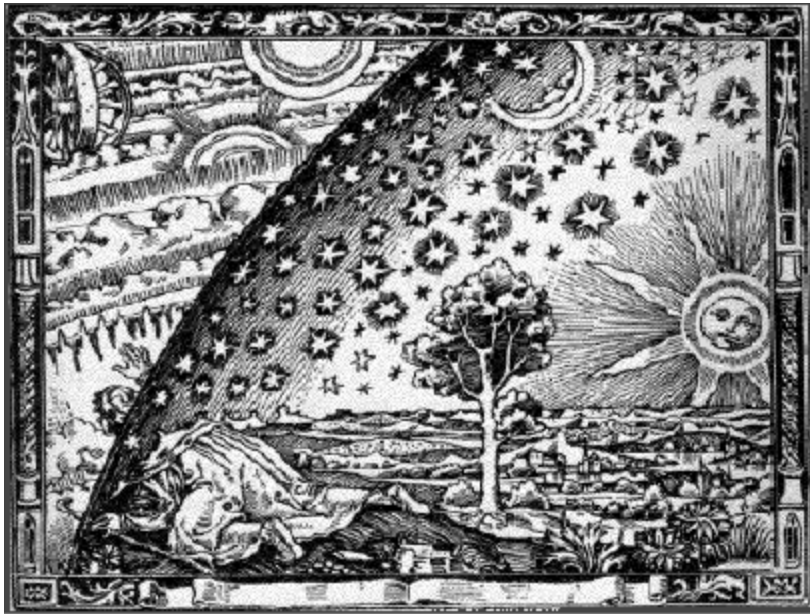
The universe is a construction like the constellations in the sky, a set of stories, a saga...

Ever since the primal/primitive campfire, we humans love stories – tales of animals Aesop-like moral vignettes, lurking monsters and dangers, exploits of heroes, noble beings and gods. There is what we call literature, the enduring body of stories that entertain and enhance our lives and sometimes express deeper and universal truths. There are personal stories: stories of origins, genealogies, families, meaningful events, personal myths and people that we recount over and over again in our lives and that give us a sense of identity. Such personal sagas of struggle and achievement intersect with and are embedded in social/political, cultural/religious and scientific narratives. Prolific cultural analyst and communications theorist Neil Postman once said that the narratives (“gods”) that govern our lives, the scripts we live by, function by giving us a consistent picture of origins, specify what is valuable and hence what to strive for, what to avoid as perilous, and what our final destiny, purpose and meaning is.

Stories help us make sense of our world – indeed they make our world against the background of a much larger universe. They give coherence to our lives – even when we fall short, don’t succeed. In fact, without stories of coherence, we couldn’t even “fall short.”

There are stories, myths, all-encompassing or cosmological stories if you will, that depict whole civilizations.

WORLDVIEWS



A worldview is the unconscious philosophy of a person, group or culture, a story of origins and desired destiny with its attendant bundle of methodologies (logic, ethics, politics). It is like a comprehensive life compass that specifies directional points, the work to be done and how to go about doing it. A worldview specifies what image/feeling we have of the universe, a concept of selfhood or a psychology, what the primary activity or task we should be engaged in (and so how to use our minds and energies to best advantage), what a good or superior society looks like and how a good community functions, its way of accounting for the sources of error, evil, discord, deficiency or disorder, and finally what constitutes good pedagogy – its theory and practice of learning (especially the skills premium for success in a given society).

Examples of the primary activity of a society would be: if you were an ancient Greek or Roman, the aristocratic search for honor and excellence (*arête*) would be your quest. If you were a medieval Christian your primary task would be the ardent search for salvation in the next world, if you live(d) in the modern world you would find yourself in an incessant and aggressive competition for power and economic/commercial success. Mass protests and the search for personal/collective liberation (the expansion of consciousness) was the *zeitgeist* in the turbulent social and cultural movements of the 1960s-70s.

Given this wide-lens historical perspective, what do you think our job should be in the coming 25 to 50 years? What special skills or talents will we need in the 21st century? How will our thinking be substantially different from the past? What organizational dynamics on all levels will help? What should our collective ‘instrument panel’ look like?

THE MODERN WORLDVIEW – BY NOW AN OLD STORY

For the last four hundred years that we call modernity, the story of the universe that has collectively arisen in the West, and globally as well, has been the scientific account. This has been a narrative that has given us modern physics, medicine, technology and cosmology. We consensually inhabit a Copernican, Newtonian, Darwinian, Big Bang and Einsteinian universe. Our cosmos is now hedged about by the strange deliverances of the Quantum World, hyperspaces, vibrating “string” dimensions, menacing and mega-dark holes, a preponderance of dark matter/energy, and a continual formation and growth of almost uncountable and centrifugal galaxies. A stunning and extravagant extravaganza universe/cosmos – one which dwarfs the laser clashes and hyper-drive pyrotechnics of Star Wars!

We humans in our realm of perception and action are said to be situated between this colossal immensity and a corresponding micro-realm of quantum-defined complexity. And, when we look at our rough and ready level, when we look at our collective bellybuttons carefully, we find we are an amazing congerie of energetic configurations of organs and tissues, chock full of DNA code and/but a seeming lack of a species owner’s manual! So will the next stop of our wild and driven imagination and hunger for improvement be genetically designed more perfect super-babies? The net effect of a suffocating planet with a teeming population in increasingly grinding poverty? Will it be techno- and engineering discoveries that will enhance or destroy our integrity as a species, as humans? New energy sources (fusion redux!?) that will provide a kind of de facto unlimited and elemental abundance? What’s next? What should be next? What will bring us into balance with our planet and our nature?

How do we situate ourselves in a time and space that has substantially different multiple global scenarios possible? How do we confront the daunting profusion of possibilities for good and evil that surround us? Averting our eyes and putting our heads in the sand of forgetfulness no longer seems like a very viable strategy!

So what makes sense, what do we do now with our lives, our localities, our increasing sense of interdependence, (the plight of) our planet?

Since the middle of the last century – depending on how you keep count and what events you mark in the new physics and biology – another story, another universe narrative has been brewing, one that has new religious, philosophical, political and practical implications.

So what might this newer-than-Newton universe be like? And what might be its implications for our personal lives and how we organize our organizations. What might be the kind of hope we can entertain, or better, the kind of hopefulness that can imbue and inspire our efforts? Might the universe be evolving in a way we could accurately and significantly call “opportune”?

This new account of the nature of things sees life not as an errant and rare occurrence in the universe but rather a revving up of the fundamentally sentient and interconnected characteristics of life itself. It says that despite all the ways we can fail, we – that is, our evolution is on course and that that course has to do with the intensification and enhancement of value on all fronts and all levels. What’s more, or even stranger, our role as catalysts of the qualitative evolutionary process becomes more self-aware and pivotal all the time. In this account we are more than well-meaning stewards of our backyard – we are increasingly co-creators embedded in a colossal cosmic process and incredibly dramatic mystery story!

But first, we will describe in greater detail what we shall call the Old Story, the mechanical view of the universe – from about the 1600s to the cusp of the 1950s to the early 1960s, just before the turbulent series of changes that took place in the 1960s—70s.

Newtonian Physics and the Philosophical Worldview of Modernity (~1600 to ~1950)



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We are simplifying reams of intellectual history here, but trying to capture an essential thread that tracked and accelerated across the 17th through to the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.

Our guide will largely be brilliant young mathematician, philosopher and pioneering thinker, Charles Eisenstein, author of *The Ascent of Humanity* and *Sacred Economics*, and more recently his important group of essays, *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible*. We will also draw from Ethan Nichtern in his *One City: A Declaration of Interdependence*, and from sociologists Paul Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson's *The Cultural Creatives*. These and many other kindred authors, like Paul Hawken in his *Blessed Unrest* – not to mention that great pioneer Teilhard de Chardin -- are emblematic of a new global/planetary sensibility emerging in our time.

According to Charles Eisenstein in his *The More Beautiful World...* (and again many other culture critics and historians), what are some of the characteristics of Newtonian physics that led to the characteristically modern way of thinking, organizing and acting?

- Atomism and Reductivism – things are made of constituent parts and functions and those parts are the fundamental and ultimate reality... Atoms -- micro-particles of matter interacting in lawful ways in basically empty space and uniformly flowing time

- The Mechanical view – a view of causation that had atoms relating to each other in mechanical ways and according to the laws of and cornerstone notion of force and in accord with the iconic equation, $F=MA$ (force equals mass times acceleration or applied effort)
- In its train this perspective with its brilliant mathematical and physical abstraction brought an emphasis on devices measurement – like microscopes and telescopes – and, in practical affairs. the sense that things are and should be basically manipulated by means of push-pull and more efficiently by ingenious and mechanical ways of multiplying force to achieved desired effects
- Another corollary of this way of seeing is the tacit recognition of the legitimacy of aggression. In political affairs there were a series of revolutions (British, American, French and Russian) that occurred in the midst of unifications and aggressions by nation-states in the West, Europe and America, and a continuing turnstile of wars, would-be empires, colonialisms and imperialisms. The earth and its peoples were turned into so many “resources” by various regimes, both political and economic. Industrial processes, wastes and toxic by-products (not to mention human suffering) were tolerated in the name of progress.
- Even though Isaac Newton himself was religious, yet another corollary of the parade of scientific updates (Copernicus, Galileo, Dalton, Darwin, Einstein, Hubble, etc.) to this narrative crafted by modern empirical and mathematical science is that the modern account of the physical universe gives no special place or significance to humankind. We humans hold no privileged status in this stupendous explosion of matter from its “singularity” in the Big Bang to its likewise stupendous inflation and evolution to its eventual crunch, dissipation, demise or collapse. In this unbelievably gigantic and intricate process of the evolution of space-time, we humans simply don’t particularly matter. We are just an accidental collocation and however preoccupied with ourselves, just an amusing and/or tragic side-show of no consequence on the cosmic scene.

SOME NATURALLY OCCURRING QUESTIONS –

WHAT EXACTLY IS OUR CURRENT GLOBAL CIRCUMSTANCE? WHAT IS THE ROOT CAUSE OF ALL THE SYMPTOMS OF PLANETARY PAIN AND MALAISE WE SEE EVERY DAY?

IS THE TECHNOLOGY NARRATIVE, IMPORTANT AS IT IS, THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN? WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ENTER “THE SPACE AGE”? IS COSMIC SPACE SIMPLY A VAST VACUITY BEYOND IMAGINING JUST WAITING FOR AN OCCASIONAL ROCKET SHIP.....!?

DO HUMANS HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN THE COSMIC SCHEME OF THINGS?

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS EVEN IF YOU AREN’T OVERTLY RELIGIOUS? DOES THE HUMAN RACE AS WELL AS WELL AS OUR LIVES AS WELL AS THE LIFE OF THE EARTH ITSELF ALL CONSTITUTE A COSMIC ABERRATION? HOW AND WHY MIGHT HUMANS BE SIGNIFICANT IN THE SCALE OF IMMENSITY? WHAT IS THE PROPER HORIZON, THE EVOLUTIONARY INNER AND OUTER CEILING FOR HUMANS? SHOULDN’T WE JUST BE CONTENT WITH NOT BEING TERRIBLY GRANDIOSE? WHAT WOULD IT MEAN EXACTLY TO SAY THAT THE EARTH IS “SACRED”?

So, we are here, with the result – Would we all agree that this is what our current ecology, economy, and politics resembles?



Now, in contrast to the above, what might be a very different picture and feeling for our universe? What might be a more sentient, human, hope-filled, and inspiring New Story of our universe? Suppose the universe were in some fundamental sense alive? What would the implications of that be?

ELEMENTS OF A NEW STORY BEING BIRTHED IN THE 21st CENTURY



The universe is interdependent on all scales, a wondrous ecology of networks and systems

- The universe is fluid and evolving, creative in its very being and essence
- The universe is sentient on all levels and the arrival of “life” is only one manifestation of this
- The evolution of consciousness and its consequent capacities for unprecedented action are one thread, a part of the main story in the unfolding of a self-reflecting universe; put another way, the universe grows as we do
- We are taking a greater role in the direction of our own evolution

- We can make a luminous planet in a cosmic meadow
- We as humans have an increasing appreciation of the power of our agency for good or ill
- All actions ripple, vibrationally spread outward with resonant effects throughout the universe
- What you see is what you get..... and beget
- There is an energetic field of “resonance” of different qualities and strength
- Brain patterns, individuals, groups and planets can be scrambled, polarized or be in alignment
- We are discovering non-violent, gentler, more aware ways of responding
- There is a potential convergence in the manifold movements of transformation on our planet
- There is a growing sense that if we treat our co-denizens and ourselves in the right way – with consideration, care and respect – we are on the right way, the right evolutionary axis, spiral path to peace, health and security
- That there is a hopefulness resident in actually how the universe intimately functions (from Quantum entanglement to the kind of cooperation necessary to and on all levels of interaction)
- That there are distinct fields of sentience and creativity in the making of a luminous planet
- That we have a literally “dramatic” role to play in the evolution of the universe, perhaps joining with spiritually if not spatially far-flung species and civilizations (see Olaf Stapledon’s *StarMaker*)
- That our actions can become pivotal in the “astral net” (Ethan Nichtern) or “noosphere” (Teilhard de Chardin) or in the context of an “infinite game” (James Carse), that is, right actions have literally incalculable effects whereas finite games seek to limit consequences to win or loss
- Spiritual practice or deep personal/collective practice – the arts of appreciation, awareness and wholeness-in-operation -- are integral to the peaceful collective transformation of our planet
- Climate is the externalization of our collective psyche; pollution and health begin at home
- That now is a “kairos” time or opportune time for transformation
- That any time is the right time for “non-scalar” or right action, i.e. it’s always the right time!
- Another name for such integral action is grace, or cooperation with grace
- We are always birthing, consciously or not, a more precious universe into existence



So, what are the implications of the New Story for the nexus of our organizations?

To telescope or take an incredibly compressed tour of history, reveals three predominant images of communication in organizations: the pyramid, the office/desk, and the live network.

The pyramid is the icon for typically ancient empire and hierarchical structures of top-down organization in which one unquestioned and supreme authority, like a king, issues commands for subjects to obey. Messages are autocratic and one way. Democracy in the modern world eventually, under pressures of efficiency, gave way to bureaucratic – literally bureau! – organization in which authority was spread out and specialized. This enabled smaller, more manageable provinces managed by functionaries to oversee daily and routine operations within larger institutional frameworks. Max Weber's sociology explained this sometimes extremely efficient and yet sometimes maddeningly frustrating pattern of controlled work and responsibility interaction. The upside of specialized control is orderliness, predictability, and the exercise of undeniable expertise. The downside of bureaucratic functioning however, endemic in and among large institutions, is silo thinking, the perspective of the part in effect usurping the whole. Also competition among divisions or departments becomes a perennial problem. The irony is that eventually organizations centered in discrete functions– whether corporations, churches, educational entities or governments – become “dysfunctional.”

Later, particularly in the late 20th and early 21st century, a new pattern of social communication and productiveness emerged. This is the icon of the network, an intricately interdependent, broad and deep complex of individual interactions on many levels, across a plethora of different purposes. Organizations increasingly operate in this new kind of sensitive matrix, a growing, differentiating and converging environment. Nodal points in this metaphor – whether human brain activity, the digital internet or the moral continuum, embody semi-independent centers in constant, dynamic communication with other centers of origination or creativity. The movement of one affects all.

The New Story, as we are tracing it here in the evolution of our organizations, surveys a scene that is a rich, teeming and buzzing ecology of relationships. The new gestalt sees a wondrous energetic field, one that is suffused with possibility!

We would like to describe how unity, diversity, and especially renewal optimally happen in the new ecology. And we would like to focus on the contemporary world of “non-profit” -- or perhaps we could say for-prophet! -- organizations and enterprises to see the possibilities they afford in our fractious and polarized world.

What would locally-based but globally aware profusion of creativity look like and how can its success be a model for all good projects now resonating like a planetary tuning fork toward a profoundly new end?

If the old story was one of slavery and drudgery, the new story is one of liberation on all fronts. How does the new story of the universe suggest a new way of thinking about organizing ourselves?

The way to work in ancient Egypt was to do the bidding of the pharaoh.

The way to work in medieval Christendom was to function in a clerical hierarchy.

The way to work in 19th century Prussia was to be a rigorous bureaucrat.

The way to work in mid-twentieth century America was to be part of an industrial assembly team.

The way to work in the early 21st century was to be in constant digital contact with your friends and have the info-sphere at your fingertips.

Our way of organizing ourselves in all our institutions – both formal and informal – mirrors how we think the universe is constructed and operates. So if the universe is organized around a king or a god or a nation-state or ideology, then it is our duty to be in sync with that. If the universe implicitly obeys laws of force, then that’s how to get results! If the universe is essentially Darwinian, then it makes sense to have free markets in fierce competition with each other. If we are electronically connected, then we configure ourselves online and network accordingly. If there is an “astral net” – a critically important emerging experiential field forming -- what then? How do we access, how do we join?

So we took a tour through history noting some dominant worldview images and how they almost unconsciously guided how we worked and how effectiveness was defined. Models that guided us were Aristotelian metaphysics, the place of earth as a human drama situated between celestial hierarchies and infernal regions, the clockwork cosmos described in Newtonian physics, Darwinian evolutionary saga of species contest, success and failure in changing environments, the Einsteinian leap that catapulted matter into energy, and now Quantum entanglements and “empty” space as the immense foam of potential existence. (And if you are on a spiritual path, the cosmos becomes even stranger!)

So what is deeply characteristic of – or deeply emerging – in the 21st century? And what does the pattern we perceive whisper to us as a better way of using our precious energies? How do we both recognize and in fact embrace the chaos we see around us and, at the same time, transcend it in a way that cultivates or promotes triumph, goodness and Beauty?

How does the operation of the “commons” of respect (and allied expansive qualities of consciousness) liberate potencies and generate fulfillments all around us? How does attending to the best in our human nature necessarily safeguard our external environments? How does being intimately mindful of

ourselves end up being the reverent perception of Nature as quite literally our body, our extended family? How does seeing – feeling – the universe as sacred transform our work lives? How do we consciously assume the role of benign collaborators, and implicit co-creators of the universe? How do we learn these arts that yield a better society as their natural by-product? What does it mean to assume response-ability for our planet? What is it about growing consciousness that makes real work an exercise in play, leisure and service? How do you melt walls and resistances and develop superconductivity in organizations that hitherto almost invariably tended toward the downward spiral of fossilization?

How can we discover a larger and more creative space – a spaciousness – in which to do business, move into an “economy” of the gift, and in the process save ourselves, our planet and thrive in a matrix of abundance? How is “abundant clean energy” a redundant phrase? How does the logic of scarcity constrict our imagination? What does it mean for humans to attain our full stature in the universe, our true majority and integrity?

SO A COSMIC MUD PUDDLE, ANOTHER KIND OF PRIMORDIAL SOUP, WHOSE ADAGES MIGHT INDICATE THAT THE WAY OUT IS WAY IN AND THE WAY IN IS THE WAY OUT, THAT WE ARE ALL IN THE CENTER...

A nexus is an intersection. We all stand at the juncture of innumerable intersections.

A nexus is electro-magnetic in nature, an organic field, an experiential field of possibilities

A nexus is revealed by qualities: the perception of a field is palpable -- a field can be weak, stagnant and incomplete, inchoate, painfully yearning, tension filled, cold and isolated, discordant and dissonant, confused, scrambled, polarized, frenzied, hostile, beguiling, placid, aligned and powerful. the Chinese / *Ching*, Book of Changes, notes sixty-four distinct phase-states in any event or arc of experience. There are in any cosmos fields within fields within fields. “Loka” is the Tibetan word for dwelling place. The medieval scholastics weren’t so dumb: how many angels can dance on the head of a pin? – Answer: yes!

A nexus is revealed in genuine dialogue; also in resonant action; right action is resonant action

Action is true action when it expresses community; before that it is just solipsism

Dialogic circles are ways of generating both creativity and reflection; and we need both

Groups – “the art form of the future” (Jacob Needleman)

Creative spaces are vacuoles of the future

The greatest counter-weight to a benign future is the Egyptian empire of suburban enclaves, but on the other hand true leisure is the birthplace of goodness as well as a devil’s workshop

True creativity embodies an endless series of counter-truths like the stronger, the more vulnerable, the greater the inner, the greater the outer, the more wide-angled, the more intimate, the more genuinely still, the more genuinely active

Reality never tells us what to do, but sometimes it merely suggests

Our current image of the (physical?) universe revolves around the Quantum Theory, Chaos Theory (a misnomer for Mutual Sensitivity or Mutual Interdependence Theory) with a nod toward String Theory (entities and dimensions defined by vibrations) – all prefiguring living, participatory experience

The universe is not so much ‘organized’ as co-created in each moment; when one thing is created the mandala of the universe kaleidoscopically reflects that

To be a conscious nexus is to dwell in Big Space both reverently and irreverently

Big Space is ultimately sacred space that carries to the most minute and most intimate transactions. The presence of Big Space makes any transient event precious.

Big Space is the ground of particularity, pores of a living universe, the portals of experience which we transform into Art, we who are sculpting/landscaping the earth with seven billion filaments currently unaware of each other – at least for now!

Nexus: it is the function now of all associations to become creative spaces germinating new realms

Nexus: is always sunrise, surprise, the charged bi-sociations of unwitting contexts that often reveal the unexpected value of circumstances and situations. The presence of Big Space – Pervading, Embracing, Welcoming, Respecting, Compassionate – transforms what it finds into media of grace

Nexus: a flowing format

Nexus: the star is just as much our cousin as the leaf

Nexus is like sacri-fice, making holy by respecting the limits of time

Nexus emanates from a central core of no-thingness and forgiveness

Nexus: a profusion of affiliations occurs whenever we see “that Greater Being to which we all belong”

Nexus is the practice of the Tao – instinctive, easy-going, always assisting, never taking credit...

Nexus: spiritual practice, that is, mindfulness at the least, joyful offering at the most, is at the heart of any perduring enterprise

Nexus: only when the world is truly precious is any part of it so

Nexus: only when a part of the world is truly precious does the world become so

Nexus: when one thing is done well it involves one in Perpetual Revolution

Nexus: action is sacred when it occurs in Big Space

Nexus: when action is performed as service, it touches the Whole

Nexus: an act of service, on any locus, any realm or on any scale, renews that realm

Nexus: renews and inspires the universe

Nexus: is Woonsocket a lotus in disguise?

And now, for something completely different -- and fun – AN EXAMPLE OF A LOCAL CREATIVE NEXUS

Consider a cosmically riparian entity: the flowing, raucous assemblage, the Riverzedge Arts Collective...

An “arts collective” -- the paradigm of truly vital, successful organizations in the future?!.....

What do young people perhaps know that we don't know?

Watch out!.....



A Roundelay of Juicy Tomes, and only one film

Gordon MacKenzie, *Orbiting the Giant Hairball*

Charles Eisenstein, *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible*

Ethan Nichtern, *One City: A Declaration of Interdependence*

Fetzer Institute, *Centered on the Edge: Mapping the Field of Collective Intelligence and Spiritual Wisdom*

Alan Briskin et al., *The Power of Collective Wisdom and the Trap of Collective Folly*

Lao Tzu, *The Tao Te Ching*

Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness, Beyond Self: Teachings on the Middle Way*

Shunryu Suzuki-Roshi, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*

Soen Seung, *Only Don't Know*

Pat Enkyo O'Hara, *Most Intimate: A Zen Approach to Life's Challenges*

Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*

Paul Hawken, *Blessed Unrest*

Paul Ray & Sherry Ruth Anderson, *The Cultural Creatives*

Kabir Edmund Helminski, *Living Presence*

Parker Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known, A Hidden Wholeness, The Active Life, Let Your Life Speak*

Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*

Sakyong Mipham, *The Shambala Principle*

Joseph Jaworski, *Source: The Inner Path to Knowledge Creation*

Joel Primack and Nancy Ellen Abrams, *The View from the Center of the Universe: Rediscovering Our Extraordinary Place in the Cosmos*

Eric Weiner, *The Geography of Genius*

Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*

Wyn Wachhorst, *The Dream of Space Flight: Essays on the Near Edge of Infinity*

Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*

Tom Shadyac's film "I Am"

Bruce Sterling, *Tomorrow Now: Envisioning the Next Fifty Years*