

Options for the Future:
Transforming Society Through a Process of
Cultural Metamorphosis

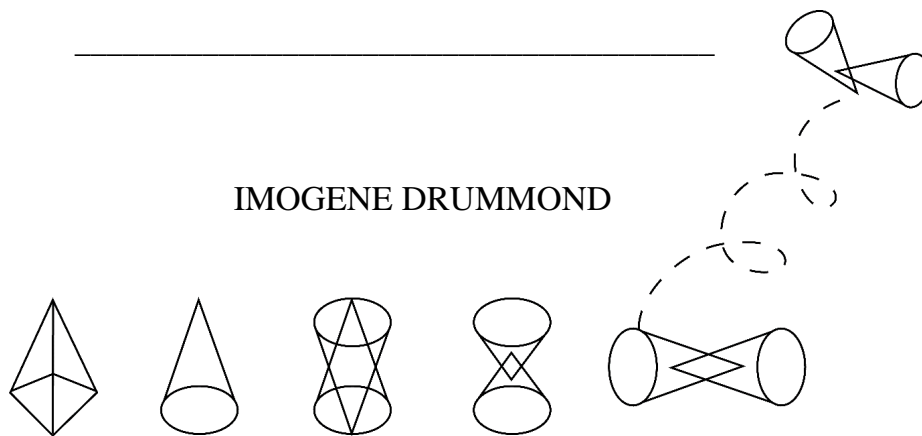


Illustration: series of matrices symbolizing cultural metamorphosis.

INTRODUCTION

Humankind has the power to transform culture. If we can consciously envision a transformed civilization for future millennia, then we can build it. In this paper, I propose a multi-phase process of cultural transformation which involves a series of metamorphic phases. I do not believe anyone else has offered this kind of metamorphic roadmap.

The core issue facing us today is whether we will continue to escalate violence, or transform ourselves and our global culture in order to survive and thrive. Will we self-destruct or evolve into a healthier culture? If so, how?

Now is a crucial time in the course of our culture. We find ourselves in the Anthropocene—a time when human impact threatens to destroy up to 50 percent of all living species on earth by the end of this century.¹ We must engage in a

metamorphic process of growth—or perish. To do this calls for new thinking that can shift our awareness and engender new and healthier patterns of growth and transformation for us all.

First, let us examine a few questions. What does the matrix of our society look like? What does the matrix of a transformed society look like? How do they differ? And the deeper question is: How can we transform society and create a vibrant, life-affirming, mutually beneficial culture? These questions fascinate me.

OUR CURRENT PATH

Just as different words represent similar ideas; one word may have numerous, even opposite, meanings. Therefore, I like to look beyond semantics and see patterns of common ground. I appreciate the way different viewpoints and their corresponding lineages make sense to different groups of people. (As there are different types of intelligence, and people perceive things differently, it's important that there are different ways of looking at, articulating, and understanding meaning.) Yet, I also feel that people articulate concepts that overlap like Venn diagrams. In this article, I explore the way visionaries in three different areas—archeology, biology, and ecology—look at some issues differently, yet their concepts connect in meaningful ways that can illuminate the way forward for us all.

In her 1989 book *Ariadne's Thread*, biologist Dr. Mary E. Clark wrote a prescient description of our world in the early 21st century. She wrote that terrorism, war, the sudden scarcity of oil and fossil fuel supplies, and the sudden disruption of financial systems could quickly leave the billions of world citizens who depend on the orderly functioning of a highly technological, but also highly vulnerable social system, totally helpless.² Indeed, the world today is in a state of fragility, instability, and volatility.

In the pursuit of power, our world leaders appear to be on a trajectory of ever-increasing violence and destruction. To use a dramatic example, both the Islamic Mid-Eastern world that views itself as exploited and the “First World” that sees itself as having to reinforce its world dominance seem to be dangerous participants in the current path of a global dysfunctional society. Both cultures appear entangled in two simultaneous modes of expressing a dominator culture: the extremely competitive “either/or” model of thinking—we win or we lose—and its accompanying mode of doing—we escalate or we surrender. Neither mode can

encompass alternative, creative modes of thinking and acting that promote humankind's survival. If this were not true, conflict resolution—not violence—would be tried early and often as a way to engender change.

We live in a war-ravaged world in which there are daily reports of new horror and violence to our fellow world citizens. Our world appears to be on a path to severe global dysfunction, and ultimately, global destruction. This violence is due to the clash of not just worldviews, but dominator worldviews.

To me, the core values in the Mid-Eastern and Western worldviews are fundamentally mirror images of each other, with only the packaging being different. Both groups believe they are morally correct while the other group is “evil.” Both believe they have a natural (read “God-given”) right to use violence to promote the dominance of its cultural goals. Both societies appear engaged in a dangerous game of supremacy that could lead the globe to the brink of a Third World War and omnicide, or destruction to all.

WHAT OUR PARADIGM LOOKS LIKE: STAGE ONE PYRAMID MATRIX

The pyramid shape best expresses our current world employing extreme competition as its driving force. It is a particularly apt metaphor because the Egyptian pyramids, involving Herculean labor, were built by slaves. For this discussion, imagine a tall, sharp-edged, rigid, four-sided pyramid. Now, imagine the first side embodying economic power, the second military power, the third political power, and the fourth cultural power. All sides are held up by, and dependent on, a broad square base embodying social—or worker—strength. (This pyramid needs a broad worker base to support it because it is dangerously unbalanced in its power-at-the-top structure.) Command central is at the pinnacle. Power and secrecy of information diminish in importance from the top to the bottom, with the disenfranchised supporting those at the top.

Because power and communication move from the top down, anything moving counter to that gets aborted before it reaches the top. This is not a healthy system. Clark describes the results of such an overly competitive system as alienation and psychic damage, vulnerability and volatility.³ This one-way communication is like a computer with a virus that mindlessly replicates its internal programs in an effort to increase its power, while in reality preventing its own evolution.

THE VIABILITY OF A POST-DOMINATOR CULTURE

Human cooperation has a long track record.

Biologist Mary Clark urges shifting from a competitive to a cooperative culture built on decentralized organizations that promote “critique and create” dialogues in order for humankind to survive.⁴ She describes Nature as inherently cooperative, pointing out that ecosystems and species survive because they fit in, not because they conquer their environments. “In Nature,” she says, “conquering one’s environment is a meaningless concept.” The health of the whole ecosystem is the result of evolutionary success.⁵ Our cells, and our nervous, respiratory, muscular, vascular, and DNA systems function in concert, not in competition within their systems or with each other—unless we are ill, which is a fitting image. For example, our genes are not isolated entities. Each gene works in cooperation with thousands of other genes to create a functioning organism.⁶

Dr. Clark says that human beings owe our “very existence to thousands of untold ancestors who established societies and upheld worldviews based on notions of human caring.”⁷ Walking upright initially freed the hands of the earliest hominids so that they could carry food—not tools or weapons—back to a home base to share it with others in their social group.⁸ She says “we were socially bonded beings before we were human.”⁹

The eminent archaeologist Dr. Marija Gimbutas pioneered new perceptions of European prehistory.¹⁰ She posited that prehistoric nature-honoring partnership civilizations were essentially different from the armed non-agrarian Kurgan tribes that conquered them.¹¹ Her protégé, best-selling author Riane Eisler, examines the evidence further in her fascinating books *The Chalice & The Blade*, and *Sacred Pleasure*.¹² Renowned thinkers such as Joseph Campbell supported Dr. Gimbutas’ findings and ideas. Campbell called this cultural shift “The Great Reversal.”¹³ Understanding that such a significant cultural shift occurred allows us to imagine a post-dominator society that re-energizes and re-integrates the partnership values of prehistoric agrarian civilizations in Old Europe.

Interestingly, the partnership cultures described by Gimbutas, Eisler and others revered the Great Mother Goddess, who symbolized being more than a vessel for the life force—she was considered the Creatrix of the Universe. I like this connection with the visionary work of eco-theologian and cultural

historian Thomas Berry. He defined the possibility of an “Ecozoic Era,” a new period in which humans awaken from their disconnection with the Earth to RE-ESTABLISH (emphasis mine) mutually beneficial relationships with the Cosmos that ensure the flourishing of life.¹⁴

Berry believes that we can and must create a new life-affirming “Ecozoic Era.” He clarifies that this era will develop through a process of listening to the four-fold wisdom of: native peoples, women, world religions, and science.¹⁵ I once asked Berry if he thought that the terms “partnership society,” “cooperative culture,” and “Ecozoic Era” were all different terms for a shared concept of a life-affirming, post-dominator society. He looked at me surprised for a moment and then said a resounding “Yes!”¹⁶

Clearly, the Ecozoic Era is a healthy alternative to the Anthropocene—if it is not too late.

WHAT A POST-DOMINATOR PARADIGM LOOKS LIKE: STAGE TWO CONE MATRIX

Nature—including human beings—is cooperative. Competition, aggression, and violence also exist in nature, although not to the degree that they exist in our current cultural paradigm.

The controlling power of the pyramid matrix comes from the top down, yet the power and ability to change the pyramid’s dominator structure has historically lain with people at the bottom—the ones traditionally considered to be the poorest, least powerful people. Imagine a base composed of marginalized people mobilizing their empathy, compassion, anger, and frustration. They organize their talents and feminize the base, transforming and changing its straight-edged square boundaries into a circular, ovoid, or egg shape. Interestingly, this shape expresses the ancient sacred symbol of wholeness—and potential for growth.

When one part of a system changes, the rest of the system adjusts to the new shape. (This is the crux of family systems theory.)¹⁷ When the base of a pyramid changes from angular to circular, it also rounds out its angled sides. When this happens, it is no longer a pyramid but a cone. The cone’s strength lies in a more equitable, rounded, and flexible structure. Without adding to the power of the pyramid or destroying it completely, we have generated a new change that benefits the whole system—and everyone in it.

Given the current developments taking place around the globe, this is where we

may be today. As change takes place at the edges and moves toward the center, it is noteworthy that some recent movements have garnered worldwide attention and support—and begun creating change. Consider just a few: the #MeToo movement begun in the US, and global climate activism including the Extinction Rebellion movement begun in the UK, and Fridays for the Future youth-led protests begun by high school student Greta Thunberg who has subsequently been nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize.

WHAT A POST-PATRIARCHAL PARADIGM LOOKS LIKE:

STAGE THREE BUTTERFLY MATRIX

The cone is not a fully evolved structure. To create a more fully evolved matrix, imagine a second cone, such as the one renowned paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould refers to as the “cone of diversity,” where life begins with the simple and progresses upward and outward to the more complex,¹⁸ growing up from inside the circular base of the first cone. The fully metamorphosed phase of this structure is two cones intersecting at their pointed ends. This new shape illustrates balance, equality, and health. Energy, empowerment, and communication flow from the top and bottom, as well as between the two interconnecting cones each with its fused nature—circle and cylinder—intact. This shape corresponds to the ancient archetypal symbol of balanced female and male interconnectedness. (See the illustration on page 1.)

Horizontally, this structure has reciprocity built in, giving it greater stability and balance. Tilting back and forth between its two “wings” will not unbalance it, but allow it to glide and soar in an upward spiral. This shape requires that the two “wings” operate as a whole in the harmonious, synchronized motion required for flight. How fitting that this image corresponds to the prehistoric symbol of rebirth and the actual shape of metamorphosis: that of the butterfly.

This structure can only truly “fly” when it integrates the need for competition with the need for cooperation and acts as a whole organism with all its parts flowing in concert for the sake of the whole. Clark says that we function by using our entire brains. This means that cognition and emotion—thinking and feeling—are inseparable activities done in concert, not in competition or conflict, with each other.¹⁹ The ultimate goal of this butterfly structure is that the disparate parts of the whole organism act in concert for the

health of the entire organism. This is what the series of matrices demonstrates: the transformation and realignment of competition and aggression not as the motive force of the system, but as one of many parts acting in concert for the sake of the health of the whole organism.

COOPERATIVE PARTNERSHIP SYSTEMS

Going forward, it is vital that the model for a healthy society be an organic image. This is a key characteristic of the butterfly matrix. Biochemist Rupert Sheldrake,²⁰ eco-theologian Thomas Berry,²¹ and many others²² have criticized the limitations and consequences of Cartesian Dualism and its obsession with thinking of nature as machinery. To move beyond the pyramidal paradigm, we need to think of the earth, our society, and ourselves as living, interconnected organisms, not machines. We can then act in concert with that interconnectedness and create a social system that supports our psychic and physical well-being.

Additionally, the joining of two structures in the later phases of transformation demonstrates the mutually beneficial aspect of diversity in partnership systems. Our adaptability as a species depends more on cultural diversity than genetic diversity. Unlike a proscribed universal world order, cultural diversity presents humankind with a rich resource of adaptive possibilities.²³ Embracing diversity promotes cultural growth.

This series of matrices teaches us that we can transform an unhealthy dominator system into a healthy system of partnership. To transform our current pyramidal paradigm, we need systems and programs that implement values of *mutual* benefit and respect.

FROM PARASITIC SYMBIOSIS TO COOPERATIVE SYMBIOSIS

Another way to understand the possibility of cultural transformation is to look at nature for role models. Our current system can be described as being like parasitic symbiosis. In this type of relationship, one member exists on the energy of the other to the eventual destruction of both members. In the Anthropocene, those in “higher” strata of society exist off the labor of those in “lower” strata; nations fight to conquer, dominate, and maintain power; and humans are even actively destroying their own habitat. To survive the

Anthropocene, we must create cooperative symbiotic relationships where both members in the relationship benefit mutually. By creating cooperative systems at every level—from micro to macro—we will transform our thinking, mythology, religion, government, business, education, language, and the arts.

According to Berry, the universe evolves through a continual process of self-transformations.²⁴ We can look to this process for inspiration in transforming dominator societies into partnership ones that value and empower everyone including our children, our women, our indigenous peoples, and our poor.

TRANSFORMING THE PYRAMID

Marija Gimbutas says our system is like a marble cake with subsystems of cooperation and partnership values mixed within the larger structure. This means that some values of cooperation and partnership already exist within our society.²⁵ If we consciously grow these values within our current system, the straight edges of the pyramid will soften. The more these values increase, the more the angled base of the pyramid will be transformed into a circle.

How can this be done? I propose that we create new models of a mutually beneficial partnership hierarchy. Just as DNA is encoded with natural hierarchies of order,²⁶ the primary values within a partnership organization will be cooperative, not exploitative dominator, values. Partnership values promote dialogue, mutual listening, and respect, and eschew domination. Here are some examples.

At MICA (the Maryland Institute College of Art, where I received my MFA and later served on the Alumni Council for many years), the recently retired President Fred Lazarus was in service to the students. His goal was to continually improve MICA's environment and academic quality in order to empower the students. He continually solicited comments from them and forwarded their ideas to committees, councils, boards, and others. When Fred wanted to make a change, he discussed it with Dean Ray Allen and others, proposed it to the Board of Trustees, various staff and committees (including the Alumni Council), and invited discussion and feedback at every step. He and others at MICA evaluated the feedback and often created long-term plans by which to implement changes. MICA is shaped by respectful communication—asking for and listening to feedback, openness, sharing credit, and by expressions of affirmation and gratitude for others' contributions. In the 36 years Fred Lazarus was president, MICA's

enrollment more than doubled, the size of the campus increased tenfold, and MICA became one of the top ten art colleges in the nation.²⁷

I have also witnessed the Kikkoman Corporation, a highly successful Japanese company known for its premium soy sauce and marinades, in action. Besides brewed products, Kikkoman creates new cutting-edge technologies and products in biotechnology and biochemistry. It is a good example of how an organization can function successfully with partnership values. A 300-year-old company begun by the widow of a Shogun warrior.²⁸ Kikkoman currently produces billions of dollars in annual revenues, with manufacturing plants on three continents.²⁹

In 1917, eight family businesses merged to form the company that eventually became known as Kikkoman. At that time, one of the first orders of business was writing a family code of business, known as the “Family Creed.”³⁰ The first of the seventeen articles states that: “Family members should recognize that harmony is of utmost importance. Harmony fosters mutual respect...”³¹ The last article states: “Do not decide important matters by yourself. Always consult with the people who have a direct interest in the subject matter prior to making a decision. Shared decision-making results in people having a positive attitude in their work.”³² The Family Creed was created out of a sense of how the families wanted to do business, both internally and in the marketplace.

Kikkoman has a bottom-up approach to decision-making. This allows for quick implementation because many people participate in the decision-making process.³³ Kikkoman’s problem-solving managerial style has been called a “trust-based” system, and Kikkoman “a company that respects people” by its American employees.³⁴ Clearly, we need more of these kinds of businesses and institutions within our current system.

OUTSIDE THE SYSTEM: STAGE FOUR BUILDING A NEW WING

For humankind to thrive, we also need transformative change outside the current system. Women cannot gain equality within a system that is based on their inequality.³⁵ It is simply not possible. We need a whole new approach and a whole new structure for creating networks, programs, and organizations. If we don’t do this, we continue to re-create our own disempowered, marginalized place, and we

sanction society's destructive power for women and men.

We must build mutually beneficial situations that become powerful change agents outside the system. Women, artists, native peoples, and people of all colors—as well as compassionate men—need to come together and organize situations and create programs specifically designed for social change. I call these programs “Options for the Future,” or “Opts” for short. I like the term “Opts” because it is a verb, not a noun. It emphasizes our ability to choose, or opt for, transformative action. Clearly, “Opts” programs need to be created in every aspect of life. Once we engage in the process of thinking “outside the box” (or in this case, the pyramid), the more we will engage in a metamorphic process, and the more ideas will occur to us that will engender our evolutionary cultural growth. Here are some ideas with which to start.

EDUCATION: “Opts” programs and courses, conferences, workshops, and seminars that address cultural and ecological evolution, and the development of consciousness, need to be created. Courses titled “Our Global Future,”³⁶ “Options for the Future,” “New Ways of Thinking,” “Toward a New Consciousness,” and “Visualizing Social Change on a Macro-Level” need to be taught at all levels. Partnership values and conflict resolution need to be *de rigueur* at schools, beginning at the elementary level. “Opts” courses need to be taught not only in alternative fields, but in traditional fields such as sociology, political science, ecology, and economics.

ART: To transform society, we need to become conscious of the meaning of the imagery that pervades our culture. We need to recognize that the dominant imagery (images that we buy and support) in our culture promulgates dominator values. What are the larger-than-life-sized bronze and marble sculptures that are ubiquitous in major museums around the world? What are the traditional sculptures in parks? They are invariably victorious male warriors bearing spears, swords, or rifles. These sculptures reflect and promote dominator values of warring and winning.

Images of violence, obscenity, shock, destruction, and oppression abound. An aspiring artist once proudly showed me a piece of art he had created. It was the silhouette of a woman on a hill with the scope of a rifle lens layered over her. I was deeply disturbed because, as the viewer, I became the viewer through the rifle lens and thus the predator. The artist professed being

completely unaware that his art was misogynous. He insisted that it was an expression against violence against women—not an image that was, in fact, by its very existence, promoting violence against women. It is like the organization that presented an award to African-American author Alice Walker for her consciousness-raising writing about female genital mutilation and then gave her a sculpture of a headless, armless female. Walker was shocked. She saw the sculpture for what it was: a mutilated female. The organization, with their dominator lens (in spite of the consciousness raised by Walker's work), saw a graceful (whole) female.

The images in our culture tell us that mutilated women are acceptable, whereas men are to be depicted as conquering warriors. No doubt the rationale is that the female sculptures are imitating antiquities that have lost certain parts over time either by deliberate amputation or the process of disintegration. Yet we do not see partial images of men being created today in imitation of the same style of antiquities. What, one is forced to ask, is the connection between these two images? Have you ever seen the colossal sculptures standing outside a streamlined skyscraper in mid-town Manhattan on the Avenue of the Americas? Most people see female figures. After reading about Alice Walker's "award," I now see huge bronze headless, armless, mutilated females. Why do we not see what we are looking at? Compare these images of mutilated women with the Statute of Liberty, and consider its symbolism: a monumental woman holding a torch of liberty to light the way for people entering a "new world"—that, additionally, was a gift from one country to another!

A white, straight-edged, towering, elongated-pyramidal (phallic) piece of architecture stands as our government's emblematic symbol in our nation's capital. The Washington Monument is a clear symbol of what America is politically invested in: white male power and domination (one could, I think, posit "white male supremacy"). But we do not consciously recognize it as being a phallus. We do not say, "There is the Washington Phallus." Wouldn't it be an interesting assignment for art students to design a new national monument for a new mutually beneficial age, one that fuses male and female imagery in concert? What would they design? Would it be a monumental fountain or a massive sculpture of crossed swords buried in the ground surrounded by a garden and a lake, or a gigantic spiral shell/galaxy coming from deep inside the earth to connect earth and sky?

Maya Lin's memorial to the Americans who died in Vietnam was a radical change from the traditional bronze sculptures of armed men in uniform—though those were required by an outraged military-minded populace who could not deal with naming and grieving their lost dead in a quiet and profound way. They insisted on adding images of men fighting, to keep their identities of themselves as (victorious) male warriors intact. For what is the point of government, power, and war if not to see themselves as the ones in authority and power—the dominators?³⁷ We need to recognize the meaning of these images and how they engender and sanction dominator values, thinking, identities, and behavior.

How is “Opts” art different from the art prevalent in our society? Jesus Christ is most often depicted as crucified rather than resurrected, even though Christianity considers his resurrection to be proof of his deity. The Virgin Mary is more often shown with her crucified son rather than ascending into heaven. Imagine what different values would be engendered if images of a resurrected Christ and an ascending Mary abounded.³⁸

“Opts” art communicates and celebrates an integration of our ideas, spirituality, and emotionality with our technical skill. For me, Matisse's work is such art. Imagine art like the Statue of Liberty, which is a particularly compelling example as it was the gift from one nation to another, symbolizing new life, hope, birth or re-birth, spring, the celebration and interconnectedness of life and death as a part of the natural cycle (rather than as a statement of one's prowess as a warrior) being pervasive in our culture.

MYTHOLOGY: To create real social change, we need new mythologies. The first step in building a transformed society is envisioning one. One way to help people imagine this is to raise them, not on stories of sin and suffering that glorify increasingly grotesque violence and killing, but on stories that celebrate life and the search for wisdom, growth, and transformation. My Cosmic Egg trilogy, that begins with *Divine Sparks* (now an award-winning film),³⁹ joins the EMMY-winning *Journey of the Universe* film co-produced by Thomas Berry's protégé Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker,⁴⁰ and *The Universe Trilogy* books by Jennifer Morgan⁴¹ to offer new stories for a new era of health and harmony. We need more!

LAWS: We need to create and implement “Opts,” laws ensuring equal human rights for all citizens, equal pay for equal work, equal hiring practices, and equal

educational opportunities. Stringent laws to stop female genital mutilation, international child prostitution, and the illegal international trade of trafficking in women—a **\$32 billion business in 2013**—need to be enacted and enforced with heavy penalties.⁴² Partnership societies and cultures do not condone or allow wholesale torture of political dissidents, prisoners, or persons with other than heterosexual preferences.

A PARTNERSHIP WORLD: STAGE FIVE SURVIVE AND THRIVE

Most essential to creating change is, first, acknowledgement that we are part of the problem and, second, the vision and courage to engage in a metamorphic process of change. When we realize that we are part of the problem, then we can begin to transform our system and heal our planet and ourselves. We need to harness our intellects, emotions, and energies to fuel our creativity and our work. Berry calls the work of moving from our current Cenozoic Era to a new, mutually beneficial Ecozoic Era “The Great Work” facing each of us.⁴³

Imogene Drummond is an award-winning filmmaker, painter, futurist, author of articles on cultural transformation, world traveler, and former psychotherapist. Her experience, talent, and vision converge in Divine Sparks. She has an M.S.W. from The Catholic University of America, and an M.F.A. from the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA)—one of the country’s premier art schools. Due to her many painting expeditions around the world, she was invited to join The Society of Woman Geographers. Her websites are: www.imogenedrummond.com, and www.divinesparks.com.

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