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Communication Tools towards a Bioregional Consciousness

By

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Dedicated to my sister, Evelina Kreimer
and all past, present and future Fostervillagers

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ABSTRACT

Recognizing that ecological collapse is within reach, I draw upon the observations that poorly distributed power dynamics supported through the reinforcement of individualism, hierarchism, reductionism, linear thinking, etc. are some of the basic principles that pose a challenge when it comes to embracing new and very ancient ways of interacting with the rest of living systems (Deloria, 1993; Senge, 1996; Suzuki, 2006; Hall, 2008). There exist "original instructions," reinforced by recent scientific acknowledgements, that contain guidelines for needed action and interaction to prevent anthropogenic ecological collapse. I utilize storytelling as well as several of the leverage points for systems change suggested by Donella Meadows (1999) in deconstructing the western worldview by teasing out points of departure from an indigenous and egalitarian[1] frame of reference. I then compare how more recent developments in systems theory align with shared wisdom from a multitude of indigenous cultures to support a development of bioregional consciousness, or a consciousness that is rooted in place and promotes interdependence, reciprocity and respect. I describe what communication tools I have been given by teachers in the fields of non-violent communication, group process and conflict transformation and explore the ways in which they lead to a bioregional consciousness.

INTRODUCTION

The ancient Hebrew people were possibly the first to experience the cultural embedding of abstract reality in their move from an oral culture to a phonetic, written culture and from a cyclical relationship to time to one more linearly structured. Their diaspora began in the 6th century BCE, with the conquest of the kingdom of Judah by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, forcing the Jewish people into a state of rootlessness. Ever moving, the identity of the Jewish people became one of a shared past and not of a shared land-base, meaning they culturally identified themselves not mainly with cycles on the land, but with a shared history of significant events that could be carried with them anywhere. While the

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1 ̈ While it is impossible to tell if all tribal arrangements were egalitarian, there are sufficient living examples of egalitarian and reverse-dominance hierarchical tribal societies as well as oral stories of social organization prior to colonization which support this claim. See *Egalitarian Behavior and Reverse Dominance Hierarchy.* (Boehm, 1993).

Jewish calendar continued to follow the cycles of the moon, the history of the Jewish people became linear — written, recorded and carried over the millennia, defining their culture by events that showed God's love of the Jewish people (Mircea, et al, 1971; Abram, 1996; Markewitz et. al, 2013). What is significant about this story is that it begins to expose points of divergence from an indigenous worldview to one that self-describes as "western".[2] A clear hierarchy emerges between the what is on earth and what exists beyond, the divine. Additionally, a reorientation of reality is established from cyclical to a linear way of being in the world.[3]

It is important to note is that *all* of humanity was indigenous once, be it DNA memories of a particular interaction of earth and water from thousands of years back that still tones the skin and shapes the nose and eyes or be it as recently as two generation ago. Some are still indigenous, boldly holding onto not only ancestral homes, customs, languages and stories of the places they inhabit — but through those, holding onto wisdom of how to live in reciprocal relationship with living systems. Wisdom guided by original instructions and long-arched feedback loops is precious. I dare say that countless millennia of experience distilled into what is called culture can not be reinvented in a laboratory, nor scripted by Hollywood, no matter how many scientists or screenwriters are set to the task.

There are several definitions of indigeneity but ultimately the notion exists in relation to colonization. Today, being indigenous means being people of place prior to colonization (Coleman, 2010) and being there long enough to have developed as an ecological individual within an ecological culture (Cajete, 2000). Colonization has severely impacted the ability of indigenous cultures to carry out their traditions, which is why the importance of giving indigenous communities the space and resources to decolonize, restore and continue their place-specific cultures can not be stressed enough. History has proven time and time again that civilizations rise and fall. Witnessing the breakdown of Earth's strained

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2 The East/West divide that originated this terminology has since been supplanted by a North/South divide. However, for the purpose of this paper, I do not distinguish between the haves and the have-nots. Specifically I describe a particular worldview that justifies and maintains inequality and exploitation.

3 These ideas will be elaborated on further in the section "Power Accumulation: A Timeline".

life support systems, the shaky institutions of nation-states and their globalized trade networks which wholly rely on the health of the land, it is clear that humanity's last 100,000 years of life-place wisdom, a truly inexhaustible wealth, rests with elders of old-growth cultures and is community held (Settee in Nelson, 2008).

A premise I fully operate on is that there is a crisis occurring now. For a few brief moments on the evening news, one can catch the daily stories of climate chaos - from entire Alaskan towns being eroded by rising sea levels (DeMarban, 2014) to California's crops drying up from exhausted aquifers and lack of rain or snowpack (Krieger, 2014). These are but two examples from this year, 2014, and right here on the western coast of the northern American continent. Until now this growing crisis has mostly affected underrepresented and dollar-poor communities, but according to the latest reports by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change it is only a matter of time before the effects are felt by all classes (Oppenheimer, M. et al., 2014). There has been a mis-accumulation of power over the past 10,000 years through a self-reinforcing feedback loop. Questions remain to guide next steps: how to begin breaking it up into pieces that every inhabitant can experience, how to develop self-regulating feedback loops, and what ecological concepts can be applied immediately through a bioregional conscientization? Through personal experience I have discovered that the most accessible and least utilized tools for shifting worldview is that of changing communication patterns.

For full disclosure, I am not a communications major, nor am I studying to be one. My interest in language and communication tools goes only so far as I've personally experienced them and witnessed their effect on others. My background as a human being and a chef, farmer, community organizer and bioregionalist may not offer enough credentials in the eyes of some in academia to substantiate the offerings found below. All I can ask is that they be considered and experimented with. My primary goal is to help fellow humans reestablish long-lost connections to the greater community of life through communication tools that will help transform conflicts and assist in conscious reinhabitation of place. Making these tools accessible using layman's terms is another essential goal of this work. A third is to buttress these offerings with examples — stories that will build muscle onto the bones of my argument.

To me, success looks like an ongoing process of collecting and refining a toolbox of memes and mental models that support the bioregional paradigm. Failure is not attempting this effort at all.

A TELLING STORY

There is a story being told subtly, through deed and art, that stands in stark contrast to the dominant narrative found on television and pretending to be lived behind white picket fences. A particular worldview informs this narrative, which I will refer to as "westernism," not to support an east/west divide, but to acknowledge a set of traditions that identifies itself as "the western world". How the western worldview came to be the dominant force that it is today is certainly complicated. I will only scratch its surface, pushing back the overgrowth slightly, exposing some toxic elements of it to much needed sunlight with the hope that self-reflection will lead to action towards a more ecological, or bioregional worldview.

At the age of 19, Kenny Ausubel woke up to find the entire left side of his body paralyzed. After failing to be properly diagnosed by allopathic, or western-style, doctors, natural medicine practitioners discovered that he had been poisoned by dioxin. Dioxin is most frequently a byproduct of industrial production. When paper is bleached, dioxin enters waterways. When plastics and other garbage is burned, dioxin enters the air. It is found in Agent Orange and other herbicides. It concentrates in breast milk, exposing humans and other infants in their earliest moments of critical development ("WHO | Dioxins and their effects on human health," n.d.). Published in 1962, Rachel Carson's watershed novel, *Silent Spring*, warned of the dire consequences of releasing toxic byproducts of industry into the environment. She witnessed first hand the massive decline in birds, including the U.S. government's own totemic bald eagle. It was one of the wake up calls that catalyzed and mobilized the environmental movement. Unfortunately for Kenny Ausubel, Carson's words were not heeded well, and instead he found himself paralyzed by similar pollution. Upon recovery, Ausubel journeyed to a farm that was part of the "back to the land" movement and there discovered the inklings of his original instructions. In 1989, he founded the

heritage seed company, Seeds of Change, and the following year he and Nina Simons, his partner, founded the Bioneers.

Since its inception, the Bioneers have brought together *bio*logical pio*neers* in social and scientific innovation to share their wisdom. From their online statement, these presenters are described as "[those who have] peered deep into the heart of living systems to understand how nature operates, and to mimic 'nature's operating instructions' to serve human ends without harming the web of life. Nature's principles — kinship, cooperation, diversity, symbiosis, and cycles of continuous creation absent of waste…." It is the organization's hope that these values will translate into ever-developing societies that are constantly challenging themselves to become more equitable, compassionate and democratic ("What is Bioneers?," n.d.).

Indigenous participants who come bearing the gift of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) to organizations such the Bioneers do so knowing that there is a history of researchers taking TEK with little acknowledgement or reciprocation. Even worse, these ideas become patented and profits reaped by multinational corporations who further destroy Indigenous peoples' access to traditional lands and practices[4]. Still, the Bioneers presenters are willing to keep sharing and I hypothesize this comes from a recognition of the urgency with which the western world must be presented with alternative ways of being. For this I am eternally grateful and take responsibility to not only heed their words and share their messages, but to spend my privileges wisely in supporting the resurgence of old-growth cultures.

One essential teaching is that of natural law. In its most ancient understanding and for the purposes of this paper, it is living while allowing other living systems to regenerate (Lyons, 2008). Original instructions, or natural laws, are traditionally transmitted through oral stories. In this way they remain alive and always delivered by a storyteller who is was able to recontextualize the lessons for the present moment. The lessons are designed for land-based cultures. They are practical instructions for how to live in place and within acknowledged community (Billy, 2009). They are tangible. For example,

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[4] This topic is extensively covered in *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (Shiva, 1999).

Willow Grouse's (Secwepemc) retelling of the story "How Coyote Loses His Eyes" conveys wisdom about how red willow grows near the water (Billy, 2009). If this coyote story were to be typed, printed and read by a young girl growing up in Illinois, it would have no direct relevance to her specific location. In cases of dislocation, only abstract concepts remain useful when transferred to the page or screen (e.g., moral lessons taught through cartoons for children). A society unrooted will have no way of carrying original instructions for how to live with the rest of living systems upon which they depend. As clear example today, many have no idea where their water comes from or what happens once the toilet is flushed yet those same people will have a high chance of knowing which pop star crashed their car the previous weekend.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WALKING IN (at least) TWO WORLDS

The Cree of what is now called northeastern and central Canada have a word for the behavior they witnessed settlers exhibiting as they invaded. "Watiku" or "wasichu" is known as a disease where one is never fully satiated — a notion similar to the Chinese, Japanese and Tibetan Buddhist concept known as "hungry ghosts"[5] or the Ukrainian "starvelings". John Forbes, one of the founders of the American Indian Movement elaborates on this concept and diagnoses the condition as "malignant egophrenia", describing it as "the consuming of another's life for one's own private purpose or profit" (Forbes, 2008, p. 34). The transformation from an indigenous consciousness to a westernized, dominating consciousness was strongly encouraged and outright imposed through imperialism and colonization of native cultures throughout the 19th and 20th centuries by Christian missionaries with the blessing of the governments of the United States, England, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, among others. "Kill the Indian, save the man" was a common slogan during this period in the often abuse-filled residential schools that took young native children away from their families and placed them into collective living and learning institutions run by various missionary organizations. While many stories have been recorded

5 Dr. Gabor Mate, a physician who deals with heroin users in the Lower East Side of Vancouver, BC also diagnoses this in his book *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction* (2010).

and many more lost, one such experience was shared by George Manuel, a Secwepemc community

organizer and the first national chief of the National Indian Brotherhood (now known as the Assembly of

First Nations) as well as co-founder and first president of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples. He

writes of his experience with residential school,

> "Nothing else contributed so much to the destruction of the Indian people
> as a nation as the school system run by the churches and supported by
> the government. It was the perfect instrument for undermining both our
> values and our economic base. The residential school…was the perfect
> system for instilling a strong sense of inferiority. When we came back for
> summer holidays, or when we simply left school, we were equally unfit to
> live in an Indian world or a European world. We had lost time learning our
> own skills. The agricultural skills we were being taught were already
> obsolete. Our values were as confused and warped as our skills...
> What was most nearly destroyed was the value of a person's labour as a
> contribution to the life and well-being of the community. It made sense to
> take the challenge of hard work, whether it was hunting or fishing or
> farming, when the work would bring food to the tables of many homes,
> strength to the community, and glory and honour to the person who did it."
> (Manuel, 1974, p. 68)

Critical examination of western consciousness has appropriately been done with great insight by

Indigenous scholars who experienced both an indigenous upbringing as well as a western upbringing.

Their analyses, along with those made by scholars of liberation are what will be offered here as points of

divergence from a mindset that honors and maintains healthy ways of community tending—both in the

human sphere and the larger ecological sphere—to one that is neglectful, either knowingly or

unthinkingly, of both the human and more-than-human communities with which they interact and share

influence. Along with George Manuel (Secwepemc), scholars such as Vine Deloria (Dakota), Gregory

Cajete (Tewa), Jeanette Armstrong (Syilx), Waziyatawin (Dakota), and Michael Yellow Bird (Arikara,

Hidatsa) offer an incredible amount of comparison between the types of thought patterns they see as

prevalent in non-Indigenous communities and those which they have been taught through their own

unique, place-based cultures. When ancestral knowledge is passed down unbroken yet evolving over

thousands of years, as "old growth wisdom" is, it can be argued that a sustainable way of living in

community with others is being achieved. However, it is important to acknowledge that though

colonization and displacement the identity of indigeneity does not always retain the spaciotemporal conditions needed to maintain relational knowledge of site-specific sustainable living systems.

A NOTE ON RESPECTFUL SHARING

As a non-Indigenous person who has been invited into Native organizing spaces, the act of allyship has been defined in many ways. I strive to practice caution and reciprocity in cultural borrowing. Before I continue discussing what teachings have been offered by those who identify as Indigenous to a place, I want to name common pitfalls that exist, including the attempt to synthesize broad and varied cultures of place as a single group: "indigenous peoples." One is the myth of the "noble savage;" that is to say, the idealization of an entire portion of the world's population as not doing harm yet not fully human. People who are indigenous to a place certainly have faults just like all other people. What is important to keep in mind is that many have lived in a place long enough to have learned from a long series of lessons, and have developed unique methods for maintaining the fabric of community and ecologically sound relations to place (Martinez and Hall, 2008). A second is the fallacy that, as a non-indigenous person, I can suddenly become indigenous if I just practice hard enough. What is being offered to non-indigenous people by discussing communication tools shared from Syilx or Lakota communities is a process, a step towards a different way of being in the world. However, that process is long and not without stumbling blocks. It may take several generations of staying in one place for a consciousness that resembles Indigenous worldviews to permeate a community, a process sometimes referred to as "re-indigenization" (Hall, 2013) . Adopting a superficial Native lifestyle, or "playing Indian" is insulting to many, as well as insufficient (Deloria, 1993). Discovering one's own indigenous ancestry supports avoiding this pitfall (Ghel, 2013). A third is the misconception that information being shared by these and other scholars and teachers is done freely, and is for the taking without a need to consider reciprocity. As I will reiterate several times, reciprocity is central to the original instructions, and must be considered whenever receiving gifts, including knowledge. Beyond these common pitfalls, I am certain that there are other

notions for which I still have blind spots, and I look forward to having them named as I continue my best efforts to learn and share in a respectful way.

WHAT IS BIOREGIONALISM?

If one doesn't identify as part of a community that is indigenous to a particular place in the world, yet sees the value in living a more sustainable existence, where does one begin to root? This is where the bioregional movement attempts to fill this void. Its philosophy is a synthesis of many threads of thought including indigenous teachings, systems theory, anarchist theory, communist theory and ecofeminist theory. Additionally, it builds on a wide range of social movements including the environmental movement, the feminist movement, the AIM movement, the back-to-the-land movement and even the Diggers and Levelers movement of the 17th century[6]. Peter Berg and Raymond Dassman refer to it as a "geographical terrain and a terrain of consciousness—to a place and the ideas that have developed about how to live in that place" (Berg, ed., 1978, p. 218). Bhutan, a Buddhist nation, in moving away from using the materialistically-centered and globalization-dependent GDP as the measure of a successful (and westernized) nation-state, established a system that measured a different set of values. There are nine domains in the index: psychological well-being, standard of living and happiness[7], good governance[8], health, education[9], community vitality, cultural diversity and resilience, time use and happiness, and ecological diversity and resilience. While tempering idealism with reality, it feels important to note that Bhutan is not a wonderland for democracy; however the fourth king of Bhutan, before abdicating his throne in favor of a democratically elected government, did, in my opinion, help create a fairly clear understanding of what a bioregionally-conscious society might use as indicators of success.

6 The Diggers and Levellers were English social movements responding to the enclosure policies of feudalism during the 17th century with calls for peace, equality and the reclamation of land for the commons.

7 This specifically refers to material needs of a person being met.

8 The Canadian International Development Agency refers to good governance as "the exercise of power by various levels of government that is effective, honest, equitable, transparent and accountable" (CIDA, 1996).

9 Quoting David W. Orr on grossnationalhappiness.com, "*[i]t is not education, but education of a certain kind, that will serve us. And the current model of western, urban-centred, school-based education, which is so often more focused on turning children into efficient corporate units rather than curious and open-minded adults, will only lead us further down the wrong path.*"
"

The philosophical framework for the word "bioregion" exists, in part, to shake loose the notions of humanity being separated from the earth and instead construct a recognition that inhabitation, an interdependent indwelling is a practice that all humans must partake in, as all species do. It is a philosophy that requires action. Utilizing the work of Peter Berg and Raymond Dassman as a platform, I build upon it and offer that four R's guide the framework. I admittedly reassemble a few notions and include additional elements in order to evolve the concept from its origins in the early 1970's. *Reinhabitation* means the practice of staying in one place and developing a relationship with other inhabitants (human and more-than-human). This also includes developing a relationship to the cycles of the land by paying close attention to elements such as water, sun and wind patterns as well as practicing local, non-exploitive methods of meeting basic needs such as food, energy and clothing. *Restoration* is the practice of restoring the health of soil, water, air and habitat that has previously been damaged through exploitation. The Mattole Restoration Council is a prime example of this orientation in action. During the back-to-the-land movement of the late 60's and early 70's, a group of young bioregionalists settled in northern California within the Mattole watershed. By the late 70's they had noticed a significant decline in salmon populations due to increased sediment in the streams from unsustainable logging practices such as clear-cutting. For three decades community groups such as the Mattole Restoration Council have been working at the watershed level, together, to prevent further erosion and bring back the health of the watershed in which they dwell. Today, they report that salmon populations are slowly returning.[10] *Reciprocity* is the third R. It is the conscious release of personal energy and resources towards building stronger life-affirming relationships. In this sense, the practice of reciprocity becomes incompatible with the western notions of waste or accumulation. This practice requires connecting to a deeper sense of self and recognizing that giving and receiving gifts are ultimately part of the same flow. At a metaphysical level, it can be seen as one of the circulatory systems of the earth. In practicality, it is a gift economy that approaches this principle most closely (see Eisenstein, 2011). *Response-ability* is the fourth R. Response-ability differs from responsibility. It is the acknowledgement that a sense of empowerment is a

10 For a full account of the Mattole Watershed restoration work, see *Totem Salmon* (House, 2000).

prerequisite for change. Then can action be taken to prevent further harms. It is the work being done by countless activists around the world who recognize that direct action is possible and necessary in order to slow down the destruction of Earth's life support systems including old-growth forests, watersheds, keystone species, and indigenous cultures who maintain the knowledge for authentic reinhabitation.

Bioregionalists have been assembling for the past forty years in what are known as *bioregional congresses* to learn from one another, sharing tactics and tools to practice the four R's mentioned. The influence that a bioregional philosophy has had on recent cultural phenomena such as the sustainability movement or the local food movement should not be taken for granted. Looking around Portland their influence can be felt in organizations such as BARK, Willamette and Columbia Riverkeepers, various watershed councils, City Repair, and many other community groups. Additionally, ecological values-based living communities have grown exponentially. Currently, at least twelve exist within Portland that practice various forms of both ecological permaculture[11] and social permaculture[12]. Fostervillage, a community of eleven focused on both aforementioned styles of permaculture, in which I reside, has a statement of intention crafted and approved by consensus that reads as following:

> "We, Foster Village, heal from our inherited, fractured culture, affirm our interdependence, and model resilient social and ecological relations in order to foster the emergence of a new culture. We relearn old ways and co-create new ways of living together in community in order to become more fully human to increase our capacity to learn, practice, teach, demonstrate and learn the cycles that nourish ourselves and our land."
>
> (Ross, et al., 2012)

One can begin at any time to practice bioregional living and developing a bioregional consciousness for they are mutually informative. I propose that changing communication patterns to reflect a bioregional consciousness is an accessible practice that does not require any additional time or resources devoted to it if they are unavailable and one can begin anytime they choose. Through my experience at Fostervillage over the past three years, I have witnessed the nurturing of communication skills that transcend the dominant paradigm.

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11 Ecological permaculture is a systems approach to food and material production based on horticulture and includes a set of principles first outlined by David Holmgren and Bill Mollison in 1978. See *Permaculture: Principles & Pathways Beyond Sustainability* (Holmgren, 2002).

12 Social permaculture is a systems approach to human interaction. See *Empowerment Manual* (Starhawk, 2012).

CHANGING COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

It is never too late to become a better communicator. Research in neuroscience has shown that plasticity of the mind allows for new learning to be retained in healthy minds of many ages (Buonomano, et. al, 1998 in Hall, 2013). This should give one hope that no matter what age one decides to change their communication patterns, it can theoretically be done. The bioregional movement shows just how quickly these communication tools can penetrate public settings and change the culture of a community. During the second North American bioregional congress of 1987, the Ecofeminist Committee proposed to incorporate into the gathering a set of groupwork techniques and tools such as conflict resolution and co-counselling. These tools stem from a long history of developing egalitarian social technologies — from native communities such as the Lakota and the Syilx, Latin America's liberatory pedagogy movement, the worldwide feminist movement, and the Quaker influenced non-violence movements, among others. The reason for this integration was a clear need for tools that assisted with working through conflict rather than avoiding and/or dismissing uncomfortable moments. With their integration greater solidarity could be reached through tension release and empowerment (Carr, 2004). The reverberations of their introduction in activist spaces such as the bioregional gatherings is clear and now the techniques are being taught in university structures such as Portland State.

Writing from experience, Occupy serves as another model of how empowering communication tools can be put into practice with lasting effects. Inspired by the general assemblies in Spain that utilized consensus decision-making, when Occupy Wall Street began on September 17th of 2011 the original occupiers immediately adopted the consensus model as their go-to process. For many occupiers that poured into Zuccotti Park over the subsequent weeks, and those that created their own local reclamations of public space in their hometowns, it was their first exposure to the empowering process of consensus. Certainly there are challenges with the model, including scalability and improperly facilitated sessions. However, on the whole it was practiced daily and continues to be implemented and fine-tuned in the broader, more cellular networks that have developed or re-established since the destruction of the physical

Occupy camps through State repression. What both the bioregional gatherings and Occupy camps offered was a space to practice alternative forms of power sharing; including mutual aid and collectivization of vision for more just, respectful and liberated societies. As a participant during Occupy Portland's thirty-nine days of establishing a temporary autonomous zone, it became clear to me that although we had the capacity to create the physical infrastructure for cultural change, it was the interpersonal work that allowed for that infrastructure to be maintained. In that area I witnessed the unconscious playing out of western notions of individualism, hierarchy, sexism, racism, classism, etc. There was a clear need for empowerment as well as communication tools to work together beyond these divisions and interpersonal power struggles.

POWER and EMPOWERMENT

To unpack the notions of power and empowerment for the sake of this project, it is vital that shared definitions of power and empowerment exist. In purely scientific terms, power is the rate of doing work. In the social sciences, it is relational. Power can be defined as the ability to manipulate and control the behavior of others, as well as oneself. Power can also be broken down into its variations: violence, wealth and knowledge (Toffler, 1990). Additionally, I describe control as the process of defining others' realities for them. In this sense, power and control become interchangeable. Empowerment stands in stark contrast to this last description of power. Critical consciousness, or conscientization (Freire, 2000, Pewewardy, 2013) is the first step of empowerment. It is a relational process of offering tools and confidence for critical assessment and engagement with the world. The irony that empowerment can happen at the expense of someone else's power is not lost. A king that seeks to empower his son by allowing him to make strategic decisions in a war fails to approach empowerment systemically. The analysis of power through a systems theory lens is necessary if the goal is to generate sustainable systems of organization that follow the original instructions, prescribing balance, reciprocity and regeneration as necessary components for a healthy system.

POWER ACCUMULATION: A TIMELINE

"[T]here remains among many [Indigenous peoples] a desire to live in the world

as opposed to living on, above or in control of the world."

(Wildcat in Deloria et. al., 2001, p. 53)

This sections explores how the accumulation of western consciousness continues to lead to a desire to construct rational systems of control over and against the unpredictability, or wildness, of nature. This is then contrasted with a place-based consciousness which acknowledges its part within and seeks guidance from living systems. Multiple lenses are used to understand the flow of power from decentralized, tribal social arrangements to centralized governments and the wealthy families that influence them greatly. These lenses include, but are not limited to: decolonial, bioregionalist, anti-capitalist, eco-feminist and green anarchist schools of thought.

Domestication, Agriculture & the Rise of the State

For 90,000 years, most humans were satisfied with the nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle of hunting and foraging which integrated horticultural practices. Food gathered utilizing horticultural practices maintains and increases production of certain plants, but to the untrained eye leaves forests and prairies in a wild appearing state (for more information, see *Keeping It Living*, Douglas Deur et. al.) There have been at least 38 theories proposed for why agriculture arose in the meeting place of the African, Asian and European continents, and why it replaced other food production methods in many parts of the world (Cowan et. al, 2006). It is important to note that its rise coincided roughly with the end of the last glacial period about 12,000 years ago. The reasons for agriculture's rise is certainly multicausal. Many suggest that the rapidly changing weather patterns and spread of disease, in addition to over-hunting, created a need for more secure food sources (Cowan, et. al. 2006; Luckert, 2013). Systemically, domestication of starchy tubers and grains meant an abundant caloric input which served to create a reinforcing feedback loop: higher infant survival rate leading to an increase in population leading

to more labor for increasing yields and so on. An increasing population led to specialization in labor, urbanization, recorded language for tax collection purposes by religious/proto-governmental institutions, which in turn established the first standing armies and recorded monarchs to protect and control the surplus.

KEY OUTCOMES:
- Patriarchy is established. Women's role in society is downgraded from autonomous provider to child-bearer and unpaid laborer. In non-agricultural societies, 80% of total calories comes from gathering while 20% comes from hunting (Gero et. al, 1993).
- Increased famine and disease due to denser populations and a less diverse diet.
- Relationship to land and other species becomes focused on controlling conditions and domesticating crop plants and animals.
- A sedentary lifestyle leads to domestication and storage of grains and animals, and produces readily available goods for trade.
- Political authority is seized by priests who operate the temples that store some of the surplus.
- Creating and protecting surplus generates need for borders and a standing army.
- Taxation to maintain protection of surplus gives rise to a more abstract notion of economy, language is recorded through symbols in order to maintain records of credit and debit. Power is accumulated by those who have access to reading and writing, furthering a division of classes.

Urbanization, Atomism, Objectification, Abstraction and the Recorded Truth

The rise of hierarchies (sexism, classism, individualism) and the desire to control developed alongside agriculture and gave rise to the city-state. Due to the specialization of labor which a surplus economy permits, massive human settlements were established with trade networks funneling fundamental resources into urbanized areas. The developing western worldview disassociated further and further from that which sustains life. Cultural protocols of reciprocity with the land replaced by a linear worship of God(s) established degrees of separation from nature. This can be seen in the works of Aristotle, Plato and Proclus as they articulate the "great chain of being". See figure 1 in appendix.

Urbanization led to the disintegration of the small-scale village as identity reinforcer, and new identities at an atomistic, individual level replaced a holistic, collectivist identity. Written language shifted from being symbolic to being phonetic. This allowed for thought and word to be abstracted beyond human experience (Abram, 1996); whereas an indigenous language "requires abstract concept formation

in the service of the experience" (Wildcat, 2001, pg 47-48). Education was no longer practiced collectively, but through specialized institutions which began ordering, organizing, and protecting information to produce a big picture of the world as it could be quantified, cementing in the mind unchanging, objective truths. Critically, a loss occurred of teaching youth how a human fits into the community and into the world—what Vine Deloria describes as "personality" and Cornel Pewewardy describes as "peoplehood." An education lacking empowerment and purposefulness contributed to an existential crisis in subsequent generations (Deloria, 2001; Pewewardy, 2014).

Accumulation of wealth by a powerful consortium of church and state officials continues under "primitive accumulation" (Marx, 2011; Federici, 2004), or, the ruling classes' strategy of violent expropriation of the feudal commons in the movement towards a capitalist society. Policies of enclosure[13] from the 15th Century on brought homelessness and joblessness into the realm of possibility for people no longer able to dwell in the land through a subsistence economy. Women, keepers of much of traditional ecological knowledge (herbal medicine, midwifery, plant tending, etc) in European society, were persecuted severely during this time period—15th, 16th and 17th centuries—marked by prevalent "Witch Hunts." It is important to note that during every century there are uprisings and rebellions against the ruling class and their policies, yet none successfully dismantle the dominating power structures. What is of note is that seeds were planted for Euro-American land-based resistance which eventually informed the bioregional movement (see section "What is Bioregionalism?").

Mechanization, Reductionism, Colonialism and Capitalism

Stability is not a trait that reinforcing feedback loops portray. On the contrary, it is exponential growth and decay which are frequent markers of such systems. Wild oscillations including the rise and fall of empires along with the booms and collapses of urban populations due to famine and disease are significant indicators of how the western worldview lacks effective instructions for maintaining healthy,

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13 For additional information on enclosure policies, the commons, and resistance movements, see *Stop, Thief!* (Linebaugh, 2014).

regenerative, and relatively stable cycles. The need to constantly increase access to resources and land was reinforced by religious leaders and government officials during the Age of Discovery (1500s), when colonization and genocide of indigenous peoples increased significantly. The atrocities committed by explorers such as Columbus, Pizarro and De Soto can be linked to malignant egophrenia (Forbes et. al., 2008). This insatiable hunger continues today; translating itself into capitalism fueled by consumerism. Sparing no cultural practice from commodification it justifying itself as progress — the beating heart of the western worldview.

The Age of Reason (17th century) and the Enlightenment (late 17th - 18th century) brought forth the framework from which much of modern science operates under. Scientism, a dogmatic belief that scientific process and empiricism provide the ultimate authority on Truth, developed an alternative spiritual structure for those questioning the existence of God(s). If one was to imagine a pendulum swinging, it would have swung from one extreme of monolithic Truths based on God's word to taxonomic classifications based on the scientific method (Foucault, 1994). Neither on their own adequately describe the human experience. Some of the most influential philosophers, mathematicians and scientists at this time set the stage for the industrial revolution. Along with early theorists of political economy like Ricardo, Say, Malthus, and Smith, noted philosophers René Descartes, Gottfried Leibniz, Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, Jeremy Bentham and Immanuel Kant ushered in a new era of progress — further disconnected from the land and humanity and disregarding the possibility that time and space are inherently linked. These lines of thought continue to dominate the western worldview today. Descartes' theories on the separateness of mind and body and on the clockwork-like mechanistic nature of the universe continue to inform much of modern thought as seen in the pharmaceutical industry. Medications are created to deal with mental conditions such as depression that are only now being linked to diet and physical health (Berk et. al, 2013). Francis Bacon's contribution of the scientific method also assists in maintaining a mechanistic view of the world that leaves no place for ethics or values-based feedback loops to exist. An invention such as the atomic bomb, it could be argued, would likely have failed to pass through a method that incorporated respect for life.

Popular social and economic theorists at the time, such as Thomas Hobbes, Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, and John Stuart Mill loudly ring the bell of progress utilizing a rational, utilitarian approach that prioritizes sovereignty over nature. In one of his more quoted statements, Hobbes utterly dismisses any other possibility:

> "In [a natural] condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving, and removing, such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."
>
> - in *Leviathan, chapter XIII*

The rise of nation-states from feudal kingdoms begins with the independence of the colonies (Anderson, 1983) to form the United States soon followed by the French Revolution and creating a cascading effect. The individual's identity again shifts from that of subject under the crown to citizen of a nation-state. Nationalism, the process of crafting an identity for the population of a nation-state is undertaken through centralized governments that adopt common symbols, maps, flags, slogans, anthems, etc. which serve to develop a sense of unity between populations while replacing traditional community identities (Ibid., 1983). With maps, borders solidify as the planet and ancient cultures are divided. Examples of this include the US/Canadian border separating the Ktunaxa people between what is now British Columbia, Idaho and Washington and the Kumeyaay people between what is now California and Mexico's Baja (Starks et. al., 2011). The ultra-reformist philosopher Jeremy Bentham prescribed a cold, rational approach to society at large under this shifting sovereignty, involving economic calculations intent upon the creation of a self-governing, rational *body politic*, controlled not simply by law (although his proposals for a centralized police force were met with widespread criticisms of tyranny), but by economic measures, such as the calculated provision of sufficient sustenance to stave off starvation while ensuring a degree of desperation required to endeavour upon even the most degrading of jobs: "The force of the physical sanction [hunger] being sufficient," he theorized, "the employment of the political sanction would be superfluous" (Bentham, 1864). Though promises of democracy provide incentive for

global peoples to unify into nation-states, economic liberalism and free-market policies serve to undermine democratic institutions. Power continues to consolidate into the hands of the wealthy who utilize the militaries of their respective nation-states to expand their personal empires, accruing land and resources through force both violently and economically (Marx, et. al, 1967).

Racism, as a social construct, arises during the 18th century in order to justify slavery as morally just. A scientific racism is proposed by Carl Linnaeus, breaking down human populations according to skin tone: white, black, yellow and red (Linneaus, 1758) and is adopted quickly by the elite and bourgeoisie in order to continue defending slavery. Laws enshrining slavery are not passed in the United States until poor white-skinned people begin organizing rebellions alongside blacks slaves (Fredrickson, 2003). Charles Darwin's writings, and specifically his mention of "survival of the fittest" (Darwin, 1909) are also adopted towards economic gains and used to justify domination of the weak by the strong, ignoring the context in which Darwin's observations were made - specifically that his observations are based on real or perceived scarcity (Gould, 1988). Anti-semitism was popularized throughout the 19th Century as a reflexive, nationalist reaction to class inequality, which scape-goated Jews through acts of mass catharsis such as the Dreyfus Affair and the Pogroms, and set the pace for the Holocaust. The accumulation of wealth and sharpening of class divisions through competition, neoliberal policies and the institution of capitalism all but replaced self-determination as a notion of how a group of people can make a better life for themselves with the idea that an "individual can buy individuality" as long as the nation's enemies are cleared out of the way (Anderson, 1983).

The transition from a subsistence economy to a capitalist market economy where the means of production are controlled by owners began during the middle ages, but grew exponentially during the industrial revolution. This move from the ancient tradition of a "production-for-use" based society devalued the role of women and separated productive work from reproductive work (Federici, 2004). This sexual division of labor was one of the essential components of establishing a society which accepted and continues to accept exploitation.

All of this is to say that the western worldview has been crafted by many points of divergence, from small-scale communities living with the land sustainably (as 90,000 years proves) to societies that can be described as unrooted, individualist, coldly rational and focused on control, as well as prediction, in the name of progress towards further urbanization and material consumption. One of the most chilling stories of this worldview playing out is one of Adolph Eichmann, a lieutenant-colonel in Hitler's army charged with the task of cost-efficiently transporting Jews to death camps and ghettos throughout eastern Europe, orders he followed perfectly. After Germany lost and Hitler committed suicide, in an attempt to hide, Eichmann moved to Austria and then Argentina. Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency, tracked him down and brought him to Jerusalem to account for his crimes. For his critical role in a precise and industrious orchestration of the holocaust against the Jewish people Eichmann stood trial and was executed in May of 1962. According to Hannah Arendt's account of the trial, Eichmann showed no remorse for what he had done, nor hatred for the Jewish people. He simply stated that he was doing his job (Arendt, 1963).

Division of labor beyond hunter/horticulturalist, that had begun during the neolithic/agricultural revolution found its rational, economic conclusion. Eichmann is not alone in a willingness to sacrifice life for efficiency. At an ecological level, these traits ultimately play out as following: nature is seen absent of agency, nothing in nature is sacred and all should be used for an individual's economic gain, all economic gain is progress (Winter, 1996). Today, multinational corporations hide behind their non-human entities as they murder activists and journalists in Brazil and other resource-rich lands that stand in the way of profit (Global Witness, 2012). A society that supports such cold, rational thought and action in the name of progress has so far failed to ensure thrivability for all. In fact, there are clear warning calls of ecological collapse (Motesharrei, et. al, 2014). A worldview that acknowledges interdependence, reciprocity, intention, and a respect for rootedness in a particular place is necessary for shifting the destiny of humanity. A science is emerging that embraces these values.

BASIC COMPONENTS of COMPLEX and LIVING SYSTEMS THEORIES

In contrast to a cold, mechanical universe that Descartes and his contemporaries envisioned, a scientific theory of living systems defines itself as showing traits of emergent behavior, decomposition, recomposition, interdependence, and reproduction (Maturena and Valera, 1972; Markewitz, 2014; Hall, 2013). Markewitz qualifies interdependence as the "bandwidth" of each living system's relationships with natural phenomena needed for existence. Complex systems thinking, of which living systems are a part, arose out of the realization that natural systems (including those created by human beings) were not reducible to their smallest parts (Lazlo, 1996). Since the 1600's, most scientists imagined the world and all of its components to be like a giant machine. If only there was enough time to unscrew and examine all the pieces, surely humanity would understand how everything worked. Prediction and control were the desired outcomes.

In 1927, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, within the discipline of quantum mechanics, mathematically proved the inability to know for sure both the location *and* speed of a particle in space. This led eventually to the acceptance of chaos in the universe (Mitchell, 2009) and scientists have, since the 1950's, been working to update various academic disciplines and develop interdisciplinary spaces in universities to study complex systems.For example, the study of emergent properties of the economy is no longer confined to classical economics but must include an understanding of social sciences as well as mathematics and computer science. As perhaps already predicted at the dawn of the modern era by the iconoclastic anti-philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, and reaffirmed by the participants of May 1968, the excesses and distortions of systems of power held by the western worldview has brought about its continuous collapse and reconfiguration, and today even the walls within the ivory tower are crumbling. Isolated university departments are being replaced by a network of information shared from many disciplines - interconnectedness is beginning to be acknowledged.

It is important to note that as an emerging science, there is still a wide variety of definitions for complex systems, and I offer the perspective of only a few systems scholars. Similar to living systems, complex systems can be described by several common properties: complex collective behavior, signaling

and information processing, and adaptation. The terms "self-organizing" and "emergent" also apply. What all complex systems have in common is that they start off from simple rules, but can quickly begin showing nontrivial emergent as well as self-organizing behavior (Mitchell, 2009). Analyzing a seed to predict exactly how big it will grow is impossible since tree growth is not only dependent on genetic information, but also on unpredictable environmental conditions. Similarly, predicting what the stock market will do one year from now becomes impossible, due to its wide bandwidth of relationships. The scope becomes too vast to take every factor into account. Making perfectly accurate predictions desired by the kind of linear thinking that the Age of Reason brought forth no longer can be expected. Relatedly, control of complex systems is also proven impossible since there are too many factors to take into account. The western desire for control and prediction can not be satisfied when complex systems are recognized. Instead, systems scientists are learning to see patterns, and are developing a mental flexibility to accommodate emergent behaviors. In figure 3 below, Lazlo (1996) summarizes and the contrasts between perspective shifts that systems thinkers are proposing.

Atomistic vs Systems Worldviews (Laszlo, 1996)

	Mechanistic / Atomistic View	Systems View
Nature	Giant machine composed of intricate parts	Organism, non-deterministic behavior
Objects	Atomistic, individualistic, separable	Connected, community, integrity
Matter	Materialistic, measureable, distinct	Interacting flows of energy, unpredictability
Priorities	Material accumulation, power, compete-to-win	Information, education, communication, services
Progress	Material growth	Sustainable development
Cultural relativism	Eurocentric	Diversity of human cultures
Species relativism	Anthropocentric	Ecocentric
Social Sciences	Struggle for survival, self-interest	Cooperation, tolerance, harmony
Medical Science	Factual, impersonal interventions to fix machine	Wholistic care of mind and body

Fig. 3

Donella Meadows in *Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System* (1999) wisely points out where breakdowns of a system occur and ways to intervene. Her observations of breakdowns coincide with the stiff reductionist, rationalist, and linear approach that is embedded in the western worldview. She

lists the following as a system's leverage points in order of increasing effectiveness (12-7). These include: looking at the parameters that are set; the buffers that are allowed relative to flow; the available materials and flows; the length of delays in a system; and the strength of negative feedback loops and gains around positive feedback loops. The aforementioned leverage points are often addressed at the institutional level through nongovernmental organizations and nonprofits. The final six are focused on in the communication tools portion and represent deeper level opportunities for change which inform the previous six leverage points listed:

Systems Leverage Points (Meadows, 1999)	Corresponding Communication Tools
6. The flow and accessibility of information	Curiosity and Wonder,
5. The assumptions and rules from which the system operates	Active and Reflective Listening, Embodiment
4. The power to add, change, evolve, or self-organize a system structure	Collective Decision-Making, Non-attachment
3. The goals of the system	Intention Setting
2. The mindset or paradigm out of which the system—goals, structure, rules, delays, parameters—arises.	Critical Consciousness, Curiosity and Wonder, Empathy,
1. The power to transcend paradigms	Vulnerability, Yes/And Cognitive Flexibility, Empathy, Non-attachment

The overlap in what Indigenous scholars have been presenting as their community's worldviews and what systems science is now affirming is startling. What is taking shape is a new cosmology, or worldview that can potentially grow from the decaying worldview of westernism. Referred to as eco-philosophy, or bioregional philosophy, Henryk Skolimowsky articulates its orientations concisely and draws upon the teachings of the Lakota people:

- The new cosmology must reflect realization that the face of the Earth is now intimately intertwined with the fate of the human species. We are the universe and the universe is us.
- Evolution is a continuum of creative becoming, and humans are the result of this process as well as its facilitators.
- With our creative evolution of mind, we are reflections and participants of a greater universal whole. We are the Earth being conscious of itself.
- Humans are but one manifestation of an implicit universal order. All parts of this order interpenetrate one another. They are holistically codependent - "we are all related."
- Hope for human meaning and destiny underpins the motivation for human attempts to realize themselves and to affirm a future with compassion, courage, solidarity, and action.
- We continue to engender and cultivate reverence for life as a way of action and to acknowledge the beauty of life and the miracle of which it is an expression.

- In understanding the evolution and application of ecological ethics, we revere all living things, take responsibility for our relationship to Earth, for doing more with less, and for pursuing wisdom and self-actualization rather than all-consuming materialism.

(Skolimowski, 1992, p. 16-27)

To begin truly integrating these orientations into the self, it is critical that the deep-set patterns of westernism like control, prediction and individualism be constantly checked. I believe that no stronger method exists than exploring the everyday interactions in which worldviews play out and no stronger philosophy exists than the one articulated by bioregionalism. To begin shifting towards such a consciousness, conflict must be embraced as an opportunity for change and growth.

CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

Conflict, in its most basic form, is the negotiation of power. The fight or flight response is often the first reaction to threat. Conflict transformation, however, offers a third way. Edges in permaculture are noted as places of rapid growth and diversity as habitats overlap. Though conflict exists for space, a richer set of solutions also exists. Species indeed compete for space but also develop unique, mutually symbiotic relationships with one another to problem-solve. Traditional responses to conflict include overpowering (forcing one's will on the other) or disempowering (giving up one's will for another). This creates a win-lose scenario. The binary logic that fuels this mode of conflict, evidence of which is found globally, must be replaced by a third way whenever possible. Conflict transformation seeks to "*minimize* the destructive effects of social conflict and *maximize* its potentialities for growth" (Lederach, 1995) by sharing resources of both parties. There are many tools available for conflict transformation and it is essential that they be implemented for a bioregional consciousness to take hold. First, the ability to hold one's ground during conflict must take place through a process called conscientization.

CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS and PEOPLEHOOD IN EDUCATION

What does it look like to move away from an educational system that promotes competition and towards cooperation? What would an education that empowers each student to think critically and contribute meaningfully in their community encompass? Liberatory pedagogy, methods developed by Paulo Freire in 20th century and fine-tuned by his successors since, have created an incredible amount of tools for practicing education for empowerment. The first step in the method was to help his students develop critical consciousness, a conscientization of the ways in which oppression is perpetrated in their own lives and an awareness around how liberation from oppression can be achieved (Freire, 2000). For empowerment to occur, Freire also realized that the classroom dynamics of powerful/knowledgeable instructor and powerless/ignorant students must be broken up. A learning community was developed in its place with a focus on dialogue. "Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education" (Freire, 1989, p. 81). He insisted that the treatment of students as safety deposit boxes of information must be transformed.

Freire's work has inspired revolutionary educational practices that are only now gaining ground in institutions such as Portland State (PSU). PSU offers few opportunities to participate in such a process. I purposefully sought out three such instructors in order to witness the ways in which a liberatory pedagogy is put into praxis. A typical day in Dr. Cornel Pewewardy's classroom on "Critical Tribal Race Theory" finds him prepared with materials and assigned readings. Students enter and begin the class with Dr. Pewewardy sharing a song of his ancestors, the Kiowa and the Comanche. Most of the rest of the class period is spent in dialogue over material that engages students with critical consciousness and discussions that nurture thoughts. In dialogue one can never be incorrect and students share thoughts that are both fully formed or still forming. A collective wisdom emerges from the group that Dr. Pewewardy contributes to and guides along. Critical consciousness is raised. I leave feeling a little more knowledgeable, and often filled with more questions than I came with. A cycle of conscientization continues within me.

The other component to a liberatory education is the respect for traditional knowledge. Western education seeks to indoctrinate into one form of reality. Traditional styles of teaching are focused on teaching by example or experience. Knowing self, discovering self in relation to others - this helps to strip away the desire to define reality for others. If one doesn't know themselves they are constantly struggling to do so and thereby resort to power games to find security of self as well as an inability to empathize with others (Deloria, 2001).

> "Traditional knowledge enables us to see our place and our responsibility within the movement of history as it is experienced by the community. Formal American education, on the other hand, helps us to understand how things work, and knowing how things work and being able to make them work are the marks of a professional person in this society….The shortcoming in American institutional life is that most people can not distinguish these two ways of knowing; and for many Americans there is no personal sense of knowing who they are, so professionalism always overrules the concern for persons."
> (Ibid, p. 46)

A SYSTEMS VIEW: RECONTEXTUALIZATION

Much of the material that Dr. Pewewardy shares offers context around the concepts which students will be exploring through dialogue. When Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* (1980) was published, it released the stories of many American experiences that had been left off the pages of history texts. Without exposure to such a work as Zinn's, an American citizen could live their whole life thinking that the only people that contributed to wealth and power in the United States were those who already had wealth and power as mentioned in their school books. In order for systems to self-regulate it must be able to respond to feedback appropriately. Information must be accessible to all components and guarded from corruption (Meadows, 2009). Democracy, a system of governance that many nation-states including the United States claim to utilize, fails to effectively function when the general population is not empowered with enough information to make informed decisions. Voting becomes a gesture easily manipulated by well-funded misinformants that influences the public to make decisions against their own self interest. As witnessed with the National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden's brave step towards transparency and the subsequent manhunt, information is flowing,

but generally flows up to those in positions of power and back out through (mostly) controlled networks. To restore healthy information flow, transparency must be restored. Additionally, horizons of time and space must be stretched in order to bring into the moment a wider view of historical context as well as present physical reality (Meadows, 2009) which requires developing an active, constantly curious mind.

TOOL: APPROACHING WITH CURIOSITY AND WONDER

A tool to utilize at the individual and local community level for recontextualization and information flow is inquiry. Re-establishing information flows in a system by recontextualizing events and actions is one such leverage point in moving towards a bioregional consciousness. The story of a tomato, for example does not have to begin and end with its relationship to the purchaser at the grocery store. To recontextualize the relationship, the purchaser can ask questions such as "where was this tomato grown?", "which watershed does the water in this tomato come from?", "who grew this tomato?", "what economic conditions is my purchase of this tomato promoting?" and "what fungicides, herbicides and pesticides were utilized in growing this tomato?". All of these questions allow for the purchaser to develop a deeper connection with their food and has systemic consequences as informed, values-aligned decisionmaking replaces hasty consumerism.

During interpersonal conflict, two of the greatest challenges to honest information gathering is being unaware of personal filters and fear from the other that judgement is being cast. This can influence both the quality and quantity of information that can be gathered and ultimately affects the outcome of the conflict. As the information gatherer, it is crucial to set a container, or an acknowledged behavior protocol. This can look like stating, "I will do my best not to judge you. I would like to hear your truth to better understand where you are coming from." The types of questions posed must come from a place of curiosity and wonder (Clott, 2013). Understanding personal filters is also essential. Alfred Korzybski, founder of General Semantics, developed this mental model to explain how personal filters affect experience. Where "Fido" is that which is being perceived, it

is the interaction, or "event" that is processed through several

filters of the mind. Maintaining awareness of filters allows

the inquirer to stay critically conscious.

The ability to separate identity-based inquiry from behavior-

based inquiry is crucial. While some components of identity

are changeable such as class and gender, others thoroughly

comprise one's mode in the world as experienced by self and

perceived by others. There is little room for negotiation when

making assumptions and attributing behavior based on outward

appearance (stereotyping). Where there is room to negotiate

change is by drawing attention to an individual's behavior

 as well as challenging structural and cultural patterns.

A synthesis of several communication for empowerment methods

offers the following[14]:

Fig. 2 Korzybski's Model of the

Filtered Experience (Korzybski, 2000)

1. consider how you would feel if you were in the other person's shoes.

2. start with positive intentions.

3. Listen to their side and take time to let it sink in before reacting.

4. Consider their needs and feelings.

5. Address them respectfully.

6. Use positive, descriptive language that does not judge, blame, criticize or label

7. Use "I" messages instead of "You" messages (speak from personal

experience)

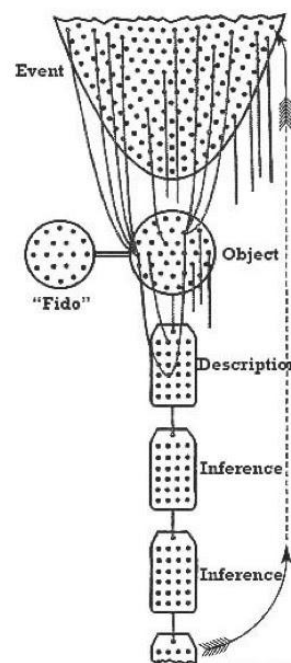**8. Make your body language and tone of voice relaxed and receptive.**

9. Be clear.

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14 These methods include nonviolent communication, clean communication, cooperative communication, centered
communication, and compassionate listening.

10. Be as open and honest about your feelings and needs as possible.

11. Focus on strengths and positive characteristics more than weaknesses.

(Connors in *Seeing Systems: Peace, Justice, and Sustainability*, 2014)

TOOL: EMPATHETIC, REFLECTIVE LISTENING for AWARENESS and ACTION

Though most people have the ability to process sound as well as body language in a conversation, the art of listening is not focused on in mainstream education. As a primary social skill, developing listening skills that build trust and cooperation is a means of closing a communication loop that can either sidestep conflict or work through it. Reflective listening is a process that respects what the person has to say and allows for the listener to test hypotheses on what they think they heard. Breakdowns in listening occur when:

- The speaker is unable to articulate themselves fully
- The listener is misunderstands the message
- The listener interprets the message differently than the speaker

(Rosengren in Miler et. al, 2002)

Important elements to consider as a listener include matching the tone and body language of the speaker as well as keeping in mind three steps that reflective listening can follow:

1. **Repeating or Rephrasing** - the listener repeats what they have heard while maintaining most of the original phrasing
2. **Paraphrasing** - the listener interprets what they have heard and adds their own inferences in a restatement
3. **Reflection of Feeling** - the listener draws out the emotional aspects from what they've heard using feeling statements (see Appendix for figures 4 and 5)

(Rosengren in Miller et. al, 2002)

The last element is often the most challenging, not only because listening is not practiced well but because the type of deep, emotional listening required for reflecting feelings is so often shunned in westernism. In conflict, reflective listening can be utilized through a back-and-forth dialogue meant to draw out the deepest sets of needs, feelings and values. Rosengren also offers several prompts that can be used when practicing reflective listening:

- "So you feel…"
- "It sounds like you…"
- "You're wondering if…"

<div align="center">(Rosengren in Miler et. Al, 2002)</div>

As a participant in the second bioregional congress noted when reflective listening was introduced into the gathering, "Within bioregional community building, women and men can begin to articulate what it might mean to be females and males in the new society. The more we oppress each other and the planet, the less we are alive. As we learn to listen to the natural world and to each, our perceptions are deepened, our intuition is reclaimed, our intelligence heightened, and all life is enhanced." (Hart et al., 1987).

THE SELF IN RELATIONSHIP

The western notion of self differs significantly from the indigenous, bioregional notion. The hyper-independent self that is promoted in modern day capitalism and individual rights-based language serves multiple functions for maintaining an economically liberal power structure that funnels wealth into the hands of the already wealthy and maintains a populace unwilling to unite and dismantle the dominant paradigm. As soon as the fabric of community began to unravel during the move towards urbanization at the beginning of the neolithic revolution, an existential crisis emerged. A relational identity[15] was no longer provided for those raised in an urbanized environment full of choice through an education system meant to indoctrinate rather than empower. Erich Fromm, a 20th century rabbinical scholar and psychologist, witnessed this existential angst on a regular basis and proposed a cure: love and reason. To Fromm love meant care, responsibility, knowledge and respect. As a humanist, he believed that through biophilia and love for humanity as well as independence and freedom, society could indeed heal its existential crisis. Important concepts he promoted were establishing rootedness (feeling a sense of

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15 Whether the prescribed identity was desired or not is another matter not covered here, though it is important to note that the feeling of being "trapped" in a community is often stated as a reason for leaving for more densely populated areas.

belonging to place), a frame of orientation (understanding one's place in the world), oneness with the rest

of humanity and the natural world, and purposefulness as well as accomplishment (Fromm, 1994).

From a systems perspective, the self is fully a holon, both independent and interdependent. To

wrap one's mind around such a possibility requires a shift from thinking in "either/or" to thinking in

"both/and" or "yes/and". From the moment of conception, the self is dependent on the mother and all that

it takes to sustain her. From birth, the human body begins to collect bacteria that not only aids in digestion

but simply coexists with the human body. In fact, bacteria cells outnumber human cells in the body 10:1

(Tannock, 1995). There is never a moment where the physical self is alone or cut off from that which

sustains it as well. The air consumed by animals is the air exhaled by plants and vice versa.

Cooperation in a system is obvious when a relational view of self exists. Although cooperation

exists regardless of whether it is acknowledged or respected, cooperation skills are incredibly lacking in a

society that rewards competition over cooperation. In a bioregional community, cooperation skills are

taught as an essential component of peoplehood (Cajete, 2000; Deloria et. al, 2001). There are many

social tools that have been developed over millennia that strive to return balance, harmony, and diversity

into decisions and they especially shine when conflicts arise—an inevitability when working with others.

Additionally, it has been noted that in order for a liberatory cycle (see Fig. 6) to take place, a community

of practice is essential for creating change and maintaining those changes. For a shift towards bioregional

consciousness, this means finding a group of committed people with similar desires. When working in a

group, even if all have similar goals the dreaded moments of conflict are not escapable, but they are

embraceable.

**TOOL: GROUP DECISION-MAKING, PRACTICING NON-ATTACHMENT, EMBODIMENT
AND YES/AND COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY**

When conflict emerges, it can seem like the two parties are at an impasse. In the consensus

decision-making process frequently practiced in social and ecological justice organizations throughout

Cascadia[16], yes/and thinking is utilized regularly though perhaps more subliminally. When a group is deciding what kind of action to take, a proposal is brought by one or a committee of members. If time has been spent lovingly crafting a proposal there is likely going to exist a certain level of attachment. Within consensus process, it is explicitly acknowledged that when a proposal is presented it ceases to be the property of the proposer and becomes owned by the entire group. In this way, the habit of attachment is named and addressed. The three main rounds of consensus decision-making. The initializing round of clarifying questions exists to make sure that all are sharing a common understanding of the expressed language of the proposal. The second round is for raising concerns. This allows for the collective wisdom of the group to surface and rinse the proposal of possible shortcomings. In a modified process called "consent" practiced in Dynamic Governance or Sociocracy,[17] the concerns process is limited to solutions that people are willing to live with rather than attempting to craft the best possible proposal in that moment. The final process involves all group members to agree to the decision or stand aside. A block can occur when group members sense that their concern was adequately addressed *and* the consequences will effect will be detrimental to the functioning of the group. Herein lies the essence of yes/and thinking: what is tolerable for others may not be tolerable for one. What is key is that differences of opinion are recognized yet do not impede in the group acting. The ability to acknowledge one's personal uncomfortability with a decision while embracing the forward motion means respecting that while elements may be mutually exclusive, there is a place for a greater all to exist, regardless.

The *en'owkin* decision-making process (Armstrong, 2008) practiced by the Syilx, or Okanagan people of what is known as southern British Columbia developed to reflect deeper elements of bioregionalism. Syilx translates into "people with a continuous responsibility to bind and twine together many strands into one strand" (Armstrong as quoted in Hall, 2008, p. 146). The process itself translates into "a slow-dripping onto the head." Essential components include a recognition that voices from elders,

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16 Cascadia is recognized as a bioregion that spans from southern Alaska to northern California and East to the contintental divide of what is known as northern North America or Turtle Island.

17 A systems approach to government practiced in various levels of authority throughout Scandinavia (see Buck, 2007)

youth, mothers and fathers are needed which in turn allows minority voices to be brought into balance with those more frequently heard. Additionally, embodiment occurs where participants are trained to speak for those without voice (e.g., water, salmon, etc.). For this process to function fully, empathy must exist within the collective.

TOOL: EMPATHY AND VULNERABILITY

For native peoples, it was colonization that established their first point of divergence from their original worldviews, violently and exploitatively. Colonization, Dr. Michael Yellow Bird and Dr. Waziyatawin offer, is "both the formal and informal methods (behavioral, ideological, institutional, political, and economical) that maintain the subjugation and/or exploitation of Indigenous Peoples, land, and resources." (Wazayatawin and Yellow Bird, ed., 2012, p. 3) This can only be addressed through decolonization, a process they define as seeking to resist and ultimately overturn colonialism in order to realize Indigenous liberation. Through colonization, a cycle of violence has left many without a fully developed capacity for empathy and through mindfulness practice a form of what Dr. Yellow Bird refers to as "neurodecolonization", it becomes possible to re-strengthen the *anterior cingulate* which is the area of the brain where our humanity appears to reside (*Decolonizing the Mind - A Talk by Dr. Michael Yellow Bird,* 2014). Mindfulness practice is developing a deep sense of both self-awareness and stillness. In Buddhist tradition, this is described as meditation. The ability to sit in stillness for an extended period of time, according to Yellow Bird, assists in enhancing "intelligence, self-esteem, life satisfaction, optimism, creativity, compassion, ability to focus and relax, and acceptance of where one is in life" (Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird, ed. p. 67). It is a practice that supports healthy communication patterns.

The practice of vulnerability is another such tool. Whereas the western worldview creates a cultural phenomena of competition leading to the oppression of others through shame, guilt, and blame, researcher Brené Brown has discovered that learning vulnerability can release oneself from such oppressive habits. Her began with a focus on the roots of shame. To contrast, she looked at people whom she describes as "living whole-heartedly", unburdened by the chains of shame. Through this lens the

common denominator became the willingness to let oneself be vulnerable (*Brené Brown: The Power of Vulnerability,* 2010) What this can look like in practice is shifting a definition of weakness off of oneself and onto the actions being performed. Weakness in the system thus becomes not taking the steps necessary to admit mistakes and inquire about additional information. A strong system establishes feedback loops for itself and adjusts accordingly along the way.

TOOL: REPLACING ASSUMPTIONS WITH INTENTIONS

Assumptions are another place where social systems tend to break down. While assumptions are at their most basic understanding a negotiation of safety (Byron, 2013), the kind of communication systems that exist today: phones, email, text all tend to decontextualize the experience of human to human communication. Without body language or the ability to make eye contact it becomes very easy to misconstrue what others say, projecting feelings and desires onto the other person that don't exist in reality. Additionally, assumptions come from a desire to predict the future which, as was proven by Heisenberg, is quite uncertain. Therefore it becomes a matter of understanding where in the process empowerment can be found to change outcomes. Ultimately, the power to influence the outcome exists in the present moment. From there, if one practices self-awareness, or what is referred to as "checking in" with oneself, it is possible to set an intention for a desired outcome and act to support that outcome occurring. When one only sets assumptions about an outcome without acknowledging their role in manifesting it, there can be a breakdown in the process that leads to feelings of guilt, shame or blame.

CONCLUSION

I have just described only a handful of the available communication tools that I have personally experienced in communities of practice working towards a bioregional consciousness. Moving from an individual to a communal sense of self requires critical consciousness, self awareness, and an ability to step into the unknown. Conflict, while unavoidable when working with others, can be seen as an opportunity for growth with the proper tools. Practicing non-judgement and open-mindedness through

curiosity and wonder helps to develop a richer context for the situation. Using empathetic and reflective listening skills helps to further understand where others are coming from and deepens both connection and respect. Learning about various power-distributing group decision-making practices can assist in a holistic approach to problem-solving, creating solutions that are greater than any one individual's contribution. The practice of embodiment even brings in voices of other living systems that often go ignored. The ability to detach from one's ideas in order to embrace others as well as the ability to set intentions rather than assumptions allows one to be present in the moment and react as necessary rather than becoming stuck in a "we've always done it this way" attitude. Finally, the cognitive flexibility that is developed by utilizing a yes/and approach to opinions and ways of being allows for a diversity to exist, ultimately allowing a living system to be potentially prepared to withstand great adversity as communities begin to shift away from a westernist worldview.

An orientation towards a bioregional worldview ultimately requires seeing and participating in living systems of interaction. These systems, often embedded and interdependent are dynamic, constantly becoming. There is no end point stable-state to reach for, unlike the underlying message of goal-oriented progress found in westernism. It is one of the most powerful myths of the time that every human being on Earth can own all the goods they need for material comfort as provided by capitalism if only they work hard enough. It is antithetical to the essence of capitalism, since in order to function it must constantly be exploiting the labor and resources of one area for the accumulation of capital in another. If indeed a flourishing of humanity is to occur, this will depend on humanity's ability to develop resilient, life-affirming practices rooted in place. I have argued that through minimal shifts in communication patterns: reflective listening, empathy building, needs sharing, intention setting, and stepping into vulnerability, reverberating effects can take place in one's life. These changes, I have discovered, help transition a worldview based on scarcity and competition with unbalanced power distribution to one that acknowledges interdependence, embraces emergence, respects life, balance and practices reciprocity. As these are only a sample of the available tools, I ask that anyone curious for more seek out their local facilitators, mediators, and wise women for guidance.

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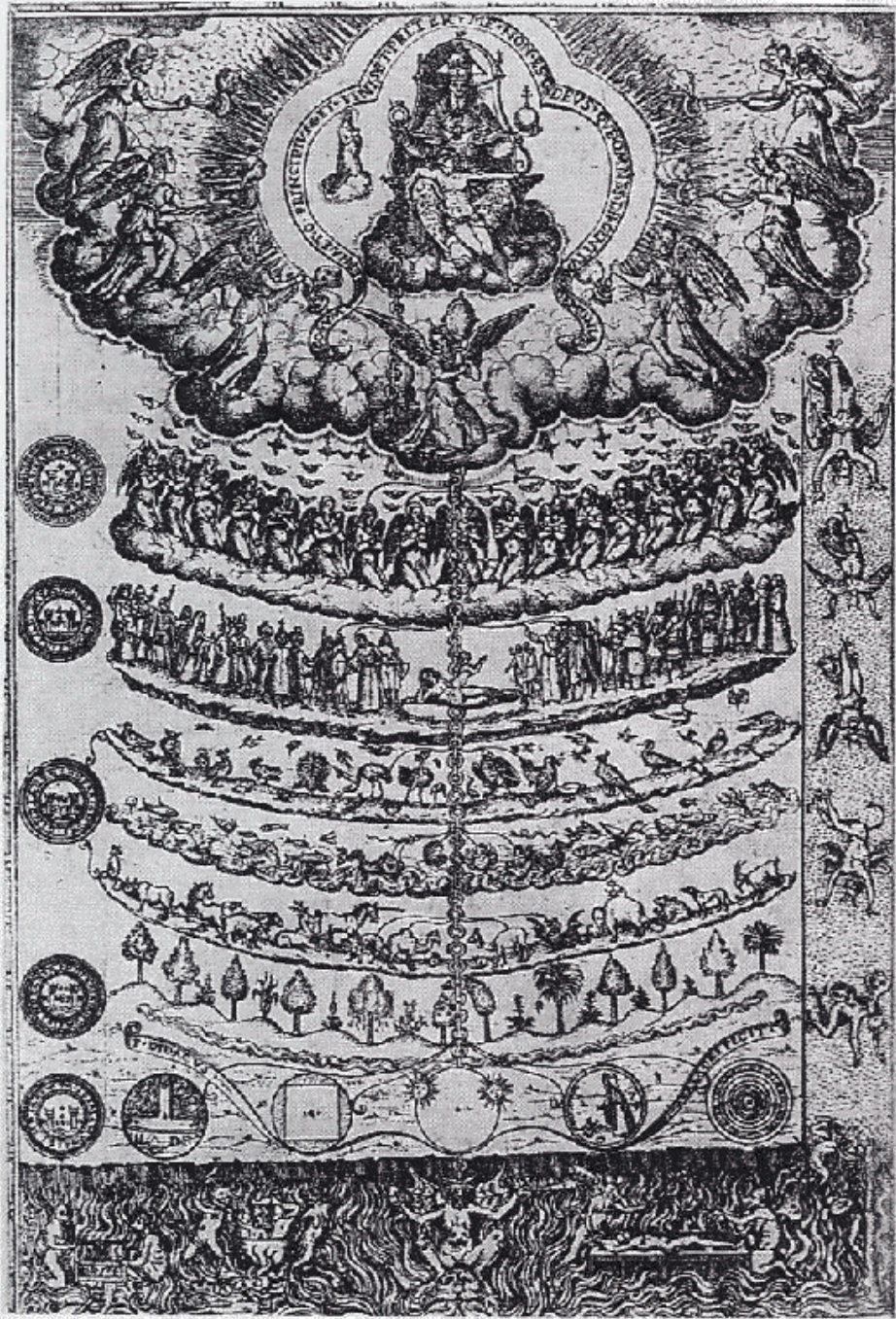
Fig. 1 - Great Chain of Being described by Aristotle, Plato, and Proclus 1579 drawing of from Didacus Valades, Rhetorica Christiana.

Needs Inventory

This list of needs is neither exhaustive nor definitive. It is meant as a starting place to support anyone who wishes to engage in a process of deepening self-discovery and to facilitate greater understanding and connection between people.

We often find that synonyms to the words listed here fit better. To facilitate this process, the needs are grouped by theme. Find the word that resonates with you. Remember that it might not even be on this list.

You might find it useful to highlight needs that you notice frequently during your self-discovery. These are your core needs.

- Air
- Balance
- Comfort
- Food
- Nourishment
- Physical Well-Being
- Protection
- Rest/sleep
- Sexual expression
- Safety
- Shelter
- Sustenance
- To Thrive
- Touch
- Water

- Authenticity
- Honesty
- Integrity
- Presence
- Self-worth
- Transparency

- Adventure
- Celebration of life
- Humor
- Joy
- Laughter
- Movement/exercise
- Mourning
- Play
- Recreating
- Spontaneity

- Beauty
- Communion
- Ease
- Equality
- Equanimity
- Harmony
- Inspiration
- Order
- Peace
- Tranquility
- Wonder

- Aliveness
- Awareness
- Awe
- Challenge
- Clarity
- Competence
- Consciousness
- Contribution
- Creativity
- Discovery
- Efficacy
- Effectiveness
- Growth
- Hope
- Learning
- Meaning
- Participation
- Purpose
- Self-Expression
- Stimulation
- Understanding
- Wholeness

- Acceptance
- Affection
- Appreciation
- Belonging
- Closeness
- Communication
- Community
- Companionship
- Compassion
- Connection
- Consideration
- Consistency
- Cooperation
- Empathy
- Inclusion
- Interdependence
- Intimacy
- Love
- Mutuality
- Nurturing
- Respect/Self-respect
- Security
- Stability
- Support
- Trust
- Warmth

- Autonomy
- Choice
- Freedom
- Independence
- Privacy
- Space

Fig. 4

Feelings Inventory

Feelings likely to be present when our needs *are* or *are not* being met. These lists can help us gain clarity about our feeling by finding a word that might fit our feeling better than the few feeling words we mostly rely on (the words at the beginning of each list). It can help us expand our feelings vocabulary.

These lists are neither exhaustive nor definitive. It is meant as a starting place to support anyone who wishes to engage in a process of deepening self-discovery and to facilitate greater understanding and connection between people.

absorbed	adoring	confident	adventurous	absorbed
blissful	affectionate	delighted	alive	alert
calm	amorous	ecstatic	buoyant	aroused
carefree	appreciative	encouraged	effervescent	astonished
composed	compassionate	excited	electrified	concerned
content	friendly	exhilarated	energetic	curious
engrossed	grateful	glad	exuberant	eager
expansive	loving	glorious	giddy	enriched
fulfilled	nurtured	grateful	goofy	enthusiastic
loving	open	happy	impish	fascinated
quiet	passionate	hopeful	invigorated	helpful
peaceful	radiant	inspired	jubilant	inquisitive
relaxed	sensitive	joyful	lively	intense
relieved	tender	optimistic	mischievous	interested
satisfied	thankful	proud	playful	intrigued
serene	trusting	satisfied	refreshed	involved
tranquil	warm	touched	zestful	surprised

agitated	blue	afraid	blah	apathetic
angry	dejected	anguished	bored	boggled
animosity	depressed	anxious	comatose	chagrined
bitter	despairing	apprehensive	disinterested	confused
cantankerous	despondent	desperate	dull	detached
disgruntled	discouraged	dread	exhausted	embarrassed
disgusted	disheartened	fearful	fatigued	frustrated
edgy	dismayed	frightened	fidgety	hesitant
enraged	distant	horrified	heavy	hurt
exasperated	distressed	insecure	helpless	irritated
frustrated	gloomy	jealous	indifferent	perplexed
furious	heavy	jittery	inert	puzzled
grouchy	helpless	lonely	lethargic	restless
hostile	lonely	nervous	listless	skeptical
impatient	melancholy	scared	mopey	suspicious
irate	miserable	sensitive	overwhelmed	troubled
irked	overwhelmed	shocked	passive	uncomfortable
irritable	sad	startled	reluctant	uneasy
mad	sorrowful	suspicious	sleepy	unglued
pessimistic	troubled	terrified	tired	unsteady
rancorous	unhappy	worried	weary	withdrawn
violent				

Fig. 5

CHANGE WITHIN THE CORE OF PEOPLE ABOUT WHAT THEY BELIEVE ABOUT THEMSELVES

REACHING OUT

MOVEMENT OUT OF SELF TOWARD OTHERS, SEEKING EXPERIENCE AND EXPOSURE, SPEAKING OUT AND NAMING INJUSTICES

TAKING STANDS
USING TOOLS
EXPLORING +
EXPERIMENTING

WAKING UP

CRITICAL
INCIDENT
THAT
CREATES
COGNITIVE
DISSONANCE

GETTING READY

EMPOWERMENT OF SELF
INTROSPECTION
EDUCATION
CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING

GAINING:
INSPIRATION
AUTHENTICITY
CONNECTIONS

DISMANTLING:
DIMINISHING BELIEFS,
COLLUSION,
PRIVILEGE,
INTERNALIZED
OPPRESSION,
DEVELOPING ANALYSIS
AND TOOLS

INTERPERSONAL:
CHANGE IN HOW
WE VALUE
OTHERS +
SEE THE
WORLD

CORE

SELF-LOVE
HOPE
SELF ESTEEM
BALANCE
JOY
SUPPORT
SECURITY
SPIRITUAL BASE
AUTHENTIC LOVE
OF OTHERS

BUILDING COMMUNITY

WORKING WITH OTHERS
A. PEOPLE "LIKE US" FOR SUPPORT
B. PEOPLE "DIFFERENT FROM US" FOR
BUILDING COALITIONS
QUESTIONING ASSUMPTIONS
RULES, ROLES, AND STRUCTURES
OF SYSTEM

MAINTAINING

INTEGRATING:

SPREADING
HOPE AND
INSPIRATION

LIVING OUR
DREAMS

MODELING
AUTHENTICITY,
INTEGRITY +
WHOLENESS

TAKING CARE OF
SELF + OTHERS

ACCEPTING
ACCOUNTABILITY

COALESCING

ORGANIZING,
ACTION PLANNING
LOBBYING, FUND
RAISING
EDUCATING,
RENAMING REALITY
REFUSING TO COLLUDE,
OR TAKE PRIVILEGE,

BEING A ROLE MODEL,
AN ALLY,
TRANSFORMING
ANGER

CREATING CHANGE

CRITICALLY
TRANSFORMING INSTITUTIONS +
CREATING NEW CULTURE
INFLUENCING: POLICY, ASSUMPTIONS,
STRUCTURES,
DEFINITIONS, RULES
TAKING LEADERSHIP, RISKS,
GUIDING CHANGE, HEALING
POWER TRULY SHARED

MOVING
INTO
ACTION:
FOSTERING
LEADERSHIP
OF TARGETS

SYSTEMIC:
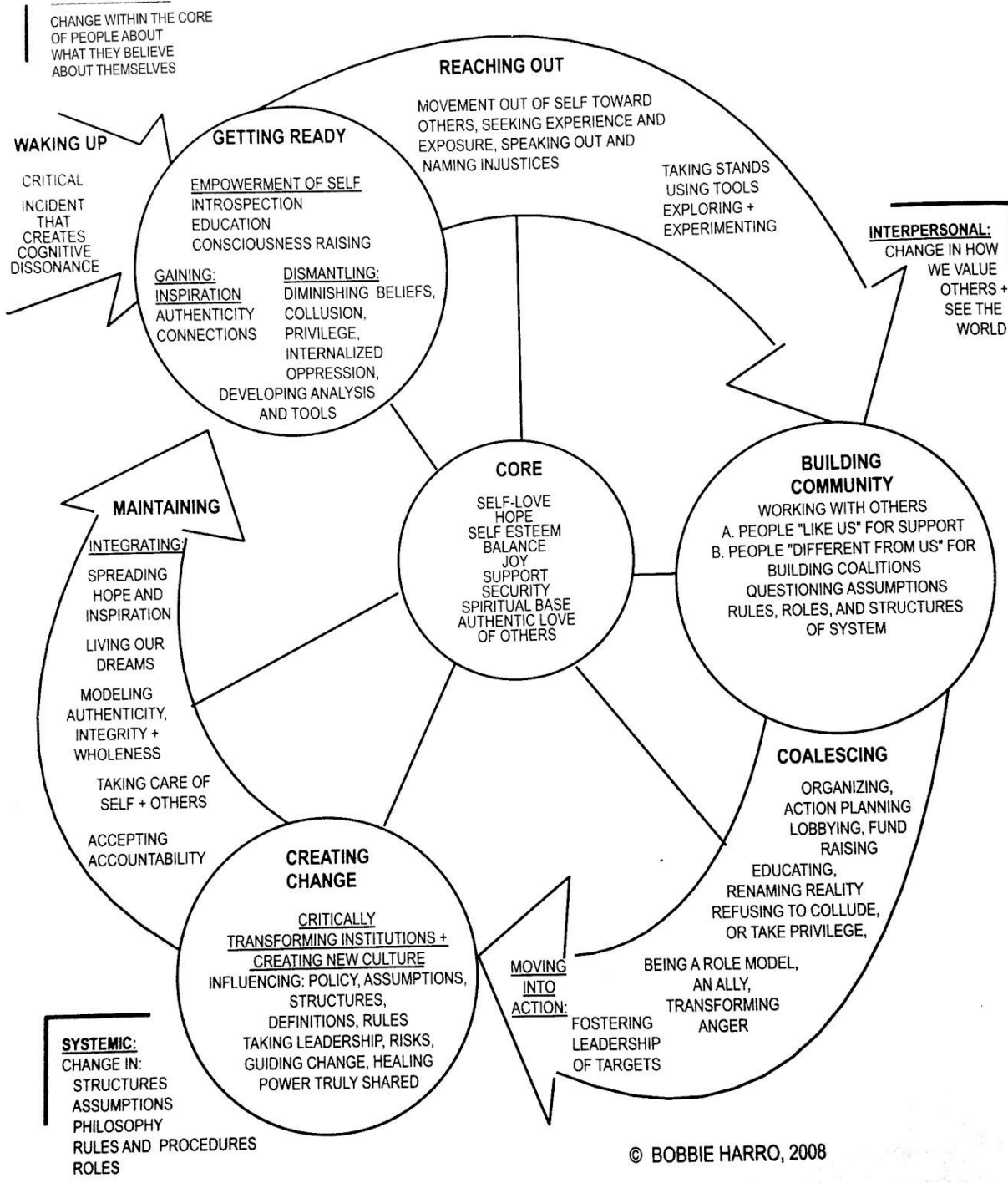CHANGE IN:
STRUCTURES
ASSUMPTIONS
PHILOSOPHY
RULES AND PROCEDURES
ROLES

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Fig. 6   The Cycle of Liberation