

BUILDING A NEW CULTURE

In Chapter 2 we looked at length of the shift from a bipolar society to a tripolar one, from a logic of confrontation to one of dialogue, no matter how vigorous this may be at first. We can approach this stance from a purely pragmatic angle, but need not stop there. We can move from a purely functional stance to a place in which we reach that form of social thinking that transcends and includes, one that sees beyond either sets of seeming opposites, one that is not content to intellectually engage with just one side of a polarity. We gave Martin Luther King Jr's Hegelianism as an example of that.

MLK saw what society presents as two terms of an impelling choice as nothing more than thesis and antithesis. He saw no reason to stop there, when he knew that the synthesis transcends and includes the terms of the polarity-thesis and antithesis. This is in effect a thinking of both/and that contrasts with the either/or thinking that the modern mind knows almost exclusively. We have a choice: with effort we can shift from one to the other; from what is easier and familiar in ourselves to what is more productive and ultimately closer to reality but requires a creative effort. To this effort follows the possibility of unleashing the imagination beyond the ordinary prescribed formulas of the ideologies of the twentieth century and their present legacy.

In Chapter 3 we looked at what it means to meet the whole human being. We started from the experiential premise acknowledging that we are beings of head, heart, and hands. It is only when we meet as such full human beings that we can recognize each other's full humanity and transcend what opposes one group of stakeholders to another. This implies a shift that can be articulated in a variety of ways. When we embrace the social practices such as those of social technology, we realize that we do not live in a social world of cause and effect, of wrong views against right views, nor of saints and villains, no matter how nuanced and subtle this discourse may become in academic terms. It seems closer to reality to argue that we live in webs of relationships in which we weave patterns and dynamics. Those may collectively help us or hinder us, affirm life or stifle it. Since they are dynamics and patterns in which we are all involved, and which we all tend to perpetuate, we can only move forward and transform them with a systemic approach. This is what has been called the multi-stakeholder approach. And the change that needs to happen at this level is one of deep, inner felt attitudes. What I say

here in the pages of a book may seem so easy as to sound trite; applying it to real life and making it one's own is much harder. Let us look at the finished product, if we can call it such.

To one who truly believes that he cannot demonize his fellow human beings, social issues need to be tackled with the largest possible variety of stakeholders. Instead of fearing adverse reactions (an old way of thinking), we will be welcoming missing perspectives. Instead of desiring to "win" against the opposition, we can ask ourselves in which way we can best hear each other and build upon each other's perspectives. Instead of priding ourselves of having stuck to the same ideas for all of our lives, we would welcome the changes we can experience in ourselves in truly hearing somebody else's perspective. Instead of prevailing, we will look forward to creating a new reality that has not been previously envisioned; in fact, one that nobody could have conceived of previously.

In Chapter 4 we looked at new ways of overcoming the social structures of the past. Hierarchies are the most obvious, but "bottomocracies," even though rare, can be just as insidious. We called this the paradigm of emergence, which occurs when something old starts crumbling and new forms emerge that cannot be predicted from the past, even though they will carry some metamorphosed elements of it in new forms. It's the paradigm of encouraging and nurturing what naturally emerges, what wants to self-organize. In Sociocracy the two forms (top down and bottom up) are kept in check. In Holacracy there is no such a need because a form has arisen that is not the opposite of top down or bottom up, but something of an emergent nature, something completely new. We can recognize something of the top down but in a refined/sublimated fashion: the deeply entrepreneurial and leaderful spirit that Holacracy promotes. And we can recognize something of the bottom up in how the form privileges the whole and leaves little room for power plays and ego. We have seen the contrast between the familiar tree structure and the nested circles. That's the most eloquent illustration of departure from the old.

What is done in one organization can be carried further at the level of networks of organizations, in that delicate dance of balancing all sorts of tensions so that the many can work for the common good by minimizing competition, duplication, gaps, and redundancies. Furthermore, we can bring the many to act with agility at a variety of scales simultaneously, at undertaking initiative where new possibilities emerge, at promoting the

entrepreneurial spirit and the awareness of the common good throughout the system.

From Either/Or to Both/And

All of the above paradigms conjugate the reality of both/and instead of either/or. They integrate and transcend two seemingly opposite poles in front of which we most often feel compelled to choose. And this is where we need to challenge ourselves for deeper understanding. The paradigm of both/and does not oppose the old paradigm of either/or. Otherwise it would be another either/or ideological position such as "We stand for both/and, therefore we oppose either/or." Since the idea of opposing is so ingrained, what would change look like from an either/or stance?

Let's go back to the subtitle of this book: *changing ourselves as we impact the world*. The old paradigm is that of the spectator. Incremental change or reform need not involve us in the first person. Here we are simply talking of changing something in the world. We devise a strategy of change, we coordinate our efforts, and we apply it. The world changes without our needing to change.

In the new paradigm we are positing that the greatest change in the world comes from the greatest changes a number of us can achieve in ourselves. Mind you, these changes happen in ourselves as we act and bring change in the world. This is a paradigm of participatory consciousness, no longer the detached stance of the spectator consciousness, which has been natural to the zeitgeist of our time up to now.

Let us try to picture what participatory consciousness will imply. Changing ourselves as we change the world means allowing ourselves to be touched by the pain of what we are part of that we want to transform. In wrestling with that pain and participating in the change, we become aware of the beauty of looking at the world in a new way, even in the midst of pain, not to mention the impact we can generate and see from acting in new ways. As this grows we can carry in ourselves two perfectly opposite feelings constructively vying within ourselves, to which we could give two voices. Voice 1 could mourn all of the misery and ugliness that touches us and impels us to seek change by allowing ourselves to be impacted. Voice 2 would emerge after some practice. It could grow in us with the realization of how much we can achieve when we think differently and act together from new places within ourselves. We will more and more be part of that reality we want to construct, of islands of beauty, even if these were in the midst of seas of dreariness. We will be

nourished by what we can learn from living within and experimenting from the new paradigms. Straddling the edges of paradigms on a regular basis is also what allows us to understand that we are never part of one without being part of the other. We are really part of both/and. Over time the pain, hurt, anger, and rage will lessen; the beauty and joy of what we want to build and who we want to become will increase. Voice 1 will recede; voice 2 will sing with a louder voice. But both will continue to live side by side in a creative tension.

The above sum of the parts is another both/and. The three paradigms put together spell out what it takes to create a new culture, not just some new or better values. It is truly a cultural shift that defines a new way of being human: from a spectator consciousness to a participatory consciousness. Obviously it is a path that needs to be walked, not a platform that can be broadcast or a slogan that can be shouted. It is slow work that will take time and patience.

The culture-building aspect of the paradigms deserves closer scrutiny. What we have explored corresponds to the discovery of human, universal archetypes derived from extended observation. Together they contribute to redefining what it means to be human and to be an individual in our time. This universal cultural aspect of the paradigms does not derive from either dogma or tradition. These are entirely new propositions for renewing culture that can be applied anywhere in the world. And it should be added that these universal aspects of what it means to be human do not stand in contrast or opposition to the various local aspects of culture.

This book has explored the difference between political and cultural change. Cultural change takes longer to build up and requires that deep inner shift that is not necessary in political change. However, a simple look at history can prove that cultural change is much more long lasting than political change. In *Legends and Stories for a Compassionate America* I explored the tidal change generated on the Eastern seaboard by the Haudenosaunee Confederacy; its genesis is estimated to the fifteenth century, and its beneficial impacts were lessened only because of European disruption. Closer to us, no movement has been as impactful on American values as the civil rights movement, a deeply culture-shaping movement, as I have argued here and more extensively in the same book.

Which One Is Your Strength?

I will argue that each of us naturally has something we can do best, one of the three paradigms in which we can find ourselves at home, one that we are

most naturally attracted to. That is often the best place to start from: recognizing our natural strength and inclination, cultivating and deepening it.

Simply ask yourself: Which paradigm do I already know, or which one speaks most to me? And when you have determined which one it is, try to imagine what would be your “course of study” look like. In this I would include for example books, a variety of approaches, workshops leading to practice, learning journeys to the places of greatest interest, and conversations with people who have expertise.

In addition to the above, you can ask yourself: Which other paradigm will I explore next? Which one do I feel reticent about? How can I lessen the distance to this paradigm, knowing that I will not be exploring it in depth any time soon? How can I prepare myself for another round of transformation? How can I lay the groundwork for collaborating with those who are familiar with the paradigms I know least?

Expanding Our Horizons by Embracing the Three Paradigms

In the fieldwork leading to the writing of this book, I have offered a slide presentation that illustrated how change in the food system could be approached from three different perspectives. From this firsthand experience I detected the following phenomena. The public with whom I discussed these matters could either primarily recognize the social imaginations on one hand, social processes on the other, or a combination of these. When I looked further afield, I could see that social processes form a bridge between social imaginations and social forms. We have seen this in the previous chapters.

On one side, when we recognize the importance of the three sectors from a purely practical perspective, change can only happen if we can convene a variety of stakeholders from the three sectors through very carefully structured interventions requiring generative conversations.

On the other hand, people working from the perspective of new social forms—Sociocracy, Holacracy and Buurtzorg are the examples we met—necessarily encounter the question of adopting new social processes that favor self-organizing and emergence.

This book predicates that of course it is difficult to see the panorama of the three paradigms, let alone acquire a degree of proficiency and mastery in each one of them, but bringing them together is a necessity if we want to accelerate social change.

Conjugating the Three Paradigms for More Effective Social Change

Now that we are coming to the end of the exploration, I want to tentatively share what has emerged for me in the course of the four months of on the road exploration. There is something organic about the articulation of the three paradigms. They show their faces in between the lines of what is said, and when this happens, they can be invited consciously, potentizing the conversation. We have seen in the previous chapters that each one of them implies a transition from an either/or to a both/and zeitgeist. And, when I look at them, I see that they build up the whole of a new panorama for achieving social change.

In the first instance we are talking about multi-sector order of reality. And when we push this reality to its logical conclusion, we are entering a new realm of social ideas. We are moving from a reality of dualism and opposition of the number two (business versus government) to one of dialogue and balance of the number three (business, government, and civil society). Unlike the ideologies of the past, this is an organic, encompassing thinking that transcends the spectator consciousness that can fashion ideas oftentimes regardless of their grounding in reality. If it is truly organic, living thinking, then we have those that we can call *social imaginations*. They are not recipes for action; rather, they are springboards for freeing the imagination in the direction of unprecedented action. A better understanding of reality offers much more than ideology or theory can formulate, but it needs to be approached differently. It has to be worked through and digested more thoroughly, and it only works within a given context: social change in the United States is different from change in the United Kingdom, in the East Coast different from the West Coast.

In the second instance we are talking about new ways of relating and collaborating. Here we are overcoming the adversarial stances that find their most explicit manifestation in radical polarization, of which the United States presents one of the most obvious examples in the present. Being immersed in that reality requires from each one of us quite an effort to humanize those who are at the other end of a spectrum, most of all the political, but also the religious and cultural. The multi-stakeholder level of reality offers us the opportunity to change enemy pictures, to change the way we feel about other people, and to establish new relationships. Social technology has most of all to do with *social processes*. The old social processes of opposition can be replaced with the differentiation and integration of all meaningful and willing stakeholders. Majority/minority dynamics can give way to supermajorities.

Our social reality needs to be conceived more organically. The way we relate to social actors needs to move towards greater inclusion and fuller participation through social processes designed toward the meeting of the whole person. So what is left?

The reality of emergence offers us the possibility of moving away from old forms and structures toward new ones. The old is crumbling and a new reality is *emerging* that we can only very partially surmise from what we know of the past. Sociocracy, Holacracy, Buurtzorg, Horizontalism, socially generative networks—all of these speak about new *social forms*.

The stance of waiting for change to come through the existing structures can be overcome by taking initiative immediately. We do not need to wait for a new president, for a new political majority, for our organization to change to dare to take action. Jos de Blok did not need to wait for the health system to change in the Netherlands when he decided to start Buurtzorg; Precision Nutrition is bringing about a shift of great dimension in food habits; Vermont Farm to Plate, Energy Action Network in Vermont, and RE-AMP are affecting change without waiting for political permission. This means we can all step into the reality of new social forms. It certainly does take courage.

The above is a natural progression. Once we conceive of social reality differently—through a qualitatively different kind of thinking—and once we relate to all social actors in a qualitatively different way, it is only natural to expect that qualitatively different social forms will emerge. Social imaginations, social processes, and social forms are part of a natural sequence leading from vision to action.

The most common way of seeing social reality at present derives from a theory of change that explicitly or implicitly reconnects with either of socialistic or capitalistic models, or mixes and matches of the two. We are saying that the greatest possibility for change derives from none of the above, from thinking organically and deliberately outside of the box; from thinking out of the past to thinking out of the future.

The most common way to manifest change at the social level happens through the political process. It requires moving from being a minority to acquiring a majority. We are saying here that this model was necessary and appropriate until the present. We can now start to think about working with large areas of consensus and with supermajorities.

All social organizational models up until the present have been hierarchical or equalitarian. This exploration has shown that they are two sides of the same

coin. The way out of hierarchical trees is not an equalitarian, flat organization that rests on the same logic, though at the other end of the spectrum. The way out lies in liberating energy towards self-organization, mimicking natural systems in which there is both autonomy of the part and subordination to the whole: nested circles instead of trees.

Each of the three ways of looking at the world is a whole. But that doesn't mean that each, taken purely on its own, cannot be one-sided.

Listening to the Future

This book has not discovered anything new. It has simply gathered strands that are of great promise for the social future. We are presently immersed in irreversible processes of dissolution and destruction. This would seem enough reason to give up. However, what has the capacity to subvert reality as we know it (a paradigm) can also reverse what appears irreversible. It can do this, not by restoring the past, but by moving into new evolutionary stages. To this we have given the name of *emergence*. The three paradigms nurture the dissolution of the old and the emergence of the new.

In conclusion, this book has been an exploration, just a primer. The greatest gift it has offered the author, which in turn I want to offer to the reader, is that of showing us that at the eleventh hour, we have all we need to turn the corner. All the tools that we need already exist, and we have explored some of them. This doesn't mean that change is easy. The resources in each chapter and your own curiosity will direct you to what you specifically need in your field of interest and action.

And not just that. Everything you need in order to accelerate change is also what can enable you to operate from a place of greater creativity and presence. It will allow you to embody change to a greater extent than has been possible so far from an evolutionary standpoint. May you fully be the visionary and change agent you wish to be! May the end of this journey be the beginning of many others.