

**Joining Heaven and Earth:** towards a new school for a new society in the dawning of the Ecozoic era

**Peter London 1/2014**

The mission of the schools we presently have, both public and private K-12 and most higher education, is to prepare the emerging generations to succeed in taking their place in the established society we have. More exactly, to prepare children to take their place as workers in and for the success of the society we have.

Joel Klein, recently the chancellor of New York City's public schools and now chief executive of Amplify, the technological arm of Rupert Murdoch's foray into educational reform, says- in a recent New York Times article, that our educational system isn't working, and that our system of schooling is, "ripe for disruption." Our schools, Klein tell us, are not efficient enough, not cost effective enough, all to unsuccessful in the preparation of children to become workers in our society. What we need is more sophisticated high technology, a tablet for every child and every teacher in every classroom. Sort of the thing he and Mr. Rupert happen to be selling. Of course we already spend \$17 billion dollars annually on instructional materials, and no matter when the Los Angeles school district cut costs in recent years by laying off thousands of teachers yet is now using bonds to finance spending \$500 million dollars on iPads. This in spite of educational research that had demonstrated that whatever the appliances and the curriculum, everything depends on good teachers. And how about this; in the last decade the future minded and concerned citizens of America have eliminated 250,000 K-12 positions while k-12 students have increased by 800,000.

Well perhaps Mr. Klein has not got that quite correct. Perhaps what is actually broken is not so much as our schools but our society. Indeed, our schools have been all *too* successful in preparing each new generation of children to take their place within the society we have- and to not merely maintain its basic premises and techniques but improve them, making what we do and how we do it even more effective.

Now this mission of schooling would be most appropriate for a society that is in a successful and sustainable phase of its history. But, our society is not in such a phase. Our worldviews, our imbalances, our excesses, our inequities, are not sustainable and not successful enough for large portions of the members of our society. Therefore our schooling; its missions, curricula, pedagogies nurturing yet another generation of our children to be successful in an inherently unsuccessful society is only to exacerbate those same imbalances and accelerate its unsustainability.

Of the many symptomatic flaws of the society we have, many observers, especially coming from the sciences but also the humanities, arts and increasingly, theology- no clearer observer and voice being that of Thomas Berry, claim the following as the underlying flaw that all others are only symptomatic: **The pervasive assumption that there is a necessary and fundamental schism between the human fraction of creation and all the rest of creation. Not only a unbroachable division, dis-unity, alienation, but that the human fragment- unsurprisingly the fragment that we happen to occupy- is endowed with certain qualities; intelligence, feelings, souls, powers, inhering dignities and rights, the devoted ear of god (s), that every other portion of creation do not enjoy.**

And thus we treat every other portion of creation accordingly; deservedly and necessarily apart from us and inferior to us.

Much has been said and written about this feature of the lens through which we not only perceive the world, but also the mechanism with which we construct our- and thus *the* world. Less taken note of is this consequence of our flawed viewing of the world. This lens by which we view the world, is the same lens through which every other is viewed- even and especially- our own kind. That is with a lens that makes every other – *Other*, distant- unapproachable- but also *Inferior*, and then every person whose skin color is different that any *other*, is not only fundamentally different but also fundamentally inferior. Every Christian views every Jew, every Jew views every Muslim, every Sunni views every Shia, every Tutsi, every Croatian, every wealthy, every blue collar, every man *every body*, views everybody else not occupying the exact same features of their own selves view every other self in the same not only dualistic way but hierarchical way.

This same flawed lens with which we view all creation *and* all members of our own tiny fragment- the rest of our species, we *also see ourselves*; not simply and actually *different* than any other. That view is pernicious enough, but we immediately translate the difference between entities to a scale of inferiority/superiority. Safe and unsafe. And so the world, congested with *variety* immediately becomes rife with *danger*. Every other- especially our own kind becomes dangerous. Having to live in a world that appears to us as inherently dangerous we- intelligent creatures as we are, act accordingly; defensive, and preemptively aggressive.

We need to do something about this. This is the Great Work that Thomas Berry urges us to address as this especially pivotal phase of our society's evolution.

Berry is not sanguine about our possibilities of doing so in the time we have to get this lens fixed with the present institutions we have- created by the same folks wearing these distorting lenses and for millennia supported by all our laws, policies, accustomed practices and collective memories. The two segments of our society that Berry has the most hope in extricating ourselves from incorrect information, stories and attending behaviors, are the sort of people attracted to the community of artists and scholars. Certainly they too live in the same encompassing environment as everyone else, and have been saturated by the same conventions, stories, histories, myths and everyday practices. But there is something about the people who find their way into the leading edges of the arts, sciences and philosophic domains, who have come to appreciate, that what is currently known as being true and good, is only provisionally "so". Coupled with this attitude, a smaller portion of this same crowd is further predisposed to be curious about what else is out there, - and in here. A smaller fraction still has the intellectual stamina to investigate the very edges of the known and the good to see what else might lie beyond. *And all too few are courageous* enough to actually do something about their findings. For the price of all these shenanigans is often steep. Not infrequently mortally so. Non the less, some of these folks do manage to squeak through the mesh of current public opinion and approbation and say what they have witnessed beyond the bend. They are the engines of societal evolution.

These are the people who make up our communities of artists, scientists, scholars and philosophers.

Their intellectual credo is: The past is but prelude to the future.

**The singular issue they devote their efforts to exploring- whatever their means of investigation and forms of portrayal, their ultimate question is the ancient and venerable one: "How shall we live?"**

**How shall we live?** This Pivotal issue will also serve as the central probe animating our New School for a New Society. But more of that in a moment.

Now, every thoughtful person and certainly every author of note has raised this same question. The question resides at the origin of every religious and political and philosophic tradition. What may be a contribution of this talk is bringing this very idea to the very center of a school.

That is; in this school every thing we do will first be tested for its worth to do at all, by asking of it- in some form- how does this contribute to the way we *desire* to live rather than accept it as the way we have come to live. And, judging the worth of our ensuing efforts, taking into consideration the resources at our command, how approximate was our achievements to live here and now the way desire to live then and there.

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Before we take a virtual tour of such a new school for a new tomorrow, allow me to set the parameters of such a view- or version, based upon the particular resources I happen to have at my disposal. Others, of course, bringing still other arrays of resources might envision and designing based according to their own lights. It's a process of imagining that all can participate, and I invite you, members of the Ecozoic Society to take up this project as well.

Well, here are the resources that I happen to bring to the project of envisioning this new school, centered as it will be as a laboratory investigating how we might live, here and now, exploring ways of addressing The Great Work, ways of drawing the human fragment of creation back into alignment with the rest of creation. I happen to be an **artist and an academic, and a modest reader of the sciences**, and so my means of addressing the Great Work will be to **envision a new school, a school for a new tomorrow.**

**This school will feature three elements, others might also be foundational, and bring about other means with similar missions, but this school will have the three I am most familiar with. Art, Education, and Nature. Let's see what kind of a construct might be made from these three.**

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### **Foundational synergies: Art, Education, and Nature**

I will first address a certain venerable understanding about the nature of Art that will serve us well for our project. **Art**, can and does serve many purposes but for our purposes in addressing the Great Work we require a generous but still essential and sturdy meaning of art. And so I offer this: **Art** can be understood as joining one thing with another, bringing about a new thing; an emergent, evolved entity that is more complex, interpenetrating and harmonious than its originating components. And in its new form, form exhibiting the complexity, interpenetrating and harmonious nature imbuing all creation.

Education too is a term and a host of ideas, mission and methods but for our purposes I will try to offer the most basic idea: **Education**, stripped for the moment of any attending ideologies can be understood as bringing one thing- *a student*, together with another thing, *a teacher*, in such a fashion as to bring about another thing; a mutual increase of breadth, depth, richness, complexity, and harmony of being themselves and being in the world.

To position this general understanding of the basic features of Education with the particular mission of *our* school; Addressing the Great Work, I would also add, that the focus and measure of success of our efforts would be their congruence with the breadth, depth, richness, complexity and harmonies of nature itself. A significant parallelism we take note of.

And now we turn to what we will mean when we employ the term **Nature**. And let us suppose, *that just where we are*, our little orb, is one fantastic chunk, of the rest of the universe, operating within the laws of all the rest of the universe. Every tree, leaf, pore, twig, bud, root, frog, tadpole, bean pole, stream, brook, dew drop, mountain top, blue bird, black bird, violet wisteria, purple iris, hiccup, buttercup, constellation, cosmos.

And when we look at our relatives- co-denizens of the cosmos, what do we see? A vast richness of complexity, interpenetrating processes, dizzying layered harmonies of entities constantly waxing and waning at the micro and macro dimensions each pulse creating astonishing- because unpredictable novel forms and phenomena. We see a great ecology, teeming with variety, everything exquisitely made, every single thing necessary, every thing grace full in its particular movements, everything patterned at every layers of its being, all layers exactly fit, every thing subtle in its manufacture, nothing sloppy, nothing incomplete. Everything throbbingly robust, every thing complex unto its finest details and order of magnitude, every thing musical in its movements, not a thing shy of its self, not a thing embarrassed by the company it keeps, or its origins, or its capacities. Everything pulsating in harmony with every thing else, no pushing no shoving. When it rains, everything gets wet. When the sun shines, every thing grows. When the seasons change, every thing changes simultaneously, each in its own way, each at its own pace, each living to the fullest each season, each day, each moment. The night having its beauties, as the Day has its beauties. Nothing ugly, no notion of Ugly, nor beautiful really, because every thing is well made, every thing fits, no left-overs, nothing and no one left out. If we look a little while longer, we will see that nature, every portion integrated with every other portion; "It is self-propagating, self-nourishing, self-educating, self-governing, self-healing, and self-fulfilling communities." Thomas Berry tells us, (Berry, 1999) Teilhard DeChardin

adds; the evolutionary nature of cosmos having a propensity for continual increase of complexity, interiority, interpenetration. (DeChardin, 1954)

Preceding these observations of the nature of nature by a few thousand years is the view of Nature proposed by Chinese philosophers. They observed nature- as it was observable around them on the surface of our planet and noted that the ways of earth were the same order and harmonies of that of all the cosmos- what they termed Heaven. And the ways of Heaven, Tao, informed and imbued those of the ways of Earth. And that learning these ways, these constant rhythmic transformations, would impart to humans, individuals and societies, similar behaviors of dignity, grace, and harmony. “The Li Chi, the ancient Book of Rites, declares that the rules of ceremony- (correct conduct) originated in the T’ai I (Great Monad, or Primal Unity), known today as Tao. The Li Chi explains that ...rules have their origin in heaven, the movement of them reaches to earth. The distribution of them extends to all the business of life...” The Way of Chinese Painting, Mai-Mai Sze, P.7

To be even modestly critical of how our human portion of nature has been behaving, would it be an exaggeration to say that we have managed to concoct for ourselves societies that seem almost incapable of not wounding our selves and each other by our penchants for solving problems through violence, for the allure of short term gains, for the unseemly wealth of the few at the cost of the impoverishment of the many. A world in which we seem to delight in categorizing people and demonizing them for such banal reasons as skin color, gender, religious convictions, or political beliefs. A world in which our species is devouring and befouling the very resources of the entire planet so that we might live in relative comfort *now* at the price of our grand children living at all.

Schools that prepare emerging generations to be successful workers in this sort of society is hardly the educational reform we need.

Dignity? Grace? Harmony? WE have learned much about nature, but we have not managed to bring the ways of Heaven and earth to bear upon the affairs of our selves.

This then is the Great Work: to observe, to experience, to participate in and thus to come to acquire enduring knowledge about the ways of Great Nature, and to inform the ways of our wayward segment of Nature; you and me. In other words; Join Heaven and Earth.

For as long as we continue insist on our self assumed position apart from, fundamentally different, more privileged than the rest of all creation, and insist upon the unbroachable schism between our selves and the rest of the cosmos, we will remain broken off from our family of origin, our immense, spectacularly varied, wonder full, rambunctious, sublime...family. The Great Work of this generation is to return to our family, and behave accordingly. Many good people in every field are throwing their talents and resources into healing this breach, giving their all at this pivotal phase of human history.

**How then might you and I, the Ecozoic Society, amongst us resource full people of many talents, and for the focus of this talk; artists, teachers, environmentalists, give of *our* talents, knowledge and good offices to this Great Work?**

Earlier I said that **art** can be understood to be a bringing things together in such a manner that they not only create a new complex, interpenetrating harmony of the particular items now joined, but that the particular joining reveals patterns of complex, interpenetrating harmonies of *cosmic* proportions. Micro is to Macro, as Above is to Below. By seeing so deeply into the nature of Nature, the arts, so practiced, can provide us with glimpses of the “Patterns that Connect”. A phrase Gregory Bateson made so famously. By seeing this deeply into the harmonics of the world, we can see past our own current awkward, often brutal ways and be guided towards **how life might be lived.**

Of course these are exactly the purposes of the sciences and Humanities as well, and a proposal similar to the one I am making could be put forward by members of these disciplines as well- and should be,

However, my familiarities fall within the parameters of the arts, indeed primarily the visual arts, and so this view of a New School will be conducted through the perspectives of an artist, educator and armature of the sciences.

Well then, to return to the fundamental question; **How might we live?**

How about like this; to live in a civilization characterized by a great ecology, a society teeming with variety, where everything is exquisitely made, every single thing is necessary, every thing grace full in its particular movements, everything patterned at every layers of its being, all layers exactly fit, every thing subtle in its manufacture, nothing sloppy, nothing incomplete. Everything throbbingly robust, every thing complex unto its finest details and order of magnitude. Every thing musical in its movements, not a thing shy of its self, not a thing embarrassed by the company it keeps, or its origins, or its capacities. Everything pulsating in harmony with every thing else. No pushing no shoving. Nothing and no one left out. Nothing to kill, nor die for. Self propagating, self-nourishing, self-educating, self-governing, self-healing, and self-fulfilling communities.” Sounds familiar? And yet, how remote from the ways we currently conduct our affairs.

*How about living within a society like that?*

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## **Towards a new school for a new society**

If we were so bold to do so, what might such a *school* look like? What might we see as we spent a day in such a school? What would such a school look like and be doing in which the entire enterprise; its curriculum, pedagogy, administrative policies, and allocation of resources are conceived of as a *vast experiment towards the Great Work*, towards Joining Heaven and Earth, of exploring the ways that Nature creates a vibrant and robust ecology of all entities, so that our ways may become as vast, viable, robust, harmonious and exquisitely made; an ecology of all beings.

I take courage in so bold a proposition from many sources, the prime one being Thomas Berry, for he tells us in his book, *The Great Work*;

“We need to reinvent [what it means to be and behave like a human] *because* the issues we are concerned with seem to be beyond the competence of our present cultural traditions, either individually or collectively. What is needed is something beyond existing traditions to bring us back to the most fundamental aspect of the human... The human is at a cultural impasse. In our efforts to reduce the other than human components of the planet to subservience to our Western cultural expression, we have brought the entire set of life-systems of the planet, including the human, to an extremely dangerous situation. Radical new cultural forms are needed. These new cultural forms would place the human within the dynamics of the planet rather than place the planet within the dynamics of the human.” (Berry, 1999)

The school I have in mind, in order for it to not to be a mere fantasy, something remote from the schools we have, will be utterly doable. Everything that you will see in this school of tomorrow is in practice somewhere, sometime. Every technique, every tool, is now at hand. No new funding is required, although we must fund education more adequately and broadly based than now, but this is a subject of another paper. No new kinds of kids, or teachers, or parents, are required, - although these too will come in time.

What is new is an entirely different mission of education, what students and their teachers are actually doing throughout the day, how the community of children and adults live here and now. Of course; what art is for and how it is “taught” will differ fundamentally from our current practices. As you come along on this journey and visit various sites and activities, imagine how you might add *your own* contributions, creating your own role in your school of similar intentions.

Last caveat: please **hear the description of this school as an example of examples**. This is not intended to be either a full description of a particular school, or the only configuration of such a KIND of school. Rather, please receive this as an invitation to engage in a broad and rich direction of thinking that seeks ways of bringing emerging generations of our species into the appetites for, then the skills and knowledge’s necessary draw our human segment of creation closer to the rest of creation, to engage in creating a more perfect union between how our species conducts its affairs and how the rest of the cosmos works. Now, drawn indeed closer to Nature, we might learn to live in a fashion that we prefer to live rather than endure the ways in which we have come to live. Certainly “An Immense Journey,” surely, “A Great Work.” Well then, Let’s begin.

## **A virtual tour of our school for a new tomorrow**

What then might we see as we take our little walk around this “New School?”

First of all you should know that the campus is right here in your own town- or might be. The buildings were designed – at no cost to us, by way of a (regional, national, international) competition, seeking designs that would provide a platform for... The Great Work! Where children (we’ll say this school is for children five through eighteen) are exploring ways to Join Heaven and Earth, and to actually live here and now, as they desire to live then and there. Where the structures and the systems and the landscaping all were to be symbolic and functional of This Great Work. The building and Landscape architects were happy

to provide the submissions at no cost for the opportunity to exhibit their work before a wide public; this whole project had been carefully groomed and promoted by the local and regional media.

We are initially greeted by a sensitively designed and clearly crafted landscape heralded by a large wooden arbor along the lines of a Shinto framing of an auspicious place. A broad field stone path, gently curved to slow the pace, and to herald the specialness of things to come welcomes us. Bordering the path are clumps of native trees selected to provide the particular visual joys of each of the seasons; some apples and pears, a clump of birch, some poplars and sugar maples.

Underneath the large borders where in earliest spring, crocuses and snowdrops sparkled against the receding snows, followed a month later by daffodils, and tulips and hyacinths for the spring, followed by simple to maintain cascade of blooms from roses to phlox, now dahlias and fall asters greet us with their crimson, violet and scarlet blooms. Of course these garden varieties are mixed in the landscape with swaths of native plants, Queen Anne's lace, native asters, barberries golden rod and such.

As we approach the buildings we enter through a great arch, rainbow-like, proclaiming that this is a place of high adventure, and that everyone is welcome to its community. Other portions of the building are differently colored some to induce quiet reflection, others to entice reverie, others to shelter close conversation. Still others schemes promote abstract and flights of fancy. Large scale sculptures are placed here and there to complement the natural sculptural qualities of the landscape. The signage strikes one as being made- and well made at that- by the students themselves. The whole site and its structures proclaim this as a special place, loved and cared for by its members, a place which invites bold imagination and finely crafted things.

Entering the hand wrought grand doorway, we come upon a great vase in the entry hall, covered as it is with marvelous hand made tiles of local clays and pigments, segues the great out of doors- in door. It is the project of the first graders to daily create and refresh this grand seasonal reminder of Nature's endless variety of definitions and look of the beautiful. Upper classmen designed and made the vase- it's as tall as a first grader.

The walls, flanking the broad undulating halls, like the walls of the temples of Egypt and Babylonia, the courts of Rome, Angkor Watt, Oaxaca, Khartoum, are decorated with mosaics of the many tales of Genesis, including the children's own conceptions of how the world might have begun, how it might be unfolding, and what futures we might attain to. This grand project has been evolving over many years and remains in the process of being recreated with each succeeding generation of students and teachers. Many hours of research, preliminary and continuing discussions with many people, each contributing different knowledge, perspectives and skills are evident throughout. The completion of each section is always attended by ornate ceremonies involving dance, music and poetry, fancy dress and fancy foods all created by the children, teachers and parents. You should make it to the next one.

Let's skip back out side for a moment and take a look at the small but lovely pond that we all created- hand dug! It is surrounded by our own designed and built benches, picnic tables, as is the entire landscape park interwoven by paths connecting one area to another. Each brick and tile, flower and shrub has been obviously chosen and placed after much thought, discussion and consensual decision. The path is called, The Great Tao, and entwines all portions of the campus.

A modest raised viewing platform over looks it all, again designed, engineered and built by our entire academic community with the addition of a cadre of parents- and surrounding neighbors. The platform has been researched and designed to symbolize the principle of Endurance, of, unshakable determination, of Heaven over looking the things of the world. The water is symbolic of the ephemeral, evolving, effervescent Earth. The little islands in the pond are to remind us that like these islands, our lives too are moments in time, brief- but beautiful moments of a life's span. Small arched bridges, of course designed and crafted in house, span the small islands. It's particularly beautiful to see in the mornings when the children arrive; and in the afternoon setting sun when they return home. It's awfully lovely in the fall when

crimson and gold leaves dot the pond, glistening in the winter, and in the spring, clumps of daffodils- that the kindergartners planted – are in bloom.

The symbolic and actual relationships between water and its many ways, and humans and our many converging ways are the subject of much art and literature of the children. Teachers tell stories of such things to their students. Our older students create such stories and read them to the younger students. The youngest students do the very same things amongst themselves. Many chapbooks that we write, illustrate and publish are on view in our gift shop where all our arts are on display and often for sale.

At the far end of the park- that was used only a few years ago as a vast asphalt plane for kids to run around on for fifteen minutes after their fifteen minute lunch break, is now covered with gently undulating grassy slopes dotted here and there with clumps of shrubs and flowers, some medicinal for the body, some for the spirit, all for the observing eye.

At a distance is a little hut modeled on the aesthetics of a tea pavilion; this one is open on all sides to view North East South and West. It's really not much of a structure; easy to build, easy if you do it *very carefully*, each step fulfilling its own purpose. It's really only a canopied platform made to observe how the world is ordering itself, so that the occupants of the pavilion *might so orders their ways*. It's only large enough for about a dozen children and adults to sit comfortable. It's a place that everyone knows is special; a place where only personally made things are shown, spoken of and performed for invited guests. Here children can read to one another their own poems, stories and essay. Where they can perform their own music, on their own crafted instruments, sing and teach their songs, try out their dances, invite a few of their friends for tea! Personally made snacks. Of course we design and fabricate all the clothing that is worn here.

The vases, baskets, paintings, sculpture, weavings, and prints we create are shown and spoken about by our students to their guests. The children speak thoughtfully and carefully; their listeners are likewise thoughtful and attentive. The children therefore become thought full and care full. Qualities all too uncommon today in both speakers and listeners.

Every one values craftsmanship in our school because we have come to appreciate that *craftsmanship is really only clarity in the service of making and saying meaning full things*. This is the pivotal reason that the *values that inform all of the arts* are the very same ones that inform all of the thinking and activities of our school. Values and ways much like our own Shakers, and the Arts and Crafts movement as well.

There's the greenhouse. Poking inside we can see a group of children and some adults; they are planting flower and vegetables seeds for next seasons. Another group is gathering seeds from the spent veggies and flowers of the previous season. Still another group is making carefully drawn images of orchids that will be made into an illustrated book, based on the hand tinted wood block prints and texts they are composing. The limited edition books will be auctioned at the end of the year to supplement the budget so that greenhouses and ponds and bridges and printing presses are no strangers to our school.

Under a geodesic dome-like structure we recently completed, is another group of children and adults, they seem to be speaking with a horticulturist from a near by university about a planting scheme for a new experimental rose garden. The funding for this is underwritten by the county horticultural society.

In the **Imagine/Research/Art, Design and Build** workshop a large multi stationed building where people go to design and build out their projects, there are a number of clusters of people at work in pods the walls of which can be slid open and closed creating spaces just fit for evolving purposes. The theme of this year's school-wide theater/performance piece is; "spring dreams of summer, winter hopes for spring". Some kids are designing and fabricating the costumes, others the sets, others the lighting, others are composing and practicing the music, others are working on the dance. People from one group are constantly going back and forth to other groups, coordinating invigorating, and negotiating, trying to establish a viable ecology amongst all the many necessary portions. Another section is reserved for solitary endeavors; simply quietly thinking, writing poetry, creating self portraits, sewing together a quilted a coat of many colors.

Those kids crawling around on the ground with magnifying glasses? They are following a trail of ants from their feeding grounds to their nest, noting the many different tasks they are performing and how they signal to each other where to go and what to bring home for supper. Each one is writing and illustrating their observations.

I think that group over there is working out the storyboards for the video/cine-graphic elements of the work. Here's a wing, that's entitled' "Microscopes and Telescopes and binoculars, Oh Boy!" Nice! Maybe we can get to go inside next time.

If you come back at night, and it's a starry one, you'll see kids looking up at the stars, kids with telescopes, kids telling nighttime stories to one another. Our school has taken back the night, and have learned how to think night thoughts, and dream time thoughts and we have come love the night and its seeing as we have learned to love the day.

In our school, artistic principles and skills inform *everything* that *everyone* is doing *all the time*. Nothing gets decided upon or designed or fabricated that is not without the eye and values and hand of an artist. Aesthetically conceived, designed and crafted things are the *only* things permitted in *this* school. And the **Imagine/Research/Design and Build** facility is where a great deal of such work is conducted.

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Oh! You say, but this is all simply impossible to afford on the budget we get from the state and our impoverished community. Of course with only *those* sources of funding much – but not all- of this would be difficult to afford! That's why we have a **Development Office!** Just like those fancy private schools! How do you think they get to do all the fancy stuff that they get to do? They have a Development Office and staff who raise the money, from alumni, from businesses, from philanthropies, from wealthy folks all of whom are also dedicated to the effort of creating a better world, a place where **everyone is involved in creating preferred ways of living.**

We also have an office of **Collaborative Learning** that develops working relationships with like minded institutions such as botanical gardens, historical societies, regional land and wild life conservancies, green businesses and agriculturists. In these ways, our school is marvelously supplemented with expertise also betting on a future they might create rather than the present they have been forced to inherit. Members of each similarly inclined institution are on our board of overseers. At no cost!

We also have a **Board of Consultants**, drawn from many disciplines of research; the arts and sciences, technology, psychology, cosmology ecology and the like who meet with us periodically to bring us news from their frontiers of knowledge and so are a constant source of hybridizing our own views and practices.

In these and many other ways, our school can be understood to be an experiment, a laboratory investigating both how we have come to live they way we have, and, how we *might come to live* given what we now know about how we used to live, and how it is becoming ever more clear as to how we might possibly live- and that must be ecologically, ever more satisfactorily rejoining our family of origin and destiny.

The children and the teachers come to our school each day not because *they have* to, but because *they are needed*. And they *feel* needed.

That girl is putting on the final coat of paint today on the garden bench she and her friends made in honor of her grandparents who donated the funds for it. She's bringing the paint, so she must go to school today.

That boy is the fellow who is responsible for firing the kilns for the mosaic tile; he can't be late for school today.

Those two are doing the lighting for the play and they have to come early today to set up the lighting board.

Here comes that older kid who is presenting a lesson on butterfly life cycles to the kindergarteners this morning. His mom and dad have been so helpful researching this that they are all here for the presentation.

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Our school is doing real and important work that requires everyone's dedicated efforts, an ecology of all beings. And all beings here know that their individual and collective efforts are absolutely necessary if this Great Work is to have any chance of success.

In *our* school, **birthdays**, of which there are over 400 in the school year, are most often celebrated; not by going to Chucky Cheese, or the Pizza Hut, or Taco Bell, or Burger Chef or Burger and Fries, birthdays in this school are celebrated by the donation and planting of commemorative trees, and gardens and islands, and fountains, and telescopes and park benches, accompanied by appropriate poetry, music, and children concocted snacks. Actually quite tasty – anyway quite interesting, novel, in any case.

Being **charter members** of the Junior league of the National Audubon Association, and also that of the national Wildlife Federation and the regional chapter of the Trust for Public Land, all the students, and their families and the teachers become LIFE members of these organizations, receiving their literature and the school a raft of free speakers and free admission to all their lands, and events: for *life*.

At the end of the school year, our school publishes an **Annual Report**, outlining all the experiments, discoveries, achievements, in a handsome, in house publication that every student and their parent receives, school board members, city councilors, as do all the alumni and benefactors. Just like every big business, every college, just like every private school. The last pages list all the benefactors and their gifts; as the list of the school's accomplishments increase, so does the list of the benefactors and the largesse of their gifts.

In this school, **all teachers**, whatever their several and common expertise, **are always planning and working together** because that's what happens in all the rest of creation; an ecology of all entities. That makes anything and everything viable, sustainable, dynamically evolving. Music, and visual art, and woodworking, poetry, dance, and literature, horticulture and microbiology, astronomy, food services, nutrition, and physics, economics, ceramics; every single one of these working together go into the creation of every movie you see, every opera you attend, *why not every school?* Especially a school who's very business it is to create a new ecology of all beings?

### **Accountability in our new school**

What about **Accountability!**? Our school, our experimental community seeking to live now, in the way we want to live ultimately, employs an entirely different system of testing for goodness and completion in contrast to the schools we have today that mostly train up a new generation to fit into the ways of yesterday. In this school we will employ the very same system of evaluation as the rest of the cosmos! No dated and imposed national standards here. No standards created somewhere and applied somewhere else. No; turning to the ways that the rest of the cosmos works, we too hold to a pragmatic standard. We too are guided by natural selection and adaptation. To these two engines of progressive evolution we add a particularly human element; we do not depend solely upon random mutations to guide us as much of the universe does, *we* introduce our particular human capabilities of *imagination* and *preference*, and so *we* steer a *humane* course, both *Pragmatic and Utopian*. The closer the fit between what we desire and what we have achieved to date; the gooder it is.

Every task we undertake in our school we ask our selves; Is this in the direction of **how we would prefer to live?** (Just what "the term "We" includes and implies is always ripe for reconsideration.) How close did this experiment bring us? Can we come closer still? Were the costs justified relative to the benefits? Did we leave any one out? Is everyone still on board? Are we there yet? Yes? Good! Where to next?

We have no need for approximate rating scales in our school. No ABC no 123. Instead we employ a universal measure of success. As any effort approaches a close fit between what we desired and what we achieved to date, we call that Good. The closer the fit the gooder it is.

If the vegetables we grow in our school gardens, that supply our kitchens, are nutritious, then that is good. If all the children eat all those vegetables, that is good. If the crop was bountiful, that is good. If someone is unhappy, hurt, we help to restore that person to feeling well and cared for; that is good. If the children are happy, that is good. If their parents are happy with their children, that is good, If the teachers are happy with their work, that is good. If the community is pleased with the proportion of their contributions to our school's welfare relative to our contributions to theirs, that is good.

We are always evaluating how things are going, always determining if this is the only and best possible way to do things, always thinking about how we prefer things to be and experimenting with ways to bring our current ways closer to our preferred ways. That's it.

### **When the children graduate from *our* school:**

They will have more than a decade of personal experiences addressing The Great Work.

They will come to love this world, because they will have had a deep, close, and care full evolving acquaintance with the Earth as it is.

They will come to appreciate that the world is not merely the pretty thing it so very much is, but it is also wise, and its wisdoms- how to live successfully on this particular planet- is accessible to anyone who bothers to learn how it speaks.

They will have observed and taken to heart that in this world each thing interpenetrates every other thing. Just like Nature. Just like the rest of our little chunk of the universe. They have taken Martin Buber's axiom to heart; All life is lived through Dialogue.

They will have studied and become adept at sustainable agricultural systems as well as interpersonal, economic and political practices.

They will know how to design and make just about everything they use, and know how to fix them as well.

They will come to know the reverence the practitioner of every art and craft and calling requires.

They will know how to share everything they have in surfeit, with everyone in need.

They will know how and when to be gentle and kind, when to be patient and enduring, flexible in times that require it, unmovable at times that that require.

They will come to value grace, dignity, and peace that come from being in accord within their own selves and within the world, what Rene Dubos terms honoring the God Within.

They will know how to conduct legitimate scientific experiments, and artistic ones as well.

They will know how to lobby for what they value to people who shape policy and allocate resources.

They will know how to treasure what is of value, how to let go of what requires relief.

They will graduate from this phase of their education equipped- as best one can be in an indeterminate universe whose origins and destinies are intertwined but imperceptible, to bend their own genius loci with that of their time and place, thereby advancing the bringing Heaven that much closer to Earth.

### Distinctive contributions of the arts

Couldn't any teacher in any discipline also nurture these same qualities?

Yes. Of course. But there are distinctive qualities that the arts contain that make their special contribution. Thomas Berry, again tells us; "The natural world demands a response beyond that of rational calculation, beyond philosophical reasoning, beyond scientific insight. The natural world demands a response that rises from the wild unconscious depths of the human soul. A response that artists seek to provide in color and music and movement." (Berry, 1999)

What are these distinctive features of the arts? The very bases for creating *any* art form are these: **to discern the patterns and hear the harmonies that coheres every single thing, and place every single element within ecology of all things.** To see the patterns and hear the harmonies that coheres every single thing, and, to place every single element within an ecology of all things. This is the core of every art form. It's called **composition- the very grammar of all the arts.**

**Other qualities of artistic sensibilities** are these; Penetrating curiosity, Devoted seeing, Exquisite workmanship, Integrated themes, Astonishing variations, Passionate forthcoming; Unhurried wonder, Leaping imagination, Openness to this *and* to that, Pattern recognition, Perceiving harmonies subtle and complex, Transparency, Persistence, Devotion to excellence, Curiosity about what lies beyond the bend in the road. A sense of Gratitude, may I even say, Reverence for the crushing beauty of Great Nature.

We also understand that each art form and its materials; each of the several visual, literary musical, dance, art forms- can be correctly understood as particularly sensitive *portals* through which one can encounter particular aspects of our many layered and entangled world. Thus, all members of our school are taught how to approach, open and enter the world through as many of these portals for which they have the readiness and propensity.

What examples are there of such artists? Artists whose qualities empower this joinery? **Indeed the evidence is art's history.** Have you not heard a Bach Cantata? What do you think that was about? Or Verdi's Requiem? Puccini's Madame Butterfly, Mozart's "Cosi fan Tutti?" Brahms's Deutsche Requiem, John Lennon, Janis Joplin, Tibetan Mandalas, Navaho sand paintings, Olmec pottery, Bengali temple dancers, Basho's Haiku, Shakespeare's sonnets, Pascal's Pensees, Almadovar's movies?

The under laying project of all the arts, in all societies, was and remains, to see so deeply, so broadly, so finely, so courageously, and to listen so care fully, feel so empathically, say so completely, that the "news" we bring back from our seeing beyond the horizon of what we now know, our scrupulous craftsmanship, are all unveilings of how *we might live*, rather than acquiesce to how we were given to live and now believe that we are *consigned* to live.

Put in other terms, again employing the language of Martin Buber, might we not say that Art filled consciousness engages every thing, every "it" in the world as if it was a "Thou"? And, by the intensity and sincerity of that reaching towards the "other," unveils the Thou that is indeed embedded in every thing; elevating every "it," to "Thou."

Thus every day things; a **pear**- in the gaze of Cezanne, a **puddle** in the eyes of Monet, a **hand** in the hand of El Greco, a **cloud** for Turner, become- through their gifts of seeing and saying, now for us too, "Thou." The closer and deeper, more broadly *we* draw closer to nature, the more things in the world we address as Thou. A school that moves its academic community in this direction is a good school. It is a school that takes up the challenges set forth by the Great Work.

What about the distinctive qualities of the other disciplines of Knowledge, for surely they do encompass similar and importantly other domains? That might be a project of your next invited lecturer.

### **Coda**

My hope on taking you on this virtual journey through this particular school, bounded as it must be by my personal familiarities and imaginative capacities, will be to invite you to take a similar journey across your own landscape of possibilities, studded by your own values and talents as you address your version of the Great Work; rejoining our human fragment of creation with all the rest of Creation. Employing your Genius Loci, the fullest scope of your imagination, will commission your school to experiment in conducting its affairs –each day, and in every aspect of that day- in such a way as to draw ever closer to the way you ultimately desire to live, and live compatibly within the infinite family of all Creation.

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