

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

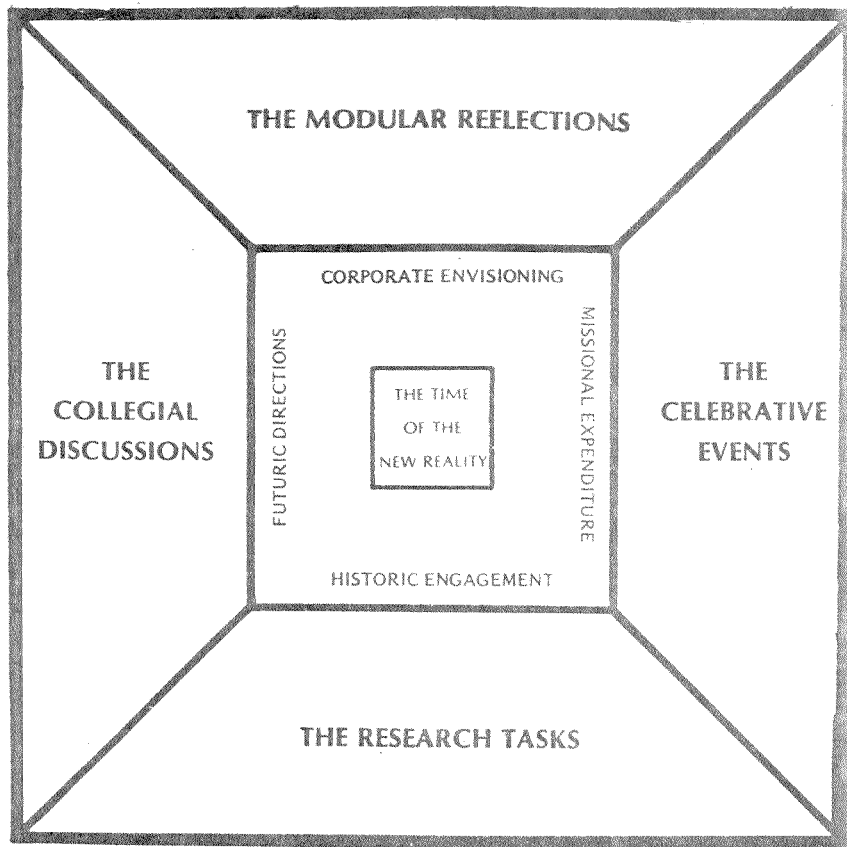
A couple of years ago we were singing *The Impossible Dream*. This morning we sang *The Possible Now*. That is what I'm here to talk about. Our song leader this morning was pointing out the now reality among us. It will take me some time to recover from one group's observation that they found reason to weep over the state of the Women's Revolution. It did not have anything to do with the poor benighted oppressed women of the world. It was that this revolution is absolutely a global phenomenon, and yet its manifestations seem to be turned in and parochial. That was the occasion for weeping. That was quite a comment, both in what it saw and in the response to it.

Our first set of talks focused on learnings of the past year, and we have learned a great deal. That's been apparent both from the talks and our conversations following them. This is the first in the middle series of four talks about the depth we've encountered. In many ways, it is about naming the significance of what we are learning. It's about touching the depth and tapping the source of creativity. It's about touching the profound dimension of what we are doing. And it is right that they be in the center of the Assembly, followed by the third set of four talks, *The Future Beckonings*. I've heard many of us say that we are looking for an edge, a flip or a creative leap out of the summer's work so that we don't go on doing more of the same better. The talks on the future have the possibility of making this creative leap by touching the depth, the center. I'm looking forward to hearing the balloons that will be just as startling to us for the next year as the yellow magic marker was last year. It is out of that sense of the center, the reality, the depth, that those practical imaginal leaps can happen.

I'm starting the second inning of talks. This reminds me of a conversation with some of my colleagues about what it means to be a lead off man in a baseball game. The lead off man only has to get on base. He doesn't have to hit a home run. So, I am charged to get on base and that means to present this topic with enough of a feel so we can all work on it. I originally hoped, about three months ago when this topic began to emerge, that we would be ready at this moment to make a couple of grand, final pronouncements of the way life is in the deeps. I discovered yesterday that I have no less than 55 grand profound pronouncements. This is not the final, ultimate speech. I want to share with you part of a letter I received recently. You need to remember this. It is from a very wise person:

The nobodies of this world are actually the people of destiny. The miserable ones have strength that comes from always being up against it. The unassuming local men and women are in control of history. Those who are relentlessly driven to devise a better order, will. People who don't always have to blame someone don't find themselves living out of the blame inflicted by other people. Single-minded ones alone see through to the depths of life. People who further cooperation instead of conflict are in tune with the civilizing process and people who are blamed, criticized and otherwise discriminated against because of doing all these other things really are living out of a new order, a new reality that is coming into being. Furthermore, you guys, to be a little more direct, might well find yourselves strangely pleased when you are slandered, maligned, and people make up rumors about you. Imagine taking so much trouble with a bunch of nobodies! Anyway, that puts you in league with the greats of history, most of whom had to put up with the same thing. Take care of yourselves. History needs this movement, but if the movement stops moving, you can't start it again; momentum's gone, and overcoming inertia in a group is impossible. So you might as well, if it stops moving, just forget it and let history wipe it out . . . You are a demonstration of the future. That means visibility. You can't very well demonstrate anything as long as an underground mindset prevails. So show off, but not for yourselves. Show off so that people can see the possibility of the future and the real practical possibility of living gloriously and happily in front of the unknown, the final reality.

This talk is called *Signs of the Times* and it has one point—that this is a time of The New Reality. The purpose of this talk is to provide images and a feel for that reality so that we all begin to stew creatively. It's not a knowing talk, I discovered. This is not a matter of intellectual clarity in the first instance, although that may be a job for us later on. It's not a doing talk. We have had a number of those. This is a *being* talk. It's what we have referred to in the past as a spirit spin, though that doesn't quite describe it, since it is about a very external reality. The most important thing going on in these two weeks has to do with the box in the center of the dynamics of the summer chart called, *The Time of the New Reality*.

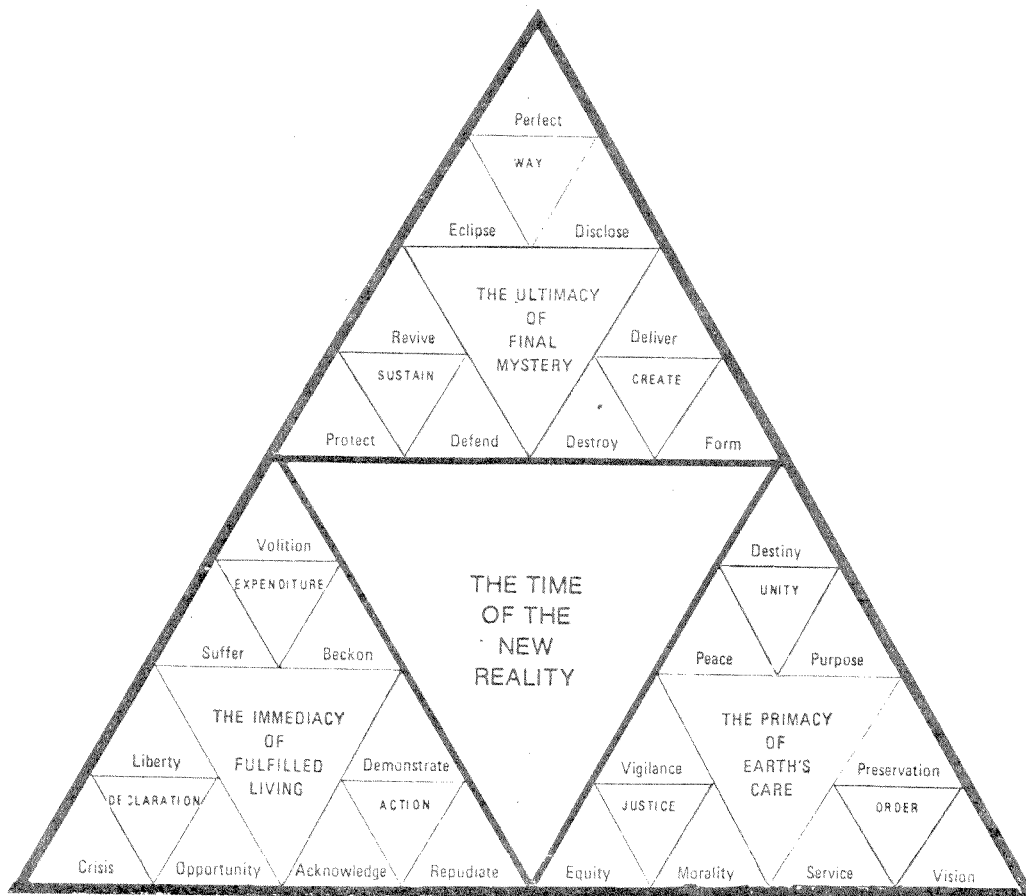


GLOBAL RESEARCH ASSEMBLY

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The summer is not about a time of *some* new reality. The most important word in that box is "the." There is something definitive and profound at the heart of what we're doing. Some of you may have discovered it already. These task forces were an excuse for us to get together and explore the new reality that is at hand. The most important thing for us in this Assembly is to get hold of what's emerged in our time as a reality which is not us, but is indisputably present.

I have not been able to make a lot of sense out of these triangles, but I think they are right. I am not going to talk about them, but try to get us inside the reality they indicate so that we can all work with the triangles. We have had fun trying to name *the* new reality that has emerged in our time. We have been able to perceive it, experience it, encounter it, and wake up in the midst of it, but we have not been able to name it. Some of you — especially those who love language — will really like this one. The winner of the contest so far has been this: The new reality is "the transparent socio-showing-uped-ness of profound humanness in primal community". That's terrible phrasing, but it is meant to describe our brooding about profound humanness that has occurred for years now. We've been thinking in this framework, not from an abstract theory of what it would be nice to be like if you were a real human being, but out of the encounter in ourselves, and in our colleagues, and in those we meet among local man of the dynamics of profound humanness. We've captured something in naming it. The most important thing, however, is not naming it; we have encountered its presence. For a couple of years we've worked on primal community and its dynamics. When profound humanness and primal community interact, you have the new reality that we are pointing to with a phrase as ridiculous as "transparent socio-showing-uped-ness of profound humanness in primal community." Anyway, I have created a formula: $PH + PC = NR$. Profound Humanness plus Primal Community is The New Reality, and it's happened.



We've tried to do a bit more than name it. We have tried to create images of it. There is another good one that appeals to me. It's the state of not being ruled by the contradiction, or the state of a different power in charge, but you have to be careful with that one. A contradiction just does not go away. You are always up against the contradiction. This is a state of not being paralyzed by the contradiction. Reports from the latest round of Consults have been startling to me. We heard that before the contradictions were written up in the document they were already being dealt with and the manifestations being wiped out. You'd find a contradiction in space care or living environment and before it was put into written form, a group of people were out moving on it. That's amazing. Anyone that has been to a Consult has experienced that in those situations, the contradiction is not in charge. Something else is in charge. A different power is in charge, and that's the new reality. It is certainly not something the ICA has dreamed up or manufactured. It's just there. We have to acknowledge that a contradiction is a very, very subtle thing. Although it is not in charge, it is quite likely to sneak around the back side and get you. I figure you can be in a place about 30 minutes before you are taken in by its contradiction. I understand that when our people go to the projects and perform miracles on living environment, the auxiliary house sometimes gets left out and becomes a wreck. The contradiction with living environment is sneaky, as all of them are. But the contradiction is not in charge. A different power is in charge, and people experience that.

Another image is that every aspect of life is electrified with the future, which seems to be at stake. This new reality manifests mystery, significance and meaning. There are times in history when this is not the case. There are times in history when routine seems to dominate; normalcy seems to prevail. These are times when you have spirit talks and spirit exercises all the time because you have to remind yourself that there is more than routine to life. You need to remind yourself that there is an ultimate dimension to life.

There are times like ours when that mysterious, profound element is everywhere you turn. It is during these periods that new forms of penetrating to the depth are invented. I picked up a book the other day—not a religious book—with this introductory sentence: “Is a new religious being born?” I didn’t know and the book didn’t know either. The point of the author’s observation was that this time is similar to those times in history when religions were born. There’s a sense of the profound reality in the middle of life that is just present for everyone to see.

Another image we’ve used is that we are in a time of the global appearance of vision, vitality and power in the very places where those things could not possibly happen. The places among the 85% are places of globality, vision and power. You would not expect anything but parochialism, impotence and day-to-day grubbing from local man, but whenever we contact local man and local community, we have found globality, vision and power.

Now these pointers indicate something. It seems so obvious and so external. It has nothing to do with how I feel about these realities. There’s something new which you expect to be able to find in the newspaper, maybe not directly in the headlines, but in a trends analysis or through statistics. Some of us tried that. We find ourselves listing all of the nice things that are going on in history these days which relate to the rise of local man. The Sadat-Begun injection into history is one example and came as a genuine surprise. The fact that Rhodesia hasn’t turned into a bloodbath yet is another surprise. You can point to many things that indicate this resurgence of local man. I was interested the other day when I picked up an article that catalogued the rise of local man, particularly focused on this country, but in every arena of life, he documented the rise of local man, and then called it evidence of collapse in civilization. You cannot assume that everyone will see The New Reality, even when they look at the signs. But sometimes they do.

After the Consult in Kawangware, but before anything had happened, lives were changed. Objectively, in fifteen minutes, you could see visitor’s lives change, and it wasn’t because of anything we said. You watched it. People were saying things like, “This is what I’ve wanted to do all my life.” And you wanted to ask them, “What? What is it you’ve wanted to do all your life? We’ve got two years worth of work to go!” They saw something there which was as objectively, externally, empirically present as anything you could point to.

It’s not simply a happening to individuals. This reality means that something is going on in history that we didn’t invent. As we’ve been working on these talks, some of our colleagues have feared that when we got up to talk, we would sound like we were saying that the ICA has created a new reality. You find yourself and your colleagues occasionally going into communities assuming that we carry a power, an expertise and a method that allows us to ignore the local situation, popping in there, snapping our fingers, and have a great new happening occur. Boloney! Anybody that’s run into this reality I’m talking about knows very clearly that it is not something you create. You discover it. It gets manifested in the midst of situations, but it comes out of careful, careful acknowledgement, and I don’t mean self-depreciation. I am referring to sensitive perception of what the situation contains. There’s something going on that we didn’t invent, that happens in history from time to time. There are troughs and there are crests. I’m pointing to a crest. For a while, we talked about ourselves in history as headed for the crest with the happening of resurgence beginning to bubble. We’ve climbed a long way up the back of the wave recently. There is *the* new reality at hand. Can you imagine Plato in his time, picking up a newspaper and saying, “Hey, Matilda — hey, look! We’re in the Golden Age of Greece and Rome!” or in the Renaissance, Michelangelo picking up the paper and saying, “Look! We’re in the Renaissance!” But there are times when there’s a breakloose in the human spirit you can see objectively. However, it is not something you can point to and say, “Look at this happening”. That’s an unambiguous pointer, and this is ambiguous.

But there is a shift that has happened. The shift is from the individual orientation to the social orientation. Another way to articulate this shift is to call it a shift from an emphasis on self to an emphasis on community; or a shift of emphasis from profound humanness to primal community as the locus for care. It is in the primal community where creativity is generated and vitalized. We’ve discovered that communities have a life of their own, not equal to the sum of their parts. I’ve heard people say in some of these projects, “The people there are fantastic, but the place is terrible.” We’re discovering the place, we’re discovering the community. I would describe it as a shift from selfhood to “peoplehood”. We’re discovering the significance of globally being a people — a people of destiny on whom the future rests. It’s that kind of a shift. Everyone here has seen it happen.

I want to tell you a story about a trip to Harvard by myself and a colleague to lay out the possibility of a number of students going to Maharashtra to spend three months, returning and doing a seminar on human development at Harvard. It was snowing that day, with about two feet of snow on the ground in Boston. The appointment was late in the afternoon, usually a bad time to talk with students. Even though there had been no recruitment, the room was filled with students. Somebody had posted a brochure, and the students flocked in. We had agreed beforehand that our presentation would be one of the finest pitches we'd ever made — brief, sharp and pointed. One of my Development colleagues talked first, and he was going to do the overview. Having just returned from a trip to India, I was going to describe conditions there, and then we'd just talk with the group. Well, he began with his flip book and talked for 45 minutes. About 45 minutes later, I finished and asked, "Now, what kind of questions do you have?" The questions the students had were, "All right, what do we do next to sign up?" There were no questions about what was happening. They just signed up. You are running into that. It's the social transformation that is sparking creativity in lives. When you attempt to point to this new reality that's among us, all you can say to somebody is, "Look, this community that was limping along is now standing tall. These people who were blind to the future now have a vision. These people who were deaf, can hear. Is that the new reality you had in mind, or were you looking for something else?" That's about all you can say to somebody, but it's the most important thing we've got to say right now. The new reality is made apparent by these events.

You find yourself returning to the phenomenological method, talking about the shift in consciousness that's taken place in our time. For many years, we have found ourselves in situations that have demanded we carry the world upon our shoulders, and we have seen that certain things happen to our consciousness. We've talked about one set of categories as the Dark Night, which illuminated that you find yourself being humiliated, being weak, being resentful, suffering all the time. An appropriate image is having a black cloud descend, which never departs. We also articulated the experience of rootlessness, ineffectivity, weariness and unfulfillment, because we're on the move, on the history-long march of people. In this time, something new has happened that's really an intensification of both the Dark Night and the Long March. To me, it is an eeriness, ceaselessness, nothingness and presence.

You notice that elemental wonder has broken out among people around the world. Movies these days contain a number of elements that deal with the awesome, the unusual, the strange, and the wonderful. I think the appeal of *Close Encounters of a Third Kind* is something in that arena. I had an incredible experience in Starks. Ten minutes before the closing feast, I ran out of gas three miles out of town in the rain. A colleague and I tried to push this little Volkswagon up a hill, and the hills in Starks are not things you push Volkswagons up, especially in the rain. My colleague caught a ride into town to rescue it. Now there were several things surprising in that event. The most important surprise was not that Don Clark returned with the gas can. Don Clark was supposed to be in Houston, not in Maine, so far as I knew. That was sort of an amazing event, but you find yourself not surprised — absolutely not surprised. It seems that you've been living in such a state of wonder for so long that there wasn't anything surprising. You weren't resentful about running out of gas. You weren't particularly worried about what was going to happen, though you were panicked. It's a state of eeriness that we found ourselves in, a consciousness of that different power in charge. The power is not the contradiction, and it's not the enemy either.

You find yourself in perpetual demand. Somebody said we're running into a nameless perpetual anxiety these days. I think it is related to the comprehensive nature of the task which has become a part of us. Some of us have talked about a nightmare which happened right before June 8th when the North American Continent went yellow. A few white spots remained on the map, and some of us had a nightmare that all the yellow would shrink up into tiny dots, and we'd have all that white space left to cover with Town Meetings again. Now that's happened. We have substituted dots on the map for the yellowed counties, which shows all the space unfinished. The comprehensive nature of the task has affected us. We've discovered that the task is not doing 5,000, or 10,000, or 250 or 2,500. The task is doing every last community on the face of the planet earth. When that abstract pronouncement of doing every community becomes an interior reality, you can understand a nameless drive, an anxiety, that keeps you moving and moving and moving.

You encounter a state of profound gratitude, beyond **resentfulness or weariness**. It is related to the experience of being nothing in yourself. I am not a person who admires and likes lots of colleagues. I tend to be a crotchety old man, and I don't intend to change until you do. To my surprise, I find myself in the state of unbelievable gratitude. My colleagues and their work are really something! They haven't become any nicer, but I've seen miracles happen. There's an awesome otherness present in the midst of this. Can you imagine all of the negative press that concerns some of us? Isn't it ludicrous that anybody would take the trouble to write about a group like us? It's ridiculous. You experience powers waging war in the world, and we find ourselves being used by one side against the other. That's a terrible way to talk in this scientific era, but that's the way it seems.

What are the practical implications of all this? One is that the new reality is all we are doing. Anybody that thinks we finally care two hoots for any particular program is wrong. Our role in history is disclosing the new reality that we didn't invent. Everything else is a gimmick—a helpful tool for doing it effectively. The second implication? This is an arena in which live bullets fly. When a new reality emerges in history, everything wedded to the old reality gets yanked out of existence, and it does not go down willingly. People's lives are vested in the old patterns and structures that are going out of being because of the new transparent socio-showing up edness of profound humanness and primal community. When that happens, there is a war with live bullets, which we need to prepare ourselves for. Third, it is an exceedingly indicative posture. You are not concerned about creating or gaining anything for yourself or your community in this new reality. You are just conscious that there is something present worthy of disclosing, which is what the summer symbol illuminates. It's not saying, "Look, wake up and see how terrible this situation is so you can change it." Awakening instead, it is calling attention to the greatness already present. The purpose of engagement is to shape the new reality that is already present, not to criticize the old.

The most exciting discovery about interchange is the awareness that no particular situation is doing one small part. Each is doing the whole. Interchange shows us that our mission is global, not something particular or unique. Formation acknowledges that we are continually in the midst of the new reality. Formation is keeping your glasses clean and keeping your perception alive. It is not training in the old sense of school. It is the necessary trained perception to see the depth reality.

The fourth practical implication is that the new reality is easily wiped out if you don't stay in it. Involve yourself in routine and you don't see the reality appear anymore. The new is a jangling but routine arena of war. Liberalism, when you find yourself more wedded to abstract ideals than to particular situations, will wipe the new reality. Panic or tyrannical responsibility will wipe it out. It is easily wiped out if these are enemies for those who intend to disclose the new reality.

Another practical implication is the shift this calls for in our practical screens. We have talked for years about inadequate numbers of troops. Our current tendency is to talk even louder as our expansion continues. The facts are that there are more people than ever flocking at our doors. We are moving from a time of paucity to a time of plenty, and it is equally problematic. It's like you pulled in a net and it has many varieties of fish in it. The vision of the future has shifted from avoiding disaster to birthing what is possible. That is reflected by the song shift from *The Impossible Dream* to the *Possible Now*. The opportunities and possibilities missionally for doing the world are incredible, and it is a matter of strategizing where, not whether.

I propose that the next thing on our brooding agenda is to start working on the top circle in the symbol. Slowly and carefully, what are the yin yangs contained in it? What are they pointing to? This is a symbol of the new reality, taking the local-global disjuncture and weaving it into one thing. That circle has bridged that gap. The gaps of tradition and vision have been bridged. The gaps of selfhood and corporateness and care and sacrifice have been bridged. These are currently my candidates for putting into those yin and yangs: local/global, tradition/vision, selfhood/corporateness and care/sacrifice. I propose that as an important arena for our brooding next year.