



Robert Weston



## About the Author



Robert Weston spent ten years in the marketing and communications industry, working with global corporations as both a 'suit' and a 'creative'. He then founded Groundswell, a communications agency for human rights and environmental charities. This led to his being invited also to work with governments and supra-governmental bodies on these issues.

Being now passably fluent in the public, private and civic sector languages, he went on to design and deliver interdisciplinary culture change programmes on social and environmental responsibility. Tired of being overpaid and underheard, Robert then began to launch a series of increasingly successful eco-enterprises of his own in the hotel, retail and property industries.

Robert holds a Bachelor's degree in Philosophy and a Masters in Responsibility and Business Practice. He has written several books on these topics, has co-launched the UK Farmers' Market movement and five children.

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## Foreword

We are publishing Organismics to coincide with the launch of twenty businesses, all of them focused on combining profit, planet and people as three equally long, strong – and equally important – legs of the ‘three-legged stool of sustainability’. Like the organs in an organism, every business feeds and is fed by every other. Every sale, for instance, made by one company can open up several potential sales or supply lines or investment opportunities for other companies within the group. The idea is to demonstrate that when run on Organismic principles, businesses can not only help prevent and repair harm to planet and people, they can also produce very healthy and sustained, often enhanced, profits.

The book represents a distillation of what I have learned over the first fifty years of my life, about myself, my family, business, community, trust, health, wealth and happiness. It explores some of the commercial, philosophical, social, cultural, spiritual and emotional challenges I have encountered and describes how I have attempted to make some sense of it all, in thought, word and deed. It also contains extracts from a number of rants I have written over the years about topics that make me more than a little cross. The faint-hearted or lily-livered may wish to give them a miss.

The basic idea behind the Organismics philosophy is simple: we humans are all organisms; we contain within us numerous distinct yet interdependent levels of smaller organisms: organs, cells, molecules, atoms, sub-atomic particles and so on. We are similarly contained within many levels of *larger* organisms: families, communities, organisations, regions, nations, the human race, Earth’s inhabitants as a whole, our solar system, galaxies and so on...and on...We – all beings – are, I suggest, as Ken Wilber puts it so elegantly, a

set of ‘nested holons’, each whole within itself, yet part of a taxonomy whose primary differences are those of scale.

Organisms benefit from the wellbeing of their organs, and vice versa. Imagine a situation in which your heart and lungs decided they were at war with each other for blood. Very quickly you would die and the heart and the lungs would die with you. If, instead, the heart were to say to the lungs: ‘you seem great at oxygenating this stuff and removing toxic leftovers; I really enjoy pumping it around,’ you would be more likely to remain alive and kicking and so would they.

The above absurd, self-destructive battle is representative of where our culture, in relatively recent history, has gone. We have focused, suicidally, genocidally and ‘geo-cidally’ on simple self-interest and overlooked the time-tested truths and efficacy of *enlightened* self-interest. In an Organismic world, the ‘all for one and one for all’ approach provides all-win outcomes and the system as a whole thrives, along with all its parts. ‘Win/win’ is an inadequate philosophy; ‘all win or death’ is my suggested alternative interpretation of how life works.

Organismics is, as I suggest, a philosophy – an attempt to make some sense of life and reality. As Professor Tony Manser, one of my first academic philosophical mentors (and, luckily for me, responsible for my pastoral care – long story, don’t go there) put it: ‘the Owl of Minerva flies only at dusk’. Tony’s room was festooned with owl images. Minerva’s Owl, he explained, represents philosophy and flies, like most owls, after the day is done. Philosophy observes what appears to go on and attempts afterwards to make sense of it. It doesn’t advocate or criticise – except, respectively, its own explanations and those of others.

I advocate this philosophy. It works for me and I hope you will find it useful too.

Rob Weston

Bath. November 20th 2006.



## How the book came out like this



Having been a professional writer for twenty-five years, I had always assumed I would be writing my *magnum opus* myself. I had written books, published by the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply, on managing corporate social responsibility in global supply chains and human rights in international business; another, published by the OECD Development Assistance Committee, on urban environmental projects in developing countries; I'd had published numerous articles and papers on a host of profit, planet, people topics; ranted regularly for ten years in my column for The Spark magazine under the byline Angry of Bath; completed, over a tortuous year, my masters dissertation on local versus global food systems and generally spewed words at the world, mostly comprehensibly, for decades.

This book, therefore, surprised me. Suddenly I had writer's block. Too close to my heart to travel down my arms to a keyboard and too much to say.

So, I hired a writer to help me. Chris Wyatt has been the most astonishingly patient and professional literary midwife. He tolerated with good humour my contractions; he accepted with good grace my bellowing, late arrivals, no-shows and tantrums; he asked many of the right questions, transcribed and edited the answers and gently but firmly eased this baby out of me after decades of gestation and through a long, less-than-tranquil labour.

Ultimately, through pride, passion and white-knuckled control freakery, I had to do the final version myself. It is still, however, written in the question-and-answer dialogue style, as from the original interviews. The questions and answers are, however, written by me. Any *non sequiturs*, errors of fact, gaps or insults are my responsibility. The fact that it has emerged at all, with both of us still alive, is, to a large extent, Chris's.

Rob Weston



## How to use this book



Before we go any further, I ought to settle one thing right up front: this is not an eco-bible or ethical tract. It doesn't advocate anything, it simply asks that we take account, in our thoughts, words and deeds and in our own interest, of our planet, of all the beings with whom we share the planet and of those who will come after us to this astonishingly beautiful and well-designed place.

This is not a book about 'right and wrong'; it is a book which describes silly and non-silly ways of thinking, speaking and acting. When people start picking holes in well thought-through strategies and tactics on the basis of relatively insignificant trifles, I see red. I see red very frequently, usually blood-red. When people start delaying worthwhile projects with time-wasting irrelevant quibbles like the carbon emissions created by Oxford Street's Christmas lights I see red herring and I want to maim. I am not politically correct and, faced with ignorant, ill-informed, holier-than-thou, knitted wholemeal sandal-wearing hippy do-gooder shite like this I begin to muse on topics like the various meanings of the phrase 'human compost'. What we need is not do-gooders but good doers, working together to create wholes greater than the sums of their parts.

Mexican Toltec nagual, Don Miguel Ruiz, advocates four living principles, which I find extremely useful:

- Be impeccable with your word
- Do not make assumptions
- Take nothing personally
- Do your best

Don Miguel's fourth principle: 'Do your best' is perhaps most relevant here. I'd say it is *how* we do things, rather than the actual things we do, that really makes a difference. I believe most females understand this better than most males.

Organismic  
Thought Number One:  
**Verbs are masculine;  
adverbs are feminine**

My ex-business partner Paul Wielgus, before he went off to become a Dharma teacher, used to recommend, very sagely, that we pay heed to two key matters in life: *attention* and *intention*. It seems to me that he had a point. There is a time when killing may be a good idea: many Jewish people might suggest the assassination of Hitler, for instance, in the early 1930s. Similarly, there is a time when, say, an embrace would be, from some points of view, disastrous.

So, please do not read this book if you are seeking 'correct' answers or reassuring, accommodating and gentle encouragements. I am confident it will make you think; I hope it will make you cringe sometimes too.

Oh, and if you just want to make loads of money, you can turn straight to the 'Organismics in Business' section, starting on Page 64. However, you'll most likely make more if you read the whole thing.

Enjoy (or not) 8^)

Rob Weston



## Acknowledgements



As is always the case – particularly in an Organismic world – everyone and everything has contributed to this work. Those of particular note, to whom I owe a debt of great gratitude, include: my wife Kari and our children Arun, Anna, Finn, Felix and Claudia, for immense love, tolerance and daily, usually painful, epiphanies; my mother, Patricia, for modelling Irish-Welsh passion and fury, for entering me into the school of hard knocks and for doing her very best; my father Alan for showing me English balance, pragmatism, the love of fine craftsmanship and all things truly ship-shape and Bristol-fashion; Judy and Pat Barnard for putting up with far too much of my often appalling behaviour and helping to finance a career of which they have never been able to make the slightest sense; Chris Wyatt for masterful midwifery; all at The House, particularly Becs, for their superb synthesis of vocational vision and getting great things done and dusted, just like it says on the tin; Gordon and Ann Glass for modest yet immensely efficacious mentoring; the academics, both in Philosophy at the University of Southampton and Peter Reason, Judi Marshall and Gill Coleman at the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice at the University of Bath – mostly for not quite throwing me out; Bill White at Rendcomb College for demonstrating what true education really means in its richest, most profound sense; Anita Roddick for repeatedly reminding me that trading is the key; Tracy, Marchioness of Worcester, for reminding me equally powerfully that I am not radical enough; Anna Gahlin and Leo Turner for eldering; Judith Smith for eldering and Judith's Ginger Juice; Grandpa Semu Huaute for opening The Big Door again; Arwyn Dreamwalker for ruthless sobriety; Hyemeyohsts Storm for larger-than-life love of Life; Martín Prechtel for immense warmth, humour and ceremony; Jamie Sams for naming

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Rob Weston



## Part One: I Take my Hat off to Fès



**Q : So you went to Fès to finish the book and came back saying you had to start it again. Why?**

**A:** Because I discovered that I hadn't described any examples of Organismic life actually being lived fully anywhere in today's world. I'd mentioned a few fragments concerning indigenous societies, both in the past and in the present, where I saw evidence of Organismic living but in Fès I found it all, writ large, live and kicking, full-fat Organismic life.

What I realised, though, talking to you and looking at the barely concealed dismay on your face, was that I only had to write an introductory story. Please forgive me if I explain this in some detail – the tale of my trip to Fès is important to me: the city is a kind of microcosm of Organismic living. People 'feed and are fed by' others in a way we don't see, for instance, in Europe and there is, despite the unavoidable suffering which happens to any organism at times, an unusually high level of health, happiness, prosperity and mutual honouring to be found there.

**Q : So tell me about organismic living in Fès**

**A:** It isn't just lifestyle and relationships, though that's fundamentally important, it's about history, evolution, doing what indigenous cultures do, which is to find out what works by trial and error over long periods. It's also about synchronicity, that's the big thing that seems to happen a lot when the Organismic life is lived. I arrived to finish a book on Organismics and suddenly, to my amazement, I discovered that the Organismic life was alive and well right where I had landed. I'm not sure why I chose this location for my writing trip. I suppose it has to do with some unconscious knowing, or, probably more

likely, luck –and as they would say there, in their inimitable way, interventions of Allah, which is just amazing when one, having tethered one's camel, lets go and lets Allah do his stuff.

### **Casablanca: 'The White House' – How Appropriate!**

So, let's tell the story of the trip. I went to Casablanca, because I couldn't get into Fès and out of Fès and back to England in time to do all the work we had to do, not least on the book. Casablanca had seemed to me like a puffy white man place. I took the train to Fès; it was £9.00 return, First Class, nine hours the round trip, with an air-conditioned compartment and a little friendly man with a well-stocked buffet trolley popping in once an hour or so. On arriving in Fès, I had lunch in this lovely place, recommended by a very civilised lady and her two daughters on the train, then I walked around the corner, in through the gates of the medina. Of course I immediately started getting all the human mosquitoes around me, as you do. The unofficial faux guides, and the hawkers and the poor little buggers who can't find another way to make a living. Incidentally, it was interesting that throughout this entire trip I didn't see many signs of poverty on the streets. In my home city, Bath, England, there is phenomenal wealth, yet you can't walk eight paces without being grabbed by a beggar, importuned by a homeless person selling The Big Issue or clobbered by a drunk. The only people I saw begging – and this was rare – were a few blind people, and most citizens seemed happy to give them some change. Anyway, so even the poor seem to be active entrepreneurs: they become mosquitoes, and they're buzzing around me at this point in the story. One guy was particularly tenacious and in the end I stopped. He spoke pretty good English, as a lot of them do, because of course they learn the language so they can hustle anglophones on the trains and in the medina. This guy was particularly bugging, and spoke good English, so I stopped in the end, and said in a loud, very angry voice, "LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING ABOUT BUSINESS. SOMETHING I DO, WHICH I FIND WORKS REALLY, *REALLY* WELL, IS TRY NOT TO INFURIATE MY PROSPECTIVE CLIENTS!" And he went away. And they all went away, because they noticed I wasn't particularly friendly towards mosquitoes that day. So that was good. I got left alone.

### **My Kingdom for a Tanner**

And then this guy appeared, as if from nowhere, and as if by invitation, and I didn't feel uncomfortable with him there at all. He's just one of those typical Moroccan guys that looks like he should be a supermodel, but didn't say much at all really. And he didn't seem to be obtrusive. After a while, as I was stomping through the medina towards the tanneries, I guess he figured out where I was going, because I was consistently heading downwards, knowing that's where the tanneries were to be found. He said in a quiet, polite yet not at all subservient voice, "The tanneries are this way, I can show you if you like." And I said "Sure, thanks very much." So he showed me the way, and I was led into the part of the tanneries where he was employed by that particular cooperative. And it was a good one. I'm sure it was as good as any, better than many. Their stuff was good. There were of course no prices attached, but I like to haggle, so it seemed fine. He introduced me to a guy, a slightly older guy, who was kind of the salesman, not the apprentice. The apprentice went and sat on the floor and just watched and said nothing. And the guy, who later turned out to be an alcoholic, which is a bit sad in a Muslim community, who was the salesman and a senior hustler, took me through the process and showed me the tannery vats and all that, left me alone to take photographs when I asked him to, and it was good. I took photographs of the tannery activities going on. And then we cut to the chase and started looking at merchandise, and I bought some exquisite items, for myself and for my family. It was very good stuff, and the prices were good too.

I couldn't pay for it, as it turned out, as my plastic had been blocked in England, through my own failure to pay my credit card bill before leaving. So we were a bit stuck, and we'd spent two hours, what with my taking photographs, and wandering around looking at stuff, and then getting what I wanted together in a group of objects, and haggling, and finally settling on a price. They had been honouring towards me and I was determined to return the compliment. So, the way it unfolded, he said, "Could you get cash out of a cash point?" I said, "Yeah, only up to maximum of 2000 dirhams a day, and we have rather more than that here to pay, quite a bit more." He said, "But these machines in this part of the world, they're for a maximum of 2000 dirhams,

but that's per transaction. You just keep taking out wads of 2000 dirhams I reckon." I said, "OK, let's try it." So we wandered off to the bank, and it took a while. To cut a long story short, we did persuade the machine to spit out quite a few piles of 2000 dirhams, one after the other, which I loved, I thought it was very funny. "Maximum 2000 dirhams, as often as you like!" All within minutes.

### **We Go to the Palace**

Anyhow, the machine caught on after a while but we got the bill paid by other means. At the end of that I said to the salesman, who had become my sort of host, my guide, "Listen, now I have to get on my train back to Casablanca, because I've got to get back to my hotel, and it's a four-and-a-half hour train journey and it's now seven o'clock in the evening." He said, "No, no, no, no, there's a later train." I said, "No, no, no, no, there isn't a later train, I checked." He said, "Yes there is a later train, they put on an extra one recently. The timetables don't show it." I replied, "Well, look, if you can check that for me, and if indeed it is the case, then I won't be worried about rushing on, we can have some dinner, we can do whatever." I was enjoying myself, and he said, "OK" and went to check. He came back and told me, "There is one at 10 o'clock, and I can show you the proof of that." I said, "Listen, if you've checked, and there is one at 10 o'clock, then let's go for it. I'll stick around a bit. He came back with, "Tell you what, if that's the case, you want to wander across the road, because over in that palace over there is this other guy, he's a friend of mine. He sells carpets. Do you want to look at those?" I said, "Yeah, I'll take a look." So we did.

I walked in, and there we were in this beautifully restored palace, in this very grand hall, with the columns and the zellij, the mosaic work, everywhere, the incredible ceilings. Just like a mini Alhambra. The Alhambra in Granada is probably my favourite building in the world, and here we were in a beautifully restored mini-version of that, surrounded by beautiful carpets, many of them made locally in Fès, where they have a very long tradition of crafting carpets. The guys began to show me a few, and I liked them a lot. I didn't know a great deal about carpets, but I could certainly see these were good ones. Of course, there weren't many prices mentioned. Once we'd been looking at them for a

while, in walked this guy, who turned out to be the boss, who owned the palace and owned the carpets. And he came and began to talk to me. Of course, we're negotiating all this stuff in French, and my French is rusty 'O'-Level French, but we're getting along fine. There was no hard sell, but at the same time, it was pretty clear that the guy would be delighted if I were to buy some carpets. So when we began to get to "OK, so I really like this one, this one and this one, what would the price be if I took all three? Please be aware, that if you don't take American Express, then I'm going to have a problem paying you, because I've just been through all that for several hours with the guys from the tannery." He said, "No, no, don't worry, we can sort that out. Do you have any credit available on your American Express, because I *can* take American Express." "Sure," I replied. He quickly added, "They'll hit me for six percent, would you pay that?" I said, "I'll split the difference with you." He came back with "What say I'll pay one and you pay five?" I replied "Depends on the price for the carpets!" He smiled, and we did a deal. It was a good deal for both of us – *a prix juste*. I knew that. So, I bought the three carpets. He took my American Express card, and he promptly completed the transaction with his machine.

### **The Life of Riley**

At the end of this adventure, I explained, "Now listen, thank you very much indeed. I've now got to get this train back to Casablanca." He replied, "No, no, no, don't be ridiculous, it'll take you hours and hours. You must stay at the palace." I'm thinking, 'Whoa, how much is that for a night? It must be the price of these carpets! My concern must be visible. He says, "Don't be silly, it's free, it's on the house. That was a good deal, and I'm delighted you were able to do such a deal with me. It was good for you, and it was good for me, and I'm very happy that you did it. Please stay at the palace, be my guest." I replied, "well if we can do that, thank you." I didn't fancy a long train ride, after a hard day's haggling, back to grimy Casablanca, full of puffy white man stuff in Moroccan disguise. He added, "You must join the family for dinner later. I'll show you your room and you can shower and change and shave and do all that stuff and we'll have dinner with the family at eleven."

The following afternoon, having spent the day as the guest of the family

and staff at the palace, they very kindly sent me with their chauffeur down to the station. By this time my bags were laden with gifts they'd given me – I discovered that every time I'd mentioned during a meal, for instance, that something was particularly tasty, a nod to a waiter would lead to the secretive stashing of a beautifully packed gift of that foodstuff in my luggage. Thankfully, the chauffeur carried my bags.

I went down and spent the next night in Casablanca, and then went to the airport, having had trouble paying my hotel bill for the same reasons I'd had trouble paying my other bills, because some people's machines wouldn't take even my functional credit cards. The delay of that caused me in the end to arrive at the airport too late, and I missed my plane. I phoned the man at the palace, just to say, "Hey, I've just missed my plane, and I can't get out of Casablanca for two more days." He said, "good, jump in a cab and come back to the palace, you can spend two days up here recovering from a hard few days working as a trader." I replied, "A cab? It's a four-and-a-half-hour journey. I'll be bankrupt before I get there." He said, "No, no, I'll sort you out a deal." In the end I did take the train, and it was a great train journey, I love those trains. You meet fascinating people, and you learn some Arabic, practise your French, and have a wonderful time. I finally got up there, the chauffeur was waiting, with my host's little son, who by that time had become a great buddy of mine, as had his guardian, the chauffeur.

I spent two days there, and in those two days – this is the point finally – I began to realise what a really amazing life these people in Fès live. This man has a palace. In fact it turns out he's got quite a few. And he has a lot of staff. He's very well known and very much respected around Fès. In those two days my host said, "The place is yours." He didn't actually use the term 'Yours to Command,' although I did feel like I was in an Aladdin or Ali Baba story. It was so like that. I began to wonder if I should figure out the three things I most wanted in life and start looking around for some lamps to rub. Anyhow, I was treated like a prince. It was a superb experience. I noticed all sorts of things over those two days, and that's when I began to realise the book needed to be reworked. This was the Organismic life, and we now know that it was this introductory story that was needed, and the book is fine, with the body of it as was, informed by this.

## **Non-Silly Lifestyles**

So what was the Organismic life that was going on? Citizenship had evolved over a long period there in Fès, which isn't the case with white man, sausage-machine, raw materials in, product out, waste-to-landfill culture. It's pretty recent, this white man stuff. It's only been happening from the Industrial Revolution onwards. We're talking about a handful of centuries there and that system simply doesn't reflect the greater reality. This isn't a mechanistic, logico-linear world; it's an Organismic world in which things move in cycles, not straight lines.

## Organismic Thought Number Two: **If it ain't broke, don't fix it**

The folk in Fès, the *Fassis*, live Organismically in many ways. Example: the tanners have been doing much the same sort of thing they do now over a period of thousands of years. I think the figure was nine thousand years or thereabouts, since that particular trade emerged. And I think it's been running in North Africa for a large part of that time. So they've pretty much figured out how to do it, and do it well, which is why I was happy to spend £1400 on goodies that they'd made. This is leather that's been so beautifully tanned, so beautifully cut, so beautifully stitched, and so beautifully finished and presented, that I know I would have paid thousands and thousands for the stuff I bought there, had I bought it in Paris or in Milan or Bath. The *Fassis* tanners seemed to be more concerned about their craft than anything else. Sure as hell they're good salesmen, and everyone knows that they're great traders. But that was another thing, they were cooperatives. *They were cooperatives*. These aren't companies in which people are employed in the sausage machine, hierarchical, power-over, rather than power-with, sort of system. These are cooperatives. You're rewarded for excellence. You're paid on a piece-work basis and on the quality of your work. You're promoted from apprentice to journeyman when

you've earned it. You've proven you're good, and you've worked bloody hard for a very long time. And whatever the level of your work, your output will be sold or not sold, and you will be paid accordingly. So if you turn out to be talented and industrious, and you're not a drunk, and you show due deference and pay attention to those who know better, you'll advance steadily, like any organism that honours the rest of the organisms that are larger than itself, or older than itself. That doesn't mean that you're not an individual or that you can't be iconoclastic – innovation has always come from this. It means that, instead of just ignoring or trying to overturn the body of knowledge and skills that have been developed over many generations, you seek either to thrive within it as it is, or improve it still further and thrive even more. You might say that Open Source design, as was used to develop Linux systems, operates in this way: all contribute, all gain. I guess the ones who weren't like this ended up being mosquitoes or drifted away. The people who were there were exceptionally good craftsmen and women, and there were women I noticed in some of the places, although I don't suppose there have been for long, I don't know.

### **Cultural and Commercial Evolution**

Next I was taken by my host to see the *zellij* cooperative, the mosaic makers, and shown the techniques that have evolved in that trade over almost as many years. I observed these guys learning by repeatedly hammering out, ever closer to perfection, one little star-shaped tile at a time, one little crescent-shaped tile at a time, one little S-shaped tile at a time, all day every day, learning bit by bit how to do it somewhat better, closer to the exquisite craft of their teachers: the journeymen and the masters. A lot of this I was able to infer from being shown it, and some of it I was told explicitly: how there's a great deal of respect shown by those that were learning for those who were teaching, and by those who were teaching to those who had taught *them*, and have become masters. It was somehow just absolutely right, and this system had evolved that way over thousands of years, because it is the one that works best for all concerned. They have trialled and errored it for so long they know what works well. They know how to honour each other, they seemed to know how to get the best out of each other. That is a true cooperative. There wasn't a big cheese who

owned the whole thing. Everybody who's involved is helped to discover where they excel uniquely and is honoured accordingly. Like the old Marxist line, 'To each according to his need, and from each according to his capacity.' Add a dose of hard-headed prosperity-consciousness and you've got a fine cross-party utopia right there. It sums up beautifully how these cooperatives work, and it just seemed Organismic to me. Nobody was being exploited, everyone was given the chance to get what I would call true education. The Latin tells us: *Educere*: 'to lead out', we've talked about this elsewhere in the book: in true education you are placed in a situation where all that you're capable of becoming is led out of you. And you, in turn, are led out into society as an ever more productive participant. And the more productive you are, the more you receive in return. So that felt very Organismic.

And I noticed other phenomena, like my host treated his people not as minions, subservient people, but as equals, with their own unique contributions to make to the running of the palace, or to the safety of the family and each other. I noticed when he wandered at about five in the morning, as did I, into the kitchen, the senior cook was opening up, and she said, "Whoa, back off, out of here!" He showed due deference. That was her domain. Cooking is somewhere where she excels and he doesn't. So he honoured that and said, "Whoops, sorry, I crossed the line," and he backed very respectfully out of the kitchen and waited for the coffee, rather than attempting to throw it together rather amateurishly himself. And I followed suit, very quickly, and she arrived with a big smile on her face and a pot of exquisite coffee, and everybody was happy. And I talked to him about all this. When he and I went walking in the medina together, a great deal of respect was shown to him, because he does have a very significant position in the ever-emergent natural hierarchy of things, and I think a lot of the respect shown to him was partly because of that, but partly also because he treats people respectfully himself. So when the street sweeper, or the donkey droppings picker-upper pauses for a conversation with him, the conversation takes place quite clearly between equals and with respect shown both ways, but somehow it's acknowledged by both parties that one is in some way more evolved than the other. And both parties participate in this effortlessly and with mutual acceptance and honour. Interestingly, other things happened around that word 'honour', which maybe

I'll get into in a later book – we won't go too far down the road of the esoteric in this introductory story perhaps.

### **In the Lap of the Gods**

That said, another thing that was very clear in Fès was that you can take the hierarchy, as we've discussed, in an Organismic world, as high and as low as you want. You can go down to subatomic particles and up to solar systems, galaxies and the universe, and ultimately you get to what anyone who uses such terms would call God, and the *Fassis*, of course, call God Allah. I'd heard the phrase *Insha'Allah* who knows how many bazillion times in my life, certainly many, many times in my very brief time in Fès. And actually they seem to use it in a very conscious, deliberate way. When I say "I think I'll take a shower," or "I'll go swimming," or "I quite fancy going off to the furniture makers this afternoon in the medina" and the answer comes back, "Yes, of course, *Insha'Allah*" – if God wills it – what you're hearing is a lot of things all at once. You're hearing 'Let's continually remind ourselves, shall we, that we know who's in charge, and it's God,' and in an Organismic world, that could mean 'all there is, creation-and-creator.' It also gets you off the hook of having to beat yourself up about, you know, "damn, I said I was going to be at the club for a swim at four o'clock and I didn't make it." Well, we did agree, did we not, only if God wills it, so you can be forgiven if it didn't happen. It may have been due to your incompetence, but that's part of God's will anyway. Shape up on the competence front by all means, but ultimately it's down to God, so don't beat yourself up too much. There's a lot of forgiveness in there. There's just a kind of rightness to it. There's an acknowledgement of one's place in the world, in the universe. And I don't see this happening much in white man world, even in popular Christianity, where many consciously practise just once a week on Sundays. Here many people pause for a conscious check-in with the Great Organismic Designer five times a day. It's pretty bloody impressive, I've got to say; that's thirty-five times a week. And then there are those who seem to live it 24/7, I found a lot of people I was talking to were somehow different, didn't seem to go down on their knees, take their shoes off on a prayer mat five times a day, facing Mecca. They just lived it 24/7. Some of the people I met just seemed to be

living that ongoing handing-over-to-God thing at all times. Sure as hell they might be driving Bentleys, and they might be buying and selling large chunks of real estate and who knows what else but they were also kind of living a permanent prayer. *Insha'Allah* was for real, it was conscious, it was deliberate, it was intentional, it was pretty much complete surrender – yet with practical application of one's unique gifts. I'm reminded of that line I heard many years ago that the Buddhists teach: 'pray to God and row towards the shore'. I gather the Arabs' equivalent is: 'pray to God, but tether your camel first.' Well they do live that, and they're great traders, they're great pragmatists. And they *are* great pragmatists, because they take note of what their predecessors learned. They take note of the impact of their thoughts, words and deeds upon others, and they take note of their place in the universe at all times. So this is just like the prayer of the three directions of the Native Americans and other ancient tribes. In it you are reminded, in everything you think, say and do, to consider the significance of – and the impacts in – the three directions: firstly the seven generations that precede you and all that they learned that you might find useful (why reinvent the wheel?); secondly, the likely impact on the seven generations yet to come, which would take out a lot of the stuff that white folk do in sausage machine world, which is not doing many favours for the seven generations to come; thirdly, all those beings who share this time and place with us, which would be everything, from the atmosphere and the oceans, to the forests and the fields and the rivers and so on. That seems to be very, very powerfully and consciously lived by these people; hence the mutual honouring, the success, among other things, in trade.

### **All-Win Honouring**

Talking of mutual honouring and success, there's a *prix juste*, a right price, somewhere in each transaction. Both parties either know beforehand, or quickly realise some time before they finally seal the deal. And when that *prix juste* is reached, you know that, as the buyer, to try and push it down any further would be to dishonour the seller, and the seller knows that to try and hold it any higher would be to dishonour the buyer, and what's likely to result is a non-sale, if you're dealing in a mutually honouring, I would say Organismic,

way. It has a parallel in timing. A study of the ancient Aramaic, on which the Bible is based, suggests, says Neil Douglas Klotz, the author of that amazing book, *Desert Wisdom*, that Christ did not teach of 'good and evil' but of 'ripe and unripe'. I remember thinking, when Neil explained this one day, that a pear that's pre-ripe is just rock hard and without any worthwhile taste. Post-ripeness it's just a mushy mess on the floor that needs clearing up, but at that one instant in between those two places it's a passport to paradise. Well that's what I see in actions, in thoughts, in words. There's a timeliness in everything. As we've discussed, there's a time when killing is right, there's a time when embracing is wrong. It's down to timing. There was a sense of timeliness in Fès. People seemed to live very harmoniously with the rhythms of the greater organisms – the community, the region, the seasons of the year created by the Earth's motion and so on.

### **Love Thy Neighbour**

Another amazing thing about mutual honouring that I found in Fès was the *Mellah*. The *Mellah* is an amazing phenomenon, because you've got a fortified city-within-a-city that the Arabs of Fès built for the Jews. I think the *Mellah* in Fès may have been the first in the Arab world, though the name has become generic as I understand it. Anyhow, it was built for the Jews, and they were invited to occupy it, in order to protect them from harm, which they were otherwise likely to suffer at the hands of other Arabs. So when the sons of Abraham, as they so often have in their sibling rivalry, got into a squabble, the Arabs of Fès said "come here brothers and sisters; we'll keep you safe. We'll build you a fortified city, and we'll enfold it within our own city so as to save you from harm at the hands of our brother and sister Arabs, mainly brother Arabs." If that's not mutual honouring, I don't know what is. That's a bit like the turning-of-the-other-cheek thing, you know, that Christians talk about. We've all seen how mutually destructive the alternative approach can be – the Arab/Jew vendetta turns up with more obscene carnage on the news almost every day. Of course, the Jews, like the Arabs, have some particularly useful traits, especially when it comes to intelligent finance and trading. This is an asset the Arabs recognise very readily. It pays to have such people as friends. I gather

that another reason the Jews were parked in a separate quarter was that they practise 'usury', the charging of interest, which contravenes Muslim rules. This does not, however, preclude intelligent finance and it can pay to have these guys on hand if you're a trader.

The *Mellah* also represents a means of 'knowing your own enemy'. There's a wisdom and characteristically Arab pragmatism to it. If someone might one day threaten you in some way, it's not a bad idea to keep them close and surround them with your proven allies, so you can keep an eye on things. In much the same way, if your body identifies an unrecognised entity such as, for instance, a new type of fruit molecule, it will often check it out to see if it's 'friend or foe'. It might attempt to convert it to fat for storage in case it turns out to be a useful nutrient during a forthcoming drought. It also has the habit of insulating it from the rest of the host system by enveloping it in a known, trusted, neutral fat casing, just in case.

So all this, to me, fits beautifully with the Organismic philosophy. There's lots of this, I could go on all night. It just astonished me. At first, I didn't see much evidence of any multinationals in Fès. McDonalds seem to be everywhere else in the world, but in Fès I didn't see one for some time. When you look from my friend's palace down over the city, all you see is what I imagine you would have seen a thousand, two thousand, several thousand years ago. We're not a million miles away from the so-called cradle of civilisation here. I don't suppose it would have been hard for the inhabitants of the Fertile Crescent and Egypt and those parts of the world to get here, it's just along the coast really. It's a long camel ride away, but it's not that difficult at any stage in history to imagine these guys who set the system up so many thousand years ago also being here. And I don't imagine that Fès would have appeared a whole lot different if you'd looked out over it five thousand years ago.

### **Welcome, Friend, Armani Your Side**

And yet, as I discovered, Fès has dealt elegantly with the multinational corporations phenomenon; it hasn't tried to battle it out with them or turn them away at the gates at all. It has allowed them in on its own terms. Organisms have

to evolve – it's one of the fundamentals of surviving and thriving that Darwin and others talked about. They have to adapt to changing circumstances. So we've talked about two parts of the city of Fès, the *Mellah* and the medina. The third part of the city is *Nouvelle Fès*. You get there, and you think 'My God, it's true, it's just like it says in the *Rough Guide*. I feel just as if I were sat right now on the Champs Elysées, I am sat right here in the most chic of 21st-century streets. And there's fancy cars cruising up and down, and the shops are selling Gucci and Armani and Versace and all those things. The people of Fès have evolved to accommodate that too: "You can have that. You want to go shopping, just as though you were in Knightsbridge or downtown Rome? You can have that. We've evolved to accommodate that. There's multinationals in that form. You can buy some incredible Roberto Cavalli sunglasses or a Maserati or pretty much anything the glitterati might want." And then, within minutes, you can walk in the medina and nothing's changed in its 940 streets for countless generations. It's immaculately clean in every quarter. There's the leather quarter, the silk quarter, the fruit quarter, the confectionery quarter. They're all still the same as they ever were. The people have changed. The French, the Spanish and the English have all been and gone, and things are just the same really. Things have not changed a great deal in the medina. Whatever else has happened, it's just gone on more or less as before.

Then along comes twentieth or twenty-first century white man's stuff, and the Fès people just seem to say, "Fine, that's OK, we'll park it over here. That's a little organ we hadn't seen in our organism before. That's a little clutch bag that we can keep on the outside, but yet make it part of the thing. We can embrace that too, and those who wish to have that can have it." The fact that you can buy much better stuff that's been made for thousands of years by superbly highly trained and qualified craftsmen down the road for a thousandth of the money may dawn on you when you're shopping in the Gucci store, and you may wish to buy your leather goods back at the tannery instead. But if you want to buy that branded stuff from multinationals and pay those prices, you can do that. And we'll take our cut, because we own the land and the shops and so on.

### **You Win, I Win (Lots)**

So the *Fassis* are not going to miss a chance to trade, particularly at those prices. Yet somehow they've managed to embrace without being overwhelmed by that culture. And that's another thing that's amazing. In nearly every single culture that I've known of in the world, when this sausage machine thing has arrived at their doorstep, it's taken over like some kind of malignant cancer. And if you read my friend Helena Norberg Hodges' book, *Ancient Futures*, you'll discover what it did to Ladakh. It's been a poison there, as it has in so many places. Yet somehow Fès manages to evolve to meet such changes to its environment without undue trouble. You could spend a lifetime in Fès and not even know *Nouvelle Fès* was there, but if you want it, it's available. And on my occasional brief visits to *Nouvelle Fès*, I noticed that yeah, I could do whatever I wanted. You can buy your Cartier in the Cartier quartier, if you so wish, but you don't have to, because there's probably better down the road for a fraction of the price. And again that is Organismic. Any organism that wants to survive is going to have to evolve to take account of changes in its environment, and one big change has been the arrival of our team, the sausage machine team, who have caused so much havoc all over the place. And the management, without harm to either party, of this parvenu has been achieved without its being excluded. Exclusion is a technique employed in some of the other places I've visited in the world. In Fès the white man's ways have been accommodated without harm to the original organism, and that's evolution. That's an incredibly powerful Organismic phenomenon at work there, and I don't think I've seen such a thing anywhere else in the world.

### **Q : So what's the overall message of the introductory story to lead it into the book?**

**A:** What, it seems to me, we have been asking ourselves implicitly is: how does one take the exemplary Organismic life that is being lived by human societies in some parts of the world still, then add the considerable benefits that the sausage machine world does bring – and it does bring all sorts of things that you can't have in these indigenous societies – and create a whole greater than the sum of the parts? How do we bring the benefits of both cultures together into a larger, 21st-century, more fully evolved future?

### **The Key to Truly Sustainable Development?**

Maybe one of the commercial strands of the tapestry that we wish to weave from these different multi-coloured threads of ours is community-based tourism and trade – with, I hasten to add, appropriate, non-destructive travel to and fro. And I do not mean to suggest that Fès, or even Morocco as a whole, should be the only location for such endeavours. What we're talking about is mutually beneficial communication and contact. If individuals, communities and nations, both in person and via digital means, can begin to learn from each other about what each does best – and worst – we could perhaps begin better to honour each other. We of the sausage machine world, and those of the cyclical, non-sausage machine world tend to benefit each other, as do the organs in the body, using face-to-face communication and the Internet, perhaps eBay in particular. There are all sorts of other ways. Peter Reason, one of those crucial academics I've mentioned elsewhere, has said there are three levels of evolution for humanity. Firstly there's the level where, as in indigenous cultures generally, which have had time to evolve at a rate that is appropriate, people are aligned with, and a part of – not apart from – nature, unconsciously, just like an egg or a frog or a dandelion. That's the 'unconscious alignment' phase. And then there's the second phase, which is 'unconscious misalignment' – that's sausage machine world. And the third phase is to be *consciously aligned* with the rest of nature, which is not either of those phases, one and two, unconscious alignment or unconscious misalignment, it's *conscious alignment*. And maybe that's what we're talking about in this book.



## Part Two: Philosophy, Shamanism and a Gamble with Death



### **Q : Can you explain what's at the core of Organismics?**

**A:** Yes, obliquely. One of my favourite acronyms is a very tasty one; it's 'mmmm' which stands for 'Much More than a Mere Metaphor', and that's precisely what Organismics is. It is a description of my take on what *is*, based on the principle that everything is Organismic, from the smallest atoms and cells, to human communities and societies, and upwards to the world and universe. Every constituent part in the greater organism that is the universe is both a whole organism in its own right, and part of a greater whole. Each constituent is both a part and a whole, the part being contained within a whole that is greater in scale. That part is both an individual and a necessary constituent of a greater interdependent community, within which it acts. Organismics is not just a metaphor for living systems, we *are* living systems, and so are our organs, our natural communities, our societies and our world. You will have noticed James Lovelock's Gaia Hypothesis, in which he suggests that Earth is one large organism, gaining ground among increasing numbers of the world's leading scientists over recent years. I would say that's an example of Organismics catching on.

### **Knowing Our Place in the World**

Using the human body as an example, a beautiful organism par excellence, the smallest cell functions both distinctly as a system in its own right, and interdependently in the organ of which it's a part. The organ in which the cell sits is an Organismic system in the same way the cell is, only one that is

greater in scale. Jumping up a level, the organ is a wholly necessary individual part within the greater organism that is the body. If the organ fails to do its work efficiently, it impacts negatively on the body. If the body fails to supply the organ with enough blood or nutrients, the organ fails, and in turn the body fails. The parts are dependent on the effective functioning of the wholes of which they're parts and the wholes are reliant upon their parts.

The same is true at any Organismic level. Every part needs to be empowered to stay healthy and functional in order for the whole to work properly. The entire system is interdependent and interconnected, from the cells of the organ to the greater global, social and economic networks of the world and on from there. If one part of the system is harmed, the whole system is harmed, so in effect, if you harm the system, you're harming yourself. There are no hierarchical structures, and no one part is better or more important than any other. Competition is honoured, in order for each part to find its duty and do what it does best, but once these duties are in place, every part collaborates with the others for the greater good of the whole organism. Communication between the parts is as important in a human system as is blood flow in a human body, without which the organs would be disconnected, and the organism would quickly die. Organismic systems work in ongoing, self-perpetuating cycles. This is the natural reality. Human social, cultural, economic, political and commercial systems too, if given the opportunity, are capable of existing along the same principles and my position is that when they do so they become healthy.

### **Disney Gets It**

We, as humans, are animals much like squirrels and moles, and thus we are modelled on the same principles as all of nature. Every natural system functions in the same way, from the smallest zooplankton to the greatest ecosystems. Biocommunities can be vast and complex, but they are never linear, with inputs and outputs at opposite ends of an isolated, disconnected sequence. The grasslands of the Serengeti feed the impala and the wildebeest, which feed the lions and the leopards, which in turn when they die feed the cleaners: vultures and hyenas. These eventually rot into the ground with the help of

billions of microscopic organisms, to nourish the earth, which, fed by the great African rains is able to send up the fresh grasses for the next generation of impala and wildebeest to tuck into. And so it starts all over again. The cycles are ongoing and endless, and the only things that remain are footprints, and the rains quickly wash them away. The system feeds and nurtures itself, is self-perpetuating, and interdependent with further systems, the carbon cycle, the water cycle the gas cycles and so on.

Water falls as rain, enlivens the land and feeds the animals, it runs out in rivers to the lakes and oceans, the sun causes it to evaporate as vapour, it is blown by the wind inland, where it condenses and falls as rain, beginning the cycle all over again. The whole of nature is effortlessly miraculous, but it makes so much sense, because it works as an organism, a highly evolved system of systems of systems. The natural world is a complex, interwoven, interdependent, seemingly chaotic but, in fact, finely tuned mass of interrelated cycles, where all outputs become inputs, and there is no unused 'waste' product. Only humans create artificial, wasteful and large-scale harmful systems, whereby some constituent parts are not honoured and nourished in the way that they might otherwise be. An Organismic system honours all parts, and in this way the system itself is honoured, healthy, self-sustaining and developing, in a condition where either everyone benefits or no one benefits. It's all in *The Lion King*. My son Finn understood that at two years of age. He learned to operate the VCR and used to make me watch the movie with him, from end to end and then would say, as I got up to go, "Wait, Daddy!" while he rewound it so we might watch it again from the beginning. Of course, that movie, being one of my favourites, also has loads of other gems in it, like shamanism, rites of passage, inappropriate self-blame and lots more. Those Disney guys know what turns on the atavistic drives in all of us and that sells movies.

**Q : Yes, but trying to stick to the point, can we look further at human systems in more detail?**

**A:** Sorry, I should explain that my conversations are rather Organismic too. Sometimes I see dialogues as trees: the core subject is the trunk of the tree and we can always come back to that specific issue. I, however, as I hinted before, am a 'squirrole', a kind of squirrel-mole hybrid. I will run off up different,

albeit connected, branches and burrow down among the various roots at a moment's notice.

### **Humans: The Great Sausagemakers**

So, back to the trunk: human systems, unfortunately, have recently been dominated by a thoroughly non-Organismic paradigm, which has created innumerable negative side-effects, such as global warming, poverty and massive inequality, desertification of the land, pollution of the seas, crime, drug abuse, disillusionment and so on. Our thinking has become entrenched in the mechanistic paradigm, championed in the so-called Enlightenment by philosophers such as Descartes and physicists such as Newton. This has produced generations of what I would call 'logico-linear' thinking, where inputs are turned into outputs in disconnected fragments of nature, whose outputs become an end point; they do not flow back around to make a cycle; the end does not turn into a new beginning, and various forms of waste product result. One way of understanding this non-Organismic process is by imagining it as a sausage machine. Raw materials go in at one end, the machine churns out sausage product at the other end, where only a tiny fraction of the mass of the original raw materials re-emerges as a saleable commodity. The rest, often as much as 90 to 95 percent of it (though I believe sausages often include what most of us would prefer to see used elsewhere!), is spewed out as waste, either to be dumped in landfill, or as toxic emissions that pollute our land, rivers, oceans and atmosphere.

The lack of sustainability inherent in the 'sausage machine' paradigm is starkly exemplified by the global food trade, where powerless farmers are thrown off the land that has sustained them and their families for generations, in favour of massive monoculture agribusiness ventures. Here the former 'subsistence' farmers are left as wage slaves, in servitude to their absentee corporate landlords. They typically work twice the hours for half the return they earned as independent farmers, growing export cash crops to feed the wealthy of the West or the North 'cheaply'. The land's fertility is exponentially compromised by over-intensive crop rearing. Toxic pesticides and fertilisers leach into the groundwater and rivers, and the once-independent, self-

sustaining farmers lose their dignity, becoming dependent on decisions made by millionaire executives in Manhattan boardrooms. The income gained from these forlorn farmers' food exports can only just about fund the enormous interest payments on multinational loans, originally made to their governments to fund such 'inward investment' programmes. Adding to all the other negative side effects, the so-called developing country spirals into further debt. Development, my arse. Social and ecological mining I call it. But let's not get carried away...

### **As Without, So Within**

We don't even need to look around us at all the negative effects of the sausage machine way of thinking. If we look within us, our bodies are full of toxins produced by this system. There are countries in Europe where many of the fish containing the highest proportions of omega 3 fatty acids, which are vital for cardio-vascular health, are now formally defined as toxins, so high are the polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) toxins in them. The process by which many kinds of plastics are manufactured leads to the pollution of oceans by PCBs, which tend to bioconcentrate in organisms such as small fish, which are then eaten by the larger fish, exacerbating the concentration process. When you eat the fish at the top of the oceanic food chain, the larger carnivorous fish such as tuna, the oils of which are particularly high in omega 3 fatty acids, you're also eating, among other things, highly concentrated levels of PCBs, which can have all sorts of negative effects on human physiology, from liver damage and birth defects to nervous system disorders. The young of polar bears and whales exposed to high levels of PCBs have been found to develop both sets of genitalia. Research suggests that, often, the concentration of PCBs in human mothers' breast milk makes it unsafe to breastfeed their babies. So whilst you're doing your best to mitigate negative effects on cardio-vascular health, by eating fish with high omega 3 content, you may also be compromising your physiological health by ingesting dangerous levels of toxic waste.

Further examples of the negative impacts of sausage machine, logico-linear thinking are numerous and for several decades the wake-up call has been sounding ever more loudly. Science has not only identified a need for

change, it has actually started to change itself, and a new paradigm is beginning to emerge, turning Newton and his mechanics on their heads. Relatively recent developments in physics describe a subatomic world in which anything is possible, where particles are not even mere particles any more, they are both particles and participants in waves, in the same way as humans are both individual organisms and parts of greater organisms - families, businesses, communities, societies and the human race. James Lovelock, as we have mentioned, described our world as Gaia, one great big, living, throbbing super-organism, alive with immeasurable numbers of interconnected smaller organisms at a vast variety of scales. As such, through the interaction of all its chemical and biological processes, the Earth is able to self-regulate its systems and itself, just as any organism does. Lovelock's thinking has helped pave the way for groundbreaking research and in the space of thirty years, the idea of the Earth as an organism has moved from the margins of scientific theory right into the mainstream.

To illustrate organisms existing and interacting similarly in a boundless variety with scale as the primary differentiator, look at the atom, with its electrons hurtling around the nucleus in the centre, with all that empty space in between. And then look at our Solar System, huge in comparison, in which the planets continually whiz around, orbiting the Sun in the middle, again with a vast amount of empty space in between. The similarities are striking. In both cases the parts are essential ingredients for the healthy functioning of the whole *as that whole*, and the thriving of the whole is essential for the flourishing of the parts. What is happening in and among atoms affects what happens in the cell of a human body, in the same way that what happens in and among galaxies affects what's happening on the Earth with all its multitudinous organisms. If we want to know how to run a society, a family, or our own bodies, then we can look through a microscope and study an atom, or we could look through a telescope and study a solar system. We can look at forests, oceans, indigenous tribal systems, or the functioning of the individual human organism. Such systems work and, treated and contextualised properly, they work well. Thus they offer a worthwhile reflection on how our own lives and societal systems might be structured. Everything exists for everything else, it's all for one and one for all, it's all-win or no-win. Organismics is not

advocating a way of life, it is merely describing how life is. I reckon.

### **Q : Will you please talk about the Organismic Self?**

**A:** I thought I had come up with the term 'Organismics' myself, although I have since learnt that leading psychologist Carl Rogers has written a book on the 'Organismic Self'. This, as I understand it, is ultimately referring to the real self, or the authentic self, which would fit in entirely with what my definition of an Organismic self would be – the self as one truly is, as opposed to the self with layers of imposed or otherwise artificial, non-selves imposed as a mask, obscuring the real 'me'. Many people, who are in the right places to know about these things, suggest that all inauthentic thoughts, words and deeds originate out of fear, and all authentic thoughts, words and deeds originate out of love. So if it is true that there exist only love and fear, then the real, authentic 'me' is one without fear, operating in and from love. Thus an Organismic self, as I understand the term, having rid itself of all fear and false-self mechanisms, is a wholly loving self, loving oneself and all of creation, of which self is a mere tiny part, containing a multitude of equally important – and equally unimportant – even tinier parts.

### **Q : That is all well and good, but how is one supposed to rid oneself of fear?**

**A:** Shamanic disciplines are a good place to start. I've indulged in the study and practice of shamanic disciplines for years, and worked with a good number of shamans from numerous cultures and places. I would suggest that shamanic disciplines are very much Organismic. They look at the world inside and outside themselves, a punctuated Organismic continuum of which they are a part; they try to understand how it works, and to work on the same principles, in order to create thriving communities for themselves and their fellow beings, in ways that are beneficial to most or all of those beings, most or all of the time. And it usually works, because they've had significantly more time than us, tens of thousands of years in many cases, to bench test, prototype and debug their systems. When shamanic thinking, speaking and acting informs your approach to keeping people fed, clothed, sheltered and happy, it seems to do a better job than those disciplines that focus singularly on spiritual, physical, emotional or

mental conditions. It touches all areas of life.

### **Which Doctor?**

Shamanism looks at the whole human being, the whole organism, and all the other organisms that it contains and is contained by, and asks 'What is their nature?' It helps to think of the human organism as a medicine wheel, which has four main directions, representing four main constituent parts – spirit, body, emotions and mind. The spirit is often pictured as being in the east of the wheel, the body is in the west, the emotions are in the south and the mind is in the north. In shamanic thinking, in order to have a fully functioning, happy and healthy organism, one needs to be firing strongly and equally on all four cylinders. It's no good firing on three cylinders and being weak, for example, emotionally, because the organism has to be balanced at the centre of the wheel. You can be balanced at the centre of the wheel if you are equally weak in all areas, but you'd be a much more effective and healthy human being if you were fully fit spiritually, physically, emotionally and mentally.

The self-named Enlightenment, the period of Descartes, Newton and all their mechanistic friends, was, I'd suggest, more of an Endarkenment for the world and mankind, as it created a massive sway, in medicine wheel terms, way off centre, to the north of the wheel, where the mind resides. Hence the Western obsession with mental, logical reasoning, and the fixation on IQ, Intellectual Quotient, as opposed to other, just as important, measurements such as Emotional Quotient and so on. Western culture has become equally obsessed with the West of the wheel as well, the physical side. You only have to look at the news stands to see how much we obsess on physical appearance – 'lose weight', 'be like these gorgeous supermodels', 'get cosmetic surgery', 'check out the cellulite on this celebrity's thighs', and so on. Our culture has drifted heavily north-west, neglecting the south and east, our spiritual and emotional needs. The result is that a great many of us have no emotional and spiritual strength, power and grounding in our lives

It is also common, where this problem is addressed at all in our culture, for some of us to obsess on the spiritual side at the expense of the other directions of the wheel, resulting in one becoming virtually ineffective in, for instance, in

the physical world. Although in some cases chanting *Om* or *Ave Maria* in a cave or a monastery all of one's life may work for the individual, it probably does not contribute much to the greater good of our species, other species, or the greater organisms of which we're a part. My mother, as an example, has spent much of her life single-mindedly focused on Methodism, massively avoiding all the problems in her emotional life. As a result she's buried herself in the east, having rejected our society completely, which hovers in the north and west. She's emotionally, physically and mentally not at all well now, incapable of doing anything much at all in these directions. Had she not had her development arrested in early life, and had she been able to develop equally her mental, emotional, physical and spiritual directions through more holistic disciplines, teachings and opportunities, she would probably have been a much healthier individual. Instead she's now holed up in a mental institution, having to be fed, clothed and read a story every night. Even the name 'mental' institution shows how 'single-minded' we can be, mental matters being in the north of the wheel, which is diametrically opposed to the emotional zone in the south, which is where the real issue, in this case, lies.

**Q : Can I just say something here? I am transfixed – well, almost – by what you're saying; I just think the pages of this book will look better if there are a few more bold questions in the longer passages of angry polemic.**

**A:** Yes, I suppose so. Now where was I? The same is true of many people, who are stuck in other ways somewhere way off centre, miles from living an Organismic life, which should have all four cylinders of the medicine wheel engine firing powerfully. This is what holistic health is all about. You look at the whole organism and try to understand what that organism uniquely may be suffering, and what it uniquely needs. The pockets of society which still honour shamanic techniques have had thousands of generations to get to grips with understanding the reality of creation, and with that holistic knowledge they can do amazing things, such as healing people in sophisticated ways that Western medicine simply can't, and creating social, political and economic systems that do deliver what they are in place to do, which is to provide a happy, healthy life for its constituents. So people live to 120 and laugh a lot, and wealth is defined in far more all-encompassing ways than in our culture – though many

of them can generate enormous cash wealth too, whenever they wish.

### **Staking my Life on the Truth of Organismics**

The Organismic approach to health is to nurture the whole organism. Such a holistic approach to health has been instrumental in my life, on occasions when the stake has *been* my life, such as a few years ago when I was diagnosed as having inherited from my father a condition called by 'conventional' medics 'familial combined hyperlipidaemia'. Like my father, I had an unusual inability to metabolise blood lipids: cholesterol, triglycerides and so on. So according to my doctor, no matter what I ate or drank, whether I smoked or not, no matter how healthy my lifestyle, I had a problem in the area of coronary heart disease, and could therefore quite easily drop dead of a fatal heart attack, as my doctor put it, walking to the surgery door on the day of this diagnosis. Even though outwardly I appeared to be quite healthy, according to the medics I was at death's door – statistically dead already – because my blood lipids were so extraordinarily high.

Now my family doctor is trained as a homeopath as well as being a more 'conventional' General Practitioner, and his wife is an acupuncturist, so between the two of them they share a wealth of understanding about holistic approaches to health. I therefore knew they wouldn't have prescribed drugs for me without having considered all other options. David has been my General Practitioner for years, and I trust him. He said to me he wouldn't want me dropping dead as a friend or as a patient. I asked him what could be done about it, and he said I'd have to begin immediately taking powerful statins – cholesterol-busting drugs – and continue taking them for the rest of my life. I asked what side effects there were, and he ran through a few. I said "No way. I'm not doing it."

He replied, "Well then, you could die. In fact there's a pretty strong chance that you *will* die of this, and it could be alarmingly soon."

I asked him to give me two weeks to do some homework on the subject in order to look at the issue Organismically. He assented to this, on the agreement that I took 75mg of aspirin every day to mitigate the risk somewhat by thinning out my blood a little. So I did my statins homework, and it seems

it's got to the point where the government and the medical profession have explicitly recommended that people should be on these drugs for life, because cholesterol, where it exists in your body, is billed as such a life-threatening substance, when in fact modest levels of it are necessary for, among other things, the healthy production and functioning of sex hormones, such as testosterone and oestrogen. Statins' side effects include potentially dramatic negative impacts on muscle health. They have even been documented as having helped successfully to kill people in certain cases. So the fact that their widespread use is being advocated by medics and that they are being made available in some cases to buy over the counter, seems to me to be a license to print money for the pharmaceutical companies but not necessarily an optimal solution to the problem they purport to solve. This is all based on a very non-Organismic scientific approach, which is an unhelpful, single issue, logico-linear approach to health. In other words they're saying, "Let's find the variable that seems to be the crucial one, and nuke it".

## Organismic

### Thought Number Three:

**If I have a headache, I'm not planning to have my head cut off to solve the problem – even if doctors recommend it and it makes the axeman a profit**

My chosen Organismic approach, by contrast, was to find as many variables as I could within and around the organism, which was me, and adjust each of them as best I could in, for instance, adjusting my diet, exercise, attitude, stress management and so on. Cortisol is created through stress and has the effect of physically clamping down on blood vessels, increasing one's blood pressure, and causing one's gunked up tubes to run a higher risk of blocking

completely. So stress management becomes a very important issue in fighting high cholesterol. I also devised a whole lot of delicious recipes from foods that reduce the cholesterol levels in my body, without having to take statins. For instance, oat bran does a really good job of clearing out cholesterol, so I started making oatbran muffins, which are incredibly tasty.

In the same way, instead of taking supplements of omega 3 fatty acids, which is found, as we have discussed, in some fish oils, and often suffers from the PCB concentration problems we looked at earlier, I devised a sardine paté, which is totally delicious, and contains omega 3 fatty acids in abundance, as well as garlic and lemon juice, which are also very good for cardio-vascular health. Eating oily fish, especially those lower down the food chain, I would say, is a very Organismic approach to having a healthy heart. You need a healthy heart, because the heart is one of the biggest and one of the most important muscles in your body. Living without your forearm would be very inconvenient, but you could still do it. Living would not be possible without your heart, so it is vital to keep it thriving, and to do this you do better if you eat something that's good for the muscles. Thus it would make Organismic sense to eat the type of fish with the most and the fittest muscle tissue, which happens to be the carnivorous fish. To hunt, chase and kill, often at great speed, they need the best possible muscles, and as a result carnivorous fish are high in omega 3s, unlike the bottom dwellers. In the same way, if you're looking for healthy bones, eat the bones, which is where fish such as sardines and anchovies again come in useful, because they tend to come ready prepared with edible bones intact. So instead of taking supplements, or having to take statins every day, I'd much rather indulge in a range of delicious foods and drinks, which achieve the required cholesterol reduction, but do a far better job in terms of overall holistic, Organismic, cardiovascular and whole-organism health improvement. Regular consumption of properly prepared oatbran muffins and sardine patés are a great deal preferable to a lifetime's statins prescription. Though, of course, there's a lot more to it than just that.

### **The Chips are Down**

When it got to the end of the first few months that I was doing this, I returned

to the doctor, and it turned out my cholesterol levels were all of a sudden much lower. My GP said to me that he's never seen vitamin B3 have such a profound effect on cholesterol levels. It turns out the reason he thought it was purely vitamin B3 was because it was the one nutrient I had asked him to prescribe for me, largely because I found I could get it cheaper that way than off the shelves, but mainly because it does have a significant beneficial effect in improving cardio-vascular health and reducing cholesterol. In fact it wasn't vitamin B3 on its own at all, it was a dozen or so other variables, all tweaked to the best of my abilities towards a shared Organismic goal, combining to create a dramatic systemic swerve in the organism, which, as we have seen, was me.

This is how the Organismic approach to health works. Look at the whole organism and at the organisms it contains, as well as those contained by it. Then make suitable, often subtle, adjustments at all these levels such that the compound effect is a powerful one – as powerful as it needs to be in order to effect the required change. This is why a shaman might heal using a set of seemingly unrelated techniques, or, techniques that don't seem directly related to the problem being addressed, but are probably just part of any number of different alterations to the organism being affected for the holistic healing of the whole organism and not just the blitzing of the one variable.

Pythagoras understood that sound heals just as effectively as physically solid or liquid medicine. He is reputed to have effected 'miraculous' cures using carefully determined frequencies. Samurai warriors would often succeed in battle by uttering a sound, immediately before engaging with an assailant, that actually lowered the blood pressure of their opponents. So when the Samurai struck, their opponents were momentarily disabled, as if they'd just been given a drug that lowered their blood pressure, and it meant they were operating at a level below their spiritual, physical, emotional and mental best at precisely the time when they were being attacked. Your average logico-linear scientist might dismiss all this as wacky, only seeing the one variable, such as Pythagoras striking a gong, or a Shaman dancing around with some particularly colourful feathers, or me dancing around with some sardine paté. He wouldn't realise that there are in fact many other factors involved, and so he'd be failing to understand Organismic approaches to life and the reasons

for the cure's efficacy. They'd doubtless call it a 'spontaneous remission', for which read: 'How flippin weird was that?'

### **Sounding Off on Academia**

One of many tools a Shaman uses for all manner of reasons, whether broadly ceremonial or specifically for individual healing, is the drum. Years ago, I was working on one of my papers for the Masters in Responsibility and Business Practice at the Centre for Action Research and Professional Practice (CARPP) at the University of Bath's School of Management. The question that I wanted to address in this paper concerned my felt sense of relationship with the Earth. One of the methods that CARPP espoused was what they call the extended epistemology, which acknowledges and works with the validity of all ways of knowing – experiential knowing, being the inarticulate sense, which you can't express on a presentational level; presentational knowing, which you still can't articulate in verbal form, but can articulate through painting, drumming, dancing, or whatever; propositional knowing, which you *can* articulate in words; and knowing in action, which is when that knowing manifests itself in your outward behaviour.

I found myself trying to write this paper, which involved a great deal of introspection on my part, but no matter how hard I tried I couldn't manage to articulate my felt sense of relationship with the Earth. Writer's block has never really been something I've experienced, or could afford to experience, having been a professional writer for so many years: like almost any seasoned hack, I'd always had to be able to write in order to earn my living. Anyway, in this case, I'd be writing a sentence on the keyboard, and then deleting that same sentence for the seventeenth time, because I just couldn't express it in words. And all the while, I'd be unconsciously drumming on my desk, as drummers tend to do, and as I'd been trained to do by some extremely good drummers in the past. It suddenly dawned on me that there was no way I could articulate this in words; I'd have to drum it. My body had figured it out long before my mind caught up.

So I turned up at the college for the delivery of my paper with my djembes and Shaman's drum, and when it came to my turn I started drumming,

explaining to the academics that this was my paper. The academics were not impressed, asking me how my drumming was supposed to be marked, particularly by an external examiner at a different time in a different place. I said I could drum it again, or whatever rendition came through on that occasion, but the point is I was unable to articulate in propositional terms the answer to the question I had posed to myself. I could, however, using the extended epistemology approach that these academics themselves had taught me, articulate it in presentational form, in this case by drumming it. They started getting upset with me, and I started getting upset with them, calling them hypocrites, while my tutor was saying they may not be able to award me the Masters degree. We were at an impasse.

### **Jack Drums It Into Me**

So I went away in a sulk, and happened to go to an Action Research conference, where an American Action Researcher was presenting the findings of a brilliant inquiry. After the presentation, a member of the audience, Professor Jack Whitehead, stood up, and said: "That was all fantastic, but where's the video of it? You're speaking in a language known only by a few academics, specifically fellow Action Research academics, of which this room is full. You're addressing it only to these people and probably most of them agree with your findings anyway. If you really want to make a difference in the world with this admirable work, you surely need to be making a soap opera or a television documentary of this, because it's important work, and I want the world at large to be benefiting from your considerable diligence and inspiration," or words to that effect.

I thought, 'This is a man I can talk to, and someone who gets it,' so I collared him at the lunch break, and told him I was really intrigued by what he'd said and would like to discuss it further. He asked why, and I told him it was because I'd drummed a research paper, and it was causing problems, even within the context of Action Research and the extended epistemology. He replied "Yes, OK," and we went to his room for instant coffee, stale biscuits and a chat. It turns out he was a specialist in alternative methods of data presentation, or, in other words, a manifestation of the extended epistemology,

as well as being a fascinating, inspiring man. However, he annoyed me by telling me that, in his opinion, I *did* know how propositionally to express my felt sense of relationship with the Earth. I said no I didn't, and he said yes I did. And he kept needling me and needling me, until he'd got me extremely irritated and frustrated very quickly. Suddenly, in my anger and disappointment, all my shields came down and the realisation dawned on me that YES, of course I *did* know why I drummed that paper and what I was trying to say in it. And he said "There you are, I told you so. So what is it?"

### **The Answer is Born**

A couple of years prior to this discussion, an astonishing man by the name of Martín Prechtel, who had for many years been a shaman and elder among the Tzutujil people of Guatemala, explained it all to me in the most powerful way, and had packed it up in my mind, in 'zipped file' form, only for Professor Jack Whitehead to unzip it in his office several years later. It happened in one of Martín's teaching sessions in the UK, at which I was present. Someone had asked "Why do we drum?" Typically, he had responded not with "I'll tell you" but with "OK, I'll show you."

Lots of people had brought drums to where we were: we were in a big, beautiful barn. He asked everyone with deep-note drums to go to one side of the barn and start drumming a slow bass rhythm, which was to represent the heartbeat of a mother in the late stages of pregnancy. Everyone with high-pitched drums got themselves lined up on the other side of the room and, on Martín's instruction, started drumming a higher, faster note, which represented the baby's heartbeat. "OK," said Martín, "we're going into labour." So we had the mother's heart getting faster, and the baby's heartbeat getting much faster as, unlike the mother, who had been in labour several times before, this was a completely new and terrifying experience for the baby, having had nine months in that safe and comfy womb. As it got to the moment of 'crowning glory', when the baby's head emerges and the pain of the mother and the freak-out for the baby reach their frenzied peak, the drumming was at its most frantic. As the baby emerged from the womb at last, Martín bellowed "MAMAS, STOP! BABIES, DOUBLE YOUR SPEED AGAIN!" And as the baby emerged and the

mother's heartbeat stopped, and the baby heartbeat drummers were going so fast you could hardly see their hands, half the people in the room burst into tears. It was an extraordinarily powerful experience. Martín explained:

"What happens when you're born is that not only have you been through one of the most traumatic events you will ever experience, but at the very same instant you lose the reassuring sound of the mother's heartbeat, which you have heard in the womb ever since the moment you were conceived. In your culture, you are permanently living that experience, because you can't hear Mama's heartbeat, the heartbeat of the Earth. My culture can, and that's where we differ. We drum to celebrate and remind ourselves of those two heartbeats in harmony."

It was unbelievable, and it made so much sense. This is what our culture is living, the experience of not being able to hear the Earth's heartbeat. Shamanic and indigenous cultures predominantly do use the wonderfully simple art of the drumbeat, as one of a whole host of techniques to form and nurture the health of the individual as a whole, and that of the greater community and community of communities. So I wrote that story as *My Felt Sense of Relationship with the Earth*, and they gave me the Masters. A Guatemalan shaman had injected into me, in seminal form, how to get my Masters degree two years before I even knew it was going to be a problem, impregnating me with the answer, and Jack Whitehead birthed the story out of me.

### **Q : Does that make me a literary shaman?**

**A:** I'd say you are an apprentice – and a very fine one. Moving on, I've lost my thread now. Oh yes, as we discussed earlier, the south and east of the medicine wheel have been largely neglected by Western culture, but in recent years there has been a growing trend in the so-called developed nations, laying a greater emphasis on matters emotional and spiritual, in such fields as personal development, holistic healing and so on. If we want to apply Organismic principles to psychotherapy, for instance, the techniques that work the best are the ones that make it clear how things *are*, the ones that help you to know yourself. If you can find out who you really are, how you really function, and why you react as you do to certain stimuli, then you are better able to manage your life. There's a process in shamanic practice often called

'recapitulation', which is a bit like the moral inventory of a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. You go back through your life, making an inventory of all the sins you've committed and the woundings you've suffered, and then recapitulate. You cleanse them out of your system, so they do not trip you up in the future, and you're not lumbered with guilt, blame, resentment, shame and so on. It works in the same way as cleansing the physical body, by looking at what it is and what it needs, and adjusting the diet and lifestyle accordingly. Organismic principles can be applied to improving both individual psychological health and, therefore, community health as well, by learning how to deal effectively with, for example, the troublesome male adolescence and so-called mid-life crisis periods.

### **Life's Quantum Leaps**

Years ago I was lent a tape by a friend of mine, on one side of which was a talk about the physicist Niels Bohr, and on the other side was a talk on the life of Carl Jung. On the surface these were two seemingly unrelated subjects, but it suddenly dawned on me how Organismically related the two actually are. The speaker was talking about Jung's work on rites of passage. It turns out that during his so-called mid-life crisis, Jung spent three or four years cutting himself off from professional and academic work, retreating into a child-like state, occupying himself mostly making mud pies and building sandcastles. On an intuitive level, he seemed to me to be allowing himself to go through that transition stage of 'middlescence', as a friend calls it. It's as if he was saying "I know I used to be a caterpillar, and I know that one day I may be a butterfly, but right now I'm stuck in the 'I-don't-know-what-the-fuck-I-am' soup phase, in the chrysalis, where I am neither one distinct thing nor the other".

This bears an uncanny resemblance to sub-atomic quantum mechanics, which was being discussed on the other side of my friend's tape. Niels Bohr talked about the quantum leaps made by electrons from one orbit to another. It appears that packets of energy are given out when this happens, which can be recorded in a spectrographic analysis of the process. This energy does not exist as a continuum, a spectrum or a gradation of energy levels. Instead it exists in discrete energy packets, taking the form in the spectrogram of single

lines across the spectrum, interspersed by dark patches.

The same is true in human development. Instead of there being a continuum in the development of a human being, during certain points in our lives, our adolescence or middlescence and so on, there are sudden explosions of energy given out or taken in, in the same way as during specific points in the life of an electron. In between these energy explosions, you bumble along through life with some degree of stability and continuity, with the same old joys, traumas, tragedies and exhilarations, until suddenly everything goes completely weird, your adolescence arrives, and there's a radical change in your experience of what it is to be alive. And then there's a later one in the middle of your life, and various less dramatic ones in between. So here, again, we see an Organismic picture emerging: if reality is designed in this way, then we had better understand how it applies to humans if we're to honour each other in our respective growth processes and help each other through the dark, soupy stages. At times like adolescence, midlife and menopause, statistic analysis shows that health suffers more often and more acutely, suicide is more common and so on. I wonder why?

### **Q : Well, why?**

**A:** In our culture, we are somewhat lacking when it comes to knowing how to deal with such critical transitional periods in our lives. We tend to have only socio-economic markers, particularly for males, like getting married, retiring, owning our first car and buying our first house. Indigenous cultures, by contrast, more often have rites of passage ceremonies and ritual activities for important, clearly acknowledged developmental stages such as adolescence or midlife. For instance, becoming a fledgling elder, one would be actively mentored by existing tribal elders, who know what it was like to go through these periods of transition, and how it works. It's a means by which people can understand that this will be a radical change in their lives, why this is happening, the fact that 'this too shall pass' and how they can deal with the transition. Rites of passage ceremonies are then enacted, which help enormously, because the subconscious mind does not differentiate between something and the representation of that something, or in this case the ceremony and the radical 'real-life' change marked and formalised by that ceremony.

## **I Predict a Riot**

There is a Native American tradition – not an occasional ceremony but a way of life – which exemplifies this rites of passage concept beautifully. One of the first Native American elders I worked with was Grandpa Semu Huaute, a Chumash medicine man and a very elder elder, for whom I have an enormous amount of respect and affection, and who turned my life around in a couple of minutes with a very simple answer to a very simple question. He and I were talking together in his house in Ojai, California, an hour and a half's drive north of Los Angeles and the now famous LA riots were going on at the time. There had been an assault on a young black man by the LA police; the black folk had decided enough was enough and had started torching shops and cars. I asked Grandpa what he made of it all, and he replied in what seemed to me at the time a casual, throwaway comment:

“Well there's a lot of black guys pretty disaffected down there, and I know how they feel, because we got quite a lot of trouble from you white folk when we were young Indian males. The white folk wanted us penned up and drunk in the reservations, and that's where most of us headed, but my clan, the Owl Clan of the Chumash people, lived the old way. We didn't go into the reservations in the same way as most of our people did, and we were able to continue living as we always had. As young men, we had all these hormones flowing, and all this new-found strength and power and sexual curiosity, as well as a lot of confusion and fear, because we didn't know what the heck was going on. So we would be sent to the frailest people in the community, after newborn babies, namely the very old people. It was then our job to live with them for several years during our adolescent period. Our job was to chop wood, carry water, fix the roof, garden the garden, and generally take care of their physical needs.”

I said, “Oh yeah. Right. Fancy another cup of tea?” and he assented. I didn't think much of it at the time, but later as I was driving down the 101 freeway, it all hit me in an instant just how incredibly profound his comment was. I nearly swerved into the ditch in rush-hour traffic on a five-lane highway. He must be one of the last living people on this Earth who would be able to tell you what it's like, because he is one of the few people left that has

benefited from this ages-old, well thought-through, bench tested, trial-and-error system for delivering what society needs. When I was an adolescent male at an English boarding school, I didn't know what the hell was going on, and the schoolmasters did help to the best of their ability, but not in the same way as Grandpa had experienced. In his people's system, not only do the old folk benefit from having the young folk put their new strength to work in ways that are beneficial to society, such as chopping wood, carrying water and so on, which the old folk no longer have the strength to do, but the old folk have a lot to offer too.

The young people are able to see that this difficult phase will pass, just by seeing that the old people they're living with must have got through it themselves, several generations ago. So there is hope, no matter how confused and fearful they are. In addition, if you are in the chrysalis phase, the I-don't-know-what-the-fuck-I-am soup, and you're living 24/7 with the wisest, most experienced people in the community, you are able to absorb the most sophisticated and detailed information there is about how life is from the people who know most about it, during the period when you most need reassurance. You don't necessarily learn from sitting down and listening; you learn from osmosis, just from being there and absorbing, like I did with Grandpa.

I had dismissed what Grandpa said, but later I realised what an amazing thing it was – and this was just one comment on one topic. The young folk would have got the same thing all the time, every day for several years, during the most crucial period of their emerging manhood. You're not going to get those benefits if you're hanging out with your teenage peer group in downtown LA, sniffing glue and ram-raiding drugstores. By the time the young adults of the Owl Clan have emerged from this confusing, but ultimately enlightening, period, they are trained and proven providers, able to fix houses and grow food, just in time to become fathers. They have calmed down again and are now even stronger, well trained and well taught, and they know what is required to look after the frailest people in the community. They can swing their attention from the very oldest to the very youngest, the other frailest people, the newborn babies, and they can do a good job of looking after them. It is a superbly Organismic approach to both community health and individual health, based

on an understanding of rites of passage – important transformative stages in life – which compares fascinatingly with other phenomena within this vast and infinitely complex creation, such as those we can see by observing electrons in their inter-orbit leaps.

### **Imagination and Transformation**

So the lifetime transitions of the electron, the butterfly and the human being are very, very different yet wonderfully similar. It's interesting that the final change of the process in which the caterpillar finally becomes the butterfly is called the imago stage, from the same etymological stem as 'imagination', 'magi' and 'magic'. The chrysalis can say 'one day I can imagine myself becoming a butterfly', and by 'magic', this may one day be the case. The tribesman may say 'one day I can imagine myself becoming an elder and the magic of these ceremonies, performed by the existing elders to ease my transition to elderhood, will help me get there'. The key is to understand *how* it works and *what* to do, and thus gain an appreciation of who you are and what you need as an individual and as a part of numerous larger social organisms. This is vital for spiritual, physical, emotional, mental and, ultimately, societal and ecological health. The Organismic approach attempts to describe life as it is, just as learning to describe and experience the being of one's true self, is the way to become healthy through whole-system healing. Health can be optimised for an individual and a community, and as an individual within a community, by knowing how things actually are, and knowing what and how oneself is, within that.

Organismic health comes down to these simple ideas:

- Know yourself
- Be yourself
- Know the 'selves' you contain
- Know the 'selves' that contain you
- Think, speak and act accordingly, for your own sake

You could sum it up by saying:

**'Know your place and play your part'**



## Part Three: Economics, Silliness and Rage



### **Q: Shall we take a look at local economies?**

**A:** OK. If we're thinking of organisms as nested holons, both individual wholes and parts of greater wholes, then it is necessary for the part to be as healthy as the individual whole it's part of. The part and the whole are equally important; all organisms are as important as each other. Thus the organ needs to be thriving for the human being to thrive, and the human being needs to be thriving for the organ to thrive (sorry to seem so repetitive... sorry to seem so repetitive).

Similarly, a healthy community is dependent on healthy individuals, and vice versa. The world is a community of communities, and as such, each community needs to be nurtured and encouraged. Local economic communities are fundamentally important organs in the global human organism, because where they work well, the smaller scale organisms, individuals, and the larger scale organism above, society, all flourish at the height of their potential. The sacrificing of the smaller organism – the local economy – to the larger organism – the national or global economy – is detrimental to the health of all concerned.

An Organismic local economy works in ways that benefit all its constituents, whereas a sausage machine economy tends only to serve its boardroom executives and shareholders. While the latter aims to maximise one variable – corporate shareholder value – in the equation, rather than optimising the equation itself, it tends to exploit and pollute. Organismic economies work in similar ways to forest ecosystems, where no one member benefits to the exclusion or exploitation of anyone else, everyone is given an

opportunity to thrive, all the constituents are both distinct and interdependent, and the system as a whole can grow to its full potential. 'Forest business' would ideally have many more profit centres than only one, many more people trained and employed, no unused output, no costly waste, no downsizing and no irretrievable damage.

### **Forest Culture**

The permaculture movement, of which Organismics is essentially a more populist – and, I hope, comprehensible (apologies, Bill!) – articulation, is founded on the notion that we model our systems, our horticultural, cultural, social, economic and agricultural systems, on natural systems, such as forest or ocean ecosystems. Permaculture is saying that by modelling your 'culture' on such natural systems, you can have 'permanent culture'. Permaculture was originally used to describe a form of permanent, self-sustaining agriculture, hence 'permanent agriculture', but this became 'permanent culture' as people began to notice that social and cultural systems were just as much organisms as horticultural and agricultural systems and the same principle, of course, applies to Organismic thinking.

In a successful permaculture design, you might have in place all the relevant things that nature does and indigenous human cultures do. Intercropping might be used, whereby you have seven levels of plants growing in one place, from the root vegetables below the ground, like the carrots and the onions, to the herbs and grasses just above the ground, to the shrubs, bushes, half standard trees, standard trees, and the very tall trees, with climbing plants like vines and beans using the tall trees as structural support. Above all though, the individual elements in the system need to be connected for it to be self-sustaining, so once it's set up and running, it will keep producing the food, fuel and building materials that humans need, without needing further work other than harvesting and using those materials. Without those connections, the organs are not collaborating to form an appropriate life support system. The design will not survive, and it ceases to be permacultural or Organismic.

'Permanent culture' has been pursued by indigenous cultures for tens of thousands of years, if only for the sake of staying alive. Such self-

sustaining economies can generally be described as Organismic. Nowadays Organismic agriculture often goes by the name (often rather pejoratively I think) of 'subsistence agriculture'. These systems tend to work because they've been tried and tested over hundreds of generations. Few people these days advocate a return to the days of subsistence farming *in toto*, but such systems, where they have existed, or still exist, can be used as exemplary models for modern Organismic economies, in the same way that a human body is an excellent model for how a society can successfully work.

### **Small Beer, Big Bucks**

The beauty of Organismic local economies is illustrated well by the Zero Emissions brewery system, tested and proven on three continents, and described in Gunter Pauli's book *Upsizing*. Breweries have for a long time operated in ways that are sub-optimal, commercially and ecologically, where the end product has around five percent of its original raw materials left in it, with the other ninety-five percent thrown out as waste. Once the brewery produces its beer, among many of the other things it spills out is grain waste, which has a high lignocellulose content, meaning that the waste cannot be composted using normal techniques. Most breweries therefore tend to get rid of the waste in other, more ecologically unsustainable ways.

Gunter Pauli examined this problem, and asked himself 'what does the natural world do with redundant lignocellulose?' The answer is: it breaks it down using fungi. So Pauli proposed growing some very high quality edible fungi: shiitakes, oysters, and other mushrooms, on the waste grain, which were sold at a high price, comparable, weight-for-weight, with that of prime fillet steak. The mushroom farm was set up next to the brewery and created increased employment in the area; there were no landfill costs to pay as the 'spent' grain was now a resource, not a waste product. The local environment and the local economy were getting healthier already.

The question then arose of what to do with the waste product of the mushroom farm, namely the broken-down waste grain from the brewery. It turns out that having broken down the grain, the mushrooms had produced a very high quality fodder for livestock such as cattle and chickens. So next

door to the mushroom farm and brewery, the Zero Emissions team built a cattle farm and a chicken farm, which employed yet more people, and which was supplied with free fodder. In turn the cattle and chicken farms produced all sorts of saleable commodities, such as beef, cheese, milk, cream, yogurt, chicken meat, bones for glue, feathers for pillows, eggs, cowhides and so on.

### **Shit for Brains**

Of course, the cows and the chickens produced lots of shit, which instead of being thought of as waste, was put into an anaerobic digester. This produced methane which, in true Organismic fashion, powers itself, by producing the heat the system needs to process the manure and create the methane in the first place. The leftover methane can also be used to power other things, but its greatest benefit in this instance was that it enabled Pauli's team to heat water to produce steam, which happens normally to be the most costly commodity in what? The brewing of beer.

Thus the cycle was closed, creating an organism of businesses which thrives as a whole as all the organs within the organism thrive themselves. It exemplifies beautifully the differences between sausage machine business strategies, which tend to downsize (at least in terms of staff) and pollute as they produce their profit, and Organismic business, which focuses on upsizing – creating employment – and expanding profitability and ecological excellence at the same time. This is achieved by increasing the amount of profit centres, training and employment opportunities, by reducing waste, and concentrating together in the same locality to reduce commodity miles and all the associated carbon emissions they cause.

**Q : Food miles is a topic we hear a great deal about since the proliferation of farmers' markets in the UK. Can you please talk about that?**

**A:** Farmers markets exemplify the Organismic economic system beautifully. Food, fuel and building materials can be grown and produced *by* local people *for* local people. This approach minimises negative impacts on the environment by cutting down food miles and other commodities' transport

distances. It also reduces the need for packaging, irradiation, preservatives and other devices often used to prolong the lives of produce so it can travel thousands of miles to market. It creates employment and training for local people, for example in market garden apprenticeship schemes; and it develops prosperity for people in the local economy. The organism, which is the community, is considerably better nourished in every sense of the word, when it is relying to as great a degree as possible on local suppliers for all its needs. This simply doesn't happen in global food systems, which is sausage machine thinking at its worst, where the only nutrient of any significance seems to be cash. Cash should simply be one of the many necessary economic 'nutrients', like oxygen, molybdenum, carbon or copper, that circulate in mutually supportive cycles.

Local farmers now make this possible again, by doing what they have always done in the past out of necessity – supplying local markets. Now they do it out of choice, because these markets are wonderful things to be a part of – and nearly everyone seems to agree, even the leaders of global food companies, who also cruise the farmers' markets as customers on weekends. To them, commercially, this phenomenon is a mere mosquito on an elephant's back. But to me, it's a start.

### **A Personal Journey Around the Corner**

I got involved in founding Bath's farmers' market because I have always had a passion for high quality local produce and I loved the experience of visiting numerous farmers' markets in the USA over many years. It took three years of lobbying to get the local council to back – or even permit – the scheme but eventually we succeeded and the rest has been an amazing joy. A television documentary was made, featuring myself, my wife Kari and our children, getting dressed in our winter clothes and then ambling around the corner to the farmers' market, where we were filmed haggling over some muddy carrots with the woman who had pulled them out of the ground that morning. The next thing we knew, we were besieged by media attention. National newspapers ran multi-page features in colour on this 'amazing, innovative venture' (I laughed a lot); others began to get involved, people throughout the UK, having seen what we were up to in Bath. They started setting up their own farmers' markets;

books were written about the phenomenon, we local food enthusiasts became the darlings of the BBC's Food Programme and a good deal of difference was made and awareness raised. Every time I jump off a train and see a sign reading something like 'Snoring by Sea Farmers' Market, Every Saturday at 10 o'clock' I get a thrill of delight as I think 'we started that!'

**Q : Good, enough of the preening; where might this phenomenon go next?**

**A:** You certainly don't need to stop at food products. Local economies would be hugely reinvigorated if people could turn to their own communities for many more of their needs; not just food, but backpacks, furniture, art, fashion and so on. Imagine local entrepreneurs, designers, craftspeople and marketeers making serious holes in the markets currently ruled by giants like Burger King, Gap, Wrangler and Coca Cola.

### **Markets Could be Miles Better**

There is a brilliant local entrepreneur in Bath by the name of Robin Shepherd, who set up Al Fresco, a delicious and comparatively healthy fizzy drink, made locally by local people, using a significant proportion of local ingredients. And in this area at least, it took a nice little chunk out of the international soft drinks companies' monopoly. It was sold in the five-star hotel Robin ran in Bath, and it really took off, appearing in Bath restaurants and food and beverage retailers, and on people's dinner tables at home. It was a great success, and there's no reason why more of that shouldn't go on. Why are we relying on Coca Cola to ship their product's packaging and ingredients seventeen times round the world to create a not-particularly-tasty, health-destroying beverage, when we're perfectly capable of producing great alternatives locally?

### **Think Globally, Act Broccoli**

From an economic, as well as social and environmental perspective, reducing as many commodity miles from as many transactions and product lines as possible is more vital than ever. The vast majority of the products and goods

we consume can be produced locally. Granted, until climate change really kicks in, we can't produce much coffee and tea on the slopes around Bath or Berlin, but it's perfectly possible to produce our garden furniture, electronic equipment, books, paper and building materials locally. The South-West of England has a very long tradition in world-class fabric production from the local wool industries, beautiful, locally sourced building material – the famous Bath Stone – as well as a whole history of apple production for local cider. It's really about re-growing all those crafts practised in the past before rapid, high-volume global shipping became possible and absurd export-based government subsidies crept in. Global production obviously should not be abandoned – I love pineapples and guavas. However, people could be more mindful in their purchasing decisions, using enlightened self-interest to help create their own employment and that of their children, for example, when they decide between New Zealand Golden Delicious and Somerset Cox's Pippins..

### **Senseless Waste**

The miles that waste travels, mostly to landfill, is a similar concern. Why, some years ago, was Bath and North-East Somerset Council paying the best part of fifty pounds a ton to landfill all its biodegradable waste? And as if that were not bad enough, they were landfilling at Buckinghamshire at the other end of the country, instead of composting it locally, which is a far easier and cheaper thing to do. It is also something which, finally, has turned out to be a highly profitable enterprise for a local composting company.

The local government was loading all its biodegradable waste onto trucks at civic amenity sites. It was then hauled to the nearest railhead in the city of Bristol, where everything was transferred onto trains. It was then chugged all the way to Buckinghamshire, where that local authority had very kindly sold us some of its excess landfill capacity. It was then taken off the train and trucked to landfill, thereby creating far more damaging greenhouse gas impacts than non-biodegradables, because the methane from organic waste is much more potent as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. And the carbon emissions from all the waste transport is added on top of that. Now that is what I call waste. All in all, it was an inexcusable and irresponsible exercise.

### **Ranting On...**

Whilst we're on the subject of unnecessary mileages, why does half of Bristol work in Bath and half of Bath work in Bristol? It's a joke. We've got all the technology to work wherever we want, and yet people commute from Bath to Brussels on a weekly basis, or even the USA. There are people living in Bath who work in New York. They fly over there in the wee hours of Monday morning, and fly back in the late hours of Friday evening. They get three nanoseconds over the weekend when they're not asleep to say a tired and grumpy hello to the kids, before jetting off to New York in time for the new week. It's unbelievable and unsustainable. Local work and local production make far more sense, are far less harmful and a great deal more rewarding.

### **Back up the Apples and Pears**

Continuing the local disturbance: in England, if you want to fell a tree with a girth greater than something like seven inches, you have to get special permission. However, if you want to raze an entire orchard to the ground, you can get a subsidy to do so. This does not seem to me to encourage local production. Another rather odd thing is, if you look around the public parks and gardens of this country, the likelihood is you'll find a lot of horse chestnut trees, but no sweet chestnuts. It appears that no one is planting trees with commonly edible fruits; they'd rather plant trees that look much the same, but don't have edibles on them, maybe because if they did, it would reduce the profits of the corporations that have sewn up the world's food industry. I found out that there are over six thousand varieties of apple that have been grown in the UK down the ages, but if you wander into your local supermarket, you are only ever likely to find eight or nine varieties. Of these, most, usually seven or eight, come from countries as far afield as New Zealand, South Africa, and the Pacific North-West in the USA. So despite our wonderful apple-growing potential and proven success over many centuries, we're shipping the vast majority from overseas, at great social and environmental cost.

Luckily, not everyone is entirely happy about this state of affairs. Common Ground, a superb NGO that promotes the concept of local distinctiveness,

conceived the Apple Day initiative, with which I got involved in Bath back in the late eighties. The idea was that every year on October 21st, people were asked to stage Apple Day events in their own local communities, in which things to do with indigenous apple varieties are celebrated. In Bath we joined together with the local newspaper to look for residents who could remember anything about the Beauty of Bath, one of the many types of apple that used to be grown commonly in the area.

We were offering free young apple trees for planting in the garden to anyone who could write in with interesting stories about the Beauty of Bath. We had a huge response. We received letters from enthusiastic residents saying things like they were octogenarians and they could remember their great grandfather planting one, and it always fruited early in whatever month it was (August, I think), and it was never the nicest tasting apple, but it certainly was beautiful to look at, and 'my mother used to turn them into such and such a recipe', and then they'd supply the recipe. Hundreds and hundreds of people responded, so for a city of only 85,000 people, the groundswell of interest was very encouraging.

Clearly we had something the people wanted, and the Apple Day group eventually helped to inspire the Farmers' Market group. You cannot create a phenomenon like that overnight. Rather than spending a hundred million dollars on an advertising campaign to launch this product overnight, things actually grow better and last longer if, like an organism, they're seeded and binary fission takes over. One cell becomes two, two become four, four become eight, sixteen, thirty two, and so forth. Apple Day events in Bath went on to become huge successes, with six or seven capacious marquees packed solidly every October 21st with people wanting to celebrate local apple varieties, apple recipes, apple games and local distinctiveness. We knew from this that the farmers' market was going to be a hit, and, of course, it was, more than we ever dreamed it might be.

### **We're Not on a Roll, We're on a Baguette...**

One of the other inspirations for putting together the UK's first farmers' market in Bath came from an organisation I was involved in setting up, called BLOB, Bath Local Organic Buyers, where we got together around a hundred and twenty like-minded families and together commissioned a group of local organic farmers to produce to order enough produce to meet our total food requirement. We ordered so many tonnes per annum of carrots, onions, potatoes, leeks, sprouts, cabbage and so on. The farmers had a guaranteed market for their goods at premium prices and no middle people, so they received the full retail price and all their customers were on their doorstep, which reduced transport and packaging costs to a minimum. We the customers were able to order exactly what we wanted each week, we knew we could trust the food, it was delivered every Friday, we got to know the growers and producers of what we ate and it was a truly Organismic, all-win situation.

### **BLOB Boom Boob**

Unfortunately Bath Local Organic Buyers became more and more focused on the Organic to the detriment of the Local. Organic carrots started coming in from Norfolk and I saw the writing on the wall. I put the writing in Permaculture magazine, where I opined in an article: 'If this continues, we'll end up Bath Overseas Organic Buyers, and that spells, er, trouble.' It got a lot of laughs but, blow me down, it happened. Before long we had organic fruit coming in from countries like Israel. So I became disillusioned and got together with a few people to lobby for the farmers' market, which became the next project. Both BLOB and the farmers' market movement are still going strong, with BLOB focusing on the organic and the farmers' market being more concerned with local supply. Both do admirable work. However, as with all things, both have room for evolution. I became aware that Bath's farmers' market was often bringing increased wealth to those who had quite a lot already: those who had bijou organic smallholdings, but who were architects and lawyers more or less retired from the rat race; those who could afford to increase their investment in staff, machinery and buildings to meet the increased demand

for local produce. Much as it was all well intentioned, it wasn't doing all it could for the social leg of the three-legged stool of sustainability. I wanted to start looking for ways in which this huge demand for local produce could be put to a more productive use socially.

### **Growing for Gold**

With this in mind, I started talking with one of the councillors for part of the Norton Radstock area, just south of Bath, which used, historically, to be the bread basket of Bath and Bristol, with thriving agricultural and mining industries. However, in more recent decades, mining has disappeared completely, and agriculture has had very little work in it due to mechanisation. Young people were now leaving school and, finding no employment in the locality, were predictably falling into alcohol abuse, theft, drug dealing and violence. So just outside the chic, wealthy city of Bath, we had riot police on standby and a hornets' nest of very serious, poverty-based social problems.

I felt it might be possible to create a market gardening apprenticeship scheme in the Norton Radstock area, which, as things turned out, it was. It was called Growing for Gold and employment and training, stimulated by this growth of demand for local produce, went to the people that really needed it, namely the unemployed school leavers. So for some people who really wanted to, they had the option of entering into dependable, lucrative apprenticeships in a sector where demand was really beginning to boom. We were awarded £200,000 by the European Social Fund and some other contributions from local government bodies and Growing for Gold was born. Sadly, the scheme petered out once the grant had run out, and we were unable to obtain new funding, largely due to the structure of the funding institutions.

### **The Local Goldrush Has Barely Begun**

Looking on the bright side, similar schemes have the potential to become great success stories. Growing for Gold could be replicated in any number of communities, where there are willing farmers, young people wanting solid, reliable training and employment in a time-tested trade, and increasing

numbers of hotels, restaurants and schools using local produce, thanks in large part to endorsements from people like TV chef Jamie Oliver. Oh, and I made Growing for Gold my Action Research topic for my masters degree in Responsibility and Business Practice (or 'SAMBA' as we alumni prefer – 'a Serious Alternative to an MBA'), where my dissertation explored Local versus Global Food Production and Distribution Systems. And, as we all now know, despite the drumming malarkey, I was awarded the degree.



## Part Four: Business, Wealth and Corporate Silliness Revisited (CSR)



### **Re-Everything Group**

#### **Q: How then does Organismics work to make serious money?**

**A:** OK, down to business. Just how do you use the Organismics philosophy to make money? The answer is to set up an organism of businesses which, like the organs in your body, feed and are fed by each other. In an Organismic business group, every sale by one company should create several sales opportunities for others. In this way, economic success develops and grows just as growth and development occur in any other healthy organism.

Similarly, as in all industrial ecology systems, waste from one enterprise should provide raw materials or other value-added opportunities for other companies in the group. In permaculture, one of the key design principles states that 'every output from any element of a design should have a number of places in which it can become input. Likewise, every required input should be available from a number of different sources, or outputs'. In investment terms the latter is equivalent to having a spread portfolio: if any one market is down, be sure to have other investments in areas where prices may simultaneously be up. In an Organismic business system, be sure to have plenty of places where you can sell all your outputs and be equally careful you can acquire each of your needs from a range of different sources. This makes for a more stable, self-regulating system which doesn't suffer peaks and troughs, boom and bust, in the same way conventional economic systems seem to.

In our Organismic business system, the Re-Everything Group, there are twenty companies, some already very busy, some in the early stages of growth,

some still emerging:

#### 1. **Re-Evaluate** – *consultancy in Corporate Responsibility*

Commercially-focused strategic social and environmental consulting to multinational corporations, governments and NGOs.

#### 2. **Re-Connect** – *eco-tourism & artefact sales*

An Organismic approach to highly profitable all-win relationships between communities throughout the world.

#### 3. **Re-Build** – *eco-housing*

Housing developments designed not only to provide environmentally benign structures but also to encourage considerably improved lifestyle opportunities.

#### 4. **Re-Treat** – *Bloomfield House, The Grange, La Umbria, le Palais de Fès*

A growing international selection of socially and environmentally conscious destinations where people can not only discover how beautiful the buildings and their surroundings can be but also how many profit centres you can get into one location!

#### 5. **Re-Discover** – *personal and organisational development*

An opportunity for individuals and groups to explore Organismics in their own lives and businesses, in order to enhance their experience of working and living.

#### 6. **Re-Creations** – *Bath gallery, retail, wholesale, import/export*

An up-market retail location in downtown Bath, UK, where visitors can purchase restored, reclaimed, re-cycled, re-used and re-imagined items, local arts and sustainable, fair-traded goodies of many kinds. This is also the HQ of our import/export, wholesale and interior design companies.

#### 7. **The Reclaimers** – *Bristol reclamation company*

A well-established architectural salvage and reclamation company (some say the best in England), founded by Steve and Michelle Oliver and recently

acquired by the Re-Everything Group, where you can buy anything from a Thomas Crapper toilet to a complete 17th-century mansion.

#### 8. **Re-Ignite** – *brand reactivation*

Not only Brand Directors but the brands themselves need restoring sometimes – if yours is tired and in need of a shot in the arm, you may wish to meet with the FireBrands!

#### 9. **Re-Store** – *Re-Creations online*

You don't even need to visit Bath to acquire a Vietnamese mountain sculpture, a restored Indian wedding temple or a re-imagined Maserati expertly covered in roadkill badger pelts: it's all on-line at [www.re-everything.com/re-store](http://www.re-everything.com/re-store).

#### 10. **Re-Style** – *interior and exterior design*

Many people don't want to try to reconcile 18th-century English antiques with reclaimed timber kitchens and lighting built from ancient farming implements – they want it all done for them in a harmonious and effortless way. Bring us your interior and exterior dreams and we'll manifest – or even exceed – them for you.

#### 11. **Re-Wired** – *recycled PC LANS, WANs etc*

Who doesn't want faster, quieter, infinitely more elegant computer systems in their offices, schools and homes for less than the price of new ones made of yellowing plastic?

#### 12. **Re-Fresh** – *very yummy, very healthy food and drink products*

Not only can we help to re-invigorate traditional agriculture, we can turn its outputs into delicious foods and drinks that actually help to reduce your risk of diseases such as cancer and coronary heart disease.

#### 13. **Re-Vision** – *films*

We are already producing our own promotional videos, you can see them playing both online and at the Bath gallery. It doesn't stop here, however, read on...

#### 14. **Re-Sound** – *recording studios and retreat*

Imagine spending a week at an exquisite location in rural Somerset, fishing and boating on our well-stocked two-acre lake, enjoying a picnic on one of the islands, relaxing beside the south-facing courtyard swimming pool. Now imagine learning to play your chosen instrument and spending a delightful few days composing and recording a music DVD with your colleagues and friends under the guidance of professional musicians, producers, sound engineers and a film crew. Wannabe rockstars, this is for you...

#### 15. **Re-Vitalise** – *club, restaurant, bar*

Wouldn't it be refreshing if you could visit a club and dance until four in the morning, or simply hang out with friends, listening to great music, eating superb quality food and enjoying a range of delicious drinks and to know that everything you ate and drank was adding to your health and the health and prosperity of others? There aren't many places where this is possible; we know one...

#### 16. **Re-Fuel** – *eco-diesel vehicles, conversions, fuel sales*

If you were offered a high-performance 4x4 vehicle that drove off-road like a Range Rover, ate up motorway miles all day at speed, towed several tonnes, outperformed most vehicles in its class for economy and servicing cost yet ran on cheaper fuel and contributed ZERO to climate change, what would you say? Why not test-drive mine?

#### 17. **Recalcitrant** - *Publishing:*

- 'Organismics: A Present for the Future'
- 'Groundswell' – Organismics magazine and e-zine
- Ongoing press coverage
- Broadcast media – see Re-Vision et al

#### 18. **Re-Member** – *Groundswell membership*

The Organismics philosophy has attracted a good deal of attention and this book can only provide a snapshot of its current evolutionary stage and progress. Re-Member offers individuals and groups the opportunity to keep

up with developments and, more importantly, to get involved.

19. **Re-Educate** – *Organismic education systems and events for young and old*

As we all know, education is a lifelong process. Many professional educators and students alike wish to engage in formal or informal exploration of the Organismics philosophy as it applies to their own lives and those of others. Re-Education is the vehicle for this.

20. **Re-Fashion/Re-Incarnation** – *recycled fashion*

There are few things more rewarding than seeing young designers developing their gifts, clothing people in superbly-crafted, ingeniously imagined garments and learning to fly in their careers. One is seeing all this happen with the exclusive use of re-cycled fabrics, re-modelled hand-me-downs that rival the haute couture catwalks and jewellery created from industrial waste. You've just got to be there...

**Q: Can you expand on these thumbnail sketches and give some more detailed examples of how these enterprises work?**

**A:** Yes, let's look at a few of the organs of this organism:

**Re-Evaluate**

My colleagues and I have been providing what is today called Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) consultancy for seventeen years at the time of writing. Clients with whom we have worked include: Balfour Beatty; BP; Carillion; Trinity Mirror Group; Bechtel; Ford; Barclays Bank; Electricité de France; NatWest Bank; the UK Department for International Development; the UK Department for Trade and Industry; the UK Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions; the UK Ministry of Defence; the Government of Uganda; The OECD; British Airways; Boots; The Environment Council; B&Q; British Telecom; Nokia; Pentland Group and Shell.

Corporate environmental and social responsibility programmes have proliferated in recent years. However, critics assert that these initiatives are, at best, genuine but short-lived. At worst, they are dismissed as a 'whitewash' calculated to disguise an ugly reality of environmental and social abuse. I would suggest that the answer is to take an Organismic approach.

The way to make corporate responsibility a living force – that is, to create ongoing improvement within and beyond an organisation – is to align internal realities with external messages and perceptions of the company. In other words, to 'walk the talk' – and be seen to do so.

Our experience has shown that long-term, self-perpetuating success in CSR can be achieved by linking internal communications with external communications in an iterative process that ultimately involves all players: staff, suppliers, customers, media, shareholders, even critics.

Clearly there are some very important benefits to be had from an effective corporate responsibility programme. They include: proud, enthusiastic staff; brand equity improvements; reputation enhancement; effective risk management; improved media profile; lowered litigation exposure – both personal and organisational; better government relations; environmental and

social awards.

Once people are given the opportunity to learn more about corporate responsibility issues and participate in the related processes, a remarkable change often begins to take place. Morale moves upwards, staff turnover and absenteeism rates drop, customer care improves and so on. Internal communications devices such as the company intranet can then be used to perpetuate and build momentum.

When external communications are added – for instance in annual reports (both online and hard copy) and multi-stakeholder conferences – corporate responsibility can really begin to become a powerful and growing force, engaging not only staff but also customers, shareholders, the media and former critics such as activist groups.

The key to success is turning monologue to dialogue. The most successful CSR initiatives have been those in which a range of interested parties has been informed of plans and progress AND asked for their responses and support.

The panel below shows how these disciplines reinforce each other.



**To illustrate how it works, a typical Corporate Responsibility improvement cycle might be:**

1. An internal CSR learning programme is designed and then set in motion with a small group of key staff members, forming a CSR Task Force
2. The group's learning is conveyed to a broader internal audience via the company's intranet
3. Suggestions, questions and offers of support are sent to the CSR Task Force by a wider range of employees
4. A larger-scale conference is convened, in which all interested parties can participate
5. The discoveries made and agreements reached at the conference form the basis for the company's CSR engagement programme
6. The CSR engagement programme is implemented and begins to yield significant environmental, social and economic benefits, both within and beyond the company
7. These benefits are conveyed to a diverse external audience via an annual report, the company's web site and the media
8. Responses from external audiences – including customers, community members and government bodies – are conveyed to the CSR Task Force and inform the next round of internal deliberations, learning and programme enhancement
9. And so on....

In this way the entire process becomes Organismic and CSR becomes embedded in the 'DNA' of the organisation and the external groups upon whom it has impacts.

Here's a paper I wrote recently which explains why most CSR programmes based on non-Organismic thinking are doomed to fail and how they can be turned into change initiatives that not only succeed but are highly lucrative as well:

## **CSR 1.0 IS DEAD – LONG LIVE CSR 2.0**

It has long been supposed by many observers that companies have adopted a corporate social responsibility (CSR) policy merely because it will make them look good, particularly in the media. In the absence of specific legislation requiring it, goes the usual criticism, voluntary CSR is simply practised as a form of public relations.

If that is true, then the CSR industry will almost certainly die out within the next five years as more and more business leaders realise what a failure it is. This is the case because companies practising CSR are generally achieving little or nothing in terms of their PR profile. To make matters worse, they are also failing to achieve many – if any – of the potential benefits in other areas too: staff loyalty and turnover rates, investor confidence, public affairs and so on. And since this is so, company profits are not being enhanced through any appreciable return on CSR investment. Therefore, CSR investment, in the absence of new incentives such as legislation, will soon be jettisoned as would any other wasteful expenditure in a sensibly-run business.

Yet, practised in a more strategically informed, multi-disciplinary manner, CSR could not only achieve significant improvements in many ethical areas – from human rights through climate change mitigation to poverty alleviation – it could also add considerably to the financial success of companies. Yet, in the forms in which it is currently emerging, CSR is usually, at best, a waste of money, at worst a threat to profitability and shareholder value.

Let us take a look at some of the evidence for this assertion. Far and away the most popular response to the CSR agenda has been the annual social or environmental report. Very substantial budgets are deployed each year on glossy publications giving details of companies' credentials in these areas. An entire industry has grown up around this practice, involving benchmarking, data gathering, assurance, stakeholder engagement, training, design, copy writing, photography, reprographics, printing, distribution...It's a veritable goldmine for the suppliers, but the clients – the reporting companies – are increasingly noticing that there are generally only three groups reading their very costly reports:

1. their competitors
2. the competitors of their CSR and communications consultancies
3. angry critics of the reporting companies – or of capitalism as a whole

So why are these thoroughly researched, beautifully designed and professionally written reports not being read? Simple answer: because, to almost everyone else, they are tedious. Even among the three groups mentioned above, who are most likely to study these reports, it is increasingly evident that readership is astonishingly low. This shows that each reader is costing thousands of pounds to the company footing the bill – and, worse still, those few readers are of no value whatever to the companies in question; indeed, they are often using the reports as ammunition for various forms of future attack upon the companies in question.

So the return on investment in this, the predominant form of CSR activity, is dismally low. And the digital form of reporting fares little better. Online reports can claim some environmental and financial credibility: there is a significant reduction in physical materials consumed and it is thus cheaper than the hard-copy equivalent. However, there are challenges here too: for instance the 'digital divide' means that some 90%-plus of the world's population, many of them among the worst-hit by the more regrettable consequences of a company's activities, cannot gain access to online information – if you live in an African village where the telephone has not yet been heard of, Internet access is unlikely to be a daily reality. This has led to accusations of élitism, or even deliberate exclusion of those with the most valid claims against the reporting companies. Furthermore – and paradoxically – the egalitarian nature of digital media for those who *do* enjoy access to the Internet (it is a very affordable medium in which individuals and relatively impoverished activist groups can quickly and cheaply become as visible as multinational corporations) means that a Google search generally reveals many more critics than supporters.

Naturally, the next questions that spring to mind are: "If this is the case, then should we throw CSR out? If not, then how do we make it work? If it becomes a legal requirement, how do we make it pay for itself? And if it doesn't become a legal requirement, how might we make it profitable?" I would suggest that a carefully framed strategy aimed at maximising dialogue in place

of monologue – asking and listening as much as telling – and integrating internal with external communications is most likely to succeed in combining ethical with economic improvements.

A comparison of two case studies may help explain this approach:

### **CSR as a major potential threat to profits**

A fast-moving consumer goods company commissioned a research programme in which we assessed the views and understanding of the Board members on three questions:

- What does CSR mean to our company?
- What is our current position on CSR?
- Where should we be headed in CSR terms?

Almost every Board member, while stating that CSR is extremely important to their sector (the company manufactures and sells alcoholic beverages, thus the social responsibility issues for them are huge) added that, in their opinion, little if anything was happening in this field within the organization.

While interviewing the leaders, numerous names of individual CSR champions at lower levels in the company's hierarchy were mentioned. We decided to interview these people too. What emerged was that, in the many countries where the company operates, spontaneous eruptions of philanthropy were taking place all the time. Usually these initiatives took the form of staff fundraising campaigns and charity support projects such as sponsored half-marathons or second-hand children's clothing or used book sales. It had become customary that in most cases, enthusiastic organisers asked local or regional directors if the company would match funds raised by the voluntary efforts of the staff. In nearly every case this was agreed and many local charities and other worthwhile causes became the happy beneficiaries of these proactive people's energy and good will.

Then came the shocking discovery. When we analyzed this global network of extremely well-meant but unconnected fundraising events, a series of very alarming facts emerged:

- The total annual cost to the company ran to several millions of pounds
- The company's global-level leaders had no idea it was happening
- Few, if any, of the potential benefits of a multi-million-pound CSR programme were being realized
- More than half of the charities being supported were children-focused
- There was a major media campaign being waged at the time, in which the alcohol industry was being castigated for its heavy focus on 'alco-pops', a range which was accused of attempting to attract children towards underage drinking

So, not only was the company (unwittingly) spending millions on a CSR programme, in the absence of any leadership-level strategic CSR intelligence, internal communications or media relations management, it was also achieving very little return on its investment. Worst of all, however, was the horrifying fact that a perfectly well-intentioned and widespread phenomenon had the potential, if picked up by the wrong kind of investigative journalist or activist group, to inflict massive damage on the company's reputation, profitability and shareholder value. We could see the tabloid headlines: "Ruthless alco-pop peddlers target vulnerable kids", "children's homelessness charity as front for booze barons".

The CEO, in a cold sweat, proposed the election of a Board-level CSR leader and the development of a global CSR strategy, to be integrated with the organisation's overall corporate strategy. The vote was passed unanimously.

### **CSR as a powerful profit-booster**

A major construction industry client wanted to create a powerful 'differentiating factor', particularly in highly competitive bids for substantial public sector projects. The company's leaders accepted that there was a strong case for a strategy combining internal with external communications and replacing monologue with dialogue. We brought together not only staff from all levels and many departments but also suppliers, community members, NGOs and others in a series of workshops designed to raise awareness of core CSR issues. We not only trained these people but listened carefully and reacted to their responses, their criticisms, doubts, enthusiasms, ideas and suggestions. It began to emerge that, by combining principles and processes with the

participants' understanding of their own industries, issues, preferences and pre-occupations, we were able to find a win/win outcome for almost any challenge, where profits and ethics enhanced each other at almost every turn.

The result was that the company not only completed the project (on which we practised our newfound win/win innovations) ahead of schedule, we also enjoyed other benefits, including:

- Enhanced supplier loyalty and understanding of CSR
- Greater staff loyalty, enthusiasm and pride in their work
- Significant improvements in 'innovation thinking'
- Exceptionally positive media exposure
- Numerous highly-acclaimed CSR-related awards
- A multi-billion increase in public sector contracts in the following year

We never did find out how much of the company's increased order book we could take credit for with the CSR programme but, given the multi-billion level of the boost in business, the Chairman exclaimed at one awards ceremony that anything over 0.01% represented a superb return on his investment!

### **Conclusion**

So, I predict that very soon we will be seeing the death of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) in its present form and from its ashes will rise a new, highly profitable and therefore long-lived answer to the question "How can we do the right thing *and* meet our shareholders' financial expectations?": CSR: the Comprehensive Strategic Response or CSR 2.0.

Watch this space...

### **Re-Treat, Re-Fuel, Re-Creations, Re-Store and a few others**

The **Re-Evaluate** CSR consultancy is just one organ in the greater organism that is the **Re-Everything Group**. Throughout the group, we aim to source where we can from ecologically and socially aware suppliers, we employ disempowered people who really need employing, as well as tithing our profits to appropriate recipients, such as local organisations that help to get homeless and otherwise disadvantaged people back into work. The result, it is hoped, as well as enabling us to pay the bills, will be a 'groundswell' of positive public and private opinion and action, turning people and partnerships on to Organismic thinking and doing.

Under the **Re-Treat** banner we operate Bath's first eco-hotel at Bloomfield House, which not only contributes to sustainable tourism but is also the venue for seminars on Organismic thinking and corporate responsibility. As things are now, many tourists travel to Bath in cars, whose emissions not only pollute the atmosphere, but also degrade and dissolve the local Bath stone, the very stone that has helped make Bath into the gorgeous UNESCO World Heritage Site it is. In other words, our visitors are unwittingly destroying the architecture they travel so far, and in such great numbers, to see. To counter this, our hotel and seminar centre offers special privileges to those guests who travel to Bath by train or other public transport. We also use very smart, vegetable oil-powered, zero-net-emission vehicles to collect guests from the railway station. The hotel serves as standard, where it can, only local, organic and fair trade produce, often from Bath's farmers' market.

As we've already mentioned, there's not a lot of coffee being grown on the slopes of Bath at the moment, so that's fair traded in from organic growers in areas such as Uganda, where in our consultancy capacity we helped the national government set up an eco-tourism programme. So now we can import coffee from Ugandans, who otherwise would not be being paid fairly on the global market, and feed it to our wealthy guests in a Bath eco-hotel. Local suppliers provide most of the hotel's needs, and wherever possible we source such items as china, paintings, furniture and fabrics this way as well – as, of course, is also the case with our interior design consultancy, **Re-Style**.

Next we plan to kit out the hotel (which has now been operating

successfully, to much media acclaim, for three years) with further improvements such as renewable energy and composting waste management systems. Only listed buildings, planning and building regulations have so far held up these additional initiatives. Bloomfield House is a collaborative initiative, involving the ideas and suggestions of as many individuals and organisations as possible. Thus with the help of guests, corporate seminar delegates, suppliers, consultants, neighbours and critics, the concept will evolve over time.

This approach is being replicated at The Grange, a beautiful rural property we have just acquired in a nearby village. The Grange is becoming the hub of the **Re-Everything Group**, locally, nationally and internationally. From here we will manage our restoration business as well as many of the other group operations. Both properties will also be showrooms for the products created by some of the other companies in the group. There's plenty of land at the Grange as well, which will enable us to set up an on-site market garden that will provide organic produce for the hotel and the restaurant, which will be another organ in the organism. We have another property, an eco-seminar centre, under construction in Southern Spain and are already involved in the restoration of a gorgeous old palace in Fès, Morocco. I hope there will be more locations coming on-stream before too long. We have been offered several sites in Europe and further afield for the construction of eco-housing developments and **Re-Build** staff are working with financiers, planners and development partners to bring some of these to completion.

Then there's **Re-Creations**, the Bath gallery which showcases and sells items that have been recycled, restored, reclaimed, reused, and, as we like to say, re-imagined. Here we offer everything from fair-traded oriental sculptures, antiques and architectural salvage to designer lighting made from agricultural implements, tailors' dummies and musical instruments. There is a very large storage and workshop facility at The Grange for this purpose, and the items are also displayed and offered for sale at Bloomfield House and the other **Re-Treat** venues. There is also an online presence – **Re-Store** – which acts rather like a sustainability-based e-bay. In these endeavours we are able to provide employment for local people who are trained and employed in antique restoration and the creation of new items, like furniture and fashion (**Re-Fashion** works with re-cycled and organic fabrics), that are high value,

both commercially and in terms of their aesthetic appeal, quality of materials, and the fact that they are built to last.

We do similar restoring and re-imagining work with computers in another organ of the organism: **Re-Wired**. We take away computers, which would otherwise be considered redundant, either because their processors aren't fast enough to deal with the huge file sizes and ever more data intensive applications that are being increasingly used, or because their plastics are turning yellow. In this case we put the PCs in designer cabinets made from exquisite reclaimed timbers, thus giving them an aesthetic appeal greater than that they started with. These are linked together using very fast central data processing units which make each work station faster, yet quieter and less energy-intensive than new equipment. In this way we can put together local area networks for libraries, schools, hospitals, internet cafes, small businesses and so on, who pay a lower price than they'd normally pay for new equipment which functions less well than ours.

Leaping on to another organ, **Re-Fuel** is the vegetable oil-powered diesel vehicles operation. It is now possible for every car with a diesel engine to be converted to run on vegetable oil, which is not only a renewable fuel, but also far less harmful in use than fossil fuels. The climate change impact of diesel vehicles powered by vegetable oil is very low indeed, in that not only are emissions considerably lower than those from diesel fuel, but a good proportion of those emissions that are produced are reabsorbed by the crop which, in this case, is predominantly rapeseed. Not only that, the particulate emissions that cause respiratory problems, for which diesel vehicles are much criticised, are much reduced when vegetable oil is used as fuel. Suitably converted diesel vehicles are able to run on any vegetable-based oils, including massage oil, olive oil and peanut oil, which was the fuel for which the engine was originally designed by Monsieur Diesel himself. Rapeseed oil, however, is the optimal fuel and is the most commonly used for this purpose.

**Re-Fuel** has plans to diversify, the commercial arm offering light haulage systems, a taxi service and sales of vehicles, vehicle conversions and vegetable oil. We aim also to give a fairer deal to the farmers who produce the rapeseed oil than is currently the case on the global markets. We'd like to restore some of the old family filling stations and offer not only fuel from

local farms but farm produce too, all available in the forecourt shops. Another of **Re-Fuel's** aims is to move into the provision of domestic and commercial power systems using vegetable oil-based diesel generators and oil burning installations.

We're not, I hope, too naïve in this initiative. Realistically, vegetable oil diesels are not going to solve the fossil fuel crisis by themselves. If every vehicle in the UK ran on rapeseed oil, there would not be enough land to grow it all. It has been shown in cases too numerous to count that monoculture does not work. We need a kind of 'perma-polyculture'; a whole set of sustainable energy creation systems. In the same way, sensible agriculture is an interlaced multi-crop system that's highly productive and easily maintained, one which not only models itself upon the rest of nature, but doesn't do harm to it either. So we certainly need to look at other means of propulsion too. For now though, vegetable oil power is just one way of propelling ourselves more appropriately than those methods most of us are currently using.

## **Re-Connect**

Here's a paper I wrote some time ago. I could have called it 'Organismic Tourism'. Actually I called it 'The Difference Tribe':

**Mindseed:** *Tribes have always been groups of people united by a distinct set of common characteristics. In the past, of necessity, one of these characteristics was shared locality. The sophistication of today's travel and communications technologies, however, means that now this characteristic need no longer apply to the same extent. Global tribes sharing a vast range of interests have sprung up. The Difference Tribe could play a significant part in breaking down one of the last barriers to sharing human development between hemispheres: improved prosperity and the consequent access to fast, effective global communication and face-to-face dialogue. This could be the beginning of a 'virtuous circle'. It all has to do with a practice which has, since time immemorial, united tribe members and enabled them to pass on vast, complex, ever-changing bodies of hard-earned knowledge and wisdom to successive generations with ever-changing challenges and pre-occupations. That practice is story-telling. Here is a possible 21st-century tribal story...*

One evening in Bath, England, May 2004, after we had delivered the Green Light Lectures on responsible tourism, Justin Francis – founder of [www.responsibletravel.com](http://www.responsibletravel.com) and ex-head of global marketing at The Body Shop – and I sat in the drawing room of my home and talked into the night.

We ended our conversation not with a conclusion but with a question: 'It has been twenty-something years since The Body Shop, Ben and Jerry's, Café Direct and Patagonia were launched. What will be the next ethical megabrand that will go way past the short-term-shareholder-value-only worldview?'

In other words, how might we create a company that moves to the next level in demonstrating that trade and enterprise can effect real change in the world, beyond merely further enriching a few of the already-rich?

As tends to happen when the gods of synchronicity are at work, within days I received a call from another friend. He asked if I could help with some marketing input on a project he'd unearthed. He had met someone with a range of high quality fair-traded products coming from Ghana. His contact had, over eight or nine years, established an extremely good working relationship with the Ghanaian tribal people who cultivated these products and had learned a great deal about the products' traditional therapeutic, healing and cosmetic uses.

What this man's business lacked was a means to scale up. The three of us met and discussed what was needed. We emerged from the meeting with a determination to create a suitable marketing system. We also agreed that it was most likely to be web-based: despite the collapse of the dotcom bubble, we recognised that digital media still represent the means to empower large numbers of people all over the world, regardless of location, timezone and current level of empowerment. Indeed, it was the failure to recognise that the Internet is a whole new kind of animal that had caused the collapse of the bubble in the first place: simply treating it as one more shop-front for business-as-usual was where the 'problem' had begun. In fact it is an Organismic phenomenon. When my neural network, your neural network and those of millions of other people are connected together online, we become a sort of 'superorganism', capable of things none of us could achieve independently or in local groups.

As I pondered this topic over the coming days, it began to dawn on

me that we might have here the beginnings of an answer to the question Justin and I had identified some weeks earlier. What I saw emerging was a web-based membership organisation, linking communities of supply with communities of demand in win/win relationships.

It shouldn't be difficult to find a global group of people who share the following characteristics; they all:

- Have a regular need for a wide range of products and services
- Would like to contribute to fairness in the world
- Recognise that their buying power is a means to effect change
- Have typical western levels of disposable income
- Do not want to pay over the odds for their purchases
- Demand high quality in all that they buy

These people could become one part of the business as customers

Add to this the fact that there are increasing numbers of people in the 'developed' world who, by any reasonable standards, are cash and asset rich but who feel there is little or no meaning in their work and wish to find a successful way of 'making a living making a difference'.

These people could become another part of the business as traders.

Then add the fact that the travel and tourism industry has been suffering a downturn in recent years, as a result of such calamities as 9/11, and, in the UK, foot and mouth disease, the London bombings and so on. Yet, despite this, there are a few niche markets which are in fact growing: eco-tourism, adventure holidays, sponsored charity fundraising trips, and ecological and social working holidays. (A friend recently described the working holiday he and his wife had taken to Asia and laughed as he told me: 'At one point, Sue and I were stood, covered in mud, hosing down an elephant in some Indian lake after a hard day's conservation work in the forest. It suddenly dawned on me that we were paying several thousand pounds each for this privilege!' His face then switched to dreamy mode as he added: 'It was the best holiday

we've ever taken.')

These people could become part of the business as visitors.

There is a huge capability among the financially impoverished people of developing nations. Their traditional skills, enterprise, innovation, motivation and hard work can produce a great deal of what the wealthy nations want and need. Yet only a fraction of this latent capacity has been realised. All that is required for them to capitalise on the opportunity to pull themselves out of dependence and poverty is a ready market for their goods, effective communication between them and their global markets and the infrastructure that would link western consumers with the goods and services the developing nations could provide. These people could become part of the business as producers.

Imagine linking all these people together, via the internet, to form a global tribe of shared vision, interest, desire, passion, commitment, ambition and hope. Then imagine giving all these members the opportunity to collaborate in an all-win scenario, based on the theme of making a difference:

- Make a product, make a difference
- Make a purchase, make a difference
- Make a sale, make a difference
- Make a visit, make a difference

Here's how it could work:

The company designs and promotes a range of training events at which paying delegates can explore and begin to answer the question: 'How might I make a living making a difference?' Some of these may choose to sign up as Difference Tribe agents; they may receive, say, half their workshop fees back in the form of a refund, or tokens redeemable against later purchases of Difference Tribe branded products.

Those who choose to become agents receive many benefits: they can begin to make a living by making a difference; they can purchase Difference

Tribe products and services for themselves at discounted rates; they will receive the regular Difference Tribe magazine (hard copy, e-zine or DVD format); they can enjoy hosting regular social gatherings of like-minded people, where sales are made and their new careers will begin to develop.

And what forms the heart of all these activities? Telling stories.

An important element of The Difference Tribe approach will be to develop a sense of inclusion, or 'tribe membership'. In this way, many customers will be encouraged to become members. In return for a relatively low monthly subscription, they too would receive the Difference Tribe magazine and be offered members' privileges, to include discounts on tickets to events, special holiday opportunities etc. This would produce regular income for the company, new agency recruits and a growing sense of being more than merely a customer base: the ethos might be encouraged to develop more towards that of a 'movement'.

**Mindseed:** *Part of the uniqueness of the Difference Tribe brand is that it doesn't centralise power. We have seen numerous organisations emerge in recent years to respond to the increasing demand for organic, fairtrade and otherwise ethical products and services. As evidenced by the supermarkets' trade in organic produce, however, the introduction of old-style business systems into an ethical marketplace causes many problems. For instance, supermarkets have been severely criticised for using their immense buying power to ratchet down prices among their suppliers, just as they do in the field of industrial agriculture, where wholesale prices are often forced below production cost. Big retailers, backed by global trade subsidies, frequently also cancel out the benefits of sustainable agriculture by flying produce from all around the world when it can be grown or reared locally. Increasingly sophisticated consumers recognise the absurdity of this and vote with their paycheques. This has been one reason for the huge success of farmers' markets in the UK.*

Where our brand might establish a more or less unique and successful position is in that it doesn't allow this type of centralisation: the profits are shared among the communities of supply and the communities of demand, with the

minimum of middle people.

The next element of the brand – and another revenue stream – will be responsible travel. The power of the stories told at selling events, conferences, in the magazine and elsewhere will be considerably enhanced when people can describe having actually visited the various countries and communities whose products are available for purchase. In addition, the recent growth of 'working holidays', usually focused on conservation, fund-raising or appropriate exploration of other cultures, is another strong vindication for the Difference Tribe approach. The members and agents may be offered discount rates for such travel and learning opportunities, perhaps raising funds for affiliated charities in the process. Those travellers who are less adventurous would simply pay a higher price for non-working responsible travel products and services. Of course all would return home laden with our most potent commercial tool: stories.

In order to make these stories as powerful and as widely available as possible, it is proposed that there should be much digital video shot in all overseas engagements. This will be put to use in several ways, not the least of which will be on the company's website. One reason for the success of farmers' markets is the ability to meet face-to-face with the suppliers of one's products. Obviously this is not possible when, for instance, European customers are looking to buy coffee or bananas. On-line video footage of members' and agents' trips to the source communities will create something of the atmosphere of a face-to-face relationship with the producers of even the most far-flung products.

Imagine being able to click a button on your laptop and see a young brother and sister, standing at the heart of their village in, say, Uganda, talking to you almost as if they were in your home. Imagine the little girl saying 'Thank you for deciding to buy our coffee and not the regular supermarket brand. Because you made that choice, we now have the school you see behind me. My brother and I have been attending classes there now for two years and are already making great progress. This means that we may be able to attend university and help to make even more of a difference in the village in future. We also now have a brand new well and water pumping system which means our mother does not have to walk eight hours a day to fetch

water for our cooking, washing and drinking. So she has been able to help in setting up two small businesses which, we hope, will soon be supplying dried fruits and clothing to the Difference Tribe. Of course, she is also able to spend more time with us and is much happier and more fun than when she was permanently exhausted. Not only that, we have managed, with some of the income generated by our newly-formed businesses, to set up a satellite telephone link to the worldwide web, so we can stay in regular touch with all our fellow Difference Tribe members in the north. The days of “us and them” are numbered!

Of course, the video material will also become a central part of building a database of developing Difference Tribe relationships and will add considerably to the story-telling impact of all members', agents' and promotional events, conferences and parties, wherever they take place.

It is also envisaged that customers, members and agents, while travelling to distant destinations, will become the 'scouts' of the Difference Tribe, bringing home stories not only of inspiring encounters with current suppliers but also of possible new product and service opportunities.

In conclusion, the company will produce increased wealth for all concerned from a range of different revenue streams:

- Workshops
- Conferences
- Members' subscriptions
- Product sales
- Travel sales

...and all these activities will feed and be fed by each other, exactly as has always been the case among the members of a truly interdependent tribe.

## **Re-Build**

Another recent rant takes the stage:

We ARE living systems. It's not a metaphor. Our communities are living systems; our economies, say increasing numbers of very eminent observers, are living systems; our bodies are living systems, our families are living systems; our businesses are living systems. James Lovelock's Gaia Hypothesis is now commanding very widespread respect and suggests that the entire Earth is a self-regulating living system.

When you look at life this way, amazing things can begin to happen... Here's the plan: each Re-Build village has at its heart a market garden and a village hall which is also a business centre with office and workshop spaces and conferencing facilities. This creates the setting for an Organismic web of businesses which, like the organs in any healthy organism, feed, and are fed by, each other.

I'll give you an example of just one possible loop – one of many possible loops, by means of which this can happen. Imagine the scene:

The research and publishing company in the village sells an article on Organismic thinking to, say, The Observer. For this it is paid by the newspaper. A reader, having enjoyed and been fascinated by the article, wants to find out more. She buys the book on the subject - another sale to the research and publishing company in the village. Having read the final page, our reader decides this is gripping stuff and she must attend one of the residential courses on Organismic thinking described there. She goes to [www.re-everything.com](http://www.re-everything.com) and discovers that these courses are run at the conference centres at the villages in question. She books herself a place.

Some months later (there was a wait, since the courses were heavily oversubscribed) our shero attends her course. In doing so she provides revenue for numerous businesses within the selected village, including the conference centre, the consultancy which designed and delivered her course, the bookshop, the delicatessen, the restaurant and, of course, the market garden which supplied these last two enterprises. In addition, she stayed at one of the few non-owner-occupied properties in the village, thereby generating

income for the owners, who have invested in them as pension earners, along with the oak and walnut plantations outside the village, from whose harvest tomorrow's structures will be built (incidentally, these stands of indigenous hardwood are themselves pension schemes too).

The plantations, along with the market garden and a good number of other such businesses in and around the village, are staffed, to a large degree, by the people who live in the social housing dotted about the community, much of it tied to the land. Many of these people had hitherto been excluded from living in the area where they were born, as prices soared when housing developers built dormitory developments for prosperous commuters who were drifting out of the main cities to enjoy the 'good life' on the weekends.

As you might expect, the course exceeded our guest's expectations, high though they were, and she returned home bubbling over with excitement. Her children haven't seen her so animated since she won several thousand pounds on the lottery last Summer. Her husband is convinced that she must have found a new lover, or, worse still, have been brainwashed by some cult. (Of course, with a name like 'Organismics', it could be both.) When she proposes that they all spend a couple of weeks at the village on one of the eco-tourism holidays she has seen advertised, he's actually quite relieved: she'd hardly be likely to take him along as she re-visited the scene of any adultery, and, if it turned out to be a cult, then he might be able to nip the problem in the bud. Also, he thought to himself, those green oak timber frame buildings, like ancient cruck-frame barn conversions, with their chiaroscuro vine-clad verandahs, did look far more appealing than he was yet prepared to admit.

So it was agreed. And who could object anyway, when our shero generously offered to pay for the entire trip with her nest-egg of lottery winnings?

A few months later, the entire family arrives at a remarkably peaceful yet paradoxically very lively village in the mountains of Murcia in Southern Spain. The family had taken a while to agree but had finally settled upon this village for their holiday. (There were, by now, quite a number of them in various parts of the world, many in the wealthy northern hemisphere twinned in trade agreements with partner villages in developing countries.)

The holiday passed faster than anyone could believe. There was so much fun

to be had. Not only did Mum and Dad get plenty of opportunity to enjoy the village restaurant and bars while the children were uproariously entertained at a whole succession of events organised mostly by the teenage residents to supplement their allowances. They also enjoyed, to their delight and amazement, learning about the propagation and preparation of traditional local varieties of fruits and vegetables. Not that they had to restrict themselves only to these: the extensive glasshouses, heated by compost, provided a vast range of year-round exotic fruits and flowers, more reminiscent of a tropical destination. Not only that, the workshops alongside, heated during the cold mountain evenings by the same compost system, gave them the (hilarious) opportunity to try out their culinary skills making preserves, patés, pickles, pasties, pies, purées and lots of other more unusual value-added delicatessen products probably beginning with 'p'.

They and the children also joined in with many of the workshops run by the village pottery and forge, the sculptors, the painters, the farriers, the goldsmiths, the lithographers, the poets and the brewers. What with the impromptu singsongs and recitals at the bars, the concerts and theatre at the village hall and the barn dance on Saturday night, they hardly had time to take in the splendour of the surrounding landscape.

And so, finally, our weary revellers began to pack their many newfound treasures and memories into their groaning suitcases. As the Eurostar whisked the family homewards, there was a rather solemn silence among them. Until Dad perked up suddenly and said "Wouldn't it be great if we lived there the whole time?" The children looked at each other in astonishment. "I didn't see a mind-reading course advertised," replied Mum, smiling. "But how would we live," said Dad, his expression losing its momentary brightness. "You'd have to give up your research post and the magazine would never put up with me working so far from the office."

"Well," replied Mum, "it all started with this very well-researched article I read in The Observer, written by a journalist not unlike you..."

**Q : Why do you rant on so much?**

**A:** Because this is important stuff. Shut up. No, ask another question.

**Q: All right. You've described much of what's going on in the Re-Everything Group and it's mostly small fry compared to the global enterprises with whom you consult. Can the Organismic approach be applied to these behemoths?**

**A:** Yes it can. I'll give you an example. A while back we were working in our capacity as corporate responsibility consultants, with another very large construction company, a corporation with global reach. They wanted to learn about sustainability principles and corporate responsibility, and apply them to a hospital construction project worth two hundred million pounds, using it as a test bed for what we'd taught them. So my colleagues and I were engaged to help them go about it.

In the past corporate responsibility consultancies have tended to advocate mechanistic approaches in these situations, like greenhouse gas audits, and measuring commodity miles and amounts of material used. These are necessary parts of corporate responsibility, but by themselves they are not sufficient to achieve meaningful, lasting, accelerating change. For us it was important instead to bring people together and get dialogue going, whereas in the past there has tended to be only monologue. As one of my colleagues used to put it: 'We are guides on the side, not sages on the stage'. He often added: 'we offer expertise on tap, not on top'.

We told our clients it was no good thinking in terms of departmental silos. It's utterly useless to leave it all to the marketing department or the energy management people, because what the company needs is an attitudinal change right across the board, and upwards from the staff to the executives. Attitudinal change does not only involve learning and understanding factual information. We wanted to try to get corporate responsibility to inform every thought, word and deed of every person in the organisation, and beyond, into other stakeholder groups. Attitudinal change is not something you can legislate for, it has to come from a sort of groundswell, where people begin to see that it's in their own interest to understand these matters and act in this way.

So for instance we suggested it would be a good idea for the company's main suppliers to join in, and with them on board we ran workshops on sustainability principles, based on the four system conditions of the Natural Step, which

demonstrate the base conditions for sustainability, applied to just about anything. At the end of these initial workshops, we all kicked around ideas, and those with a greater knowledge of their own specialist disciplines pitched in with comments, ideas and questions about specific angles they had on this project and in their industry at large. Through these sessions, the growing groundswell achieved innumerable breakthroughs. Things began to rock and roll, and we had what you get when an organism is injected with new nutrients; the organs start sparkling, singing and jumping for joy. This was performance enhancement of the highest order.

For instance, on one occasion there was a suggestion from the managing director of the roofing contract company that we double the insulation in the roofs of all the buildings. His chief financial officer replied that this would nearly double the cost and make their company less competitive. Then in the same workshop, one of the directors of the company that had won the plumbing contract put forward the suggestion that if we did double the insulation in the roofs, we would ultimately need less hardware in the upper floors of the building to provide heat for the buildings. With better insulation we would need fewer radiators and less piping, meaning less energy wastage and lower installation budgets. They worked out all the costs and savings using computer modelling, and found that the savings to the plumbing contractors actually worked out at a little more than the additional costs to the roofing contractors. So a 'contra' deal was struck, the extra insulation was put in, the plumbers were required to fit less kit to heat the buildings, and the overall project saved a great deal of energy.

To add further to the commercial success of the venture, this project was a government-awarded Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme, which came with a twenty-seven year management contract. Therefore the contractors are responsible for the building for twenty-seven years after its commission, so saving lots of energy was in everyone's interest, if only from an economic perspective. Saving energy meant saving money in the long term, not to mention earning green brownie points for everyone involved, and increasing understanding of energy-saving issues and CSR issues in general across the board. As in so many Organismic systems, we had discovered an all-win situation.

Next the waste management contractors pointed out that of all the commodities used in construction, plasterboard accounts for the biggest proportion of landfilled materials. So we made it one of the criteria for selecting a plasterboard supplier that when delivering the fresh plasterboard, they would also be required to take away the off-cuts and, instead of landfilling them, to devise a way of turning them into new plasterboard. The company which eventually won the contract had agreed to develop such a technology, and as a result they themselves saved logistics costs, by having their delivery trucks no longer returning empty. They have also been able to win substantial contracts with other clients since then, because they possessed this technology where others didn't.

So the benefits of implementing and running an Organismic CSR strategy spread not only throughout our client's organisation, but far beyond as well. Staff loyalty was given an enormous boost and people became proud to say they worked there. Prior to this the company's leaders had been subjected to a good deal of adverse media coverage, particularly as a result of controversial anti-roads campaigns, where they were involved in building a number of contentious bypasses and campaigners had been linking arms and chaining themselves to trees to prevent the bulldozers starting the construction. Suddenly the very same corporation is receiving all manner of awards and accolades, the staff love saying they work there, they're saving vast amounts of money, and winning numerous extra projects. And so it goes on, and to this day the project still sends back positive reverberations. Our client's website is now emblazoned with sustainability and community-minded thinking. It's been a great triumph. All we had to do was inject the benign virus of what I would call Organismic thinking, and watch it spread throughout the organism and far beyond.



## Conclusion



So, that's the way Organismics works in business. The wonderful thing about it is that, by reading this book, you are already participating in the realisation of those parts of the imagined future which have yet to happen.

The **Re-Everything Group**, a living demonstration of Organismic thinking in business, is, like any other organism, an organisation based on *autopoiesis*. *Autopoiesis*, as explained by the world's leading systems thinkers, is a defining characteristic of living systems. Literally 'self-creation', it shows how systems contain within them and attract towards them the means by which they thrive and evolve.

You might be one of those who can contribute to this process. Whether as a customer, a supplier, a member of the **Re-Everything Group** tribe, an investor, a media professional, a critic or simply an interested observer with helpful suggestions to make, you may be ready to become part of this phenomenon. If you believe business itself can be 'poacher-turned-gamekeeper' you may wish to contribute your skills, passion, cash or commitment to the spread of this 'benign virus'.

If you like what you have read and can begin to see your own role in the **Re-Everything Group**, all you have to do is visit [www.re-everything.com](http://www.re-everything.com) and find out what's already happening, what is yet to happen and what you can do to help move us from the former state to the latter.

Organismic  
Thought Number Four:  
**Nobody's as clever  
as everybody**

