

# Catalysing mass commitment to transformational change

We are in an ecological emergency. Our challenge is to inspire mainstream commitment to turning things around.

Therefore, I'd like to ask you to do something unusual: talk to your neighbours.

Talk to your friends, neighbours, academic and business colleagues about our existential emergency. Talk to them about the systemic changes necessary to pull out of our ecological nosedive. Talk to them in a way that moves their thinking from silo thinking to the level of whole system change.

Such conversations prepare people mentally and emotionally to support leadership for large-scale transformative change when it arises. Without prior support, such leadership can go nowhere.

And there is much more to it than politics. Collectively we must change the operation of our entire society to operate within planetary boundaries... and take care of people in the process. I expect you know this.

So, I'm not talking about just casual talk. I'm talking about communicating in a way that *improve people's thinking*.

I think this request is unusual, because although we may be skilled at arguing, the idea of communicating with people we know to help them think better is novel. I'm going to show a possibility.

One more thing. If just a few of us do this, it won't amount to much. So let's catalyse a mass movement *to inspire mainstream commitment to doing everything required to pull out of our ecological nosedive*.

We have set up a platform for this. It is called the [Great Transition Initiative](#). Our strategy is to engage the members of the millions of groups that care about environmental and social well-being as citizen educators, and provide ready-to-use communication tools.

I picked up a tip from a former stage magician turned corporate spruikster. He noted that people like to have physical objects to hang ideas on.

What follows is a way of conducting conversations using physical markers to help people keep track of complex conversations. Having the markers laid out on a table means people do not have to 'play mental chess' with the ideas. People like the approach. We call it Kitchen Table Conversations.

We start with a line of thinking called *Five steps to an effective movement for transformational change*. It answers the question *Beyond raising the alarm, then what?*

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## Five steps to an effective movement for large-scale transformative change

### 1. Raise the alarm!

The Extinction Rebellion folks in London are doing this through attention-getting actions.

We can also do it in quiet conversations.



### 2. Recognise that there are a number of adverse trends and threats that threatens the survival of civilisation

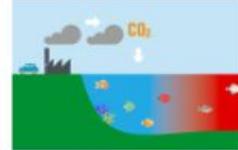
Runaway global warming



Nuclear war



Ocean acidification



Topsoil depletion



**Existential  
Emergency**

Species loss



Toxins in the food chain



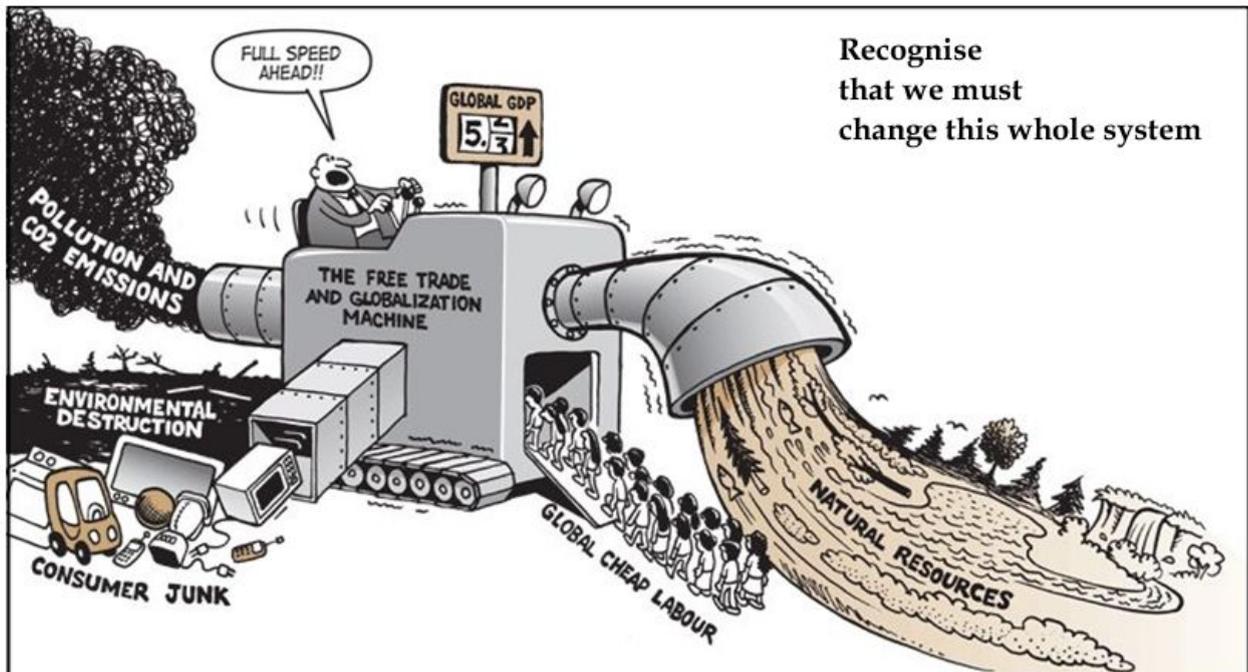
Freshwater depletion



bees dying

### 3. Recognise that it is a systems problem

Our society as a whole operates in ways that make everything worse. Therefore we need to change the whole system.



### 4 Establish a positive goal

It helps to have a positive goal. Adapting a phrase from eco-philosopher Joanna Macy, we could say that

*The overarching goal of our time is to **transition to a life-affirming global culture**, rather than continuing on our present course of military competition, economic growth and ecological self-destruction.*



## 5 Seed this goal into mainstream culture

... and enable folks to understand what's involved.

A major unsolved problem for the environmental, progressive and faith movements that care about a positive future is:

How might we get past preaching to the converted?

How do we go beyond our own thought bubbles?

We have a huge **untapped resource** for this: the *members* of the millions of groups that care about environmental and social well-being. Mostly they pay dues and sign petitions. Given the right tools, they could become *citizen-educators* and thought catalysts.

Each member of each group has their own personal network, including their friends, neighbours, business colleagues, and larger social networks. The combined reach these networks, if aligned towards a common goal, is enormous. We reach into every level of society.

Engage a critical mass of  
mainstream folk

# Networks & their members



talks  
&  
articles

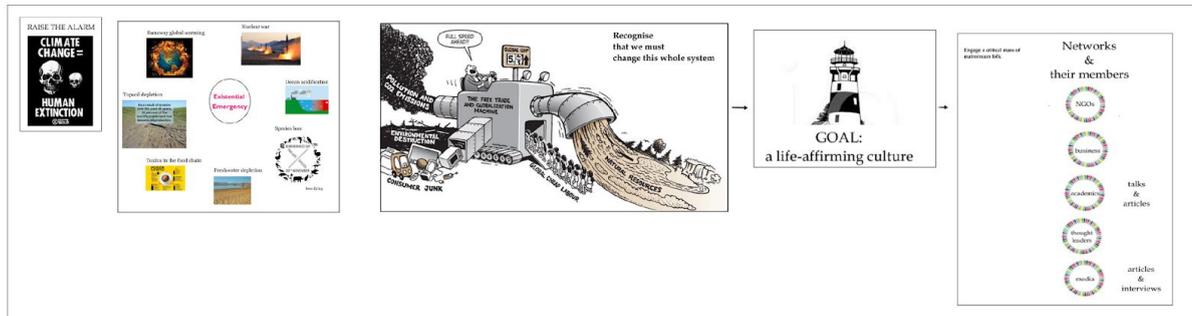


articles  
&  
interviews

A simple organising approach is to inspire as many groups as possible to espouse the goal of transitioning to a life-affirming culture, and provide ready-to-use tools their members can use to communicate with their personal networks.

The Great Transition Initiative is our platform for this.

# This is what the sequence looks like when it is laid out; it is a flow of thinking



The Great Transition Initiative is a platform to support citizen educators and thought leaders in communicating through their networks. We provide sample emails, guerrilla marketing tactics, and Kitchen Table Conversations, a tool for face-to-face conversations about systemic change. Two of the key modules are below.



# Big Picture Drivers of Global Warming

This is a module for conversations on the topic: *What makes CO2 emissions go up?*

Its purpose is to take people out of silo thinking, and enable them to grasp the systemic big picture drivers that make global warming worse. The same drivers apply to many other aspects of our current 'situation', as political comedian Steve Bhaerman puts it.

This conversation equips people mentally and emotionally to support leadership for large-scale changes in economics, trade agreements, undue corporate influence on governments, and the like.

Here is what the model looks like:



## Conducting the conversation

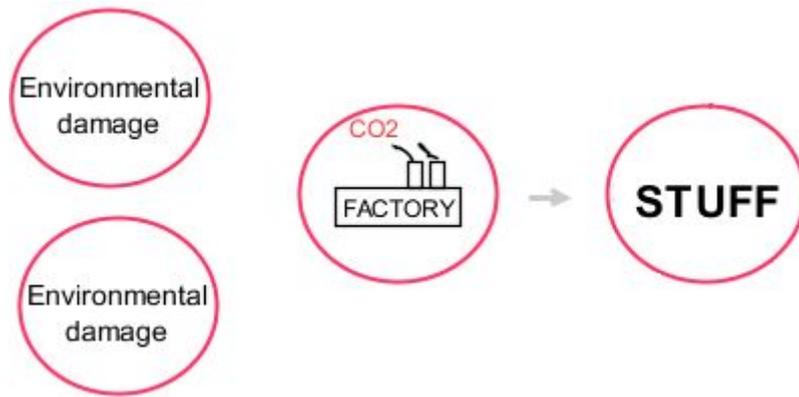
This is a cross between a conversation and a presentation.

It assumes that the person we are talking with is already aware that global warming is an issue. If not, [Looming Disasters](#) in *Kitchen Table Conversations*, is a module for a conversation to make people acutely aware of the many trends that put our present and future well-being in jeopardy.

The focus of this conversation is the question:

What major factors in the way our society operates tend to make CO2 emissions go up?

We start by laying out four markers that show the connection between *stuff* that is manufactured and *environmental damage*, including CO2. It works as an equation: The more *stuff*, the more the associated environmental damage.



So, our enquiry is about ***What factors in the way our society operates make the amount of stuff go up***, as a proxy for CO2 emissions.

We ask this as an open question.

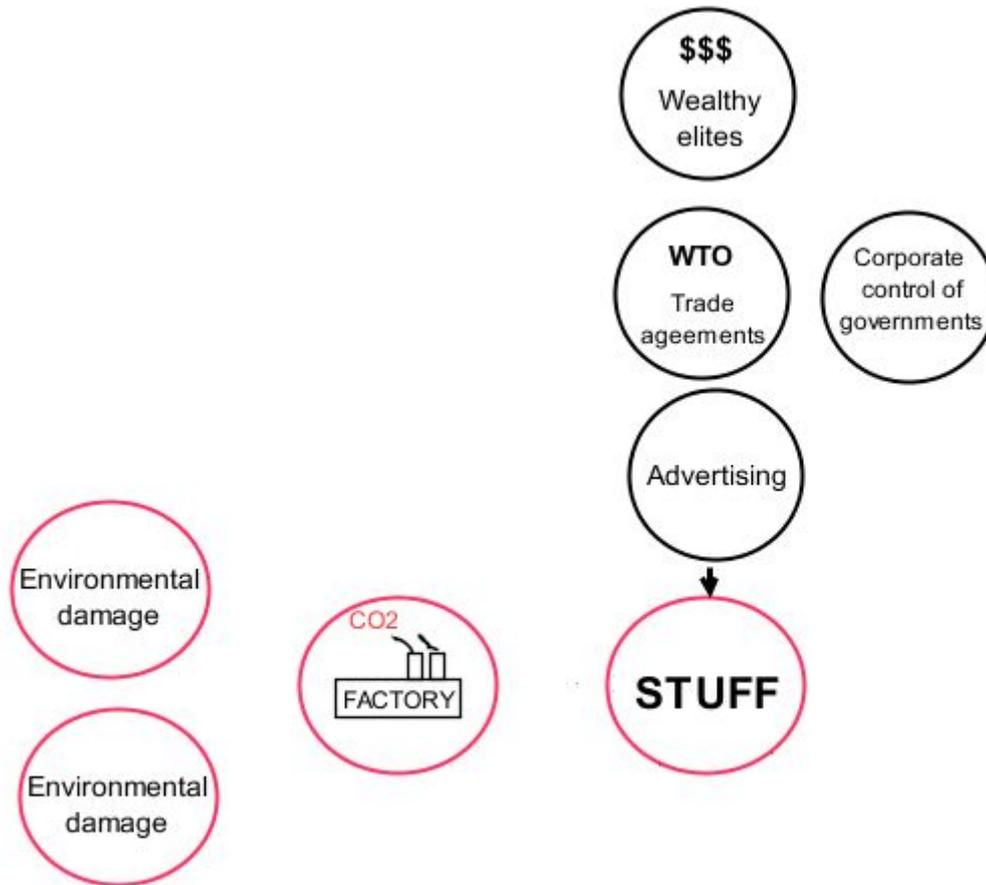
People may say *advertising*. I put down a marker for this.

I might add the *World Trade Organisation (WTO)* and *Free Trade Agreements*.

People nod their heads when I mention *corporate influence on governments*. And This whole system is designed to support the *wealthy elites* who set it up.

In pointing these things out, we are not trying to be 'original'. Rather, we are stating the obvious and connecting the dots so that people develop a big picture overview of what's going on.

However, there are people have never heard of the World Trade Organisation, so this opens up that conversation.

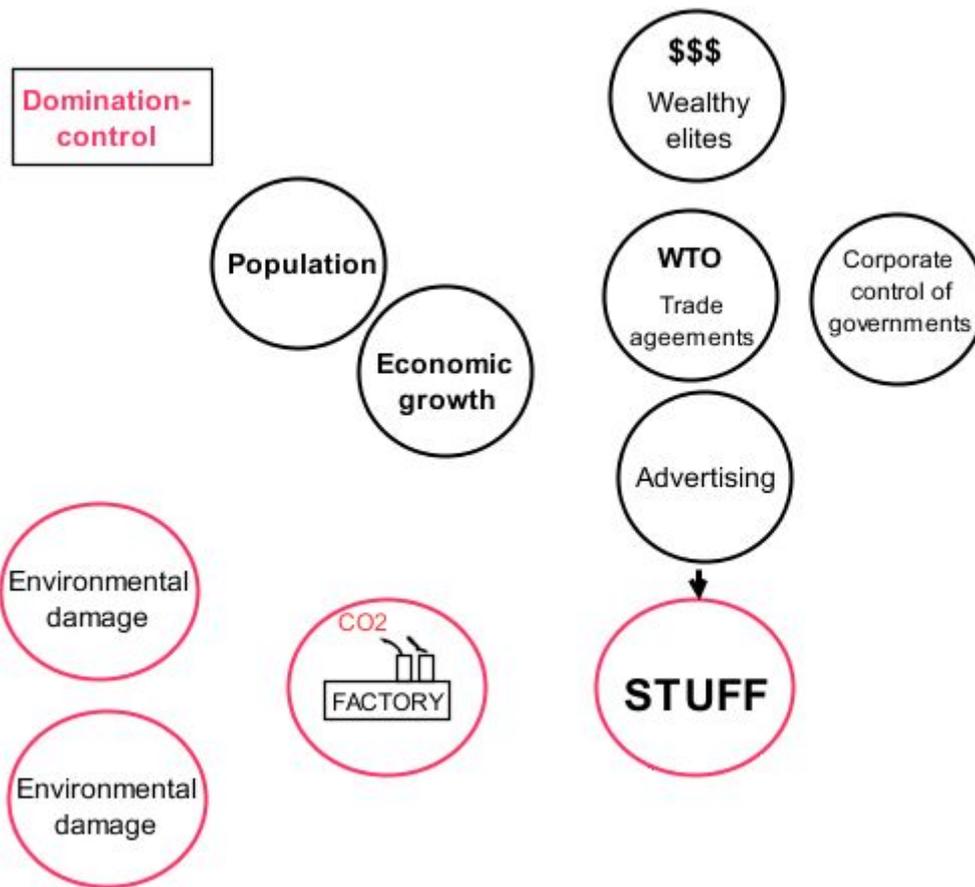


This whole system is driven by devotion to *economic growth*. So we have an important conclusion: *economic growth* is a major driver of environmental destruction.

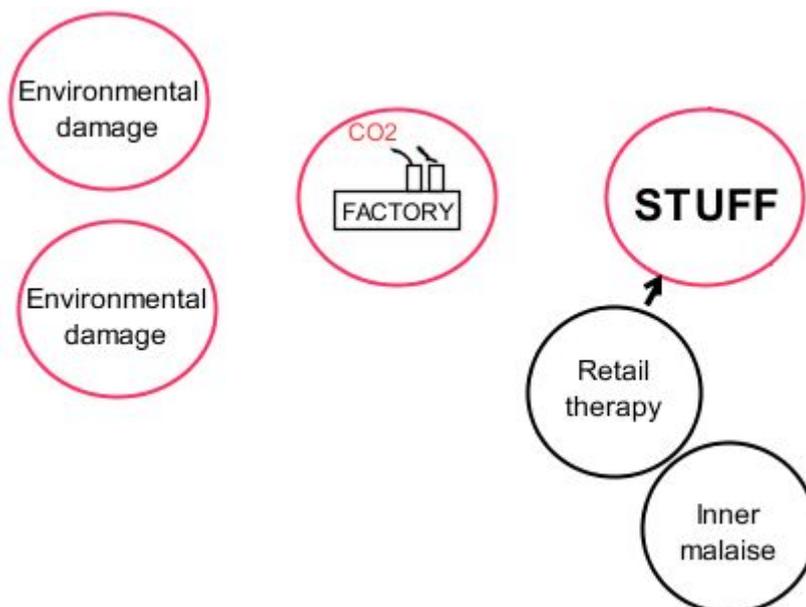
And population amplifies everything.

And at a metalevel, this system operates on an ethos of *domination-control relating*, willingly destroying people and the planet.

We add these to our model.



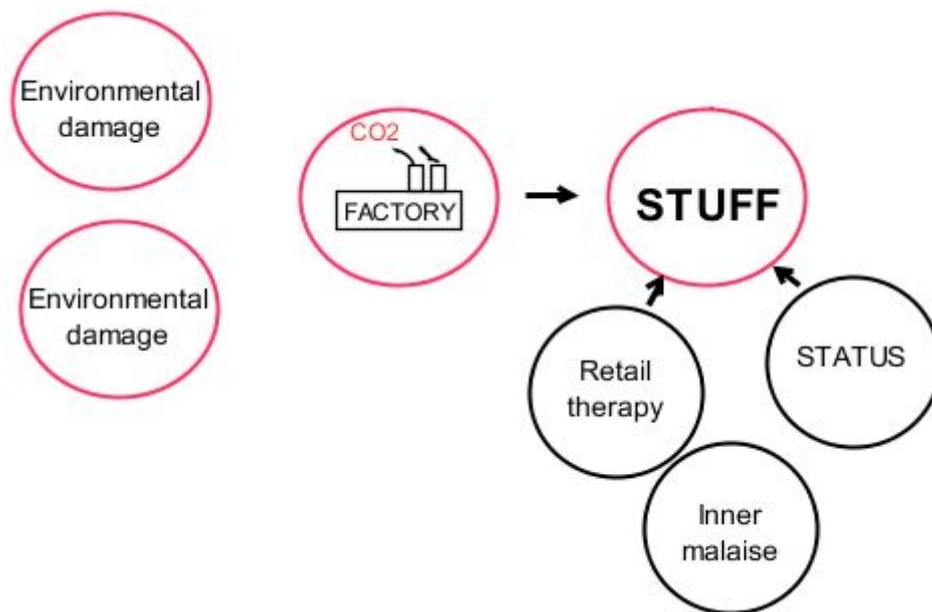
There are psychological factors as well that drive excess consumption. We have a name for it: *retail therapy*. People buy stuff as compensation for not feeling happy. In other words, there is some kind of *inner malaise* going on. An aspect is disconnection from community, nature, spirit...



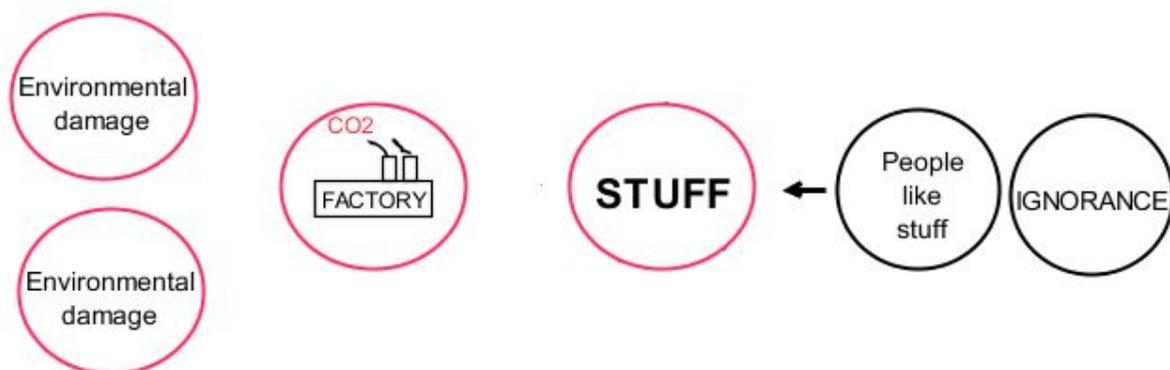
*Inner malaise* – a huge topic, many causes. Domestic violence, child abuse, rape, economic stress and racism all affect brain functioning, feelings and behaviour.

Positive levels of intervention include gentle birth, coaching new parents to bring out more of their nurturing side than their punitive side with their children; schools that support children’s innate curiosity and initiative; and respectful workplaces ... along with insight meditation; psychotherapy and energy psychology techniques to resolve our personal emotional issues. All these are important aspects of transitioning to a life-affirming culture.

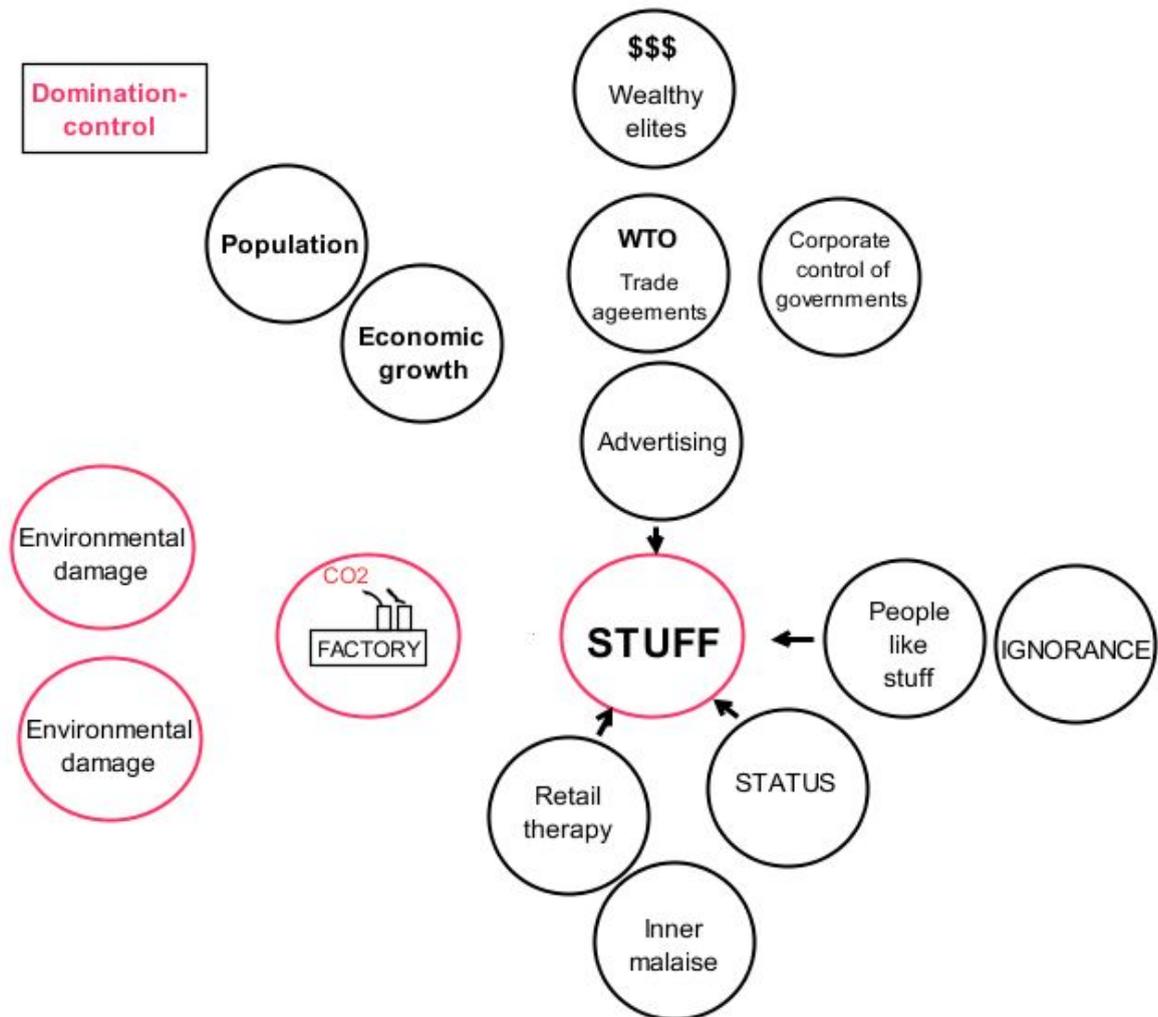
*Inner malaise* also shows up is the compulsion to appear important – i.e. *status*.



Ah – but *people like stuff!* True. It can seem cheap and temporarily interesting. And people are ignorant of the larger pattern and its consequences that we are all part of. So we add *ignorance* as a major driver of global warming.



Putting the whole pattern together, we have an integrated overview of the **major factors that must change** if we are to have any chance of pulling out of our ecological nosedive:



NOTE: On the back of the two *Environmental damage* markers we have *animal agriculture* and *industrial agriculture*, as well as *ocean acidification*, *freshwater depletion*, *toxins in the food chain*, *deforestation* and *species loss*. They are all part of the pattern.

This module has two purposes:

- Enabling activists to get out of silo thinking
- Enabling everybody to develop a rough but comprehensive framework for grasping the systemic drivers of environmental destruction.

Having such a framework equips people mentally and emotionally to support leadership for large-scale transformative change, including economics and undue corporate influence on governments.

Our next section, *Connecting Aspiration with Practical Action*, highlights the core operating principles of a life affirming culture.

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## **Connecting Aspiration with Practical Action**

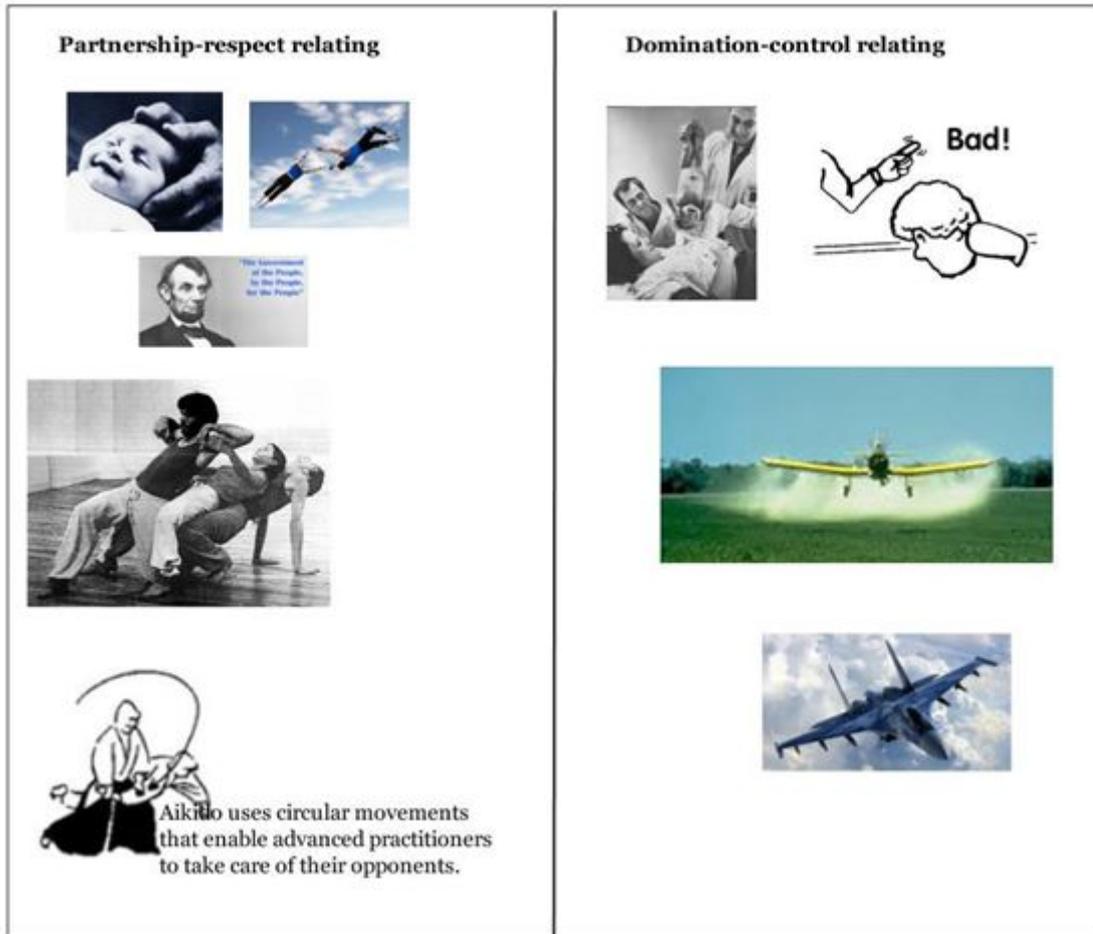
We have embraced the goal of transitioning to a life-affirming culture.



When we unpack what this means, there are two core operating principles. A life-affirming culture will operate within planetary boundaries. And it must operate on what systems thinker Riane Eisler calls *partnership-respect* values rather than *domination-control* values.



This graphic contrasts partnership-respect relating with domination-control relating:



### Comments on the images

In this image of a typical birth, the doctors are happy, the mother is happy. A successful birth!



But look at the infant: he is in agony.  
The infant is an aware and responsive human being.

After presiding at many births, French obstetrician Frederick Leboyer realised that the normal practice of holding an infant upside down and slapping it to stimulate its breathing was a form of assault. He asked:  
*What would be a gentle way to greet a newborn?*



His answer: dim down the lights, keep the birthing room warm, immediately put the baby on the mother's body, and, importantly, do not cut the umbilical cord until

blood stop pulsing (typically 6-8 minutes after birth). This gives the infant time to adjust to the experience of oxygen contacting delicate lung membranes for the first time.

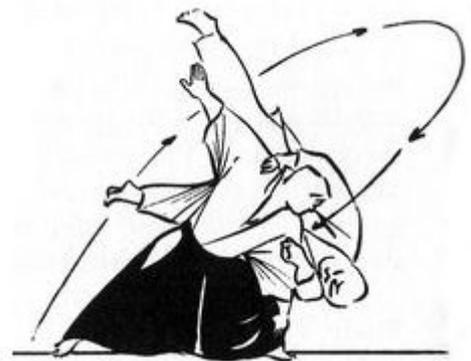
After a typical birth children are in shock for about six weeks. As this picture shows, after being born gently a child can be at peace within a few hours.



This is an image of improvisational play. When we improvise, we do not control our partner does; we 'go with' what they offer.

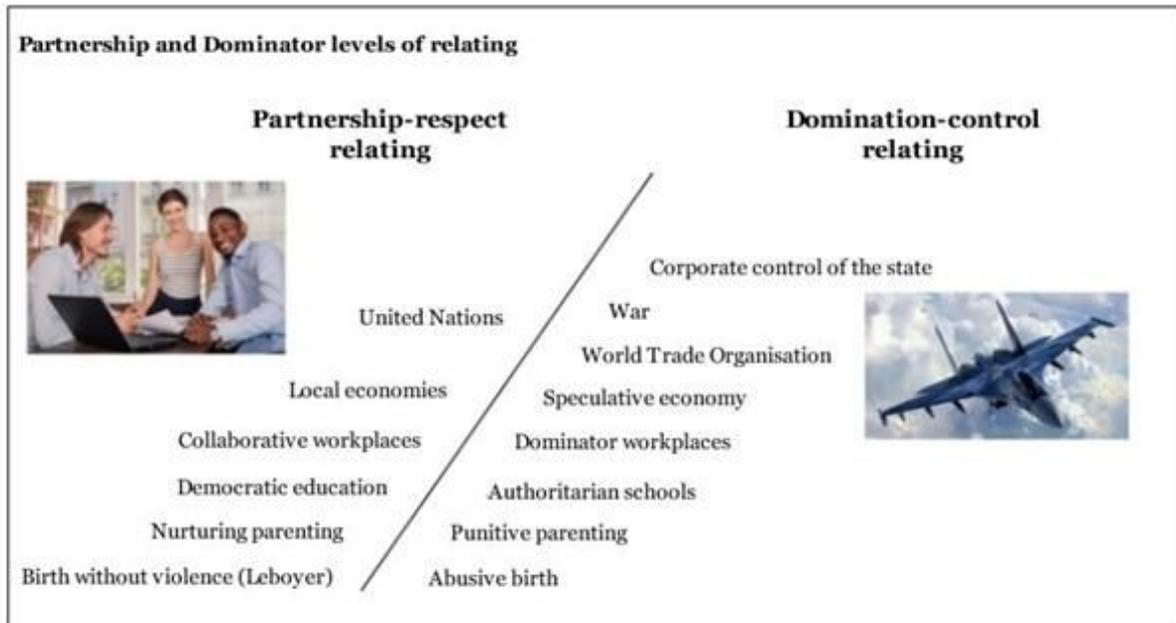
Similarly in Aikido, a Japanese martial art, we 'go with' an opponent's attack, rather than resisting it. However, we guide the attack into a graceful spiral that ends in a throw.

The aim – if you are advanced enough – is to actually take care of someone who is so misguided as to think that you are their enemy.



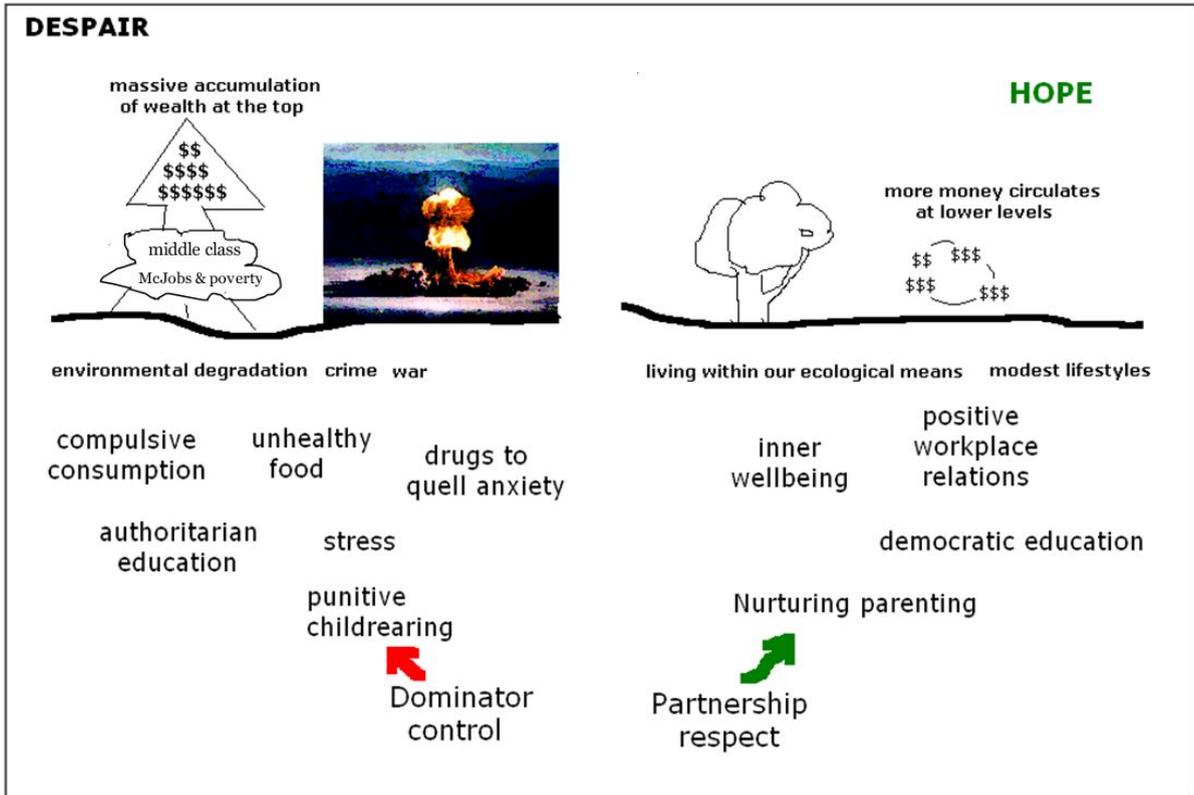
Improvisational acting, Aikido, Non-Violent Communication and other methods are ways of training to become more skilful at partnership-respect relating.

Partnership-respect relating operates at every level from birthing to global governance:



Futurist Arthur Clarke noted that any technologically advanced civilisation that develops nuclear weapons will destroy itself unless it evolves modes of collaboration for mutual well-being. Humanity is at this choice point now.

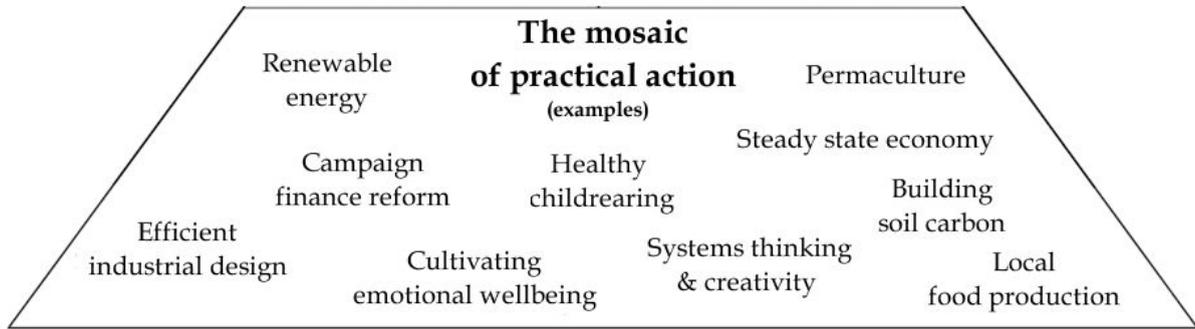
There are two paths to the future. One is the continuation of domination-control economically, militarily, and as a mode of relating at every level. The other is transitioning to partnership relating as a mode of relating at every level. Our future depends upon partnership-respect relating setting the tone. There are ways to act on this.



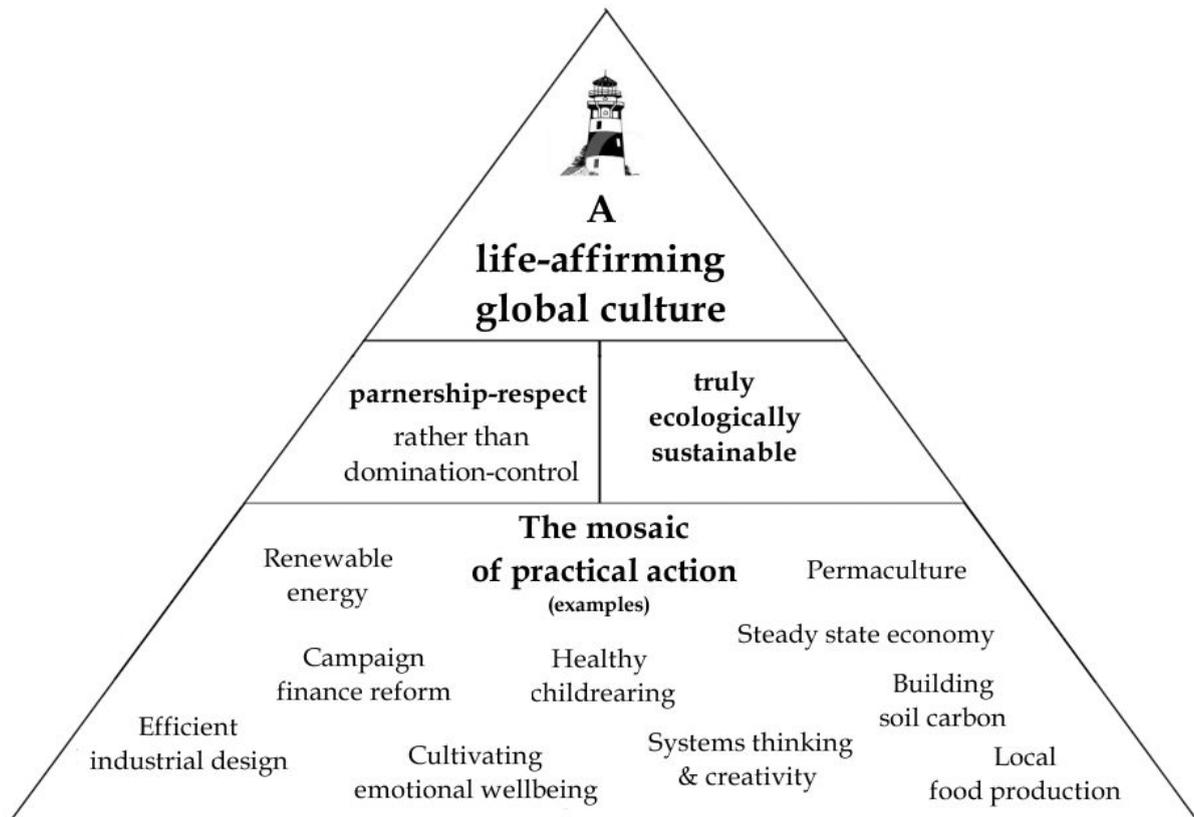
We have noted that *partnership respect* relating and *ecological sustainability* are the two core operating principles of a life affirming culture.



They manifest as large-scale changes in economic policy, trade agreements, and the role of money in politics. They also manifest as a multitude of practical actions that we want to ramp up. We indicate these in our Mosaic of Practical Action:

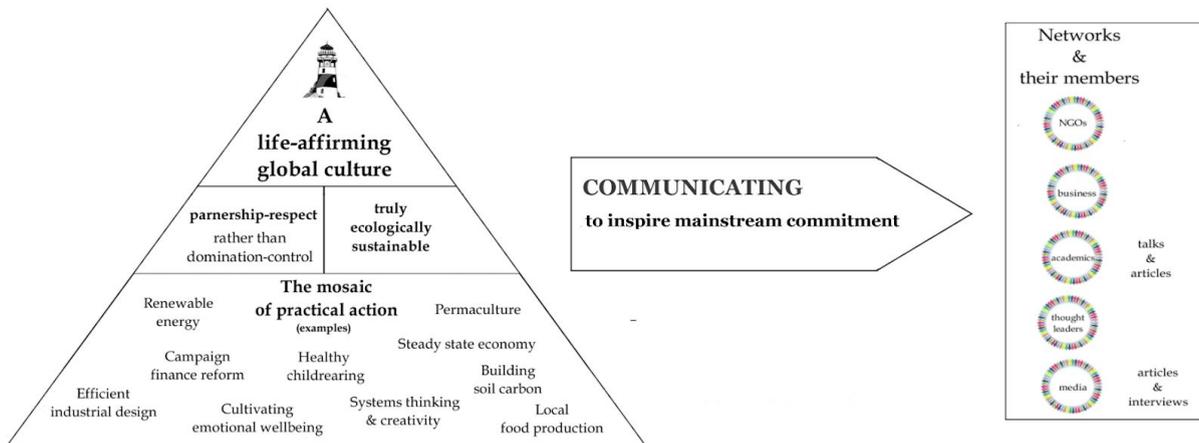


So there is a connection between the goal of a life affirming culture and practical action. People doing practical action can frame their work as a contribution to the evolution of a life affirming global culture.



Something else is essential in addition to ramping up practical action. That is *communicating to inspire mainstream commitment*.

We can do this by inspiring the members of the millions of groups that care about environmental and social well-being to act as citizen educators / thought catalysts.



The Great Transition Initiative is a support platform for this communication.



## The Great Transition Initiative

The [Great Transition Initiative](#) is a support platform for communicating about transitioning to a life-affirming culture.

It is not an organisation in the usual sense. There is no central individual or group that directs what other people do. This is not needed.

All we need to do is to *align* around the goal of *transitioning to a life-affirming culture*, and get on with communicating about that through our own initiative. Individuals and groups can do this while still pursuing their own projects.

This keeps things administratively simple. However, it obviously calls for a high degree of individual self-responsibility.

Our network includes thought-activists in America, Canada, England, Scotland, Germany, Portugal, Thailand, Brazil and Australia.

A Kitchen Table Conversations Kit, with the pieces we used in this presentation, is available [here](#). The Kit includes a PDF of *Kitchen Table Conversations*. Templates for making the kisses yourself are [here](#).

Register your interest to be in the loop [here](#).



The bottom line is

*Greta Thunberg will have reason to hope when she sees that mainstream society is committed to turning things around.*

Let's make it happen!

Andrew Gaines

Great Transition Initiative

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*Accelerating the transition to a life-affirming culture*