

Turning leadership inside out

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EDGES

NEW PLANETARY PATTERNS

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**Guides to a
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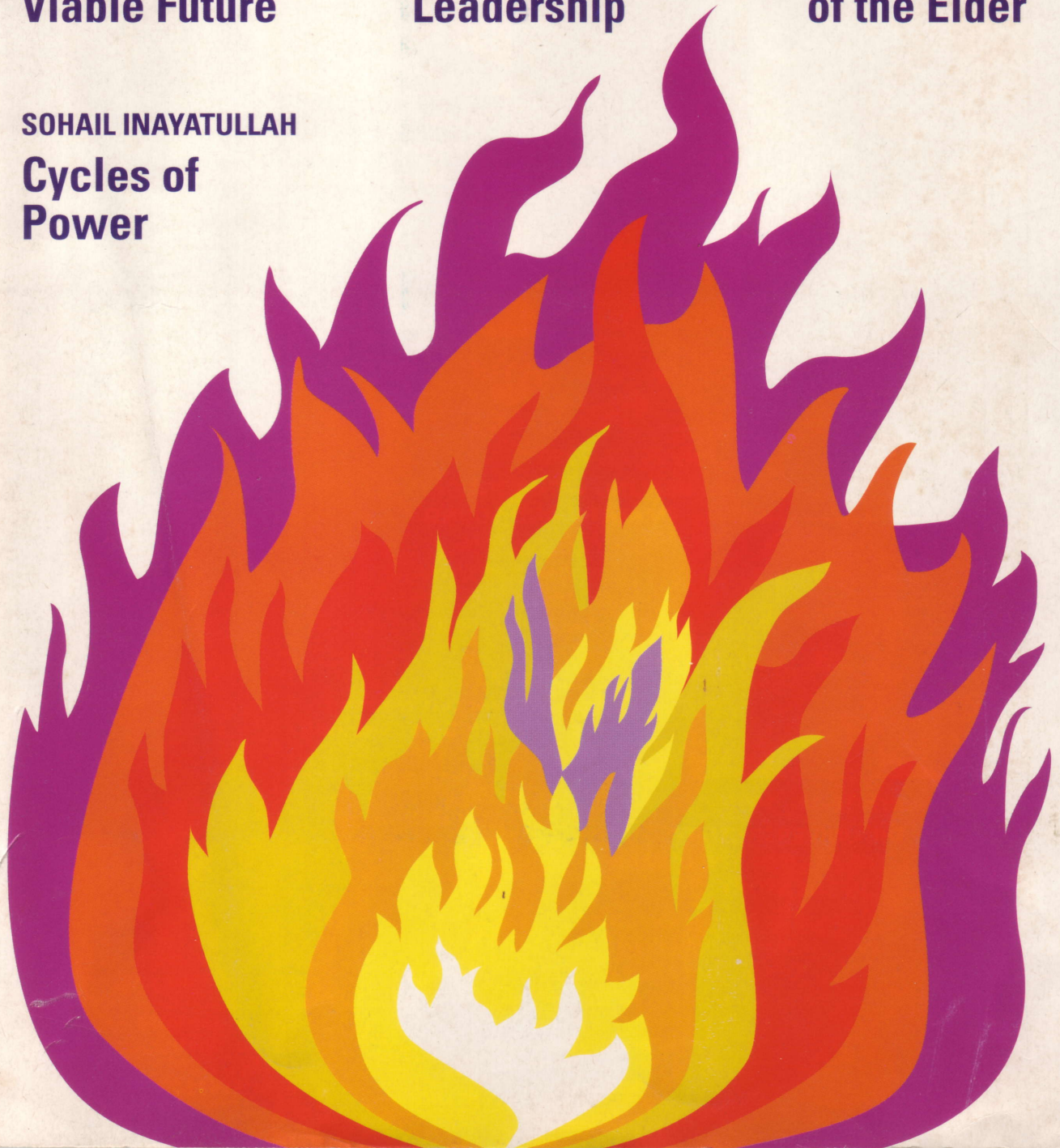
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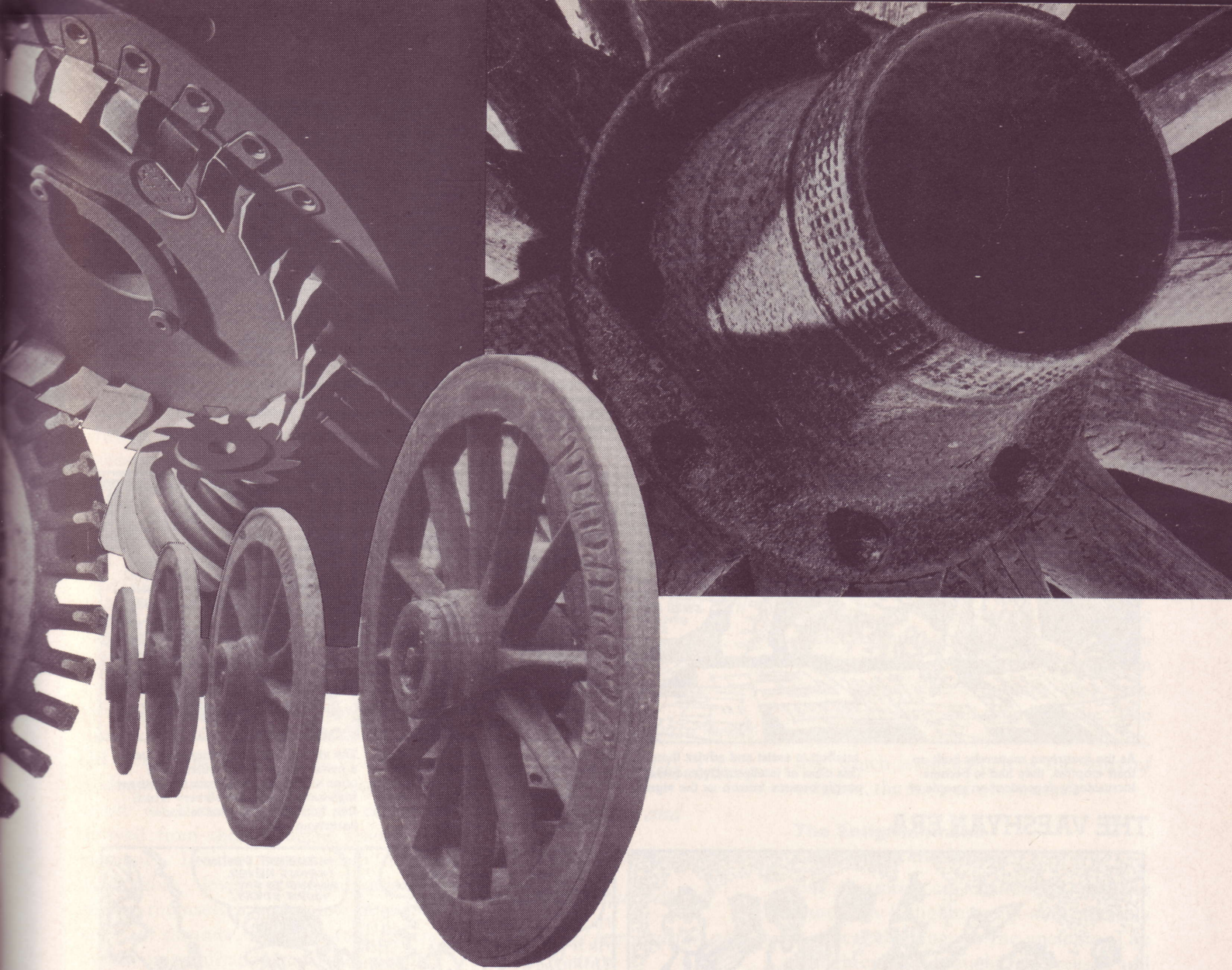
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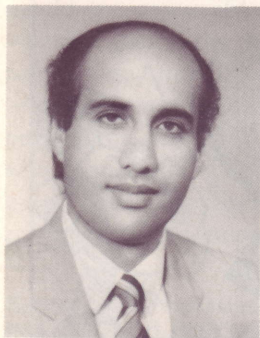
SOHAIL INAYATULLAH

**Cycles of
Power**





I left work early last Friday, largely to go home and watch an amazing event. No, it was not star American basketball player Michael Jordan soaring through the sky; rather I went home to watch the Chinese



This is a version of a presentation to the Pacific Telecommunications Council Mid-Year Seminar, "Rural and Remote Communications: A Pacific Island Focus" in Oahu, Hawaii, May 24, 1989. Sohail Inayatullah resides in Hawaii and recently completed his doctorate in Political Science. He is also a researcher in forecasting, planning and policy analysis at the Hawaii Judiciary. His address is 3059 Maigret Street, Honolulu, HI 96816, USA. He can be reached there or on assorted Honolulu basketball courts.

revolution on TV. I was suddenly made part of this awesome event...this age of video had now included me in judging the goodness or the rightness of the events. My eyes could then decide whether the official words of the Chinese government or the American government were true; I could judge for myself. As the Chinese bureaucrats tried to force Cable News Network (CNN) to leave, I again could decide who was correct. Was Chinese national territory and culture being violated by this foreign presence or did CNN have a larger global right to provide information?

In the end, CNN avoided the philosophical issue and settled for the bureaucratic discourse. They agreed to pull the plug only when a letter signed by the Chinese government was given to them. The Chinese were, of course, puzzled by this. The Beijing official tried to explain to the newsperson that these were obviously extraordinary times:

why the evocation of official stationery? But with CNN unwilling to evoke rights, all that was left for them to buy time was procedure, due process, and when the letter—written in Chinese—was produced, the live revolution was over. The basketball game, too, was over, and there appeared to be no revolutions in the offing: Aquino was already stable, and Marcos appeared to not want to die Friday evening; Zia had died last year and Noriega had his own timeline. So I turned the age of video off, walked onto the street and pondered the incredibility of it all.

The Ancients: All Things Rise and Fall

Sau-Ma Chien, ancient Chinese historian, had written of—without access to live real-time revolutions—how new dynasties are born from the actions of the sage-king, and how they rise in virtue, but eventually, over time, there comes squandering, laziness and pride, and then the tyrants step in, virtue is gone and the dynasty ends. This cycle is repeated over and over. The Tao is present; it then disappears. In virtue all gain; in decline all lose. Ibn Khaldun, the 13th century founder of sociology and modern history, too outlined this cyclical view of history. But to him it was not the rise and fall of virtue, it was the rise and fall of *asabiyya* or unity. He studied the Bedouins and saw that their success was a result of their solidarity; a closeness derived from their struggle against the elements. In the desert, they had a remarkable level of communication among themselves and a low degree of noise, of disunity. But over four generations, unity disappeared and people's minds turned to wealth and to expectations without hard work. Each succeeding rulership did not have to work for leadership—it was routinized. Thus, the empire fell and *asabiyya* passed on to some other group, usually someone from the desert who still had unity and a collective vision of the future; he would then ride on a camel into power.

For these two historians and others like Indian philosopher P.R. Sarkar—whom I will come to—all things rise and fall. Leaders come into power, they exaggerate their power and in this exaggeration there is exploitation. As Sarkar would say, power always centralizes to some group on the wheel: it goes to the warriors, to the intellectuals and to the acquirers. And, of course, in this cycle there is the group who causes revolutions but rarely gets to enjoy them—the people, the students, the workers, the women, the groups who do the work. They bring about a new world, but power quickly centralizes to other groups and, although each new era brings about increased rights for the previously right-

less, power quickly congeals and the cycle of power continues. The wheel is eternal. From this perspective of macro-history, even if the Chinese students succeed, there is a larger deeper structure which will re-emerge. It is the cycle. The ancients noticed this cycle everywhere: in nature, in our breathing, in the moon; it was this cycle that led women to create mathematics (mother-wisdom according to writer Barbara Walker in *The Crone*); it was this cycle that reminded the great that one day they would fall, and it reminded the impoverished that they would one day rise—everyone knew they would have their turn. It is this cycle that gives hope to the third world, to the Pacific Islanders, to women and to the environment itself—to Gaia. And to use another sports metaphor, mother earth always has the last bat. Nature always wins. This is then the world of the rise and fall. Here, there is no linear progress; rather there are fits and starts, moments of glory and episodes of betrayal.

And as I walked outside along the sea and looked above at the near full moon of May, the self-evident truth of the cycle seemed utterly clear. For when Michael Jordan rises, he falls. When great teams win, eventually they lose. People are born, and then they die. The cycle speaks to that which is irreversible; that which is ancient. It is the story of creation, the story of who we are.

The Enlightenment Challenges the Wheel

But all stories are challenged, and the European Enlightenment was precisely a radical challenge to the ancients. The Enlightenment brought forth reason and made it natural; it brought forth the linear arrow of time and made it a necessity; it brought forth greed and made it divine; and finally it brought forth nature and made it human. This was the end of the cycle; with reason and industrial technology, God and the cycle of nature could forever be vanquished. In their place would emerge the city of heaven on Earth—a city where power was curbed through the written word, where despots could not claim the divine mandate, but instead were forced to exist in a mutual contract with the people. The world was now not god-centred or nature-centred or myth-centred; rather, it was man-centred. In fact, as Michel Foucault brilliantly argues in his *The Order of Things*, humans have existed epistemologically only for a few hundred years—knowledge was ordered differently in feudal and religious eras. “Man” is thus a recent category, and soon, as we enter a postmodern world, whether it be a spiritual recovery of enchantment, or a technological creation of the evernew, “man” will once again disappear to the

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Cartoons selected from the comic book *Human Story: Human History from the Dawn of Time to the Dawn of the New Age* by Ron Logan and Michael McClure. The book explores P.R. Sarkar's model of social history. This new publication and a catalogue are available from Nucleus Publications, Rt. 2, Box 49 Willow Springs, MO 65793, USA. With permission of the authors.

sidelines, and the gods of magic or the robots of the future will become the focus of thought.

Now, when the Enlightenment faltered, when the cry of equality, liberty and fraternity in the British and French revolutions ended the reign only of the clergy and the aristocrats, but not of the bourgeois technocrats, there came another challenge—that of Marxism; but it, too, continued the project of rationalism; after all, historically speaking, liberalism and Marxism are minor deviations from each other: they both believe in empiricism, materialism, prediction, domination and separation from nature, and technological progress. Marx, however, saw the cycle, but believed that if ownership could pass to the people, then new technological developments would not create contradictions, but, rather, would generate greater levels of wealth. The wheel of history would end and the heaven promised by the people of the book—the Jews, Muslims and Christians—would descend. The secret of knowledge would be forever gained.

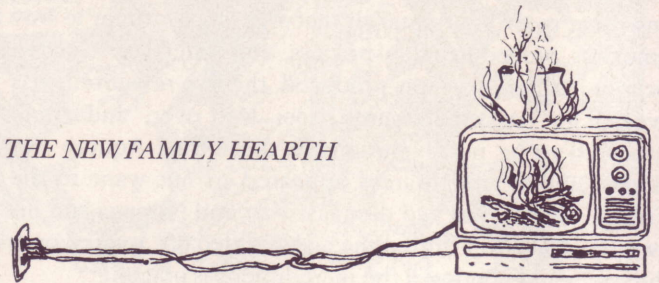
But we all know where that project ended. Power centralized, new wealth went to the Party and instead of the priests of religion, it was the ideologues of the Party who watched over the brain-death of creativity. Just as the priests took away all spiritual insight, the partycrats took away all individual initiative. The grid of partocracy succeeded, but at a cost that led to its own demise. The cycle of history was not so easily defeated.

Then came the liberals. The liberals put something else at centre stage that could once and for all solve the problem of poverty: this was technology. Tools removed us from the monkey and they would provide the next jump in human history, one where the myths of the past, the myths of scarcity, of the rise and fall, of the stranglehold of irreplaceable, nonrenewable commodities such as oil, would keep us from realizing the good society that was possible.

New Technologies Challenge the Wheel

Now from the liberal view, there is a new revolution that will climax the project begun a few hundred years ago. For this revolution has as its base something that when used becomes better and when shared increases. It promises to bridge the distances between individuals, cultures and nations. It promises to join the isolated into a community and to take the best from the historical and the modern world to create a global village and an electronic cottage. This world will have highways but not polluted ones; rather they will be of light; instead of seaports or airports there will be teleports. We will have resolved the historical contradictions of the urban and the rural, of self and community, of worker and manager. These contradictions will be resolved not by the Pacific Shift, not in the Japanese method of miniaturizing nature (as in the Bonsai tree) and including it in the city; not by making meditation a corporate activity, or giving lifetime employment; it will be resolved by creating a post-scarcity society. The ups and downs of history, the rises and falls will then disappear—so say the proponents of this revolution—once basic needs such as food, health,

THE NEW FAMILY HEARTH



While visiting my home village in Pakistan a few years back, I saw an amazing television show. A village family found their fortunes changed by the addition of TV and a VCR from a brother who had made it as an engineer in Saudi Arabia. These new technologies attracted more and more people to the house of the family. Every day, all the neighbours would gather to watch. And, of course, the host family would have to provide food and drinks. The father would complain that he missed the old peaceful days, but others in the family loved their new centrality. One night the TV/VCR was stolen. The man saw it happening but kept his eyes closed. His nemesis and the villagers' prized possession was gone. The police quickly captured the thieves. But the man would not admit that the new technology was his, for his meal was now prepared on time, his house was quieter; he had never liked his relatives, anyway. Finally the chief of police begged the man to reclaim the TV and VCR because now he, the chief of police, no longer had peace in his own household. Reluctantly the man agreed. Now he knew his family would stay home and make hell for him, and his wife would refuse to cook for him. The technology was back in the man's house and all was normal again. All was natural again.

In this story there are numerous codes: the extended family finds unity not through the fireplace, but through the electric; the search for individuality and community, all are there, but the key is in the nature of the normal. For suddenly these new technologies have become the natural: it is not the flicker of wood that evokes images of the mystical, but the flicker of the screen that leads us into other worlds. In my parents' village which became wired for electricity in the early '70s and still has no toilets, they have these new video technologies. Soon they will have satellite dishes and access to more information in a few years than in the last hundred thousand or so, it seems. And even while the streets are still made of mud, they have access to texts and images from everywhere and everytime.

—S. Inayatullah

shelter, medicine and education-information are plentiful and natural, not for the few, but for all.

Through these new technologies, poor countries will be able to jump past the industrial era and quickly and painlessly enter the Age of Video. Villagers won't need to go to cities, because the Mango (the Pakistani clone of the Apple computer) will allow them to stay at home and work from there. Families will remain united and the rumour

that in the big city streets are made of gold will forever be gone from history. Population will stay evenly distributed, and, with increased wealth, population rates will continue to decline. Businesses will no longer be site-specific; they will be able to move here and there, and even labour will be free to move from region to region, and both business and labour will be able to move through history, from one culture to another, then and now, for the cycle of time will have been vanquished.

And to those critics who argue that these new technologies are prohibitively expensive comes the reply: can anyone not afford to invest in them? Moreover, perhaps it is too late anyway. Among other technologies, the VCR is already a global phenomenon. Within minutes of a release of any movie, pirated copies are available throughout the world. In Pakistan, for example, any movie from any country is available. And those who try and remove this new technology from the home are quickly rebuked (see sidebar).

Thus, these new information technologies, according to many, do not have the contradictions of previous industrial technologies, for they allow one to live at an ancient stone-age level. They do not open and close, nor expand and limit at the same time; rather they allow the past, present and future, real and unreal, to exist simultaneously. Thus, what the best minds of Europe failed to do in the Enlightenment, what the Marxists failed to do in this century, is about to be accomplished by the technological revolutions—the cycle is about to end.

The Response: End of an Era

But there remains a fear among us all. What if we have gone too far? What if the new technologies are not creating a new world, but simply reproducing old inequalities? What if there are limits? What if there really is a natural state of things that we humans in our desire for control and power are upsetting? Have we gone too far? The myth of the cycle thus lurks underneath all who claim to have defied the laws of nature. In this fear, what lies ahead is a catastrophic depression.

This depression will result in the end of the era of liberalism and capitalism (the Communist vision having already ended); it will be the reclaiming of earth; it will be the conclusion of greed; the revenge of Kali or Pele—Mother Earth as destroyer. Those individuals and nations who are linked with the present whether intellectually, materially or spiritually will be devastated by the massive depression. Those islands that depend on tourism or on economic aid from the Core Powers will see their existence ravaged. Those places that remain self-reliant, that still have traditional

ohana (extended family) structures will survive; that is, the high will fall and those that have bought into the liberal/capitalist or technological worldview will pay for it. The dream of the last few hundred years of progress will vanish before their eyes as the Tokyo, New York and London markets begin their slide. We gave ourselves a warning in 1987 but did not listen. There will be many who will have their life meanings decimated such that they will be caught between a future that has disappeared and a past that no longer exists.

But how can that happen? Everything seems to be going so well—even the feared recession might be merely a soft landing. There is more wealth than ever before; peace and democracy are breaking out everywhere. Six hundred years ago, Ibn Khaldun said it best: “At the end of an era or dynasty, there often appears a show of power that gives the impression that the senility of the era has been made to disappear. It lights up brilliantly just before it is extinguished, like a burning wick the flame of which leaps up phenomenally a moment before it goes out, giving the impression it is just starting to burn, when in fact it is going out.”¹ The 1990s will bring in an end of an era, but it will be a difficult end; capitalism has not survived five hundred years by accident. It will take the collapse of the speculative bubble that has fuelled the markets; it will take the realization that the debt game is really a pyramid scheme, and it will take, say, a minor earthquake in Tokyo, a flood here, a sea-level rise elsewhere, a nuclear explosion or two, and soon the project will be over. And within moments the rational world of liberalism and Marxism will have met its end.

The Movements and the Counter Project

But there are others who have been described by the Enlightenment project as people outside of history and thus outside of the future, who view things quite differently.

They know they have been in a depression for centuries; they have lived without a self, without a home. These were the people in the colonies who provided the labour, these were the regions from which the raw materials emerged. These were the people who lived and rejoiced in the cycle. And it was only brutal force and the promise of joining the world of progress that convinced them to join forces with the liberals and the Marxists. But this joining did not make things better for them. Each time the flame of power passed—from Riverine to Mediterranean to Atlantic and now to the Pacific Rim, they were left behind, for the system of expansionist power always needs something and someone to be the resource, to be the difference, the inequality, from which wealth can emerge.

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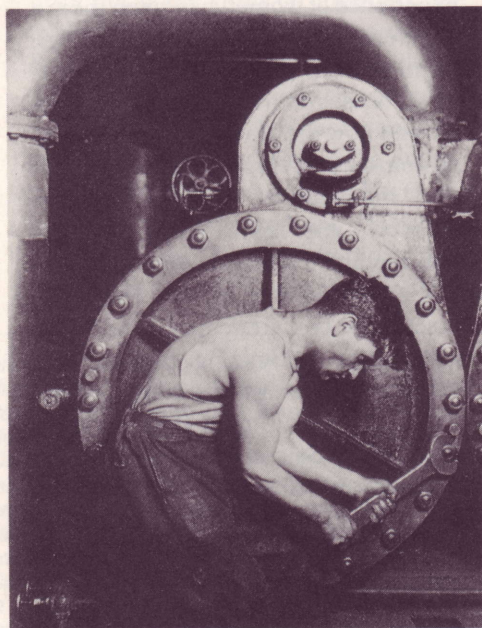


Photo by Lewis Hine, 1920. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

CYCLES OF POWER

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Thus, as we look at the feminist movements, at third world efforts to renegotiate the terms of technological trade, at the spiritual movements, at the peace and green movements, we see a counterproject that is emerging. While many of these groups are anti-technological, others have become more sophisticated and want to create their own local technologies. In this view, the world has been created by the West and all of us see ourselves through this Western view: the culture of the self itself has been conquered. What then is needed are ways to recover the self that existed before the modern world. This is the view of the recovery of the past. The recovery of historical ways of seeing the world before contact with the expansionist West. It is, for example, the effort to keep alive the language of the oral traditions presently being done in Vanuatu by the Vanuatu Culture Centre. And it is not letting Western cultural institutions have copies so that oral history can be economized and transformed into the additive intellectual knowledge of the West. It is also the Prime Minister of Papua and New Guinea, Paias Wingti, attempting to stop the Australian dreams of a Pacific TV empire. In his words, "we are being asked to sacrifice our cultural heritage for passing material gain. No money can buy back our languages once they are lost."²

It is also groups like PROUT (Progressive Utilization Theory) who are attempting to create a new cycle. Sarkar, the founder of this movement, is among the few spiritual activists and mystics who is basing his vision on a merger of spiritual and physical technologies. Although he believes the cycle of rise and fall will continue forever, nevertheless through spiritual wisdom and intellectual information it is possible, through evolutionary intervention, to keep the cycle moving to reduce significantly the phases of misery. Unlike humanists, who still believe that there is dignity to work, he looks forward to the day when we will not have to work. For him, to bring about this new world, we must think beyond left and right. There must, for example, be ceilings and floors on wealth, and there must be ways to reward excellence. Instead of bureaucrats, technocrats or partycrats, there must be people's organizations which, of course, could work best with the new telecommunications technologies. Instead of corporations, there should be local and, eventually, global cooperatives. In addition, even while new cultures are constantly being created, he has started cultural, linguistic, bio-regional, local self-reliance movements to counter the liberal/Marxist paradigm. Yet at the centre of this counter movement is a spiritual universalism, lest the movements become particularistic. This universal, he hopes, will come about largely from spiritual practices, but also from the fall of the national community, the nation-state, brought about

by travel, videos, and of course pollution and the fear of nuclear destruction, for they do not respect boundaries of nation or body.

This spiritual view is also expressed by the Greens who claim they are neither left nor right, but in front. Central to them is the natural world. This world must be given rights not for our sake, but for its sake. Greens are not interested in information, nor knowledge, but in that which comes from understanding the cycle of life—wisdom. For wisdom cannot be commodified; the power of the king or the market cannot control it. This the yogis and the martial artists of the past knew well—thus they learned to fast, to think, to live with few clothes, to master the elements, and to live outside of wealth, such that the soldiers and the priests could not control them. They lived with the natural world. In this view, the real communication is not among humans, but in the planet itself, and the messages she receives about us are no longer positive.

The Feminist movement, too, reminds us who has done the real work for the last thousand years; it reminds us that new technologies must be developed that lead to cooperation, not dominance, among groups. Otherwise, although men prefer the images of the virgin and the mother, creation and preservation, there is also the Crone—the image of power and destruction that descends upon all, and forces us to remember the temporality of that which we thought was eternal.

But while Sarkar's PROUT and to some extent the Greens and the Feminists focus on ownership of technology as central to the social good, they also speak about other technologies. For Sarkar, the future is not about molecular assemblage or genetically engineered chickens, but it is about the Age of Microvita. He posits that the smallest building blocks of life are the emanations from Pure Consciousness. These emanations, however, can be understood not by more refined microscopes, but by refined minds, for they exist outside our sense world, yet provide the bridge between the mind and the brain. They are the silver lining between perception and conception. They can be used to spread ideas throughout the world, they can be used to heal bodies, and they can be used to spread information throughout the stars. According to him, the rediscovery of these "mind waves" will soon radically change physics and chemistry and biology, for these microvita impact our thoughts, our food, and our social movements. One goal, then, is to find ways to refine the mind so that it can perceive these seeds of life and use them to increase economic productivity, intellectual awareness and spiritual well-being.

There is also the theory of Rupert Sheldrake articulated in his *A New Science of Life*. For him, too, this is the end of the materialistic age of science. The new telecommunications technology are not physical but fields of awareness that are

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invisible but organize behaviour, that explain how ideas are unconsciously transmitted; how ideas become powerful and resonate among us. He provides a scientific reading of myth and of social change. Thus, this means that humans can learn from the past, and they can learn at quicker and quicker rates. The exact conclusion that telecommunications experts believe that telematics will lead to. More information means more learning, means a better world, eventually. The wheel then is just a reflection of everything we have seen for the last thousands of years, but this structure, with learning and new ways of thinking can be overcome, and new structures can gain force.

Of course, the movements mentioned above would focus on access to these new technologies, the liberals would concentrate on the growth of them, and the Marxists would argue that a central authority would better distribute the benefits of them.

The End of the Really Real

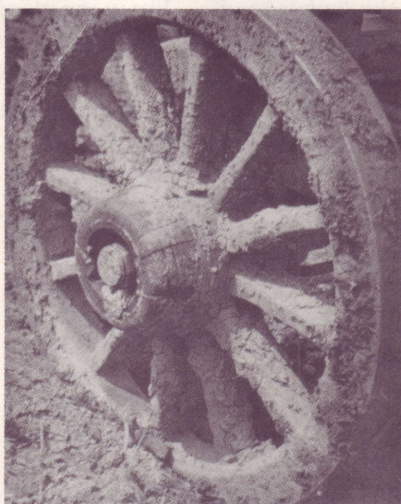
But the postmodern theories of Sarkar, Sheldrake and others are made contentious by another group. This third group believes that nothing is natural, that everything is human creation, that everything we know is perceived. We cannot know anything as it really is. Every theory, whether Platonic or Aristotelian, whether earth-centric or sun-centric, puts at centre one way of knowing over another way. In this view, there is nothing to predict; there is nothing to recover or remember; there is no self to prop up, to save from technology—the self is created by society. For when we perceive, we must describe in language and in this representation the world is created. We cannot know anything as it really is, since “we” are implicit in the act of knowing. The real is always mediated.

Thus, for this group, we must look at our language and our categories of thought and see who gains from them, what is lost, what is silenced. We must look at the cycle and see what this construct does—does it liberate or oppress? For them, nothing is really real, everything is description. Power is making one description seem more real or natural than others. Thus time is a social construction, not a reality; the purpose of talking about the future or the past is not to predict or to recover, but to make the present remarkable; to thus make the status quo contentious and thereby create the possibility for change, for creation.

In this view, we must also live on the edges of reality, always testing to see if we have made a representation really real—ontologically real, always seeing the power of our descriptions of the world. In this view, the new technologies will create more and varied texts and the present notion of the separation of the empirical-physical world and the world of text or video will forever be gone. Television creation *Star Trek* will really be more interesting and thus real than the landing of humans on the Moon. Fiction and

non-fiction will become one and the focus of the text or the video will not be the writer, the producer, the manufacturer, but the *reader*, the interpreter, the consumer, or the user. There will then really be, as Roland Barthes argues, an infinite number of interpretations to everything.

And what exists beyond language, perception, interpretation? From the cultural and spiritual view, a world of mystery and bliss, of the divine. For the empiricist, the material physical world—tables and chairs but no inherent meanings. And for the third view, beyond interpretation, are other interpretations waiting to describe what is, for both the divine and the physical are simply imposed meaning structures, for we cannot know if anything really exists: the key question is who gains and who loses by every description of the world. I have no idea what appears to be real and what is really real: are the Chinese restructuring their world because positive microvita has entered them, or because they have more knowledge of things, more information, or because new fields of awareness have been created by the Filipino non-violent demonstrations? I do not know, but will more information, microvita energy waves, or fields of awareness help me slam dunk a basketball after watching Michael Jordan this week? Perhaps there are limits.



As it turned out, the Chinese student's hope for celebration that could transform the bureaucratic party structure of the past fifty years did not turn out to be. Perhaps it was that Deng did not wish to be humiliated again in Tiananmen

Square, or perhaps their turn will come another day; perhaps a video image of the crumbling of the Berlin Wall will be catalytic, leading to a transformation of the Great Wall.

But more central than video images themselves, however, are individuals who can transform these images into myths and visions. These larger stories of who we are provide the link between the routine day-to-day activities of the present, and the personal sacrifice, the episodes of bravery, needed to create a new tomorrow. To create this new future, these stories will, I believe, have to speak to the cycle *and* speak to a notion of progress. To meet the challenges ahead, leadership will have to speak to and balance humanity's spiritual, knowledge and material dimensions. Here Sarkar reminds us that while the cycle will continue, through spiritual leadership the phases of exploitation and human misery can be reduced, thus creating a vision that dialectically embraces the ancient, enlightenment and post-modern. In the meantime, I look forward to being ever at home and seeing the myriad of worldviews that exist: past, present and future. ❖

1. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, p. 246.

2. Liz Fell, "Poor Reception for TV Moguls": *Pacific Island Monthly*, May 1988, p. 43.