

# *CES Monthly Musings*

*Chronicling the Transition from Economic-Industrial  
To Ecological-Cultural Societies*

*(January 2013)*



**CENTER FOR  
ECOZOIC SOCIETIES**  
Seeking Well-Being in All Life Communities

*2013, twelve years after we began publishing, we begin anew with the next stage of CES Monthly Musings. We of CES have had to ask ourselves what we can contribute that will be beneficial when there are now so many other email newsletters and blogs covering all aspects of environmental awareness and sustainability. We have also had to ask how we should locate ourselves in relation to Thomas Berry, whose work has been so central to our own over the years.*

*Without going into all the background of the decisions we have made, we have decided to dedicate ourselves to providing philosophical background to the transition to the ecozoic. We will do this by covering key principles of various writers and peoples that we believe lay the foundation for ecozoic ways of living. Further, taking the prophetic stance that in the larger arc of history we are moving from economic-industrial societies to ecological-cultural societies, we will chronicle that transition.*

*Alice Loyd, formerly Executive Director of North Carolina Interfaith Power & Light, and a long-time Board member and officer of CES, has become the Co-Editor of this online magazine.*

*We invite your contributions. Contact Alice Loyd or Herman Greene at [ecozoicsocieties@gmail.com](mailto:ecozoicsocieties@gmail.com).*

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## Call for Ecozoic Societies (a Foundational Paper of CES)

By Herman Greene\*

We need to bring into being Ecozoic Societies! The challenge is set forth in *The Universe Story* by Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry:

The future of Earth's community rests in significant ways upon the decisions to be made by the humans who have inserted themselves so deeply even into the genetic codes of Earth's process. The future will be worked out in the tension between those committed to the Technozoic, a future of increased exploitation of Earth as resource, all for the benefit of humans, and those committed to the Ecozoic, a new mode of human-Earth relations, one where the well-being of the entire Earth community is the primary concern.

This is the jumping-off point, the razor's edge, the great divide, the call to action and commitment. Will we be about the Technozoic, or will we be about the Ecozoic? Our response will reverberate through every future epoch. We have come to a moment of great decision, one that calls us to answer once and for all the question posed in that song of old, "Which side are you on? Which side are you on?"

Yet, we find ourselves in a situation where there seems to be no truly meaningful way to extricate ourselves from the technological enterprise around us. This essay was typed on a computer produced by thousands of industrial processes, the computer drew power from vast electric grids that course through forest and field. When we depart for work, many of us will join hands with men and women around the world in the contemporary venture we have named "Technozoic." What then are we to do?

### Three Building Blocks

While there are many answers to this question, and many associations currently engaged in bringing into being ecologically sound societies, here this author will present three organizational foci which may shed light on current activity in this area, and around which some

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\*We will be re-publishing the "Foundational Documents" of CES in this online magazine in the coming months. These "Foundational Essays" and "Foundational Essays" provide the key understandings on which the work of CES is based. We hope you will find guidance in them as well.

This particular "Foundational Essay" was originally written in 1996 and was published, under the title "The Ecozoic Society," as Circular #175 of the Center for Reflection on the Second Law (July 20, 1996). It was Herman Greene's first published article in the field of ecology and culture. Later the article was re-published as "A Call for the Ecozoic: The Great Work of Our Time," in *Earthlight* (Winter 1997-1998).

This article has been revised slightly as a call for "ecozoic societies" rather than "the ecozoic society," in recognition of the diverse cultures and peoples of the world and the multiple ways of realizing ecozoic societies.

people may choose to organize in new associations. These areas are the New Story, Bioregionalism, and Ecological Spirituality.

### ***The New Story***

The New Story—the narrative of the creative development of the universe from the primordial flaring forth to the emergence of the Ecozoic Era—is one of the building blocks of Ecozoic Societies. At once a scientific account and an epic myth of origins, this story relates how things came to be and what significance and role humans have in the ongoing drama of the cosmos. The dual nature of the story, its blending of the scientific and the meaning-giving mythological, is what makes it the “New Story.” A primary source for learning this story is Swimme and Berry’s *The Universe Story*.

The New Story needs to be told in myriad ways. It needs to be taught. It needs to be read in bedtime stories. It needs to be told at the hearth and campfire. It needs to be sung. It needs to be danced. It needs to be expressed in liturgy and art. It needs to be beaten on drums. Orchestral works, operas and oratorios need to resound in celebration of the evolutionary adventure taking place throughout the universe.

But, you might ask, as exciting as this New Story is, why is it so important? There are three reasons. First, the New Story awakens a sense of the awe and mystery of existence and of our participation in the cosmological order of the universe. Second, the New Story reconnects the self (and so restores the self) with that which is more primordial than family, tribe, clan or nation—the self’s relationship with the natural world from which it came and of which it is a part. Third, the New Story provides a unifying mythology for all human cultures and a basis for common action in the realization of the Ecozoic Era.<sup>1</sup> If we take all these together, we might think of the New Story as an important part of the “knowing” dimension of Ecozoic Societies.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The “Ecozoic Era” is a term coined by Thomas Berry. It refers to the promise of a coming era when human beings live in a mutually enhancing relationship with the larger community of life systems. It is a process concept . . . not something to be arrived at, but something ever to be created.

<sup>2</sup>As a part of the knowing dimension, the New Story involves knowledge of the scientific and historical discoveries of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that made possible the telling of the story. These discoveries include, among others, the laws of thermodynamics; the theory of evolution; the theories of special and general relativity and of the relationship of time, space, motion, matter and energy; quantum mechanics; modern astronomy and the theory of a time-developmental universe; cellular biology, genetics and the discovery of DNA and RNA; and advances in mathematics and computational science and modern archaeological, anthropological and historical studies that have vastly expanded our understanding of human history. As Swimme and Berry have said, the New Story is the Copernican Revolution of our time. It is a narrative expression of a set of understandings primarily derived from science and history that are transforming human consciousness and reorienting the human community within the larger community of life. The narrative is important in its own right, but it is only the tip of the iceberg. The New Story, as any adequate myth of origin and purpose must, expresses an inexhaustible mystery, but the creative aspects of this mystery for humankind may best be appropriated when apprehension of the

### ***Bioregionalism***

A second building block of Ecozoic Societies is Bioregionalism. A “bioregion” is a naturally occurring geographic division of Earth that contains an interacting community of life functioning as a relatively self-supporting system within the ever-renewing processes of nature. To think bioregionally means to think of humans as being co-existent with and dependent upon the natural order, not as being dominant over it. The role of humans in the bioregion is to appreciate and celebrate its diversity and to honor and preserve its vitality, including the human part of it.

The bioregion would seem to be the fundamental ordering principle in Ecozoic Societies, the successor to the nation-state and the “world without borders” or “globalism” now so much in vogue. Here a word needs to be said about the word “society.” In the bioregional sense, “society” means the entire community of animate and inanimate beings. The constitution of the bioregional polity would preserve, not only the rights of humans, the rights of the entire community. In the bioregional economy, the global would exist to serve the local, rather than the other way around, and the local would contain most of the industries and sources of food and supplies needed to sustain the life of the community. Citizens of bioregions would know their places as much by trees, plants, animals, rocks and streams as by streets and buildings and other human features. In a world of bioregions, eating and living would observe the gentle ordering of seasonal cycles, and there would be no place for wasting . . . for all the world would be a sacred place for the community of all beings.

Bioregionalism provides the context for meaningful human endeavor, and thus it can be thought of as an important part of the “doing” dimension of Ecozoic Societies. Good works are those that sustain the diversity, communion, and self-organizing dynamics of the bioregional community. Bad works are those that destroy the diversity, communion and self-organizing dynamics of the bioregional community. Therefore, work in support of the bioregion might include planting and maintaining neighborhood gardens; learning and teaching about composting and other forms of re-use and recovery of materials; learning and teaching about local plants, animals and geology; learning and teaching about native species, permaculture, and environmental conservation, including preservation of wild lands; changing personal and family patterns of consumption; supporting local farmers and industries; working with developers, town councils and zoning boards on development of communities that preserve natural habitats and consist of human structures that reduce demands on resources; learning and teaching about bioregionalism and its implications for government and economics, including such difficult issues as trade, employment and distributive equity among the differing

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mystique of the narrative is combined with seeking to understand the new science and history on which it rests and the implications of this new science and history for understanding our place in the world.

bioregions; protesting development that negatively affects a bioregion; and sharing ideas on bioregional efforts that work.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Ecological Spirituality***

A third building block of Ecozoic Societies is Ecological Spirituality. In many ways as humans we have lost our sense of the spirituality of Earth and of our intimate connection with the natural world. The understanding that has dominated the sense of reality and value in the classical civilizations and religious traditions has been based on a sense of the pathos of the human condition and of the transient and tragic nature of the temporal order. As observed by Swimme and Berry in *The Universe Story*, the phenomenal world in this understanding has been viewed as oppressive to the more exalted aspects of existence. The spiritual world and the natural world have been viewed as two different orders of being. The conviction that the natural world is a lower, temporal reality, as distinguished from the higher, eternal reality, has served to validate the belief that exploitation of Earth for the sake of humans is acceptable.

The secularistic tendency of modernity (a turning to temporal, this-worldly concerns) has not proven to be an antidote for the problems related to this ancient dualism. With the de-souling of nature by Descartes in the 17<sup>th</sup> century began another dualism, this between the human being with mind and the nonhuman world as mechanism without inherent values or purposes. Nature became something to be mastered and conquered, to be “tortured to reveal her secrets.” The millennial expectation of the ancient dualism to be realized by divine intervention gave way to the technological pursuit of a humanly made paradise (at least a penultimate one) in historical time.

Ecological Spirituality differs from both ancient dualism and modern secular humanism. Ecological Spirituality is grounded in the sense that from the beginning the universe has had a

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<sup>3</sup>Bioregionalism does not mean a return to the regional societies of the past. While the past provides some models of what is possible, this author believes it is not possible or desirable to return to regional societies as they existed in earlier times. Subsistence farmers in the South may by necessity be living in bioregional economies and yet rightfully seek to improve their standards of living through participation in the global economy. In industrialized societies, where, for example, even the paper on this page involves shipments of chemicals and materials from several countries or regions and cultural exchanges are important sources of meaning, fulfillment and possibility, strict bioregionalism may be viewed, with some merit, as an abstraction of limited relevance. Nevertheless, the concept of bioregionalism would seem to provide the proper theoretical basis for moving to ecologically sound societies, ones that offer the promise of habitat and nourishment for other-than-human plant and animal species and sustainable sufficiency for the human species. It seems inevitable that, to achieve the goal of a viable human economy within the larger community of life systems, there must be a movement to localization of industry and agriculture to bring production, consumption, re-use, recycling and disposal closer together. Yet bioregionalism is not the opposite of globalism—indeed the natural world depends on global transport of air, water, chemicals, nutrients, and even species, such as in their migratory journeys. So in Ecozoic Societies there is a place for inter-regionalism (economically, politically and culturally), but what this place is must, in the future, be measured by its impacts, both positive and negative, on the interacting communities of life at the bioregional level.

psychic-spiritual dimension and this dimension is manifest in every element of the universe and in the universe as a whole. As Thomas Berry said in his paper on “The Spirituality of Earth,” when we speak of the spirituality of Earth we are not speaking of Earth as having an objectively spiritual quality, as when we observe the beauty of Earth, but of the spirituality of Earth as subject, the interior numinous reality that gives form to Earth and in which we participate. Thus, Ecological Spirituality doesn’t separate the divine and the natural realms, rather it sees the divine as indwelling and influencing the process of creation; nor does it separate human from other-than human life, rather it understands, in both an evolutionary and existential sense, that there is a kinship of all beings.

Ecological Spirituality might be thought of as an important part of the “being” dimension of Ecozoic Societies. Simply understood Ecological Spirituality involves reconnection with the natural world and its numinous quality. This could involve attention to the singing of the birds, presence to wind and sea, absorption in a starry night, or nearness to soil and seed. If spirituality seems like a troublesome word, this element might be thought of as personal transformation—transformation from being separated from nature, to being present in an interior way to its mystery and value.

For some people Ecological Spirituality would involve a communal dimension and, for many of these, the practice of an established religion. In the communal context, Ecological Spirituality would involve the renewal of traditions or the birthing of new traditions that awaken sensitivities to the natural world and to the continuing creativity of the cosmos. The primary referent of these ecological spiritualities in their various forms would not be the written text of any religion, but rather the primal, beyond words awareness of the revelation of the divine in nature. Ecological Spirituality would not replace traditional teachings of spirituality and ethics; rather it would broaden the context of these teachings and expand the awareness of the divine-human encounter.

In a more complex understanding of Ecological Spirituality, the term includes the humanistic dimension of spirituality and presence to the mystery and value of the human community within the inclusive community of life. It honors the role of humans, as stated in *The Universe Story*, of “enabling Earth and the universe entire to reflect on and celebrate themselves, and the deep mysteries they bear within them, in a special mode of conscious self-awareness.” As so understood in its comprehensive meaning, Ecological Spirituality becomes a guiding motif for the realization of Ecozoic Societies.

So offered here are these three building blocks—the New Story (knowing), Bioregionalism (doing), and Ecological Spirituality (being)—with the hope that they will illuminate the way to Ecozoic Societies.

## Bringing Climate Forward in Conversation

By Alice Loyd

President Obama didn't mention climate change during his run for re-election last fall, but he's not the only one staying silent on the most important problem in human and non-human affairs. A small group has made the subject contentious in order to preserve its own financial interests. Politicians walk on tiptoe around it, and even people who care deeply about it have difficulty bringing nature's needs into daily conversation.

It's easy to talk about the weather, but difficult to have comfortable exchanges about climate ("climate"<sup>4</sup> as contrasted with the "weather," which is always easy to discuss). When I raise the issue with someone I don't know well, I'm likely to enter a gauntlet marked by skepticism, ignorance, or fear. I want to communicate concern, and perhaps information from my vast stores gained by years of attending to what scientists say. But most days I'm not up to argument, or the nursing of someone's frail equilibrium. I understand why people revert to doubt and denial when confronted with this planetary emergency. These are normal human responses to threat of pain. If we don't talk about global warming, though, we can't expect the public to welcome climate change-related policies.

I think the climate discussion is ripe for dissension partly due to the schism between nature and humans that Herman, quoting Swimme and Berry, mentions in the above article: "The phenomenal world . . . has been viewed as oppressive to the more exalted aspects of existence. The spiritual world and the natural world have been viewed as two different orders of being." We don't like to face the limitations of our animal existence. Our minds can escape through a number of mechanisms, particularly in advanced industrial societies when we live insulated from wind, rain, cold and heat. The facts of human-caused climatic upheaval threaten physical comfort and emotional composure. It has been easy for oil companies to cast doubt on the human role and on the whole discipline of biogeochemistry.

Perhaps I find it awkward to introduce climate change when I speak with neighbors for the same reason I find it hard to explain CES's mission. "What does CES do?" is a question I'm asked when I name it as one of my affiliations. Try replying, "We work toward a coming era when human beings live in a mutually enhancing relationship with the larger community of life systems." During transition periods when paradigm shifts are in the process of being developed,

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<sup>4</sup>**cli·mate** (klī'mīt) *noun*

1. The meteorological conditions, including temperature, precipitation, and wind, that characteristically prevail in a particular region.
2. A region of the earth having particular meteorological conditions: *lives in a cold climate.*

language has to be stretched. There's no commonly understood street chat to use when discussing what's going on.

Attempts to bring up new concepts are bound to be ungraceful. The fact that our well-being is interwoven with that of the non-human world, or that our current, costly industrial lifestyle must give way to one yet to be defined—to convey either idea requires true dialogue if it is to succeed. True dialogue is sure to happen between neighbors during a hurricane, of course, when quickly we cut through philosophical difference. Beforehand or weeks later, the same neighbor and I may be on more reserved footing. Our plight is that the most urgent threat humans have ever faced is upon us, and yet remains almost unmentionable.

If we start talking, though, we may find allies. According to scientist Anthony Leiserowitz, Director of the Yale Project on Climate Change Communication, 16% of Americans say they are “alarmed” about climate change and 29% classify themselves as “disturbed.” Those who are disturbed feel less than alarmed because they see climate change as more distant in time or space than those in the “alarmed” group do. The number of entrenched skeptics found by the survey regarding climate science was only 8%.

In his interview on the January 4, 2013 Bill Moyers program, Leiserowitz added that two-thirds of those surveyed said protecting the environment either has no impact on the economy or improves it. He concluded that 40,000,000 Americans are ripe to become an “issue public,” an organized movement that demands change.

I'm writing to encourage that kind of movement building by the ecozoic community. Global warming is a unifying opportunity as well as the greatest threat to our vision of Earth harmony. By offering feelers to our fellow citizens when we find ourselves in line with them at the store, beside them on a bench or in a café, or meeting them as we dawdle in the park on a warm day, we soften the sense of isolation these 16-and-29% tend to feel as the loud 8% dominate the airwaves.

On January 21, 2013, President Obama broke the silence on climate change in his inaugural address. If the rest of us proceed in our conversations from the weather to the climate, or from the price of gas to its true cost, we help to make way for the changes we so deeply desire.

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**To become a member of CES, send a letter to CES at 2516 Winningham Road, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27516, USA, with your contact information (name, address, email and phone) and dues. Dues for each calendar year are US\$35 (individual or family). Dues for Sustaining Members are US\$135. CES also accepts members who pay lesser dues or no dues. You may, also, become a member (and pay be credit card or Paypal) by contacting us at [ecozoicsocieties@gmail.com](mailto:ecozoicsocieties@gmail.com).**