

The Next Level

by Dan Armstrong

“Let us imagine the whole history of mankind crowded into twelve hours, and that we are living at noon of the long human day. Let us, in the interest of moderation and convenient reckoning, assume that man has been upright and engaged in seeking out inventions for only two hundred and forty thousand years. Each hour of our clock will represent twenty thousand years, each minute three hundred and thirty-three and a third years. For over eleven and a half hours nothing was recorded. We know of no persons or events; we only infer that man was living on earth, for we find his stone tools, bits of his pottery, and some of his pictures of mammoths and bison. Not until twenty minutes before twelve do the earliest vestiges of Egyptian and Babylonian civilization begin to appear. The Greek literature, philosophy, and science, of which we have been accustomed to speak as “ancient,” are not but seven minutes old. At one minute before twelve, Lord Bacon wrote his *Advancement of Learning*, and not half a minute has elapsed since man first began to make the steam engine do his work for him.”

-J.H. Robinson, *The Ordeal of Civilization* (1926).

Because of the stretch of time and the incredible acceleration of civilization in the last one hundred years, it is difficult to completely absorb what it means that we represent the crown of human creation. Some ten thousand years ago humans began a gradual conversion from nomadic hunter/gathers to planted agrarians. The evolution of those seed communities into cities then city-states, then industrial nations and today's tense alliance of those nations is the steady process of human civilization. The sum of this process, all cultures, all literature, all science, throughout recorded history, is currently available and coming to life in the multimedia cyberspace of our maturing global community. We have an articulate electronic mirror of ourselves and our history. And with it, we have become something new. We have become a community with a collective self-conscious. Three hundred and fifty human generations stand stacked one upon the next and the grand perspective reveals the outline of our temporal and spatial human horizon. What can be seen is both stunning and frightening.

Using historian J.H. Robinson's time scale, the last ten seconds of human advance have

exploded with a wealth of creativity. Nine seconds ago, we split the atom. Five seconds ago, a man walked on the moon. Three seconds, home computers. Two seconds, super conductors and laser discs. One second, a Worldwide Web. Our base of knowledge and empirical facts increase as quickly as the capacity of each new generation of computer chips. With each day we further detail every branch of scientific study, each field of literature, every realm of history. So much so, and with such a timely collapse upon the present, that for the first time humankind has the perspective to clearly evaluate the imprint of civilization on planet Earth and to truly judge *what man hath wrought*.

We transplant human organs. We mimic natural hormones. We drop tinker toys on the moons of Jupiter. We digitalize music with beams of light. We imprint entire lexicons on a silicon chip the size of a mustard seed. We tap the energy of the invisible atom.

It is stunning.

But also frightening.

We have stockpiled enough nuclear warheads to blow our planet home to Kingdom Come. Our creative forces have so overrun the landmasses we have all but deforested Paradise. The waters of the oceans and rivers run toxic. The air in our cities burns our eyes and our lungs. We have so senselessly procreated, we threaten to out run Earth's natural resources. We force the animals from their habitats and bring extinction to one species after another. Agricultural recklessness scorch and erode the land. A huge portion of our kind are chronically undernourished and/or shackled by poverty. From the pinnacle of society in these United States, we watch all this as it occurs and do nothing but continue to consume as though that is the answer. Ten thousand years of civilization and still we seem no more than hungry puppies wolfing down our kennel ration. Stunning and frightening and true!

The Faustian paradox stares back at us from the mirror. The collision course is us with ourselves. We enter the third millennium of this age engaged in a deep questioning of the future and purpose of human endeavor. Evidence of our new self-conscious awakening is the environmental movement of the last forty years. It is a clear reckoning of man's material splendor with the balance of the community of life on Earth. Do we continue to separate ourselves from the sacred web of life or admit our implicate part in it? Simply put, *what are we? And why do we struggle so?*

We, the vanguard of civilization, the fortunate upper twenty percent of the world population, live enmeshed in information. From genetic code to lasered disc, our consciousness knows more than we cognate. The invisible fabric of our imagination is woven upon an iconoscape of media image and threaded through with an encyclopedia of facts. We have television, newspapers, magazines, radio, and the Internet integrating information sources from all over the globe. We have electron microscopes and genetic engineering, drawing us closer and closer to the workings of the atom and the very spark of life. We have launched a series of sophisticated space probes aimed at the outer reaches of our solar system, armed with remote cameras and electronic sensors to scan the planets and their moons for traces of life—*and it is there!* We have a powerful telescope orbiting Earth beyond the atmospheric veil, peering galaxy beyond galaxy into before untold spatial and temporal depths, actually anticipating the origins of the universe and time itself. These are miraculous achievements. No, more than that! Humans verge upon a nominative godhood. It is true. All that remains to crown our deification is the wreath of impassioned wisdom. We must grasp the implied significance of our libraries of knowledge. We must unfold into the implicate suggestion of the human potential. Before us is this grand challenge. The clear evidence of our genius demands that we step to the next level.

It seems we have been laboring under a drastically limited understanding of what it means to be human. The technical awakening of the twentieth century, in all its electronic and industrial magnificence, offers a reciprocal and necessary awakening of human consciousness in the twenty-first, inspired by our increased understanding of ourselves and the universe. Industrialization and technology have given us back the keys to Paradise, but we miss the point if we raze the Garden in the process.

Our society shares a dynamic information pool. In it is the imperfect sum of our somatic knowledge, the collected works of humankind. It is a multi-cultural collection of histories, astronomies, and religions. It contains a scheme of numbers, a geometry, a physics, a science of medicine, hundreds of languages, and is sustained in an electronic global mirror of the present. It is our shared knowledge. Our global dictionary. The language of the languages. And it operates as a mutual objective consciousness. It is something that nearly all the people in the world partially know. It is the ultimate tool for world stewardship. It is our collective conscious,

humanity's somatic oversoul.

The Worldwide Web is the perfect analog. Nested in the memory banks of the Internet is a growing fund of information. Encircling the globe as a pulsing electromagnetic net and accessed by phone or cable or satellite, it is available all the time. Turn on the computer. Push a key. And suddenly the individual is online with an instantaneous global network with links to computers in libraries, museums, archives, offices, and homes all over the world. Nearly all that humankind has recorded—music, art, science, literature—is but the touch of a finger away. This transpersonal collected conscious, this interactive media-mind, if you will, has become the new social contract: the individual's responsibility to conceive of an objective global reality from the sum of modern society's multimedia input. It is, without our acknowledging it, a habitual stretching exercise in intellection, synthesis, and abstraction. It is the expansion of consciousness through the brute facilitation of the electronic oversoul.

Yet this age of information has happened so quickly, we have been slow to grasp its significance. We are enthralled by its wonder. Entranced by its breadth. Lost to its glitter. But we miss its deeper suggestion. Even with our miraculous technology and powers, we struggle to find meaning in our existence. The world's systems of government are horribly corrupt and paralyzed by excessive bureaucracy. We wander upon a desert littered with things. Our intention has been so misguided and egocentric it is difficult to imagine a world without major catastrophe in the next fifty years—pandemic, cataclysmic climate change, terrorist action. There are few truly optimistic scenarios for the future without less greed. We have ignored the rhythms of the planet. We have partied on our neighbor's lawn. We have asphalted over the lungs of the earth. The entire globe, flora and fauna, wheeze with every polluted in breath. It is evident something must change. There is something yet for us to learn. *Who are we? What are we? And what are we doing here?* Besides diminishing species.

This cannot be right. It is time for the human race to do some soul searching. We are the only visibly conscious beings on the planet, and we persistently stumble over that conscious “self.” We must somehow acknowledge and/or redefine our purpose as humans—if only to acquiesce and seek harmony with the other living things. Should our goals be more than that, we must name them. The talent and creativity of being human demands it. We are limited only by our imaginations. There is no end to what we can do or be. We must fill up the second twelve hours of Mr. Robinson's cosmic day with purpose. We are not just happenstance in a universe of

randomness. The moral of human existence on this planet screams of meaningful allegory and unanswered potentials. Either the empire will blindly bring about its own end or humans must awaken to their greater being. The Age is changing. It is unavoidably so.

We have great faith in technology. If we can put a man on the moon, surely we'll find a way to purify the waters. Adjust the ozone densities. Conserve the soil and forests. Find a clean, efficient energy source. Solve every virus. Anti-body every bacteria. Grant the basics of life to every man, woman, and child. These feats are not outside our abilities. Yet if we must continually use our science to solve the problems of the way we live, maybe the point is being missed. In the case of humans on earth, having finally realized we are conscious, as a group, the question is primarily one of balance and management. Our own fully conscious being can not be realized until we recognize our place in the entire spectrum of living things. We are not apart, but implicate in the design. Our society tends to separate and isolate, when times dictate we should conjoin and commune.

There is an organic mind that persists in all life, animal and vegetable. Minimally an Innate Will, it serves impetus to the involuntary operations of the mind and body. Within this life motive is a common fund of evolving racial memory, an ancient imprint echoing up through the chromosomal chains, seeding our dreams and guiding our intuitions. A collective unconscious to match our collected conscious. This subtle, transpersonal subconscious connects us all just as surely as the Internet. If the body of human knowledge is our somatic oversoul, then the complement is this clear spring of life, the subliminal racial undersoul.

The spirit of humanity flows from these twin wells of inspiration. When we disregard the sanctity of our own planet, when we concentrate too much on the goo-gaws of modern life, we disrupt the balance of that inspiration. As we compress and populate the planet beyond the limits of its natural balance, we create stresses and strains on our psychological being as well as the organic whole of the earth. Because we are so intimately interconnected with the body of life, when the water, the air, and the soil are toxified, so are our psyches. When significant portions of our kind live in poverty and hunger, we take on a silent grief and depression.

Stripped of the social pretense, the human is as proud and dignified as an eagle, as energetic and playful as a porpoise. The embodied apex of life on Earth, more than animal, a thing of both athletic body and creative intelligence, human being is born of a noble calling. But

packed and stacked in cities for acre upon acre of urban sprawl, our minds become like our populace—cramped, stressed, and paranoid. And this is proportionately reflected in the direction and production of the affluent culture. Deep innate survival drives are turned inward and perverted. Streaks of violence and sexual exaggeration color the oversoul. The electronic iconoscape warps with narcissism and vain distraction. The global conscience becomes convoluted by a propaganda of spins and counterspins. The moebial container of our somatic knowledge becomes a disturbing funhouse mirror instead of a tool for conscious human evolution. The oversoul, like the atmosphere and the waters, darkens with pollution. And we struggle under its cloaking screen of emotional static. The undersoul suffers.

We must find a way to match the vast genius of our intellectual mind with commensurate humanity and respect for the living thing. We must match our achievements in science and technology with a grace for what we are. There exist a wide variety of religions in the cultures of humankind. Though the clear sense of the sacred is evident in every one, too often they are divisive. The global society enters the twenty-first century a collection of separate folk peoples whose consciousnesses have been unified in an electronic hyperspace. Because of the unknown potential of unified consciousness, this effervescence offers humankind a grander and more powerful challenge than atomic energy.

It is evident that something more exists. We can be certain life pervades the cosmos. We are not just a planet of multi-various peoples. We are the physical personification of something that permeates all reality. And this is not meant as fanciful transcendentalism. It is a call for human consciousness to recognize itself. Revealed in the limitless application of our science and our art is the clear beauty of the symmetries of the human mind and its link to the infinities of the universe. We are special because we can know this! *We think therefore we are!* And this can't be simply glorious accident.

It means there is something immortal in us. That the story of humankind is part of the larger story of the universe and that the interconnective tissue is mind. That the balance of our consciousness is sacred and that the organic and somatic minds are equal parts of the larger thing. That we have the potential to surmount ourselves. To be dimensionally larger beings. To understand that we are deeply enmeshed in and part of a living consciousness.

To advance to the next level, to be true stewards of Spaceship Earth, we must realize that

we are children of the universe. We have been entrusted with one of the jewels of our galaxy. There is a way to live here. It is our duty as well as the human path to seek it. It is only in our best interests to achieve it. It is simply a matter of bridling our will and being more. Nelson Mandela put it powerfully: “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that frightens us.”

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