

Transformation by Design

by Melissa Hoffman

You don't have to understand chaos theory to appreciate the new species of corporate organization that Dee Hock has unleashed on the planet, an organizational paradigm that could very well represent the next step in the collective evolution of the human family. You don't even have to know anything about corporate structure, nor do you have to nurse a secret passion for institutional reform. All you have to do is take a long look at a snowflake, reflect on a forest, ponder the neurons in your brain—or use your Visa card—and you will begin to appreciate the intricate, manifold hive of pulsing impulses and multidimensional parleys of information that give rise to everything in the created universe. Sound perplexing? Well, as a group of scientists are discovering, this orderly chaotic buzz is the way of the world, and if you just sit down and think about it, really think hard about it, or take long walks in the woods like Dee Hock did, you might find yourself surfing waves of miraculous and intricate order foaming at the narrow edge of chaos. Look deeply enough and you will discover the true nature of all of evolution's architecture.

Dee Hock is the founder and former CEO of Visa International, the most successful business venture on Earth. Could this former bank manager with a conscience be evolution's unlikely hero? Visa owes its success, according to Hock, to its structure, which is nothing less than an evocation of nature's "cha-ordic" laws. Hock coined the term chaordic to describe that perfect balance of chaos and order where evolution is most at home. Yes, that's right. A business venture that takes its cues from Mother Evolution, whose "trademark" dynamism, changing change, and explosive originality are forever groping to innovate, prosper, and extend creation's euphoric reach further and further into manifestation.

If you don't think that something as common as the plastic Visa credit card in your wallet could be part of evolution's plan, consider this: Visa International

... espouses no political, economic, social or legal theory, thus transcending language, custom, politics and culture to successfully connect a bewildering variety of more than 21,000 financial institutions, 16 million merchants and 800 million people in 300 countries and territories. Annual volume of \$1.4 trillion continues to grow in excess of twenty percent compounded annually. A staff of about three thousand people scattered in twenty-one offices in thirteen countries on four continents provides ... around-the-clock operation of two global electronic communication systems with thousands of data centers communicating through nine million miles of fiber-optic cable. Its electronic systems clear more transactions in one week than the Federal Reserve System does in a year.

Hock has chronicled Visa's spectacular emergence along with his philosophical and personal odyssey in a book called *Birth of the Chaordic Age*. Therein he deftly disassembles assumptions you didn't even know you had; assumptions about how

we have come to order, organize, and configure everything, from our desktops to our institutions to the very pattern of our thinking.

Hock wrote *Birth of the Chaordic Age* in the late nineties, years after walking away from the thriving Visa. He had spent the better part of ten years in retirement, restoring the degraded acreage around his ranch to vibrancy. Then, as the story goes, one night while reading Mitch Waldrop's *Complexity* (a book about chaos theory), he found illuminated in its pages an uncanny echo of the very principles he had invoked to bring Visa into being. His bucolic retirement was soon to come to an end (a fascinating story which you'll have to read about in his book).

You may be wondering what a chaordic organization looks like, and if you ask Hock, he would likely point you in the direction of a snowflake or a bee's wing. But fortunately his book, along with the website of the nonprofit organization he helped found (The Chaordic Commons, www.chaordic.org), explains this phenomenon in captivating detail. Principally, a chaordic organization is a self-organizing and self-evolving entity, which ends up looking more like a neural network (like the Internet) than a hierarchically-organized bureaucracy in which decision-making power is centralized at the top and trickles down through a series of well-regulated departments and managers. Chaordic organizations do not fear change or innovation. They are, by their very nature, supremely adaptive. They also tend to be inclusive, multicentric, and distributive and, ultimately, strongly cohesive due to their unshakable focus on common purpose and core principles. If you can't quite visualize it, there's a good reason, which Hock will explain in the following interview.

So the reason that this issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* had to include Dee Hock—a corporate innovator whose personal risk taking and conscientious peeling of life's onion has led to the emergence of a new collective life-form—is this: our spiritual canon, while replete with examples of personal transformation, has rarely addressed the intricacies of real collectivetransformation. And since the ability of the many to communicate, coalesce, and coordinate as one may be the only hope for humanity's future, we thought that what Dee Hock had to offer was nothing less than a profound example, wrought out of his own sweat and experience, of just where we humans might be heading for our next evolutionary leap. Hock has proved that a very large group of individuals can come together under the cohesion of a unifying purpose while enhancing—rather than swallowing—the autonomy of each participating individual. To say that the individual and collective benefit each other in this arrangement would be an understatement, for, ideally, the intricate dance between part and whole endlessly releases new creative capacities in both. Hock talks a refreshing brand of truth and proves that it's possible for a unified yet diverse group of people to wend its way through tumultuous change while continuously growing and transforming itself as it embraces the hidden potentials of an unknown future.

Finally, Hock's own odyssey made us wonder: What would it take to be fully chaordic in this crazy, fomenting world, teetering on dual brinks of salvation and disaster? Must we, as Hock suggests, consistently sweep our minds of their old, beleaguered Newtonian concepts, which act as an invisible lens through which we behold a mechanistic and controllable world? What manner of dedication on our part would be needed to cast aside our old ways of thinking so that we might even begin to directly perceive the ever-present genius of evolution's design? In the following interview, Dee Hock talks to WIE about the mind-stopping implications of the "chaordic age," an age that may have begun more than thirty years ago, in part, with this ordinary bank manager, who looked around, saw what was happening, asked a heck of a lot of

questions, and took action.

WIE: In your book *Birth of the Chaordic Age*, you describe how you combined the first syllables of chaos and order, inventing the term chaordic to describe a dynamic form of organization modeled on the fundamental organizing principles of evolution and nature. Your work, the underpinnings of which have much in common with the science of chaos theory, involves reconceiving organizations according to these fundamental chaordic principles and represents a departure from the traditional, relatively rigid, mechanistic model that characterizes most organizations today.

DEE HOCK: Yes, and to add to the definition a little more, chaordic simply describes the behavior of any self-governing organism or system that harmoniously blends what were previously conceived to be opposites, such as chaos and order or cooperation and competition. But most importantly, this is a way of thinking. And in fact, everything I could say about it, you already know. It's already there because you are chaordically organized. It's the way nature has been organizing things since the beginning of time, including you—your brain, your immune system—and every living thing. So in terms of a chaordic commercial, political, or social organization, the question becomes: Can you evoke it, or bring it into being?

WIE: What inspired you to become involved in organizational transformation?

DH: Well, years and years ago, I started to ask myself three very simple questions, which dominated my life for many years. One of them was, "Why are organizations everywhere, whether commercial, social, or religious, increasingly unable to manage their affairs?" The second question was, "Why are individuals throughout the world increasingly in conflict with and alienated from the organizations of which they're a part?" And the third was, "Why are society and the biosphere increasingly in disarray?" When I asked these questions to audiences a few years ago, they didn't have that much meaning to most people. But with such recent events as September 11 and the collapse of Enron and WorldCom, it's all pretty obvious now. So if all those things are true—and to me they're just as obvious as the nose on anybody's face—there has to be some deep, universal, underlying thing we're not getting at. There has to be.

WIE: How do you help people understand chaordic principles in relation to the current forms of organization that are so much a part of our lives?

DH: An illustration I use to get people to understand it is this: I'll ask major corporate audiences: Why don't you just take all your traditional beliefs about organizations, and apply them to the neurons in your brain? Organize the neurons in your brain, the most complex, infinitely diverse organ that has ever emerged in evolution, as you would a corporation. The first thing you've got to do is appoint the Chief Executive neuron, right? Then you've got to decide which are going to be the Board of Directors neurons and the Human Resources neurons, and then you have to write an operating manual for it. Now, if you could organize your brain on that model, what would happen? You would instantly be unable to breathe until somebody told you how and where and when and how fast. You wouldn't be able to think or see. What if your immune system were organized on this basis? First you'd have to do some market research to determine what virus, if any, was attacking you, right? Then you'd have to write a business plan for how you were going to deal with it. And you'd have to get it approved by the senior executive neurons in your brain. Then you'd have to have marching orders for all the various aspects of your immune system. Okay. So why in God's world do we think we can use something like the brain, which is organized on

this beautiful set of chaordic principles to organize society in a superior manner? That's an exercise in arrogance and ego.

WIE: So, basically, what you're saying is that it just doesn't make sense for us, as part of evolution's intricate design, to think we can organize society in a manner that is superior to the way in which nature has so perfectly organized us?

DH: Exactly. It's unbelievably arrogant and foolish.

THE COLLAPSE OF FLOAT

WIE: Before we talk further about why our old models need to be abandoned, I'd like to ask you about the current climate of change surrounding the emergence of chaordic systems. We just interviewed Don Beck, a leader in large-scale systemic transformation, and he emphasized how our climate of rapidly accelerating change and increasing complexity is generating the need for new organizational forms. This is how he put it:

We know what's happening everywhere on the planet within ten minutes after it happens, and it's on the TV news live. The complexity has been there in the past, but it didn't arrive here until the ship came in six months later or by telegraph maybe twenty-four hours later. Now all these things that are happening on the planet are suddenly right in our face in real time. And that's one reason why there's so much stress on us, which also means that we might be looking for new organizational forms—more ensembles of people—because no single person is going to be able to keep all these things in mind.

Now, you have actually brought a new organizational form into being. Does what Beck describes here match your experience?

DH: Well, I agree completely with what he's saying, except I think he's understating the case. I use two different examples to try to get people to understand this: one called "float" and one called "CRUSTTI," which is an acronym for the Capacity to Receive, Utilize, Store, Transform, and Transmit Information. You can probably remember the days when a check would often take weeks to find its way through the banking system. That was called "float." This float was used as an early form of venture capital. Now, stop and think about other kinds of float. Think about information float (this is what Beck is speaking about): if you go back just a few centuries, it took, for example, almost a century for the knowledge about the smelting of iron ore to cross one continent. That brought in the Iron Age. When we landed on the moon, it was known and seen in every corner of the world in 1.4 seconds. Think about technological float: it took centuries for the wheel to gain universal acceptance. Now any microchip device can be in use around the world in weeks. Think about cultural float: it used to take centuries for one culture to even learn about or be exposed to a tiny bit of information about another. And now anything that becomes popular anywhere in the world can sweep through other countries in weeks. Consider space float: in just one long lifetime, a hundred years or so, we've gone from the speed of the horse to interstellar travel. People and materials now move in minutes when they used to move in months. And even life float—the time it takes to evolve new life-forms—is collapsing with genetic engineering.

What all this means is the loss of change float—the time between what was and what is going to be, between the past and the future—so the past then becomes ever less predictive, the future ever less predictable, and everything is accelerating change with

one exception: our institutions. There has been no truly new concept of organization since the ideas of nation-state and corporation emerged several centuries ago.

Now even more important—and you have to think hard about this—is the history of what I call the "capacity to receive, utilize, store, transform, and transmit information." If you go back to the first single-cell form of life, it clearly possessed the capacity to receive, to utilize, to store, to transform, and to transmit information. This capacity even precedes the cell, for that's the very definition of DNA. So the key to understanding what Beck is speaking about is that the greater the capacity of any entity or organization to receive, utilize, store, transform, and transmit information, the more diverse and complex the entity. You can track this capacity from particle to neutrino to nucleus to atom to amino acid to protein to molecule to cell to organ and to organism. Or the phrase I like to use: from bacteria to bee to bat to bird to buffalo right on through to the baseball player.

And evolution went on, and in time this ability to receive, utilize, store, transform, and transmit information escaped the individual entity and became shared—as the song of birds, the sonar of bats, the pheromone of ants, or the language of humans. With the capacity to communicate, immediately came the evolution of complex communities of organisms: hives, flocks, tribes, herds, whatever. Language was a huge expansion of that capacity to deal with information. And immediately you had a huge leap in societal complexity. With mathematics, the first global language, you had the same thing—a huge increase in societal diversity and complexity. With the printing press came the capacity to include that which can be mechanically recorded and transported. Then the telegraph brought electronic capacity, and the telephone brought phonic capacity, and television brought visual capacity. Every single one of those expansions was immediately followed by a huge leap in societal complexity.

All of a sudden, just within the last three decades with the emergence of microtechnology, we have on the order of a thousand times better algorithms, five hundred thousand times more computing power per individual, and five hundred million times more mobility of information. As I like to say, the entire collective memory of the species—that means all known and recorded information—is going to be just a few keystrokes away in a matter of years. Now, what does that explosion in the capacity to receive, utilize, store, transform, and transmit information mean for organizational forms and for the complexity and diversity of our problems?

But that's nothing. Take nanotechnology—which in simple language is the engineering of self-replicating computers and assembly machines so tiny they can arrange atoms as though they were bricks—that's the way that we're going to be constructing organs, organisms, products, and services within three or four decades. With nanotechnology, information will move in speed and quantities hundreds, perhaps thousands, of times greater than it moves today, okay? And equally important, each such change brings an equal increase in our power to alter and destroy nature. That's where we are. So unless evolution has totally changed its ways, we're going to face an explosion of societal diversity and complexity, and a disruption of biological systems, enormously greater than we now experience or can yet imagine. The essential question then becomes: Can we deal with it with the same old seventeenth-century mechanistic command-and-control forms of organizations? There's not a snowball's chance in hell. I always tell my audiences, if you think this change isn't going to happen, or isn't happening, or that you can prevent it, or that you can operate in the old way and not deal with it, just try to remember the last time evolution rang your telephone number and asked your permission. It is going to happen. But there are two ways it could happen. We can continue to perpetuate these old forms and try to make the world behave

in accordance with our old mechanistic internal model of reality, or we can change our internal model of reality. The first is not only foolish, it's futile. The second is difficult, but it is essential if we are to have a livable world.

WIE: The way you're describing it, our individual and collective willingness to change our internal model of reality is fundamental to meaningful transformation. But what you seem to be saying is that what we're replacing the old model with isn't merely a new substitute model. What we're actually attempting to do is to align our perception and behavior with the essential nature of evolution.

DH: Yes. We don't have to remain in this radically destructive mind-set and institutional-set. We can change, and the natural order of things could emerge in all of our societal organizations—government, commerce, religion—it's right there, waiting to happen. I often tell people that every mind is like a room in an old house, stuffed with very old furniture. Take any space in your mind and empty it of your old conceptions and new ones will rush in, good or bad. So change is more a getting rid of rather than an adding to or an acquiring.

BEYOND THE MECHANISTIC MINDSET

WIE: At the end of your book you emphasize that you hadn't anticipated the power of individuals' resistance to change. You noticed this phenomenon throughout your experience with Visa. Since then, how have you come to understand this resistance to change?

DH: The reason people have so much trouble with change, I think, is a matter of conditioning. It arose many thousands of years ago, but essentially, this mechanistic way of thinking came into dominance about the time of Newton and Descartes, when Newtonian science postulated that the universe and everything in it could only be understood as a clocklike mechanism, a machine, with each part acting on the other part with precise linear laws of cause and effect. So when this way of thinking came into being through science, we began to try to apply it to everything. Starting about four hundred years ago, we tried to organize every aspect of society based on this mechanistic, scientific perspective. The Newtonian way of thinking has marvelous uses. For example, if I go in the hospital for eye surgery, I don't want a chaotic operating room. If you're going to build a perfect silicon chip, you need a totally controlled, very clean, highly organized, almost mechanistic environment. But that doesn't mean it's a good way to run Intel, or a good way to run a health care system.

So for four hundred years we've been trying to build all our organizations as though the Newtonian mechanistic internal model of reality were universally applicable. You know, this person reports to that person who reports to that person. Planning comes from the top and is distributed down. Everything else—money, power—is distributed up. Everything has linear cause and effect, which leads to endless manuals of rules and regulations.

If you think about it, you realize that every institution you have experienced in your lifetime is consciously or unconsciously based on that metaphor and that model. Your school operated that way, and your church, and your community, and your state. Your internal model of reality is the machine. So it doesn't surprise me at all that it's difficult to think otherwise or even to really understand that you are thinking in a mechanistic way. Stress arises out of having this internal model of reality at a subconscious level, literally in your genes, without knowing you've got it, and

without asking how you've got it, and why you've got it, and whether it's useful any longer. And it's enormously more difficult, even if you can intellectually understand it, to literally get it in the bone.

So it's just not surprising at all that people should have such difficulty after so many years of conditioning, and given the fact that even if they start thinking in a different way, they are immediately head-to-head with a society in which virtually every institution and situation is operating on the old Newtonian model. That's why it's difficult. I think it will take several or more generations to break completely free of the Newtonian mechanistic mindset.

WIE: In light of the enormity of this conditioning and our reluctance to let it go, what do you think actually provokes the leap out of the old system? You were incredibly motivated to do this. What do you think it's going to take for individuals to be willing to endure the discomforts of leaving the old model behind?

DH: Well, first of all, you really need to open your mind to try to understand what your existing internal model of reality is and how it functions. And then you need to familiarize yourself with it. Emerson had a wonderful line. He said, "Everywhere you go you take your giant with you." So you have this giant unconscious thing, this internal model of reality, against which you judge and measure everything. You're never going to get rid of it, so you might as well turn around, introduce yourself to it, and say, "We're going to be together the rest of our lives, but I'm not going to let you drive my thinking any more. You have to live with my ability to think in a different way." You just confront it. I often tell audiences, "Lord, I was raised to command and control. I'm a sort of command-and-control-a-holic." I may never get it out of my system. But unless I understand it, I can't begin to deal with it.

PURPOSE AND PRINCIPLES

WIE: How can a group of people learn to think in a different way on a collective level?

DH: Well, you really have to go deep. I spent months and months asking myself, "What is an organization?" If I'm talking about institutional and organizational change, what am I really talking about? What is an organization in the deepest sense? It surely isn't just a set of bylaws, because I can write a set of bylaws and shove it in a desk drawer, and it just becomes an old moldering piece of paper. And if you really think deeply about it, you discover that every organization and every institution, without exception, has no reality save in your mind. It's not its buildings. Those are manifestations of it. It's not its name, it's not its logo, and it's not some fictional piece of paper called a stock certificate. It's not money. It is a mental concept around which people and resources gather in pursuit of common purpose.

Now let's follow this just a little further. If that institution has no reality save in your mind and the minds of all your associates and the people who deal with it, then what is its real nature? What's its real strength? And that led me to believe that the heart and soul of every organization, at least every healthy organization, is purpose and principles. What is the purpose that brought you together and what is your system of beliefs about how you intend to conduct yourself in pursuit of that purpose? If your beliefs are based on the old model of top-down command and control, specialization, special privilege, and nothing but profit, your organization will, in time, turn toxic. It will become antithetical to the human spirit and destructive of the biosphere. The evidence is everywhere around us.

Your organization needs to be absolutely clear about purpose and principles and must be very careful to know what a purpose and a principle is—you know, a purpose is not an objective, it's not a mission statement—a purpose is an unambiguous expression of that which people jointly wish to become. And a principle is not a platitude—it is a fundamental belief about how you intend to conduct yourself in pursuit of that purpose. You have to get very precise about these things. If the purpose and principles are constructive and healthy, then your organization will take a very different form than anything that you ever imagined. It will release the human spirit and will be constructive of the biosphere. Natural capital and human capital will be released in abundance and monetary capital will become relatively unimportant. To put it another way, I believe that purpose and principle, clearly understood and articulated, and commonly shared, are the genetic code of any healthy organization. To the degree that you hold purpose and principles in common among you, you can dispense with command and control. People will know how to behave in accordance with them, and they'll do it in thousands of unimaginable, creative ways. The organization will become a vital, living set of beliefs.

I've found that it's very difficult to lead people through enough metaphors and enough thinking about this—you can only think about it so much and your circuit breakers just go out. You have to rest, reset them, and come back to it. And you go over and over it. But what I find is that once you get a group of people who really begin to understand this, then energy, excitement, and enthusiasm literally explode out of them—they know what to do. You know, it's just in their nature. You can't stop it.

So to go back to the question of change—you can see that because of these four hundred years of intense conditioning, we've been taught to fear change. If you're in a rigid, mechanistic, cause-and-effect society and/or organization, then any change becomes a crisis in self-esteem. It destroys our identity, our sense of being, our sense of time and place. And we're never sure we're going to be of any value in the new order of things. We falsely see this as terrifying. But my God, this might be the greatest, most exciting adventure for the species that ever occurred.

WIE: You're pointing to a strong relationship between an individual's willingness to change and the emergence of new organizational forms.

DH: Once you understand that you and your organization are inseparable (since every organization exists only in your mind), then the idea that it's about individual change or it's about organizational change, and that one can proceed independently of the other, is utter nonsense. It takes both. I was working with one group—and this always happens in one way or another when people truly begin to understand chaordic concepts—one woman stopped the meeting to say, "Wait a minute, wait a minute. I thought we were here to work on changing our organizational structure. This is about changing me. I'll have to change my consciousness, my spirit, my way of thinking, in order to function in this new organizational form." She said, "I'll probably have to withdraw. I don't think I'll be capable of making that kind of personal change."

Individual and organizational change go hand in hand. It takes openness and a strong will to make such a change. And this comes back to why I started doing this work and what it takes to create an organization that's more harmonious with nature, and based on, the same concepts around which nature organizes every living thing and, in fact, organizes the inanimate functioning of the universe as well. When you start thinking this way, the distinction between animate and inanimate begins to vanish, and you can't be sure that the universe is not a form of life, a different manifestation of a living

organism.

ETERNAL BECOMING

WIE: So for individuals to really go somewhere with this work requires that they embrace the evolutionary dynamics of the universe in a very personal way. This sounds like a thrilling prospect that, by its nature, provokes constant transformation.

DH: I wrote in my book about one of my deepest beliefs, which is that life is not about doing, it's not even about being. Life is eternal becoming, or it's nothing. It can't exist without eternal becoming. Fundamentally, the whole story of evolution is a story of experimentation and change, is it not? So if you think you can freeze that, if you think you can create a controlled environment, you are living a life of total illusion. And you are going to be full of angst and conflict, because you are essentially trying to live contrary not only to nature and evolution but to your own nature. So change is not a strange thing. It's the very essence of life.

But the bigger question people always ask is, "But, gee, so if I'm embedded in these huge command-control organizations—in the school it's the same, and my church is much the same, even the city operates this way—what can I do? Where do I begin?" And my answer is very obvious. I say, "Right now, right where you are, with what you've got—and don't hesitate for a moment." If you start pursuing these concepts, you're going to find dozens and dozens of people within your own organization and in other organizations who support these concepts. And if you don't get the support and understanding from your own organization, then cross the boundaries and link with people in other organizations who are moving this way.

WIE: You're describing quite a high level of individual commitment, the kind that has the power to create sweeping change.

DH: At one time I got interested in trying to understand how great leaders created enormous social change—take Christ, take Muhammad, Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Joan of Arc, Martin Luther King, Jr. When you look back at their history, almost without exception they were nobodies. Nobody! Gandhi was just a mediocre attorney who got thrown off a train into the dust by the British because he was Indian. Mother Teresa—just an ordinary nun. And so I studied—what made their ideas so compelling? Their ideas weren't that unique. In fact, they were often pretty traditional. Why, then, did their articulation of their beliefs have such profound effect? What I discovered was something that I think is almost universally true. They really examined what was happening around them, and examined all the existing institutions, and saw with clearer vision. They didn't delude themselves about it. Furthermore, they had the capacity to project themselves into the future and deal with the four aspects that I think are essential to understanding anything: how things were (history), how they are today, how they might become or where they're heading, and how they ought to be. They had the capacity to take that larger question of "how things ought to be" into the future and decide how they ought to be.

Now, the interesting thing is that almost without exception, they didn't start by preaching it. They started by living as though it were already true. They profoundly changed their way of living and said, "I don't have to live the way I am now." Mother Teresa said, "I can pick up a beggar in the street and tell him God loves him and help him die with respect and dignity. That I can do." Right? So once they began to live as though what ought to be was true, they had an authenticity that was just compelling. Complexity

theory would call it a strange attractor, a legitimacy, an authenticity. And then they talked about it. They never wavered, no matter what the obstacle, or what the condemnation. And many of them died because they couldn't live any other way. Some of them were killed. I don't think they were unique. I think that capacity is in every single living human being. We just have to get in touch with it. And begin.

WIE: Your work calls on people to stretch and grow tremendously, in part because you're evoking something at a collective level. By definition, what a group can accomplish is beyond what any one individual can imagine or encompass. This seems to be calling for a release of something in our nature over which we fundamentally have no control.

DH: What gets released, and what is arising, is what complexity theory would call an emergent phenomenon. Something starts to emerge in multiple thousands of places and nobody can figure out what caused it to happen. The kind of consciousness I've been describing is an emergent phenomenon. These kinds of organizations are going to happen. There is no alternative. The question becomes: Are they going to happen by the old Newtonian model of collapse, destruction, and reconstruction—tear the building down, build another one—or will they move in a totally different direction? For example, there are architects who say a building should be a living thing that evolves in total harmony with nature. And they're doing it. This way of thinking is emerging almost everywhere in surprising places. But it's not yet emerging as fast as the change in societal complexity and diversity that I described. It may catch up, but it's not there yet.

ON THE KNIFE'S EDGE

WIE: Where would you say we are on a global scale? Are we poised to move in a different direction?

DH: I think we're on the knife's edge where we're going to undergo cataclysmic institutional failure. We have it all over the world. Look at some of the countries that are in a state of perpetual starvation and revolution; there's just no present institutional structure capable of dealing with societal complexity and diversity with anything other than more centralization of power and increasing violence and force. So we'll have one of two possible scenarios. The first would be that we'll have a massive series of institutional failures, social anarchy, and enormous societal and biological carnage—far more than we now experience—and then maybe out of that will emerge these new concepts. But I think if we do experience massive institutional failure, the first thing that will emerge, before we see the new forms, is almost total centralization of power and control, which will result in a widespread loss of liberty and freedom. That will last for a while, but it ultimately will not work, much like the Soviet Union. And when that collapses, then we're in for a second period of social carnage that will be unbelievable.

WIE: So you're talking about a double cataclysm?

DH: Yes. And out of that, right from the ashes, may emerge the new forms of organization.

WIE: What's the second scenario?

DH: The second scenario is that enough momentum can be put behind more chaotic

ideas of organization, and there can be enough interconnection and enough actual examples of these organizations built so that as the old institutions are failing, the energy of the people goes into the emerging new forms. Existing organizations can even come to realize that transformation is essential for their health and continued existence. You would then see people's energies and resources move away from destructive behavior toward constructive behavior. If that happens, it's going to be the emergence and rebirth of a community in harmony with the human spirit and biosphere, such as we've always dreamed of.

Because of the collapse of change float, either one of these scenarios can happen in a fraction of the time we would ever expect. As I said before, we can change and allow the natural order of things to emerge—it's right there, right now, waiting to happen—

WIE: —if we choose to go along with the natural order of things.

DH: Yes, but we don't have to go along. I also believe in free will. Within us as a species for the first time is the capacity to say, "Yes, I want to go along. I want to affirm this, to consciously choose it." It's an affirmation of where we came from, what we are, and it is totally compatible with every living thing, with the living Earth, and with the universe. We have the possibility of a regeneration of these natural characteristics that will bring us totally in harmony with the human spirit and the biosphere. I see it as the greatest opportunity that I can imagine in history.

WIE: And it seems that through your work you're attempting to create the very conditions whereby this regeneration can occur now.

DH: You said the magic words. You cannot cause such things to happen. You can only create the conditions by which they can emerge and realize that they're already there. Everything I described already exists in the universe, in the Earth, in every individual, in every collective of individuals. It's just waiting to be evoked. So you create the conditions and you try to evoke it, and that's the most you can hope to do.

WIE: Perhaps that's what real transformation is.

DH: Yes. It's an evolutionary approach. And if our societal institutions and our consciousness are contrary to the fundamental organizing principles of evolution and nature, we're on a collision course. They represent the ultimate in arrogance and ego. What we need is a huge dose of humility. By the way, all those great leaders I mentioned were invariably quite humble people. But that humility did not prevent them from being very pragmatic and practical about getting things done. I'm fond of saying that we don't have any idea what the Earth could produce if we came into harmony with it.

WIE: Maybe by its very nature it's impossible to imagine.

DH: Well, is it so far-fetched to believe that somehow something wonderful and incredible beyond our present imagining could occur? I don't think so. I think that's what's been going on in evolution since the beginning of time. So let's give it a chance.