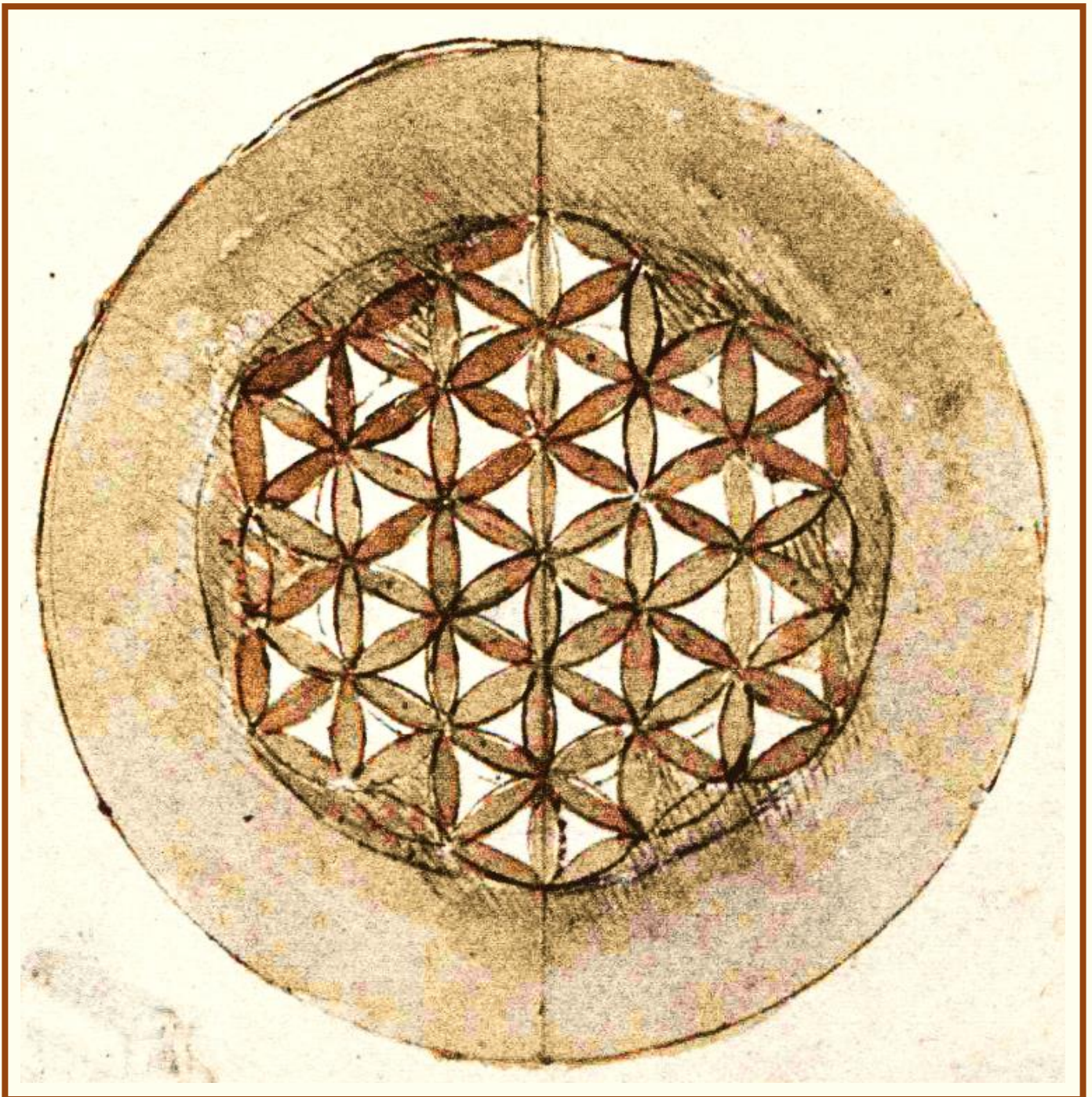




ASSOCIAZIONE  
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# THE WEB OF LIFE





## The Web of Life

edited by Dr.ssa Alessandra Bracci\*

«This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family.  
All things are bound together. All things connect.  
Whatever happens to the Earth happens to the children of the Earth.  
Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it.  
Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself»

A legend whose setting is the amphitheater of Gavarnie in the Pyrenees, where six knights of the Temple lie at rest in a chapel, tells that every year, on March 18th «a knight of the Temple whose shroud is replaced by the famous white cloak with the four-triangled red cross, is seen to appear. He is in battle apparel and holds his lance in rest. He walks slowly towards the centre of the chapel and utters a piercing call, which re-echoes around the amphitheater in the mountains: 'Who will defend the Holy Temple? Who will deliver the tomb of Christ?' At his call, the six entombed Templars come alive and stand up, to answer three times: 'No one! No one! No one! The Temple is destroyed» (Corbin, 2010, p. 143). The echo of those voices resounds in the folds of time and places to recall of a catastrophe at the centre of the universal history: the destruction of the Temple, the destruction of that form in whose sacredness the divine world is reflected. But in the flow of time, another triumphal image occurs, an image that opposes to this apparent inevitable defeat. It is the image of the rebuilding of the Temple, an image that gets the dimension of a cosmic restoration: the human being, having lost his soul, is called for a journey to recover the meaning of the crypt and take part in the construction of a New Temple. A "heroic" search of a centre that being no place in itself, cannot be located, a temple travelers far away in time and space, have dedicated their own existence to, everyone at his own pace, demonstrating there is no division in the spiral of life that in its kaleidoscopic variety of forms, extends from its darkest depths with no solution of continuity towards the sharpest peaks. The path is not for everyone, but it is a perilous path worth walking along to get to that truth, that love that permits the human being to express the deepest and most creative dimension of his own existence, a recall of his own experience of totality looking for that ancient harmony with Nature, the vital premise of his own survival.

We are dealing with a hard process of transformation concerning the whole humanity both individually and collectively: «The decisive question for Man is: Is he related to something infinite or not?» That is the question of his life. Only if we realize that what truly matters is the infinite, we can avoid fixing our interests upon futilities, and upon all kinds of goals which are not of real importance. [...] If we understand and feel that here in this life we already have a link with the infinite, desires and attitudes change. [...] The greatest limitation for Man is the "self"; it is manifested in the experience: "I am only that!" Only the consciousness of our narrow confinement in the self, forms the link to the limitlessness of the unconscious» (Jung, 2007, pp. 382-383). But can Man orientate towards such an original nucleus and approach it getting his own totality? Can Man move through this labyrinth, through the darkest mazes of his own subjectivity to accomplish his own metamorphosis? Which psychological characteristics are needed for such a transformation? From this perspective, Man's questions above the meaning of birth, the value of death, the meaning of life and its project, of pain and pleasure have become today the most asked among the collective questions.

In the eternal flow of existence, the time coagulates in a form, in a clot of senses according to the continuous process of life and death, in that continuous process of making and unmaking of the matter. If we could film our own existence and the collective one, reproduce the moviola and speed up the sequence endlessly, our ephemeral life and that of the humanity would disappear!

And it is in a blink of an eye that the human being is called to go beyond the fragmentation and the "false

divisions” being able to recognize that tapestry finally woven that is the world he belongs to and wake up the awareness of living in an interconnected universe. In fact, the modern science demonstrates there is not separation between man and environment, mind and nature because both are part of a series of relations built on a network model, where each knot is related to the other knots of the system. The recent discoveries in the field of biology, epigenetics, physics, psychosomatics and so on, highlight the need of a methodology and theoretical criteria of reference able to evolve to have access to a trans-disciplinary and network vision of the phenomenon called Life.

A vision of the world that trying to entangle the personal, the social, the collective and the spiritual level in a coherent model, would imply a necessary search for order reactivating the universal archetypes and their individual becoming not only expressed in the human affairs, but also in the biological and psychological history of Man’s body and mind analogically repeating the laws of the Macrocosm, where the term “cosmos” implies in its dynamics, two meanings that are strictly related: the order, that being present in the Universe is therefore also present in the Universe, and the harmony, that holds up its immutable laws that express in Man as a synthesis of the harmonized parts of a whole, as a biological, psychological and spiritual continuum that articulates in the infinite phylogenetic metamorphosis in a virtual project having its goal in his own individuate consciousness. The ecobiopsychology as a development of the sciences of complexity and in agreement with the modern evolutionary theories, proposes a model aiming to relate the semiotic codes of the forms of the human being and their specific languages (ecological aspect) with the analogous languages of the human body that sediment in themselves the phylogeny of the world (biological aspect) to then find this relation between the “world” and the human “bios”, in its psychological and cultural aspects thanks to the myths, the history of religion and the collective images of the humanity (psychological aspect).

In this sense that is possible to consider Man as a “Complete Creature” that in its deepest meaning, expresses that dimension rooted in its physicality becoming the living temple of its own progressive conscious emancipation towards the unity. A dimension that is not yet ordered according to that harmonic constant defined as universal law, but that in its proceeding towards integration, opens up the consciousness to unpredictable meanings transcending the ordinary.

To have access to what hidden in the intimate sanctuary of the personal soul, it is not possible to count on a simple descriptive “linear” logics, it is needed a “circular” reading able to integrate the rational knowledge with the irrational value of the empathy and a real awareness of the essential interaction and interdependence of the physical, biological, psychological, social, cultural and spiritual phenomena.

It is essential to deprive ourselves of that exterior sight, those needs we chain our existence to, and embrace the gradual deconstruction of any egoism, sacrifice the illusory hope of happiness projecting in the Other our own needs of completeness to open up to an inner sight able to overcome the barriers built by the egoic will and embrace the invisible and the inaudible. Only through the projections of the Ego, it is possible to start the path towards the complete consciousness and the real transformation that implies the pain and the suffering as privileged means of knowledge and awareness of a sense of belonging to a community of a more general order, that of Life: we are all part of the “earth family” and as such we should behave as the other members of the family – the plants, the micro-organisms – that form the vast network of relations known as the “web of life”. This living global network has disclosed, evolved and diversified in the last three billions of years without ever breaking. As members of the global community, it is also necessary that Man is able to develop his own projectuality as not to interfere with the nature of Life. But how to penetrate the mystery of nature? How to get the sense of deep entanglement with it? If we keep on living only with a limited state of consciousness of the Ego, our civilization may not survive long, some other form of life will emerge. The human being is part of the universe, but he is not but a traveler on this earth, a traveler who facing the passing of time is called to cross the threshold, and cross a symbolic bridge to have access to a new reading of the flow of life he is part of.

As Diego Frigoli would say «The true spirit of the integrated man has not got the aim to destroy the natural forces, but rather to dominate them, to adapt them, to put them at the service of his inner forces. In other words,



the human consciousness has to first dissolve from the inside those physical steps of the phylogeny, the individual mirror of those cosmic powers of life. Only on such premises the consciousness in the process of individuation can join with its inner movement that having lost its egoic character, becomes faster and faster to get to that greater movement that governs life itself. And it is then that in that vivifying contract the consciousness itself of man becomes the protagonist of that eternal dance that constantly transmute the becoming» (Frigoli, 1985).

Therefore the question is not that much to respond to the urgencies dictated by pollution, resource depletion, overpopulation, an economical system obsessed by ideas of growth and expansion, the political and religious decay and so on, but rather to look deep inside ourselves till we become aware of what is about to emerge: while we are still looking for the right instruments and processes to plug and stop a crisis sure of our supremacy over Nature exhilarated by our successes and unbelievable achievements, we have not yet come to control our inner nature, to understand that heap of emotions agitating in our “inner sea”, to accept the hardness of our limits and at the same time the grace and lightness we can experience in our dreams, to keep the fire of our deepest search burning as well as the precious gold hidden in our depths.

The echo of that faraway voice keeps on resounding: «Who will defend the Holy Temple?»: any change can originate anywhere, and start up in any human being ... in any one of us. No one has the right to stand by and watch waiting for the others doing what he is not willing to act.

To change or not to change: that is the question! We are witnesses of a race between tipping points and at the light of the theory of complexity, we are aware that these elements of instability can lead to damage but also innovations. As Albert Einstein would say, “We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them”, therefore the “overcoming” is characterized by the raising of the level of consciousness: the problem is not solved logically, is not removed, but it appears under a different “light”. While at an inferior level we are blocked in a situation of crisis defined as “pathological”, at a more elevated level potentially everyone can have access to, unfolds an amplification of the consciousness able to cope with the tension of the opposites, to recognize the legitimacy of both of them and to integrate new horizons. The focus is on the necessary “mentality attitude” for the understanding of the symbolic dimension that can permit the protagonists of the global world to approach the events getting not only the visible aspect that is immediately evident of reality, of people, of information and events, but also to penetrate deep inside the articulated connections.

From such premise, the project called “**The Web of Life**” is meant to meet Researchers from different disciplines, to welcome their “reading” not only of the time currently lived by the Man, but also of the “revolution of the consciences” necessary to be carried out. The drive for change becomes more and more intense and is necessary to reinforce it and in-form it contributing to link together the knowledge of the different disciplines on the same domains of the reality, permitting to the theories built on empirical facts by each science, to find an agreement for a sort of internal criteria of reality and a targeted perspective of integrated development. By thanking all the Researchers who have accepted to open a dialogue with our School, we hope to move forward together along the necessary process of the collective metamorphosis of the consciousness.

**Image.** Leonardo da Vinci, The Flower of Life in Codex Atlanticus, fol. 309v, detail, 1478 - 1519

**\*Dr.ssa Alessandra Bracci** - Manager at an automotive multinational company and winner of national and international prizes in the marketing field. Editor-in-chief of the ANEB magazine MATERIA PRIMA - Magazine of Ecobiopsychological Psychosomatics. Author of scientific publications.

**Interview to Riane Eisler**  
edited by Dr.ssa Alessandra Bracci\*



Riane Eisler, JD, PhD (hon), is a systems scientist, futurist, attorney, and macro-historian whose work has transformed the lives of women and men worldwide. She is president of the [Center for Partnership Systems \(CPS\)](#), Editor-in-Chief of the [Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies](#) at the University of Minnesota, and author of [Nurturing Our Humanity: How Domination and Partnership Shape Our Brains, Lives, and Future](#) (co-authored with anthropologist Douglas Fry; Oxford University Press, 2019), showing how the social and biological sciences, specially neuroscience, support the findings from her research. Her other books include [The Chalice and The Blade: Our History, Our Future](#) (now in 57 U.S printings), [Sacred Pleasure, Tomorrow's Children](#), [The Power of Partnership](#), and [The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economics](#), hailed by Nobel Peace Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu as «a template for the better world we have been so urgently seeking». Eisler authored over 500 articles for outlets from *The Christian Science Monitor*, *the International*

*Journal of Women's Studies*, and *Business Insider* to *Quartz*, *The Human Rights Quarterly*, and numerous presses. She keynotes conferences internationally and consults for governments on the partnership model; pioneered the expansion of human rights theory and action to include women and children; and received many awards for her work for human rights, peace, and the foundations for a better future.

**"Everything in my life had prepared me for this moment". Do you agree with that? What is the question your research is based on?**

Certainly my life experiences prepared me for my work and mission.

I was a child refugee with my parents from Nazi Austria. I saw insensitivity, cruelty, and violence on Crystal Night (so called because of all the glass shattered in Jewish homes, businesses, and synagogues), when a gang of Gestapo men broke into our home and dragged my father away. But that night I also witnessed what I today call spiritual courage: the courage to stand up against injustice out of love. My mother displayed this courage. She recognized one of the Nazis as a young Austrian who had been an errand boy for the family business and furiously asked him how he could do this to a man who had been so kind to him, demanding my father's release. Many Jewish people were killed that night. But by a miracle my mother was not, and by another miracle my father was returned to her (some money passed hands of course), and by still another miracle we were able to escape my native Vienna, at night with only what we could carry. My parents had been able to purchase an entry permit to Cuba, one of only two places in the world at that time admitting Jewish refugees from the Nazis. But until my parents got back on their feet again, we were very poor. So I grew up in the industrial slums of Habana, where I experienced and observed another injustice: the huge gaps between haves and have-nots in Cuba at that time.

These kinds of experiences led me to questions many of us have asked: When we humans have such a capacity for consciousness, caring, and creativity, why has there been so much insensitivity, cruelty, and destructiveness? Is this, as we are often told, inevitable, or are there alternatives? If so, what are these alternatives?

**How did you discover your vocation?**

I did not start my multidisciplinary, cross-cultural, historical study of human societies to try to answer these questions until many years later. That was after university (including the UCLA School of Law) and jobs such as

working for the Systems Development Corporation (an offshoot of the Rand Corporation, where I was introduced to systems analysis), after marriage and motherhood, after involvement first in the US civil rights movement and then in the women's movement, after writing two books based on my legal experiences, including *The Equal Rights Handbook*, the only mass paperback on the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the US Constitution, where I predicted that if the ERA failed it would usher in a massive political regression, which is exactly what happened.

When that simple amendment, which only said that neither the US federal government nor any US state could discriminate on the basis of sex, was defeated, I realized that, as important as changing laws is (I worked hard for that), a cultural transformation is needed. That took me back to the questions of my childhood and led to a fundamental question: a transformation from what to what?

I realized that there have been repressive, violent regimes in every one of our old social categories, whether secular rightist, such as Hitler's Germany or secular leftist like Stalin's USSR, or religious regimes (Eastern, Western, Northern, Southern, such as Khomeini's Iran or the Taliban, etc. So the question of what kind of social system supports our human capacities for consciousness, caring, and creativity rather than for insensitivity, cruelty, and destructiveness clearly could not be answered looking at social systems through these old lenses. By then I was also aware that not only our conventional social categories but also our conventional studies of society marginalize or ignore nothing less than the majority of humanity: women and children. So in my study of social systems I used a new method of analysis that includes the *whole* of humanity, both its female and male halves (and everyone in between), as well as the *whole* of our history (including the long period we call prehistory), and the *whole* of our lives (including our family and other intimate relations).

This new method, the *study of relational dynamics*, made it possible to see patterns: social configurations that keep repeating themselves across cultures and across time. There were no names for these social configurations, so I called one the *domination system* and the other the *partnership system*.

Unlike conventional categories, the new holistic categories of the partnership system and the domination system make it possible to see connections that are otherwise invisible. We can see the link between the status of women and children, on the one hand, and, on the other, whether a society is equitable or inequitable, peaceful or warlike, and whether or not we live in harmony with nature. Not only that, these new categories provide the frame for the evidence from archeology, linguistics, mythology, and DNA studies that for millennia in our prehistory human societies were more equitable, gender balanced, and peaceful (that is, they oriented more to the partnership side of the partnership-domination scale).

These data show that the old story we have been told that humans are inherently warlike, male-dominated, and inequitable is false: that war (and warlike male-dominated, exploitive domination systems) are only 5,000 to 10,000 years old. Knowing this is vital, especially at this critical time in human technological evolution when an ethos of domination – of man over man, man over woman, race over race, religion over religion, and humans over nature – is taking us to an evolutionary dead end.

### **What is at the heart of your mission?**

At the heart of my mission are three goals:

1. Demonstrating that we can move to a better future, knowing that for many thousands of years, as documented in *The Chalice and the Blade* and other works, human societies were more equitable, gender-balanced, peaceful, and lived in harmony with nature;
2. Helping us look at the *whole* of social systems through the *lens of the partnership-domination social scale* and leave behind conventional categories (and thinking) -- including terms like matriarchy and patriarchy, which semantically provide no partnership alternative;
3. Showing that, while we have moved somewhat toward partnership in the last several hundred years, to build solid foundations for a more peaceful, equitable, and sustainable future and avoid recurring regressions to

authoritarian, male-dominated, violent systems requires a shift from domination to partnership in four key social cornerstones: *childhood, gender, economics, and narratives and language*.

**Considering the Corona virus both an individual and a collective event, which synthesis is possible to express taking into account the following two communicative methods: the segnic (related to the way the virus moves in the organism) and the symbolic one (related to the alterations of the symbolic code, the expression of the individual and collective unconscious)?**

This pandemic is one more sign that domination systems are unsustainable in our time of nuclear and biological weapons, climate change, and increasing global viral outbreaks such as Covid 19. However, the dislocations caused by the Corona virus are not only a crisis but also an opportunity for fundamental changes in consciousness, and with this, in beliefs, policies, and socio-economic structures.

The *study of relational dynamics* uses a methodology based not only on systems analysis but on disciplines, such as self-organizing, chaos, and non linear dynamic theories, showing that complex living systems (which social systems are) can fundamentally change during periods of great systems disequilibrium. The cultural transformation theory (CTT) introduced by my work is grounded in evidence from archeology, mythology, linguistics, and DNA studies showing that during such a period of great dislocation in our prehistory the mainstream of social systems shifted from a partnership to a domination direction; that is, to systems characterized by generally inequitable relations, rigid male-dominance, and the use of fear and force to impose and maintain top-down rankings (man over man, man over woman, race over race, religion over religion, man over nature). CTT also shows that as the industrial revolution gained steam (another period of great disequilibrium), many progressive movements challenged entrenched traditions of domination: from the “divinely ordained rights” of kings to rule their subjects, of men to rule women and children, and of a “superior” race to rule “inferior” ones -- all the way to the once idealized conquest (dominion) of nature.

These movements brought some alternation of domination symbolic codes (e.g. changes in such normative ideals as fealty and obedience to equality and democracy). But these movements primarily focused on dismantling the top of the domination pyramid: politics and economics as conventionally defined. This largely left in place the foundations on which domination systems – whether secular or religious, Eastern or Western, Northern or Southern, capitalist or socialist – keep rebuilding themselves. My most recent book, *Nurturing Our Humanity* (Oxford University Press, 2019) -- which details findings from neuroscience that these foundations are childhood, gender, economics, and narratives stories -- provides a roadmap to a better future.

We hear a lot about returning to “normal” after the Covid pandemic – but in that “normal” millions of people worldwide had barely enough to eat, and even in the wealthy United States no less that one quarter of all children lived in poverty. Our job is to create a better partnership-oriented normal.

**The Corona virus is a pandemic going further into the health crisis although critical and extended it may be at a global level. It is a pandemic having its roots in a world where the actual and dominant “reductionism” typical of our economic, political and educative systems ignores limits of the real biological capacity of our planet exploiting in a capricious and prodigal way the vital resources, while using still insufficiently, the human capacities. What is your opinion about that?**

I do not believe the problem is reductionism per se, but the entrenched belief that we have to dominate nature. In domination systems, there are only two alternatives: you dominate or you are dominated. This belief is key to domination thinking, be it man over man, man over woman, race over race, religion over religion, or man over nature. There is in this domination thinking no partnership alternative, so trying to somehow live in harmony with nature requires a cultural shift. And that shift must pay attention to the majority of humanity: women and children.

Children first learn to fit into domination systems in domination-oriented families. We know today from neuroscience that children’s brains develop in interaction with their environments. So in domination environments, their brains become prone to accept, and even want, a world of top-down rankings. In these

punitive families, disobedience is not tolerated and children are told their caregivers have a moral right to cause them pain, emotional, physical, or both. This denial that the people on whom children depend for survival are responsible for causing them pain becomes a mental habit, facilitating climate change denial, election result denial, Covid 19 denial, and the blaming of “out-groups” that authority figures tell them are causing all their troubles. So it is not coincidental that for the most repressive, violent, regimes of modern times (Western secular ones like Nazi Germany and Stalin’s USSR, Eastern religious ones like Khomeini’s Iran, the Taliban, ISIS, or Western religious ones like the rightist/fundamentalist/populist alliance in the US), a top priority has been imposing or maintaining an authoritarian, highly punitive, rigidly male-dominated family.

In these authoritarian, rigidly male-dominated, highly punitive families children not only learn that the word of their authority figures is law but also to equate the difference in form between male and female with superiority/inferiority, dominating/being dominated, being served/serving. So very early on, before their brains, much less their critical faculties are formed, they internalize this way of regarding relations, which is then applied to any difference, whether racial, religious, etc.

We have to look at the whole social system to see that both capitalism and socialism are based on a gendered system of values in which anything stereotypically associated with women and the “feminine” -- like caring, caregiving and nonviolence -- is devalued. This is why leaving behind domination gender stereotypes and the ranking of “masculine” conquest and violence over the “soft” or feminine caregiving and nonviolence is key to moving to a new economics that works for people and the planet, as detailed in my book *The Real Wealth of Nations*.

**Einstein recalled how he imagined chasing after a beam of light and that the thought experiment had played a memorable role in his development of special relativity. What is the role of imagination in the creation of new scenario on future?**

Imagination is essential. Einstein also said that we cannot solve problems with the same thinking that created them. The new categories of the partnership system and the domination system are vital to create a new scenario of the future. Linguistic psychologists tell us that the categories provided by a culture’s language channel our thinking, so it is almost impossible to imagine different alternatives. We need new language to imagine and build a better future.

**Beyond any religious “divisions” and many “faiths”, what is the importance of the spiritual dimension and how is it possible to make it concrete in our everyday?**

Spirituality in partnership systems means putting love into action in our personal lives as well as in our socio-economic system. We must sort our spiritual teachings using the partnership/domination lens, working to leave behind the ones added to impose and maintain domination systems and strengthening the ones such as caring, nonviolence, and “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” that are partnership teachings.

**“Be the change” can be on one side an exciting concept rich of potential, but on the other an extremely touching one dealing with profound fears. If the transformation of the totality implies an inner change on a scale many have not yet experimented, are we really ready for such a change? Which are the capacities and the knowledge that at individual and collective level, are necessary to develop and strengthen to contribute to a more authentic comprehension of life and to discover who we really are and what we wish to become as a society?**

I think I have already responded this question above; it is hard to change for people who as children learned through their experiences and observations that it is very painful to question authority, no matter how unjust. Studies show that the parts of our brains that help us recognize and effectively deal with change are less developed in such people. This is why childhood is one of the four cornerstones for either domination of partnership oriented systems, including education for changing from violent and authoritarian to non-violent authoritative parenting, as described in *Nurturing Our Humanity* and other works.



**The change able to make the difference occurs in the depth of our hearts. According to you, how much is that true? How is this process possible?**

I think of this process as changing consciousness, of waking from what I call the “domination trance” and realizing that there is a much better partnership alternative. Today’s many movements – from Me-Too, Black Lives Matter, the Women’s Movement to the Environmental Movement, the movement to recognize and end the pandemic of violence and abuse of women and children, etc. - challenge traditions of domination. Awareness is the first step, action follows, not only on the personal level but also on the social and economic level. Socio-economic systems are human creations. We can shift to a partnership system.

**Finally, I am also asking you to describe “GAIA AS IS & TO BE” using words and images to symbolize it. In other words, according to your personal view, which images could describe our Planet in present and future time that you hope for it?**

In domination systems nature is “raw in tooth and claw” so it has to be dominated. Partnership systems recognize and celebrate in nature the cycles of life and death, of regeneration. We can, and must, think of our planet more as it was seen in prehistory. We see there images of our Mother Earth: of a Great Mother from whose womb all of life ensues, like the cycles of vegetation, to be once again reborn. I write of this in detail in my works, including *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth, and the Politics of the Body*. We need images honoring the life-giving- and-sustaining powers of our world inherent in our own bodies. Policies that reward the essential work of caring for people, starting at birth, and caring for nature will accompany this change in consciousness about our relations with one another and with nature.

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Eisler R., website: [www.rianeeisler.com](http://www.rianeeisler.com) and [www.centerforpartnership.org](http://www.centerforpartnership.org)

\*Dr.ssa Alessandra Bracci - Manager at an automotive multinational company and winner of national and international prizes in the marketing field. Editor-in-chief of the ANEB magazine MATERIA PRIMA - Magazine of Ecobiopsychological Psychosomatics. Author of scientific publications.