

# THE EMERGENT GLOBAL MYTHOS

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There is something of profound significance at work in the human domain, namely, the emergence of a new/old mythos that speaks to the natural impulse toward well-roundedness.

**Myth has the power to touch and exhilarate the deepest creative energies of the psyche, and to generate symbolic images that confer shape and significance upon what often seems the chaotic anarchy of contemporary life.**

–Evans Lansing Smith, Pacifica Graduate Institute

## The Missing Sync

*We lack a contemporary mythos, one that is desperately needed to guide humanity away from self-destruction and toward a sustainable and flourishing future.*

**N**ot long ago, no tribe, culture or civilization was without its guiding symbols, defining metaphors and mythic tales. Today, particularly in western cultures and dogmatized social systems – predominant dominion spiritual traditions notwithstanding – our guiding myths have evaporated or been drained of meaning.

Have they been paved over by progress? Been rendered irrelevant by cultural mass-diversification? Lost in the find-meaning shuffle? Fallen to the wayside, exhausted by the pace of change?

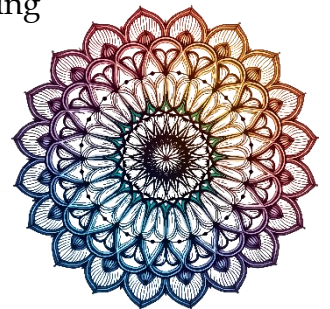
It hardly matters. Without myths to serve their ancient purpose of synchronizing our attitudes and actions with the world around us we are unable to collectively make sense, to understand what we truly need, to see what we need to become or are becoming. We are left groping, unable to reconcile or harmonize the inner and outer aspects of our life experience, or more precisely, connect to our experience of being alive.

*Myths, symbols and metaphors are not fixed stars. They are dynamic, alive. If they stop moving with the flow of time, they die. To stay relevant myths must acclimate. They must adapt to the cultures they serve.*

Mythic images, such as the circle and the sphere, are a human constant, inhabiting our consciousness, our dreams, perhaps even our DNA. They dwell in the space where reason and imagination, physical and metaphysical, self and other, unite.

Myths bind our personal and social identities. They guide us in how to live as who we are, and where we are, and with each other.

Through symbols, metaphors and stories, myth has the power to inform and transform, to generate a deeper understanding of cultures, to open portals or doors or some form of ingress to self-revelation.



The stories in myth speak to the energies of life that form the patterns of existence.



...myths are important communications from ourselves to ourselves. If we do not understand the language in which they are written, we miss a great deal of what we know and tell ourselves in those hours when we are not busy manipulating the outside world. -Erich Fromm

## The Problem Beneath the Problems

*...is the way we are looking at the problems*

There is a strong case to be made – supported by the events and conditions of the past few centuries – that we cannot live well or fully without a guiding mythos.

Because the primary purpose of myths is sensemaking, when our myths recede or disappear our worldviews lose coherence. Perception fails to harmonize with experience.

The worst of it is this: If our myths don't adapt and keep pace with changes in knowledge, technology and culture, we devolve. We grow shortsighted. We act sans context. We become less civilized and more destructive. We come to see the planet and each other not as a life continuum but as a collection of resources from which to extract what we think we need even as we misread what we need.

*As we see, so we be.*

Without guiding symbols, metaphors and stories we spend our time categorizing and deconstructing problems. We ask questions such as: What went wrong? Why didn't that work? How can we fix this? Who is responsible?

Often, we find ourselves desperately trying to uninstall systems we previously created with the assumption we were building a better world.

The great irony of our species is that we have done marvelous things to make the world profoundly better for ourselves while also making it profoundly worse. Are we doing the wrong things? The right things but in the wrong way? Without contextually relevant myths, sharable across isolating borders and insulating cultures, we cannot know because we cannot together see the context of our beliefs and actions.

We need a new way of looking at ourselves, at each other and at the world that attunes us to our time and place. We need a guiding mythos, a sharable worldview that embodies all worldviews. And, as it happens, it already exists.



Myths do not solve problems.  
They contextualize them.



**The only myth that is going to be worth thinking about in the immediate future is one that is talking about the planet, not the city, not these people, but the planet, and everything on it... This might be the symbol for the new mythology to come.** –Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*

## Being Spherical

*Looking at systems and experience from a spherical perspective syncs people, place and planet.*

**S**tanding on the surface of the moon, gazing up at the big blue marble floating in the boundless horizon of space, we see ourselves. We see the spheres of our lives on the sphere of the planet in the sphere of the universe.

We see an image of life systems (physical) and thought systems (metaphysical) existing as fully networked aspects of a total system, one that is conceptually and practicably inseparable.

Though most perhaps don't see it, we are looking at the symbol, the metaphor, and the mythology that is timelessly immune to cultural shifts and contorted modern worldviews.

Science has systematically demonstrated the truth that many spiritual traditions have long known: This world, this universe, is whole and indivisible. We are not living in it, or on it, we *are* it. In that sense, mythologically and metaphorically speaking, everything is an expression of the sphere of existence.

*When we see the sphere, we are seeing in an old/new way.*

Any system can be imagined as a sphere: Personal spheres, family spheres, community spheres, team spheres, tribal spheres, organizational spheres, eco spheres and so on. When people work, learn or play together, they form spheres of activity and endeavor.

The continuously shapeshifting sphere represents the needs, influences, energies, and dynamic relationships of our lives and all life. The sphere, as a metaphor, represents life as it is, whatever *it* is. It is a symbol of mythological dimension that embodies the knowns and unknowns of being.

The sphere is an emerging global mythos that has been obscured and suppressed by the mechanistic and consumptive practices of what might be called the dominion worldview. Ironically, the poly-crises of our time are causing the sphere to be newly recognized and newly experienced. The sphere is emergent everywhere we look.



The iconic 1966 satellite photo of earth from space – the first space selfie – quickly became a symbol of the environmental movement and a metaphor for oneness.



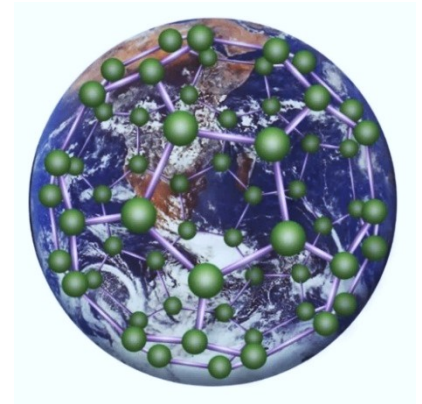
The new mythology is already implicit among us as knowledge a priori, native to the mind. Its images will be derived from contemporary life, thought, and experience, anywhere and everywhere, and the moral order to the support of which they are brought shall be of the unifying culture of mankind.

—Joseph Campbell

## Everything Connects

*When we look at systems from a spherical perspective  
we see the whole system as systems within systems.*

For millennia individuals, tribes, and societies have adopted the image of a circle to express awareness of interconnection, interdependence, and oneness. To indigenous people of the Americas, for example, the circle is a sacred symbol core to their rituals, beliefs, values, and identity. Tribes live in the hoop of the world, attuned to the cycle of the seasons. They council in circles, dance in circles, and once lived in circular encampments. The mythic symbol of the circle intertwines their lives like the woven strands in a dreamcatcher, expressing the intimate interrelational nature of all things.



Spheres are us.

*Spheres are 3D circles. Circles are 2D spheres.*

Geometrically, geologically, symbolically, and mythologically, we live on a sphere surrounded by spheres. The sphere appears as metaphorical expression in art, poetry, literature, even music. It appears in rituals and religious rites. Of course, it also appears in product branding and corporate logos.

Even where there is no imagery to visualize it, the sphere can be found in the work of systems theorists such as Humberto Maturana, Russell Ackoff, Gregory Bateson, Fritjof Capra, Donella Meadows, and Peter Senge. In his expansive trilogy *Sphären* (*Spheres*), contemporary German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk characterizes the whole of the human experience as the formation of bubbles (self-awareness), globes (societal expansion) and foam (complexity of multitudes).

R. Buckminster Fuller once said, “Everything is a system. There are no non-systems.” Paraphrasing Fuller: Everything is a sphere. There are no non-spheres.

The sphere, then, is not a worldview that needs creating. It already serves as an encompassing mythos that speaks to us of unity even within our divisions.





A myth is an image in terms of which we try to make sense of the world.

–Alan Watts

## Seeing Spheres Within Spheres

*Every sphere embodies other spheres while  
being part of larger spheres.*

Metaphorically and spatially, the spheres of systems have an inner space and an outer space. The obvious analogy is the complex amalgam of systems that is our planet – a holistic globe shaped by internal and external forces and encircled by layers of atmosphere.

Another example is our bodies. Our form is shaped and animated by interdependent systems for functions such as circulation, respiration, nerve impulses, musculoskeletal movement, immune response, and so on. The healthy sphere of an individual consists of the harmonic functioning of the individual system spheres.

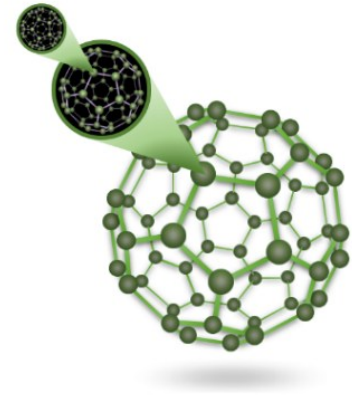
The emergent spherical mythos, therefore, defines space as well as the relationships of elements and energies that form the space.

Emotionally and psychologically our lives are composed of internal and external aspects as well. Our lives are shaped by spheres of awareness, influence and attraction. We gather, virtually or in person, within omnidirectional, multidimensional spheres of interaction. When we meet with others, spheres form around us like a gathering ether, both sensed and unseen.

*The emergent sphere of even a simple conversation assumes a naturally defined space composed of and shaped by spheres within it, not unlike the way small soap bubbles group together as foam.*

Individuals, with their spheres of experience, identity, knowledge and awareness, connect and communicate. As they do, they spontaneously create a sphere of interaction. The sphere that emerges is both internalized and externalized. It is a contextualized space in which things happen relationally.

Our urge to commune, to work together and be together, is a manifestation of our innate need to inhabit space together – to be physically and emotionally in spheres with others. When imagining the emergent spherical mythos, we see the spheres we are and spheres we share, and that is how we influence the shape of the spheres of our lives.



**You've got to translate these things into contemporary life and experience. Mythology is a validation of experience, giving it its spiritual or psychological dimension.** –Joseph Campbell

## Spherical Dynamics

*A well-rounded, well-functioning system exhibits strong spherical integrity.*

Systems, such as people, projects, organizations, families, or communities, are shaped by the connections and energetic interactions between elements. If we think of those elements that shape our lives as nodes and think of the connections between elements as conduits for the energy exchange of relationships, we can imagine the spheres of those systems in a constant state of reforming and reshaping.

*All parts of the system influence the shape of the whole sphere.*

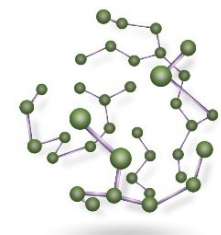
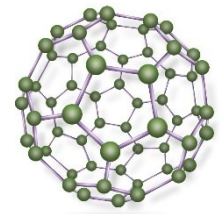
A dynamically robust sphere is one that maintains strong, energetic connections. Such a system is said to have good spherical integrity, that is, all its parts are integrally sound. Visually, the sphere appears in good shape with minimal dents and deformations.

Lack of vital connections, or lack of system-sustaining energies, cause a corresponding deformation in the sphere of the system. Like a geodesic dome, which derives its structural integrity from the tension and compression (tensegrity) between nodes and struts, when vital links are cut or missing, the structure loses spherical integrity, its shape distorts and deforms, making it less healthy and functional.

Catastrophic loss of spherical integrity appears as total or near-total collapse of the sphere of the system. Examples include the collapse of an ecosystem due to severe disruptions in the environment or societies that collapse from conflict or the depletion of vital resources.

Spherical integrity also applies in a moral and ethical sense. Negative behaviors and attitudes such as dishonesty, cruelty, greed and exploitation cause connections to weaken or break, resulting in deformation of the sphere and connected spheres.

Conversely, positive moral and ethical characteristics expand and round the sphere by bolstering connections and increasing the energy flow between nodes. A system with strong spherical integrity exhibits flexibility, adaptability, and resiliency. It rolls and bounds over obstacles, overcomes friction and resists internal and external pressures.



Missing nodes, broken connections, and weak energy flow cause deformations and potential system collapse.



**A myth is far truer than a history, for a history only gives a story of the shadows, whereas a myth gives a story of the substances that cast the shadows.**

– Annie Besant

## **Spherical Communication and Collaboration**

*Successful interaction among individuals and groups manifests as a well-rounded sphere.*

Because all parts of the sphere affect the whole sphere, the thoughts, interactions and psychophysical energies of one individual or one group to some degree shape all the spheres to which they are connected. We can see this in our own lives as the spheres of those we communicate and interact with influence the shape of our personal spheres and we theirs.

*We are shaped by those around us just as they are shaped by us.*

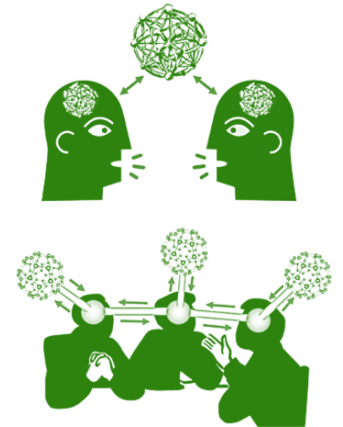
We see this clearly demonstrated by viewing a conversation from a spherical perspective. The moment a conversation begins, a sphere begins to form. The nodes are topics or points of discussion. The connections between nodes carry the energies of the interaction throughout the sphere of the conversation causing it to dynamically shapeshift.

In a conversation between two people who have never met, on a blind date for example, the initial connections are tenuous, the sphere of the conversation is unformed, nascent. As the conversation progresses and the individuals find nodes in common, the sphere increases in size. If a mutual interest develops the sphere becomes more fully formed. If there is strong interest and attraction, the sphere grows increasingly rounder due to the harmonic interactions withing the budding relationship.

From the outside we see a sphere with a changing irregular surface, as if a ball of clay is being molded by an invisible sculptor. Viewed internally, we see the sphere of the conversation rhythmically undulating and vibrating as new nodes and connections are formed and energies are exchanged.

Robust and meaning-filled conversations in an atmosphere of trust and openness create harmonic interactions that contribute to a visibly expanding and well-rounded sphere, while counterproductive dissonances, such as unfair judgements, harsh criticisms, deceit, distrust or disinterest, cause the sphere of the conversation to contract and deform and lose roundness.

In this way, the participants both shape the conversation and are shaped by it.





**...in a mythological organization of symbols, the conflicts between the different organic impulses within the body are resolved and harmonized. You might say mythology is a formula for the harmonization of the energies of life.**

– Joseph Campbell

## **Roundness as Goal, Process and Metric**

*The emergent global mythos teaches us to think in old/new ways about what we truly need.*

All systems theory is useless until it finds its way into everyday life and proves its value. The same is true for thinking spherically. Thinking about systems (life) from a spherical point of view is meaningless unless it fosters and facilitates the emergence or reemergence of new old/new ways of being and becoming.

Core stories and mythic images take many forms and have many inflections, but the conveyance of core meaning must resonate communally.

*Disconnected and discontinuous stories fragment rather than unite.*

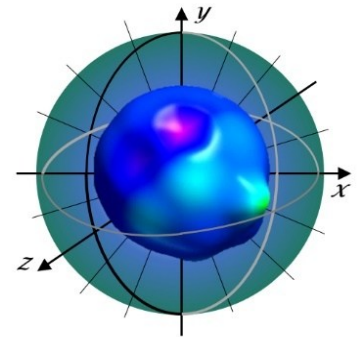
Logically then, the goals and expectations, methods and processes, evaluations and metrics must have a metaphorical and mythic theme in common. The theme, conceptually and visually, is roundness.

In the previous example of a conversation, it can be said that regardless of content or intention, the core meaning and purpose is to have the conversation be as well-rounded as possible. Well-roundedness in this case translates as: A conversation that satisfies the needs and expectations of all parties to the greatest degree possible. The goal is to have a maximally harmonic interaction between participants.

What constitutes roundness – how well the conversation is meeting needs and expectations – is determined not by external standards, authorities or facilitators, but by the participants themselves.

Because the participants bring their individual needs to the conversation, they also serve as arbiters of how well the conversation is shaping up.

Success or progress is not measured by specific outcomes, actions or deliverables but rather by the quality of the contributions from each participant – respect, trust, openness, listening, sharing, caring, ideating, etc. – that enhance the shape of the sphere of the conversation.



What shape are we in?  
What shape do we need  
to be? What do we need  
to do to get in shape?



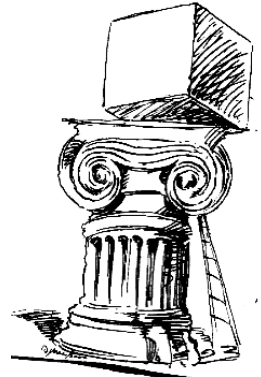
**Stay alert! ...to the ways the industrial era has shaped epistemological perceptions of everything from education to farming, to competition, psychology and evolution.** – Nora Bateson, author of *Small Arcs of Larger Circles*

## **The Sphere vs. The Box**

*The world is out of shape, distorted by modernity.*

The sphere as a mythic symbol and guiding metaphor cannot be understood without also considering another mythological symbol, the Box. The Box is metaphorical of a constricted and anachronistic worldview shaped by the forces of colonialism, industrialism, capitalism, and despotism.

The Box represents a worldview mentality of divide and conquer, extract and exploit, command and control, amass and wield. It stands for limited thinking and limited possibilities. The Box is an image of constraint. It holds and withholds. It divides, deforms, limits, isolates, and kills.



*The Box is mechanistic, reductionist, hierarchical.*

Mythologically speaking, The Box is a dark force that blots out the light emanating from the sphere thereby denaturing the systems it controls. The Box compresses the natural sphericity of people and planet into a mold designed for the benefit of those whose worldviews are of control and domination.

But The Box is not invincible. Try as it might, it cannot lock in the irrepressible sphere. It cannot forever divide and disconnect systems. It cannot ultimately shield the sphere from view.

Today, we are witnessing is the death of The Box. Its walls are decaying like termite-ridden lumber. It is collapsing under its own weight. It is trembling and disintegrating from its own disharmonics.

Inside the suffering mounts as the creators and rulers of The Box struggle in vain to reinforce the walls, redecorate the interior, keep a lid on things. From inside The Box the changes look and feel cataclysmic, but in fact are natural processes at work.

As The Box crumbles, the sphere reappears. It takes shape everywhere we look, and as it does, we see we've been in the sphere all along. Some of us, many of us, maybe most of us, lost sight of it for a while, but it has always been here, because the sphere, in this symbolic, metaphorical and mythological sense, is life.

