

The Principles of World Transformation, Part I: Fundamental Concepts and Theory

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Introduction: To Change the World

The dream of changing the World has long captivated and inspired humans and many attempts, both great and small, have been made to fulfill this dream. There have been some successes, but the efforts overall, often characterized as experiments, revolutions, discoveries, or inventions, unfortunately, have mostly been ill conceived, haphazardly executed, and rather superficial in nature. As a consequence, the outcomes have largely been mixed, sometimes even disastrous, and the benefits to humanity overall have been fairly limited. In the end, meaningful, fundamental-level World change has yet to actually occur and the World, in essence, form, and function, is still the same as it ever was. However, the interest in and desire for World change remains high and is perhaps even growing at this time as calls for change intensify. Despite the lack of past success, there is a widespread and persistent feeling that the World needs to be changed somehow, which suggests that there is some meaningful long-felt need motivating these efforts.

Humans seem to instinctively presume that such change is actually possible and that they have the ability to produce it, but the poor track record of past efforts naturally brings into question both the validity of these assumptions and the motivation behind the efforts. Whether it is actually possible for humans to change the World in any meaningful way is a matter of debate and opinion. Some schools of thought claim that

humans have the unique ability among all creatures to take action that is truly original and creative. With this capacity we can produce (i.e., invent) things that do not occur in Nature and over time this ability allows us to progress and develop by the power of our own imagination and change the World in the process. No other organism is known to do anything like this to the extent that humans do. In contrast, other schools of thought argue that creativity, agency, imagination, progress, development, and even the Universe itself, are all fantasies and illusions that do not really exist. In their view, change is just a dream that will never come true. While this is a perfectly legitimate position from a theoretical perspective, it is not very convincing from a practical standpoint. It contradicts the ordinary human experience, recorded history, and the archeological evidence all of which suggest that there is some kind of development taking place with humanity and that it is self-driven to some extent. Admittedly, the possibility of human-driven progress is something of an assumption, but it is a good one and it provides the foundation for this work.

Why humans have the persistent desire for World change is another important matter to consider. The well-known saying that "*necessity is the mother of invention*" provides some insight. It suggests that the drive to satisfy some unmet need motivates humans to invent things that do not naturally exist and change the World from its current state. It seems that we have a primal drive to improve our situation on many different levels, to make life more comfortable, safe, prosperous, just, fulfilling, interesting, etc., and we are willing to put forth substantial efforts to achieve this goal. In the pursuit of this improvement, we address both specific, pressing issues which we view as threats or problems and the broader, more subjective matter of general progress and

development. Problem solving is certainly a valuable skill that all organisms must acquire if they are going to survive because there is a never-ending supply of problems which must be resolved. Although problem solving is a mainly reactive process it does involve some amount of creativity and is undeniably critical to both our immediate survival and long-term progress. Unlike other creatures, however, we are a dynamic, progressive species, and we deliberately take premeditated actions that are intended to do more than just solve problems for the sake of survival, security, or comfort. These actions may not offer an obvious or immediate payoff, but they will hopefully provide some benefit in the future. Through repeated problem solving, invention, and innovation, humanity achieves progress and development over time. Survival, progress, and satisfying unmet needs are very understandable and credible motivations for our persistent and widespread desire to change the World.

At the World Transformation Institute (WTI), we recognize that the 21st century is a unique and critical period for humanity when substantial qualitative change in the World is not only necessary but is actually possible to achieve, perhaps for the first time in our history. Today, we are faced with both great opportunities and immense challenges on an unprecedented scale which have the potential to dramatically alter the human condition and our World. Recent improvements to our knowledge, understanding, and technical capabilities, such as artificial intelligence, space travel, and advanced automation, make profound progress to the human condition realistically achievable in the near future. At the same time, a multitude of global-scale challenges, such as climate change, terrorism, overpopulation, warfare, pandemics, resource depletion, and economic turmoil, threaten Civilization, the World, and even our very

survival. Admittedly, these challenges are widely recognized and great efforts have been made to resolve them, but there has been no real success in the matter and because of this these issues are often referred to as “wicked” problems. Likewise, significant attempts have been made to advance the human condition so that our various needs are more fully satisfied, but the majority of people on Earth have experienced little noticeable improvement in their circumstances.

This is a perplexing situation to most, but at WTI we realize these efforts have been ineffective because they are merely incremental, reactive measures which are based upon stale thinking and a worldview that is rapidly becoming obsolete. The situation itself, characterized by intractable problems and stagnant progress, is a telltale sign that the fundamental framework of the World is becoming obsolete and needs substantial revision. As a consequence, the conventional type of thought and action which may have worked well in the past will prove increasingly ineffective in the future because there is a substantial qualitative change currently underway in our basic circumstances which is altering the very fabric of our World. In reality, these seemingly intractable problems are predictable, characteristic artifacts of our current World paradigm and they cannot simply be eliminated through shallow, incremental, post hoc measures. In our view, we must learn how to address the threats and take advantage of the opportunities in a thoughtful, proactive manner or we will continue to suffer increasingly severe consequences of passivity and haphazard reactivity. What is needed at this point is truly meaningful qualitative change in our World on a very fundamental level not just another reactive rearrangement of superficial features, a change that we consider a *transformation*.

Our dilemma is that such profound change requires a detailed theoretical and practical understanding of the World, but to most of humanity it is a complete mystery, a so-called “black box.” We are thrown into the World and we eventually learn how to function in it, but there is little meaningful understanding of this thing. This is an astounding realization, but it actually is the case and such ignorance makes it essentially impossible to produce any true transformation in the World. Certainly, there have been a great deal of philosophizing and discussion about the World through the ages, but it has not resulted in anything concrete or coherent enough to be of use for the practical work of this project which focuses on progress and problem solving driven by invention, innovation, and technology. We are not concerned so much with how the World *should* be according to someone’s subjective philosophical interpretation, but how it actually *can* be in a practical, objective sense considering our current abilities and needs.

At WTI, we aim to change the World as many others have tried before, but our approach, circumstances, and objectives are substantially different from all others. Past efforts have been rather subjective in nature, typically being motivated by someone’s particular emotions, beliefs, or views, and were often carried out in a haphazard, reckless manner. They were merely superficial, incremental efforts performed within the context of the existing framework of the World which did not seek to alter and improve that framework in any fundamental, qualitative way, largely because there was no real understanding of the World to provide any guidance. In contrast, our work is conducted in an objective, systematic, logical manner, is concerned with both resolving recognized problems and promoting progress, and deliberately focuses on fundamental

level considerations to produce substantial qualitative change. We take a systems approach to first develop a clear objective understanding of the World on a basic conceptual level, then we focus on fundamental level design considerations and visionary innovation to achieve practical end goals. The project begins by establishing a sound, objective understanding of what the World actually is and does and how it is created. With this understanding as a guide we determine how meaningful human-induced World change can be achieved in a thoughtful, controlled manner. The circumstances in which our work takes place are also very different from those of the past. Today we are faced with a multitude of global-scale threats which many credible sources claim require swift resolution to avoid catastrophe, so we have serious and sincere motives. Also, our practical level of knowledge, understanding, and technical capabilities, which are the primary building blocks of invention, have reached an advanced state and offer the potential for substantial qualitative improvement to our World. This provides great advantages over past efforts which were limited by comparatively primitive capacities. Now, we must implement these advanced building blocks to achieve this potential for improvement in a planned manner or they will simply be absorbed into the current system in a haphazard, piecemeal process. The ultimate goal is to enable paradigm-changing transformation in our World which simultaneously resolves the greatest immediate problems we face today and helps spur the long-term progress and development of humanity. Our work aims to actually create entirely new models of the World which may serve as future World paradigms, develop a systematic process by which a paradigm shift can occur from one model of the World to another, and provide guidance in the shift process when the time is at hand.

In summary, we take the position that meaningful qualitative change in the World is possible and it can be produced by humans in a thoughtful, organized manner. Our overall objective is to provide humanity with the understanding and means to actually produce that change when the time is right. First, however, we must develop a clear understanding of the World itself.

Understanding the World

Initially, it is difficult to believe that we do not have even a basic understanding of something as all-pervading and vital as the World, but a brief reflection reveals that this really is the case. Few have any meaningful comprehension of the various elements that comprise our World, such as electronics, vehicles, modern medicine, science, agriculture, ethics, religion, etc., so it is unsurprising that the integrated combination of these elements is not understood in its entirety. In a long tradition of the blind leading the blind, others teach us how to use the various black boxes of the World and we somehow manage our way through life with only a partial knowledge of what we are actually doing. The linguist Ferdinand de Saussure suggested that this is exactly the situation with human language, one of our most critical inventions (1966: 72-75). He explains that our language is a complex system used by all people on a daily basis, but, somehow, those using it are generally ignorant of its origins, structure, and operation. That is, to most people language is a mysterious black box even though they are highly familiar with it and rely upon it for their very survival. Clearly, familiarity and proficiency do not necessarily result in understanding. Language, according to de Saussure, is a preexisting system that is received by us from our ancestors and is generally too

complex to be fully understood by anyone but experts. Even though language does evolve over time it is not something that can be changed easily, and when change does occur it results from a slow shift in the relationship between the signified and the signifier, the basic building blocks of language. He admits that there is some objective basis to language, but to a great extent it is entirely arbitrary, and perhaps this is what makes it so difficult to comprehend. Certainly, language has a basis in our primal need to communicate and our particular capacities to convey information to others, but in actual form and operation it is rather arbitrary and could be constructed in various ways.

It seems that the World shares many of these peculiar characteristics with our language. Humans are thrown into this sprawling, preexisting system and must learn how to operate within it effectively in order to survive. Even though we are perpetually immersed in the World its creation, structure, operation, and ultimate purpose are mysteries to us. As with language, it is not something that can readily be altered and to most it is simply a black box that is used but not really understood or questioned to any great degree. This predicament naturally makes it difficult, if not impossible, to accurately characterize problems with it and resolve them effectively. Probably the most common assessment of the problematic circumstances in the World today is that “the system is broken and needs to be fixed”, but it is unclear what “the system” actually is, what is broken, or exactly how it should be fixed. Of course, that is a consequence of reliance on a black box. When it does not function properly or perform as desired it is difficult to determine exactly what has gone wrong or how to rectify the situation.

If we are going to make any meaningful qualitative changes to the World, then some very fundamental questions must be answered first to provide us with a clear

understanding of it. Where exactly did this black box come from, what is it, and what does it do? Does it have some concrete basis or is it completely arbitrary and how does it operate? It turns out that the World is closely tied to and greatly influences the typical human experience and basic human condition. The 20th century political philosopher Hannah Arendt explains the relationship between the World, the human condition, and the human experience rather well in *The Human Condition* (1958). She describes the basic material conditions of human existence as life, worldliness, plurality, and Earth (1958: 7-11). That is, humans are living beings that coexist on Earth with others of their kind mainly in an environment that is of their own creation (i.e., the World). Biology and circumstance dictate that we exist on Earth along with other humans. We have no control over these matters and they are simply imposed upon us.

Arendt notes that we must toil ceaselessly in labor, like all living creatures, to satisfy the basic necessities of life in order to survive, but the condition of worldliness is actually our own doing (1958: 9). In reality, we create the World ourselves through the process of work. It is not an utter necessity that humans work to build the World, but it is done anyway to benefit ourselves in many different ways. The World transforms and overlays Nature (i.e., Earth) to provide us with a more comfortable, safe, and secure environment in which to live and a more stable, efficient means for securing the basic necessities of life and satisfying other needs that more subjective and non-materialistic. An important point Arendt makes is that the World we create also acts to condition or limit us and has a strong influence on our behavior. That is, once the World has been created in a particular form having a certain basis (i.e., a given World paradigm) it provides a conceptual and tangible framework which is always there to limit or condition

the human experience. Our thought and behavior are influenced by and understood within the context of the World paradigm in which we live. Thus, it has a great impact on the types of issues which we identify as problems, the manner in which we address these problems, and our general understanding of and approach to progress and development.

The World, in summary, can be understood as a dynamic, progressive phenomenon which is produced by human beings. It provides us with many benefits, but it also conditions the human experience. Like physical phenomena the World involves the dimensions of space, time, matter, and energy and occurs in Nature, but it also has meaning and purpose which are imbued to it by its creators. Humans produce this phenomenon by transforming a portion of Nature from its original state through the process of work to a state that is more well-suited to their needs. This greatly improves our understanding of the World, but a critical question remains unanswered: how exactly is it created?

Civilization: the Means for World Creation

It was mentioned earlier that humans invent things very deliberately and for good reason, namely, out of necessity. In other words, invention is motivated by the desire to satisfy some need that is considered important or necessary. These inventions can be classified broadly into two categories: conceptual constructs and technologies. In this work, conceptual constructs are viewed as independent abstract ideas, such as value, kindness, efficiency, life, etc., which do not directly perform any function themselves. They can be considered human creations, but it is also possible that they are universal

concepts that precede humanity. Technologies, on the other hand, are clearly human creations. They are systems, devices, processes, etc. that are intentionally conceived and produced to serve a particular purpose which provides some benefit. Conceptual constructs provide the basis or essence for a given technology, so there is an inherent connection between the two categories. For example, work is a means (i.e., a technology) by which humans add value (i.e., a conceptual construct) to the World (a phenomenon). In a very basic sense, we could view both conceptual constructs and technologies as tools which humans create and use to help them address their needs more effectively.

As it turns out, humans are rather needy creatures, but we fortunately have the unique and exceptional ability to imagine things that do not exist in Nature and bring them into being through our seemingly inexhaustible power of invention. For example, the ability to communicate with other humans is clearly useful in many ways, so we invented our peculiar human language. Protection from the elements is critical for survival and comfort, so we invented clothing and shelter. A stable, predictable food supply reduces the likelihood of starvation and malnutrition, so we invented agriculture. The list of human creations is long and it constantly grows as we imagine new and better ways to satisfy our multitude of needs.

The psychologist Abraham Maslow proposed a pyramidal hierarchy of human needs with the more basic material or physiological needs at the base, psychological needs in the middle, and the most advanced self-fulfillment needs at the top (Maslow, 1943). He suggested that humans are motivated to address the more basic material needs first, then they move on to higher level subjective concerns only after the basic

needs have been satisfied. Although this theory is not universally accepted and has not been scientifically validated, the general notion that humans have a variety of needs, both material and non-material (i.e., objective and subjective), and that the most pressing needs are typically of greatest concern is commonly considered realistic and convincing. Of course, the basic material needs are the only needs that can be objectively observed, measured, and quantified making it possible to determine whether they have been adequately satisfied or not. It is also a more obvious matter as to how they should be addressed since they can be directly observed. The other needs concerning psychology and self-fulfillment, however, are largely subjective and are not readily observable or measurable. Thus, it is not possible to quantify the level of these needs or determine whether they have been met or not. These subjective needs are certainly real and important, but there is not much beyond this that can be said about them from an objective standpoint.

The work of this project is primarily objective in nature, so it remains focused on the type of invention that is concerned with addressing material needs. This is a great concern of our current World paradigm, perhaps its dominant concern, so it is the appropriate place to direct our attention. To help us satisfy these needs we invent systems, devices, and processes that are deliberately designed and constructed to perform a certain beneficial function, such as harvest crops in the field, provide transportation from one location to another, prevent disease, and so on. The design and construction process itself requires specialized tools, both conceptual and tangible, which have been invented themselves. In this way, the inventive process iteratively builds upon itself becoming more sophisticated, complex, and powerful with time

providing humans with ever greater creative capacities. Over time there is some progress in our knowledge, understanding, and technical capabilities making it possible, in theory at least, for us to more easily address our needs and make some improvement to the human condition.

It is important to realize that these different inventions which are continuously being produced are not isolated, disconnected creations floating aimlessly about the World. They are conceived, constructed, implemented, and understood within the context of a preexisting framework which is both conceptual and tangible. This grand framework which helps provide a holistic orientation and coherence to our different inventions is called Civilization. It is an invention itself and is truly a system of systems. Human Civilization was likely simple at first, having only a small number of basic elements such as language, family, shelter, and clothing, but over time every new innovation altered and improved it to some extent. It has become a much more complex and diverse system over time to reach its current sophisticated form.

Civilization is a critical part of this project, but, as with the World, it is a mysterious black box to most. While the term is frequently used and the topic is often discussed, notions of Civilization are numerous, ambiguous, and often entirely unrelated. For example, the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines civilization simply as “*a relatively high level of cultural and technological development*” or “*the culture characteristic of a particular time or place.*” Such nebulous conceptions are of no practical use for our technical, design-oriented work, so we must first establish some concise, objective description of what Civilization is and does and how it is created as was previously done with the World.

The historian Will Durant provides one of the most comprehensive descriptions of Civilization available in *The Story of Civilization*, a multi-volume historical account detailing the development of human Civilization. He offers the following concise definition for Civilization: “*a social order promoting cultural creation.*” (1954, 1) This is a rather narrow and imprecise description, but it does convey the general idea. Durant goes on to say that Civilization is constituted by four elements: economic provision, political organization, moral traditions, and the pursuit of knowledge and the arts (1954, 1), and that in the end it is based upon the food supply which highlights the importance of economic provision in his view (1954, 7). With Civilization, says Durant, man finds time to invent productive tools and to work with regularity and order (1954, 2). The benefit of this invention is that such systematic behavior enhanced with specially designed tools allows humans to more efficiently satisfy their various needs which is the ultimate concern. Both Maslow and Durant suggest that the basic material needs which are satisfied via economic provision are the most vital, pressing needs to address. While this is a reasonable position, it is actually a subjective matter of interpretation as to which need is the most critical at a given time. In this work, we do not prioritize the various needs in a hierarchy, but simply realize that each is important and has a strong influence on the form of the technology (i.e., Civilization) which was created to help satisfy it.

Durant has answered many of our basic questions about Civilization. It is a human creation, an invention which comes from our imagination, and because it is a system and process that performs a function, it can correctly be identified as a technology. Its function is to help humans satisfy all of their different needs, including

basic material, psychological, and self-fulfillment needs. In a simple sense, Civilization is a tool that we invent to assist us with our work and in the process of using this tool we create a phenomenon known as the World. That is, Civilization is the means with which humans transform Nature to create the World. On its own, Civilization is merely an inanimate tool without meaning or purpose, but when taken up by humans it helps to create a phenomenon having meaning. It began as a simple technology, but over time numerous improvements have been made and it has become very sophisticated and powerful. Naturally, this invention conditions us since it is used directly to create our World and it has three important effects on our behavior. First, it makes humans more organized so their efforts are systematic, not just haphazard and inefficient fumbling. Once the operation has become systematized, its various elements and processes can be analyzed and adjusted for optimal performance. The second effect is to optimize human activities so time and resources are used efficiently. Often, the final stage in the development of a technology is automation. Once a technology is advanced enough to become automated very little, if any, human input is required for its operation. The third effect is to automate certain manual operations so humans can direct their efforts toward other matters that require their attention. This is actually the conventional developmental process of any technology, including Civilization, and the impact this process has on those that use it. In summary, Civilization is a technology which is used by humans to produce the World and it has three primary effects on our behavior: to organize, optimize, and automate certain human activities.

The effect of automation is now just starting to be fully realized due to recent advancements in our technical capacities, such as artificial intelligence, which make its

practical implementation possible. Automation is a critical development because it effectively eliminates certain activities and concerns from the human experience, thus it offers the potential for a substantial qualitative change in the World and the human condition. Of course, the activities in question must be routine, predictable matters to enable automation and this is the realm of material concerns associated with basic needs, what Durant calls economic provision. Materialistic matters can be objectively observed, measured, and quantified which makes them ideally suited for systematization, optimization, and eventual automation. This is the natural next stage in the development of our Civilization, to automate certain activities and relieve humans from these tasks. All of this may sound rather fantastical and futuristic, but the systematic automation of material-related activities has been underway for over a century and will likely accelerate in the near future. It is simply a conventional aspect of technological development in which old, obsolete elements become replaced by new, updated elements. In the early 20th century, for example, the majority of the workforce was engaged in agriculture, even in developed countries, but by the end of the century only a small fraction of the workforce in developed countries worked in that sector due to automation and other advancements. By the beginning of the 21st century only about one percent of the U.S. workforce was still involved with agriculture. The same effects of automation are now being felt in the service and manufacturing sectors and the results will likely be the same as with agriculture, i.e., fewer people are needed to do the work.

It seems that the next logical step in the development of human Civilization is the automation of economic provision, i.e., the automatic fulfillment of material needs. This

is technically possible and desirable to most, so it will likely become a reality. The consequence will be the elimination, or perhaps the obsolescence, of a fundamental and critical element of our Civilization, namely work that is materialistic in nature and concerned with economic provision. Certainly, there is more to Civilization than materialistic work and its product, material value, but they are undeniably a large part of it and of the human experience. When a critical feature of a technology becomes obsolete it is reasonable to say that the technology itself has become obsolete and needs to be replaced. Ironically, our Civilization is becoming obsolete not because it has failed but because it has succeeded. This situation is actually a cause for celebration not for fear, panic, or worry as many conventional critics suggest. Now, the great challenge before us is to invent a new model of Civilization that is more appropriate for our current needs and circumstances and with it create a new, qualitatively different World paradigm. These are the goals of the work at the World Transformation Institute.

Conclusion: Basic Principles of World Transformation

In this paper some of the fundamental principles of World Transformation are presented and explained. To begin, the possibility of and motivation for meaningful, qualitative change in the World are considered. This is followed by an analysis of the central concepts of the World and Civilization. The findings of this work provide much of the theoretical basis for the novel transdisciplinary field of World Transformation, a principal product of the original work performed at the World Transformation Institute.

Humans often seem to instinctively presume that substantial change in the World

is possible and put forth great efforts to achieve it, but whether it actually is possible is a matter of debate and opinion among differing schools of thought. We take the position that human-induced World change is possible and proceed from that assumption. The motivation behind the desire for such change is easy to understand. It seems that we have a primal drive to improve our situation on many different levels, to make life more comfortable, safe, prosperous, just, fulfilling, interesting, etc., and we are willing to put forth substantial efforts to achieve this goal. In the pursuit of this improvement, we address both specific, pressing issues which we view as threats or problems and the broader, more subjective matter of general progress and development. Survival, progress, and satisfying unmet needs are understandable and credible motivations for our persistent and widespread desire to change the World.

Many substantial efforts have been launched to alter the World, but meaningful, fundamental-level change has yet to actually occur and the World is still the same in essence, form, and function. Perhaps the greatest reason for the ineffectiveness of these efforts is that to most of humanity the World is a mysterious black box. It is not known in any meaningful detail what the World really is or does or how it is created and this makes it impossible to produce any coherent changes in it that are substantial and lasting. According to our analysis, the World can be accurately described as a dynamic, progressive phenomenon which is produced by human beings. It provides us with many benefits, but it also conditions the human experience. Like physical phenomena the World involves the dimensions of space, time, matter, and energy and occurs in Nature, but it also has meaning and purpose which are imbued to it by its creators. Humans produce this phenomenon by transforming a portion of Nature from its original

state through the process of work to a state that is more well-suited to their needs.

We transform Nature to produce the World with the help of our greatest invention, Civilization. It is a human creation which comes from our imagination, and because it is a system and process that performs a function it can be appropriately classified as a technology. Its function is to help humans satisfy all of their different needs, including basic material, psychological, and self-fulfillment needs. In a simple sense, Civilization is a tool that we invent to assist us with our work and in the process of using this tool we create the World. On its own, Civilization is merely an inanimate tool without meaning or purpose, but when taken up by humans it helps to create a phenomenon having meaning. It began as a simple technology, but over time numerous improvements have been made and it has become very sophisticated and powerful. In summary, Civilization is a technology which is used by humans to produce the World and it has three primary effects on our behavior: to organize, optimize, and automate certain human activities.

The next stage in the development of our Civilization, which is currently unfolding, is the automation of certain activities which will relieve humans from these tasks. In reality, the systematic automation of material-related activities has been underway for over a century and will likely accelerate in the near future. This is technically possible and desirable to most, so it will likely become a reality. The consequence will be the elimination, or perhaps the obsolescence, of a fundamental and critical element of our Civilization, namely work that is material-related and concerned with economic provision. Once a critical feature of a technology becomes obsolete it is reasonable to say that the technology itself has become obsolete and

needs to be replaced. This is merely the conventional process of technological development in which obsolete elements are replaced with new elements so the idea is not fantastical or utopian. Ironically, our Civilization is becoming obsolete not because it has failed but because it has succeeded. In our view, this situation is actually a cause for celebration not for fear, panic, or worry as many conventional critics suggest. Now, the great challenge before us is to invent a new model of Civilization that is more appropriate for our current needs and circumstances, create new, qualitatively different World models with it that may serve as future paradigms, and develop a coherent process by which a paradigm shift can occur from one World model to another. These are the goals of the work at the World Transformation Institute.

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