“Most public discussion in our society is dominated by the tyranny of narrow focus and minimum rethink. A rethink deficit is a poor rational strategy in a situation where so many cracks are appearing in the empire, where multiple ecological problems are compounding and converging. Strategies that limit us to casting about for simple substitutes are dangerous. We revamp those hazardous sources good sense has led us to resist so far — nuclear fuels for example. Rethink deficit strategies do not encourage us to question the big framework narratives that underpin our extravagant demands or the associated commodity cult of economic growth. Or to question our right, as masters of the universe, to lay waste to the earth to maintain this cult's extreme lifestyle.”


I have subtitled this book 'Re-thinking' the future because I feel that we, that is the human race, or rather, classical western culture, have basically got it wrong. We have derived a form of culture from ancient roots which has not only led us to a state of global conflagration and antagonism, but is simultaneously the major cause of the destruction of the ecosystem which supports us. Fundamentally this error lies in the development of a way of thinking which eliminates the spiritual dimension and so rigidifies our relations with the natural world that we have, as Ivan Illich poignantly stated in the title of his last book, 'lost our senses' [Las Perte des Sens, 2004]. Such a description illuminates the very crux of the matter in that the major flaw in the predominant form of western culture, namely scientific materialism, is that it fails to make the connection between the information supplied by the senses in connection with the natural world, and the internal logic of a way of thinking which uses purely abstract methods to verify its central claims.

In contrast to this, Holism is a way of thinking and perceiving which is ultimately dependent on the veracity of experience, which may then be elaborated or stored as an 'emotional' memory or a symbolic form of expression such as art, storytelling or activities which embody an intuitive connection with nature. In the context of the narrative of this book, this may seem to be a definition of the history of western culture as a reactionary form due to the fact of dwelling on the contrasting elements of the 2 ways of thinking. One could either approach this dilemma by suggesting that there is apparently a history of classical thought which did in fact diverge momentously from its predecessors, and thereby left us with a stark contrast with other cultures. Or, on the other hand, we could, in the spirit of holistic analysis, deny the existence of polarised forms, and suggest that the modern form of Holism is something entirely derived from the urgency of planetary disintegration and therefore it is a new way of imagining a possible future, inventing its own forms to satisfy current needs.
My own persuasion is that the latter is really the case, not because it cannot learn from the past, but because, in the nature of a form which emphasises the need to break the conditioning of the dominant culture that we have, it is vital to wipe the slate clean and re-imagine the way the world around us should be.

And I use the word 'should' deliberately to highlight the glaring absence in a system of thinking which insists that it bears no responsibility for the structures which govern and uphold the ideologies of this same conditioning. As such I could wax lyrical on the multiple dimensions of how the ostensible mythology which goes with modern culture weaves its tales of deception and denial through layers of subterfuge and fabrication, all the while purporting to be an objective and healthy expression of our habitation of this fragile earth. Such a decoding of the modern mechanistic ways of thinking such as 'Reductionism', 'Idealism', 'Humanism', or even so-called 'Deep Ecology' and 'Environmental Science', will be a by-product of my intention to elaborate a more digestible and sane approach to life and thought. But, in the spirit of a creative process which attempts to draw on whatever undercurrents, or even counter-currents, of the instinctive need to keep one’s head above the water, it is best to focus primarily on the vitality and holistic dimensions of an attitude which is fundamentally positive and forward thinking, rather than dwelling on what R. D. Laing described in 'The Politics of Experience' [1967], as 'being more concerned with what we are not!'

However, this does not mean that I will not be focussing on these forms to flesh out the inherent flaws in their own systems, but that this will occur in a style that attempts to diverge from a reactionary adoption of the methods which underpin that which I am criticising. The point, from my own experience, is that I have managed to extricate myself from the knots of co-dependence with a society of mass addictive consumption, emotional denial and gratuitous aggression, primarily through the liberating sensations of a passionate embrace of the forces of nature. In this mystical release from the imposed suffering of a deeply conditioning milieu, it becomes apparent that not only is a simple and harmonious existence possible, but that most of the globe is smothered in a layer of psychological garbage as well as industrial pollution.

My first real acquaintance with the fear associated with the demise of the ecosystem was seeing smiling suns painted on bridges with the message 'Nuclear no thanks' written underneath. Slightly later I was persuaded to abandon my proposed career path in the army by an equally simple poster which portrayed a soldier being struck by a bullet and in the throes of what I had enacted millions of times in mock battles throughout my childhood. The simple caption 'Why?' spoke to me on an existential level. These 2 themes united in my opposition not just to killing people in wars, but in what I perceived as the death of the planet from nuclear radiation, wherever that might come. The accident at Chernobyl in 1986 led me to a large conference in 1988 where we heard reports from the Ukrainian emergency services and were invited to consider the implications of such a disaster. Having become interested in the philosophy of science as a student I was drawn to the whole subject of planetary instability and the theories which had led us to embrace
such an apparently catastrophic interpretation of the human mission on the earth. In turn I decided that if nature, or mother earth, as it had become popular to call it, was indeed a source of wisdom, no less than the intelligence behind the coherence of the ecosystem, then it must be through an openness to this source of intelligence that the solution to the 'crisis of the environment' must come.

This quest led me more and more into the heart of nature and a lifestyle which was, at times, blissfully free of the trappings of modernity. Through an embrace of all things contemplative and natural I ended up trying to express my new-found relationship with mother earth through painting her, the landscape, and then, once I had discovered the joys of sailing, switched my subject matter to the sea and the vast open skies on the western seaboard of these islands. I will come back to the stuff of this period later, but to summarise my conclusions from 4 years of painting in the spirit of wondering how to solve this seemingly unstoppable force of destruction, I realised that I was looking in the wrong place. If nature could teach me anything, it was that the blockage of a harmonious relationship with nature derived fundamentally from my perception. It was me, and 'us' who was in crisis, not the natural world; which would probably restore its equilibrium even if we did our best to knock it off its axis and send it hurtling into space. From here I started trying to unravel the strands of my own thought processes and attempted to fully liberate my own being, physically as well as emotionally or mentally.

As it stands, having achieved the ripe old age of 50, I still feel that this course is the right one, although in the last few years I have immersed myself increasingly in the study of the world 'out there' and believe that what we see in the world is no more than a reflection of what we see, or don't want to see, in our innermost being. As such the path of attempting to solve the problems of the world solely through an analysis of the patterns and emotional upheavals of other people and situations, brings us to face what the Hindus call 'Samsara', or the world of illusion. This is because the attempt to externalise everything inevitably compounds the reluctance to face up to our own repressed emotions or habits, to the extent that we end up projecting onto others what we don't want to acknowledge in ourselves. This chimes well with an understanding of materialism as essentially a form of knowledge which denies its responsibility for the consequences of its inventions. Ideally then, if we manage to follow a path of devotion or charitable service which recognises the blocking effect of the ego or 'self', our actions and observations may reflect a balance between inner reflection and outward compassion. It is fundamentally this kind of balance, I feel, which characterises the form of knowledge which has come to be known as Holism; a form which popularly expresses the notion that things work better as whole integrated systems and that nature, or even the cosmos, is the ultimate unknowable whole which represents, not only a potential source of intelligence, but primarily, a sense of belonging and fulfilment on an individual basis.

On digesting the first draft of this introduction it dawned on me that I was undergoing an upheaval which reflected the very struggle for existence. But
then maybe it is not supposed to be a struggle? Anyway this dilemma gradually clarified into the sense that what I was proposing to write as a book which would at last compile my thoughts into a meaningful whole, actually represents my own attempt to synthesise a formula for living. In other words, if I tend to see life, and my own in particular, as a battle to assert my own faith over the conditions of life, then the compilation of my various strategies and thoughts on life in general actually emerge as a solution to the ultimate battle of light over darkness. A vision of how things could be if only the great hordes of humanity plunging into the abyss of despair would reach enlightenment and start to live out their faith!

Having realised that my task had suddenly expanded into an infinite empty space it became blindingly apparent that just laying out a theory of Holistic knowledge systems was in fact a naïve form of preaching to a majority with deaf ears. Rather, that sort of approach would inevitably founder as a well-meaning, but hopelessly incompatible form because it assumes a level of complicity, not only in terms of previous education, but in the willingness to unquestioningly consume my particular formulas for 'right livelihood'. Obviously I needed to re-think my own strategy first and carefully consider, not only how a grand metaphysical scheme will leave the majority still largely in the dark, but how any attempt to reconfigure uneducated minds is itself of dubious moral standing. This is because it assumes that what is good for me must necessarily be a one-size-fits-all for even a select few inquiring students. The answer, then, must be informed by a sense that, on an existential level one's fundamental project, as Sartre called it, primarily expresses the dynamics of one's own evolution; and that the belief that such a structure can be magnified to represent the entire history of human grappling with the forces of darkness, if not doomed to premature obscurity, is treading on eggshells. Therefore the belief that all creative endeavour is the fundamental human expression of the urge to empathy, albeit possibly fatal. Anyway that having been said, here goes!

So that leads me to the twofold, or perhaps multiple, strategy to devise both a style of writing and an intended purpose for the book as a whole, as expressed by its format and structure. Ultimately this is a nice curving path back to the beginning of my search for truth in a more abstract way, in that it is central to an explanation of how holism works to understand that if this is expressed in a book form, then its first task is to clarify what language can or cannot do. On that basis, as already briefly alluded to, I feel there is significant tension between the opposing camps in terms of linguistic construction and verification, and this will form a large chunk of my thesis. On the second count of how a book can somehow stand in face of the overwhelming weight of human and planetary diversity, vitality and confusion, my predominantly artistic tendency inclines me to a more 'descriptive', as somehow different to a 'narrative', form, not to mention my preference for a non-academic and decisively non-rational approach. So I feel that whatever my intentional structuring may assume, it nevertheless will be limited by the inexpressible underpinnings of my own fundamental path in life and therefore justifies itself primarily as an act of faith combined with a deep sensibility for the beautiful
over the tangible. The rest remains in a process of collaboration with the
reader and the unfoldment of the time it takes to write; activities which spur
me to what Karen Armstrong suggests is somehow a confluence of the
practical with divine inspiration.