



GREENER VISION

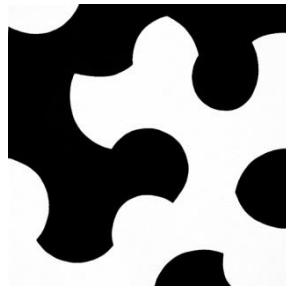
A Consultation

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Foreword

2022 was our hottest year on record, with an unprecedented number of heat-related deaths, wildfires and infrastructure disruptions. 2023 looks set to be still worse. But our response is not yet requisite to the scale of the challenge. Climate change is an existential threat which we have become strangely accustomed to living with.

Transport is the fastest growing source of global greenhouse gas emissions and the biggest polluting sector in the UK. The current approach has achieved little progress in 30 years. Increased road traffic has largely offset improvements in vehicle fuel efficiency and the switch to electric vehicles. The central proposition of Greener Vision's Pathways to Net Zero thought leadership programme is that we need a whole systems transition to net zero and a paradigm shift in terms of how we think about decarbonising transport¹.

Since early 1990s, through my art, I've been working on a creative project which started with the assumption that we won't solve our most intractable problems with the same thinking that created them in the first place². The Tabula Project aims to provide a new perspective on the mind. Anthropogenic climate change is not the only peril we face but it is arguably our greatest existential threat. If we are to make any real progress, we will need to change our whole approach.

I have been on two parallel journeys. It feels timely and potentially worthwhile to bring these separate journeys together through this current inquiry.

This paper outlines some of the insights from The Tabula Project relevant to tackling climate change and sets out themes and questions for further investigation. I would welcome any feedback at info@greener-vision.com.

The climate crisis is the defining challenge of our times. For real and lasting change to occur we need to begin with ourselves.



Claire Haigh
Founder & CEO, Greener Vision

4th July 2023

¹ <https://greener-vision.com/publication/pathways-to-net-zero-series-of-reports-and-roundtable-discussions/>

² <https://www.claire-haigh.com/>

The Climate Imperative

To keep global heating to 1.5°C, global GHG emissions must be reduced by 45% by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050.³ Only reductions on that scale and in that timeframe will give us a chance of avoiding catastrophic climate impacts.

The International Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) final 2023 synthesis report highlighted just how far off these targets the world is⁴. Steeper emissions cuts will be required across all sectors to avert a future dominated by catastrophic heatwaves, droughts, floods and tropical cyclones. The IPCC has called for the "mainstreaming of climate action across society."

Public concern about climate change is rising⁵ but the biggest barriers to progress are political not technological. The potential impacts on living standards means that implementation of climate policies can be difficult. However, incremental changes won't be sufficient to bring about the transformation required. If we are to achieve our targets, how we live our lives in 2050 will need to be radically different to today.

This consultation explores how findings from The Tabula Project [ANNEX I] might help inform our approach to tackling the climate crisis. The inquiry will investigate where decision making has become flawed and how our thinking needs to change. The aim is to encourage more open and self-reflective approach, which starts with an honest appraisal of how we look at the problem.

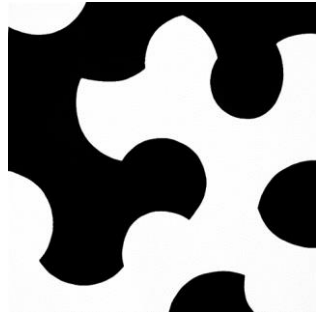
- How we think is inextricably linked to our sense of identity, which is a product of our history, of our individual and collective experience.
- Greater self-awareness is needed if we are to improve decision making.
- We need a radical realignment of how we perceive ourselves in relation to others and the environment on which we depend.
- We have developed an exploitative ethos as the basis for our actions.
- We need to prioritise cooperation over competition if we are to achieve a more stable social order.
- We need to take a systemic approach and to address underlying causes.
- We need to encourage people to do the right things for the right reasons. Political expediency is self-defeating.
- We need to move beyond polarisation and ideological evaluations.
- We need to think and act in a global context and for the long term.
- We need a new paradigm.

³ <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/net-zero-coalition>

⁴ <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/>

⁵ <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/8-10-britons-concerned-about-climate-change-half-think-net-zero-target-should-be-brought-forward>

Consultation



1. Setting the Challenge
2. The Need for Change
3. Steps to be Taken
4. Truth is the Foundation
5. A New Framework

1. Setting the Challenge

i. How we think is inextricably linked to our sense of identity, which is a product of our history, of our individual and collective experience.

To understand knowledge, we need to know the characteristics of the groups which create and use it. This is a central tenet of Thomas Kuhn's seminal work *The Structure of Science Revolutions*. One of the legacies of Kuhn's work is the concept of the "paradigm"⁶. All knowledge depends on preconceptions which may need to be examined or altered, or even rejected, if one wants to progress in any given field. Alfred Korzybski famously put forward the idea that "the map is not the territory". No map shows all its presumed territory, and crucially it leaves out the map maker⁷.

- **Do you agree or disagree with this statement?**
- **What would you regard to be the key elements underpinning current thinking and the current paradigm for climate policy?**
- **Can you provide any concrete examples?**

ii. A greater level of self-awareness is needed if we are to improve our decision making.

We need to examine ourselves, the filter through which we see the world. We may imagine that we are capable of seeing things as they really are, and that our own view is the "objective" one. However, we are laden with preconceptions and unexamined assumptions which colour and distort our view of everything. As anthropologist Gregory Bateson observed "very few people seem to realize the enormous theoretical power of the distinction between what I "see" and what is actually out there".⁸ Our ability to form an integrated position is further undermined by our coercion by consumer culture⁹.

- **Do you agree or disagree with this statement?**
- **Are you aware of any assumptions and preconceptions affecting your thinking?**
- **Can you provide any concrete examples?**

⁶ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Science Revolutions*, 1962

⁷ Alfred Korzybski, *Science & Sanity*, Fifth Edition, Institute of General Semantics, 1994

⁸ Gregory Bateson, *Sacred Unity: Further steps to an ecology of mind*, Harper Collins, 1991

⁹ Robert Williams, *Art Theory: an historical introduction*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2004

2. The Need for Change

iii. **We need a radical realignment of how we perceive ourselves in relation to others and the environment on which we depend.**

There are serious limitations to a view of the world in which individuals are separate from society and the world they inhabit. Relationships are prior to, and constitutive of, the individual self (Mead)¹⁰. No individual has a mind independent of the social process which produced it. The individual is "pressed into shape" by external forces (Foulkes)¹¹. The complexity sciences provide useful insights into global trends. The modern world is unsustainable and on the way to a bifurcation point (Lazlo).¹² The cumulative effect of how we live our lives today is putting a massive strain on our ecological system.

- **Do you agree or disagree with this statement?**
- **How do we start to see ourselves as a society rather than as a collection of individuals?**
- **What practical examples and/or actions would you suggest?**

iv. **We have developed an exploitative ethos as the basis for our actions.**

In *The Future We Choose*, Christiana Figueres and Tom Rivett-Carnac argue that change of the magnitude required will not be possible all the while we are informed by the same state of mind that has been predominant in the past. Over time we've developed a deeply exploitative ethos as the basis for our actions. We must now adapt to the scarcity of resources we have caused, and the rapidly diminishing space left in our global atmosphere for carbon emissions. To do this we must prioritise collaboration. "A shift in consciousness may sound grandiose to some, insufficient to others".¹³

- **Do you agree or disagree with this statement?**
- **How can we as a society develop a sustainable ethos that adequately responds to the climate imperative?**
- **What practical examples and/or actions would you suggest?**

¹⁰ G.H. Mead, *Mind, Self & Society*, University of Chicago Press, 1934

¹¹ S.H. Foulkes quoted by Farhad Dalal, *Taking the Group Seriously*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1988

¹² Ervin Laszlo, *The Chaos Point: The World at the Crossroads*, Piatkus Books Ltd London, 2006

¹³ Christiana Figueres and Tom Rivett-Carnac, *The Future We Choose*, published by Manilla Press, 2020

3. Steps to be Taken

v. We need to prioritise cooperation over competition if we are to achieve a more stable social order.

Stuart Kauffman, the pioneering complex systems researcher and thinker, suggests that self-organization is the root source of order. “Order is free, it just happens”. He points to the importance of cooperation over competition, creating a state of dynamic equilibrium. How do we avoid potential catastrophic consequences? He suggests all we can do is “be locally wise, even though our own best efforts will ultimately create the conditions that lead to our transformation to utterly unforeseen ways of being”.¹⁴

- **Do you agree or disagree with this statement?**
- **How can we prioritise cooperation over competition, individually and/or collectively?**
- **What practical examples and/or actions would you suggest?**

vi. We need to take a systemic approach and address the underlying causes of problems.

We pay too much attention to the symptoms of problems and not enough to the system. Treating the symptom makes the world a safe place for the pathology, such as ‘curing congestion’ by building more roads. Courses of action adopted for short term gain can by default be adopted for the long term often with disastrous consequences (Bateson)¹⁵. Ideas have a self-fulfilling power of their own and when they go unexamined can become hard-wired habits difficult to reverse.

- **Do you agree or disagree with this statement?**
- **How do we move away from short-term thinking and take a more systemic approach to addressing problems?**
- **What practical examples and/or actions would you suggest?**

¹⁴ Stuart Kauffman, *At Home in the Universe*, OUP, Oxford, 1995

¹⁵ Gregory Bateson, *Sacred Unity: Further steps to an ecology of mind*, Harper Collins, 1991

4. Truth is the Foundation

vii. We need to encourage people to do the right things for the right reasons. Political expediency is self-defeating.

The reasons for ecological policies are as important as the policies themselves and these need to be communicated clearly to people. Otherwise, politicians will struggle to gain the mandate they need to take future difficult decisions¹⁶. ‘Stealth strategies’ – trying to substitute low-carbon behaviours for high carbon ones without people noticing – are inherently self-limiting as by definition they do not make the case for change (Willis).¹⁷ Political expediency is self-defeating.

- **Do you agree or disagree with this statement?**
- **How can we encourage a more open and constructive dialogue and ensure that decision making is not driven by political expediency?**
- **What practical examples and/or actions would you suggest?**

viii. We need to move beyond polarisation and emotionally charged ideological evaluations.

Compassion and understanding are needed if we are to tackle our most serious social, environmental and systemic problems. Sociologist Norbat Elias suggests that we avoid emotionally charged ideological evaluations and polarizing notions of good evil and take a “detour via detachment”.¹⁸ We already know that much depends on achieving a better balance between self-restraint and self-fulfillment, but such a balance still eludes us. We know that we are able to live a more civilised existence, but not how to bring it about.

- **Do you agree or disagree with this statement?**
- **How do we move beyond polarization and ideological thinking – individually and/or collectively?**
- **What practical examples and/or actions would you suggest?**

¹⁶ Gregory Bateson, *Sacred Unity: Further steps to an ecology of mind*, Harper Collins, 1991

¹⁷ Rebecca Willis, *Too Hot to Handle? The Democratic Challenge of Climate Change*, Bristol University Press, 2020

¹⁸ Norbert Elias, *The Symbol Theory*, Sage, London, 1991

5. A New Framework

ix. We need to think and act in a global context for the long term.

We are wired to focus on that which will serve our immediate self-interests. But by focusing on narrow self-interest and the “common sense” dictates of our individual consciousness we make unwise decisions. The result is short term expediency and a lack of systemic wisdom. Our decision making is flawed when it ignores our interdependence with each other and the biosphere. The ‘unit of survival’ is the organism plus its environment (Bateson)¹⁹.

- Do you agree or disagree with this statement?
- How can we move beyond thinking based on narrow self-interest and start thinking and acting in a global long-term context?
- What practical examples would you suggest?

x. We need a new paradigm.

Our fixation with cost-benefit analysis based on strictly linear GDP growth undermines net zero objectives. Climate change has been described as the greatest market failure that the world has seen²⁰. Professor Jackson defines prosperity as our ability to flourish within the ecological limits of a finite planet.²¹ Ervin Laszlo points to the obsolescence of modern beliefs such as: the “law of the jungle”, the “invisible hand”, and “a rising tide lifts all boats”.²² Kate Raworth suggests we should be “agnostic about growth”. She makes the case for a social foundation of well-being that no-one should fall below, and an ecological ceiling of planetary pressure that we should not go beyond²³.

- Do you agree or disagree with this statement?
- What should be the key elements and building blocks for the new paradigm?
- What practical examples would you suggest?

¹⁹ Gregory Bateson, Steps to an Ecology of Mind, 1972, University of Chicago Press, 2000

²⁰ The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review, 2007

²¹ Tim Jackson, Prosperity without Growth: Foundations for the Economy of Tomorrow, Second Edition published by Routledge 2021

²² Ervin Laszlo, The Age of Bifurcation, Gordon & Breach, 1991

²³ Kate Raworth, Doughnut Economics Seven Way to think like a 21st Century Economist, published by Random House, 2017

ANNEX I: Further Reading

The overall objective of [The Tabula Project](#) is to provide a new perspective on the mind so we might improve how we think and evolve as a society. The paintings depict states of consciousness and thought, and the development of the project is informed by extensive research across a range of disciplines.



[The Tabula Project: A New Perspective on the Mind](#) describes the development of the paintings and how they relate to different states of consciousness and thought.

The level of threat we live with is greater than ever, but the mindset that got us into this predicament won't get us out of it.

If we want to change behaviours we need to change the premises which led to them.

We need a shift in consciousness away from one where we are narrowly focused on selfish desires, inward looking, to one where we operate from a higher level of consciousness, at one with our society, our environment and the world around us.

If we consider the many self-created challenges we face, it is reasonable to conclude that there is something fundamentally wrong with how we think.

Social injustices and inequalities, widening extremes of wealth and poverty, inhumane treatment of each other and of other species, wars and acts of terrorism, unsustainable plundering of the planet's resources, anthropogenic climate change, the list goes on.

These are all examples of suffering which seem destined to repeat in different guises indefinitely, but which are within our gift to change. And yet for each generation the same patterns repeat and the level of threat to our existence becomes ever greater.

The question is, where do we keep going wrong? Why do we keep making the same mistakes? What can we do to change things for the better? How do we avoid the threat of ultimate extinction?

We need to change how we think. Not just *what* we think, but *how* we think. This goes to the core of who we are, our identity and entire existence as individuals and as a society.



[The Tabula Project: Towards an Evolution of Thought](#) includes a summary of the main findings of research.

The material is grouped into three main sections:

Examining thought – outlines some of the assumptions governing our thinking and how we perceive ourselves in relation to others.

The need for change – highlights the fact that our understanding of ourselves is deeply problematic and we need to embrace a more holistic perspective where the individual and the social cannot be separated

Towards an evolution – points to the steps we need to take to begin to evolve our thinking and make better decisions grounded in our fundamental interdependence with each other and with the biosphere.

We must evolve to meet the challenges of the times we live in.

In the age of mass information, it is even more important to recognise that it is not *what* we know, but *how* we know what we know that matters. This involves examining assumptions governing our perception and our understanding of the world, how we perceive ourselves in relation to others, and how we relate to society and the world around us.

The massive acceleration in our technological and scientific capabilities has not been accompanied by any real grasp of the implications. We are ill equipped to make the ever more difficult decisions we are faced with. We are overloaded with information, and it is difficult even to know what we should focus on, what we should think. We need to acquire the maturity and wisdom to recognise what is important, and to cope with the responsibility that our knowledge gives us.

The situation could be set to get yet more perilous. A current hot topic of debate is the degree of existential risk posed by artificial intelligence. Rapid progress in AI is arousing the fear that we could be developing minds that might eventually outsmart and replace us.

At the heart of The Tabula Project is the sanctity of truth.

This imperative has come into even sharper focus in recent times with the rise in populism and the development of a phenomenon described as ‘post-truth’, where judgements are based on emotions and beliefs rather than facts. The ability to separate fact from fiction is an essential prerequisite for a healthy mind and a healthy society. When basic facts cannot be relied upon democracy is at risk.

We are witnessing an erosion of our capacity to think at a very time when new and potentially lethal threats are emerging that have the potential to wipe us out.

ANNEX II: About the Paintings

[The Tabula Project](#) aims to provide a new perspective on the mind. The paintings seek to depict different states of consciousness and thought. They are in three main sections and were produced in parallel over a period of more than two decades.

- **Examining Thought** seeks to explore current predominant thought forms.
- **Clearing the Mind** is about achieving a state of consciousness without thought.
- **Building a New Framework** is about discovering a new integrated framework for thought where the whole mind is in balance.

EXAMINING THOUGHT

Faulty perception is at the root of our suffering and much of the trouble in the world. If we can correct this perception the world will radically change. We need to examine ourselves, the filter through which we perceive the world. This leads to the recognition of our fundamental interdependence with each other and the biosphere.



[Metamorphosis](#) explores the fluidity of the self and the infinitely malleable and changeable nature of consciousness. The paintings represent stages of a [poem](#). They depict states of awareness, and a range of sensations of pain and pleasure which could be experienced by any sentient being. The fourth painting in the series, *Easing the burden of consciousness* (pictured) encapsulates the driving motivation behind The Tabula Project.

[1993, 15 paintings, oil on canvas, each painting 96x106 cm]



Evolve to Survive explores the self-limiting nature of much of our current thinking. The paintings represent stages of a [poem](#). The series describes how thinking that is focused primarily on self-interest can become self-defeating and destructive, as described in the second painting *Life shrinks further inside* (pictured). We are hard wired to focus on that which serves our immediate narrow self-interest, but this can lead to poor decision-making.

[1994, 4 paintings, oil on canvas, each painting 80x88 cm]



Forms of Thought attempts to represent generic thought forms. The paintings in this series are deliberately devoid of figurative content, the assumption being that the patterns depicted could apply to a wide range of subject matter. The paintings seek to explore in the most abstract sense how the mind processes and generates information.

[1994-2007, 9 paintings, oil on canvas, each painting 80x88 cm]

CLEARING THE MIND

Our minds are often cluttered with repetitive thoughts that make it very difficult for us to be fully present. Managing the mind is a key skill, and this includes the discipline at times to be able to switch thought off. We need to discover the ability to live fully in the here and now. This is the pathway to true understanding.



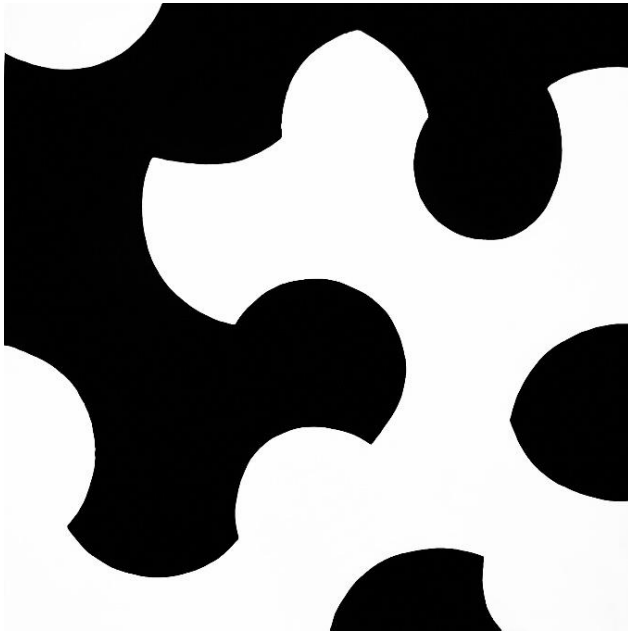
States of Mind depict different states of consciousness. Each ink wash was produced very quickly, the result of a spontaneous outpouring of visual thoughts and feelings. It was an enormously cathartic process. The effect was one of at least briefly decluttering the mind, accessing stillness, before more thoughts and feelings emerge.

[1993, 15 studies, ink on paper, each painting 34x44 cm]



In Search of the Perfect Line illustrates the challenge of quietening the mind. The paintings seek to define the mind at rest, the landscape upon which new thought will eventually emerge. The perfect line represents a clear mind. But in searching for the perfect line, new lines continue to appear seeming to replace the previous ones - like repetitive thoughts which echo unprompted and repeatedly through the mind.

[1994, 6 paintings, oil on canvas, each painting 80x88 cm]



Tabula Rasa depicts the mind at rest, free of thought and full of infinite potential. The perfect line emerges as the interface between black and white. Clearing the mind of thought, creating a blank canvas on which we can create a new framework. This creating the conditions for mindfulness, pure potentiality and the freedom to redefine ourselves.

[1995-2015, 16 paintings, acrylic, each painting 92x92 cm]

BUILDING A NEW FRAMEWORK

The goal is a new integrated framework for thought, where the whole mind is in balance, with thoughts, feelings and intuitions working together in harmony. The mind becomes a tool at our disposal. Free from incessant thoughts we can become open to new insights, and eventually able to reach a place of enlightenment.



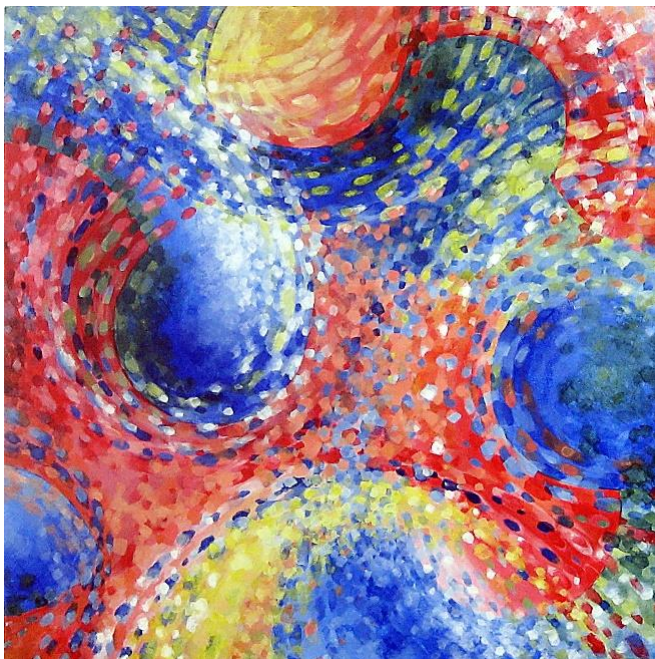
Building a New Framework develops further the generic patterns of thought depicted in the Forms of Thought series. The nine-part series presents an evolution to an increasingly integrated thought system. The journey begins with a representation of basic cognitive awareness and gradually builds in layer by layer more developed thoughts, feelings, and intuitions. The final painting in this series (pictured) seeks to bring all these aspects together into an integrated whole.

[1994-2010, 9 paintings, oil on canvas, each painting 80x88cm]



Finding New Frontiers illustrates some insights from the fields of quantum mechanics, string theory and the complexity sciences, including *The Particle and the Wave* (pictured). Patterns can be a way of expressing the inexpressible where verbal communication is inadequate. There are fundamental principles about how things work, and these principles can be captured in patterns.

[2006-2007, 6 paintings, acrylic on board, each painting 92x92 cm]



A New Framework. Here the boundaries between thoughts, feelings and intuitions begin to dissolve. The paintings point to the beginnings of a new framework for awareness. We may recognise that the self is an object in our awareness, a filter through which we see the world. We may come to see our knowledge as a tool or a construction, and our “selves” as constructions too. This brings the possibility of real change: the liberation from the self. With this comes the realisation that any division between ourselves and the world is an illusion.

[2011-14, 3 paintings, oil/acrylic on board, each painting 92x92cm]