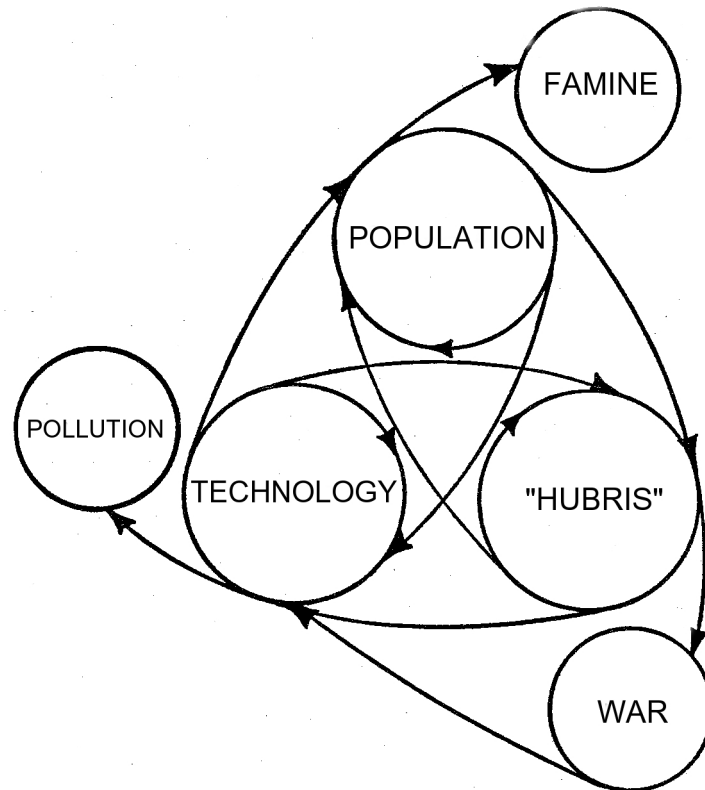Appendix III. The Wheels of Destruction

This diagram and the quotations below are from Gregory Bateson's STEPS TO AN ECOLOGY OF MIND, "The Roots of Ecological Crisis" pages 488 to 493. First published in 1972, and recently reprinted by University of Chicago Press, this collection of over thirty articles represents a 'first big synthesis' of Bateson's thinking about biology, anthropology, art, pathologies of relationship, evolution, epistemology and ecology. Thirty articles over thirty years old, but still news you can use.

The two other volumes of Bateson synthesis you can use are *Mind & Nature: A Necessary Unity* (1979) and *A Sacred Unity: Further Steps to an Ecology of Mind.*(1991).

"All of the many current threats to man's survival are traceable to three root causes:
(a) technological progress
(b) population increase
(c) certain errors in the thinking and attitudes of Occidental culture. Our "values" are wrong."
"We believe that all three of these fundamental factors are necessary conditions for the destruction of our world. In other words, we *optimistically* believe that the correction of any *one* of them would save us."
"These fundamental factors certainly interact. The increase of population spurs technological progress and creates that anxiety which sets us against our environment as an enemy; while technology both facilitates increase of population and reinforces our arrogance, or "hubris," vis-a-vis the natural environment."

"In this diagram each corner is clockwise, denoting that each is by itself a self promoting (or, as the scientists say, "autocatalytic") phenomenon: the bigger the population, the faster it grows; the more technology we have, the faster the rate of new invention; and the more we believe in our "power" over an enemy environment, the more "power" we seem to have and the more spiteful the environment seems to be."

"The ideas which dominate our civilization at the present date in their most virulent form from the Industrial Revolution. They may be summarized as:

It's us *against* the environment.

It's us *against* other men.

It's the individual (or the individual company, or the individual nation) that matters.

We *can* have unilateral control over the environment and must strive for that control.

We live within an infinitely expanding "frontier."

Economic determinism is common sense.

Technology will do it for us."

"We submit that these ideas are simply proved *false* by the great but ultimately destructive achievement of our technology in the last 150 years. Likewise they appear to be false under modern ecological theory."

"The creature that wins against its environment destroys itself."

Bateson's "Dynamics of Ecological Crisis" wheels have been spinning for some centuries. They continued to spin at an "autocatalytic" pace for the three decades after they were mapped by Bateson in March of 1970. Bateson was too optimistic. He thought stopping any one of the three main wheels would save us. It's the 21st Century and we have to stop all three of the big wheels. Now. Before those little wheels of famine, pollution and war grind us into very fine dust.

Call it conserving consensus, call it vision or prophecy, call it an alternative worldview or worldhear or worldsensing, call it the return of Participatory Consciousness to humans in all of their cultural diversity, call it a Batesonian ecology-of-mind politics – but all six wheels of Mother Earth destruction, Gaiacide, can and must be stopped.

The "population" wheel is slowing. Not so long ago I read an article in the New York Times about women all over the world having fewer children than expected. People on all continents are waking up to the fact that we don't all have to be here at the same time. People everywhere are sensing that Gaia is currently overburdened by us. Think what would happen if we had a fully financed campaign for world literacy and free prophylaxis. This "population" wheel will stop and reverse soon.

The "hubris" is in our faces as never before. Pride, arrogance, power, violence, discredit leaders everywhere. When "terrorism" and "war on terrorism" blend into each other as a no-win, lose/lose, spiral of violence people are tempted to "blame both sides" so it is crucial to assert over and over again that crimes against humanity, i.e whether administrative massacres carried out by states against minorities or terrorists attacking civilian populations, require international courts, bold police actions, swift interventions,

warrants, arrests, trials, punishments. Crimes have perpetrators and victims. We can sort out right from wrong. And there can be no lasting peace without justice being served.

In response to "hubris", more and more people are seeking spiritual growth and cutting back on consumption. More of us seek what we can barely make out to be humility, take the 12 steps out of our addictions, tech fixes and feeding frenzies. Buddhism of all kinds is growing; heart softening continues; compassion increases & joy grows steadily for those who find their way to the dharma in the Thich Nhat Hanh and Pema Chodron books, going on to build local sangas and practices. There is the Earth Charter movement. Find the Earth Charter. Endorse it. Work for it. Spread it. Helen Caldicott at Nuclear Policy Research Institute is creating consensus to stop the spread of nuclear power and weaponry. Broad religious and political movements worldwide are converging on species diversity, cultural diversity, indigenous traditions, ecological balance, sustainable economics, as reachable goals. This "hubris" wheel is slowing and will stop eventually. Can it be reversed in time to stop our current "technology"?

This "technology" wheel grinds on. Money, the triumphant "numisphere" (Hakim Bey), pours legitimacy into weird pseudo-science & deadly tech as never before. People who should know better still believe in better living through chemistry. Poisonous nuke power, even though no entrepreneur will build a plant and no insurance company can insure it, has been legislated for expansion by the corporate pawns who pass for politicians. Bioengineering runs amok and may do us all in just as the "population" and "hubris" problems are being solved. This death-tech wheel still has growing momentum and causes much confusion in our minds. Many people are numbed and resigned to the rising pollution levels in their own bodies. Many people think most of TV is bad "but some of it is really quite good." Our leaders think war helps push along our economy, technology and politics, while many people shut up and go along, still hoping for more oil and cheap gas for the SUVs and 4x4s. Lots of addictions, denial and craziness thriving here. Alternative technologies do exist, sustainable and appropriate technologies are springing up all over the world; we could share best practices and reclaim our place in the balance of Nature, adapt to the "Laws of Nature, and of Nature's God" that the founding fathers of the USA believed in. Still, I can't say that this evil "technology" wheel is slowing or will stop soon, and this is certainly where any single terrorist or war-on-terrorist can find a growing arsenal of easy to use weapons.

This book-in-progress is a continuing effort to increase Participatory Consciousness and give more children more choices about the many ways they can express themselves, connect to each other and to Nature. Any child who becomes thoroughly alienated (from body, Nature, labor, society, etc.) may become, in this day and age, a potential suicide and/or a mass murderer. Participation, feeling part of, belonging, keeping together in time, the individual skills of collective arts integration, dance-drama, sanga, ngoma - we've given 60 chapters to seeking cures. Appendix G., saving the worst news for last, and trying to save the world-not just the appearances - gives us Bateson's simple diagram of the industrial civilization disease, and enough of a diagnosis to start treating it.