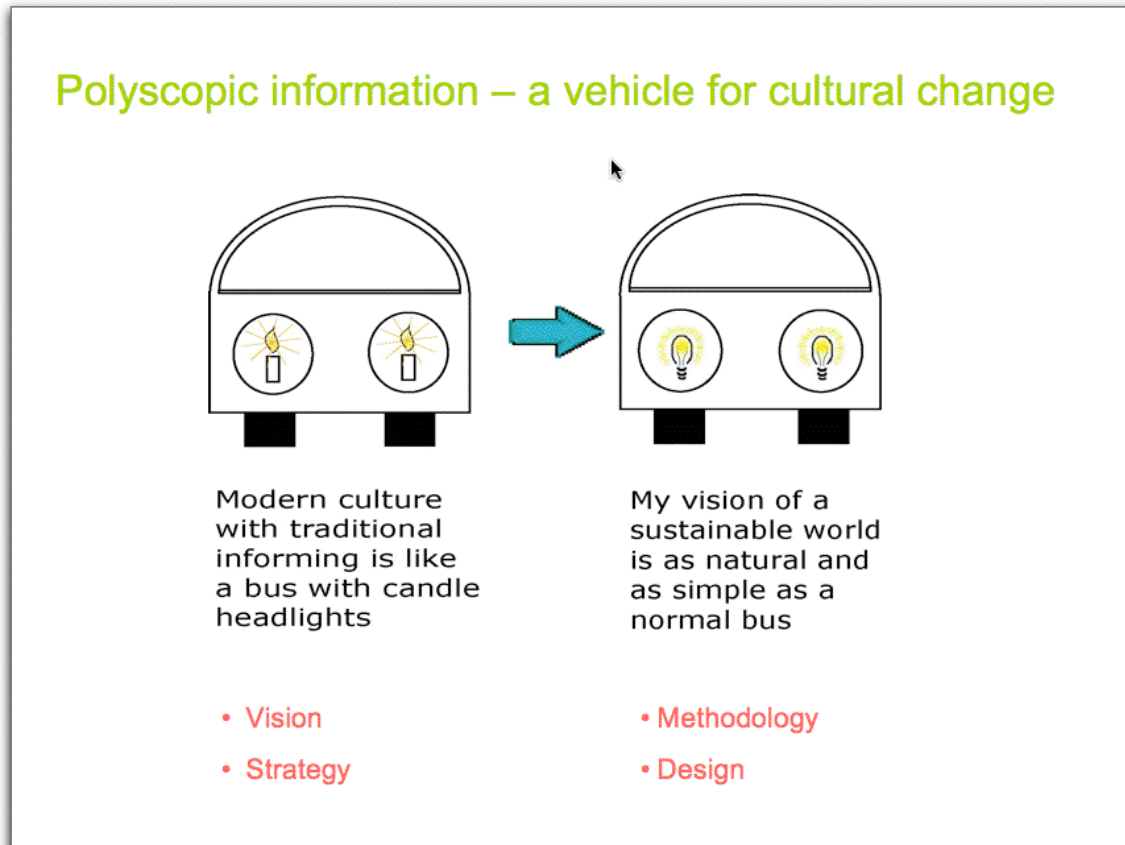The following is a transcript of the lecture I presented on the VISIONS OF POSSIBLE WORLDS conference, organized by the Faculty of Design of the Politecnico di Milano and the Triennale di Milano, November 28-29, 2003. We were asked to present a vision of a sustainable world which is *possible* i.e. realizable.

This is the last lecture today. And this is my only slide.

All I want to tell you in these fifteen minutes is in this picture.

I have been feeling so glad being here these two days and listening to your lectures. The vision I intended to share with you was the one of a change of focus and of values – from the technology to the human, from the "heavy" to the "light", from the economy to the well-being – from which a change of design, and then of everything else, naturally follows. But being here these two days I have been feeling that my vision had already become reality! One after another you have been depicting various facets of my vision more eloquently and more artistically than I will be able to do (my background is not in art and design but in science and engineering). However, I know, and we all know, that our vision is not yet shared by the larger community. This here is an elect group. Outside of these walls the world has not yet changed. The people out there are by and large still busy serving technology, economy and other "heavy" and "old" pursuits. So the question

remains, how can we make our vision possible or real? How can we spread our message beyond these walls? As Chris Ryan said at the end of the session yesterday, we all agree very well about what needs to happen, the question remains *how* to make it happen? It is this "how" that my lecture will be focused on. I want to propose to you a concrete strategy, how I believe this may be done. But let me first say a few words about my vision.

Vision. I do not really like the word "sustainability" because it keeps us focused on the negative side of the spectrum of possibilities, on the interval between a disaster on one side and maintaining the status quo on the other. Sustainability makes us ignore the more interesting positive possibilities. I believe that the change which is now possible to us is far more positive than just making our condition sustainable. I see the possibility for a change which is similar to the Industrial Revolution, and even larger in its positive effects on our well-being. But this next wave of revolutionary change will result from our deepening insights into the human and the cultural, rather than the bio-physical world.

My view of our world at the threshold of change is very simple. It is expressed by the ideogram in this picture. The bus on the left represents our situation as it is now. We have been focused on developing the technology which, like the bus in the picture, is now able to take us very fast wherever we want to go. But we have neglected our culture, and in particular our informing, which should give us the guidance and the vision that is necessary for steering the technology. My idea of what is possible is on the right. What brings about the change from a non-sustainable to a sustainable condition is a simple act of design – the *design* of an informing (of the way we create and use information). The new informing is such that it fulfills the vital need that information needs to fulfill in our culture, namely, it allows us to make choices consciously (with understanding of their consequences, especially the long-term ones). In effect, this informing allows us to steer not only the technology, but also the culture itself, to use both of them better, for our true benefit. Simply said, my vision of a possible world is a technologically advanced culture which is based on an informed pursuit of happiness.

What shall we see when we turn on the light of proper information? We shall that we are being driven at a very high speed *somewhere,* but that the road we are following does not lead to higher well-being! Somewhere along the line we have made a wrong turn and we have missed the way.

If it were really true, as many people still believe, that in order to have an increasing well-being we must have an ever-increasing consumption, there would be little hope of making a significant positive change before it is too late. *Fortunately,* and we here seem to largely agree on that, this is not true. Our well-being has an interesting and paradoxical dynamic which, when properly understood, leads to different, sometimes even *opposite* values and priorities from the ones we have today. This is why we may expect that, when we put the right "headlights" into our "bus" and we turn them on, the direction of our "bus" will change quite radically.

Strategy. My ideogram also depicts the strategy that I am proposing for realizing the above vision. This strategy consists in first designing an informing (the way we are creating and using information), and then using the proper information to guide us to higher well-being. Let me explain in a few words why this is the natural strategy in our situation.

What we have been talking about these two days is a revolutionary change – first of all of consciousness and of values, and then also of design. What is the strategic point that every revolution must secure pretty much first? Suppose that we are talking about an armed revolution. What is the building, the strategic object that you must definitely have under your control if you want your revolution to succeed? (…) It's the TV station! It makes a world of difference whether it is you standing in front of the cameras and saying "Everything is all right. We are in control. The order has been established. The bad guys will soon be gone." Or whether it is your enemy saying "Those guys with machine guns are our enemies. Get them out of here!" Please don't misunderstand me. I am not inviting you to an armed revolution. Our revolution is a revolution in consciousness, not a revolution with weapons. But if even an armed revolution must first make sure that it has the information under control, should that not be even more true about our consciousness revolution? And yet, in our revolution we seem to have completely forgotten the information. Given a bit more time, I could show to you that our information is indeed right now in the hands of our enemy.

Methodology. Our next question is how can the above strategy be realized, practically and concretely? The answer I am proposing is "By first creating a *methodology*." A methodology is a collection of principles, criteria, techniques and results which can govern the creation and use of information. The idea is simply to create a written convention which says: "This is what information needs to be like if it should serve the purposes information needs to fulfill." And "This is how we can make such information." And then let those people who agree with the convention use it as the basis for creating and using information. During the past decade I have developed one such methodology called "Polyscopic Modeling and proposed it as a design prototype. At the University of Oslo Information Design Group we have a research and a teaching program whose goal is to develop this *methodological* approach to information and to put it into practice, both academic and actual. I will be very glad to share the details of our experience, as well as the future work, with those of you who may be interested.

Here I cannot do more than just give you a flavor of this methodology, a hint showing how it works and what it can do. I will again use my ideogram to illustrate the main point. The vision I am presenting here is created by using Polyscopic Modeling. The idea behind it is to consciously choose our ways of looking, the so-called *scopes*, in order to show clearly what needs to be seen. A very useful way of looking, far too little used in our culture, is what I call metaphorically "the view from the top of the mountain" where we look at an issue "from above" in order to see it as a whole. This view needs to be used for choosing directions (we cannot properly choose the direction if we are in the middle of the forest, seeing the trees but not the forest itself). So what would we see if we should look at the sustainability issue "from the top of the mountain?" I claim we would see in essence what is shown in my ideogram. As long as our culture is structured like a fast-going bus with candle headlights, it cannot be sustainable! But this situation may be changed, by giving our culture a suitable informing.

Design. There seems to be a fair amount of agreement, also on this conference, that *holistic thinking* will be one of the main characteristics of the emerging cultural paradigm. I am using the word *wholeness* to express what I consider to be the essence of holistic thinking. I define *wholeness* as the quality of a whole machine or an organism. In both cases the whole depends on all its parts, and if any part is dysfunctional so is the whole.

What I am calling *Polyscopic design* is the design which
- o Has *wholeness* as the guiding criterion and
- o Uses *designed information* which provides holistic vision as a basis for both design and marketing.

Polyscopic design can be applied to anything. Applied to a chair, it would mean not just modifying the traditional chair by making it more comfortable or more appealing, but first of all asking "What are the main issues involved in designing a chair?" and "What does a chair really do to our organism after fifty years of sitting?" And then designing the chair based on such holistic vision.

Polyscopic design could just as well be applied to designing a part of the culture, such as the informing, or for solving the sustainability problem. *Polyscopic design* applied to informing would not only create information by following the traditional recipes and standards, or use the new media to grab and occupy people's attention. It would begin by asking "What are the main issues involved in information making?" and "What should our creation and use of information be like so that *the whole thing* can function?" It would continue by *designing* an informing which can make the whole thing functional.

It is not difficult to see that *Polyscopic design* is what is needed in order to make our world sustainable. And what can bring us to a *whole* culture which can make *us* whole. *Polyscopic design* is just another name for "developing the new cultural paradigm." It is also the sort of design that suits the new paradigm. But in order to be operational in general, the *polyscopic design* must first be applied to information, for the following two reasons:
- o Suitable information must be in place before we can be able to understand the issues in a holistic way in order to practice *polyscopic design.*
- o Suitable information must exist and be used for making choices before we can be able to market the products of *polyscopic design.*

And now an essential point, explaining why the strategy I am proposing really has a chance to work in practice. What in my view distinguishes a realizable strategy from a utopia is that the former takes the power balance into account while the latter one doesn't. A realizable strategy cannot appeal only to consciousness and ethical principles and at the same time be suicidal as a business. The reason why the strategy I am proposing really *may* work in practice is that *polyscopy* as an approach to information can open up new markets for new products. And new markets and products are exactly what the modern businesses who struggle to survive in the tight globalized economy most vitally need. If the newly opened directions turn out to be profitable, the business will be more than glad to follow and more than fast to respond. And since the newly opened directions are leading us into a better and more stable world, this strategy will naturally direct the power of the business towards a cultural change, that is, towards the realization of the vision that all of us here share.

In sum, the strategy I am proposing is simply the symbiosis between information and design. The idea is to first apply *design* to information, and then to use good information to illuminate the way to good design.