

**INTERNATIONAL CONSORTIUM FOR  
ACADEMIC AND SOCIETAL  
TRANSFORMATION**

**PROSPECTUS**

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## MAIN POINTS

- Humanity has reached a crossroads, where nothing short of an arts-driven revolution in creativity and consciousness/spirituality will suffice to address the challenges—as well as opportunities for growth—that are unique to our time.
- The revolution will need take hold in the world's educational systems if it is to manifest in society.
- Consciousness—understood from a post-materialist, noetic perspective—is the next major educational and societal frontier.
- Creativity and the arts—approached from a consciousness-based perspective—are the primary vehicle. Whereas conventional education is rooted in a science-spirituality divide, a noetic arts paradigm is key to spirituality/arts/science synthesis.
- Improvisation and meditation are the epistemological anchors for the revolution, spawning a rich epistemic circuitry through which creativity and consciousness may flow throughout all aspects of the educational system and are thus transmitted to society.
- Within the arts, jazz—among the most epistemologically diverse knowledge systems in the history of the academy—and a Black aesthetics yield an ethno/epistemic template that can be applied across fields and propel all areas within the arts, humanities and sciences to new evolutionary vistas.
- Existing disciplines are re-enlivened, new disciplines come into existence, and significantly new approaches emerge for the most pressing issues of the present historical moment—including ecosustainability, racial justice, healing political and ideological divides, peace building, economic disparity, and the challenges posed by AI and other technological advances when disconnected from consciousness.
- There is no middle ground:
  - An educational paradigm that neglects, if not decimates, the creative and spiritual foundations of the human being is a primary indicator of a civilization in sharp decline.
  - An educational paradigm that restores spirituality/arts/science wholeness signifies a civilization in ascent.

The time has come for individuals and institutions with leadership aspirations to step up and guide what may be among the most impactful revolutions in our life time.

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## **PART I**

### **ICAST Mission**

To promote an arts-driven revolution in creativity and consciousness in education and society.

### **ICAST Vision**

The central message of Buckminster Fuller's 1969 book, *Utopia or Oblivion*, may be more apt now than it was at the time the book was written.

In response to the many challenges of the present moment in history, there is no middle ground. Humanity will either achieve new levels of planetary flourishing, or succumb to the wide ranging socio-ecological crises that threaten the very survival of civilization as we know it.<sup>1</sup>

Informed by an emergent worldview called Integral Theory, ICAST brings together the spiritual insights of the world's wisdom traditions, the creative and cultural vitality of the arts and humanities, and the technological advances of the sciences to advance a paradigmatically new educational vision.

"Never before," notes the philosopher Ken Wilber, largely recognized as the primary exponent of contemporary integral thought, "has the sum total of human knowledge and achievement, from age-old insights into the nature of consciousness to cutting-edge developments in cognitive neuroscience, been so widely available."<sup>2</sup>

The arts factor prominently as a catalyst for the spirituality/art/science synthesis, with a Black aesthetics and its uniquely broad epistemological scope—particularly as embodied in jazz—a guiding precept. Integral Theory thus unites with Afrofuturism, Advaita Vedanta, Quantum Nonlocality, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Archeoastronomy and a wider array of thought streams that bridge ancient wisdom with contemporary understanding to redefine what it means to be an educated individual in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>3</sup>

Improvisation, transcultural and transdisciplinary syncretism, the inextricable link between art and life as a whole and spirituality/consciousness are among the cornerstones of the emergent vision.

Diverse epistemologies—or diverse ways of knowing and being—are thus a key distinguishing feature of the integral framework, in sharp contrast to conventional education's epistemically limited science-spirituality divide. Whereas prevailing epistemic dearth renders education fragmented, surface-bound and static; epistemic breadth—particularly when grounded in creativity and consciousness—promotes integration, inner-outer wholeness and robust capacities to respond to increasingly challenging and unpredictable world circumstances.

Consistent with integral approaches across fields, the creativity/consciousness-based model does not jettison conventional practices but rather resituates the strongest examples of existing models within a fundamentally new developmental context. The emergent framework also

significantly expands understanding of, and approaches to a range of contemporary issues. These include familiar themes in higher education such as DEI, ecosustainability, mental health, arts advocacy, and AI as well as more academically elusive, yet equally essential topics such as spirituality, critique of religious *and* scientific fundamentalism, healing political and ideological divides and peace building. As examined more closely below, DEI is a key example of prevailing change discourse that, due to epistemic ambivalence, is not only incomplete but which actually fuels the crisis—in this case, systemic racism—in question. ICAST thus strongly recommends renaming and fundamentally reframing the pluralist imperative.

An educational paradigm that neglects—if not overtly rejects—the creative and spiritual dimensions of the learner is a signifying feature of a civilization in peril.

Restoration of spirituality/arts/science wholeness to the heart of learning and human development is key to planetary flourishing.

The time has come for individuals and institutions that harbor leadership aspirations to step up and initiate what may well be among the most extraordinary revolutions in the history of education, with equally significant ramifications for society at large.

## **15 ICAST Pillars**

ICAST delineates 15 interconnected pillars that will serve as pathways for the creativity-consciousness revolution.

- **Post-materialist Consciousness/Spirituality Paradigm**
- **Improvisation, Art, Soul, Cosmos**
- **Transdisciplinarity, Critical Thinking, Rigor**
- **Mental health**
- **Beyond DEI: Noetic Pluralism**
- **Ecosustainability/flourishing**
- **Science, Technology and Artificial Intelligence**
- **Religious, Scientific and Aesthetic Extremism**
- **Healing Ideological/Political Divides**
- **Peace Building**
- **Public Education as Transformative Gateway**
- **Artists and Athletes as Change Visionaries**
- **Enlivening the Cosmic Imagination**
- **Navigating the Rapids**
- **Changing the Narrative Around Change Itself**

## KEY TERMINOLOGY

- **Science/spirituality divide:** The conventional academy privileges science and rejects spirituality (arts exist but are not well integrated into overall academic mission)
- **Spirituality/art/science synthesis:** All three domains coexist and coevolve. Correlates with the 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> person epistemologies of Integral Theory (see below).
- **Materialism:** Comprises the ideological heart of the science/spirituality divide. Consciousness is either reducible to or epiphenomenal to a neurobiological (or material) substrate. Denies notions such as soul, physically transcendent dimensions of consciousness, nonlocal and collective consciousness.

*Francis Crick: "You are nothing but a pack of neurons."<sup>4</sup>*

Materialism is a relatively new development in human history (including Western thought, particularly in the extent to which it has taken hold in the academy,

- **Integral Theory:** Consciousness-based worldview that draws from and unites spiritual, scientific, artistic, cultural, philosophical and other wisdom from sources across the globe. The coevolutionary interaction of spiritual/artistic/scientific **epistemologies**, or ways of knowing, is central.
- **Noetic:** Soul-based knowing. Astronaut Edgar Mitchell founded the Institute for Noetic Sciences to promote research and development into extended capacities of human experience and understanding.<sup>5</sup>

The terms integral and noetic overlap, yet with each delineating important principles of the emergent educational paradigm. Noetic education is soul-based education, integral spirituality/art/science synthesis delineates a kind of epistemological circuitry through which creativity and consciousness may flow from the soul level and permeate all areas of education.

- **Post-materialism/prematerialist paradigm:** Predicated on the primary role of consciousness/spirit in all of creation and, unlike materialism, is coherent with worldviews across the globe and from time immemorial as well as leading-edge scientific research into extended dimensions of consciousness, sometimes known as **psi**. Psi research supports the view of consciousness as **physically transcendent** (survives bodily death), **non-local** (not tempo-spatially confined), **intersubjective** (not just individual but collective, as in C.G. Jung's collective unconscious and spiritual systems worldwide) and interactive with the physical world (psychokinesis).<sup>6</sup> scientific and musical lines and is thus a key driver for the creativity/consciousness revolution.

## **PART II**

### **DESCRIPTIONS OF THE 15 PILLARS**

- **Post-materialist Consciousness Paradigm**

Consciousness from a materialist perspective is either reducible or epiphenomenal to a physical substrate. ICAST proceeds from a post-materialist perspective, where consciousness—while not devoid of neuro-biological correlates—is physically transcendent, survives bodily death, nonlocal and primary in the broader scheme of creation. Age-old wisdom from the world's spiritual traditions unites with leading-edge scientific findings to support the post-materialist (which might also be called pre-materialist) framework. As expressed in the Vedantic tradition,<sup>7</sup> individual consciousness is to universal consciousness as the wave is to the ocean. Whereas materialism denies the existence of soul, transcendent experience (as anything beyond neuro-cognitive explanation) and heightened perceptual capacities, post-materialist understanding of consciousness situates these and other phenomena within a significantly more expansive vision of human creativity and spiritual potential.

A large body of scientific research, although often marginalized in the academic sciences, into the discarnate, nonlocal and intersubjective dimensions of consciousness issues significant challenges to materialism and strongly supports the post/pre-materialist framework. Duke University, Princeton University, the University of Virginia and Mamanoides Hospital—institutional challenges notwithstanding—are examples of mainstream sites that have provided space and resources for this research.<sup>8</sup> Institute for Noetic Sciences, California Institute for Human Science, International Consciousness Studies Laboratory and Maharishi International University are examples of non-mainstream sites that have made seminal contributions.<sup>9</sup> Society for Scientific Exploration, Science and Medical Network, Association for Post-Materialist Science are among the professional organizations that have emerged to offer safe haven for open and rigorous inquiry into consciousness.

#### *Educational ramifications of competing worldviews*

The materialist view of consciousness underlies the science/spirituality divide and the epistemologically narrow and fragmented horizons that define conventional education.

The post/pre-materialist paradigm provides a basis for spirituality/art/science synthesis and thus a significantly broadened and integrative epistemological scope that promote creativity/consciousness evolution.<sup>10</sup>

A wide array of transformative benefits, for individuals and society, stem from the emergent model. Individual growth indicators include cognitive sharpening, improved mental health, interpersonal development, transdisciplinary awareness, and an array of attributes related to higher stage creativity/consciousness

development (integration of transcendent experience into everyday life, transformed perception of self, heightened interconnectedness with others, environment and cosmos, and other aspects of mystical experience).<sup>11</sup>

Among the more provocative collective growth indicators is the collective consciousness principle, where a promising body of research suggests that large-group meditation practice may generate a harmonizing influence on the environment, resulting in decreased crime, illness and accidents. ICAST will promote further exploration of this intervention as well as ramifications of the collective consciousness principle for addressing issues such as the ecological crises, planetary peace and conflict-resolution, and technology-related challenges (i.e. AI).<sup>12</sup>

*An educational paradigm that neglects, if not decimates, the creative and spiritual foundations of the human being is a primary indicator of a civilization in sharp decline.*

*An educational paradigm that restores spirituality/arts/science wholeness signifies a civilization in ascent.*

- **Improvisation. Art, Soul, Cosmos**

Conventional arts practice and arts advocacy have not been immune from the epistemological crisis that stems from the materialist science/spirituality divide. The marginalization of improvisation in music studies is a primary example. Whereas improvisation has long been the primary modality for musical navigation and understanding in cultures across the globe, and was central in earlier eras in the European tradition to which music schools ostensibly claim homage, the process remains anomalous among the majority of music students and faculty.<sup>13</sup>

This is problematic not only in its limitations in the preparation of aspiring musicians, but for its ramifications across fields. A transformed music studies paradigm, rooted in creativity-consciousness, is the locus for galvanizing and rendering all of the arts the essential link for spirituality/art/science synthesis. Proclamations about the transformative capacities of the arts that fail to acknowledge the epistemological crisis in music are yet another example of empty progressivist rhetoric that only reifies the prevailing paradigm. Indeed, such rhetoric further centers the science/spirituality divide by which the arts are marginalized in the first place.

Here a parallel, overarching epistemic crisis/contradiction comes into focus that sheds further light on both the musical manifestation of the problem and its systemic scope across the educational spectrum. The philosopher Pierre Hadot



has been eloquent in his reminder that the ancient Greco-Roman systems of logic, rational analysis and critical thinking that are the intellectual basis for the academy were the outgrowth of consciousness-based engagement among the various philosophical schools. Only through transcending ordinary forms of mental engagement were philosophers able to formulate intellectual pathways whereby outer coherence and progress could be grounded in sound interior principles.<sup>14</sup> Just as music studies has skimmed the surface objects (works that comprise the European canon) from the creative epistemologies that gave rise to them, overall academic inquiry has similarly skimmed surface intellectual objects from their transpersonal epistemological roots.

The fact that musical and overall academic conventionalists will nonetheless reject efforts for (re)integration of improvisation (in music) and meditation (in the humanities, if not across fields) *in the name of upholding tradition and academic integrity*, underscores the epistemic contradiction that engulfs higher education. Concerns expressed from the academic sector about a crisis in critical thinking, for which higher education prides itself, that engulfs contemporary society only underscore the contradiction; annihilation of creativity/consciousness interiors annihilates critical inquiry capacities—with the blatant ignorance of the epistemic/historical foundations for critical thinking, as evidenced above, a primary example.

#### *Primordial epistemological anchors*

To be sure, the idea that—among the innumerable forms of music, let alone across the arts—jazz might be key to galvanizing music and the arts in the overarching transformation may pose challenges to conventional arts understanding as formidable as post-materialist challenges to conventional scientific understanding.

The principle of epistemological anchors is key.

Jazz is well-known for its improvisatory foundations, and—from an expanded historical perspective—may be seen as the site where improvisation made its return, if in more globally-mediated form, in the West. Less well-known is that a long legacy of jazz artists have complemented their wide-ranging creative excursions with contemplative disciplines and corresponding studies that, as just seen in Western philosophical schools, take awareness to transcendent dimensions of consciousness.<sup>15</sup>

Also significant is that both epistemic anchors spawn a wide range of further modalities for creativity/consciousness-based engagement and understanding that have application across the arts and all educational fields. Improvisation along the creativity line anchors compositional, performance-based creativity as well as many areas of craft (technical and theoretical skills; aurality/somatic/rhythmic fluency; aesthetic/cultural, cognitive awareness) that support creative (and consciousness-based) development.

Along the consciousness line, the experience of pure consciousness—awareness of nothing but awareness itself, where exquisite mind-body stillness coexist with extraordinary wakefulness—anchors a broader contemplative range that includes somatic, creativity-based, nature-based, devotional and other modalities.

Both lines support an important principle that is key to differentiating between conventional and emergent (integral/noetic) approaches to arts practice and advocacy, as well as prevailing and emergent educational reform discourse:

*Jazz is among the most epistemologically diverse knowledge systems in the history of the academy.*

Jazz enables the ICAST idea of an arts-driven revolution in creativity and consciousness to take one further step, one that is only possible through the shift from materialist to post/pre-materialist paradigms.

#### *Improvisation, Soul and Cosmos*

Among the most fruitful connections made by jazz's long legacy of improvisers/contemplatives (creativity/consciousness innovators) involves the jazz-Vedanta nexus.<sup>16</sup> If, as noted previously, human consciousness is to cosmic intelligence as the wave is to the ocean, human creativity is similarly inextricably linked to cosmic creativity. Recognizing, moreover, that the Vedantic notion of *lila*, or universal creative play by which Brahman, the source of all Being, gives rise to the infinitely diverse creation, is improvisatory in nature, the roots of human improvisation can be understood to run not only deeply in the soul, but in the structure of the cosmos itself.

*Human beings are co-evolutionary participants in the cosmic improvisatory unfolding.*

Jazz not only redefines arts-advocacy but yields a template that is applicable across the arts, humanities and sciences for creativity/consciousness transformation.

Important parallels also come into focus between collective improvisatory performance and collective consciousness-based healing interventions. The uniting of an emergent aesthetic premise (collective creativity) and emergent social transformative premise (collective meditation/spirituality) gives further shape to the ICAST idea of creativity/consciousness revolution.

A single axiom underscores an important first step in the new direction:

Arts advocacy, no matter how vociferous about how the arts are marginalized, that fails to acknowledge the epistemic crisis in music studies fuels the source of arts marginalization.

*Proclamations about the transformative capacities of the arts that fail to acknowledge the epistemological crisis in music are yet another example of empty progressivist rhetoric that only reifies the prevailing paradigm. Indeed, such rhetoric further centers the science/spirituality divide by which the arts are marginalized in the first place.*

- **Transdisciplinarity, Critical Thinking and Rigor**

The importance of transcending disciplinary boundaries as essential for solving today's challenges is nothing new in academic reform conversation. However, the creativity/consciousness paradigm significantly expands how transdisciplinarity is understood and operationalized. The experience of pure consciousness takes the concept from an intellectual construct to direct, noetic experience, which lays new groundwork for critically examining the prevailing educational paradigm (and alternatives thereto) and rigor. Awareness of nothing but awareness itself—where profound mind-body stillness coexists with the most exquisitely radiant wakefulness—grounds education is a realm transcendent of disciplinary differentiation.<sup>17</sup> Improvisation-based creativity and creative awareness, in turn, promotes navigation of the primordial interstices from which all knowledge originates and the subtle strata at which all disciplines first begin to differentiate. Transdisciplinary awareness, then, is not oblivious to disciplinary differentiation but, in fact, enables heightened conception of such through access to, at once, the transcendent depths beneath surface disciplinary waves and the broader spectrum of disciplinary manifestation.<sup>18</sup>

Important by-products of noetic transdisciplinarity involve heightened critical inquiry capacities and levels of rigor. When awareness swings between transcendent silence and dynamic surface engagement, understanding of both how disciplines intersect and interact with one another expands along with heightened attention to localized detail; hence, entirely new parameters for rigor (to re-invoke a former educational buzzword invoked by conventionalists even as they would cling to epistemically narrow, fragmented and surface-bound practices which conflate rigor with *rigor mortis*).<sup>19</sup>

The same transdisciplinary awareness is key to capacities to step back and critically interrogate both a given field and the overarching educational paradigm. While—similar to prevailing assumptions about rigor—cultivation of critical thinking capacities is often deemed an unquestioned hallmark of educational achievement, a creativity/consciousness lens reveals that the conventional model decimates critical thinking, not only within but across disciplines. Among the biggest obstacles to reform that moves beyond token modifications is the paradigm-obliviousness of participants in reform discourse.

- **Mental/spiritual health**

Epistemologically narrow, fragmented and surface-bound knowledge systems, such as those which dominate, undermine mental health. Ethno-epistemically

broad, integrative (inner-outer development, transdisciplinary growth) and contoured knowledge systems promote mental health, as measured by well-being, resilience, self-awareness, interpersonal development, leadership capacities, spiritual development. The ICAST protocol measures mental health not as absence of depression, anxiety and other debilitating afflictions, but through psycho/emotional/spiritual flourishing.

- **Beyond DEI: Noetic Pluralism**

Claims to welcome individuals from diverse backgrounds without foundational integration of their diverse ways of knowing and being are not only incomplete, they fuel racism. Ethno-epistemically broad, integrative (inner-outer development, transdisciplinary growth) and contoured knowledge systems are key to new pluralism paradigms. The marginalized place of jazz in music studies, and a Black aesthetic across the arts and humanities, is a primary example of not only DEI lapse, but its detrimental impact. Indeed, whereas DEI took hold on the wings of a revived Black Lives Matter movement, the failure to take the next step of Black Music Matters (and Black Aesthetics Matter) may well represent the height of academic hubris—which can only be analyzed as the most egregious examples of racism in disguise.<sup>20</sup>

ICAST strongly urges the identification of these patterns, not to dwell on them but to clearly say their names, in the context of fundamental revisioning of the diversity/racial justice/artistic justice/spiritual justice imperative. Immediate extinction of the DEI heading is a first step in this process. As a colleague at the University of Michigan courageously asserted—DEI needs to D.I.E.

- **Ecosustainability/flourishing**

The ICAST creativity-consciousness paradigm introduces paradigmatically new dimensions to ecosustainability discourse and action. Central is the principle of jazz-inspired improvisatory ecologies, which include heightened resilience, interactive capacities (with environment and others), creative problem-solving capacities, and awareness of localized relationships as embedded in overarching strata of macro-relationships (epistemological, ethnological). The jazz ecosystem encompasses the innermost strata of consciousness/soul, the most minute details of the creative process, and the furthest dimensions of the cosmic wholeness.

Within this expanse, two forms of noetic intervention that are particularly significant come into focus. First involves deep levels of communion with the natural world and the subtle energies, or strata of spiritual intelligence, that the world's wisdom traditions have long recognized as intrinsic to bio-physical reality, yet which dramatically elude the gaze of industrial society and its educational systems.

An additional noetic intervention involves enlivenment of collective consciousness via large group meditation and focused intention programs.<sup>21</sup> If, as one can reasonably infer from the combination of indigenous wisdom and

leading-edge scientific inquiry into the nature of consciousness, mind and physical reality are aspects of an undivided wholeness, the possibility that consciousness-based environmental interventions—however challenging to both conventional and progressivist academic assumptions—is one that we ignore at our peril.

Music improvisers attune to multiple levels of information—manifest, transcendent and all in-between—in their creative excursions and consciousness/spirituality development; this same awareness needs to undergird academic (and other) ecosustainability programs, in so doing rendering them ecoflourishing programs.<sup>22</sup>

- **Science, Technology and Artificial Intelligence**

AI is perhaps the most recent example of the threat that scientific and technological growth, its many contributions to the quality of life notwithstanding, poses when disconnected from consciousness/spiritual foundations. ICAST brings a significantly expanded approach to the topic which situates AI inquiry within the biggest questions surrounding human nature and potential and the place of the human being in the cosmic wholeness. The collective consciousness principle may be among the most illuminating in terms of distinguishing between machine and human intelligence, providing a backdrop against which development of machine intelligence occurs, and possibly an antidote to unpredictable destructive capacities of such development (massive disinformation campaigns, a race of self-organizing/self-replicative machines with emergent, or nefariously programmed, destructive capacities; unleashing of nano-viruses, etc).<sup>23</sup>

- **Religious, Scientific and Aesthetic Fundamentalism.**

While the exclusion of religion, and with it extremist religious viewpoints, is an important (if rarely expressly articulated) part of conventional academic culture, the idea of scientific fundamentalism—even as it pervades much academic pedagogy and research (including the improvisation-defiant arts)—is less familiar and, when brought to attention, often elicits intensive reactions. Aesthetic fundamentalism attracts modest amounts of attention through DEI and related lenses, though rarely foregrounded to the extent it warrants (particularly when it comes to Black music and aesthetics). ICAST views all three forms of fundamentalism as manifestations of the academy's epistemic crisis, with the science/spirituality divide at its core. Diagnosis of the problem is an important step toward spirituality/arts/science synthesis, where—in place of division and conflict—all domains, grounded in creativity/consciousness interiors—coexist and co-evolve.

- **Healing Ideological/Political Divides**

Oblivious to the twin pathologies of religious and scientific extremism, the academy plays an important role in fueling the political/ideological divides that riddle the US and world. Reproductive rights is a particularly charged and divisive topic that higher education's spiritual aversion only exacerbates; were the

academy a site centered in deep probing of the soul—where all human beings, regardless of political, ethnological, gender identity and other orientations, connect—highly productive conversations could transpire that, at the very least, begin to dispel the sharp divisiveness, which increasingly leads to violence, that prevails.

Similar to DEI, ecosustainability, mental health, and arts advocacy; the conventional academic paradigm is incapable of probing the epistemic roots of a pressing real-world issue. Unlike the former areas, however, the conventional academy has not even reached the point of identifying political/ideological tensions as an issue that it might have an obligation to address.

A jazz-inspired noetic standpoint offers much in the way of guidance. Recalling creativity/consciousness-based capacities for critically interrogating language, new perspectives on highly charged and divisive terminology such as conservative and liberal, closely related to spirituality and science, come into focus. Conservative and liberal impulses originate deep in the structure of the cosmos itself, and thus coexist and coevolve at the innermost dimensions of the soul and overlying levels of individual and collective life. The same holds for spirituality/religion and science. Surface tensions are thus the product of disconnection from the soul level—among the seminal contributions of conventional education to the decline of human civilization—and can be healed through arts-driven spirituality/art/science synthesis.

A backdrop of spiritually-robust conversation and experience could also transform exchanges around race, immigration and environmental issues that fuel, and are fueled, by current political/ideological divides.

ICAST promotes programs to prepare individuals to convene dialogue that heals the divides so that individuals of contrasting orientations can work together for the betterment of society.

- **Peace Building**

While not as starkly absent as initiatives devoted to healing political/ideological tensions, peace building work is nonetheless notably scarce and underscores the academy and its disconnect from the world we live in. ICAST's creativity/consciousness-based vision introduces new and expanded ways of understanding and addressing conflict. Collective consciousness interventions fundamentally transform the conversation, not in place of conventional approaches (diplomacy, cultural exchange, etc), and work in tandem with arts-driven collaboration across cultural boundaries.<sup>24</sup> ICAST will convene transformative symposia/festivals around the arts/spirituality nexus that juxtapose collective meditation/spiritual practice, improvisation-based artistic interaction and noetic activist programs.

- **Public Education as Transformative Gateway**

K-12 teacher and administrator education and licensing programs are the conduit through which the assumptions and practices of the conventional paradigm are transmitted to society. That same public education conduit, however, can uphold a transformative function and transmit a creativity/consciousness vision and practices to the world. Schools of education, while not enjoying the same status as other disciplines (e.g. schools of education, or medicine, or the arts and humanities) are of enormous importance in the creativity/consciousness revolution. Within the arts, the transformation of K-12 music teacher education around noetic premises may be the most impactful site in all of education for the revolution.

- **Artists and Athletes as Change Visionaries**

While the arts and athletics are securely positioned on college/university campuses, neither significantly inform the academic mission, let alone are recognized as transformative catalysts. The arts are recognized as a cultural enhancement, athletics is largely relegated to an entertainment/school spirit function. ICAST takes important further steps in recognizing the deeper contributions of the two domains. First involves recognizing the athlete as a profound artist and creative/spiritual visionary, thus conjoining two academic areas that do not commonly interact (beyond athletic bands in music schools). Artists/athletes invoke performance-driven transcendence as well as frequently engage in formal consciousness-based spiritual practices and have much to offer challenging conversations such as healing political/ideological divides, racial justice, peace building, mental health and educational reform.

- **Enlivening the Cosmic Imagination**

In its commitment to grappling with the biggest questions surrounding the nature of the human being and its place in the cosmic wholeness, ICAST promotes foregrounding of yet another academically-elusive area—that involving the prospects of extra-terrestrial intelligence and potential contact therewith. Triggered by increased attention among governmental, military, religious, corporate and other leaders into Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena, inquiry that for decades was quite robust in popular culture has now begun to take hold in more mainstream circles. The importance of consciousness-based UAP inquiry, however, remains elusive. The late senator Harry Reid, speaking from a post-materialist vantage point, emphasized this point: “the UAP phenomenon cannot be seriously investigated separate from the topic of consciousness and its farther reaches.”<sup>25</sup> Here an important parallel between academic consciousness studies and academic UAP studies, both approached from either proclaimed or default materialist vantage points, may be noted: Neuroscience is privileged in the former, astronomy and astrophysics in the latter. If there is any validity to the technological capacities—which appear to defy known laws of physics—being observed by top military personnel, the possibility of advanced consciousness development, including mind-matter interaction, needs to have a place in the inquiry.

While remaining agnostic on the extraterrestrial origins of UAP, ICAST foregrounds the possibility as a kind of thought experiment that catalyzes far-reaching reflection.<sup>26</sup> If humans are not alone among intelligent life forms, how does this impact how we understand our cosmic status? What might be the impact of contact with extraterrestrial species? What would that contact look like? Might there be value in preparing for such a moment, not so much from a practical standpoint but in light of the questions it raises?

UAP are yet another catalyst for what philosopher Sean Esbjörn-Hargens calls “Enlivening the Cosmic Imagination”—a central facet of noetic education.<sup>27</sup>

- **Navigating the Rapids**

ICAST sustains an optimistic view for the future of humanity and the prospects for unprecedented levels of planetary flourishing—as measured by peace, the end of widespread poverty amid an age of global prosperity, ecological rejuvenation, racial/ethnological justice, creativity, spiritual growth, among other indicators. However, what the pathway from the current state of world affairs, which—while not without instances of great beauty, altruism and other positive attributes—is deeply riddled with crises and what the emergent vision might look like remains unclear. ICAST thus recognizes the idea found in wisdom traditions across the globe of inevitable periods of turbulence—which may involve widespread suffering and socio-economic collapse—that accompany evolutionary shifts, which ultimately are shifts in global consciousness.<sup>28</sup>

Two important principles might be noted that carry strong ramifications for creativity/consciousness-based educational reform.

First involves the capacity for hope, an essential facet of well-being and thus creative interventions, that is possible when periods of turbulence as planetary healing cycles. By contrast, nihilism and despair, which decimate creativity and well-being, are inevitable outgrowths of materialist ideology.

Second is a principle that is an even more powerful source of hope, optimism and creativity: This entails the capacity in human consciousness, due to its collective/intersubjective nature, and also its inextricable link to cosmic intelligence, to mitigate, or significantly neutralize, turbulence and suffering during global healing cycles. Collective meditation/spiritual practice, working in tandem with collective improvisatory (and other forms of) art making will thus be key to any such effect.

It is of utmost importance for educational systems to inform society about the overarching dynamics of change, the healing function of turbulent cycles, and the capacity for enlivened individual and collective consciousness to mollify



corresponding suffering; in essence, to transmit the message that humanity has a choice in what the future holds.<sup>29</sup>

- **Changing the Narrative Around Change Itself**

If the world is to invoke the transformation to creativity/consciousness-driven planetary flourishing, not only is it necessary to deepen the diagnostic interrogation of the conventional educational paradigm and expand future visioning, but entirely conversation needs to transpire around the phenomenon of change itself. Change needs to be approached as a topic of study that warrants levels of critical analysis, rigor and wide-ranging, transdisciplinary interrogation that are as robust as found in any academic discipline. Given the chronic aversion to even moderate types of reform that have long plagued the academy, particular attention needs to be devoted to distinctions between superficial and paradigmatic change, with consciousness and its far-reaching spiritual/mystical implications serving as a primary example catalyst for the latter inquiry.

## **PART III**

### **WHAT ICAST WILL DO**

- Form a global network of individuals, institutions and organizations that support the ICAST leadership vision and serve as a collective voice for paradigmatic change.
- Establish teams around each of the 15 pillars that render corresponding the themes creativity/consciousness noetic gateways. Ways in which noetic approaches expand, often significantly, beyond prevailing approaches will be emphasized. The teams will generate proposals for both curricular and research interventions.
- Convene symposia/festivals that bring together practitioners from diverse areas to share ideas, initiate collaboration and inspire change activism. Representation among governmental, corporate, spiritual/religious and other societal leaders, practitioners from professional arts and athletic realms, various activist circles (environmental, social justice, etc.) will join educationalists to vastly expand conversation and action.
- Promote collaboration between mainstream institutions and consciousness-driven progressive institutions for joint degree programs and research initiatives.
- Establish ICAST hubs on as many college/university campuses as possible. The University of Michigan Program and Creativity and Consciousness Studies will serve as the initial hub that oversees the launch of ICAST.<sup>30</sup>

## **PART IV**

### **APPENDICES**

#### **ABSTRACTS**

##### **A.**

#### **Rethinking the Arts, DEI and the Nature of Change Itself**

Why the arts—and within the arts, jazz and a Black aesthetic—as key to the revolution in creativity and consciousness? What are the roles of, as well as evolutionary benefits to be gained by, the other arts areas, humanities and sciences within this vision? What are the ramifications for pluralism discourse, often framed in recent years as DEI? How might the ICAST vision impact how the academy approaches the phenomenon of change itself?

##### **B.**

#### **Who Owns Consciousness Studies**

While neuroscience has tended to dominate academic consciousness studies, ICAST emphasizes the need for not only contributions from all academic fields, but to expand the horizons of what constitutes consciousness research. Direct experience of pure consciousness through meditation and other contemplative modalities, ideally grounded in one or more wisdom traditions, immediately assume center stage as central research criteria. An improvisation-inspired creative awareness, which can evolve apart from expertise in the arts, is also key.

If the spirituality/art/science revolution is to take hold in education and society, a revolution in what constitutes research, and the background of the researcher, is paramount.

##### **C.**

#### **Pillars of Academic Consciousness Studies**

Inspired by the mission and vision of the Program in Creativity and Consciousness Studies at the University of Michigan, ICAST identifies key principles to guide academic consciousness studies programs.<sup>31</sup>

**Transformative practices:** Consciousness studies needs to shift the educational narrative from distanced inquiry to direct experience and growth.

**Transformative coursework and curricula:** Design of new classes and degree programs that reflect fundamentally new educational paradigm.

**Transformative research:** Conventional research methodologies—qualitative and quantitative—need to be situated atop new practice-based foundations. The experience

of pure consciousness invoked in meditation is a core research modality and requisite for investigation of the topic.

**Transformative societal impact:** Consciousness studies needs to spawn transformative interventions that impact society at large (e.g. collective meditation programs that impact ecosustainability, pluralism initiatives, healing conversation, peace building).

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<sup>1</sup> Buckminster Fuller, *Utopia or Oblivion: The Prospects for Humanity*

<sup>2</sup> See Ken Wilber, Introduction to Integral Theory and Practice,

<sup>3</sup> The statement is admittedly somewhat redundant inasmuch as Integral Theory, commonly described as a Metatheory, or theory of theorizing, inherently subsumes all the areas listed. However, in at least two instances, the knowledge system listed gives further shape to the unifying impact of the integral model. Afrofuturism, particularly when its spiritual dimensions are prominent, illuminates the key contributions of Black cultural wisdom for not only the future of Black people but all of humanity. Second involves Advaita Vedanta, which is generally a primary source for integral accounts of the nondual relationship between individual and universal consciousness, and the primacy of consciousness. Here, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Apaurashaya Basha—commentary on Rig Veda—is, while fairly obscure in contemporary consciousness studies/spirituality circles, an extraordinarily rich source for Vedic wisdom that gives further shape to the primacy of consciousness principle. See Maharishi's *Constitution of India*; also see Tony Nadar, M.D., PhD; *Ramayana in Human Physiology*,

<sup>4</sup> Francis Crick and Christof Koch, 1998, "Towards a Neurobiological Theory of Consciousness," in *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*, ed. N. Block,

<sup>5</sup> See Institute for Noetic Sciences, ions.org

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, *Transcendent Mind*.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Apaurashaya Basha (in his *Constitution of India*); also see Nadar, *Ramayana in Human Physiology*.

<sup>8</sup> Duke University Rhine Research Center; Princeton [Engineering Anomalies Research \(PEAR\)](#), which spawned the [International Consciousness Research Laboratory \(ICRL\)](#); University of Virginia Medical School Division of [Perceptual Studies](#).

<sup>9</sup> [Maharishi International University. MIU.org](#); [Maimonides Dream Telepathy research](#) (see Dean Radin, *The Conscious Universe*; Elizabeth Mayer, *Extraordinary Mind*; Imants Baruss, Julia Mossbridge, *Transcendent Mind*).

<sup>10</sup> See Ed Sarath, *Black Music Matters*, for consideration of the practical ramifications of competing worldviews as important to nature-of-consciousness debates. Materialism is not only philosophically incoherent, highly limited practical applications stem from the framework.

<sup>11</sup> Research on the benefits of meditation practice now spans decades and is widely available. See, for example, the IONS website ions.org, Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher education acmhe.org, and . While research into higher stage consciousness development is less common, see F. Travis, A. Arenander, and D. DuBois, 2004, "Psychological and Physiological Characteristics of a Proposed Object-Referral/Self-Referral Continuum of Self-Awareness," *Consciousness and Cognition* 13: 401–20, for among the very first set of neurophysiological data in support of higher enduring stages.

<sup>12</sup> David Orme-Johnson, David Wear Orme-Johnson, Kenneth L. Cavanaugh, Michael C. Dillbeck, Rachael S. Goodman. Field-Effects of Consciousness: A Seventeen-Year Study of the Effects of Group Practice of the Transcendental Meditation and TM-Sidhi Programs on Reducing National Stress in the United States. *World Journal of Social Science*, [Vol 9, No 2 \(2022\)](#). Also see earlier research on this phenomenon in D. Orme-Johnson, C. Alexander, J. Davies, H. Chander, and W. Larimore.1988. "International Peace Project: The Effects of the Maharishi Technology of the Unified Field," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 32, no. 4, pp. 776–812.; Noteworthy is that the editor of the journal provided a disclaimer to indicate that, while the idea of collective consciousness (let alone that it could be enlivened through meditation) directly countered prevailing sensibilities in the sciences, the research that went into the article was impeccable, fulfilling the highest standards of scientific rigor, and thus the decision to not publish simply because many might find the idea preposterous, would comprise scientific and academic integrity.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, Sarath, *Improvisation, Creativity and Consciousness*.

<sup>14</sup> Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, Sarath, *Improvisation, Creativity and Consciousness*.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, Sarath, provides commentary on the jazz/Vedanta nexus. Alice Coltrane's leadership has been seminal. Contributions of physicist Stephon Alexander—*Fear of a Black Universe: An Outside's Guide to the Future of Physics* (Basic Books, New York, 2021)—may also be noted; whereas both the jazz/Vedanta connection and the physics/Vedanta connections have a fair amount of history, Alexander situates both within a context that includes the less familiar jazz/physics connection.

<sup>17</sup> Important commentary on pure consciousness: Alexander, Langer, eds. *Higher Stages of Human Development*. Robert Forman, *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*.

<sup>18</sup> Nicolescou's *Transdisciplinary Manifesto* emphasizes the importance of interior dimensions of consciousness in transdisciplinary discourse, even if not addressing the full scope of noetic inquiry.

<sup>19</sup> Sarath, *Improvisation, Creativity and Consciousness*.

<sup>20</sup> Ed Sarath, *Black Music Matters* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2018)

<sup>21</sup> It is essential to not conflate meditation-based collective consciousness interventions, where participants carry no intention (e.g. to quell violence) but simply fathom the innermost dimensions of consciousness and enliven transcendent unifying principles (Natural Law) (see Orme-Johnson, et al), with overt intention-based interventions, where participants consciously—even in some degree of settled, contemplative awareness—aspire to affect some sort of specific goal. See Dean Radin, "A Brief History of the Potential Future," in *Mind Before Matter: Visions of a New Science of Consciousness*, Trish Pfiefer and John Mack, eds. Wincester: O Books. and Lynne McTaggart, *The Intention Experiment*. ICAST embraces both types of intervention.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., *Improvisation, Creativity and Cnsciousness*. .

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Marcus Anthony, *Power and Presence: Enlivening the Authentic Self* ( ) offers a useful framework to which three principles are central: Know Thyself, Know the Humans, Know the Machines.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, D. Orme-Johnson, et al.

<sup>25</sup> Harry Reid's remarks are made in his Preface to *Skinwalkers at the Pentagon*.. Also see Leslie Kean, 2011. *UFOs: Generals, Pilots, and Government Officials Go on the Record*. New York: Harmony Books; James T. Lacatski, Colm Kelleher, and George Knapp, *Skinwalkers at the Pentagon: An Insiders' Account of the Government Secret UFO Program*, 2021. Henderson: RTMA;

<sup>26</sup> Harvard Astrophysicist Avi Loeb in *Extraterrestrial: The First Sign of Intelligent Life Beyond Earth*, foregrounds the importance of big questions and challenges thereto that dominate the academy.

<sup>27</sup> Sean Esbjörn-Hargens, "Our Wild Cosmos"—self-published essay. Esbjörn-Hargens is Dean at California Institute for Human Science, author of many books related to Integral Theory (including *Integral Ecology (Shambala)*, *Integral Education*, *Dancing With Sophia*, *A New Republic of the Heart*).

<sup>28</sup> Maharishi Mahesh Yogi has compared these healing cycles to what are called "phase transitions" in physics, where shifts toward greater coherence in a system are preceded by turbulence. His emphasis on collective meditation practice (see Orme Johnson, et al) is driven by the aim to neutralize the negative impact of the healing.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Founded by music professor Ed Sarath in 2001 (originally as the Faculty Network for Creativity and Consciousness Studies), the U-M PCCS is among the first consciousness-based initiatives in higher education and will serve as the temporary hub for the launch of ICAST. The PCCS followed in the footsteps of the design of the Jazz and Contemplative Studies degree program and expanded the work across the U-M campus. The PCCS has supported course design, including cross-disciplinary collaborative teaching, faculty study groups, a lecture series and convened a national symposium. Sarath currently co-directs the PCCS with Professor Molly Beauregard from the College of Creative Studies, with both colleagues combining many years of meditation practice and corresponding study with professional careers publishing on consciousness and consciousness-driven pedagogy (Sarath's books cited above; Beauregard's most recent is *Tuning the Student Mind: Explorations in Consciousness-Centered Pedagogy*, SUNY/Albany, 2019) .

Other seminal faculty in the formation and evolution of PCCS include Henryk Skowlimnowski (philosophy/Engineering), Frederick Amrine (philosophy), Michael Gould (music), Jeffrey Evans (neuropsychology), Rita Benn (integrative medicine), Vincent Castignacci (art), Judith Becker (ethnomusicology), Sharon Kardia (public health), Steven Modell (public health); contributions from Richard Mann (psychology) and Martha Travers (English/music)—both of whom designed and taught transformative consciousness-related coursework that have impacted many students—have been particularly significant.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid