MORE THAN SURVIVAL

TOWARD A YOUTH SOCIAL ECOLOGY

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Our kids may be younger than us, but they are also newer. They are the lat-
est model of human being, and are equipped with a whole lot of new features.
Looking at the world of children is not looking backwards at our own pasts—it's
looking ahead. They are our evolutionary future. . . . our test sample—our
advance scouts. They are, already, the thing we must become.

Douglas Rushkoff

Each new generation must determine reality for itself. That's asking a lot but then what is the alternative? John Cage remarked, "I can't understand why people are frightened of new ideas. I'm frightened of the old ones." It is the task of young people to sort out from the accumulation of their culture what is useful and what is not. And then add, shape and experiment with those elements that make sense to them in their struggle to survive and grow. Reality is often defined as that which actually exists or happens; that which is *real*. Nadine Gordimer however, writes of the *apprehension* of reality, "Apprehension is no less than the first principle of consciousness, the beginning of everything, our place in relation to nature and our perceptions of fellow human beings." [1] And Leonard Shlain believes that: ". . . a new way to think about reality begins with the assimilation of unfamiliar images. This collation leads to abstract ideas that only later give rise to a descriptive language." [2] Furthermore, we speak of *illusions* of reality and of its different angles; the objective to the subjective.

Still the enlarged definitions which youth are experiencing often seem to us like simulated reality; technology—computers, iPods, and cell phones—allows young people to create new realities encompassing wholism, expansion of consciousness, relationships, and generate a different concept of family and community. For youth, reality occurs on several overlapping levels, some coherent, others conflicting.

But who are youth? There is an inherent fallacy in using age as the sole criteria of "maturity." Many street or village children at 10 or 11 have already faced conditions that would tax the coping skills of adults. By using age as the criteria for granting rights, we have disabled youth. They cannot only help themselves more than we think, but more importantly, they can help one another as many do in peer teaching. Children at any age can contribute to society in their own right by alleviating social and economic conditions and go beyond that to advancement. We've withheld the skills and opportunities from them. Youth need new opportunities for growth and development through direct participation. Rather than imitations, such as student governments and mock UN sessions, they want the real thing.

In this piece, the stage set is primarily the industrialized nations since it is in those countries that trends are often set.

Levels of reality.

1. *Societal*. We begin with society's expectations starting with the family (or the lack of one). Here lineage values are passed on to the young with the expectation that they will be pre- served and replicated for future generations. Family means reproduction. Education is essential for future jobs, financial security, raising one's own family and preparation for old age. Community is local, the neighborhood; young people are not involved in the political arena. Youth have peers to give them a certain sense of belonging; some satisfying, others competitive and ultimately destructive; they also become a source of pressure to conform to in-crowd values and practices. The way language is used becomes another form of this reality: ". . . words like freedom, democracy and Christian values are still used to justify barbaric and shameful policies and acts"[3] Religion spells church, lacking in spirituality. Youth are susceptible to commercial- ism in all its insidious forms. In sum, youth are seen by society as irresponsible, consumers, and passive recipients in a transition stage towards adulthood.

2. *Personal*.

I found a love of life so expansive that it made me realize just how limited one man's life must be, and how important it is for us to experience as much as we possibly can without worrying too much about the outcome. All of a sudden a lot of pieces seemed to fit together, though it was some time before they really began to make sense to me.[4]

At a second level, youth have abundant assets and needs; they have enormous drive and energies. They have recognized their unique intelligences and learning styles and they struggle to maintain active imaginations. Youth are aware of their physical, emotional and spiritual states of well-being. They value communication: relationships with friends, a feeling of comraderie, and sexual experimentation. They try out expansion of consciousness from drugs, athletics, music and spiritual practices. Television, film and the Web have made vicarious living a reality for many young people. "There is even a lyricism of international Internet jargon—its basic procedure is known by the poetic verbal imagery 'surfing the Net.' "[5] Ideas are communicated through iconography. "Ours is the Age of Impatience that does not look forward to something: wants it now. Expects to have it, and gets it, so far as technology can provide it."[6] Music too shapes reality for youth: "The contemporary ear requires a completely different approach to music."[7] Young people want emotional, social and financial autonomy. At this level, they have moved from a passive to an active stance.

3. *Accomplishments*.

Almost everything that is great has been done by youth.
                                                                          Benjamin Disraeli

Thirdly, youth have made accomplishments on their own. We fail to recall what youths have achieved. As a reminder: Alexander the Great was King of Macedonia at age 20; by 27 had conquered the civilized world. Michelangelo produced his sculpture "Battle of the Centaurs

at 17 and by 26 had finished "Pieta." Pascal wrote a book on geometry at age 16; three years later invented the adding machine. Joan of Arc, at 18, united the French against the British. Mozart began writing compositions at age four, made his first tour as a musician at age six and by eight finished his first symphony. Thomas Edison patented many of his inventions by the time he was 21. We might minimize these youthful contributions as genius or child protegees; but then why not strive for every youth to attain that faculty? Looking at youth achievements on a societal level, we have the courageous examples in our time of China's Barefoot Doctors, the Feldshers of Russia and the Brigadastos of Cuba, large scale, national programs primarily carried out by youth.[8]

Youth have established life styles that work for them, have mastered technology and applied it to meet their circumstances, have created a community of friends and associates, sampled the paranormal, and brought a coherence to their lives, chaotic as it might appear: Much is achieved outside the mainstream including their families and encrypted in their own way of life framed by a position of commitment and involvement.

Joey is a bright, attractive 17-year-old living in an affluent American suburb with his family and two siblings. His parents have high expectations and are sending him to a private school in the nearby city where he commutes daily. He has a cell phone and an iPod which allow him momentarily to shut off the discord between the outside world and the one he has created to meet his needs and interests. He has a girlfriend, many companions and is active socially in school. Joey also spends afternoons with an older companion, about the age of his father. They met on the bus two years ago and exchanged email addresses. From that casual meeting a relationship developed which allows Joey to integrate the sometimes dissonant versions of reality he is confronted with. He has found an adult with whom he can openly communicate on any subject and who will enter into his world by invitation. His girlfriend withholds sexual gratification which she believes is not proper outside of marriage. His older friend, in contrast, is a willing participant. When asked about his sexuality, Joey says that he is neither straight nor bisexual— "I'm just sexual!" As to the future, he will let that happen when it comes. In the meantime, Joey maintains that his older companion has so much that he can teach him.

4. *Prospects*. The fourth level of reality is where we may glimpse the future and amplify youths' experiments and accomplishments while identifying means that will aid them in their quest. Here is where we need to change our images of youth, insure their rights, support their activities, and pass on what knowledge and skills we can.

How and why we must change the status and expectations of youth. Sociologist S.N. Eisenstadt, commenting on the changing patterns of youth social movements, contrasts present day youth with that of the 1960s and 1970s where protest characterized the era by recognition of inequalities and attempts were made to reconstruct society's centers. In contrast, youth today are developing distinctive ways of life, taking enough resources from the central culture to create their own. They are more concerned with self-identity, quality of life and lifestyles and are aware of and involved in transcendental aspects creating a "weakening of historical Western consciousness." Youth, he emphasizes, are the loci or starting points of far-reaching changes in society, forming enclaves within which new cultural forms emerge, and as such should be recognized as a social group.[9]

Unesco's document on the "Rights and Responsibilities of Youth," issued in 1972, stressed

that:

1. Legal rights are more often a statement of intent rather than a reality; they amount to doubtful protection and furthermore education serves to integrate youth by imposing a system of values, into a society which they increasingly contest.

2. Youth have been treated by governments as clients without representation, without means for decision making, and without participation or involvement. As for responsibilities of youth, these are frequently seen as ". . .duties imposed on them by adult society—the duty of submission to the authority of the family, the community or the State; the duty to receive education devised in the main by adults—or not to receive it if they belong to underprivileged social groups; the duty to work, often at an early age and under harsh conditions . . . the duty, lastly to respect a world order established independently of them and which is becoming more and more alien to them."[10]

Among others, the Unesco document recommended that:

1. Youth, as a social group, have the responsibility to define their own role in society—the right to develop their own culture. Youth must cease to be seen as being in a transitional stage to adulthood and make contributions to society without being stifled. To accomplish these changes, youth must claim effective powers, while preserving their own unique characteristics.

2. Youth must recognize and use conflict creatively (develop new modes of encounter) between themselves and the adult world which holds the real power. If not youth will continue to be an alienated group, rejected, and exploited by adult society, hence reduced to a juvenile level and as such a collection of individual problems (drug abuse, delinquency, mental illness, suicide, sexual, etcetera) to be solved by adults. The alternative is being a social class with rights and means to develop and contribute.

It is sad to report that not much has happened politically and socially to change the situation for youth in the intervening three decades since that declaration was made. There are encouraging signs, however, that there is still time and that with youth taking the initiative much could happen.

I propose a somewhat different approach to youth participation—the development of a *youth social ecology.* I will focus on five areas for consideration and suggest one way that youth, in Action Teams, could activate the Unesco recommendations to contribute to worldwide social reform and, at the same time, enhance their own development, These areas include the democratization of information, political involvement, contributions to peace, direct participation in social issues, and in job creation.

By youth ecology I mean not only their relationship to society but the active engagement of youth in their physical, social, political, cultural, spiritual, and psychological being. An engagement with profound implications. It includes conservation and preservation of youth's energy and creativity. The key word here is *active.* Action is the process of doing and implies movement. To that concept, we must also add the words *informed* and *responsible.*

1. *Democratization of Information.* To be informed, youth first must have free access to information. Technological breakthroughs enable information to travel unrestricted across national and regional boundaries within seconds. It needs no passport and no visas. Already millions from 150 countries use the Internet, which no one owns, and has no curtailment on language or images that it carries. Nations can only restrict access, but ultimately this is futile—and anti-democratic. We must learn how to use information creatively and responsibly, not censor it. Development of technology, especially in new forms of communication can be seen as

one of the few fringe benefits of weapons research.

Most societies traditionally have been very insular but commercialization (movies, advertising, etcetera.) brings about a demand for foreign goods along with changes in values, styles, and so on. Readily available information and ideas are making changes in social, political, cultural, and religious structures and practices not only inevitable but imminently possible on a large scale. With the enormous amount of information constantly flowing from one area to another, we can expect great changes in structures ultimately dissolving traditional social, political, economic, and cultural barriers between nations and generations.

The power of ideas resulting from free exchange of information could eventually bring about greater change than economic factors—fresh sources of information will make new concepts and ideas more readily available, which, in turn, will lead to new expectations, new demands, and new opportunities for young people.

2. *Political Awareness and Involvement.*

The real tyranny of the self is not commitment but lack of commitment.

Nadine Gordimer

In April of 2006, a 19-year-old youth became the latest activist in the succession of suicide bombings, this one in Tel Aviv. It would be presumptuous to deduce his reasoning or incentives. One could guess, however, that he was searching for a purpose to his life, whether he was aware of it or not and that he had a belief—a commitment—in what he was to accomplish: a *cause célèbre*. And furthermore, that he was exploited by his elders' political and religious aims; in his act, he had changed from servitude to being co-equal. Immortality became more than a fringe benefit.

The commitment of Jan Pallach, the 21-year-old Czech student who burned himself in Prague's Wenceslas Square in 1969, to protest the Soviet invasion of his country, was far different in essence. Jan Pallach used self-immolation as the ultimate price in his quest for freedom; the Palestinian used revenge in the form of deaths to the "enemy;" ironically it required his life as well.

Young people everywhere are searching for a *raison d'étre*—something beyond the quotidian of every day life. They may be immersed in the mire of survival but yearn for something more. Some search for meaning through identification with others—heroes, idols, those who have been recognized on whatever grounds. Other youth find gratification in emulating what they admire: choice of occupation, adopting style, speech, living arrangements, or character. Still others who are more aware of their quest may seek inspiration from religion, politics, organizations, and social concerns while grasping the beauty and sacredness of relationships. Here the individual is not only finding out about himself—but *with* himself.

Youth everywhere have a declining confidence in social institutions, especially their schools. There is little involvement in political affairs and political parties, in labor unions, and in youth organizations. Many of the latter are little more than providers of entertainment—to keep youth occupied at a juvenile level until they enter the work force—or as employment opportunities for youth workers!

Most governments manipulate or prevent youth political involvement shored up by the media (which stereotype youth), conservative political and fundamentalist religious groups;

they restrict information, limit decision-making, and impose archaic notions and values—adherence to the party line. In accomplishing their missions, they have developed their own constituencies, methods of indoctrination, and rewards. Some of the results have been terribly tragic. The target groups are mainly youth. Economic development does not necessarily carry with it greater freedom. To the contrary; we've seen many recent examples of the erosion of human rights masked as development.

As the Unesco document affirmed, restrictions and prohibitions ostensively disguised as protection, characterize much of the predicament of youth. For the industrialized nations, many valuable years of a young person's life are taken in preparation for adulthood ("coming of age,"), which includes steady provision for gaining legal rights. Schooling to prepare one for a steady job is obligatory and youths have few real choices insofar as conforming to the social norms—or "dropping out." We attempt to keep them out of the labor market for as many years as possible. Youth in the less industrialized nations are more fortunate in this respect. But they are frequently misused for their labors and manipulated by commercial interests of the technologically advanced nations. In many of these economically poor countries, they do have more opportunities to participate in the work and social activities of the community.

The media commercializes violence, industries capitalize on it, while governments practice it in the form of war. We expect abstinence while the media promotes indulgence. And yet there is little being done to educate youth for making informed, responsible, free choices. Many forms of self destruction among youth—substance abuse, irresponsible sexual activity (prostitution and unwanted pregnancies), and suicide are a constant concern. We know only too well about the poverty, hunger, ill health, and joblessness which youth face everywhere; despair, apathy and spiritual crises, all confirm the needs for different forms of personal and social development. Children and youth become the unwitting victims of greed, war, and poverty.

Governments' main solutions to the difficulties of youth are punishment, restrictions, and doles. Imprisonment is increasingly meted out as deterrence; punishment all too often leads to chronic criminality. Aside from waiting for certain rights to be bestowed on them by longevity (to vote, marry, drink, hold office, acquire property, and so on), how can youth involve themselves in political activity? Through the power of information, they can make informed choices, influence legislation, elect representatives—including youths—and effect political parties, form coalitions, and frame new parties of their own. This was the accomplishment of youth in the Netherlands in the 1960s and 1970s who formed the Provos political party and Reul van Duyn won a seat on the Amsterdam Town Council. Their strategy was to demonstrate against community ills and offer imaginative illustrations—mockups of what could be done. Later they dissolved their party and formed a new one, the Kabouters, which carried their ideas further. In the 1970 elections, they gained 11 seats on the town council and others in local elections throughout the country. One who was elected was age 16, thus not allowed to take a seat until the council changed their law on age restrictions.[11]

More recently, at age 17, Michael Sessions, lost the election for student council at his high school in Hillsdale, Michigan. But that didn't discourage him. He was not satisfied with replicas. A year later (2005) when he turned 18, while still in school, he was allowed to register to vote; at the same time, he conducted a write-in campaign for mayor of his town of 8,200. He raised his own campaign funds by selling snacks and conducted a month-long door-to-door canvass. He won the election, defeating the incumbent 51-year-old mayor. Mayor Sessions is currently enrolled at the local community college combining studies in political science while gov-

erning the town.[12]

Legislation was introduced (but of course defeated) in the State of California to allow 14-year-olds to vote (the same age incidentally they can be tried as an adult for criminal activity). Amid cries from the press of the irresponsibility of youth, fears of the consequences of what might happen to the established power structure were voiced. But since 1968, politicians including those nations with long established democratic governments, fear youth who pose the real possibilities of toppling them. Again, the heart of the matter is not withholding legal rights, but the freedom to exercise informed choice and the kind of education that would empower youth to use it wisely. Or, as a character in a film once said: "If you don't give it to them, they're going to take it."

Responsible action can, and must, occur at all ages. I previously cited the action of a classroom of eight and nine-year-old children in the State of Oregon, but it merits repeating for it's a simple, effective model worth emulating. Their teacher asked them to watch one half hour of their favorite evening program and simply count the number of violent acts, use of weapons, and so on, that they observed. In 12 hours of programming, the children recorded 649 incidents of violence—nearly one per minute. From that simple homework assignment, the children took action. They refused to watch children's programs that displayed violence, wrote a Declaration of Independence from Violence for the student body and by engaging their parents, boycotted products of the companies which sponsored children's programs with violence. Through this social and "political" action, by having information the children had gathered first hand, they were empowered to make wiser choices in the future. That exercise occurred ten years ago; imagine what those children could do todaywith technology to disseminate their findings and build networks of like-minded colleagues.[13]

Looking at the position of youth globally, we must attempt to minimize the ill effects of "Eurocentrism," and "Americanization," and recognize the contributions of other areas—Asian, Latin American, and African regions. We must find new metaphors devoid of divisive and elitist concepts such as majority/minority peoples or developing/developed nations. We must move beyond male domination, sexism, and traditional family structures, to new lifestyles and political structures which emphasize cooperation, diversity, and redistribution of power which will improve the quality of life for everyone. Youth need, and are finding, new forms of participation which include self-help and support groups, along with self-study methods.

Some of these actions are occurring with little notice. What is sometimes seen as passivity on the part of the present generation (in contrast to the 1960s and 1970s) on specific issues is misunderstood. As Professor Eisenstadt indicated, they are going about creating their own life spaces. They are building their own "communities" in cyberspace, making their own open-ended metaphors, their own spirituality, and telling their own stories. In contrast to the idolatry adults attempt to force on them as "role models," they seek more intimacy with equals. It is more difficult to see youth involvement in broader aspects of social change but they are present as active engagements in movements such as peace, ecology, human rights, and consciousness raising (differing from "exploration" of former generations).

Involvement means taking risks. I'm referring to consequences beyond personal humiliation or even loss of one's job. And it means going beyond making "declarations." Sometimes it means actually putting one's life on the line. The kind of youth activism displayed by 12-year-old lqbal Masih from Pakistan, sold into slavery by his parents at age four. He was shackled to a carpet weaving loom, tying tiny knots for the next six years. At age 10 he escaped the factory

and eventually traveled to an international labor conference in Sweden where he spoke out against child abuse of the other six million children below age 14 in his country. After receiving repeated death threats from the carpet industry, Iqbal was assassinated while riding his bicycle in his village.[14]

The story doesn't end with Iqbal's tragic death. A 12-year-old Canadian, looking for the comics, came across Iqbal's story, was so struck that he relayed it to his eighth-grade class. He found interest from some of his classmates, held weekly meetings from his family's den and then set up a website to make daily contact with human rights groups. A year later, Craig Keilburger made the trip to Islamabad and found the unmarked grave of the peer who had inspired him. He visited places where he witnessed gross violations of child labor, has met with Archbishop Tutu, Pope John Paul II, Mother Teresa, and the Dalai Lama. Today, a decade later, Craig lays claim to the world's largest children helping children network. "Free the Children" has built 400 schools that provide education for 35,000 children daily, supply clean drinking water for 100,000 children, started alternative income projects for 20,000 people, and has shipped more than nine million dollars in medical supplies to 40 countries. All these accomplishments while a student in peace and conflict studies at the University of Toronto.[15]

Youth can contribute significantly in the direction of making real progress toward justice, equality, and peace; all youth must be able to earn an international passport to help reduce restrictions of national boundaries. Everywhere there is the need to develop positive national youth policies which are not limited to rights by default, to social class, or attempts to deal with problematic behavior. They must include all youth and have their active participation.[16] Such policies must eventually cross national boundaries with or without the aegis of the United Nations.

3. *Peace*. While nations' elders decide on the battlefields, it is youth who are exposed to, and suffer, the consequences. Peace, moreover, is greater than the mere absence of war; rather, it begins with a positive orientation within; the basic element which the Palestinian youth seemed to lack. As so often said, peace begins within each individual, radiates out to those around, to wider dimensions, and so on. Youth must learn to embrace values of cooperation and collaboration rather than competition and exploitation, interdependence rather than independence. Youth must demand education for peace and not let it occur haphazardly. And in the interim, youth must insist on the right to conscientious objection from military training and service.

A curriculum for peace education includes such studies as cooperative learning that helps develop individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, and interpersonal and small group skills. It also includes training in conflict resolution where conflict becomes a challenge. To implement resolution, third party youth facilitators are needed who are skilled at mediating and turning conflict into creative mutual leaning opportunities transcending win-lose arbitration situations. These studies must begin at the earliest ages in the curriculum of formal education with opportunities to practice in the community. Children and youth can master these skills.

4. *Work and Leisure.* Formal education continues to erect barriers between the economically privileged and the poor, between learning and work, between intellectual and manual labor; it devalues physical tasks. Even with advanced schooling and cultural exposure, many people are under-employed and taken advantage of. For the creation of new jobs youth can no longer depend on governments, or private industry alone nor can they expect formal education to prepare them adequately for existing or future jobs. Youth must ready themselves for an ambiguous future, filled with chaos, uncertainty, and complexity. They must acquire their own skills,

be able to create their own jobs—jobs that will allow them to express creativity, and at the same time, make a social contribution and a decent living as exemplified by Craig Keilburger's entrepreneurship. Youth must be prepared to exercise problem-solving skills, be flexible (the ability to change jobs often), work collaboratively (as in temporarily assembled teams), and customize goods and services. Free access to information and learning how to use it for service is one beginning. Youth are forming networks, many made possible by application of technology, such as electronic billboards, chat rooms, blogs, etcetera.

If we were to use formal education alone to define financial success, then we need only look at the world's richest man (outside royalty) to refute that criterion. Bill Gates dropped out of college and, by his thirties, had made his fortune from scratch by devising ways to communicate information. And he is not the only one: 30 million of the wealthiest Americans are not college graduates.[17]

New concepts of work can help raise consciousness and contribute to the quality of working life. "[T]here seems to be a need for a new concept of culture . . . culture would cease to be viewed simply as the heritage of an elite, and would come to be seen above all as instrumental in the raising of the consciousness and in the development of the entire community."[18] Community-making can take the non-linear form on the World Wide Web.

Youth need to ask questions and require answers. In the industrialized nations, for example, they need to ask educationists why, as graduates, they can't get jobs? Educators are quick to blame economic factors such as recessions and downsizing of industry for job slumps. But employers, on the other hand, voice their discontent of workers' skills due to the elitism and obsolescence of formal education. Recent graduates should likewise be asking how the curriculum did not meet their concerns?

Children and youth should also be asking why their schools do not recognize and maximize their various learning styles? Instead, schooling maintains its primary system based on one predominant form which features rote learning taught by an adult teacher, in the confines of a classroom. Those with action learning styles are forced to conform, their abilities are devalued, and often they are driven into problematic behavior. At best they are seen as "deficient" (viz, "Attention Deficit Disorder") and isolated into "remedial education" where they are tagged as "disabled." Were he living today, Leonardo di Vinci would probably be separated from the academic mainstream due to his ambidexterity, mirror writing, and ability to go backwards and forward simultaneously in space and time; without a doubt, he'd be diagnosed as having dyslexia and siphoned off into a "special education" classroom (soubriquet for segregation).[19]

Project or service learning is still depreciated and virtually ignored in favor of textbooks, lectures, and examinations. Distance learning is expanding however, with the aid of technology as television and self-study methods become more readily available and accepted into the workplace. Duke University, for example, gave each student in the class of 2008 a free iPod, with a web station. The plan was not only that youth could augment their classwork, but that it would encourage professors to integrate it into their courses.[20] Youth, however, have a long way to go to get the education they need and at the same time they have a lot to say about getting it.

Social learning. I previously referred to British social psychiatrist Maxwell Jones and his concept of *social learning*. To recap, he devised a method whereby people could learn from their relationships and the situations in which they found themselves. From schools to correctional institutions and mental hospitals, from governmental agencies and the military to families, his "living learning" procedure enabled participants to interact with one another to explore

new ways of perceiving situations and resolving conflicts. *Real* youth participation in social learning would inevitably decrease the necessity, or indeed do away with occupations such as social workers, counselors, youth workers, probation officers, and others who are presently engaged in confining, restricting, and manipulating youths' movements.[21]

Finally, there is the matter of leisure. Despite the tremendous commercialization of free time by mass media and industry, youth have much to offer. The passivity of marketable leisure in the industrialized countries—for example, spectator and competitive sports, recreation paraphernalia, and packaged travel—stifles creativity and limits the experience of pleasure, to say nothing about its ecological damage. It reduces leisure to consumption, dictating locations, styles, forms, tastes, and the rest. It appeals to dreary values and obsolescent aspects of cultures. Youth want, need, and can create something more worthwhile. They experience the basic joy of play itself.[22]

We also sometimes forget that many of the world's great inventions originated as play during leisure time. "We are more ready to try the untried, when what we do is inconsequential." So wrote Longshoreman Eric Hoffer in *The Ordeal of Change*. He continued: "Hence the remarkable fact that many inventions had their birth as toys. In the Occident the first machines were mechanical toys, and such crucial instruments as the telescope and microscope were first conceived as playthings."[23]

5. *More Than Survival: Toward a Youth Ecology.* As vital as it is, youth must move beyond ordinary subsistence in their personal lives as well as the world in which they live. The ecological, social, psychological, and human predicaments youth have inherited are both contaminating and complex; some are irreversible. Much of our energies and resources are now consumed in developing competency to cope if only to maintain the status quo. In spite of damage control, youth must become proactive by taking positive stances. Youth, for example, must be more concerned with wellness than illness, with conserving and developing resources than with consumption, with expanding and perfecting the human condition rather than repairing it. Youth as well as adults must be prepared for shifts that will result from widespread social and technological changes. Already these changes have had significant effects on youth psychologically creating a wholistic outlook; they see no separation between play, magic and work, between information and ideas, thought and the material, religion and business. Iconography allows them to condense complex matters by recognizing patterns and forms a new kind of metaphorical understanding. They are able to engage in more than one task simultaneously and can live with ambiguity, uncertainty and chaos. Youth create their own virtual communities and seek genuiness in spiritual quests in contrast to secondhand religions. They tell their own stories and in the telling, create their own identities.[24]

Youth everywhere must be able to be involved in matters that affect their lives at the moment. They need to have a sense of benefit and usefulness for their activities. Participation is a splendid source of personal and social development. And we need their assistance; by the same token, they need ours, such as it may be. If youth are given opportunities for active participation, they become collaborators who work for constructive change. Youth need opportunities to learn through projects which they design and carry out to bring about the improvement of society. Boycotting products of manufacturers supporting violence on television is one, getting oneself elected as mayor is another. These projects should be an integral part of formal education in collaboration with other organizations, but are increasingly being done outside its structure.

To carry out action projects, we have to share scientific methods with youth. The funda-

mentals begin with learning how to spot and state problems which need study and amelioration. Next, they need to calculate the resources and obstacles (analyze the forcefield); then subsequently devise and carry out a plan of action. Finally, they need to assess the results in terms of how effective—or ineffective—the plan of action was. They may need a re-run with a different strategy. This cycle is the basis for action or project learning, which furthermore leads to the formation of knowledge.[25]

Other tools we need to share with youth include humanistic and social psychology and mythology. Concepts and practices such as intuition, archetypes, dreams, collective unconscious, visualization, and meditation are but a few. Unfortunately in it's efforts to become "scientific," academic psychology got lost in reductionism, breaking down human behavior into analyzable bits and pieces. People just don't function that way. Luckily, newer more wholistic psychologies have emerged, largely outside of mainstream academia. Some have been there all the time but encoded in terminology and complex theories that only professional psychologists could comprehend.

Jung's theory of archetypes, is a good example. It has been available since 1902. In it he showed that we all have tendencies to form psychic representations in symbolic language; motifs show up in dreams, myths, and fantasies. These are energies that inform the psyche which drive a person in a certain direction psychologically, emotionally, and even job-wise. Both talent and temperament are dictated by the archetype, working deep inside the unconscious like the nucleus of an atom: hidden yet vital, guiding the evolution of the individual's psyche towards full consciousness. Classically they were personified in Greek mythology in the appearance of gods and goddesses.

The appeal of the "Starwars" movies is an example of archetypal lore. Luke Skywalker is still very much the archetypal son. His life-and-death struggle with Darth Vader (the dark father), is a replay of the eternal struggle between the upcoming generation and the one in power; the hostile fathers, Uranus and Cronos feared their sons' acquisition of power. Luke, the son with a loving heart, must defeat the destructive father to set free the loving one.

Michael Jackson exemplifies the androgynous element of the psyche, which the Greeks characterized as Dionysus, god of ecstasy, an eternal youth who scarcely knows who he is, and is unable to differentiate the feminine from the masculine in himself. He searches for his true identity, experiencing the cycles of death and rebirth. Michael Jackson's surgeries to change his physical appearance are an attempt to find himself: to create a self that is separate from "Michael Jackson, superstar." He is both black and white, masculine and feminine, child and adult. His appeal for young women is in his seeming vulnerability; for adolescent males he represents the possibility of being both sexes.[26]

Youth can learn useful information from other areas—quantum mechanics, synergy, morphic resonance, poetry, reincarnation, spirituality, and the use of abstraction—as important tools to explore their world with a broader view, what someone has called, "a wider landscape of the imagination." Metaphors, for example,

> are ways of helping our minds process the unprocessable . . . Problems arise in belief systems like religion, science and its application only when people insist in believing that these metaphors are literal truth. . . In trying to understand something we reach for a metaphor for it. And the best metaphors spring almost unbidden from the unconscious. This allows a substitution for the thing in terms

of something more familiar to us, like the "pangs" of hunger.[27]

And to bind learning and experimentation, youth need to perfect the art of human relationships.

6. *Youth Action Teams.* As means to implement the Unesco counsel, we need ways for youth to become mobilized and receive the skills for its implementation. One method would be the creation of teams of youth summoned for action, *Youth Action Teams* (YATs). They could be educated in Youth Development Centers and non-profits as well as in traditional schools. Such Teams would be composed of six to 12 youths of all ages, two older experienced youth, and an adult expert who would serve as a coordinator or facilitator. Training would evolve around design and implementation of projects which the Teams would select much like the research and development components of industry.[27]

We have splendid examples of youth serving constructive roles worldwide through voluntary service in many governmental and nongovernmental agencies. A *Youth Action Team,* however, would supplement and enlarge these activities by providing expertise in helping a community or an agency assess its resources and needs, then fabricate and carry out a plan of action. Teams could be mobilized to meet general or specific tasks; evaluating youth services and agencies to ecological preservation, conceiving new forms of literacy training to disaster preparation and in creative uses of leisure time. Differing from voluntary service organizations, Teams would not offer direct services, but rather assist others to acquire appropriate information and skills, and learn how to use them effectively.

An international exchange would enhance such undertakings and enable youths to learn from one another cross-culturally and cross-nationally, perfect their skills, and enlarge their knowledge—not too unlike the partnership in the International Space Program. Team members would be paid for their services and receive academic recognition if they so desired. The peace dividend in the form of use of military facilities would make exchanges readily possible on a large scale at a minimum of additional cost. As far back as 1959, *Life Magazine* proposed a plan to establish a "Great White Fleet" composed of unarmed naval vessels, painted white as a symbol of peace, ". . . would sail around the world with food for the hungry, medical facilities for the sick or injured, and technicians to help underprivileged people improve their own lot."[29] The many recent world disasters would have been greatly assisted by this project; portions have been realized through voluntary organizations such as "Free the Children" and "Doctors Without Borders."

Concluding thoughts. That fundamental changes are taking place among youth, furthering their existence as a distinct social class, is well recognized. From their enclaves we can see starting points of possible future personal, cultural and societal change. Impatient with the obsolescence of acculturation to a society with which they feel at odds, they are creating their own lifestyles, relationships, means of communication, and indeed, their own communities. The question is raised as to how we can assist youth in their experimentation, or can we at all? And what can we learn from them in their pursuits? A youth social ecology is one means to preserve their rights and foster their development by sharing tools that will aid in their unearthings. Building on their sense of relationships, action teams of youth, employing a program development cycle, could lead to new ideas that would simultaneously provide the need for participatory experiences and lead to jobs in the "industry of discovery."[30]

EXEMPLARY YOUTH ACTION TEAMS

1. *Human Needs*. Determining, fostering, and protecting basic physical, emotional, intellectual, sexual, and spiritual needs; designing new ways for fulfillment and enrichment of the quality of life.
2. *Human Services.* Study needs and assist agencies to implement new methods and evaluation of services in areas such as: physical and mental health, crime and delinquency, substance abuse, violence, aging, child abuse, learning and teaching, and social welfare. Preparation of "Consumer's Guides' to public and private agencies and practitioners. Emphasis on self-help approaches and primary prevention models. Development of a "service bank" where people could receive credits for services performed to be used in exchange for goods and services.
3. *Community Public Health.* Assisting the community in identifying its needs and assets for coping with current health matters and prevention. Promotion of pilot projects; define youth issues and gain youth representation on boards, committees, and planning entities, and engage in youth advocacy.
4. *Disaster.* Aiding disaster (of which a major one strikes the earth at the rate of every 15 days): earthquakes, floods, famine, riots; ways to mobilize civil and military sources to assist communities to plan and intervene.
5. *Ecology.* Social and physical conservation, alternative energy sources, corporate auditing and responsibility, to preserve all areas of the planet and make it more habitable,
6. *Human Rights and Justice.* Preservation and furthering of fundamental freedoms, including human rights and justice; rights of racial, generational, and sexual minorities, nationalities, etcetera.
7. *Peace.* Ways to bring about and protect local and world peace, promote understanding, conflict resolution, and cooperation among families, within neighborhoods, organizations, and nations; de-escalation of violence, guns, and the arms race; conversion of military resources to global peace pursuits. Form liaison and affiliations with local, national, and international peace organizations, for example, the UN's University of Peace in Costa Rica.
8. *Youth Development.* Examining existing theories and conceptions of youth development on a cross-cultural basis; designing and conducting surveys and research to enhance developmental theory and putting refined theory to service.
9. *Employment Creation.* Experimenting, defining, and testing new forms of youth employment, entrepreneurship. bartering, and how to implement them (identify potential areas, resources, obstacles, strategies, spread).
10. *Political Action.* The role of youth in political action; use of existing political structures and creation of new ones, including youth political parties; participation in voter registration for youths, forming youth constituencies, and a clearing house for legislation concerning youth; establishing liaison with incumbents.
11. *Leisure*. From sports to hobbies: Locating, experimenting and supporting a wide range of leisure time activities, especially evenings, weekends, and holidays. Exploring talents, physical fitness, and facilities such as 24-hour community schools and their integration into the community. Ways to find and disseminate information on local, national and international resources and events.
12. *Media.* Development of responsible reportage of newsworthy events to enlighten and broaden opinion, raise social conscience; critically examine news events reported by the media,

track stories and reporters, originate press releases, conduct depth interviews and reactions to events; distillation of coverage and presentation to the community for discussion. Team would be mobile with a van equipped for filming, videotaping and rapid compilation of news sheets and distribution to remote areas to promote discussion. Maintain liaison with commercial media.

13. *Performing Arts.* Development of art forms such as theater, including talk-back and street theater, mime, video, film, and dance, both as cultural forms and commentary for public involvement.

14. *Literary and Literacy.* Study of literature from classical forms to graffiti, as social commentary and its linkages to the community; writing fiction and non-fiction, offering critiques, linking with local writers and literary organizations. Promotion of approaches to reducing youth and adult illiteracy.

15. *Oral History.* Oral history as a means for discovering our roots, our heritage, the life of the community and its relevance to youth. Training in depth interviewing, data recording and preservation.

16. *Research.* Design and implement forms of evaluation for social action strategies, including monitoring projects, legislation, and agencies' programs for effectiveness; social auditing.

17. *Futures.* Designing creative culture models of the future; use of physical and social space, time, leisure, play, work, and technology. Visions and plans to celebrate the new millennium.

18. *Development.* From neighborhood to nation building: enhancement of economic, social. cultural, and political aspects of local, national, regional, and international development without exploitation of human and natural resources.

19. *New Economic Order.* Design ways to implement the International Order locally, based on equality rather than military domination or industrial exploitation.

20. *International Exchanges.* Planning and implementing Team exchanges nationally, regionally, and internationally to assist others and learn from them; to celebrate youth's role in the new millennium.

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