

Humanity Must Find its Humanity

By Christian de Laet

An Address to the Canadian Association for the Club of Rome, Ottawa, April 2000

Edited from the original tape by Ezra Daniel, Revised 17 November 2000 by Christian de Laet

Introduction by Wayne Kines

It's a great privilege to introduce Christian de Laet.

I first saw him standing in the back of the room at the Stockholm conference in 1972, at which time he was still the head of the Secretariat of the Canadian Council of Resource and Environment Ministers. Some of you are familiar with that organization, which, I believe, was set up under the initiative of the Hon. Walter Dinsdale during the tenure of the Diefenbaker government. Christian headed that organization for nearly ten years.

That period really was the beginning of the creation of awareness, a national awareness that we not only had an environmental problem but that we were part of a global environmental problem. I can remember how successful Christian was in creating that awareness. He organized a huge conference at Montebello about the problem, with participation from all over the country. Young people had so sufficiently assumed responsibility that they decided he was part of the problem and he had a rough time at his own conference, which was to me a great sign of progress.

Christian went on to work with the United Nations in Papua New Guinea, to the Mekong River Basin Authority and to advise Maurice Strong on the development of the UN environment programs. Later Sonny Ramphal, the then Commonwealth Secretary-General, called him to become his Science Advisor and Secretary of the Commonwealth Science Council. Then the president of the University of Regina called him to the Great Plains Research Institute to research the previous hundred years of rapid rural modernisation of the Prairies. He had already had a very interesting time in the west some years earlier. I had been called to help with the reorganisation of Notre-Dame College, which many of you will remember through Father Murray and his hockey team, the Hounds of Notre-Dame. But when Father Murray passed away and the college began to decline, Mark Kenny asked me to help him in the redirection and I brought him Christian. I think it's safe to say that Christian had by far the greatest influence on the redirection of that college and the fact is that it is now one of the most successful private colleges in the country because of its redirection toward "educating the whole person." Christian has continued to be a catalyst. I don't know what else to call him other than that.

At the moment Christian is an advisor and indeed one of the instigators of the Society for Development Alternatives out of New Delhi, an incredible organization. He is, as well, on the board of the Union of International Associations in Brussels and many others. He is here today with Sylvia Van Brabant, who will tape his presentation. Sylvia is one of the best documentary filmmakers that Canada has and she and Christian are working together on a film about water.

Why this man on this subject at this time? I think I'll let his presentation tell you that. Christian is speaking on the subject of "Humanity Must Find its Humanity".

From Science to Conscience

I chose the subject, with its slightly pretentious title borrowed from Michel Serres, because at my age I felt it timely to have a signpost to put my life together and plan what remains to be done with it. I certainly believe, as a baseline that it is time to go from science to conscience. We must all be ready to attempt the bridge between science and personal responsibility and there are a growing number of those who are ready to become engaged in this endeavour.

One problem with the term humanity is that we never know which humanity we are referring to. We feel very comfortable about being the 20 per cent of the 20 per cent, in a numerical analogy to Pareto's 20:80 ratio. But

whose humanity is it when we hardly see any display of humanity when casting a glance at the media any given day?

For a long time I have stumbled over the inaugural speech of US President Truman in 1949, in which the notion of "development," as we pretend to know it, was first mooted as a necessary shift from guns to ploughshares. It was then easy enough to achieve in Europe because the Marshall Plan was designed to spend money to replace war-destroyed equipment. Europe already had a high level of technical maturity, notably in transforming materials and energy into the variety of technical objects, equipment and products, that would reconstruct its economies.

Not so simple in the later-named third world, consisting

of newly independent countries, recently metropolitan wards going through a de-colonisation process which rested on adequate numbers of qualified technical manpower. There was a cognitive dissonance there, if that is the right term, and throwing money or equipment at it couldn't bridge it.

Generally speaking, much of my earlier years in Canada in the fifties were marked by observing the gaps between the rhetoric, public or otherwise, and the reality of Canada north of its border fringe with the rest of the American continent. While my basic references were that of Belgium and of its colonial realm in Africa, I was able in the late 50's to focus on the Canadian reality by travelling extensively throughout its outer reaches. The notion of 'sustainable' development was not then, of course, a meaningful concept: no point deploring the absence of a yet unborn concept even if there was already the evidence of significant dysfunction.

The gap between rhetoric and reality was particularly evident for me, aggravated by the imperfections of my newly acquired English. Yet all sorts of language traps were gaping, strikingly bizarre if not misleading, particularly in interregional and in international arenas. When we listen to what the pundits say about development in Zimbabwe or in the Sudan, (or elsewhere for that matter) it is difficult to believe that English is such an inaccurate language that people can mess with it to conjure up erroneous images of what was sold as development. The evidence was looming that, at the end of the development pipeline, there was nothing very positive done about development other than processing throughput from infinitely large sources to end in bottomless pits of wastes and garbage.

Even on the BBC this morning a particular failure was reported as "a pipeline problem." The inference was that governments are good, institutions are sound, the public finances are healthy, it's just the stupid plumbing that doesn't connect properly.

The lesson to be drawn from this is that, whenever possible, we have to go upstream from the cost centres of industrial and commercial processes and verify the overall quality of the decision-making processes which give rise to such wastes or toxic spill-overs. We may even have to go further upstream and check the planning process, which presumably rests on a sound basis of societal goals and public rationality. Let's stop at this for fear of asking you to suspend disbelief. Yet, we can't afford to go on being counter-productive, nor even counter-intuitive for any sustainable length of time. We

do know now that nature, even human nature, cannot be held to a bad bargain indefinitely.

Francis Bacon said something about finding nature obedient only if we *OBEY IT*. Nobody knows for sure where the crest or the watershed is; the point, or the moment, at which infinite demands can no longer be squeezed into finite supply systems. But there is a cusp where mal-development starts to take over. Without being prophets of bad augury, many people suspect that the unravelling of standard development issues and practices have started visibly as of 1973 and the energy crisis.

The past five decades have been punctuated by benchmarks of various kinds. Some of them have acquired greater significance in retrospect. Wayne Kines, in his kind introduction, has alluded to some of them in terms of changes in direction and professional lifestyles. There was also a change of personal lifestyle, and personal reasons tend to run deep. For me, 1967 was a pivotal year for external reasons as well. The more important shifts, however, have been in changed outlooks at the meaning of life and of my place in it. These must of necessity account for the re-calibration of my objectives, the means at my disposal, the response to inevitable constraints as well as the open-ended strategies devised to meet changes on the world scene.

Here in Canada we had the National Conference on Pollution and the Environment in 1966-1967, culminating successive waves of consultations at national, regional and local levels and back again. Abroad, a noteworthy signpost towards the meaning of access and equity to lift the burden of poverty was the initiation of development-dialogue efforts carried out by the Swedish Hammarskjöld Foundation. The object was to question the nature, the extent and the direction of development, of development aid and of technical assistance. My personal objective was to instigate a type of martial arts' *kata*. It would aim at beyond the *skull* of mal-development and do away with most technical assistance programmes. The notion was arising that we needed visible results rather than more self-complacent reports.

It was a very lively period with brain cells challenged, and in good company, which to me was an essential in working out sensible solutions. After the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in '72, many hopes were set back as world leaders failed to set the bar high and firm enough for institutions to follow. Then came Stockholm plus five, when I went to the Commonwealth Secretariat, then plus 10, with an

opportunity to review the progress on regional collaboration among and between 50 countries. Then there was the Rio Conference at plus 20.

We have had a Rio plus five and now, what next? How long can we keep on deferring the inescapable deadlines of a convergence between nature, human nature and an adequate and timely toolbox of techniques and technologies to achieve the claimed objectives of development? I suppose I've become of softer tissue in my older days, but not of lesser resolve. I have concerns about globalisation without a solid base of localised development results. I decided that the great winds of change to come could not be met by hunkering down and listening to platitudes: we must sail the winds in the real world. This is what I am going to tell you about in this necessarily short address. My programme is three-fold: Info-learning, getting a life and communications.

Info-learning

One panel of the triptych could be called *Info-learning*, which I might describe summarily as an operating manual for the métiers of tomorrow. This follows Robert Jungk's²⁴ ideas, with which I combine a bit of "edu-tainment" to make learning more fun; for example with the play- *Homo Ludens is the key to Homo Sapiens*. The young people that I meet today seem keen to discover for themselves a plausible vocational métier – something like the age-old Compagnons du Devoir in France – except that there is no longer a cultural tradition to follow in family footsteps. In the guilds of yesteryear the children were taught at a very early age the purpose and the pursuit of craft as an "oeuvre", something which was topped up with a *chef d'œuvre*, an object of pride for the *artisan* and for society. The apprentices learned to devise the tools that ultimately fashioned objects, big and small, which carried the culture that had given rise to their trade in the first place. Even if in a modern vein there is still an annual highly-prized recognition as "le meilleur ouvrier de France", I suggest we look beyond technical objects made of transforming materials and energy and reach for the current higher priced-value of knowledge and its management.

The loop described above between artisans, tools and physical production has been decried as elitist in reaction to the social pressures characteristic of Europe in the mid-1800's. Let us face the reality. The technical progress which followed was due to the creativity,

inventiveness and teamwork brewing in the cauldron of the social unrest due to the necessity of abandoning *Middle Ages* structures and values unaffected by the contemporary social revolutions, many of which are still undigested at this time. Be that as it may, many states launched significant "projets de société" such as the Suez and Panama Canals, the Eiffel Tower, and the Crystal Palace. All were showcases of where a sustained technical education could lead. This is not to say that these were an unalloyed success, as the present day can attest. However, it is up to us to learn from the experience of the last 150 years and to avoid the pitfalls of hyper technology by a more human-centred development as we move into the new century. The required changes in outlooks will particularly affect the use to which we put our cortical endowment: the power of knowledge rather than that of coercion however it may be disguised.

As Ashok Khosla, President of the Society for Development Alternatives in India, and vice-president of the Club of Rome, is wont to say "from the fountainhead of our western civilisation, it takes a long time, probably six generations, for development change to take root". We no longer have 150 years of slack ahead of us to live as we do now here in a G7 country, even if we no longer make any mistakes at all. An overall performance of this kind is a remote objective: it certainly has not been part of humanity's track record over the past few centuries at least. Now, we must achieve it consistently, productively, equitably, as in *Sustainable Development*.

We are thus at the threshold of a new jump-shift if we want to make 2100. This time horizon is that of Thierry Gaudin²⁵, former head of the innovation policy sector in the French central administration for about 20 years. He has established an INGO Prospective 2100 to explore in depth the 12 emerging pathways in research-action, the least number which can be managed to converge successfully in the window 2020-2060. Thierry considers this as an imperative gateway to the next century.

An ambitious programme made up of demanding projects. Cutting across them, we could run a new thesaurus of value-words to carry us in the tasks, using most letters of the alphabet. Taking "I" as an example, we can isolate "intelligence, innovation, institutions, inventiveness, intuition". The art would be programmes and projects that build on such attributes jointly, not randomly. Even that single letter would generate a tall order of skills and aptitudes, which as we know, are in

short supply in our materialistic world. So far, in most political and policy-making circles we have been content with intelligence of the military type. The late French President, Georges Clemenceau compared the new skills and aptitudes with music! . Indeed we need a new kind of Music.

The looming deadline for me is the next 25 years. Not because of my expected life span but because the young adults of today will then have become the decision-makers we will need. What we are doing to them today is critical and we must start now, thus the "*Info-learning*" initiative, a computer-based interactive compilation of practical knowledge, material and otherwise, aiming at the right kinds of *métiers* to pass on to youngsters. This seems to me essential if we want to avoid the less desirable outcome of spending the best of their lives in a kind of Third World, or even Fourth World, here or elsewhere.

Europe has 500,000 villages they don't know what to do with because they can never be fitted, geographically, culturally or otherwise, into the *Hi-Tech* world of *Technopolis*. There are sad stories of miss-fitting in the corridors of the EC in Brussels, such as putting up a new, high-technology plant to be staffed by locals who are used to their own interpretation of their communal life and traditions. To assemble electronic parts, or whatever, wouldn't leave them with enough of the *right kind of time*: socialising time, ritual time, or simply leisure time to help with a building bee. Cultures clashing in dissonance there, in the heart of Europe and not just in the Balkans or other hot spots!

Getting a Life

The second panel of the triptych is "*getting a life*" in the field. With a residence in the Mount Sutton range of the Eastern Townships of Quebec for over 45 years, I have progressively seen the importance of casting "*thinking locally* into *acting locally*. There are land ownership and cultural pressures there because young retirees and hordes of holidaymakers from Montreal are only 90 minutes away. The landscape has changed significantly for a wide variety of reasons, which are all leading some of us to work out environmentally sound and ecologically valid solutions to tourism opportunities in re-orienting the vocation of private wood lots, often clear cut, to multipurpose agro-forestry gardens and farms.

The point is that there is very little organised scientific and technical knowledge about relatively small private

wood lots! The owners feel trapped into buying a chainsaw to secure some expected economic returns! But how do you measure primary bio-mass productivity over a few hundred acres to find out what the potential carrying capacity might be for different streams of fauna and flora to be harvested seasonally, whether for utility or for amenity purposes? How does one optimise, or select between, competing ecological, environmental, economic and social cultural opportunities? How does one bring up the subject for discussion with local authorities? How do you cope with institutional inertia, with entrepreneurial resistance, with low public rationality? How do we measure economically, at specific places, the water flows of small streams and the atmospheric precipitation, all with their seasonal variations? Where do we begin to plan the growing seasons of certain kinds of herbs and plants, and at which locations in this mountainous region, so as to maximise the overall productivity? What and where are the criteria? Even if we do have them, how should we make them known through the *Info-learning Initiative*?

These may be fascinating and even useful questions to ask, but time shrinks fast in the face of all that needs be done. Many people can be found to belong to a so-called *Eco-village*; while their objectives are praiseworthy in humanistic terms, they seldom make the grade in terms of economic self-sufficiency. Let us remember that if *Sustainable Development* does not lead to the basic guarantees of food, clothing, shelter, health, education or leisure, it just will not happen. Travelling abroad has convinced me that western consultants landing in a Third World country do not realise the amount of "*métier*" needed to blend traditional and modern knowledge into coherent practical operating systems. There is a revival of interest in nature, and that's good! There is great difficulty, however, in enlisting associates willing to work in relatively modest lifestyles, even if the needed technical knowledge has been adequately husbanded and harnessed. Who is going to "go the distance" in sustainable paces in that direction unless it is in their interest to do so?

I might make a vague claim that my professional experience and personal values add up to some kind of legacy to be left locally, and that it can be generalised and replicable. It involves how we acquire technical, social and political maturity fast, in order to create *wealth* instead of just making money by whatever means? That the state is anorexic is a good signpost to

benchmark the road ahead. Another is that, contrary to Gresham's law, good money must be made to drive bad money away. This takes team vigilance, which we seem to see emerging in groups such as ATTAC.

Communications

The third panel of the triptych has to do with communications. With many of my friends, such as those in Development Alternatives in India, the Union of International Associations in Brussels, in Prospective 2100 in France and the World Media Institute here, a major joint effort is to be made in communicating what far-flung, relevant documentation is available. It can only be useful if it is adequately dimensioned to serve the various scales of the public which, let us remember, all have their distinct cultural criteria to respect, whether here or elsewhere on the planet. After all, over 3,000 different languages are currently spoken and there is no reason to believe that English will overcome them all before the time horizon of our deadlines. We do not have the four or five planets to give everybody our own lifestyle, which by all reckoning is neither technically efficient nor socially effective.

What should be communicated that can make sense overall and how should it be communicated? Data is not information per se, whatever its accumulation. Information itself is meaningless unless it is related to specific objectives. It is not just a matter of information technologies, it is having an adequate set of values to benchmark the desirable progress in the perceptual, interpretative inter-linkages that can be established among bundles of data, which otherwise mean nothing except in statistical realms. We have lots of data, but we don't have coherent and consistent information. Besides, we don't use whatever information we do have to inform others. We use it to misinform, certainly, to deform, likely. To train people into senseless, robotic technical tasks, yes. To make them come out of themselves and become whole people? This is difficult, which in institutional terms means "*Not right now*".

How I compensate for this at this stage of my life is what has happened all along. I do not write books, or manuals, nor do illustrations, barely outlines for friends, colleagues or clients: they can flesh it out! The welcome opportunity which has happily landed at my doorstep is teaming up with a younger generation person, Sylvie van Brabant, a successful documentary filmmaker – and accidentally also of Belgian extraction! I am lucky to have been invited to join forces with

her for a film on water, an inherently complex subject which, perhaps for that reason, has been deferred too long. After all, aren't we "water rich"! We have downsized this extraordinary complex subject into simple patterns of meaning. But the inner complexity of the subject matter is left in the safe hands of gifted young adults who will be the key interviewers in the many field situations that will be filmed. Their age group will indeed be the decision-makers in 2025 as noted previously. They will have accumulated by then the knowledge, the strength and the sense to tell their "old-school" predecessors to leave it to them to work out successful outcomes on the survival battlefields of tomorrow. As we already suspect, Roman arenas would be mere Victorian tea parties in comparison.

These young adults of today will force us then to move out of the way and to live off our decadent myths in retirement. They will not accept implausibly sacred cows nor vested interests in sheer size whether bank accounts or 50-metre dams. How many of these structures end up flooding our gardens under the pious and self-serving pretence of watering our seeds? Are they to be treated as alarmists when they start to raise essential alarms? The youngsters, intelligent and sensitive as they are, will be on a personal and collective quest about water. We can go around the world to any number of places where I have witnessed development successes and failures, all yielding useful lessons. These young adults will be doing a lot of questioning among themselves as well, in an interactive mode. Their questions about water will be analogous to the questions they start asking about their own selves: where from, what use can it be, how to keep it in play healthily and for a long, useful life. This documentary is far from an easy endeavour but Sylvie has the mastery of her art, with a large number of very successful films to her credit.

This has been a cursory overview of the major three initiatives that attempt to cap my professional life and many of my personal interests. A few images can illustrate some particular aspects, which may be of interest to this audience.

The Info-learning initiative is focused on learning about and from nature, but more particularly of learning about human nature: to explore how the clear intent of human development has been side tracked to exploitative economic development. Our vaunted technologies and associated techniques of development are sound but their application is misinterpreted to suit the preferences – acknowledged or denied – of individuals

acting either on their own or in the wake of corporate demands. Corporations, public or private, end up behaving like pseudo-tribes whatever their claims to serve also the *Public Good*. Most of the failures in the attempt to maintain or recover a sense of human community are due, not to lack of money or physical resources, not because of the lack of materials and energy nor of 'appropriate technology.' The great handicap is in the orientation of people – their mindset, their public rationality and their view as part of a community. Many cultures have ended up locked in the cabinets of compulsive consumerism and technology, making it impossible for people to realise their own potential and monitoring their physical, social or political environments critically. Progressive infantilism, dependence or blind obedience on false idols is not a recipe for sustainable development.

The challenge is to expand the private universe of people as individuals and make them want to know themselves, their relatives, and their neighbours, in spite of the constant pressures on each to surrender yet a bit more to the invasion of their privacy. This is not a proposition with easy recipes. It is a sad turn of affairs when people must be forced to the brink of disaster to recover their sense of "Life doesn't have to be like this!" But what is the practical alternative pathway out of the conundrum. The prevailing technology and greed-driven economic system cannot let go until it is itself drawn to the edge of the abyss, fighting for the few remaining marginal benefits still to be gouged. The gradual decay of the human value system is accompanied by the rising inability to see what could be done to raise us above our animal impulses. Hence the title "Humanity Must Find its Humanity." None of us has a private, '1-800' line to truth and righteousness. But if we want to make the 2025 benchmark in relatively safe waters, now is the time to get started. Resolve, like a tide, will lift all boats, large or small. There are no large boats to do the job for the smaller ones, or if there are, do not trust them blindly. In an ebbing tide, the big ships will be stranded first.

The question of water is critical in our rise to greater discernment. There is no life without water. Many, if not most of the mining reserves of the world have already been pre-empted and spoiled for generations by the metropolitan overlords who set the mining system up in the first place. So everything we can manage on the planet's thin biosphere, itself proportionally no thicker than the condensation of our breath on a football, is a precious layer of fauna, flora and microbial

life. It is very little but it is of critical importance because it is all the biomass we do have, ourselves included.

Sobering thoughts, but whom does it sober up? Nobody seems to get sobered up, hacking away at the forest and mining the fish and the rest of it. We praise democracy, but often the louder where we practice it least. We don't want dictators or even enlightened autocrats yet our behaviour suggests that that is what we end up with! We have reached a point where the paradoxes and contradictions in which we are mired cannot be resolved any longer by long awaited reports and endless rounds of meetings. The end comment here is that the largest failure of modern society (to paraphrase Khrushchev) is its inability to create selfless men.

If the building up of usable knowledge systems is the main issue I have been embarked on, there are two "outriggers" to maintain the needed balance while keeping an eye on reality checks. One is water; the other is the understanding of multi-purpose agro-forestry gardens at a local, individual level.

Water: The Giver of Life

Water, the "giver of life," manifests itself in all the life forms it helps create, and it stays with its creations, its creatures, throughout their whole life spans. It is more than 70 percent of our body mass, for some other species, up to 95 percent! So, we must agree, water is the real nerve end to twitch, if there is one.

Public outcries start to become heard everywhere, however ill-informed the public. Maybe it is not rationality that impels them – it is their gut feelings and instincts. This anxiety must be managed in order to avoid grave social disruptions. Yet, there are no quick fixes, certainly not while governments are toying with privatisation schemes. Their heavy hand is not designed to handle a fluid like water, nor is the private sector concerned with anything else but merchants bottling and selling it as an economic commodity

Who then will do the needful? Our proposed documentary on water is designed to bring out desirable action strategies for the mid-term. This is indeed a 'one-of' opportunity to serve as a background for an enquiry into forestry gardening.

What is fundamentally wrong is the way the modern systems of government have tended to fragment humans, basically herd animals, into individual units (is it just for fiscal and electoral purposes?) and to set them

up competitively against each other. In some countries, like in India, a family is still able to choose whether its members are going to live under the umbrella of an undivided family corporation or to belong to the more modern model imposed by the then British Raj, the metropolitan overlords. Many of my colleagues in India have chosen the undivided family corporation model. It suits them as busy professionals and their analysis shows that there is an overall and individual saving in time and other resources, apart from lessening the soul-destroying exercise of dealing with bureaucracies.

Similarly, in many places in the world people have never really abandoned some version of communal structure, in spite of blandishments from institutional and financial circles. Even from the standpoint of imperfect knowledge, the “other” model has so many beneficial features that unless you are in the centre of that mindset you cannot perceive them. The current mindset of the hyper-technical Western Judeo-Christian culture has become near overwhelming – notwithstanding closed communities such as religious groups. The point of view we have lightly sketched here merely reflects the conviction that whatever we do, equity and ethics must play their part. Only then can “democracy” have any meaning at all.

A further insight is that, without neglecting the global, the local arenas are the true breeders of human development. Environmental values can only be factored in if there is a perceived risk in their breach. Timely and adequate remedies do not percolate down. They rise up through the inner up-surfing of local traditions and their practitioners. Remedies cannot emerge from the spurious outpourings of an urban “intelligentsia” divorced from the stark realities that affect Pareto's 80 percent, wherever they may be located, North or South, jointly or severally. We simply have to develop fast, adequately trained sets of “*gens de métier*”. Just like with the oriental “Tao,” each cluster of political and civil society must become a willing ally of the other aspects, no longer fighting over senseless divides.

Again, water gives us process and content to remedy many of our ills. If not, what is the proposed alternative? The approach used to understand what is happening for the wood lots serves as a profitable guide to sustainable development, while instilling meaning and purpose in development from the ground up. Retiring baby boomers, like all of us, have a conscience of sorts. They want peace and quiet and the opportunity to maintain, if not upgrade, their capital investment in

often substantial wood lots not only for themselves, but for their children, and theirs. ... We have here an echo of the cautions of the First Nations that proposed decisions should be tested for validity over the next six generations.

In partial conclusion here, we can assert that the future is already here, if our exponential curves are any guide, notwithstanding hypothetical and largely implausible technological fixes. The future, if there is to be one in which we can be meaningfully included, must thus start no later than today. Our evolution as a species is at the price of blending our knee-jerk, opportunistic tactics of individual survival with overarching strategies in the common good and eventually shed many of the former. We belong to one humanity living on one planet, a planet that after all is not presumed to have a particular interest in human survival over and above that of other life forms. We have to become good stewards

Our friend Tony Judge, the architect of the Brussels-based Union of International Associations' Encyclopaedia of World Problems, Human Potential and Action Strategies, refers to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as “*Necessary to Governance Organisations*.” But where is the political will to share the podium? Right now, political and civil societies live as each of the two hemispheres of the brain.

We have to find the analogue of nature in ourselves, and look at our inner workings in terms of what might be called psycho-neuro-immunology. Psychologically, do we have the value systems necessary to maintain our planetary life support systems in condition? Neurologically, do we have an adequate information-processing brain to do the job? Finally, looking at how nature's immune systems seem to be challenged, can we guarantee that the life-support systems will not fail but fail to “safe?” Our desultory and unprincipled way of managing nature is of the same order as our working understanding of humanity as a whole. Surely we can see that, if all else fails, the rich people will not likely be able to feed on their own thousand-dollar bank notes.

Our education system, our communication system, our media, must recognise that we are individuals whereby our spirit, our heart, our head and our body are not divisible; they are one – one set, one system – and anybody who tears it apart for selfish purposes should soon be tried by civilised society. If we take on the task of considering humanity as one, we have to look after people as one overall unit, not only within themselves but within their family group and their community as

well. The importance of the Water film is the opportunity it gives us to inquire at whatever depth will yield the proof that humanity is one.

I have had lots of opportunities to travel and to store myriad memories. Hopefully the more meaningful recalls are going to be invested in the proposed film. My confidence in the outcome has been strengthened because the idea for a film has germinated simultaneously in each of us, the artist and the artisan, for a long time. The spillover of multi-media products available with the new information and communications technologies available is another signal that the time is ripe: nothing that we envisage now could have been done five or ten years ago.

Thierry Gaudin has studied history and shown persuasively that humanity has always born a cross made of a horizontal materials-and-energy axis and of a vertical time and life axis. Lately we have emphasised a shift from the first to a deeper understanding of all life forms and of time, cosmic, spiritual and technical. Modern scientific progress is beginning to do so. However, many of its traditional habits are greed and graft, rather than creed and craft. Life forms tend to mean genetically modified organisms, and technical time tends to mean accelerating optical computers to a femto-second or 1,000 times faster than the capacity of our brain cells to record meaningful polarity change. Will we live in a state of permanent hallucination? Will we be able to rise above the tuggings of our primitive reptilian brain? We can talk about humanity, but sometimes it seems as if there is more of it in a troop of dolphins than there is in a group of standard humans.

Life forms are essential to us. We can not survive without them. Even hydroponics need water. But those who will be the decision-makers of 2025 are among our children and grandchildren. We feel confident that we can help trigger in them this Socratic emergence of the self. Modern-day maieutics are called for! How do we help them bring forth the best of their own potential? First of all, to bring out of them what they already know deep inside their long-term deep set cultural memories. These have often been shut out or dismissed by the prevailing societal taboos and totems.

They Show us the Way

There are guides to show us the way: I mentioned earlier Thierry Gaudin, who wrote “2100, Odyssey of the Species.” He ventures to list the result of over

fifteen years of working back (in history) and forecasting the key turning points of 1900, 1940, 1980 etc., right into 2100. What does it matter if it turns out to be true or not? It spurs us to think and keep our brain cells alive. What Thierry Gaudin collected in terms of the imagination and sophistication of around five or six thousand scientists from around the world is remarkable. His Association Prospective 2100 has sorted out, as we have already noted, this large volume of documentation and has established twelve major channels of opportunities for significant projects that have to be dealt with in that window 2020-2060, noted previously.

Last year I was at one of 2100's major meetings called “Planetary Gardens,” in Chambéry, France. It was very remarkable to see how some participants, normally institutionally blasé, took sudden life at the rich texture of the discussions. Within the three full days of technical presentations and discussions, many shifted their positions radically. Many of them were near retirement and may have then suddenly decided not to die as institutional debris but to become part of a new club of emerging statesmen. They were taking the risk of being believed, a rare occurrence in political or institutional circles, and they came forth.

A healthy environment does wonders, and this is the kind of mutation that I would wish to witness more often here in Canada. Where is the All Souls College High Table to which the Master, having left your uniforms, your medals, your titles and other armament in the cloakroom invites you? Where is the genius of the place to call and encourage a good discourse?

It is with this slightly mournful but optimistic coda that I thank you for having asked me here, and for having been so patient.

²⁴Robert Jungk (1913-1994), Austrian Honorary President of the London Institute for Social Inventions and well known for his projections for the future and peace and anti-nuclear activity. Author of *Tomorrow is Already Here*, *Brighter Than a Thousand Suns*, *The Nuclear State*, *The Everyman Project* and *Future Workshops*.

²⁵Thierry GAUDIN (1940-), author of *2100, History of the Next Century*, written from twenty years of experience in technology and innovation analysis. Gaudin directed, from 1988 to 1993, a worldwide prospective synthesis, combining approaches from the social sciences, ecology and technology. A reduced version is available in English [2100, Our Species' Odyssey](#). Founder of Prospective 2100.