

JES !

Towards a Joint Effort Society

**Frank van Empel
Caro Sicking**

An abstract painting on a light grey background. A large, vibrant red triangle points downwards from the top right towards the bottom left. To the right of the red triangle, there is a white, elongated, vertical shape that resembles a stylized figure or a hand, outlined in black. The background is filled with various colors and textures, including shades of blue, orange, and purple, with fine, repetitive brushstrokes creating a sense of movement and depth.

JES! Towards a Joint Effort Society

Frank van Empel & Caro Sicking

JES! Towards a Joint Effort Society

First published as e-book, August 2013.

Publisher: Leanpub, Vancouver, Canada in cooperation with Studio nonfiXe, Vught, the Netherlands.

ISBN: 978.94.90665.104

First printed edition, March 2014.

ISBN: 978.94.90665.111

Cover image: untitled, Joost Sicking, mixed media, 120x150cm, 1985, detail

nonfiXe
the power to differ

www.nonfixe.nl

Studio nonfiXe, Vught, the Netherlands.

© All rights reserved.

Table of Contents

Preface	6
<i>From Industrial to Spiritual Revolution</i>	<i>6</i>
Reader's guide	9
Summary	11
<i>The overall convenient action</i>	<i>11</i>
Acknowledgements	15
Footnotes	16

Everywhere people ask: 'What can I actually do?' The answer is as simple as it is disconcerting: we can, each of us, work to put our inner house in order. The guidance we need for this work cannot be found in science or technology, the value of which utterly depends on the ends they serve; but it can still be found in the traditional wisdom of mankind.

E.F. Schumacher, Small is Beautiful, Economics as if People Mattered.

Preface

From Industrial to Spiritual Revolution

The belief that everyone, by virtue of her or his humanity, is entitled to certain unalienable freedoms is rooted in earlier tradition and documents of many cultures, but in the arenas of brute market forces human rights and needs have been completely misunderstood. They were formulated by higher Spirits. It took World War II as a beastly catalyst to propel human rights onto the global stage and into the global conscience. People like Robert Schuman – one of the founding fathers of the European Union – and Eleanor Roosevelt – co-initiator of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – paved the way for the human rights movement. The moment of glory came in the sixties and seventies of the 20th century; hippies and other idealists claimed the power to change, former colonies liberated themselves from their Western rulers and the first steps towards a ‘better’ world were set in happy optimism. The backlash came almost immediately.

Ending the 1970’s conservatism & competition in the political arena took over from idealism & cooperation. The dominant ideology of conservative politics and neo-liberal economics sang the same old song: enrich the rich, empower the empowered, after which the poor would rise from the Swamp of Poverty & Injustice in some miraculous manner. One of the tunes was called: supply side economics. Critics use the term ‘trickle-down’ economics. The main characteristics of supply side economics were large-scale tax cuts for individuals and corporations, deregulation of businesses and strong incentives for investment. This would lead to economic growth and an accumulation of wealth that would ‘trickle down’ the economy. Its proponents believed that making the rich richer eventually would help the poor because the benefits of an expanding economy would seep down to them. But, in fact, this last shackle of the chain got lost. And this is exactly what went wrong: Inequality grew like weed in the America’s of Ronald Reagan.

Not only in the USA inequality grew during those years, all over the world disparities increased, despite humanitarian aid and development programs for the developing countries and for the poor and deprived. Especially on the

African continent the population suffered and was unable to throw off the heritage of colonialism. Wars and famines raged, and still do, over the continent. Of the many theories and explanation on the causes, the socio-psychological analysis of John Kenneth Galbraith is much referred to. He published *The Nature of Mass Poverty*, at the eve of returning conservatism and neo-liberal economics, in 1979. Galbraith blamed e.g. accommodation for being one of the psychological forces of the poverty trap. The strategy to accommodate is a rational act, since improvement of the circumstances of life seems impossible to those who have suffered deprivation already for generations. No reasonable individual spills energy if there is no gain to expect from the effort. Accommodation can only be attacked by examples of successful escape. Migrants and revolutionaries are among the front soldiers that battle accommodation. They possess the will to succeed and show their peers that escape is possible, bringing energy and dynamics for change to the community.

Together all economic, political, ecological, socio-cultural and psychological developments have left 1,2 billion – and probably more – people in the world starving. They live on less than \$1 a day. In Africa 46% of the population earns less than \$1 a day.¹ It is one of the key problems and major societal threats of today.

JES! Towards a joint effort society is an attempt to contribute to the reduction of poverty and injustice. It advocates fundamental human freedoms and promotes to stimulate self-reliance. Professor of Philosophy (University of California) Paul Feyerabend provided the motto for this adventure: ‘If we want to understand what is going on and if we want to change what displeases us then we have to know both the nature of the world and of human beings and we also have to know how they fit together’.²

So...

As opposed to the Historical Materialism of Karl Marx this book proposes Historical Spiritualism;

As opposed to Darwin’s Evolution this book proposes Ecolution;

As opposed to a focus on Production & Consumption (Wants) this book

stresses Needs & Opportunities;

As opposed to Galbraith's Affluent Society this book promotes a Joint Effort Society (JES) as part of a Spiritual & Moral Revolution. It is a natural follow up of Materialism, which dominated the last two hundred and fifty years.

Writing for a better world implies starting a dialogue with scholars who went there before, learn of their thoughts and meanings and make new combinations, and while doing so creating a fresh vision on what society needs today and tomorrow morning. While tomorrow afternoon, hopefully, somebody else will further the discussion. This person will reject parts of JES! and will embrace other pieces. She or he will create something new, again, and so on. This is the process of learning we call 'ecolution' and that has to go on and on to higher plateaus of awareness. This book is part of this neverending story.

Please join the dialogue: www.ecolutie.nl

Frank & Caro

Reader's guide

In the North life is focused on one purpose: bringing order in chaos. Still chaos is the rule, and so is disequilibrium. Order, linearity and balance are the exceptions. One strategy of politicians and policymakers is to break the rule and try to beat Nature. The other, more realistic, strategy is to get used to chaos and try to live with it. Chaos has a charming side to it. It leaves room for creation.

Chaos is a system, like all others. It has structure. It is not pure anarchy. There are some ordering principles underneath all things. Things that present themselves as signs and clues to follow up on. One has to try and look at the *things behind the things*, the relations and at the patterns underneath.

A clarifying discovery was that of a rhizome. A rhizome is like a rootstock, a networked herb that grows underground with no other ordering principle than the search for fertile earth, water and sunlight. The rootstock is indestructible, unless the gardener uses chemicals or patiently, meticulously and continuously, keeps on weeding. Deleuze and Guattari wrote on the rhizome³: 'Let us summarize the principal characteristics of a rhizome: unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple.' 'It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overflows. It constitutes linear multiplicities with n dimensions having neither subject nor object, which can be laid out on a plane of consistency, and from which the One is always subtracted ($n - 1$).'

JES! is a rhizome of words and concepts. There is no beginning, neither an end. You can plunge into it at every paragraph and find a dimension or a direction in motion. Always in motion, in development. All pages together form a network that may be hard to oversee or summarize, but that offers an intuitive vision for a direction society and individuals in that society can choose. Searching fertile grounds is done without a map, because as soon as

the map is drawn the land has turned infertile or overcrowded. As soon as a society is described, developments have taken a different course and the society has changed. Only things that are dead and done can be rightfully described in a linear way, because the motion stopped, the 'thing' is finished, it has become something with a beginning and an end, history has entered. In that case the hindsight can do the trick, but for living organisms, under which we reckon all systems, just looking back is not sufficient for there is nothing linear between the past, the present and the future.

The rhizome needs to be approached from the middle, which can be at any place of the network. To find it we need to develop at least an understanding of how it works. Understanding goes beyond knowledge or information, although these are required. Understanding needs context too as well as experience. All these elements come together in intuition, which enables a person to dance with systems. Dancing is the only effective way to interfere, as Donella Meadows stated.⁴

A person can start to understand her or his surroundings and circumstances once knowledge and information are embedded in a context. A context that changes with time and place. It needs to be researched carefully before applying evolution.

The theory of evolution introduces a method and toolbox for change. Please keep in mind that this is a process, an ongoing development. The toolbox is just as dynamic as reality is. It contains concepts, which are plans for action that are variable and multiple. Each person, community or organization can think of their own. Seven criteria to select concepts support the choice for constructive plans.

The match of context and concept offers content, it stirs the mind to change and gives meaning to the plan. The idea becomes reality and evolves, new ideas sprout, unknown territory will be discovered. Every time this occurs, society develops towards a higher ecological, economic, societal and psychological level in the direction of a joint effort society.

Summary

The overall convenient action

*We are having a war against the poor, a war by the comfortable against the unfortunate*⁵
J.K. Galbraith

The war between rich and poor is going on since 250 years ago global wealth rocketed onto a nearly vertical growth curve that we are still climbing today. The creation of wealth by a mix of technologies and organizational capacity of human beings during the Industrial Revolution was accompanied by increasing inequality. Social Darwinism introduced the concept of 'survival of the fittest' in order to justify class inequalities, racism, colonialism and other social injustices. Simultaneously mankind plundered the earth and destroyed all kinds of lifecycles.

The Industrial Revolution not only caused a civil war on global scale between rich and poor, but also a war of humanity against nature and in the end of human beings as a species against their own. Since the Industrial Revolution started in England - after which it became a world hit - humanity failed to resist the inner destructive powers and expressed this in behaviour, technologies, institutes, decisionmaking, procedures, cultures and social orders.

Despite good intentions and significant advances mankind failed to solve growing ecological, economic, social and psychological problems on global scale. Worldwide we didn't temper the population growth enough. We didn't share enough. We didn't learn and we didn't join efforts enough so everybody on Earth can lead a life of a meaningful wellbeing. We failed to conserve resources and to safeguard life-supporting eco-systems. We didn't secure the clean water supply, didn't stop the decline of bio-diversity, and were unsuccessful at beating slavery, educating children, banning arms and preventing wars.

We can blame it on the system, on our grandparents who took wrong decisions, but that doesn't help. After all, the systems, processes, structures and cultures that have put us on the slope to destruction are self-made. Now

we'll have to use our fantasy, creativity, energy and willpower to steer the whole development into a sustainable direction.

This will not be easy. Systems are hard to steer. Especially the bottom up type which can be defined as a rhizome. One cannot predict the outcome of interventions. Therefore intervening requires sensitivity, agility and flexibility, but above all awareness.

One of the systems that got out of control and swept ecological and social fabrics along is the economic. Economists have been on the look-out for equilibrium of demand and supply for 250 years. Such free market equilibrium, brought to existence by the Invisible Hand, would take care of a fair distribution of goods.

However, there is one big problem: the economic system is open to a variety of influences (impulses, greed, irrational decisions, fears) and as a consequence permanent out of balance. As soon as one market tends to balance, it is thrown off again by another market. In the real world rational expectations and forecasts don't make sense. People are guided by animal spirits that disorganize, disorder and deconstruct the linear models that economists have built. Tensions and vibrations have more to do with psychology, biology and quantum mechanics. Nothing is fixed or certain, especially not in a complex world. Disequilibrium is the rule and equilibrium is the rare exception.

The current situation requires different axioms, paradigms and attitudes. Climate change and mass deprivation do not stop at borders or at the fence of a gated community. There is much to gain for the so-called winners as well as for losers.

Today the overall convenient action is not fight & divide but work together & unite. Cooperation leads to different paradigms on sharing and accumulative learning. It enhances social fabrics and is more likely to come up with durable solutions for the current global issues than competition and the free market mechanism. The latter encourage a fight of all against all, leaving us - mankind - as losers.

In a cooperative environment, the economy becomes embedded in and supportive of social and ecological goals, as it should be. Cooperation is one of the concepts that can add new meaning to being part of a society.

The movement away from competition replaces the Affluent Society with a new political engagement model: the Joint Effort Society. A joint effort society is a free association of individuals. All contribute, cooperate and co-create according to their ability and out of free will and all reap the fruits. Such a society has a healthy relationship with nature, understands the interconnectedness and reciprocity of systems and aims at the wellbeing of all people, here and now, there and later. The incremental progress to higher levels of wellbeing is called eolution.

Eolution imposes changes in the direction of a joint effort society. The theory of eolution is based on the principle idea that changes are brought about by deconstruction. Dissent, diversity, variety and disorder prevent or stop the slack that is the presentiment of any system - a society, company, even the body and mind of a single person. The power to differ averts falling into the destruction phase.

Eolution is the type of deconstruction that leads to a higher ecological, economic, social and psychological level each time a person or organization acts. Vigilant individuals and growing awareness are crucial. A society is created by the people in it, as much as the people are the product of their society. The theory of eolution therefore approaches both sides: the whole and the individual.

The theory of eolution contains a conceptual framework, toolbox and method to interfere when, or before, a system develops destructive tendencies. The approach is comprised in a model for strategy and vision creation that is dynamic and sensitive, always on the move, checking and balancing and that allows to decide on shared principles what to do to transform a development and reach towards a higher level of wellbeing for all.

This book is a call for positive action. JES! Towards a Joint Effort Society describes the context of today and comes up with concepts (plans for action) to deconstruct and change destruction into construction. In system language: it learns people and organizations to look for lever points (deconstruction) that take the wellbeing of more than 7 billion people to a higher level each time we act.

The trend towards a joint effort society is already visible in the niche of society, in the conceptual framework of organizations like the EU and the UN and in the workings and doings of many individuals and communities. These are the promising sprouts for the future.

Now let's act!

Acknowledgements

JES! started as a translation in English of the thesis *Allemaal Winnen* Frank co-authored. The original idea came from Donald Huisingh⁶ whose enthusiasm fused the project. *Allemaal Winnen* researched regional sustainable development, using the Dutch province Noord-Brabant as a study case. Together with Martin Bakker, Frank designed a matrix, toolbox and new conceptual framework for development called *ecolution*. Donald thought the book should be available to other than Dutch readers as well.

Most writers and thinkers will agree that translating old work is not so much fun as coming up with something new. We already were beyond *Allemaal Winnen*. Therefore we decided to take the beef out of it - matrix, toolbox, conceptual framework - and apply these to the world, while improving on the theory and walking the talk.

Donald kept pace, more than that, he kept inspiring and being critical. Founding father of the Dutch Association of Integral Biological Architects, VIBA, Peter Schmid⁷ did the same. These two mentors and friends were, and still are, with us all the way, providing insights, advice and recommending books to read.

We also have to thank our children, adopted children, friends and family for providing us with real life opportunities to apply the theory of a joint effort society. Many diners that have been devoted to discussing JES! and theories have been applied as try-out, sometimes more successful than others.

The people surrounding us are a bunch of mavericks, freedom fighters, musicians, artists, moviemakers, ict-ers, entrepreneurs, writers and thinkers. Together they form an international community without borders. Some are very young, others already reached a respectable age, but all are young in spirit. Not in the least our parents. Jan and Riet van Empel, who at the age of 88 supported in more than one way. Joost and Helma Sicking, who no longer inhabit this planet, have left us their ideals and works of art that still inspire.

Not in the least we thank you, reader, for your interest. We hope you will join us on the journey to a joint effort society. Please do share your thoughts, comments and questions with your friends and with us, so we can improve JES! and make it happen.

Frank van Empel & Caro Sicking

frank@nonfixe.nl

caro@nonfixe.nl

January 2014, Vught, The Netherlands

Footnotes

Aantekeningen

[←1]

3.000.000.000 people have to live from \$2 a day. World Bank, World Development Report, 2000-2001, 22

[←2]

Paul Feyerabend, *The Tyranny of Science*, Polity Press, 2011, p. 10

[←3]

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *a Thousand Plateaus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Continuum, 2008, p.23

[←4]

Donella Meadows, *Thinking in Systems*, Earthscan, 2009

[←5]

Dr. John Kenneth Galbraith spring 1996, interview with the
International Harvard Review

[←6]

Prof. Donald Huisingh, Institute for a Secure and Sustainable Environment, University of TN, Knoxville, USA.

[←7]

Prof. Emeritus TU/e Mag. Arch. Eng. Dr.h.c. Peter Schmid, R E D
ResearchEducationDesign in ScienceArtTechnology for
PeacefulSustainableDevelopment

nonfiXe
the power to differ

JES! On new thinking and acting, on economics for people, on fundamental human rights and how we can live the lives we choose for our selves in a joint effort society.



Frank van Empel (1954, Tilburg, The Netherlands), economist and social scientist, worked as editor (economy and politics) for some of the main Dutch newspapers and weeklies, such as Haagse Post, Elsevier and NRC Handelsblad. He is Indie writer and entrepreneur since 1997 and published on economics, management, sustainable development and policy-making. Frank is the co-author of *Allemaal Winnen*, the Dutch forerunner of JES!



Caro Sicking (1963, Tilburg, The Netherlands), linguist and art critic, has been working with irregular migrated women and children in the Netherlands from 1996. She is Indie writer since 2003, publishing on human rights, migration, art, politics and environment, as well as fiction. The novels *Nin* and *Wat de Hel!* are her most recent fiction books.

www.nonfixe.nl

www.ecolutie.nl

nonfiXe
the power to differ

