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PROPOSAL AND CONCEPTION OF AN INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL ECOLOGY AT THE HUMBOLDT UNIVERSITY OF BERLIN

Scientific outline

It is obvious that modern civilization, with its scientifically founded industrial mass production, is disturbing the global balance. This disturbance, that we describe as the ecological crisis, moves the relations between human and nature into the centre of general attention. This challenge, however, has only been understood as far as to extent that we should not kill the chicken, that lays the golden eggs. Protection of the environment and „ecological modernization“, in the sense of longer term utilitarian considerations, only insure the „Real Apocalypse“. They create a notion of false comfort, while their effects must remain basically inefficient. While disposal of our industrial waste is mainly illusory, we ourselves keep documenting, that we do want to die. Awakening to this reality is the condition for a social agreement, that allows procedures for our rescue to emerge. Conventional ethics always fails to meet the depth of our attachment to the progress on the deadly spiral. A *new* foundation of society, politics, science and technology is needed, for which a retuning of our entire psychic being is required. Establishing this foundation will be the focus of our research.

Since human practice is responsible for the disasters of civilization, which become manifest in the destruction of nature, the individual and social functioning of these processes must be followed down to their roots. Insofar as *ecology* refers to the interaction as human as a social being with nature or *Gaia* as animated living Earth, of which human is part, it can only be termed *social ecology*. Since this subject was formulated originally in a religious, artistic or philosophical manner, it can hardly be treated without bio- and social anthropology nor comparative cultural history. It is equally important, that work in this field must be interconnected with research at the level of civilizations with sociology and political science. Sociology, envisaged as an department of its own should provide the right context for the integration of the institute. Strong affinities also exist with theology, philosophy, law and economy, as well as biology, medicine, peace and conflict research.

The natural sciences and their application are not understood within this concept as the primal cause for this disturbance of the balance, which in the final analysis therefore cannot be restored by science and technology. However, in being so powerfully instrumental to this imbalance, not only their role, but also the disposition of human mind to express itself in such a manner must be fundamentally clarified. The issue being a reconciliation of humanity with the earth and with oneself, a cooperation of the natural sciences with biology, agricultural science and medical science is of present utmost importance.

Sciences and the university have to call themselves into question fundamentally for their involvation into the civilizatory logic of self-extermination and destruction of the environment. There is required a rationally founded and multiply practical critique of the scientific reason and the specialized existence being aimed at its reintegration

into the reproduction of life. Insofar Hegel well-founded called the university „our church“ the ecologic question should lead to a reformation of the scientific spirit. Everybody can reform herself/himself only; the institute, for its part, should take inspiring effects – theoretically and practically as well as by life-style.

Provided that the ecological crisis will concern to all spheres of our practice and science, that it – caused by human – will become a general challenge to the mankind there will be no field of scientific work which wouldn't have to be regarded anew from this point of view. And – „the problem is not the A-bomb but the human heart“, Einstein said.

As a small unit, the institute should focus on the fundamental questions of the ecological shift and implement its solutions, if possible, throughout the university, and Berlin's social life as well. In this regard, practice means: to prepare the ground for conceiving the general consensus within all spheres of the society. On account of its own attractiveness, the institute should be supported by activists from all faculties and all sections of the society who, for their part, influence their background for making the needed space. Possibly, the most important impact of this work on the research and education activities of the university results from the rather indirect effects of the exchange of thoughts and experiences which is characteristic for this way.

Naturally, the institute will be editing and publishing works; contents, forms, way and place will be completely subordinated to the only purpose - retuning of consciousness. From the point of view of this conception, the criteria of evaluation which are common practice – the drugging „publish or perish“ included – are seen as part of that hunting towards abyss and madness.

Within its projects the Institute should survey, pursue and try practicable ways of the ecological shift (from the retuning of subjectivity up to the rebuilding of the material foundations) - setting an example itself. Hence, contacts to practice will be orientated towards protection of nature, landscape management, ecological farming, co-operative work, and communitarian forms of life. Generally, the main emphasis will be put on the last and most important cause of all cultural processes on the earth – the human itself -, the issues of his earth, his driving forces and motives, his potentiality for leaping into another logic of development.

Since Kant (by the way, in the original Marxism, as well) the attentiveness is more and more focussed on the subject of insight - consequently, we should not only bear in mind the (indirect) self-change resulting from the change of the external world but even more the practical reflection of the discerning and acting subjectivity, i.e. the exercise – exercitia – of the organ of insight - of the human as a discerning being. On the one hand, the striving for power – and the capability of love, on the other hand, represent very different habitual dispositions with regard to the perception of the external world and the real functioning of the gained knowledge. In future, methods of sensibilisation, of self-knowledge, possibly, can be the decisive factor for the scientific working process, while methods of destruction and torture (for example, in animal experiments) will be getting unacceptable.

Consequently, the style of living and working practiced at the institute will have experimental character and include communitarian elements. What is not practiced cannot be taught. At least in the social sphere research is effective only if it includes

self-discovery – the discovery of the own individuality. Essentially, discussion means interaction focussed on concrete topics. If the result shall not be anew some technocracy with only the prefix „eco-“ added, the participants must firmly ground their own thinking and feeling. Especially the female element and principle should fundamentally and equally influence the life-form from the interior of living-spaces to theory and practice. The aim is more ambitious than the conventional task of an institute and of scientific research. It is rather a return to the old classic concept of what was once known as „academos“ or „symposion“, and which in a different form reappeared during the times of the foundation of European universities.

The subject of research and social experiment will consist of the following questions and issues:

- 1.1. What is the nature, cause and origin of the ecological crisis?
 - 1.1.1. The understanding of the crisis as being fundamentally linked with human existence and culture, especially modern scientific civilization in its conflict with the earthorganism or *Gaia*.
 - 1.1.2. Differentiation and examination of the hypothesis of a logic of self-extermination, as it has been pointed out in the LOGIC OF DELIVERANCE in 1987 (Avoiding Social and Ecological Disaster, 1994), as well as the function of science, technology, economy (market, capitalism) and the state within this context.
 - 1.1.3. What is the anthropological source of this driving force towards limitless expansion on a limited earth? Is the human ego constitutionally insatiable, and how can human transcend human in this sense (the idea of Pascal)?
 - 1.1.4. How is this connected with the fundamental disturbance of the balance between the masculine and the feminine or patriarchy?
- 1.2. How is the natural order or Great Order of nature constituted, which we are constantly disturbing?
 - 1.2.1. What are the premisses for this question?
 - 1.2.2. How does human experience, recognize and verify the message of being or the whole premordial, actual reality?
 - 1.2.3. Spirit and nature – or: essence and mission of the human in the universal context. What is the relation between the social and natural order? What changes does this relation undergo in the history of the species?
 - 1.2.4. If, from the first, human beings are male or female, experiencing and perceiving the world out of this primal difference – how does the relation between the sexes influence the integrations of society into nature?
- 1.3. What kind of disposition is needed to meet the challenge successfully in relation to a new anthropological concept?
 - 1.3.1. Is an anthropological revolution part of the potentiality of our species? What kind of initiatives, practices, life-styles, initiations could be productive?
 - 1.3.2. What are the psychic, social and political preconditions?
 - 1.3.3. What frame of reference would most encourage a „logic of delivery“, a way to our rescue?
 - 1.3.4. What principles would underlie a truly redemptive politics?
- 1.4. What institutions on such a ground would be possible or conceivable?
 - 1.4.1. In what way comes about new policy (social structure, law and state), if society as well as the basis of our civilization changes?

- 1.4.2. Ways and steps towards an ecological shift, especially considering how a consensus on this issue can be achieved.
- 1.4.3. Is a modification of old structures conceivable in a way, that would help to transcend them?
- 1.4.4. Possible initiatives – the necessity for new communal life-forms, the idea of self-reliance and global order ...
- 1.4.5. The question, whether and how a gradual transformation of legal order is possible, according to the principle of supporting a new world, in agreement with nature and social justice, respecting life and human dignity?