

**Announcing**  
***Horizons for a New America***  
**by the end of 2019**

Bad news in our time are plentiful, good news are buried among the rest because it often takes new eyes to see them. Seeing with new eyes possibilities and opportunities where only challenges seem present is one of the objects of this book. I am claiming a next social revolution is possible; in fact it is under way. Is this naïve optimism?

Some examples among the many this book explores. From 2009 to 2014, thanks to the work of the Farm to Plate network (F2P) Vermont's food system added some 2,162 jobs and 199 establishments. Between 2007 and 2015 food insecurity in the state decreased for the first time since the Great Recession. Thanks to the work of F2P's Meat Processing Task Force, launched in 2011, five new slaughter houses and two new processing-only facilities opened or expanded to better coordinate needs between breeders and processors.

The Re-Amp network, started with 12 nonprofits and 7 foundations, selected very carefully, and sustained by the Garfield Foundation in 2003, successfully prevented the building of 28 coal generated electrical plants over four years. It pressured for and obtained more stringent Renewable Energy Standards (RES) in OH, MI, IL, WI, MN.

The idea of an interconnected system of wild lands stretching some 2,000 miles was completely new when the vision of the Yellowstone to Yukon (Y2Y) network was first uttered in 1993. Since then the network has facilitated the creation of two new national park reserves whose surface is the equivalent of nearly four Yellowstone National Parks, of a 16-million acre of protected lands and special management zones, and of 400,000 acres of land on which the British Columbia government banned all oil or gas development. Northern and southern grizzly populations are now within 100 miles of each other in west central Montana—the closest they have been in over 100 years.

It has been said that often in social matters practice precedes theory. This intended work is the proof of it. The skeleton ideas came from the realization of the direction taken by the work of many visionaries across the nation. As someone involved at the lower levels of societal change I have been privileged to see that the change I am seeking and working on at the community level is also possible at larger levels, and that this change rests on general principles that have emerged from practice. It has therefore become imperative for me to understand these better, to embody them in myself and to offer them to the reader as a testimony of hope in our time.

How can we reconcile the idea of hope with the reality of crises after crises that unfold before our very eyes? How can we be both optimistic and realistic at the same time? We can if we accept both the undeniable movements of decline and destruction and those of ascent and renewal. At present they stand side by side. A guiding image of this work is

that of the 'two houses.' The house that we have inhabited with our minds, hearts and limbs is crumbling, and this should give rise to pain and anguish. No one wants to see their own house crumble if she can shore it up. This book takes a both/and approach in this regard. We can and need to sustain the crumbling house as much as possible. But we can, indeed must, also build a new house alongside in which we can eventually move in. This is a house that we build both in ourselves and in the world.

This book revolves around a holistic restructuring of values resting on three pillars; a new way of looking at/understanding the world; new ways of relating to and connecting to each other; new ways of operating collaboratively.

### **New way of looking at/understanding our social reality**

Up to the present society has been understood as the playground of two major forces; government and the economy. And economy means mostly big business or transnational corporations. This naïve and incomplete representation of reality has been shaken to the core by the growing power of what we can call civil society, the arena in which develop all so-called non-profit, NGOs, and community-based-organizations, and to which also belong by right all educational/cultural efforts. Therefore we have the public sector, private sector and civil society standing next to each other as equals.

Society has been rightly compared to a three-legged stool and its health made to depend on a balanced relationship between the three legs. This expansion of views made to better correspond to facts of the matter leads us by necessity from thinking in twos—either/or—to thinking in threes—both/and. It is not an easy change—neither inwardly nor outwardly, but one that promises great future harvests. We no longer need to confine our gaze to capitalistic versus socialistic solutions, or any variations and combinations of the two, rather we can let emerge the truly new.

The corollary in this change of perception and thinking are already emerging in our midst. When the three sectors are called to the table, collaboration can take the place of antagonism. And government is now one of three partners at the table. In many instances this means a shift from government to governance—from representative to participatory democracy and civic engagement; a movement which implies continuous input through self-organizing principles, not just a visit to the ballot box every now and then.

In the economic field this leads to an emphasis on collaboration over competition, to what has been variously called gift economy, collaborative or associative economy. This means an economy that is not just profitable in the bottom line but one that makes the best use of resources, services and human potential; an economy that takes its departure from the consideration of the needs of the stakeholders and of the individuals, and tries to meet all of them.

## **New ways of relating and connecting across divides, political and other**

In what has been called 'social technology' but could also be called 'social art,' America has led the way to what we can call a science and art of listening to what can emerge from the needs of all stakeholders and from listening to the future. Many of the approaches and methodologies are becoming more and more familiar to a larger public. Names like Appreciative Inquiry, World Café, Consensus Decision-Making, Open Space Technology, Theory U are some that we may have heard more than once, especially if we have interest in social change. To these we could add many others; Dynamic Facilitation, Future Search, Bohmian dialogue, Conversation Cafes, Citizen Juries, etc.

Most of these techniques address the seemingly intractable issues we are facing at present. They apply to truly complex situations in which there are a multitude of stakeholders and no clear solutions in sight. They rely on some universal and holistic principles. It is only when we address the whole person/organization/stakeholder group in mind, heart and will that we can expect to have lasting results.

Through tried-and-true processes we presently know that we can generate the conditions through which the whole of the stakeholders and of the individuals assembled can reach consensus, and a place in which something completely new and unforeseen can emerge. The name that has been given to the turning point, and that we use in the book, is 'presencing.' It is the unexpected experience of feeling completely at one with self and others—another experience of both/and—and knowing that solutions can emerge that meet the needs of all stakeholders. In this way the new governance can operate from common ground consensus, rather than from weak compromise and majority rule.

The approaches leading to presencing are plentiful and more and more people are gaining the capacities to lead groups through these transformative and universal processes.

## **New ways of operating collaboratively**

We are talking here of 'socially generative networks' which have incubated in the last two decades and emerged most strongly in the last ten years. This is the third element that can enhance and bring to fruition the two previous ones. How can we move a spectrum of very diverse participants, across sectors and stakeholder groups, and have them work synergistically in concerted action, avoiding misunderstandings, competition and duplication? How can we do so without recourse to carrots and sticks, when everything we want to accomplish is completely voluntary? What would hold this coalition together, and why would it not dissolve once an objective is reached? This goal too can be achieved through the greatest balance of social science and art.

Networks rely on the power of self-organizing, balancing greatest coordination with highest level of autonomy, managing somehow to thrive on a whole set of seemingly opposite values and needs. The network stewards can only inspire and intuit what directions the network can take through a process of sensing and responding rather than the

traditional command and control. The members will have the last voice since they only collaborate willingly. Such a way of working is supremely decentralized and able to respond to the challenges and opportunities that present themselves in one part of the system and quickly replicate them in other parts of it. A network at its best truly works like a living organism adapted to its environment. What is more, such an organism can work both at its largest as at its smallest scales of operation simultaneously.

At present such networks are present in the food system, in matters of energy conservation, public health, landscape conservation, community organizing, public safety, and are quickly spreading to more and more fields.

Each part of the equation listed above plays an important role in the success of the whole. There is of course a learning curve, which indicates that the change we want to see in the world is also the change we need to be able to achieve in ourselves. It's a holistic paradigm that can happen at the individual, organizational, sectoral and societal levels. We can truly hope to build a second, more lasting, house alongside the existing one.