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Marilyn Ferguson

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Paul Winter's Earth Mass

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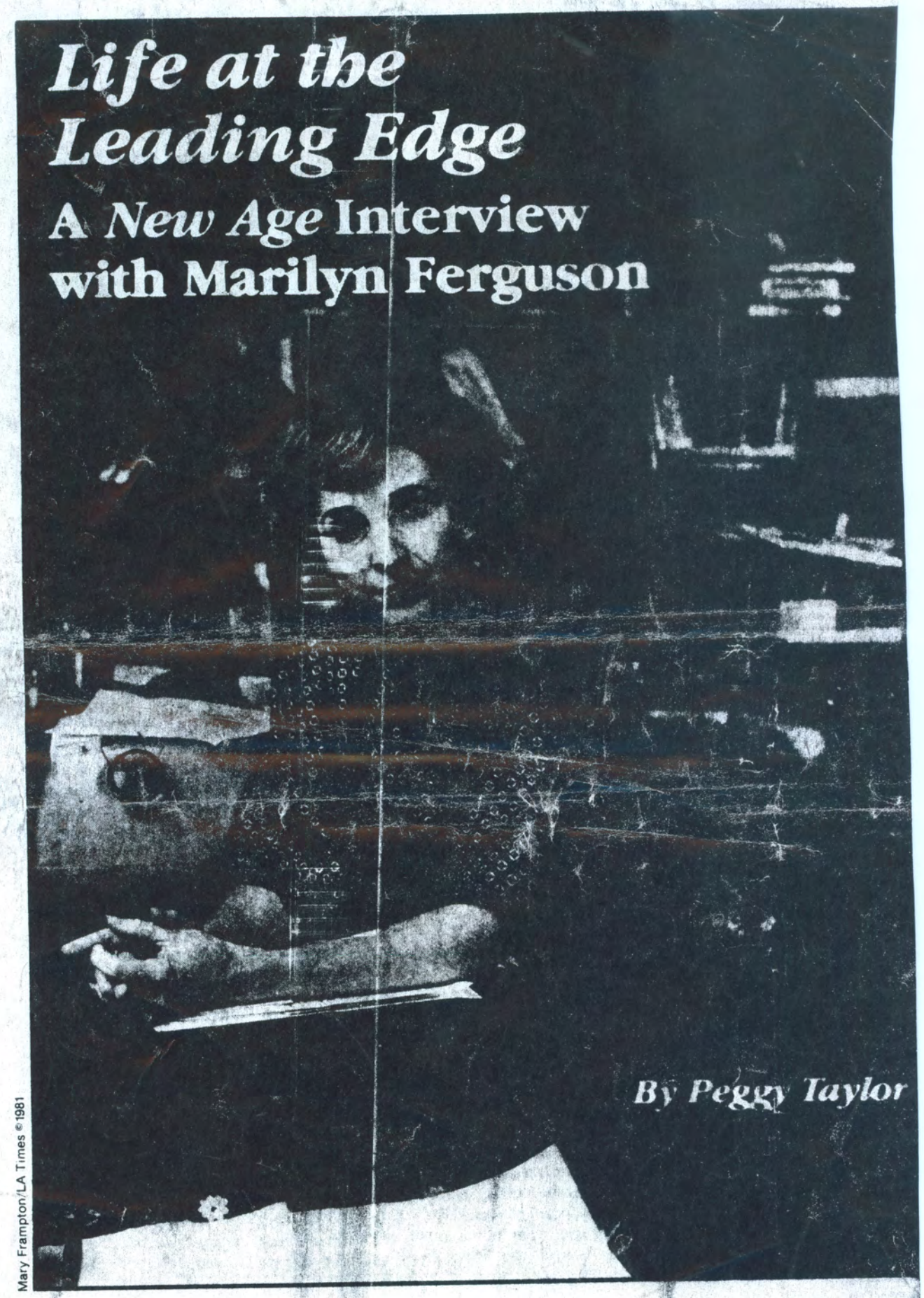
Life at the Leading Edge

A *New Age* Interview with Marilyn Ferguson



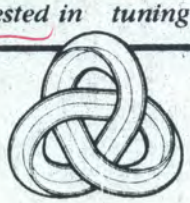
By Peggy Taylor

Mary Frampton/LA Times ©1981

When J. P. Tarcher first brought out Marilyn Ferguson's Aquarian Conspiracy *in 1980, it looked like an unlikely candidate for the best-seller list: a blueprint for a better world, it seemed destined to appeal only to an audience that was already convinced of the need for change—the idealistic fringe, the dreamers.*

But sales, unaccountably, grew and grew—to tens of thousands in the first few months, and to date nearly a quarter-million copies. What those early projections failed to consider was the very phenomenon Ferguson was writing about: the vast, underground (yet primarily mainstream) network of people interested in maximizing human potential and transforming the human experience. The book sold by word of mouth, and the word spread across the world: translations have come out in French, German, Dutch, Swedish, Japanese, Korean, and Esperanto.

Ferguson herself—a dynamic, down-to-earth woman who has a unique talent for sharing her passion for new ideas—now spends a good deal of her time traveling the globe, speaking to sell-out crowds. In her inimitable, ebullient style, she is talking about a new kind of world consciousness, and the whole world is tuning in.



New Age: Did you have any inkling of the kind of impact that *The Aquarian Conspiracy* would have?

Ferguson: I don't really know what I expected. I know there were moments, while I was working with it, when I let myself imagine that the book would have a really big impact, but when you are a writer and have had career disappointments as all writers have had, you get a little tentative about your hopes. So I think I didn't let myself go very far, because I am in a state of perpetual astonishment! There is not a day that goes by, literally, that there isn't some piece of news that comes in that makes me stop and say, I can't believe it. The openness that people have shown toward this vision, the idea that we could work together for a new beginning, is just amazing.

I never expected *The Aquarian Conspiracy* to reach some of the audiences that it has. I've seen a Xerox of a letter from Anwar Sadat, thanking a woman who sent him the book; another woman said that the leaders of the solidarity movement had asked her to ship ten more copies—they had one and wanted more. I got a very nice letter of appreciation from a leading Soviet sociologist. I've been asked to talk about *The Aquarian Conspiracy* to members of Congress, to Army wives, the American Hospital Association, the American Council of Life Insurance—a lot of mainstream folks. And discussion groups got started before I even had the discussion guide ready: there are groups run by Vista volunteers, by many, many churches, by medical school faculty members at the University of Colorado . . . groups in England, Germany, France, Australia, New Zealand . . . It's astonishing!

New Age: What do you suppose accounts for the book's broad appeal?

Ferguson: What seems to happen is that the book is a mirror for people. Either it mirrors their experiences or it doesn't. If it does, they pick up on that part which they resonate with in some way. There are so *many* people in this society now who are living kind of at the evolutionary edge, who have gone beyond "normal" and have experimented with, explored, and are beginning to use our full human capacities.

a +ve presentation of alienation

New Age: You've been one of the chief chroniclers of the explosion in human potential for many years now. What got you interested in this field?

Ferguson: I had an early interest in biofeedback, and then my younger brother dragged me into TM. I became fascinated by the experiences I had meditating. It made me wonder what was going on in the brain and the nervous system that was able to create all of these phenomena. And that curiosity led me to check out some of the research that was being done. Basically I wrote *The Brain Revolution* in 1973 because I wanted a professional excuse to spend a lot of time investigating this area.

Then, in 1975, when I started publishing *Brain/Mind Bulletin*, almost right away I started getting information that was not quite the territory of the newsletter itself. We were reporting more on creativity and learning, hypnosis, psychiatry—that kind of thing. And what was coming in was from people who were working on and bringing about social change. It was fascinating, so I tried to occasionally drag it into the editorial coverage of the newsletter, but it was not quite *Brain/Mind*'s turf.

Even before I started the newsletter, I knew I wanted my next book to be about the emerging alternatives in our society, the new choices being made in various institutions. But it became increasingly evident, the more I thought about it, that what we were seeing was not just a collection of changes and choices: there was a deep, underlying shift occurring in the entire society which was in fact a change of values, a change of realities.

New Age: How would you describe that pattern?

Ferguson: I think it helps to look at the changes we are undergoing in terms of a couple of models. One would be the idea of the paradigm introduced by the historian of science Thomas Kuhn in the 1960s. The word comes from the Greek *paradigma*, which means "pattern." When he came upon this idea, Kuhn was basically trying to understand something about the history of science that had him puzzled. The ancient Greek philosophers are still quoted today in terms of their general all-purpose wisdom. What puzzled Kuhn was, How could they have been so quaint in their physics? As smart as they were, how could they have possibly believed the physics that they believed?

Kuhn got his own paradigm shift, his own shift of understanding, suddenly one day when he realized that the Greeks had put together all of the experience that they had up to that time—all of the observations that they had made—into an explanation that made sense to them. It

Peter Barry Chowka

> I never expected *The Aquarian Conspiracy* to reach some of the audiences that it has. There are so many people in this society now who are living at the evolutionary edge—who have gone beyond "normal" and are beginning to use our full human capacities.

was not unscientific: it was everything they knew up to that point. It created a framework that wasn't perfect but worked, according to what they knew at that time. Similarly, whatever explanations *we* have, any scientific theories we have now, are just partial. We have only put it together out of what we have seen so far.

Furthermore, Kuhn realized, every important step in science has in fact not been a matter of incremental knowledge that we just add on day after day, year after year; the really important steps have been revolutions. They have been radical shifts of perspective, usually so bizarre at the time they're proposed that they are considered crazy, outrageous, and not accepted. So the history of science has been a history of revolution, and not, as the textbooks present it, an inevitable unfolding of information.

So Thomas Kuhn did a tremendous service by describing the process whereby we are surprised. The way he talked about it was that when you have a theory, a scientific model or framework (and by the way, you can translate this into any kind of social theory, personal theories of life, of values, or relationships), you have a kind of matrix through which you interpret and understand everything. Once this is established, that this is how things are, then you do your work within this theory, within the bounds of what Kuhn calls "normal science," and you expect certain reasonable outcomes.

Over the course of doing normal science, however, people come up here and there with abnormal findings. Initially these findings are disregarded: they're swept under the rug one way or another, because they don't fit the model. We develop a certain blindness, or at least annoyance with anything that doesn't fit the model: we say, "I must have made a mistake," "They must have made a mistake," or, if it's something really outrageous, "They must have lied." That way, we keep from having to tamper with the model, because we know intuitively that if we start tampering with the model, we're going to find that there is something fundamentally wrong.

But over the course of time so many anomalies get swept under the carpet that it's too lumpy to walk on. There are always a few people—bless their hearts—who are willing and eager to deal with the anomalies. They struggle with these puzzles, and eventually, at some point, they discover that there is a fundamental assumption in the old paradigm, the dominant paradigm, that is wrong. And this is how a paradigm shift always takes place: there is something that everybody has taken for granted, something so obvious that nobody has even questioned it, that turns out to be not so. And when they question it, and pull that one key piece out of the old paradigm, everything falls together in a different way.

A good analogy is the murder mystery. Every murder mystery, in fact, is a story of a paradigm shift, because once the crime is done, a paradigm immediately develops around it, based on circumstantial evidence. A lot of conclusions are jumped to: the body was found in the library, so clearly it was an inside job; he talked to so-and-so on the phone at eight o'clock that night, so it couldn't have been done before then; a sister-in-law who seems a likely suspect couldn't have done it because she was in London. (I used to read a lot of Agatha Christies.) Then little anomalies start to pop up, but that doesn't get the official detectives to change their minds. The detective hero is the one who suddenly realizes there is something wrong with the assumptions of the paradigm: the door, in fact, wasn't locked; that was a tape recording; she wasn't really in London, it was her twin sister. And whatever the error is, the detective pulls out that assumption, and the whole story falls together differently, and you get the dénouement, and the detective gets to be a hero.

Unfortunately, the fictional detective is the only person who gets to be a hero for introducing a new paradigm—at least while they're still living. Because the fact is, although you might think we'd all be grateful for a new paradigm, we would really rather have things *not* making sense with the old, comfortable model than to get a new one that explains more. What Thomas Kuhn said is that the old scientists—the ones who made their reputations, who became established within the dominant paradigm—have to die off first: they will virtually never accept the new paradigm. Only the younger generation of scientists, who don't have the emotional attachment to the old paradigm, who haven't bought into it so deeply, will be willing to change their minds. Now, obviously there are exceptions to this, but that's been kind of the rule. As Max Planck, the great physicist, once said, "Science progresses funeral by funeral."

In some ways perhaps the same thing could be said of us as a society, in terms of changing values, because we have a tendency to get locked in, and in our personal paradigm shifts we go through very much the same thing the scientists go through in theirs. I think the problem is not so much the fear of the new paradigm, or the love of the old, it's that funny place in between. It's like being between trapezes. It's that not knowing, like when Linus's blanket is in the dryer. You know, it's very hard when you've given up your old values and you're not sure what your new ones are yet. It's difficult to live between paradigms.

New Age: How can we get a better perspective on this "in between" time?
Ferguson: There's another model that's helpful in understanding our current situation—the model of cultural awakening proposed by the anthropologist Anthony Wallace in the 1950s. Wallace said that every society has certain normal paths that people tread, and they expect to live out their lives in a certain way because that's how it has always been done. But inevitably, over time, the society will come to a place where these "cultural mazeways" are blocked: something happens that makes it impossible for people—or at least certain elements of society—to work out their lives on those mazeways. In a primitive tribe it could be that they have always lived in a certain area but there has been a drought for several years running and suddenly they're going to have to totally uproot the society and go elsewhere. In our society right now, it could be, for example, the older people who thought they could retire on a fixed income but find that, because of inflation, they can't support themselves. In other words, there are many different kinds of jarring things that can happen in a society.

Now, according to Wallace, when a society comes to the time of blocked mazeways, a general freakout starts to occur, first with the unstable members of the society, and then it spreads to everybody and there is a lot of alarm and concern. Just like the anomalies within the scientific paradigm, certain things don't make sense anymore.

Then what starts to happen is that here and there within the society, just as the scientists who face the anomalies come up with the breakthroughs, there are certain people—Wallace called them the "new lights"—who will face the pain and conflict head on and come up with alternatives. Because they start to attract attention, however, the new lights also start to attract attack from the people who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo or who are simply too rigid to move into a new idea. Wallace called these people "nativists" and pointed out that nativists always, no matter what society you are in, have the same diagnosis and the same prescription for it. The diagnosis is: The problem is a lack of basic discipline. And the prescription is: We have to do things the old way better. If we did the rain dance the way our forefathers did, we wouldn't be having this drought. We've got to go back to—and here you can fill in any kind of "back to" you want: back to the Bible, back to the basics, back to the land, back to conservative ways, back to liberal ways—because that's what's needed. But the problem with the nativist solution to the crisis is that if something isn't working, doing it *harder* isn't going to help!

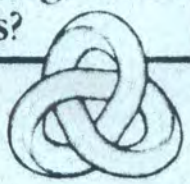
According to Wallace, the nativists will always get a hearing, but their solutions won't work, because times have changed. Ultimately the vision of the new lights will prevail. At a certain point the new paradigm will become the dominant paradigm—probably just as the new lights have become bored with it and gone on to something even newer!

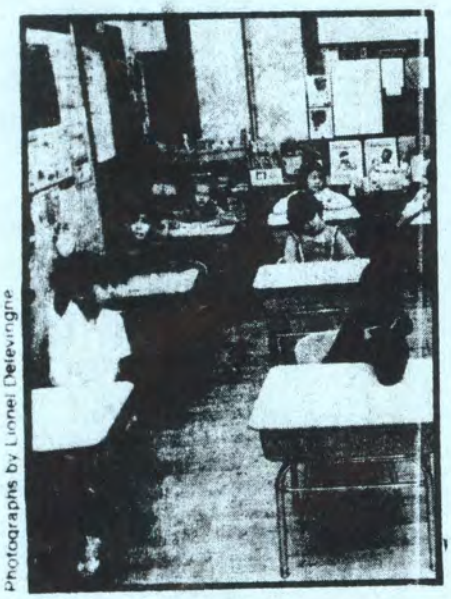
New Age: What are the "new lights" up to today? Where do you see the most change taking place?
Ferguson: The most advanced paradigm shift going on right now, I would say, is happening in the field of health care. Until recently the whole question of how to deal with health issues in this country had been circling around pathology and medicine, and then people starting posing the question differently and coming up with different answers. We stopped focusing on illness quite so much and started asking, What is wellness? Now a lot of states have created wellness commissions—and *wellness,* by the way, still isn't even in the dictionary (somebody ought to tell Webster's!).

We're also beginning to see the connection between the mind and the body. Research has been quite overwhelming in this regard. We're beginning to see the connections between personality types and certain types of illness. Anyone who watches the *Merv Griffin* show or reads the *National Inquirer* understands the role of stress in disease: it has become a

Rick Rosen

The most advanced paradigm shift right now is happening in health care. We've stopped focusing on illness quite so much and started asking, What is wellness?





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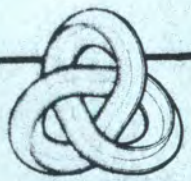
Another important shift is happening in education: We're moving from the idea of schools and schooling—which just aren't working—to the larger paradigm of lifelong learning.



cliché. Everybody has to take responsibility for their health now and their lifestyle. They may not want it, but it's there. Wellness is in.

Another important shift is happening—though not nearly fast enough—in the field of education. We seem to be moving from the idea of schools and schooling to the larger paradigm of learning. It's interesting, because broadening the context in this way allows us to have a little more hope. If all we did was look at the schools, we could get very depressed: I mean, they're just not working, and I'm sure that most dedicated educators and a great many people in the community at large would agree it would be great if we could all take a really big sabbatical and rethink what this whole thing is supposed to be about.

But meanwhile there is an incredible phenomenon taking place in terms of lifelong learning: adult education, extension courses, community colleges. People are discovering that you don't have to be "finished," that you can just keep going on and on and on, creating yourself and recreating yourself as part of a learning society. This is one area that is very exciting.

Also, although it has not exactly turned the world of education upside down overnight, the powerful metaphor of right and left brain learning is also having some impact. The schools as they exist now are brain-antagonistic: they don't respect the different neurological types, which means that some of the most gifted people in our society, the right brain people with a holistic perceptual style, are being labeled "learning disabled" because they don't learn to read in quite the same way. The discovery that, in fact, the brain has more than one way of knowing (which good teachers always knew) gives credibility to a richer kind of teaching than what we have had in the past—a whole brain approach.

Another hopeful sign in education—though it's a bit ironic—is that the task of refining the skills of teaching seems to be becoming more the province of professional management consultants, people who do trainings for business and organizations. I think that this trend is bound to feed back into our educational system, and maybe put some pressure on it to improve, because basically what's happening is that organizations—businesses in particular—are finding that they have to do a lot of remedial work with us after we get out of school. The problem is that we were not taught how to think, how to organize, how to be creative, how to innovate. That might have been okay a while back, but right now our society desperately needs innovation and fresh thinking, and the schools just aren't producing it. So businesses are having to bring in a lot of outside people. A very big business has grown up of going into businesses and other organizations and telling people that they are smarter than they think they are, telling them how to be more creative, to please disregard the limits they may think they have.

New Age: Have you found the business world to be relatively open to the idea of expanding human potential?

Ferguson: One of the things that has surprised me most since the book has come out is that business seems to be the *most* open audience around! Top businesspeople seem to have a gut knowledge of what's involved in transformation, which is very exciting because, if it's having an impact in that sector, it would seem to have a huge portent for the society as a whole.

I think it was a Rolfer who told me that when businesspeople come in and start opening up to the process, there's nobody who changes faster, and I think there are several reasons for this. First of all, when you're dealing with top-level executives (I'm not talking so much about middle management, or people who serve more administrative functions down the line), these are people who have entrepreneurial minds, which means they are risk takers. Also, various studies have shown that business executives tend to be right-brained, or at least quite spontaneous, creative, and intuitive in their thinking. And they are also extremely pragmatic: they're interested in anything that works. Now, the saving beauty of all the transformation technologies is that they work. Sometimes it's hard to remember that fact, because we tend to romanticize them, but they are very, very pragmatic. So businesspeople tend to be open to this type of change.

New Age: Can you really see the military-industrial complex changing? Our concept of "business as usual" seems so ingrained.

Ferguson: To the extent that there is change, it seems to be a matter of reconceptualizing things. Much of this change is, again, pragmatically motivated. For example, our lagging productivity level,

in comparison to other industrialized countries, has caused us to look at a lot of different management techniques, particularly those of the Japanese. (It seems ironic that we had to learn from the Japanese that Abraham Maslow had a lot to say!) It turns out that what is clever in the Japanese approach to management is not that they all sing songs together and do exercises and go on vacations together. It has to do with a more intuitive and sensitive way of handling people—enhancing their self-esteem and inspiring them to feel that they are participating, that their decisions are important. It creates a sense of synergy, by helping people to be autonomous while still feeling powerfully committed to the group.

Now, a lot of the Japanese design or context or methods are not specifically going to work for us. But the idea behind them is that the company has a mission, and in fact American business is getting very interested in the role of vision in leadership, the sense of mission—something that can elevate people and give a purpose to their work. In the process, we're finding that leadership is not what we thought it was. As James MacGregor Burns says in his book *Leadership*, in the past we used to think of leadership as power wielding, and we're beginning to see that true leadership, or what he calls transformational leadership, is the ability to inspire a higher level of functioning and thinking in one's followers—kindling participation and creating a whole community or infrastructure of support. We are beginning to discover new sources of power: the power of having lots of alternatives, the power of networks, the power of people cooperating. We can have power *with* other people instead of over other people. It's more fun, more exciting, and it works better.

I see this more integrated model of leadership coming more and more into the fore, and part of what I have awakened to is that the people who are in Establishment leadership positions, really top positions, are more creative and more comprehensively intelligent than most of us imagine, in terms of their ability to take an idea and move with it.

New Age: What about what would seem to be the last bastion, the military Establishment?

Ferguson: My most favorite surprise since the book has come out happened a couple of months ago. There is within the Army something called Task Force Delta, which is sort of a think tank where they talk about advanced ideas of leadership, et cetera. One of the members is Lt. Col. Jim Channon, who came up with the idea of the First Earth Battalion, which is a futurist scenario of what it would be like to have a transformed military whose task it is to take care of the planet. (He points out, for example, that the Army is in a perfect position to create the first experimental ecotopia: they have the personnel, a fair amount of money . . .). Jim invited me to a Delta meeting at the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. When I got there, I found out that the Dallas Cowboys football coach had just canceled out as the keynote speaker for a conference on "Leadership in the Army," so they had put me in. I wasn't sure what to make of that. Then I met the new assistant deputy secretary of defense, the psychologist Sharon Lord. She told me in private conversation that she had introduced *The Aquarian Conspiracy* into Panama when she was there two years ago, and that before she took the post at the Pentagon, she had spent a week at a Sufi holistic health retreat. Things are not necessarily what they seem!

Jim had told me, "Oh, you'll feel right at home; there are a lot of Aquarian Conspirators here." Sure enough, several beat-up copies of *The Aquarian Conspiracy* showed up wanting autographs. So I guess all of this inspired me to do something which seemed a little mad at the time. In talking to this group about the incredible explosion of the peace movement in the mainstream, I said, "You know, when I go around the country and mention that there are people in the military interested in transformation, people find it hard to believe, because they tend to think that the military *wants* war." The audience—there were about a hundred people there, 60 percent of them military, the rest consultants—looked shocked, because, by all accounts, they don't. After all, who has more to lose than they do? And who knows more about the horrors of war? I told them, "Here we are, talking about leadership in the Army. How about leadership *by* the Army? You know, even though doctors deal with pathology and disease, we do think they should be involved in promoting health. What would happen if you started promoting peace?" They looked surprised again, but I want you to know, they stood up and applauded.

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Lt. Col. Jim Channon, who came up with the idea of the First Earth Battalion—a transformed military—points out that the Army is in a perfect position to create an experimental ecotopia.

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New Age: Were you surprised that they seemed so open to this suggestion?

Ferguson: Well, when you think about it, why should it come as a surprise? I think it's crucial now for us to talk to one another, and not just assume that other people in other groups couldn't "get it." You know, it's interesting: psychological studies have shown that most people think they are more caring, more honest, and more responsible than most other people—but we don't act on it because we think it's a jungle out there. *We* are the jungle! We are acting out a self-fulfilling prophecy because we're not willing to trust one another.

New Age: So you're saying that a lot of what could be called the New Age movement has been guilty of a certain insularity.

Ferguson: That, plus I think that one of the things that has happened over the years is that those of us who were interested in social reform, in making a new world, had a vision, and we projected into the future how things should be, and we didn't spend a lot of time imagining what the place in between would look like: we didn't give much thought to the essential, the *crucial* transformation of the existing institutions and organizations. It's as if we thought we'd wake up one morning and there'd be no army, no multinational corporations—just tofu and people saying "Om."

The problem is that we may not recognize the transformation occurring if it doesn't look like we expected it to look, or if it's happening in places where we never expected it to happen. And if we don't notice it, this whole revolution could pass us by, in a sense. The people who thought that if there was going to be a New Age, they were going to be the mavens of it, are going to find out that it has already come and that there are very bright people out there who, once they catch on to the potential of this vision and become excited about it, are ready to take it and translate it into terms that everybody can understand.

New Age: Can you give some examples?

Ferguson: Well, I recently discovered, for example, that the J. C. Penney company's consumer education office in New York has been preparing and distributing the most wonderful transformational educational material since 1974. In Los Angeles, aerospace industry employees in at least seventeen companies have started what they call "Making a Difference" clubs. The heads of the teamsters' and carpenters' unions in Orange County, California, have thrown their financial and moral support behind a wellness clinic, and in fact twenty union executives have been taking an intensive course in wellness which includes white light meditation.

Everywhere you look, it seems as if people are trying to bring their growth into the workplace. And the fact that it's happening from the inside, I think, is unusually hopeful. People within the New Age movement have tended at times to be pretty judgmental about businesspeople or politicians or various groups that seem to be other than themselves, in a way that can be very polarizing: by labeling other groups of people, we tend to set artificial limits on them. But if you really want to spread these ideas, there *is* a way of talking about transformation that can translate into almost anybody's language.

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New Age: How's that?

Ferguson: First, you wouldn't use the word "transformation"—not if you want to reach maximum numbers of people! I've done a lot of radio telephone interviews from different parts of the country. The host often gets on the phone before the program and says, "I'm hip, but the folks out there are probably not going to get this"—they're from the Bible Belt or whatever, they're Middle American people with traditional values. So we do the interview and I talk about it in terms of people being more creative and powerful and connected and helping one another, and what kind of world it would be. And people call in—people with strong regional accents, elderly people, just folks—and say, "You're talking about cooperation instead of competition. That's what I've always believed in." Or, "Is this interdependence we're talking about? I've always thought that was a good idea."

You see, these values are indigenous to American culture: they reflect the early frontier mentality, where cooperation was an absolute necessity to survive, and they still exist in lots of places. These values are not hard to understand: they are simple, straightforward, and not encumbered with a lot of philosophical considerations. Neighborhood associations, bartering, food cooperatives—these are all a part of this whole phenomenon. And whether these forms of cooperation have New Age names or not doesn't make any difference: that is what they are. They are ways of people helping each other and establishing a sense of community. And if we see that, then we don't need to feel that envisioning a better world has to be such a lonely occupation, because there are millions of people already working on it.

New Age: Do you really think that the movement is well underway? There seem to be so many signs of backsliding and backlash, whether it's former radicals deciding to "go straight" or the campaign to stamp out secular humanism in the schools. What makes you so sure we can weather the transition?

Ferguson: I think we are discovering more about the nature of our resistance to the new, our fear of it, and learning that we can get through it—that we can handle it, we can transform conflict and contradiction and keep changing and moving.

There's another model that can be tremendously helpful in understanding both personal changes and where we are moving collectively: it's the model of neurosis proposed by the neo-Freudian analyst Karen Horney, who died in the early '50s. Now let's assume, for the purposes of this discussion, that we're all neurotic (as Jean Houston once said, "The only normal person is someone you don't know very well"). The question then becomes not so much, Do you have neurosis? as Does the neurosis have you? And with her clients, Horney found that in most cases the neurosis had them.

What she said was this: As young chil-

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dren, we find that we're not altogether adequate for the people in our environment; we don't quite live up to what they want. They want us to be different, and over time we start to *become* different. Gradually we construct an unreal personality, which Horney called the neurotic or idealized self, and pretty soon we think this idealized self is us. It's a bundle of criteria and opinions. It sets totally impossible standards for itself, and we develop around it what Horney called the neurotic pride system: we get very, very touchy, because we're trying to be perfect, but we're in despair because we know we're not. Because of all our early experiences, we're afraid that maybe we're not lovable, so either we learn to reject people so that we don't have to worry about that or we become clinging and dependent—we develop all kinds of strategies, or neuroses. Over a lifetime we take on a whole collection of them.

Then what happens is that if we run into a snag, we go in for help. Now, Horney said that as a matter of fact, we almost never come into therapy to get rid of our neurosis. We just want it fixed up a little bit. It's not working as well as it used to. This is why a lot of times people are not all that cooperative with their therapists, because the therapist in fact is attacking the fundamental assumptions they have about themselves.

Eventually, according to Horney, there comes a point at which the field of battle shifts: the neurosis is being undermined and the real self, which has been bound and gagged since childhood or at least hampered in some way, is getting stronger and stronger. And suddenly what Horney called a central inner conflict occurs: the neurotic personality thinks it's going to die, because this real person, with its own agenda which the neurotic personality doesn't understand at all, is getting the upper hand.

That point in our personal transformational journey is the pits. That's the point when people think, here they've made all these gains and now they're backsliding or regressing and everything seems very much worse. It's a kind of struggle over who gets to play the major role in the soap opera. I don't think we ever get rid of our neurotic personality entirely, but the question is, Does it get to remain the central protagonist in our lives?

New Age: And you're suggesting that that's the kind of conflict we're undergoing now, both as individuals and as a society.

Ferguson: Right, and in a way, there's something incredibly hopeful about it. Our personal process of change is stimulating and triggering collective change, and on both levels we're beginning to challenge our neurotic assumptions. The old image we have had of human nature is changing. Have you noticed how, when people say, "It's human nature," it's never anything good? Our vision of ourselves has been that of untrustworthy, neurotic beings; it has been tribe against tribe, Hatfields versus McCoys, left against right, nation against nation—these polarizations and neurotic conflicts have been

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going on for millennia. That's our big neurotic self in control. But over the past ten or fifteen years, we seem to have started to establish a new self-image. Granted, it had a lot of foreshadowing in human history: a lot of mystics and visionaries and scientists and poets had another vision of our potential, of who we are and who we can be. Now millions of people are sharing that vision; it seems to be contagious. Maybe Teilhard de Chardin was right; maybe we are moving toward an omega point—a critical mass of human consciousness. Maybe in fact we are creating a big enough vision and giving it enough energy and enough participation collectively that we can finally resolve the planet's inner conflict between its neurotic self (which we've created and which is unreal) and its real self. Our real self knows how to commune, how to create, how to help us imagine ourselves out of our current predicament. We created this whole situation, and we can uncreate it.

New Age: What about the ultimate threat, that of nuclear annihilation?

Ferguson: We created the Bomb, and if we created it, we can uncreate it. But as Jonathan Schell points out in *The Fate of the Earth*, it won't do us any good to dismantle all our arms or to destroy the factories unless we're really willing to deal with the fundamental issues, because Pandora's box is open now, we know how to blow ourselves up. We have to have a world politics, and to do that we have to have a world consciousness. And I think that there are signs that this is emerging. The image of the whole earth is showing up again, have you noticed? More than anytime since the first space shot. It's showing up on brochures and posters and so on, and I think that's very important. It is our new self-image, our new story. We can look at that image and see that there aren't any boundaries. England isn't green and Germany pink and the Soviet Union orange.

New Age: So you sense that we're ready to start overcoming our differences and start working together.

Ferguson: From everything I've seen, people really urgently want the kind of new beginning I was talking about in *The Aquarian Conspiracy*—the new modes of healthcare, new management, education, relationships, politics—and that shift, that set of new values and realities, is spreading throughout society. Unless we blow up the planet or do something otherwise disastrous, what I originally envisioned as a possibility may be an inevitability.

Marilyn Ferguson is now at work on a new book (as yet untitled, forthcoming from Tarcher) and setting up "state of the art" seminars in transformation. She also continues to edit two excellent newsletters: Brain/Mind Bulletin, *which covers the newest developments in brain and consciousness research, and* The Leading Edge, *which keeps up with the advances being made by the Aquarian Conspiracy. The newsletters are available for $20 each per year from P.O. Box 4211, Los Angeles CA 90042. both are indispensable guides to a rapidly changing world.*