

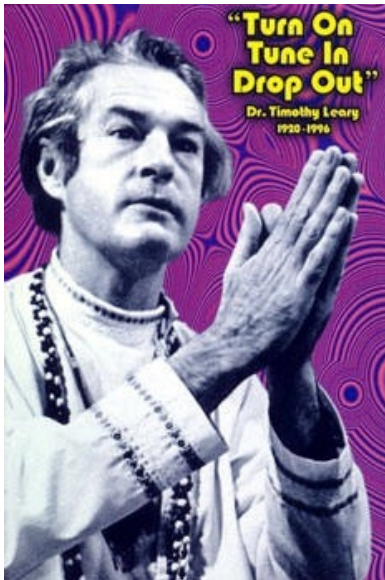
IT

“Flowers produce seeds and there are millions of seeds from the flowers of the 1960s. Every aspect of American society is being run by the seeds of the flowers of the 1960s. We are the establishment and we are doing a good job.”

Timothy Leary

In the 1960s, many soon-to-be famous musicians flooded into Laurel Canyon in the foothills above Santa Monica. A vibrant music scene emerged almost overnight on the nearby Sunset Strip. Record producer Terry Melcher recalled, *“kids came from everywhere. It just happened. One day you couldn’t drive anymore. It was, like, overnight – you couldn’t drive on the Strip.”* Clubs sprung up on the Sunset Strip and major record labels sprang into action. So did the mainstream press. Since that time, theories have emerged about what was happening there and why it began so quickly. One theory points out the blood relations of many of the musicians and their military families, positing that corporate interests behind the war in Vietnam could have collaborated with government to cultivate a vibrant counterculture, rooted in "muse-ick", psychedelics and new age consciousness in order to distract and absorb some of the dissenting pressure coming from the radical left. Where did all the LSD come from? Who paid for it? Did The Brotherhood of Eternal Love, aka the "hippie mafia," who produced and distributed their own brand of LSD called "orange sunshine" really have CIA connections? Did Timothy Leary's "Harvard Psilocybin Project" in the early 1960s have connections on high? Was Owsley Stanley, the LSD supplier for the Merry Pranksters, Grateful Dead concerts, "acid tests" and events like the the human be-in of 1967 and Monterey Pop Festival and Altamont Free Festival just a man acting alone? As popular as LSD was, not to mention illegal (in Ca.) after 1966, it could probably have fetched a pretty good price on the street. Yet LSD was often passed out free of charge, as if it grew on trees, begging the question of who was footing the bill. It was speculated, even by counterculture insiders, that the mass doping was part of a CIA plot to

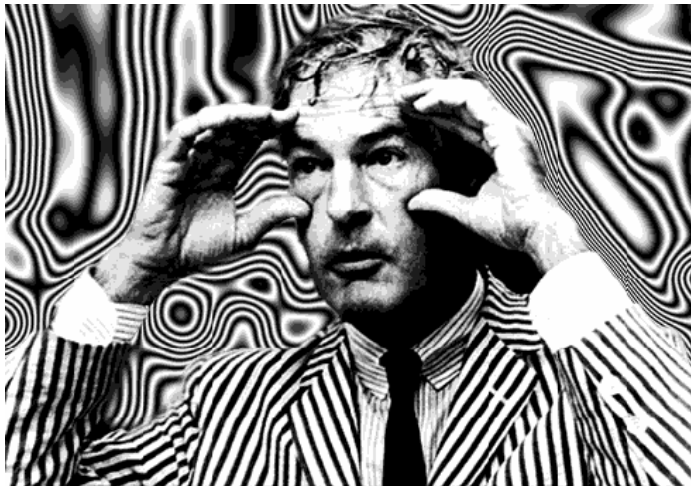
neutralize dissent, especially after it became known that the CIA was behind the MKULTRA program in which counterculture icon Ken Kesey was involved. In the documentary, "Hippies," former Digger, Peter Coyote, said, *"Some on the left even theorized that the hippies were the end result of a plot by the CIA to neutralize the anti-war movement with LSD, turning potential protestors into self-absorbed naval-gazers."* Yippie founder, Abbie Hoffman, said *"There were all these activists, you know, Berkeley radicals, White Panthers ... all trying to stop the war and change things for the better. Then we got flooded with all these 'flower children' who were into drugs and sex. Where the hell did the hippies come from?!"*



But there was an even more interesting and soon to be more culturally relevant component to all this several hundred miles north of the Laurel Canyon scene. In the Silicon Valley, just south of San Francisco, a true revolution was underway, a revolution in which LSD also factored in heavily. Ironically, it was prominent counterculture intellectuals and their adamantly anti-technocratic core values that would play a major role in bringing internet technology to the mainstream. IT was looked upon by the 1960s counterculture as a way of promoting their egalitarian worldview and power to the people.

Much of the early computer research was done at the Stanford Research Institute (SRI). During this same period, Stanford was also one of the many universities around the country where the CIA was conducting covert and illegal mind control experiments using psychedelics, including LSD. One such experiment was the Harvard Psilocybin Project. During the fall of 1960, Aldous Huxley was appointed visiting professor at the nearby Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston. He

also became involved with the Harvard Psilocybin Project which began that same year. Other participants included Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert (Ram Dass) and others. In 1954, Huxley had theorized in "The Doors of Perception" that there are metaphorical doors in the human brain that may be opened by properly administered psychedelics, greatly facilitating consciousness expansion and self-discovery. Huxley was recognized as a man of remarkable intelligence, described by author, Jay Stevens, as "*probably the brightest young literary man of his generation in any of the western countries*" (1) adding that; "*The fall of 1960 was an equivocal time for Aldous Huxley. His lectures on visionary experience were jammed. And not just by students. The public ones at night caused traffic problems more appropriate for the Harvard-Yale game.*" (2) So it's no wonder that Huxley was sought out by Leary to participate in the 1960 Harvard project. Huxley was also enthusiastic about working with Leary. As Stevens put it, "*For Huxley, Tim Leary was like a strong breeze in a sail that had started to sag. His enthusiasm, his theoretical orientation, and most of all his connection with Harvard, made him the perfect man to advance Aldous's psychedelic scenario.*"



The "most dangerous man in America," according to President Richard Nixon.

But concerns were raised about the safety and legitimacy of the project and it was shut down. Leary and Alpert, both rising academic stars, would be released from the university the following year. Leary and Alpert then began seeking a better place to pursue the study of psychedelics. They would go on to continue their experiments in Millbrook, New York, but went their separate ways shortly thereafter. Each spent their own time traveling in India. Alpert returned from India with a new name, and would henceforth be known as "Ram Dass". Leary went on to become involved with the Brotherhood Of Eternal Love in Laguna Beach, California, an organization that produced and distributed "orange sunshine", their

own brand of LSD. Huxley would become involved with the Vedanta Society of Southern California, a society that was devoted to spiritual activities. (3) Huxley, Leary and Alpert would all go on to become involved with the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California. Founded in 1962, Esalen was intended to be a center for the study and development of human potential, and is still regarded by many as the geographical center of the human potential movement. Besides Huxley, Leary and Alpert, past teachers include Buckminster Fuller, B.F. Skinner, Deepak Chopra, Albert Hofmann, Stan Grof, Arnold Toynbee, Ken Kesey, Abraham Maslow, Jerry Rubin, Gary Snyder, Alan Watts, and many others. LSD was a tool often used at Esalen to promote consciousness expansion. As one participant put it;

*"Esalen provided the philosophy for the Hippies, but before the Hippie thing could catch on, they needed to find a catalyst and a sacrament. Well, Ken Kesey turned out to be the catalyst and Timothy Leary and Stanley Owsley provided the sacrament, namely the LSD. Our country has never been the same since. It's kind of hard to believe that all of this came out of an obscure little camp out in the woods that only us starving artists and philosophers know about. The Esalen Experience, they call it, experience being the key word, for it's the experience that counts. For example, it's not good enough just to read *The Doors of Perception*. What you have to do is experience what's behind the doors of perception. In other words, you have to take the acid and have the experience."* (4)

A utopian social vision was emerging in the counterculture which was centered around a strange brew of forces, which in some cases seemed quite at odds with one another; human potentialism, a sort of back to the earth tribalism, modern technology, and mind expanding psychedelics, especially LSD. Nowhere was this vision better encapsulated than Stewart Brand's Whole Earth Catalog which launched in 1968. In the words of author Theodore Roszak, this strange brew of forces had a "*hybrid taste*," elaborating that;

Alongside the rustic skills and tools, we discover high industrial techniques and instruments: stereo systems, cameras, cinematography, and, of course, computers. On one page the 'Manifesto of the Mad Farmer Liberation Front' (Wendell Berry's plea for family-scaled organic agriculture); on the next, Norbert Wiener's cybernetics." (6)

Author Fred Turner echoes these Sentiments;

"In 1968 Brand founded the Whole Earth Catalog in order to help those heading back to the land find the tools they would need to build their new communities.

These items included the fringed deerskin jackets and geodesic domes favored by the communards, but they also included the cybernetic musings of Norbert Wiener and the latest calculators from Hewlett-Packard. In later editions, alongside discussions of such supplies, Brand published letters from high-technology researchers next to firsthand reports from rural hippies. In the process, he offered commune-based subscribers a chance to see their own ambitions as commensurate with the technological achievements of mainstream America, and he gave technologists the opportunity to imagine their diodes and relays as tools, like those the commune dwellers favored, for the transformation of individual and collective consciousness. Together, the creators and readers of the Whole Earth Catalog helped to synthesize a vision of technology as a countercultural force that would shape public understandings of computing and other machines long after the social movements of the 1960s had faded from view."

"In the Whole Earth Catalog era, these networks spanned the worlds of scientific research, hippie homesteading, ecology, and mainstream consumer culture. By the 1990s they would include representatives of the Defense Department, the U.S. Congress, global corporations such as Shell Oil, and makers of all sorts of digital software and equipment." (7)

Brand credited Buckminster Fuller for the catalog's inspiration. Marshall McLuhan was also a key influence. He and Fuller both helped Brand to *"imagine a new synthesis of cybernetic theory and countercultural politics,"* as Turner put it. And according to Turner, McLuhan had *"twin interests in cybernetic approaches to communication media and tribal forms of social organization"* that *"linked both the new tribalism and its promise of a return to a prebureaucratic humanism to a more cybernetic rhetoric of human machine entanglement,"* adding that;

"In McLuhan's view, the individual human body and the species as a whole were linked by a single nervous system, an array of electronic signals fired across neurons in the human body and circulating from television set to television set, radio to radio, computer to computer, across the globe." (5)

Brand had other important influences. He first took LSD in December of 1962, and began hanging out with Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters at Kesey's home near Stanford. He later began collaborating with Kesey and the Pranksters for events

like the Trips Festival in 1966, which catapulted Brand to the fore as entrepreneur. By this time, about 8 years had passed since Kesey had volunteered as a test subject in the CIA's MKULTRA program, presumably unaware that it was a CIA program exploring mind control. Theodore Roszak elaborates on the role of LSD in the counterculture social vision;

"The assumption underlying these mass distribution efforts was blunt and simple: dope saves your soul. Like the Catholic sacraments, it takes effect ex opere operato -- by its very ministrations. Once this promise crossed wires with the growing interest in oriental mysticism, the psychedelics had been launched as a cultural force. It seemed clear that the research laboratories of the western world -- including those of the giant pharmaceutical corporations -- had presented the world with a substitute for the age-old spiritual disciplines of the East. Instead of a lifetime of structured contemplation, a few drops of home brewed acid on a vitamin pill would do the trick. It was the short cut to satori."

"Here, I suspect, is the reason why Buckminster Fuller, Marshall McLuhan, and the other technophilic utopians struck such a responsive chord among the countercultural young. Acid and rock had prepared an audience for their message, and prepared it in an especially persuasive way that undercut the cerebral levels. ... Combined with the music and the lights in a total assault upon the senses, they can indeed make anything seem possible."

"This experience, purchased out of the laboratories of our industrial culture, somehow allies its disciples with the ancient, the primitive, the tribal. Its proper use is among huddled comrades, gathered in a sacramental hush in park or field, on the beach, in the wilderness, or the enfolding darkness of an urban den. Here, then, we find the same striking blend of the sophisticated-scientific and the natural-communal that Buckminster Fuller claimed for the geometry of the geodesic dome, and that the Silicon Valley hackers would eventually claim for the personal computer. 'This generation absolutely swallowed computers whole, just like dope,' Stewart Brand observed in a February 1985 interview in San Francisco Focus Magazine." (8)



In the late 1970s, the Reagan presidential campaign hired SRI (Stanford Research Institute) to help them design an effective strategy. This was well documented in the 2002 film, “*The Century of the Self*,” by Adam Curtis, who interviewed actual SRI researchers who had participated in this study. SRI had developed a method called “VALS” (“Values, Attitudes and Lifestyles”) which could be used to help both corporate marketing and political campaigns through profiling. In this case, SRI profiled the motivational tendencies of so-called “inner directed” individuals of the counterculture (the film specifically names the Esalen Institute as a countercultural “nexus”) thereby learning how to pander to them most effectively. This ended up making the difference in the election and making Reagan the 40th President of the United States, a somewhat bitter irony which surprised even SRI researchers. (9) By the time Reagan was elected, SRI had already begun work for the Department of Defense on a project that would later become “Star Wars” program, proposed by President Reagan on March 23, 1983. How prominently might IT factor in to such exercises in social engineering today?

More recently (2005), in his Stanford University commencement speech, Steve Jobs would compare Stewart Brand's Whole Earth Catalog to the internet search engine Google, echoing Timothy Leary the previous decade and his newly modified, slogan; “turn on, boot up, jack in.” “Digital be-ins” would carry the tradition forward into the new century, “with a mission to carry forth the ethos and values expressed at the 1960's Human Be-In, and bring them into the world of multimedia and Internet technology.” It served a role through the 1990's as a venue for the San Francisco Bay Area's community of new media pioneers to socialize and exchange ideas. Cyberculture became the focal point of the gatherings.

However, producer Michael Gosney also brought in key figures from the Human Be-In such as Allen Cohen, Chet Helms and Timothy Leary to maintain the 60s influence, as well as 60s icons Ken Kesey, Ram Dass and Wavy Gravy. In the early years, it drew major companies as sponsors, such as Apple, Microsoft, Adobe Systems and Kodak, while at the same time staying an underground party.



It is somewhat strange to see technology and access to information suddenly in the hands of so many people when not all that long ago this would probably have been looked upon as threatening to established economic and political interests. So why the about face? Any potential threats associated with this technology must be outweighed by some sort of benefit and probably several. One of the most important of these has to be the social transformation corresponding to the shift from the industrial age to the post industrial age of information where knowledge, the production of ideas and information sciences represent a new form of capital, and one for which access is more broad and therefore thought of as more egalitarian. But does broad access necessarily translate into a more egalitarian society?

Though IT today can be put to many good uses, it is the consummate slippery slope. This technology doesn't just make transgressions of good use of time more likely. It makes them practically inevitable. You log on to order some new supplies for your business and the next thing you know you find yourself reading some obscure article in world news for no other reason than that it was easy. Our browsers mysteriously seem to know exactly what our interests are, placing perfectly tailored ads right at our finger tips. How much of this is, to borrow from Aldous Huxley and his "Brave New World Revisited;" "*for the purpose of preventing people from paying too much attention to the realities of the social and political situation,*" or worse?



Suffice it to say that it might not be such a good idea to have a one stop shopping portal and bona fide oracle in the same place that we make important communications and transactions. But never mind for a moment that this technology represents the mother of all distractions, one that almost makes daytime television look good. Never mind that it provides the infrastructure for corporate marketers to surveil your keystrokes and create detailed individual profiles, or for the government to carry out newly adopted protocols to spy on citizenry. Those are already serious issues, but what about the insidious changes in our own values? What of the ever growing disparity between what we ourselves believe is a sane amount of time to be engaged with this technology and the actual amount we spend? We communicate with social groups to a degree that is not even remotely commensurate with genuine need. Obscure global news that used to seem less relevant somehow seems more important. Broad access imbues a sense of relevance on numerous levels. How often do we find ourselves spending an amount of time engaged with internet technology that even we ourselves characterize as irrational? By repeating this behavior over and over again, what are incorporating into our belief system? Where might this sort of behavior be leading us?



This broad access greatly facilitates the dissemination of various forms of propaganda. The so-called "independent media" takes on a bigger role, assuming a very convenient air of legitimacy in being "indie," the organic label of media. Its difficult to imagine a better tool for foisting misinformation, fashioning a false consensus or softening the target for what would otherwise be unpopular legislation and reform.

And it's not just ideas that may be represented falsely. How easy it would be, with the apparatus of IT in place, to falsely incriminate any person or group deemed a threat, at the behest of a single individual - the President, thanks to the recently broadened powers of the unitary executive. So while the technology in question may very well empower ordinary people to some degree, the egalitarian billing it received was either grossly misrepresented or woefully shortsighted. Though Roszak is certainly correct in calling IT a "mixed blessing," there is little doubt which class of society benefits the most;

"Even when the Internet was nothing more than a restricted military messaging system, enthusiasts envisioned a day when politically restive millions would network their aspirations and talents via computer. All they had were funky little CPUs that scrolled sickly green letters and numbers at a snail's pace across a 6-inch screen, but that was enough, they said, to build the New Jerusalem. ... The computer has brought us convenience and amusement, but, like all technology, it's a mixed blessing. Far from smashing Big Brother, computers have given him more control over our lives. ... We have watched high tech become the next wave in big-bucks global industrialism, the property of the crass and the cunning, who are no more interested in empowering the people than General Motors was." (10)

"Similarly, it now seems abundantly clear that long before the personal computer has the chance to restore democratic values, the major corporations and the security agencies of the world will have used the technology to usher in a new era of advanced surveillance and control. ... It was an attractive hope that the high technology of our society might be wrested from the grip of benighted forces and used to restore us to an idyllic natural state. " (11)

How badly do we really need the information we are actively seeking out? Is our thinking on this matter artificially inflated by access to IT? Since the arrival of the world wide web, how much time do we have to just relax and rest? Are we trying to assimilate too much, too fast? Does a society plagued by a constant temptation to connect with the flood of information emanating from the press and the world wide web stand much chance of even successfully managing their own affairs and making ends meet, much less organizing to create social change? What good is all this information if the underpinnings of society, on multiple levels, are disintegrating, in large part because our collective level of infatuation has grown to be reminiscent of moths around a porch light?

What is happening domestically echoes the global trend, a trend in which we see the breaking down of values and traditions as well as the erosion of national sovereignty and personal freedoms, all of which are seen by the prevailing economic and political interests as obstacles to control. A cult of information is playing a leading role in wiping old hard drives clean, making global citizenry more malleable and clearing the way for new tributaries of control on multiple levels. Is the correlation between the rise of technology and the decay of both the nation state and the family unit merely coincidental? Are computers and the Web catalyzing these trends?

Today, global events no longer feel like the distant events that they are. Local communications with friends and family are vastly more numerous and trivial. Suddenly we have a far greater responsibility, or so it would seem, to keep track of absurd levels of information. Our collective level of distraction has reached fever pitch. We seem now to have validation to devote large swaths of our time and mental resources to matters which are insignificant, diversionary and even irrelevant. Their allure has increased by virtue of nothing more than the fact that they are more accessible, a direct result of technological "progress" and what Huxley called *"the development of a vast mass communications industry, concerned in the main neither with the true nor the false, but with the unreal, the more or less totally irrelevant."* And this was before the world wide web. Even without the Web, according to Huxley, the level of distraction was immense;

“But even in Rome there was nothing like the non-stop distractions now provided by newspapers and magazines, by radio, television and the cinema.”

Today, in the presence of the internet, all this is multiplied exponentially. There is a sort of symbiotic relationship between information itself and the delivery system. Marshall McLuhan’s adage, “the medium is the message,” has never been more true. Along with the information being passed around, new behavioral demands are built in. Increasingly, there seems to be some sort of moral or ethical imperative associated with both computer use and the Web. More and more, one’s self-worth is being measured or associated with one’s stature in social media networks. Being easily reached and available to respond at all times is being associated with being on the cutting edge. Our youth aren’t cool if they’re not texting with their peers on an ongoing basis, multitasking that with computer and cell phone use, often simultaneously. We are socially irresponsible if we do not track global news, if we do not stay abreast of what the mass media and popular culture deems important, most of which is negative. We appear out of touch if we do not boo and hiss whenever the media holds up the supposed enemy of the state, “grave threats to national security” and other fear-centered propaganda that runs rampant. This has become entrenched in our culture, doing the same thing newspaper, tv and radio use to do but on a logarithmically greater scope and scale. What effect must such an esprit, increasingly global in nature, have on the family unit?



Can this technology be used to our advantage? Absolutely. But *is* the technology being used primarily in such a manner? Isn’t this the more salient question? Recently I went into an eating establishment to get lunch, and literally everyone, both standing in line and already seated, was staring into some sort of computer monitor. If the amount of information the human mind can process before reaching sensory overload has ever been in question, then the day of reckoning has certainly arrived. Is this a positive development? Will it make us more happy, satisfied and fulfilled? Just how much information, over any given time, is really healthy? At what point does it become unhealthy? How many people exceed their individual threshold by their own assessment? How many exceed it by an enormous margin?

Surely there are very few of us who are awash in free time. In our very limited waking hours, what are we giving up to make time to engage with some facet of IT? What is being displaced by what has been dubbed “screen addiction”? Is it good

that a musician be encouraged to put away an instrument, or an artist their brush and canvas, in favor of the digital medium? While a digital synthesizer is useful to a point, will it ever sound as good as the real instruments that they emulate? And even if they could sound as good, can they even begin to match the experience of playing a real instrument? And how much gets put on the proverbial shelf today so that we can engage with some facet of IT that is only vaguely important, if that, even by our own admission? I only hope that the barrage of information emanating from the world wide web will be used with the judiciousness that it commands, so that we don't go down in history as the epoch in which human behavior resembled that of lever-pressing lab rats. Insofar as we might like to maintain some semblance of control in our lives, it may serve us well to recall the words of Aldous Huxley;

"A society, most of whose members spend a great part of their time, not on the spot, not here and now and in their calculable future, but somewhere else, in the irrelevant other worlds of sport and soap opera, of mythology and metaphysical fantasy, will find it hard to resist the encroachments of those who would manipulate and control it." (12)

It's one thing that it was the anti-technocratic ethos of the counterculture which played a pivotal role in ushering in the next big technology. It's another that this would be the full blown technological revolution on the scale that it has been. And it's still another that LSD would factor in at all, let alone as prominently as it has. Who knew? And what does it all mean? Anyone's guess, I suppose. But perhaps the following irony (or is it?) affords us a hint. The same Aldous Huxley who warned of "*the development of a vast mass communications industry*" had a brother, Julian Huxley, a lifelong internationalist and UNESCO's first Director General, who wrote;

"That task is to help the emergence of a single world culture, with its own philosophy and background of ideas, and with its own broad purpose. This is opportune, since this is the first time in history that the scaffolding and the mechanisms for world unification have become available ... " (13)

A mere, brotherly rivalry, perhaps? More likely, the perfect conjunction, an alchemical masterpiece that would have made "Darwin's bulldog" proud, a dialectic that would have given Hegel a chuckle as well, had he been around to see it. It would be interesting to know exactly what Julian Huxley meant by "*unification*" and "*single world culture.*" Then again, isn't it becoming clearer everyday?



Notes:

- 1 - Jay Stevens - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbI4f1WvN9w>
- 2 - Jay Stevens, from "Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream" p. 141
- 3 - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vedanta_Society_of_Southern_California
- 4 - <http://wild-bohemian.com/esalen.htm>
- 5 - Fred Turner - http://www.edge.org/3rd_culture/turner06/turner06_index.html
- 6 - Theodore Roszak, "From Satori to Silicon Valley" - <http://web.stanford.edu/dept/SUL/sites/mac/primary/docs/satori/taste.html>
- 7 - Fred Turner - <http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/817415.html>
- 8 - Theodore Roszak, "From Satori to Silicon Valley" - <http://web.stanford.edu/dept/SUL/sites/mac/primary/docs/satori/short.html>
- 9 - See BBC film, "The Century of the Self" - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJ3RzGoQC4s>; (scroll to 2:36:54. Strap yourself in.

10 - LA Times (2004) - <http://articles.latimes.com/2004/jan/28/opinion/oe-roszak28>

11 - Theodore Roszak - <http://web.stanford.edu/dept/SUL/sites/mac/primary/docs/satori/light.html>

12 - Aldous Huxley, from Brave New World Revisited (1958) - <http://www.huxley.net/bnw-revisited/>

13 - Julian Huxley, from "UNESCO - It's Purpose and it's Philosophy" - <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0006/000681/068197eo.pdf>