



“LIFE IN THE YEAR 3000 AD”

Speech delivered by Tom Spencer to the Young Presidents Organisation
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Thank you for that introduction. Decoded it means that until July I was, as Chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee of the European Parliament, the European equivalent of Jesse Helms. I used to be the Leader of the Conservatives in the European Parliament, even if my politics are closer to those of Al Gore.

I am here rather than in Washington DC, because I spoke at the State of the World Forum last week and met two members of the Young Presidents Organisation, Steve Farrall and David Dyke on the roof of the Fairmont Hotel. The Forum is an amazing “only in California” annual gathering of the good, the great, the very bright, the mystic and the frankly waco. It has been asked by the UN to organise a meeting of civil society in New York at the time of the UN Millennial Assembly in early September 2000. Manhattan will be awash with one hundred and eighty or so heads of state and government and their advisors, hangers on and power brokers. The Millennial Assembly was planned to celebrate the first round of UN reform, but that has been log-jammed. We now have the prospect of most of the world’s power structure stuck in Manhattan with nothing to talk about. We intend to fill that vacuum with ideas and initiatives. I will be bringing the GLOBE Council, of which I am Secretary General, with a posse of former Prime Ministers lead by Mr Hashimoto.

We are looking for a few good men and, of course, women, with ideas for changing the world, to do a little shoulder rubbing with the planet’s pols on behalf of business. I don’t mean the kind of lumbering business dinosaurs that normally “speak for business”. We want lean, keen business mammals with their own minds and creativity intact. Jim Garrison can’t be here today, because he is with the UN fine-tuning the details, but I have brought the State of the World home team to join your party. The State of the World Forum does big ideas, but we have never tried anything as big as the Year 3000 AD. You can’t predict a thousand years ahead, but you can think around the idea.

Time is God’s way of making sure everything doesn’t happen at once. I think of history and the future as part of one pattern that one can move about in and learn from. The extraordinary solar system in which we exist is like living in a huge watch. When asked to talk here today, I spoke to a friend in Atlanta, who is writing what I think will be the great book on time. I asked him to give me an astrological chart for this spot at noon today, noon on 12th October 999 and noon on 12th October 2999. The results are fun. If you want to see the charts e-mail David Railey at Drrailey@aol.com. 12th October 999 was a great day for fishing, trading and some kind of pow wow - a sort of early YPO meeting! Incidentally you picked a great time to meet in 1999. “A day for honesty, candour and humour, for examining our deepest held beliefs and recognising that we can influence our joint adventure”.

So I conclude that a thousand years is both a very long time and, in the life of the solar system, just a moment. So what can we learn as we look at Y3K?

To begin we must rid ourselves of the Whig view of history, which sees mankind progressing up a smoothly rising curve towards ultimate perfectibility. Today the species is getting bigger and bigger, time seems to be moving faster and faster. But it is not always thus. The 12th century in Europe was great, but the population fell by a third and ideas dried up before the recovery to what we know as the Renaissance. There are good times and bad, slow times and ‘jump times’, renaissance and stagnation.

Then we might ask ourselves how much that is fundamentally new has been said since 999? How much new about love and death, justice, peace and war? The mystics had sensed it; the pre-Socratic Greeks had written it; the Romans and the Chinese had turned it into law. The great religions and the great languages were alive by 999. Do we have any evidence that the human mind of today is innately

superior to that of our ancestors a millennium or more ago? Is Clinton more subtle than Cicero as a crowd pleaser? Is Kissinger wiser than Confucius at running a system? Or Jesse Ventura more aggressive than Jenghis Khan? I am reminded of the iron law of committees which states, as the moment of collective exhaustion approaches, "Everything has been said, but not everyone has said it!"

So I conclude that Y3K will be more like today than we expect. However, let me pick a few big areas where I think we will see fundamental change.

We are a species in biological crisis. As Al Gore, who was the President of GLOBE before me, has said "faith is the primary force that enables us to find meaning and direction despite all the buffeting chaos of life". We are an adaptive species and we will bring about a spiritual re-programming of ourselves. If we can overcome our fear of death, we might stop breeding for immortality. Our population will go from six to ten billion by the middle of the next century, but by 3000 AD we may have had the collective sense to take it back down to a sustainable one billion.

This process of spiritual re-programming will be helped by the syncretism of rubbing together all the religions and thought systems of the planet as never before. Over a thousand years I expect to see a new consensus form around the idea that Teilhard de Chardin expressed when he said that "we are not human beings having a spiritual experience, we are spiritual beings having a human experience".

This will be massively enhanced by the Internet and its successors. It is difficult to underestimate the cumulative impact of the direct personal experience of knowledge, of gnosis, not filtered and controlled by governments or religions.

We may, with luck, have properly established human rights in the next century, but I suspect there are going to be much longer struggles over 'privacy' in a world without walls. There will be fights over the government's need to know and, beyond that, over the species need to know. We will need to re-invent taboos about knowledge which is off limits. There will be things which we just put aside. Nuclear weapons and nuclear power are probably amongst them; transgenic manipulation and the creation of chimera another. Big boys with big toys are dangerous for our survival as a species. I am not saying that we should constrain the human mind, but we can cut off the gargantuan flow of research funding to projects that threaten our survival.

I love the 'Braintickers' book which Elizabeth and Rod have created and published in record breaking time, thus demonstrating that there need be no barriers to how we define ourselves. However as you read these brain tickling questions you rapidly recognise that they really encapsulate the challenges which the species will face, not in Y3K, but in the next fifty years. At the GLOBE International General Assembly this year we used the formula 10:10:100. We looked back over the last ten years of environmental work, and then we looked forward to the crucial next decade in which we have to get the institutions right to survive the next 100 years. As a species we have to find the answers for climate change, bio-diversity, biotech and global governance amongst many others. In my judgement we only have ten years in which to do it.

These years lie in the prime time of each of you in this room. We are all living through a 'jump time', a renaissance. You are the children of that renaissance and the most difficult challenges fall to you. You have the power. Power that flows from creativity, money and the freedom to make a difference. Your predecessors in 19th century England made money and built great houses, but they also created institutions that made a difference. So I invite you to step out of a box marked business and boldly go wherever ideas lead you in this world caught in political and institutional transition. Use your patronage to pick a strand of thought, to shape an institution, to adopt an idea that resonates for you. Do so as individuals, because our state structures are too cumbersome for this crisis. Do so with humour, as play is what keeps the species adaptive. As you work on these ideas this afternoon I invite you to remember the motto of the State of the World Forum "Turning Conversations that Matter into Actions that make a Difference". I wish you luck as you go out to think about life in the year 3000, but please come back with ideas and actions that can make a difference in the next crucial decade.

