



The proteus initiative

Two Invitations from
The Proteus Initiative
October 2010

The Conversation Series

**Cultivating a particular form of conversation that “gets underneath the skin” of
the issue at hand**

“Standing at a Crossroads: Appropriate Action in Challenging Times”

Perhaps, despite our intentions, our social activism ends up defeating itself. Perhaps – inadvertently – we contribute towards and thereby become part of the very problem we’re trying to resolve. How then, can we ‘re-align’ ourselves, find our ‘true north’ once more, connect once again to ‘right action’, living in the world as social activist with an understanding that enables free action in the midst of struggle.

The “Reading from Nature” Series

Discovering the nature of process from the processes of nature

“Generative Energy”

The Towerland Wilderness in Spring is a place where one can be born aloft by the intensity of nature’s unfolding process. Through paying rapt attention to this process, and through our own practices of observation and imagination (such that we begin to think along with nature), we will investigate the generative energies within our own processes of unfolding, and how these may be facilitated in individuals and groups.

You do not need to have participated in either of these series before, nor do you need to participate again. The two series will be offered every year for those who are interested at the time.

The Conversation Series

Cultivating a particular form of conversation that “gets underneath the skin”
of the issue at hand

The First of the Series ...

In June 2008, The Proteus Initiative hosted its first five-day Conversation. We looked at the South African context for NGOs at the time, through the lens of *Boundaries, Possibilities and Constraints amongst NGOs in South Africa: an In-depth Conversation*. Our intention was the cultivation of a particular form of conversation amongst social and development activists and practitioners which enables the discovery of new depths to issues in order to inform more effective action.

Out of this series of Conversations, we intend to print booklets which capture the essence of each conversation from different perspectives. The first conversation has been written up and printed, and will be distributed, free of charge, as an important insight into the context within which we find ourselves currently.¹ Although this conversation took place almost two years ago, the achieved perspectives around (NGO) life in South Africa and beyond remain deeply relevant and thought-provoking – precisely because the Conversation was able to penetrate into the underlying and formative energies still resonant at the heart of our emerging reality.

The Second of the Series:

“Standing at a Crossroads: Appropriate Action in Challenging Times”

11-15 October 2010

Few will contest that we find ourselves – at this time – facing increasingly complex and difficult realities in almost every sphere. Politically, economically, ecologically, technologically. All of these are seamlessly interwoven: indeed, it is hard to discern the boundaries of these concerns. We, human beings, are at the centre of it all. In effect, we are responsible for the layers of crisis that we feel despair and confusion about. Many ideas about addressing these issues seem to end in *cul de sacs*, and even (or especially) activists find themselves despairing both in terms of their seeming impotence as well as because our own actions often seem – even if inadvertently – to contribute towards or merge, undifferentiated, with the endemic complexities and difficulties.

Perhaps we feel such impotence (despite all the work and good intentions). Perhaps we feel pain. Perhaps we feel that we have lost our sense of proportion, our sense of humanity. Perhaps we have even lost a sense for beauty, amidst the prevailing demands on our time, on our energies. Perhaps we find ourselves inadvertently drawn into working on ‘solutions’ that appear to accelerate the underlying sense of intractable problem. Perhaps we feel bewildered by the suspicion that we may be collaborating with the very ‘problem’ itself. Perhaps, despite our intentions, our social activism ends up defeating itself. How then can we ‘re-align’ ourselves, find our ‘true north’ once more, connect once again to ‘right action’ in a world which seems to diminish the bravest of intents.

Understanding our own complicities – not as a reason for blame but as a factor in the *way things work* – is key. Understanding the dynamics of social collusion may enable a more dispassionate sensibility to overcome possible tendencies towards sentimentality, blame, cynicism and defeat. And so find a way of living in the world as social activist with neither naive belief nor jaded cynicism, but with an understanding that enables free action in the midst of struggle



¹ You can get hold of this booklet by contacting The Proteus Initiative administrator, Lela Rabie, at people@proteusinitiative.org

The “Reading from Nature” Series

Discovering the nature of process from the processes of nature

When we really pay attention to the processes of nature, we may find that they illuminate the nature of living process itself. If we can begin thus to think organically, new approaches to the facilitation of social and individual development may reveal themselves. Through this, a living thinking, mobile enough to follow social and individual processes of development, is cultivated through insight and practice. Reading from the book of nature, we are able to enhance our faculties for a participatory engagement with the processes of human development.

The Proteus Initiative will host a series of such ‘readings’ (or immersions) over the coming years, covering different themes and angles in order to address different aspects of human development and facilitation. Each will be of one full week’s duration (including travel time) and all will take place at the Towerland Wilderness – southern Cape, South Africa - where the outpouring of the mountains will guide our inner explorations.

These weeks are intended for all practitioners of human development, in the broadest and most particular senses. Each week is self-contained and may be attended on its own or in conjunction with others.

First reading in the series

“Generative Energy”

25-29 October 2010

Where does the energy that drives new impulses, that generates change, that carries whole lives, come from? What does it take to move beyond the stuck places of the soul, into possibility once more? What do we need to nurture so that people, organisations and projects are able to find the energy to overcome the myriad barriers to change and development? How can we open ourselves to what is calling to us from the future? How can we enable what needs to emerge, rather than ‘manage change’? How can we discover that magical moment between holding on and letting go?

The Towerland Wilderness in Spring is a place where one can be born aloft by the intensity of nature’s unfolding process. Through paying rapt attention to this process, through its many manifestations, and through our own practices of observation and imagination (such that we begin to think along with nature), we will investigate the generative energies within our own processes of unfolding, and how these may be facilitated in individuals and groups.

Details for both Events

Each workshop is open to a maximum of 18 people.

Both events take place at Towerland Wilderness (see following page). Because this venue is in the countryside, participants are expected to arrive the Sunday afternoon before the event, and will depart on the Friday afternoon.

If you are interested in participating please write to Lela Rabie at people@proteusinitiative.org giving us some background as to who you are, what you do and why you would like to participate. (Also please write if you have any queries.) Applications should be in no later than **May 25th, 2010**. We will notify you by the end of June 2010 as to whether your application has been successful or not.

Both these series are largely funded. We therefore require only a contribution of R2500 from organisations and R1500 from individuals to cover all costs for the week.

Travel costs either to George (southern Cape) or Cape Town (western Cape) are for participants’ own account, but travel bursaries may be applied for. From George/Cape Town all travel costs will be covered.



The proteus initiative is led by
Al Kaplan and Sue Davidoff

“Through developing the organic and holistic methods of JW von Goethe into a new understanding and approach to the sphere of social renewal, our work is an attempt to realise the full consequences of true participation and of socio-ecological complexity. This in the pursuit of an emerging consciousness which holds freedom and responsibility as a generative polarity in the quest for wholeness”.

Towerland Wilderness
Southern Cape, South Africa.

Towerland is nestled in the Langeberg Mountains which form a borderland between the dry interior and the more watered coastal plains, and is really a wilderness retreat, which means that we have tried to keep it as unadorned and unobtrusive as possible. The rooms are simple and private, yet situated within a community or ‘village’ (as we like to call it) comprising these modest and exquisite rooms, each hand-built from natural materials. There is no electricity, the emphasis being on the encompassing presence of the mountains themselves. This is a truly inspiring and wonderful venue to explore nature, conversation and human unfolding, and we will be using the remarkable indoor and outdoor spaces that it offers to illuminate our understanding, precisely because such wild spaces are not readily accessible in a more urban setting.²

Please Contact

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2 You can find out more about Towerland on our website: www.proteusinitiative.org