

EIGHT

Youth as a New Element in the Evolution Society

—Constantin Schifirnet

This article deals with aspects referring to youth and the young as new elements in society, as promoters, up-holders and creators of the new. The young are a factor of social change, of reproduction of society and renewal of social structures. This survey sets out from the premise that the degree of participation of the young in the social life, the development of youth and its involvement in the renewal of society depend on how much society is open to the new and on its concern to create and ensure conditions for the assertion of the young as an innovating force of society.*

Youth—the Dialectic Unity between the Present State and the Future Orientation

Youth is a process and also a state. It is the unit between being and becoming. It is a stage in the human evolution and not just a transitory phase, it is existence in itself and, concurrently, a permanent becoming. At this age, the individual sees

* The problems of youth as change, the impact of change upon young age, the young as an agent of social change, the relations among generation as an element and framework of change are dealt with in our book "Youth between Renewal and Permanence", Ed. politica 1987.

radical changes biologically, physiologically, socially and relationally. These changes, however, are not due to the transitoriness of youth, which we believe to be a stage like any other in one's life cycle, but are intrinsic to youth. The difference between youth as existence and youth as becoming helps to depict what is characteristic of this moment in the human evolution and to delineate the way in which one's personality develops. The emphasis laid on the difference above avoids simplifications and confusions emerging from the definition of youth as a mere transitory stage. It is interesting to note that setting out from such an outlook on youth, judgments are passed on the young seen as a group that is to replace the adults, or that are being trained for future roles. But the young have their own life with their own problems and specific ways of solving them.

Youth is not isolated. On the contrary, it is a natural stage in the human life cycle. It is part and parcel of the flow of life and cannot be severed from the individual's general evolution. Undoubtedly, this stage is under the influence of the past childhood and of the aspirations of the youth for the adult state. It is sometimes strongly severed from childhood, denying it on the basis of what has been accumulated and assimilated.

Society lays the general pattern of age behaviours¹, wherein the youth takes over rights and obligations. In society he knows statuses and roles, opts for the ones that comply with his aspirations and needs, or statuses and roles are forced upon him. Youth may be defined as the period of the game of roles. If during his childhood, the individual adopts concrete roles from the immediate reality, and he does so in a lucid way, during his youth, he accepts broader, mere abstract social roles. Certain roles and statuses exist for youth only, and this is an argument in favour of its existential nature. The personality development refers to both future and present, to one's specific needs. The youth must solve pressing problems of his age. To stress the future dimension when analyzing the young is to overlook the very existential element of youth. The future orientations cannot be beneficial unless they are founded on the present real situation. There is no denying a discrepancy exists sometimes between the norms and values of youth and the future aspirations, orientations and ideals of the young.

Such a gap highlights once again the need to establish an adequate relation between youth as a present reality and its becoming.

We dwell on this dialectics of youth between existence and becoming setting out from educational realities which underline and act accordingly to mould the young in the values of the future, even if this is not thoroughly upheld by the youth. One overlooks the fact that the discontinuity that youth represents in the evolution of man and society is nothing but the emergence of a lack of balance, which is a prerequisite of the balance established in the personality of the youth and in his relationship with society. The establishment of this balance largely depends on the fulfilment of the relation between youth as existence and youth as becoming. The youth is not only a perpetual becoming, a continuous change, and old age only an existence checked by the history created and experienced during a man's evolution. It is true that youth does not stand out through a rich history, it rather perceives the history of others and is highly sensitive to the history of society. No matter how paradoxical it may seem, however, youth seeks its legitimacy in history. Its existence is less historical, but this very characteristic feature makes it more dynamic, wherefrom the feeling of becoming, of perpetual, unceasing change.

The differences between youth as existence and youth as becoming can be found in the table below:²

<i>Youth as present reality</i>	<i>Youth as becoming</i>
— accumulation, assimilation	— creativity
— spontaneous social relations, usually in groups of the same age	— broad social relations
— group prestige	— social prestige
— specific problems	— generally human and social problems
— its own culture, expression particularly of the generation	— general cultural interests
— consumption	— production (based on it there is consumption)

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| — biological and physiological flow | — biological stability |
| — disagreement between the real and the desiderata | |
| — health problems | — physical and spiritual vigour |
| — wish to know a lot, tendency towards many-sidedness | — tendency towards specialization |
| — sharp difference from children and adults | — relations with adults, with all the generations |
| — theoretical, abstract training | — vocational training |
| — involvement in the present | — future projections, prospective view |
| — role ascribing | — role acquisition |
| — group life, autonomy from family, denial of family values | — orientation to family life, wish to form a family |
| — a certain immaturity | — social maturation |
| | — professional integration |
| | — ensurance of a social and professional status |
| | — parental status |

Other features could still be added up. However, it is not the purpose of this paper to approach all the elements specific to youth as existence and youth as becoming. We barely mentioned some of them in order to point out the difference between the two states. Youth is the reality that the individual intensely experiences and it materializes as such under all the circumstances by acquiring, distributing and creating specific values. Its becoming means the transformation of the individual, *i.e.* his transition to the adult state with future orientations. Both states are characterized by change. Youth as a state is integrated to the present, whereas youth as becoming pertains to the future.

Youth means an effort in search of the adult state and of accomplishment of the personality. But it is also man's aspiration to live differently than in the other age periods. The young age forms and asserts its own culture to this very purpose of capitalizing the young psychological and social condition. Social investigations have identified aspirations, needs and options specific to the young without pointing radical differences from these belonging to the adults. The youth culture is not obligatorily opposed to the global culture of society. The differences between generations do not so much reside in the different values each age cherishes, but rather in the meaning attached to the same values by each age, in the way it perceives or experiences them.³ Therefore, the generation differences are not due only to the teleonomic orientation of the young. They focus on their present problems and not so much or not only on their future orientations. Youth is no psycho-social moratorium⁴, but that period in a man's life when the individual is in search of his own identity, that he relates primarily to the conditions he is faced with.

It is difficult to define youth. O. Badina argues that it is impossible to define it according to the rules of classical logic, i.e., by the next higher genre and the specific difference. Without going into the details of the description and definition of this population category, we believe it is essential to grant a differentiated appraisal to the young man, the young at large and youth. The philosophical view prevails when speaking about youth. Thus, we define youth as *stage in the life cycle, characterized by the unity between existence and becoming, between the present state and the future orientation, whose salient feature is to actively search and discover its own identity in the context of individual and social evolution*. This is why the opening to the future and the teleonomic essence are not inalienable characteristics of youth. Society is primarily interested in asserting these features, because it aims at moulding social agents able to continue its objectives and ideals. In youth, the relation between existence and becoming and between the present state and its evolution prevails. Should we stress the future as a fundamental dimension of youth, this stage in human life will be diminished to an element that is

characteristic to each age, but particularly to adulthood, to which youth usually relates.

The young man, who complies with the age limits of youth must be investigated particularly from the psychological viewpoint. The psychological surveys help tackle the evolution peculiarities of the young at this age.

Sociology deals with youth as a group. When defining youth, one cannot overlook the social aspect and stick to the other elements of youth: the biological, physiological and psychological ones. That is why it is not possible to define youth as a social group in itself. Unlike other social concepts, the youth must be related to all the dimensions mentioned above. It is a social reality mainly due to these physiological, biological and psychological characteristics, whose existence with human individuals depends on social structures.

We define the youth as an *age group whose physiological biological and psychological characteristics depend on social structures which become specifically human due to the concrete existence in a social framework, on the way society related to this group and evaluates it, granting statuses and roles according to its ends and ideals and promoting it is a factor of social change*. Therefore, the young stand for that social-human group placed at the crossroads between youth and the social statuses and roles in a given social-historical context, which differs from that of the other age groups in terms of formation and social assertion. To this effect, the young as product of a society is the creator of a novel social reality, the propelling force of social development, the dynamic element of social life, oriented towards the new, creativity and change.

Such a definition allows the concrete analysis of youth according to the changes in a certain society, due to the fact that they belong to a society. Thus conceived, youth appears as an agent of social change, involved in the events that take place in a certain social framework. Youth is a strongly socialised age group, oriented towards social change due to its options and capacity to establish new means of approaching social reality.

The research of youth means the analysis of how its values and ideals are produced in the framework of concrete social structures. To study youth is to investigate an objectivizing

reality in the permanent flow of life. Youth research should investigate what youth is, and identify the specific action of youth to objectivize as reality and symbols and, on the other hand, to understand the attitude of youth towards society. This means the taking into consideration of the production of the young, without overlooking the influence of the social environment on the section of youth. Youth is that stage in the human life characterized by experiments in roles, when it cristallizes its power of change and creates its own social space, because the evolution of society is not oriented only towards what the adult create at social level, but also towards the values, traditions and reality built by the new generations. If the research of youth problems is to identify the specificity of youth in the dialectics of life, it must need answer such questions.

Youth is no social group and, therefore, cannot be defined as one. It merely participates in the social practice of various social groups. This is why it is inappropriate to speak either about youth as a social-political entity, or about the global status of youth. The science of youth (juventology), setting out from youth as a distinct category, is also inappropriate. The youth problems are not studied by any autonomous science, they are the rather naturally approached by all the social and humanistic sciences, which must systematically and with arguments explain the novelty of youth, the capacity of change and creativity, its power to innovate and sometimes radically change society.

The Young and Social Change

The relation between youth and social change encompasses, on the one hand, the impact of social change on youth and, on the other, the effects of the changes experienced by the young upon society. The evolution of the young cannot be conceived other than as change.

The pace of social change has varied effects upon the different age groups. It has become commonplace that the young are most affected by change, as they are in full swing of development, unlike the children, lacking any assumed social function, and the adults, who are autonomous in their decisions and

activity. But change triggers off mutations in the system of values, rules and customs of society as a whole, irrespective of age. Even in the so-called archaic or primitive social structures, where the criterion of age classes is much stronger, change occurs in a contradictory process through the relationship between age groups.

Some sociological doctrines, *e.g.* functionalism, analyze the impact of change on youth in relation with the status of youth. A high status of the young is often associated with a high rate of social change. In societies where the old can bar the access of the young to adult statuses, there may be a drive towards change, social innovation and experiments.⁵ The segregation of the young from the adult world would entail their being turned into a potential deviant population. The author argues that a high status of the young can be acquired by integration with the adult world. The place of youth in the social structure is directly connected with the stability of society and is an answer to the outer circumstances of change. According to this outlook, the assertion of youth in society depends exclusively on agents of change independent of them. A second thesis comes in support of this one, *i.e.* that the youth groups emerge in societies where the family is incapable of achieving the full social status, the development of identities and the social maturation of part of its members. The idea belongs to Eisenstadt.⁶ According to it, the fact that young people gather in groups would deepen and objectivize their problems from the viewpoint of their own values and symbols. Social change is analyzed in relation to family, disregarding the natural tendency of a youth to approach social structures, institutional frameworks and to get involved into their activity. In the functionalist view, society is the place where each of its members occupies a number of statuses and plays a number of roles. But how are these statuses acquired. In action, by concrete activity, therefore in the social-historical practice. The dynamics of society is due to the productive activity, and it is there that change takes place in the first place. It would not do to oversimplify the complexity of social relations in which the young are directly or indirectly integrated, by insisting on the acquisition of

statuses and roles when speaking about youth as an element of change.

Youth is that moment in the evolution of society which triggers off the continuous innovation of its structures, and not a mere link between childhood and adulthood, as perceived by functionalism, or a completely new reality, severed from society, as a results from radical outlooks. Youth as an expression of the relationship between innovation and permanence exists as a factor of innovation in a given social context and contributes to the evolution of society both by its reproduction and by its change.

It should be mentioned that change, particularly the social one assumes various forms in certain polar relational structures. Thus, change is the outcome of the relation between tradition and innovation, residual-emergent, creativity-reproduction, conformism-activism, adjustment-innovation, socialization-juventization, old-new, peripheral-centre. Other polar categories may be added up, but important is that the analysis of youth should overcome a certain limitation, by investigating all the facets making up the process of youth. In this way, change materializes according to the particular field of youth assertion and to the activities it is involved in. Let us dwell on some of these relations (new-old, tradition-new, modern-tradition) in order to highlight youth dynamics and its place within the life cycles.⁷

The Young as both Object and Subject of Social Innovation

How does the relation between old and new get established with the young? It is time we specified that this relation has its own peculiarities when discussed in the context of youth problems. Social change also affects the young from the viewpoint of the relation between old and new.

The young are to the adults the new elements. In society they have their own behaviour according to their age, needs and aspirations. They create their own social space, and thereby bring about a new way of thinking and acting. The young are in search of the new and its assimilation is the very prerequisite

of their existence. Society itself sees in them a potential of the new and a means to implement it. The new flow into social life by educating the younger generation in its spirit.

The receptivity towards youth as a new element in society means the acknowledgment of the new youth stands for. Youth is new as follows: *ontologically*—as a new reality, *gnoseologically*—acquisition of new knowledge in a systematic framework and *axiologically*—creation of specific values of the other generations.

The young ones wish to enjoy more understanding from adult generations because they have another way of life and think differently. Dogmatism and a paternalism result from the lack of receptivity to the problems specific to them.

To the young, the new stands for a new and daring conscience, as opposed to petty dogmatism. The conscience of the new makes them reject what is outdated and wish to render the forms, methods and styles reflecting the new, the change as progress permanent. It is an imperative need that all the educational institutions in our society should train this potential for the new of the young. Youth is a factor of change and an element of change by its orientation to the new and to its promotion.

The traditions also contribute to the socialization of the young. It is where they find the models, persuasions and skills necessary for their integration in society. The young have not yet got their own experience, and consequently have no traditions, but as a new element of social structure, they get attached to traditions. They must become or do something that has never been done before, by assimilating the already accepted values or by already initiated actions in their socialization environment. Those who educate the young teach them traditions and the experience given by the past. The educators teach verified and legitimate knowledge, in a word they pass down certain heritage. The essential question is whether this heritage complies, at least partially, with the aspirations and needs of the young. This agreement ultimately depends on the way in which society is interested in passing down to the young those values that are acceptable to the new requirements formulated by the new generation.

When dealing with tradition, the past is conveyed in

consensus with the contemporary age, and it is accepted because it has been accepted by others in the past, as well as by the older people who relate to the past as to the present.

The interaction between the young and the adults is founded on the relation between future and past in a concrete present. The adults exercise their influence over the young also from within those values whose expression are the adults, meaning both their own values created by themselves and the values of the past taken over by the young from the adults. From the viewpoint of tradition, the relationship between the adults and the young is contradictory. The young themselves can resort to the past in order to discover other values and to establish other value hierarchies or priorities. The asymmetrical interaction between the young and the adults allows the young to attach to past states of mind embodied and symbolized by the adults.⁸ Even if the past is not explicitly recalled as underlying a tradition, the young still conceive of it as related to the past embodied by the adults. The young ones look for models in the past beyond what is offered to them by the adults. They rediscover values of the past, particularly those that comply with the revolutionary, changing dimension of tradition and impose them on society. It is true that the young witness a certain anti-traditional spirit, but that is due to their need of differing from the value system established by the adults.

Youth is apparent in this relation between tradition and the new. The young accept change more than the adults, but this does not mean in principle that the adults prove more resistance to change. There are, however, adults who oppose change in various ways: negative, passive attitude towards the new active resistance by rejecting the new and imposing old values in an obsolete framework; adjustability to change; transformation of the new values created by the younger generation by attaching new meanings and ends to them.

The attitude towards change is different, therefore, in a family where the tradition of change has been passed down from generation to generation, from a family centered on repetition, on the preservation whatever with the present requirements of its members. It has been found that many young

people become aware of tradition rather by means of the mass-media than directly.

An important prerequisite of participation in social innovation is the *way in which the young perceive modernism*.

Age itself is no indicator of modernism. The acquisition of modern values is a process that depends on the social structures, on the orientation of society towards the new and its assertion in the social and individual life.

Nonetheless, age accounts for some differences that are due to the unequal development of each age period. The adults already possess some experience and a tradition that allows them to evaluate the new. The adults are more selective than the young, and they conceive of change as attachment to elements of stability proven by their experience.

The young are moulded in a more modern framework than the adults. They enjoy other working and living conditions, other facilities of leisure and holidays, etc. They are the first to receive elements of modernization and to know their impact. This does not mean a removal or rejection of tradition, by the young. The young sincerely need to assimilate the moral and spiritual values that agree with the traditions. Faced with the cultural values and a way of life different from tradition, the young turn to the modern, setting out from the traditional values. The desire of change with the youth springs from the need to be fashionable.

Consequently, it is difficult to draw clear-cut borders between the young and the other generations based on modernism. The young are more mobile and more receptive to fashion. The adults are more opaque to the impact of fashion. Any change means evolution, development, growth, adjustment to new events and situations and this is why a certain behaviour is compulsory in order to meet the requirements of change. The resistance the adults oppose to change is partly due to the difficulties they meet when assuming all the follow-up of change.⁹

The attitude of the young to modernism depends on their personality, as well as on the social environment they live in. Groups of young people relate to the new according to their own system of values and aspirations. Every group of young people feels the need of change because they have their own

requirements, which, in their turn, emerge from the needs of living environment of the young. This is why it is impossible to label a youth or a group of young people as fashionable behaviour of some young people through external criteria or according to indicators referring to other social or cultural realities. This is equally true as regards the attitude of the young towards the adults are even towards some youth they believe unfashionable, due to shallow and ephemeral aspects, that they usually confine to a certain reaction to fashion. Being modern in one's behaviour, way of life, thinking and attitude is not something abstract, but an expression of the way of thinking and acting under concrete living conditions in keeping with the changes undergone by the working and living environment.

The young may encounter difficulties in fulfilling their modern aspirations, either due to their own behaviour or to the attitude of their environment (family, group of friends, relations with other adults). This occurs particularly when the young doff any influence of tradition and would impose exclusively fashionable values. The new values promoted by the young find their assertion in a long and complex process, which depends on the social structures and on the tradition of youth in order to receive and assimilate the new.

It must be noted that the young accumulate much knowledge but use little of it because they are not integrated in some kind of productive activity and also because their life experience is still limited. They are not used to capitalizing this knowledge in concrete actions. One's life experience may evolve either parallel to or in contradiction with the accumulated knowledge. Youth represent this contradictory unity between the culture experienced and the culture acquired. The paradox of youth is its great capacity to assimilate knowledge during the educational process and not to use it during the professional activity as such. The knowledge acquired is usually put at work in a limited way and the aspects activated are, as a rule, of a lesser importance.

Social researches have pointed out the interest of the young for the new, for changing the old and promoting the new. Thus, half of the investigated students (876 altogether from all the university centres) believe that the main prerequisite of

success in life is one's possibility to invent or discover something new.¹⁰ They make clear that the essential demand of our time is to organize both social and individual life in close agreement with the new. Besides, 90 per cent of the students believe that the expert in any sphere of activity should be mainly concerned with the discovery of the new. Many young people, not only students, are of the opinion that the specialists, the highly trained expert are one and the same with the seeker of the new, with the one who implements it. One of the essential problems of the young in educational institutions is to update the educational process by introducing the scientific, technical and cultural breakthrough. This keen interest of the young in the new is the telling evidence of their creativity.

Fashion does not rule out tradition. On the contrary, the modern man integrates tradition, the valuable tradition obviously, according to the requirements of the past and future. The modern man has an unprejudiced mind, a mobile thinking and advanced views of the world and society. The promotion of the new is an important feature of the modern man, but it should not be overdone to the detriment of stable values.

The young are very interested in innovations and modernization. They are for the introduction of technology in the economic and everyday life and they are open to any breakthrough or invention in technology. Almost half of the lot of investigated youth stated that they have technical skills and most of them wished to be included in forms of technical training.¹¹ A large number of the young devote their spare time to technical activities.¹² These are but a few feature characteristics of the new profile of the contemporary younger generation in our country, which is oriented towards other values than the preceding younger generations. Speaking about the year 2000, the young underline that the salient feature of their generation is its scientific and technical training, whereby science and technology are assumed to serve exclusively the ideals of peace and progress of mankind. At the turn of the third millennium, the young cherish the legitimate aspiration to fully benefit from the positive effects of scientific and technical discoveries.¹³ Among the defining characteristics of the

generation of the year 2000, let us also mention a modern thinking and behaviour, plus modern relations with other people. The young voice their confidence that society evolves in a single direction, i.e. the removal of all barriers from man's accomplishment and the fulfilment of his creative powers. They do not admit of deviations from the spirit of justice and equity.

The establishment of genuine moral principles and the generalization of the values of communist morality are, to the young, a sign of modernism and they really feel the need to develop the moral spiritual values generated by traditions. The young, and the rural youth in particular, are faced with new values and a way of life that no longer resembles the traditional one.

Some of them have to give up the traditions they were moulded in, so as to be able to cope with the new residential environment. Actually, in some villages¹⁴ and even in some urban structures, if we may add, there is a mixture of tradition and modernity, a mechanical unity expressed in the behaviour of some youth.

The formation of the young for participation in the social and cultural innovation should also take into account the specific culture of the youth. This culture acts as a lever in one's education according to the targets of society and the spiritual requirements of the youth. The youth culture consists of a bulk of needs made up of a wide range of aspirations and ideals.¹⁵ It is, at the same time, an essential means to stimulate their participation in change and social development, because participation should also account for the aspirations, interests and motivations of youth, oriented towards the discovery, promotion and enforcement of the new, toward the creation of new values and of a specific social space, which is an essential prerequisite to the progress of society.

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DEVELOPMENT OF EMERGING WORLD YOUTH

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