

AUROVILLE TODAY

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PHOTO COLLAGE BY RENO

Even as the individual has a psychic being which is his true self, governing more or less openly his destiny, so too each nation has its psychic being which is its true self, moulding its destiny behind the veil: it is the soul of the country, the national genius, the spirit of the people, the centre of national aspiration, the fountain head of all that is beautiful, noble, great and generous as a tangible reality. India's role is to be the spiritual heart of the terrestrial body just as, for example, the role of Germany is to express skill, or that of Russia the brotherhood of man, or that of the United States enthusiasm for adven-

The role of nations

ture and practical organisation. France meant generosity of sentiment, newness and boldness of ideas and chivalry in action.

The first aim then will be to help individuals become conscious of the fundamental genius of the nation to which they belong and at the same time to put them in contact with the modes of living of other nations so that they may know and respect equally the true spirit of all the countries upon earth.

The ideal is that every nation with a definite culture will have a pavilion representing that culture, built on a model that best reveals the habits of the country: it will exhibit the nations' most representative products, natural as well as manufactured, as well as products that best express its intellectual and artistic genius and its spiritual tendencies. Each nation would thus find a practical and concrete interest in cultural synthesis and collaborate in the work by taking over the charge of the pavilion that represents it.

(*The Mother*, in a text given for the inauguration of the Ashram International Centre of Education in April 1952.)

In This Issue

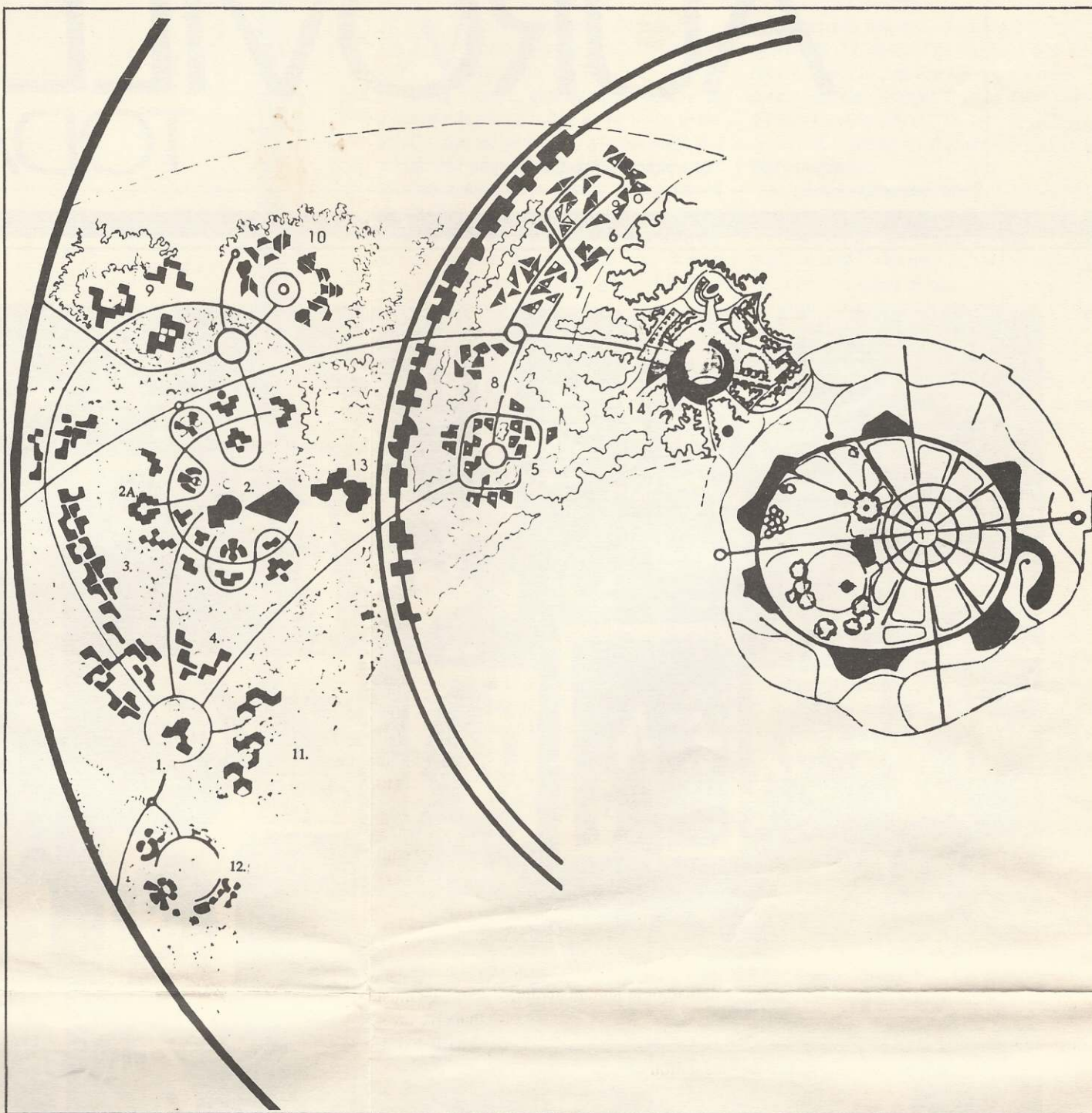
When the Mother spoke about Auroville in detail for the first time, on June 23rd, 1965, she described the four big sections of the Auroville township; the industrial section, the cultural section, the residential section and the international section. Later, these sections became known as 'zones'. The idea for the international section, where every country could have its own pavilion, was already expressed in April 1952, in a text given by the Mother for the inauguration of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (see front page).

India was the first country to express its wish to build its national pavilion, which was called Bharat Nivas. The construction was started in 1971 but came to a halt in 1982. The buildings were left unfinished, and with them the concept of Auroville's International Zone was largely disregarded for a long time.

Nowadays, however, we witness a renewed interest within Auroville and abroad as regards the starting of the International Zone. Consequently, in this issue of *Auroville Today* we present the views held by Roger Anger on the International Zone, and report on the efforts to realize the Tibetan and the French pavilion, and to improve Bharat Nivas. We also refer to attempts to clarify ideas concerning the German and American pavilions.

We also touch on education in this issue. "Auroville's education has to become an example and practical help to India", said Heidi Watts, a visiting scholar from America, who also has high hopes for Auroville's educational efforts. In addition, we report on the problem solving techniques that another visitor taught Auroville children in Transition school.

In Focus: THE INTERNATIONAL ZONE



Map of the International Zone
(made at Aurofuture)

LEGEND

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A New Perspective

After a number of gatherings had taken place in Auroville to discuss various cultural pavilions, such as the German, the French and the Italian pavilion, a meeting was called in March, in which ROGER ANGER, appointed by the Mother as the chief architect of Auroville, presented a conceptual map of the International Zone with sketches of the various pavilions (see photo). AUROVILLE TODAY asked him about his present view of the development of the International Zone.

Roger Anger: The International Zone is situated in the West of Auroville. When designing this Zone, we had to take into account the location of the newly built Visitors Reception Center, which will act as a primary focal point. It is the intention that all visitors will first be directed there. Their vehicles will not enter the city but be parked outside the zone. From the Visitors Reception Center, internal non-polluting transport will take care of the transportation for inside the city.

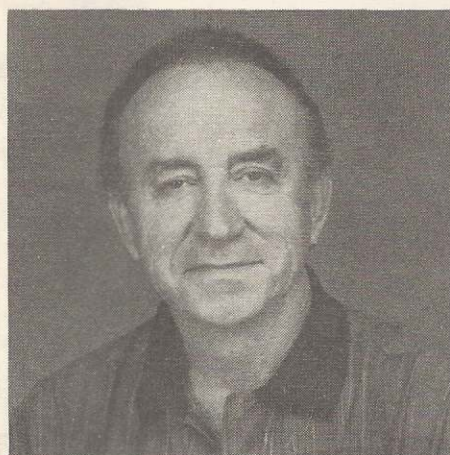
The present proposal for the International Zone is that it will consist of national pavilions that are grouped together, so that

"The present proposal for the International Zone is that it will consist of national pavilions that are grouped together, so that various countries who have a common culture and history are visibly united."

various countries who have a common culture and history are visibly united. In this way we have grouped the pavilions of Europe together, and also those of Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Oceania-Australia and North and South America.

AVT: Does it mean that the idea of individual, free standing pavilions, has been abandoned?

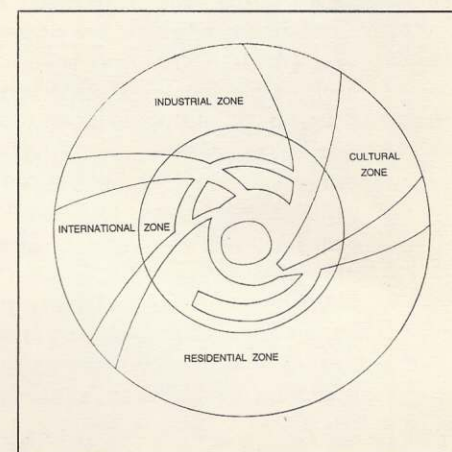
Well, first we should take into account that the area in which the pavilions are to be situated is not so large. And if you do not find a solution that links the pavilions, you'll need only for Europe already half of the area available. So we plan for pavilions of about 400 m² for each country, containing a multipurpose area, an exhibition area, store rooms and



an apartment for the caretaker. That's all. All the rest that is common to all pavilions, such as hotels, restaurants, museums, theaters, cinemas, shops, conference halls, will be situated along the crown road that passes through the international zone. General presentations and exhibitions of technology and art will take place there.

But there is another, more important reason to abandon the idea of free standing, individual pavilions. These can only be justified for those countries whose culture is indeed unique. But creating independent pavilions for the European countries, whose political, cultural and commercial history is so much interlinked, and who are now even expressing a common aspiration towards

(continued on page 2)



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unification in the political field, would go against the spirit of the time.

What should the pavilions express?

The pavilions are not intended to show a country's commercial or cultural or technological products in a competitive way, or be a kind of cultural embassy. Mother said that each pavilion should express the soul of its nation; express the contact its nation has with its soul; and express the participation of its nation in human evolution, the way it has contributed to the growth and development of the universal consciousness. Each country has its specific nature, its soul. And each country has had its glorious episodes, and its less glorious and ignoble periods. All those periods have been of consequence to the progress of human evolution, and that could be shown for example in the form of a small permanent exhibition inside each pavilion. And the pavilions could manifest a very simple and symbolic expression of an important part of their country's culture as well. For example, the Greek pavilion could well have marble walls, the Dutch pavilion could put one painting of Rembrandt, the Tibetans could place a magnificent sculpture of Buddha, and so on.

Evidently, this will necessitate a certain noblesse, a certain simplicity, which will be very difficult to achieve.

Mother spoke of the fact that each nation has its soul, which expresses the specific nature of that country. She mentioned the specific nature of some countries, but not of all. It will be a difficult task for each Aurovilian to interiorize themselves sufficiently to contact the soul of his or her nation, and to find out what his or her country represents in the human evolution.

How would you like to visibly realize such a grouping of nations?

I am studying at present the possibility to unify all the pavilions of the European countries. This could, for example, be done by placing them all under one large and common roof structure; a light high-technology structure, which also could partially cover roads, patios and gardens that separate the

pavilions. Below this common roof are the small individual pavilions, built in such a way as to give expression to the soul of each nation. Certain countries that have a close common culture can be situated close to each other. But I am not yet fully certain about the common roof structure; perhaps it should be differentiated in height, perhaps there should be a play of terraces—I am still studying this question. I have to find a common pattern, in which each pavilion can integrate.

It will be difficult for each pavilion to express in the way it is built the soul of the country. Architecture is at present rather international, and you can hardly speak anymore about typical French or Italian or American architecture. And I do not think that a pavilion should represent a country's specific architecture of the past.

How can such a unifying structure be financed?

I believe that Europe should participate in the financing of the superstructure. The roof structure may cost about one million US dollars, an amount which could perhaps be raised from the European Community with the help of the members of the Auroville International Advisory Council. The pavilions below can be relatively cheap, from US \$ 50,000 to US \$ 100,000 each. This means that it will be feasible for groups of individuals in each country to raise the money necessary for their pavilion. We know that it is difficult to get the individual countries officially interested. It may be the task of the Auroville International Centers to find the money for their pavilion.

We have to approach potential donors with the invitation to participate in a spiritual experiment. It does not make sense to present the pavilion as another cultural embassy, these things exist already in one form or another. Our focus here in Auroville is participation in human evolution. And we must have the courage to put it like that. We must present the International Zone as a representation of what humanity, as a global collective, has done in the past thousands of years in the process of human evolution.

What about the other countries?

For the U.S.A. the grouping is very easy. It is already unified, so it should not be too difficult to express that visibly in its architecture. The countries of South America also have shared elements of a common history and culture, and a common super structure is also feasible. For Asia the thing is much more complicated. Take, for example, the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture. The model is already there. It represents a typical Tibetan architecture, but it could also be the model of a Tibetan monastery! I would prefer if it could be integrated in some ways with other Buddhist cultures.

The Indian pavilion, of which the present unfinished structures at Bharat Nivas are part, is one of utmost importance. I do not, however, believe that the original concept of the separate independent state pavilions interlinked with the auditorium and the restaurant should be continued. The Indian pavilion could well find a place in the context of the existing structures, once all the offices are removed and some necessary restructuring has been done.

There is one aspect of the International Zone that is not so well known. Mother once told me that it might be interesting to also have a representation of the various religions of the world—a Christian church, a Hindu temple, a Jewish synagogue, a Islam mosque; so as to illustrate the role each religion has played or is playing in the frame of the human evolution.

I realize that it may take another few years to start the International Zone. But I hope we can start soon.

Interview on 3-3-1993 by Carel and Jill.



Auroville's International Zone

"Le vingt-unième siècle sera spirituel,
ou ne sera pas." ¹⁾ André Malraux

In the global nineties the growing challenge of the progressive and inevitable unification of the human race is a pressing one on which perhaps the very survival of our species depends. How can unity be achieved in an area of increasing interdependence while avoiding the perils of uniformity and political or economical domination and subjection? How can humanity move towards a synthetic organization of nations at the dawn of a new and spiritual age?

The theme of human unity in diversity could be the starting point. Sri Aurobindo, in the beginning of this century, gave in his book *The Ideal of Human Unity* ²⁾ his views on the possibility of a World State, and on its most desirable form as "a federation of free nationalities in which all subjection or forced inequality and subordination of one to another would have disappeared, and, though some might preserve a greater natural influence, all would have an equal status."

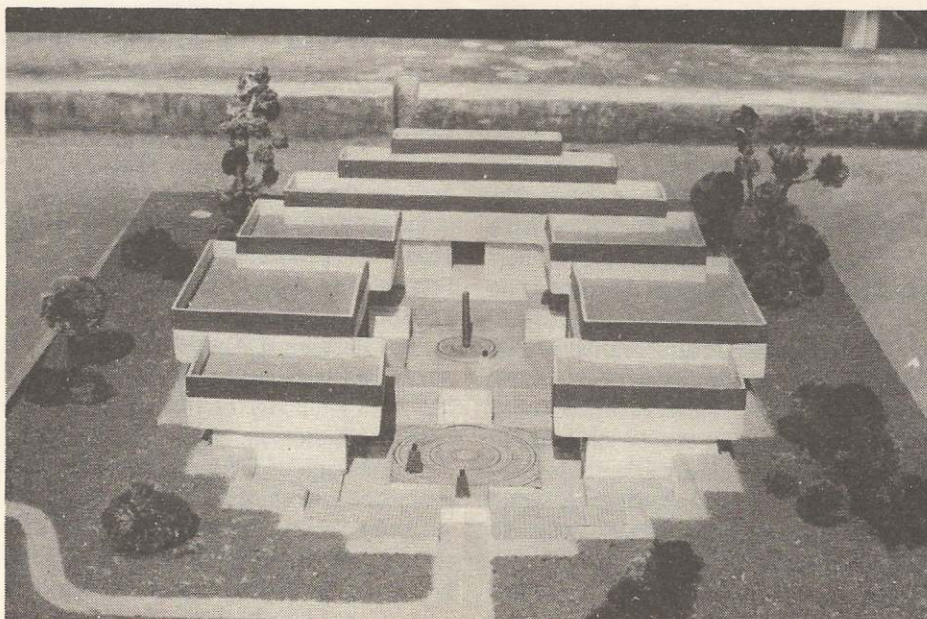
This ideal, if recognized and expressed, could provide the seed bed for a new flowering of man's spirit and lead to an acceleration of the forces of transformation at work throughout the world today.

Seen from this perspective, the project of Auroville's International Zone with its cultural pavilions, envisaged by The Mother, could well become a pilot project, a testing ground for a "clear sighted and effective collaboration" between nations."

Roger

Notes:

- 1) The 21st century will be spiritual, or will not exist.
- 2) page 571



The model of the proposed Tibetan Pavilion

THE TIBETAN PAVILION: From the Roof of the World

Auroville's connection with Tibet goes back to February 28th, 1968, when soil from Tibet was placed in the urn at the inauguration ceremony of Auroville by a Tibetan girl, and Tibetan was one of the sixteen languages in which the first paragraph of the Auroville Charter was read out. In 1971, the Mother accepted twelve Tibetan children in the Auroville schools, and they studied here until 1978. In 1973, the Dalai Lama visited Auroville and Pondicherry for two days and had an audience with the Mother.

Ever since the International Youth Year in 1985, when youth representatives from fifty countries—including two delegates from Dharamsala representing Tibet—met in Auroville for a seminar on Human Unity, cultural and educational exchange programmes between Auroville and a number of the Tibetan communities in exile have been dynamic and ongoing. The personal physician of the Dalai-Lama, Dr Tenzin Choedrak and teams of doctors from the Tibetan Medical Institute in Dharamsala have visited Auroville for seminars on Tibetan medicine; the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts and the monks of Zongkar Chode have on different occasions brought us dances from the different regions of Tibet, while monks from the Gyumed monastery have created sand mandalas and butter sculptures in Auroville. Tibetan dentists have been trained in Auroville, masons have come to study our low-cost ferrocement building techniques and Auroville greenworkers have visited southern settlements to help in treeplanting and water and soil conservation projects.

A couple of years ago a site was chosen for the pavilion of Tibet, the land was consecrated and the following message was received by the Dalai Lama.

"We are deeply interested by the spiritual aim behind the building of an international city called Auroville. The importance of the effort to achieve human unity and international cooperation by the creation of such a city cannot be overemphasized; nor can we neglect the benefit acquired from it. We are therefore very keen to be the first country to build a pavilion. We understand this pavilion will be dedicated to the essence of Tibetan culture in an effort to show that out of the diversity of world cultures, these pavilions can help to create a new harmony towards world human unity."

1993, the year of the Water Bird, honoured by monks from the Gyumed Monastery who conducted the Incense Ceremony on the first day of the Tibetan New Year in a field behind the Bharat Nivas, will be an auspicious one for the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture in Auroville. The Dalai Lama has accepted an invitation to visit Auroville in December.

An architect's model for the pavilion now exists which is planned to include a room for permanent exhibits, a library cum study room, a cafeteria and guest facilities. It will be built with cost-effective construction techniques such as ferrocement and stabilized mud blocks employed by the Centre for Scientific Research. Its estimated cost is U.S. \$60,000. For those interested in contributing or requiring more information please contact: Claude Arpi, Pavilion of Tibetan Culture, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, South India.

Roger

Helper or Bar?

Why do we need pavilions of different nations or cultures in Auroville? Years ago, when I first heard about the planned pavilions, I had a lot of resistance. Why, I thought, should we give attention to anachronisms like national or cultural groupings? They were something which seemed totally out of tune with Auroville's ideal of human unity, as well as with the new global spirit of internationalism fostered by the communications revolution and new political and economic realities.

Later, when I read how Mother had explained the concept, I began to think again. Because it became clear that she wished each pavilion to express not ephemera but the best, the highest and most representative aspects of each culture. And, more than that, the spirit, the essence of each culture. But still, I wondered, is this anything more than an academic exercise for us here in Auroville?

Nevertheless, I decided to try the experiment—with some fellow Brits—of deciding upon what the British pavilion should contain. It wasn't easy! Because, even while we searched for a representation of the spirit of British culture, we kept stumbling over the stereotypes—the bowler hat, fish and chips, the pub, the Changing of the Guard etc.—or, at best, events or images—like the Stately Home or garden party—which are evocative of a particular class or period. We seemed to be getting closer when we looked at the English language, expanded and refined through Shakespeare, Dryden, the Romantic Poets and others, as a vehicle and container for something characteristically 'British'. But the question remained. What is the spirit of British (or should it be, English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish?) culture? What, in other words, is Britain's unique contribution to world culture and evolution?

We still haven't solved it. But asking the question has activated something in me. It's drawn me deeper into my culture than I have been in many years. And it's made me realise that, at some level, I've been rejecting something of great value in my background through not distinguishing between its superficial stereotypes and its essence. And more than that, I sense now that human unity, at its most fundamental level, the reaching out and total identification with other cultures and peoples, is not possible until one has recognized and honoured the essence of one's own culture, in the same way that the recognition of one's true identity is a prerequisite to realizing a genuine unity with others... And those somewhat controversial cultural pavilions, approached in the right way, could be a catalyst for that process.

Alan

THE AMERICAN PAVILION

E Pluribus Unum?

The American Pavilion will definitely not be some sort of plastic fast-food outlet à la MacDonald's Hamburgers. However, some of the ideas have been... unusual. The first concept elaborated by the architect and planner Joel Goodman in the seventies, was aluminium cargo containers shipped from the U.S.A., loaded with materials for linking the containers together in a portable, expandable, multi-functional complex. That ship did not come into port. And even the modest proposal of maintaining a 'reading shelf' in the library of related American periodicals and books has not happened. The most recent suggestion comes from an American Aurovilian, Roy, who said: "What about a teepee? Then we could move it and put it up wherever we wanted."

The site for the American Pavilion was picked out in the mid-seventies under a summer sun by a small group, led by the unfailing advocate of this pavilion, Seyril Schochen. The few stones piled up by those sweating pioneers have since tumbled back into the eroded canyons.

In the Eighties, under the banner of PACA (Pavilion of American Culture Auroville)—there was even stationery printed for the purpose—another effort was launched. Funding from the U.S. Government for a pavilion might have been possible if Auroville could have been declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. However, this avenue turned out to be a dead end. The U.S. Ambassador to India and Consul General (Madras) had also showed interest but bricks and mortar were never ordered.

Later, at a meeting of Auroville International USA an interesting approach was suggested by Paula Murphy, shifting the PACA emphasis to a Pavilion of Pan American Culture in Auroville: to pertain to and include the cultures of all the states of North, Central and South America and of all Indigenous Americans. As she put it:

"The beauty of this name PACA is in its broad sweep. I realize, however, that it represents a shift in focus from purely the USA to all Americans. It has the potential to encourage and allow for participation from many peoples, tribes and nations which may not be able to financially pull-off a pavilion in Auroville for a long time. Native American tribes and indigenous people throughout North and South America often have no connection to or representation in the governments currently in power. In some places they suffer under injustice. This raises the question of who to ask to participate in the Pavilion. It would be ideal to have both traditional and modern aspects of each nation represented—the best of all possible worlds. In the U.S., Native American tribes have 'Sovereign Nation' status. It would be interesting to approach them with the respect one gives to other 'nations'. It represents a real push towards the future realization of Auroville's international aspect".

Doesn't the expression on American coins, 'E pluribus unum' (out of many one) also fit Auroville? The dollar also carries the inscription 'Novus ordo saeculorum' (a new world order). Hopefully both together will help build the Pavilion.

Bill

THE PAVILION OF FRANCE

Le Pavillon de la France

"France was once generosity of feelings, the newness and boldness of ideas, action that was chivalrous. That France inspires the respect and admiration of all; and it was through those virtues that she dominated the world.

A utilitarian France, calculating and mercantile, is no longer France; these things do not correspond to her true nature, and by practicing them she loses the true nobility of her world position.

(The Mother in a message for the inauguration of the French Institute in Pondicherry on the 4th of April, 1955).

"It is France that can connect Europe with India. There are great spiritual possibilities for France. She will play a big part in spite of the present bad condition. It is through France that the spiritual message will reach Europe. That is why I chose France for my birth, although I am not French."

(The Mother)

Sri Aurobindo was a great admirer of French culture and Pondicherry's links with France—centuries old—to this day continue. Auroville's very name is French and our charter was originally written by the Mother in French. French is one of the four main spoken languages in Auroville and is one medium of instruction in our schools. Auroville's composite character retains a strong French element, and the French are the second largest community in Auroville. It would therefore not be surprising to see a pavilion of French culture in Auroville take shape in the next few years.

A first symbolic step in that direction occurred on February 28th this year with the laying of a foundation stone for the pavilion in the designated plot of the International Zone. It was the result of nine years of dedicated work by Mireille Albrecht—the president of the Association for the Pavilion of France that was founded in Paris in 1991—who first visited Auroville in 1984 as a special envoy of the French Government, and has since returned regularly. In 1991, the Association for the Pavilion of France, which has its headquarters in Paris, received the official support of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The pavilion is envisaged as being a center of an exchange between France and Auroville, as well as India and France. Its goals are to represent France and the spirit of France in Auroville, and to provide a center of research where exchange programmes could be conducted with specialists in such areas as science, ecology and technology, social studies, medicine, communication, teaching, culture, ecology, and the Arts, relevant to both Auroville and India. It would also be a place that would help French groups interested in participating and becoming involved in appropriate programmes in India.

A library and a space for video and slide presentations as well as guest facilities for researchers and students from Auroville, India, and abroad, (including French speaking Africa which is at present hardly represented in Auroville) are envisaged. Auroville's rural and social environment could provide a testing ground for new approaches to some of the many problems facing large parts of the world today.

At the beginning of the year a small grant was received from the French Government. Although a debate continues as to what form the pavilion will finally take, there are plans to start with the building of a small reception office and library.

Roger



THE PAVILION OF INDIA

Bharat Nivas

Bharat Nivas, the Indian pavilion, "should be a symbolic representation of the Soul of India". Its beginnings date from 1971 and have mirrored the process of Auroville in its struggle to be born. Another major step towards its completion is now being made.

The Government of India has granted funds to complete Bharat Nivas Auditorium, now also called the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium. Rs 2.5 million (25 lakhs) have been sanctioned and with Rs 5 lakhs remaining from the sale of scrap material left lying at the site for years, there is Rs 30 lakhs (\$ 100,000) to complete the auditorium before February '94, when it will be used for a UNESCO sponsored conference.

'Auroservice d'Auroville' (a unit of Auroville which has designed four cities for the Steel Authority of India Ltd.) helped prepare the estimate, as they have already designed a large auditorium for Vishakhapatnam Steel Township.

To complete the Auditorium according to the original standard, which was very luxurious and included air conditioning,

more than four times the amount which is now given would be needed. Therefore it has been decided not to spend any money on aspects such as aesthetic treatment of the facades, but to focus on improving the capacity of the auditorium to host artistic performances and large conferences.

The first major item is stage lighting and sound equipment, modification of access and circulation and two large dressing rooms. The second major item, where actually a good third of the funds will be spent, will relate to improving the power situation. This will include the main control panels, a 40 KVA generator (with generator room), and equipment for the stage control room with remote control dimmers. Mesh will be installed to prevent bats, rats and squirrels entering the Auditorium while still allowing the flow of air as there will be no fans or airconditioning as yet.

It is hoped that, as more high-quality cultural events take place there, funds for a real completion that would also take care of the aesthetics will be forthcoming.

Gilles

THE GERMAN PAVILION

Food for Thought

When Wolfgang and Marianne from Auroville International Germany visited Auroville in January this year, they brought with them a report containing ideas and discussion material, generated by a group of Aurovilians and friends of Auroville living in Germany, for the eventual construction of a German Pavilion in the International Zone. In Auroville, they had several meetings with German Aurovilians, to get their feedback. Here are extracts from that report, translated from the German, which was presented to the Aurovilians for further discussion.

The process up to now

In the three meetings in Germany during which we 'built' the pavilion, we experienced a connection with Auroville, with the German Aurovilians. We also experienced that the proposed pavilion became a bridge between Germany and Auroville—and that's exactly what the pavilion is supposed to be.

We felt that, when focussing on the pavilion, we inevitably got to deal with our German identity, and, above all, with the unpleasant aspects of our collective and partly also our own personal pasts. It is then essential to deal with our German past and identity to a point where we do not avoid shame and rejection. We wish to find in the pavilion a renewed honouring and development of our national identity and capacities.

It will also be necessary to bring our 'typical qualities' into the pavilion, without however ending up in the dead-end street of grandeur or self-glorification, or merely presenting German poets and thinkers.

In any case, it seems to us that our German identity is a broken one. This reveals itself in our past (national socialism) and in our present situation (the never-ending difficulties the two once separated German countries are experiencing in growing together).

When you look at the typical German qualities—for example, our capacity for precise effective work and the high standard of the technological development we have reached—we cannot overlook the fact that it is just not possible any more to solve each problem with technological progress. More and more we experience the shadow-sides

and the high price of the growth-ideology and the belief in technology connected with it. Therefore, for a German pavilion, impressive technological innovations for their own sake are not adequate; innovations in the development of our consciousness are more likely to be the need of the hour, in order to create a basis for our handling of technology.

Against the background of these reflections, it is of vital importance to us to make the German pavilion a place where it will be possible to deal with and look critically at what the German identity means—with the aim of becoming conscious and developing further a 'German soul', which in its turn can contribute to a united world.

Practical ideas

In this context we are considering certain aspects of the pavilion which seem to us significant and desirable:

1. A place where the spirit of the Mother is present and being cultivated, in the atmosphere as well as in the nature of the place, because the central aim of a German Pavilion is not different from that of Auroville.

2. A place where German Aurovilians can fulfil their longings for German literature, language, newspapers, news about actual developments in Germany, and German cuisine.

3. A centre of information regarding strategies and technologies for the service of man and environment.

A starting point for the beginning of the pavilion, which can and will only grow slowly, could be a small cafeteria or restaurant, as well as some rooms where people working on the pavilion can live. A next step could be the construction of a small technical unit or workshop connected to a few guest rooms.

Of course this is only an interim report, and any further development of the pavilion concept should take place in close cooperation with the German Aurovilians and others who are interested in this issue.

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Letters to the editors: Auroville Today, CSR Office, Auroville 605101, India.

THE GERMAN PAVILION

A Critique

Most of us are aware of the existence of pavilions in Mother's vision of the City of Dawn. Therefore the focus of attention cannot be arguing about whether we should have pavilions or not. The real question is whether a preoccupation with pavilions is appropriate at this point in time or not.

Auroville's process of growth and development is an integral one. Auroville is a living organism that evolves from within to without and it is only by cultivating this quality of being that Auroville can serve as an example to the world. We are asked to protect our integrity and have faith in our process as a collective body—a process that will articulate the need for a pavilion at the right time when it is really necessary for both Auroville and the world. The risk we take in abandoning this basic law is the risk of becoming alienated, of gradually losing touch with our authentic innermost being, our soul. Auroville would be in danger of becoming a place like so many others with interesting projects that do not necessarily reflect our highest aspirations.

The need for pavilions and other projects has to be felt and articulated first here by many or all of us so that when the time comes and the conditions are right, national pavilions will naturally appear in the Auroville landscape.

The idea of a German pavilion in Auroville, was, however, born in Germany. A group of about twenty people, some who've lived here and others who have been



First project started

"No words, acts" seems to be the conclusion of the discussions around the German pavilion; and when Eckhardt Kamasch, an engineer and friend who has visited Auroville and the Ashram regularly for many years, suggested that he sponsor a project for research in electric vehicles, a temporary workshop was set up in Ami for this purpose. The first part of the project will be to repair and improve a few of Auroville's existing electric two-wheelers originally made elsewhere in India. The second part will be to design a high quality electric vehicle with German know-how and parts.

After initial reservations about the idea of a German pavilion, especially the idea of putting down a building at this stage, a number of German Aurovilians seem to be slowly warming to the idea of starting with activities. There are proposals to invite artists, perhaps in cooperation with the Max Mueller Bhavan in Delhi; educational activities relating to German language and culture for Auroville children; environmental education etc.

in contact with Auroville for many years met occasionally to focus on the subject. The meetings were apparently both rich and rewarding particularly on the personal level. As a result of this fruitful interaction a first written concept and proposal for a possible German pavilion was sent to Auroville. I and some others who read the paper reacted quite strongly to its tone and the character of its projective statements. A series of meetings were then held in Auroville on the request of visiting members of Auroville International Germany. The seventy participants of the first one then dwindled to 35 until finally only 12 attended the last one. The discussions at the first meeting were rather controversial and aggressive and revealed to me the gap that exists in our approaches to Auroville, a difference in perspective in the way people see and relate to Auroville from abroad, and the way we experience Auroville by living here. It seemed somewhat inappropriate to be talking about a pavilion that would function as a bridge between Germany and Auroville, consoling us with German beer and sauerkraut as we inhaled Goethe and Schiller, while Auroville was dealing with an alarming high incidence of typhoid fever, disease-carrying flies, a lack of water and another season of poisonous cashew-spraying ahead. The argument that Auroville is "here and everywhere" doesn't hold. Auroville has a body that exists in a particular area, a location that is 15 kms from Pondy on the Bay of Bengal, and the identity and integrity of that physical body is directly related to the physical location, the ground it stands on.

It is not for Auroville to solve the problems of European identity and heal the wounds of Germany's broken identity. I for one am not trying to find my 'German soul'... I am trying to find my gnostic soul!

The preoccupation with national pavilions in times where the planet is in severe crisis is, I believe, inappropriate and we need to devote our energies to issues that matter now. The idea of a German pavilion didn't really unite us. On the contrary anger and frustration arose, the interest for some was lost, the metaphor of a pavilion was killed. However an energetic situation like this in my view is potentially capable of initiating a new and better relationship. But for this to happen a radical change in attitude has to occur. For me a redefinition is both obvious and necessary.

Ulla, Auroville

Alan

Restoring the Earth

The concept of the Earth Restoration Alliance (ERA), which was presented to and enthusiastically endorsed by the Earth Summit in Rio last year, is the brain-child of Hanna Strong, wife of Maurice Strong, who is a member of the International Advisory Council of the Auroville Foundation. The ERA is intended to be an international movement which will engage people from all walks of life, the young, the aged, indigenous peoples etc. in projects to heal the planet. Such healing necessitates a change of consciousness which, in turn, implies a holistic approach. Consequently, projects will include not only afforestation, water purification and cleaning up pollution, but also community building, group dynamics, personal growth and a strengthening of the spiritual connection to the earth.

Initially, there will be nine pilot centres around the world which will train people in earth restoration skills and awareness. Auroville has offered to be one of these centres, and a detailed proposal is at present with the Government of India who, hopeful-

ly, will forward it to the United Nations Development Project which has earmarked funding for such centres.

Auroville, of course, is a practical example of many earth restoration skills. But which Aurovilians would be ready to involve themselves in this project, and what exactly can we offer trainees?

Two meetings have been held so far to try to answer these questions. The result? A small core organizing team seems to be building, and some clarity is emerging about what our training programme could offer. This includes not only programmes which we are already offering—such as in land restoration techniques (including afforestation and organic farming), appropriate building technologies, and the utilisation of renewable energy systems—but also others which we feel we would be able to run on the basis of experience built up here over the years. Such programmes might include experimental education, physical education, group dynamics, healing and the organiza-

tion and running of craft-based and other labour-intensive industries.

What was interesting was that the process of identifying what we could teach and, therefore, our strengths as a community, also exposed our deficiencies. These deficiencies include lack, or a relative lack of, environmentally-appropriate transport, bioregional consciousness, true collective facilities and resource sharing, effective communication and the empowerment of our youth, as well as genuinely innovative ways of moving beyond money exchange or its equivalent.

The next step while we wait to see if our proposal is accepted in Delhi may be to plan a six month ecology course for the new Auroville College as a dry run for the real thing. Whatever happens, the process of focussing ourselves on the issue of Earth Restoration has sharpened our understanding of what Auroville can offer—and has shown us how far, in some areas, we are as much a part of the problem as of the cure.

A Look at the Auroville Schools

"Auroville's afforestation has become an example for India. It is my dream that Auroville's education likewise becomes an example and a practical help to India."

HEIDI WATTS is speaking, a professional American teacher of teachers, who came to study the educational system in Auroville, and to give a course to the teachers of the Kindergarten school, the Transition primary school and to the teachers of New Creation. She came to Auroville for 6 weeks on the invitation of one of the Kindergarten teachers, who had attended one of her courses in the USA last year. The American Foundation for World Education provided the funds for this visit.

AUROVILLE TODAY spoke with her, and listened to her dreams about education and to her views on Auroville's educational efforts.

AVT: You have expressed a high aspiration about making Auroville's teaching an example for India...

Heidi: (laughing) Well, I have observed that Auroville likes dreams, and I have my own. I believe passionately in certain ways of education, and it would be wonderful to think that there were possibilities in India of providing these kind of experiences.

My interest is focused on what teaching really is. I was originally a primary school teacher but I have taught at almost every level and now I am teaching adults how to teach. In the USA I represent a particular way of thinking on education, which is called by a lot of different terms such as *progressive education, open education, student centered education*. And to my utter amazement I found that these terms cover approaches to education that are remarkably comparable to those taught by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo! Before I came here, I prepared myself and read some of their writings on education, and my reaction was, "this is wonderful, this is exactly what progressive education should be like. These persons have put into words better than I could do, what I feel education should be!" A true discovery.

In the USA, the school system itself is rarely responsive to those ideals. True, there are schools where Auroville would feel very comfortable and which are good examples, but there aren't many. The general problem is one of state and local controls, which means that there are all kinds of regulations that are not consistent with what is the best for children and teachers. And there are many different value systems.

Auroville has a common set of ideals and value systems based upon the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and that provides a kind of commonality. I have seen that there are lots of different opinions in Auroville about how things should be done in practice, but the common bond binding the different backgrounds and cultures is extremely strong. People have intentionally chosen to be part of this experiment, where education can be offered without the kind of constraints that we often have in our centralized and bureaucratic Western countries.

And that is why I see possibilities here of working out moulds of education which could then be examples for other people. I certainly see the potential to do that in the educational system here.

Isn't this dream too far from our present day reality? For example, few of our teachers are professionally trained, and some

Aurovilians believe that our educational level is not on a par with systems elsewhere in India or the world.

But I do not believe at all that it is a handicap that you do not have many professional teachers! It is a great advantage that the people have not been spoiled by professional training. There is a very real possibility of learning the wrong things in professional training. The people here are really fresh, committed, and come with an openness just because they did not have to go through all that. Here, they have to work it out themselves, and that is a great advantage, to be able to make mistakes and learn from them. I can see that there would be things in professional training that Auroville teachers could profit from but that is not equal to the disadvantage professional training sometimes brings with it.

And I think one should be extremely careful comparing levels of education. It has a great deal to do with the potential of the child and the will of the child to learn in a particular mode. It also depends on what the child gets from the parents and the culture.

It begins to become an issue if you talk about preparations for some kind of external exams. We have exactly the same problems in the USA—the conflict between the education that is oriented towards the needs and the growth of the individual and the education that is oriented towards the expectations of external authorities of some kind.

There are always the tensions between external and internal standards: the needs of the individual and the needs of the community or the larger society, and I think it is not a tension we will ever get or even should get rid of. There is a legitimate need for some kind of standardization and for some kind of external expectation, some way of assuring quality and that we all know what we are talking about when we use a certain term. On the other hand, there is also the absolute need of the individual to grow and develop in that person's own way and to concentrate the education too early in accordance with external standards may kill a kind of inner growth. If we are really concentrating on the person and the growth of the person, that does not mean sloppiness or laziness or anything goes. There is a kind of discipline that is necessary for the inner as well as for the outer being. Finding that is a very difficult and important task.

And there is another point to make. Those people who are critical about the educational level in Auroville should realize that there are children here who are working in two to three or even four different languages. Research says that children who are bilingual, learning two languages at once, are slower in the beginning at both languages, but attain a level in these languages at the end that is superior to that of anyone who has learned a second language later. When people say for instance that the children are not up to standard in mathematics, they should take into consideration that they are nearly fluent in languages, and mathematics will follow.

You have visited some of Auroville's schools. Do you have proposals for major changes?

No, not in terms of major changes. There are some of a more specific kind... I believe Auroville should start to think of ways in which Tamil could be integrated into those

classes where English is the main mode of instruction. It just seems unfair that instruction for Tamil and Western children is in English. I am aware that almost no one in these classes are native English speakers, so they are all at some disadvantage, not to mention the teachers, but it is easier for the Western children because they have before them the example of their parents who are working in a second or third language. Whereas in general I gather the Tamil children don't have that model at home. Perhaps Auroville could profit from an experiment done in a school in Milwaukee in the USA. That school has a large part Puerto Ricans, Spanish speaking children. One day they give all the instruction in English, the other day all is in Spanish. So all teachers and pupils are at a disadvantage once every two days, but by the end they are all fluent in both languages.

Another observation I would like to make is the need for continuity and stability. If you are going to build a strong school, you will have to have the same people working in it over a period of time. If people are learning on the job, which is what is happening here, they have to stay on the job in order to put into effect what they have learned. Too much change is detrimental to building up that stability and continuity. It is also important for teachers to have an opportunity to exchange ideas and learn from each other.

What is the follow up you expect to happen after your courses?

One of the objectives of the workshop was to enable the teachers to talk together and share ideas. I discovered that the resources within the group that is teaching here are enormous. The teachers should continue to share ideas together, and even give workshops and trainings for each other. What they need to a large extent is to help each other, and we made some plans for that. I have acted here as the outsider who is the catalyst, saying, "you are o.k. You are not only o.k., but you have a lot going for you, and so trust yourselves and go with it."

Apart from this, the groups with whom I worked came up with many practical ideas, such as the need for some teachers to work on their English pronunciation, to have regular meetings to talk about transition from one class to another and from one school to another, to maintain cumulative records of children, lots of ideas like that which may happen.

Another outcome may be the establishment of a professional library and resource center which has a potential to be filled up with all sorts of things which teachers could use.

I would also like to see more exchange with the teachers of New Creation happening. I have worked intensively with the New Creation teachers, and I think that there is a real opening there. It is necessary to show the Tamil teachers what kinds of things they can do with children. They have had less higher education than the Western teachers, who generally have had various forms of higher education or more traditional secondary schooling. Consequently, they have less of a repertoire, and their Western colleagues can help with many ideas.



But I would also like to express, apart from my criticisms, what I really liked in Auroville. What I really appreciated is the sense of respect for children. I felt that in every school I visited and with every teacher I talked to. It appears that those who are working in the school do it really out of appreciation for children. I do not want to use the word love exactly, because it sounds so sloppy. I do not mean it that way, although it is love in a sense. I saw a sense of wonder and delight and respect for childhood which is transmitted even in the most traditional kind of classrooms. The children must feel that. Corresponding to that was the wonderful openness of the teachers to what I had to bring. It was as if the openness they had towards the children was carried with them towards learning about anything. The people were remarkably undefensive, unlikely to say 'oh, we are already doing that', just open to learning. That openness and appreciation is like working in a garden.

I found myself in a place where people hold the same ideals, in a sense speaking with the same vocabulary. I did not have to explain why it was important to observe, why it is important to pay attention, why... as these were already part of the educational philosophy. The Mother emphasized that life is a continuous education, and I have a sense of that here because of the variety of schools and the variety of population these schools serve, and the openness of adults to learning.

There is a lot that I have not seen, and would love to have seen, such as the night schools, the After School programme and so on. But this is only my first visit to India and Auroville, and I do hope that it won't be my last.

Interview by Carel on 15-1-1993

Heidi Watts, Ph. D., received a doctorate in adult and continuing education at Cornell University, having received a B.A. from Brown University and M. Ed. from Harvard University. She directed two teachers' centres, one in Vermont and one in central New York. Her past experience also includes nine years of classroom teaching at the elementary and secondary level and work with student teachers at Harvard University and Windham College. She has published articles in the USA and Europe on issues related to professionalism of teachers and on teaching/learning process in adults. She was a core faculty member of the Antioch/Putney Graduate School in its formative years. At present, Heidi is co-chairperson of the Department of Education of the Antioch New England graduate school in Keene, New Hampshire, USA.

"MISTAKES ARE WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN"

This year several people came to Auroville to offer their skills in the field of education: Julie Pool gave workshops on dyslexia (see AUROVILLE TODAY no. 44), and Heidi Watts gave a teachers' training seminar. CHERYL ADAMS, a child and family counselor, taught specific class meeting techniques. As one of the teachers of Transition put it: "It is the first time that we get professional help from people who visit Auroville. We always had the feeling that we had to do everything alone. Now we feel able to offer people who do not live here the possibility of participating in the Auroville experience, and we feel more connected to the outside world. And we do want the schools to be that large and open!"

Cheryl Adams came to Auroville in March as part of the 'Earthstewards' group. "I really want to go, but I use a wheelchair. How will I get around there?" she asked before leaving America. The answer was, "Just go!" And so she arrived, tired from the long air flight from the United States and enthusiastic about her new adventures. At the end of her stay here, she wrote the following article.

There are several things that I wanted to do and see while in Auroville. My first and most important priority was to visit the Matrimandir. I was pleased to find the room completed and the crystal in place. However I wasn't prepared for the route that I would take to reach the room.

When the workmen and their supervisor brought out the chair with the poles attached, I was curious to see what they intended to do. Before I could answer the question, I was sitting in that chair with four strong men lifting me into the air from each pole end. I felt like a queen in ancient times. At the same time, I felt profoundly humble. I found myself overcome with emotion. I told myself this could never happen in America.

The other very important activity for which I wanted to be involved was to offer my skills as a child and family counselor in the schools. I first approached Greta at New Creation who felt that my counseling efforts were beyond the present scope of the Tamil children because of their lack of English proficiency. However, she gave me an opportunity to speak to the seventh-grade class about where I came from, what I do there, what it is like to be disabled and some about American schools. The response from the children was open and responsive.

I also offered my service to Transition school through one of the second-grade teachers named Li, who co-teaches with Jean-Michel. Li was describing some discipline problems which I felt could be handled through a curriculum I am currently developing called *Adlerian Class Meetings*. Through this, children learn that all problems have a solution, it may just take time and effort to find it. And one does not necessarily have to find this solution all alone. Through a democratic process we can identify together the (usually) interpersonal problems that occur in or around the classroom. How? Suggestions for solutions are listed on the blackboard so everyone can see them. The suggested solutions are then tested on whether they meet the four R's. Are they Respectful? Reasonable? Responsible? and Related to the problem? After identifying only those that meet the four R's, (which the children guessed meant Rupees!), everyone votes on their favourite solution.

This process is valuable for adults as well as children, but it is actually easier to introduce it in the schools. The children then grow up learning to be responsible for their own behaviour and experiencing how to solve problems. The key to the success of this process is regular practice, and once a solution has been found, using it whenever this same problem arises. If, after a sufficient effort has been made, the solution does not

appear to be working, the process can be used to determine a new solution.

It is the process—NOT the personalities that make the changes. It works for everyone, if only given a chance.

For me, it was an opportunity to have an 'Aurovilian experience' even though I am not a resident. To be welcomed with such openness and willingness to learn from teachers and students in both Transition and New Creation, gave me a real sense of belonging to the experience.

Cheryl Adams

AUROVILLE TODAY talked to one of the teachers of Transition, Li, about her experiences with the class meeting techniques.

Li: The first day after we started the class meetings, many things came up. The children wanted to try it out to see how the process works. They wanted to find solutions for certain problems they had before but which were not solved. First it seemed that they started fighting more. But once we made an agreement, they were happy about having an agreement, like respecting each other and apologizing if they were not nice to someone. The rule of keeping to the subject ('Related to the problem') does not work so well yet, we have to work on that. We have to keep reminding them of the consequences of what they have chosen, but once you tell them this they respond immediately.

AVT: Do you think what you learned from Cheryl is useful for you to apply in your class?

I think it is useful. When they do something to someone in the class I ask, "Was this respectful?" I see that the relationship between the children is better. They do say sorry, and I realize that by doing so you nip the problem in the bud.

I think in the end it will help the group a lot through giving everybody a chance to speak up. Right now there are a lot who are afraid to speak up. So slowly we can help them. It is also easier for me to talk about letting them share their work. Through this process I am more aware of the behaviour problems or personal problems the children have between them and how much this influences the whole classroom situation. Before, I was only more concentrated on the things I wanted to teach. Now I'm more focussed on what is happening between the children in the classroom.

We will have to find a specific time during the day of the week to have this special meeting. More things seem to come up now, and I have to be alert.



Earthstewards meeting (Cheryl in the foreground)

The Return of the Earthstewards

It's no surprise that a few thousand people who are committed to global caring through communication, conflict resolution and citizen diplomacy, and calling themselves 'The Earthstewards Network', would eventually connect with Auroville. Founded in 1980, the Earthstewards sponsored Teamwork '88, better known as 'Peace Trees', which Auroville hosted in 1988 (see AUROVILLE TODAY nos. 2 and 3). After this event, which involved planting 2000 'peace trees' as part of an educational exchange between Soviet, Indian and American youth, some young Aurovilians travelled round the world to participate in similar programmes, planting trees and building trust in such unlikely places as the inner city of Washington, D.C. (See AUROVILLE TODAY No. 34). In 1992, Aurovilians participated in 'Peace Trees', Cascadia (Northwest, USA) and when the *Seattle Times* newspaper featured the event they didn't get the story exactly right: "Auroville, India, was a desert until the Peace Trees Project came along and encouraged people to plant trees".

The first Earthstewards Citizen Diplomacy delegation to Asia arrived in Auroville in mid-March. The group of about twenty people had various itineraries, one of which included not only India but Nepal, Tibet and China. The Tibet-bound part of the group left with Claude Arpi (our Auroville 'ambassador' to Tibet!) on March 16th amid airline strikes and bombs in cities and unclear information whether the winter would allow flights to Lhasa. On March 23rd, they began an overland expedition from Kathmandu to Lhasa, which they reached a few days later.

Whatever the destinations, what did become clear during their encounter with Auroville and themselves was an intense commitment to peaceful change in our world from the bottom up—through people meeting people. Active, caring people seem to stimulate each other for the miraculous task of healing the earth. The Earthstewards seemed very much at home here. In fact, so much so that a couple of them will now live in Auroville. Others will return again in December, 1994, with sixty young people from various Asian countries for more 'peace trees' and less 'desert'. — Bill

EXHIBITION

"Resonances Auroville" 1993

Under the title "Resonances Auroville" a photo cum art cum information exhibition was held at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris from April 2nd to 9th. "It was fantastic! Everything went like in a dream!" reported Yanne, our 'French correspondent', who also helped organize the exhibition together with other members of Auroville International France.

Mrs. Nina Sibal, leader of the Indian delegation at UNESCO, opened the event, followed by Mr. Federico Mayor, Director-General. He spoke about the great adventure of Auroville and mentioned how honoured he felt to be a member of our International Advisory Council.

The exhibition contained three elements. Information on Auroville was offered; there was a photo exhibition put together in Auroville by John Mandeem, Ireno, Sven, Tineke and William, and based upon Sri Aurobindo's *The Human Cycle*; and this was interconnected with an art exhibition by Pierre Legrand who specially came from Auroville to help mount the exhibition.

Later in the evening, the Mother's 'Dream' was read out, and an Odissi dance was performed by Devasmita.

An Indian-style buffet with samosas, Indian 'mixture', tea and fruit juice was served, making, as Yanne put it, "the whole place smell like a good local Indian tea stall." □

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The contribution for the next 12 issues of Auroville Today in India is Rs. 150, for other countries Rs. 750, Can.\$ 30, French F. 150, DM 47, It.Lira 35,500, D.Gl. 52, US \$ 25, U.K.£ 14. This includes the postage by airmail. Please send your contribution (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) either to the Auroville International centre in your country (add 10% for admin. and bank charges) or directly to Auroville Today, CSR Office, Auroville 605101. Cheques should be made payable to Auroville Fund, specifying: 'Contribution for Auroville Today'. You will receive the issues directly from Auroville. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do not send postal money orders. Subscribers will receive a reminder when their subscription is about to expire.

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In this issue:
The International Zone; Education; Ireno's exhibition; etc.



PHOTO IRENO

The first moment with the ocean...

Silent Speaking

When you see them all together... I think the family is there. The Auroville family.

Seeing Ireno's photography exhibit at Pitanga this month is like going home to the family. You are greeted by a warm smile and a hug, and unquestioningly invited to share the intimacy. These visual documents of Auroville's more private moments are sweet, silent testaments to the power of love and the joy of wonder. They remind you of why you're here, and surprise you with their gentleness and humour.

"The body is the chrysalis of a soul." (Savitri)

And there are such warm, wonderful bodies in this exhibit. Pictures of children, fresh and alive, gorgeous in their innocence and spontaneity, their spirit spread out for all to see. Still other photos reveal the seriousness of love: between parent and child, between friends, between the wonderer and Nature's unlimited wonderment. In the eyes of one special child there is no fear, just an unblinking stare which reaches into your soul.

"I love to explore complexity and never lose the simplicity. My joy is to show the largest amount of meaning in the smallest amount of information." Like a poet, Ireno is obsessed with simplifying the complex, capturing just the right moment—the connection between people revealed in one small, conclusive gesture. The gesture then expands

and takes on a universal meaning. So a child is seen exploring his first moment with the ocean; T'ai Chi practice becomes a cosmic dance and the juxtaposition of faces with different emotions shows us the infinite variety of expressions that are elicited by a shared moment.

As an Aurovilian, an 'insider', Ireno feels he can be there for the picture without intruding. "If people know you, it's easier. You don't disturb." Patience is also important. And concentration. "When you are there, you have all your professional background to enable you to take some photo away from that day. The trick is to be open to what can happen without putting your knowledge in front. So that the moment just happens, spontaneously, without any link to anything anticipated."

Ireno is also passionate about the work in the darkroom. "I like to transform the photo. To see what it is and imagine what it can become. For example, for children, the lighter the copy, the more happy the connection. When you add more contrast, the picture becomes more dramatic."

When you look at these photos you feel the passion, the knowledge, the sweetness the perfectionism, the luck of an artist working in a medium he loves, taking pictures of people he appreciates. In some photos, he's added a bit of colour. "I started with water-colour, but now I also use oil." The addition of colour adds a sense of play to the image.

It's another juxtaposition, this time of playfulness and seriousness, of having fun with the eye and catching the viewer by surprise when only a portion of the photo has been tinted.

Going back to look at the exhibit a few weeks after it was hung, Ireno was pleased. "I like to see them, because I live again the moment I took the picture." To Ireno, putting all these photos together in one show is also a way of revealing the dream of what Auroville could be. "It can show what can happen if you stay here longer."

Through the eyes of a gifted photographer we see that the dream of what Auroville can become, because of what it already 'silently speaks', is very much present and alive.

Jill

Photos: Ireno

