Downward Spiral's Silver Lining: End of Lonely Plastic Culture

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06 February 2009

Culture Change Letter #234 -
We all see and feel the intensifying depression of the consumer economy, with incalculable human costs such as hunger, loss of homes, sense of failure, and fear of the unknown. This column has long warned of collapse of the petroleum economy and of the ecosystem, and we don't feel good about being right about bad news. However, we have always maintained there is a better way to live life than to trash the planet as isolated consumers under the yoke of exploitation. We've even pointed the way with specifics.
Even the worst of the upcoming "Nature's correction" to our overshoot of ecological carrying capacity (apart from a nuke scenario) will have to result in the survivors' automatic extrication from the destructive, heartless system dominating us today.

Coming from a bad place

People yearn for more feeling and closeness, as evidenced by interest in romance stories, fierce attachment to pets, and worshiping pretty celebrities. The mass mania for the Beatles was a wake up call to society that young people needed something their parents and institutions were incapable of offering. Our modern society's hold on the masses is such that they are divided down to the individual level -- so much so that even within the individual the heart and mind are separated, causing torment, confusion, and damage to Mother Nature.

In addition to being divided, we are extremely busy. Our time in the U.S. is limited to working, sleeping, and eating -- and not much else. On weekends or vacations we have to just recover. We forget our youthful dreams and don't keep up our creative interests or branch out into others such as a musical instrument. People don't have time for simple pleasures or leisure, or they grab it on the run. "Quality time" is a recent notion; all time should be quality time, and we should never be compromising over spending days and nights with loved ones. Above all, our children need us far more than they need a teacher employed by the state. No wonder the elders are put out to pasture in institutions to die alone.

We seek love and excitement through machines for virtual companionship or sex. For those who scoff at this and pride themselves on having real human relationships, their marriages are often arrangements for convenient sex and cohabitation. Not to be cynical about love, which is always with us, we must realize we've been sold a bill of goods by the ruling class: compete, work hard, buy things, and maybe then you'll get approval and a lover or spouse. Property and money are held to be the supreme accomplishment, as confirmed by divorces occurring as a result of either financial stress or selfish urges.

What's going down today isn't all bad

With time on our hands from unemployment, good deeds can happen as a result of reaching out to members of the community. Sharing is an important human trait that has been suppressed by divide-and-conquer domination. The tendency neighbors have to be useful to one another in order to assure survival is second to none in our human impulses, for this is our evolution (until very recently). This can manifest itself by a care-giver providing needed help while the young or sick or infirm person's family may pursue other activities such as rigging up a bike cart or foraging for firewood.

The closeness that will increase from such interactions will bind us together again as bands and then tribes. The nation state was an effort to smash tribes, in part due to megalomania of the empire builders or the self interest of the king makers. When the unfolding collapse of the U.S. economy and corporate globalism is further along, there will be tax rebellions and a redefining of new societies' priorities. Economies will be local, with distant nations or tribes linked through sail power -- as practiced for many centuries before the oil-powered cargo ships that destroy the air and water.

One's personal living environment will be shed of plastic crapola (thank you James Howard Kunstler) that has crapped out and no longer can be powered. It is too late for our generation and our civilization to be known other than the Plastic Culture, based on the non-biodegradability of our petroleum products we "need." But if there are future generations to study our trash, as today's archeologists and anthropologists do, they may also note that we seemed to cease and walk away from our Plastic Culture and its associated ways -- perhaps about 2009?

Forgotten pleasures return

Although gardening is hard work, it is also healthful and social. Since nature knows no waste, we will become very efficient and go with the flows to minimize work and disruption to the land and waters that must be restored to health. So when food forests start to bear fruit and nuts, as well as coppicing for firewood and basket materials, for example, we will work less and have time again for our songs, stories and dances that all our ancestors' cultures indulged in religiously.

Let's not skip the part about coping with toxic soils, the task of depaving, and the need to gather and hunt. These activities are unavoidable and done under duress in our transition. But those participating will be shown appreciation by those occupied by cooking, sewing, child rearing, making musical instruments, or acting as counselors or teachers. But keep picturing more time for these real things, including loving and family cohesion, when we are no longer working for abstract capitalist entities and doing the debilitating commutes. Above all, a relationship with nature will keep us together to overcome adversity.

The future culture of sustainability will be more sane and liberating than modern living -- for those who survive the collapsing house of toxic cards. The sooner we get started in dismantling the present failed system, and be our own leaders, the more of us and our fellow species will survive to continue what might still be the endless dance of evolution. The answers are here today, but must be sought out. In time, however, they will become obvious and spread quickly as people try to adapt to the loss of Big Brother the Boss Man of The Machine. Good riddance, and hello tomorrow's new age.

You may say I'm a dreamer, but as one of the former Beatles sang, I'm not the only one. Give peace a chance. It's getting better all the time.

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