

The Plastic Generation's transformation and the demise of the religion of technoworship

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The people are being murdered but they don't know how. "Surely, the chemicals and radiation that fetuses and children are exposed to are safe, or else they wouldn't be allowed, right?" This convenient attitude seems to belong to the majority, who indeed have little choice.

Yet, the idea that the world was flat was common enough until dispelled, and the Christian church's view of the solar system was trashed as well. Those flips in world view are considered historically momentous, but an even greater departure, perhaps, from conventional thinking and spirituality is about to occur in our lifetimes. The coming changes in dominant viewpoints will accompany an involuntary, massive, radical shift to living within the sharply reduced bounty of the natural environment.

A growing number of victims of both the greed economy and the religion of technological "progress" are quite aware that things are not right. In addition to being poisoned, they know the top dogs are getting something like 450 times the pay of the minimum-wage earner. Angry feelings are suppressed for the time being, as long as order is maintained thanks to relative abundance of material essentials.

A rebellious response to the irresponsibility of today's rulers could be along the lines of China's current anti-pollution unrest whereby the police are routed by outraged citizens suffering from lies and stillbirths. The U.S. public has additional resentments such as the bogusly launched War on Iraq, although the people here share complicity due to their petroleum consumption.

The American people are a mix of docility and violence. The abuse they have taken has only grown, while they are told this is the pinnacle of any nation's success. But everybody knows that quality-of-life indicators are overall still going downward after decades of consumerism and loss of pristine nature. What people don't know is how much worse the raw deal has been all along, and that it is all going to come crashing down -- the good and the bad.

The two necessary steps for completing a 180-degree change for modern humanity are petrocollapse and culture change.

Die-hard defenders of the dominant system adhere to the money-is-the-answer dogma. They will be least prepared for coping with deprivation that outlasts their hoarded supplies and useless cash. These hapless folk may even be the object of retribution when most people see that sharing must be the order of the day. When sharing the Earth is fully accomplished, except among holdouts who may try to enforce an extension of today's capitalistic/feudalistic model, retribution may be considered outmoded and pointless.

Here's why this column's position is correct that a comprehensive cultural change of values will prevail for peace, equity and nature-protection: anything less, and we have a good chance of not making it for long as a species. There is little time to waste muddling along, let alone continuing to destroy the planet and millions of innocent lives every day.

The Plastic Generation

The Me Generation of the 1970s was a disgrace, with its rapid evolution into the Yuppie syndrome. But The Plastic

Generation is even worse, and includes almost everybody living in modern society because of the constant, rising diffusion of petrochemicals through plastic consumption. The same goes for the religion of technological knowledge and application: like plastic, it's stuck in the brains of the whole population except for some precious traditionalists and endangered primitives. Can one easily discount or gainsay the possibility that until the diseases of plastics and technoworship are wiped out, our world remains on its disaster course? Let's see what we can do to hasten their demise and save Mother Earth.

Anyone over 30 years of age in the year 2005 can easily see the increase of plastic objects surrounding us. I am writing this at an upscale outdoor microbrewery where all the chairs are solid plastic of a single mold. This was not so commonly seen several years ago except at McDonalds, for example.

Worse, the presence of plastic particles and associated toxic chemicals in modern people makes for weak genes, congenital diseases, and a rotten feeling in my soul when I think of the human race's physical deterioration. Looking at an apparently healthy person, seeing him or her licking a plastic utensil, one must imagine the chemical contamination in the person's body and brain.

It starts with the baby pacifier. Some pacifiers are possibly still made of latex of the rubber tree, but subsidized

petroleum is replacing every natural product conceivable, from hemp rope to straw hats. For a couple of decades we have all marvelled at the high fashion of wearing a backwards baseball hat with the plastic size adjustor smack on the forehead.

Going back to the baby, why not give the baby the breast? Besides the mother not being always available or of a mind to breast feed, the breast milk is of lower and lower quality due to petrochemicals (pesticides, plastics, and other poisons). Eskimos who have little petrochemical contamination in their home environment are getting poisoned breast milk from the sea and the air which we all share.

Another simple example of petrochemical poisoning is PVC wrap on food. Known sometimes as Saran Wrap, the migration of chemical molecules into food is as certain as the migration of phthalates into blood from soft plastic blood bags in hospitals. Things like this are unquestioned by many and thus persist, and to change the situation one must await some major news media attention. But this is quite unlikely when car bombings and Hollywood marriages dominate our programmed consciousness.

So, it would appear that people are basically trusting and unthinking, and as a result the plastic plague goes right on climbing. The movement to wake people up and get rid of plastic is admittedly young, but we are competing with heavy news such as climate change, petrocollapse and nuclear proliferation.

The question should be, "What do we do about this plastic disaster now?" However, before one can even ask the question, people are apt to offer up excuses for persisting in their ecocidal habits.

Even people old enough to have shopped in U.S. supermarkets in the 1960s without ubiquitous plastic bags, offered since then in unlimited quantity, are now quick to wonder out loud, "What can we do instead? What's the alternative to the plastic?" - as they claim there is little likelihood of giving up plastic convenience. To improve their feeling of powerlessness they save and clean plastic bags to reuse, but they do not know the plastic is toxic and should not be touched. It is much easier to be in denial and just hope that year after year of touching and ingesting plastics does absolutely nothing! Oh, what's that you say, your sister has breast cancer?

Plastics are Forever

Petroleum is the source for perhaps 99% of plastic, and it does not biodegrade. Only 3.5% of plastics are recycled in any way, and the resultant products are of low quality after much loss of material into the environment during recycling.

Sixty-three pounds of plastic packaging goes to landfills in the U.S. per person per year. Twice the weight of all U.S. humans is produced each year in the form of plastic resin pellets, the raw material for consumer plastics.

Four hundred to five hundred years of "photodegradation" (from sunlight) will break down disposable diapers, six-pack rings and plastic bottles into tiny bits of plastic, but this only makes it easier for fish, birds and mammals to ingest. It has been found in sea water that with the tendency of other pollutants in the surrounding water to stick to plastics, the effect of biomagnification up the food chain gets to you and me. Many of these pollutants are endocrine disruptors which act as incredibly powerful hormones. These chemicals throw a switch that triggers diseases and birth defects that are on the rise in modern societies.

Plastic particles in the Pacific Ocean have tripled in the last decade from maximum densities of 320,000 particles per square kilometer to one million particles per square kilometer. Scientists predict a 10-fold increase in ocean plastics by the year 2010, bringing the ratio of surface plastic to zoo-plankton in the North Pacific Central Gyre to 60:1 by weight. It is now "only" six to one.

Half the varieties of fish once commonly fished are gone, as are 90% of big fish. This is due almost entirely to human overpopulation and the use of plastic nets and fishing lines, and the sheer magnitude of over-fishing enabled by petroleum fuels. Aren't we modern humans clever by feeding ourselves at any cost?

The religion of techno-worship

Any oppressive religion is a good reason for advocating major cultural change. Going back to Isaac Newton and the replacement of the church with "science" in England in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, history witnessed the near complete and ruthless elimination of the ancient worship of the Earth by pagans and witches.

The process began to permeate what was becoming mainstream culture. This eventually occurred to the extent that a white-cloaked priesthood -- eventually represented by television characters -- convinced people to ingest poisons because experts said it was okay. Only now are a few people learning that, for example, there is no safe dose for radiation, and that mercury in vaccines may have spread autism far and wide.

Mathematics and chemistry have come a long way from the ingenious ancient Greeks and the later Muslim scientists who tried to understand their universe. Today, the sophistication of these disciplines, along with physics and biology, have unbalanced humanity when we consider people's lives are under attack and are arguably less beautiful, at least on a mystical level, than ever before. Knowledge is not bad in itself, but it is increasingly pursued almost always for selfish and questionable reasons in today's globalized corporate economy.

I believe that humanity can get along with enough mathematical ability so as to track seasons and calculate some angles, and ideally dispense with all else. After all, the innate mathematical aspect of music is a hell of a lot of good funky math, at times. Do we really need vast storehouses of (commercialized) knowledge, which just happen to be the key to destroying the biosphere?

Whether we need this age's knowledge or not, it is certain that many people have a closed mind about even considering that the pursuit of technical and scientific-reductionist information is perhaps not worth the effort. I am of the small camp that says it is not -- for more "growth" anyway, at this stage of the game.

The point of my focusing on the questionable religion of technical knowledge/application is that future survival may actually have to be without much technical ability anyway. With the imminent tsunami of peak oil's global effects, no one can assume that vast technological activity can persist at least indefinitely. Pursuit of vast technical knowledge itself, just for learning, is not inherently bad, as most of us say. There is truth to the need to utilize technical knowledge to do a better job of mitigating pollution. However, the idea of using high technology to solve technology's legacy of problems is doubtful to some of us heretics. Will the attempt be perpetuated until some bitter end?

My form of sacred mathematics happens to be music. My participation in cosmic vibrations and beats could well be my most religious practice, especially if it counts as meditation. One can also consider the alternatives to such a "holy" pursuit: hanging out in bars, although that's much better than designing weapon systems that can't or shouldn't ever be used.

I don't know why anyone should care if I dig music more than the "average" person. But I'm making the point that the many intellectual and technical "strides" we have seen as hallmarks of the ultra-scientific consumer culture have not been entirely "forward"! And there are other ways of living better. It so happens that people lived for over 99.9% of their time on Earth in a low-tech and non-material knowledge base. The other .1% represents only a recent foray into science fiction made into industrial reality. One may argue that now we are stuck with it. We clearly need to have a conversation whereby everyone is involved, because some people have made up their minds to deal with technology and its abuses short sightedly as always. Polluting via utilization of water filters made in large part of toxic plastics -- for landfill dumps -- can be a detail brought up when the world must change direction. Could that time possibly be now?

The change will not be voluntary, as history and the current picture tell us, but don't say nobody had alternative strategies. The alternatives today can be traced back to the 1960s and even previously. If the hippies were in some ways like native American shamans, and the politically minded hippies were cultural revolutionaries, a look at their strong and weak aspects is in order.

The influence of the 1960s endures and was alive at the G8 summit protests in Scotland a few weeks ago. However, the various minds and philosophies giving their all, when the Powers That Be did almost nothing but protect the unfair status quo, were not interviewed by reporters for a billion consumers of "news." To find out more about the lifestyles and value systems of those who are fighting, with love for the most part, to bring about a sustainable future for the whole world, read past and future issues of Culture Change (and check those great links).

"It Better End Soon" by Chicago:

Can't stand it no more. The people dying. Crying for help. For so many years. But nobody hears. Better end soon my friend. It better end soon my friend.

Can't take it no more. The people hating. Hurting their brothers. They don't understand. They can't understand. Better end soon my friend. It better end soon my friend. Just think about it.

Hey everybody won't you just look around. Can't anybody see? Just what's going down. Can't you take the time? Just to feel. Just to feel what is real. If you do. Then you'll see that we got a raw deal. They're killing everybody. I wish it weren't true. They say we got to make war. Or the economy will fall. But if we don't stop. We won't be around no more. They're ruining this world. For you and me. The big heads of state won't let us be free. They made the rules once. But it didn't turn out. Now we must try again. Before they kill us off. No more dying! No more killing. No more dying. No more fighting. We don't want to die. No we don't want to die. Please let's change it all. Please let's make it all good for the present. And better for the future. Let's just love one another. Let's show peace for each other. We can make it happen. Let's just make it happen. We can change the world. Please let's change this world. Please. Let's make it happen. For our children. For our women. Change the world. Please make it happen. Come on. Come on. Please. Come on. It's up to me. It's up to you. So let's do it now. Yeah. Do it now

Can't stand it no more. The people cheating. Burning each other. They know it ain't right. How can it be right. Better end soon my friend. It better end soon my friend.

- With this album, we dedicate ourselves, our futures and our energies to the people of the revolution... And the revolution in all of its forms. (- Robert Lamm and Jerry Kath, 1969. Aurelius Music.)

- Depaver Jan Lundberg in Berkeley, California

References and Links:

Algalita Marine Research Foundation and its new brochure "Plastics are Forever"
<http://www.algalita.org/initiatives.html>

Dead on Arrival: The Fate of Nature in the Scientific Revolution - from Culture Change magazine #20 (never printed):
<http://www.culturechange.org/issue20/deadonarrival.htm>

G8-protests photos by Berkeleyan from Scotland on Indymedia:

<http://www.indybay.org/news/2005/07/1752466.php>

<http://www.indybay.org/news/2005/07/1752483.php>

War on Plastics, by Jan Lundberg (syndicated on Truthout.org, Rense.com, BlueGreenEarth.com and elsewhere):

<http://culturechange.org/e-letter-plastics.html>

Beyond Oil - Philadelphia: Teach-in and Conference, Sept. 18, includes speakers such as the son of Ken Saro Wiwi, the martyred Nigerian anti-oil activist, and Jan Lundberg. See
<http://phillybeyondoil.org/>

7th Annual Sustainable Communities Symposium, in beautiful Crested Butte, Colorado, Sept. 28, 2005 (Jan Lundberg, keynote speaker):

<http://hccaonline.org/page.cfm?pageid=2655>

Peak Oil and Community Solutions - second annual conference, Sept. 23, 2005, Jan Lundberg and Richard Heinberg

among speakers. Yellow Springs, Ohio

<http://www.communitysolution.org/05conf1.html>

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