

Getting There (Part 2): Bringing to Life a Transformative Culture

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Why should people take action to improve society and the ecosystem, if collapse is imminent? Apart from ameliorating our present worsening conditions a tad (which is better than nothing), activism is vital for (a) practicing resistance and refusing bad deals, (b) creating models of sustainability through honing our skills and establishing long lasting projects and communities, and (c) maintaining both the traditional and newly established projects and communities, which will evolve rapidly through vigilance, trial and error, and above all, cooperation.

Before we fret about how difficult a new society will be without the familiar order of the corporate state and top-down authoritarianism, it helps to recall what humans' natural state has been for the vast majority of our time on Earth:

Tribal and natural living are proven for efficiency and sustainability. Traditional, indigenous ways lasted thousands of years, as unique cultures proliferated. The diversity ranged from matriarchal to patriarchal, from ostentatious wealth (often shared, as in the Potlatch) to egalitarian communism, and from strict codes to fluid, loose guidelines to live by. Occurrences of violence and injustice were no doubt intolerable in places at times, so some members of a society would break away -- not a problem when population was low and there was room.

Modern rejection of the benefits of past tribal culture fails to admit that the environment wasn't despoiled by the pre-history ancients, as in water contaminated by non-biodegradable petrochemical toxins. Another complaint about pre-civilization is that its technological inferiority allegedly meant short life spans. But not only were non-civilized peoples healthier than moderns, it was the higher infant mortality of the distant past that, when averaged into adult life spans, brought down a population's apparent longevity.

Another public health concern is that the future will not offer highly energy-intensive, high-tech facilities for the masses, for saving the lives of the weak. The human race will be strengthened, painfully but surely, by the accelerated loss of so many premature babies and perhaps many Caesarian babies. Similarly, the elderly on life-support machines, and disabled, obese people on various pharmaceutical drugs may be absent post-collapse. This is not something to look forward to at all, for we must be compassionate. But being compassionate also means taking real trends seriously.

Having to let go of the conveniences and advantages that money brings today will halt the separating of people from nature. This is thoroughly objectionable to many who feel helpless or revel in techno-toys and convenient petroleum. Indeed, many believe that a car-free lifestyle is merely a choice for exercise nuts or eco-zealots. But when car-free living is the only choice -- very soon, perhaps -- and we have established alternative low-tech transport systems that work locally and across oceans, we will find that the traffic jams, the pollution, the crash fatalities and the urban sprawl are not missed.

There will be eco-cities if they are linked eco-villages, as sufficient farmland and wildlife habitat must provide almost all of the communities' needs. Sail transport can bring some distant products as well as art and visitors.

Detailed living outside the system

There have always been people living outside their original social systems. In the distant past it was a matter of choice or, in the case of outcasts, survival. But with the advent of totalitarian agriculture and the expansion of civilization that imperialistically took over all lands, individual rebels or misfits were of a different spirit and mentality than the masses.

The cultural or lifestyle rebels or misfits have always had ways of operating and sharing that assure survival and enjoyment of life. Some are just trying to be left alone while others are opponents of the system. Some attributes and practices of living outside the system are mainly money-saving, whether done individually (including by hermits) or communally (the very social). Some grow their skill sets in a determined fashion, while others thrive on the convivial and

try to spread happiness. It should be noted that many people living outside the system are only succeeding to a degree, and they may not wish to adjust the degree.

The nuclear family in a suburb is least likely to live outside the system. Divide-and-conquer social trends aided the economy of expansion. Living as slaves, albeit wage slaves, participating in "the rat race," can be more or less tolerable depending on the psychological make-up of the worker and the level of material success. But when health is lost because of the (a) sedentary lifestyle, (b) the tainted water, food and air, and (c) Western medicine's petrochemical drugs that weaken the body, the freedom to shop and the self-gratification of sex no longer serve. At that point it may be deemed too late for someone to change lifestyle and live outside the system. But it is never too late to question one's past decisions influenced by conditioning, and embark on some measure of liberation.

Ironically, it is the system dwellers who are less community oriented than the nonconformists and rebels living outside the system. Indeed, living outside the system may primarily feature maximizing community. This is what communes achieve. For the word "communism" to be demonized when the root words are "common" and "community," we see the effects of propaganda and brainwashing. Capitalism separates those who manipulate the social means of production, and seize resources of the commons, from the "common" people with invisible yokes on their necks. A non-alternative is state socialism for industrial growth. It is merely another aspect of Western Civilization that fails to value pristine nature and the wild, untamed human spirit.

The DIY movement -- Do It Yourself -- is part of the anarchist movement. How DIY (and its counterpart "skill-share") can be criticized would take a twisted capitalist or totalitarian democrat, because what could be wrong with being resourceful and skilled? The strange trend of opting for unknown, distant expertise and products has happened alongside the loss of thrift. Thrift means saving and not wasting. But astronomical debt and an indebted lifestyle have served economic growth. And maximized spending meant more wealth for the elite. How so many non-elite folks fail to see this trap, this scam, points toward a tendency for the human to follow blindly and fail to recognize a relatively new threat. The corporate media assiduously ignore DIY, skill-share, and thrift, in favor of revving up consumption and fear.

Enough of generalities; here are specific behaviors and methods for living outside the system or subverting the system for local economic enhancement:

- Cultivate others who take pleasure in being self-reliant and preventing the system from cheating them of their natural energy. Mutual aid props us up and builds powerful relationships that are better than any amount of money.
- Have fun and be creative. Do so in such a way to pull the plug on one's dependency on the machinery of destruction and false gratification. For example, play music with people using acoustic instead of electric instruments. Go talk to a human being instead of using a cellphone or texting or using Facebook.
- Forget about time, and focus on the quality of the act. To travel to another continent by jet may be faster than sailing or going on land, but much is lost as well.
- Because the system has become heavily globalized as to trade -- with petroleum-powered, polluting transport -- local purchases are an act of independence and even rebellion. Lowering the miles that goods are transported fills one with satisfaction.
- Buying used items rather than new ones furthers the local economy even more. But, knowing the seller or the maker of an item gives a feeling of confidence while perhaps inspiring the learning of a skill.
- Defend Mother Nature. The system hates this, as it must feed on farmland and wildlife habitat that the system turns into asphalt, concrete or dead soil. Agribusiness fields are saturated with artificial fertilizers and pesticides, while farm equipment uses petroleum fuels. Boycotting GMO food and growing one's food are so natural they are acts of rebellion and lead to a sustainable culture.
- Live in Nature. Outdoor living does not have to be under a highway bridge. Being homeless can be easy compared to working. The image of constant camping, when one doesn't like it, can be horrible. But if you like camping and nature, it can be a good lifestyle. Having to pay for dental work, however, may not fit with low-income management or being

utterly broke. The U.S. empire prefers not to offer socialized health care, so one often lives close to the edge.

- Become extra healthy and fit so as to lessen dependence on having to spend money on medicine, surgeries, and therapy. A healthier mind will result, making it easier to cope with the system of oppression that would force us to conform and pay for unneeded stuff.
- In the event of illness in old age, or in case an elder ought to but cannot live with his or her children, a new kind of elder care "insurance" could be offered by friends for each other. This is the Health Care Tribe concept that author Daniel Quinn told this writer was "Intriguing."
- Start a buying cooperative, or a commune, or tribe. A collective is another form of living in solidarity, depending on the span of activities. An affinity group can be formed by like-minded folk to carry out one or more actions that fight the non-community culture. The actions can have either a negative or positive emphasis; both can be educational and inspiring.
- Migration can save on hassles relating to weather and climate. For example, homeless people in Portland, Oregon can do alright when the weather is good, but in the fall they migrate south to mild climes. It gets harder to find a safe spot and find wild foods to forage when development steals healthy land and overpopulation crowds out those who wish to live simply.
- Dumpster diving and curbside collections are so satisfying when goods are available and taken for reuse. Why pay for what can be free?
- Paying no taxes through having a low income can reduce stress and give satisfaction that the military budget or road building are not being supported with one's funds (if such funds existed).
- Raising one's own children, instead of palming them off to strangers hired to exert crowd control and conditioning for the job market, is part of rejecting the system and breeding more resisters.
- Some live outside the system by preying upon it, as in thieving and defrauding. When this is utilized there may occur drift into unethical, antisocial behavior that hurts other people.
- Know other cultures. Outside the confines of the U.S. national security state and the reaches of the corporate state -- even in Mexico with its socioeconomically vicious WalMarts -- there is more social cohesion, love and support of family and friends, and less materialism.
- Prepare for collapse on all levels, so when it hits there is less confusion and you know what you and your collective, commune, tribe or affinity group need to do in any situation.

The overall result of taking such steps can appear to be only a mixed bag: sense of accomplishment while knowing not enough is being done; acting ahead of the curve so as to be a visionary but lacking in wide support; living the future now while foregoing the reward-system of being a slave or predator. Community is key, and can be created even though the present system discourages it. Community and love will outlast the system.

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PART 1 of this essay is Getting There: Awakening from the U.S. Delusion

References and further reading:

Degrowth Seminar, Copenhagen Klimaforum09 - Speech by Miguel Valencia

Extinction of Human Languages Accelerating, by Kari Lydersen

Dr. Tim O'Shea: ""The healthiest people in human history were groups who were geographically isolated from "civilization."
Quoted in

Inoculation and Deception: The Swine Flu Hoax, by Daniel Zengel

Social Justice Activists Must Take Into Account Ecological, Cultural, and Economic Transformation.
Alternet titled it ""Social Movements Will Achieve Little Unless We Embrace the Realities of Petrocollapse" and changed it again to "The World's Political Uprisings Will Change Nothing Until We Embrace the Fact That We're Running Out of Resources."

Pledge for Climate Protection with 10 steps to change lifestyle for not just reversing global warming but getting through petrocollapse

The DIY Movement: Collapse of the petroleum delusion / Rise of the DIY movement, Culture Change Letter #80

John Whitelegg's article "Time Pollution" at sonomatlc.org. The article appeared in the Auto-Free Times magazine, Issue 11, 1997.

Health care tribe: elder care "insurance" by Jan Lundberg, Culture Change Letter #8, November 2002.

I love nature so I sleep with her - Living outside the box by Jan Lundberg, Culture Change Letter #37, October 6, 2003.

Dumpstering for Christ, by Sarah Mirk, Portland Mercury