The Beauty of Nature versus The Human Fixation. Grassy Fields or Plastic Turf?

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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We have just witnessed the power and fury of nature, with devastating hurricane force. But it is through neglecting the beauty of nature, and perpetrating narrow human interests, that we reap nature's wrath - e.g., Sandy.

We all like to think we appreciate the beauty of nature. But to really know it and appreciate it, we need to keep in perspective a critical understanding of what may be termed the human fixation. This is the modern mindset of constantly putting our human-oriented concerns, desires and schemes first.

We want to acquire or grab material things and experiences to maximize short-term comfort and gratification. Nature becomes invisible or abstract. Why? We are besieged by man-made vibrations, toxic drugs, impure food and water, and poor air. So we're being deviated subtly from even wanting nature, and are programmed for just more corporate advertised products. We are left with trying to buy happiness, without realizing or caring that this tragically and dangerously consumes nature. In contrast, when we spend time in nature, this brings happiness, and many of our human fixations subside.

When someone is down-and-out, homeless with no hope or help, this is understandably a crisis, and not generally expected as normal for many. Very poor people without access to land must worry about survival every day. They may or may not have much time for the beauty of nature, and may not have much leeway in reducing the mainstream culture's anthropocentric fixations. So when we look up the food chain to middle-class and rich persons' typical values, devices and habits, it is more stark that such fixations unnecessarily block out appreciation of the beauty of nature.

Buying something fancy, getting ahead socially, trying to obtain more sex -- these are sometimes essential and amusing activities. But they are overplayed by a huge population, and comprise narrow pursuits that typify the modern human fixation. They tend to minimize the role of nature in both daily life and one's worldview. At the extreme end -- the elite in the societal food chain -- we sometimes detect cold efforts to control, dominate and manipulate people and nature. This is couched as being for our own good. Call it government.

Nature can never be minimized, because it is none other than reality. But the illusion of being divorced from nature is prevalent in consumer culture and in the images and stories from the corporate media bombarding the population. The question is, then, how can the beauty of nature and the opportunities to have a fulfilling, natural life be elevated to where they should be? How can people find greater consciousness required for survival in the changing natural world? That the world is becoming less natural is partly illusion, yet true from the standpoint of ever more pollution and disruption of the climate.

On our minds now is the question of whether the latest natural disaster, Hurricane Sandy, was produced by global warming. Going further, does it raise awareness for many more people to start caring for our besieged climate? Fortunately, New York City's Mayor Michael Bloomberg saw the light this week when he announced that climate change has now made him reject the Romney camp in favor of the Obama option. (The New York Times changed its headline for the story to remove "Climate Change" in favor of "Fallout from Storm".)

Perspective on the human fixation versus the beauty of nature came to me yesterday when I was sitting in my back yard. I was enjoying a break from the usual multitude of human-fixated tasks, and noticed the dried kelp string that festoons the patio umbrella over me. It had wrapped itself around me in the surf a month ago, and I came home with it. Now dried and moistened by the welcome light rain, the translucent light brown seaweed was in the foreground of a large honeysuckle bush. The amazing art of the kelp and the bush's flowers and leaves blocked out from my consciousness any other thoughts or concerns. Call it meditation or a revelation; the phrases "the beauty of nature" and the contrasting realization of the dominant "human fixation" popped into my head. I saw how human fixations obscure the beauty of

nature.

Like machines or robots, modern humans revolve each day around technological tasks in our artificial environments. We go about our ambitious days filled with errands, spending most of our days on questionable work, obsessed with the urge to possess an attractive human (for an hour or a lifetime). Is a beautiful human body a human fixation for someone else, or the beauty of nature? We easily forget that the entire basis of our lives is the whole natural universe. We fail to enjoy the amazing sights, sounds and smells of non-human nature that are still around us. At indoor work places there are coffee breaks but not nature breaks. Some of us are so oblivious that we fixate on seeking a disproportionate amount of money and property by developing nature out of existence.

An example of that comes to mind when we see costly astro-turfing of perfectly wonderful grass playgrounds. Suddenly classified by local officials as necessary and advantageous, the off-gassing plastic "carpet" of stench becomes a multimillion-dollar investment, after the bulldozing and plumbing applied underneath as preparation. Some watering is saved in the short term. But the artificial ground is unsustainable, and is another scam for petroleum refineries to strew their products around the planet.

It is also another way to distort education: at one junior high school in Santa Cruz, California, the mascot for sport teams is a bee. But the busy pollinators lost a big piece of their habitat when the grasses, dandelions and other species were killed and removed. The toxic runoff from the plastic "grass" as it degrades goes right into your Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. Of all places, you might have thought, progressive Santa Cruz -- with its high degree of fixation on personal health and New Age philosophy --might have said "No" by now to so much poison runoff. But car dependence and the other many forms of petroleum consumption are a convenient, addictive human fixation. And Sandy didn't happen here. Yet.

By astroturfing school playgrounds in Santa Cruz, "we" not only traded the beauty of nature, but attacked it for our human fixation. A radical change in culture will be required to straighten out the all-too-common, convoluted thinking and corruption of local politics. A happy medium of putting the Earth first for health and community, while using nature wisely for our individual and collective advantage, is not only possible but exists today in many instances -- even in industrial society. The problem is that these examples do not offer fabulous profits for the few. The oil industry does not benefit. However, when the corporate model of long-distance shipped goods collapses, as cheap subsidized oil and natural gas make their final exit, "unprofitable" community gardens and other cooperative projects will become the beautiful norm.

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