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OS24



As American society has focused on creating items and technologies to better our lives, radical changes have occurred which raise concern. In an attempt to make our lives streamlined, faster, more efficient and more comfortable, we have macro-ed to the point of losing skills, becoming fatter due to the lack of need, and focusing more on superficial aesthetics. Since the Industrial Revolution, we have been increasingly dependent on decisions that focus only on the short term. Carelessness has replaced intention and the tangible has turned digital. We have changed more in the last one hundred and fifty years than we had in the previous five hundred, thanks to resources that have never been matched and will not ever be recreated. Continuing our dependency on nonrenewable resources forces us to make stress based decisions, poor policies concerning money and issues tied to energy, and unstable and rushed planning which in the long run could lead to disastrous affects around the globe. If another offshore oil well explodes or another storm threatens a nuclear reactor in a largely populated area, we would see even more tragedy, chaos and death. Human suffering would most likely be multiplied by the loss of environmental stability and habitat for native flora and fauna.

With 84 Million barrels of oil consumed daily throughout the world and rising,¹ the global oil reserve is rapidly ending. America alone uses 25% of the world's oil in the pursuit of the American dream. We seem to have a euphoric mentality that this will continue on into distant future generations. We consume seemingly with little thought to peak oil and the question of "what happens next?" This effect is seen in housing trends and markets, food systems, and the euphoric mentality that all will forever be provided has seeped into our economy, residential status, and global relations. It has replaced traditional methods and ideology at an extremely rapid rate, consequentially producing an unstable foundation that if we are planning to continue using, will need to be constantly repaired.²

One very present example is that traditional methods of farming have been replaced to a large degree by a food system that depends on oil. Most of the food we see on the shelves in any large grocery store in America has been trucked in from distant states. One wonders what will happen to our food supply if there is no fuel to truck it in, or if the prices rise so much that the average consumer cannot afford to eat because of the gasoline price increases and subsequent food price increase.³

This is not only a phenomenon in America. Since the 1940s and the invention of agrichemicals, countries have abandoned the local food chain and gone industrial. Many industrialized countries around the globe also have converted to oil-dependent food production, which in a short period creates cheap and readily available food, but in the long term pollutes the health of the consumer, the product, and the land that is used. The introduction of invasive plants, pesticides and chemicals have the potential to forever change the face of agriculture, particularly in developing countries, to their detriment. In countries such as India and other developing nations, Unites States-based multinational corporations are encouraging small farmers to convert to modern technology agriculture and abandon the traditions, heirloom seeds, and knowledge passed down through the families. Since then the unstable new technology, with mechanical failures and hinging vulnerability on oil, force the farmer to be completely dependent on someone else for their success. As the machinery brakes, the farmer must constantly get it

¹ *Collapse Movie*. Dir. Chris Smith. Prod. Kate Noble. Perf. Micheal Ruppurt. 2009. Netflix

² *Collapse Movie*. Dir. Chris Smith. Prod. Kate Noble. Perf. Micheal Ruppurt. 2009. Netflix

³ *The Omnivores Dilemma*, Michael Pollan 2006

fixed, and if they do not have the money, then they must state bankruptcy and their home, land, and livelihood could be taken away from them. This is driven by money by big business and a desire to have other countries “do it our way.”

In the Green Movement of the late 20th century, we accomplished more towards improving our climate and welfare for the planet and its inhabitants than we do now; this issue, however, continues to rise in importance and urgency. During the “environmental decade” (1970-1980), President Nixon signed the National Environmental Policy Act, created the Environmental Protection Agency, and regulated many types of pollution sources. Since then, little has been done to advance these necessary changes and much has been done to move our country in the opposite direction. Since the movement towards awareness and love for ourselves and our planet, the industry has taken over more and more. For example, the Bush Administration, Administration seemingly demonstrated emphasis on oil, global superiority, and defense. There was very little emphasis placed on environmental protection, protection of national forests and parks, air and water quality, and regulation of toxic waste and environmental toxins. In some cases, earlier regulations that afforded protections were replaced with regulation that favored big business.

Many people are in denial of their own impacts and the government’s impacts on the environment. People think as if the government’s righteous reform of policy and law will save our global and local crises. However, if one looks at presidential statements and decisions over the past 40 years, eight presidents have claimed to bring our country to a point of using progressive technology independent of foreign oil and/or oil all together. Since the oil spill of April 20th 2010, Obama has promised this country with curbing America’s appetite for oil to 1/3 by 2025,⁴ just as George Bush once promised “to replace More than 75% of our oil imports from the middle east by 2025” and in 1974 Richard Nixon also claimed that “At the end of this decade in the year 1980 the United States will not be dependent on any other country for the energy we need.”⁵

The depletion of oil reserves is on a slippery slope towards rock bottom, and we are getting more and more needy. It’s as if we know it’s going to be gone soon, but it has not been necessary for individual consumers to make radical changes that affect lifestyle yet. A poststructuralist theory by Jacques Lacan on how we became so addicted to oil is a false love fueled with the false need of material items easily acquired by the influx of technology. Trying to acquire love through material items is like trying to fill in an imaginary missing hole; consumption also implies something is missing by always trying to receive more. Lacan’s thinking links the two together in the form of a mother’s womb. In the first stages of life, the mother’s body provides everything, and when we separate at birth we constantly strive to return to that original state of euphoria for the rest of our lives.

Because our economy is fueled by consumer demand, the large corporations have

⁴ Hughes, Brian. "Obama: U.S. Must Curb Dependence on Foreign Oil | Brian Hughes | Politics | Washington Examiner." *Washington Examiner | Breaking News, Local News, & Political News | Washingtonexaminer.com*. The Washington Examiner, 30 Mar. 2010. Web. 17 Apr. 2011. <<http://washingtonexaminer.com/politics/white-house/2011/03/obama-us-must-curb-dependence-foreign-oil>>.

⁵ Stewart, Jon. "The Daily Show-An Energy Independent Future." *The Daily Show*. Comedy Network. June-July 2010. Television.

somewhat lessened the problem of conscious greed and over indulgence by advertising products with morally just extras. Not only do you get to buy what you want to have, you also are providing 1% of your payment to a charity or issue like AIDs or the environment. A temporary fix for the ongoing problem at hand, but a sly cover up for the people's denial.

Since 2001, the United States has spent roughly 1.6 trillion dollars on the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq.⁶ This amount of money could easily go into another outlet to aid in climate change and reform in our own country; however, it seems the US has other goals. In the Iraq "war on terror," we have been told we are helping Afghanistan and Iraq build democracy by permanently occupying the countries. Iraq sits on the second largest oil reserves in the world according to the US Energy Information Administration,⁷ yet 90% of the country's oil reserves remain unexplored because of the wars and sanctions. The US government has built an American embassy the size of the Vatican City outside of Bagdad, the biggest military compound in the history of the US.⁸

The countries leading the world in investments, money, technology, and foreign policy are all invested in oil. Historically, wars are driven by the desires of one country to exploit the resources of another, thus gaining power (desert storm, Gulf war, 1973 oil crisis, invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, interest in the Middle Eastern revolution). As the oil is depleting more and more there is a good possibility of more wars like this become more and more common. Countries that have not invested in the last of the oil will be lost as a world power and will be occupied by another country, just as smaller nations have dealt with in the past.

In the race for oil, there could be a power struggle between the stronger countries, a battle of the fittest, to see who walks away with the biggest share. Cutthroat action has already happened in the Cold War when the United States and Russia continued to reequip themselves with better technology in the case that the other attacked. Right now, the countries with the most nuclear weapons are Russia (28,240), the USA (12,070), England (400), France (513), and China (425). Even in these years after the cold war, it is in the range of possibility that if threatened or provoked, these countries might use their nuclear arsenal. If nuclear weapons were engaged in warfare, the affects would be more destructive and widespread than any other war that has been fought on Earth. The consequences of nuclear war would be horrendous, from loss of life and genetic mutations of the animals and humans to nuclear winter ending all life on Earth.

Nuclear War is a possibility, but a more likely disaster scenario involves a breakdown of the technology that individuals and nations depend on. Without the ability to communicate or to control the technology that runs the machinery, countries would literally shut down. If the failure were long-term or permanent, the failings noted earlier would make their presences felt. If something were to happen that was not well planned for, such as a staple shortage, brown out, or natural disaster that affects a large area, the skills needed to cope with it would not be present due to people's lack of the skills all together. On the governmental side of things, a country such

⁶ Notes and Sources | COSTOFWAR.COM." *Cost of War to the United States* | COSTOFWAR.COM. National Priorities Project. Web. 09 May 2011. <<http://costofwar.com/en/about/notes-and-sources/>>.

⁷ 2002, February. "Iraq: Oil and Economy." *U.S. Government Info - Resources*. Web. 09 May 2011. <http://usgovinfo.about.com/library/weekly/aaIraqioil.htm>

⁸ *Collapse Movie*. Dir. Chris Smith. Prod. Kate Noble. Perf. Micheal Ruppurt. 2009. Netflix

as the US with a very large population and surface area will have a hard time controlling the people and its own infrastructure as the information and energy will be squandered.

The situation could get very bad very soon, and the core government could easily fall. When governments begin to fail, social services, utilities such as electricity and water, trash pick up, mail, and including police and armed forces, are likely to loose infrastructure and break down.

For example, Los Angeles, the city built in a basin with no natural resources, is a metropolis for commerce, but also a dangerous place to be caught in if there were a natural disaster and people had to fend for themselves. Resources are brought into the valley to sustain roughly 10 million people and the population is expected to triple in the coming years (three Chicagos in ten years). The water is pumped in from many sources (Colorado river, canals from the central valley and Mexico, groundwater),⁹ which is very costly to support. If there were disasters that kept the city from getting the water, other resources would also fail. The city keeps roughly three days of food to sustain the entire population and with three or four freeways exiting the city fleeing before the existing safety reserves are emptied. Those especially affected would be those in the suburban neighborhoods around LA, such as the San Fernando Valley, which is most at risk because there is nothing to be found there other than grocery stores to help the people.¹⁰

In 2008, for the first time in history, more than half of the world's population resided in urban areas.¹¹ This undoubtedly means a swell in temporary jobs to suit the rising number of people in the cities, and more readily available resources. In rural settings, people needed some degree of self-sufficiency to be capable of providing for themselves, since there are not as many grocery stores, health professionals, and general needs occupations at hand like there are in cities and areas of larger populations.

The unrealistic American dream of everything always being provided lacks an awareness of inputs and outputs to the system, and is very destabilizing to the human race. Like a bear that has been exposed to the addicting food in human trashcans, Americans are addicted to simplicity and convenience and are quickly forgetting our roots and traditional gathering methods and survival. As we progress into the 21st century, the number of people in cities will exponentially multiply and more and more people will abandon the old, more tiring more sustainable way of life for the immediate success lifestyle in the cities. In the case that something did fall through the cracks or the country at hand became engaged in warfare and cities were targeted, as they have been in almost every war in the past, the people of these cities would be helpless in their situation.

Like a personal case of depression, we must have support and reassurance in order to overcome these problems. As a nation we must be inclusive of all people in our support and globalize the concept of community so that everyone will be empowered to contribute and

⁹ Maven. "Where Does Southern California's Water Come From?" *Aquaforia*. Aquaforia Blog, 29 Apr. 2008. Web. 17 Apr. 2011. <<http://aquaforia.com/where-does-southern-californias-water-come-from>>.

¹⁰ *Collapse Movie*. Dir. Chris Smith. Prod. Kate Noble. Perf. Micheal Ruppurt. 2009. Netflix.

¹¹ "Urbanization: A Majority in Cities: Population & Development: UNFPA." *UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund*. June 2007. Web. 09 May 2011. <<http://www.unfpa.org/pds/urbanization.htm>>.

achieve a more sustainable lifestyle and environment around them.¹² Hyman Minsky stated in the late 1950's that "stability itself is destabilizing." Oil has brought a very destabilizing lifestyle around the world that has clouded our sense of reality and sensitivity to our choices. None of the issues that we face today from our past decisions can be solved in isolation. They must be tackled by looking at the entire system that has been built in three human lifetimes, still a very new and malleable situation, and mold it to a more sustainable plan that will sustain seven billion lives, the environment, the animals, and the future. Building urban gardening areas, saving seeds, and investing in renewable energy will help out on an individual level. Attending re-skilling workshops such as Firefly in the North Carolina Mountains or a primitive skills school teaches people how to fend for themselves and be aware of their environment.

Since most of the population lives in urban and suburban settings, the ideology of suburbia will have to change. We would not necessarily have to rid the world of the suburbs, simply transform them into metropolises of local commerce and innovation. The younger generations usually live in the suburban and urban areas, not returning to the rural areas from where they grew up. Many scientists and theorists agree that in times of great turmoil and plight, the people will band together and survive. Humans are pack animals, and mammals in nature are known to travel back to where they feel comfortable when they are in danger (their dens, with their group, etc). We as humans will conceivably return to their families and stop traveling, to help out their local community. Transforming the Suburbs into urban gardens, easy transportation to local businesses and round cities will contribute to one's self reliance and confidence in one's abilities to better themselves and their community by helping out one another and looking out for one another like we used to.

When the Soviet Union withdrew from Cuba in 1991 the country was forced to stop using conventional agriculture and convert entirely to organic farming. If we use that model before we have to then we can overcome our oil crisis before its too late. Coexisting is a term we as a global community need to embrace, and together we can overcome.¹³ One way of achieving community is planting small gardens in your backyard, even potted plants of vegetables on you deck or roof. As food miles are becoming more of an issue, and as people become educated on where their food is coming from, people will want to be involved in he process. Planting your own food is the cheapest most efficient strategy of telling the world you do want to a part of the crisis of policy and food. Many visionary writers speakers and farmers have said that the first step is to get educated and get involved.

Community gardens are an easy and useful way of bringing together people who are passionate about being progressive and sustainable. It brings people of all backgrounds with different incentives to one space to produce one of the most fundamental things in life: food. As communities tend their own food, they grow in empowerment of themselves but also have interest in the environment around the garden. People become less dependent of food prices at the market and start becoming more aware of what goes into their food. Since most community gardens are small scale and consist of a counsel, it is up those involved to say how the garden is managed and what is put into the soil. By having control over what kind of plants and trees are planted, how to raise money, what kind of farming practices will be established etc, this allows the people of the garden to be healthier by not ingesting so many pesticides and chemicals from

¹² *Collapse Movie*. Dir. Chris Smith. Prod. Kate Noble. Perf. Micheal Ruppurt. 2009. Netflix.

¹³ *The Power of Community: How Cuba Survived Peak Oil 2005*; Film

conventional agriculture.¹⁴ For people who do not have the time to cultivate their own agriculture but wish to contribute to their community, they can cut down on food miles by getting their food locally, and save money in the long run by cutting health bills and refusing to contribute to government subsidies. Community Supported Agriculture, or CSAs, are an easy way to get locally grown food.

A big step in helping everyone be on board together is proper education and training. Instead of focusing on the history of how we have done things in the past, we should be focusing on skills needed to be involved in our government as well as local community. Instead of gym class where students are taught that it's important to be active, actually have class be active with electives and opportunities to work in a school garden or responsibilities. Eco-jobs are another way of encouraging sustainability and progressive thought. There are jobs with an environmental spin in virtually every occupation, you just have to be in the mind to do so. The solutions are there, we just have to embrace it and one another in trying to change the world. The phenomenon of the one-hundredth monkey will be in affect as more people are on board. I believe that once we begin the changeover, it will be quick and successful.¹⁵ There is hope, but we have a lot of work to do. So let's do it.

¹⁴ How to Start a Community Garden." *American Community Gardening Association*. Web. 09 May 2011. <<http://www.communitygarden.org/learn/starting-a-community-garden.php>>.

¹⁵ *Collapse Movie*. Dir. Chris Smith. Prod. Kate Noble. Perf. Micheal Ruppurt. 2009. Netflix.

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