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Thoughts on the FUTURE

The Future is coming! Some say that we are already living in it thanks to technology. Techno futurists suggest a future of gizmos, gadgets and toys but they don't look out of the window. How about answering a basic question ... how is perpetual growth supportable with finite natural resources?

Some people think we are building up to something, some big event - the second coming, the end of the world, the singularity, longevity, revolution, machine consciousness. In New Age circles the date 2012 is when it is all supposed to happen. The end of the Mayan calendar. If you are a Jehovah's Witness it was supposed to be 1974, (since then they have opted out of the prediction game). If you follow Nostrodamus the date was 1999, but why? It is a case of psychology.

Everyone is going to die...sometime...and we see everything leading up to this, by a simple psychological slight of hand we transfer this imminent event by an act of distraction into something big that we guess/wish/predict/assume is going to happen external to ourselves. Rather than a load of small, virtually insignificant, in themselves, events. Or are we doomed?

Capitalism is eating the planet. Whatever you care to call it-'the cancer stage' of Capitalism, Late Capital (to ever hopeful Marxists), Decadent Capitalism, Post-Modern Capitalism. It is in effect a parasitic pseudo-organism feeding off the body of the Earth. Potentially undermining not human life as a whole but many actual human lives.

Globalisation means an underclass in every country. A global elite flitting about, owning everything but with no power to control what is occurring. Global warming, pollution, new diseases, corruption eating away at humane institutions. The rich buying themselves security. Life will go on like this, it will not end just because the earth warms up, pollution spreads, resources run out. It is just the quality of life that will go down, as it is already, and people will die.

Economic growth is not a useful indicator. Destruction of the natural environment increases economic growth, pollution increases economic growth. A total decline in the quality of life is perfectly compatible with economic growth.

We are faced with a degenerating environment, more freak weather, storms, desertification, failed crops, soil erosion and declining yields. Mass migration. The poor will be driven into cities to hustle, beg, scavenge and rob, or work in low wage, non-unionised production work.

The spread of small arms means the spread of war. Inequalities, ethnic and religious tensions mean there are always reasons to go to war if the technical capacity is there i.e. the possession of guns. The corruption of the international drugs trade has a destabilising effect. It must by definition be outside the reach of international law. It is destabilising and will continue to destabilise whole countries. Perpetual war and drugs export is a steady state, it can go on indefinitely leaving the people of those countries traumatised and beaten down. Like in Burma and Afghanistan.

Body consciousness is very apparent, produced by medicine, sport, psychology, fashion and art. The next step, already apparent in environmentalist and New Age thinking, is a contextualisation of the body. Through diet and other environmental inputs, this is the invisible world. Monitoring inputs and outputs. The impact of such thinking may be as great as that of hygiene in the 19th century. Already a sizeable proportion of the population has a neurotic fixation with passive smoking. But ignore pollution. 70% of the U.K. population has access to a car, and I'm sure that the majority of the 30% who don't, being poorer, tend to smoke. It is unlikely that those who own cars will become fanatically anti-car.

There is a trend for people to 'see' the invisible world of U.V., electronic fields, pesticides, microwaves, P.C.B.s, heavy metals, NOX and SOX. This may have an impact, a holistic approach to health. They already have their obsessive enemies. The demand for organic produce (in the U.K.) outstrips domestic supply. This isn't necessarily environmentalism but an extension of the fixation on health and hygiene. Medicine is a mechanistic intervention after the fact. The monitoring of inputs is preventative medicine.

One of the faces of 'Future Shock' is fundamentalism. It is a reaction to uncertainty, finding relief in certainty. **Alvin Toffler** talked about this in his books *Future Shock* and *The Third Wave*. His central concept is of 'demassification' this is a very apt and necessary analysis of society in the grip of the information revolution. Future shock has been replaced in the younger generations by the ability to float free of rigid concepts. The use of psychedelic drugs is an adaptation behaviour enabling users to process masses of information into new more 'appropriate' worldviews, they may also potentially blow their minds to bits as they attempt to make sense of this world. Future shock is evident in a conservatism. People who go into denial and resort to fundamentalist ideas. It is in showing these mechanisms that Toffler is an education, future shock leading to denial and de-massification leading to electronically linked in-groups, a prescient prediction of the internet written in the '70s.

On the 'info-sphere' Toffler said this "It is difficult to make sense of this swirling phantasmagoria, to understand exactly how the image-manufacturing process is changing. For the Third Wave does more than simply accelerate our information flows; it transforms the deep structure of information on which our daily actions depend". The de-massified media lead us to find our own way thru the image-inary of our culture 're-signifying' what we perceive.

Toffler "Instead of merely receiving our mental model of reality, we are now compelled to invent it and continually re-invent it ... a de-massification of personality as well as culture."

Consciousness is determined by the 'system' (whatever that is - capitalism, the world.) The acceleration of the information flow has also been called a 'schizophrenisation'. Information overload in the individual.

We live in the Information Age. There seems to be a growing transparency about government and business operations, but few people are interested in this particular stream of information, as it co-exists with a million other streams of fantasy, trivia, myth, religion, lifestyle and gossip.

Is Artificial Intelligence going to come and save us? I see it this way. Technology puts in your hand an instrument that can make calculations millions of times faster than a normal human brain. Is it as intelligent as a person - NO. Put these chips together and you have a big fast computer not a mind.

If consciousness is the game of chess, it requires a board, in this case silicon chips, no matter how large the board is it will never become the game of chess (conscious). If the pieces are brain chemicals and their interaction consciousness then A.I. is a long way off. There are 32 pieces on a chessboard yet there are known to be at least 64 different types of Dopamine alone indicating to some degree the complexity of the Brain/Mind

I do believe that Artificial Life and Artificial Intelligence (= Consciousness) will come about, maybe even this century. The parasitic pseudo-organism has insect intelligence. The collective has less intelligence than the individuals that make it up. For example faced with scientists predicting climate change its reflex response is to deny, dissimulate, spread misinformation. A survival instinct. Protecting untrammled transformation and consumption of resources and the concomitant greenhouse gases, but ethical and environmental audits are helping it to evolve greater 'sensitivity'. This is the role of feedback in the system.

In the long run it would be a good idea to shift to a sustainable economy. If we start now it will be less painful in the long run. A sustainable future is a better future. So are we all doomed?

By Wolfensteppe