



Before the Ebola Factor: Instability of Technological Infrastructure Amidst Potential for Healing

Ebola is a wild card, but a threat can also be a symptom of our mistakes in the dominant culture for an unprecedented number of technologically dependent humans

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The role of high-tech disempowerment in health and sustainability

Much has been written, albeit unnoticed by what should comprise a large audience, on the risks to the stability of the electric grid. Warnings and remedial plans are based on government investigation into vulnerability to sabotage, natural disasters and occasionally energy supply. Never is total dependence on the grid or on electricity openly considered to be a serious vulnerability in itself. Nor is this vulnerability, nor the greenhouse-emissions aspect, openly discussed as being a negative state of affairs that nevertheless can be bypassed or dealt with successfully in short order by radical conservation and curtailment.

At least the tenuousness of complete reliance on this key, centralized and complex technological system is already admitted and shown, for anyone interested. Beyond the widely acknowledged climate issue among scientists and a respectable readership/activist base, the full consequences of the reliance and pervasiveness of the entire technological complex still need to be appreciated and disseminated.

Meanwhile, we take what we can get in terms of seeing attention for these critical issues: what may ensue from socioeconomic collapse or depopulation, possibly triggered by Ebola, has until very recently been mostly the domain of fiction-writing and sci-fi films. Their nail-biting suspense often relies on frightening, technological failure stemming from totally misplaced trust in complex, artificial systems. The fictional societies' cultures turn out to have invited disaster sometime back.

I have increasingly sensed that mass consumption of high-tech communication devices mostly disempowers people, especially the young. This is because they have no memory of what was simply and easily used by previous generations rather sustainably. The young consumers of high-tech are actually sold helplessness and hopelessness under the guise of independence and mastery. The glamour of the advertising and corporate social pressure offers the false and unobtainable: a life without nature and its light and darkness, its warmth and cold, life and death, decay and rebirth.

Few young people take interest in emancipating themselves from the electrical grid or -- more critically -- the corporate food system. A silver lining is that car-buying is not quite the be-all-end-all that prior generations of young U.S. adults went along with. Guarding against collapse and creating the alternative of sustainability is still low on almost every consumer's list. A manifestation of this was noticed at peak oil preparedness meetings that were populated almost completely by middle-aged and senior citizens, mostly white males.

The Ebola Factor

How bad is this disease?

"Ebola is indeed scary and has a potential of wiping out too many people for me to imagine. This is the time that low-tech medicine—finding and isolating those infected and protecting the caregivers—can and should prevail. But it is not a given. It is interesting that Cuba has sent 150 doctors and other caregivers to West Africa. We [the U.S.] should do more. We were too preoccupied with other crises to pay attention early on." - David K. Cundiff, MD, author and past director of a major hospital's AIDS and hospice program.

One of the factors in the anticipated collapse of the Consumption Civilization is the human inability to always and forever maintain the vast, complex distributive and technological systems. Sudden failure can happen through added stress arising in a range of sectors, such as the food-supply system breaking down, related civil unrest, financial house-of-cards meltdown, and natural disasters. As to petrocollapse: peak oil has been thoroughly analysed, although misconceptions and delusions about oil reality and energy alternatives are still rife. Peak oil as a movement peaked around 2006, eclipsed by other threats to society and the planet. World conventional-oil extraction peaked in 2005.

Now taking center stage is a long-anticipated but heretofore murky contributor to massive human -- rather than technological -- malfunction or failure: deadly, contagious disease as widespread plague. It would be nothing new in human history since people crowded into cities. Today most people live in big cities and cannot go back to the land. Urbanites and many rural populations are dependent on centralized, complex systems including the entrenched subculture of Western Medicine and its technology. Why emphasize this? Because, it is thought to be the best defense against public-health threats. This is despite its checkered track record and high cost, neither of which have stimulated much of an alternative approach except among the marginalized and rebellious few.

A plague has been anticipated for today's overpopulation, apart from religious Apocalypse, by some scientists who see our species as possibly "a virus on Mother Earth" (the Gaia Hypothesis). Die-off may be almost guaranteed from something, or a combination of unforgiving global pressures, what with

- climate disasters and refugees,
- deteriorating water supplies,
- unnatural, not very nutritional diets dependent on petroleum-oriented agriculture,
- mounting environmental toxicity, and
- knee-jerk toxic prescription-drugging.

[What would be entirely new is nuclear winter, more devastating and infinitely longer lasting than plague. But let us save that for another report.]2

Although it is officially soft-pedaled, Ebola or other resilient organism could wipe out a huge portion of today's human population. Do the math: Ebola is highly contagious, not so easy to detect in large, dense, fluid human populations, and the death rate is 70%. Yet, since the body's immunity -- greater in some than others, for discernible reasons -- determines health (barring, for example, getting hit by a truck), the question of whether or not a most dire scenario hits must depend on how resilient health is in the individual and in communities. The role of natural immunity or resistance in an organism (e.g., a human) that can vary greatly from person to person, must be applicable at all times. The immunity factor in our level of vulnerability to Ebola has more of a scientific basis for determining possible casualties caused by the organism than necessarily attributing an unthinkable Ebola scenario to the inescapable, uncontrolled kind of outcome that an asteroid hitting the Earth would pose.

[read the remainder of this report at <http://www.culturechange.org/cms/content/view/922/63/>]

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