

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SUSTAINABILITY PETER COWMAN BARCH.

In the developed world Economic Growth is regarded as a true measure of hope and success. Economic Growth is fuelled by the spending of money that is earned or borrowed. The most common form of borrowing is 'mortgaging' which is the practice of borrowing money to buy a Home.

Modern Economic Systems are underpinned by the value ascribed to mortgaged property. So critical is this to the perceived health of Economies that governments and their executive agencies strenuously encourage people to become Home Owners. They also do their utmost to maintain a steady rise in Property Values. Property has, in fact, become the new Fort Knox where Bricks 'n Mortar are watched over, not by armed guards, but by people protecting [the value of] their Homes.

The use of the Home as 'security' for borrowings has tied people to the success and failure of the Global Economy and to strategies for Economic Growth. Where the Home also provides emotional security for its occupants, people have become emotionally enmeshed in these strategies as well. Where decisions about Economic Growth are inevitably head-centred, bottom-line-driven and oftentimes threatening to Life, the linkage of these to peoples' emotional security has resulted in people being embroiled in a system that seems to threaten their very survival!

The reliance of the Modern Economy on Credit, Growth and [notional] Property Values is a consequence of the changes wrought by Industrialisation. The roots of environmental breakdown can be traced to the same origins. In general, the departure from traditional pre-Industrial Revolution economies has not only spawned a range of Life-threatening consequences but it has also overseen the cessation of vernacular sheltermaking, the abandonment of traditional values and religious belief systems as well as the demise of local food production and marketing. These changes are further marked by the commodification of peoples' Time. The accumulated effects of these changes largely contribute to the negative feelings many people have about Modern Life. The Fear that surfaces as a result of this is oftentimes so great that the majority of people blot it out, feel overwhelmed or simply give in and indulge in the material excess that is considered a right in a Modern Economy.

The relinquishment of traditional belief systems has considerably diminished peoples' emotional rapport with Life and has left a void formerly occupied by discredited deities. This has resulted in the repression of peoples' intuitive faculties - leaving matters entirely to The Head. This is a job which The Head relishes, programmed as it is to follow a rational and logical path that diminishes the importance of emotions. This results in Material Success being accorded God-like status.

Without the critical balance provided by intuition - The Heart - Head-centred decisions pass themselves off as being in our best interest and 'the right thing to do.' When this type of decision-making is applied to the acquisition of Property the role of The Home in providing physical and emotional security is subject to The Head's ascendancy, and, as described previously, people become embroiled in the perpetuation of a system which, in essence, is Life-threatening. Where this also threatens peoples' emotional security the further repression of the intuitive faculty is required, a task which The Head relishes immensely.

The effort to satisfy the human demand for physical and emotional security in the 'one package' as it were - The Modern Home - critically lacks the type of frisson characteristic of Life where everything is matched by a dynamic opposite. So, hot is balanced by cold; dark by light; action by reaction. Without the stimulus of such dynamic opposition The Modern Home can be more accurately described as being 'dead' rather than being 'alive.' The 'aliveness' of a Home is critical in that it encourages its occupants to connect to the deeper aspects of Life and facilitates a harmony with the natural world.

If one looks closely at the most advanced example of the Modern Economy - that of the United States - much is revealed in regards to where the Material Path leads. Selfishness, arrogance, inequity, conservatism and an obsession with longevity. This latter aspect could just as easily be expressed as a Fear of Dying. This is hardly surprising given that so much attention is paid to physical existence and

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none at all to emotional well-being. This is the nature of the Fear cited earlier - people are threatened by the notion of their own mortality and by the absence of emotional stimuli which connect them to a deeper reality. This is a consequence of the absence of The Heart from decision-making processes and of the deification of the physical.

The discreditation of The Heart as an everyday tool for living has compromised peoples' decision-making ability and has emphasised Material Values over Emotional Satisfaction. It has defined Life as a material phenomenon and has ascribed the deeper meaning that many seek to the acquisition and consumption of material goods rather than to the attainment of higher consciousness and awareness. The Value of such awareness cannot be 'capitalised' as part of the Modern Economy. In fact, adherence to such Values distract the consumer sufficiently to affect a reduction in consumption, something that strategies for Economic Growth abhor. Consequently, all those with a vested interest in Growth - government; financial institutions, big business and the media - regularly discredit such Values and claim the Modern Market Economy to be the one true path.

Where mortgages are rapidly becoming the sole means for many of acquiring a Home it behoves people to make themselves fully aware of how being tied into the Global Economy affects their psychological well-being and how Fearmongering is used as a means of perpetuating a Head-centred system which, quite literally, is destroying itself. Without the dynamic balance provided by Head-Heart 'opposition' the Modern Home cannot facilitate peoples' emotional expression and cannot allow them to connect to a deeper reality. As a consequence Life takes on the characteristics of a compulsory, dull, lifeless, self-consuming and monotonous pay-per-view TV serial.

Where The Home is critical to peoples' physical and emotional wellbeing the move towards a Sustainable Lifestyle must be facilitated by Homes that nurture all aspects of human Life - body, mind and spirit. Clearly these must be created and financed on a scale and in a manner which allows independence from the Global Economy. Where this is hardly going to promote Economic Growth those drawn to Live Sustainably will find themselves open to vilification, threat and ridicule as a consequence of their choices. If these aspects of the move towards a Sustainable Lifestyle are ignored the current definition of 'Sustainable' as - Sustaining [Economic] Growth - will prevail. In the context of Natural Building this manifests as a range of expensive and [supposedly] Green products, whose assembly into a building is also costly. While this might appear to be good for Economic Growth it is disastrous for people seeking a more Sustainable Way of Life if for no other reason that it locks them deeper into the wider Economy in order to pay for the building and to support its [notional] Value.

The move towards a Sustainable Life is first and foremost an emotional one. This requires that people repossess these repressed aspects of their Lives and re-integrate them into the decision-making process. This is a consciousness-raising exercise, a move towards a heightened awareness. This is the real challenge of the Sustainable Life - the acceptance that Sustainability is not something you can buy, it is something which you feel and live.

As a consequence of embracing this new Way of Life one can begin to see everything differently. The hegemony of the Financial Institutions, the Planning Authorities, the Construction Industry and the Media can then be viewed from a new perspective. The challenge of designing and constructing Sustainable Shelter and of Living Sustainably can then be tackled outside of the barriers so carefully erected by The System.

A word of caution however. One should not be fooled that The System wishes to dally with the truly Sustainable except, perhaps to enclose it in a Death Embrace.