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An Ethic of Simplicity: For Life's Sake

Louis Chauvin

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Religious Studies

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy at Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

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ABSTRACT

An Ethic of Simplicity, For Life's Sake

Louis Chauvin, Ph.D., Concordia University, 2002

This thesis offers an Ethic of Simplicity as a response to what is perceived by an increasing number of people as a destructive and dehumanizing socio-economic system. The thesis starts with a description of the methodology used to determine who “simple-lifers”, the adherents to this ethic, are and what they are concerned about. The next three chapters expand on these concerns: 1) they are beginning to question the wisdom, relevance and sustainability of an economic system that is based on, and aggressively promotes, continuous growth in consumption and production. Recent studies show that the purported benefits of the current model of the capitalist system, are now giving way to disillusionment; the rich are getting richer, the poor poorer and more numerous and people in the middle are working harder and longer to maintain gains made in standards of living (Chapter 2); 2) the gradual spread of the current model of the capitalist system across the face of the globe has highlighted its shortcomings (Chapter 3); 3) evidence is growing that we are testing the limits of the physical systems of the planet. The Worldwatch Institute warns that we would need 3 to 5 planet Earths to provide North American consumption levels to everyone on the planet and to absorb their wastes (Chapter 4).

In Chapter 5, it is suggested that current attempts by national governments, international bodies and the business community at reversing the growing inequities and environmental damage have proven highly inadequate. Citizen groups have awakened and are asking for greater and more sincere efforts at reining in what they see as a rogue economic sector. The citizens supporting these groups need, however, to be able to disengage from the system if they are to have the independence to critique business and government. A growing number of them are. In the Conclusion, the value system and behavioural standards of the Ethic of Simplicity propose moving consumption back to its traditional position as a social epiphenomenon rather than a central one. Thus, at the same time as it liberates people from financial servility, it relieves the stress on the ecosystem and promotes a more equitable sharing of the planet's resources.

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FOREWORD

Renowned anthropologist, Barbara Myerhoff (1974) refers to human beings as *Homo Narrans*, man the storyteller. She explains that our primitive ancestors sat around the fire carving spearheads and eating blueberries, while telling stories in which time was woven into a tapestry of myth and legend. These tales were the encyclopedia of human knowledge. Through dramatic telling of the triumphs of heroes and heroines and the antics of fools, they provided explanations for the past, present and future.

To this day we continue to tell the stories of our world, of how it came to be, of why it is the way it is and of our role in its unfolding. Traditionally this was the function of religions. For various reasons however, mainly related to increased scientific knowledge of the workings of the world, the traditional religious stories have lost a good deal of their relevance for the populations of today. But since, as George and Sabelli (1994) tell us: “[t]here are no societies without religion”, the void left by the loss of influence of the traditional religions has had to be replaced by new stories. These are the stories of the natural and physical scientists, the politicians, the medical scientists and the social scientists among whom, today, economists’ stories seemingly prevail.

Today I tell a story of a particular group of storytellers. I want to tell this story for several reasons. First it is a story that needs to be told and repeated as often as possible so that its very important message is recognized in all its urgency. It is the story

behind the story. History, we are told by historians, is the story of the conquerors, of the winners but it is not the whole story and thus it is not the “real” story. The story being told by the dominant groups of today is also only partial reality and if we know only this story we miss out on a good part of the richness of life. If we don’t hear the stories of the other members of our societies, the women, the indigenous peoples, the children, the non-human animals, the plants, we ourselves can never be whole. We can only go through life as faint phantoms, pale reflections of the true richness of our being. Second, I want to attempt to pull the many threads of this tale together to help us recognize the coherence of the story. As our social structures become more complex it is harder to see the interconnections, the interdependence of the various elements. While the stories presented in this work are varied, there is an underlying scream in all of them; the scream of people who feel their life is being extinguished because it is not recognized as valid; the scream of people who feel their view of the world is more amenable to human life than the currently prevailing worldview. Though the heroes of their tales are seemingly disparate (sea turtles, coral reefs, dolphins, old growth forests, rainforests, rivers, lakes and oceans, students, union workers, indigenous people, environmentalists, archeological sites) they seem to all agree as to the nature of the beast that is “consuming” the world and that the hero must conquer. There is also widespread agreement as to the main elements that must be put in place in order to make the world and therefore our lives more “whole”some. Third, this is an important part of my personal story. Through it I discover who I am and MY role in the grander scheme of things. Through it I travel towards “wholeness”.

So today I lend my voice to this group of storytellers. We will visit the beast in its lair and discover its nature. We will listen to stories of the devastation it has wrought on the land and the fear it has instilled in the people's hearts. We will hear of the heroes' and heroines' plans to defeat the beast or to tame it so that its power can be put to the service of the people. We will hear of those who think the beast must be put to death. We will hear a story of frustration and of despair but ultimately of hope; a hope that humans will face the challenge offered to them as we turn into a new millennium; the challenge of "LIVING SIMPLY SO THAT OTHERS MAY SIMPLY LIVE".

PROLOGUE

This dissertation is an episode of a “life-in-progress”. It is the result of both an intellectual and pragmatic or “reflection-in-action”¹ odyssey. In a sense it is a mid-process “taking stock” of a three-decade journey. At varying levels of intensity, this journey has been a seeking of some sort of equilibrium between inner (private) and social (public) life, a balance between work and leisure, an understanding of the difference between meeting one’s material needs and seeking to meet “higher level”, spiritual needs. This process occurs in a society that, for the most part, attempts to meet both types of needs through increased material consumption. As I speak of inner and social “life”, I purposefully avoid the plural of the word “life” here for two reasons. On the one hand, I wish to not compartmentalize and “specialize” in what I perceive to be an already overspecialized world. The second reason is a corollary of the first yet perhaps more important. It is an incrementally acquired belief that the loss of holism in our worldview especially our individual connection to “the other” has contributed, to some unmeasurable extent, to the socio-economic and political quandary described in the following pages.

¹ “In each instance, the practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomena before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behavior. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomena and a change in the situation.... He does not keep means and ends separate, but defines them interactively as he frames a problematic situation. He does not separate thinking from doing... Because his experimenting is a kind of action, implementation is built into his inquiry” (Schön, 1983, 69).

The writing of this thesis, therefore involves me at the professional level but also at the personal, relational and spiritual levels. However, it is the professional level that will take centre stage. The other aspects occupy a more retired space from which they have influenced not only the choice of topic but also the questions that have framed the issues, the choice of sub-topics and the decisions as to which authors would be given voice. Since it is intricately woven from the fabric of my own personal and professional evolution, this work therefore cannot but reflect, to a certain degree, my own worldview and biases. From Zukav I have learned that we can never detach ourselves completely from the object of study. The observer always has an effect on the subject even in apparently very objective experiments in physics. How much more so then in the social sciences. Schön (1983) and Schön and Argyris (1974) however have helped me come to the understanding that this need not invalidate the process of learning or discovery though it increases the need for vigilance. To this end then, throughout this work I will attempt to let my authors speak, as much as possible, though I realize I have chosen the portions of their stories that will be told. The reader is unfortunately left to her own devices should she so desire or be so inclined, to explore the missing parts of the different stories presented here. Choices had to be made in attempting to reach the goals stated in the Introduction.

This work is thus, partly, the result of more than a decade of “reflection-in-action” of the professional facet of my life, which has brought me to delve into and try to grasp and understand the environmental and socio-political implications or consequences of the economic facet of our lives. Somewhat incidentally, several years ago, I was brought to shift the focus of my exploration into ethics to the business arena. I was thus given the

opportunity to examine, in retrospective, twenty years of life in the business world that I was much too busy “doing” at the time to stop and analyse. That reflection was instrumental in shaping a university-level course in “Ethics in Management”. Building and teaching this course over several years, allowed me to obtain greater insight into how we, as individuals, choose to live our lives both personally and professionally. As the years passed the course evolved along the lines of the questions that increasingly haunted me: how do our actions affect others around us and eventually everywhere else on the planet? How does our relationship to the institutional structures (social, political, economic) take shape? What are our responsibilities in first understanding the system and then participating in it? Eventually I added an environmental facet to the course and expanded the reflection to the effects of our ideologies, actions, and structures on our physical environment and on all the other species that share it with us.

This seemed to lead almost naturally to the next step of my academic life where I was asked to teach a course on “Sustainable Development”. This experience opened up a completely new realm of exploration for me that expanded an increased environmental awareness to one that included a greater understanding of the inner workings of the corporate world and of some of the major industries that comprise it. The works of authors like Hawken (1994), Commoner (1992), Brown (1995) and others allowed me to better understand the links between human economic systems and activity and the gradual destruction of the Earth’s life-sustaining systems. I was able to get a better grasp of the catch twenty-two situations corporate executives often find themselves in as they try to balance their career goals, the interests of their multiple stakeholders and the often socially and environmentally disruptive and destructive activities of the corporations they

lead (Korten, 1999; Greider, 1997). I gradually came to understand more clearly how, in order to meet or answer often conflicting and sometimes irreconcilable expectations of various stakeholders such as shareholders, employees and social or environmental activists/groups, these business leaders feel compelled to spend more time and energy on crafting or changing public perceptions than effecting relevant and lasting changes to their modes of operation. This is often done through the creation of elaborate public relations campaigns either or both at the corporate and industry levels (Frankel, 1998). The petrochemical industry is probably the best-known example but others, such as forestry and pharmaceuticals have quickly followed suite. This stage of my career also put me in touch with several honest attempts from the corporate sector at trying to invent new ways of doing business. I thus became more familiar with organisations like The Body Shop International, Ben and Jerry's, Tom's of Maine as different socio-economic experiments that, though not free of controversy², have brought us to reflect on the possibility of doing business "otherwise", of commerce with a social as well as an economic conscience.

The current stage of my academic career has added other dimensions to my reflection and allowed me to deepen previous understandings. In order to provide management students with a more well-rounded understanding of the effects of commercial activity on our societies it was agreed to add another course to the core curriculum of the Faculty of Management at McGill University. Most courses of the curriculum, especially core, centre on process and skill building in order to make

² See in particular the voluminous work of Jon Entine on social and ethical marketing, especially his October 1995 article "*Rain-forest Chic*", in The Globe and Mail Report on Business Magazine.

businesses do more efficiently and productively what they are already doing. This course would concentrate, rather, on examining how the current system came into being and questioning whether we should actually be doing what we are currently doing in business since it appears to many, that the system, in many instances, is no longer adequately performing the social tasks it was originally meant to. The course therefore looks at some of the more deleterious consequences of the current system and presents students with what is perceived, by some (business people and economists as well as social activists), as plausible alternatives or modifications to the status quo in order to reduce or eliminate some of the more negative effects. Thus I have explored several facets of the current socio-economic system (encompassingly called capitalism or free market economy) prevalent in the Western world but gradually growing to include most of the globe (Sexty, 1995; Shaw, 1999; Daly, 1977). I have been brought to examine the currently controversial phenomenon called globalisation both from the position of its proponents (Levitt, 1983; Hart, 1997) and opponents (Barlow and Clarke, 2001; Korten, 1996,1999; Gélinas, 2000; etc.) and must admit to a certain sympathy if not affinity with the latter. To name only a few areas of concern, I have been brought to examine the links between the economies of industrialised and developing nations (Shiva 2000; Shuman, 1994; Korten, 1996, 2000; Moore Lappé, 1982), the growth of corporate power and the erosion of that of the state, a growing global economy and widening gaps between the rich and the poor both inter and intra-nationally (Barlow and Clarke, 2001; Greider, 1997; Gélinas, 2000).

More importantly, I felt a certain responsibility to assuage some of the cognitive dissonance I was creating in my students. Some were being forced, for the first time, to

face these aspects of their chosen fields of endeavour. I was brought to offer them opportunities for change by introducing them to authors from various fields (management, economics, ecology, agricultural science, sociology, political science, urban planning, etc.) who propose not only critiques of but also concrete and feasible alternatives to the status quo (Korten, 1999; Halstead and Cobb, 1996; Hoffman, 2000; Mungall, 1986, Norberg-Hodge, 1996; Nozick, 1992; etc.). We thus came to discuss subjects like the role of unions and the state in mediating asymmetries of power between corporation and employees and citizens, the democratizing of business through such means as collective forms of management or cooperative enterprises, rescaling of business and industry to human size, localizing and regionalizing both commercial undertakings and political decision-making, the latter often seen as a necessary complement to the responsabilisation of business populations. More importantly, it became increasingly clear that whatever infrastructural or systemic changes occurred, they would have to be accompanied by a transformation at the individual level (Durning, 1999; Brown, 1999; Elgin and LeDrew, 1997; Elgin, 1997; Etzioni, 1996, 1998; Mongeau, 1998; Schumacher, 1989; Wright, 2000; Harman, 1998). Individuals would have to attain a level of awareness of their personal responsibility for the existing situation and a recognition that, just as the present has been shaped by past generations of individuals trying to organise their world, so too will the world of our children's children be shaped by the decisions we all make today. Our current lifestyle decisions, the way we work, how we feed ourselves, our leisure activities, prioritisation of values, the nature and quality of our relationships with other people and with the non-human elements of the Earth, our consumption habits to name only a few factors will all play a part in

determining what the world of tomorrow will be. What and how much we consume is of capital importance since it has a direct link with all of the other factors mentioned.

It is this last phase that has been more instrumental in prompting me to write this dissertation. As my research progressed and my reflection deepened, I came to believe that any meaningful systemic change would have to come, directly from the people through inner revolution, and at the prompting of and with the unswerving support of the citizenry. I became convinced that politicians and business people could only elaborate and effectuate the modifications in governmental and corporate policies that would be necessary if they were: 1) either fundamentally transformed themselves in their belief that the status quo is not a sustainable alternative for human populations (or for the planet) in the long run, or 2) that at least they are somehow convinced that an important enough part of their constituencies holds or is sympathetic to this belief, that their survival as business and political leaders is threatened if they don't start paying attention.

As of November 1999, with what has been dubbed "The Battle of Seattle", where an unprecedented agglomeration of diverse and disparate individuals and groups from across the world united in a common cause to disrupt the meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), I started paying as close attention to the messengers of the protests as I had, previously, to the message. I started to realise that such massive popular mobilisation meant that scores of people were aware and engaged enough to generate an effect on the "machine" of corporate and political power. Further protests in Windsor, Washington, Prague, Quebec City and Genoa, to name only a few, both in their scope and

numbers came to support this stance. Business people and politicians are paying attention. While their reactions might be questionable (barricading themselves behind fences, in desolate wilderness areas, or intolerant and oppressive dictatorship states) they are nevertheless affected enough to react.

This thesis is the analysis of the current socio-economic system as seen through the eyes of this former group of people and their proposed alternatives.

INTRODUCTION

As I explored the relationships between environmental degradation and consumption and population issues, in the course of my search for plausible alternatives to the existing paradigm, I had come across the concept of “voluntary simplicity”. As I became more familiar with the protesters at economic events, having participated in a few and woven closer ties, I began to see many similarities between their ideas, values, lifestyles and those that I had seen on the multitude of websites centred on simple living and in the writings of contemporary adepts of this lifestyle such as Duane Elgin, Serge Mongeau, Hazel Henderson, Linda Breen Pierce among so many others. I decided to delve more deeply into this apparent connection with the unabashed hope of finding evidence that these shared values might contain the seeds of a solution to our social and environmental dilemmas.

What I actually found are signs that a significant portion of the world’s population (a global phenomenon but perhaps more evident in the industrialised world) is increasingly struggling to come to grips with rapidly changing scientific and socio-economic realities that affect not only pragmatic concerns such as work structures and lifestyles, but, in fact, our fundamental understanding of the workings of nature and our relationships to it (Harman, 1998; Zukav, 1980; Smil, 1993; Pimentel, 1996; Ehrlich and Ehrlich, 1991; Lovejoy, 1988; Sahtouris, 2000). In the context of this struggle and in answer to the need to give meaning and provide a framework of reference to this nascent worldview, existing institutions such as governments and religious groups are trying to

revamp their ideologies. For the most part they appear to be coming short in these attempts. Reduced voter turnout and church attendance in the West are only two symptoms of this reality. Several authors have suggested that the inability of these groups to capture popular imagination has left a void that has increasingly been filled by capitalist consumerism, which they perceive as or at least compare to a new religious competitor to the great religions of the world (Cox, 1999; Nelson 1993; Loy, 2000).

More and more, however, people are becoming disillusioned by the failures of the basic promises of capitalism and consumerism to both bring about a society of leisure and satisfy second order needs through increased consumption. In the first instance, Americans are working harder and longer than they did forty or fifty years ago (Schor, 1998; Breen-Pierce, 2001) and the negative effects of this are increasingly visible in the nature of insurance claims and medical consultations³. Secondly, five decades of unfettered and conspicuous consumption have failed to increase people's relative levels of satisfaction and happiness. Students of advertising and marketing, often seen as the proselytising arm of capitalist consumerism, explain that its role has become one of bringing about dissatisfaction, rather than satisfaction, in order to promote continued and growing consumption (Jhally, no date; Kilbourne, 2000; Durning, 1999). Several surveys from the end of the last century have shown a non-negligible shift in values away from consumption to less tangible means of meeting second order needs such as self-worth and self-esteem (Elgin and LeDrew, 1997)⁴.

³ See Chapter 2

⁴ See also a 1977 Lou Harris Poll referred to in Shi, 1985, p.268, and the World Values Survey, spearheaded by the Institute for Social Research of the University of Michigan, under the direction of Ronald Inglehart.

Many people, therefore, are actively looking for and experimenting with alternatives to life and work-styles that are increasingly seen as unsatisfactory and often destructive and therefore unsustainable in the long-term (Elgin, 1981; Mongeau, 1985, 1998; Etzioni, 1998; Ray & Anderson, 2000; Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002; Shaw & Newholm, 2002). These generally translate into ways of living that constantly seek to balance the dynamic exigencies of physical survival and higher order needs. Among other things, it means, reducing one's material consumption in order to bring it more in line with the perceived limits of the planet to provide the resources necessary for the production of these material goods and its capacity to absorb the waste created by the production and the discarding of these goods once their useful life is over.

Another, larger segment of the population appears increasingly sympathetic to this idea and is ostensibly waiting on the sidelines to see how the experiments succeed. If nothing else, at least, as Gerard Celente of the Trends Research Institute (TRI) says, "a new aspect is that people no longer look down on you if you are scaling back like they would five, 10 years ago. There is a perception now that there is a lot of sanity behind it." In 1994 TRI identified the stirrings of a "strong movement" towards material simplification of lifestyles and an attention to other aspects of life such as community and spirituality. This trend, the Institute said, would gather momentum and grow quickly as the century came to a close (Schor, 1997).

This thesis is about this diffuse group of loosely knit individuals and small groups who, in spite of their diversity of “lifeways”, backgrounds, political, religious and other orientations and ideologies, share a core of common values that attempt to give pragmatic response to what they perceive are the socio-environmental challenges of the new century. The goal, here, is to attempt to identify these core values and to bring preciseness and coherence to the diffuseness; to ultimately identify a way of life, an ethic, that could prove an important component of humanity’s step off the threshold that leads to the new century. I felt it was important to give voice to this group for several reasons. First, it is becoming increasingly clear that the planet cannot support both the inevitable population increases and the production growth and consumerist ideology inherent in the capitalist system. A working, viable and sustainable alternative way of life or ethic may shortly be quite welcome. Second, there are already many people presently looking for different and more satisfying ways of living and who are increasingly frustrated with the offerings of mainstream models. A greater understanding of the reasons people are shifting in this alternative direction and the consequent positive personal and social effects could be useful to them in their quest. Third, through their voices, the thesis also has an advocacy dimension. The message it holds needs to be told often enough and from varying sources so as to eventually and diversely reach the governing elite. The current pleas and exhortations to consume proffered by our politicians and economic leaders since the dramatic events of September 11th, 2001 in New York are clear indications that they are narrowly confined in their capacities to imagine creative solutions to new challenges. Fourth, I think it is important for the holders of this ethos themselves to be aware that their actions are increasingly relevant for a growing number

of people. It may be useful for them to be presented with a work that could help to coalesce the underpinnings of their position and that allows them to re-evaluate, rethink and possibly reaffirm this stance. Fifth, I hope parts of this work will open up or at least indicate new avenues of research for academics in various fields. I know for example, that it has prompted in me a desire to acquire a better understanding of how the current socio-economic global challenges will affect or are affecting our perceptions of work, its meaning in our lives and our definitions of basic concepts like “workplace”. Finally, perhaps my findings and conclusions will help me reduce the cognitive dissonance of my students referred to above and possibly even my own.

In view of these goals I felt it necessary to extensively elaborate on the underlying reasons that have prompted people to disengage from the consumerist ideology. In so doing I have referred to authors who are not necessarily direct advocates of voluntary simplicity in their writings but are nonetheless useful since they hold and have clearly articulated some of the core and peripheral values of its adepts (e.g. Daly, Commoner, Hawken, Hart). They also provide more elaborate analysis and information that help us understand some of the motivations for “simple-lifers”⁵ extension of their “lifeways”

⁵ Elgin states that adepts of voluntary simplicity were wary of identifying themselves with a “movement”, with a “dogma”, with a “system”. They even hesitated in adopting a shared definition of the simple life. Though many elements are shared, diversity is seen, as is evident in nature, as almost essential to long-term survival. A narrow definition might lead to dogmatism, self-righteousness or some form of elitism (Elgin 1981, 50). These people, therefore, who were attempting to “bring their lives into a more harmonious balance with the needs of the world” explicitly expressed the fear that if it were identified as a movement it might be picked up in a flurry of “media hype” and quickly burn itself out by attracting fad seekers not committed to the long process needed for the internalization of the concept. Using such an unsexy term as “simple-lifers” almost assures me that the label won’t stick while at the same time facilitating the writing of my work. That being said I recognize the difficulty in achieving a balance between respecting this desire and the possibility that a work such as this may contribute, however minimally, to the coalescence of this group into a social force.

beyond a simple reduction of material consumption. These authors have therefore been selected for several reasons: one, they clearly and at length elaborate on concepts that are dear to adepts of simple living but which, for a number of reasons have not yet found their way into the group's core literature; two, since several of these authors are considered less marginal than many of the voluntary simplicity authors, the links made may add credibility to the latter's position and three, in natural succession to the second, it is hoped that the presence here of these arguments and authors and the links made to the simple living movement will increase the motivation of other academics to more closely examine some of the ideas of "simple lifers" as relevant to addressing current major social, political and economic concerns. Finally it is clear that some of these authors have and continue to inform the directions, reflections and decisions of many who have adopted more simple lifestyles. They have influenced choices these people have made as to how to spend the time they have freed up by often reducing their working hours and how to channel the impetus acquired from increased awareness of their role and responsibilities for social construction.

The first chapter introduces us to "simple-lifers": where I found them and their concerns. We examine how "simple-lifers" are intrinsically linked to other social entities like the environmental movement, the anti-consumerist movement, the human rights movement and the anti globalisation movement. The next three chapters of the dissertation present the reader with the main social issues that have informed the socio-political stance of the "simple-lifers".

The second chapter introduces what the authors perceive as the fundamental issue underlying environmental degradation and social dislocation as well as several individual problems. Essentially, the problem is identified as a socio-economic system that is no longer in touch with the needs and realities of current societies and modern understandings of the working of natural systems. The economic system is based on perpetual growth in destructive production and consumption and sees the environment as a subset of economics rather than vice versa. Large corporations have become instruments of power for a financial elite that is gradually either wresting political power from democratically elected representatives or becoming undistinguishable from it. Economics and the corporate system are aligned to encourage if not coerce populations into continuous increases of material consumption. Thus, in this chapter, a “rapprochement” is made between “simple-lifers” and the anti-consumerist movement. It is proposed both implicitly and explicitly, that the system be modified to meet the “re-examined” needs of populations with minimum negative impact on the environment, social structures and individuals. Corporations must be made accountable for the consequences of their products and processes and for reducing or eliminating the power they have gained over other sectors of society such as education and government. Some of the consequences of internalizing costs would be investment in cleaner technologies and increases in costs of products. The latter would allow people to make choices in the products they want based on adequate information about their real costs. Reduced corporate power would permit more democratic decision-making as to the allocation of public funds. Hopefully, these would be directed towards projects that increase social well-being rather than undifferentiated economic growth.

The other two chapters elaborate on the main values that draw “simple-lifers” to reducing their consumption: respect for and living in harmony with all other humans, respect for and living in harmony with the physical environment, and an understanding of community as a nurturing environment facilitating the meeting of material needs while emphasizing the importance of non-material fulfillment accompanied by individual responsibility and accountability. The third chapter reflects the views of “simple-lifer”/anti-globalists. It explains how financial globalisation and the expansion of the capitalist/consumerist ideology is simply exacerbating the issues described in chapter two and internationalising the negative consequences; how individuals and communities are adversely affected by the globalisation of the capitalist enterprise. The 1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development made it clear that meeting the basic needs of populations has to be extended to include everyone on Earth. A picture is drawn of a strategy of economic globalisation reminiscent of colonialist and imperialist strategies of previous centuries. Here also, implicit and explicit proposals are made as to ways of eliminating exploitation of people and resources of the most disadvantaged countries and of reducing the inequities of global wealth distribution. The role of reduced consumption is explained.

The fourth chapter expands at length on the environmental dimension of human activity in an attempt to make more salient to the reader the deleterious consequences of the socio-economic status quo. The environmental impacts are discussed to demonstrate how the authors that inform “simple-lifers”/environmentalists see environmental

degradation as a direct consequence of irresponsible and unsustainable consumer and corporate behaviour. The positive environmental impact of simpler ways of life is described.

Sustainable development, especially since the publication of the World Commission on Environment and Development's report in 1987, has become the mainstream, sought after solution to the problems of poverty and environmental devastation. The fifth chapter discusses the concept of sustainable development and how it is increasingly seen as having become somewhat of a catch-all term for governments, corporations and a multitude of other groups, to the extent, some feel, that it has lost its capacity to represent any meaningful framing of the real questions and issues that need to be addressed if we are to reverse the trends identified in chapters two through four. Chapter five explains "simple-lifers'" disappointment with the results of involvement of business, governments and extra-governmental bodies in the attempt to creatively and meaningfully address issues of sustainability. It points to certain dangers in the relationship between civil society groups and their funding sources and the need for democratic representation at that level also. The chapter concludes at the individual level, where transformation must originate if there is any hope of effecting greater social change. It is suggested that the social organisations that want to effect social change will need to be supported by individuals that have somehow reduced their dependence (material and psychic) on the existing system.

The Conclusion proposes that “simple-lifers” are well-positioned to support and/or spearhead organisations that promote changes to the existing socio-economic system. An elaborate discussion is provided of the core values prized by “simple-lifers” whether they come from the anti-consumerist, anti-globalist, environmentalist, human rights or other movement, the simple-living movement or no movement at all. A second section discusses how the internalisation of such values affects these people’s everyday lives i.e. a portrait of consequent behavioural standards is drawn. This set of values and principles supported by a set of behavioural standards allows us to formulate an Ethic of Simplicity that provides a particular worldview and guidelines that can be used both as metaphysical and moral foundations.

In the Epilogue, we reflect on the possibility of an Ethic of Simplicity replacing the current consumptive ethic and possibly being a useful tool in getting humans through a transition period identified by several authors in different fields (Lester Brown, environmentalist, Paul Ray, sociologist, Duane Elgin, economic historian, Willis Harman, engineer and Hazel Henderson, economist (the latter three turned futurists), David Korten, management, and Elizabet Sahtouris, biologist). These authors believe we are standing on thresholds of understanding and becoming that offer great opportunities either for disaster or transformation. From different scientific angles we are seen as being at a pivotal point in our evolution. For several reasons, not the least of which is the fact that it articulates a very definite Ethic of Consumption, the Ethic of Simplicity is presented as one of the few proposals on the table right now capable of getting us through the transition.

The quest for more conscious, meaningful and simple living is certainly not a new phenomenon. It has been with us, in secular form, at least since the classical Greek period and records show that its religious counterpart dates from even earlier in different parts of Asia such as China and India. American instances of this process have been aptly described by historian David Shi, now president of Furman University, in his book The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture (1985). One might ask then, if and how the current resurgence of “simple-lifers” differs from previous occurrences so that it merits additional exploration. Throughout his book Shi has stated quite emphatically that the tendency to simplification of lifestyles, though historically omnipresent as an undercurrent, has gathered momentum in times of crises, be they martial, political or economic. Until now, these measures have, for the most part, been seen as temporary necessities to get a social group through whatever crisis it faced. I believe Shi himself points to the difference in current manifestations of the quest for the good life in the closing chapters of his work. He suggests that the most recent resurgence of simple living adepts and forms (in his case he refers to the hippy movement of the sixties that was transformed in the seventies as the hippies moved back into the cities and suburbs) has two singular and novel characteristics. One, the present state of affairs is increasingly perceived as tending to permanence for an ever-larger portion of people, especially in industrialized countries. We are perceived as rapidly approaching or already having attained limits of the Earth’s regenerative systems (Union of Concerned Scientists, 1992). The second aspect of the present situation that differs from previous crises is its apocalyptic character, probably not seen since Malthusian predictions that

expanding populations would outgrow the food supply. But even Malthus wasn't as apocalyptic as some of the eclectic interpretations of his work would make him sound. He didn't foresee any kind of global meltdown that is today perceived as an increasing possibility but simply a medium-term adjustment in populations through sporadic famines. The current situation is quite different. The possibility of the destruction of the capacity of the Earth to provide the necessary life-sustaining materials and functions has become as real to many as was the possibility of a nuclear holocaust during the cold war. If, therefore Shi is right in linking voluntarily simple lifestyles increases to crises and if he is also right in assessing an increasing perception of the current crisis as permanent and apocalyptic, then Elgin's position stated in the early 1980s that voluntary simplicity was being driven by the push of necessity and the pull of opportunity takes on unprecedented relevance. To the necessity of living within the limits of the Earth's capacity to provide and to the opportunity "of finding more satisfying ways to live" is added the challenge of elaborating, living and promoting lifestyles that could actually allow the human race and the web of life on which it depends to survive beyond the next century or two.

There is no place in this work for a detailed history of the various incarnations of the practice of voluntary simplicity. Its origins in, and links to, other movements be they religious like the Quakers, political like the Progressives or ideological like the Utopians have been quite aptly discussed by others such as David Shi (1985), Link and McCormick (1983) and Trahair (1999). Since the interest of this work lies in the connection between current manifestations of voluntary simplicity and the socio-

economic environment that has spawned them, in a sense, it takes up where Shi left off. Therefore, most of the works referred to here, date from the last two decades of the twentieth century. Many of the issues such as environmental devastation and social dislocation were only vaguely perceived or hinted at as possibilities by Shi's "simple-lifers". Today they have taken on new and sharper contours under the lights of new occurrences and understandings. We are now in a better position to verify the accuracy of Shi's suggestions noted above. While I have no pretensions as to the capacity of this work to elucidate such broad questions as the permanence or apocalyptic nature of current human economic behaviour, I nevertheless hope that it will serve as a springboard for additional reflection on the feasibility or sustainability of such behaviour as well as its concordance with basic human values or needs. There also exists the hope that the alternatives presented here can be useful in indicating the wide range of creative possibilities that many people are open to and spur our political leaders to implement more sustainable social policies and structures.

CHAPTER 1

THE “SIMPLE-LIFERS”

A. Introduction

There is often a standing joke in families that have had a few teenagers around the dining table that they will eventually be eaten out of house and home. Up until recently I don't think very many of us expected that the analogy could be applied at the global level. Yet, that seems to be what is happening. While the question of limits to growth has been with us for a very long time, since the late 1960s scientists and other concerned citizens have started asking, with much greater background knowledge and urgency, the question: “How much longer can the Earth sustain the consumptive habits of the human race?” (Meadows et al., 1972; Durning, 1999; Ehrlich, 1994). In the thirty years during which this question has been visited by a growing number of people on the planet, much confusion has emerged from the various attempts at answering the question but there has been consensus on a number of points. First, it is understood that the issue has ramifications on two levels: the social, and the environmental or ecological. At the environmental level there is general agreement that the problems we face are quadrupolar. Two of the poles are related to population issues: 1) population levels, 2) consumption levels; the other two are related to questions of the production needed to meet human consumption, 3) extraction or depletion of resources and 4) waste

production. The problem has been transformed into the equation: $EB = P \times A \times T$, where EB is the environmental burden, P is population, A is affluence or consumption levels and T is technology or the processes used in production (Hart, 1997). While rather simplistic and difficult to evaluate, the formula is useful to indicate that the environmental issue needs to be addressed multi-directionally.

The problem at the social level is also multifaceted. The main issues are questions of poverty, overconsumption, overpopulation, rapid urbanisation and decaying infrastructures, violence, both internationally and intranationally, inequity and inequality. Environmental and social issues are increasingly seen as being intertwined. The presence of the consumption and population factors in both categories is indicative of this. United Nations reports, for example, inform us that a small percentage of the Earth's population is consuming an inordinate percentage of the world's resources⁶, and much of the environmental degradation that affects ever-greater numbers of poor people is directly linked to this consumption. Internationally, in the quest for cheaper labour and laxer environmental laws, much of the polluting production has been moved to developing countries that use up their resources and pollute their environments to produce goods for residents of Northern countries⁷. Intranationally, poor people are more likely to live in areas or districts that have higher levels of pollution and, therefore, negative health effects, because of lower land and residential values.

⁶ Figures vary from one report to another but are usually in the range of 20-25% of the population consuming 75-80% of resources. See UNDP, Human Development Reports (HDR) for other figures quoted here.

⁷ In this work I use the following qualifying terms interchangeably to identify what were, for a long time, known as First World and Third World countries: North/South, developed/developing, industrialised/industrialising or pre-industrialised, rich/poor. Industrialised countries are also referred to as the West or Western countries.

Our economic system seems to be exacerbating many of these problems especially since it is built on the necessity of perpetual growth and since the whole industry of marketing and advertising is oriented towards convincing people to increase their acquisition of material goods. “Simple-lifers”, that group of people that is central to this work, have concerns about levels of consumption and their consequences that make them leery of the economic machine that promotes the consumptive mindset. Though it is in the nature of living matter to consume in order to maintain itself and reproduce, they see the consumption patterns of humans in the past several decades as having become disproportionate to these needs of maintenance and reproduction.

Steiner and Steiner (1997) and Harris (1995) review various groups that, through time, have expressed wariness about business enterprises and entrepreneurs. The present work centres on more recent times, during which several individuals, movements and groups have taken over the call to caution as regards commercial activity, but, more specifically, the capitalist ideology of perpetual growth of production and consumption, corporate power, and economic globalisation. Peter Corrigan in his *Sociology of Consumption* reminds us that “although consumption takes place in all human cultures, it is only in the present [20th] century that consumption on a truly mass scale has begun to appear as a fundamental, rather than merely epiphenomenal, characteristic of society” (In Shaw & Newholm, 2002). The same might be said of the power of the corporate entity (Chapter 2), and the rate of spread of the Western economic system across the planet (Chapter 3). “Simple-lifers” believe that the *magnus opus* of the current capitalist system

is to turn human beings into consumers, with all the consequences we will examine, all the while promoting the idea that the constant quest for more material objects is the “natural” state of humans. To a great extent, this belief drives their urge to disengage from the system.

Increasingly, this ideology of consumption or consumption ethic and its spread across the face of the planet, are linked to the degradation of physical and social systems. Understandably, therefore, the responses to it have come from all corners of society and have been quite varied. The anti-globalisation movement, represented, later in this work, more saliently by Gélinas (2000), Korten (1996) and Barlow and Clarke (2001), is certainly the most evident at this time but there has also been a strong anti-consumerist movement. Etzioni (1998) and Schor (1997a) refer to the counterculture movement of the 60s and 70s as a major representative of this trend. Environmentalists, conservationists and ecologists of various shades of green have deplored the destruction and despoiling of Earth through what they see as uninformed and unenlightened economic activity. Labour advocates have decried the lack of concern, other than as factors of production, within the current system, for the workers who toil to provide society its wealth. A new breed of economists is calling for a more realistic theoretical base for its science. Biophysical, ecological and stewardship economists, among others, maintain that consideration of the physical environment must be made central to any economic theory. The realm of politics has also been affected. “Green” political parties are sprouting up all over the planet but their appeal is, for the moment, most evident in the European Union where, in Germany, they have even been brought to power. In a

never seen move, Norway elected Gro Harlem Brundtland, an environmental minister and outspoken environmental critic as its Prime Minister, a post she held for ten years before becoming head of the World Health Organisation (WHO). Finally, the field of education has also reacted. Numerous environmental modules are now integrated into the curriculum of primary and secondary education in most Western countries. For example, Pestle (1984) discusses the integration of environmental considerations and reduced consumption in Home Economics courses. Bob Corbett (no date), at Webster University, offers an undergraduate course in philosophy entitled Voluntary Economic Simplicity. Even business schools in major universities offer courses in environmental ethics, sustainability and a host of other courses, seminars or specialized education, offering alternatives to the corporate model of doing business.

This chapter is an attempt to identify and define a particular segment of the above population, this “diffuse group of loosely knit individuals and small groups” referred to in the Introduction, whom I have called “simple-lifers”. These are people with links to diverse sets of ideologies and activities but who have chosen a specific and pragmatic personal path in answer to the pressing environmental and social concerns humanity is faced with as we embark on what is seen by many as a pivotal century in human evolution.

It is difficult to pin down exactly who “simple-lifers” are. There is no fixed model. There is no dogma. There is no single, common or overarching motivating factor other than, possibly, the awakening of a desire to live more consciously and to question

current ways of living and working. “Simple-lifers” come to this state of questioning from various directions and their reactions are as varied. Though they are often involved with various activist groups, it is also not always clear whether involvement in these groups came as a result of the move to simpler ways of life or vice versa. Nor is it always clear, as one might expect, that simplicity means reduction in expenditures. While for most, pragmatically, the decision to live a simpler life has meant a reduction in consumption levels, for others, expenditure levels may have remained similar to what they were or even risen, while the object of their consumption has shifted dramatically. For this second group, the question of consumption is not only one of immediate quantity. There is also, as we will see, a pioneering and socially transformative element to the quality and type of purchases made and this comes at a price.

This chapter is essentially descriptive. It is meant to introduce the reader to “simple-lifers”, explain their motivations and present their concerns. Knowing who “simple-lifers” are will allow the reader to better understand their worldview and how it affects their perception of the social constructs many have chosen to challenge. In this chapter, I explain the methodology used to identify “simple-lifers”. I attempt to clarify the steps culminating in the elaboration of the characteristics that individuals would need to display if they were to be legitimate sources of data for the elaboration of an Ethic of Simplicity.

B. Finding “Simple-lifers”

1. Original Sources

If, then, this group is so difficult to circumscribe, it is important to explain how I came to identify them. My first exposure came through an Internet search through which I was looking for moral responses to what I had identified as negative consequences of the current capitalist system: generally speaking, lack of concern for the human part of the system other than investors or shareholders and negative effects on the environment. The search brought me to Duane Elgin’s website “Awakening Earth” (<http://www.awakeningearth.org/>) where I found a reference to his original work, Voluntary Simplicity (1981). When I eventually decided to do my thesis research on voluntary simplicity as an ethical response to the current economic system and ideology, this book, along with Serge Mongeau’s Québec equivalent (1985), served as the foundation. It was through these two works that I identified the original characteristics of “simple-lifers”. Both of these authors are quite emphatic in their statement that voluntary simplicity is not a state but a process that is very individualistic. People start with their current “state of living”⁸ and decide their own goals of simplification and a rate of integration they feel comfortable with. Elgin and Mongeau are also quite clear that voluntary simplicity is not only behavioural but, actually, even more of an internal process that manifests itself through certain behaviours as values and principles are integrated and internalized. They believe that if behaviour precedes internalisation of

⁸ State of living includes standard of living and the quality of activities needed to support this lifestyle, eg. type and amount of paid work; level of consumption and indebtedness; environmental “footprint” etc.

values it increases the probabilities that the behaviour won't last. Mongeau, however, in his latest work on voluntary simplicity (1998) does suggest that one make a practico-symbolic radical gesture of commitment when embarking on the simplicity life path (something like selling one's car, getting rid of one's TV or cutting up one's credit cards) (247). He is careful, however, to mention a preliminary step of deep reflection on one's current state of enslavement to consumptive behaviours. These two statements on the essentially individualistic nature of voluntary simplicity may partly explain why it is not coalescing into an easily identifiable social movement.

2. Main Concerns

Elgin and Mongeau's works were also useful in identifying common concerns of people who refer to themselves as having materially simple or simplified lives. I subsequently looked for authors, websites and individuals that demonstrated these concerns in order to expand the base from which to determine a core set of values. Elgin and Mongeau identify "simple-lifers'" consumption-related concerns as:

- 1- the negative impacts of their consumption or lifestyle on their perceived quality of life;
- 2- the impact of their consumption and lifestyle on the physical environment;
- 3- high consumption often reduces one's choices when trying to find balance between working to meet one's material needs and work that is meaningful i.e. that contributes to one's personal development and to the increased welfare of society;
- 4- indiscriminate consumption of goods and services blurs the distinction between interdependence with others and dependence on experts and their systems;
- 5- becoming aware of the impact of their consumption and lifestyles on the capacity of others elsewhere on the planet and in the future to live decent, dignified lives;

- 6- becoming aware that material goods will not fulfill higher, psychic and spiritual needs.

Of course, since voluntary simplicity is a “becoming” rather than a “being”, not all “simple-lifers” need have all these concerns at one time. Rather, these concerns have been identified, out of many others, as the most often referred to, either as motivators to move to a simpler way of life or as gradually emerging from a more conscious life.

3. *Simple-lifers and Simplifiers and Frugalitarians*

Much of the academic literature on the topic of simple living refers to “simplifiers” rather than “simple-lifers” (Etzioni, 1998; Schor, 1997a, 1998; Shaw and Newholm, 2002). Quite often the terms are not differentiated and I believe this has the potential to create misunderstandings. For example, Etzioni refers to three categories of what I call “simple-lifers”: downshiffters, strong simplifiers and the simple living movement. However, his discussion refers to all these people as “simplifiers”. To simplify implies movement, change. For example, one has a cluttered, complex life and chooses to simplify it. His categorisation, however, may have the unfortunate effect of contributing to the myth that you need to have first “bought into” the consumerist ideology and lived it to satiety and then reduced your consumption to be considered an adept of voluntary simplicity. While this may be semantically true for “simplifiers” it need not be so for “simple-lifers”. Several decades ago when the social and environmental problems previously identified by Shi (1985, 268) were less salient and were perceived as being temporary and reversible such a link may have been more

probable since there may have been less perceived incentive not to live a highly consumptive lifestyle. However, it appears that, especially now, as increased consciousness and awareness of our plight spread, this attitude has changed. Thus, while the “simple-lifer” may be a “simplifier”, he or she can also be anyone whose apprehension of the current state of the world, whose grasping of an emerging global consciousness (Harman, 1998), call to another way of living, to another way of “being in the world” without the motivation of satiety of consumption. The driving force in such a case would appear to be a different understanding of the world, of one’s relationship to the whole and one’s role in the unfolding of the future and need not come from direct experience of affluence. Much like the unpleasantness of second hand smoke may drive one to not smoke, it may be enough to have lived close to the affluence to understand its effects and be repelled by it.

Unfortunately, though he does very briefly allude to other practitioners of simplicity, Etzioni’s approach (and this is the case for most of the academic literature on this subject) contributes to rendering invisible a whole range of “simple-lifers” that I identify here. Since his goal is to propose simplifiers as agents of social change and, as such, the question of numbers is important, he may actually be doing his own thesis a disfavor with this limitation. My discussions on Internet-based listservs and my work with NGOs has brought me into contact with a number of young people from middle class families who consciously and voluntarily choose a life of simplicity without having personally adopted its opposite though they are aware of the consumerist lifestyle. Quite often these young people make the same kinds of decisions as Etzioni’s strong simplifiers

in the sense that they keep their levels of consumption as low as possible; they choose work that is meaningful and satisfying rather than highly remunerative, though their level of education allows them the choice; they choose a life that is “other-oriented”, getting involved in their communities or in volunteer work.

In addition to the youth mentioned above, there is also a host of individuals from various social classes for whom voluntary simplicity means simply not “buying into” the high consumption ideology in the first place. There is an important number of individuals and families throughout North America and even more so in Europe who, for various reasons, though surrounded by the enticements of the capitalist economy, consciously do not give in to it. In a family setting this often translates into single-income families where one parent will stay home with the children, for example. Consequently they are selective in purchases of such things as food and clothing, transportation and entertainment choices, staying away from costly consumer credit options and so on. This is not a negligible portion of society and yet it is mostly absent other than in the fundamental voluntary simplicity literature of Elgin and Mongeau and more recently discernable in parts of Ray and Anderson’s (2000) work. It is also visible in the growing number of people who form and join “Intentional Communities”, “Eco-villages” and even housing cooperatives where traditional community values of sharing, cooperation, help, concern and simplicity are the rule.

Schor (1995), on the other hand, may be too inclusive in her understanding of simple-lifers. Using Inglehart’s World Values Survey as a base, she speaks

interchangeably of the anti-consumerist and the voluntary simplicity “movements”: “An extreme form of post-materialism, namely anti-consumerism, has begun to emerge at the margins of social life. In the United States it goes by the name of the 'voluntary simplicity' or 'frugality' movement”. However, Craig-Lees and Hill’s study (2002) brings them to the conclusion that: “[t]o assume that non-materialistic and anticonsumerism values are the main drivers of the choice [of adopting voluntary simplicity] may be incorrect”. So, while it may be safe to assume that most members of the anti-consumerist movement would tend to reduce their consumption, it does not appear to follow automatically, that “simple-lifers” are rabid anti-consumerists.

Further research has also brought me to question Schor’s interchangeable use of voluntary simplicity and frugality. Analysis of websites currently dealing with frugality shows a much more superficial tendency, almost exclusively limited to saving money when purchasing rather than reducing consumption. Most sites had links to discount stores, many centred on the availability of discount coupons, some sold an assortment of baubles, a few even had links to “the lowest” interest rates on credit cards. These are all things one does not find on voluntary simplicity sites where, for the most part, any references to purchasing are limited to books or newsletters. In all fairness, however, some frugality sites, however, also carried hints and tips to reduce waste, to make things oneself rather than buying all made, or making things last longer, all things that are more in line with simplicity values. This may partially explain the confusion of the two groups.

4. The Simple Living Movement?

In the first part of this chapter I have been hesitant to speak of a “movement”. Rudolf Heberle, in his 1951 groundbreaking work, Social Movements: An Introduction to Political Sociology, defines a social movement as a “**collectivity that has group identity and a set of constitutive ideas**” (my emphasis) and that attempts to bring fundamental **changes to the social order**. My research has shown that, for the most part, “simple-lifers” are not, or at least until very recently, were not primordially concerned with social change i.e. change in policy, legislation or institutions. Change is more oriented to the personal level, to the individual. Social change becomes coincidental. Though one might deduce or occasionally encounter expressions that there will be social or cultural change if enough people go through the transformation, the original focus is not oriented that way. This, in no way, is intended to mean that “simple-lifers” have no social concerns or involvement. We have already shown quite the opposite and the remainder of this work will expand on their social preoccupations. What it does mean is that for “simple-lifers” real change occurs first within the person. Even if they operate within modified structures, people who have not undergone personal transformation are more apt to repeat the same mistakes.

As we have seen, “simple-lifers” often have very disparate origins and their allegiances are often much stronger or even uniquely directed towards other social groups. Their “group identity” is usually not formed around their simple lifestyles but rather around other ideologies or activities. Though it varies, the adoption of a simpler

way of life is often much more a consequence of involvement in another group or movement.

Elgin states that “there are no fixed rules or norms that define this way of life. The worldly expression of voluntary simplicity is something that each person must discover for himself or herself in the context of his or her unique circumstances” (1981, 85). We will see, shortly, how difficult it is even for those individuals thoroughly implicated in voluntary simplicity to come together to formulate a clear and consistent ideological statement. The very concept of a set of “constitutive ideas” feels somewhat alien in such an individualistic framework. Though the phenomenon has variably been identified as a trend or a movement, Elgin himself sees it more as “a natural alignment of many independent persons rather than as a conscious social movement” (1981, 51). From a sociological perspective, therefore, the concepts of social network theory may be more useful in future studies of this group than those of social movement theory. For all these reasons, I have felt that, at least for the present, it is much more *à propos* to speak of an ethic of simplicity that has become central to a growing number of people who are concerned with a wide range of social issues.

This being said, I think it is important to shed a bit of light on a group that Etzioni (1998) identifies as “The Simple Living Movement”. It is certainly possible to single out a certain number of individuals who have made voluntary simplicity the central preoccupation of their lives. Most of these have written books and or numerous articles on the topic. Their presence through these books or through numerous websites has become important in the daily lives of many active and “would-be” “simple-lifers”. The

group has found a virtual home in a network of websites set up and maintained by authors of works themselves, practitioners who offer down-to-earth advice on how to make voluntary simplicity work, and people who offer support groups and help in organising them in your community. Among the most relevant are: the “Simple Living Network”, the “New Roadmap Foundation”, “Seeds of Simplicity” and “Circles of Learning” (See Appendix 1-A for details on these and other sites). Etzioni refers to this group as the core of the global voluntary simplicity “movement” that gives it a certain cohesion, promotes its propagation, offers support tools and activities and articulates its underlying philosophy. However, from a recent report the purported “leaders” of the group have recently published, it is not at all clear that even they see themselves as a movement.

In spite of Etzioni’s (and others’) categorisation, there has been lack of interest or refusal, to date, to organise the movement hierarchically or otherwise. The closest they seem to have come was identifying twenty-two leading members of the “concept”, mostly authors on the subject, who were brought together in a forum funded by the Fetzer Institute, a non-profit private operating foundation that supports research, education, and service programs exploring the integral relationships among body, mind, and spirit. The forum, entitled *The Power of Simplicity*, took place in June of 2001 in Illinois. The report that followed the conference is posted on their website: <http://www.simpleliving.net/simplicityforum/default.asp>. However, though the site informs visitors that “[i]n the future we will use this web site to share with you the results of our growth and development as a united voice for simplicity”, nothing new has been added since last summer. Still, the Simplicity Forum eventually

“envisions the capacity to issue collective calls to action. Through discussion, it intends to sufficiently align on the meaning of simplicity to be able to develop public policy recommendations and a research agenda to establish 'simplicity' as a significant field...to claim the legitimacy and power of simplicity as a core American value and practice”

(<http://www.simpleliving.net/simplicityforum/pos-default-5.asp>).

Should this occur, we might then be able to refer to a fledgling social movement as defined by Heberle. As of now, however, we still can only speak of “stirrings” or of an embryonic attempt at organisation.

Reading the full report brings to light the fact that consensus is far from reality on a number of issues not the least of which is the desirability of coalescing into a bona fide social movement under the banner of voluntary simplicity with a clear activist agenda. While there appears to be a certain will to do so, it would seem that there are serious impediments to the flowering of the group as a social organisation. While some of these have been mentioned in this chapter, the report brings out a few others that are relevant to the focus of this work as a discussion of the possibility that voluntary simplicity is an appropriate answer to the current social and environmental dilemmas:

- 1- There are strong social, economic and political forces involved that are antithetical to voluntary simplicity so that it is legitimate to ask whether it can ever be more than a marginal movement.
- 2- Environmental degradation is such that it is legitimate to ask if there is time to effect the necessary changes
- 3- Given the control of media by the corporate mindset do “simple-lifers” have the tools to get their message out to the people?
- 4- Given the quasi-complete control of the political by the corporate can governments be counted on to act upon the expressed will of the people should they desire change?

- 5- It is held, in addiction rehabilitation programs, that an addict must recognise the existence of the problem in order to move towards healing. If consumption has, in fact, become addictive behaviour yet is so widespread that it has been normalized, is it possible to achieve the “recognition of a problem” needed for the first step towards its elimination?

These were some of the questions these leaders asked as they pondered their next steps. They certainly will need to be addressed seriously if this core element is ever to bring a significant number of simplicity practitioners together into a coherent social movement.

There were, however, expressions that this step may not be needed or even desirable. The visible growth of this trend, in the past two or three decades, appears indicative to some that the requirements of the times are already applying pressures that are moving millions of individuals to the realisation of the well-foundedness of simpler ways of life. It was felt that those already involved need only continue, without fear or restraint, to perform the services they already do, be it as agents of change through support or proselytising. Either way, the existing “core” continues to serve an apparently growing “community” of like-minded individuals and is poised to take on the challenges the unfolding 21st century brings.

5. Extent of the Phenomenon

It is difficult to know with any kind of precision the extent to which the simplicity phenomenon, in actual practice, has made inroads into our societies. In North American populations, estimates vary greatly with upper measures around 10 to 15% (Elgin, 1981; Ray & Anderson, 2000). However Elgin also estimated, in the early 80s, that around this core of active “simple-lifers” lay another large group of people, probably around 25 percent, claiming to be very sympathetic to the idea. This is more recently confirmed by Ray and Anderson whose fifty million “cultural creatives” expressed, at a rate of 80 percent, that voluntary simplicity was an important value for them. They also estimate that the rate is somewhat higher in Europe. Perhaps even more telling, the same survey indicates that 58 percent of the total American population is sympathetic to a more simple way of life which would represent a substantial increase since Elgin’s estimate of the early 80s. This sympathy is further supported by Etzioni who tells us that a 1994 Gallup Poll reported that more than one quarter of Americans would be willing to take a 20 percent cut in pay if it meant being able to work fewer hours, indicating a propensity to simplification.

The sympathy towards simplicity stems from various sources. As people become more aware of the pressing issues surrounding the environment, globalisation and human rights, among others, they come to realise the overarching role that consumption levels play in all these arenas. It thus becomes increasingly difficult for the environmentalist (activist and non-activist alike), realising the environmental impact of consumptive

activity, to remain true to his values and continue to consume at North American levels. In the same manner, the anti-globalist who comes to understand that much of the current economic global and globalising activity is oriented towards satisfying the consumptive needs of industrialised country populations, would be hard pressed to maintain his integrity without reducing his own consumption. Finally, as people concerned with human rights understand how Western consumption habits contribute to the exploitative treatment of workers in developing countries and even to inequities in industrialised countries, they also must come to terms with their personal contribution to the phenomenon.

Elgin, in an interview with van Gelder (no date), provides a summary of his interpretation of the numbers relating to changes in the way we live: About 75 percent to 80 percent of the American public say that living sustainably on Earth will require major changes. About 60 percent of US adults say they want to be part of the changes. They are sympathetic but not actively engaged. About 25 percent are actually doing something by changing the way they live. These are the so-called "downshiffters" or strong simplifiers identified by Etzioni and Schor.

“Finally, about 10 percent of US adults are ‘upshiffters’ that have gone even further and are pioneering a new way of life that is more sustainable, satisfying, and soulful. They’re making a whole-pattern shift in their lives that grows out of an ecological awareness and the sense that ‘I’m here as more than just a consumer to be entertained; I’m here as a soulful being who wants to grow. I want to have meaningful work, a meaningful life with my family, a meaningful

connection with my community, and a meaningful sense of spiritual development.’ That 10 percent is about 20 million people, and it’s almost two-to-one women to men.”

6. Data Sources

Other than the people with whom I have been involved directly, friends, acquaintances or fellow volunteers and whose value structures I could detect personally, there were several other sources of data from which I tried to identify the characteristics and concerns suggested by Elgin and Mongeau. Of course there was the original survey by Elgin and Mitchell that provided much of the data for the elaboration of Elgin’s book Voluntary Simplicity (1981). Other major surveys included Health of the Planet, Results of a 1992 International Environmental Opinion Survey of Citizens in 24 Nations, from the Gallup International Institute, The [1996] Index of Leading Spiritual Indicators, by George Barna, and the 1994 National Opinion Research Center, General Social Survey, (all three in Elgin and LeDrew, 1997), the ongoing World Values Survey spearheaded by Inglehart of the University of Michigan and the 1995 Paul Ray survey on cultural creatives serving as data for Ray and Anderson (2000). I depended also on several smaller studies such as those by Craig-Lees and Hill (2002), Shaw and Newholm (2002) and Schor (1995, 1997a). Much of my data came from an expansive survey of websites dealing with or referring to voluntary simplicity or simple living as well as Internet-based newsgroups and discussion forums. Having identified certain authors from these sources I probed more deeply into the biographies of these authors to determine their personal

position as regards simple living. Thus, for example, transcripts of interviews with David Korten, David Suzuki and Elizabet Sahtouris provided relevant information as to their personal views of the meaning of, and commitment to, voluntary simplicity. The data provided me with a clearer picture of the links between simple living and other values, how they are connected and flow from each other.

In summary, the data used to determine who “simple-lifers” are, to identify the values and principles of an Ethic of Simplicity, and to understand how internalizing this ethic affects individual behaviour, come from a host of sources that I have categorised in the following manner:

- 1- primary literary works, written by authors who claim to be “simple-lifers”, that deal directly with the topic, identifying voluntary simplicity by name either as a trend, a movement or an ethos (Elgin, 1981; Mongeau, 1985, 1998; Breen-Pierce, 2000, 2001; etc.);
- 2- primary websites whose authors claim to be “simple-lifers”, that deal directly with the topic, identifying voluntary simplicity by name either as a trend, a movement or an ethos and/or that offer services or guidance towards living more simply (See Appendix 1-A);
- 3- secondary literary sources comprised of authors for whom I have found no overt claim to be “simple-lifers” but rather who have identified or studied the phenomenon either intensively through qualitative studies (Craig-Lees and Hill, 2002; Shaw and Newholm, 2002) or literature studies (Etzioni, 1998) or extensively through surveys (Inglehart, 1999; Schor, 1995, 1997a, 1997b; Ray and Anderson);
- 4- secondary websites that deal with other issues such as ecology, anti-globalisation etc. but that contain references to the lifestyles and values of “simple-lifers” and possibly contain writings about the phenomenon (See Appendix 1-B);
- 5- tertiary literature sources that deal with other subjects or topics but that refer to voluntary simplicity as somehow related or relevant to their endeavour (Harman, 1998; Goodwin, Ackerman and Kiron, 1997; Brown, 1999, 2001; Ehrlich and Ehrlich, 1991, 1996; etc.);
- 6- personal contact and discussions with individuals either face to face or through Internet-based newsgroups and discussion groups (See Appendix 1-C).

C. Conclusion

It becomes clear, therefore, that “simple-lifers” number in the millions, even the billions if one follows Korten’s approach of including all *Sustainers*, those people around the world who live material lives that do not overly stress the capacities of the planet (see Conclusion). The potential of this force is not to be disregarded or summarily dismissed. Though they may disagree on the pragmatic considerations in the organisation of the group or not even know that there is “a group”, they nonetheless converge when it comes to the core concerns and values that define them. These values and concerns have provided a picture of a particular view of “the good life” and what I would call a “draft” of the preferred social organisation to achieve it. While many “simple-lifers” are active in groups promoting social change, they have recognised and accepted that social change passes through each and every individual human being and this is reflected in the personal choices they make about their lives. They believe you cannot ask for policy changes whether in governments or corporations if you are not willing to make fundamental changes in yourself. As Gandhi once said: “We must be the change we wish to see in the world” (M.K. Gandhi Institute for Non-violence, <http://www.gandhiinstitute.org/>). They are convinced this view is a necessary step not only to the continued existence of the human species into the foreseeable future, but a continuing existence that is in harmony both within the species and with the other elements that make up our universe.

It doesn't really matter what reasons have brought these individuals to the simple life. Whether it be the environment, concerns about economic globalisation, anti-consumerism or simply relief from a stressful life, the targets of their concerns are always the same: a socio-economic system that promotes excessive consumption, made possible by increasingly efficient and exploitative corporations, egged on by demanding financial markets and supported by economic theory out of touch with reality. The final straw is the propagation of this system across the face of the planet, with the help of "international capitalist agencies like the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO" (Wood, 1999, 118), at breakneck speed, disregarding all warning signs heeding to caution. These aspects of the current socio-economic system, they feel, are detrimental to the achievement of their goals of personal transformation and will be the subject of the following chapters.

CHAPTER 2

CONSUMERISM, CORPORATIONS AND ECONOMICS

A Simple-Lifer/Anti-consumerist Perspective/Critique of Capitalism

A. Introduction

“Simple-lifers” see the current capitalist system, whose inner processes require continued growth in consumption feeding an increasingly efficient production machine, as responsible for a number of social and environmental ills. These consequences of the system have prompted them to respond pragmatically with a reduction in their levels of consumption and/or a move to consumption patterns perceived as less socially and environmentally costly in the medium and long term. A number of them (Korten, 1996, 1999; Henderson, multiple references; Elgin, 1981; Mongeau, 1985, 1998; Schor, 1995, 1997, 1998; Baruch, 2001) have also become quite active in the social critique of the system and elaboration of alternatives. Other authors have shown a certain sympathy for the position of simple-lifers though I have not been able to determine their personal involvement in the lifestyle (Bello, 2001; Daly, 1977; Halstead and Cobb, 1996).

Concordant with the goals stated in the Introduction, this chapter is an attempt to bring together several disparate analyses of different parts of the system into an integrated vision that has prompted “simple-lifers” to disengage in various ways from the consumerist ideology that characterises the system. In order to provide the reader with a better understanding of the “simple-lifer” position it is necessary to elaborate, to a certain

extent, on how they see the system as having evolved to its modern form. The point of this chapter, therefore, is not to give the reader a detailed account of the historical development and the intricacies of the capitalist system or rather the type of capitalism that exists today in Western industrialised countries. Since capitalism has been the main subject of numerous important works, it is inevitable that the material presented here represents a somewhat simplistic and certainly partial view of this particular socio-economic system. The goal, here, is to provide an overview of those elements of the system and its evolution seen by “simple-lifers” as instrumental in understanding how the system basically works and why it should be seriously challenged. What interests us here more specifically is *their* perception of some of the historical and ideological background that has allowed the present form of capitalism to take shape. These views are important because they inform a basic set of ideas made available to, and to differing extents adopted by proponents of and adherents to the “simple-life” described previously. While there have been several critiques of the economic system throughout history by Marxists, Fabian Socialists, Papal Encyclicals, social gospel prophets and social democrats among others, these critics have been analysed thoroughly by others and will therefore not be dealt with in this work. In any event, in order to appreciate the scope of the changes in the way we organise industrial and commercial activities, we need to concentrate on more current critiques. The “culture of consumption”, the move of consumption to a central position in the lives of most Westerners, is also a relatively recent phenomenon and it can be more accurately addressed by actors on that same stage who can grasp the more recent psychological and sociological underpinnings of the methods used to create this culture.

The current critique is done on both the theoretical and pragmatic levels. On the theoretical level, economics is held to be fraught with faulty assumptions from concepts of the place and role of natural systems to understandings of human behaviour (Dowd, 2000; Hall et al., 2001). At a more pragmatic level, capitalism is challenged both as to the means it employs to achieve its desired objectives as well as to its results to date. The concept of a self-regulating free market is questioned. Korten, especially, views the current system as a parody of what a true market economy should be if constructed according to the assumptions and *caveats* of classical economist like Adam Smith. Its failings are seen as ranging from its major responsibility for the degradation of ecosystems, to not keeping its end of the social contract in such areas as producing more leisure and more security, especially as regards employment. Harry Shutt, a former senior researcher at the Economist Intelligence Unit, a division of the publishing group that publishes The Economist, unexpectedly supports many of Korten's critiques of the capitalist system as well as several of his conclusions as to the modifications needed to make the system fulfill its social role of providing "the mass of people with what they...would want if they had full knowledge of all the choices open to them" (1998, 219). This explicit denunciation of lack of information and transparency of the current system by a former member of its staunchest supporters is indicative of a state where the "status quo is manifestly untenable" (230).

The remainder of this chapter will expand this critique. After an overview of the growth of capitalism and an explanation of its principal characteristics, the discussion will be divided into three sections. The first part looks at the development of the

consumerist society, essentially how markets were developed to absorb the oversupply of increasingly efficient production systems. The second part involves a critique of the large, for-profit, publicly-traded corporations as tools of the capitalist system, how they participate in distorting markets and succeed in eliminating alternative conceptions of society to the point of threatening the democratic process. Finally, economics, the theoretical basis of capitalism, is questioned as to what is seen as an increasing gap between theory and reality as well as the continued social utility of its current models. Throughout the discussion, the alternatives or modifications needed to reinstate the legitimacy of the economic system as a tool for the welfare of society will be addressed. The conclusion will express “simple-lifers” concerns surrounding the radical changes that need to occur to successfully effectuate these transformations and the resistance that is bound to arise from those profiting from the status quo. To some extent, it takes on the scope of a Copernican revolution where fundamental hierarchical social structures are threatened. Shutt reminds us that

“it will come as no surprise to find that any suggestion that we can or should seek to evolve a more viable economic order in [profit-maximising capitalism’s] place will be dismissed as inherently utopian. For, as already emphasised many times, in contemporary Western society, as in any other throughout history, ‘the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas’, and therefore any suggestion that the status quo will need to undergo fundamental adjustment is bound to be portrayed as eccentric” (1998, 229).

B. The “Simple-lifer” View of the Development of Capitalism

1. Defining and Contextualising Capitalism

At its most basic, capitalism can be described as an economic system in which the means of production and distribution are held privately (rather than by the State) by individuals or groups looking to make a profit. The economic sector interacts with other social sectors such as politics, religion and education among others. This interactive quality, especially as it concerns politics or government has, through the years, as societies have become more complex and as they have also become interactive with other societies, made the workings of capitalism increasingly difficult to fathom (Sachs, 1998). The critical literature, for the most part, agrees that there is no pure form of that capitalism which is generally identified as *laissez-faire or free market capitalism* in which the other sectors of society, especially government, do not interfere whatsoever with the workings of commerce.

The capitalism of the Western World referred to in this thesis is, in fact, a pot-pourri of socio-economic systems based on similar premises but that vary on a wide spectrum of interactivity of the different social sectors. Thus the social capitalism of Sweden is different from that of Canada and both differ from the more “market-directed” capitalism of the United States. The kind of system that takes shape depends greatly on socio-historical factors that have brought societies to respond to specific political and

economic needs and react based on values forged through centuries by culture, religion, and other traditions. German capitalism, for example, is very much shaped by Lutheran concepts of work as vocation and post-war cooperative efforts among the different sectors of society (Aktouf, 1996, 375). Wood (1999) explains how capitalism evolved quite differently in France and in England because, in part, of varying social structures.

2. The Historical Roots of Modern Capitalism

The capitalism that is challenged here is often portrayed by “simple-lifers” as being born out of key socio-historical events rather than as a “natural” progression of human aims, desires and activity. This section presents those aspects of the historical development of the current capitalist system that are seen as relevant to the “simple-lifers” view and that are needed to shape an understanding of their perception of the system’s failings and faulty assumptions. The following, therefore, represents their critical perception of historical relevance and is also important for those who would understand their “story”. The discussion, in this chapter, will limit itself to the explicitly Western portions of that history. In the next chapter, where globalisation is addressed, we will expand by adding to the discussion Western capitalism’s evolution in contact with other parts of the world.

The capitalism of our textbooks is a fairly recent phenomenon and, until recently, one limited in scope to a particular area of the globe. “What we call capitalism did not fully emerge until the Renaissance in Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries”

(Shaw, 1999). The concept of the profit motive, which is a major trait of capitalism, was “only scattered through Renaissance times and largely absent in most Eastern civilisations” (Heilbroner in Shaw, 1999). “Even those who most emphatically insist on the [modern capitalist] system’s roots in human nature would not claim that it existed before the early modern period, and then only in Western Europe... few would say it existed in earnest before the sixteenth or seventeenth century, or perhaps even the nineteenth, when it matured into its industrial form (Wood, 1999, 3).

a. Industrialisation and Commodification

It was industrialisation in the Western world of the 18th century, however, that provided the true impetus for the development of capitalism. The development of the technology that heralded the industrial era had two important effects on the economy. First, in combination with the British “enclosures movement”, technology moved the locus of economic value from rural to urban areas, from land to manufacturing; a corollary development of this was the relatively rapid move of productive activity to urban centres fed by the throngs of dispossessed peasants now looking for wages to ensure their survival (Dowd, 2000, 21). With this move came a dislocation of rural communities and the elimination of traditional values built around cyclical agrarian life. “The earth...became commodified into a collection of resources to be exploited. Human life became commodified into labour, or work time, valued according to supply and demand” (Loy, 2000). Increasingly, humans were seen as being “outside nature”, which is to be tamed, controlled and put at the service of humanity in its quest to appropriate for

itself natural resources and systems. Estimates to date suggest we have already appropriated for our use about forty percent of natural regenerative systems leaving only sixty percent for all the other functions natural systems perform (Hawken, 1994, 22).

To this day, this shift in values is reflected, for example, in our lack of understanding and appreciation of the land that grows our food. Through the centuries, we have become increasingly dislocated from the source of our life and well-being. In his 1999 book The Post-Corporate World, Korten explains how the capitalist enterprise has gradually removed humans ever farther from life-giving processes. Any wilderness is seen as an undeveloped area waiting to be civilised. Much of the best agricultural land is carted away to make room for concrete basements of suburban homes or paved over as parking lots for shopping malls; farmers' children dream of the day when they can leave for the city and get well-remunerated jobs; and governments have to surreptitiously make us pay a price that approximates the true value of our food through subsidies to farmers, presumably because we appear unwilling to appreciate food's and thus farming's real value. The end result has been a shift in the basis for the elaboration of social values from a cyclical form to a perception of the world as more linear in nature. In The Ecology of Commerce, Hawken explains that, in this context, values of nurturing, regeneration, restoration and diversity are replaced by those of maximum exploitation and production. Forests are seen as static stocks of lumber and paper, oceans as inextinguishable stocks of seafood and soils as perpetual providers of nourishment. They have no inherent value. Under a profit-maximising exploitation system, human

engagement with these elements of nature lies in finding ways to squeeze as much out of them in as short a time as possible.

b. Industrialisation and Capitalisation

The second consequence of the new technological developments is seen as the element that has given modern corporations the power they hold today. This was the need for large sums of capital to build the machinery and the buildings to house them. “The large sums of capital necessary could be raised only through a corporate form of business, in which risk and potential profit were distributed among numerous investors” (Shaw, 1999). This was thus a determining factor in the formation of the type of capitalism (corporate) that we live with today. As technological marvels grew in size, so that today we have trucks bigger than houses and worth millions of dollars each being used in operations to dig up the earth’s riches, so did the power of the corporate structures needed to dream up and produce such behemoths...to the point that, of the 100 largest economies in the world today, more than half are not nations but corporations (Ellwood, 2001, 55).

It is not necessary, at this point, to trace the various legal decisions that have given corporations the power they hold today over much of society. A few of these are discussed in the next section and David Korten in his seminal work When Corporations Rule the World (1996) quite adequately describes this acquired power. Suffice it to say, here, that though, in theory, capitalists clamour for reduced government intervention they

have, in fact, gleaned their strength through the decades (mostly since the end of the 19th century) from a close association, some might say collusion, with legislators. Even today, business and government work very closely in a sometimes uneasy relationship. The discomfort comes from the fact that governments are elected as guardians of the collective welfare whereas the closeness of their relationship to business often gives the appearance of a bias towards the well-being of corporations, their owners and managers (Barlow and Clarke 2001; Gélinas, 2000). Much effort, therefore, goes into making those ends synchronous if not synonymous so as to get the support of populations. Huge public relations campaigns by corporations and whole industries are supported by government incentives and policies linking their economic fates. Simplistically, perhaps the most generalized way of doing that has been the linking of individuals to corporate fates through the employment contract (implicit or explicit). Another has been to allow the integration into the corporate finance structure of huge pools of public funds such as pension plans, so that not only is one's current fate linked to the corporation but so is one's future survival through one's pension plan. Even *public* employees' futures are now closely tied into the success of the private corporate system through their pension plans. Opening retirement plans to foreign investments also ensures a vested interest in spreading the system across the globe. Policy changes guide practice in desired directions. In a few years, for example, the allowed foreign investment content in vehicles such as RRSPs has increased from 10 to 30%.

3. Capitalism in the 20th Century

a. Expansion

Gélinas sees the 20th century as the apogee of the capitalist system. Beaud (1983) speaks of “Capitalism’s Great Leap Forward” from 1945 on and Dowd (2000, x) refers to “behemoth capitalism unbound”. In spite of this, interestingly, the century started with strong government intervention, in attempts at breaking up the huge trusts formed at the end of the 19th century and ended in Seattle in November 1999, with an impressive popular revolt against corporate values and their social infringement. In the interval, the capitalist ideology has made great strides in gaining world-wide acceptance especially after the demise of the Soviet Bloc and its forays into Stateist, centrally planned economies. This has been a century of expansion. It started with the discovery and development of petroleum and electricity as the main energy sources. Combined with the steel boom and the development of the chemical industry, a veritable second industrial revolution occurred (Gélinas, 2000, 29-30). What followed was growth in the manufacturing industry of such scope as to produce incredible surpluses of goods. We will see later how markets were “created” to absorb this supply. The middle decades of the century represent the unfolding of the American Economic Dream: unemployment was low, salaries were high, energy was cheap and plentiful, as were raw resources, and new products were coming out daily increasingly promising to eventually create a utopian leisure society.

b. Shattered Expectations

Unfortunately, as Korten and Breen-Pierce remind us, the latter part of the century didn't quite live up to these expectations for most people. While the economy (GDP) has continued to grow and new dot.com millionaires speckle the countryside (fewer since the second part of 2001), the fate of the average North American isn't quite what was promised. People are working longer hours than they were in the 1950s. Adjusted salaries have fallen back to 1960s levels. Most households feel they need double incomes to meet their needs (Breen-Pierce, 2001). Between 1980 and 1993, Fortune 500 firms reduced their workforce by 4.4 million while during the same period "their sales have increased by 1.4 times, assets by 2.3 times and CEO compensation by 6.1 times" (Korten, 2000). Business now faces a barrage of critiques centred on its failure to meet its end of what was perceived as a social contract. These critiques range from issues of employment guarantees, community dislocation, collusion for price fixing, corruption, collusion with governments, all the way to destruction of the environment. Major environmentally and humanly destructive events such as the well-publicized Exxon Valdez oil spill and the Union Carbide Bhopal disaster have served to fan the flames. Paul Hawken's (1994, 3) statement that "[t]here is no polite way to say that business is destroying the world" reflects the position of a growing segment of society. Little wonder, given this situation, that occasions where governments are seen as collaborating with business have become hotbeds of protest; witness in the last two years the protests in Seattle, Quebec City, Washington, Windsor, Montreal, Prague, Genoa and the list goes on.

c. Financial Capitalism

Another phase in the development of capitalism that is important to understand because of the systemic power it has acquired, has been identified as *financial capitalism*. There have been two main incarnations of financial capitalism. The first, analyzed by Shaw (1999), refers to the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th: “As competition intensified, an industry’s survival came to depend on its financial strength to reduce prices and either eliminate or absorb competition. To shore up their assets, industries engaged in *financial capitalism*, characterized by pools, trusts and holding companies, and an interpenetration of banking, insurance and industrial interests”. For Shaw, however, government reaction to this phenomenon created *state welfare capitalism* in which “the government plays an active role in regulating economic activities in an effort to smooth out the boom-and-bust pattern of the business cycle”, a condition he sees as enduring to this day. He appears to disregard the renewed tendency in the latter part of the 20th century towards exactly that corporate behaviour that he identifies as existing at the start of the century.

Korten (1996, 1999, 2000), on the other hand, analyzing the current situation, is more critical. For him, the *financial capitalism* of the end of the 20th century is pathological. He uses the term to describe a condition in which the whole system is controlled by a very large and powerful “financial sector” and where even large manufacturing corporations “function increasingly as instrumentalities of the global

financial system”. Like economist Hazel Henderson (2001, April; 1998) and others, he sees the modern financial market as one huge electronic and global casino where the mot d’ordre is speculation, where huge sums of money are transferred daily, taking advantage of minute variations in commodity prices, stocks, currencies, futures and options and where nations’ economic fates can be decided in hours by “market” forces.

Corporations’ and even governments’ solvency can be affected almost instantly as was seen in the Mexican peso crisis in the early 1990s. Korten describes a paper economy overlying the “real” economy (where goods are made and sold and services such as health care are offered) but almost completely disconnected from its realities. He reiterates William Greider’s argument in his 1997 book One World Ready or Not: The Manic Logic of Capitalism: “The financial markets and the owners of capital become ‘increasingly purified in purpose – detached from social concerns and abstracted from the practical realities of commerce’ and develop expectations regarding the returns invested saving ought to earn that increasingly ‘diverge from the underlying economic reality’” (Korten, 1999, 51). Managers of corporations are forced to reorganize their operations so as to be in synch with the short time cycles of speculators. As Jim Stanford, economist at the CAW (Canadian Auto Workers Union) explains: Individual investors and investment fund managers or other investors, in their quest to increase the return on their investment, will look for telltale signs of share movement and will move their money accordingly without realising that their move may affect a corporation that is providing local employment and other local financial activity that is indirectly beneficial to them. Inadvertently, “individual investors” may actually be financing their profits with their own unperceived losses as employees or taxpayers (1999).

Very little of the money exchanged on the global financial markets ends up in corporate coffers. Some estimates are as high as 90% of trades on the stock market being unrelated to the real or productive economy except as perceptions of confidence. While in some cases this can reflect confidence that the company will do well or meet its social contract, this is not necessarily the case. Often, it is simply confidence that somewhere down the line, someone will be willing to pay more for the shares than the buyer did. “According to 1993 [U.S.] Federal Reserve figures, equity financing raised through the sale of new shares contributed only 4 percent of the total financial capital of U.S. public corporations. The rest came from borrowing (14 percent) and retained earnings (82 percent)” (Korten, 1999, 54).

The “casino effect” may be even more evident in the realm of currency speculation. This is perhaps the area where detachment of “paper” from the real economy of goods and services is the most evident in its speculative form. Dowd (2000) shows the dramatic increases in currency transaction in the last fifteen years of the 20th century as well as the corresponding increase in its speculative character. In 1986, “*daily* currency transactions were \$186 *billion* and that, significantly, no more than 10 percent of that was to finance real investment or trade” (185, italics in original). He goes on to state that these numbers had progressed and regressed respectively to \$800 billion and 3 percent by the early 1990s and to \$2,000 billion and well under 2 percent by the end of that decade (ibid.).

The capitalist system is increasingly controlled by financial and speculative interests, distant both from the processes of business themselves and the geographical locales in which they operate and on which they have tremendous effects. In reaction, people have come to desire more accountability and transparency, something not inherent in the current system. Veblen had pointed out this same problematic characteristic as far back as 1904. In his discussion of Veblen's The Theory of Business Enterprise, Smith (1998) states:

Capital in business corporations was an object of trade. Ownership and management were, as a consequence, widely separated. The links made by Adam Smith between the enterprise of the business man, the efficiency of industry and the good of the community no longer applied. The business man could end up rich while the corporation he had invested in went into liquidation. The community bore the expenses of his wheeler-dealing and suffered the ensuing loss of industrial production (87).

Little wonder then, as we will see, that close monitoring of and control over capital accumulation and flows are central to the "simple-lifer" rethinking of the capitalist/corporate system. Upon this background canvas of capitalist development we now draw a more precise picture of the main elements and workings of the system that are brought into question

C. Simple-lifer Critique of the Current Version of the Capitalist System

While supporters of capitalism often refer to what they perceive as natural and innately human traits in support of their ideology⁹, “simple-lifers”, on the other hand, see the modern incarnation of capitalism as made up of characteristics that often conflict with human traits and values. For example, the competitive nature of persons referred to copiously by capitalism, abstracts people’s complementary trait of cooperation and even altruism. Where proponents of capitalism often depict it as a “natural and even inevitable evolution” of human socio-economic relationships, “simple-lifers” tend to perceive the system as socially constructed, mostly by an oligarchy, and therefore subject to manipulation in the interest of some and possibly to the detriment of others. The range of positions within “simple-lifer” ranks, as regards this issue, is quite broad. Some, like Korten, believe that the eventual outcome must be the elimination of the “for profit, publicly-traded corporation” and, quite foreseeably, those institutions, like the Bretton Woods Trio, that support and empower them. Others, like Khor, prefer less radical approaches at modifying the existing system to make it more amenable to human needs. Shutt (1998), for his part, essentially calls for a quasi-total dismantling of a system that has outlived its usefulness and is increasingly dangerous in its consequences for a world that is radically different from what it was only a century ago. A more detailed discussion of these positions will appear in the closing chapter.

⁹ See Greider’s reference to an “adventurous spirit” and “acquisitive desires” in *One World, Ready or Not*, p.31. See also Wood’s extensive critique of capitalism as the “natural evolution” of Western societies in *The Origin of Capitalism* (1999).

1. The Development of the Consumerist Ideology

The most virulent critique of capitalism by “simple-lifers” is the creation of a consumption ethic and the transformation of citizens into not much more than consumers. This has been instrumental in shaping their position regarding the importance of consumption levels. They believe it is important to understand the process of this creation in order to demystify it and allow individuals to disengage from it by seeing through its manipulative techniques. It is important for them to understand the system in order to break through the socio-political premise (as emphasized by our politicians since the dramatic events in New York on September 11th, 2001), that to be a good and loyal citizen, one must also be an avid consumer. This understanding is also important for them if “lifestyles” that have a chance of saving the planet from environmental destruction are to be seen as satisfying ways to live. Finally, it is important, they say, because it has already been demonstrated (Durning, 1999) that beyond a certain level, increases in consumption can only create dissatisfaction and so the consumerist myth must be debunked to allow people and societies to engage in activities that actually do bring satisfaction and happiness.

a. Economic Model of Households and Firms

One of the three systemic imperatives of capitalism is expansion¹⁰ (Dowd, 2000, 220). The means of achieving expansion are fairly limited. Dowd identifies four: 1) increase in consumption, 2) exports or increases in exports, 3) substantial technological change and 4) increase in consumer debt (11). The last three are evidently directly related to consumption. When national markets mature and are saturated, one needs to find new markets. Technological change allows for increases in production or the elaboration of new and enticing products, and of course, when incomes stagnate and/or production increases dramatically, future income must be mortgaged.

Though the tools and processes of market transactions have become increasingly complex, in effect, the basic economic model that describes the system and measures expansion is quite simple. In that model, you have two actors: households and firms. The interaction between them occurs on two levels. On the first level, households provide firms with land, labour and capital. Firms provide households with goods and services. On the second level, households purchase goods and services from firms who return that money to households in the form of wages, profits etc.

¹⁰ The other two are exploitation (of the masses) and oligarchic rule. The first is seen by Adam Smith and David Ricardo as normal and necessary where workers must be kept at subsistence wages “only to keep them alive, reproducing and working” (page 8). The second Dowd sees as necessarily coming from capitalism’s essential stratifications of income, wealth and power.

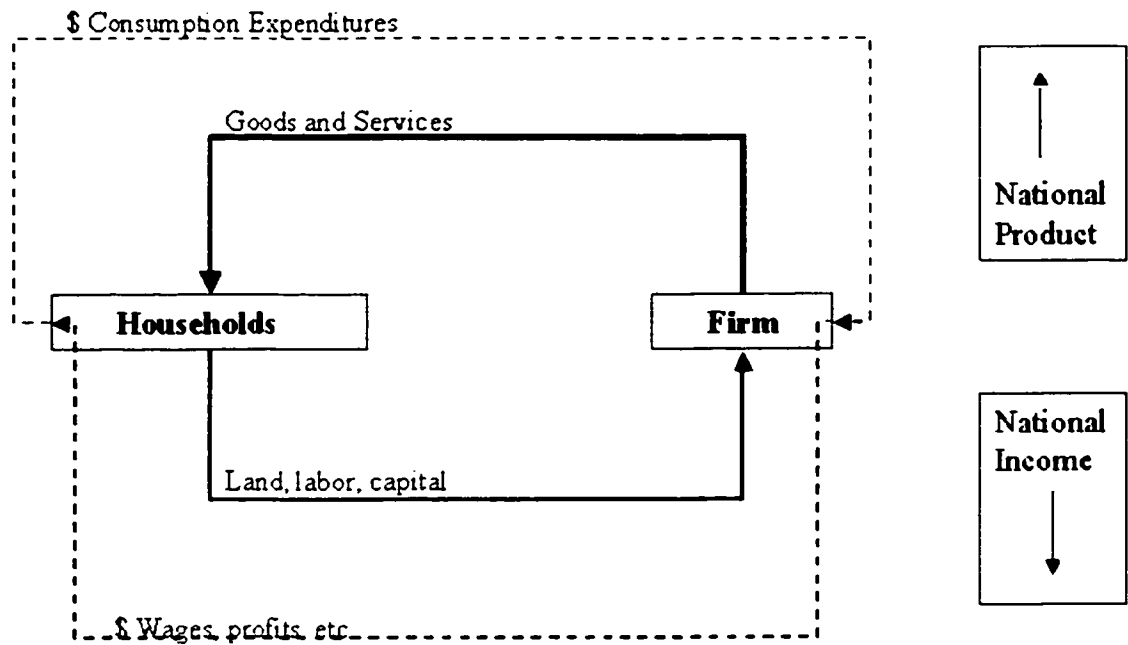


Figure 2.1 Drawn from Hall et al. (2001)

In order to find out how well the economy is doing, one need only add up all the transactions occurring in the loop of this “perpetual motion machine”; the higher the number, the healthier the economy.

Consumption can be increased as population increases but if this is not occurring, the economy can also be prompted by creating new technology that produces more with fewer people and by somehow making existing populations consume more and more. In the early decades of the past century, industrial technology and management/production methods greatly improved production output. Manufacturers were actually putting out more goods than existing populations were consuming. This, of course, brought down the prices of goods and reduced profits. The problem became framed not as “too much produced”, but as “not enough consumed”. Producers had essentially two choices. One,

reduce production, but that would have meant laying off workers and thus reducing even more the number of goods that would be bought since people would have less income. The second option was to find ways to make people consume more. Numerous works have been published on the development of markets in the U.S. in the early and mid-decades of the 20th century. They involve complex psychological and communication theories whose full development is beyond the scope of this work¹¹. However, it is important for the conclusions to be drawn towards the end of this paper, to understand the mechanism used to “create markets” for American overproduction.

b. The Creation of Markets

There were possibly a few ways of creating markets to absorb industrial overproduction. Henry Ford’s way was to increase workers’ wages so that they would be able to afford his cars. Of course, this technique by itself isn’t sustainable because in the first place, cost of production is also increased. Increasing income doesn’t automatically guarantee that people will start buying new products. Other methods need to be found that support this tactic. One answer is finding ways to create a change in attitude and so a whole new industry was created to change thrifty Americans into consumers. Marketing and its operative arm, advertising, rapidly became a growth industry. The goal here is not to do an intensive analysis of the advertising industry and its merits or demerits. This has already been done quite ably by such authors as Velasquez and Gaibraith among others.

¹¹ See McGrane, Bernard, The Ad and the Id: Sex, Death and Subliminal Advertising, an educational video on subliminal advertising; Ewen, Stuart, All Consuming Images, for a discussion of Pavlovian psychology in social education through advertising.

In fact, the question of the usefulness of advertising for consumers has been debated as far back as Veblen and Hobson (in Smith, 1990, 87, 93). The intention here, is simply to allow adepts of simplification to critique some of the methods used by the industry in its supportive role of the capitalist edifice. The message of these critiques is important to people who want to reduce their consumption since it shows them how they are being influenced, a necessary step to disengaging from the influence.

Large sums of money were deployed to determine ways of finding out what consumers wanted, but also, and especially, means of getting them to purchase the goods that were already being produced. These amounts have kept growing every year. It is estimated that in 1998, global advertising expenses reached \$437 billion, up from \$237 billion 10 years before. Over \$150 billion dollars were spent on advertising in the U.S. alone in 1998 (Korten, 1999; Durning, 1999). As these amounts continue to rise, these means are increasingly seen as inordinate and bordering on the unfair since individuals often have no idea of the investment and the means deployed for turning them into consumers. Neither are they equipped to easily counter the influence of advertising because of the asymmetry of power. Even smaller organisations are no match for big advertising money and their lobbies. Adbusters, for example, has been refused advertising space in print media for fear of offending larger advertisers. PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) was turned down when it applied for billboard space, in Western Canada, for an ad decrying the living and dying conditions of farm animals.

But the amount of money invested in making people buy products isn't the only sore point with the critics. They also contend that the nature of advertising has changed from informative to manipulative but especially, that the ubiquity of advertising is now such that it has a strong social influence through continuous bombardment of the same images that, because of their cumulative effect, become confused with reality. Jean Kilbourne (2000) explains that individual ads may have no direct effect on individuals – you won't run out and buy a product such as a television set because you've just seen an ad – but being subjected to thousands of ads every day eventually embeds in our psyche the powerful messages of consumption.

i. From Rational Utility Maximiser to Impulse Shopper

Economists, who provide the theoretical foundations of capitalism, have set up theoretical models based on the individual as a “rational utility maximiser”. The 18th century, which was dominated by utilitarian thought, provided fertile ground for the elaboration of a capitalist ideology wherein society is seen as being made up of individuals seeking their own personal ends. In addition, these self-interested individuals are motivated to action by the pursuit of pleasure maximisation and pain minimisation. Using reason, they will calculate which course of action will meet these goals. Advertising in 19th and early 20th century America was faithful to this tenet, and so, most ads talked about the product, its qualities, its price and described how it could be useful to the potential consumer. The idea was to differentiate your product from your competitor's or to introduce a new product to the marketplace (Ewen, 1999).

The Power of the Image

In the 1930s however, as selling extra production became more urgent, we see the ads changing. They now start talking about lifestyles, appealing to emotions of pride, of safety, etc. Increasingly, throughout the 20th century, ads move away from the product itself to appeal to the consumer at another level: the unconscious (Ibid.). Television greatly facilitated this move since the target can now be addressed through images rather than words. Modern communications theory tells us that images are much more effective at motivating or convincing people than words. If a consumer is presented with an argument for a product, for example, it engages him/her at the intellectual or rational level. The words have to be absorbed and then analysed for the idea to be understood. That sets off a whole process of evaluation of the quality (veracity) of the information provided. However, the brain doesn't process images the same way. The image can work on a symbolic level where it is most effective but, even at a more primary level, the brain immediately associates an image with reality and doesn't react to it in the same way it reacts to words (Pollay, 1986).

Preying on Fears and Insecurities

Interestingly, after what we have seen of economics' understanding of consumer motivation, consumption, the fuel that stokes modern capitalism's engine (growth), is promoted to the modern consumer through feelings or emotions not reason. It seems that

the marketing and advertising industry understood human motivations much more quickly than economists did. Much of the advertising works in two ways. On the one hand, it is geared to prey on and amplify existing weaknesses, fears and insecurities, especially those of social acceptance (beauty, fear of ageing etc.). In order to sell a cream that is said to remove facial wrinkles, for example, what is emphasised are the negative effects of aging and a corresponding heightening of the fear of aging (Kilbourne, 2000). On the other hand, with the help of technology such as image enhancement, it creates standards that are unachievable (poreless skin) and then promotes products that are supposed to allow you to meet these standards, fill your needs and eliminate the fears. The promise of satisfaction of desires and needs actually creates dissatisfaction on two fronts. First, the elaboration and promotion of new and improved products create dissatisfaction with what you now have (the newest car model, the latest computer). Second, as products fail to perform as promised, this can amplify the feeling of inadequacy (wrinkle removers, weight loss programs, longer hitting golf clubs, etc.) (Kilbourne, 2000).

Consumer Credit and the Citizen-consumer

In the mid-1950s, another problem arose. As production became even more efficient and fewer people were needed for the same output, there was less money available for the purchase of these goods. As mentioned earlier, raising wages would only increase the costs of production and therefore could not be a long-term solution. Americans had already been converted from economisers, for whom thrift was a virtue,

into consumers, for whom self-worth was closely associated to material possessions or the visible ability to acquire them. Another means of making production available had to be found and the answer came in the form of consumer credit (Durning, 1999).

Mortgaging future income soon became the norm rather than the exception in North America. After all, what was needed was not only for the American citizen to consume more and more products; consumption had to become a way of life. “Our enormously productive economy...demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction, in consumption... We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced and discarded at an ever increasing rate” (Victor Lebow, American retailing analyst, in Durning, 1999). What eventually evolved was a complete social edifice built on the concept of debt. Debt has allowed us to mortgage not only our own future but our children’s as well. Corporations and other institutions finance their operations through debt, as do governments and individuals. In order to keep paying the interest on this debt, while new debt can be put into circulation by banks to offset some of the old, eventually the burden returns to the “real” economy where goods and services are produced. This is another factor that forces constant growth upon this system. You need additional growth to pay the debt that allows you to infringe on the future (Korten, 1999, 34-5).

What Lebow is calling for, in effect, is a radical shift in human beings’ perceived relationships to their environment and to other people. The whole earth and its resources become something to consume. The earth is there to provide people with the materials

needed in the quest for fulfilment. Studies have shown that when people attempt to gauge their materially-based satisfaction levels, this is not done by determining how much money one has but rather how much of it one has in relation to others around him (Durning, 1999). In the anonymity of our large cities and large workplaces, one's value (personal and social) is expressed through one's material possessions, an easily discernible standard (Mongeau, 1998, 73). The other becomes a yardstick against which to measure one's success and, in a world of scarce resources, a competitor for those resources. If those resources are closely identified to either your self-worth or your way of life or both, then you may be willing to go to extremes to preserve that. This is exactly what President Bush said about the Gulf War. It was a war to preserve the American way of life (Jhally et al., 1991). What he actually meant was that we needed the energy of the Kuwaiti oil fields in order to support our level of consumption. And because our self-worth and self-definition is based, to a great extent, on our material possessions, because we see others either as competitors for, or providers of, the resources needed to maintain our lifestyles, we were able to put up with the atrocities that we saw and heard in the news during that war. What other atrocities will we turn a blind eye to, or even participate in, as resources such as oil and water become scarcer and more expensive and thus increasingly available only to the privileged few?

c. *The Limits of Individualism and Competitiveness*

In its defence, proponents tell us the capitalist economy has made the U.S. the mightiest power on the globe, has improved standards of living for all, and has served to

uphold a free and democratic way of life. “Simple-lifers”, while acquiescing to the first point, do so more hesitantly for the second point because they challenge the price at which that has been achieved and our capacity to maintain it in the long run. That price, they maintain, has actually been a reduction in quality of life at many levels. While the environmental issues surrounding quality of life are fairly evident and will be discussed more extensively in Chapter 4, there are others, related to the question of work, that are also central to “simple-lifer’s” concerns and have driven many of them to re-evaluate their relationships either to their employers or even to the concept of work itself.

Increased emphasis on principles of economic efficiency and productivity has meant longer hours for a majority of workers. Technology has made workers available 24 hours a day seven days a week through portable computers, cellular phones and/or pagers. Shutt (1998) explains how aspects of the old feudal system that capitalism apparently supplanted are still evident in today’s society. It is evident from his argument that the current employer/employee relationship, in many ways, is reminiscent of the ancient noble/serf one. If one carefully examines the employer/employee relationship, it quickly becomes evident that unless the employment contract specifies otherwise, the number of hours that an employer can demand of an employee is only limited by the number of hours that other employees or potential employees are willing to give him. What this means is that, in many instances, in spite of the appearance of a regular work schedule, if the needs of the corporation are such that overtime or weekend work is needed, the employer can call on employees for that time. Greider (1997) then explains how current labour markets would allow workers in only a few privileged sectors to be in

a comfortable and secure enough situation to refuse. In other words, the situation could be interpreted to mean that the employer generally “allows” employees some private time (often because he has been coerced into it by legislation) that he can call upon at his discretion.

In many cases, this constant availability has put additional stress on family relationships and on the health (mental and physical) of individuals. Nineteen ninety-eight was the first year in which group insurance claims for non-physical ailments surpassed physical ones. The ILO, in a research paper on work-related stress, reports that in certain countries, such as Finland and Germany, “early retirement due to mental health difficulties, in particular depression, has been increasing, and mental health difficulties are the most common cause of disability pensions” (ILO, 2000). In fact, Wright (2000) states that, as national income grows, so does the number of people suffering from serious psychopathology. More people become chronically depressed and the suicide rate often rises.

In addition to availability, increased efficiency has also meant added mobility of the workforce. Not only can your employer call on you whenever he wants, but also wherever he wants. This has resulted in dislocated communities, where fewer long-term ties are established. Sennett explains that people move in and out of bedroom communities sprawling around urban centres, having barely met their neighbours. Quite often, their social life is centred on the office rather than the community in which they reside. This has meant a change in the nature and quality of relationships. It has become

harder to establish long-term friendships that have traditionally been seen as playing an important role in development of self-worth and self-esteem and in reported levels of happiness (Wright 2000; Sennett, 1998). Sennett adds that this has been true not only for the workers themselves but also for their children for whom this may be even more important. Several studies have indicated the difficulties couples have in managing dual-careers. Mobility has meant increased difficulty in dealing with this situation. It is not always easy to decide how to calculate priorities and precedence in a couple where both work, especially when self-definition has increasingly been identified with one's work. This can certainly be seen as an additional factor in increasing divorce rates. In a study of business, professional and entrepreneurial women in Wichita, Kansas, sociologist Susan Williams discovered that dual career issues were a factor in the divorce of 61% of her respondents (Williams, no date).

As for the third point concerning democracy, the employer/employee relationship described above has also taken its toll on the concept of citizenship, a fundamental democratic principle. The lack of identification with and sense of belonging to the community has, in addition, eroded this concept of citizenship and removed the sense of individual social responsibility that is being increasingly transferred to the corporate entity with which individuals identify. What this has meant is that, increasingly, the concept of citizenship applies to corporations rather than individuals. From Sennett's arguments, we understand that the individuals who do get involved in the political process do so increasingly within the context of their role as members of corporate entities. As such, the requests they make on the political and legislative sectors are

oriented to the benefit of the corporation, which is increasingly identified with that of the employee if not of the social whole; a reinforcement of the old saying “What’s good for GM is good for America” (Sennett, 1998).

Glassman, in his discussion of the realignment of the class structure in capitalist societies, explains that the corporate dependent individual is less prone to political outspokenness. He states that a good proportion of the “old middle class” was made up of small entrepreneurs and shopkeepers, gradually displaced by megastores and franchises or chains. “The key to the difference is that the old middle class was independent economically, and, therefore, outspoken politically, while the new middle class is ‘locked’ into corporate, service or administrative bureaucracies, and thus, not independent economically, and hence less outspoken and less clear in their political views” (2000, 6). He then asks whether this latter group, as the new majority, will be able to “generate new ideologies, programs, and policies in society” (Ibid.).

Members of the economic elite themselves admit to the threat to democracy. Soros observes: “Although I have made a fortune in the financial markets, I now fear that the untrammelled intensification of laissez-faire capitalism and the spread of market values into all areas of life is endangering our open and democratic society” (1997).

d. *The Limits of Collectivism and Cooperation*

Another problem stemming from the basic capitalist ideology of individualism and competitiveness is the capacity of these characteristics to curtail efforts at improving the current problematic situations we face. “Simple-lifers” thus strive to nurture and live by collective values and cooperative effort to resolve our pressing problems of environmental degradation and social disruption. However, the answer does not lie in building a social structure based strictly on these values either. The recent historical evidence does not support any supposition that this would succeed any better than capitalism. What appears to be needed at this level is a recognition of human complexity in that all these elements (competition/cooperation, greed/altruism, individualism/collectivism) are present within the human psyche. Social Darwinism neglects the cooperative aspect of the gregarious human. The communist experience of the USSR abstracted people’s needs for creativity and individuality. “It is not just collective values that need to be struggled for, but collective values that recognize individual rights and individual creativity. There are many repressive collective movements already in existence - from our own home-grown Christian fundamentalists to the Islamic zealots of the Taliban in Afghanistan” (Jhally, No Date). One might see here the wisdom of “simple-lifers” who try to keep their movement as diversified and diffuse as possible, avoiding the setting up of hierarchical structures. Although there are several charismatic figures in the group, they tend to shy away from organisational structure that might bring the movement to coalesce and become faddish or subject to the “guru syndrome”.

2. Predominance of the Corporation

Shaw (1999) identifies four “key features” he sees as core to all capitalist systems: “the existence of companies, the profit motive, competition and private property.” Where the last three are fairly familiar and stem from concepts of classical economics dating back several centuries, the predominance of the “corporate” characteristic as it exists today would have been less familiar to early economists. Today however, it might be agreed that one of the most predominant traits of all of our modern forms of capitalism is the preponderant place taken within them by large corporations (see especially Korten, 1996). It is also evident that the power and qualities acquired by these corporations through the years have largely contributed to making the system what it is today. This aspect is surely one of the major issues in the controversy surrounding the adequacy of the current economic system to meet social needs or conform to social expectations of a growing number of citizens. The controversy appears to stem mainly from two sources related to corporate power: corporate size and corporate legal status.

Much of the argument used by mainstream economics to support the validity of the current system is based on a position supposedly elaborated by Adam Smith. More specifically, they maintain that the capitalist market system is self-regulating through the medium of competition, which ensures that greedy racketeers do not gouge consumers and producers remain efficient. In principle, if one businessperson overcharges for a good or produces a shabby product, someone else will come along who will produce a

better product or undercut the former's price and take away his or her clientele. (Levitt, 1983)

Critics maintain, however, that Smith foresaw the possibility of the current situation and that, in fact, he elaborated on several traits that were necessary for the system to function properly. Korten, for example, refers to two very important points as regards competition and complete information availability for all participants. One, consumers need to be cognisant of all the factors necessary for making a rational purchase decision (prices, quality, components etc.). In our complex world, where hundreds of similar products battle for our attention and where products or their components are often made halfway around the world or behind inaccessible doors, it is increasingly difficult for the average person to be an "informed" consumer. Two, competitors must also have access to information. For Korten, this implies that there can be no trade secrets (Korten, 1999, 38).

a. Corporate Influence Through Size

i. Reduces Competition

Korten observes that the size of business enterprises is central to Smith's argument concerning competition. Smith was quite specific in his statement that firms in competition ought not be so large as to be able to affect prices (through monopolies, oligopolies or other types of collusion) or to influence the market. "Smith...opposed any

form of economic concentration on the ground that it distorts the market's natural ability to establish a price that provides a fair return on land, labor, and capital; to produce a satisfactory outcome for both buyers and sellers; and to optimally allocate society's resources" (Korten, 1996, 74). As mentioned previously, the beginning of the 20th century saw legislative attempts at reducing the size of corporations in order to limit their social power and to ensure that consumers would not be abused. Towards the end of the 1900s however, government attitude seems to be almost totally reversed. Other than the Microsoft controversy and the (softening) position of the Canadian government on bank mergers, governments seem to be encouraging corporate mergers and acquisitions in order for national firms to become more competitive on the global market. Korten argues:

“Any industry in which five firms control 50 percent or more of the market is considered by economists to be highly monopolistic. *The Economist* magazine recently reported that five firms control more than 50 percent of the *global* market in the following industries: consumer durables, automotive, airlines, aerospace, electronic components, electrical and electronic, and steel. Five firms control over 40 percent of the global market in oil, personal computers and – especially alarming for its consequences on public debate on these very issues – media (Korten, 2000).

ii. Facilitates Externalisation of Costs

As we have discussed, the goal of the capitalist enterprise is the quest for profits. The current Western version of capitalism, especially with the proliferation of the publicly-traded corporation, emphasises the need not only to make profits, but to maximize them. The normal process to achieve this is to reduce the costs of production as much as possible. The means to this end are quite varied. Among the most popular are: increased efficiency of processes and therefore reduction in raw materials and wastes, reduction of labour either in numbers or wages, and externalisation of costs. Costs are externalised when they are passed on to individuals, other social groups or to society in general. The clearest case of this is certainly environmental damage caused either by the production process such as the extraction of resources and the emission of polluting wastes, or by the products themselves through their use (as in the case of automobiles) and through their disposal after their useful life is over. Large corporations, whose ownership is diluted through wide diffusion of shares, or whose owners are geographically removed from the site where the damage occurs, have less motivation to be accountable for their operations. The size of corporations and the consequent dilution of responsibility among the employees and decision-makers, also tend to favour reduced accountability. Externalisation of costs succeeds in distorting the market forces that would help consumers make appropriate consumption choices by providing them with the relevant information necessary to make such decisions. If the health and environmental costs of burning fossil fuels, for example, were added to their price, then renewable alternatives might suddenly appear more appealing.

iii. Allows Control of Media

The media is the vehicle of choice for people to make sense of the world they live in. Many of our everyday decisions are based on data gleaned from television or newspapers. To a great extent, media extensively informs our worldview. A very serious issue for “simple-lifers” is the fact that today, much of the media is concentrated in a very few hands or rather in a very few corporations whose interests lie in maximising returns for their shareholders. The size and excessive capitalisation of corporations, along with relaxed rules concerning monopolies, has allowed, as of 1997, the media world to be presided over by “ten or so vertically integrated media conglomerates, most of which are based in the United States” (Edward S. Herman and Robert W. McChesney, The Global Media, as quoted in Dowd, 2000, 192)¹². Dowd goes on to express misgivings about such concentrated control and the danger it poses to the possibility of the public having access to multiple views of the events and ideas that shape our world:

“How is it then that with such a dubious record...capitalism is less resisted and more popular than ever? One answer lies in the sources and uses of capitalist power...For capitalism’s ongoing purposes, and my present concern, those advances that help to shape thought and feeling, those in communications are most relevant: they have facilitated the processes by which our “cultural space”

¹² See also the very elaborate website related to media concentration at: <http://www.mediachannel.org/ownership/>.

becomes totally dominated by commercialism, serving most especially the super-corporations and their “boughten” political cohorts” (2000, 2).

Are “simple-lifers” justified in their concerns? Do we not have in place mechanisms that ensure the protection of the “public interest”? After all, aren’t organisations like the Canadian Radio-television Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) in Canada and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in the States instituted to provide this protection? While theoretically this may be so, Mark Crispin Miller informs us that, at least in the U.S., gradually, the regulations put in place in a less corporate-friendly age are slowly being eroded. For example, the “public interest” is not even a part of the vocabulary of the current Chairman of the FCC, Michael Powell, son of Secretary of State, Colin Powell. When asked for his definition of the “public interest”, he offhandedly replied: “It’s an empty vessel in which people pour in whatever their preconceived views or biases are” as he continued to call regulation “the oppressor” (Miller, 2002). More than 70 years ago, political scientist, Harold Laski asserted: “Whatever the forms of State, political power will, in fact, belong to the owners of economic power” (in Smith, 1990, 163). It would seem, from what precedes, that the current situation is no exception. Control of the media, however, reinforces control of the political by ensuring that no other options are visible.

iv. Threatens Democracy

It follows from the arguments of the previous section that concentration of economic power in large corporations, in addition to concentrating political power as argued by Laski, at the same time, reduces the chances of the populace to frame an opposition. If capitalist forces control, through these corporate entities, the economic, political and cultural dimensions of our existence (Dowd, 2000, 2), not only do they erode people's capacity to resist, even worse, by convincing people that "all is for the best in the best of worlds", they eventually remove even the will to resist. The "populations in the politically democratic countries have been so mesmerized – or trapped, or lost – in the jungles of consumerism that force is no longer necessary to gain their acquiescence in an exploitative and otherwise harmful social system" (Ibid., 8). "[P]eople will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacity to think" (Neil Postman in Dowd, 2000, 207)

As businesses "buy" politicians, as politicians and bureaucrats flow to and from corporate executive offices and boardrooms and as strong corporate and industry lobbies use their inordinate economic means to sway the political process, the move from "one person one vote" to "one dollar one vote" progresses steadily. There is nothing to lead us to believe that the situation has changed since Veblen, in the early part of the 20th century, exposed government, through the party system, as a tool of the rich for the maintenance of rights of ownership and investment rather than a tool of the people for their welfare. J.A. Hobson asserts that this power is used to subvert the democratic

process: “To present the appearance of democracy, without handing over the reality of government to the people, has long been the unchallenged achievement of the upper classes in Britain and America” (in Smith 1990, 82, 88, 94).

These ideas that ours aren't actually democratic societies, in the true sense of the word, are often hard to accept. Still, it is increasingly clear, that corporate interests and the institutions and other tools, such as trade treaties, they put in place to enhance and protect these interests, are gradually eroding the powers of sovereign States to act in the interests of their general populations and to enact legislation that conforms with the desires of the people (this will be addressed in the next chapters). The social consequences of acting against such powerful entities that occupy large spaces outside the economic sphere are often such that they cripple the capacity of governments to make the appropriate choices as regards safeguarding the environment and preserving the rights and dignity of the weakest.

b. Corporate Legal Status

Another aspect, less addressed but perhaps even more important, of the controversy, revolves around the legal status of corporations. Critics of the present system say that two aspects of corporate status hamper the proper functioning of the market and thus the regulating mechanism of competition. “Simple-lifers” are not opposed to markets as outlined by the likes of Adam Smith. Markets have existed for millennia and can be socially useful for exchange of goods and even knowledge and

culture. What they maintain is that, in addition to the previous arguments, the current system has been perverted through time, in legal struggles where corporate power has succeeded in moulding legislation to its advantage and continues to do so.

i. Limited Liability

The first such perversion is that of limited liability. This right effectively limits the responsibility and risk of owners/shareholders of corporations to the amount of their investment and to the value of the corporate assets. The very basis of common law, “individual responsibility” is thus undermined (Morris, 1998). For example, should “the corporation” be the cause of damage to others’ property, life or to socially held goods such as the environment, the owners cannot be required to replace, restore or repair or otherwise compensate the victim(s) to a greater extent than the value of the corporation. What this often does, in effect, is remove personal risk and responsibility from the corporate decision-makers. Recent attempts at responsabilising individuals have seriously been curtailed by the consequent appearance of liability insurance policies for directors and officers that dilute the risk and are paid for from corporate coffers. More importantly, the now immortal corporation is not unduly affected by the recriminations against its individual members. It can easily replace them and continue its activities. This has frustrated corporate critics to the point that some are now actively seeking legislation that would allow for “corporate capital punishment” (Morris, 1998). Morris explains that, originally, limited liability posed such a social dilemma, since individual responsibility is a bedrock principle of the common law tradition, that legal instruments

were invented to curtail the power of corporations. One of these was the corporate charter. For example, the charter was accorded on the condition that the activities of the corporation be socially beneficial, their size or capitalisation was limited to a certain amount (5 million dollars in the U.S. until 1890), and it was limited in time (usually between 20 and 50 years) since, originally at least, charters were accorded for specific undertakings such as exploration or large infrastructure projects such as railroads.

Legislatures could and often did revoke the charters of corporations that did not live up to their responsibilities. Over time, much of this legislation has disappeared or been weakened to the point of inefficacy. Anyone can now obtain a corporate charter simply by filling out forms and going through the bureaucratic process. There is no limit to size and though there are still regulations concerning monopolies, they too appear to have been extremely weakened. One has only to look at how many industries are controlled at more than 40% and 50% by only a few corporations to realise this. The concept of limited liability allows individuals to risk making profits from goods that are socially and environmentally harmful and to impudently incite people to consume these.

ii. Personhood

Not only have the original safeguards against corporations been nullified so that corporations do not operate under the same limits as individuals, in addition, as we learn from Korten (1996, 59), in 1886 in a landmark legal decision (Santa Clara County Vs Southern Pacific Railroad) they were accorded “personhood” status with all of its advantages, freedoms and rights. These include, among others, freedom of speech and

expression and property rights. Most of these “rights” were originally intended to protect individuals with limited power from coercion by the state or other groups. They were not elaborated with corporations in mind. Critics therefore say that corporations have been able to take undue advantage of these freedoms because of their inordinate financial power and their access to legislators through strong lobbies. It is one thing they say, for example, to allow freedom of speech to an individual, but it is quite another to grant the same right to a few corporations that have the power to control most of the media outlets of a nation, or to flood the airwaves and print media with a constant barrage of their consumerist messages, or that have the financial might to hire batteries of lawyers to defend them should they be accused of things such as libel and undue influence. Very few individuals would have that kind of power.

3. Capitalism and Economics

Economics is another important element of the “simple-lifer” critique of capitalism since it is the theoretical base that supports the capitalist edifice. Its claim to scientific status, closely related to mathematics, helps it to legitimise a whole range of socio-economic decision and policy making and activity. As economist Douglas Dowd explains, “[w]hat became the economics profession most always served to support capitalism, while obscuring its harmful consequences – with, only now and then, voices of reform or opposition (2000, 3). These voices, however, are often effectively silenced or marginalized. Noted British economist J.A. Hobson, for example, was barred from teaching economics when he proposed economic measures that went against the

orthodoxy of the end of the 19th century. Veblen was seen as a “brilliant, unsound eccentric” (Smith, 1998, 77, 79). Dowd recounts how, at a State university, in California, where he was teaching, more than half the economics faculty were discharged. All were what he refers to as “left of centre”. “The then president of the university soon joined (and remains) with a California research institute whose staff includes Milton Friedman [implying a position quite far right of center]” (2000, 284).

The main thrust of the critique of economics is directed at its perceived detachment from economic and social realities creating a theory/reality gap. Economics is perceived as neglecting or misinterpreting the role of important parameters such as the physical environment and human psychology, and of downplaying the role it plays in setting social and political agendas. If this is so, critics contend we must seriously question the social usefulness of econometrics.

a. Continuous Growth Paradigm

As we have seen earlier in this chapter, the basic economic model underlying the capitalist system presumes continuous growth in the sense of perpetual increases in production and consumption of goods and services. There is no provision in the model for physical limits. In fact, the physical system holds only a very minor role in the economics equation. The environment is simply a subset of the economic world. In defiance of the laws of thermodynamics, the model provides for no entropy and no waste. As a matter of fact, neither does it provide for the importance of absolutely necessary

inputs like energy. Within that subset, the energy factor is quite minor since, on average, it represents only about five to six percent of total costs (Hall, 2001). Therefore, the best, healthiest economic system is the one that has the most consumption and production.

The parameters resemble very closely those of the Environmental Burden model presented in the first chapter i.e. $EB = P(\text{population}) \times A(\text{consumption}) \times T(\text{technology})$. In the economic growth model, EB will be tempered by improvements in T. Increases in population and consumption are not seen as drawbacks or strains on resources but rather as positive inputs since they provide more consumption and more productive (and problem-solving) units. This is usually supported by giving examples of increased economic activity in periods of high immigration (Simon, 1990), a situation that does not address the question of physical limits and of sustainability and therefore begs the question.

Limits to the system's energy, resources and capacity to absorb wastes are addressed on two fronts by economists of the right. The first line of defense is the law of supply and demand (which, according to Soros, was invented to supplant an unsustainable assumption of perfect knowledge). We can never run out of a resource, Cornucopians say, (Simon, 1993) because as supply reduces, the price will go up and demand will decrease. One example often cited is the current case of petroleum, where, when the price of oil went up, people started switching to natural gas. When brought to consider the possibility of social upheaval as the price increases to an extent that resources become out of reach of most people, the usual answer is that consumers will

demand, and creative entrepreneurs will invent, an alternative. In the above example, solar or wind power could supply energy, or plant sugars and starches could provide plastic products. And of course, this unbounded faith in technology, at its limit, can dream up the unlimited power of nuclear fusion or the mining of asteroids or other planets. Ultimately, when projected into the future, this act of faith can answer any question. Irreplaceable water can be melted from Antarctica, evaporated from the oceans or even beamed down from the icy tail of a comet. Critics, of course, contend that such discourse is more of the realm of faith than science, bringing economics back to the status of theology if not pure science fiction.

For the pragmatic “simple-lifers”, the physical limits are real and must be taken into consideration if the market economy is to function properly and eventually provide benefit for all, as capitalists maintain. They say that many economists do not understand the importance of scarcity because their usual metric of scarcity is price, and short-term market value is not always reflective of supply since the basic model handed down by Smith, Ricardo et al. supposes non-intervention in markets as well as full internalisation and complete knowledge of all costs (Korten, 1999, 34-36). We know, for example, that the petroleum industry is heavily subsidised, to the tune of tens of billion dollars a year with direct subsidies, tax breaks and infrastructure provisions. According to Greenpeace, the oil industry received net government subsidies of from \$15.7 billion to \$35.2 billion, including defence subsidies, in 1995 (Koplow and Martin, 1998). In addition, other costs such as pollution and destruction of fragile ecosystems are not factored into the price since they are externalized (Korten, 1999, 46ff).

The model is also based on the theory of rational human agency. However, as Schumpeter pointed out: “from the earliest times to the twentieth century men have been governed by drives of an irrational and instinctive kind which have cut across the rational pursuit of material interest assumed by the model [of pure capitalism]” (in Dowd, 2000, 77). We also saw, in a previous section, how marketing’s understanding of the irrational consumer conflicts with economic theory. A new movement is emerging, within the field of economics itself, requesting a “rapprochement” of theory to reality.

b. *Theory/Reality Gap*

Recently, many economics students have grown dissatisfied and are asking that the teaching of economics take a turn away from abstract theorizing and start to include empirical testing and verification of hypotheses. An open letter to all Economics Departments by a group of 75 students, researchers and professors from twenty-two nations who gathered for a week of discussion on the state of economics and the economy at the University of Missouri - Kansas City (UMKC) in June 2001, also opined in this direction. This is in line with Dowd, Daly, and George and Sabelli who see economic models as supported by basic assumptions not provided as testable hypotheses but as givens (Daly, 1977; Dowd, 2000, 197). In their study of the World Bank as an ideological arm of the capitalist economy, George and Sabelli (1994, 6) contend, for example, that the tenet of development based on economic growth is impossible to validate because it is not scientific since “[economists at the World Bank] have not

established reliable and recognised criteria for determining whether development has, in fact, occurred". Partly in response to such critiques, the World Bank eventually put out an elaborate annual report entitled World Development Indicators that includes a great amount of data in areas such as poverty, education, health, economics and the environment.

Even George Soros, foremost capitalist, draws parallels between eternal verities and those claimed by capitalists, and challenges their scientific basis:

"The main scientific underpinning of the laissez-faire ideology is the theory that free and competitive markets bring supply and demand into equilibrium and thereby ensure the best allocation of resources. This is widely accepted as an eternal verity, and in a sense it is one. Economic theory is an axiomatic system: as long as the basic assumptions hold, the conclusions follow. But when we examine the assumptions closely, we find that they do not apply to the real world" (1997).

As we can see, neo-classical-economics-based capitalism is challenged at the scientific level both from outside and within its ranks. These challenges take several forms. Concurring with what has been stated above, natural scientists, often in conjunction with dissenting economists, maintain that though "internally consistent and mathematically sophisticated, [economic models] ignore or are not sufficiently consistent with the basic laws of nature...especially thermodynamics" (Hall et al., 2001). They

maintain that seeing the physical environment as a subset of itself, rather than the opposite, is a fundamental flaw. Scientists also contend that the “boundaries of analysis are inappropriate because they do not include the real processes of the biosphere that provide the material and energy inputs, the waste sinks, and the necessary milieu for the economic process”, thus giving the impression that something can be created ex nihilo (Ibid.).

c. *Economics as a Policy Tool*

Though “simple-lifers” are increasingly aware of the failings of economic theory itself, because of their pragmatic approach to questions of sustainability, human scale institutions and human enterprise, they are at least as concerned, if not more, by the use made by corporations, politicians and others of the tools provided by economists. In Dowd (2000, 196), post-Keynesian economist Hugh Stretton is quoted as saying: “Economists share responsibility for that ‘right turn’ in economic policy. Without their expert authority it is hard to believe that the various political and business groups who drive the new strategy could have persuaded majorities to support it, or tolerate it, for so long”. Dowd goes on to explain how economic ideas have come to prevalence in the political discourse that shapes government social and economic policy through increased exposure from “a rising flow of publicized arguments by economists in journalistic essays, on TV shows, as government officials and elsewhere” (Ibid.).

This is perhaps most evident in the confusion surrounding the concept of growth in GDP as an indicator of social well-being. While several economists whom “simple-lifers” consider more enlightened, are challenging this notion, media continue to bombard their audiences with the connection. Herman Daly has been warning for several decades now against using economic indicators in the wrong context or to draw erroneous social conclusions. More recently, Halstead and Cobb have asked the very pertinent yet baffling question “If the Economy Is Up, Why Is America Down?”. In a series of articles they challenge politicians’ and others’ use of the GDP as an indicator of the well-being of our societies (Halstead and Cobb, 1996). When challenged, of course, mainstream economists admit that GDP isn’t an adequate measure of well-being. Yet, claiming the need for scientific rigour, they suggest no other tool that could be more adequate. Halstead and Cobb maintain that the issue needs to be addressed in at least two dimensions: first, they claim it would not be less scientifically rigorous to give some value amount in national accounts to natural resources (e.g. an unexploited forest would have value per se), to volunteer work, parenting and household work, etc. than to give none at all. Both are, in essence, value judgements. Second, the confusion must be eliminated as to what exactly these tools are measuring. They implicitly put out a call to policy-makers, politicians, and corporate leaders to stop pretending that measures like the GDP reflect social progress. There must be an honest effort made to both eliminate the confusion and develop new tools to measure progress. In the wake of Daly and Cobb’s “Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare” (Greider, 1985, 453), Halstead and Cobb propose a new measure, the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) that goes further than its predecessor and factors in such elements as resource depletion, pollution, non-market

transactions, income distribution, etc. into the economic equation. Halstead and Cobb are only two of an increasingly large and vociferous force. The United Nations has also developed a similar index called the Human Development Index that they have used for several years now to rate countries as to their social quality. The index includes such factors as literacy, employment and life expectancy (Frankel, 1998,208). The Canadian Council on Social Development has elaborated a website dedicated strictly to social indicators (http://www.ccsd.ca/soc_ind.html). It contains leads to hundreds of groups and institutions that are developing instruments to help determine social health. Among them are a few interesting economic tools that would be worthy of examination by our elected representatives and mainstream economists.

d. Capitalism and Economics as Ideology

The preceding discussions have raised the question, lately, of the position economics occupies on the spectrum of scientific classification. While some right-wing mainstream economists (Simon, Friedman and what is often referred to as the Chicago School) appear to have a tendency to position economics closer to the “hard” sciences, claiming a strong mathematical base (the number and length of equations in economics journals can be dizzying for the non-initiated), others (Daly, 1977; Henderson, 1997; Dowd, 2000; Halstead and Cobb, 1996), however, tend to put economics more in the realm of the “softer” social sciences and subject to human behaviour that is certainly not as predictable as a mathematical equation. At the other end of the spectrum are those authors who identify economics more closely to an ideology, political or religious, a

theology of sorts more based on givens and faith than rigorous scientific method (Cox, 1999; Loy, 2000; Nelson, 1993; George and Sabelli, 1994). Even Daly, an economist himself, often refers, in his writings, to the “theological tendencies of economic theory”. Dowd, reflecting on modern economics’ utter domination by mathematics, claims that much “like the priests of old [who] performed their rituals in Latin, the economists of today work within a realm of obscurity, which they alone can decode” (2000, 197).

In order to understand the scope of the power wielded by corporations supported by economic theory and rhetoric, useful parallels are being drawn between Capitalism (upper cased) and organised religion, especially Christianity. Authors sympathetic to “simple-lifers” humanistic values and their attempts to redefine the system in more human terms by addressing questions of size and power, have contributed to a greater understanding of such through these parallels and deserve integration in this discussion. There is more and more literature comparing the market to God in terms of power references to omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence (Cox, 1999; Loy, 2000; George and Sabelli, 1994; Nelson, 1993). Some of these authors, Nelson especially, even maintain that the comparison is more than functional, that this God actually exists and comes equipped with its religion, capitalism and most importantly its theology, economics (1993).

These authors contend that like religions of salvation, Capitalism has given itself the tools necessary for its elaboration and propagation. To some extent, they maintain, Capitalism has supplanted traditional value/religious systems to the point of rapidly becoming the world’s first, truly universal religion (Loy, 2000, 15). This comparison is

not arbitrary when one understands the tremendous social power religions have wielded through the ages. It is important to realise this because only then can we understand the power that this economic system has acquired in such a short time and that it wields so ubiquitously.

Religions have performed a variety of roles in societies through the ages. From a functional perspective, traditional religions have given us our understanding of how the world works and of our role in it. From this esoteric knowledge they gained their power. So does much of the capitalist priesthood's (economist's) power come from claimed understanding of the inner workings of this market god. Since much of the challenge to the religious view of the world has come from the sciences, economics' scientific contentions supporting capitalism bolstered its capacity to fill a growing existentialist and values void. Capitalism, after major successes in improving standards of living and developing impressive technologies that seem to defy the will of the old gods (mastering the power of lightning, sending images through the ether, propelling people into outer space – and bringing them back, performing quasi-miracles in medicine and modifying genetic structures etc.) was all set up for the task. Advertising, the dogma propagation arm of this religious system, uses our newfound faith in technology and science to make us believe products can “magically” transform our lives much in the same way some religions promote the idea that pronouncements of faith or the performance of certain rituals can magically transform you.

Jhally contends that Capitalism starts by filling the values void created by a perceived lack of relevance of traditional cosmologies and cosmogonies. Old values are turned on their heads. Greed, for example, becomes good: “The market appeals to the worst in us (greed, selfishness) and discourages what is the best about us (compassion, caring, and generosity)” (Jhally, No Date). Capitalists maintain that the pursuit of one’s self-interest becomes an instrument for the improvement of the social whole. Loy however, maintains that the blind pursuit of self-interest undermines trust, an essential trait for the market system to function harmoniously (2000).

New values such as productivity and economic efficiency replace fundamental Christian values like care and compassion. While there is no denying that attention to these two aspects of the production of goods and services has, in many circumstances, reduced costs and increased corporate profits, it is not as readily evident that they have been instrumental in improving the quality of goods and especially services. More importantly, neither is it evident that these values can be universalized across sectors as our society appears to be trying to do today. Health care, for example, has moved from under the tutelage of traditional religious organisations that harboured and promoted such values as care, compassion and beneficence. Hospitals, HMOs and clinics are now big business and are increasingly expected to be, if not profit centres, then at least self-sufficient. In medical circles, patients are seen more and more as consumers. One well-visited website centred on health - <http://www.wellnessweb.com/> - opens with the following statement: “Everyone is a consumer of healthcare. At Wellness Web we believe that consumers should have a strong voice in decisions about the delivery and

future of healthcare.” Though possibly subtle, the difference in relationship between a provider of health services/products and his customer seems inherently different from that of a healthcare provider and his patient or even “recipient”. In practice, this has tended to create either a two-tiered system of care with moneyed individuals getting better service, while the majority is faced with reduced amount and quality of care, or a system in which staff are overworked in deteriorating conditions and equipment cannot be replaced in a timely fashion.

Capitalism and economics are thus being challenged on both counts: as a religion and as a science. We have already discussed the scientific challenge in terms of false premises and assumptions as well as issues of testability. Critics of Capitalism as a religion maintain that it has failed to keep its promises of individual happiness and social well-being (seen by these authors as manifestations of salvation – somewhat in the Calvinist tradition of predestination). Proponents of Capitalism maintain it has improved standards of living, increased longevity, literacy and access to innumerable goods, although it is difficult to demonstrate actual evidence of any direct causal link with the first three consequences. In this vein, “simple-lifers” and their academic supporters continue their questioning of the capitalist system’s capacity to meet human needs other than basic material ones. They maintain that even if the above contentions proved to be true, studies show that this has not affected the level of happiness, peace and tranquility or contentment of individuals. Several studies demonstrate that, in fact, though the economy has seen a fivefold expansion since the 1950s (Korten, 2000), our level of satisfaction has not changed. Similar studies confirm that our perceived level of

happiness is no higher than in societies where the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita is only a fraction of ours (Durning, 1999). In fact, Mckibben tells us that Kerala, an Indian province of 30 million people, while one of the poorest, with an annual per capita income of \$222, boasts of life expectancy and literacy rates similar to ours. On the other hand, at the societal level, the United States, often perceived as the “most successful” capitalist economy, also has one of the highest crime rates in the world, the highest ratio of imprisoned people and a weak social services infrastructure such as in health care (1999).

Perhaps as a result of these issues, several new branches of economics are surfacing. We now hear of biophysical economics, ecological economics, stewardship economics and environmental economics. These all represent recognition that current models inadequately reflect reality and some suggest that our present situation requires that we urgently examine the assumptions and methodology of these models. The extent of the implication for change is comparable to the movement that eventually loosened the Medieval Church’s hold on society. The tenets of the “new universal religion” must be questioned so that it also take its proper place.

D. Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, what is implicitly and explicitly drawn, is a picture of an alternative to the current economic system. It offers us a vision of economic thought and ideology that differs greatly from the mainstream teachings. Given the social power of

the field of economics, Dowd maintains that it is accompanied by an equivalent social responsibility to help people understand the real economy: “All the more reason, therefore, for socioeconomic theory to take great care in choosing what to abstract from, when and where; and when to return to ground level. Most especially is that so when the society is changing as rapidly as in the past century” (2000, 197). For Dowd, “policy precedes theory”. Theory, then, and especially economic theory these days, should help in the analysis of “sociopolitical problems and possibilities” stimulating “the thinker to identify particular social processes as being crucial, and as requiring certain changes which, when made, will permit desirable conditions to persist, eliminate undesirable conditions, and/or make way for better social order” (13).

Under this alternative economic system, therefore, theories surrounding consumption, corporate structure and economic modeling would be reoriented to be more amenable to the needs, desires and aspirations of whole populations and not only the controlling elites as identified by economists like Hobson and Veblen, following Marx. As such, consumption would become more “needs oriented” and attention would focus more on distribution than on growth. It would also move from a materialist orientation to a more service or psychic focus, i.e. education, holistic and preventive health care, spiritual, artistic or philosophical endeavours. The means to achieve this shift would be modified from large bureaucratic institutions and organizations to more human-sized, geographically localized ones. This would increase responsibility and accountability, hopefully reducing negative social and environmental impacts. Economic theory, for its

part, would attempt to be more in line with economic realities, bringing its abstractions to the testable spheres of physical and sociopolitical realities.

The underlying message in the critique of capitalism is that the system is not concordant with human aspirations nor is it meeting a whole range of human needs for a large portion of the world's population. It is said to fail because it makes false assumptions about the world and about human beings. It has succeeded to date simply because of human propensity to self-delusion and human ingenuity at finding ways of extending the life of the illusion. This is the thesis of Greg Morrison's ingenious book The Spirit in the Gene (1999). Having built an unsound air vehicle and propelled it off a very high cliff, the occupants in mid-fall still have the impression they are flying.

Table 2.1 summarises some of the main differences between the actual economic system as seen by its critics and one proposed by the authors who inform "simple-lifer" views.

Table 2.1 COMPARATIVE ECONOMIC SYSTEMS¹³

	Capitalist Economic System	Simple-lifer Economic System
Purported Goal	-Increase the well-being of society	-Increase the well-being of society
Ideology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Goal can be achieved through individual, self-interested pursuit of profits. -The market is inherently self-policing and self-regulating. - Nature and labour are commodities to be exploited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Individualism and narrow self-interest need to be monitored and guided towards the interests of the greater community. -Civil society and government provide this guidance and add the moral element to the decision-making process. -Nature provides and sustains life and must be respected. Humans must live in harmony with it
Means	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Economic activity free from government intervention both nationally and internationally. -Theoretically, free flow of capital, materials and labour globally. -Perpetual growth of production and consumption. -Debt-based growth. -Large publicly traded corporation is the ideal vehicle. -Externalisation of costs. -Money supply controlled by banks and financial institutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Economic activity is subject to social justice and to the physical environment. -The precautionary principle must override the quest for profits. -System based on balance, and small and local wherever possible. -Limits to power and size of corporations. -Internalisation of costs to reflect true price. -Ownership in workers, managers, customers and communities. -Capital is an instrument of development not speculation. -Money supply controlled by governments. -Elaboration of alternate wealth distribution systems.
Successes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Very efficient at producing cheap goods. -Increased creature comforts -Increases shareholder wealth i.e. of the few. 	<p>(Expected successes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reduction of social inequities. -Protection of environment. -Reduced production of unnecessary or socially destructive products. -More stable economies. -Better and more secure working conditions. -Reduction of demeaning and alienating work.
Drawbacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Growth of large corporations reduces competition, the main self-regulating mechanism. -Creates oversupply of goods. -Efficiencies reduce labour and wages and therefore demand. -Degrades the environment. -Increases social inequities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Limits certain individual freedoms to self-interested behaviour. -Requires serious reductions in levels of consumption. -Requires radical change in mindset.

¹³ Much of the data for the existing capitalist system comes from Korten (1996), Greider (1997) and Gélinas (2000). The data for the elaboration of the “simple-lifer” system is informed by several authors referred to in Chapter I and also derived from the values of the Ethic Of Simplicity presented in the same chapter.

Though it doesn't even seem to be a question anymore as to whether existing anthropogenic processes related to our economic life are contributing seriously to the degradation of our societies and ecosystems, what appears less evident, is the means of reducing and eventually reversing this trend. One difficulty lies in finding a way to integrate this Ethic of Simplicity into an economic system that can only survive on consumption and growth. Even more problematic is the fact that the economic ideology of consumerism has infiltrated our whole society at multiple levels. It has contributed to establishing power structures, lifestyles, and social values. The resistance therefore is bound to be tremendous. Those individuals and other entities, drawing their positions of status and power from the existence of the present system, have every interest in maintaining the status quo. This is part of the reason that "simple-lifers" maintain we are at the point where theorizing must be translated into behaviour that is concordant with ideological positions that consider socio-environmental realities. These issues will be addressed in the concluding chapter. The fact that this consumerist ideology is spreading across the globe makes it, according to this group, even more imperative to act and this aspect will be dealt with in the next chapter on globalisation.

CHAPTER 3

ECONOMIC GLOBALISATION:

OF EXPLOITATION AND RIGGED TRADE¹⁴

A Simple-Lifer/Anti-globalist Critique of Economic Globalisation

A. Introduction

For many “simple-lifers” the connection between their life choices and the living conditions of other people around the world appears evident. In a world they recognise as having limited resources and limited energy (under the current energetic model) to transform these resources, it is evident for them that if some persons or groups use more than their share of available resources, it can only be at the detriment of others. They have a particular understanding therefore of the connection between (historically) recent unfoldings such as colonialism and current asymmetries of political and economic power and of their place as individuals within this structure. Their behaviour and lifestyle choices are thus informed not only by their view of capitalist and consumerist ideology as it takes shape within their immediate temporal and geographical space but also by the overarching consequences of the spread of this ideology to the entire globe. Economically-driven globalisation has made issues of physical limits and social and financial inequities and disparities even more evident to them.

¹⁴ Term borrowed from an insightful May 2001 Oxfam paper on the inefficacy of past and current trade and aid policies.

For “simple-lifers” therefore, no discussion of modern day capitalism and its effect on society would be complete without addressing the issue of globalisation. In fact, it is especially relevant since the encompassing term globalisation has come to mean not only extension of commercial undertakings to include all areas of the globe, but in fact, the implementation of the capitalist system of the core industrialised countries worldwide. Since the “simple-lifer” reaction to socio-economic forces is at least as behaviourally pragmatic as it is ideological, many have joined their voices to those of the anti-globalisation movement.

1. *The Myth of Perpetual Growth Globalised*

The intent of this chapter is to expand the discussion of Chapter 2 to get a better understanding of the extent of “simple-lifer”/anti-globalist motivations to find alternatives to the current production/consumption model. Respondents to Elgin’s original survey concerning voluntary simplicity mentioned the perceived impact of their consumption on the socially and economically less fortunate of the world as a motivator for their reduced consumption. As one reads through the simplicity literature and visits simplicity websites, the connections between “simple-lifer” values and those expressed by members of the anti-globalisation movement become evident. Though the problematic issues concerning globalisation take many complex forms, for “simple-lifers” they can essentially be reduced to two areas of concern: perpetual growth and historical determinacy. First, in their view, the current globalisation model repeats the errors and false premises expressed in Chapter 2 especially that which presumes that the

present model of continuous growth can go on forever. The illusion can be maintained regionally as industrialised countries, representing twenty-five percent of the global population consume eighty percent of world resources and open new markets in the developing world for their overproduction (Greider, 1997). However, when looked at on a global scale, the illusion quickly dissipates. Speaking of the transformation of the capitalist system from an “engine of economic development” into “a formidable hurdle to economic advancement”, economist Paul Baran in his 1957 work, The Political Economy of Growth, states: “...it is in the underdeveloped world that the central, overriding fact of our epoch becomes manifest to the naked eye” (In Wallace, 1990, 214). The globalisation process makes it increasingly clear that, in order for everyone on Earth to consume like a typical North American, we would need resources equivalent to another three planet Earths (World Watch Institute, 2001). William Rees, co-author of Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth, using an area-based evaluation, suggests that we actually would need anywhere from two to five planets to achieve this goal (1996). It stands to reason therefore that, for “simple-lifers”, any attempt to spread the Western production and consumption model to the rest of the world is the equivalent of attempted suicide. Since there are not enough resources to meet everyone’s needs or wants at this level, they foresee two inevitable outcomes. The first is that of environmental degradation, possibly to the point of compromising the Earth’s ability to sustain life as we know it today. The second is related to social structures. Even before environmental degradation is complete, economic non-workability or the collapse of the current system could occur more likely than not because of the frustration of people, more specifically young males, who come to realise that the dream is false and

can only become reality for a select few (Shutt, 1998; see also Shiva in *The Human Race: Bomb Under the World*). These concerns will be addressed extensively in this chapter and in Chapter 4.

2. Historical Determinacy

The second area of concern is related to an apparent generalized ignorance of the fact that our current privileged economic situation is, in large part, the result of an historical context rife with violence and exploitation and that imperatives of restorative and distributive justice demand that counterbalancing measures be applied to right old wrongs but especially to level the economic playing field. “Simple-lifers” maintain that until we realise and internalize the fact that the plight of many developing and LDC’s (Least Developed Countries) is partly a result of past and present Western intervention that has created asymmetries of power, it is difficult for us to question our perceived position of superiority. Martin Khor, former professor of political economy and now President of the Third World Network, an independent, non-profit international network of organizations and individuals involved in issues relating to development, the Third World and North- South issues explains:

The new structures, consumption style, and technological systems became so ingrained in Third World economies that even after the attainment of political independence, the importation of Western values, products, technologies, and capital continued and expanded. Third World countries grew more and more dependent upon global trading and financial and investment systems, with

transnational corporations setting up trading and production bases in the Third World and selling products there (1999).

In summary, as long as we can believe that we have “legitimately” attained our current lifestyles due to our ingenuity, determination, work ethic etc. rather than through a combination of these and other factors such as exploitation of peoples around the world and their resources, it will be nigh impossible for us to achieve the mindset needed to implement behaviour that will lead to a more equitable sharing of the world’s resources. In fact, Nobel prize winner, economist Amartya Sen explains how verbalised perceptions of the colonised by the colonisers affect the formers’ self-perception so that it requires great effort on the part of the exploited to break out of the cycle (Sen, 1993). Achieving this transformative mindset has become a preoccupation for many “simple-lifers”, one they expressed clearly in Elgin’s survey (1981, 54).

Western involvement in global economic activity goes back to the precursors of Marco Polo and their forays into East Asia and more particularly China. Usually historians speak of three stages: a mercantilist period, the colonial period sometimes used interchangeably with and sometimes somewhat differentiated from an imperialist era, and finally the modern period. The dates vary substantially from one author to the next. Quite often, the stories told and their classifications vary according to the position from which the authors speak. The “history” told here is no different. The aim is to bring to light certain historical facts and events relevant to bringing about the “simple-lifer”/anti-globalist understanding of the current global situation. Much of my understanding of the

evolution of internationalised commercial activity comes from Gélinas' La globalisation du monde, and Michel Beaud's A History of Capitalism, 1500-1900. However this evolution is framed, "simple-lifers" often see in it various incarnations of an attempt, sometimes quite explicit, at other times less so, by Western nations, to appropriate for themselves the resources of the planet.

It is against this avowedly simplified historical background that this chapter will provide a discussion of globalisation and of those elements perceived as instrumental in spreading the consumerist value scheme across the planet. We start with the ideology of the underlying the process (development through liberalisation of trade and services) and "simple-lifers'" understanding of how the ideology is currently applied. We then move on to the processes (colonisation, bi- and multi-lateral trade agreements, foreign direct investment, structural adjustment programs) used to put the system in place globally. Finally, we look at the institutions (transnational corporations, international financial organisations, the UN and national governments). Throughout the chapter references will be made to "simple-lifer"/anti-globalist preferences for an alternate international economic order. For "simple-lifers", who see the world changing through the transformation of one person at a time, only when these elements are understood as being part of their lives can individuals hope to be equipped to make choices that become part of the solution rather than of the problem. In the meantime, in a world where the economic forces at play internationally are only dimly understood (Sachs, 1998), they propose we tread on the Earth as softly and prudently as possible.

B. Economic Globalisation Defined

One might wonder, in fact, why all this consternation concerning globalisation exists. After all, trade has already been global for several centuries. During this time, nations have had economic ties, have fought economic wars, and have scoured the globe for resources and cheap (slave) labour. So what's different now? Why is the current picture so disturbing for so many? There are many, complex responses to this question. At its simplest, the answer is that, as discussed previously, and as we will see here in greater detail, the globalisation of the capitalist enterprise has not delivered on the expectations arising from the "planned" "Keynesian" international economy of post World War II.

At its worst, the current globalisation undertaking is seen as a continuation and even strengthening of the colonial and/or imperialist structures of the last four hundred years. Theories of underdevelopment, present a situation where "peripheral countries [traditionally referred to as the Third World] are 'conditioned by' the nature of economic activity initiated in and propagated from the core [industrialised countries]" (Wallace, 1990, 215). Within this concept we find a wide range of opinion on the degree of determinism involved in the relationships. One that is popular with "simple-lifer"/anti-globalists, is reflected by A.G. Frank who "describes an almost automatic process whereby the core moulds the periphery into an antithesis of itself ('the development of underdevelopment')" (Ibid.). At best, the planned liberalisation of the international

economy is seen as a misguided, misunderstood, ineffective foray into international benevolence (the discourse mainly of the World Bank).

1. Globalisation, the ideal

At its most basic expression, modern globalisation means transnationalisation of the economy: the creation of an economic world/system that transcends all national borders. In its purest state, economic globalisation refers to the elimination of all barriers to trade and to the movement of goods, services, labour and capital. It means moving to a state of non-intervention by governments in economic affairs other than as just another economic actor on the consumption side. It means the gradual elimination of all forms of protectionism be they subsidies, tariffs, quotas, etc. It means that governments should treat all firms equally, regardless of their origin. In this world corporations no longer have national loyalties. They are free to scour the globe for the best conditions and the least restrictions in their quest to meet their purpose of maximising shareholder wealth. This collection of ideas has often been referred to, as it will in this work, as “the ideology of economic liberalisation”. Jack Welch, CEO of General Electric probably painted the most vivid picture of this process when he said that, ideally, every business would be situated on a barge so that it could easily move from one place to another seeking the best advantages. This is more clearly articulated in the statement of the President of ABB, Percy Barnevik: “I would define globalisation as the freedom for my group to invest where it wants, for the time it wants to, to produce what it wants, sourcing itself and

selling where it wants, having to endure as few constraints as possible as regards labour laws and social conventions” (translated by the author from Gélinas, 2000, 19).

“For globalization enthusiasts, this development promises increased gains from trade and faster growth for both sides of the worldwide income divide” (Sachs, 1998). This is the ultimate promise of the globalisation movement: an increasingly wealthy world population living in evermore democratic environments. Greider explains the expectations as regards foreign direct investments in China: “They (firms and governments investing in China) are assuming that China will evolve with development. gradually democratize its political order...as incomes rise, its centralized controls will be relaxed, the state-owned enterprises dismantled” (1997,147). As more employment is transferred to developing countries in order to gain access to new and huge markets such as those of China and India, it is expected that wealth will be created in those areas to allow a reduction in income gaps between countries. This is the globalising ideal of mainstream economists and corporatists who view the transnational or global corporation as a useful and even essential tool to this end.

2. Globalisation, the reality

Reality, however, has been much more nuanced. To date, and at least for the foreseeable future, globalisation has meant and will likely continue to mean a “tendency” to move towards open or disappearing borders but with the involvement of national governing bodies in the process, trying to make the transition as smooth as possible

without major economic upheavals and social uprisings. Thus, governments in industrialised countries still provide huge direct and indirect subsidies in several sectors such as agriculture and energy, they support and regulate massive money markets and their budgets include enormous sums for social welfare programs. It could thus be argued as Korten (1996) and Barlow and Clarke (2001) do, that the “Washington Consensus” model of globalisation, far from being based on an open economy actually refers to a particular type of “regulated economy” to the advantage of the rich and powerful.

The involvement of civil society in the globalisation process has also added to the gap between the ideal and reality. For slightly more than twenty years after World War II the process of growth promoted by the ideal view of economic liberalisation seemed to be unfolding quite according to plan in North America and Europe where GDP grew strongly and steadily. Standards of living and incomes rose accordingly. Then, in the early 1970s, things started to change. Some, like Frankel (1998), believe the change began as an environmental consciousness started to take shape in America with the publication of Rachel Carlson’s book “The Silent Spring”. The scope of the first Earth Day in 1972, for example, was such that it sent a clear message to legislators that the environment was an important part of everyone’s lives and needed attention. Links started to be made between the economic activity of corporations, government policy and unexpected and unwanted effects of productive activity. Gradually the economic sphere came under increased scrutiny from a variety of organisations concerned with the growing economic and social power of corporations and the consequences on the

environment and social structures at home and abroad. At the same time, improvements in communication technologies allowed these groups to interact and share information and concerns.

In 1998, a rather unprecedented event occurred. There was a premature leak of a document called the MAI (Multilateral Agreement on Investments). The document, drawn up by representatives of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) governments and business groups, proposed major changes to the regulation of money markets. Interpreting the MAI as giving inordinate powers to corporations, financial institutions and other institutional holders of capital, several social groups from around the world jointly reacted. They presented a common front of opposition so strong that the proposers had to back down and the agreement was shelved (Barlow and Clarke, 2001, 22). Since then, as we will see, civil society, which includes many proponents from the ranks or supportive of the worldview of “simple-lifers”, appears to have awakened and become extra vigilant whenever governments or government and business get together to discuss any project.

There is certainly recognition in the “simple-lifer” milieu of the benefits to be gained by reshaping of our view of the world into one that recognises and even optimistically accepts global interconnection. What is questioned are the underlying agendas and the means presently used to attain economic globalisation. Perhaps this is most clearly expressed by Martin Khor:

Globalisation as practised today is a kind of apartheid, a term mentioned by Juan Somavia, director-general of the ILO in his speech just now. It is misleading and it skirts the issue to talk only in terms of "sharing better the benefits of globalisation" and helping the "marginalised." This presumes that globalisation only produces benefits, but some gain more than others. In reality, globalisation creates benefits for some, losses for others, and worse, the same process that generates benefits also generates losses. So, part of the benefits of the gainers is at the expense of the losses of the losers (2000).

...a radical reshaping of the international economic and financial order must occur so that economic power, wealth, and income are more equitably distributed and so that the developed world will be forced to lower its irrationally high consumption levels (1999)

For many scholar-activists like Khor, the real world experience with globalisation is far removed from the rhetoric or the theory. Even as these words are written the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is meeting in Doha, Qatar and representatives from developing countries and NGOs again deplore the fact that, while Northern countries are requiring deregulation in certain sectors in which they are strong such as investment and property rights, they have yet to deal with tariffs and subsidies in their own countries in areas such as agriculture and textiles where developing countries are strong. Many see this as continuing imperialism or a new form of colonialism. In fact their discourse is often one that deplores the lack of actual free-trade rather than too much of it. Of course

developing countries also realise that, if the ideal as described above were achieved, in spite of their strengths in certain sectors, they would not be able to compete against the strong industrial Northern machine on equal terms. Though Westerners can claim the system operates under a fair set of rules that apply to everyone, Martin Khor, in an interview with the Multinational Monitor, explains that simply because the rules apply to everyone this does not necessarily make a system fair. He gives the example of a 300-meter foot race where the rules are firmly established as to things like starting point, endpoint and track to follow in between them. Such an event between Carl Lewis and Ben Johnson might, for all intents and purposes, be considered fair (given of course that there is also the possibility of checking for irregularities such as illegal drugs). However, the same contest, with the same rules becomes totally ludicrous if Johnson's rival is a 12-year-old boy who hasn't eaten in four days.

C. Summary of the Evolution of Western International Economic Activity

Contrary to what has been promulgated by media and the targets of the anti-globalisation movement, global trade is an acceptable activity for "simple-lifers"/anti-globalists...as long as it is not performed under conditions and on scales that are environmentally or socially disruptive. Certain areas of the globe contain materials and goods not available in others and that may be desirable and/or useful for others to possess. For peoples to set up mutually beneficial systems of exchange of these goods can be very positive. However, problems of conscience arise when these activities

degenerate into abusive power relationships that are exploitative and destructive. This is the situation described in the following story.

1. Pre-colonialism

Trade has been part of human activity, anthropologists tell us, since members of different tribes met at the borders of their tribal territories to exchange goods. Gradually, trading activity expanded between human groups, especially with the diversification of means of transportation. In Europe, up to the 15th century such trade was relatively limited by the constraints of beasts of burden and carts used to transport goods since most long trade routes were over land. Though the Phoenicians, Greeks and Romans had developed an extensive maritime trade amongst the colonies around the Mediterranean, the size of sailing vessels limited most marine trade to rivers, lakes and coastal regions. The possibilities for intercontinental forays were, for all practical purposes, inexistent. Other than a few more adventurous and sparse undertakings such as the sea endeavours of the Vikings to America or the overland trips of the Italians to India and China, most European trade was very localized and done on a quite restricted scale.

a. Physical Coercion

It wasn't until the end of the 15th century that Europeans developed the sea vessels that allowed them to conquer extensive sea routes: rounding the Cape of Good Hope (Diaz in 1488), the "discovery" of America (Columbus, 1492), or the trade route to

India (De Gama, 1498). This opened up possibilities for what has been referred to as a great “mercantile” era that would last until the 17th century. The 170 years from 1490 to the last decades of the 17th century have been described as years of war, pillage and genocide. It was on these that the capitalism of Europe was founded. Beaud (1983) reminds us that the amount of wealth transferred from America to Europe in that interval is astounding: “According to official figures, 18,000 tons of silver and 200 tons of gold were transferred from America to Spain between 1521 and 1660; according to other estimates, double this amount” (19). The human costs to American populations were unbelievable: “In a little more than a century the Indian population was reduced by 90 percent in Mexico (where the population fell from 25 million to 1,5 million) and by 95 percent in Peru” (Ibid.). While it is true that many of these deaths were due to the spread of European diseases, millions were also victims of martial violence and exploitative slavery in the mines and sugar cane fields: “They were slain in war, sent to Castile as slaves, or...consumed in the mines and other labours...” (Ibid.). Referring to the breadth of these massacres, Las Casas reports in A.G. Frank’s World Accumulation, 1492-1789 (1978): “Who of those born in future generations will believe this? I myself who am writing this and saw it and know most about it can hardly believe that such was possible” (In Beaud, 1983, 19).

Such was the first stage of the globalisation we know today, as the Europeans set out to “discover” the world. This was an era of mercantile globalisation. The quest was mainly for spices, precious metals and stones. The Portuguese, who had developed efficient sailing ships loaded with canons, started the undertaking. The Portuguese were

looking for a route to India and China that would bypass Muslim-controlled land routes to the East. They eventually established outposts along the African coast, both East and West as well as in India and Brazil (to which they were blown off course on their way to India) (Smitha, no date). Eventually the Spaniards and then the Dutch and the British joined the race and slowly all the continents on the globe became, over a period of 200 years or so, dotted with European trade posts.

2. The Colonial Era: Developing Dependence

Gradually, the European nations attempted to get a firmer hold on the resources they sought and to protect their interests from competing Europeans. As their populations were replenished after the Black Death, they needed additional resources to meet their needs and eventually they also needed raw material inputs and new markets to provide work for their people. In time, with the increase in industrialisation and the consequent overproduction, this situation became exacerbated. Their presence in the South/East was extended and solidified with permanent garrisons, a military force to support trade interests. And thus a concept of colonies different from that of the Greek Diaspora emerged. This is the period “simple-lifers” contend tilted the scales in favour of the West/North but more importantly created situations of long-lasting exploitation. The wealth accumulated at the expense of these new lands was the engine that permitted the expansion of capitalism and the development of new technologies in Europe starting in the final decades of the 18th century. England became the hub of capitalist expansion

after the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763, having come out victorious of numerous colonial wars.

a. Protectionism

The colonies became a seemingly unlimited source of raw materials to feed the endless capitalistic loop that turns capital into production, production into capital and so on indefinitely. In addition, the colonies became captive markets for the overproduction of European industry. In order to provide employment for their citizens, the colonisers eliminated, either by force or by protectionist decrees, any competition from the colonies. A good example is the textile industry. For centuries India had been an exporter of fine textiles to Europe and Asia. Gradually the British closed down the Indian textile industry. They shipped Indian raw cotton to Britain where it was transformed and then forced India to buy its finished product. India was coerced into converting some of its best agricultural land to cotton for export to feed the ever-growing British textile industry (Gélinas, 2000, 26ff). In this way, capitalism grew tremendously in Europe but apparently only because it was able to feed the system in one area of the world while depleting and degrading the existing systems in the colonies. We must remember that the Indian economy was at least equivalent to that of Britain at the onset of colonisation. Khor, known, through his writings, not to be one to idealize a golden age of the past, explains that,

[b]efore Colonial rule and the infusion of Western systems, people in the Third World lived in relatively self-sufficient communities, planted rice and other

staple crops, fished and hunted for other food, and satisfied housing, clothing, and other needs through home production or small-scale industries that made use of local resources and indigenous skills. The modes of production and style of life were largely in harmony with the natural environment (1999).

This is essentially not very different from the situation of most people in Europe at the same time. But colonialism and then industrialisation changed all that:

Colonial rule, accompanied by the imposition of new economic systems, new crops, the industrial exploitation of minerals, and participation in the global market (with Third World resources being exported and Western industrial products imported) - changed the social and economic structures of Third World societies (Khor, 2000).

Third World countries became increasingly dependent on the international economic infrastructure controlled by the imperialist powers.

Other protectionist measures gave budding European industries and agriculture the freedom from competition of already established businesses elsewhere in the world. In agriculture, for example, Britain passed the famous *Corn Laws*, banning the import of grain from the colonies where it was much more cheaply grown in huge quantities (Dowd, 2000, 32). They also limited transport of trade goods between England and the colonies to British ships (47). This effectively spelled the death of a prosperous shipbuilding industry in India at that time. Britain also imposed interdictions on the export of machinery or new technologies (Gélinas, 2000, 28). In other words, much of

the behaviour the free-market capitalist ideology decries today was probably what allowed capitalist economies to take form originally. State intervention was instrumental in making the budding capitalist economy what it was to become.

b. Currency Controls

Another means of control used to expand the power of capitalist forces of the day was the application of currency controls. Few would argue that the use of money rather than barter has greatly facilitated trade. However, a corollary is that those who control the supply and transfers of money also acquire a good deal of power in the process. A good intra-European example is how much of the gold and silver brought to Spain and Portugal from America ended up in the coffers of the Dutch who had already developed an efficient banking system. In fact, Marx called Holland the “capitalist nation *par excellence*” (In Beaud, 1983, 27).

Europe used this source of power to extend its control to all social sectors in its colonies by imposing taxes that could only be paid using “coin of the realm”. In order to get the currency needed to pay their taxes, businesses had to sell their goods to the colonisers. Individuals also had to go work in the fields or industries of the colonisers. Village leaders were used to collect taxes so as to effectively undermine their relationships with the villagers (Korten, 1999, 30). Too busy to work on their own farms or cottage industries, these gradually fell apart along with the communities they supported and dependence on the moneyed system of the conquerors quickly increased.

Once the relationship of dependence is created, it becomes very easy for the controller to extend his power. We need only look to today and how dependent on different systems we have become for our comfort and even our very survival. It appears to be a recurring irony that, as we create, build and maintain systems to make our lives more materially comfortable, we also become slaves to those very systems. Reflection on our relationship to money, for example, quickly brings us to the realisation that our very survival is totally dependent on those who control the money system.

As we have seen in the previous pages, “simple-lifers” recognise that the current development ideology of capitalism is not a strictly recent invention but has deep historical roots. As the world geopolitical situation started shifting dramatically in the mid-twentieth century, newly independent Third World countries were already enmeshed in an international system that favoured the industrialised countries. In many instances they were also left with legal and administrative systems that clashed with their cultural systems and geopolitical divisions that made very little sense and promoted internal social and ethnic conflict. Dowd refers to the example of Sudan where the British drew together under one rule approximately six hundred different ethnic groups speaking about 400 different languages (Dowd, 2000, 78 and note 82 p.247). All of these factors are interpreted as having played a determining role in the power structures that exist today, factors that must be taken into consideration when establishing international rules of trade and other economic activity.

Earlier, we asked why the current wave of globalisation has drawn so much fire from various sources. One reason may be a better understanding of rationalizing and justificatory language used by dominant groups. It appears, from reading history texts, that Westerners have always justified or rationalised their economic and/or military incursions into other lands using socially acceptable premises. Thus many trips of the mercantile period, condoned by a strong papacy of the Roman Catholic Church of the time, were justified by the lofty goal of “conversion”, bringing God or religion to the heathens. The atrocities of the colonial era were tempered in two ways. The most obvious was the placing of the undertaking under the aegis of bringing civilisation (of which religion was an important component) to barbarians. More surreptitious was cloaking it in the semantics of “discovery”. Though the Europeans “discovered” nothing, in any real sense, since these lands had already been “discovered” and were inhabited by others, the use of the term is very effective in granting a somewhat behavioural carte blanche through its implication. “Simple-lifers” note that in the modern era the new justificatory catch phrase is “development”. Their understanding and stance are grounded in dependency theories of development and underdevelopment (Wallace, 1990, 215-217). The industrialised countries, mostly made up of the old imperial powers, through a complex web of socio-economic ideology and power sharing have essentially decided that the current capitalist model based on perpetual growth is the ideal, if not only and often qualified as “natural”, model for the well-being of the human race. Accordingly, they maintain that this model, for reasons we will explore in the following section, needs to be adopted by all the Earth’s peoples if they are to live comfortable material lives and co-exist harmoniously with others.

3. The Development Era

The Development Era is characterized by two important features in the “simple-lifers” analysis of the issues surrounding the globalisation of capitalism. The first is the tremendous growth of multinational corporations both in numbers and size, part of which we have discussed in the second chapter, but, as applies here, especially their metamorphosis into transnational and then global corporations. As with the semantics surrounding the terms “discovery” or “development”, so too here, the semantics of “global” come to reinforce the supranational character of the modern corporation that has no ties to any particular government. This separation of corporations from the tutelage of national government and their rise to a situation of power over these governments is important in understanding “simple-lifer”/anti-globalist reaction to the corporate mindset. The second is the elaboration of a complex infrastructure of institutions and treaties put in place to facilitate the spread of these corporations across the world and of the corporatist/capitalist ideology for which they are vehicles.

a. The Rise of the Global Corporation

i. Private Fortunes: Of Captains of Industry and Robber Barons

The end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th saw the making of huge private fortunes in the United States. It was the time of the Rockefellers, the Morgans,

the Carnegies and the Duponts. Call them Captains of Industry or Robber Barons depending on your vantage point, the fact remains that they were the creators of the first American multinational companies. The size and consequent financial power of these corporations allowed them, with their armies of lawyers, to avoid, or at least mitigate the effects of, antitrust legislation set in place to limit that power. It also permitted them to influence changes in the legislation in their favour and to gradually control large sections of the global economic pie.

Those who see these men and their corporations in a positive light speak of how, through their enterprising spirit, hard work, dedication to an ideal of personal and national prosperity, they set in motion the apparatus that would eventually give the United States the highest standard of living in the world, the most prosperous economy and make it the world's mightiest nation. Those who refer to them as Robber Barons, on the other hand, accuse them of having acquired power using methods as heinous as those referred to earlier concerning the colonies. In addition to the avoidance of legislation mentioned above, they accuse them of exploiting workers, often making them work twelve hour days seven days a week as in the case of Andrew Carnegie (Gélinas, 2000, 32). They also employed thugs or used their close connections with the local forces of order to keep their employees in line and bust any attempts at forming unions. The same kinds of tactics, ranging from threats to murder, were used to eliminate competitors who wouldn't sell out (Zinn, 1995, 268ff). Critics maintain that every advantage for anybody but the owner/shareholders or, more recently, managers has had to be pried from corporations and fought for tooth and nail often over long periods. Corporations and

corporate leaders, with their powerful financial means and close personal connections to elected officials, have constantly lobbied and cajoled to defeat or stall policy or legislation that would cut into their profitability. These include environmental legislation, labour laws, conservation projects and laws to limit and control financial markets (see references to Frankel in Chapter 2).

The Americans weren't the only ones involved in the elaboration of a world economic system based on powerful corporations. Greer and Singh (no date), authors of several books on corporations, finance and globalisation,¹⁵ tell us that

[d]emand for natural resources continued to provide an impetus for European and US corporate ventures between the First and Second World Wars. Although corporate investments from Europe declined somewhat, the activities of US TNCs expanded vigorously. In Japan, this period witnessed the growth of the zaibatsu (or "financial clique") including Mitsui and Mitsubishi. These giant corporations, which worked in alliance with the Japanese state, had oligopolistic control of the country's industrial, financial, and trade sectors.

ii. The Depression and World War II

The market crash of 1929 and the ensuing depression would, however, put quite a dent in industrial output and trade that fell by 40% and 30% respectively. The situation would last for a decade and culminate, some would say, in the Second World War. The

decade before the war was also a time where, because of the loss of face and public favour of business, the government was able to intervene and implement social change favouring workers and general populations. But even then it wasn't an easy battle:

“Huey Long, a colourful populist Democrat from Louisiana who claimed to be the advocate of the poor against the rich, rose [in the Senate] to condemn a ‘ruling plutocratic class’ controlled by the ‘fortune-holding elements of Morgan, Mellon and Rockefeller.’ In 1934, Long introduced a plan to redistribute wealth which would annually tax large fortunes and corporate assets and redistribute the money by guaranteeing every family a gift of \$5000. and an annual income of \$2500. To promote his plan, Long established a Share Our Wealth Society which attracted over 5 million members in 1935, but he was assassinated before its enactment, and the milder reforms of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal proved sufficient to placate his supporters” (Steiner and Steiner, 1997).

Though the war gave the stagnating American industrial capacity a life-giving shot in the arm, subsequently the link was made between economic instability and violent conflict. This would lead to the elaboration of a global economic system meant to prevent instability. The consequent economic advantage the war gave American industry, along with the role of “saviours” they played towards the end of the conflict, put the U.S. in a position of strength for what “simple-lifer”/anti-globalists have seen as a

¹⁵ Jed Greer co-authored *Greenwash: The Reality Behind Corporate Environmentalism* (1997) with Kenny Bruno and *TNCs and India* (1995) with Kavaljit Singh. Singh also wrote *The Reality of Foreign Investments* (1997), *The Globalization of Finance* (1999) and *Taming Global Financial Flows* (2000).

determining event in the economic sphere to this day – the Bretton-Woods Conference, that will be examined later.

iii. The Growth of Corporate Global Influence

During the period of intense industrialisation in the U.S., American TNCs heavily dominated foreign investment activity and in the two decades after the Second World War, were joined by European and Japanese corporations that began to play ever-greater roles.

In the 1950s, banks in the US, Europe, and Japan started to invest vast sums of money in industrial stocks, encouraging corporate mergers and furthering capital concentration. Major technological advances in shipping, transport (especially by air), computerisation, and communications accelerated TNCs' increasing internationalisation of investment and trade, while new advertising capabilities helped TNCs expand market shares. All these trends meant that by the 1970s oligopolistic consolidation and TNCs' role in global commerce was of a far different scale than earlier in the century. Whereas in 1906 there were two or three leading firms with assets of US\$500 million, in 1971 there were 333 such corporations, one-third of which had assets of US\$1 billion or more. Additionally, TNCs had come to control 70-80 per cent of world trade outside the centrally planned economies (Greer and Singh, no date).

In the last quarter of the 20th century the tentacles of TNCs have quickly crept around the globe. From a mere 7,000 in 1970 their numbers had grown to more than 38,000 by the mid 1990s with ninety percent based in the industrialized world controlling more than 207,000 foreign subsidiaries. However, as with all other wealth distribution figures under the capitalist system, there are enormous inequalities here also. The top 100 firms own or control \$3.4 of the total U.S. \$5 trillion of assets for all 38,000 firms (Ibid).

TNCs have also increased their power over the less industrialised world through investment alongside private banks. Many of these corporations have assets or sales greater than the GDPs of the countries they settle in. This gives them tremendous power in negotiations. Currently, only the stronger developing countries like China and India can offer any kind of challenge or meaningful resistance. LDCs such as the majority of Sub-Saharan countries are utterly at the mercy of these giants. As Khor reports:

With the aid of infrastructure programs funded by Industrial governments, multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, and transnational banks, Third World governments were loaned billions of dollars to finance expensive infrastructure projects and to import highly capital-intensive technologies. They were also supported by foundations, research institutions, and scientists in the industrialized countries that carried out research on new agricultural technologies that would "modernize" the Third World - that is, that would create conditions whereby the Third World would become dependent on the transnational companies for technology and inputs (1999).

Of course these “billions of dollars” would, for the most part, come back to the industrialized nations in the form of contracts to expert firms retained to build these infrastructure projects.

Yet, for numerous reasons, many of them unfathomable, developing countries have adopted the concept that the solution to their economic woes is closely related to the fates of global corporations. The Economist (Anonymous, 1993), reports that in developing countries, TNCs are seen as "the embodiment of modernity and the prospect of wealth: full of technology, rich in capital, replete with skilled jobs." The Economist notes further that these governments have been "queuing up to attract multinationals" and liberalising investment restrictions as well as privatising public sector industries.

iv. The “Washington Consensus”

During the first half of the 20th century, Britain, or more specifically London, had remained the mercantile capital of the world. This would all change, rather rapidly, at the end of the Second World War following decisions made at a meeting, in July 1944, at Bretton Woods in New Hampshire, to which the Americans had invited 44 nations in the hopes of establishing a new world economic order. This meeting, in which the noted British economist John Maynard Keynes is said to have played a key role, was motivated by the concept of establishing instruments that would create an environment in which all countries could grow and develop their economies in peace and safety. In spite of

Keynes' presence, the scales ended up being heavily weighted in favour of the Americans. Evidence of this lies in the acceptance of the American dollar as the new basic world currency against which the gold standard would be pegged, despite strong opposition by Keynes. Another is the resistance to Keynes' idea for the creation of a sort of global "clearing house" "[t]hat would make it possible for countries to engage in trade and financial transactions in their own currencies" (Ellwood, 2001, 114). This is not overly surprising when one considers that the tenets of this new, world economic order had been elaborated earlier by the American Council on Foreign Relations. The tenets of this world order eventually came to be known as the "Washington Consensus" (Barlow and Clarke, 2001, 57-8). This new order would have several important characteristics based on free trade, free competition and free enterprise under the slogan **America First, Business First:**

1 – Free access to the world's raw materials to supply the formidable American production apparatus that had been bolstered by the war

2 – Free access to foreign markets for the foreseen overproduction of American goods

3 – Free circulation of capital to open up Foreign Direct Investment globally (Translated from Gélinas, 2000, 35-6).

A few milestone events took place at this memorable meeting. As mentioned above, the first was the adoption of the American dollar as universal currency: the only one to be convertible to gold at a fixed rate. Bretton Woods also saw the creation of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund [IMF], and the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs [GATT], later to become the World Trade Organisation [WTO]. As mentioned earlier, these Bretton Woods institutions were instrumental in consolidating

capitalism's monopoly on feasible economic systems. They have also served to extend business' sovereignty over national economic policy and to blur the lines between the economic and other sectors of society. Finally, they have allowed business, in conjunction with the governments of industrialised countries, to establish a position of power over the socio-economies of most of the world.

b. The Bretton Woods Institutions

“Simple-lifers”/anti-gobalists see the meeting at Bretton Woods as key in establishing institutions that were later to support the rapid expansion of the transnational culture and capitalism across the face of the globe. The World Bank, the IMF and the WTO will be dealt with in this single section because what is relevant for this work, i.e. their ideology, affiliations, links and preoccupations, runs as a common thread throughout all of them. The purpose here is not to give a detailed report of their organisational structure and their inner working or even to elaborate extensively on their accomplishments. What is proposed, rather, is a demonstration of what “simple-lifers” see as the important role they have played in spreading capitalist ideology around the globe and how they have bolstered Western (mostly American) corporations' growth by helping them get access to world resources and markets. It is important to understand the role and power of these organisations and the power they wield over national and local governments if we are to appreciate the difficulties of implementing some of the alternatives suggested at the end of this work. Perhaps more importantly, what should become clear is how the narrowly economic standards that drive these institutions and

serve them as progress-measuring guidelines come into conflict with the more community, human and environmentally oriented values of the “simple-lifers”.

Much of the information for this section comes from Barlow and Clarke’s new book, Global Showdown, which provides a detailed understanding of the workings of these institutions, as they are perceived by a great number of social activists, especially anti-globalists. Since 1998, following the key role they played in the organization of the coalition against the MAI, Barlow and Clarke have become two of the most prominent figures of what has come to be termed the anti-globalisation movement in Canada and North America. The Council of Canadians, headed by Barlow, has become a key watchdog of the role played by international treaties and organizations in sensitive issues such as water and genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Barlow is also the chair of the International Forum on Globalization (IFG) based in San Francisco. The IFG’s goals, very much in line with many “simple-lifers” aspirations, are to (1) expose the multiple effects of economic globalization in order to stimulate debate, and (2) seek to reverse the globalization process by encouraging ideas and activities which revitalize local economies and communities, and ensure long term ecological stability. (International Forum on Globalisation, <http://www.ifg.org/>)

Tony Clarke is also an associate of IFG in addition to having founded the Polaris Institute, an anti-corporate-driven globalisation organization stationed in Ottawa. Authors and co-authors of several works in this field, Barlow and Clarke have become de facto experts in the analysis of the negative consequences of corporate-driven

globalisation, spearheading movements and coalitions that offer alternatives. They have thus become the prominent Canadian and sometimes North American voice for this worldwide movement.

i. Original Raison d'Etre

When the conference at Bretton Woods was over, the World Bank and the IMF were instituted and the guidelines were set for the GATT, which was to become the WTO after the Uruguay round of talks to modify the GATT in 1995. Barlow and Clarke argue that these three organisations were meant to instantiate the economic world proposed by the Council on Foreign Relations (see above). The World Bank's role was "to help with reconstruction after the war and to assist Third World countries with long-term development programs." The IMF was "to promote currency stability and oversee international financial and monetary order" (Barlow and Clarke, 2001, 56). The World Bank's overt mandate was to alleviate poverty. The preferred means chosen to achieve this goal was the promotion of foreign direct investment. Most of the Bank's programs involved the financing of large projects like dams or power plants, or the modernization of agriculture. Foreign investment was promoted by including clauses in the loan agreements that foreign corporations (from the larger lending nations) would contract to do the work. "A top Treasury official bragged to Congress that for every dollar the U.S. contributes to the World Bank, American corporations receive \$1.30 in contracts (Ibid., 59). Lately, after coming under fire for its practices, the Bank has theoretically modified its lending policies and revised the types of projects it will promote. It has also set up an

important image campaign promoting its poverty alleviation mandate and its current preoccupation with social programs, infrastructure projects to improve health and sanitation etc. A cursory visit of their website easily confirms this. There is nothing to indicate, however, that any of this is actually substantially different from the experiments of Robert McNamara, World Bank President from 1968 to 1981. There is no reason to believe that strategies used then, loans for social programs and infrastructures, will yield better results today (Worldwatch Institute, 2001, 155). After writing a scathing critique of the World Bank in Mortgaging the Earth, (1994) Bruce Rich, director of the International Program of the Environmental Defence Fund, contends that the Bank's renewed position statement on poverty is mainly rhetoric; that in practice its hands are, to a great extent, tied by its close affiliation to the IMF and its exigencies, and the service it promises to its customers. For example,

[i]n 1996, 1997 and 1998, MIGA [Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency] and the IFC [International Finance Corporation] approved loans and insurance for Coca Cola bottling plants in Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan, respectively. Since 1997 the Bank has been preparing a huge IBRD/IFC project to assist Exxon-Mobil, Chevron and Petronas in oil field development and pipeline construction in Chad and Cameroon. MIGA guarantees have helped to support huge gold mining operations in Indonesian Irian Jaya and Papua New Guinea run by giant multinational mining operations with execrable environmental records: Freeport McMoran and Rio Tinto Zinc (Rich, 2000).

In fact, Rich maintains that behind the anti-poverty rhetoric, the World Bank continues its regular banking practices and there are few references to anti-poverty concerns in everyday operations. While it is impossible to deny that the Bank has implemented various programs in the past few years that intend to promote the elaboration of social programs in the poorer countries, Rich says the effort is actually marginal and not part of the functional ideology. What is done is minimal compared to what is needed and is meant to be window dressing for a corporation attempting to remake its image.

The IMF, for its part, has traditionally filled its role mostly by making short-term loans to its member countries to smooth out bumps created by balance of payment deficits. Until Nixon unilaterally decided to eliminate the gold standard as pegged to the U.S. dollar, the IMF also monitored currency fluctuations. In the latter part of the 20th century it took on the additional role of bailing out countries unable to pay off their foreign debt and whose economies were on the verge of total collapse. This has usually meant “bailouts” of extraordinarily large sums in the tens of billions of dollars. Brazil, Mexico, Russia and several Asian countries “benefited” from these loans in the 1990s.

As its name implies, the GATT was originally concerned with the regulation of trade, mostly through the negotiation of bilateral and multilateral trade agreements, and with the control of tariffs on internationally traded goods. Gradually, its mandate expanded in the course of various rounds of negotiations since its formation, to eventually also include non-tariff barriers to trade. These include labour and

environmental laws for example. The last round of talks in 1995 saw the formation of the WTO that took over the role of enforcing the trade agreements that have come out of the negotiation rounds. The WTO was endowed with powers and processes that allowed it to enforce the agreements in ways that GATT had never been able to. What is relevant for the purposes of this work are not the accomplishments of the GATT in the fifty years before it became the WTO. Though the treaties it was empowered to supervise were many and often controversial, it wasn't until the WTO was given a new structure with broad enforcement powers that concerned citizens started to worry and quite vociferously express their concerns. These new powers were seen as allowing the WTO to supersede national interests and legislation put in place for the well-being of citizens.

Originally these three organisations were under the supervision of the United Nations and answerable to its member countries but as early as 1947 when it came time to institutionalize the GATT/WTO that link was dissolved and they now operate independently out of Washington and Geneva. Martin Khor (2000), a staunch supporter of the United Nations and believer that this organisation should be restructured and strengthened, says the WTO could not have operated under the values and principles of the UN, especially its Declaration of Human Rights.

ii. Changing Roles and the Growth of Resistance

Until the 1980s the activities of the World Bank and the IMF weren't subject to much public scrutiny. However, in the 1970s large sums of money from oil-rich

countries flowed into their coffers and that money needed to be invested. A series of questionable loans and projects followed, mostly in developing countries, and by the mid-80's country after country started defaulting on these loans. The IMF and the WB quickly became quasi-bankruptcy brokers and suddenly they were both in the spotlight and hotseat. Group after group called for their heads. Even Milton Friedman (1998), of the neo-liberal Chicago School of Economics, in an article in Forbes requested the IMF's head on a platter after the Russian debacle. According to Friedman, much of the critique of the IMF's bailout loans comes from the recognition that, in essence, they are used to protect imprudent investors using taxpayers' money. When a loan is accorded to a country in difficulty, the money is used to reimburse bondholders and other debtors, usually from wealthy countries. The taxpayers of the troubled country then become indebted to the taxpayers of the wealthy country through the auspices of the IMF and the large investors, banks, and other corporations emerge essentially unscathed.

As for the WTO, since its birth in 1995, it has quickly become the prime target of a host of activist groups of concerned citizens from several countries. From the onset many disagreed with its creation and the scope of its mandate and several decisions and rulings it has made have drawn much ire and fire. Since it is more directly related to corporations and corporate activity than the other two institutions it has been of more concern for those, including "simple-lifers", who propose alternatives to corporate-driven globalisation.

As mentioned previously, the number of activist groups and other organisations upset at the workings of the three Bretton Woods Institutions is mind-boggling. Every time one of these organisations has had a meeting in the past decade, protests have been organised. Seattle, in November 1999, however, seemed to be a new landmark of activist organisation. There were several well-organised marches made up of a multitude of groups. From the AFL-CIO, myriad student groups, raging grannies, to farmers and activists in turtle costumes protesting rulings on shrimp fishing, all seemed to somehow have an axe to grind with the WTO. Long before the meeting itself there was extensive co-ordination of groups from around the world. Several workshops were organised where courses were given on peaceful resistance, civil disobedience, how to deal with tear gas and charging police, how to climb buildings and other structures to unfurl banners etc. There was an alternatives conference with renowned speakers like, David Suzuki of Nature of Things fame, Maude Barlow of the Council for Canadians, Tony Clarke of the Polaris Institute of Canada, Martin Khor of the Third World Network and Vandana Shiva from the Schumacher College in Great Britain. There were also several satellite sites around Seattle where the anti-globalisation messages could be heard “à toutes les sauces” (in all flavours). Everyone but the demonstrators, it seems, was amazed at the number of protesters and their diversity.

Eventually, the WTO talks were disrupted. At one point they were shut down because the delegates were prevented by activists from getting to the conference centre and at the end of it all the delegates went home without an agreement. Barlow and Clarke (2001, 12-16) tell us that Third World delegates started listening to what was

being said outside and observing how they were being treated inside (often off-handedly, excluded from special “green room” sessions) and started getting upset and wondering what they were getting themselves into. Faced with the force of concerned citizens from around the world, many from their own developing countries, they became rather uncooperative. “The spectacular failure of the WTO Seattle meeting had its roots in both the system of decision-making and the substance of the negotiations” (Khor, 2000).

4. Social Impacts and Simple-lifer/Anti-globalist Concerns

What were the concerns expressed at the alternatives conference and on the streets? They revolved around jobs, the environment, democracy, transparency, exploitation and colonisation. The discussions were about corporations dictating to governments and about government members not listening to the desires, wants and needs of their constituencies. At its most fundamental the uproar was about people’s fears and apprehension and their frustration at not being listened to most of the time and not being taken seriously when they have the chance to be heard.

This message related by Barlow and Clarke is central to “simple-lifers” core values of community, of openness, of respect of persons, of involvement and responsibility (Elgin, 1981, 38-40; Mongeau, 1998, 241-2). If the social systems in which they have to live do not respect their values, voluntary simplicity is a pragmatic reaction to dissatisfaction that helps reduce dissonance. Understanding, denunciation, protest and the suggestion of alternatives are some of the tools they use in their attempt to

transform situations. The following pages elaborate on a few of their preoccupations related to the connection between the capitalist ideology of economic liberalisation and the realities and concerns of actual people faced with the concrete results of its implementation.¹⁶ We will concentrate, here, on questions that are central to “simple-lifer” values and concerns: the social impacts on employment, education and health and social and economic inequity. We will also examine a few values and issues they see as essential in the construction of more human-centred communities: democracy and transparency.

a. *Employment*

The question of work or employment is as central to the globalisation debate as it is to the “simple-lifer” ideology. It is seen as an important element in giving meaning to life as well as providing sustenance. Therefore, having access to meaningful employment is key in the pursuit of the good life. If, within a capitalist nation, the tension between labour and capital is always problematic, the issue of employment within the globalised context presents several additional problems. First, there is a drain of jobs from industrialised countries towards developing nations. A corollary to this is the downward pressure on wages and deterioration of working conditions and job quality in both developed and developing countries. More importantly is the undermining of the support for unions and socialist parties and the more collectivist social ideology as the working class shrinks and its power disintegrates (Glassman, 2000, 4).

¹⁶ The environment is such an important aspect of the simple-lifer critique of capitalism and its globalisation that it will be dealt with in a separate chapter.

i. The Effects of a Growing Workforce and Productive Mobility

Social analysts of differing ideologies, since Marx, have recognised that the capitalist system is based in the ownership and control of productive property: “a small group that owns and controls, and a great majority that does not, and whose resulting powerlessness requires them to work for wages simply to survive” (Dowd, 2000, 5). Despite this, the 20th century saw great strides in the improvement of the fates of workers across the Western world. Until the 1970s, labour conditions and wages improved constantly throughout North America and Europe. A strong union movement kept constant pressure on industry, controlling labour flows and keeping workers united, greatly increasing their capacity for getting their demands heard and met.

Where proponents of globalisation see these same benefits accruing to populations of the Third World as time evolves, critics are much more sceptical. They point to the erosion, in the last few decades of the century, of workers’ rights and powers as capitalism took its “great leap forward” through the globalisation enterprise. Greider (1997) provides an incredibly thorough analysis of the issue of employment in the globalising workplace. Through their promotion of capitalist economic globalisation, the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO in particular are seen as encouraging corporations to take advantage of workers across the planet. Greider’s analysis centres on the oversupply of workers and the increasing mobility of capital and industry. Oversupply is directly related to technological discoveries that have allowed us to

constantly increase our production while at the same time reducing the labour hours to do so. As regards mobility, first, there is a shift of an increasing number of jobs and types of jobs from developed to developing countries. Second, mobility of capital facilitates the exploitation of labour in developing regions where labour laws are lax or non-existent.

In industrialised countries, labour activists deplore the loss of jobs as corporations move their operations to developing countries to take advantage of low wages. This has been especially inflammatory in the Southwest United States as moves take place just across the border into the maquiladora district of Mexico and U.S. workers can almost see their old jobs performed by Mexicans. Companies like Ford, GE and a multitude of European companies have settled in these areas that offer tax incentives and low-wage workers adhering to state-run rather than independent unions, when there are any at all. There are now over 13 of these economic free zones in China involving millions of workers (<http://www.transnationale.org/anglais/pays/CHN.htm>).

To date, the transfer of jobs has mostly been in the industrial/textile sector but increasingly it is moving to other sectors. Certain countries of the Third World, foreseeing this change have set up extensive education programs. In India, for example, the area of Bangalore is a booming computer software development centre boasting the presence of Indian world leaders like Infosys Technologies and Vipro. Information technology giants from around the world including Sun Microsystems, Texas Instruments, Intel and ZiLOG have opened installations in the city that became “a key location in India for the electronics industry, primarily because the Indian government

located a number of government-owned electronics companies and defense-research institutions in the city” (Ribeiro, 2001). NASDAQ even opened its doors in Bangalore in February 2001.

Programmers there will work for a fraction of the rates of North Americans. In a field like information systems, where physical location is, for the most part, totally irrelevant, several brokers have now set up links with developing countries’ human resource base and, on the Internet, are offering the services of these workers. They offer offshore outsourcing services where corporations can not only get cheap labour but also avoid paying costly social benefits. In India and other former colonies of the British Empire, language is also not an issue since the British had set up good education systems in English for the elites and these were taken over and continued after independence was achieved (Greider, 1997, 64-5).

This increased competition for jobs has created a downward pressure on wages in industrialised countries. Where the jobs have not been lost, quite often wages have been pushed down, in part, by the perceived or real threat of corporations moving their operations abroad or even to another province, state or city. In fact, while CEO and upper management compensation has skyrocketed in the past few decades, workers’ real wages are now at approximately the same level they were in the mid 1960s. In practice, this has meant longer work hours and a lowering of real wages for a great number of North American workers. In an article in *The Boston Globe*, Bernard Sanders explains that in the U.S., for example, “[i]n 1973, the real (inflation-adjusted) hourly earnings for

production and non-supervisory workers averaged \$14.09. By 1998, that wage had fallen to \$12.77... To maintain their standard of living in the face of declining wages, people in New England and throughout this country are working extraordinarily hard. Incredibly, the average American is now working an entire month longer every year than he/she worked just 20 years ago”(Sanders, 2000). The mobility of corporations has also had an effect on collective bargaining. When an employer can credibly state that if workers ask for too much in the way of wages and/or benefits, labour standards or work conditions they will move their operations elsewhere, the strength of unions or other employee groups is greatly reduced (Rodrik, 1997). While direct causality can't be established between this loss of power and the popularity of union membership, it is true that in the last decades, participation in labour unions, an important factor in the gains made in the last century in the areas of worker rights, benefits and wages, is in a state of decline.

The decline of worker collectives in industrialised countries and the lack of capacity of workers to organise in developing countries because of similar pressures from corporate employers has also resulted in a reduction of quality in the work environment. This is much more flagrant in developing countries. Foreign production facilities, usually take one of two forms. Either the corporation sets up its own operation unit, most often patterned on their Western counterparts, or they subcontract to local entrepreneurs. Many American firms, for example, no longer have any manufacturing outfits in the U.S. Sometimes they bring in components from across the world and simply assemble them in North America. Other times the whole operation is done abroad and then the products are brought in for sale in the more lucrative Western markets.

Whatever the situation, civil rights groups maintain that the conditions under which many of the industrial workers have to work are outrageous. Conditions may be somewhat superior in the units set up by the corporations themselves since most often these are new establishments and at least the physical environments can be acceptable. Even there, however, issues are raised concerning low wages, long hours and strong interference in the establishment of unions. In a Ford plant in Mexico for example, workers who went out on strike and assembled to form a union independent from the usual government-controlled unions of Mexico were summarily fired and replaced. Before the firings, thugs entered the factory and started indiscriminately shooting at the employees (Korten, 1996, 129).

In factories where the work is subcontracted, these same things happen but, in addition, physical working conditions are often abominable. Very often, improvements made to the plants are done much more in relation to increased productivity or efficiency than to improve working conditions. IKEA, for example, in a furniture factory in Hungary, has helped the supplier set up a robotized paint room that improves the quality of the surface painted and reduces the input of paint, reducing costs. However, where a conveyor line could have been installed to move the painted parts into the drying kiln, it was cheaper to let women carry them even if they had to inhale the health-damaging fumes from the paint (In the video, [IKEA: Santa's Workshop, IKEA's Backyard](#)).

Quite often the workers are either women or young children who are more docile and whose wages can be set even lower than those of men. In a speech given in Seattle in November 1999, Warren Allmand relates the plight of these female workers in Asian sweatshops: there have been reports of beatings for slow production, employees are often given only one pass per day to go to the bathroom and there has also been mention of workers tied or chained to their workspaces (in the video, Bye Buy World; also Korten, 1996, 231-232). There have been news stories in Asia and Africa of workers being burned alive in the factories whose doors had been locked to keep the workers in (Greider, 1997, 333ff).

As Greider points out one element that gives corporations this kind of power is the increasing pool of cheap, unskilled labour around the world. Though improved technology is instrumental in reducing labour needs, another contributor to this pool of labour are the loan and aid policies of the IMF and World Bank. Korten explains that under these plans, huge tracts of land have been expropriated in developing countries and turned into plantations to produce export goods so that developing countries could meet their debt repayment. As people are thrown off their lands for these and various other reasons, they migrate to the cities and become easy and cheap fodder for the factories producing goods that only Western consumers can afford (1996, 49).

Though nothing comparable to the treatment of workers in developing countries, Greider gives several examples of how the conditions of workers are also negatively affected in developed countries. Increasingly confronted with the reality of an

overabundant global workforce and threats or subtle innuendoes of closures or moves, governments of industrialised countries, in an effort to create or maintain jobs in their regions, are also falling under the “blackmailing” discourse of corporations. Workers are also coerced into accepting lower wages and more precarious working conditions such as part-time work (Greider, 1997, 59-65).

Barlow and Clarke (2000, 133) refer to another worrying phenomenon in this vein, which, they say, affects social and individual well-being and stability. That phenomenon has been dubbed McJobs. These are jobs that provide very low wages and security. They are most often part-time, non-unionized jobs in the rapidly expanding service sector and are majoritarily held by youth and women. Though there have been a few exceptions, for the most part, the lack of security in these jobs has prevented labour organisations both North and South from forming to protect worker rights.

Where, in industrialised countries, this is clearly a manifestation of deteriorating work conditions, in developing countries it is not as immediately evident. Without at least a general knowledge of the conditions that have affected the situation of workers in these countries, at first glance it may appear that their lot is improved through the provision of jobs. What critics say is actually happening however, is a promotion and continuation of the situation of dependency started under colonial empires. Greider explains that oftentimes the employment provided is made up of jobs that can be moved in the blink of an eye to another country where conditions might be more favourable. Even Jeffrey Sachs (1998), when attempting to defend the current model based on growth

figures, admits that those developing countries that have shown economic growth have done so under the model of reserving LDCs (Less Developed Countries) as sources of cheap unskilled labour.

b. Health and Education

It might appear cliché to state that the future of a nation is its youth. However, in the case of developing countries this is especially evident. “Simple-lifers” are concerned that the current globalisation model with a strong industrialization base is exacerbating the plight of children in developing countries in at least two ways. First, Korten hints that the drive to enter the globalised market has motivated countries to turn a somewhat blind eye to the issue of child labour since it is seen, in the short term, as increasing competitiveness (1996, 231-232). The use of children as workers reduces their future opportunities since the type of work they do often affects both their health and their chances at getting a good education. The second aspect relates to children’s greater vulnerability to pollution factors.

While we often hear of the AIDS crisis or issues of water-borne diseases as relates to health in developing countries, one less explored issue is health problems directly caused by the industrialising process in these countries. One of the major factors concerning globalisation and health issues in developing countries is the transfer of polluting technologies, industries and processes to developing countries eager for any possible occasion to get them out of their morass of increasing population and increasing

foreign debt load. In rural areas in Mexico, studies are looking into possible links between increased use of pesticides and health and developmental problems in children who have shown “decreases in stamina, gross and fine eye-hand coordination, memory, and the ability to draw a person” (Ecology Center, 2000).

In the same line of thought, studies have also shown that in some Mexican cities children’s IQs and general health have been negatively affected because of the higher level of lead ingestion due to corporate polluting activities (emission and the manufacture of products with lead inputs) and to increased use of automobiles since leaded gasoline is still used. The industrial city of Torreon in north Mexico has earned notoriety because of its sick children. They are afflicted with headaches, upset stomachs and appetite loss while some have difficulty walking. The children are victims of an environmental scandal - allegedly caused by the activities of mining and metals company Met-Mex Penoles, the world’s largest silver producer and one of the largest lead smelters. “Penoles was ordered to scale back production at [one of their] plants by more than 50 percent May 21 after more than 1,000 neighborhood children were found to be suffering from high lead levels caused by a lead-tainted waste site” (Minnis, 1999). Rothenberg (1998) in his study of blood lead levels in Mexico City reported: “data from our cohort and from several others examined in Mexico City reveal that a substantial proportion of pregnant women and young children still have PbBs [lead levels] recognized as being potentially dangerous.”

A Chinese study released in the spring of 2002 shows the same kind of situation in China (Chu, 2002). While many cities showed lead poisoning rates above 60%, some

were as high as 83%. Economic growth has pulled millions of Chinese from the jaws of abject poverty but some of the most dire consequences are only now coming to light as projections from the study indicate that up to 50% of all Chinese children may currently suffer from lead poisoning. These situations affect children's future prospects for education and health and thus work.

But the problem of health issues as related to work is not limited to children. In a June 1999 article in the Financial Times, Frances Williams reports on a World Health Organisation (WHO) and International Labour Organisation (ILO) study that said that:

“the continuing shift of industrial production to low-cost sites in developing countries where worker protection is lower is likely to increase the global incidence of occupational disease and injury...The ILO estimates that work-related injuries and diseases kill an estimated 1.1m people worldwide each year...about 300,000 deaths from 250 million workplace accidents, as well as deaths from occupational diseases such as respiratory and cardiovascular diseases and cancer. Hazards include not only exposure to toxic chemicals, noise and dangerous machinery but also stress, which is associated with higher incidence of cardiovascular disease and mental illness.”

c. Food Security and Safety

We will see later how questions of self-sufficiency and self-reliance are important values for “simple-lifers” providing individuals and communities with a sense of control over their destinies and the possibility of developing relationships of interdependence rather than dependence. In developing countries, one element of self-reliance that has come under scrutiny on a regular basis is that of the food supply. Several researchers and studies referred to in Barlow and Clarke, Gélinas, Korten, Oxfam, Shiva and Wallace contend that other conditions imposed by the IMF and the WB have contributed to reduced food security for developing countries. First, they cite the requirement to facilitate trade by reducing or eliminating tariffs and quotas in sectors where the same rules are not applied to industrialised countries. This is true especially in the agricultural sector where industrialised countries still maintain very high rates of subsidies. In many instances they say this has encouraged the inflow of subsidised products from the North and totally destabilised agriculture in the Southern countries submitted to this. Oxfam (2001) gives the poignant example of Haiti that was flooded with cheap, subsidised rice imports from the U.S. The result was the destruction of much of the rice production capacity in Haiti. Farmers who couldn’t compete with these products’ prices left their farms and migrated to the cities in hopes of finding gainful employment. This contributed to the expansion of the urban slums problem and the disruption of rural communities. In addition,

“rice is now becoming less affordable. While the initial surge in imports reduced prices in urban centres, thus generating income gains for net food-

consuming households, rapid depreciation of the national currency has now driven up import prices. Buying local rice would now be cheaper, but it is no longer available between harvests due to the slump in production... From a position of near self-sufficiency in 1990, Haiti's imports now account for over half of national consumption." (Ibid.)

Critics also maintain that the Western industrial and agricultural model may not be uniformly transferable to all situations. Also, promoting or forcing countries/farmers to move to cash crops either to pay off the foreign debt or with false promises of making them millionaires has created situations of despondence. Wallace (1990) refers to the inefficiency of agricultural models developed for temperate climate zones and the types of soils found there when these are applied in tropical or sub-tropical regions. Vandana Shiva has done extensive research on the situation of farmers in India and has found deplorable conditions that she attributes, at least in part, to the IMF and World Bank's insistence on the application of Western farming methods. These situations have a direct bearing on the present and future ability of Indian populations to feed themselves properly. Initially, what drew her attention was a rash of suicides in several provinces of India that had heretofore been very productive areas agriculturally. What she found during her investigation was a great number of relatively highly indebted farmers who had had to borrow either to dig wells for irrigation or to purchase other agricultural inputs such as machinery, fertilisers or pesticides. Others had been enticed to switch to growing cotton, a water intensive crop that also needs large amounts of pesticides. In her article Globalization and Poverty (2000), Shiva paints a grim picture of the trail of

environmental, social and individual damage that these practices have brought. Heavy use of pesticides and the introduction of hybrid seeds have been, in her estimation, the most damaging but traditional agricultural systems are very complex and have evolved over millennia into webs of interdependence and the simple solutions of modern technology are proving incapable of effectively replacing these systems.

In addition to having indebted farmers, pesticides have had disastrous effects on biodiversity, which was the basis of Indian nutrition. Spraying has killed the bees and other pollinators so that fruit trees no longer bear fruit. The green “weeds” that women used to collect amongst the grain crops have disappeared. These used to provide a rich diet of necessary minerals and vitamins in the guise of bathua, amaranth and mustard leaves. Biotech firms are now vying to provide these vitamins in new strands of foods. The case of the Vitamin A enriched “Golden Rice” is but one example. Shiva, however, says this is another trap in which farmers already find themselves. Having introduced hybrid seeds from seed transnationals, farmers have become dependent on purchasing seed supplies from these companies every year. No longer can they keep part of their harvest to sow next year’s fields. This fact also reduces the ability of native farmers to provide food security for their compatriots. Faced with degraded lands and debt they know they will never be able to repay, farmers now kill themselves by ingesting the very pesticides that destroyed their livelihood.

Korten (1996) and Shiva (2000) also give voice to those who worry about the safety of the food supply. They maintain that capitalism’s constant push for short-term

profits has led corporations to avoid taking the precautionary measures needed to provide people with foods that are nutritious, healthy and safe (Korten, 1999, 187). Biotech companies, they say, have succeeded at least partially in convincing the world that there is a food shortage and that they have the solution. Both Korten and Shiva, supported by several others (see Barlow and Clarke, 2001, 130-1, for a list of the main concerned civil groups) propose that this position is wrong on both counts and worry about the safety of the proposed new products. First, they say, there is no food shortage. While a few areas are agriculturally strained there is enough food grown in the world today to provide each inhabitant with an adequate level of nutrition. The problem is much more political and one of distribution and often, of use of inappropriate techniques.

Second, they contend that biotechnologies are not the answer to feeding world populations. In addition to making populations dependent on large corporations, they say the evidence is inconclusive that biotechnology actually can produce more food and it is also debatable whether the food sources they provide are actually safe for human consumption. Many authors maintain that the testing methods and schedules for these products are inadequate. In support of these positions Shiva (2000) cites Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) studies that demonstrate “that small bio-diverse farms can produce thousands of times more food than large, industrial monocultures”. Shiva also says that there is ample “empirical evidence that genetic engineering does not produce more food and in fact often leads to a yield decline”.

Shiva's concerns about the destructive qualities of modern, large-scale agricultural processes are echoed by Pimentel: "Worldwide, more than 10 million hectares of agricultural land are abandoned annually because of serious soil degradation. During the last 40 years, about 30 percent of total world arable land was abandoned because it was no longer productive. About half of the current arable land now in cultivation will be unsuitable for food production by the middle of the twenty-first century" (1996, 293). The message is clear. Though we may presently have the resources to feed the world, if we continue with current destructive practices this may not still be the case within a few short decades. In fact, China, the largest producer of grain in the world is nevertheless a net importer of grain. This is in part due to the loss of arable land due to unsustainable farming techniques (Brown, 1995, 54ff). In addition, the farmers who usually move to cities when this occurs now become drains on the agricultural product rather than suppliers. The Haiti example provided by Oxfam and mentioned earlier is a clear indication of how this occurs.

d. Wealth Distribution

In the discussion on employment we saw how Western exploitation of cheap labour in LDCs has succeeded in keeping wage levels very low. This creates a situation in which the wealth discrepancies between the workers and the owners of capital keep increasing. If, as we have seen, the problem of wealth distribution is an issue in industrialised countries it is no less so both within developing countries and in the relationship between industrialised nations and LDCs. The numbers are impressive and,

according to some (Korten, 1996, 1997; Loy, 2000; UNDP, 1999; Weisbrot et al., 2001; Barlow and Clarke, 2001) not getting any better since the beginning of the globalisation process. In fact, based on a wide range of indicators, it would seem that global economic liberalisation has not been very efficient in helping the poorest catch up to the richest economically or in social well-being.

The UNDP says that the richest human beings are profiting incredibly more from world trade than the poor. "The top fifth of the world's people in the richest countries enjoy 82 per cent of the expanding export trade and 68 per cent of FDI -- the bottom fifth, barely more than one percent" (UNDP, 1999). Loy (2000) explains that "[t]he richest 20 percent of the world's population now have an income about 150 times that of the poorest 20 percent, a gap that continues to grow". And yet, it's certainly not a question that there isn't enough wealth to go around. Korten (1997) explains that the world is certainly not short of money: "The world's 450 billionaires alone have combined financial assets greater than the combined annual incomes of half of humanity". Another way of putting it: "Today, the world's 3 richest people have assets greater than the combined economic output of the 48 poorest nations" (Poor People's Summit to End Poverty, 2000). Even according to the [World] Bank's Operations Evaluation Department's latest Annual Review of Development Effectiveness 1999, "poverty trends have worsened... The number of poor people living on less than US \$1 a day rose from 1,197 million in 1987 to 1,214 million in 1997" (Rich, 2000).

Weisbrot et al. (2001) also demonstrated in their study that the per capita growth rates in GDP have fallen more steeply for the poorer nations than the richer ones in the

last two decades, another demonstration that the poor are always more adversely affected by downturns than the rich. This is supported by Oxfam:

“[e]xcluding Bangladesh, which accounts for almost one-quarter of the total LDC economy, per capita income increased by just 0.4 per cent a year in the 1990s, widening the gap in living standards between the LDCs and the rest of the world. Twenty years ago, the ratio of average income in the LDCs to average income in rich countries was 1:87. It is now 1:98.”

Durning (1999) and Rich (2000) refer to studies and theories showing that satisfaction with one's fate and feelings of happiness are related to one's level of income relative to those we compare ourselves with. If such is the case, as new communications technologies bring us in closer relationship with people of developing countries and they “see” exactly the discrepancies in wealth, their level of happiness and thus well-being is bound to reduce. Given this theory and the improvements in communications, it becomes even more pressing to reduce the income discrepancies. Some authors maintain that one possible consequence of this feeling of inequity could be increased violence. In an interview in the NFB video entitled *The Human Race: Bomb Under the World*, Vandana Shiva brings up the spectre of violence and terrorism as young males in developing countries feel comparatively deprived and start to realise that the earth's resources cannot allow them to reach Western levels of consumption or levels of the richer individuals in their own countries. She also points to the possibility that this situation could be having an effect on the rise of fundamentalism in poorer countries and the consequent social

ruptures. Shutt (1998, 215) also makes the correlation between large variations in economic levels and the possibility of martial conflict.

e. Democracy

Barlow and Clarke refer to an important point of irritation that leads “simple-lifers” to oppose corporate-driven economic globalisation, a core social and community value they see as constantly flouted: democracy, in which all persons have a say in the elaboration of their social dream. Proponents of the existing socio-economic system often make the link between the economic success of the West and the fact that these countries also have democratic political systems even though it is, in reality, difficult to infer direct causality. In fact, it can be difficult to fathom how essentially undemocratic organisational structures like corporations can be instrumental in promoting democratic ideology. In addition, several economic successes have occurred under very autocratic regimes. One need only refer to examples such as Malaysia, Singapore and the current economic growth in China where effective state controls have played an important part in the successes. There are, in fact, inherent tensions between corporate and democratic ideologies (Steiner and Steiner, 1997). For capitalists, economic efficiency, productivity and self-interest are major motivators and resources are best allocated, at least theoretically, through an impartial market mechanism. It has been shown, in our examination of competition, that these forces have a tendency to concentrate wealth and power. A fundamental democratic value, on the other hand, is equality. From its Greek roots in the words meaning “people” and “power”, democracy bases power in the person

herself rather than her assets. All persons have an equal say in how things should be organised. Decisions for social organisation are made on the principle that “sovereignty, first and foremost, resides in the people...creating and recreating governments with the authority to act for the common good” (Barlow and Clarke, 2001, 168).

Another aspect of the democracy/business link seen as problematic has been Western states’ tendency to conveniently ignore questions of democracy abroad when corporate or their own economic or political interests are at stake. While preaching the value of the democracy/free-market relationship at home, recent history is full of instances where Western powers financially supported oppressive and abusive dictatorships from Asia to the Middle East to South and Central America. They have also been much quicker to react to local conflicts in areas where they maintained economic interests. The Gulf War may be the most recent flagrant example of this. On the other hand, when the aggressor of democracy is an economic ally, reaction to support democratic principles is much slower, as was evident in the East Timor conflict with Indonesia. Greider (1997) points out that it is often to business’ advantage to deal with countries with strong and/or oppressive rule. It is much easier in these systems to influence policy and legislation that can be beneficial to business and to the ruling elite but could be bad for workers and/or the environment. So businesses have little advantage in promoting the expansion of democracy when that may mean that a presently dependent and servile workforce could start asking that their democratic rights also be respected in the workplace. Even Adam Smith, a most revered father of the free-market ideology,

warned of the involvement of business leaders in political or legislative matters. In *The Wealth of Nations* he states:

The proposal of any new law or regulation of commerce which comes from this order ought always to be listened to with great precaution, and ought never to be adopted till after having been long and carefully examined, not only with the most scrupulous, but with the most suspicious attention. It comes from an order of men whose interest is never exactly the same with that of the public, who have generally an interest to deceive and even to oppress the public, and who accordingly have, upon many occasions, both deceived and oppressed it. (Smith, 1904)

Critics accuse not only global corporations but also organisations like the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF of being quite far from living the democratic principles they theoretically support. The WTO, especially, is the target of this discourse since, unlike its sister institutions, its charter gives equal voice to each member. Though it may be difficult to argue with the theory, Khor (2000) maintains that, on several occasions such as the ministerial meeting in Seattle, practice has shown that it can be questioned at least on two fronts: the decision-making mechanism and the conflict resolution apparatus.

Khor explains that it can be very difficult for the smaller, cash-strapped nations of the Third World to participate fully in the WTO's democratic process. The WTO's

offices are set up in Geneva, certainly not the cheapest place in the world to live. While the large, industrialised countries maintain sizable secretariats with batteries of corporate and international law experts who constantly meet and interact, some of the poorer nations can't even afford to send delegates to all the main meetings. When they are there, lacking the expertise, one can understand how easily they could be swayed (or coerced) into supporting the position of the stronger countries (Khor, 2000).

In the same vein, the democratic power of small poor nations is challenged when WTO rules are enforced. It is very clear that these nations do not have the political or economic strength, quite often, to support WTO decisions even when these are in their favour. It's easy for the larger powers to threaten to withdraw support in another area or to take the smaller country to task at the WTO on another issue. It is also much more difficult for smaller countries to accept to maintain a particular position and pay WTO rulings of compensatory payments than it is for larger countries, should they choose to do so. It is also harder for smaller, poor countries to take the risk of implementing policies or legislation that could be challenged at the WTO.

Finally, Barlow and Clarke explain that the powers of the WTO's conflict resolution mechanism and the agreements it monitors are such that they override much legislation that activist groups around the world (people power/democracy) have worked for decades to get implemented by their democratically elected representatives:

No other international agreements (with the exception of NAFTA...) have the legal and enforcement powers of the World Trade Organisation. WTO rulings are so powerful that they take precedence over Multilateral Environmental agreements (MEAs), such as the Convention on Biological Diversity; Human Rights agreements like the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and international labour codes, such as those of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). WTO rulings also apply to laws at every level of domestic governance – federal, provincial, state, regional, or local. If a law or regulation is challenged at the WTO and found to be trade illegal, it has to go, no matter who passed it or why. (Barlow and Clarke, 2001, 72).

Many of the trade agreements such as the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) referred to above are also seen as eroding the rights and capacity of national populations to self-determination. In the discussions that preceded all of these key international trade agreements, global corporations were quite active. In the spirit of Adam Smith's warnings quoted previously, civil society groups have been wary of their level of involvement in these agreements.¹⁷

¹⁷ In fact, the NAFTA was a controversial agreement from its onset in Canada. Even opposition political parties fought tooth and nail against it. Until he came to power and suddenly became one of the converted, Jean Chrétien vowed to fight the agreement with his last breath. In his book on the Canadian Establishment Titans, Peter Newman says: "...Brian Mulroney, the incoming prime minister at the time, was dead set against free trade" (1998, 156).

The scope of power of many aspects of the agreement has come under fire but none so heavily as the famed Chapter 11. Much like WTO rulings, Barlow and Clarke maintain, the NAFTA prevents national governments from implementing policies and legislation that could effectively protect their citizens and their environment. It allows corporations to sue governments (foreign or their own) for the loss of potential profits their legislation prevents them from making. The onus is put on governments to prove that their legislation is absolutely needed to preserve the well being of their citizens. There have been several such instances recently. In one crucial case the MMTB (a fuel additive known to carry carcinogens) had been banned from sale in Canada and Ethyl Corporation sued the Canadian government. The case was finally settled on the sidelines and the Canadian government paid 13 million dollars of compensation to the corporation, settling before the NAFTA ruling came out. There are now other cases in court concerning the export of water to the U.S. and UPS has sued for unfair competition from Canada Post. As mentioned earlier several other private institutions now apparently hold sway over national governments impeding their capacity to make decisions conforming to their mandate of ruling for the common good (Public Citizen, 2001).¹⁸

In summary, while trade can be seen as beneficial for societies involved in it, there is increasing concern about the power the agreements and the people or organisations that oversee them have gained over the governing bodies whose role is to care for the common good of the populations they represent. They are often seen as promoting the interests of a minority economic elite at the expense of the well being of

¹⁸ The Public Citizen Website offers a list of resolved and pending cases under Chapter 11 along with the ruling decisions.

the greater whole. The perception is that there is an increasing “disconnect” between the welfare of populations and societies and that of the organisations put in place to bring about this welfare.

Essentially, it appears as though the democracy that is taking shape under the aegis of these organisations is one in which corporations are the new citizens holding the power to make or break political leaders, being able to influence policy and legislation, and whose interests are being served rather than the people’s. The situation seems not very different from what it was one hundred and ten years ago when “Mary Lease, speaking on behalf of the Farmers’ Alliance ticket...complained: ‘Wall Street owns the country. It is no longer a government of the people, by the people and for the people, but a government of Wall Street and for Wall Street’” (John D. Hicks in Steiner and Steiner, 1997).

The globalisation process, as it exists today, appears to be undermining core social and political values that general populations have been fighting for for centuries. Being responsible for one’s ultimate destiny is a valuable principle for “simple-lifers”. The voice given by the democratic process is instrumental in this quest of self-determination. But the democratic process itself is qualified by people’s access to it and to the information needed to make proper decisions. To this end the decisions made by individuals, groups or institutions in power and the information that led to the making of these decisions should be made available to citizens to allow them to properly exercise their sovereignty rights and duties.

f. Transparency

The World Bank and the IMF have fewer pretensions than the WTO to democratic organisation and decision-making. Their power structure is organised according to the financial input of its members. The more contributions a country makes the greater its voting power. Since contributions are a function of economic might, the larger industrial powers hold the voting power with the U.S. in the lead. In fact, with its 17 percent voting share, it holds effective veto power as to any possible modifications to the organization's structure. While questions of democracy (other than support of non-democratic regimes) are less of an issue for these organisations, it is certainly not the case for transparency. Barlow and Clarke contend that public organisations whose activities have such an impact on the fate of so many should have transparent processes. In reality, many decisions in these organisations are often made in highly secretive "subcommittees" and processes. The Paris Club is but one of these "subcommittees". At the Paris Club "Third World debtors and their creditors from rich countries get together with IMF and World Bank officials to set rigorous conditions for debt relief. At these meetings says one insider, the Non-industrialised countries get 'beaten up'" (Barlow and Clarke, 2000, 58).

In a letter to the Executive Directors of the IMF on April 17th of 2001, 123 NGOs from 47 countries urged that the organisation acknowledge the right of citizens to participate in the formulation of national development policies and that it make

“accessible information about macroeconomic and structural policies in draft form, *prior* to Board approval, with sufficient time for the public to respond and provide input.”

They deplore the fact that “[p]olicy formation is still conducted through secret negotiations between borrowing governments and World Bank and IMF officials”, keeping development NGOs out of the picture. Quite often many documents related to the establishment of structural adjustment policies are not made public even after the loans have been approved (<http://www.foe.org/international/imf/transparencyletter.pdf>).

The WTO is also questioned as to its transparency especially since its leading members often refer to its democratic organisation. The expression “green room” has been coined to mean secret transactions by groups of power. In Seattle, in November 1999, the delegates from developing countries were witnesses to such behaviour by the industrialised powers, when their representatives met without them in the green room of the conference centre, to try to iron out conditions of agreements without their participation. The same process seems to have been used in the recent ministerial meeting of the WTO prior to the conference in Doha. Only a handful of the 142 delegates were invited to a preparatory meeting (mini-ministerial in Singapore) to draft a declaration to be presented to the General Council. Organisations like the Third World Network and Focus on the Global South decry such tactics as attempts to pressure less influential members into accepting resolutions that favour the more powerful.

Transparency is also questioned at the level of dispute resolution tribunals. In a January 2001 letter to United States Trade Representative Elect Robert Zoellick, a number of California legislators expressed their concern:

The procedures applicable to the operation of dispute resolution tribunals and other aspects of trade policy formation fail to comply with basic democratic norms of transparency, openness and due process. While trade treaties may have evolved within a context that required confidentiality and limited access, the secrecy with which they operate now undermines the credibility of NAFTA and the WTO in free and democratic societies. We are also concerned that the trade advisory groups that advise the Administration are largely closed to groups representing the public interest...) <http://home.att.net/~sally.pfft/ft-calif.html>.

The Bretton Woods Institutions are accused of having been not only instrumental in promoting the interests of corporations but also of having become the instruments of corporations in promoting their own self-interest. While, for the most part, non-governmental organisations and other groups from civil society have been excluded from the decision-making process of these organisations, and in the influence they have had in shaping national policies, this has certainly not been the case for corporations and their associations. Barlow and Clarke tell us that, for example, though no members of corporations hold any positions in the WTO, “[i]n the United States, more than five hundred corporations and business representatives have been officially credentialed as security-clear trade advisors... The ongoing President’s Advisory Committee for Trade

policy Negotiations, for example, is composed of representatives from AT&T, IBM, and Eastman Kodak, among others” (2001, 74). The same situation exists for the other members of the QUAD (U.S., European Union, Canada and Japan – seen as the unofficial executive arm of the WTO). In Canada for example there are close ties between WTO officials and members of the Business Council on National Issues. This situation exacerbates the concept of corporate citizenship as one that continues the erosion of the political power of individuals as citizens.

D. Conclusion

This chapter presents a vision of economic globalisation from the perspective of “simple-lifers”/anti-globalists. According to this vision, capitalists, through their multiple instruments, have succeeded in putting most countries in the world in a position of dependence reminiscent of the taxation tactic of the colonial era described earlier in this chapter. Most developing countries are now in a state of indebtedness from which it is, to all extents and purposes, impossible to extricate themselves. In their pressures to extract repayment, industrialised countries are forcing them to switch to market economies whether they are ready or not and sometimes whether they want to or not, with the basic presumption that it is in their eventual best interest. As we have seen here and will expand on in the next chapter, this has already proven disastrous in several instances. As countries are forced to deregulate, Western corporations swoop in to claim the spoils. For example, under structural adjustment requirements, some countries have had to deregulate such public service areas as water treatment and distribution. Since

national business entities often do not have the technology and resources to undertake such projects, Western companies are taking over, often under laughable conditions. “[F]or instance, Chile was required to guarantee a profit margin of 33 percent to Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux as a World Bank condition – regardless of how well the company eventually performed” (Barlow and Clarke, 201, 63).

Under stringent SAPs imposed by the IMF and the World Bank, governments in these countries are forced to reduce public spending and thus cut into or privatize social services often depriving their populations of much needed education and health care services; populations also move away from a subsistence economy supported by subsistence farming as agricultural policy is oriented towards cash crops for exports to get the much needed foreign currency to pay off debt. In many cases the effect has been to flood markets with commodity products effectively reducing their prices to the benefit of Northern consumers but to the detriment of producers. The current coffee debacle is the perfect example. Prices have fallen to an all-time low so that farmers burn their crops because it’s not feasible to harvest them and bring them to market. Small producers and plantation workers are flooding cities in search of work adding to the fodder for sweatshop employment. The end result is social and community disruption on a large scale, the consequences of which we have just seen. Finance Minister Paul Martin explained the unreasonableness of such requests in an article in the National Post:

“In an interview earlier this month, he [Martin] openly criticized the fact that poor countries seeking loans from the Bank and the IMF are forced to accept

a long list of conditions. ‘To go into a country and say, as a condition of getting a loan, you’re going to privatize, you’re going to reform your pension system ... and here are another 45 things you’re going to do -- which no G7 country could do within that short a time period, let alone an impoverished country with a very weak public service -- it’s just unrealistic and unacceptable. And yet this kind of thing goes on all the time’” (McQuaig. National Post, 2001, 07,30).

For “simple-lifers”, the stranglehold of large corporate entities on world commerce and trade, agriculture and, increasingly, on social sectors such as public works, health and education is terribly problematic. For the most part, these corporations have autocratic structures not set up to seriously allow meaningful input from a variety of stakeholders. They are narrowly focused on maximizing profits and shareholder wealth often at the expense of other stakeholders such as employees, communities and the environment. Backed by a complex web of institutional infrastructure fronted and supported by increasingly powerless national governments they are gradually extricating themselves from the dictates of these same governments. The result, “simple-lifers” say, is a world in which corporate values of greed and narrowly-defined self-interest predominate, where long-term social planning is disappearing, where environmental degradation is threatening the well-being of all life forms on the planet and where whole sectors of many societies are being upended and left without roots.

The tension between the protagonists in this issue of globalisation occurs on two levels. At one level is the question of whether it should be done the way it is, i.e. whether

it should be economically/corporate driven. The other level is that of the analysis of the meaning of interim results or consequences and consensus as to a viable global level of consumption. To some extent proponents of the current model agree that the current model presents difficulties and hardships for certain countries and populations. They maintain, however, that given the necessary time, prosperity will come to all or most and we will move towards a more just and peaceful world. In support of their claim, they point to the Industrial Revolution as a difficult period for Europe. They explain that there were several wars, sweatshops, exploitation, pollution, terrible conditions in urban centres but that all these were overcome and the West/North is now in excellent condition. The critics on the other hand are less optimistic. They look at the results of the last decades of globalisation and point to very negative results. In fact, Weisbrot et al. demonstrate that the last 20 years of the globalisation effort show negative growth in a majority of regions and sectors and that there has been a slowdown in the progress made towards reducing child mortality and increasing life expectancy and education and literacy levels. Even the World Bank's own World Development Report of 2000 "acknowledged the failure of economic growth to reduce the numbers in poverty or close the equality gap in many nations...noting that, 'facilitating the empowerment of poor people – by making state and social institutions more responsive to them – is also key in reducing poverty.'" (Worldwatch Institute, 2001, 13). The Worldwatch Institute also maintains that societies are increasingly polarized at both the national and international levels and that, in spite of sporadic and regional gains; overall, the state of the world's physical systems has greatly deteriorated. As for the Industrial Revolution argument, it is pointed out that conditions now are very different from what they were then. Global

population is reaching potentially globally stressing limits and, quite unlike the situation in the 19th century, there are very few population-free areas into which to expand today (Amin, 1997, x). Finally, opponents even question the fact that we are really better off today than we ever were. Although standards of living, as determined by material comfort, have improved for many, the relation to quality of life is questionable. An increasingly toxic physical environment is thought to be at least partly responsible for increases in different physical ailments and deadly diseases as well as increases in atmospheric catastrophes. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, “simple-lifers” are not staunchly against a form of globalisation that would allow the sharing of resources more equitably amongst the people of the planet. They simply question rather strongly whether, given current evidence, the current model will allow this to happen. If globalisation has shown one thing it is that the current capitalist model is based on illusion. Following in the footsteps of Baran, Greider suggests that “[t]he notion that the industrial system can continue to expand in this same manner, more or less forever, is the logical fallacy made plain by the globalized system” (1997, 446). “Simple-lifers” see this “logical fallacy” as being two-pronged and being narrowly linked to patterns of consumption. First, globalisation has made salient that it is impossible for the 8 to 11 billion people expected to reside on this planet by 2050 to attain North American levels of consumption. Second, as globalised modes of communication are made more accessible, a greater understanding has emerged of how Western fortunes are not based in self-sufficiency but are actually quite dependent on continued exploitation of people and resources of South and Southeast countries. In other words the links between Western levels of consumption and some of the more dramatic failures of the global economic

system are now impossible to deny. In the next chapter we will explore in greater detail the environmental effects of the current Western capitalist mindset and its propagation across the globe under the aegis of global corporations.

CHAPTER 4

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF GLOBALISED CAPITALISM

A Simple-lifer/Environmentalist Understanding

A. Introduction: A Call to Restraint and Caution

The surveys by Elgin (1981), the historical study by Shi (1985), “Voluntary Simplicity” literature by authors like Mongeau (1998) and Linda Breen-Pierce (2000) as well as my own survey of simplicity websites and discussions with “simple-lifers” all point to a serious concern for the quality of the environment. This is not especially surprising since one of the core motivations for simplifying one’s life is an attempt to improve one’s quality of life. The wellness of one’s physical environment is often mentioned by “simple-lifers” as an important component of this quality. As we have seen in the two previous chapters, “simple-lifers” see a direct link between the commercial structures we have put in place to meet our needs and wants and the gradual degradation of the environment. The recognition that much environmental damage has come about as a direct consequence of irresponsible and unsustainable corporate and consumer behaviour, has driven their search for lifestyles that attempt to break this pernicious cycle.

This chapter is not meant to be a detailed study of all the environmental problems or issues facing humans and the Earth today. That would be a work of its own given the

scope and complexity of most issues. Rather, it is an elaboration of those aspects of the environmental picture that are particularly relevant to “simple-lifers”. The topics covered here are meant to present the concerns and understandings of individuals and groups of people who then suggest materially simpler lifestyles as at least a partial, but necessary solution to these problems.

The research undertaken for this work has revealed a wide array of disparate but scientifically grounded observations of the gradual degradation of the ecosystem that provides life, as it exists on Earth today. Part of my role here has been to organise these in a way that will help fulfill some of the goals stated in the Introduction, especially that of adding coherence to the multitude of voices addressing similar issues and concerns. Where larger debates exist and consensus has not been reached, as in the case of global warming or genetically modified organisms, “simple-lifers” tend to adopt a conservative, precautionary stance. This attitude also informed how these topics are presented since the research has centred on authors who tend to share this view. By no means is this meant as denigration or denial of the other facets of these issues. “Simple-lifers” are generally quite aware of the arguments that often represent them as neo-Luddites, attempting to stop the flow of progress. In part, this chapter presents a survey of many negative consequences of a host of human experiences, over the past half century or so, that many “simple-lifers” refer to as indications that we should slow at least some parts of the technological push into the future and take stock of the moral and social dimensions of the path we have chosen to meet our needs and wants. They explain this attitude by pointing to the many things originally thought to be safe and benign when introduced,

that, with time have proven to be dangerous and toxic or having serious unwanted consequences. The best example is certainly the case of DDT and other Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). These consequences have, at least partially, and sometimes greatly, offset the benefits.

In summary, for most “simple-lifers”, environmental damage serves as a call to caution and action. It is a sign that the way we live, play and work is unsustainable; that, somewhat reminiscent of cancerous cells, we are slowly consuming the host that gives us life. Thus, the degraded environment is but one facet, though a very important one, of the sustainability issue that will be discussed in Chapter 5. While part of their “message by example” is that we can lead very fulfilling yet materially simple lives, another is that this reduction of consumption can lower the negative impact we have on the physical environment at least until (or if) we develop appropriate, sustainable, less or non-damaging ways to meet our apparently insatiable appetite for new “things”. As we have seen in the two previous chapters, “simple-lifers” see the current economic/corporate system and ideology as inherently not amenable to this objective for two main reasons: one, the system is dependent on the concept of perpetual growth of consumption and production in a limited physical system and two, it is centred on short term economic results and technological advancement with little or no social vision. “Simple-lifers” see responsibility for change, therefore, devolving onto individual and grassroots action that eventually drives social change. To paraphrase the anthropologist, Margaret Mead: we mustn’t underestimate the power of individuals or small groups of committed people since they are the only ones who have succeeded in effecting great social changes.

Reduction of consumption and changes in what we consume and the way we consume therefore become driving factors of social metamorphosis. We will address this from several perspectives that I have identified as central to the discourse of “simple-lifers”. I have thus divided this chapter into four sections: energy, agriculture, resource extraction and manufacturing, and transportation. Overarching all concerns is the question of energy. Life is energy-driven. From the simple ingestion of food to complex mechanical and chemical processes of raw resource transformation, all human activity involves energy transfer or transformation. Therefore, while energy is a topic of its own, it also appears as a subtopic in the other three sections. Feeding ourselves is certainly the most fundamental of human needs. As such, much of our ingenuity has gone into the processes of providing our nourishment. As we have transformed these processes and as our populations have grown through time, feeding ourselves has come to have tremendous impact on the planet. Once fed, we must also fill other basic needs such as clothing and shelter. In order to do this we need to draw upon the resources of the Earth and modify these into forms that are humanly useful: plants into textiles, trees into lumber and ores into metals. All these activities require that we move things and ourselves from one place to another. We have come a long way from the bipedal or quadrupedal modes of movement that were the norm only slightly more than a century ago. The impacts of the changes and scope of these activities in such a short time have been enormous.

B. Data Sources

Much of the data for this chapter comes from sources made available by the Worldwatch Institute. This organisation, founded by Lester Brown, author of several insightful books on the state of our environment, appears to have accomplished the impossible in gaining respect and a good deal of credibility for its work from the business world and governmental and supra-governmental organisations as well as concerned citizens. The breadth and scope of this organisation's work is phenomenal. Though "dedicated to fostering the evolution of an environmentally sustainable society" they have quickly come to realise, as many others, that the "environmental" in "environmentally sustainable" cannot separate the social from the physical environment. Their work therefore spans such topics as Third World poverty, genetic engineering, climate change, population issues, economics and international policy. Their most well-known work is certainly their annual State of the World Report supported by the more statistical Vital Signs. The most recent issue purports to "[show] how the economic boom of the last decade has damaged natural systems. The increasingly visible evidence of environmental deterioration is only the tip of a much more dangerous problem: the growing inequities in wealth and income between countries and within countries, inequities that will generate enormous social unrest and pressure for change." (<http://secure.worldwatch.org/static/titles/sow.html?98m6Avr5;;97>). The Institute proposes to do its part in changing the world to a more sustainable one by disseminating information as a tool of social change. Vital Signs and State of the World Report, used extensively here, bring together a wealth of information from a variety of authors

addressing environmental issues as well as a great number of data from governmental and para-governmental organisations. Their work and Lester Brown's are often referred to on the websites I have surveyed in my simplicity research.

It would be nigh impossible to document all that has been written on the topics addressed in this chapter. Much of the material referred to has been arbitrarily selected as I came upon different authors in my quest for data (Hawken, 1993; Frankel, 1998; Brown, 1995, Commoner, 1975, etc). Other sources I was directed to in face-to-face or web-based discussions with friends, environmentalists, ecologists and "simple-lifers" (Smil, 1993; Shiva, 2000; Korten, 1996; Hart, 1997, etc.).

Paul Hawken's understanding of the relationship between economic enterprise and the state of the environment as described in the "Ecology of Commerce" has importantly shaped my own, especially his statement that "[t]here is no polite way to say that business is destroying the world" (1993, 3). This perspective will certainly be apparent in this chapter as it has been in the previous ones. It is also a sentiment that I have found expressed in many of my discussions with "simple-lifers" and it is a recurring theme in the simplicity literature.

David Suzuki has also been a great source of information, through his more recent books but mainly through his video series The Nature of Things. I have gleaned from these material emphasizing the urgency of addressing environmental issues such as

automobile use and its consequences, water pollution and depletion and for the precautionary approach as regards work on genetically modified organisms.

Another important source of data has been the Internet. This has certainly become, of late, one of the greatest tools for civil and grassroots organisations for dissemination of information on a scale that was unthinkable only a few decades ago.¹⁹ Organisations like the World Wildlife Fund, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, and the more radical Earth First! have set up websites replete with information relating to the environment and corporate activity as it affects it. The members of the few organisations named here already number in the tens of millions and their activities have had direct impact on government and corporate policy as well as on the recent resurgence of civil society referred to in previous chapters. The work of these organisations is varied in means as well as ends. Some, such as Greenpeace and Earth First!, are more oriented toward direct action, (some quite radical and aggressive) and are very adamant at remaining financially, politically and morally independent of government and business. Others, such as the World Wildlife Fund and The Natural Step, originating in Sweden and newly spearheaded by Paul Hawken, have chosen to work more directly with both government and business in attempting to find ways to reduce our impact on our physical environment. They serve as consultants and advisers to national governments and to corporations such as BP, Nike and Wal-Mart. They have occasionally drawn recriminatory fire from concerned activists who fear these corporations may be using them as legitimization vehicles while in effect doing little to implement fundamental

¹⁹ The Internet has become so important and popular that the prestigious magazine National Geographic has declared it one of the great marvels of the world and places it among “the 50 most interesting travel destinations in the world”.

change as they tweak their corporate structures and processes. Still, they have been valuable sources of information for my work. I have also gathered data from more specialized web sources that limit the scope of their concern to very specific activities. These include such sites as the Pesticide Action Network, Miningwatch, Carbusters, International Rivers Network, Forest Action Network, etc.

C. Energy Production (transformation)

As stated previously, energy is, by necessity, an overarching concern. Gary Zukav's book, The Dancing Wu Li Masters (1980) serves as an excellent starting point to give the layperson a grasp of the fantastic discoveries of the world of quantum physics and mechanics that explore the energetic substructure of the universe. Zukav tells us that everything that exists is energy, a swirling mass of atomic and subatomic particles involved in an endless cosmic dance. Modern sciences like genetics and quantum physics and mechanics are bringing us closer to an understanding of the underpinnings of nature. Genetics show us that we are only slightly different from other primates who share some of our external characteristics and about 97% of our DNA. More surprisingly, perhaps, we also share over 90% of our genetic structure with all other life forms whether animal or plant. Quantum physics demonstrates that we are "linked" in previously inconceivable ways to other natural structures. A split atomic particle instantaneously "knows" of an effect caused on its "twin" by an external force. Awareness of this interconnectedness of all things has brought many people, lay and

scientist alike, to re-evaluate their relationship to their physical environment (Zukav 1980; Harman, 1998, 120).

There is often a misconception that we create energy. The laws of thermodynamics tell us that energy cannot be created, it can only be transformed. As far as we know today the only true “input” of energy into the planetary system is solar energy.

“Living creatures draw on energy flowing through the environment and convert it to forms they can use. The most fundamental energy flow for living creatures is the energy of sunlight, and the most important conversion is the act of biological primary production, in which plants and sea-dwelling phytoplankton convert sunlight into biomass by photosynthesis. The Earth’s web of life, including human beings, rests on this foundation.” (U.S. Department of Energy, 1999)

Biological systems and current technology are not one hundred percent efficient in transforming energy for specific uses. Other outputs are formed which we call wastes or “undesired effects”. For our purposes, the problem of wastes can be divided into two issues: quantity and type. As relates to quantity, the issue is fairly straightforward: the amount of energy transformation activity is directly related to demand. Demand has three main points of thrust: 1) the number of people making demands, 2) what these people demand, and 3) the energy efficiency of the processes used to meet the demand. In general terms, the current problem is that gains in energy efficiency have not sufficed

to offset increases in demand so that we are having to transform increasingly greater amounts of basic energy sources into forms useable by humans. This has brought about another area of concern, which is that we are very quickly depleting our known stocks of fossil fuels and are ill prepared to effect a rapid change to other sources of energy. As relates to types of wastes, in most biological ecosystems and/or subsystems, the waste of one organism becomes the food of another. The nature and scope of human transformation appears to be more linear than cyclical though this may be a temporal scale illusion. However, as far as we can determine, many of the wastes we produce either have no known “assimilators and transformers” and therefore accumulate both within specific biological units (like fish and humans) and in the greater physical environment (air, water, soil). We label some of these wastes “toxic” when we can detect their immediate or short term destructive effects (such as diseases) but we are only recently coming to consider seriously the “toxicity” of these wastes when their effects are on the greater global scale, for example, perceiving the oceans as “diseased”.

Other than the process of food assimilation that provides human energy, humans have succeeded in harnessing or transforming other energy for their own uses. The first occurrence of this is certainly the harnessing of animal energy, which has gone on for thousands of years and, which, along with wind, water and biomass (mostly the burning of wood) was still the main source of non-human, work producing energy up to the middle of the 19th century. The gradual but rapid disappearance of wood from the European landscape promoted a search for replacements, which eventually came in the form of fossil fuels, the first being coal. This has been referred to as the first stage in the

“decarbonisation” of the energy economy (Worldwatch Institute, 2001, 83) since burning coal, rather than wood, releases fewer carbon atoms per hydrogen atoms released. The next stages are oil and then natural gas.

1. Traditional Sources

a. Coal

There are several stages in the transformation of fossil fuels to usable forms of energy. Each of these stages itself requires an energy input. Transformation usually occurs through chemical means, such as combustion, or combinations of elements or products. For example, coal can be used directly as a heat source. In that case energy (mechanical or biological) has to be expended to extract the coal from the soil. More energy is used to build the containers in which combustion will occur. Finally, energy is used to transport the coal from its point of extraction to its ultimate point of use. In order for the energy transfer to be viable (or sustainable) less energy should be used in the processing stages than is released for the ultimate use. (I am not referring here to economic viability but to ecological viability, i.e. in a closed energy system – which adequately describes the fossil fuel energy system – if the energy inputs constantly surpass the outputs, the system atrophies) The U.S. Department of energy tells us that, in the United States, 51% of electrical energy is produced from coal combustion. For every electrical unit of energy 3 units of coal energy must be used. The remaining energy is lost either as waste heat or in transmission from the power plant to the end user. (U.S.

Department of Energy, 1999) These figures do not take into consideration the additional energy used in extraction or transportation to the power plant.

In addition to the lack of efficiency, our current transformation systems also produce wastes and are prone to environmental accidents that negatively impact natural systems. This has been evident (in the case of coal) for quite a long time. “King Edward I of England, for instance, so objected to the noxious smoke and fumes from London’s many coal-burning fires that in 1306 he tried (unsuccessfully) to ban its use by anyone except blacksmiths.” (U.S. Department of Energy, 1999). Seven hundred years and several billion people later, the problem still exists despite technological attempts at reducing emissions and cleaning up the coal before use. While our economy is still thought of as being oil-based, coal remains a major source of energy in both industrialised and developing countries. China’s industrialising economy is largely coal-based, for example. Pressure from several sources to reduce emissions from coal combustion has legitimised such a controversial project as the Three Gorges Dam (The controversies around such projects will be examined in more detail in a later section). Even in industrialised countries, as domestic oil reserves peak (or have already peaked as in the case of the U.S.) and attempts are made at decreasing dependence on other oil-producing countries, the coal industry is proposing an increase in coal use, suggesting we can develop the technology to render coal combustion relatively harmless.

Coal not only spews undesirable elements into our ecosystems. Its extraction is also responsible for despoiling vast areas of land (wilderness), often inhabited by

indigenous peoples who depend on sustainably functioning ecosystems for their livelihood. Already, hundreds of thousands of acres of forests have been destroyed by open-pit coal mining. These projects cannot but change the natural processes of the environments in which they take place. (Chatterjee, 1996)

b. Oil and Natural Gas

As another fossil fuel, the transformation of oil into other forms of usable energy presents the same types of problems as coal. In addition, oil-producing activities produce their own important negative effects on the environment. These effects are seen and felt at every stage of petroleum transformation into usable forms of energy such as gasoline and electricity. Leaks occur at extraction points. If these leaks are from land-based sites they can infiltrate ground water supplies or damage ecologically sensitive areas such as marshes or other wildlife habitat. However, if they come from marine-based drilling platforms they can be even more devastating as the oil is transported by the water to cover vast areas and threaten fragile marine and coastal systems. Shell's operations in Nigeria for example have been highly criticized for their destructive effects. Not only does oil spilled into waterways cause damage to offshore coral reefs and mangroves, it also ends up covering and destroying large areas of fertile farmland when the waters flood the fields and then retract (Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 2000).

In addition to point of extraction issues, oil use also presents problems both in transportation and storage. The transportation issues will be dealt with later in this

chapter as they deal with motorized transport, both land and marine. However, in this case, there is the additional problem of pipeline construction and maintenance. Oil-transporting pipelines cover huge distances in all areas of the world. The pipeline system in the United States alone has “over 280,000 miles of high-pressure gas pipelines, more than 170,000 miles of oil and products pipelines and many thousands of miles of lower pressure local distribution gas lines” (Stress Engineering Services, 2000). They are difficult and expensive to monitor and maintain. This has meant that in certain areas, either isolated or where there is civil unrest, there has often been negligence, and leaks have occurred on a regular basis. Quite often these pipelines traverse areas populated by indigenous peoples who directly depend on their immediate physical environment for survival. Not only does the construction of these projects disturb their environment and livelihood but constant access for monitoring and repair also has an effect. Because of their socio-economic “invisibility”, their needs and wishes often go unheeded (Friends of the Earth, no date).

Pipelines are also easy targets for sabotage in areas of socio-political unrest and conflict. They have often been damaged by groups attempting to cripple the political power in place by affecting their revenue sources. They have also been attacked in a symbolic attempt to link oil production to the purchase of arms that repress whole populations or ethnic groups. Both Nigeria and Sudan are prime examples of this but there have also been incidents of sabotage in generally more peaceful areas such as Canada’s Northwest (Environmental News Network, January 18, 1999).

Petroleum products are often transported to refineries or point of ultimate use by ships. While much media coverage is accorded to spectacular accidents of oil spills from shipwrecks like that of the Exxon Valdez, much more oil enters our water systems every year from voluntary spillage. Once they have delivered their cargo, many ships rinse out their bilges with salt water, which they then discharge directly into the oceans. Of late, a few facilities have been installed in major oil ports to prevent this but these are rare and even where they do exist it is often cheaper for ship captains to ignore them and continue with their old habits (Seawifs Project, No Date).

Storage also provides occasion for additional destruction. Storage tanks at gasoline retail outlets for example are all underground. With time, these tanks corrode and leak part of their contents into the ground and eventually into groundwater supplies. It is often more economically feasible to pay for the lost gasoline than to dig up and replace the tanks.

Oil refineries are another source of pollution. Anyone living in refinery areas is familiar with the sights, and smells. One of the important sources of air pollution from refineries is the flaring (burning) of gas by-products of the refining process. This was another important issue of the Nigeria/Shell controversy. The pollution caused by flaring is avoidable. The technology has existed for some time to collect the natural gas burned in this way and reuse it as an additional source of energy. Feasibility calculation models have made this an unpopular option until recently as environmentalists put more pressure

on governments but especially as oil companies come to grips with depleting stocks and rising prices of natural gas. After forty years, Shell is finally building a liquefied natural gas facility in the Niger delta (Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited, 1998).

c. Large Hydro

The problem with using fossil fuels to power our economies is no longer simply localized pollution around the electricity-producing plants and other users. Many scientists and environmentalists maintain that because of the scale and scope of energy transformation, the weather patterns of the whole planet are being affected. This has prompted looking to alternative means of energy production. The most popular alternative has been hydropower. Most of the major rivers of the world are now the site of hydroelectric projects that consist of damming the river and building up a reservoir which allows water to be dropped from varying heights into turbines that then spin and produce electricity. While not as evidently producing air or ground pollution as fossil fuel plants, many of these projects, especially the larger ones have come under attack for various reasons that will be discussed in greater detail in the agriculture section of this chapter. The most current data on large dams comes from the World Commission on Dams created in February 1998, under the auspices of, but independent from, the World Bank. It consisted of 12 commissioners representing a variety of interest groups and chosen by these groups. They included members of governments, activists, and members of the business community but each acted individually and not as a representative of any

organisation. The Commission published its final report in November 2000 at which time it disbanded. In the final analysis the Commission concluded that large dams undoubtedly had many benefits but that these were often mitigated by the costs and consequences. As regards electricity generation they concluded:

“Large hydropower dams tend to perform closer to, but still below, targets for power generation, (as compared to irrigation targets) generally meet their financial targets but demonstrate variable economic performance relative to targets, with a number of notable under- and over-performers. Large dams generally have a range of extensive impacts on rivers, watersheds and aquatic ecosystems – these impacts are more negative than positive and, in many cases, have led to irreversible loss of species and ecosystems” (WCD, 2000).

Though they are touted as being emission-free, environmentalists claim that they actually produce measurable quantities of methane, a greenhouse gas thought to be more damaging than CO₂:

“Along with all of the well-known environmental, social and human rights impacts of large dams and reservoirs, the WCD report details the greenhouse gas emission implications. These are far more severe than previously thought. Basically, all reservoirs that have flooded forests are sources of greenhouse gases, often methane from rotting vegetation. Methane, however, has a global warming potential more than 20 times that of carbon dioxide by weight. The Balbina Dam

in Brazil is estimated to produce about eight times the GHG emissions per year as a fossil fuel plant generating an equivalent amount of electricity. So, the "conventional wisdom" that large-scale hydro is a clean technology from a climate perspective is clearly wrong" (Climate Action Network No Date).

d. Nuclear

Another important source of energy that has also not been without its controversies is nuclear fission energy. Though ostensibly not producing GHG emissions or acid rain-forming oxides, other problematic issues have created a debate around the desirability of this energy source. Perhaps the most important, especially since the Chernobyl incident of 1986, is the risk of accidents stemming from human error or faulty construction. The French Nuclear Energy Agency reports that the reactor meltdown at Chernobyl took many lives both human and livestock, devastated the countryside with radiation so that farmland is unusable to this day, had perceivable radiation impacts all over Europe and even as far as North America. Crops as far as Italy and Norway had to be destroyed because of higher than acceptable radiation levels. Today, 15 years later the area around the accident has much higher than normal rates of certain forms of cancer and other human physical anomalies (OECD Nuclear Energy Agency, 1995).

Other incidents closer to home such as the one at Three Mile Island in the States have served as motivating forces for a strong anti-nuclear lobby. The risk of accidents is not only present at the power plants themselves but at several other points in the supply

chain. A few incidents occurred in Japan in the past few years that have sparked fear but also outrage at the mishandling of the events. Though experts continue to claim that the risks are small especially in the more modern plants, they have not succeeded in eliminating all opposition and most countries, with a few notable exceptions such as France and Finland, have either taken the steps to eliminate their nuclear production (Sweden) or have decided not to increase capacity by constructing new plants but simply let existing plants live out their useful lifespan and then decommission them.

Another important issue related to nuclear power plants is the subject of toxic nuclear wastes. Nuclear waste is extremely toxic, presents imminent danger to human health, and is virtually eternal. In the past we have been fairly negligent in our disposal of this waste, either burying it or dumping it out to sea, sometimes using pipes directly from the plant, but mostly in barrels that are expected to eventually corrode and leak their lethal contents into the oceans. Due to increased awareness and public outcry, producers have been more careful in the past decades but have yet to find an acceptable means of disposal. In the meantime the only alternative is storage. Because of controversy both about transport and acceptable sites most nuclear waste is still stored on site by the plants.

Nuclear also has all of the same mining issues as fossil fuels. Uranium mining activities have had their share of controversy ranging from mining accidents to run-ins with indigenous populations.

A final concern about nuclear energy centres on the nuclear as a weapon of terrorism. As the reality of terrorism spreads to the West there is an increasing wariness of bringing nuclear technology to areas of the world that are politically unstable. There is also concern about the impermeability of existing power stations to terrorist attacks, giving rise to the spectre of events resembling Chernobyl.

2. Emerging Alternative Sources

Because of all the environmental and social problems associated with the traditional means of producing usable energy, many ecologists are suggesting several alternatives that they like to refer to as “renewable” sources. The most common of these are wind, solar, biomass, geothermal and small hydro. Interestingly, these are all sources that were used before we turned to fossil fuels.

a. Geothermal

Geothermal implies using the heat within the earth. In most instances this heat is tapped and used as a preliminary warming of air or water so that less energy of another type is used to bring these to the desired temperature. In specific areas where thermal activity is quite high, the heat from the earth can be the sole energy source but these areas are rare given present technology. Some say there is the possibility that with technological development we will be able to access geothermal energy at greater depths

and thus make it available pretty much everywhere but that technology still has to appear (Geothermal Resources Council (1998).

b. Biomass

Biomass, in the form of wood combustion, is probably one of the oldest sources of energy. Since fossil fuels are the old remains of plants, biomass technology uses the same plants but before they become fossilised. The plants can either be burned as is (some stoves burn grains, such as corn, for example) or they can be processed into different kinds of fuels and/or fuel/alcohols. A current example is the ethanol blend gasoline sold in many retail outlets. One could wonder how combustion of the same plants that form fossil fuels would not bring about the same CO₂ issues as for fossil fuels. The theory is that the CO₂ in live plants is not at the same concentration as it is in their fossil form where it has been compressed and accumulating for millions of years and is then released within a relatively short span of a few hundred years. Scientists maintain that the CO₂ released by biomass combustion would be reabsorbed by existing and new plant growth.

“The use of biomass will greatly reduce the Nation's greenhouse gas emissions. Fossil fuels remove carbon that is stored underground and transfer it to the atmosphere. In a combustion system, biomass releases carbon dioxide as it burns, but biomass also needs CO₂ to grow -- thus creating a closed carbon cycle. In a gasifier-fuel cell combination, there is a net reduction of CO₂. In addition,

substantial quantities of carbon can be captured in the soil through biomass root structures, creating a net carbon sink” (American Bioenergy Association, No date).

c. Small Hydro

Because of the important environmental and social problems associated with large hydro projects and the huge dams they require, many people have suggested that we could, instead, use smaller dams on free-flowing rivers i.e. using the natural systems as they occur. Environmentalists maintain this addresses several issues. First, the construction stage would be less disruptive. Since less land is flooded (if at all) there is less effect on the natural systems (flora and wildlife habitats) and fewer people, if any, need to be displaced. Second, having several energy production sites decentralises and offers less opportunity for major disruptions in case of technical failure. This decentralisation also allows for local decision-making as to the management of the resource. As we will see later, many believe that localization of decision-making is key to making sustainable choices. Finally, it has been demonstrated that smaller dams are less subject to the failings of larger ones as described in the World Commission on Dams’ 2000 report. Siltation and GHG issues as well as issues of archaeological destruction are greatly minimised if not completely eliminated. (International Small Hydro Atlas, 2002)

d. Wind

Wind power is certainly the alternative energy source with the most growth currently. In fact, several large oil companies like Shell and BP, British Petroleum (or Beyond Petroleum as its current CEO likes to call it) are investing important sums in the development of this energy source. As with water, exemplified in the waterwheel mills of yore, wind power is also an old source of energy, used both in the production of mechanical energy as in the flour mills that still dot the Dutch countryside as well as for marine transportation. Later it was used extensively in rural areas as a means of pumping water from wells for irrigation purposes. Today there are major wind farms throughout North America and Europe producing an increasing percentage of electrical power. The annual electricity production from wind rose to 18,100 Megawatts in 2000, an increase in capacity of 4,200 Megawatts over the previous year. At a cost of 3.5 cents per kilowatt/hour, the latest wind project in the U.S. has demonstrated its price competitiveness (Worldwatch, 2001, 44). In addition to being less polluting, wind farms take up much less land than their coal equivalent when the mining areas are taken into consideration especially since the space between windmills can still be used as grazing land. Wind farms can also be set up in desolate settings such as deserts and rocky, barren coastal areas. Several of the new European wind projects are being moved offshore into the North Sea where they do not compete for valuable European land resources.

e. Solar

Because the fundamental source of energy is the sun, many contend that it is the only true renewable and is virtually limitless if we can learn to tap that energy properly. The sun's energy has been used for millennia as a source of heating for homes that were oriented to get the most benefit from its rays. There has been a resurgence of late of this process which has been termed "passive solar". Another model is that of solar farms such as the one in the Mojave Desert. It uses a huge array of captors that trap the sun's rays to heat water into steam that then spins turbines producing electricity (Video, Ocean Planet). However, what appears to be catching the interest of the energy barons with a current growth rate of over 25% per year, is the concept of photovoltaic (PV) cells. Made from various materials but currently mostly from silicon, solar cells capture the sun's light and, through a chemical process, transform it into usable electricity. One big advantage of solar cells is that they are autonomous and therefore present an interesting solution for isolated areas where no transportation lines are currently available. The saved cost of putting in and maintaining power lines can more than offset the current higher cost of energy production. However, because of high capital cost at the outset it is still considered the "rich man's" power source (Worldwatch Institute, 2001, 46). Solar cells have taken on multiple forms and uses. They are used to power handheld calculators, flashlights and other small electronic devices. Made into roof shingles they can provide a good amount of the total power needs for the average family especially if combined with passive solar (<http://www.renewables.com/Products/Unisolar1.htm>). A new generation of solar cells no longer requires direct sunlight but is sensitive enough to

work with only the light of day so that frequent cloud cover need no longer be an obstacle. The main drawback of solar, of course, and this also applies to wind is the storage of energy i.e. capturing it when it is available and storing for use when it is needed. Except for the small appliances mentioned above, the batteries can not only be cumbersome but also highly polluting. Lester Brown proposes that the answer to that, in the foreseeable future, is a combination with hydrogen fuel cells where unneeded wind and solar, when available will be used to manufacture hydrogen to power fuel cells when the wind subsides or the sun sets (Brown 2001, chapter 5).

3. Conclusion

Looking at the above sources of energy it becomes fairly clear that we are in a sort of bind. Eventually, limited stocks of fossil fuels will disappear. World oil supplies are expected to peak between 2007-2013 or shortly thereafter according to the more optimistic predictions (Worldwatch Institute 2001b, 121). At our present rate of consumption (which is unlikely to stay as is or decrease), fossil fuels will have been depleted within a relatively short time. Once the oil is gone, natural gas reserves needed to replace its current and future use will decrease exponentially. If we remain fossil fuel dependent, the only other alternative is the frighteningly bleak scenario, environmentally, of a world that then depends almost entirely on coal.

Despite the evidence, we hesitate. Business continues its quest for profits using whatever systems are in place. Barry Commoner warns that: “there is no way to organize

society along ecological lines without challenging head-on the powerful, politically conservative – more plainly speaking, the corporations – that now control the system of production” (1975, 172). We have yet to seriously dedicate the resources necessary to modify the current energy infrastructure. Governments seem to fail to perceive the urgency of the situation and the need to implement policies and tax or subsidy structures that will motivate or even coerce us into modifying our collective and individual behaviour.

For most “simple-lifers”, a good part of the solution must therefore reside in a significant reduction in the demand we put on the system. Especially as we globalize, restraint must be practiced to allow populations of developing countries to at least meet their most basic needs without submerging the world under a sea of soot and grime. In accordance with their core value of taking responsibility for one’s quality of life, “simple-lifers” will translate their beliefs into simple actions that promote energy conservation and efficiency: using renewable sources where feasible, eliminating the use of energy intensive appliances like air-conditioners or clothes dryers, using energy efficient construction materials when building or renovating homes etc. Much of this behaviour is evident in the growing number of small “intentional communities” whose planning, construction and lifestyles are based on these principles of thrift, simplicity, concern for the health of the environment and consequently of people, etc. (See Conclusion).

On a systemic level, what is proposed is to pattern our energy system on natural systems that thrive through diversity (Commoner, 170-1). The “mot d’ordre” would be

“decentralize and diversify” such that a community might have windmills on surrounding farm/grazing land, a small hydro project if a fast-flowing river is near, and every building equipped with some sort of solar transformation system. Of course everywhere, the most efficient processes and patterns of behaviour would be encouraged by all levels of government through incentives for consumers and subsidies and grants to producers. Since the cheapest source of energy is that which is not used, much research must be done into energy efficiency and ways must be found to encourage today’s consumers to use those means that are already available to us.

The sections that follow delve into more detail into human activities that use energy and therefore contribute to the destruction energy consumption brings about. These activities also have other deleterious effects on the environment.

D. Impacts of Agriculture

In 1950 there were 2.5 billion mouths to feed on this planet. Thirty-seven years later that number had doubled to 5 billion. Only 13 more years were needed to add another billion to the number (Gélinas, 2000, 198). There are also millions of people dying from hunger every year. However, it has been regularly stated by organisations like the World Bank and the FAO that people are dying not because of the lack of global production of food but rather due to other systemic causes such as our inability to properly distribute the food that there is. While there are areas that are agriculturally stressed, it is also true that in other parts of the world governments are subsidising

farmers not to grow certain crops. Incomprehensibly, rather than dealing with the problem head on, our efforts are still concentrated on producing more, hopefully with fewer inputs. This may be a laudable goal if we presume that we will never get our population growth under control and that we will continue agricultural practices that ceaselessly reduce available cropland. However, what might be more feasible, in the long run, would be to address the current problematic issues directly and examine the possibilities of preventing damage rather than waiting for it to happen and then attempting to repair it. While there have been gains in productivity during the Green Revolution of the 1950s, they have not been achieved without a price.

This section looks at the most pressing and controversial of these issues: soil deterioration, water use and availability, irrigation processes, biotechnology and deforestation.

1. Soil Deterioration

The use of large farm equipment and the accompanying tillage, intensified application of fertilisers and pesticides, mono cropping and increased use of irrigation have all taken their toll. Deterioration of the world's soils takes the form of erosion, desertification, depletion of nutrients and contamination, among the more serious causes. Every year the world loses millions of hectares of arable land to desertification as millions of tons of precious, fragile, overworked topsoil blow away in the wind because of intensive and multiple tillage. The FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation, a branch

of United Nations) estimates that the global loss of productive land through erosion is 5-7 million ha/year (<http://www.botany.uwc.ac.za/Envfacts/facts/erosion.htm>). The issue is serious enough in Western countries, but in developing countries, where crop wastes are not left on the fields but rather removed and used as forage or fuel, the problem is exacerbated. Brown tells us that a few days after spring tillage starts in China, observatories in Hawaii register the increases in atmospheric dust particles (1995, 83-4). In the spring of 2001, the effect was felt all the way to the Western coast of North America.

As the number of crops per year increases so does the depletion of soil nutrients, which must be replaced with chemical fertilisers. Many of these fertilisers are made from petrochemicals and, as we have seen in the previous section, the stocks of petroleum are quickly being depleted also. Eventually we must find other means of regenerating the soils.

Desertification was considered serious enough of an issue for the UN to form the Convention to Combat Desertification. The UNCCD explains that desertification occurs because of climate variability and unsustainable human activities among which they include over cultivation, overgrazing, deforestation, and poor irrigation practices (UNCCD, No Date). Desertification, as defined by the Convention, is not the moving forward of existing deserts but the formation, expansion or intensification of new ones through degradation of fragile drylands that would normally recover if not for human activity. The phenomenon touches approximately 35-40 million square kilometres or

30% of the total landmass on which live more than one billion people. The primary consequences are fairly evident: loss of soil productivity as farmland, increased soil erosion, lowering of water tables and reduced ground cover growth. The secondary consequences can vary from changes in weather patterns, to various of socio-economic effects such as increase in poverty, reduced levels of education and even famine (FAO, No date).

2. Water Issues

Possibly one of the greatest concerns of the environmental effects of agriculture on the environment is related to water. Problems associated with agricultural use of water appear both at the level of water as an input to agriculture, and at the level of the effects of the agricultural process on water quality.

a. Water as Input

As regards water as an input, the issue is multifaceted. It deals with the stocking of water to guarantee continuous supply, the transport of water to bring it to agricultural areas, and the use and efficiency of irrigation systems. The importance of agriculture as regards water supply is evident when we consider that agricultural use of fresh water supplies represents about 70 percent of total usage. In order to achieve this level of usage, we have made several modifications to natural water systems.

i. Dams

Perhaps the most important of these changes has been the expansive network of large dams, used, among other things, to create huge reservoirs so as to guarantee continuous and constant supplies of irrigation water. This process has had enormous consequences on existing ecosystems and watersheds. Though it is not the goal of this work to analyse all the ramifications of dam construction, the fact that their construction is often justified by their agricultural benefits warrants that some of these effects be noted here.

The report of the World Commission on Dams released in the fall of 2000 reveals that damming of rivers has disturbed watershed downstream, affecting patterns of vegetation and wildlife habitats. The flooding of huge areas behind the dams has had negative effects on resident populations (mostly aboriginal groups) and on their traditional livelihoods. In some areas, the damming has been seen as responsible for the appearance of certain viral or bacterial illnesses. This was the case of the Nile behind the Aswan dam. Randal writes:

“For example, the enormous increase in Egypt of schistosomiasis followed the completion of the huge Aswan hydroelectric dam on the upper Nile river in 1968. Schistosomiasis is a parasitic disease transmitted to people by contact with freshwater snails. The Aswan dam, by creating Lake Nasser and slowing the river's flow rates, caused the snail population to explode downstream. The

problem has yet to be solved either in Egypt or elsewhere -- in Sudan and Ghana, for example -- where large power dams have also been built. Moreover, what such dams have done for schistosomiasis, they seem to have also done for a mosquito-borne viral illness. Rift valley fever was once almost exclusively a livestock scourge. Since the completion of the Aswan dam, Egypt has, for the first time, had human epidemics of the disease as well. Other countries with enormous dams and a similar experience include Senegal, Mauritania, and Madagascar” (Randal, 1996).

In some sectors of the planet this damming has also meant the disappearance of a large number of cultural and archaeological artefacts. The Aswan Dam site was subject to this deterioration but the Three Gorges Dam in China will certainly be the most flagrant example of this phenomenon.

“Among the potential tragedies of the Three Gorges Dam project are over one thousand sites of archeological and historical importance that will be submerged and lost forever upon completion of the dam. Ancestral burial grounds and centuries-old temples, fossil remains and archeological sites dating as far back as the Paleolithic Age risk being obliterated from public access and scholarly pursuit if they are not unearthed and relocated before the waters rise”

(<http://www.pbs.org/greatwall/controversy1.html>).

Siltation occurring behind the dams has meant a reduction in soil nutrients downstream. This has resulted in the necessity to increase chemical fertilisers and, in the case of the Nile, it has meant a complete transformation of the delta to the extent that several species of fish have disappeared greatly affecting that industry. Ahmed reports that:

“[n]egative effects on fisheries in the Nile system and coastal lakes, as the migration of certain types of fish were dependent on the arrival of turbid floodwater, which is now impounded upstream of the AHD. This problem can be exemplified by the fact that since the mineral rich silts that nourished certain fish species have been deposited behind the AHD, sardines, which breed at the estuaries of the Nile, almost disappeared” (Ahmed, 1999).

There have also been other problems such as

“[s]alinity and waterlogging problems, which have developed since the AHD construction due to the over-irrigation of lands, increase in cropping intensities and expansion of rice and sugar cane cultivation. The horizontal agricultural expansion in sandy or light soils that lie generally within the Nile Valley fringes of higher elevation have increased seepage into the Nile system lands, thus contributing to salinity hazards” (ibid).

Damming has also had political ramifications. Where water systems cross boundaries be they national or international, those who control the dams and reservoirs hold a great deal of power. In the latter part of the 1990s much has been said about water wars being the wars of the 21st century. “At the international conference on Water and

Sustainable Development hosted by the French government at UNESCO Headquarters, the Organisation's Director-General Federico Mayor and [French Prime Minister] Chirac, warned that, without international co-operation, dwindling water resources could threaten development and world peace. 'As it becomes increasingly rare, it becomes coveted, capable of unleashing conflicts. More than petrol or land, it is over water that the most bitter conflicts of the near future may be fought,' the UNESCO leader said" (Gleik, 1997). The same sentiments were expressed by Klaus Toepfer, director-general of the United Nations Environment Programme in an interview that appears in the January 1 issue of the scientific journal Environmental Science & Technology, published by the American Chemical Society (Environment News Service, 1999, January 1).

The complexity of the dam issue is reflected in the ongoing discussions between the opponents and proponents of the procedure. What has not occurred yet seems to be open to speculation and what has happened in certain places is often said to be circumstantial. The huge literature on projects like the Three Gorges Dam in China or on the Narmada River in India are some of the most known current examples.²⁰ There are several other issues related to dams, especially large ones, and it is difficult to get an adequate understanding of all the ramifications. Many still remain mere possibilities but, as has been explained earlier, "simple-lifers" tend to prefer to err on the side of caution. Therefore, serious repercussions such as those mentioned above and others such as the increased possibility of earthquakes or the possibility of these dams becoming wartime

²⁰ The website http://www.chinaonline.com/refer/ministry_profiles/threegorgesdam.asp provides a good overview of the pro and con positions. More elaborate arguments can be found in Pearce (1997b), and in the Chinese Embassy document: "Some Facts about the Three Gorges Project" November 1, 1997, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/6893.html>).

targets, move them to look to less controversial solutions. Proposals have been made to replace plans for large dams with smaller, more numerous ones that are easier to build, to maintain and to modify in the future should the need arise. It has also been suggested that improved irrigation methods in existing dammed areas could go a long way towards alleviating problems of salinisation and waterlogging.

ii. *Irrigation*

The role of dams in agriculture has been to provide ready access to fresh water for irrigation and to control flooding in river floodplains. It is not only the construction of dams for these purposes that is controversial. Irrigation itself as it has been practised to date is becoming the target of criticism of environmentalists for a host of unpredicted consequences.

Thirty to forty percent of irrigated land world-wide now relies on dams and with growing populations there is an urgent call to increase irrigated lands and, at the same time, the water basins to feed the irrigation systems (World Commission on Dams, 2000). But irrigation itself poses several problems. These are perhaps best illustrated by Lester Brown in *Who Will Feed China?*, his study of a country where half the farmland is irrigated and four-fifths of all grain produced comes from irrigated land. This intense usage has put great stress on existing water supplies. Most irrigation projects prior to 1970 were supplied by dam construction mainly through gravity-fed canals. Since 1970 however, water from irrigation comes from groundwater supplies and this is having a

serious effect on the level of aquifers, huge natural underground water storage and transportation reservoirs (Brown, 1995, 68-69). The situation is such that in some provinces even those croplands that are equipped with irrigation equipment can no longer “be guaranteed water during the growing season”.

Though irrigation has allowed increasing yields, it has also contributed to additional stress on the land because of intensified use, thus putting another resource or agricultural input at risk. Irrigation thus has an effect on the future accessibility to arable, fertile lands. Irrigation reduces available cropland both because of waterlogging and salinity. Brown tells us that 15% of Chinese cropland is afflicted in this way:

“When river water is diverted onto the land, part of it percolates downward. Without adequate drainage, the water table rises. When it reaches a few feet below the surface, deep-rooted crops suffer from waterlogging of their root zones. When it gets within inches of the surface, water evaporates through the soil into the atmosphere, leaving a thin layer of salt on the soil surface. Unless this rise in the water table can be reversed, by installing either more wells in the area or an underground drainage system, the accumulating salt eventually turns fertile land into wasteland...” (Brown, 1995, 71).

b. Water Pollution

At the other end of the spectrum, agriculture affects water quality. There is hardly an area of the globe that hasn't been affected by farming activity. The damage from waste products from animal husbandry though an important source of pollution of creeks, rivers and lakes, is perhaps more easily held in check because of its visibility than the water-fouling qualities of other agricultural inputs. With the increasing commercialisation of agriculture in the last four or five decades, much more emphasis has been put on productivity and economic efficiency. Among other things, this has meant increased application of fertilisers, pesticides and chemicals of all sorts. Overdoses of nitrogen are suffocating the soil; phosphates are suffocating life in lakes, rivers and streams; organo-halogens are poisoning the fish and then the birds and the people who feed on them (Moore Lappé, 1982, 84). Groundwater in certain parts of China, India and the United States is so contaminated with nitrates from fertilisers that farmers can't drink their own water (Worldwatch Institute, 2001, 27).

Fred Pearce (1997a), in his study of pollution of the Mediterranean and Adriatic Seas, mentions the damage caused by the Italian Po River spewing tens of thousands of tons per year of phosphorus, nitrates, and ammonia into the Adriatic. The same has happened in the Nile River delta where construction of the Aswan Dam has forced downstream farmers faced with reduced soil fertility to increase their chemical inputs. The consequences on these seas have been multiple. As was referred to earlier, there has been a decrease in the size and diversity of fish stocks, and seabed flora has been

weakened to the point where it can no longer resist the invasion of foreign species. These are but two chapters in an unfolding drama that covers the globe. The scenario repeats itself on the coasts of all continents and where there are large cities and large populations needing to be fed.

3. Biotechnology

The purpose of agriculture, in an era of specialization where we don't all grow our own food, is to 1) feed a given population while 2) allowing those who produce the food to earn a living. In many areas of the world, especially in the Third World "[i]t is women and small farmers working with biodiversity who are the primary food providers"(Shiva, 2000, 15). The emergence of biotechnology in agriculture is seen by "simple-lifers"/environmentalists as threatening this system on a scale at least as important as the introduction of chemical fertilisers and pesticides (including herbicides and fungicides). It seems, however, that the effects will be seen and felt much more quickly than was the case with chemicals. For example, only five years after its introduction to Western Canada, bio-engineered canola resistant to herbicides is becoming a serious problem. On June 21st 2001, CBC news reported several cases where this "canola weed" has invaded wheat fields or where it has appeared in and contaminated non-bio-engineered canola fields. Monsanto, the "creator" of the "pest" canola is offering farmers to send in crews that will manually extract the undesired plants since it seems this is the only efficient way of eliminating them due to their resistance.

Other chemicals could be used but they would also damage desired crops

(http://winnipeg.cbc.ca/cgi-bin/templates/view.cgi?/news/2001/06/21/mb_seeds210601).

Currently, organic farmers in Western Canada are suing biotech companies Monsanto and Aventis because of this widespread contamination, which, they say, is preventing them from exploiting a lucrative market for GM-free canola. They also express fear that the proposed introduction of GM wheat will repeat the phenomenon (Kossick, 2002). There is increased concern that we may be reliving the nightmare of toxic organo-halogens such as DDT and Myrex that will be present in our natural systems decades or even hundreds of years after they have been recognised as dangerous and banned.

David Suzuki, Vandana Shiva and other opponents of the corporatisation of agriculture worry that short-term economic vision will supplant the precautionary principle and see the domain of biotechnology as much too risky for the proposed benefits of increased yields, increased use of fragile, marginal lands and greater resistance to pests. Shiva (2000) even challenges these purported benefits on several fronts: 1) It is not clear that biotechnology in agriculture has brought about the increases in yields that were promised; 2) biotechnology reduces diversity which increases crop systems' capacity for survival from the onslaught of pests; 3) biotechnology's main justification is the ability to feed the poor of the world but we already grow enough food to feed everyone on the planet decently; in fact governments pay farmers NOT to grow surpluses; 4) biotechnology concentrates control of the food supply in the hands of a few

(and increasingly fewer) large corporations, compromising farmers' independence and ability to provide nutrition for local populations.

4. Miscellaneous

Coral reefs and mangroves are being destroyed off the coasts of India and Brazil, threatening the equilibrium and therefore the ecological functions of these ecosystems. In its Vitals Signs 2001, the Worldwatch Institute reports that the proportion of the world's coral reefs considered severely damaged has increased from 10 to 27 percent from 1992 to 2000. While "more than one hundred countries...rely on these reefs for essential goods and services...[t]hey are [also] important feeding and breeding grounds for commercial fisheries" (92). The Institute identifies farming as a contributing factor to this deterioration because of runoff of harmful nutrients and sediments.

Another major aspect related to farming is the destruction of forests to provide additional agricultural lands. Referring to the latest FAO analysis of deforestation rates the World Resources Institute reports that:

"the leading causes of deforestation are the extension of subsistence farming (more common in Africa and Asia), and government-backed conversion of forests to other land uses such as large-scale ranching (most common in Latin America and also Asia). Poverty, joblessness, and inequitable land distribution, which force many landless peasants to invade the forest for lack of other

economic means, continue to drive forest clearance for subsistence farming in many regions (World Resources Institute, No date).

The consequences are quite frightening. The world's forests are the main contributors in a system that provides clean air for other organisms including humans. They ingest carbon dioxide and transform it into oxygen. Paradoxically, as we increase the amount of CO₂ in the air we are simultaneously destroying the natural systems that would help clean the air of these toxins. The tropical rainforests that we are cutting down at a rate of over 10 million hectares per year, in part, to provide additional grazing land also contain most of the world's biodiversity as regards plant, animal, insect and bacterial species. Many of these have been essential in making the natural systems what they have become today. We are only now beginning to understand how all these elements are linked together and the role each plays in the biosphere. Some species, we know, are disappearing before we can even discover their role thus possibly depriving ourselves of valuable knowledge providing key information about the links between these and us.

Destruction of these habitats is also having serious deleterious effects on the human populations of these areas. As they are slowly crowded out and drawn into modern ways of living, aboriginal traditional ways of life are being disrupted and ancient knowledge about plants, animals and survival is being lost forever. Many of these people, who used to do quite well in their traditional lifestyles, have not been able to adapt to changing circumstances are now perceived as social and economic burdens by the same people who took away their lands and means of subsistence.

Clear cutting of forests has also affected water systems, has contributed to increases in flooding and has deprived us of access to and contact with important parts of our own natural habitat. Forestry companies claim to be replacing the cut trees saying it's only good business sense. However, FAO figures show that, in spite of reforestation efforts, between 1980 and 1995 the net loss of forests amounted to approximately 180 million hectares (World Resources Institute, No date). Environmentalists are also quick to remind us that tree farms are not forests. Once a forest is cut down its intricate systems are disrupted for decades if not centuries; the diversity is destroyed since tree farms are usually monocultures and it is yet to be shown that the previous natural equilibrium ever returns to these new environments.

5. Conclusion and Alternatives

Agriculture is a fundamental human activity. As human populations increase, the stress they put on physical systems to meet their nutrition needs also increases. "Simple-lifers" response to these issues is usually to change the position from which they feed themselves in the food chain. For many this has meant a change in diet to either veganism (no animal products or by-products whatsoever) or vegetarianism, or at least a significant reduction in meat from their diet (Elgin 1981, 57). In fact, one of the great motivators to a change in diet to vegetarianism is now the impact of meat production on the environment rather than health issues. Meat production has been identified as stressing farmland resources from two to five times (depending on the type of meat) as

much as a plant-based production. It requires more energy, water and space. Improved knowledge in dietetics has allowed us to understand that meat is not necessary for our survival or even our health. As such, in accordance with “simple-lifer” values, elimination or at least reduction of meat becomes the responsible choice. This becomes even more salient when we understand that, in order to fill the requirements of the high meat content North American diet, resources of developing countries need to be exploited.

“Simple-lifers” have also shown interest for alternative types of farming such as organic and communal experiences. Mongeau (1998, 253-5) refers to the phenomenon of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) a growing concern in Europe and North America. In the CSA concept, closer ties are forged between the farmer and the people he feeds. Consumers, usually from urban centres, share the farmer’s risk by pre-purchasing their share of the harvest and getting their produce delivered to them as it becomes available in the season. The farmer can thus purchase his seed and other inputs without resorting to indebtedness to financial institutions. The food is usually grown organically (without the use of chemicals) using proven, natural, soil regenerating methods. Quite often consumers are invited to participate in farm life either helping in the planting or harvest, for which they receive a reduction in the cost of their share. In other cases, farmers invite their clients to different activities on the farm such as sleigh rides or visits to the sugarbush. The concept creates awareness in urban populations of the work that goes into preparing their food and the value of the farmer, encouraging greater respect for both the food and its producers.

In Quebec the concept has attracted a good deal of interest. Équiterre, the organisation (NGO) that has spearheaded and organised the movement in the province reports that, after its initial four years, the project, in 2000, had grown from 7 to 48 farms supplying approximately 4,700 clients with fresh, organic produce at a reasonable price (Hunter, 2000, 16).

As with other issues, the simplicity principle of reduction also applies to food. In North America and especially in the U.S. obesity is becoming a serious health concern. Health officials worry mostly about increased obesity in children since they predict a considerable increase in juvenile diabetes as a direct consequence. More than 25% of American children are obese. The causes of obesity increases are varied, including sedentarism and diet but also quantities of food ingurgitated. The CBS television network in September 2001 brought to the public's attention an astonishing CDC (Centres for Disease Control) study revealing that the rates of obesity and diabetes had doubled from 1999 to 2000 (<http://cbshealthwatch.medscape.com/cx/viewarticle/404645>). During the interview, the lead scientist in the study identified a decrease in calorie intake as one of the three behavioural changes needed to reverse the trend. The other two were increase in physical activity and increased consumption of fruits and vegetables. He also recognised the role of advertising and marketing in bringing about the current situation: "There are so many obstacles for us to make healthy choices. We are bombarded by messages and advertisement that encourage the eating of more food

than we need.” Little wonder that one very popular behavioural choice of “simple-lifers” is the elimination or significant reduction of television from their lives.

In addition to buying organic and local through CSAs, many “simple-lifers” also choose to grow part of their food themselves either through backyard or communal gardens or even “pot gardens” on apartment balconies and/or windowsills. They also often include some sort of composting activity in the process to reduce input into common landfills.

As with the energy issue, systemically, the “simple-lifer” call is a move away from industrial-based agriculture to smaller, diversified, organic farming. Government policies need to reflect growing concern for the health and environmental consequences of the current system and a desire for alternative methods of food production.

E. Resource Extraction and Manufacturing

In addition to the materials needed to till the earth, sow and harvest our food, we humans also require clothing and housing and we have developed an appetite for a whole gamut of objects perceived to make our lives easier, more comfortable, enjoyable and interesting. This section addresses the toll that the production of all these things extracts on the environment. Given the scope of the manufacturing arena, a work in its own right would be needed to do justice to all the environmental issues concerned. I will present an overview, supported by pertinent examples, of the kind of destruction and damage to the

environment that results from an economic mindset that presumes that resources are infinite, that the environment can absorb an unlimited quantity of waste and that there is logic in an economic system that accords no inherent value to resources such as forests, mountains or hydrologic systems that include wetlands, rivers, lakes and oceans. My purpose, here is to draw attention to the destructive aspects of manufacturing and resource extraction, and present the “simple-lifer” response.

Issues concerning resource extraction and manufacturing of goods can be classified into three categories: 1) the destruction caused by the extraction itself; 2) the depletion of resources; 3) the wastes produced by the manufacturing processes and by the goods themselves once their useful life is over. This section will provide an overview of these issues.

1. Extraction and Growth

First, all goods manufacturing requires an input of raw materials be they mineral, animal or plant. If the source is mineral, these must be extracted from the soil. In the past and to this day huge tracts of land have been dedicated to this activity often with dire consequences on the ecosystems, the wildlife and the human populations situated within these areas of activity. We have already discussed the consequences of mining or digging for fossil fuels. Mining other metals can be just as devastating if not more. Archives abound with stories of accidents on mining sites. Some of the elements or chemicals used in the process of separating minerals from their ores can be quite toxic

and can cause serious damage in case of accident. For example, there have been several incidents related to gold mining activities where cyanide-laced water containment tanks have been breached and their contents have poured into rivers upstream of where communities depend on the water for bathing and drinking, and on the fish for their basic food requirements. Several people have died and many more have needed medical attention, this, in addition to being deprived of their lifsource for varying periods of time. Greenpeace reports that bursting chemical holding dams are an annual occurrence. They provide a short list of such accidents occurring in the 1990s that includes, among others: 1) 1993, Ecuador, sludge and rubble bury a gold-mining settlement and 24 people die; 2) 1994, Harmony Mine, South Africa, 2.5 million tons of cyanide sludge buries a gold-mining village; there are 17 dead and 80 houses are destroyed; 3) 1995 Omai Gold Mine, Guyana, the dam wall bursts and 2.5 million liters of cyanide solution flow into the Essequibo River; fish die on an enormous scale and the area is declared a "national disaster area" (Greenpeace, No date).

But, according to Jeremy Bransten (2000) of Radio Free Europe, despite the damage these have caused, "it took January's [2000] massive spill of cyanide-laced waste water at the Baia Mare gold mine in Romania to concentrate the world's attention on the issue." In addition to the size of the spill (estimates have been made of up to 100,000 cubic metres of cyanide-laced water), the fact that it polluted major river systems in central Europe including the Danube and killed tons of commercial fish stocks was sure to garner public attention.

Resources can also be plant-based with cotton and trees as the main ones. The growing and harvesting of cotton to provide textile for clothing and furniture, for example, gives rise to some of the same issues as were discussed in the agriculture section: depletion of soils, pollution of water from the application of pesticides, transformation of aquatic systems because of the need for irrigation etc. Twenty-five percent of all pesticides used globally are applied to cotton fields. Some of the most toxic chemicals listed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency are used in cotton farming including Aldicarb slated as the most acutely toxic one (<http://www.simplelife.com/organiccotton/13PSTCDSSTTSTCS.html>). From the EPA website we also learn that cotton culture was the last agricultural stronghold of arsenic-based products. It was only in 1993 that this chemical was delisted as an acceptable one in agriculture while it had been known to be a human carcinogen since the late 1970s and had been banned from all other agricultural uses since 1988 (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 1999, November 19).

One of the most important issues in plant-based resource extraction is the environmental destruction caused by current forestry/logging practices. In the previous section we dealt with the problems of deforestation as relates to agriculture and the need for additional land. Forests also provide us with furniture, building materials, paper and a multitude of other objects ranging from hydro poles to chopsticks to golf tees, feeding our seemingly insatiable appetite. In addition to the points raised in the section on agriculture it should be noted that most of the forests being depleted currently are in the developing world while reforestation efforts occur in industrialised countries (World

Resources Institute, No date). Much of the deforestation is being done to get access to sorely needed foreign currency to pay off a strangling international debt. As logging roads are built giving access to the stripped wilderness people move in, fleeing overcrowded areas, reducing the chances that these areas will ever be reforested

When the resource is animal-based such as fur or leather for clothing, furniture or automobile interiors, the animals have to be raised and provided food and land space putting additional stress on natural systems. Again the issues raised in the agricultural section are only compounded by these additional uses of animal products.

2. Depletion

The second aspect of this issue is depletion of resources. In the case of minerals there is a set amount of stocks. As we use them, they are not replaced. As both our population and rate of consumption increase these resources disappear at unprecedented rates. We have discussed in the second chapter how economic theory says that we will never run out of these resources because of price adjustments dictated by the laws of supply and demand. It was shown that this is one of the basic fallacies of the economic system and that, in fact, these resources are available in finite quantities and, as such, must eventually run out if populations and production and consumption are not checked. Unless we learn to make things ex nihilo this is inevitable. This means that, at one point, we must reduce our demand.

In the case of plants the problem has two facets. For rapidly growing plants the issue is one of depletion not of the plants themselves but of the soils and their minerals needed to grow them. This has been previously discussed for foodstuffs and the same arguments apply here. As regards forests the issue is quite different and possibly more dramatic. Our increasing hunger for wood and wood derived products such as paper simply magnifies the problems discussed in the agriculture section. The critical nature of the problem has even been recognised in the business arena. In response to consumer pressure Home Depot refuses to sell lumber taken from old growth forests and will also carry and identify lumber that has been harvested sustainably and been certified as such. Forestry practices are still fraught with controversy however. It seems that not a week goes by without some sort of confrontation between forestry companies and environmentalists. The issues range from the protection of endangered wildlife and safeguarding ancient trees, to providing jobs and meeting consumer demands. While progress in conflict resolution has been made in some areas, none appear to be nearing satisfactory permanent resolution.

3. Wastes

The final aspect to consider in this section is the wastes created by the production processes and the products themselves. In the energy section we have already mentioned the wastes from the energy used in the fabrication of the objects we use and the impact this has on air and water quality. One example is the electricity intensive aluminium industry. The Worldwatch Institute identifies the production of aluminium products as

one of the greatest contributors to global climate change. Although energy requirements have decreased by approximately 25% over the past 20 years, increases in demand have more than offset this reduction. Though the industry boasts of the recyclability of its product very little of it is actually recycled and over two-thirds of what is, comes from primary manufacturing scrap rather than post-consumer sources (Worldwatch Institute, 2001b, 64-5).

But the energy used is only one aspect. Just as we have seen with agriculture and its inputs such as pesticides and chemical fertilisers, so does the manufacturing of most of our other goods require chemical inputs that are very destructive for the environment. For example, several of the chemicals, such as chrome derivatives, utilised in the tanning of leather used for our shoes, clothes, furniture and other accessories are quite toxic and several tanneries in the U.S. have been subject to EPA investigation and lawsuits for dumping wastes containing these chemicals into the environment. Since 1996 the EPA has enacted strict rules for plants that discharge their liquid wastes into surface waters or public water treatment facilities (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 1996, July 8). However, in developing countries the problem has yet to be addressed in any serious way. A case study from the American University in Washington presents the issue as it exists currently in Pakistan where the leather tanning industry makes up 5% of the GDP. The case exposes a situation where effluents from tanneries are spewed untreated into water reservoirs and the sea where they affect the health of populations and the fish stocks upon which they depend for food (Augustus, 1996).

Tanning of leather and making of soft drinks cans are just two examples that are repeated day in day out as businesses churn out the products we demand of them or that they want to foist upon us. Other examples could be given of the bleaching and dyes for our paper and textiles, the glues for our running shoes and so on.

Western countries have enacted a good deal of legislation to try to limit such damage but the monitoring arms of environmental watchdogs are overworked and understaffed and cannot possibly hope to discover all instances of non-conformity. In addition the legislation is often so toothless that for many large companies it is cheaper to pay the fines than to modify their processes. One would be amazed at the number of fines corporations (especially in the primary sector such as mining and transformation of ores) voluntarily pay each year (Mokhiber and Weissman, 1999). More importantly, as we have seen in the chapter on globalisation, corporations are increasingly moving their production activities to developing countries where environmental legislation is either very lax or non-existent. Constant reduction in the number of tanneries in the U.S. for example, could account for increases in this industry in countries like Pakistan. However, the belief that we can export our pollution to other areas of the globe is an illusion supported by current business mindset and practice of externalising costs. If we understand that the earth is a closed system, we also know that the pollution we transfer to India or to China will eventually catch up to us just as DDT used in the South found its way into the fat of arctic seals and then into the bodies of the Inuit (McAndrew, 1998).

The final element of waste in the product chain is the product itself. There are several reasons why our products end up in garbage dumps today. The first and most logical is that they have lived out their useful product life and are thus disposed of. The second is that they have broken down and cannot be repaired. A third reason, which is often the case in our consumerist society, is that a new model has been marketed and as good consumers we dispose of the old to bring in the new. Whatever the case may be, we in the West and the large metropolises around the world face a trash problem of gargantuan proportions. Cities like New York have attempted to float their garbage on barges to cash-strapped developing countries. Toronto, finding a fairly hostile climate in the town of Kirkland Lake to their proposal of sending their garbage up there, found a more receptive town across the lake in Michigan (Smith, 2001). The highest point on the Eastern U.S. coast south of Maine is a mountain of garbage from New York City nearly one hundred and fifty feet high (Video, [Ocean Planet](#)).

What do we find in these trash heaps? Of course we find the expected things like household garbage in those green bags we leave at the roadside every week. We also find however, some rather nasty things like old refrigerators leaking their gases, old leftover paint containers with lead or even old furniture and building materials with lead paint on them, computers and computer screens, and a host of other objects made with toxic materials. Why do we need to worry about this? Because as it rains on these sites these chemicals and toxins leach through the ground and eventually find their way into our water whether it be the ocean as in the case of that garbage mountain mentioned above or into our groundwater, rivers or streams in other cases. We must remember that

everything we make eventually becomes garbage. Even the factories in which we make things and the machinery they contain often become obsolete and are either dismantled and “thrown away” or left to deteriorate in place as is the case of a host of old factories on the Detroit river. Quite often these sites are soaked with the chemicals that were used in the manufacturing processes they employed.

4. Conclusion

The validity of the “simple-lifer” fundamental response of reduction in material goods is even more evident for this section. Elgin’s basic premise of Voluntary Simplicity, “Toward a way of life that is outwardly simple, inwardly rich” is elementary in this situation. “Simple-lifers” have devised several tactics for facing this facet of the sustainability/environmental issue and reducing their impact on the planet. We will explain in more detail in the concluding chapter how they have done this. It is sufficient for our purposes, here, to enumerate a few. In addition to simply not falling into the consumption trap in the first place and buying things that will not really enhance their quality of life, “simple-lifers” will reuse things such as clothes or furniture. Thrift shops and used furniture stores are known terrain for them. Some people, in Internet communications, have said that their friends never throw anything away now before asking them if they want it. Repair shops are also used when things can’t be repaired at home (Spayde, 1997); see also the video, [Escape from Affluenza](#)). Quite often “simple-lifers” will pay more for certain items either to obtain items with more durability or because they have less impact on the environment. A case in point for the latter is the

purchase of organic cotton products or the substitution of cotton or leather products by hemp ones. Hemp is a very versatile crop from which such products as shoes, bags and various foodstuffs can be made. It is a crop that requires essentially no chemicals, replenishes the soil, grows on marginal farmland, has a rapid rate of growth and is not water intensive (Maday, 1999).

At the systemic level, “simple-lifers” suggest that the influence and ubiquity of advertising that promotes inordinate consumption levels must be addressed seriously. Disengaging from the system at the personal level is essential but support must be given by social structures. More stringent enforcement of existing laws and regulations is needed as well as the implementation and reorientation of detractors and motivators to encourage desired behaviour in the creation of less damaging products and processes. National accounts must be amended so that they take into consideration the value of natural resources before they are transformed into products. The difficulty of assigning value to these resources can be averted, at least partially, by calculating the costs of system maintenance and other services provided by these resources. These include but are not limited to: converting CO₂ into oxygen and flood control in the case of forests, water filtration services in the case of wetlands, and entertainment services of lakes and rivers. In any event, assigning an arbitrary and imprecise figure would be better than using zero as an amount.

F. Transportation

We may have become more sedentary since we became agriculturalists, but our nomadic roots seem to have resurfaced as modes of transportation have improved. We constantly and continuously move our goods and ourselves across the world, by land, sea and air (and now even through space, but even though we recently saw the emergence of the first space tourist, this aspect will not be dealt with in this section.). As we saw in the chapter on globalisation, it doesn't seem as if this is about to stop or even decrease. Global trade is increasing every year. New trade pacts such as the FTAA are being negotiated in prevision of this trend, and also to facilitate it, and business is lobbying strongly for a liberalisation of trade and capital movement, which would give the tendency even greater momentum. In this section we will examine the different kinds of damages inflicted on the environment by this behaviour and examine some alternatives to the current model.

Easy and cheap access to fuels such as diesel and gasoline has encouraged the implementation of a vast network of roadways across Europe and America. The American love affair with the automobile is not a myth and it is still in full bloom. There are as many automobiles on the roads in the U.S. as there are people. Canada follows very closely. As a matter of fact David Suzuki tells us that Vancouver may well be the most car-addicted city on the continent. He tells us that more new cars are sold every year there than there are babies born so that the automobile population is growing faster than the human population (Video, Lost in the Suburbs).

1. Passenger Cars

When looking at road transport we can divide it into two meaningful categories: industrial/commercial and passenger. The two have several things in common as concerns our subject but they also have a few important differences that warrant their being addressed differently. Of course the most evident thing they have in common is that they foul the air with carbon dioxide and smog producing chemicals. Because of their sheer numbers, passenger cars are more responsible for this than commercial vehicles. This creates unbearable situations in a number of Western cities (and several Asian cities as well) where urban populations are regularly advised not to strain or exercise outdoors as it can be dangerous for their health. The elderly are often told to stay indoors and children not to play outside. A World Bank report places the 1995 count of premature deaths occurring worldwide due to pollution-aggravated illnesses as high as 500,000 with four to five million new cases of chronic bronchitis (World Bank, 2000, 57). In addition to increasing health hazards, vehicle emissions damage buildings with soot and smog and destroy plant life.

One of the most important results of increased car use has been urban sprawl and the consequent paving over of large areas of America and Europe for roads, driveways and parking lots. Since cities were often originally situated where there was fertile land, this sprawl has meant an important loss of valuable prime farmland as the cost benefit ratio tilts away from farming towards selling the land to developers. Once the land has

been developed for housing and commerce it can never be recovered for farm use since, at least in cooler climates, most buildings have basements and so the fertile land has been carted away and replaced by cement. Quite often marshes and other fragile ecosystems are filled in and destroyed to make way for urban development.

The passenger car dilemma appears to be the perfect example of Jevon's Paradox, according to which, as we find more efficient solutions to certain problems, we also boost the original behaviour that brought the problem on. In this case, for example, as we build new roads or bridges to reduce traffic congestion, people increase car usage both in the number of cars used and the number of miles driven (Mayumi et al., 1998).

2. Heavy Vehicles

While commercial vehicles also participate in exacerbating the problems stated above, they present other problems that are just now being addressed. They are responsible, for example, for much of the wear and tear of roads. This increases stress on the environment through the production of the materials that go into the building and maintenance of our roadways. We have come to realise lately that large trucks cause much more deterioration than passenger vehicles. In a news interview, Florida state highway operations director Bill Albaugh stated that "...a single 80,000-pound truck creates road damage equal to 9,600 cars..." (Hurtibise, 2001). A lot less material and equipment for rebuilding roads and repairing them would be needed if it weren't for these vehicles. Cities are now looking at ways to distribute the burden of this maintenance

more fairly between passenger and commercial vehicles, and to motivate transporters to change the mode of transportation of goods altogether.

Perhaps the ultimate transportation insult to environmentalists is the recent trend in advertising seen in all of our major cities: the mobile ad, a truck that drives around the city all day and whose only purpose is to cart around a billboard advertising a product. In addition to promoting environmental destruction through consumption, the activity simultaneously soils the air.

3. Air Travel

Road travel is only one of our favourite means of moving about. Notwithstanding the current decrease due to a reaction to the events of September 11th 2001 in New York City, the number of airline passenger flights increases continually. Whether we travel for business or pleasure the result is the same: contribution to depletion of the ozone layer that protects living things from the ultraviolet rays of the sun, depletion of fossil fuels and contribution to noise pollution in large areas of modern cities. If we travel as tourists we also often participate in increasing the GDP of many developing countries that have turned to tourism to bring in badly needed foreign currency to help pay off heavy debt burdens. This however, like all other human activity, comes at a price and, as is often the case, it is the environment that takes the brunt of it. The ocean waters off the coasts of many favourite exotic destinations are increasingly polluted by several sources such as human excrements from the hotels that line the shores. A recent study by researchers at

the University of Georgia shows that bacteria from human feces is becoming a problem in the shallow waters off the Florida coast and in the Caribbean where it is killing both coral and fish (<http://dsc.discovery.com/news/reu/20020617/coral.html>).

“Tourism is also a major indirect contributor to much of the oil and fertilizer/pesticide pollution of coastal waters. For example, in the US Virgin Islands most reportable oil spills stem from yacht, ferry and cruiseship fueling activities. In both the Sarasota Bay and the Corpus Christy National Estuary Program assessments, lawn care practices on golf courses and second-homes and condominium resorts were found to be major sources of nitrate and phosphate contamination of the bay from storm water runoff” (Island Resources Foundation, 1996).

Increased use of motorised marine vehicles adds to this pollution and to the destruction of fragile marine ecosystems such as coral reefs and mangroves.

Airplanes and jets have also become quite popular for shipping freight. Shifting our production activities to developing countries has meant that in addition to the consequences already mentioned, we must factor in the damages wrought on the environment due to the transportation over huge distances of raw materials, components and finished products.

4. Miscellaneous

Studies have shown that the average distance travelled by most of the food on our plate is approximately 2400 kilometres (Waridel et al., 1997). On the shelves of our local grocery stores one can find one-dollar cans of mushrooms originating in China. It is difficult to understand the logic that makes it cheaper to transport a can of mushrooms all the way from China than to grow and package them here. After all, we grow mushrooms here and we have canning facilities in the area. So what business logic can allow us to add to the pollution in our environment by the additional transport costs, and do it at a discount? How can, as often happens, apples flown in from New Zealand be cheaper in our stores than apples grown here in Quebec? Where is the cost of transporting these goods halfway around the world? How do we justify economic practices that encourage people, through their purchasing decisions, to engage in behaviour that destroys our environment?

5. Conclusion

These are the kinds of questions that motivate “simple-lifers” to take a closer look at the effects of their activities on the environment and ultimately on those with whom they share the planet. The response has materialised in varied ways. Mongeau and Elgin report that voluntary simplicity moves people to be more in tune with the physical environment (Mongeau, 1998, 143-167; Elgin, 1981, 29). Their modes of transport tend towards reduced car use and a move to more ecological and communal means such as

cycling, walking and public transit. A Montreal organisation concerned with urban pollution caused by vehicles has proposed a “Transportation Cocktail” and published and distributed a pamphlet explaining the damage done by cars and truck and encouraging the use of a multiplicity of means of moving ourselves around (Équiterre, <http://www.equiterre.qc.ca/english/transportation/index.html>).

Tourism often takes on a different meaning for “simple-lifers”. Many have discovered the marvels of their own surroundings remembering that often, tourists from halfway around the world come to enjoy them. Discovering wider areas in the way of bicycle/camping trips is also a popular activity among them. Nature activities stay away from motorised vehicles such as snowmobiles, all terrain vehicles, or motorised marine vehicles (Mongeau, 1998, 30).

As we have seen in the agriculture section, “simple-lifers” tend to attempt to reduce the travel length of their foods by encouraging local producers. The same mindset applies to all consumption from shoes and clothing to bicycles and health care products.

Systemically, the changes “simple-lifers” propose are quite numerous. In particular, they strongly suggest a move towards the local rather than the global when it comes to production of goods. When goods need to be transported, rail transport is seen as a much more ecological choice. Governments at all levels should use their power to encourage ecological personal transport choices by supporting public transit, adding bicycle paths wherever possible and being very wary of adding roads and bridges to the

existing infrastructure. They also propose redirection of funds towards revitalisation of urban cores to make them more liveable places and thus stem urban sprawl. Suburbs should be reorganised so as to become more than dormitories, encouraging the establishment of multi-purpose construction that melds residential and commercial spaces. Moving employment from city cores to outlying areas should also be encouraged so as to reduce the number of cars and the miles travelled.

F. Conclusion

We have seen throughout this chapter, that current human activity, motivated by an ideology of perpetual growth through production and consumption of goods, is having dramatic consequences on the Earth. Scientists, environmentalists, activists and even some economists are sending out warning signals that if we don't start reducing our impact on the environment we may shortly reach a point where the equilibrium forces that keep all systems functioning properly are compromised. That may mean serious changes in weather patterns, in sea levels, in availability of arable land and in access to clean, fresh water. In addition, the same ideology is taking a toll on human beings across the planet and on the societies they have constructed over the centuries.

CHAPTER 5

THE SUSTAINABILITY OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Of Disillusionment but... "Another World Is Possible"²¹

A. Introduction

It should now be fairly clear, after the first four chapters, that a great number of people believe human beings are faced with an incredibly complex and especially urgent challenge in this nascent 21st century. The complexity of the various issues is evident from the impossibility of reaching consensus or even an overwhelming majority position on such seemingly worrisome issues as global warming, genetically modified organisms (GMOs) or ways to reduce world poverty. We already seem to be capable of enormous impact on existing systems and processes of nature even as we have barely begun to understand them. This applies to our manipulation of genetic material, our control of water resources in the form of dams, canals and irrigation systems, the elaboration of gigantic, relatively functional human agglomerations and the development of various technological marvels especially in the field of medicine and communications. At the same time our predictive capacities as to the consequences of these actions, many of them undesired and undesirable, have been limited to say the least. It seems that every discovery intended to improve our well-being and standard of living has been accompanied by a host of corollary problems that need to be addressed with differing

²¹This is the slogan that has emerged from the World Social Forum an event now held each year in Porto Alegre, Brazil by civil society groups in parallel to the World Economic Forum.

levels of urgency. We have seen that while we have made our lives materially more comfortable and physically easier, we are increasing our mental stress to inordinate levels; we have reduced our quality of life in that the air we breathe, the water in our rivers and lakes are greatly fouled, supportive and nurturing community structures have been replaced by urban expanses that are cold and anonymous at best, centres of crime, destitution and despair for many; we are using up stores of natural energy sources and raw materials far more quickly than their replenishment rates. These activities have also been instrumental in creating enormous discrepancies in wealth and income distribution at both the microeconomic (within nations) and macroeconomic (amongst nations) levels. This has led to a host of inequitable situations as concerns the basic “goods” (physical security, access to sufficient quality food, to clean water and air, adequate health care) needed to make life minimally human. Tens of thousands of people still die every day from starvation, from water-borne diseases and from armed conflicts as millions of well- or overfed, decently clothed and adequately sheltered individuals sit passively by, feeling either unconcerned or powerless. The violence of despair has become endemic in many areas of the world.

Many now believe that things can't continue as they are. Throughout this work we have heard from authors who have made a compelling case concerning the non-viability of current human activity and the pathology of the institutions we have put in place to maintain and enhance this activity. In more and more areas, be it economics, geography, psychology, sociology, ecology and biology to name only a few, a bevy of

voices is rising to challenge the status quo and to present, to an increasingly concerned populace, a strong argument for deep-seated change.

In addition to academics, we have learned, here, of a large group of people who not only talk about these things but have also integrated awareness of these issues into their lives and lifestyles. For this group, the crux of the problem is that human beings are overtaxing the Earth's resources. The problem is two-pronged: 1) either by their numbers or their levels of consumption humans are impinging on the resource base of their children and grandchildren; 2) they do so under a system that allows a very small minority to consume inordinate amounts of resources for luxuries, while a majority of the world's population struggles to meet its basic needs. In other words, the life patterns of current human populations are unsustainable in the long term. They are unsustainable ecologically because they are based on the depletion of a limited resource base and the biosystems that support life are being congested by great amounts of wastes. They are unsustainable socially because, as the world gets smaller through improved methods of communication and transportation, inequities become more visible and feelings of injustice arise. Shiva (2000) and Shutt (1998) tell us that these feelings contain the seeds of revolt and violence. Many have made connections between these social inequities and the dramatic events that occurred in New York on September 11th 2001. As the violence spreads across the globe, the possibilities of establishing the systems needed to achieve intra-generational patterns of sustainable living are decreased.

While “simple-lifers” are aware that social, political, environmental and economic issues are woven into an intricate web of interdependence, they also recognise that what maintains the web is the mindset and consequent behaviour of the millions of individuals who have “bought into” the ideology that underpins it and thus give it legitimacy. As this mindset changes the web can be unravelled, legitimacy can be withdrawn. In his fascinating and accessible proposal of a revolution to a steady state economy in Shoveling Fuel For A Runaway Train: Errant Economists, Shameful Spenders, And A Plan To Stop Them All, wildlife biologist turned political economist, Brian Czech (2000), reminds us that when a majority of the population of a society adopts an idea, it usually becomes a social reality (he uses the example of the ending of slavery in the U.S. to illustrate his point). While “simple-lifers” are still far from being a majority in North America, support for their ideas and position is constantly growing. We saw in the Ray and Anderson study how 58% of the total American population is sympathetic to a more simple way of life. Despite being continually bombarded by politicians, economists and mainstream media with the ideology of growth or growthmania as Daly (1977) calls it, of neo-classical economics, nearly 40% of Americans do not believe in the concept of unlimited economic growth (Czech, 2000). If this is true in the U.S., then it is perfectly reasonable to assume that those numbers would be even higher in most other countries of the world where consumption ideology is less ingrained, bolstered and continually reinforced. This means that on some of the key aspects of the problem we are approaching majority levels at which, Czech says, change is susceptible of occurring.

Throughout the 70s and 80s there was a growing realisation, in various circles, that humans were pushing the environmental systems to their limits. As the West intensified the worldwide push of capitalism through economic globalisation, the problem of unsustainability became increasingly evident. At the end of the 1980s the UN urgently put together a commission to evaluate the situation and propose solutions. The concept that emerged, “sustainable development”, has captured the collective imagination of the planet so that it now appears in the mission statements of scores of NGOs, in the annual reports of a majority of multinational corporations, and in the policy statements of a wide variety of ministries and departments of national governments around the world. Sustainable development, if applied as directed, bore the promise of greatly reducing if not eliminating a number of social ills, the first of which was poverty, and of bringing economic prosperity to all nations as they developed in harmony with the planet’s physical processes.

“Simple-lifers”, as, and through the eyes and voices of, anti-consumerists, anti-globalists, environmentalists, social and human rights activists, etc. have studied and evaluated the current proposed solutions and have responded in their own unique way. This chapter elaborates on this process and is thus divided in two parts. The first tells of “simple-lifers” assessment and critique of the global sustainable development enterprise. After an overview of the concept of sustainable development and its main areas of concern, we will discuss the reactions and commitments of some of our governments to this challenge. We will examine the rather negative self-evaluation of the process to date by both the UN and the Canadian government.

The second part, reveals the ideological construction of “another world”. These will touch on the various issues we have dealt with throughout this work. We will thus present a variety of alternatives to the more problematic aspects of capitalism and globalisation. We have seen, in Chapter 4, pragmatic “simple-lifer” responses to specific environmental issues. Here we will examine some of the more general or systemic approaches that are deemed necessary to support individual efforts. Of course, underlying all these concepts and strategies is the “simple-lifer” focus on consumption and in these pages they will be given priority. Other positions, centred on the political, for example, will be addressed through a consumption-oriented lens.

B. Concept and Issues

1. Ubiquity of the Term

The World Commission on Environment and Development defines “sustainable development” as the elaboration of human activity in such a way that the needs of current populations are met without compromising the ability or capacity of future generations to meet their needs (1987, 8). Considering the short time this term has existed in the active language base of our society its expansion has been fairly incredible. A Web-based search on a well-known engine delivered 948,000 references to it. It reveals hundreds of governmental, para-governmental, institutional, activist and corporate sites having sustainability as their central theme. A more detailed analysis leads to a host of

organizations that, while not having sustainability as their central theme, dedicate varying amounts of their site to the topic and their concerns about or implications in the concept. These have as their major interest such varied subjects as animal welfare, population issues, water issues, energy, trade, urbanization, or pollution. The idea of sustainable development has infiltrated a great many sectors of human activity: manufacturing, agriculture, retailing, resource extraction, energy production, the chemical industry and the forestry industry. It has surreptitiously crept into our universities in an increasing number of faculties and schools. Almost every government department at every level has developed a sustainability policy in an attempt to help its members reduce their impact or “ecological footprint”. Because of its pervasiveness in business and government the concept has become important in the elaboration of economic and political policy. To a lesser extent it has become a part of everyone’s daily lives in many forms not the least of which, recycling, which has become pervasive.

In view of the extent of the spread of this phenomenon, it would be impossible to provide a detailed analysis of the multiple forms it has taken, nor is it necessary for our purpose. We will therefore not attempt, for example, to elucidate whether corporations are honest in the integration of sustainable development language in their corporate communications though the possibility of attempted co-optation will be addressed. It is enough to see, on a more macro level, whether words are translated into action.

Neither will there be any attempt in this chapter to outline the historical precedents of sustainable development as found in the several conservation movements

and proponents that existed from the middle of the 19th century to the 1960s and 70s. We are reminded here of individuals like Aldo Leopold and the Land Ethic, or of Walt Whitman and John Muir founder of the Sierra Club, among others. Though they are important in that they have, at times, inspired or provided reference and grounding for their more modern developments it would be beyond the scope of this work to look into them in detail. What we will concentrate on here, is an examination of some of the programs of action that have been proposed and what has actually been done (as far as can be determined) as regards these programs since the concept has become more mainstream.

2. WCED Report

In 1987, The World Commission on Environment and Development published a report entitled Our Common Future (also referred to as the “Brundtland Report” after its chairman) in which it introduced to the public at large the concept of Sustainable Development. The Commission had been formed in 1983 as “an urgent call” by the General Assembly of the United Nations with the very optimistic goal of elaborating strategies that would lead to “achieving sustainable development by the year 2000 and beyond.” There was already, at that time, a “widespread feeling of frustration and inadequacy in the international community about our own ability to address the vital global issues and deal effectively with them” (WCED, 1987, ix). The chairman of the Commission, Gro Brundtland was then Prime Minister of Norway, a position she had come to, unusually, after several years as an outspoken environment minister.

The Commission's report turned into a fairly expansive foray into the connections between human activity and the destruction of the environment. It tried to establish causal relationships that could be addressed in trying to come to terms with the drastic changes in attitude that would be necessary if humans were to have any chance of surviving either as a civilisation or even as a species beyond the next few centuries. The report makes salient the fact that the web of life, of which humans are a part, is an intricately complex arrangement that we are still very far from understanding completely (WCED, 1987, 147). It brings an understanding that the "apart from nature" attitude that human beings, for the most part, have adopted, has led to our controlling and destructive behaviour and this must change. Therefore, a good part of the report concentrates on the damage inflicted on the Earth by humans, the threats this poses to our survival and the challenges that need to be faced to stop or reverse the process. We have discussed these issues in Chapter 4 in detail and later in this chapter we will examine some suggestions as to how to properly readdress them.

a. Identifying the Problem

In spite of the emphasis placed on the environment, that is not the crux of the problem presented by the WCED. The problem actually has two facets: population growth and a socio-economic system that creates excesses both in poverty and in consumption. Though many of the proposed solutions (especially that of economic growth which has captured the minds of political and economic pundits) have been and

continue to be hotly debated, the report correctly identifies inequitable distribution of wealth, knowledge and resources combined with exponential population growth as the ultimate dilemma. Within a very short time there will be a much greater number of people on Earth: anywhere from 8 to 10 billion by 2050 and hopefully plateauing at approximately 11 billion by the end of the century. Yet, we are already experiencing serious difficulties in addressing the needs of current populations. The challenge, therefore, is how to bring about a new state of affairs where at least the basic needs of the poor are met as concerns food security and safety, access to clean water and sanitation, family planning and access to basic healthcare and education.

Concerns about the poor are not new. The world's ancient religious texts, from the Hindu Vedas to the Christian Bible are concerned with poverty. But it is only in the past 50 years, after decolonisation and the consequent attempt to integrate all national economies into the process of economic globalisation that we have become less tolerant of the causes of *world poverty* and have gradually come to see it as a critical issue (Sen, 2001). Massive levels of poverty, especially in developing countries have been linked to degraded environments by the Brundtland Report:

“Those who are poor and hungry will often destroy their immediate environment in order to survive: They will cut down forests; their livestock will overgraze farmlands; they will overuse marginal land; and in growing numbers they will crowd into congested cities” (WCED, 1987, 28).

Elimination of poverty has also been linked to prospects for world peace:

“In May 1999 people from around the globe gathered at The Hague to hold a summit to discuss how to end the existence of war. At this Hague Appeal for Peace it was determined that poverty is one of the root causes of war. The Kensington Welfare Rights Union, as part of the Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign, agreed to spearhead the International Campaign for Economic Justice, to raise the fact that there cannot be peace in the world without the elimination of poverty” (Poor People’s Summit to End Poverty, 2000).

It is not surprising, therefore that the question of poverty has become central in issues of development.

b. Quantifying the Solution and Confusion in Terminology

When presenting the issues, the Brundtland Report allowed itself ample scope. However, its mandate was to come up with solutions that could be operationalised by the end of the century i.e. within a decade. As such, the Commission realised it had to work within the bounds of the existing socio-economic system:

“The time has come to break out of past patterns. Attempts to maintain social and ecological stability through old approaches to development and environmental protection will increase instability... Yet we are aware that such a

reorientation on a continuing basis is simply beyond the reach of present decision-making structures and institutional arrangements, both national and international. This Commission has been careful to base our recommendations on the realities of present institutions, on what can and must be accomplished today (WCED, 1987, 22-23).

In this vein the report proposed that an annual economic growth of 5 to 6 percent, in developing countries, would go a long way towards eliminating or at least radically reducing poverty within a period of a few decades (WECD, 1987, 50). This was seen as an essential prerequisite to sustainable development. This part of the report however, was subsequently and understandably, as we will see, given inordinate weight so that "development" became very closely and almost strictly associated with "economic growth" in spite of the numerous environmental and social issues that the report addressed and the warnings it gave about excessive production and consumption in developed countries. What seems to have been forgotten was that the reference to material growth was directed to economies where the basic needs of citizens were not being met.

As we have seen in a few other instances in this work, semantics can be very powerful ideological tools. In this case the use of the terms "development" and "growth" present particular challenges since both are culturally positively loaded words. They both imply progress, which usually signifies good things. A child develops into an adult. Plants grow and develop to maturity. One develops psychically or spiritually and we refer

to personal growth. It is thus very difficult, in our societies, to express reservations about growth. Attaching these terms to economics reduces the chances that policies, standards and measurements that indicate growth will be challenged. Yet, in reality, the concept of growth also implies the attainment of maturity, at which point maintenance becomes the operative concept and additional growth leads to problems (in humans, for example, of obesity or bloating) (Daly, 1977, Chapter 5; Czech, 2000, Chapter 6). The questionable benefit of continued growth is left untouched by modern economic theory.

c. *Western Focus on Economic Growth and Environment*

In the West, most of the emphasis has been directed at developing sustainable production processes or at least reducing the environmental impacts of these processes. Since abject poverty was not considered an issue (which is not to say that it shouldn't be), sustainable development has been more closely associated to questions of establishing equilibrium between the perceived necessity of economic growth and environmental issues. This has meant that the attention of government and business has centred on reduction of waste outputs from manufacturing processes and retail outlets, as well as increasingly efficient use of input resources. More efficient and less wasteful processes have not, unfortunately, meant net reductions of pollution or lowered rates of resource extraction, to a great extent, mainly because they have been offset by increased consumption.

The very concept of the “good” of consumption still remains to be challenged. Confidence in maintaining levels of consumption and compensating by concentrating on improving technological processes has led, “simple-lifers” insist, to a distortion of the problem and a blocking out of alternatives. Should we succeed in improving the technology, they maintain several questions still need to be answered.

The first is whether the current economic system can adapt to such a concept without collapsing and, if not [since it is difficult to imagine eliminating economic growth from a debt-based system where growth has to occur in order to pay the interest on the debt (Korten, 1999, 35)], are there modifications that can be made to the financial system to make consumption reduction something more than an unrealistic utopian dream?

Another question is whether we can socialise ourselves out of Jevon’s Paradox, which states that, as we improve efficiency, we also increase consumption thus wiping out any “efficiency” gains that might reduce wastes and resource extraction. Jevon’s Paradox also applies to all types of consumer goods: less polluting automobiles that are used more often and for longer trips; more energy efficient homes that become bigger; more energy efficient refrigerators that also become bigger and propose new energy consuming gadgets like in-door ice makers and juice dispensers; more efficiently grown crops that are used to feed an increasing human population and a great number of additional inefficient protein converters such as beef; and the list goes on (Mayumi, Giampietro and Goudy, 1998).

3. Environmentalist Reaction to the Report

In addition to critiques of the misinterpretations and misuses of the contents of the Brundtland Report, the report itself has come under scrutiny by various individuals and groups. Some have shown understanding for the complexity of the task, others have been somewhat harsher. Perhaps the most extensive critiques have come from ecology groups and individuals for whom the basic anthropocentric position of the report automatically led it down functional and ideological dead ends. They felt it was important to be aware of the shortcomings of an instrument that has had great influence in establishing policy and guidance. One of the most extensive critiques I have encountered comes from David Orton (1994), a Canadian from Nova Scotia, very involved in Forestry issues. In summary, he has elaborated on eight points that have led to his rejection of the Brundtland report. These eight points are directly related to Western consumption patterns discussed in previous chapters. Knowing the pressure the Commission was under to present a functional and operationable analysis, and the consequent discontinuities between its findings and its recommendations, he presents the following *caveats*:

The Report:

** emphasizes that economic growth is needed and advocates a five- to tenfold increase, worldwide in manufacturing output. The Report does admit that even doubling this output under current technological capacities would be globally fatal (p.14), yet it seems to be stuck in this impasse since it also operates under the reigning growth-based Western capitalist paradigm.*

** accepts the ecologically destructive lifestyle of the "developed" world, and the Western economic model, as something to be sought by the rest of the world.*

** has a human-centered orientation; other species of animals and plants do not have value in their own right, but are considered "resources" for human use. There is no ethical challenge to a human-centered universe. Sustainable, remains sustainable for humans.*

** considers ecology or ecological sustainability as not primary, but merely one among a number of factors to be considered in policy decisions.*

Increasingly, even dissenting economists maintain that economics must become a subset of the environment (Daly, 1977; Hall et al., 2001; Halstead and Cobb, 1996; Czech 2000).

** accepts the elimination of some species and advocates that conscious choices be made by humans to this end.* Orton's position appears to be two-pronged: 1) an ethical one that asks what right we have to determine the continuity of entire species and 2) a functional one that challenges our capacity to make the right choices given our limited understanding of the workings of the systems.

** accepts and projects a world population of 8.2 billion persons by the year 2025, whereas a sustainable planet for human and non-human species requires major human population reductions.* Serious students of the population issue not constrained by political correctness support Orton in this position. Herman Daly (1977) suggests that tradable procreation licenses be issued. Hardin

(1980) is more radical in his statements of the need for reduced populations especially in developing countries and the means to achieve these.

** advocates greater use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.* Importantly this is only one area of production in which the report recognises the future increased reliance of developing countries on Western technological and financial inputs (p.18). They don't seriously question the well-foundedness of this position nor consider alternatives. Though recognising the damages inflicted by modern agricultural processes (p.291), the writers of the Report have not, it seems, sufficiently researched the nourishment-producing capacities of well-managed traditional agriculture (Shiva, 2000). It cites FAO reports but apparently not the same ones Shiva bases her position on.

** does not call for a massive global transfer of wealth and for the cancellation of third world debts.* Although the burden of this debt is recognised no realistic proposal is made to eliminate its destructive social and environmental impacts as indebted countries cut down their forests, deplete their soils and pollute their air and water in order to raise much needed foreign currency to pay off the debt.

In view of the fact that the next substantial document on sustainable development, The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992) opens with the overtly anthropocentric statement: "Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature", environmentalists' position may be well taken. Considering the continued deterioration

of the environment since and in spite of a multitude of conferences, promises, documents, agreements and commitments, it may be time to explore other avenues. As we have seen in previous chapters, environmentalists are increasingly supported in this position by several branches of economics.

Other reactions to the WCED report, in the ensuing decade, have been mixed. There is a general recognition that the report was a “diamond in the rough”. Its mandate was overwhelming and the three years between its inception and the publication of the final document were tumultuous ones as far as sustainability is concerned. Drought in Africa initiated problems estimated to have killed perhaps one million people; two major industrial accidents, Bhopal and Chernobyl killed thousands, affected the health of hundreds of thousands and had still unaccounted for environmental impacts from increased incidence of cancer to soil pollution; “an estimated 60 million people died of diarrhoeal diseases related to unsafe drinking water and malnutrition; most of the victims were children” (WCED, 1987, 7). These major, disturbing events affected the course and nature of the study bringing even closer to the consciousness of those participating, the impact of human activity on the Earth and prompted the chairman of the Commission to state that they were “serving urgent notice” to the world that the time to act had come. In view of the urgency, it is amazing that it took five years before any concrete steps were taken to address these issues from a global perspective.

C. The World Responds and Makes Commitments

In 1992, a few years after the appearance of the Brundtland report, Rio, Brazil was host to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). During the conference, the 172 participating governments, 108 of which were represented at the level of heads of State or Government, made some serious commitments to engage in actions that would lead the world toward sustainability. This original conference would be the first of a series that would unfold under various themes over the next decade.

Many of the commitments to sustainability to date have been made under the umbrella of the United Nations while others were the subject of other multilateral and bilateral agreements amongst nations. At the Conference itself two documents were signed: The Statement of Forest Principles and The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. Interestingly, even such a specific agreement as the Forest Principles refers to consumption. Among the principles: “The sustainable use of forests will require sustainable patterns of production and consumption at a global level” (<http://iisd1.iisd.ca/rio+5/agenda/principles.htm>). The second agreement made broad statements (27 points in all) outlining those areas that needed to be addressed. Apart from the obvious declarations about poverty eradication and environmental protection, conservation and even restoration, the declaration makes links between sustainability and less obvious factors.

Among others, it refers to questions of:

- 1) demographics – which includes size, age and movement of populations – and the necessity for States to promote appropriate demographic policies;
- 2) increased access to information and decision-making which would take the form of
 - a. technology and knowledge transfer, which also involves economic cooperation,
 - b. involvement of formerly marginalized groups such as women, indigenous peoples and youth,
 - c. corporate and governmental issuance of impact assessments and prompt publicizing of accidents or risks;
- 3) the importance of adequate legislation that will monitor, motivate and curtail unsustainable human activity;
- 4) the importance of letting precaution prevail in case of threat or risk to the environment (as we have discussed in Chapter 4), and
- 5) working tenaciously toward the achievement of peace and security for all – an essential element in the sustainability equation.

While fairly encompassing the document had two major drawbacks. First, it was couched in language nebulous enough, in most circumstances, to allow for broad interpretations. For example, it refers to the precautionary principle as guiding future policy decision, but then removes any teeth it might have by making it subordinate to

economic interests. First, it says the principle will be applied according to a State's capacities so that if the U.S., for example, feels it does not have the "economic capacity" to reduce greenhouse gases it has the leeway to avoid doing so. They then refer to "cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation". Again, this clearly reflects the acceptance of the economics of a situation as primary. Any other consideration takes secondary importance. For example, if it is more cost-effective to burn coal than natural gas, this statement allows you to do so. Several of the other 26 principles could be the subject of this sort of analysis. Such text formulation has contributed to removing pressure on States to make sure their commitments were met.

1. Multilateral Agreements

Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) have proliferated in the past 30 years. The international community is faced today with the responsibility of implementing and enforcing more than 500 MEAs, of which approximately 300 are regional, and nearly 60 per cent have been in existence only since the Stockholm Conference in 1972. In the wake of UNCED a number of agreements in various social and environmental sectors were elaborated and ratified. The following were among the most well-known that are directly related to consumption. The connection to consumption can easily be made by anyone with a will to look and yet we will see in a later section how this discussion is constantly avoided.

- 1) The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

- 2) The Convention on Biological Diversity
- 3) The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa
- 4) The Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States
- 5) The Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities
- 6) And the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The existence of these agreements certainly indicates some sort of political will to find solutions to the wide range of problems they address. However, the Centre for International Environmental Law warns of several problems in moving from rhetoric to action:

“this growing body of MEAs suffers from the inability or unwillingness of Parties (many of which are developing countries or countries in transition) to implement and enforce them. While each Party faces its own unique challenges, implementation and enforcement are often made difficult by a lack of financial and human resources, the sheer volume and complexity of associated obligations and responsibilities, inconsistency in implementation regimes between countries, and occasionally a lack of political will” (CIEL, 2002).

Also following UNCED several gatherings, known as the “Rio cluster”, were held, throughout the world, to expand on the subjects initiated in Rio. While less directly linked to consumption, these conferences dealt with issues that, unless addressed seriously, impede any possible progress towards implementing the difficult strategies needed to make human life on Earth more sustainable. Among others, these included, women’s issues, human rights issues, and population issues. A partial list of these can be found in Appendix 3

Many other such conferences have been held every year since that aren’t seen as directly related to Rio themes but that demonstrate a continued preoccupation with the issues raised at UNCED. As issues, societies and international relations become increasingly complex it appears that the number of these meetings multiplies exponentially. The United Nations Environmental Programme’s (UNEP) calendar of meetings and events, for example, showed nearly 150 different activities in the first six months of 2001. There are also a few more interesting conferences to be held in 2002, of which Earth Summit +10, Johannesburg, September 2002 is certainly the most visible and awaited.

2. Agenda 21

The broad categories set out in the Rio Declaration were subsequently spelled out in more detail and then adapted nationally by all the signatories in a project named Agenda 21 “a global consensus and political commitment at the highest level on

development and environment cooperation” (UNSD, 1992, Preamble, 1.3). Agenda 21, proposed, in part, as an operational tool, is divided into thirty-nine topical chapters, grouped into four broad sections of relevance:

- 1) Social and Economic Dimensions, which covers issues of poverty, demographics and international cooperation;
- 2) Conservation and Management of Resources for Development, which deals with environmental issues;
- 3) Strengthening the Role of Major Groups, concerned with issues of access to information and decision-making, openness, transparency and cooperation and
- 4) A final section entitled Means of Implementation that offers guidelines for feasibility of the project including means for public education in this area and ballpark cost assessments.

Following adoption of this framework a host of “Local Agenda 21s” took form in countries, cities and towns around the world trying to integrate local issues and situations into a global framework meant to spearhead global social and environmental change. Canada was one of the countries that took up the challenge at the national level. Several governmental departments and organisations were mandated to devise a working plan to meet Canada’s Sustainable Development objectives. An endeavour called “Projet de Société” compiled responses to Agenda 21 by representatives from all sectors of society working in committees, round tables and other feedback instruments. From the fall of 1992 to the spring of 1996, Projet de Société worked as a multi-stakeholder coalition,

drawn from over 80 sectors of Canadian society. It was meant to help promote Canada's transition to a sustainable future.

“In order to facilitate the transition, the *Projet de Société* initially focused on three complementary and reinforcing activities: a report on Canadian response to Agenda 21 and the Rio Conventions; a draft framework and process for sustainability planning; and a series of practical actions for moving forward. The immediate goal of the *Projet de Société* was to design a National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS), which is identified in Agenda 21 as a pivotal mechanism for countries to implement the actions and accords agreed at the Earth Summit.” (<http://iisd.ca/ic/sb/direct/sdhist.htm#BCSD>)

In fact all countries must produce an NSDS (or NSSD, depending on the source used) for the upcoming summit in Johannesburg in 2002.

It appears evident that the existence of such a host of meetings taking place each year and involving high-level members of our governments' decision-makers must be a sign of recognition that they have a mandate from their electorate to deal with their safety and well-being. This global consultation and cooperation should be an important element in that process. When one reads through the websites of these committees, the mission statements, the meeting reports and all the other documents, one cannot help but feel that there is genuine interest of the people involved to improve the fate of the Earth and all the species that inhabit it. In addition, in the early stages, there appeared to be a certain

conviction that real progress could be made. The efforts made to produce this wealth of information, to present it to the public and to follow-up on issues are surely indications that these meetings are more than empty shells left behind at photo session opportunities for high profile politicians.

To try to make sure they would not be worthless, in January 1993 the UN Economic and Social Council instituted the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) that had, as its principal mandate, the follow-up of the commitments made by the signatories to the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21. The commission has met 9 times since its inception, the latest being in the spring of 2001 under the themes of Energy & Transport; Atmosphere; Information for decision-making and participation; International cooperation for an enabling environment. Rio Summit +5 in 1997 was a presentation of an in depth report to a special session of the General Assembly of the UN on the progress of the UNCED commitments (see discussion below) and a second report is planned for 2002. Despite all this frenetic activity and the public interest there must be in order to support such labour, one is left wondering why we hardly ever hear about all this work. Why is this rarely, if ever, in the media in elaborate form so that the general populace can become aware of the urgency of some of these issues? Other than the *brouhaha* on climate change and an occasional environmental accident none of this makes front line news. If our governments understand that we are willing to pay for all this with our tax dollars why don't media think we care enough to follow it? We have addressed some of these questions in Chapter 3 and the consequences of the steps necessary to deal with the

hard choices of sustainability which will be explained shortly, should give clues as to why corporate media is not interested in stirring up public interest and support.

3. The Corporate Response

While governments and NGOs work at these things in the shadows, corporations, on the other hand, lack no exposure for the steps they take towards “more” sustainable practices. Who hasn’t seen the multi-page colourful spreads of the chemical industry in all the national newspapers and on television showing pictures of pristine lakes and rivers as it touts its new Responsible Care Program, or the forestry industry’s full-page colour ads depicting aseptic mills emitting pure white clouds while delightfully smiling deer play in virgin forests? Large corporations seem to have wasted no time in finding ways of integrating this newfound public interest for sustainability in their ideological communications and operational policies. As mentioned earlier, this section refrains from passing judgement on the integrity of corporations as they struggle to meet social expectations. While there is no denying that the Program has engendered some progress, for example, in the areas of employee health and safety and the transportation of hazardous chemicals there is healthy scepticism in social and environmental circles as to whether this is anything more than a frenzied attempt to ward off the spectre of stringent surveillance and legislation. Surveys show that public trust in the industry is quite low with positive responses under 15%. In an article in Chemical Week, Peter Fairley states: “public confidence in the industry is eroding as public concerns shift away from the safe operation of chemical plants--Responsible Care's traditional focus--and toward long-term

effects from chemicals”. Surveys show that the general population strongly disagrees with the industry’s position that products should be allowed unless they are proven to be a threat to human health. “82% of those surveyed agreed that the use of new products should be restricted until their exact impact on human health can be determined” (Fairley, 2001). Even within the industry, 10 years after the Program was initiated, leaders expressed their concerns. At the Society of Chemical Industry CEO huddle in Prague, Bryan Sanderson, CEO of BP Chemicals stated that “the Responsible Care program was a first rate initiative, bringing about a much greater alignment between industry attitudes and public demands. But I feel that we have become a little too complacent, using the program as a convenient catch-all to offset public concerns” (Hunter, 1998). Yet he goes on to say that great efforts must be made by the industry to work on its “reputation”. He called for dialogue with nongovernmental organizations, ‘through which we can listen and coach others into an understanding of our own thinking’” (Ibid).

There is a wealth of data surrounding the uses made by corporations and industries of their particular appropriations of the concept of sustainable development. It often seems to be used both as an operational tool and a social position statement by some corporations. For example, the Royal Dutch/Shell Group’s Year 2000 “Shell Report” defines “sustainable development” as the world’s approach to tackling some of society’s most pressing concerns--extremes of poverty and wealth, population growth, abuses of human rights, environmental destruction, climate change, and loss of biodiversity. It also proposes guidelines that Shell can follow to achieve its goals of “play[ing] our part responsibly--by maintaining and enhancing natural and social capital,

as well as contributing to the global economy's capacity to generate and distribute wealth" (Williams, 2000). The implication is that they will henceforth judge their progress against these standards or values. So while Shell plans on developing a series of measurements by which to gauge its health, safety and environment performance, creating quantifiable parameters it calls "key performance indicators" (KPIs) and then implementing ways to verify those parameters, it is also telling the public that it is making sweeping changes in its value system and its role as a social actor based on the concept of sustainability.

Another example of the use of sustainability tools is that of WMC Ltd, an Australian gold mining concern. They work with an annual sustainability report to keep the world apprised of their activities and efforts at cleaning up their operations and becoming good corporate citizens. The WMC Report is a short, eleven page document that relates environmental and social performance against expectations. The report is audited by Price Waterhouse Coopers who attest to the veracity of the statements and claims made. WMC's openness and transparency is refreshing as they present the different phases a corporation needs to go through to achieve sustainability while admitting that they are still quite far from reaching the last phase. Their candour allows them to admit that the process makes good business sense in that giving the communities in which they operate as much knowledge as possible about their operations gives them operating legitimacy if they are not rejected. The principle is clear that if we don't actively reject certain ideas or activities then we become complicit in their social legitimization (Barlow and Clarke, 2001, 219). Interestingly, while there is admission of

environmental and safety “incidents”, there is very little information or explanation of how everyday operations adversely affect the environment.

D. Progress Evaluation on Commitments

1. Business

It is difficult to evaluate the seriousness and efficiency of the commitment of business entities to sustainability. It is evident however, that large corporations realise that they can't go on operating with impunity disregarding the growing concerns of populations. The awakening of civil society groups especially since Seattle 1999 has made that amply clear. If nothing else, their efforts demonstrate recognition that the public's social and environmental concerns must be addressed. The few examples, among thousands, cited above, demonstrate how business has chosen to adapt the concept of sustainability as a tool to transmit to the public that they are attempting to live up to social expectations of corporate sustainability. While there are a few exceptions, much of these efforts are still at the rhetoric stage and very few have, to date, significantly affected actual environmental performance. There are several impediments to such changes, some inherent in the activities of the businesses themselves, others related to the structure of the economic system within which they operate. In the first instance, it is difficult to see how corporate activity that requires tremendous energy inputs in their manufacturing processes would not in some way contribute to the degradation of the

environment. Essentially, all extractive activities are damaging to the ecosystems in which they operate.

The second level of difficulty in enacting real change was explained to me by the environmental manager of a Canadian mineral resources firm. He explained that they had the technology to reduce their polluting emissions but retrofitting their factories would be expensive and, at least temporarily would make them uncompetitive thus causing them to lose market share, profits and probably share value. This would be unacceptable, he felt both to upper management and to shareholders. Faced with such issues it becomes evident that if we are to expect corporations to make real changes we have to supply them with the appropriate incentives or disincentives.

WMC's case also serves to exemplify corporations' need to give priority to economic imperatives. In no less than four cases they refer to social and environmental projects that were put on hold indefinitely because of financial problems and governance issues.

2. CSD and Rio +5

As mentioned previously, The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was formed to evaluate progress on national and global commitments. The reports of the CSD are prepared with a wide consultation base including national government, local governments, business and industry, scientists, workers and trade unions, indigenous

groups and non-governmental organizations. The CSD meets in plenary once a year, at which time there are usually both a multi-stakeholder segment and a high-level segment, composed of senior national government officials. Five years after Rio, at the evaluation session presented to a special session of the UN General Assembly, the mood was less than cheerful as government representatives had to admit that they had come quite short of their Rio commitments. In the first part of the report under "Statement of Commitment" they state:

We acknowledge that a number of positive results have been achieved, but we are deeply concerned that the overall trends with respect to sustainable development are worse today than they were in 1992. We emphasize that the implementation of Agenda 21 in a comprehensive manner remains vitally important and is more urgent now than ever.
(United Nations General Assembly, 1997)

In fact, and perhaps even more interesting in light of governmental reactions to recent protests by civil society groups, the chairman of the session, General Assembly President Razali, in his closing speech and press conference, called on NGOs to "go back to the grassroots" and pressure governments for "more sincere" implementation of the Rio accords, because "our words have not been matched by deeds."

Progress was deemed to have been made in population issues because growth rates had slowed though nowhere in the report are any links made between this reduction

and strategies stemming from Rio. In fact, in the section on population the report decries the lack of support from donor countries for this issue in failing to meet their commitments made in Cairo in 1994 at the International Conference on Population and Development. ICPD+5 in 1999 reminded governments that they were a far cry from their promised funding of \$5.7 billion dollars. The total global ODA (Official Development Assistance) budget had been slashed by 21% between 1992 and 1995 passing from .34% to .27% of GNP when the commitment at UNCED had been of reaching .7% by 2000. Though impetus from the Cairo conference had produced an increase in funding up to 1995, subsequent years saw a decline. Developing countries also failed to meet their commitments to the “20/20 Initiative” under which they would allocate 20% of their national budgets to the sectors of health, education, family planning and water and sanitation (UNGA, 1997). Finally, it is questionable whether population growth rates will continue to decrease, when the largest generation of young people in human history—1.7 billion people aged 10 to 24—are about to enter their reproductive years. This wave of youth is occurring at the same time that international funding, especially from the United States, for family planning and contraceptives has been cut (Worldwatch Institute, 2001b, 74)

The greatest disappointment was certainly the impact of UNCED on poverty. This subject is always on every agenda whether it be energy, climate change, children, education etc. It is a major preoccupation, following in the steps of the WCED’s proclaimed necessity of eliminating poverty to attain sustainability. Commitments had been made to reduce by half the number of people living in poverty by 2015. Five years

later the numbers had grown. Though lower in percentage to total world population, absolute numbers have increased substantially because of population growth. Based on a recent study on strategies for waging war on poverty, chances of meeting the target by 2015 are not very good, for most developing countries, according to an article in the OECD Observer (Kamal-Chaoui, 2000). Figures from the World Bank for 1998 show that in China alone there are over 220 million people (almost the equivalent of the whole population of the United States) living in abject poverty and China is one of the countries where the gap between rich and poor is increasing in spite of very good growth and initial general low incomes. The article goes on to say that based on growth rate history, countries like Brazil and many Sub-Saharan countries would have no chance of achieving these goals of poverty reduction.

Other areas of serious concern were the continued depletion of fish stocks (a legal agreement adopted in 1994 was still not in force in 1997) and pollution of ocean coastal waters, increasing numbers of people without access to clean water due in part to countries' limited implementation of UNCED recommendations, lack of serious efforts at protecting biodiversity, inadequate efforts at protecting forests (though inroads were made, over 13 million hectares a year – greater than the surface of Nepal – is cut or burned every year) and greenhouse gases continue to rise dramatically and are foreseen to increase as developing countries industrialize.

For “simple-lifers and other people who have understood that most problems of sustainability are rooted in consumption, the most contentious issue has, of course, been

the one dealing with consumption patterns. The original Agenda 21 document emphasised the importance of changing consumption patterns especially in developed countries if environmental destruction was to be reduced and if social sustainability was to be achieved. Throughout post-UNCED documents, consumption is referred to as a major constraint or roadblock to attaining sustainability and is seen as exacerbating the rich/poor issue. Agenda 21 made it a priority element for the CSD follow-up exercises “In the follow-up of the implementation of Agenda 21 the review of progress made in achieving sustainable consumption patterns should be given high priority.” Still, while the ensuing CSD reports mention consumption, they do very little to suggest ways of curbing it and concentrate more closely on production processes and finding ways of making them more efficient.

Elisabeth May (1995) in her article representing Canadians’ reaction to Chapter 4 of the Agenda refers to how the “Bush Administration reacted defensively to the notion that U.S. consumer and industrial behaviour held any responsibility for environmental degradation around the world. In the words of former U.S. President George Bush in the discussions leading up to Rio, ‘(t)he American lifestyle is not on trial.’” Summit+5 correctly frames the consumption issue as being the fact that twenty per cent of the world’s people continue to consume eighty per cent of its resources but in the “Actions Taken” or in the “Proposals” section nowhere is there even any hint of the possibility of reducing consumption. Action revolves totally around technological issues such as recycling and efficiency improvements. This is difficult to fathom when one understands that the sought for tenfold improvement in manufacturing efficiency is still very much in

the realm of pipe dreams whereas it is within everyone's reach today to limit their consumption.

If one looks even deeper into the issue one realises that the expression "changing patterns" of consumption seldom means reduction of product consumption but rather ways of consuming that support the concept of increased efficiency. The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) based in Winnipeg, Manitoba maintains a database of instruments developed by different governments to promote sustainability (<http://www.iisd.org/susprod/browse.asp>). It reports that Canada, for example, has developed several programs to change things like volume of curbside garbage and promoted a very successful campaign to reduce packaging. While these are valid sustainability projects there are none to be found that actually have the immediate goal of getting people to buy less.

Several other proposals of Agenda 21 have yet to see any serious consideration because they threaten the very foundations of the economic system. Agenda 21 required setting up databases and promoting studies related to the earth's limits to consumption. When, as we have seen, the economists who direct policy will not even admit to such limits it becomes very hard to get such projects approved for funding. Agenda 21 pushed for a new system of National Accounts that would integrate other indicators more reflective of human well being. While several organizations have worked at developing indicators that incorporate social, environmental and economic data (Halstead and Cobb, 1996; Rees et al. 1995; UN Human Development Index; see also the Canadian Council

on Social Development's Social Indicators Website), there is as yet no indication of political will to incorporate these into our national accounting system in any meaningful way. As for transfer of sound technologies to developing countries, that has also proved problematic because, in most cases, the private sector owns these technologies and there is very little incentive for them to incur the costs of bringing this technology to countries that have little chance of developing enough to become markets. While some transfers are occurring in countries like India and China, for countries tied down inextricably under huge burdens of foreign debt, the chances of attracting such technology are rather slim.

3. Report of the Auditor General's Office

Auto-critique of efforts at achieving sustainability has not only come from UN organisations but also from within the Canadian government itself. Every year since 1997 the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development (CESD) of the Auditor General's Office publishes a report evaluating the progress of Canada's efforts in this direction. Every year since 1998 the Commissioner's message echoes:

“Although the federal government has repeatedly stated its commitment to sustainable development - striking a viable balance between economic, social and environmental goals, now and for future generations - it continues to have difficulty turning that commitment into action... The pursuit of sustainable development is complicated by the fact that responsibility for it is widely shared between departments, between governments and with other partners. Typically, a

number of organizations are responsible for one aspect of the issue or another but none is responsible for the whole. They need to work together to develop and implement a coordinated approach. But managing these working relationships has proved difficult. (CESD, 2000)

E. A Review, Final Critique and Suggestions for Change

And who are these “partners” referred to in the preceding quote? Brown (2000) tells us that the partnership is made up of the triumvirate of the government, business and civil society. These are the three legs of a stool each needing approximately the same length (strength) in order to maintain equilibrium. Recent history demonstrates that that equilibrium is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. Less recent history shows that when the bench topples, no matter what side it topples on, social disruptions are rather unpleasant, coming in the form of wars and revolutions and/or of periods of economic deprivation usually more seriously affecting the less well off but also taking its toll on the middle class. Let’s take a moment to review the positions of these three actors and the array of proposed solutions to what is increasingly perceived as an unstable system that risks imminent collapse and is gradually eroding social gains made at great effort over the course of the last century (Shutt, 1998, 180).

1. Governments

“What is this madness? The economy is booming. The stock market is setting new records. The US is again heralded as the world's most competitive

economy. We are assured that we are richer than ever before and getting richer by the day. Yet we are also told there is no longer enough money to provide an adequate education for our children, health care and safety nets for the poor, protection for the environment, parks, a living wage for working people, public funding for the arts and public radio, or adequate pensions for the elderly. According to the official wisdom, even though richer, we can no longer afford what we once took for granted. How is this possible? What's gone wrong?" (Korten, 1997).

As was seen previously in this chapter, governments are not living up to their commitments of moving societies towards more sustainable lifestyles or of resolving the issues that are known impediments to this cause. They are also not living up to the expectations of their constituents who are becoming increasingly vocal in their requests that their elected representatives and guardians of the "common wealth" do what's necessary to protect this wealth that is the environment and the social well-being of the population. It is often difficult to fathom why they are not succeeding. The answers are complex and any presented in this work must certainly only be partial. They are perceived, however, as pivotal by "simple-lifers" who have been willing to make dramatic, revolutionary and radical changes in their way of viewing themselves and their relationship to the rest of the world.

First, while an imposing sum of money is directed to the "sustainability" institutions and activities referred to previously, there appears to be a serious lack of

political will or capacity to fund the actions to the levels required to make effective changes. It is difficult to believe, however, that it is a lack of capacity when there always seems to be available funding from taxpayer pockets for the billions needed to bail out imprudent capital investments that turn sour or the even larger billions needed to support an increasingly costly war machine. Worldwide defence spending now soars at near \$800 billion dollars every year (Sen, 2001; Worldwatch Institute, 2001b, 84). After the events of September 11th 2001 in New York, many more billions are redirected to defence and military expenditures.

Second, consumption critiques have said that the political arm is much too close to the business sector; that most of our politicians' personal and professional fates are intricately linked to those of capital. This is perhaps most evident in the U.S. where corporate political contributions have few restraints so that business contributions to congressional candidates rose from "around \$40 million in 1978 to \$150 million in 1988 and appear to have risen to at least four times the 1988 level by 1996 (Shutt, 1998, 178). Since corporate funds are spread quite evenly between the two major parties. This would seem to indicate that funding is based, not on political conviction, but rather as "hedging one's bets" so as to get political favours no matter who is elected. It thus becomes increasingly difficult for politicians to support any policies and/or changes to legislation that would run counter to the interests of capital (Shutt, 198-231). Even what has been traditionally referred to as the "left" has seen its destinies increasingly tied to the capitalist enterprise and the erosion of the working class through their gradual "embourgeoisement" has left them essentially voiceless (Ibid., 200).

Third, there appears to be a lack of willingness or capacity to recognize the urgency and to face the hard choices of some of the needed changes, especially as regards the environment. The complexity both of the issues and of the decision-making process and the presence of strong lobbies of those who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo often act as an impediment, if not a paralysing influence, to the capacity of the government to make the necessary choices. Seemingly sensible insertions in the process, such as various versions of the precautionary principle, meet the resistance of those who feel the need to brashly forge ahead in order to keep their investments afloat.

2. Business

There must be no misunderstanding, say the voices behind this work. Under a capitalist system, business, in the form of corporations, financial institutions, media, and the bevy of instruments they have put together either unilaterally or with the participation of governments, have, as their principal goal, service to the interests of capital. These interests are directly related to their capacity to get people to consume their goods or services. In line with Adam Smith's warnings, their actions must constantly be analysed from the perspective that they will do everything in their power to maintain the system that allows them to perpetuate these interests. While they would have us believe that, as they do so, they also serve the interests of the social whole, that perspective is increasingly coming under fire in light of the economic realities of the last several decades since the middle of the 1970s. While it is true that substantial gains in standards

of living were made in the two decades that followed the Second World War, the last three decades of the century have seen a gradual erosion of these gains (Weisbrot et al., 2001; Shutt, 1998, 214; Barlow and Clarke, 2001, 132-134). While it is also true that individual and social fates are increasingly intertwined with those of business through the employment contract, financial security tools and even cultural activities, it does not follow necessarily that the interests of the many can only be bettered by inordinately biasing advantages in favour of the very few. The economic “trickle down effect” has aptly been named. Wealth does not “flow” from the top nor does it “pour”. It merely “trickles” from a huge pool that keeps getting bigger at the top.

It stands to reason that business’ concern with the public interest will be relative to the impact it will have on their primary goal of promoting shareholder wealth or of allowing them to continue their operations when this is threatened. Perhaps this explains why the greatest concern for stakeholder management occurs in resource-based companies and industries that are the most destructive of the environmental systems upon which social well-being depends.

Finally, as we have seen, the system does not easily allow even those corporations that might want socially beneficial changes to their operations to do so. As explained previously, attempts at radical changes are punished by the economic system unless all productive agents cooperate to make the same changes, at the same time. Yet this would be considered “collusion” and is completely contrary to the rules of competition that underpin the capitalist system. What has developed therefore, is an intricate system of

public relations and lobbying that spends huge sums of excess, underutilized capital in maintaining the illusion of societal concern.

Economists have proposed a host of changes addressing particular aspects of the system but very few have had the courage or freedom to challenge it at its roots. Shutt explains that, for the most part, economists are in the employ of the owners of capital and would be hard pressed to bite the hand that feeds them. He goes on to say that academic economists, on the other hand, have been somewhat more vocal in critiquing the system. However, as educational institutions increasingly also feel the pinch of reduced public spending and turn to the private sector for much needed funds, one is brought to speculate on how the new relationship affects academics' capacity for independent thought:

“it has been noticeable in recent years that very few have shown any sign of departing significantly from one or other of the approved orthodoxies – Keynesian or free market. Given the growing financial strictures placed on universities...because of the state fiscal squeeze, and their consequently greater dependence on private-sector funding, it is plausible to suppose that this may have affected their intellectual independence and capacity for more radical analysis” (Shutt, 1998, 207).

To date, the systemic modifications proposed have mostly fallen on deaf ears or have been seen as too disruptive to implement. In any case most of them are quite partial

solutions that, some would say, only delay the inevitable collapse of the economic system.

3. Civil Society²²

“It has become increasingly apparent that Governments alone cannot manage to provide the development services to meet the basic human and social needs and aspirations of their citizens. NGOs were genuine partners in framing the Programme of Action agreements and are now partners in its implementation. Effective and empowered women’s movements and other mass movements are proving to be important in ensuring progress in policy development and implementation in many parts of the world.” (From ICPD+5)

Combined with UNGA President Razali’s statement earlier, this is a clear call to governments to become more open to the suggestions of its grassroots movements, and its involved citizens. It becomes more and more evident from looking at UN documents that the very demands civil society groups are making of their governments when they confront them in Seattle, Québec City, Prague, Genoa and Washington and which they are often told are unreasonable, are simply an echo of the very commitments made by these same governments in different venues. What they are asking is that governments respect the promises they make after having consulted them on social issues. They

²² Much of the information for this discussion is taken from Barlow and Clarke, 2001

deplore that elected officials quickly and conveniently forget these promises when they come up against the business sector and the soulless workings of what they perceive to be a rogue financial system.

Of the three “legs of the stool”, civil society has certainly been the most vocal advocate for radical modification of the system into one that provides more just and equitable distribution of wealth, more popular participation in the political process and increased protection of the planet’s life-supporting physical systems. The voices have been disparate in that they have approached fundamental issues from varied directions: protest against genetically modified organisms, concerns about pollution, worry over the scale of species destruction, fears of the consequences of the commodification of common goods like water, concern for the disappearance of local cultures and their traditional knowledge, etc. However, they have found common ground in the fundamental issues that centre on six categories of basic rights:

- 1) Subsistence rights: dealing with food security and safety and access to fresh water.
- 2) Economic rights: dealing with access to proper livelihood and the problems surrounding contingent labour, sweatshops and debt bondage.
- 3) Environmental rights: dealing with human activities that modify and/or degrade whole ecosystems and also have adverse effects on the most vulnerable populations.
- 4) Social rights: dealing with access to public education, health care and social security like housing and sanitation.

5) Cultural rights: dealing with the preservation of indigenous knowledge and the numbing power of the new “mediocracy” (rule of the media).

6) Human rights: dealing with such issues as the dehumanising aspects of the flesh trade, of military repression and of lack of respect of labour standards. (Barlow and Clarke, 2001, 126ff)

These rights are linked directly to questions of democracy and social justice. They are also intricately related to how we choose to organise our lives. What these groups are calling for is a redesign of the democratic system that allows for more direct popular participation; using modern means of communications to institute a true democracy “of the people” that rises from below rather than being imposed from above. However, the leaders of these groups realise that they have their own crisis of legitimacy and need to reinforce democratic principles within their own organisations. Many of these groups are directly dependent on government funds for their survival. This can certainly impact on their ability or at least the strength with which they can voice positions that are contrary to their funders’ interests. As public budgetary constraints occur many have to turn to other sources of funding. The most common are philanthropic foundations often set up by successful capitalists and/or corporations like the Ford Foundation, the Heinz Foundation etc. While these foundations take pains to distance themselves from their commercial origins and any influence from these, it is still difficult to imagine (though it has occasionally happened), that they would seriously support, in a generalized manner, organisations that would attempt to subvert the very system responsible for their existence.

Barlow and Clarke remind us that their attack on the lack of democracy and representativity of international institutions has been turned against them and they have been accused of the same. They recognise that some organisations need to maintain a delicate balance because they provide essential public services that the government has divested itself from. However, they insist it is important for some key groups to maintain their freedom and work from a democratic, membership-based format in which they continually “renew and revitalize their own internal processes for effective participation in policy development and action” (2001, 224). Ideally, in a true democracy, only those institutions and organisations that appeal to a broad-based citizenry would survive.

4. Suggestions for Change

One thing is clear: though they sometimes develop power and direction of their own, systems still get their legitimacy from the individuals who support and maintain them. The capitalist system has been such a great success, in many ways, over the past two centuries because it has succeeded in capturing the imagination of people, has drawn them into its vision and promise of a world of material comfort and abundance, a world of increasing wealth and decreasing toil. It has, in fact, provided this for some, for a while, but its capacity to maintain the pace as population increases exponentially seems seriously compromised. The capitalist system appears to work well in an unconstrained environment. It is a system based on growth and in order to function properly it needs room in which to grow. When the environment in which it operates and on which it

depends for its inputs and for the absorption of its outputs shows signs of having reached or of approaching certain limits, then, it also starts to show cracks in its seamless façade. Many, like Greider and Shutt, maintain that these cracks are appearing because the system is based on continuous increase in consumption and that, since the mid-seventies real consumption has, for the most part, stagnated, leaving us with an oversupply of goods, capacity and capital (Greider, 1997, 50-52). Consumption has been stemmed for several reasons:

- 1) Mature markets: some goods, like appliances, homes and automobiles last for a long time and you only need so many at once;
- 2) Marginal utility: as basic needs are met the desire to spend on other needs is relative to income and perceived benefit of the additional purchase;
- 3) Debt: household, corporate and government debt has reached unprecedented levels; we are mortgaging future income for current consumption and that capacity is stretched
- 4) Reduction in jobs and job security reduces the propensity to spend on luxury goods
- 5) Increased privatization of public services has eroded disposable income as citizens must compensate with private services (Shutt, 1998, 184-187).

This situation is contributing, Greider and Shutt agree, to a downward spiral that is only maintained artificially by government intervention in the private sector with public funds. But the illusion is losing its power. These are some of the failings that civil society is now pointing to. What they are asking, so urgently, is that we break through

the illusion, maintained by those in power, before it is too late, before the system implodes and collapses onto itself bringing social devastation often accompanied by martial strife and/or great suffering.

Several actions need to be taken if the implosion is to be avoided. The following suggestions are seen as tools that need to be used (implemented) if the broader social goals such as the elimination of poverty and more equitable distribution of wealth are to be achieved. They are answers to some of the problematic issues addressed in the previous chapters. They are also seen as initial steps towards bringing human lives and activities more in line with principles of harmonious co-habitation with others of their species, with other species and with the biosystem in general. It is clear to simple-lifer anti-consumerists, environmentalists and anti-globalists that all these changes, or similar ones, must occur. For some, our very survival depends on it.²³

1) At the local level:

a. Encourage local barter and currency systems that keep wealth in communities and compensate for national currency shortfalls.

b. Encourage the creation of small and medium-sized locally owned businesses based on democratic structures of governance such as cooperatives.

c. Encourage the de-materializing and de-monetizing of individuals by promoting policies that encourage personal development activities, earth ethics and sustainable values

d. Implement legislation that makes urban centres more liveable places by promoting community and urban revitalisation.

2) At the national level:

²³ The following are taken from various works by Hazel Henderson, Harry Shutt and David Korten.

- a. *Change the tax structure from being income and payroll based to one that taxes environmental "bads" such as pollution, planned obsolescence goods, resource depletion etc. or implement user fees for commercial use of the commons.*
- b. *Eliminate certain corporate privileges such as limited liability and rights of personhood that were meant for individuals.*
- c. *Create new economic measurement tools and integrate them into national accounting systems so that damage to the public wealth from human activity will be considered.*
- d. *Force corporations to internalize all costs related to the manufacture, use and disposal of their products.*
- e. *Eliminate subsidies from non-sustainable sectors or activities such as fossil fuels and other resource depletion, automobile, airlines and other energy intensive and polluting sources.*
- f. *Modify the political decision-making system so that decisions are made at the smallest level possible.*

3) At the international level:

- a. *Institute a small tax on the enormous global capital flows that are actually made up around 90% of speculation on currency and use the income to reduce and/or eliminate Third World debt*
- b. *Establish an international agreement and institution (a sort of global Securities Exchange Commission) regulating international finance and corporations **or** redesign existing institutions like the IMF, the WTO and the World Bank so they can perform these activities.*
- c. *Put in place institutions that have the political independence and power to enforce laudable control mechanisms like the OECD's Polluter Pays Principle. For example, create a World Environment Organisation rather than simply putting environmental clauses in the WTO constitution.*

Given the institutional track record to date as regards making real systemic changes it is questionable that these can be made without strong impetus from other sources. We have seen that change can't or will not be done unless it is strongly

supported by an awakened citizenship. Brian Czech (2001, Chapter 6) reminds us that change, such as that described in his “Steady State Revolution”, will be social rather than political. It will be brought about by sincere people who act on their convictions; it will be iterated explicitly, leaving no room for misinterpretation by politicians; and it will be oriented to the long term i.e. sustainable.

F. Conclusion: For “simple-lifers” it all comes down to the individual

One would think that if, as “simple-lifers” say, the answer to the problems created by the socio-economic system is reduced consumption, then the situation of stagnation described above would be a good thing. The problem is that this reduced consumption is very different from that of “simple-lifers” in that it is not planned, quite often it is unconscious and, more importantly, it is not voluntary. This is important because people who do not “choose” to reduce their consumption will feel deprived if it is somehow forced upon them. We have already spoken, in the chapter on globalisation, of the disruptive effects of feelings of deprivation. In fact several voluntary simplicity authors (Elgin, 1986; Breen-Pierce, 2000; Korten, 1999) are emphasizing that just choosing a simple lifestyle is not necessarily enough. In addition it must be done out of joy and not fear or obligation because the latter are also, ultimately, expressions of coercion. To a “Gandhian” American, Richard Gregg, from whom Duane Elgin borrowed the term *voluntary simplicity*, who expressed reticence at parting with his books, Gandhi replied that if we eliminate things from our lives before we are ready to do so, the action will come back to haunt us, leaving us no peace. “If you were to give it up

in a mood of self-sacrifice or out of a stern sense of duty, you would continue to want it back, and that unsatisfied want would make trouble for you. Only give up a thing when you want some other condition so much that the thing no longer has any attraction for you, or when it seems to interfere with that which is more greatly desired” (Gregg, 1936). Choosing simplicity must be done because people realise that it is a better life, a more satisfying and fulfilling life, and a richer life.

Based on what we have seen in the second and third chapters and somewhat in this one, one of the most subversive social actions today is the refusal to consume. From this conclusion an important question arises: If the capitalist system is supported by consumption and if we are already seeing instability in the system brought about simply by reductions in “rate of growth” then won’t drastic reductions in consumption bring down the whole edifice? The answer to that is still forthcoming. We know that other systems are possible. Capitalism has only been with us for a very short time and already it has evolved into numerous variants depending on geography and history and a host of other variables. Economic and social systems are dynamic enterprises in constant flux. What we do know is that the social and environmental costs that we are already aware of (and there may be others) of continuing on the current path appear to outweigh any perceivable future benefits. While a growing majority of people are admitting that the current mode is unsustainable, there doesn’t seem to be any kind of general consciousness that what that means, in reality, is that whether we want it to or not it MUST come to an end. That’s what “unsustainable” means. We don’t know what will

happen if we change our behaviour but we have an increasingly accurate picture of what will happen if we don't.

The key groups that are going to have the independence and the legitimacy to confront abuses and demand changes are going to be citizen-based. But what kind of individuals will support groups whose ideology is radically different from the dominant one, who clearly understand the current situation, who resist being co-opted by the dominant paradigm and its organisations, who openly and fearlessly mount and iterate a coherent critique of it, and who then build a new, concrete vision for a sustainable future? Where do we find individuals who are as independent as this type of organisation; who are not addicted to the consumerist culture and do not rely on it either for their material well-being or for their self-identity and their self-worth; whose world will not fall apart if the economic system collapses; who have already shown their determination and commitment by taking concrete steps to disengage from the destructive consumption system. The conclusion to this work presents, and expands on, both the values that "simple-lifers" feel are important to internalize and the behaviour to adopt if one is to be prepared to make a tangible difference in the social/global quest to sustainability. Together, these values and behavioural guidelines form an Ethic of Simplicity, a view of the world and humans' place and role in it.

CONCLUSION

An Ethic of Simplicity

From my research and the material referred to in the “data sources” section of the first chapter, emerges a fairly comprehensive set of values from which I originally expected to elaborate a new Ethic of Consumption for a dissonant world: a world in which populations are encouraged to constantly increase their consumption and are led to believe that material goods will fulfill their every need while, at the same time, the negative and destructive effects of this consumptive practice are becoming increasingly evident. I have actually found much more than expected. Though the ethic of consumption for the 21st century can be derived from the data, what emerges is a complete way of life, a different way of being in the world, with the world and of the world. I refer to this as an Ethic of Simplicity.

As stated in Chapter 1, rather than seeing “simple-lifers” as part of a social movement, I have found it much more appropriate and pertinent to deal with them as a group that shares a core set of values and principles, a certain understanding of the world we face today and an idea of the appropriate pragmatic responses to some of the problems facing humanity. In that sense what binds them together is an ethic, an understanding of the right or good response to a set of dilemmas that is more than simply economic or environmental but actually brings into question the very future of the human enterprise. It is not, however, a legalistic ethic set in codes and dogma. It is an ethic that more closely resembles Joseph Fletcher’s *Situation Ethics* (1966), that emphasises 1)

individual responsibility and 2) the importance of the total context within which moral decisions are made. Much like Fletcher's situation ethics that is structured as a moral decision-making model for a Christian ethic based on love, the Ethic of Simplicity is a tool based on life, on a biocentric ethic, to guide individuals in their response to the particular context that has been described in the previous chapters of this book.

The following pages present a discussion of the normative and prescriptive aspects of this new ethic. Using the values and principles upon which the Ethic of Simplicity is founded as a starting point, I have then attempted to elaborate a set of ideals and minimal standards that the ethic calls for. It becomes rapidly evident, from this exercise, that the decision to be or become a "simple-lifer" is much more than a simple reduction in consumption. We have already mentioned that some, who purport to having simplified their lives, have actually done very little to reduce the amount of money they spend in a given time period. They have rather changed what they perceive as the *quality* of their spending. What appears to be happening with this group is the age-old attempt at redefining the "good life". Shi (1985) refers to this as "the pristine pursuit of goodness over the mere pursuit of goods" (279). Determining what makes up the good life is, of course, a value-laden enterprise and the "simple-lifer" literature abounds with value statements.

The following are the most frequent iterations of what has value for them: 1) the environment, material simplicity; 2) quality time, freedom, self-sufficiency, self-reliance; 3) meaningful work; 4) community, sharing, meaningful relationships, human scale (local

and small); 5) spirituality, personal growth, health, balance. The discussion that follows explores these values in an attempt to identify and define an “Ethic of Simplicity” and one of its subsets, a “Simplicity Ethic of Consumption”.

The order in which the values appear should, in no way, be construed as a prioritization. Since balance is very important in the lives of “simple-lifers” a more holistic approach must be taken. The order of appearance merely reflects the prominence of certain values in a particular snapshot in time, a particular context. Conscious living, a prerequisite to the adoption of the simple life, is a dynamic unfolding that entails being sensitive to the changing realities of one’s environment. The emphasis will vary with spatio-temporal exigencies. It was therefore not a surprise to find that the most referred to values at this time were the environment and questions of time. Pollution, climate change and water concerns abound in the news these days and are thus constantly on many people’s minds. People are also feeling more and more stressed and harried by the speed and complexity of modern life. As we have seen, psychic or psychological ills are quickly surpassing physical ones as regards health complaints in industrialised countries. Therefore, because of this dynamism, prioritising would serve very little purpose and would actually tend to go against the group’s values. Establishing a hierarchy of values would fly in the face of the group’s own refusal at hierarchising itself.

A. Values and Principles

1. The Environment

The earlier literature (pre 1990s) concerning voluntary simplicity centred more clearly on the reduction of material consumption as a means to balance the time spent at work and the time for other pursuits often seen as more meaningful. Material simplicity was often seen as a means to reduce the time one needed to spend at gainful employment since less money was needed to meet one's needs. In the more recent literature, however, the most often referred to value-based criterion is the environment or ecosystem and the impact of one's patterns of consumption on these. "Simple-lifers'" relationship to the environment is not instrumental. The Earth and its resources are not seen as things to exploit or to use in order to create goods whose consumption is intended to lead to ever-higher levels of satisfaction. Rather, the Earth is seen as a living place in which humans dwell and with which they are intimately connected (Lovelock, 1988; Sahtouris, 2000; Ehrlich and Ehrlich, 1991). "Simple-lifers" adapt to and live in harmony with nature respecting its limits and thus taking as little as they can to meet their needs.

Since the raw materials transformed to fulfill human needs and the absorptive limits of the Earth's ecosystems are seen as limited, "simple-lifers" tend to be conservationists rather than consumers (Mongeau, 1998, 148-149). When they do consume, as they must, they tend to be "green, or ethical consumers" concerned with both the upstream and downstream consequences of their consumption (ibid.; Shaw and

Newholm, 2002). For the ideal “simple-lifer”, consumption of material goods is directly and exclusively related to filling material needs. They are very leery of the links made, especially by the advertising industry between objects and second or third order human needs such as security and freedom or self-esteem and self-worth (Korten, 1996, 153-154; 1999, 33; Lears 1997; Durning, 1999). They recognize that ultimate satisfaction of such needs is not found in consumption of goods.

Finally, “simple-lifers” nurture a deep respect for all life. They do not maintain an adversarial relationship with other life forms and wilderness. They seek rather to understand the concept of diversity and respect the role each species plays in maintaining a precarious state of ever-shifting ecological equilibrium (Ehrlich, 1986, 169-170). As such, not taking any more space or resources than is absolutely necessary in order to allow other species to survive becomes an ideal to be striven for.

These values have prompted a sort of symbiosis between “simple-lifers” and the environmental movement. They have been mutually influential and it is often difficult to determine the direction of the influence flows. Concern for the environment has prompted “simple-lifers” to join environmental groups like Greenpeace, the World Wildlife Fund or Earth First!. At the same time, the recognition, by environmentalists of the effects of high levels of consumption on the environment has prompted many of them to reduce their consumption or to change to consumption patterns that reduce their “ecological footprint”. One example is presented by Matavilla (2002), who suggests that it is becoming difficult to be a “meat-eating environmentalist” given the pollution and

resource intensive production methods for meat. “Energy-intensive U.S. factory farms generated 1.4 billion tons of animal waste in 1996, which, the Environmental Protection Agency reports, pollutes American waterways more than all other industrial sources combined”. The solution, therefore, is to adopt or tend towards, vegetarianism or, stated otherwise, to eat lower on the food chain, eliminating stages of nutrient transformation and thus reducing degradation of the planet. In other words, a more simple diet made of grains, fruits and vegetables, and legumes, with less meat and processed foods, is a natural choice for “simple-lifers” both because of the lessened impact on the environment and greater autonomy and independence from the corporate system that industrially produces and processes foods.

2. Quality time, freedom, self-sufficiency, self-reliance

The question of time is also an important consideration for “simple-lifers”. For them, time is not simply a commodity that one uses or exchanges for other things as in the case of exchanging work time for money. Time is actually perceived as life energy itself (Korten, 1999; Dominguez, 1990; Robin and Dominguez, no date). “The purpose of money is to consume resources. Any time you spend money, you are consuming resources. Since you have traded a piece of your life to get that money (through your employment), you are also consuming your own resource (your life-energy) when you spend money” (Dominguez, 1990).

Thus, when one performs paid work, or any other activity for that matter, one expends life energy. When seen this way it becomes much more important that the activity undertaken provide an important return. Some activities are seen by “simple-lifers” as being life-giving or sustaining and sustainable, while others drain life. Time spent sharing and exchanging with friends, for example, can leave one full of energy, as can a walk in a forest. A concerto can be listened to over and over and it is still always there, available to enrich anyone’s life and therefore can be seen as timeless or not encroaching on time. On the other hand, for most people, a one or two hour commute in rush hour traffic sees them coming into the office already tired before the work day starts.

Seeing time in this way gives added meaning to the perspective of the scarcity of time presented by Linder (1997), a Swedish economist. Time, here, is seen as a limited resource to be divided amongst a number of activities. He identifies several sectors: 1) work time (paid work for production), 2) personal work time (maintenance of goods and one’s body), 3) consumption time (consuming goods), 4) culture time (developing mind and spirit), 5) idleness time (relaxing passively). The importance put on the acquisition of goods has increased the time necessary to maintain and consume these goods. This “personal work time” contributes to our hectic pace of life so that, contrary to common belief, it is not simply productive (paid) work time that cuts into other time sectors and provides the feeling that we are always short of time. It becomes evident that economic growth, based on increased consumption increases time scarcity. Understanding this, or at least intuitively perceiving it motivates “simple-lifers” to reduce not only their work time but also the consumption of goods that increases “personal work time” and cuts into

leisure, idleness or cultural time. Non-simplifiers, seeing time as a commodity to be exchanged for money will often attempt to optimize their time by different combinations; they will combine work and leisure by socialising with business acquaintances either over a meal in a restaurant or on the golf course; they will listen to personal development tapes while driving to and from work or they will combine a job-related conference with a holiday. However, this often results in creating the impression that one is always engaged in productive work and reduces the feeling of balance in one's life. "Simple-lifers", on the other hand, seem to prefer another approach: that of reducing "productive" work time and the number of activities (consumption of goods) to fully concentrate on the activity at hand.

The freedom associated with simpler ways of life is also accorded great importance. Freedom is generally a highly held value in human societies, which is why the curtailment of freedom through imprisonment is seen as an adequate deterrent to criminality. Reducing one's material needs increases freedom and reduces dependence on employers, financial institutions and experts. Many respondents of Elgin's original survey referred to the liberating aspect of living more simply. Mongeau (1998) and Korten (1996, 281) mention the liberating experience, contrary to popular misconception, of not owning a car. In fact, Mongeau devotes a full chapter of his latest book on voluntary simplicity to this subject, emphasising the importance the automobile plays both in environmental issues and in questions of the structuring of human habitats to make them more amenable to human activity (1998, 131-141).

For many, simplifying their lives has also meant keeping things as simple as possible in and around their homes so as to free themselves from dependence on experts. Just as living without a car relieves one of the dependence on the mechanic, so reducing the number of motorised and electrical appliances (lawn-mower, dryer, microwave, air-conditioner etc.) frees one from dependence on experts of all kinds. Many “simple-lifers” often acquire new skills such as, plumbing, electrical, gardening, etc. (Harris, 1995) that increase their self-sufficiency and self-reliance. Quite often, the rewards are not only physical but psychological, bringing about greater self-esteem and releasing many fears and insecurities related to dependence. One must not equate self-sufficiency to social isolation, however. The recognition of links to the social whole is not eliminated through increased self-sufficiency. Much more realistically, the person that develops freedom-granting skills is then in a much better position to be useful to others. The near impossibility of achieving total self-reliance or autarchy in modern society means that eventually we will meet a situation where we need someone else’s help. Having useful skills to exchange in the non-economic marketplace represents a tremendous asset (Mongeau, 1998, 218). Self-reliance, therefore, is not seen as liberation from other people but rather from a social and economic system that is seen as debilitating and alienating and that promotes dependence rather than interdependence.

Living more materially simple lives also frees one from what “simple-lifers” see as the tyranny of indebtedness, an ill that afflicts modern societies at all levels today from the individual to the largest institutions that are governments. Perhaps one of the more influential works dealing with the pragmatic aspects of the trend to material

simplification has been that of Robin and Dominguez, Your Money Or Your Life, (1992) in which they put a good deal of emphasis on living debt-free. This mantra is repeated constantly on websites dealing with voluntary simplicity and frugality (see Appendix I) and in most writings promoting simplicity (Mongeau, 1998, 220; Elgin, 1981, 166; Durning 1999). The literature often relates the inability to make free choices about lifestyle to levels of indebtedness that mortgage future life energy.

3. Meaningful work

The practical implications of the simplification of work will be addressed in the next section. Here we address the values that motivate work choices for “simple-lifers”. Ideally, for “simple-lifers”, the lines of demarcation blur between what were traditionally seen as public and private lives. From a more holistic perspective, work, like other activities in one’s life, is seen as an opportunity for personal growth, service to others and the community, and improvement of the overall social condition (Harris, 1995; Segal, 1997; Ray and Anderson, 2000). The concept of meaningful work is seen as so important in building human societies that some authors, like Segal actually see the transformation of work to this model as a social or political obligation and propose that we should “expand the supply of creative jobs...reduce or eliminate jobs that cannot be made satisfying, and...ensure that the remaining mundane and arduous work tasks are equitably shared” (1997, 348). Segal’s position is that many more people would switch to more socially useful employment if such was more readily available and that this is a choice

we can make as a society by moving the work/value focus from economics to creativity. Schor (1997b) shares his opinion that work structures today are much more fashioned according to the needs of businesses than the needs of people. She believes, for example, that many more people would choose to work part-time if such arrangements were more available and provided the same kind of security that full-time employment provides.

Recognising the strength of semantics, Korten (1996) prefers the term livelihood or “means of living” to that of “jobs”, which he sees as referring strictly to a source of money. “Speaking of jobs evokes images of people working in the factories or fast-food outlets of the world’s largest corporations. Speaking of sustainable livelihoods evokes images of people and communities engaged in meeting individual and collective needs in environmentally responsible ways – the vision of localized systems of self-managing communities” (289).

In effect, these three authors are clamouring for a complete rethinking of the way we see the means through which we meet our human needs, both the physical ones and the more esoteric. Work must no longer be seen as the ideal (or only acceptable) wealth redistribution system at the expense of human dignity and the environment. We must be more creative in providing our populations with socially productive employment that enriches the “common wealth” rather than draining it.

4. Community, sharing, meaningful relationships, human scale

In the simplicity literature, community, on the one hand, is a meaning provider. Community provides meaning to individual lives. Second, as communities offer meaning to individuals, these come to realise, in turn, that the values and social organisation of human-scale communities offer hope for the socio-economic transformation needed to halt the destruction of the environment and the disintegration of liveable human agglomerations.

Humans are social, gregarious animals that, for the most part, need the reassuring presence of other humans. Participating in the communal enterprise, contributing to its elaboration and development and receiving from it is an enriching dimension of human life. Nowhere is that more evident than in the numerous and diverse attempts at forming smaller, human scale communities of shared values as exemplified by the Intentional Community Movement, discussed later in the section on “lodging and living arrangements”. Many have felt alienated by the size and complexity of modern human agglomerations and have sought alternatives. They see modern cities as cold, impersonal places haphazardly constructed and often structured much more to facilitate commercial undertakings than for human living and the meeting of human needs (Korten, 1996, 277). While it is true that more than 56% of the “simple-lifers” of Elgin’s 1979 survey live in suburbs and cities, it is also true that they tend to gravitate toward those cities or suburbs that have made steps towards making their spaces more amenable to human living. This is the case of places like Davis, California, Portland, Oregon, or Ithaca New York to

name just a few (Mongeau, 1998, 160; Spayde, 1997). These communities are attempting to build human living spaces in which people know and interact with their neighbours, work and shop near their homes and in which they play with their children; communities that nurture values of solidarity and mutual help (Mongeau, 1998, 207).

My own research stemming from personal involvement with several groups involved in community building has allowed me to come into contact with numerous persons concerned with and involved, in various ways, in promoting and facilitating social change. These organisations are very active in questions of urban planning, transportation issues, agricultural issues (more particularly the concept of community supported agriculture to be discussed later), the elaboration of Fair Trade systems and issues more directly related to the urban poor, more specifically as regards housing. The people involved in this work, most, but not all, quite young, demonstrated dedication not only to their work but also to the personal values they brought to their endeavours. Thus, respect for persons, regardless of their socio-economic status, integrity, openness, sympathetic solidarity with the less and least favoured (with whom they often worked), equality and equity, and a concern for global justice were very often translated into their personal life choices.

There is an undercurrent of agreement in the simplicity literature that our social, political and economic institutions have outgrown our capacity to understand and control them and that, therefore, their utility in fostering healthy and harmonious living spaces for humans is compromised. While there is recognition that Schumacher's "Small Is

Beautiful” may be too simplistic an approach to deal with the global issues of the twenty-first century, there is also an awareness that these social and environmental issues can only be addressed through and by responsabilised and accountable individuals. Huge, impersonal bureaucracies and corporations are not seen by “simple-lifers” as amenable to attaining the required level of consciousness and empowerment to face the challenges the human species is currently presented with. Humans are seen as being at their best, and most individually and socially creative, when placed in surroundings that foster those characteristics most needed at this time in human development. “We have a demonstrated capacity for hatred, violence, competition and greed. We have as well a demonstrated capacity for love, tenderness, cooperation and compassion. Healthy societies nurture the latter and in so doing create an abundance of those things that are most important to the quality of our living” (Korten, 1996, 277)

As the communications revolution shrinks the planet, there is increasing recognition that those same concepts of community must somehow be expanded to encompass all the people of the world. “Simple-lifers” are aware that taking more than their share of limited resources means others must do without. Even if they are not in our backyard, access to images of the plight of people in industrialising or non-industrialised countries brings the principle of interconnectedness to life. As television increasingly brings Western images to the lives of the deprived, similarly there are fewer and fewer places to hide from the lifeless eyes of the billions who suffer from hunger and thirst.

Awareness that the current model of economic globalisation encourages patterns of behaviour that are detrimental to the majority of the people of this world has created links between “simple-lifers” and the unfortunately and inappropriately dubbed “anti-globalisation” movement. In the original survey upon which Elgin’s book, Voluntary Simplicity is based, several respondents mentioned they had come to live simply after having come into contact with realities of life for people in developing countries or with poor people in their own countries. A sixty year old woman says: “It was the injustice and not the lack of luxury during the Great Depression that disturbed me...simplicity ...seemed more just in the face of deprivation – better distribution of goods...more honest – why take or have more than one needs” (53). Another couple mentions that its “interest in voluntary simplicity dates to overseas tours with the U.S. embassy in underdeveloped nations – we know firsthand what the problems are” (ibid.). If contact of this sort can make people move towards living simpler lives then certainly the same kind of contacts and awareness creation through the anti-globalisation movement can do the same. Thus, as with the environmental movement, affinities with the anti-globalisation movement has created synergies that serve to reinforce the determination and motivations of both.

Several leaders of the anti-globalisation movement such as Vandana Shiva of Schumacher College, David Korten, and David Suzuki, other than perhaps an inordinate use of air travel to meet their speaking engagements, have all greatly simplified their lives to make them more concordant with their values. More evidence of this will be presented in other sections of this chapter.

5. Spirituality, personal growth, health, balance

“Simple-lifers” acknowledge the multi-dimensionality and complexity of human beings. The simplicity literature often refers to man as a physical, emotional and spiritual being with needs stemming from each dimension. It decries the modern emphasis on materialism and consumption with its correlate of immediate gratification to the point that even spirituality and personal growth become commodities sold as “weekends of illumination” provided by the latest well-marketed guru (Cox, 1999). There is a recognition that second order needs cannot be met by increases in material consumption or the constant quest for “the next best thing” that will fulfill us. Adopting a simpler, less cluttered and more deliberate and meaningful way of life is seen as a preferred means of achieving balance amongst the different aspects of the human person.

Certainly, one cannot neglect the physical facet of being human. In fact, the body and its health are important considerations in “simple-lifer” philosophy. Many simplicity websites carry advice concerning properly feeding oneself. Eating simple, fresh, wholesome foods with as little industrial processing as possible is often part of the simplicity lifestyle (Mongeau, 1998, 80ff.). The benefits of a vegetarian diet both for health and as respect of other sentient life forms (an element of living in harmony with nature) is also regularly extolled (Harris, 1995). Many leisure activities such as walking,

jogging, swimming, preferred by “simple-lifers” are also oriented towards improving health.

However, voluntary simplicity has deep roots in spirituality. Much of the philosophy and values (mentioned here) of the more visible component of the North American voluntary simplicity movement, the “simple-living movement”, finds its roots in early American religious movements such as the Quakers. Elgin, in his 1981 book that is subtitled “Toward a Way of Life that Is Outwardly Simple and Inwardly Rich”, often refers to core values of Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and others as being representative of the values dear to “simple-lifers”. While most traditional religions have said little about consumption per se, they have expressed reservations about wealth and attachment to worldly goods. In both Western and Eastern traditions admonitions and cautionary advice is given concerning the tenuous relationship between the spiritual and material life. People with strong attachment to the values of their Church or tradition could be more inclined to not letting materialistic values become central in their lives. As many as twenty percent of “simple-lifers” identified by Elgin affirmed being actively engaged in traditional religious groups. However, even those who did not express close ties with any particular religion stated that spiritual development was a very important part of their lives. Corbett’s work on simplicity mentions the desire to pay more attention to one’s spiritual life as one motivation for adopting a simpler life (no date).

Still, the overarching philosophy of voluntary simplicity is one of equilibrium amongst the various levels of human needs. Thus, deliberate and conscious living and

reflection will bring one to the realisation that spiritual needs are fulfilled, not by material goods but by other activities such as participating in religious ritual and practices or by meditation; belonging needs cannot be purchased away but need to be developed and nurtured; personal development comes with a lifelong process requiring discipline and commitment not as a silver bullet in a weekend workshop. A balanced life, therefore, means spreading one's available time and resources amongst the various exigencies of life, never losing site of our full range of needs.

In fact, Elgin (1981), in his discussion of adepts of voluntary simplicity, identifies their moral struggle partly as a constant quest for balance among a number of conflicting values ranging from environmental concerns to social equity issues. So, while "simplifiers" may tend towards an ideal of reduced consumption, this may not always be evident in the amount of money they spend since they may be willing to pay more for certain goods that allow them to be faithful to other values. Thus, an "ethical simplifier", identified by Shaw and Newholm (2002) as part of the voluntary simplicity family and as one whose purchasing decisions will be guided by a set of moral values, might be willing to spend a fair amount of money on a photovoltaic electrical system that he will perceive as being less environmentally destructive and as providing greater self-sufficiency. Ethical simplifiers will also pay more for organically-grown and local food that is more respectful of the Earth and needs less energy for transportation. They will also be willing to pay more for clothing they know has not been produced in sweatshop conditions, is more durable, functional and less likely to go out of style quickly. In this sense their choices appear more aligned with Korten's concept of the difference between

money and wealth: the recognition that while some things may cost less initially, their purchase disproportionately reduces the common wealth (Korten, 1997).

Table 1.1, the Comparative Values Chart, provides an overview of the salient differences between the Ethic of Simplicity and some of the main characteristics of what might be referred to as an Ethic of Materialism that “simple-lifers” see as dominating the capitalist landscape. It is not meant to provide a comprehensive understanding of such an ethic or even to suggest that this actually is the predominant value structure of current Western societies. Highlighting such differences should prove useful, however, in understanding the position of “simple-lifers” in regards to a socio-economic system they see, for the most part, as encouraging or actively promoting such values. Much of the information for the formulation of these materialistic values is taken from Korten (1996, 1999), Mongeau (1998) and Schor (1997a, 1998).

Table 6.1 COMPARATIVE VALUES CHART

	SIMPLICITY (interdependence)	MATERIALISM (instrumentality)
Environment	Humans are part of a living environment; they adapt to and live in harmony with nature taking as little as they can; oriented towards conservation rather than consumption; ultimate satisfaction not found in consumption of goods; respect for all things.	Humans hold an instrumental relationship to the natural environment; nature is to be conquered and modified to suit the needs of humans; Earth and its resources to be transformed into goods for use by humans; ultimate satisfaction comes from the creation and consumption of goods.
Time	Qualitative; time is life energy to be conserved, savoured, appreciated at every moment.	Quantitative; time is a commodity; it is exchanged in the production, maintenance and consumption of goods.
Work	Work should contribute to the well-being, development and betterment of the individual, the other and the social whole.	Work is a "productive" activity allowing the earning of money to purchase consumption goods or to provide capacity for future consumption.
Relationships	The lines between self and the other blur; recognition of patterns of interconnection and interdependence and reciprocity; living in harmony with and respect of all other humans.	The other is instrumental to one's acquisitiveness; provider of goods for self and family; the other often commodified as a satisfaction provider; the other becomes a competitor for limited goods and jobs.
Community	Community is a web of relationships facilitating the fulfillment of physical and material needs while at the same time respecting the uniqueness and individuality of each member; emphasis on individual responsibility and accountability; emphasis on cooperation.	Hierarchical and bureaucratic social organization that allows for efficient production and distribution of consumption goods; order is maintained through laws and regulations; emphasis on competition.
Personal Development	Emphasis on living more consciously, aware of impact on self and other; importance of balance; development of physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions.	Emphasis on physical development and comfort; often attempt to meet emotional and spiritual needs through increased or differentiated consumption

B. Living Simply

Identifying “the simple life” is no less daunting a task than attempting to decide who “simple-lifers” are. David Shi (1985, 3) says that “[t]he simple life is almost as hard to define as to live.” Following Elgin (1981) and Mongeau (1985), Shi states that the simple life is a shifting complex of perceptions. It is formed and informed by dynamic social factors such as economics, social organisation and structures such as family and work, religious and other ideological constructs etc. As such, the simple life of 2002 could be very different from that of 1902; the simple life in New York City might only vaguely resemble that of “Smalltown, rural Saskatchewan”.

Just as the previous section is a sort of compendium of the values and principles that inform this wide array of people so is this section an elaboration of the wide variety of forms living simply can take in our societies. Of course, as for the other parts of this work, this one is, to a great extent, limited to Western manifestations of the concept. The data available for other parts of the world are yet too sparse, but where they are available and relevant they will be included. Quite often, what we consider an alternative lifestyle is the norm in many parts of the world; a norm Martin Khor (2000) says was very serenely accepted as satisfactory until we started exporting what are often misrepresentations of the benefits of our consumptive lifestyles. The number of people around the world living lives that are much less stressful on the Earth and its resources has even brought Korten to ponder the possibility that these 3.3 billion people that he identifies as “*Sustainers*” might actually offer us the model of life needed to save the

world. These people: 1) travel by bicycle and public surface transport; 2) eat healthy diets of grains, vegetables and some meat; 3) drink clean water plus some tea and coffee; 4) use unpackaged goods and recycle wastes; 5) live in modest, naturally ventilated homes with extended or multiple families; 6) wear functional clothing (1996, 281).

I have intermeshed within chapters two through five many of the ideological positions and behaviours of “simple-lifers” as regards environmental and social issues. This section attempts to present a more structured picture of the daily life of those who pattern their lives according to that set of values and principles discussed previously.

Though, as Etzioni (1998) says, many “dedicated and holistic simplifiers...often move from affluent suburbs or gentrified parts of major cities to smaller towns, the countryside, farms and less affluent or urbanized parts of the country”, Elgin reminds us that, in fact, a majority (56%) of respondents to his survey actually lived in cities and their suburbs (1981, 47). It may be fairly easy for us to visualise the life of “simple-lifers” in a country or rural setting. We imagine them on farms, building or repairing their own homes, growing a fair part of their own food and then preserving the harvest, tending to a few domestic animals that might provide eggs, milk and cheese and possibly wool. They have a strong community life where everyone knows everyone else, and support and meaningful interaction are common. As Cecile Andrews of the Center for a New American Dream reminds us, quite often the closeness is accompanied by town gossip but community values often allow this to be recognised as such and accepted. Alternative means of exchanges of goods would be available, either on a person-to-

person basis or in the form of a farmer's and craft market. Leisure time is very nature-oriented since it's at their door so that hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, swimming and dog-sledding might come very naturally. Transportation might cause the most dissonance since lack of public transport in rural areas often forces people into cars.

The everyday life of the urban "simple-lifer" is not always as easy to imagine. However, several clues were provided by Ray and Anderson's study of "Cultural Creatives", Craig-Lees and Hill's Australian study, and Shaw and Newholm's analysis of two studies undertaken in the U.K. Close, personal contact with several people who fit the kinds of criteria mentioned above also helped in creating and confirming this composite picture. The following, while centering on urban lifestyles, will certainly also give insights into the ways of life of "simple-lifers" in general.

1. Lodging and Living Arrangements

The Craig-Lees (2002) study shows that, for "simple-lifers", the *house* itself is not an important consideration or concern of their lives. How they succeed in making homes of their living quarters is much more important. The Ray and Anderson study confirms this, in that, *Cultural Creatives*, eighty percent of whom have said that voluntary simplicity holds a high rank in their values, are less likely to buy homes than their counterparts in the same income categories. When they do buy homes they are not ostentatious or adorned and are quite often retired from view, hidden by shrubbery or trees. They are more prone to purchase used houses that they will then renovate or repair

to suit their tastes and needs. One subject of the Craig-Lees study had even built his own home, “from mud bricks and used wood”, they say. Though not elaborated upon, what at first may sound quite primitive might in fact be a “cob house” construction that can be built with very little experience and turn out to be quite elaborate, elegant and functional. This is actually a favourite of rural “simple-lifers” in the Western United States.²⁴

Probably because of their involvement in their living space, “simple-lifers” in the Craig-Lees and Hill study tended to be more personally attached to their homes while non-simplifiers referred to them more in terms of a commercial relationship, as good investments. This attitude was also reflected in the approach to the inside of the house which is much more important, with comfort being the ultimate consideration. Furniture was chosen more for its functionality and comfort than style or appearance. Interestingly and somewhat dichotomously, the interior space of “simple-lifers” appears to have more things in it than non-simplifiers. Though this is not explained in detail, reference to pictures on the walls brought up the possibility of interest in and closeness to family and friends, which, as we have seen, is an important part of the value scheme of “simple-lifers”. Ray and Anderson also refer to an abundance of books in their subjects’ homes, a theme that recurs in Elgin and Mongeau.

Another, increasingly appealing living option for “simple-lifers” is the concept of “intentional communities”. There are several types of intentional communities but

²⁴ One can find many examples of cob houses at <http://www.deatech.com/cobcottage/pics/>. A few sample photographs are available in Appendix 2.

generally they are organised around principles of closely-knit community, of ecological concern, and often contain a spiritual or cultural component.

One popular form of intentional community is that of cooperative or co-housing. This concept itself, originating (at least in its modern reincarnation) in Denmark, has taken on many forms through the years and continues to evolve. The Co-housing Network (<http://www.cohousing.org/>) lists hundreds of such communities in different stages of organisation in the U.S. alone. In Canada, for reasons unknown, the concept has been more active and successful in the Western provinces, more specifically in British Columbia where at least five such communities are already in operation (Canadian Cohousing Network). In cohousing, individuals and families own their particular living quarters but there are shared common spaces (usually a common room) where several activities take place and the members of the community share meals on a very regular basis. The common building “amenities may include a kitchen and dining room, children's playroom, workshops, guest rooms, home office support, arts and crafts area, laundry and more” (http://www.cohousing.ca/what_is.html). Very often the communities are multi-generational adding to the small town spirit and in most cases organic gardens provide part of the community's food supply. According to the Cohousing Network, “Cohousing communities balance the traditional advantages of home ownership with the benefits of shared common facilities and ongoing connections with your neighbors. These cooperative neighborhoods are one of the most promising solutions to many of today's most challenging social and environmental concerns” (<http://www.cohousing.org/>). In addition to the communitarian aspects, this system

appeals to “simple-lifers” because of the reduction in consumption they afford. The projects are usually built using the latest technology in the way of energy efficiency and therefore allow reduced environmental impact of the residents. Clustered housing is also less land intensive. The shared amenities like gardens and laundry facilities and automobile co-ownership permit less individual consumption of appliances, tools, etc.

Another variant of alternative living possibilities is the “ecovillage” which can be urban as well as rural. It’s not always easy to differentiate between cohousing and ecovillages since they often overlap. Several are listed both on the Cohousing Network website and the Global Eco-village Network (GEN) (<http://www.gaia.org/>). Cohousing is a legal organisation form whereas the concept of Ecovillages is more ideological and can encompass several forms of communal organisation. According to the GEN, “[e]covillages attempt to integrate a supportive social environment with a low-impact way of life.” To achieve this, they integrate various aspects of ecological design, permaculture, ecological building, green production, alternative energy, community building practices, and much more. Ecovillages typically build on various combinations of three dimensions: Social/Community, Ecological, Cultural/Spiritual (<http://www.gaia.org/about/guide-ev-start.asp>). Thus, the emphasis of GEN is on sustainability, but not only physical, environmental sustainability. By late 1999, 160 intentional communities and more than 10,000 traditional villages were linked to GEN. As we have seen in previous chapters, there is a recognition, which is slowly gaining ground, that without social and personal values transformation, environmental sustainability will remain but a dream. Attempting to make sure it doesn’t, GEN

submitted a proposal to the United Nations in 1996 asking for financial support of \$100 million dollars for a programme for eco-habitats as living examples of Agenda 21 planning. In an email exchange with Albert Bates of the Ecovillage Training Centre in Tennessee, I learned that since the program to which they submitted their proposal was never endowed, the funding never materialised. “The Habitat Conference in 1996 has been often criticized because although it came up with a many fine objectives, it provided no funding mechanism. The same for Rio, and Kyoto. Any possibility of GEN receiving such funds is therefore academic” (Bates, 2002). Still, the Ecovillage Training Centre continues to offer support and advice, doing what it can to support the growth of the concept and practice.

Another model of intentional community is the commune of which the kibbutz movement in Israel is certainly the broadest, most recognised form. It is much more difficult to gather information about communes since they tend to be small, often rural, and rather closed communities. They do, however appear in urban form. Though these are more popular in Asia under the “ashram” model and in the Middle East as kibbutzim, they also exist in Europe (more predominantly in Denmark) and in North America. Perhaps the most well-known American urban commune is Ganas in New York City (See Appendix 1). The following information was taken from their self-description on the Federation of Egalitarian Communities (FEC) website. “Ganas moved to NYC from San Francisco in 1978 with six people (all still here). We're now about 75 adults of varied ages, philosophies and ethnicity. We live in seven well-maintained buildings with lovely gardens. In our five commercial buildings nearby, we recycle and resell furniture,

clothing, household goods and more.” The FEC (<http://www.thefec.org/>) is the main web-based resource for communes in North America. It boasts seven full-fledged members and six others in discussion for possible membership. This is certainly the strictest application of communal living and research indicates it to be a good test of the application of the fundamental principles of voluntary simplicity since all property, goods and income are owned in common. Most of the commune literature found boasts the Marxist principle of “from each according to his ability; to each according to his needs”. The most well-known North American commune still in operation today after more than 30 years, is The Farm, started by a San Francisco professor by the name of Stephen Gaskin accompanied by 320 hippies and built on 1,750 acres in Tennessee. “On a budget of \$1 per person per day and no grants, no food stamps, and no welfare, the 320 original settlers bought the land, erected the buildings, and became agriculturally self-sufficient within 4 years” (<http://www.thefarm.org/general/farmfaq.html>). At one point, reaching a population of more than 1,200, the community outgrew itself and its manageability so that, in 1983, a reorganisation was undertaken. Today approximately 20% of the members still live under a hybrid communal model.

Similarly, a few of the newer communes studied were actually subsets of larger intentional communities within which some members decided to intensify their commitment to communal living. This was the case, for example, of Aspenwood, a small income-sharing community that is part of the larger community of Pinon Ecovillage near Santa Fe New Mexico. Others are Dayspring Circle and Tekiah Community small income sharing groups within the broader base of Abundant Dawn Community, located

on 90 acres in the Appalachian Highlands (<http://www.thefec.org/communities/cid.html>).

A cursory look at the vision statement of Abundant Dawn is indicative of their commitment to “simple-lifer” values:

◆ We are creating a loving and sustainable culture. We live close to one another, cooperate, and share resources, so that we may live more lightly and joyously on the earth.

◆ As we seek to realize ourselves through service, and work towards ecological and social responsibility, we respect the diversity of our members' life choices.

◆ Whether in times of peace or conflict, we meet each other face to face, with openness and caring. We are each individually committed to reaching through our hurts and fears to find and share our deepest truths.

◆ We honor the spark of the divine in all beings

(<http://www.abundantdawn.org/#reality>).

2. Transportation

Urban “simple-lifers” are privileged compared to their rural counterparts when it comes to transportation. It is much easier for urbanites to meet their needs in this category without resorting to automobile ownership, which is one of the most sensitive points for ecologically-minded people. For example, fifty percent of adults living on the island of Montreal do not own a car (Équiterre website). In fact, as regards automobile ownership and use, Montreal resembles much more the average European city than a

North American one. Several of Craig-Lees and Hill subjects “expressed guilt feelings about their cars”, and some from the Shaw and Newholm study were “becoming increasingly disturbed by private transport.” As for much else in their consumption “simple-lifers” refer to necessity, reliability and functionality when they feel they must own a car, as opposed to comfort and brand quality for non-simplifiers. Similarly, Ray and Anderson’s voluntary simplicity subjects, for their part were “far more likely to want safety and fuel economy in a mid-price car. If they could also get an ecologically sound, high mileage, recyclable car, they’d snap it up” (2000, Lifestyles page)

However, most urban “simple-lifers” do without automobiles when it is at all possible. David Korten (1996) talks about the liberating experience of not owning a car when he and his wife moved to New York City (281). Though far from referring to New York as a model for sustainability, he does recognise the potential that high density, ethnically and culturally diverse urban centres can offer if exploited properly. He describes his family’s transportation needs for example as being quite adequately met by using the equivalent of the “transportation cocktail” promoted by Équiterre and referred to in Chapter 4. Much of their needs can be met by walking. Dozens of shops, restaurant and entertainment venues are within easy walking distance. While his office is in their apartment, his wife takes the subway to work and when they need to go out of the city they take the train or rent a car. Not only are they relieved of the hassle of car ownership such as fighting traffic and finding parking, some of the thousands of dollars they save every year have allowed Korten to modify his work habits and can be spent on things he finds much more pleasurable.

As Korten's example shows, there are various reasons for not owning a car that appeal to "simple-lifers", especially in the city. Snow removal and parking tickets are certainly two other joys of car ownership most drivers would easily do without. Mongeau (1998) reminds us that the dream of freedom automobile manufacturers sell us in their advertisements is just that: a dream. In reality many of us lose quite a bit of our freedom in the number of hours we have to work to pay for the car (136). Runzheimer International, an international management consulting firm specializing in transportation, travel and living costs, calculates operating and ownership costs for all types of vehicles. A regular mid-size automobile in 2002 will cost at least \$10,000 and can go up to more than \$14,000. For the average Canadian that can mean approximately \$20-28,000 of pre-tax income to pay for the privilege of owning a car (Runzheimer Canada, 2002).

Even for rich people freedom most often may be a myth since most cars are used to take people to and from work in rush hour traffic. David Shi tells us however, that while "[i]n 1911 a horse and buggy paced through Los Angeles at 11 miles per hour, in the year 2000 an automobile makes the rush hour trip averaging four miles per hour" (2000, June 25).

In rural or suburban intentional communities, the issue of transportation is often addressed through co-ownership or sharing of vehicles. Of course, as telecommunications improve, the need for physical displacement and thus vehicle use should be dramatically reduced. Telecommuting is increasingly becoming an option for

employees who want to work from home. Teleconferencing is reducing the need for business travel. Redesigning and building communities based on principles of sustainability should also reduce vehicle use as towns and suburbs are reorganised as increasingly self-contained communities rather than dormitories for cities, with less need to travel outside the immediate area.

3. Food

In the case of food, Korten again serves as a good example. While in New York he lived half a block from the Union Square farmers' market where small farmers sell locally produced, organic dairy products, wine, baked goods, fruits and vegetables etc. He boasts: "Eating nutritious, flavourful, unprocessed, chemical-free foods, we feel healthier and more vital, sleep better, and think more clearly. We enjoy getting to know the farmers and take comfort in the knowledge that our food is being produced in environmentally responsible ways" (1996, 282). These are the things "simple-lifers" strive for as pertains to food matters. While this has been feasible in rural areas from time immemorial, urbanites have not always had the same benefits. Although farmers' markets have been staple fare in most North American cities, they are quite often not numerous enough to make them easily accessible and thus a mainstream choice. Montreal, for example, only has two such markets for the whole island. The appearance of large supermarkets offering the full range of food requirements under one roof gradually displaced the farmers' market. However, a new phenomenon, discussed more in depth in Chapter 4, has appeared, in recent years, that has provided urbanite and

suburbanite “simple-lifers” with a healthy, ecological alternative to the produce found in large supermarkets that, until recently, were quite unresponsive to these concerns. Équiterre, a Montreal NGO, over the past four years has spearheaded the concept of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) mostly around Montreal but slowly expanding into other regions. This allows choices in line with the values of “simple-lifers” who tend, according to Shaw and Newholm (2002) “to make positive purchases, such as...favouring...local produce”.

According to the same study, there appears to be an increasing tendency, with “simple-lifers”, towards vegetarianism or veganism based on several concerns such as a more equitable distribution of food i.e. the realisation of the amount of grain, water and other resources needed to grow meat protein, “health, food quality, animal welfare, the environment and biodiversity, global equity, and power relationships.” Diet and its simplification seem central as they are mentioned in all the studies referred to in Chapter I as well as in the more basic books by Elgin and Mongeau.

When they *must* shop, “simple-lifers” also tend to shop in small stores, cooperatives or family businesses. This was expressed again by Korten and also found in Elgin and the Shaw, Newholm study. They like the personal service and the feeling of community the experience provides.

4. Work

As seen in the section on values, the relationship between time and work is seen by “simple-lifers” as an exchange of life energy. Therefore, in the case of work that is seen and felt as individually and socially meaningful, as contributing to self-worth and self-esteem, as contributing to personal growth and development, the exchange carries inherent satisfaction. However, because the possibilities of obtaining and earning a decent living from this kind of work are quite limited for a host of economic, political, structural and institutional factors that have been discussed throughout this work (Schor, 1997b; Segal, 1997), “simple-lifers” are often characterized by their attempt at reducing the time spent doing paid work. In a situation where the transaction is simply one of life energy being exchanged for the money needed to provide physical sustenance, satisfaction levels are usually low and there is normally no feeling of loss from a reduction in working hours.

However, the situation isn’t always so clearly defined. Many of the “simple-lifers” I have known personally, who have moved to the simple life without first going through a life of inordinate consumption, spend quite a lot of time at work since the demarcation between their personal and professional lives often becomes blurred. It would appear that the main reason this occurs is that, following their values, they have chosen meaningful and socially redeemable work from the outset. Therefore, time spent at paid work can be quite variable depending on how one came to the simple life.

If a “simple-lifer” has not been able to find remunerative work in a self-identified meaningful field, chances are she will have reduced her work hours in order to spend more time in unpaid pursuits that add value to her life. These might include community oriented volunteer work, continued education, social or environmental activism, part-time employment in lower-paid work, or leisure activities that will be discussed in the next section.

The type of work from which “simple-lifers” gather meaning and personal development is, however, extremely varied. It ranges from environmental and social work, to food services, healthcare, education, trades services like electrical and plumbing, agriculture etc. Many “simple-lifer” professionals prefer the freedom of self-employment whenever feasible. The capacity to set their own work schedules is a valuable asset. Therefore, rather than working for large firms with the security and prestige it entails, they’ll own their small law practices, for example, often oriented towards helping the less socially or economically favoured of society. In health care, quite often they’ll be oriented towards alternative, holistic therapies (Spayde, 1997). Those who choose to open retail businesses will generally tend towards products or services that are seen as more respectful of sustainable ways of living. Spayde, writing for the Utne Reader lists several such businesses and organisations having sprouted in Ithaca, New York: bicycle and computer recycling and repair shops, organic bakeries, vegetarian restaurants and small organic farming concerns. He also gives examples of medium-sized businesses, in unusual sectors for alternatives, that can appear and grow when the political will and population support is present. He mentions the “Alternatives Federal Credit Union” that

provides banking services but more importantly, loans to individuals and small businesses that would not normally qualify in mainstream financial institutions. There is also the Green Star Co-op a supermarket-sized cooperative that gives shelf preference to local products. “Every Ithaca-produced foodstuff is carefully labeled as such... BGH-free milk from several area farms, Miami transplant Susie Gutierrez's line of seitan (wheat gluten) goodies, organic chicken raised by a former engineer and his partner, a onetime scholar of Japanese history. ‘We'll move other stuff off the shelves to make room for locally produced food,’ says Peters” the Co-op manager (ibid.).

5. Leisure

Much of the motivation for reduced paid work time is the freeing up of time for activities “simple-lifers” particularly enjoy doing. Studies show, however, that “simple-lifers”’ leisure activities are generally quite different from those of non-simplifiers. Books and reading are a common theme in the voluntary simplicity literature. Ray and Anderson (2000) actually identify books as status objects for their respondents. Craig-Lees and Hill also mention reading as “simple-lifers”’ favourite leisure activity. They differentiate between the hobbies practiced by their identified simplifiers and non-simplifiers. The former will tend towards “gardening, crafts and renovation”, while the latter prefer “golf, running, touch football and surfing”. Mongeau (1998, 130) says that “simple-lifers” will stay away from leisure activities that involve energy consuming vehicles such as motorboats and other watercraft, snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles, preferring human powered ones such as canoes and bicycles. Other activities mentioned

in Elgin's (1981) survey include meditation, listening to music or playing (or learning to play) a musical instrument, yoga, and taking courses at the local university or community college, writing and painting and sculpture (35-36, 61). Several of the simplicity websites refer to the arts and other creative activities as preferred leisure.

As stated in the previous section, the questions of food and diet appear to be important for "simple-lifers". For most of those I have known personally questions of food and meals are quite central in their social lives. They enjoy gardening, cooking, both on their own and with friends, and will often make an evening of shopping for, preparing and enjoying a meal with friends.

In addition to the above, the "simple-lifers" I have known personally, most of whom were social activists, enjoyed spending time with friends and workmates in pubs discussing global social, economic, political and environmental issues over a locally-brewed ale. They also engaged in sporting activities such as biking and friendly weekly soccer matches in a very non-competitive environment. Their favoured holiday appeared to be a camping trip.

Finally, in many cases, the time freed by working less is devoted to community and/or family activities. Many "simple-lifers" volunteer in health institutions or in schools; they spend more time than others caring for youngsters or elderly people; they are involved in communal environmentally restorative activities; they are political and social activists (Elgin, 1981, 36; Dillmann, 2000).

Table 1.2 provides an overview of the variations of living patterns that differentiate hardcore “simple-lifers” from more moderate ones informed by the values in the chart provided in Table 1.1. I have added a third column to indicate how “simple-lifer” behaviour differs from many North American “materialists”. This is not meant to presume homogeneity in living and consumption patterns of people who have not voluntarily adopted a more simple way of life. Many people, who could not be classified as “simple-lifers”, have made changes in their lifestyles based on a variety of values. The table is simply meant to display the range of behaviour in our society at present. Individuals will usually find themselves at different points on a continuum depending, as Shi says, on the dynamic interplay of a variety of forces. What comes into play are the reasons for which people change their behaviour.

A fourth column might have been added to indicate a set of minimal behavioural standards but, given Elgin and Mongeau’s earlier statements about the individualistic nature of the process, it is more accurate to simply state that, minimally, the “simple-lifer” will become conscious of the effects of his consumption patterns on himself and his social and physical environment. This “taking stock” of his individual situation will be followed by *some* modification of that behaviour, the extent and rate of which needs to be determined by each individual. “[T]he application of the principle of simplicity is for each person or each family to work out sincerely for themselves” (Gregg, 1936).

Table 6.2 COMPARATIVE LIFESTYLE CHART²⁵

	Ideal “Simple-lifer”	Average “Simple-lifer”	N.A. “materialist” Consumer
Lodging	Communal: a)Urban –high density/mixed b)Rural productive c)Rural ecological/self-sufficient	Same as ideal but not necessarily communal	Suburban, large house with 2-3 car garage
Transportation	Walking	Walking, biking, public transport, occasional car use	1,2 or 3 cars with an SUV
Diet	a)Organic-vegan b)Macrobiotic	Vegetarian or low meat content. Organic and local	High meat Fast-food Processed food
Leisure	Creative: arts, gardening, crafts. Yoga-meditation. Reading from library. Nature: walking, running, swimming. Social: being with family and friends	Like ideal, plus reading material might be purchased, biking, canoeing camping (i.e. more use of material objects but low impact)	Motorised: watercraft, snowmobiles, ATVs. Gyms with equipment. Air travel tourism. Cruises.
Work	Self-employed. Meaningful for self and society	Same as ideal or reduction in paid work hours	Work to consume. Seek: High income High prestige High power
Community	Close communal ties. Attitude of service	Community is valuable. Work at maintaining it through social involvement, volunteer work etc.	Separation and isolation. Centred on nuclear family and small group of friends.

²⁵ Data for the average North American consumer was gleaned from several sources such as Statistics Canada for information on homes and vehicles, Schor (1997a and 1998) for information on leisure and work motivation and Moore-Lappé (1982) for diet.

EPILOGUE

“Another World Is Inevitable”

The above subtitle might seem a quite banal utterance. After all, given the dynamic quality of all life, “change”, as a wise philosopher once said, “is the only constant”. Yet, its banality disappears when we consider the size of the stakes involved in the changes that humanity faces today. Several authors (Brown, 1999; Harman, 1998; Elgin, 1997; Korten, 1999) have described our current situation as “standing on thresholds”. We are standing in the doorways of change. Concordant with the new findings of quantum physics, it appears that we are standing in several doorways at once and that these doorways, though not always evidently so, are all interconnected. In addition to physics, a new understanding of life and its processes and interconnections is occurring in biology, psychiatry, environmental science and geography to name only a few.

A threshold is a point which, when crossed brings important transformative change. Lester Brown (1999) explains with the example of water. “One of the most familiar thresholds, for example, is the freezing point of water. As water temperature falls, the water remains liquid until it reaches the threshold point of 0 degrees Celsius (32 degrees Fahrenheit). Only a modest additional drop produces dramatic change, transforming a liquid into a solid.” Four thresholds are pertinent to the discussion of this work: 1) the scientific threshold; 2) the environmental threshold; 3) the economic threshold and 4) the psychic threshold. The scientific threshold is fundamental because it

underpins our whole understanding of how the universe functions and of how it is all held together. “The view of reality emerging from the frontiers of science seems congruent with the possibility of a functioning collective consciousness. The new cosmology in physics views our vast cosmos as an ‘unbroken wholeness in flowing movement’” (Elgin, 1997). The new biology is pushing us to rethink our understanding of universal processes, asking us to move from a mechanistic view to an organic one. A machine is the opposite of life. To be useful it needs to be stable and unchanging. Life, on the other hand is constantly evolving: living systems absorb inputs and emit outputs, parts die and are replaced; it is a state of constant renewal. This view of a living universe helps us understand, for example, the difference between “a planet with life on it and a living planet”. “[T]he Earth regulates its temperature as well as any of its warm-blooded creatures, such that it stays within bounds that are healthy for life despite the Sun’s steadily increasing heat. And just as our bodies continually renew and adjust the balance of chemicals in our skin and blood, our bones and other tissues, so does the Earth continually renew and adjust the balance of chemicals in its atmosphere, seas, and soils” (Sahtouris, 2000, Chapter 1). Crossing this threshold (which is not evident because many still hold to the old paradigm) will dramatically revolutionize how we see the world and our place in it. Such a paradigmatic shift in understanding can only bring an avalanche of changes in a whole range of other fields.

Brown suspects that, in the environmental context, we are close to a new consciousness, an “awakening”. Even as the planet is undergoing tremendous stress trying to cope with anthropogenic change in amplitude and speeds that nature is not

accustomed to dealing with, he sees “signs that the world may be approaching the threshold of a sweeping change in the way we respond to environmental threats – a social threshold that, once crossed, could change our outlook as profoundly as the one that in 1989 and 1990 led to a political restructuring in Eastern Europe” (1999). Just as, in the case of Eastern Europe, certain ideas attained a critical mass that then prompted such changes that weren’t even foreseen by the best political science think tanks in the world, so, he believes, an environmental consciousness is spreading so rapidly across the globe that the possibility of a dramatic shift is becoming evident. These changes are comparable to evolution processes that are now known to occur in leaps and bounds as well as gradually. Major sudden shifts do occur but they are usually preceded by long periods of preparatory activity, and, then, the crossing of a threshold. Brown sees evidence of this preparatory activity in much of what was discussed in the fifth chapter. While there seems to be little effective change occurring, just the fact of the numbers of people involved in this activity, the numbers of organizations being created, even the people in corporations who are making the topic part of their normal, everyday conversations are all signs that we are possibly well on the way to reaching a point of critical mass of environmental consciousness.

The third threshold is economic and since it claims scientific status and is a subset of the environment it cannot help but be affected by any change that occurs in the first two. In the first instance, the move from a mechanistic to an organic order must necessarily lead economists to question their quest for hard and fast unchanging rules that apply unfailingly (or almost) across time, space, culture, geography etc. This new view

gives additional force to the request of those economists who are asking that the science be more closely aligned with the reality. At a second level, human economic activity, in great part, consists in the transformation of the elements of nature into forms that are usable and useful for human beings. A renewed understanding of the workings of nature and its limits must be integrated into economic understanding if it is to concord with reality. Hazel Henderson (1997) speaks, for example, of economics needing to consider the varying speed of the different economies. Whereas the financial operates at the speed of light, crisscrossing the world in ongoing gushes of electronic bits and bytes, the speed of the “real” economy, where things are produced and consumed, is much slower and the “natural” economy that produces the raw materials for the real one works on cycles that are even greater still. If economics does not take these variations into consideration it is bound to make theoretical errors. Our extended environmental knowledge also gives us a new lens through which we can look to enhance our predictive ability. Brown (1999) says that the Chinese case is the perfect tool to make us realize that “the Western industrial model will not work for China”. And if it doesn’t work for China then it can’t continue working for the rest of the world either, nor for a small portion of it only, without causing major havoc. Brown explains, using two examples, how China allows us to see quite clearly the failings of the system: 1) “If the Chinese should reach the point where they eat as much beef as the Americans, the production of just that added beef will take ... an amount [of grain] equal to the entire U.S. grain harvest”. 2) His second example is even more telling: “if the Chinese were to consume oil at the American rate, the country would need 80 million barrels of oil a day – more than the entire world’s current production of 67 million barrels a day” (1999). The lack of importance of raw

inputs preached by neo-classical economics takes on an entirely different perspective when seen through this lens. In the words of Sahtouris, the concepts of economy and ecology were erroneously separated and must be reintegrated, must be made whole.

Finally, the fourth threshold is a psychological one; what Willis Harman (1998) calls a “Global Mind Change” and Elgin and LeDrew (1997) a “Global Consciousness Change”. The interconnectedness of all things is not only at the physical level but also at the psychic level – in fact, it may be increasingly difficult, as paradigms evolve, to differentiate between the two. Harman refers to Toffler’s The Third Wave, in which he says that, in contrast to the bickering of the tenants of the old industrial order “growing millions...recognize that the most urgent problems of the world – food, energy, arms control, population, poverty, resources, ecology, climate, the problems of the aged, the breakdown of urban community, the need for productive, rewarding work – can no longer be resolved within the framework of the industrial order” (1998, 130). Reminiscent of Carl Jung, Elgin takes up the flame of the collective consciousness, which, he says, unites these millions of individuals. Elgin has spent a good deal of his professional life in the search of evidence of changing ways of perceiving reality and human life within it. This search brought him to write his book, Voluntary Simplicity. In that book he explains, in congruence with the growing environmental evidence, that human civilization is approaching another threshold at which, historically, civilizations usually break down followed by a long period of stagnation. He believes that the new consciousness threshold, that recognizes the interconnectedness of all things at the psychic level, if crossed in time, can change that pattern into one where breakdown, though turbulent, can

be an opportunity for renewal, redirection and a new period of high growth based in another paradigm. “This does not have to be a crash” he says. “Instead, the human family could mobilize itself for an evolutionary bounce by releasing humanity’s collective energy for the common work of building a positive and nurturing future” (1997). Sahtouris, in line with Elgin and drawing from the indigenous knowledge that Agenda 21 says we must integrate into our vision, reminds us of the need to plan, to prepare, to be conscious of the challenge we face:

“A healthy world for all cannot easily rise from total destruction; rather it must be formed now, in the midst of the chaos we create. Such a ‘new world order,’ I am again and again reminded by the indigenous elders I have listened to intently for their deep understanding of sustainability, must be based on a very old world order -- on the laws of nature as indigenous people understand them, on laws they have been trying to teach us for a very long time: laws of balance, harmony, of giving back in full measure for all you take; laws designed to insure survival at least seven generations into the future” (1999, Chapter 1).

Elgin, Sahtouris and Paul Ray have been involved in another facet of social evolution that gives them hope that the spread of the new consciousness may be rapid enough to stave off complete civilisational collapse: the new communications technology, especially as represented by the Internet. They see incredible possibility for the spread of knowledge. They compare it to a manifold growth of collective human “functional intelligence” potential. “Among the possible benefits of the new electronic

and other technologies are a massive increase in global ecological awareness, as well as more dialogue on sustainable values and ways of living” (Elgin and LeDrew, 1997). Sahtouris adds: “the scientific knowledge that makes it possible to understand and reintegrate ourselves into nature's self-organization patterns...has also brought us to a stage of technology that permits us to share our discoveries and our understanding planet-wide in no time at all, to work together as a body of humanity with hope of transcending our present crisis in a far healthier and happier future for ourselves and all the rest of Earthlife” (Sahtouris, 1999, Prologue).

Harman, for his part, refers to demonstrations, protests and other activities as consciousness raisers saying they are often held “not so much to win a tactical objective as to bring about a ‘radicalization’ of minds, a lessening of the hold of the accepted belief system of the culture” (1998, 131). This has two secondary effects: 1) it alters one's perception as regards the target of the protest – in the current scenario, large corporations, the economic system and international institutions like the IMF, the WB and the WTO; 2) it involves changing self-perception and the relation of the self to these institutions – again, in our case, the shift from a passive consumerist role to one of active citizenship.

For the past few years, tens of thousands of social activists have convened in what has been called the World Social Forum. Held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, it has paralleled the World Economic Forum, meeting annually in Davos, Switzerland until this year when it was held in New York City. The World Social Forum is perhaps the most evident demonstration of a global will of civil society to make its position clear to the ruling

political and economic elites and to show that the individual protests and demonstrations are not isolated and temporary events. They are the evidence that the input of citizens around the world must be active, constant and permanent. They are also evidence of the consciousness change occurring across the globe. For every delegate at this conference, countless others are actively engaged at home.

The surveys done by Elgin, Schor, Inglehart and Ray and Anderson that led us to the discovery of “simple-lifers” are only a few that demonstrate that we may be rapidly approaching critical mass as regards a consciousness paradigm shift that would allow us to realise that the current model does not lead to satisfying human lives. This new paradigm is represented by the Ethic of Simplicity. To recapitulate, it is a model that is centred on life rather than money or objects. Humans are an integral part of a living macrocosm that is in constant flux and they adapt to the system rather than trying to mould the system and all its constituent parts to their needs only. There is an understanding that all things have their place in the system and, as such, have inherent value. The recognition of interconnectedness brings humans to value and develop a sense of community in which individuals, while respectful of the needs of the whole, are also nurtured to develop physically, psychically and spiritually. Recognition of connectedness also promotes a sense of, and a desire to participate responsibly in, the healthy development and maintenance of the whole. It is a model, therefore, in which human activity, be it work, leisure, consumption, are done in an atmosphere of respect as the lines between self and other become blurred and realisation increases of the effect of one’s acts on the other.

The old Marxist paradigm of class struggle has been surpassed. The pockets of resistance and constructive vision springing up all over the world as people's consciousness changes cut across social strata. This is no longer the Marxist class struggle but a struggle for life itself, a recognition that ultimately we are all at risk equally on this fragile Spaceship Earth hurtling through space at 108,000 kilometres per hour. The World Social Forum has adopted the slogan "Another World Is Possible". My research for this project has brought me to conclude that, not only is it possible, it is "inevitable". The only question that remains is: Will our simplicity be voluntary or will it be imposed upon us by the collapse of the economic system, the ecosystem or both?

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<http://cbshealthwatch.medscape.com/cx/viewarticle/404645> (Obesity and diabetes)

<http://dsc.discovery.com/news/reu/20020617/coral.html> (Coral and feces)

<http://iisd.ca/ic/sb/direct/sdhist.htm#BCSD> (Projet de société)

<http://iisd1.iisd.ca/rio+5/agenda/principles.htm> (Rio Principles)

<http://www.botany.uwc.ac.za/Envfacts/facts/erosion.htm>

<http://www.cohousing.ca> (Canadian Cohousing Network)

<http://www.cohousing.org> (Cohousing Network)

<http://www.gaia.org> (Global Eco-village Network)

<http://www.ifg.org/> (International Forum on Globalisation)

<http://www.pbs.org/greatwall/controversyl.html> (Three Gorges Dam)

<http://www.renewables.com/Products/Unisolar1.htm> (Solar roofing)

<http://www.simplelife.com/organiccotton/13PSTCDSSTTSTCS.html> (Organic cotton)

<http://www.thefarm.org> (The Farm)

<http://www.thefec.org> (Federation of Egalitarian Communities)

<http://www.transnationale.org/anglais/pays/CHN.htm> (Chinese free trade zones)

<http://www.wellnessweb.com/> (Health and obesity)

APPENDIX 1-A

Websites with Simplicity as Central Theme

URL-NAME: <http://www.life.ca>-

GOAL/PURPOSE: Educate Internauts about living more in respect of the natural environment

OFFERINGS: Magazine on natural living (Online and hard copy)
A list of events in the Ottawa area (workshops, protests, conferences, festivals).
A store offering a selection of books, music and Earth-friendly products

ISSUES ADDRESSED: Sustainable Homes
Organic gardening and cooking
Livelihood
Leisure
Family-Education (Home-schooling)
Holistic health

.....
URL: <http://www.simpleliving.net/>- The Simple Living Network

GOAL/PURPOSE: "Providing Tools, Examples & Contacts For Conscious, Simple, Healthy & Restorative Living".

OFFERINGS: A wealth of information on and sale of simple living resources such as books, videos, do-it-yourself kits and literature, websites.
Information and links to simplicity circles and study groups based on the book *Your Money or Your Life* by Robin and Dominguez.
An on-line simplicity study group.
An earth-friendly resource database
Planned web-radio station
Newsletter
Testimonials

ISSUES ADDRESSED: Simple-living
Environment

.....
URL: <http://www.newdream.org/>- Center For a New American Dream

GOAL/PURPOSE: "Helping Americans consume responsibly to protect the environment, enhance quality of life and promote social justice."

OFFERINGS: Advocacy programs to get people involved in reducing consumption (people sign up and keep track of actions).

Section on and for children especially oriented towards media and advertising.

Guide for more environmentally-friendly consumption

Newsletter, How-to guides, email bulletin and other publications

Discussion forum, chat room, listservs

ISSUES ADDRESSED: Consumption
Environment
Kids and commercialization
Religion and simplicity
Advertising and junk mail
Green procurement

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.seedsofsimplicity.org/default.asp>- Seeds of Simplicity

GOAL/PURPOSE: "A national, nonprofit public-membership organization working to help build a strong voice for voluntary simplicity as an authentic social justice and environmental movement."

OFFERINGS: Home base of three programs:

Simplicity Circles (Groups organized as support and info for living more simply).

Simplicity and Justice Dialogues (Organisation to promote dialogue between the poor and more well-off in Los Angeles area.

TrueGoods.com A parody of an online shopping site where one shops for *values* and everything is free

ISSUES ADDRESSED: Consumption
Environment
Social Justice

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.simpleliving.org/index.shtml>- Alternatives for Simple Living

GOAL/PURPOSE: Equips people of faith to challenge consumerism, live justly and celebrate responsibly.

OFFERINGS: A wealth of print and electronic resources

An e-store offering an incredible number of books, tapes, videos, calendars, bumper-stickers etc.

Newsletter

A Network of volunteer speakers and workshop organizers

Quarterly newsmagazine

ISSUES ADDRESSED: Consumption
Environment
Faith
Social Justice

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.newroadmap.org/default.asp>- The New Roadmap Foundation

GOAL/PURPOSE: "Provides people with practical tools and innovative approaches for managing and mastering basic life challenges."

OFFERINGS: Home base for the 9 step program in Your Money or Your Life
Granting foundation awarding nearly \$1 million since 1984
Home of <http://www.conversationcafe.org/> web-based discussion on social issues

ISSUES ADDRESSED: Consumption
Social Justice
Environment

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.simplicitevolontaire.org/>- Le réseau québécois pour la simplicité volontaire

GOAL/PURPOSE: Meant to provide information about voluntary simplicity

OFFERINGS: Newsletter
Discussion forum
Resources under various themes
Coordinate meetings and regional discussion groups

ISSUES ADDRESSED: Consumption
Environment
Spirituality
Community
Health
Transportation
Etc...

.....
URL-NAME: <http://hometown.aol.com/DSimple/index.html>- A Frugal Simple Life

GOAL/PURPOSE: Website promotes the author's books while giving interesting information about reducing costs of food, info about debt reduction and general family activities for "simple-lifer" families

OFFERINGS: Newsletter
Books by Deborah Taylor-Hough
Message Board

ISSUES ADDRESSED: A lot about cooking healthy and simple
Issues of kids and simplicity
Debt
Family issues

.....

URL-NAME: <http://www.simpleliving.com/>-

GOAL/PURPOSE: Site claims to be a refuge of peace and calm inspiring people to lead a vibrant life of joie de vivre. Site promotes the author's books and journal on simplicity

OFFERINGS: Books by the author
Journal on simplicity Simple Living Oasis designed to enlighten, inspire, and connect readers from around the world who share the philosophy of living fully while living simply.

ISSUES ADDRESSED: Consumption
Environment
Debt relief
Family issues

.....

URL-NAME: <http://www.globallivingproject.org/>- Global Living Project

GOAL/PURPOSE: To learn, embody and teach an artful way of life that equitably shares Earth with humans and other species. Based on concepts of Your Money or Your Life and the Ecological Footprint.

OFFERINGS: The Global Living Handbook – tool to calculate one's footprint and reduce it.
Workshops and conferences

ISSUES ADDRESSED: Sustainable lifestyles
Efficient resource use

.....

URL-NAME: <http://www.summitstrategies.net/earthways/EarthwaysPurpose.htm> - The Earthways Institute

GOAL/PURPOSE: To help individuals, organizations and communities master the art and science of creating sustainable, integrated and harmonious ways of living, working and growing together

OFFERINGS: Books and pamphlets
Workshops and conferences
Weekend getaway workshops
Coaching

ISSUES ADDRESSED: Creating alternative futures
Simple living
Conscious living
Community co-creating

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.gallagherpress.com/pierce/index.htm>- The Pierce Simplicity Study

GOAL/PURPOSE: Resource base for literature on voluntary simplicity. Site promotes author's book

OFFERINGS: Extensive bibliography
Simplicity/cultural exchange programs and trips
Testimonials (real-life stories)

ISSUES ADDRESSED: Consumption
Debt

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.realsimple.com/realsimple/>- Real Simple

GOAL/PURPOSE: An online magazine devoted to simplifying life and making it more meaningful for busy people, based on the print magazine.

OFFERINGS: All articles based on living simply
Also offers print version

ISSUES ADDRESSED: Food
Clothing
Home tips
Testimonials

URL-NAME: <http://www.digicom.qc.ca/~fprive/>- La simplicité volontaire- François Privé

GOAL/PURPOSE: To provide info, resources and encouragement to French “simple-lifers” or would-be “simple-lifers”

OFFERINGS: Tips to save money on purchases or in banking
Classical literature texts supporting simplicity

ISSUES ADDRESSED: Simple Living
Environment
Economics

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.lifestyle-movement.org.uk/>- The Lifestyle Movement

GOAL/PURPOSE: “Exists to provide inspiration and practical advice to all people of goodwill who aspire to live in a way that reflects the ideals of justice for our Earth and for those who live on it.”

OFFERINGS: Newsletter
Booklist
Advice

ISSUES ADDRESSED: Consumption
Environment
Lifestyle modification

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.simplyliving.org/sl/>- Simply Living

GOAL/PURPOSE: “Members and friends share a desire to live more lightly and joyfully by learning and practicing environmental awareness, sustainability, and voluntary simplicity.”

OFFERINGS: A compendium of links to websites on peace, the environment and simplicity.

Newsletter
Calendar of community events for Central Ohio
Sale of ecological paper and office products
Simple living tips
Courses and workshops

ISSUES ADDRESSED: Consumption
Environment
Food

Health (alternative)
Spirituality

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.pathtofreedom.com/indexnojava.html>- Path to Freedom

GOAL/PURPOSE: A Family project I urban homesteading

OFFERINGS: A wide array of articles from various source on world peace and the role of consumption and simple-living.

- Newsletter
- Photo galleries
- Personal testimonials (month by month project diary)

ISSUES ADDRESSED: Self-sufficiency
 Food and agriculture
 Environment
 World Peace

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.mindfulcanada.com/>- The Canadian Voluntary Simplicity Network

GOAL/PURPOSE: "For those interested in voluntary simplicity, intentional living, simplifying daily life, reducing the waste of time, money and resources and more. Reduce the impact on your life and the environment through simple choices and living mindfully."

OFFERINGS: Newsletter
 Discussion groups

ISSUES ADDRESSED: Books
 Simplicity circles

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.geocities.com/simplefamilylife/index.html>- Simple Family Life

GOAL/PURPOSE: To help people reduce the clutter and simplify their lives

OFFERINGS: Tips on de-cluttering
 Meditation exercise
 Coupons and savings in Ontario
 Travel savings

ISSUES ADDRESSED: Simplifying
Travel
Consumption
Health and Beauty
Meditation

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.geocities.com/davdd.geo/>- David's Page

GOAL/PURPOSE: An example of "extreme voluntary simplicity" to share with the world.

OFFERINGS: Testimonial of a very simple life
Wealth of literature and links
Email exchanges with curious people from around the world
Tips on reducing expenses

ISSUES ADDRESSED: Consumption
Environment/sustainability
Work
Social economic justice
Travel

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.geocities.com/newlibertyvillage/>- New Liberty Village

GOAL/PURPOSE: Virtual intentional community bringing together people who dream for a simpler life and a better world.

OFFERINGS: Discussion groups
Articles on alternative communities
Hosting for people who want to share their thoughts or experiences

ISSUES ADDRESSED: Simplicity
Community Economics
Spirituality
Homesteading
Etc.

.....
URL-NAME: <http://songaia.com/doors/simple.htm> - Songaia Community

GOAL/PURPOSE: Songaia is an intentional community co-housing project based on values of simplicity.

OFFERINGS: Testimonial of the community

ISSUES ADDRESSED: Community life
Organic gardening
Spirituality

.....
URL-NAME:
<http://groups.msn.com/simpleliving/whatissimpleliving.msnw?pgmarket=en-us> A
voluntary simplicity MSN group

GOAL/PURPOSE: Offers support, advice and tips for would-be or active “simple-lifers”

OFFERINGS: Resource list (electronic and print)
Chat room and discussion forum

ISSUES ADDRESSED: Simplifying life
Environment
Family
Gardening and cooking
Money and anti-consumerism

.....

APPENDIX 1-B

Websites with Simplicity as Sub-theme

These are just a few of the thousands of sites one can find with a simple search engine like Google.

URL-NAME: <http://www.consciouschoice.com/>- Journal of Ecology and Natural Living

GOAL/PURPOSE: E-journal with emphasis on living more consciously

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: Articles centre on many of the issues relevant to “simple-lifers” i.e. Health, food, culture and the living environment writ large.

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.context.org/>- The Context Institute

GOAL/PURPOSE: E-journal In Context centred on issues of sustainability

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: Often contains articles directly related to voluntary simplicity as a necessity in achieving sustainability.

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.greatriv.org/> - Great River Earth Institute

GOAL/PURPOSE: “Dedicated to fostering personal and cultural transformation through grassroots study and discussion that encourages individuals to examine their deeply held values, accept responsibility for the Earth and choose to live in ways that are as ecologically friendly as possible.” Developed around three interlocking themes: Deep ecology, voluntary simplicity and bioregionalism

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: Voluntary simplicity is one of three themes

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.nwei.org/>- Northwest Earth Institute

GOAL/PURPOSE: “Develops programs that motivate and educate individuals and organisations to protect the Earth”.

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: Voluntary simplicity is one of several course offered by the institute

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.islandnet.com/~see/living.htm>- Living Gently Quarterly

GOAL/PURPOSE: "An electronic magazine promoting a voluntary simple and frugal lifestyle which enhances personal satisfaction and reduces environmental impacts."

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: The title says it all. All articles are oriented towards less intrusive ways of living

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.uukam.bc.ca/>- Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Kamloops

GOAL/PURPOSE: "A likeminded, caring group of people who reach out to each other and into the community, providing support in times of need, and working to improve the quality of life for all.

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: Promote and maintain simplicity circles

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.ardeacoaching.com/>- Ardea Coaching

GOAL/PURPOSE: "Life coaches--as distinguished from sports coaches--support clients to envision, plan, and live the life of their dreams."

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: The author of the site plans to write a book on voluntary simplicity, more particularly living simply in the city. As a data gathering device his site has an extensive questionnaire on simple living lifestyles and experiences.

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.careerlifeconsulting.com/>- Career Life Consulting services

GOAL/PURPOSE: "Dedicated to assisting workers to understand and develop the career management skills, knowledge and attitudes they need to thrive in the new world of work."

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: In their financial planning section they discuss planning finances in the context of voluntary simplicity principles regarding consumption.

URL-NAME: <http://www.frugalitynetwork.com/>- The Frugality Network

GOAL/PURPOSE: The Frugality Network uses the power of the Internet to save money on everyday living expenses.

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: Under a section entitled encouragement, has links to a few simplicity websites.

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.word-works.com/simple.htm>- Word Works

GOAL/PURPOSE: Web-based business offering services in webpage design

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: The owners of this web-based business are “simple-lifers” and maintain a part of their site to tell their simplicity story. They offer pragmatic advice and links to print and electronic resources. They have also set up a chat room to help “simple-lifers” communicate and share.

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.scn.org/>- Seattle Community Network

GOAL/PURPOSE: “A free public-access computer network for exchanging and accessing information. Beyond that, however, it is a service conceived for community empowerment.”

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: Has an extensive section on living lightly where people can get information about simplicity resources or organisations.

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.december.com/>- December Communications Inc

GOAL/PURPOSE: Web-based business offering a variety of IT services

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: The author of the site has written an e-book entitled Live Simple: Radical tactics to reduce the complexity, costs, and clutter of your life.

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.greensense.com/>- Green Sense

GOAL/PURPOSE: To offer alternative products that are less damaging to the environment

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: Unnecessary consumption is discouraged. Articles provided about simple living.

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.ecofuture.org/>- Ecofuture

GOAL/PURPOSE: Information for sustainability.

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: A section on what individuals can do to make their lives more sustainable i.e. living more simply

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.eeeee.net/>

GOAL/PURPOSE: "A consulting business that helps people and organizations to clearly see how sustainable economic development, offering equal opportunity to all people, can only occur if the natural environment upon which it depends is carefully managed."

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: Offers a book called Living a Sustainable Lifestyle for Our Children's Children

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.futurenet.org/> - YES! A Journal for Positive Futures

GOAL/PURPOSE: Online journal with articles on creative sustainability

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: Offers an FAQ on how to live sustainably. Also several articles in the journal in the past have dealt with voluntary simplicity

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.utahgreenpages.org/voluntarysimplicity/> -Utah Green Pages

GOAL/PURPOSE: A Guide offering tips and links for an earth-friendly lifestyle.

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: Site is divided into ten sections one of which is voluntary simplicity. Others deal mostly with environmental issues.

.....
URL-NAME: <http://www.slcppl.lib.ut.us/reading/volsim.pdf> - Salt Lake City Library

GOAL/PURPOSE: Self-explanatory

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: The library has prepared a complete list of all its holdings on the topic of voluntary simplicity

.....

URL-NAME: <http://www.serve.com/ecobooks/> - Ecobooks

GOAL/PURPOSE: An online environmental bookstore

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: Has a separate and substantial section on Simple Living.

.....

URL-NAME: <http://www.earthministry.org/main.htm> - Earth Ministry

GOAL/PURPOSE: "To help people of faith see more clearly the connections between their faith, their daily lives and ecological concerns."

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: Voluntary simplicity is one of their feature areas viewing *simplicity as compassion*. Offer courses on the topic in relation with Northwest Earth Institute.

.....

URL-NAME: <http://www.soulfulliving.com/index.htm> - Soulful Living

GOAL/PURPOSE: A New Age flavour ezine.

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: Much of the spiritual dimension of voluntary simplicity is core here. Several articles on the topic including one by Duane Elgin.

.....

URL-NAME: <http://www.eartheducation.org/> - The Institute for Earth Education

GOAL/PURPOSE: Provide environmental education programs for primary and highschool kids.

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: Living within the limits of the Earth is an important component of each program. Site also offers books on voluntary simplicity. Loose business link to the Simple Living Network

.....

URL-NAME: <http://www.whywork.org/> - Creating Liveable Alternatives to Wage Slavery

GOAL/PURPOSE: Site offers a wealth of information on the concept of work and questions basic assumptions about the social benefits “working for someone else” for a wage.

PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: Has a special section on Simplifying Your Life, a useful complement for people who want to eliminate wage work from their lives.

.....

APPENDIX 1-C

Newsgroups dealing with Simplicity Issues

alt.lifestyle.simplicity

humanityquest.simplicity

uk.community.voluntary

alt.community.intentional

free.uk.lifestyle.frugal

free.uk.lifestyle.vegetarian

net.food.veg.lifestyle

clari.living.consumer

co.consumers

can.consumers

buf.consumers

ba.consumers

iu.consumers

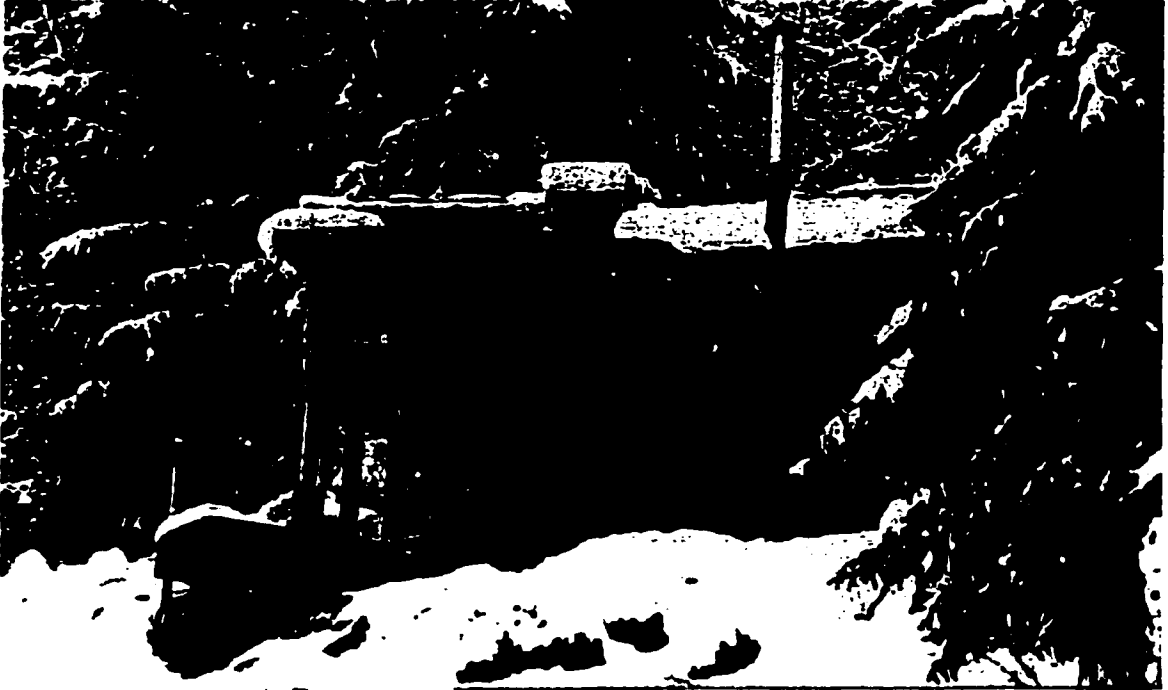
aus.consumers

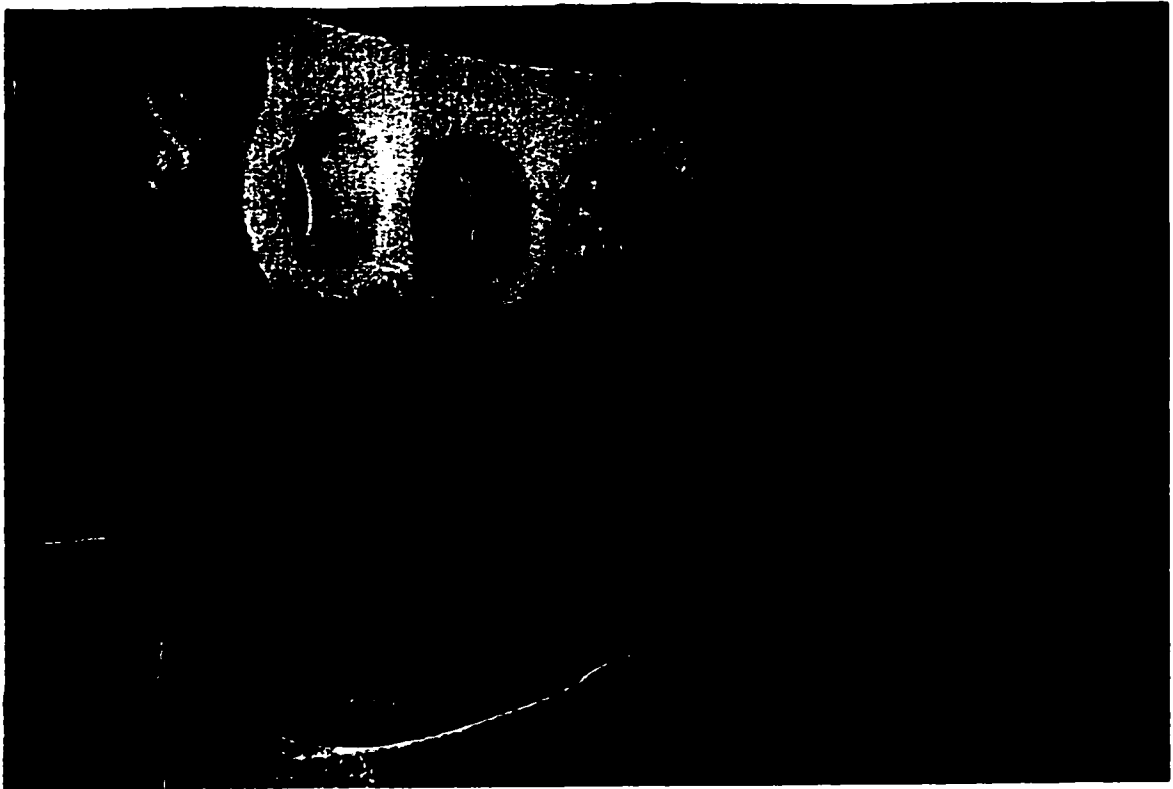
misc.consumers

misc.consumers.frugal-living

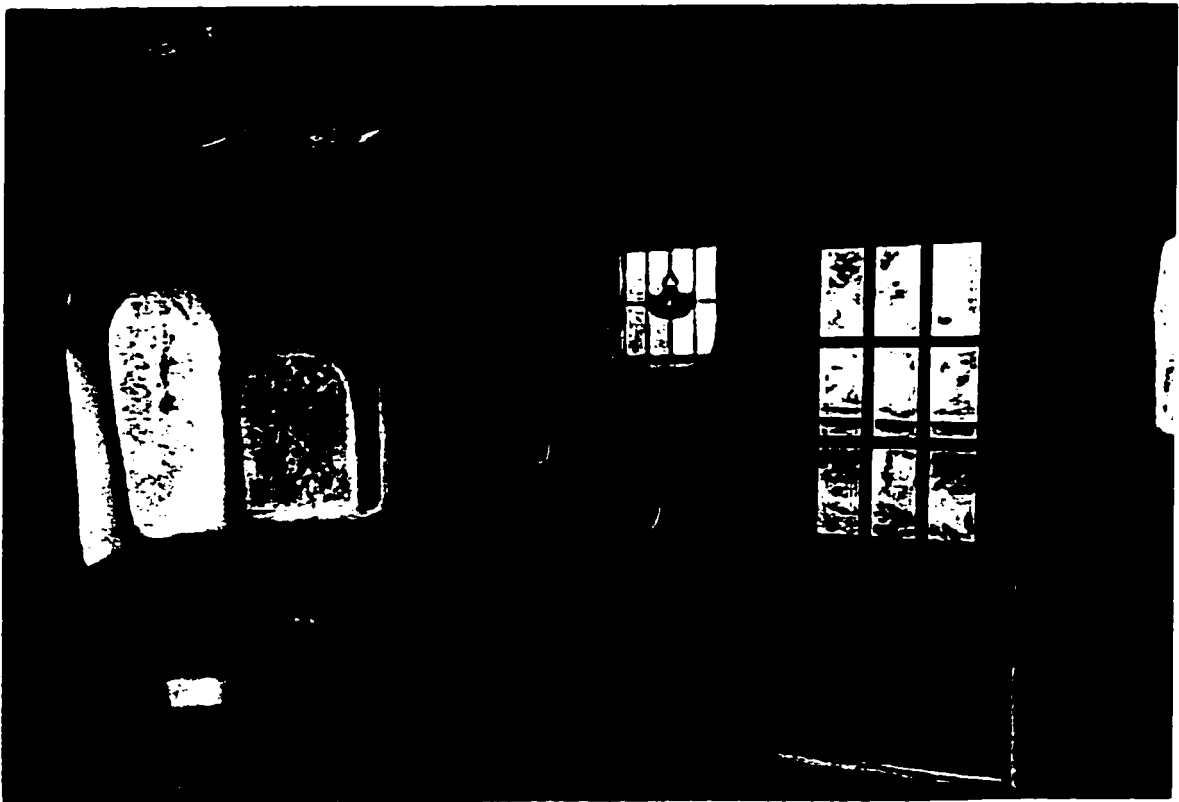
APPENDIX 2

COB CONSTRUCTION





The three pictures above are of Michael Smith's Cob Cottage in Cottage Grove, Oregon. Built by Cob Cottage Company in 1994. Available at <http://www.deatech.com/cobcottage/pics/>



The two pictures above are of Cob Cottage at Rainbow Ranch in Austin, Texas: November, 1997. Available at <http://www.deatech.com/cobcottage/pics/>

APPENDIX 3

World Conferences on Issues That Must Be Part of Sustainable Solutions

Part 1- The Original Conferences

- 1) The World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, June 1993
- 2) The International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, Sept. 1994
- 3) The World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, March 1995
- 4) The Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, Sept. 1995
- 5) Habitat II, Second UN Conference on Human Settlements, Istanbul, June 1996
- 6) The Intergovernmental Panel on Forests
- 7) The World Food Summit, Rome, November 1996

Part 2- Follow-up Meetings

- 1) Social Summit +5: Geneva 2000, United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) – a follow-up to The World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, March 1995
- 2) The World Food Summit +5, Nov. 2001, a follow-up to The World Food Summit, Rome, November 1996
- 3) Poor People's World Summit To End Poverty, November 15-18, 2000 New York
- 4) Istanbul +5, June 2001, follow-up to Habitat II, Istanbul, June 1996
- 5) Beijing +5: Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century, New York June 2000, follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995
- 6) ICPD+5: New York, 1999, a follow-up to The International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, Sept. 1994
- 7) Global Ministerial Environment Forum, Sweden, May 2000