

The American Way of Life

by Bill Herbst

*Version 1.4 (posted on 26 January 2021)
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In 1992, the First Earth Summit was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. That conference of world leaders was intended to explore ways that civilization, and specifically national governments, could address the newly-recognized problem of global warming. At that conference, American President George H.W. Bush stated: "*The American Way of Life is non-negotiable. **Period.***" Nine years later, in the wake of the September 11th attacks, then-President George W. Bush — George H.W.'s oldest son and unlikely heir in the Bush family political dynasty — urged Americans to "*go shopping*" as a response.

What is so tragic about the two statements is not that these father and son Presidents were out of touch with reality. No, the bitter truth is that their understanding of American public sentiment was completely accurate.

Americans overwhelmingly approve of and like Death Culture. As to why this is so, we can certainly point fingers at the elites and the economic/social/spiritual system that practices manipulative mind control so successfully in narratives that are continual and never-ending, 24/7/365. I don't regard that as a conspiracy foisted on us against our will. Instead, I see it more as an unconscious collective agreement entered into by both the rulers and the populace.

In large part, the mass mind control to which I refer is achieved through marketing and advertising. Obviously, commercial entertainment networks advertise consumer products and services (selling air time for ads is how they make their profits), and the percentage of total broadcast air time devoted to ads has been steadily increasing for decades. In 1962, 13% of network air time was taken up by ads, about eight minutes per hour. Now it's 30% — roughly 18 minutes of ads per hour.

Do you imagine that non-commercial or "premium" subscriber networks do better? Think again. PBS and HBO aggressively subject viewers to ads, not for corporate consumer products, but for their own programming, taking up significant air time between shows to do so. Most "regular" entertainment networks have begun using picture-in-picture ads when running the credits for shows, with some networks doing so even *during* the show.

Mainstream news networks now overlay onto their chyrons scrolling across the bottom of the screen ads for their own infotainment shows. These corporate "news" giants also take up air time by telling viewers what's coming up after

the next commercial break, and urging them to keep watching. "*You won't want to miss what's coming up,*" they say, like the shameless hucksters they are.

Imagine that something really bad were to happen, like a mini-Armageddon. If you turned on MSNBC, CNN, FOX, or any mainstream "news" network, do you think that the every-other-eight-minutes break for three minutes of commercials would magically vanish because the real news was so serious? I'd lay you odds that it wouldn't. "*Paris has been completely destroyed, and you won't want to miss our continuing coverage coming up right after the break.*" Pursuit of profits through the onslaught of advertising is an unstoppable tsunami.

Online algorithms track our every action on the internet, and the Deep State collects a staggering amount of personal information on all of us. (If you think that paying upwards of \$50 a year for a VPN protects you from prying eyes, I'd suggest that you're naively trusting.) Still, the vast majority of algorithms are dedicated to something other than government surveillance. Most algorithms that record our every step online are coded for and effectively used in the target marketing of Americans (i.e., "consumers") for companies, most of whose reason for being and overriding goal is to sell us something.

And while the cute cat video you watched for two minutes that resulted in your personal YouTube feed being filled with cat videos the next day may seem innocuous enough, all that "instantly giving us more of whatever we chose" is ultimately funneled into commercialism and its unceasing drive for profits.

This the country (and the world) we live in. Algorithm Nation. And here's the really sad news: Americans — not everyone, but a large majority — are just fine with it. Many of us seem to think it's peachy keen. We love Amazon and Facebook and YouTube. We're thrilled with Next-Day-Delivery of well, nearly everything.

We are told repeatedly that we can and should have everything we want, and that we never have to give up anything. Always more, never less. And we seem to believe it. But we've become the dragon eating its own tail. We're consuming ourselves to death. Oh sure, tens of millions of Americans respond to polls on the environment by saying that they care and that something should be done, but most of us aren't willing or don't want to make any fundamental changes in the way we live. "*The American Way of Life is non-negotiable. **Period.***"

I'm not the first person to see this as madness, and I'm sure as hell not the only one who reacts with concern. Selected individuals — writers, artists, poets, scientists, intellectuals, and even some business people — as well as numerous organizations have been screaming from the rooftops about this throughout my entire 71 years, and I've witnessed how completely they are ignored. Our system (the unconscious collective agreement) is unmoved by such expressions of alarm, chugging merrily right along. And no, I don't expect my little blog posts to have any impact in pointing out that the Emperor has no clothes.

Please understand, I'm part of the problem, too. All I'm trying to do in writing this particular diatribe is explain why I place responsibility on everyone for the mess we're in. It's not just the elites or the wealthy or politicians or corporations that are to blame (although they're guilty as hell, of course). It's EVERYONE. Damn near all of us are complicit in Death Culture.

The search for meaning, fulfillment, purpose, joy, happiness, pleasure, and all the other "positive" experiences within life (i.e., the stuff we like) takes every imaginable form and direction. Some of these are better than others — more authentic and enduring, less illusory and toxic — but we pursue them all, whether healthy or not. When illusion becomes so pervasive that it obscures or denies reality, however, we face diminishing returns — hollow meaning, fake fulfillment, false purpose, phony joy, pleasure that harms us, etc. When that condition sets in, if we are unable or unwilling to give up our illusions, the stubborn resurgence of reality eventually and inevitably results in personal suffering and social collapse.

Societies that collapse are not new. That's been happening — over and over and over — as far back in civilization as we care to look. Cultures, societies, and nations arise, flourish, get crazier over time, eventually succumb to illusion, and finally collapse. For a long time, the slow slide into madness is ignored, denied, or papered over. Near the end the madness spikes, seemingly all at once. Now that spike is happening to us. The main difference this time is that as America collapses, we're taking down the whole world with us.

I realize that this post will quite probably seem to some readers as a very dark and pessimistic vision. Maybe it is, but it's what I see happening. My intention is not to convince you, dear reader, but rather to share my experience. If you don't believe me, that's fine. I'm just not willing to water down or sugar-coat what I see within and around me. I'm way past comforting platitudes. False inspiration won't help us get our heads screwed on straighter. As they say in AA, addicts have to hit bottom before they can begin recovery.

So, while those statements I noted at the beginning by the two Bush Presidents — father and son — seemed to me utterly wrong-headed, they were I think an accurate reflection of where America was three decades ago and two decades ago (respectively). And while it's not particularly surprising, I fear that we're much further down that sorry-ass road to ruin now than we were then.

The saddest part of my perspective is that this is probably the best we can do. Despite good intentions, electoral politics isn't likely to change it. Better, more competent government would be nice, but it won't significantly alter the zeitgeist of our collective beliefs by weaning us away from our illusions. As much as I approve of community activism, its successes are inherently limited. On the metaphysical side, those who speak of an impending great awakening strike me as deluded optimists who take refuge in ever deeper illusions. At this point, I worry that even mounting disasters might not be enough to change us.

But maybe I'm wrong.