

Closing the Energy Loop

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Voluntary simplicity as an act of resistance

Friday, September 11, 2015 -- Griet Bouwen

Curator's Note: *Our dear friend and colleague, Griet Bouwen, is starting a new brave journey into voluntary simplicity with her family this fall. We are thrilled to come alongside her in some small way, by reposting a blog each month about the discoveries she is making. Griet is a resident of a small hamlet in Belgium as well as author, consultant and fellow generative media maker. Watch for a new entry on the third Thursday of each month.*

As human beings, gifted with a deep sense of morality and the ability to think, it is time to say “no.” No, we don’t want this large-scale, only-profit-driven way of organizing our world anymore. No, we don’t want to sicken Mother Nature any further. No, we don’t want to build the future of our children on the fundamentals of thin-air banking logics. No, we don’t want to be fed by industrial food that leaves the farmers as the poorest actors in the chain, nor clothed by the fast-fashion industry that thrives on the exploitation of textile workers.

If we cannot align the way economics work today with our sense of morality, we must wake up the activist in ourselves. We can start with this active resistance right in our most valuable place: the personal life we share with our loved ones — our family, friends, our local community. The resistance can be saying “yes” to a meaningful and moral life, strongly connected to the soil and the community.

This resistance can be called “voluntary simplicity.” A deliberate choice to start moving away from doing what our economic and political leaders want us to do: work hard, consume more, don’t think for ourselves. We can become the leaders of our own lives again. We can make the choice to bring life back to its absolute

essence: becoming fully human amongst human beings, nourishing our relationship with each other, caring for one another, caring for the Earth that is our only home.

Choosing a Simpler Way of Life

Voluntary simplicity is, as Samuel Alexander, co-director of the Simplicity Institute in Australia describes it, a call to move from over-consuming to a far more materially 'simple' and less energy-intensive way of living. "It means focusing on what is *sufficient* to live well, and creating new cultures of consumption, new systems of production, and new governance structures that promote a 'simpler way' of life. Our basic needs can be met in highly localized and low-impact ways, while maintaining a high quality of life."

This resonates with the activist in me. A big "yes" bubbles up. Yes, I can make a start here and now in my life, my family, my community. I do have the ability to stand up against what I feel is a dead-end economy of consuming our natural resources like they are never ending, exploiting people as if their lives have the single purpose of producing an endless stream of goods. I can stand up by choosing to live differently. Saying "yes" to a meaningful life, that is not built on "to have" but on "to be, to live, to care, to flourish."

Making Changes in Our Personal Lives

David Holmgren, one of the thought leaders of the permaculture philosophy says: "The experience in my own life has been that the most powerful things I've done are in the way I live personally, the way I operate in a family, at a household economy level. For example, the non-monetary economy of growing food at home, cooking, caring for children, maintaining space. Moving away from a mediated nocturnal existence to a direct experiential daytime existence — maintaining health and fitness by physical work to provide ones needs. Often times we can start with a simple household audit. Where is energy going to and coming from and how can we close the loop and stop the leakages of energy?"

But how to make this major shift? How to escape the treadmill we are trapped in? I've found — for myself — that investing in awareness is the first step. Discovering how trapped we are in the logistics of a global scale growth-driven economic system. How deeply this growth-focussed production of goods is making people and nature ill: both nature and people — even children — are being seen as assets to production rather than the means of what we produce. Even as consumers of food, clothes,

electronic devices etc., we became assets in the endless hunger for more profit for fewer people. Although the message sounds different, large-scale economy is not about our wellbeing. It's about our ability to work and spend, work and spend. Our system of working very long and very hard to earn money so we can spend that again in the very same system we've earned it: that's the trap. And it is up to us to step out of it. To resist. To become an activist, starting where we have the most impact: in our own life.

Taking Back the Time, Our Time

Raising awareness requires time to discover what is happening behind the scenes. It takes time to think. To reflect honestly on our patterns of work, consumerism and relatedness to others and nature. To dream about the changes we want to make in our lives. To experiment and learn.

So, an important step we — my family and I — are taking towards a life of voluntary simplicity is making a start with creating open time. It means saying to some of my potential clients (I'm a self-employed consultant and writer), "Thanks for your kind question and your confidence in my contribution, but no thanks to more work. I'm quite happy to pass it on to one of my colleagues." It means developing the ability to recognize what is truly "enough." Enough work, enough financial security, enough food, enough stuff.

This is not something we can achieve in a fortnight. This is our starting point. Here, we will start to close the energy loop again. Dedicating our energy, resources and the gifts of our soil and relationships to make the shift towards a life and a community that closes the energy loop around the most precious gift that is ours to receive, cherish and to pass through: life.

- More to Come

Inspiration & Links:

Ready for some disruptive awareness about our industrial production? See ['Food Inc'](#) (about food-production) by Robert Kenner and ['The True Cost'](#) (about fast fashion) by Michael Ross & Andrew Morgan.

Learning about the essence of Voluntary Simplicity. This is a good starting point: [The Simplicity Institute](#)

What we can learn from the principles of permaculture: The [full article](#) on David Holmgren and his thoughts about permaculture.