

P.E.I. (Personal Efficiency Index): a note to the Good Livers by Giulia Loli

Dictating lifestyle, even though on my dark days is a tendency I have to beat back like a brushfire, is not on my agenda. The Personal Efficiency Index can only serve as a gauge and "Intervention Guide" (to borrow from the World Health Organization), for how can one teach conscience? These two words side by side already negate each other. There is nothing to teach, only to use what already exists, somewhere interred, amid debris.

Empirical knowledge gained from cross-training, along with Instinct/Intuition/Conscience/Common Sense and other brilliantly intangible homing devices are inbuilt in all of us.

Like most scientific (and pseudo-scientific) theories, it began with observation.

I did my research in California (32° 42' 54" N, 117° 09' 45"W) observing the lifestyle in a typical, middle-class condo complex. I marked an 8-hour trajectory of slim, fit women (usually mothers who assume their low B.M.I. is equal to high P.E.I.) in spandex workout gear, climb up into enormous SUVs (often alone), drive only a few miles to a gym, then drive on to an organic supermarket before driving home.

Everything here is inverted. They take 3 steps 'forward' to take 5 steps back. Their actual P.E.I.s are similar to exporting Italian almonds to California & importing Californian almonds to Italy.

To suggest mini-urban private farming is absurd to many despite that it provides an excellent amount of tanning and sweating, both highly sought out by this demographic.

If they don't have the smallest piece of dirt to grow some of their own organic vegetables, then why not at least walk to the grocery store--balancing shopping bags as weights while walking--?

If neither of these options are possible, then there must be a gym that only runs on human energy. To build the resistance that the machines give you which in turn builds your muscles and 'works you out', you have to step or run on it. The energy you work up is then stored and distributed throughout the gym to run its lights, refrigerators, heating, etc. [if anyone knows of an engineer I can work on with this, please put us in contact.]

Californians, some of the most progressive people on Earth, suffer some of the lowest Personal Efficiency Indexes ever.

Back in the tiny, medieval village in Italy where I've pieced together the data, this social diverticulosis has coiled itself into these rolling hills as (un)well. My neighbor (among the majority) goes shopping (20 yards away) exclusively in her silver Sports Utility Vehicle, all the while complaining ad nauseum of mysterious physical ailments & stubborn abdominal fat. In addition, she is one of many who have developed new undiagnosable ailments springing from that leaky pest of the doctor's fountain pen. More on that later.

And while I know many who do not live like these examples, the amount of people who do warrants this essay.

From "Inconvenient Truth" to Existential Dilemma: No Political Solution without Spiritual Resolution

America and friends just don't get it. We have to cut it waaaaay back.

Neither by Al Gore's limp outline stating that "smart consumer choices" are one of the top two things you can do to help the planet, nor by "unplugging your cell phones when they're done charging" as a Hollywood starlet recently suggested. Yeah, that'll do it, Cameron.

They want it ALL. What they propose, Ms Diaz et al., is instead of, like, 80,000 different lipsticks made from whale blubber and petrochemicals and totally gross stuff like that, let's have 90,000 different lipsticks made from cellulosic biomass! Because we're bloody worth it.(?!)

Imagine the fields bogged down with an unquenchable demand for sunflowers, soybeans and sorghum, thirstily drinking someone's water, just to squeeze out it's oils to make lipsticks, Santa Claus dolls, StairMasters, Spanx, pet toothbrushes...Then picture the fields, barren and insufficiently productive to meet demands, built over with laboratories to reduce the time and resources needed to squeeze even more stuff out of life forms that other life forms {we} don't need (another perfect example of paradoxically low efficiency).

When I first read about Bill Gates' 80% reduction plan for CO2 and the world population I naively thought he was projecting the amount of reduction it will take rich nations to properly recalibrate the world-machine.

In the so-called 'first' world, this would be seen as a tragedy, failure, an antithesis to a good life and progress. There is an innate balance in everything, including these much-touted terms "sustainability" and "efficiency", the value of which rely exclusively on that fine line: too much on one side, you have disease and weakness through excess and atrophy; too much on the other, you have disease and weakness through malnutrition and lack of hygiene.

Look around you- whatever side of the balance you're on, it's impossible not to see that the compass has been swallowed whole by the maw of greed.

The more popular green movement (or Hollywoodian green movement, as I like to call it), should be renamed the "neutral" movement (could these people handle the subsequent insect population explosion in their dreamy, green world?), because what people really want is to continue progressing and expanding personal comfort levels without damaging too much where they can't sleep at night, i.e., "sustainable development". In some ways, this is a pipe dream (pun intended on the oil reference). I believe some high-standard 'livers' really do have a crushing angst with regard to the cruel imbalance of the world; so how can Angelina Jolie, for one, not feel like an obese child eating an ice cream cone in the middle of Dadaab?

Dostoyevsky, addressing the humanitarians of his day, was highlighting the real problem facing the world- which I believe is neither a political, economic nor environmental crisis, but an ancient human one-:

"...one drop of your own fat is bound to be more precious to you than the lives of 100,000 fellow humans."

Morality Graphs, Conscience Indicators and other Unsavory Pies

Vinod Khosla, a high-risk "eco"-venture capitalist, maintains the belief that climate change, like "nuclear proliferation, terrorism or national defence" is NOT a moral issue.

"Environmentalists are fiddling while Rome burns. They get in the way with silly stuff like asking people to walk more, drive less. That is an increment of 1-2% change. We need 1,000% change if billions of people in China and India are to enjoy a Western, energy-rich lifestyle." (the Economist, Volume 398 Number 8724).

With enough data from the past 60 + years, we begin to see clearly and without bias, the long-term noxious consequences of this "Western, energy-rich lifestyle", along with its benefits and achievements. And while we're working on better divvying up this prosperity pie that comes from access to resources & technology, we should make sure not to spread the putrefactive diseases (see recent comparative studies on bad gut bacteria in children in Florence, Italy vs. good gut bacteria in children in Burkina Faso) of these "spoils of war" most commonly seen now in the creeping America & co./'good-living' epidemic of obesity and depression leading straight into that other vomitous abyss of kick-back doctors scribbling fancy, toxic love letters from their hemorrhaging fountain pens--recipes for turning childrens' and adults' livers into human foie gras.

No accountability, responsibility, discipline, prioritizing or any other such boring, last-milennia fetters of Mosaic law are expected of us--Free at last! Now it's just a matter of waiting for the smart people to think up of new "clean-tech" solutions, funded by the elite's off-shore pirate (oops, I meant, "private") booty, and the rest just keep that ol' feed bag strapped on. This incredibly wide-spread line of thinking asks only that we desire and consume, demand and pay.

To put it simply: we've gone too far in the wrong direction. Time to reduce consumption and manufacturing, redirect, prioritize.

The importance of each individual affecting this change is why it's called Personal Efficiency Index and not National, Global or Corporate Efficiency Index.

"We all want progress, but if you're going on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; in that case, the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive." - C.S. Lewis

Even those of us Below the Radar are On the Grid/ From the Other Side of the 'Developed' World/ Compli-City

I'm writing this from a rural outpost in the cold, volcanic mountains of the Mediterranean, not an apartment in New York City where I last lived overlooking a fire escape full of pitiful little potted plants, surrounded by gunshots and sirens. Do I want to become a farmer? Not if I can help it. Living the ancient symbiosis between man/nature for the past 7 years has made me realize that if I were to truly live off the land, I would not have time to be a committed musician/artist, let alone spend enough time contemplating this topic to wrangle it into an essay. This nature stuff is not easy; but, I believe there is an alternative to 'Positive' Regression (an idealistic, full-blown return to archaic means of survival in nature). What we're engaged in now is what I call Negative 'Progression'.

The deeper you go into analyzing the problem, your own complicity, the sticky web which we all live on, and the seemingly inextricable mess we've gotten ourselves into, it's easy to see why there is Breatharianism, Self-Immolation and the most heavily-promoted and popular forms of Evasion: nihilism and decadence in the form of music, art, film, popular culture, media and all else falling under 'entertainment', all-you-can-eat-kill-screw buffets, Free Market Party Capital, and other American Dreamisms-- all which handily double-up as glitzy proselytizing to convert the 'have-nots' into believing that what they want is what the 'haves' have.

(This new religion is explained in my upcoming essay, "Theoconomy: Sermons from the Pulpit of Death".)

When I started this strange, new country life (kicking and screaming along the way), I couldn't have imagined that we'd collectively reduce our family lifestyle by at least 50%. Having hot water half the week in the 9 cold months of winter, heating a little pot of water on a wood-burning stove for washing dishes, never having a comfortable room temperature = no central heating, using every scrap of food, not buying any new clothes or shoes, not owning a car, using and reusing down to raw-bone and threadbare, rationing electricity, heat, water (and just recently, no running water for a week), every resource being squeezed and ultimately appreciated-- seemed uncivilized and unthinkable coming from even our dingy inner-city, low-income perspective. Had I known we'd be living like my grandparents, I might not have enlisted.

This is what I am still learning from that blind initiative:

1. I completely lost the illusion that metropolis like New York, London and Tokyo are the ultimate hubs of activity, power points on maps, the epicenters of life. The irony and truth is that their very breath depends on an enormous, rhizomatic, artificial life-support system that trucks, ships, flies in provisions from all kinds of unfashionable places to sustain its millions. A city cannot produce enough food for even a fraction of its population. If people do not eat, they die.
2. Sacrifice and poverty are relative. I've gotten a whiff of this double-edged strength called human adaptability, e.g., our rinky-dink 50% reduction could be further reduced another 30% at least, based on the statistical and empirical reality of the living standards of our extended family in the Motherland.

Finally, after many painful subdivisions, we arrive at Bill Gates' famous 80% reduction (I wonder how his is going), applied as it should to more than CO2 emissions and population control.

Being acutely aware of the where/how/why of our food, water, clothes and utilities is the beginning, but not enough. Weaning ourselves off the big, artificially-enhanced tit is the first step in the right direction.

The scope is not necessarily to secede from society to form a militant, autonomous utopia, but to simply become more flexible and agile so as to not be gripped at the jugular, hijacked by the industries that spoon-feed us our lives.

The point *if we ultimately will have a choice* is not to fanatically tend to the flourishing of the flora, fauna and oceans of Earth by slingshotting ourselves back to a stone age.

Diagnosis & Treatment of the Symptom-based Disorders in "The Age of Austerity"/ Incentives, Benefits and Mutual Growth

There is now even more stupidly obvious evidence from both the world of hard science and monolithic economics directly linking the "path of least resistance" enablers, i.e., "modern conveniences" to the decline in mental and physical health (and the difficult-to-quantify-but-plain-as-day spiritual vacuum). From National Geographic's cover story on longevity to any current medical journal, what makes up our psychology, state of mind, BELIEF in what we are working for and our sense of purpose in life (all, interestingly, Unseen phenomena) are as or more important than diet, exercise, genetics and environment.

This points to an invisible and psychic crisis, as much of the world's workforce operates outside of this crucial mind-frame.

In P.E.I. terms, there is ample proof that our bold, new world is inefficient inasmuch as "the rate of work done to energy supplied" (as "efficiency" is classically defined).

In literal laymen terms: We are built for sacrifice and sweat, ideally invested in what inspires us.

Despite statistics and Kellogg and doctors and technology, we are still living in the shadows of fallen empires which amazingly for centuries have reserved the most unhealthy, unnatural and downright perverted ways of life for the rich. Long before and after the age of Reason and Industrialization, sweating and eating whole grains from the land was cast down to the poor masses while the most noble diets were rich in animal fats, white sugar and refined flour with no strenuous movements (save for an anaerobic minuet or equestrian jaunt).

Barring extreme poverty, the lowlier ways are healthier than the wealthier, but are we still brainwashed by the latter?

(And let's leave the argument that refined sugars, fats and flours simply taste better to babies).

My ear pricked up when Obama, in his inaugural speech, spoke of the "sacrifice of our forefathers" as the road to realignment. Unfortunately, like so many, he abandoned the original meaning quickly and wholly. The great think tanks of the world, running against time to come up with THE Economic, Environmental and Energy Solution are circumventing the inevitable: Reduce!

Their reluctance to utter that cutting word is understandable; after all, nothing will make you less popular in the short run than telling a party of fat, spoiled children there'll be no more Coke®™ and Twinkies®™.

"Frugal Innovation", the hot new business phrase slung around by behemoth corporations such as Siemens (and other Economist economists), is quickening the pulse of suits and ties worldwide. Further proof that there is something powerful in reduction...maybe even magical...or maybe, rather un-magically, they are accepting what they know to be unavoidable. From a comfortable distance, they keep their lecherous buzzard eyes on what brilliant creations the leaner and meaner are conjuring up from their unassuming basket of tools.

They are no different than my peers in the music industry who want the revolutions that created ground-breaking art, music and culture without the oft shitty-but-fertile soil out of which they blossomed.

The Power of Reduction and the Spiritual Payoff

"In order to deliver a record called 'The Cure', I felt I'd have to be living on a mountaintop, a one hundred percent vegetarian, deep in some monk state of transcendence...I wanted to be a living example of the words I wrote." -The RZA, "Tao of Wu"

At this point, one might ask what can be personally gained from all these dank afore-painted pictures of renunciation and struggle?

First, nature (cosmos included) gives us, literally and figuratively, the raw materials which become everything man-made: from integrated circuits, laser diodes and sulphur drugs to bridges, amplifiers and gourmet dishes. Amazingly, with no monetary currency demanded. Ever.

Perhaps its only requirement in exchange for its treasures is that we abide by its Law which states that Nothing Shall Be Wasted.

Secondly, faced with necessity, the little switch we've been engineered with flicks on>>> In any chosen field, creativity and resourcefulness are two of the most powerful assets for human progress that never fail to light our way.

We then realize that not only can we survive with less, but we can actually flourish. This high-pressure mode is what's called "diamond-making time".

The words that stand out from RZA's quote are "mountaintop", which represents a pure nature, and "monk state" which is emblematic of a reduced material and heightened spiritual lifestyle. He knew he'd be cutting out the middleman and going directly to the Source. The Source never dries up.

The Source is the Solution >>> The Solution is Elemental.

The Elemental and human invent art, music, technology, science and solutions that are penetrating, intense, illuminating, inspiring, sharp and in-depth.

Being able to live close to the ground slices through the thickest of academic farts...there is simply nothing more to say when you are living it. And this is the missing link in all of the discourse, panels and conferences on what to do about climate change, global financial crises and other man-made obstructions to justice.

The real cog in the wheel of progress is not the petro-politics of Big Oil, but our own reluctance to commit. Words, overused, die cliches unless pumped to life. Then one finds the buried meaning magnetizing through the body like liquid electrolytes.

Note: RZA, whose past pioneering and legendary musical productions have influenced and inspired me to the core, never dwelled upon said mountaintop, never made said record and is now playing an L.C.D. black man, i.e., a pimp-looking sex addict, on the cable series "Californication".

The Misplaced Energy of the Well-Fed Masses: Black Nobility, Diaper Genies and the Myth of Sisyphus

So much of our lives, as counter and revolutionary as we imagine ourselves to be, is dependent on the current sick infrastructure. For all of our protesting under banners of no more oil and corporate greed, we are living on the back and sucking the juices of the very thing we condemn.

What is clear in recent revolutionary activity is the importance of building a new infrastructure out of whatever rubble of the old forms we leave behind. If we do reduce and shut down the factories manufacturing endless lists of useless products, e.g., the Diaper Genie™, Happy Meals, Swiffers, etc., what will those factory workers do? What will that space be used for instead? How can we be most efficient with the time and space vacuum left by this great re-ordering? And what about the down-side that communism and extremism has shown us: Who will be the judge of what is luxury and what is necessity? The people? A madwoman with a vision? (Warning: never vote for me).

Of course, we can't leave this to the Bilderberg group who is busy investing in the preservation of the feudal-industrial estate and other remnants of outdated empires.

This ghost-of-sorts has always been there, haunting poets and billionaires alike.

This is not a nostalgic invitation to a seance with troglodytes, to dance Duncan-style swathed in Greco-Roman chiffon prancing about primordial fronds.

We can only live fully now in what we've got, in the oozing sludge of petrol spills, blundering human guts and all.

Images of the End of Days flickered and flashed by mass media, conspiracy theorists and right-wing zealots alike are not so much psychic visions as much as the inner soul rebelling against what it senses to be profoundly wrong.

"How can it go on like this!" it screams in horror/fatigue, omitting the question mark in the hopes of jabbing us into action.

Perhaps, as some venture capitalists venture, reducing our lifestyles will not save the planet, but it could save the soul without the integrity of which any new revolutionary technology is doomed.

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