

The environment to the test of the society generalized doping

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The modern human society cannot avoid the statement that the natural environment is going bad, and that it is responsible for this situation. Our fossil energy resources will run dry in a few decades; the natural resources essential to survival - air, water, vegetation - and with them the life diversity, are being degraded like never before.

However, privileged people continue their unbridled consumption, followed now by the rest of the world population.

However, a competitive spirit dominates international relationships, which involves the unrestrained and non-coordinated working of natural resources.

However, the economic doping is encouraged, believing that scientific solutions will be brought to the related environmental problems.

How is it possible to explain this inappropriate development of the society with regard to the planet safety? An answer may be found thanks to another irrational behaviour: the one of the smoker who discovers the side effects of cigarette smoking, without stopping it. The privileged world citizen is seeking after immediate gratification, which implies neglecting the consequences of his acts on the long run. He has become dependent on products promoted by the ruling political, industrial and financial system, such as standardized seeds and their associated chemistry for the farmer, as well as the bank credit, permanent electricity, car and cell phone for everyone. To renounce this system first implies being aware of our addictions and their negative effects, and then find substitutes for the nearly-drugs of abuse currently favoured by the wide-spread competition in economy, agriculture, transport, energy production and telecommunication. This search for alternative cooperative models is illustrated by an experiment of itinerant collective life: the "AlterTour for a non-doped planet".*

* Definition of generalized doping: *Any process which temporarily increases abilities, but generates long term degradations and addictions.*

1. The unbearable fly of time

The spatial dimensions of our physical world can easily be worked on... not always for the best, as shown in the perceptible ill-treatments inflicted on natural spaces. On the contrary, time remains a frustrating dimension because it flows continuously, independently of our will. This frustration may explain why human beings consider swiftness as a prime quality. Student's evaluation is mostly based on their ability to learn fast and then perform a related task in a limited amount of time. Still for the modern man, overtaking the time flow by increasing his speed has first been a challenge before becoming compulsory in several ways: to move from one location to another, to possibly buy a house, to communicate with each other, and – for farmers – to raise crops and to breed cattle. This hastening trend, now favoured and organized by the society, relies on two factors: the availability of environmental energy, and the society ability to concentrate money over time for doping an individual's purchasing power. These speed dependencies face a third limiting factor, namely the insidious and delayed degradation of the environment, as now illustrated by global warming. As a matter of fact, visible, direct and short-term degradations of the natural world such as deforestation can obviously be reproved by the public opinion and fought by ecological movements. More worrying are the hidden, indirect and long-term effects on the environment of our well-established dependencies.

Given that fossil resources are estimated to run dry by a few decades, since the economic and financial globalization faces a major confidence crisis, time has come for us to search for new ways of living that would warrant a living future for the planet. Once abandoned the "Time is money" statement, psychological features may contribute to find the most satisfying life course.

Apparently, days last longer in children than in their parents. This is the density of new perceptions which notably gives the feeling of a fulfilled life; not only visual and auditory stimuli, but also the

inner perceptions provided by the movement of our muscles (*proprioception*). Although saving time within a day-long period – at the expense of the time previously spent at work for accessing some purchasing power –, high-speed motorized transports do not provide a passport to welfare. Mostly stuck in a chair, the body does not feel much proprioception nor acoustic variations of its – often noisy – environment. The pieces of landscape passively viewed from a plane, high-speed train or car narrow window cannot compare the visual experience actively known by either walker or cyclist.

Unfortunately, time spent in transport has increased in modern society. On the long term, despite some episodes of speed it allows, running a car is globally more time-consuming than a bicycle (Ivan Illich, 1974). Paradoxically, implementing swiftness in society may thus lead to a waste of time. Not only of time, unfortunately.

2. Blindness of competition in time

To make progress in life is often obtained by imitating someone who feels well within a certain field of interest. This emulation supposedly happens at school, when pupils get interested in an enthusiastic teacher. Later on, one may meet somebody who looks definitely satisfied by her/his occupation, and feels like resembling that character one day, provided some effort then more easily taken up. Emulation could thus play the part of the natural motor-fuel aimed at our “motivation engine”, also guided by the society on-going job requirements. Non-exclusive, this driving force would not require competition between students, provided that all employments are equally well regarded. Do we need more nurses, doctors, assistants? Let us organize hospital visits aimed at students and unemployed people, who then would meet an attractive medical staff.

Besides being subordinated to the existence of exemplary persons who would be satisfied with their work, this emulation-based motivation is not enough for filling in the hierarchical levels of the current society, in which competition between people, companies and countries results in a few winners who each head a piece of the world puzzle. The existence of many losers seems to matter little, except that this competition now implicates every world citizen in the same dramatic environmental situation.

In agreement with the assumed prime importance of swiftness among human qualities, speed plays a main part in competition. But the runner does not care about his/her environment. The development of race-tracks has to meet speed requirements, no matter if arable land and natural areas get covered with macadam for this purpose. Similarly, the industrial farmer who runs after more profit while keeping in tune with the scientific progress does not care much neither if hedges which shelter a high-range biodiversity are destroyed, nor if noxious chemical substances are spread over larger and larger fields. With competition in the background of his mind, the president who is mainly concerned by the economical position of his country may support guerrilla warfare in foreign countries if this feeds his country war-industry and allows basic resources to remain available for little money: uranium to feed nuclear power plants, coltane to feed the mobile-phone industry.

Doping is the logical companion of this blind generalized competition, noticeable in every process which temporarily increases a given ability while generating long term addiction and degradations.

3. Not only doped organisms undergo doping

In a world composed of interrelated organisms, to unbalance one of them through doping results in side effects over several other ones. Among a large set of troubles caused by the consumption of doping substances, 90% of deaths by lung cancer is caused by cigarette smoking, The risk of developing coronary heart disease or lung cancer, among others, is not limited to the only smokers, since cigarette smoke may spread in public locations, and touch people who then become “passive smokers”. Exposure to Environmental Tobacco Smoke significantly increases a non smoker's risk of developing lung cancer. Furthermore, whereas the tobacco industry lives by the production of cigarettes, this is the whole society which has to stand the related healthcare costs.

Extreme self-confidence and impairment in decision making are both associated with chronic abuse of neurostimulants such as cocaine. If someone addicted stands at the head of a company or a country, s/he may take wrong decisions that will be undergone by millions of people, not mentioning the natural environment. This also works for every type of doping: besides polluting the air and requiring large asphalted areas, high-speed transport threatens wild life. Furthermore, worldwide every year,

more than one million people are killed and 50 millions are injured in motor vehicle collisions. In another field of activity, wireless telephony is based on a network of relay-antenna which spreads microwaves over the country, a major threat to hypersensitive persons. As for sport in which masking procedures are often joined to doping, these antennas are sometimes masked inside false chimneys or steeples. Along the same line, the scientific results which indicate that the long-term use of microwaves may threaten living beings are not quite advertised. With respect to energy consumption, the boosted use of non-renewable energy sources participates either in the global warming of the planet (coal, oil) or in the production of nuclear waste to be stored in safe areas (uranium). Last but not least, our natural environment mainly undergoes agricultural doping.

For instance, when large quantities of green seaweeds are accumulated, their decomposition generates a deadly heavy gas which stays close to the ground. The proliferation of this species along the Brittany shore threatens small living beings, including children. This phenomenon (which has already been involved in the death of one man, a horse and a couple of dogs), can be linked with an excess of nitrates issued from the industrial breeding of pigs.

From a wider perspective, since the Second World War, a global model of agriculture has replaced the local grass-based cattle feeding. For feeding animals which hold a main part in the current alimentation of human beings, large fields of maize are raised, which require high levels of watering. Because it lacks proteins, maize is mixed with Soya imported from South-America, where its large cultivation has taken the place of either human-food crops or the rain-forest, impoverishing the local population, and participating in the global warming. This global industrial agriculture has been financially doped by European subsidiaries and bank credits, and chemically doped by fertilizers, weed-killers and insecticides sold by the seed industry. Furthermore, the classical sowing of farm seeds tends to be forbidden by law. This is how farmers became dependant to both banks and seed industry. In this frame, Genetically Modified Organisms, which are promoted by some scientific laboratories, represent an instance of plant which is doped by a foreign gene in order to generate royalties through patenting, and to be sold with its indispensable specific industrial products (i.e.: the same company sells both herbicide and the GM plant which survives it).

4. How to cure a doped society

After having been attracted by a pleasurable model of society, the human beings now experience related dependencies. When not stuck in a traffic jam, a car actually provides its driver with a basic feeling of power. In case this experience was not rewarding enough, driving a car is fostered by advertising, and has soon become unavoidable with the delocalization of human activities and the public transport deficit. Now that food providers are mostly concentrated in supermarkets, away from home, itself built at long distance from work locations, even a longer way from holiday stations, there is no choice but using speedy transport. Planes, high-speed trains and cars are thus brought into a bad play for the planet. The use of several modern tools has now shaped our society: freeways, power plants, relay-antenna masts, large industrialized fields... which increases the difficulty to escape from this generalized doping.

This is hard to become sober when you are encouraged to inebriety.

Whereas learning about our surrounding world should run its own sources of satisfaction, the implicit motivation of students is to get a good job – after many years of school competition -, in which “good” usually stands for “well paid”. In current society, money has become as strong as a non conditioned reflex, one that can drive action whatever the current context. In this favourable framework, economical doping is easy to settle, thanks to bank credits which concentrate money over time towards either one company or one person. Rather than economizing for months or years, one can soon behave like someone rich. Even already in adverse financial situation, the “subprime” borrower may be allowed to experience financial doping, involving high interest rate, namely long term dependencies to the bank system, possibly leading to bankrupt. Solutions have been proposed to avoid these drawbacks, all based on “more regulation”. As a matter of fact, most banks already limit funds lending to nearly-rich people.

A more radical solution would be **to cancel the differences in wages between people**, thus discontinuing the doping status of money. Only jobs implying either annoyance or risk would be associated with an extra income. In this view, a chairman, given the conveniences and comfort of the

chair, as well as the intellectual interest of his position, should earn a bit less than the man who collects everyday household refuse. Accordingly, having luckily carried on interesting studies thanks to the educational system would not be rewarded again by a big income. A balanced distribution of wages would then not justify a banking system at the service of “poor” individuals, since everyone would make enough money to buy good food from local producers, a bicycle for moving, and enough money to economize for accommodation - possibly run collectively -. At a global level, investment based on the revenue of equal taxes would be used for collective work aimed at public services, and without interest. Everyone could also be given a universal income (Paul Ariès, 2010).

Money represents a border-line case among other quasi-drugs of abuse established by the current society. A general strategy to get rid of generalized doping may follow the steps below:

- First, to realize the multiple addictions that one lives with;
- Second, to become aware that these addictions are indirectly responsible for the long-term degradation of the planet;
- Third, to shift towards a dope-free lifestyle, and discover the long-run satisfactions which are then brought in.
- Last but not least, act at a political level for the **re-localization of human activities** which save energy, including organic agriculture, as well as the full recovery of public services, including shared communication tools (phone-boxes), large-scale transport comprising bicycles carriers.

5. An instance of itinerant community

Putting ideas into practice, the AlterTour “for a non-doped planet” was founded as a “People’s Education” tour, initially across the French regions. Rather than competition, this is solidarity which is here implemented among various people of all ages, firstly through a bicycle relay-circuit with a bus for conveying the cyclists while they do not accomplish their part of relay. Participants are offered the opportunity to learn about alternative models presented by their hosts who are met along a festive trip of several weeks. Starting from this global framework, the participants in the first sessions have gradually designed a collective life which appeared not to involve hierarchy. Contrary to the common sense usually conveyed by the term “anarchy”, this journey has to be carefully planned, and relies on each participant responsibility. Intendancy tasks are shared, and the nomadic bicycle riders may be proposed to help their hosts in their activities (i.e.: farming). In the absence of leaders, people are given the opportunity to express their ideas or comments about the ongoing situation, in particular on the periodic occasion of so-called Circles of Speech. Every year, new “altercyclists” spontaneously join in the changing team who is in charge of organizing the next tour.

After three AlterTour seasons, a possible recipe for a lifestyle involving a low environmental impact can be drawn as below:

- On the one hand, experiencing withdrawal from doping habits:

Changing of environment helps getting disconnected from emotional stimuli usually found in previously met doping circumstances (i.e.: for townsmen who discover several countryside territories). Try not to have recourse to procedure put here in the same category as doping, such as: eating productions of industrial “doped” farming including over consumption of meat, dealing with money, watching TV, using a mobile phone, running a car.

- On the other hand, finding substitutes to nearly-drugs:

1/ Moderate physical activity, a consequence of which is to maintain good condition as well as a sufficient level of neurotransmitters release associated with a positive mood, indeed, euphoria.

2/ Moderate level of renewed stimuli through travelling at the speed of a bicycle, which warrants the frequent discovery of new territories and friendly people, as well as learning new skills in a festive frame.

3/ Believing to be part of a useful movement, in which sufficient resources and tasks are shared by everyone through all generations, where no one is subordinated to someone else, as an implementation of the ideal human right to Freedom-Equality-Fraternity.

6. Protecting both our environment and inner emotional circuits

These last centuries, our understanding of the world has evolved at different rates along several dimensions. At the present time, the physical and chemical rules governing our environment are still better known than the basic circuitry ruling our inner brain. As a matter of fact, High-Tech is derived from Electronics and Computer Science, themselves issued from branches of Mathematics and Physics. Beside this fast development of technical knowledge aimed at feeding the current economical demand, the physical basis of human behaviour has for long remained mysterious.

With recent strides in Medicine and Neurobiology, the way emotion works our behaviour starts being understood, taking the shape of the so-called *reward pathways*. What differentiates the most human beings from other animals is probably their ability to anticipate long-term rewarding, based on their knowledge stored in the neural tissue. Drugs of abuse tend to lessen this remarkable feature. The possible impact of the compulsive consumption of quasi-drugs on the selective growth of the deep-seated brain circuitry cannot therefore be neglected. Thanks to – or shouldn't it be: “because of” – mobile phones, carefully planning appointments is for instance not required anymore. Immediate communication or consumption favours an impulsive behaviour rather than reflection, through short-cut rewarding. Negative effects of immediacy occur at a global level, too. When the Environment appears to be degraded by our addictions, the ability to use emotion for driving our behaviour can be considered as misused. Better understanding the involved underlying mechanisms might help to deal with this question in the future.

Meanwhile, trying to get rid of our dependencies requires both inner and outer will. Luckily, most society-originated drugs can be considered as soft ones – beside money, maybe.

If, aiming at reducing your environmental impact, and despite all your industry-made habits, you are strong and free enough to replace your car by a bicycle, your mobile phone by a wired one, your drugs intake by a bicycle, your bank credit by lengthy money saving, your imported feeding by local organic food, your home heating by renewable energy apparatus, your psychoanalyst by a bicycle, your gambling, TV or Internet sessions by festive meetings with close friends and neighbours, then your consequent obvious happiness could emulate more and more groups of people, including deciders, for ultimately leading to a rearrangement of the world society.

Ivan Illich, “*Energy and Equity*”, 1974.

Paul Ariès, “*Décroissance & Gratuité*”, 2010.

Types of doping	Consequences for the Environment
<u>Economy</u> : investment in great works sites (highways, supermarkets, towers, airports...)	Gradual destruction of arable land, forests, humid zones.
<u>Agriculture</u> : chemical fertilizers, herbicides, insecticides, heavy motorized machines, industrial breeding, GMOs.	Spreading of agrotoxics into water, soil impoverishment and compression, threatening of biodiversity and bees, green seaweeds, bees at a loss...
<u>Transport</u> : speedy motorized engines	Land cutting up by roads / Global warming (CO2)
<u>Energy</u> : boosted use of non-renewable sources / Nuclear power plants	Global warming (coal) / Risks of nuclear pollution
<u>Telecommunication</u> : cell phones, antennas	Maybe bees at a loss, human health problems