

In Search of the Seamless

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In Search of the Seamless

Introduction

Ever since the now famous “Battle of Seattle”* I have been questioning the markers of privilege I had always lived with. It was not that I was indifferent before. Certainly I, like most of my friends, lived responsibly in the world as it applied to us in the microcosm of our daily lives. Big macrocosm viewpoints were not often considered or if they were, only in a fleeting somewhat defeatist context. “Power corrupts” or “Leave politics to the politicians” were easy missives along with the notion that social sciences such as economics and politics were best left to the professionals.

I was not a child of the 60’s. I was barely old enough to vote by the time the 70’s rolled around and had spent the better years of teen hood in the inarticulate pop culture fog of drugs, sex and drugs and sex (I was never big on rock n’ roll). So there was no real tradition of political activism for me to draw on; at least not in the orbit of my personal stomping grounds. Decades and evolutions later, my reasons for going to Seattle for the W.T.O. protests were more about curiosity than clear position. I wanted to know what everyone was talking about.

Once in the auditoriums of the Beneroyal Hall*, I experienced a clear and resounding moment when life as I had known it had changed. As I listened to one speaker after another I knew that we, the world’s citizens, had been duped. Just how and when and to what end was not yet clear. I heard of things I never before imagined nor could ever again forget. If nothing else, the experience has left me with the clear knowledge that people can and will change when confronted with the truth and that much of what has been done in the name of our American standard of living has defied what I believe is the true heart of most Americans.

What is happening across America today is the revelation that our future, and the future of most of our brothers and sisters around the world, is being stolen by the agenda of a chosen few. Further, that should the elite have their way, there will be little left of those things we hold most sacred: the health and well being of the family of all living things.

What started out as a generalized discomfort with the world around me has morphed into a full-blown dissection of human-designed systems with a particularly emphasis on economics. That dissection has come manifest in these writings but, in reality, I realize “In Search of the Seamless” represents a lifetime of inquiry into what it means to be human.

As a child of a Holocaust survivor I understand the story of humanity's legacy of cruelty. It certainly set me on a course of considering the state of the human soul. In the oddest of patch quilt gestures, I sought to dissolve the mystery. Certainly my own life was nothing if not messy. In between the clear and pointed searches were the obstructed ones - the missteps, the dark days, the confusions articulated or not. Included in that search are the stories of all those who never made it to the other side, the lost, the addled, the addicted and the dead; some of them my friends. It is with that lens (and with those memories) that I understand how a spirit can get lost in the wasteland of humanity's broken promises. I understand that the sins of our history are visited on the children or, more accurately, that the impact of the collective consciousness should not be discounted.

We, as a people, bear the emotional witness of every act of kindness or cruelty performed anywhere regardless of our participation or awareness. That is something I know in the way a soul knows things. Those teachings are the domain of the heart and are felt in the heart. We, as citizens of the world, not only inherit a political and social legacy but the legacy of the soul's collective victories and misdeeds. Made conscious or not, these inheritances inform us as a people and a generation. They shape the spirit of the world our children will inherit. Facing up to that legacy will offer our children the best chance of a chance that I know of.

I have long sought to find grace within the brokenness of the human experience. Insofar as I can, it is best encapsulated in the Buddha's mantra to "live joyfully in a world of sorrows". While that will always be a sure and humble response to the inevitable failings of the human experience, the Seamless has offered me a new way of considering my path in this world.

Today I see both the problem and solutions stemming from the systems that surround us. Whereas Seattle offered the initiative to consider the workings of our economic system it was really my relationship with the larger organic world that supplied the larger framework for this analysis. It was in my garden, working with the soil, growing food and considering the health and requirement of the ecosystem that gave me a personal, even primal, understanding of systems as they exist in their organic state. There, in my backyard garden, I found the impetus to consider the effectiveness and interrelationship of systems both inside and outside the natural world. What I stumbled upon was the notion that the definition and rules for healthy and effective systems were the same regardless of the origin, agenda or design. From nest building to nuclear fusion, from compost to our global economy, the roadmap and requirements for a system to be considered healthy are of one voice. Most dramatically, what became clear was the notion that to the extent any of them are at risk all are at risk. While that risk may not bear out in a time and measure we always can see, it will bear out. Faulty design, no matter how obscured, is still faulty. Not connecting ourselves and our human agenda to the infinite interdisciplinary nature of the world's systems makes us both grander and smaller than we should be.

It turns us into cartoon characters; one dimensional images in the story of our own design. It also puts the planet at risk which is much too big a price to pay for the hubris or our conceit. To that end In Search of the Seamless is an evolutionary tale, a tracking of our time on this planet through a Darwinian eye. It is a roadmap both backwards and forwards or maybe just a way for me to make sense of things. It is the hunger for a life in sync with the natural world or perhaps, only, a new framing of an old way of living. Whatever it is or will be to you, it is my great hope that it will be helpful. Writing is has been so for me.

* Battle of Seattle - The World Trade Organization Conference of 1999 convened for three days starting November 30th, 1999 and comprised a series of trade negotiations that were to be called "The Seattle Round". They were, however, interrupted and later cancelled due to the street protests comprised of over 40,000 citizen, industry, radical and religious groups collectively concerned over issues and policies of economic globalization. It is both these protests, and the surrounding sentiment of opposition to globalization, that is generally referred to when speaking of the Battle of Seattle

*Beneroyal Hall - The symphony hall that hosted many of the invited lecturers for the event.

I - The Hot Rock

I admit I'm obsessed. I can't stop thinking about the dysfunction of our economy. I can't help feeling the maligned and broken consequences this no boundary, "free" trade, Chicago school* economic policy has wrought. I can't stop working through its history, the evolution, the causes, effects and reasons that have gotten us here. I suppose that is good given the condition of the world. Every day you read of the fallout -- destruction of our environment, contamination of the food supply, privatization and market control of everything from media to seeds, from national intelligence to water. We read of children kidnapped into slave labor, of government corruption, of greed and violations of the public trust, of citizen protests resulting in unlawful detainment and death; of outsourcing, job losses and home foreclosures. We see our own youth lost and confused, aimless in their pursuit of false fame and wealth. We see their idols, puppets of the media moguls, fall to crime and addiction. We read of the illnesses, the compulsions and the conspicuous consumption as the next generation feeds from the troth of too much of nothing. The disfunction of our society can be seen everywhere. We as a society are bombarded with the bad news of a global economy run afoul. So while I do not wonder why I am weighted by our current conditions, I consider the impetus to decipher them more than a lay person's curiosity. I consider it a primal calling.

At the deepest level, my concerns over the conditions of our global economy feel linked to that single-cell instinct towards adaptation. They feel connected to an ancient code instructing me to access the full functionality of my environment and make corrections where necessary. This is a primal pursuit; something borne of instinct. Our primal and instinctual selves are powerful. Had they not been, we would have climbed out of the primordial deep onto a hot rock and perished. We would have stayed there, in the heat and hungry, and never grown legs. We would have accepted the status quo and died. But the instinct to survive is strong. That is why the hot rock was not our final resting place and why our species flourished.

While today's hot rock is very different from the world of our single-celled ancestry, it is still a metaphor for the environment we preside in. What we call culture, or more likely, "The way things are" is simply the hot rock of our time. Today's environment is the result of a complex interplay of systems (academic, biological and social) that have landed us where we are for good or bad. I might not have felt so obsessed with the apparent mess of it all if the scales were not so tipped. But bad seems to be getting much worse and the hot rock is getting hotter. My instinct was to find out why.

For a moment I will ask you to think through the hot-rock perspective of reptilian mind. It is the perspective of life in the relatively uncomplicated environment of the primal world. It is an environment of a single biological system. It is the fertile world of the organic.

Imagine yourself on the hot rock and think (however a primal single cell being thinks) about what would constitute happiness. I want you to consider what survival and health might mean. Through my own lens I imagine it to be a fairly uncomplicated proposition. My assumption is that what stood for happiness was simply survival and that what supplied survival were effective systems unchallenged by too many predators. I say “too many predators” because I think nature is not greedy. Species survival, as we will discuss in a moment, understands cooperation.

I think therefore (and I know this is very basic biology) that the idea of effective systems were most likely synonymous with sustainable systems; systems that supplied sustained life. In fact, I’ll take the position that the first rule of primal systems was simply: That which sustains life is good, that which does not, or will not, is bad. Admittedly this is a very basic breakdown but I believe it is the original bell weather for what constitutes effective systems. Modern technology might well decide to add on to this definition but they should not in a way that might compromise the original criteria. That is what I believe we have done. I believe we have tampered with the basic coding of effective systems to the detriment of our world’s health. I think that is because we have, in part, forgotten Darwin.

Sometimes concepts, by virtue of their familiarity, are stripped of their proper significance and rendered elements of pop culture. I think that is the case for Darwin theories. They deserve greater respect since like the first rule, Survival of the Fittest suggests an instinct towards adaptation that is rewarded with sustained life. The problem is, while most of us are familiar with the phrase, the principles of “survival of the fittest” is generally taught in watered down high-school lessons as a faint marker to the past; something suited to amoebas and monkeys with relative significance to the whole of the human experience. This is unfortunate and to a certain degree points to a failing in both our education and religious systems (remember the Scopes trial?). Today, to the degree we refer to it at all it is usually as justification for greed and the doggy-dog substance of success and power in the marketplace. That is unfortunate since on a primal level survival of the fittest suggests an organic truth--that dysfunctional systems will not thrive. Admittedly we would have to go far back for this organic truth to exist without the obfuscation of the modern world yet I suggest we try. Failing to think like an amoeba is getting us into trouble. Perhaps we need to move up the evolutionary chain. Perhaps a telling of the crises facing our bee population might help.

* The Chicago School - The economic policies brought forth under the dictates of free market liberalism and neoclassical price theory. The ‘Chicago School’, as it would come to be known, was founded in 1892 by oil magnate John D. Rockefeller but is more recently referred to in reference to Milton Friedman and members of the “Second Chicago School”. The principles of the Chicago School are often cited as promoting “Imperial Economics” and, as a school of thought, is seen in direct opposition to Keynesian economics.

II - Honey on the Rock

A bee “understands” what being a bee means. Programed into it’s DNA are the systems that assure the survival of the hive. Traditionally, changes in a bee’s environment result in adaptations that have decades and even centuries to occur. Some adapt successfully and some die off. These adaptations can be daunting even in the single system environment of the natural world but become ever more difficult when the environment is obscured and manipulated by competing systems. Case in point is the conditions referred to as C.C.D. or Colony Collapse Disorder.

C.C.D is the result of the bees’ difficulty mitigating the conditions of modern society. Their natural systems must accommodate and traverse a million external systems that are happening at a pace outside their own. They must contend with cell towers, viral and industrial agriculture to name only a few. They feel the weight of the competition. For many bees the result is nothing short of collapse. On many levels the bee is the canary in the coal mine. They are experiencing a system failure due to development and technology; two complex systems outside the bees and, in many ways, two systems that have wandered off the definition of good as a bee might consider it.

To ignore what is challenging our bees’ survival is to ignore ourselves since we, like the bees, are of the natural world. We, like the bees, have evolved for most of our lives in a natural world system, a system that, like the bees, has evolved slowly. Yet we, like the bees, have been fast forwarded to a culture that operates mostly outside the natural world. Some might call for a distinction here to suggest that humans, unlike bees, are not solely of the natural world and have a greater capacity for social adaptation. That as creators in the multiplicity of human systems (religion, philosophy, agriculture, industry, etc.) we are the culture we create and therefore have had time to adapt to the changes.

This distinction is both relevant and not. To be the designers of a system is significant only to the extent the system is successful and inherent in the success of a system (be it academic, technological or primal) is, again, the first rule: That which sustains life is good. Under this definition any system that fails to support life is a failed system. This is not a moral claim but rather a biological imperative. We can discuss the “right” and appearance of unwanted, aberrant and/or invasive species and whether technology has a responsibility to intercede but that becomes another debate. The first rule is crafted in our DNA and transcends any morality play. The first rule requires no social narrative, it is fundamental to species survival. Ignoring this deeply ingrained requirement invites false technological bravado at the cost of a healthy natural world. On some level we cannot help ourselves. We have been so long separated from the interrelationship with natural systems that we have forgotten our roots. This might well be our planets undoing.

III – Whose Party is it Anyway?

I want to take a moment to reiterate the folly of our co-creator story. There is no question humans are an enormously creative species. I can see how we can think we are the masters of our fate but again, this is just our assumption. Not recognizing our connection to the first rule and the requirement of functioning systems renders us all at risk of extinction. Still, say you refuse. Say you cannot imagine our culture as fundamentally beholden to the first rule as I suggest we are; that you imagine our culture buffered from the swings and arrows of the natural world. Then perhaps you can turn to the spirit and concept of cooperation for direction. It is a sandbox value every child is taught and something most of us understand as valuable on the most basic of levels. But cooperation is more than a simple lesson in social ethics. Like the concept of adaptation, in the world of effective systems cooperation is essentially a primal mandate not a moral one.

As the second law of systems, cooperation speaks to the symbiotic nature of all things. There are very few systems that exist in an isolated loop; most live and die off the workings of other systems. I suppose that sounds parasitical except to recognize that those same feeding systems have systems feeding off of them. Cooperation really suggests an ebb and flow of life. It is an intricate system hovering in a delicate balance. Should any one system gain total dominance in its environment it will generally perish since it would have nothing to feed off of; if not immediately than eventually.

A system that does not cooperate or work in relationship with its environment simply fails to prosper. In fact, to the degree any system is failing is to the degree all systems are failing. That is what makes cooperation so vital and why parents like to talk about. Unfortunately, not even they know why they do. If they did, they would act a little nicer themselves. They would play nicer with the planet. They would understand cooperation as key to our survival since all systems, no matter how they have evolved, are bound by the rules of life by way of adaptations and cooperation. To make my point I am asking you to shift from the hot-rock perspective of reptilian mind to a more recent time. Let us consider how these rules might apply in town.

IV – Pissing in the Town Well

In one of our earliest social experiment you have small villages managing their needs for water through the town well. In such small scale environments cooperation was key. To the degree they managed the quality and usage of their water was to the degree they would have a reliable source. Failure to do so would be immediate; the well would get polluted or go dry and most likely people would die. This ability to view, in real time, the consequences of a design flaw or management error offer the necessary incentive for cooperation within the social context. But again, this incentive tracks back to our DNA. Like our instinct to adapt, cooperation is based on the code of species survival. We manage the town well together because it allows for our survival.

Granted there is a great deal of emotion attached to socialization but humans are not really all that far removed from the flat rock regardless of the obscurity. And it is exactly that obscurity, the veiling of the natural systems from the larger social context, that have confounded our ability to appropriately respond to conditions as they arise. Our ability to successfully adapt and cooperate are compounded by our inability to view any missteps. The obscurity effects our ability to gauge our environment or the well being of others in it. Given the size of our cities and the anonymity of our neighbors it is easy to understand how instincts have been dulled and how it is that our water systems have gone so far afield. In today's water system, tossing bleach into our sewers makes sense. Allowing for agricultural pesticide runoff and the dumping of toxic waste into our waterways makes sense.

We might well understand this sad reality since few know where the well is and, more tragically from the standpoint of accurate corrections, no one is directly affected by the consequences of their behavior; at least not in the immediate. The elements of scale deeply affect our instincts towards adaptation and cooperation. When we get too big and too convoluted as a social system we are compromised in our ability to keep tabs on the subtleties of our environment and the needs of the inhabitants. In the case of a small town, the social agenda can be accurately managed. The "who" in the system that wants more water for growth, or development, or increased agriculture would be known personally. The "who" that might suffer as a response to another's desires is also known. Like the well itself, consequences of decisions would be felt in the immediate by the people in the town and by the watershed itself.

This example speaks to the need for appropriate scale or, more specifically, the efficiency of a small-scale environment as compared to large global ones. Small-scale environments allows for familiarity, for concern and for an awareness of consequences of faulty systems design in a clear and present time. Our neighbors are us. Our resources are us. "We are our brother's keepers" to quote a much used phrase. Small keeps social agenda in line with nature. Small allows for quick and accurate adjustments and for true cooperation since the well flows to all homes.

But over and over there comes a time when small is no longer relevant or is forgotten as relevant. There comes a time when the wisdom of the rules are abandoned and competing agendas win out. A time when human agenda trumps nature. A time, like these, when small has no value at all; when Big is all and generally never, ever, big enough. Unfortunately, the love of Big allows for short memories, narrow vision and imagines that not recognizing limitations is the same as avoiding them. But all they (and we) are doing is postponing and ignoring the requirements of natural corrections. Yet system designers do it all the time. Human designed systems born of social agendas outside the affected community and natural world result in shortsighted designs destined to play out badly. The question is why? Why do some designers refuse the laws of effective systems?

V – Mixed up Minds and Agenda

I believe recognizing and making corrections in systems (and by this I mean human designed systems) are challenging for two reasons. First, many human designed systems are of relative value. They are answers to problems that don't exist other than to the designers themselves. Point in fact, you don't really need an economic system to survive despite what people might think. Economic systems were designed to manage large-scale trade and to aid in the objective of profit making. Early and small communities did not need economic systems; they just traded skill for skill, milk for butter, shoes for candles. You don't really need an economic system to trade goods and services with others. You do need them, however, when you want to manage large scale trade in neighboring communities, cities, countries and continents. So that is the first thing to consider when evaluating the effectiveness of systems. Why were they designed and who do they serve? But secondly, and more importantly, a system whose measure of success is enmeshed in the social values and agenda of the designers are easily corrupted. A system designed by the wealthy merchant class (for example) to serve the merchant class and judged effective by the merchant class isn't likely to serve those outside that class; at least not specifically.

Human designed systems can put value into anything they want to (war for example) and do not have to include anything they do not want to (people's lives for example). Of course, I think this is fool hearty but generally speaking that is the truth and folly of most human designed systems. The designers can pencil in and out whatever they deem relevant. They can choose which changes in their environment to respond to and which to ignore thereby making the corrections as contrived as the systems themselves. An economic system geared towards supporting the wealthy at the cost of the poor and the natural world is "functioning" only to the degree it operates within its intended agenda. It does not function to serve all creatures great and small but then that was never the designer's agenda. And that is an important thing to keep in mind. Academic, political and social systems are generally pegged to a very narrow sense of history and the natural world and, without suggesting clear out malevolence, have been designed to suit the needs of the people that are designing them.

So then the question to address is; How did it get like this? Why did we allow it? Well, in part, because "we", as in "we" the people, have not historically made the Big systems nor considered them. Generally "we" the people are too busy getting by to consider the social, political or economic narrative behind our systems. Secondly, we have been seduced into believing other have our interest at heart. But many of us are waking up and wondering how to make changes. I think a good way to start is to demystify the prevailing systems since they, to a very large degree, shape our culture and our lives within it. And since I believe it is our current economic system that holds most of the blame for the shape we are in, I have chosen to start there. In all ways I consider it the system most wanting of a new standard of design.

VI – Economics as a First Person Narrative

When most of us use the word “economy” we assume we are referring to a fundamental and necessary system of trade without which societies would malfunction. But economic systems, as they are currently understood, are a relatively modern invention. For centuries prior to the “science” of economic systems, civilizations had functional means for the transference for goods and services. Way before the language of an economy existed there were systems to handle both the production and consumption of goods. In early hunter gatherer societies humans foraged and hunted and met the needs of their tribe. In agrarian society, humans tilled the soil, grew food and held livestock as the raw materials for most of their needs. In both cases these cultures produced and consumed within the scale of the natural world. As agricultural societies prospered, and artisan trades flourished, transfer of goods between outside communities grew. Some exchanges involved early forms of currency while others involved barter. In either case, what was produced and consumed was done within societies of similar ways and means and in limits to what reasonable travel would allow. All this was done within the appropriate scale and natural constraints of human endurance and resource limitations. In a way, it was a self regulating system, a closed loop system where the cycles of production, distribution and consumption stayed close to home. But a switch was flipped and the industrial revolution entered the field and in a dramatic turning of events, century-old traditions of self reliance, barter and the community marketplace were eclipsed by the workings of industry.

Though the history of the market place have their roots in early civilizations, the seeds of our current economy lay in the industrial revolution. During that time, more and more humans worked outside the closed loop of self reliance. Most lived on ever-diminishing parcels of land or in city tenements. They produced less and less for themselves and used cash as the significant means of exchange instead of barter. During that era that an ever-widening loop between producer and consumer presented itself stripping many of their ability to provide directly for their needs. Soon they depended on an industrial system to provide for both their work and goods.

But most dramatically, what humans experienced in this new model was the transformation of their status as unique individuals within a system of self reliance (tending their land, raising their livestock, servicing their own needs) into indistinguishable and interchangeable elements within a system of industry. What they traded (or were forced to trade) was the diversity of interdisciplinary skill sets required for a life of self reliance for the specialized and repetitive skill sets required by industry.

VII – Strict Standards for Profit

Many people have written about the culture of specialization and how it has betrayed the genius of the human spirit. Specialization is part and parcel with industries' need to divide the parts of production into increasingly reducible units. Specialization's operational theory is that once you reduce a task to its independent parts you can improve both the time and skill involved to complete them. Specialization denies the genius of the individual by assuming they are detriments to effective productions; that they will slow it down or infuse it with too much individual design, design that cannot be replicated. Specialization suggests that there is nothing lost by removing the human spirit from any effort. Rather, what is important to industry is the strict and reproducible standards specialization offers as a mean for supplying profits.

We cannot talk about the workings of economic systems and industry without casting a long eye on the function of profit. And we cannot talk about profit without considering the control industry must assert on the variables that effect it. These controls are not optional, they are required because if profit is the end goal of industry (which it is) then with few exceptions standardization is the way to get there.

The making of profit follows a number of rules. They include: procuring a reliable source of raw materials; access to a reliable work force; effective systems of production; easy access to distribution lines and, on the final end, a willing consumer class to buy what is produced. It is a linear system that starts with raw resources and ends with consumers. When all aspects within this liner system are working to maximum capacity then maximum profits are gained. No matter what is being made, sold or bought, the profit making system functions the same way. And while there are tools of the trade to trump up each of those individual components, the most important one is standardization. Standardization is key to controlling and predicting a level of consistency in all aspects of the profit-making system which, in turn, is key to maximizing profits.

Standardization suggests the repeatable, controllable and predictable. Standardization does not like variables, obstacles, subtleties and individuality. Standardization seeks to turn the natural world and humans into the objects under their control. Economic systems thrive, and profit is most assured, when the elements in the profit making system are stripped of as many variables as possible; when the objectification of natural systems (humans and resources) is complete.

Perhaps there are degrees to the ruthlessness of the objectification but not in the principles. Standardization is vital to industry and regardless of the softening of methodology it is a fundamental

principle, not an optional one. In fact, that is one of the rules in the profit-making system and like the ones found in the natural world, are part of industries survival. Taking away our moral response to the process and viewing it through a lens of systems analysis reveals the truth of design. It is a system that seeks to control variables. If it must, by virtue of it's design, objectify nature and humans in the process then that is just the need of the system. And herein lies the deep and inevitable crux of industries conflict with nature.

VIII- Marking the Fault Line

By the definition and requirements of each system, industry and nature cannot ever be fully aligned. Perhaps there is a greater ability to do so in small-scale environments where motivations and definitions of “functional” systems include (by virtue of our direct relationship with them) the conditions of the natural world. But large-scale industry and aggressive profit making systems do not align themselves with the natural world. We might well see this an operational duel of systems. To a point, if industry thrives in the objectification and control of natural systems then natural systems will not. Where industry seeks to strip humans and resources of their individuality, individuals, conversely, seek to hold on. In the most fundamental of ways industry separates itself from natural systems by a wholly independent set of agendas.

It is simply not in the interest of industry to adjust to the needs of the natural world even though industry would like you to believe it is. Again, this does not need to be seen as a moral claim; it is the consequence of design. In the strictest of terms, the rules of healthy and functional systems as they relate to the natural world cannot, fundamentally and by design, operate in the same plain as industry. They are different rules, different systems and they define health by wholly independent criteria. We can tweak, adjust and make room for the functioning of both simultaneously but it will always be to the detriment of the one or the other systems full functionality. Still, I understand why industry tries to reconcile the conflict. I understand why they are furiously scuttling around for a new message of “sustainability”. It is both in the interest of profit and an unwavering faith in the systems themselves. Yet this unfettered faith, to the largest degree, is what is keeping us back. It is the faith that commerce and global economic systems are the principle values and saviors of our times that is keeping us tethered to the problem.

IX – No, You’re Stupid!

I get what Bill Clinton was suggesting when he said “It’s the economy stupid”. He was suggesting that all the problems with our social systems are related to the economy or, more specifically, to the particular functioning principles of any economic system. He is right in a way however I think he should better point a self reflective finger at his own brain. Sorry, but what I am suggesting is that if there is “stupidity” to be found it is in our unabated confidence in economic systems themselves. The principles of “rising boat”* and “trickle down”* economic distribution are so primary to the assumed good will and functionality of societies that we cannot see beyond our own assumptions. The point is, if economic systems are seen as the sole engine of a thriving society, (which they increasingly are) then reconciling the inherent conflict between nature and industry is ultimately stymied by the operational gestalt of this global reason d’être.

If one believes that the market place is the sole arena in which we can supply for our needs then I understand why we must continue to promote them. If global trade is the prevailing ideology for lifting the poor and disenfranchised out of despair then how can anyone refute the fundamental goodness and logic of its principles. Those, though, are the principles as they relate to industry themselves. They are the principles of the system designers and the elite. On a more personal level it is the belief and faith of every-day citizens that keep the system alive. It is our nations’ inclination to hold on to the premise of industries’ ability to get us through the thicket that we must contend with as well. But I do not want to seem dismissive.

If we, as citizens in this market-driven economy want to believe, there is a good reason. One that is honest and true. It comes from the shared legacy most of us have experienced. It comes from a time of America’s greatest and most fulfilled economic promise. It can be tracked to the time and birth place for the rising-boat, trickle down-theories that supply, in our nostalgia, the siren songs of our economic status quo. If ever there was a time our system worked it was during the middle-class experiment of the last century. It was certainly the formative experience of my life and one that I have looked to when considering the death grip industry has on our ability to imagine real alternatives.

*Rising Boat - these words derive from the larger phrase that “a rising tide lifts all boats”. In essence the phrase is used to suggest that a thriving economic environment will reach all residents within that economy. Given recent statistics the hope of such euphemisms have been proven frail and unsubstantiated since wealth, as it has been accumulated, has stayed within a small sector (one percent) of the population.

*Trickle-Down - another phrase taken from the theory that wealth has a distributive quality that, while made and encouraged at the top tier of industry (by virtue of tax breaks and incentives), will eventually “trickle down” to the larger society in the form of employment and increased wages. The concepts of a trickle-down economy, however, have proven somewhat inefficient in providing the promised increases to the standard of living for the working class citizenry.

X – Memories of the Middle

In the middle class experiment of the 50’s the contract with industry meant something you could take to the bank, buy a home on and send your kids to college with. That hay day was real to many of us and the memory of it prevents us from understanding what is really happening today. The hay day gives most of us a feeling of approval for a system that worked for our families and the community at large. We (and I am speaking of the Boomer generation) were part of a burgeoning middle class, a world of financial and educational opportunity. Unfortunately, that system and time will simply never return. Even as most boomers (and their parents as the last retirees that will enjoy pensions and social security) enjoy the result of a good affordable education, equitable pay and reasonable housing costs, they know their children will not. That fact is a gnawing reality for most of them as they jockey to secure a place for their children in the global economy.

But what really are we jockeying for? Surely we must understand that on a playing field of diminishing returns the future will never be so bright as it was for the kids of the 50’s and certainly never, ever, again for our grandchildren. Hopefully Boomers will face up to what is stealing this bright future from their descendants or, more aggressively, will recognize that the life they had was never really theirs to enjoy in the first place. That the the go-go nineties was really only a smoke screen for a system already deeply at risk. Yet the lure of modernity and leisure can keep us from thinking it through. And why? Why can we only come up with frail “market driven” solutions? Why do we still hang on to a life and system that will only bring us closer to the endgame regardless of all the “green” solutions we try to sell consumers on?

Some of the answers can be traced to the same agenda industry has always had, but more comprehensively I think the problem with our economy is rooted in the language of economic systems themselves. Before we can change the system we must change the language that defines it. Not just by clever new terms but wholly and systemically.

XI – The Shifting of a Pattern Language

I would like to take another moment to further explain what I mean by economics as a first-person narrative. It is the substantive theory behind the Seamless and offers a solution not only for our own way of living in the world but for the health of the planet as well. It is both simple and extreme; obvious and obtuse. Certainly it is a shift in our way of defining ourselves in this modern industrialized world.

At its core is the realization that the natural world -- humans, animals and resources, did not choose objectification but have rather endured it. Further, that we are so deeply entwined with our identity as objects in this systems that we cannot readily see it. We have become part and parcel to the systems themselves. We cannot see the insanity because we have been so thoroughly convinced of its logic. We cannot imagine solutions because we have no language to do so. What we have today is a language of objectification so entrenched in our psyche that even our solutions are corrupt.

The fact is, economics and profit-making systems are mired in the language of objectification. Before labor and resources can become elements in an economic equation they must first be objectified, measured and controlled. No profit-making system can be successful when natural systems are left to thrive on their own accord. And that is the basic conflict between economic systems and the natural rules of systems. One demands complete control while the other desires self management. One values sameness while the other thrives by variability. One demands the objectification of life while the other demands the unique quality of subjectivity.

With regard to the role of labor, industry values humans to the degree they can be controlled whereas humans seek independence and self reliance. In fact, self reliance is more the experience humans have held in the world. Prior to industry, humans were partners in a first-person narrative of existence. They were the subject, not object, in their experience of work. They lived in the natural world, they worked in the natural world, they managed and sustained themselves within the limitations of the natural world. Each element in the equation of survival was seamlessly interwoven with the next. If they were to consider the value of their time it would be more within the larger context of the task at hand and not by their capacity to render the principles and systems of profit making. There was no need. Success on at any task was viewed through a completely different lens. If anything, it was the natural world and not industry that was the master.

But today it is different. Today we are so closely identified with our role and mission as employees that we cannot even begin to comprehend the objectification that has led up to our notion of work. In many ways, we have all become part of a modern serf culture. Certainly some might consider this

extreme but I am suggesting a distinct difference between the linguistic concepts of “I work” and “They labor”. A difference that can begin to liberate modern economy’s hold on our lives.

I think it is fair to say that humans have not always factored their days and weeks in economic equations. Today’s clock-watch delineation of minutes (even seconds) days, weeks, months and years on a task or job is economic systems speak. It is the language of standardization, objectification and industry. How can you track labor if you do not objectify it? This is not a mere semantical observation but rather an important distinction in recognizing how we have come to view our time and effort. In fact, “labor” as it is currently understood, only takes on its meaning when it becomes an object. “Resources”, as they are currently understood, only takes on its meaning when they become objects. Taken even further, whenever you use the word “economy” itself you are utilizing a pattern language of objectification.

Continuing with that line of reasoning all sorts of words became decidedly contrived to me. Words and phrases like “branding”, “niche markets” “viral marketing” or the more common, “bottom-line”, “buy low, sell high”, “got in at a good time”, “made a killing” “not worth my time”; “what’s my cut?” and on and on, are now good examples of how entrenched our modern language had become with the principles and inherent “logic” of profit making and, more specifically, objectification. All of them presuming, in one way or the other, that we are the entitled puppet masters manipulating life in an equation leaning towards profit making. The insidiousness of that thinking is both profound and revealing. If this is our accepted language what is our accepted thinking? It appears to me that before you can effectively envision a new economy you must discard the notion of economy or, at the very least, the traditional pattern language of economic systems. But what would take it’s place?

XII – Defining the Seamless

Ever since embarking on this process of confronting this increasingly non-functioning economy I have been seeking an alternative. And I can say it was more a heart mission than a head. It has been my heart and primal spirit that has hungered for the salve of new models and it has been my heart and primal spirit that refused what we, as inheritors of elitist systems, were told to believe in. I know I am not alone. Everywhere a new movement is showing up. In between the cracks of this current economic model I see the formation of what I called the new tribalists. Everywhere the spirited are seeking celebration and gatherings of the soul in response to the deadening of the prevailing system. Urban dwellers are attempting new forms of homesteading as the old skills of foraging, fermenting, food preservation and barter are taking hold. Eco-villages are popping up throughout the country in an effort to define new forms of community and trade. Activists writers, journalists and regional leaders (our neighbors and friends) are taking on the cause of the ignored and dispossessed, the people and the planet.

On both the local and national front a movement is emerging to face off with the pattern language of empire. All of them, including myself, struggling to come to grips with a system increasingly out of balance with natural and equitable systems. What we must all confront is the privilege of modern life. We must be honest or all this is simply high-brow theory. In one way or the other, creating alternatives suggests abandoning some of the leisure, the aesthetics and ease with which we are accustomed to or, rather, replacing them with new and different markers. The Seamless is one of those markers, it is a new framing for an old way of living in the world.

The Seamless is a concept that simply suggests the circular systems of life. It suggests a more direct method by which to gauge the health of our spirits, bodies and environment. It discards the linear logic of most industrial systems and opposes the notion that anything in the universe seeks to be stripped of its individuality. Further, it honors the unique multiplicity and inter-disciplinarian nature of life. It liberates us, renews our integrity, frees us from the systems of industry we have heretofore taken as gospel. But perhaps it's greatest value comes in how it will shift our understanding of others.

Taking a moment to consider how immersed you are in the pattern language of industry will not only alter your own narrative but will shift your impressions of others. It will give you a better understanding of how we all get caught and how difficult it is to reverse it's hold and logic. Tracking back and reclaiming the beauty and right of "I work" will offer greater respect for people who have historically suffered under the systems of "they labor". By that I mean the conditions of those who have been most marginalized by our particularly type of economic speak.

It is a great moment to imagine that once we begin to face off with the demoralizing narrative of our own third-person experiences we can better understand those of others. Others whose lot is far worse than ours. Others that have generally been discarded as the outsider and underachiever. Those that live outside our own world and traditions. Those that have the systems and pattern language of industry thrust upon them just as it was thrust upon us. Considering our own legacy will reduce our tendency to distort the plight of the outsider. We will be more likely to see it as the consequence of a distinctly third-person narrative; of narratives handed to us before we could imagine our own.

Facing off with our own third-person narrative will minimize our use of the distorted Darwinian principles I mentioned earlier. Sayings like “I worked for mine let them take care of themselves” is part of that narrative. They encourage arrogance, blame and indifference. And while it is true there is sloth I suggest it is more than likely a type of numbness since for many the opportunity for a full life within the mainstream economy is simply out of reach. The numbness results from caring, trying, and striving for the legacy of the American dream only to fall short time and again. The numbness is born of worn nerves and broken promises. You see it in people’s eyes and in the homelessness, crime and drug abuse gone rampant. You can see it in unemployment lines of America’s discarded work force. It is the numbness of losing hope. What is worse, many of these folks are being discarded by the very system that has fed on them, used up their hopes and lured them by the bright lights of the golden ring. And I believe there is a system in America that is just that contrived, just that heartless. I call them the book makers and what they are doing is making book on stupid.

XIII – Making Book on Stupid

I admit this chapter was written as a stand alone piece even before the notion of the Seamless was clear. I have included it because it applies to the Seamless or, rather, to the selling of third-person narratives. It applies when considering why it is so hard for so many to either recognize or change the conditions of their world.

“Making book” is a phrase borrowed from the Bronx or at least that’s where I first heard it. It is what bookies do. They carry around little books to enter names and wagers on odds from anything from horse races to birth dates. Making book on stupid is a phrase I came up with to suggest a spirit of malevolence. It suggests selling a myth whose ridiculousness of inequity is silenced by the allure. Bookies know that people will defy logic, will wager on the long shot, will hope for the big break and will believe that one day their horse will come in. In considering the tactics and turns of modern economic systems, I use the phrase as a parable for the times.

Utilizing the tricks of the trade, corporate bookies reside in boardrooms and Wall Street preying on our willingness to suspend disbelief and on our willingness to believe in the odds. Their task is simplified by the fact that Americans want what they are selling. In fact, everyone wants it. What they are selling is the “American Dream”, the notion that with ingenuity and hard work the future could be bright. It is understandable that people want it. Security is not an elitist notion, it is something we all long for. In its essence I do not fault the people for this desire. In its simplest form it is the desire to provide for our family. It is about our survival. Taken a step further, however, it can manifest in the unexamined need for excess and the type of mock grandeur that plays a part in our undoing (and this conditions exists in both the haves and the have nots.). Yet I try to be gracious since it is difficult to see the forest from the trees when so much time and energy is put into keeping the forest dark. So while I think we hold some responsibility for our folly, who I really fault are the bookies and the intentionally contrived messages they deliver. When I say contrived I mean just that since many of the corporate bookies and policy makers today know that what they are selling is long gone; that the American dream as it was once understood, is dead. It is dead and they, the bookies, the dream weavers of Madison Avenue and Wall Street, are making book that we will not figure it out.

Sometimes, when I am feeling particularly generous, I feel bad for them as well because even they are being had. They too are caught up in the story they are selling. Like race horses they have been promised the gold ring, the big salaries, the stock options, the partnerships. Like fiery foaming beasts they rush for the finish line. It will be sad to see, I suppose, but even they will be hung out to dry when they are no longer needed. What the bookies don’t realize is that someone is making book on them. Today there are only a few true power brokers and puppet masters in this world economy.

They are making book on the stupidity, or just plain ignorance, of all the rest of us. They feed on our ignorance and disconnect. They feast on the hunger of an aspiring class who assume, not only, that “getting there” is available to them but also that “there” is “fair” and part of a good and equitable system. They ride on to the economic hopes of both the deluded and “least of these”.

While I might not pity the deluded all that much (and by deluded I mean those that simply refuse to pay attention) I am dismayed for the lot of the “least”. They are the most vulnerable. For them, the bookies sell what is not only unneeded but unaffordable. In selling off disingenuous pieces of the American dream the bookies encourage pay-day loans, interest-only mortgages and rent-to-buy furniture. They promote the notion that not only can they keep up with the Joneses but that the Joneses still exist. It is high time we recognized that the Joneses are a mythical lure and to the extent they do exist they are declaring bankruptcy alongside their neighbors.

We read of it daily, the overextended going down like so many bowling pins. Behind closed doors we blame the victims for their hubris of going beyond their means when doing so is part of the American dream. They wanted only what everyone wanted; something to call their own. So they sign on the dotted line and watched their fortunes turn from bad to worse. This time their fortune turned on the debacle of faulty sub-prime mortgage debacles but there will be next time. There is always a next time and it will always be the same story. The emperors of the world know it is the same story but they also know that we have short memories and that further, with a little tasteful topspin, we will continue to engage in the endgame of diminishing return.

But just as the bookies are making book on the delusion of inclusion, so are they victims of their own stupidity by assuming we will never smell the rat, that the exploited (resources and humans) will not balk. That history will not repeat itself or that there will be patriot acts and paid militias in place when it does or that their own children and grandchildren will not bear the weight of their own stolen future. Somehow they have come to believe that the water will only flow to their wells and that there are walls high enough to protect it when the truth all comes to bear. That thinking is simply smoke and mirrors and, smoke and mirrors are always, only, just that.

I admit I am more than frustrated with the audacity, the lies, the inequity and the simple self serving sloppiness of the economic policy they are touting. Clearly, I am angry. Maybe it is only the lies. Maybe if our leaders and policy makers told us the truth behind their economic policies we would be relieved of the obsessions. Maybe it would be like the lover that finally admits their adultery; it would not make it better but it would take away the disconnect between our suspicion and reality. I have always said that the truth, no matter how difficult, is always better than lies. Truth aligns the world in ways that can put change into our hands. We stop being victims. We start considering who we are and

what we want. That is not what the elite want which is why they have wisely taken over the media. Today's media does not report the truth because the rulers, policy makers and power brokers don't want us to consider the truth or, rather, worry about what we might do if we knew it. And they are right to worry.

So where is the hope in all of this? I am not always sure. Maybe in the miracle of mutations, adaptations and a distinctly primal instinct--the quest for higher ground. A broadened scope of our economic history shows many stories of generosity and altruism. Humans have always struggled between the forces of greed and charity. Certainly the emergence or the new tribalists and countless others working to imagine a different world is a welcoming omen of things to come. Perhaps, in the end, it will be our humanness, and not our primal instincts, that can restore exploitive systems to sustainable ones. I would like to think that a rational and humane species will attempt to design rational and humane systems. I do not think we can pussy foot around with notions of sustainable "business" no matter how soft a landing it may appear to offer. What we must do is envision a very new model, a new pattern language, a new system. Again, we come to the Seamless.

XIV - A Framework for the Seamless

In considering how to live in the Seamless I am struck by both the idealism and challenges of the endeavor. Getting there may never be complete and I admit I have no idea what, exactly, “There” would look like. I do not know what is fair to hold on to and what must be released. Clearly we are so enmeshed in the modern world that it is difficult to imagine a full distancing or whether that is what should be done. Rather I imagine entering into the Seamless to be a walk backwards; a tracking of what we have lost in our rush towards modernity. It is decidedly personal and a matter of degrees. Where one starts will no doubt be very different from where one ends up. I have come up with a few markers for my own life but those may change. I am new on this journey myself and will no doubt discover what is possible, what fits and what will remain in the captive domain of a system out of step with its natural legacy. My believe is, however, that each move towards a world in sync with the rhythms of the natural world will bring us closer to sanity. Here then are a few ideas:

Go back to the very basics – make as much of what you use yourself. I call this closing the loop. It is about making the distance between what you make and what you use as small a circle as possible. It is not that easy. In fact it is very hard. To the extent that you can I suggest you grow, cook, sew, mend, build and repair all that you need to live on. I have often thought that were we really to live by the labors of our own hands and sweat all production and consumption would be reduced to proper scale. That is because there is only so much a person can physically do in a day. I consider this the self limiting rule. We would consume less because what we produced would be more dear to this. I think of this when collecting and cracking nuts. You are quite proud when you accumulate a pound or two. It is not fast work unless you put large-scale mechanisms to the job. But those things obscure the real time and real value essence of any job you undertake; particularly as it relates to the systems and scale of the natural world.

Be generous with the “wealth” you have accumulated. The earth’s resource were never ours to own (and what is money but a replacement economy of those resources), so be humbled by the opportunity of returning those resources to the earth or to those who have been less fortunate. This will challenge many because financial security is so primary to our notion of success but, again, the Seamless is about working our way backwards to a place of natural systems sanity. I am not suggesting you go outside your comfort zone but rather you take seriously the consideration of what your comfort zone is pegged to. If, and when, you can imagine an opportunity to share some of your good fortune I think you will find it is very rewarding. Supporting those who need help will restore your humanity because in many ways it will have come from a reevaluation of the entire system of our mad global economy and your part in it. In that way, I am not speaking so much about charity as redistribution.

Value and consider the lives and choices of others who you exchange precious resources with. Encourage and support those who you believe are committed to sustainable systems and not (forgive the judgement here) green washing alone.

Live in smaller homes or welcome the new tribe into your big one (they simply cannot afford the cost of living anymore). Invite your kids back home. Let them put their work towards the homestead. One of the biggest ruses of industry is the perpetration of the myth that children cannot individuate or find voice in the family home. How individual do you think they can be as wage slaves working in an economy that will be continually stacked against them? You know the statistics. Between the high cost of education, high-interest student loans, skyrocketing housing costs, a crippled social security and health care system and a wage system increasingly out of step with the cost of living you are casting them out into insanity. And then there is the burden each new household puts on the city's or states supply of basic services and the resources that supply them. Think about it. I think it can offer some new models.

Meet your community and tend to each other's needs. I have been amazed what a surplus of collar greens did for my relationship with the larger community. It got me knocking on doors and getting to know my neighbors more intimately. Work communally and collectively to overcome the isolation of modern life. Modernization has done nothing if not separated us from each other. It has even made us suspicious of those we do not know. We live behind locked doors, cars and communities because we are all suspicious of the other. We don't even know how to reach out anymore. We fear what and who we do not know but as I mentioned, challenging the realities of a third-person narrative puts a face and humanity to the conditions of the world we have previously deemed as abhorrent.

Try to invent new words for describing our "economy". Words and phrases of the global economy come fully-loaded with the oddest of notions. We don't think about what they really mean because we are so immersed in this crazy competitive system but believe me, in the larger scheme of things, they are just plain silly. What I think would go a long way to cleaning up the mess we're in is abandoning all the pattern language of the mainstream economy. This could be an exercise in linguistics since words inform both our thoughts and actions. So throw the silly words out! Just saying that makes me smile.

In essence try to do exactly the opposite of what this economic system promotes. Treat all species (animal, mineral and vegetable) as a sacred resource. Use only what you need and handle it all with respect. Give away as much as you can. Support organizations that are working for solutions. Support independent media. This is absolutely vital. Support the good people and organizations who have given their lives to creating alternatives. Share the excess, share the excess, share the excess.

Use your labor as a precious resource and don't give it to the folks committed to rampant capitalism; they will not respect your time anyway. Challenge your notions of entitlement. Wear the same outfit at least two times and preferably three times a week or go naked. Yada, yada, yadayou get the idea. I know it is hard since stuff is so endemic to our world but what's the alternative? The endgame is upon us and that's a fact. Let's just try to act as if our life depended on it (which by the way it does). I'm quite sure we'd design a better system of living as a result; one that our little primal flat rock selves can flourish in. At least that's what I'm hoping for. For anyone reading this or interested, I promise to offer a greater framework for living in the Seamless in a future book. I'm trying my hand at it now and it is both exhilarating and daunting. Hell, what are the alternatives? Until then, I wish you good luck, innovation, community and a spirit of revolution. Until then, bee well.....Sorry, I couldn't resist.