

Western Culture

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What most defines our western culture is overconsumption, everything else our society does is based off of that. So the real title of this piece should be called *The Culture Of Overconsumption*, but if I had called it that, nobody would have realized I was talking about our culture, our way of life.

As I said before, our culture is defined by its overconsumption and its need for *more, more, and more*, and how this affects every other part of our culture. Even the parts you would never think are related to it are influenced by it. Even something as simple as what the majority of the music is these days. It's all pop now because that's what sells, that way they can sell more of it, and if you don't sell your music, our society won't promote it. This is why even the most "*radical*" bands we like to put as examples all the time, and even the band members think they are "*radical*", are truly another piece in the system. Why? Because they all sell their talents. If they didn't sell, you would never have heard of them. And I would have more to say on this topic, except the fact that it would be straying too far from the main topic of this piece.

On another note, the overconsumption aspect of our society leads us to its expansion. Western Culture and Western Civilization in general (since they are both the same) are known for being extremely imperialist and expanding themselves rapidly, therefore invading other cultures. Western Civilization needs to expand in order to continue making and selling more and more. Without this, it breaks down into pieces.

Now, you may not see this in such a clear way, things are not how they used to be where the oppression and the invasion were so obvious as wars are (since they took the form of wars). Instead, the invasion is subtle, and uncontrollable. No one comes over with guns into a country. Instead, we (the richer people who **belong** to this civilization) come to these poorer countries with televisions, pop music, liberal arts, modern technology, and a thirst for profit. And people in these poorer countries (especially the young) become attracted to these new ideas/concepts, and begin to apply them slowly (generation by generation) to their own lives. This ends up causing our Western Civilization to expand there and invade. But take into account that we wouldn't have gone there if it were not for our need for expansion to consume more.

Now, you might ask "Well, if they themselves adopted our way of life, maybe that's because our way of life is better." This is a very false assumption. They adopt our way of life because they think that by doing so they will be able to live like us in the richer countries. This assumption causes them to adopt our culture, and it does nothing but bring them into poverty. But not a poverty because they have less money than before (since before they most likely used money very little), but because now their overall life conditions are worse than before (notice that you don't have to have money in order to have good living conditions).

A good example for this is the Bushmen from Sub-Saharan Africa. They used to live a nomadic life, where they had plenty of food, plenty of water, plenty of free-time, and enough *stuff* to keep them happy (which was extremely little). They lived happily, you could say, until we, the rich countries, came in and told them that the lifestyle they're living is wrong, and that they have to change to living a more agricultural life, a life where you choose what you eat that day rather than nature telling you what to eat. Now, the elderly of the group were never really convinced, but the young were. They knew about how in

the rich westernized countries, rich kids got to eat whatever they wanted, and how we all have pools in our backyards, and how we all live our lives doing little to no work. Little did they know, this is only what happens in our rich countries. What they were destined to by our civilization was a life full of hard work, poverty, famine, and overpopulation.

This is because our civilization needs someone to suffer for all of us to live the lives we live, which is beyond our natural means. Think about it this way, everyone starts out living at 100% meaning that I consume as much as the Earth can provide for me. However, I want to live at 200%, but that's not possible for me to live that way and the Earth to still sustain my way of living. So what I do is that I live at 200%, but **two other people** have to live at 50% (because no one can live at 0%, otherwise they'd die).

So truly, even if they end up choosing to live that way of life, it might not be because it is the best, but rather because they think it will be, because that is what we tell them it is. When you go to a place where everyone is still living in huts, and using technology we haven't seen since the days of Ancient Greece, you think to yourself (not exactly this, you put a lot of rhetoric in what you think) "Why haven't these people changed to our way of life yet? I'm pretty sure they would love to live like us. These kids would all be so happy if they could use a computer, or listen to music on an mp3 player..." But the truth is, these kids that you will see in these places are some of the happiest kids in the world, and giving them material possessions won't make them happy, if anything it will make them more stressed.

Which brings me to another aspect of our culture: stress. We are constantly looking for a way to be stressed. We are constantly stressed, complain about it, and yet we are looking for a way to get stressed. I have two examples, one of them shows the gradual change to a more stressed society, and then, the other example will be our daily lives here in Minnesota, and I will show you how we ourselves are looking for stress.

In all my years in Spain, and all I have heard from my father and his parents about how life was before, I have seen a gradual change towards a more westernized society where everyone is stressed. Before I begin, I would like to explain that to compare a change in social habits, I like to use Spain because (due to the Civil War) Spain is a generation behind when it comes to how "*developed*" we are. So using places like Spain, or any of the Eastern European countries is a good idea for these kinds of studies (I won't mention any others since I have no first hand experience, nor investigation of their social habits). What I see in Spain is that slowly, as it has become a more developed nation, people are looking for ways to stress themselves out. Before, people used to entertain themselves in the streets, there were no schedules, no agendas, no *playdates*. However, slowly, these aspects that come with being a, so called, "*developed*" nation, have been coming to people's daily lives in Spain. Now, you can see people signing their kids up for karate classes, English classes, and in the richer parts, even organizing time to meet friends (which has never been done until Spain had become more economically developed).

So what happens to us here in Minnesota is that we sign ourselves and our kids up for all sorts of activities, and we organize absolutely everything (we don't all have a physical agenda, but we all have one mentally). Another thing that is very common over here (which I believe to be caused by how our cities are made, being separated into residential and commercial areas), is that we organize when we go to meet friends. I know that with my most flexible of friends, I have to call at least twenty four hours in advanced, and even then it doesn't give me a place in their schedule. Not only that, you can't tell them "I'm coming over tomorrow" without giving them a time. And this is why we resort to watching TV. When I was bored

in Spain, I went straight to a friend's house, no calling or anything. If I'm bored here, I can't go to a friend's house, I have to know that I'm going to be bored twenty four hours in advance, otherwise I have to resort to other methods that don't imply socialization.

This is a completely foreign concept to anyone coming from the Mediterranean culture, that you have to know when you're going to be bored. That is what friends are really for, to be there for you when you're bored, to help you out. But since in our society here in Minnesota, we have everything on a schedule, we *know* when we're going to be bored (for example, someone might say "tomorrow I have nothing to do from 3:00 - 5:00 P.M.>").

Now, you might be asking "Why do we look for this stress? Why do we purposely get stressed out?" Well, relate this back to what I said at the beginning of this essay: Western Civilization is based on overconsumption. Now, think about what these activities we use to stress ourselves have to do with overconsumption.

The answer for it is simple, all the activities that we sign up for are commercial activities. They all imply that we pay someone else to do something. Even the activities such as hanging out with a friend. Notice that when we think "*hang out with a friend*" we think of doing this such as *going to see a movie in a movie theater*, or *going to the mall*, or *going shopping*, or *going to a restaurant*, or *going to drink beer*, or *going to a concert*, but never *going for a walk*, or *talking for several hours*, or *working on a project*... This is all because we have been taught from birth, due to passive brainwashing and propaganda that *having fun* is going out and consuming. Notice that that is all you'll ever see on TV. Look at all these reality TV shows, they all have that aspect to them.

So the next time you try to hang out with your friends, try it this way and see what their reaction is. Go to their house (without calling ahead) and knock on the door. Then, when they answer, ask them if they would like to go for a walk and talk about history for an hour or two. They will immediately think you are crazy, and who the hell would want to do that.

Now, before I continue to another subject. I am not saying that stopping somewhere to eat with a friend is bad, you have to eat sometime. What I don't like is that the consumption is the main part of the event. If you go for a walk with your friend and you get hungry and decide to stop and eat at a restaurant, that is perfectly fine. But what I don't find good is if you purposely go for a walk just to get to the restaurant and eat there with your friend.

The biggest aspect of our society of overconsumption is that it turns everything into a commercial activity. From things such as eating to doing exercise, to drinking water. Our society needs more profit than the last year, every year. If not, there's a crisis. And every time there is a crisis, we need to find a new bubble to start up the economy again because then everything starts from zero. So, as you can see, we have been making everything into a business. Even walking. If you have ever gone on long walks as I do, and you observed your surroundings as I do, every time you pass by a gym you would be disgusted. I pass by a gym and I see people who paid to get in there, using these treadmills to do the same exact thing I'm doing. There are no benefits to walking in a gym rather than on the street. I walk on the street and meet people (those few *weird*, like me, who decide they'd rather be outside socializing), and talk to them, talk about the weather, about current events. Meanwhile, there are people in the gym doing the exact same exercise I'm doing, but without socialization, and with \$50 less in their pockets.

In fact, it has been psychologically proven that walking on the streets is better for our mental

health than walking on a treadmill in a gym, precisely because of the socialization factor, and the fact that the scenery changes. And this has been proven time and time again, but nobody pays any attention. Why? “Because who cares what is good for you? I’m going to do what everyone else does (which is the only thing I am used to).”

Which brings me to another subject, which is tolerance. Our culture **loves** to talk about tolerance, but when it comes to something where they actually have to be tolerant, the rhetoric goes out the window. We only care about tolerance at a very superficial level, it has to be something so superficial like race, or what TV shows you watch, or what music you listen to. But even then, it can’t be anything too out of the ordinary.

I have a lot of experience with this when it comes to music. I have always loved to listen to things that are very different, such as world music (especially from India), I love instruments such as the Sitar. But the thing that makes me the weird freak is that I like to listen to absolutely **free** music. I like to listen to music that the authors made free legally, and they are under a creative commons license. Because of this, I am viewed as a weirdo.

You also see it in things such as software. I am a huge fan of the open-source movement, and I try to use everything open-source (which is why I use Debian GNU Linux). And because I use this, people see me as a strange guy, and even call me things such as a *hacker* (with a negative connotation), all because I use an operating system that has its code out there on the internet for free.

Now, relate this back to what I said at the beginning of this piece again (yes, again). I like free stuff, and I live in a society ruled by overconsumption. Of course! My using free software does not have any commercial value, there is no exchange, no money going from one place to another, **no profit!** Because of this, I am discriminated, saying that I’m communist for using Linux, that Linux and such other open-source softwares are socialist. And I will not deny that the Linux philosophy is quite socialist, but just because I use it doesn’t make me a socialist. I will point out that an estimated 95% of servers use Linux, around a 4% other, and only a 1% use Windows or Mac.

But using it on servers is different, because when you use it on the servers it is to cut costs of companies. Which is why it isn’t discriminated when companies use Linux, only when people use it on their personal computers. So if you use Linux for economic reasons, according to our society that’s good, but if you do it for personal, philosophical reasons, it’s because you’re a dangerous communist.

Now, what scares me, and other people who see things like I do, is the way this type of culture just absorbs all resistance and anything that tries to rise of against it. If you have read the book 1984, our society is exactly like that, but in a more passive and subtle way. What our society does is that it makes all forms of resistance to it and makes them into a business, therefore making them another piece in the machine.

A good example for this would be Rage Against The Machine, a rap-rock band from California. They are known by a lot of people for being very “*radical*”, however, truth be told, they are no more *revolutionary* nor *radical* than Microsoft. What happens is that, at first they are radical, when they play on the streets, participate in protests, play for anyone without need for payment. But the moment they begin to sell their message as a product, they are not radical anymore, they are now a way for the system to make the so called “*radical*” and “*revolutionary*” people (usually teenagers trying to stand out) nothing more than another piece in the machine. In the case of Rage Against The Machine, once they got

a record deal, they were no longer revolutionary, because their message went from being “*fuck the system and everything it stands for.*” to “*Buy our stuff.*” Now, some people might say “No, but their music still has a very anti-establishment message.” The thing is, even though that is their message, it doesn’t make a difference because if you followed that message, **you wouldn’t be buying their stuff.**

Which brings me to another points about our society, our society loves individualism, that everyone cares only about him or herself, and everyone needs to have things that are only his or hers. That is why people living with their parents after the age of 18 is so weird for people over here in Minnesota. When I told my friends that after high school I wanted to go live with my grandparents for a few years, they were astounded by what I had just said. Meanwhile, I didn’t see a problem with it.

Our civilization wants us to be individualist because then, for example, instead of me and a group of people agreeing to all share one Xbox, we all get one of our own, which generates more profit. Instead of me sharing a house with my grandparents or my parents (therefore is no consumption since I am reusing a house), society wants me to get one of my own so that they can sell more every year. Individualism fuels the economy.

So, as you can see, our Western Civilization is defined by overconsumption which has a constant need for more and more and more, and not only that, but that more must generate profit, and more profit than last year, all in such a way that our consumption grows exponentially. This is our culture, this is what you do in your daily life, this is what all our society’s decisions (and a lot of yours) are based on. We do everything to generate profit for those in command, the elite class (because, as I explained before with the Bushmen example, someone has to suffer for another to prevail).

There is no way to get out of this system, even if you believed me and you wanted to. The best thing we can all do is to live a life to the margin of society (not literally), to live a life that is different, one of less consumption, one where you are still in society, but as far away from it as you can get (again, not literally, you can still live in the city and be on the margin of our culture). But most of all, talk to other people about it. You’re not going to convince anyone that is already so deep in they can’t even imagine a life without all their material possessions, but you might be able to convince people that are in a stage between the two, where they know something’s wrong, but they don’t know what. And maybe you’ll find a few other people who can help you to create a better alternative.

Now, why would you want to make an alternative lifestyle? Well, because this society is going to die. Our society of overconsumption is coming to a close, it is killing itself. There is no way you can stop it with a revolution or anything, all we can do is to wait for it to self-destruct, and leave its inhabitants no other choice but to change ways of life, or to die.

It would seem pessimistic of me to say such a thing, but I would say it is an optimistic opinion. That we can all change to a form of living where everyone lives a decent life; where there is no rich or poor; where we are not constantly worrying about whether or not we can arrive on time; where we are not killing the very planet we call home, and therefore, killing ourselves. I would think that my opinion is rather optimistic. Sure, there are much less material possessions than what we are used to here in the richer countries, but as we have seen before when I was talking about the Bushmen, people with less possessions are some of the happiest people in the world, precisely because they are less afraid of losing those possessions. So why not let society fall apart, if it gives way to a new, and better beginning? I say, let it go, let society fall, and let a new era of man in harmony with the Earth, and itself, begin.