

On The Future of Developed Society - Reflections from Bangkok Airport



In the space of a few years, almost all countries have been covered with a network of homogenous buildings that protect their professionally managed system of support staff. People flows between hubs of the global communications network are managed with mathematical precision. In theory, and increasingly in practice, the use of every square centimeter is allocated, controlled and monitored. Millions of staff collaborate in an automated global system whose integrity is enforced by armed guards and military grade technology to scan and monitor its throughput.

What is the principle which structures the activity here with such rigidity? Optimal satisfaction of needs. Needs not of people but of Money. In fact, one single need dominates all others in directing this activity. The human ties that exist here are mere shadows of the vital relationships of earlier days. People's presences here, as in the commercial environment more generally, are transient and self-serving. The founding principle that underlies platitudinous homilies about progress, safety or customer convenience, is the need of Money to expand and replicate itself, and in the expansion of its dominion, to subvert all disinterested parties to its control. Business is business.

Money alone grows here. Fish like machines exist in isolated tanks, knowing nothing of the uncertain life for which Nature intended them. Their existences are stage-managed spectacles, their confinement even tighter than that of the humans for whose amusement their lives have been reengineered. They are hostages of commercialism more even than the logo-bedecked human resources that martial ranks of passengers placed in front of 24 hour TV screens. Little more than glorified ashtrays, stunted trees in scattered baskets of plastic stones kneel before huge plasma screens. Token reminders of the natural world, like relics of a bygone age, they serve to amplify the cornucopia of manufactured goods, collected at great expense from around the world. Collected that is, not on a whim, but to be passed on at even greater expense to the wielders of gold and plastic.

Believers gather at altars that declare themselves "duty free", but which carry an obligation of worship to a range of mass-produced idols from Nike to Hennessy, Marlboro to Estée Lauder. Sacraments are flown thousands of miles for dispensation to the faithful by the apostles of the materialist gospel, and most are carried thousands more before ritual consumption. Some of these modern day super-pilgrims carry the relics back to their place of origin.



The logic of such a practice cannot even be questioned; no luxury is lavished upon the high priests of Capital without financial justification. All activity that allows Money to prosper is, by definition, worthwhile. No forest is cut down in vain, no young lives cut short, no species driven extinct without profitable cause. Money is a jealous god with no compassion to waste on the blighted lives of the financially disabled. Heretics are banished from the garden by the modern curse so damning it is usually delivered from master to slave only by mechanical means: "Credit Expired"

Mass produced texts abound, anonymously posted messages declare "Stand here", "Violator shall be fined 2000 Baht", "No photograph". Some are curt, others bizarre. "This playground is not for use for other purpose." The logic behind all such pronouncements is as uncompromising as it is simple. Individuality is to be expressed through the wallet. Your presence here will be tolerated only as long as you submit to the whims of the machine that built this place that runs it. This is no community - these are not expressions of a consensus view, but dictates issued by clergy of the Money cult.



A single concession to local tastes reminds the alert viewer that he is probably not in London, Dubai or Rio de Janeiro or any of a thousand other temples. A shriveled, barely recognisable squid carcass served up in the ubiquitous clear plastic package, adorned with a mocking logo. Who knows whether she once swam free in the sea, or whether, like so much of modern life was born and raised a slave to Money? Such wonderings are not found in the mind of the true believer, who sees everything and everyone as mere numbers on a balance sheet. The underlying logic, exponential growth of capital, is acultural, as far removed from real life as pure mathematics is from a mother's love.

Ultimately, the rigidity and rapacity of the financial machine will be its undoing. After a century of explosive technological growth, a large proportion of the natural world has been laid waste and the rest faces a highly uncertain future. The fervent denials of environmental catastrophe or of any alternative to market-based methods reflect not conviction but an increasing doubt and desperation from the followers of Money. The world is finite, but Money's ambitions are not. The earth only has so many resources to be plundered. What price this well-oiled capitalist machine in 2008 when oil production starts to decline? What new faith will its adherents find?

If you want to experience the future of developed society, go to an international airport. If you can, try to imagine living there every day. The prices are higher the profits bigger. This is 'progress' as defined by the money-minded. Forget the world outside. Forget the world.

