

The Plastic Bag Distraction Joey Moncarz

The banning of single-use plastic bags is the latest in a never-ending parade of distractions meant to lull us into thinking that modern civilisation is becoming more “environmentally friendly” and that the elite, corporations and their bureaucrat servants are capable of doing the right thing. It's also meant to distract us from considering what *really* needs to be done to deal with climate crisis, to avoid total ecological collapse, and to solve the many worsening social problems around us. Our failure to recognise this latest plastic bag distraction *as a distraction* is a result of having lost the ability to even identify what is important, what is real, what should be a priority and what is bullshit. Part of the reason why we've lost the ability to distinguish the real from bullshit is that our entire lives have been reduced to nothing but an endless string of distractions – i.e., lives of bullshit.

Before looking at the bigger distraction picture, let's look at plastic bags. It's a distraction from the fact that *all plastic* has to go. Plastic is made directly out of oil and requires destroying and poisoning the Earth to manufacture, releasing thousands of toxic chemicals, its existence is completely unnecessary (humans lived without plastic for more than two million years) and plastics continue to poison and kill for thousands of years after they're thrown away. (CIEL 2019) How will stopping single-use plastic bags change anything when plastic manufacturers plan on *quadrupling* production? (Gould 2016; Qualman 2017) This is why its a distraction. In the end, we still lose.

Similarly, the push to ban BPA from plastic bottles was another distraction. Everyone felt they were doing the right thing and making bottles safer. Hardly. Corporations simply replaced bisphenol-A with bisphenol-S, which now appears to be just as bad, if not worse. (Bilbrey 2014) All that struggle and we still lose, because we're not asking the bigger questions. The appropriate question to ask would have been, why are any of the more than 80,000 synthetic chemicals made at all? (Chilikov 2010; Gray 2010; McGinn 2000; NRDC “Toxic”) And then from there you'd ask, why do corporations exist? Why does profit exist? And finally, who decided that this is how life should be? (Bakan 2005; Jensen 2006; McMillan 2015; Scott 2017)

As you can see, asking too many questions is dangerous to the elite and those in power. (Levine 2012) That's why we're trained to accept lives of distraction. It starts when we're kids and we have to spend every day in institutions of distraction – schools. We'd rather be playing outside and discovering the world as we evolved to do, but instead we're forced by law to sit inside behind walls, to do “work” and “to learn”. Of course, we never learn what's really important or how the world really is. Instead we're trained to be passive and obedient and to accept that we can't do what we actually want, and to accept lives of distractions. School distractions include all the bullshit work kids are forced to do in class, the homework, the tests, and traveling to and from school each day. Along the way we're also bullied, stressed, drugged, made insecure, socially and emotionally crippled and rendered generally ignorant. (Gatto 2002, 2010; Mwanzia 2013) Once we go to university, this all continues and we have to again prove how passive and obedient we'll be. (Schmidt 2000)

From there, if we still have any hope of living meaningfully, that's quickly squashed by having to “get a job” and “pay the bills”. We have to pay to live on the planet – a first for any species. That effectively will distract us for our entire adult lives, as we readily accept without questioning that the point of living is to be exploited – which is what all jobs are. (McMillan 2015) We even come to believe that the more we allow ourselves to be exploited, the more virtuous we are – what a distraction! This is called the “work ethic” and it's drilled into us from when we start school.

Along the way we also have plenty of distractions that we willingly choose. This includes video games, internet, movies and TV, cellphones, shopping malls, drinking, smoking, drugs, gambling, sports (playing or watching), nightclubs, pornography, organised religion, amusement parks, zoos, aquariums, circuses, pop music, concerts, fast food, cafes and restaurants, and most of what we call “hobbies”. These we generally choose as coping mechanisms from being abused by schools, abused by work and abused by this social arrangement we call civilisation.

The mass media, working on behalf of the elite, do an excellent job of distracting us. The plastic bag distraction is one example. The media works so well because of how they ask the questions and they frame how we think of the world. They repeat the questions they want us to ask. In other words, they program us. (Chomsky and Herman 2002) In the plastic bag example, the media repeat over and over, “We need to get rid of single-use plastic bags.” And sure, we think to ourselves, that sounds reasonable. Single-use plastic bags shouldn't exist. But the media will never say, “We need to get rid of all plastic.” Because that threatens the system. They don't want you thinking that way.

The media will often distract us by what this or that politician said, like royalty, as if we should care. But they'll never raise the issue of whether *having politicians at all* actually helps us.

The media will distract us with a famous person's racist comments, as if it's just a few rotten people, but no one will ever raise the fact that the European and neo-European nations are all inherently racist, including all their institutions, such as schools, courts and police, which no one talks about.

We'll be distracted by this or that famous person's sexist or misogynist remarks, but no one will raise the fact that civilisations, by virtue of all being dependent on agriculture, are all patriarchal and hence all sexist and misogynist, and that civilisation is the problem. (Lerner 1986; Zerzan 2018)

We'll be distracted by an endless parade of scandals, corruption, crime, political games, scientific studies and “discoveries”, celebrity gossip and any other mindless crap the media can get their hands on.

Now, if you happen to be less distracted than most people and you see what's going on in the world and want to do something about it, there are many distraction traps to fall into as well. Green consumption is a favourite. The media, corporations and all mainstream environmental and social activists push this. Al Gore, at the end of his 2006 film “An Inconvenient Truth”, pushes all the things people can *buy* to help deal with climate change, none of which will actually make a difference. But most people fall into this trap. This includes buying electric cars and solar panels. These last two are very big distractions, actually just examples of magical thinking.

“Renewable energy” and talk of a “Green New Deal” is part of this delusion. If you care about the planet, this is the perfect distraction, regardless of reality. The climate problem solved in such a nice package – as long as you're ecologically ignorant and don't think too much. But mining and extraction remains. Factories remain. Toxic chemicals remain. The laws of thermodynamics remain. The law of unintended consequences remain. And, in fact, burning fossil fuels *increases* – because that's the only way to power all the extraction, production, distribution, maintenance and disposal required for all the glorious renewable energy people are fantasizing about. (Friedemann 2019; Huessemann 2011; Makarieva 2008; Parrique 2019; Smil 2012; Trainer 2010; Vartabedian 2012; Waldermann 2009; Zehner 2012)

Which leads us to the question, *who* decided that “renewable energy” is the solution?

And more importantly, why the hell do we need all that energy? That's the big question that's never asked. (Illich 2000; Nikiforuk 2014)

With “renewable energy” the car culture remains, too. What's interesting here is that people are upset that plastic bags end up in the oceans and kills roughly 200,000 marine animals each year. Compare that to the car. Cars kill one million animals *each day* in the U.S. alone. (Bekoff 2010; Kelleher 2015) A Brazilian study estimated 1.3 million animals are killed there *each day*. (Guimarães 2015) Millions of birds are killed on European roads each year. Plus more than one million humans are killed each year in car accidents. (WHO 2018) Add on millions killed or diseased from toxic air pollution, oil drilling, oil wars and so on. Forget plastic bags. Destroy the car culture!

We're also distracted with all the other ways we can “make change”. Voting, and the idiotic campaigns of endless lies that go along with elections, are a huge distraction. Yet somehow no one seems to notice that voting accomplishes nothing. Remember Emma Goldman's wise words, “If voting changed anything they'd make it illegal.”

Petitions, protests, vigils, marches, and publicity stunts are other distractions. They make us feel good but accomplish nothing. They're forms of begging. If they were effective, the world would now be in better shape. But it's important that we're directed to these methods of “doing something” because hell, the elite definitely do not want us to engage in direct action and take things into our own hands – in Malcolm X's wonderful words, “by any means necessary”. We might start asking, What are we waiting for? Why can't we just organise and fix things ourselves? What other actions can we take to get the job done? What have people done in the past? What has been most effective?

Which is precisely why we need to be distracted, whether it's plastic bags, cocaine, voting, screens, school or Disney. From an early age, and then constantly. To make sure we never, ever, ever ask the wrong questions.

Because ultimately we would start asking:

- What is the natural way for humans to live?
- How did humans live for two million years before civilisations arose? (Sahlins 2009; Woodburn 1982)
- Has civilisation actually been an improvement? (Diamond 1987; Ponting 2007)

And then:

- Why do we put up with all this crap?

This is when we would finally peel all the layers of distraction away and see civilisation and “progress” for the bullshit it is and we'd come to understand that the only way we'll ever live a meaningful life, and the only way our kids will ever live healthy, meaningful lives, is for us to forget plastic bags, get off our asses, turn off our screens, and organise to take things into our own hands and do what really needs to be done.

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