

# The World of Tomorrow

## -Lost Visions-

(Last edited: 7/21/2013; PDF conversion: 12/25/2012, begun in 1997)

The following is copied out from a set of Time-Life's *This Fabulous Century* --referring to the years spanning from 1870 to the 1960s. 1870-1900 was treated in one book, with a separate volume each for the decades of the 20th century. (It might as well have ended with the 60s. After the Kennedy assassination, Vietnam, and the triumph of venality, --the title no longer seems appropriate.)



This is General Motors' legendary "Futurama" pavilion at the 1939 World's Fair in New York. Its theme: "The World of Tomorrow". Social aspects of the visioning which follow didn't issue from wild-eyed lefty idealists, but from the heart of corporate America --as told to us by the Time-Life publishing empire. Perhaps GM's kept futurists had little awareness of the owning class' propensity to walk away from the game with all the marbles, but it's a reasonable guess that such rosy forecasts were part of a campaign to "out bid" socialist future-casting of the day (like in the USSR's giant pavilion.)

However that might have been, professional and academic sociology types use to seriously worry about a future filled with more free time and disposable income(!) than the average citizen might know what to do with --and as recently as my own youth (1950s/60s). This was to have been the logical result of our nation's investments in energy development, industrial base, and automation. Since 1890, productivity (wealth produced per hour of work) has increased by approximately a factor of 10. ---**Where did it go?**

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I was prompted to assemble this page (originally a slide show, then a web page and now a private PDF document) by a national strike in Germany --held to preserve paid vacation trips to spas in Spain, and another in Norway to maintain their 6th week of paid vacation. Few Americans appreciate the benefits which have been standard for much of Europe.

(The image and several long quotes in this article are copyright Time-Life, 1969)

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The Fair's "World of Tomorrow" theme was given spectacular treatment in General Motors' "Futurama" exhibit. Crowds averaging 28,000 per day came to see the largest animated scale model (covering 8/10ths of an acre) ever constructed, which presented designer Norman Bel Geddes' conception of the American landscape in the year 1960. Each visitor was seated in an armchair which moved along on a conveyor belt, taking 15 minutes to see the entire exhibit. Individual sound devices described the scenery passing by below. This display was so striking that *Lifemagazine* featured GM's prophecies in an enthusiastic article --excerpted as follows.

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**America in 1960 is full of tanned and vigorous people** who in 20 years have learned how to have fun. They camp in the forests and hike along the upcountry roads with their handsome wives and children. The college class of 1910 is out there hiking, half its members alive and very fit. These people do not care much for possessions. They are not attached to their own homes and home towns because trains,

express highways (and of course planes) get them across America in 24 hours.

**When Americans of 1960 take their two-month vacations:** --they drive to the great parklands on giant express highways. A two-way skein consists of four 50-mph lanes on each of the outer edges; two pairs of 75-mph lanes, and in the center: two lanes for 100-mph express traffic. Cars change from lane to lane at specified intervals, on signal from spaced control towers which can stop and start all traffic by radio. Being out of its driver's control, each car is safe against accident. The cars, built like raindrops, are powered by rear engines that are probably improvements of the Diesel. Inside, they are air-conditioned. They cost as low as \$200. Off the highway, the driver dawdles again at his own speed and risk.

These highways skirt the great cities, but the happiest people live in one-factory farm-villages, producing one small industrial item and their own farm produce. Strip planting protects the valley fields against erosion. The land is really greener than it was in 1939. Federal laws forbid the wanton cutting of wooded hillsides. Dams and canals prevent freshets and floods. Fewer acres, intensively and chemically cultivated, feed all the citizens of the United States. More of the surface of the land is in forest and park. Behind this visible America of 1960, hidden in laboratories, are the inventors and engineers. By the spring of 1939 they had cracked nearly every frontier of progress. Liquid air is, by 1960 a potent, mobile source of power. Atomic energy is being used cautiously. Power is transmitted by radio beams, focused by gold reflectors. The Lanova Cell has made all gasoline motors Diesels.

These great new powers make life in 1960 immensely easier. Such new alloys as heat-treated beryllium bronze give perfect service. Great telescopes show 100 times more of the cosmos than the men of 1939 saw in the sky. Cures for cancer and infantile paralysis have extended man's life span and his wife's skin is still perfect at the age of 75. Architecture and plane construction have been revolutionized by light, noninflammable, strong plastics from soybeans. Houses are light, graceful, easily replaced. Electronic microscopes literally see everything.

On every front America in 1960 knows more about unleashing the best energies in its citizens. Nearly everyone is a high-school graduate. The talented get the best education in the world. More people are interested in life, the world, themselves, and in making a better world. Politics and emotion still slow progress. But these obstructions are treated with dwindling patience in 1960.

\* Liquid air engines --see: <http://www.powerlabs.org/engines.htm>

\* Radio'd power: see the history of Nicola Tesla's inventions: <http://www.stargazing.net/Astroman/NTBio.html>

\* Lanova cell: A special combustion chamber, also called an energy cell, for diesel engines of high rotary speeds.

\* Beryllium bronze (from a year 2002 motorcycle brochure): "new valve seats made of beryllium bronze, an advanced material previously used only on racing engines. The new valve seats have improved heat dispersion and low wear characteristics --.

\* Infantile paralysis: Now called "polio".

\* Plastic composite airframes have been used since the Learjet of 1981. See:

> <http://www.skyaid.org/Skycar/overview2001ALL.htm>

\* This philosophy of housing was probably influenced by Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion House of 1927 .

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### **Don't you just want to leap at some of those lines in Life magazine's forecast?**

Much of this future at least started to be fulfilled --for better and for worse, --until about 1970. Since then, we've more than stagnated. In order to support a very prosperous segment of society (verging on 10% owning 90% of the wealth), we're even losing sight of the 40 hour work week (let alone needing only one such job per family).

Much of this has been the consequence of land speculation and development. Clever and/or advantaged

people buy or lever your next lot and home (at great public subsidy in taxes and development costs), then sell it to you for a fat profit. If you're at least 40 and have been working, you may have ridden up a bit with this escalator. You might also remember urban rents under \$100/month (utilities included) as recently as 1973, and good small homes selling for \$20,000 or less. Since then, "production workers" have seen wages go from \$4/hr to \$12/hr (\$10.18 by one recent account), but ever fewer of us have such jobs and paid benefits.

The real wages and wealth of the average American have eroded terribly, while the number of hours worked per family have increased. Was our prosperity of the future supposed to be the result of living in "one factory" company towns, or "not caring about possessions" --wanting only to stomp around in the woods and to enjoy the open road, following the work like migrant workers --"detached" from our home communities? The mobile work force concept has been realized, but we somehow missed out on that cheerful sense of "tanned" well being.

The most heartening aspect of this propaganda is in remembering that there was a time when people had expectations of an ever better future (--and despite the great economic depression).

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5/6/06 update: Andrew L. Yarrow captured and framed what I've been trying to say here in his article: "**America: Utopia Lost**", published 2/25/06 in the L.A. Times.

## **America: Utopia Lost**

**Fifty years ago, America's future was limitless. So what happened to optimism?**

by Andrew L. Yarrow

America has never been richer, but it once was much more optimistic -- even utopian, about its future. In 1956, Fortune magazine published "The Fabulous Future," a book of essays by luminaries forecasting a nation of technological and economic wonders by 1980. Adlai Stevenson spoke of "the most extraordinary growth any nation or civilization has ever experienced." George Meany predicted "ever-rising" living standards. And David Sarnoff gushed, "There is no element of material progress we know today that will not seem from the vantage point of 1980 a fumbling prelude."

That same year, that wild utopian, Richard Nixon, then vice president in the Eisenhower administration, heralded a 30-hour, four-day workweek "in the not too distant future." Gallup polls found that only 3% of the population questioned whether the nation was enjoying "good times," and just 8% doubted that the good times would keep getting better indefinitely.

For the rest of this excellent article, please see:

> <http://www.commondreams.org/views06/0225-28.htm>

(Andrew L. Yarrow's "Visions of Abundance" was published in 2007. © 2005 The Los Angeles Times)

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--And here's a succinct essay in answer to: "what happened to all that leisure":

Published May 3, 2008 by Orion Magazine:

## **The Gospel of Consumption**

by Jeffrey Kaplan

Private cars were relatively scarce in 1919 and horse-drawn conveyances were still common. In residential districts, electric streetlights had not yet replaced many of the old gaslights. And within the home, electricity remained largely a luxury item for the wealthy.

Just ten years later things looked very different. Cars dominated the streets and most urban homes had electric lights, electric flat irons, and vacuum cleaners. In upper-middle-class houses, washing machines, refrigerators, toasters, curling irons, percolators, heating pads, and popcorn poppers were becoming commonplace. And although the first commercial radio station didn't begin broadcasting until 1920, the American public, with an adult population of about 122 million people, bought 4,438,000 radios in the year 1929 alone.

But despite the apparent tidal wave of new consumer goods and what appeared to be a healthy appetite for their consumption among the well-to-do, industrialists were worried. They feared that the frugal habits maintained by most American families would be difficult to break. Perhaps even more threatening was the fact that the industrial capacity for turning out goods seemed to be increasing at a pace greater than people's sense that they needed them.

It was this latter concern that led Charles Kettering, director of General Motors Research, to write a 1929 magazine article called "Keep the Consumer Dissatisfied." He wasn't suggesting that manufacturers produce shoddy products. Along with many of his corporate cohorts, he was defining a strategic shift for American industry --from fulfilling basic human needs to creating new ones.

In a 1927 interview with the magazine Nation's Business, Secretary of Labor James J. Davis provided some numbers to illustrate a problem that the New York Times called "need saturation." Davis noted that "the textile mills of this country can produce all the cloth needed in six months' operation each year" and that 14 percent of the American shoe factories could produce a year's supply of footwear. The magazine went on to suggest, "It may be that the world's needs ultimately will be produced by three days' work a week."

For the rest of this precious article, please see:

> <http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/2962/>

Jeffrey Kaplan has long been an activist in the Bay Area. His articles have appeared in various publications, including Orion, Yes! and the Chicago Tribune. © 2008 Orion Magazine

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snippets from:  
**RADICAL DEMOCRACY**  
by: C. Douglas Lummis 1996

\* Democracy is not everything but it's something. The capitalist corporation has itself become an anti-

democratic system of rule. The question of how to democratize the main actor in the free market -the corporation, is, for the capitalists and the managers, THE subversive question.

\* Radical democracy describes the adventure of human beings creating, with their own hands, the conditions for their freedom. And it is an adventure the main part of which is yet to be undertaken. Democracy means that people rule. To do so the people must form itself into a body by which power can, in principle, be held. Democratic common sense is created through moral discourse, choice and action. Democracy is not a kind of government but an end of government; not a historically existing institution, but a historical project. Democratic power does not fall from above, it is generated by a people in a democratic state of mind, and the actions they take in accordance with that state of mind.

\* The expression "development of underdeveloped countries" refers to a set of activities which from another value perspective can be called "neo-colonialism." Under this ideology was launched the most massive systematic project of human exploitation and the most massive assault on culture and nature, which history has ever known. It is not correct usage to apply the term development to the process of knocking down one thing and building something else in its place.

\* The world economic system generates inequality and it runs on inequality. If something deeply affects the order of our collective life and we are taught that we have no choice about accepting it, when in fact, we do, that is a problem for democracy.

\* Rousseau said: "It is the obedience to the wills of other humans, not obedience to the laws of nature, that threatens our freedom." It is liberating, I think, to remind ourselves that most of the technologies that a human being really needs to live an orderly, comfortable and healthy life are ancient. Choose a technology and you choose the politics (i.e.: the order of work) that comes with it. Choose mass consumption and you choose mass production and a managed order of work.

Copyrighted thoughts, 1996 --and I'd have liked to quote the whole thing. (So many fine thoughts have been turned into property and imprisoned.) My apologies in that the above (apparently having been already re-edited a bit by others) needed to be cleaned up from an old (badly) OCR'd copy that came my way years ago --with some minimalist editing liberties taken for readability --hopefully in the spirit of Lummis' original. (Yes: I'll break down and get a copy of the book --someday.)

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7/21/2013: **Dr. Majia Nadesan** better acquainted me with Edward Bernays, a force who expertly, but mindlessly, shaped the world as we know it. Majia put me onto: "**Century of Self**" at:  
> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7EwXmxpExw>

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**"In the post modern condition people are set free from oppressive and ridiculous dogma. But they are also set adrift from invaluable, sensible ways of understanding how life should be lived, ways that have been realized through emotional, social and bodily experience gleaned over millennia. Into this vacuum step the herders of the post-modern psyche – the public relations people – the engineers of consent as Bernays called them --" --Mackey**

Steve Mackey's perspective on where we're at comes from a 10 year-old, unpublished paper of his (save for its Internet citation/copy), which surely rates an appearance on my page:

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# "Using the Rhetorical Turn to Grasp the Full Importance of Public Relations"

by: **Steve Mackey** (As formatted, English spellings changed, [lightly edited] and punctuated by Craig)

> [http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p\\_mla\\_apa\\_research\\_citation/1/1/1/3/9/pages111391/p111391-3.php](http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/1/1/1/3/9/pages111391/p111391-3.php)

[An unpublished] paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Marriott Hotel, San Diego, CA, May 27, 2003

## **Abstract:**

This paper sides with critics who say that at present public relations is NOT a bona fide area of university study. However the paper argues that public relations COULD be made a legitimate and surprisingly important academic discipline through a deeper understanding of notions of rhetoric than that given by Robert Heath (Heath. 2001). In the post modern era, scientism, progressivism, grand-narration, in fact all the other pointers to thinking and philosophy, are coming adrift from their foundations for most western people. One consequence of this fragmentation of perspectives, this loss of religiosity or faith in progress and the modern, is that the academic 'market'- as we might call it, has a new opening for a subject which specialises in understanding frameworks for thinking in the post modern age. Public relations activity fills this role in a similar way to the way rhetoric filled this role for the ancients.

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## **Extract** (from pages #1 and 2):

Social commentators and neighborhood gossips may exert some pressure to tell people what is 'right' in a 'godless' and 'liberated' era. But of far more importance is the daily, in fact hourly, round the clock work of corporations, governments and other organizations who constantly round up those aspects of democratically [scattered], un-narrated thoughts, which they would prefer were aligned to their own self interested perspectives. These are the thoughts which determine what sort of politics we should live within; who we should go to war with; how we should direct our charity; what we should eat; how we should travel; what our expectations should be in terms of education, health and other social services; what we should think about environmental degradation.

Less and less are our thoughts drawn from the revelations of our forefathers, foremothers and social leaders in terms of what sort of a society we should build cooperatively. Less and less do these thoughts come from an aboriginal dreaming or a notion of social progress or a conscience based on religion or a value based understanding of what is best for our children and our communities. In the post-modern world all those old fashioned mythologies fade into the background behind the vivid TV sound bite, the persuasive PowerPoint presentation, the massive issues management or election advertising campaigns.

In the post modern condition people are set free from oppressive and ridiculous dogma. But they are also set adrift from invaluable, sensible ways of understanding how life should be lived, ways that have been realized through emotional, social and bodily experience gleaned over millennia. Into this vacuum step the herders of the post-modern psyche – the public relations people – the engineers of consent as Bernays called them (Bernays. 1969).

But psyche engineers are not new. Strategies for getting people to see things in certain ways were well understood by Aristotle and many other rhetoricians in the centuries before and after him. Aristotle even

wrote a book about it: *The Art of Rhetoric* (Aristotle. 1991). But the psyche engineers of the 21 st century do not understand much of the above. They themselves are mostly cut off from philosophic roots. What they do have however is a finger on an unprecedented array of communication technology, including instant global communication technology. In addition those employed by the already dominant organizations have access to very large economic resources.

To understand how public relations can be turned from a rather shabby practice, captured and incorporated by dominant interests into a legitimate academic subject, it is first necessary to reflect a little on ontology. One has to be aware of the naïve objectivism which still holds out as an underpinning to orthodox public relations thought. It is no little embarrassment to say that most intelligent academics in other university subjects, including many in management studies, abandoned objectivism long ago. Objectivism hangs on in public relations studies because it is fundamental to the ideological underpinning of the tradition form of public relations. To explain the political-cultural reasons for this hold-out would take another paper. Suffice it to say they are to do with the American-style capitalism which dominated first the US, and which is now dominating the globe. Dominant capitalist institutions and their orthodox public relations [spokespersons] prefer people to hold the naïve view that there is right and there is wrong; there is good and there is evil; there is truth and there is falsehood and that the American way is best. One only has to analyze the last speech by any serving US president to realize what an unsophisticated view of the world American capitalism requires.

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