

I Want My Buzz Word Back

Capuchin



Along the unsafe streets of the English language lie the burned out hulks of words and phrases, exhausted by marketing firms pursuing the dollars of the elusive conscientious consumer.

Natural, Organic, Free Range, Fair Trade—they clutter the labels at health food stores and fill the gaps in inane Eco-conversations. Rest in peace I say to most. Their meanings were manufactured to begin with, tied loosely to regulation and exploited by whichever producers could find the most cost effective way to abide by the letter of the law. Language lives and evolves. If these words have passed out of usefulness and into the purgatory of untrustworthy slogans so be it, but leave me Sustainability.

There was a time when Sustainability still had weight and significance. It meant survival, pure and simple. It meant avoiding a Malthusian Apocalypse, environmental collapse, disaster and death. It brought a level of gravity to any conversation. It said, "This cannot go on forever". It said, "Anything Unsustainable is slow suicide."

Not so anymore. Now Sustainability is merely a generic positive adjective in the vaguely progressive mind. Sustainability stands in for Wal-Mart, images of styrofoam packed land fills and coal power plants in China. It suggests the type of world ending cataclysm that can be averted by changing to a non-animal

tested shampoo or properly sorting your recycling.

In a better world the move to despecify environmental claims would be a positive result of an engaged consumer culture. As animal lovers found out that over bred chickens living in less than a square foot of space but shown an open door for five minutes a day qualified as "Free Range" and environmentalists realized that acres of Californian monoculture, smothered in black plastic could be labeled organic they would shun these claims and insist on better accountability. That requires getting to know the sources of the foods and products you use, and making nuanced choices. Is a local apple from a conventional farmer you trust to spray only at need a more or less sustainable product than organic Chilean grapes? Ambiguity is a fact of life. In the face of uncertainty, making decisions requires taking moral responsibility for your actions and their effects on others.

Unfortunately, Sustainability's proliferation and dilution seem to represent a movement in the opposite direction, towards passivity. Consumers are tired of keeping track of whether they are "supposed" to be buying Free Range or Cage Free. They don't want to research what Organic means when raising different types of vegetables. They would rather not know what Fair-Trading coffee companies consider fair.

Like it's aesthetically pleasing cousin "Green", Sustainability's generality makes it appealing and simple. Whoever's using it knows the buzz word of the day, which means they're probably hip to all the trendiest Eco-fads and

environmental faux-pas. The passive consumer can most likely use Sustainable Product X without doing their due diligence and avoid being labeled an earth-killer later. What was once and apocalyptic demand for action becomes a de facto 30% sales tax at Whole Foods in order to feel good about yourself.

Tragic, but why is Sustainability more worthy of a rearguard action than any of its appropriated predecessors?

Sustainability is worth fighting for because as a conceptual foundation it could link movements that have become too self-absorbed to recognize potential allies. In a world where nuclear weapons exist, war is unsustainable; every conflict a risk of escalation and genocide. A world in which 20% of the population make 82.7% of its income is unsustainable. A world powered by finite resources is unsustainable. Apartheid is unsustainable. Oppression is finite. Empires do not last.

The unsustainable world order supports itself through a web of reinforcing inequalities. Private prisons profit of inmates fed processed food whose price is kept artificially low by government subsidies to agribusiness which returns the favor in campaign contributions. The drug laws passed to keep these prisons full (and disproportionately so with people of color) are a domestic side to a War on Drugs that has put military and paramilitary resources in the hands of US-business friendly right-wing regimes through out Latin America. If people against the prison-industrial complex, in favor of small

genetically diverse and responsibly tended farms, against the criminalization of drug use, against racism and police discrimination, in favor of radical electoral reform, against militarization and neo-colonial occupation of Latin America each fight alone against a facet of the behemoth above, they will lose. If they can see the paradigm of exploitation that underlies the existing power structure and organize around an ethic of sustainability, which is no more than the collective self interest of human kind, they may stand a chance.

If Sustainability can be twisted until it is loosely symbolic of good, let good come to mean Sustainability: a willingness to suspend the immediate pleasures of privilege for the sake of survival and the possibility of a better day.

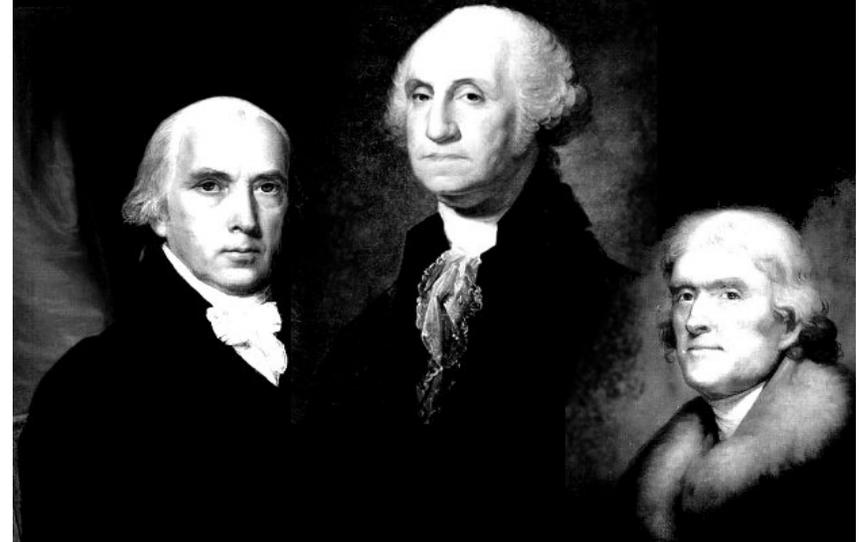
Sunday Food Not Bombs is Changing Times

Free Vegan
Food For
Anyone!
and
Holly
Corner of
Railroad

Starting
October 9th
Serving Time
Will Move From
4 pm to 2 pm



They Enslaved Human Beings



Deal With Hard Facts

Money and Middle-men

Capuchin

Welcome to the free world, by which we mean the world of free trade, or rather the world free from trade regulation, where everything has its price, and every price is determined by the divine objectivity of might makes right.

The heat of competition refines us, drives out our impurities and makes us all we can be. It burns on the free flow of information forced through pipes under the watchful eye of the middle-men. In this ideal marketplace the middle-men justify their existence by summoning up the specter of inefficiency: consumers confounded by ignorance, unable to make the most rational decision at every juncture. Middle-men specialize in making these decisions for you. Their expertise allows them to make choices for whole flocks of citizens. Picking an expert is the only choice you ever need to make.

Welcome to the free world, by which we mean a world with no monetary value, or rather a world in which money has no inherent worth if no one will give you anything in return for it.

This is not a novel idea. Money is an efficiency when the negotiation of vital goods and services becomes too complicated

for bartering. It's a way of retaining the value of ephemeral products like fresh food, encouraging people to achieve economies of scale and plan for the future. Money is a middle man.

Like other middle-men, money is not progress itself. It creates nothing, builds nothing, grows nothing. At its best it removes obstacles, lowers the cost of transactions by setting certain pre-existing conditions, allows for more effort to be spent on creating, building and growing. Often we forget this.

Then money moves from a means to the end. The middle-man becomes the boss. Competition for the job is stiff and new experts emerge to navigate the existing array of agents, brokers and analysts. Those who already have money have the competitive advantage in positioning themselves on top of the middle-man pile. Their money makes money while the people creating, building and growing work harder to support the ballooning class of 'optimizing' parasites. Volume is prioritized. Transaction speed increases until the wheels are spinning out of control, shedding value like heat.

Look around you. Where are you? The free world, by which we mean whatever world we want, or rather whatever world we spend our freedom on. Freedom is like money, an abstract function of your dreams worth only

as much as what you can get with it. You're not getting much in return for yours. Trade a woman's freedom to choose, for a semi-automatic handgun in every house. Trade your freedom to love whoever you want for cheap Twinkies at every gas station convenience store.

I'd rather spend my freedom elsewhere. I'll give up my right to exploit anyone weaker than me for the selfish reason that someday I'll be the weakest. I'll give up my freedom to ignore those in need for the selfish reason that someday I'll be the neediest.

Is this naïve? To me it's the bitter result of a hard-nosed negotiation with reality. I've sold my freedom to believe our world is a perfect uncorrupted rational marketplace filled with the optimal number of hardworking middle-men. I expect, in return, to navigate the uncertain alternative, suffering constant disappointments and occasional triumphs, clutching the hope that my legacy will be unable to fit in a large safety deposit box.

Welcome to the free world.

