

# SOFiA

## Exploring Values, Meaning and Spirituality

### Whatever happened to the 60s?

The 60s was a time of ferment and upheaval. The younger generation rebelled against the older generation. It was no longer willing to do its patriotic duty and risk death in the Vietnam war. It found the world of “mutually assured destruction” mad indeed and refused to accept it. It was no longer willing to don suit and tie and work for a big corporation; instead, it grew long hair and wore jeans. In religion too, it refused to adopt an identity pre-defined by one particular denomination and instead wanted to explore new religious possibilities and find its own identity.

Theodore Roszak tells the following story that gives a feeling for the Zeitgeist of the time:

“On October 21, 1967, the Pentagon found itself besieged by a motley army of anti-war demonstrators; 50,000 protestors made up of activist academics and students, but also contingents of ‘witches, warlocks, holymen, seers, prophets, mystics, saints, sorcerers, shamans, troubadours, minstrels, bards, roadmen and madmen.’ The central event of the day was an exorcism of the Pentagon by long-haired warlocks who ‘cast mighty words of white light against the demon-controlled structure’ in hopes of levitating it right off the ground.”

(*The Making of a Counter Culture* p 124, quoting the East Village Other magazine.)

A good 50 years on, almost nothing remains from this upheaval. It seems that the establishment has been able to absorb its destructive energy and come back even stronger. There might be a few hints of the 60s continuing influence: the yoga and Tai Chi classes at your local gym or a more relaxed dress code at your place of work. But the invention of internal assessments in education and the requirement to find a

paying job at the end of one’s study serve only to tighten the grip of the establishment.

This issue of the newsletter aims to look at the 60s from various angles to see what of value we might learn from it.

It looks to Theodore Roszak’s book *The Making of a Counter Culture* for an in-depth analysis of the causes of this ferment:

“So, by way of a dialectic Marx could never have imagined, technocratic America produces a potentially revolutionary element among its own youth. The bourgeoisie, instead of discovering the class enemy in its factories, finds it across the breakfast table in the person of its own pampered children.”

This analysis includes an awareness of the 60s rejection of Enlightenment-style secularity and a new fascination with religion especially of an exotic kind coming from the East:

“What the counter culture offers us, then, is a remarkable defection from the long-standing tradition of sceptical, secular intellectuality which has served as the prime vehicle for three hundred years of scientific and technical work in the West. Almost overnight...a significant portion of the younger generation has opted out of that tradition, rather as if to provide an emergency balance to the gross distortions of our technological society, often by occult aberrations just as gross.”

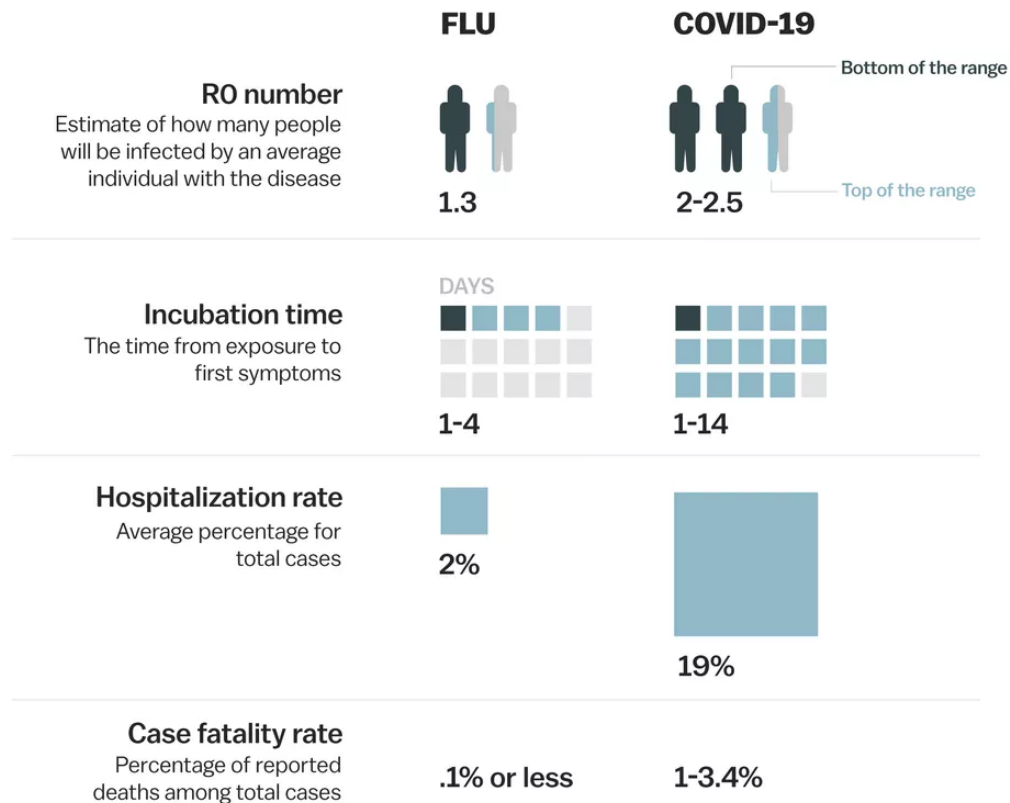
This issue also looks to the rock festival Woodstock as an expression of the mood of the time and to the Esalen institute which provided much of the religious and psychological initiatives.

Maybe the 60s legacy is to invite us to explore various experiences rather than to analyse concepts.

*The Editor*

# On COVID-19

## How seasonal flu and Covid-19 compare



Sources: CDC, WHO, NCBI

**Vox**

SOFiA hopes that you are managing to cope with the lockdown; that your anxiety is within bounds and that you are having some interesting experiences with the restrictions it brings. Your editor finds the lack of noise and traffic refreshing and that others are more likely to give me a friendly greeting when I'm out for a walk.

### Some light relief

I've heard that people are going crazy from being in lockdown!

I've just been talking about this with the microwave and the toaster and we agreed that things are getting worse.

I didn't mention anything to the washing machine as she puts a different spin on everything.

Certainly not to the fridge as he is acting cold and distant.

In the end the iron calmed me down as she said everything will be fine, no situation is too pressing.

The vacuum cleaner was very unsympathetic... told me to just suck it up, but the fan was more optimistic and hoped it would all soon blow over!

The toilet looked a bit flushed when I asked its opinion and didn't say anything, but the doorknob told me to get a grip.

The front door said I was unhinged, and the curtains told me to pull myself together.

(With thanks to Peter Cowley for finding this gem.)

# About SOFiA

SOFiA (The Sea of Faith in Aotearoa) is a network of people interested in the non-dogmatic discussion of values, meaning and spirituality. We want to explore for ourselves what we can believe and how we can find meaning in our lives.

SOFiA is not a church: it is a forum for discussing ideas, experiences and perspectives. SOFiA itself has no creed; its members come from many faiths and from those with no attachment to any religious institution.

If you are in sympathy with our aims, you are most welcome to join us; receive our Newsletter, attend a local group and/or come to our Conferences.

We follow similar organisations in the UK and Australia in taking our name from "Sea of Faith", the 1984 BBC TV series and book by the British religious academic, Don Cupitt.

## Committee

Our national Committee oversees the work of SOFiA.

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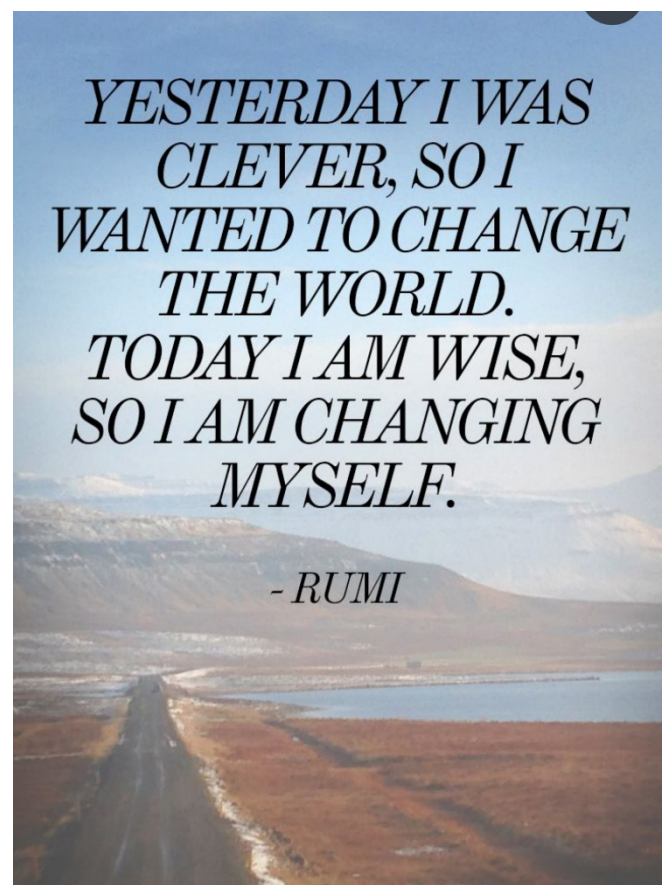
## Life Members

Sir Lloyd Geering ONZ, Don Cupitt (UK), Ian Harris and Noel Cheer (deceased). Also Suzi Thirwell, Yvonne Curtis and Peter Cowley.

**Publication deadline** for the next Newsletter is 7 June 2020.

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# SOFiA News

## From the Committee

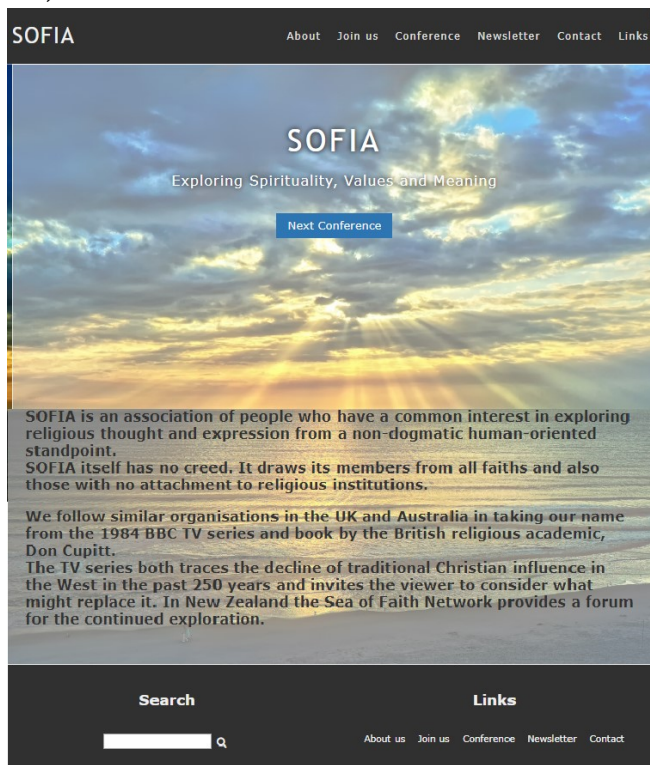
### Coopted Members

The Committee reports that it has co-opted two new members: John Thornley and Roger Wiig. Both bring significant skills to the role and we are very appreciative of their willingness to support us.

### New Website

SOFiA has restructured its website. It will be accessible under the URL ([sofia.org.nz](http://sofia.org.nz)) and under [sof.org.nz](http://sof.org.nz) as well. The new design has been in the pipeline for some time, but the Committee held off implementing it because of the discussion around changing our name.

By the time you receive this newsletter, the new website may already be a reality. If not, check back from time to time.



The old website was created using an earlier technology: hand-coded in HTML and consisting only of a single page with links.

### Norm Ely

We have received some unwelcome news about Norm Ely's health.

Norm wrote:

"I now have a final diagnosis of my health. I had an extensive series of tests at the Neurological Clinic yesterday. They literally poked me with needles, prodded me with electric shocks, re-examined me and came up with a diagnosis of Motor Neuron Disease. I have months rather than years to put up with this.

I am looking at care homes with hospitals over the next weeks.

I have a Geriatrician who specialises in this coming next week to plan my future and to set up necessary care plans.

So, I am finally being taken seriously and care plans put in place."

Our Committee secretary has written to him on our behalf:

"The committee has asked me, as the current secretary of the organisation, to write expressing our concern for that and our gratitude for the many years of service you have given to the Sea Of Faith.

Your participation and active work while both a member and in office, sometimes in trying circumstances, as I experienced, represented some of the best and most fruitful years for our organisation, something that we can now look back in some envy. That we have lasted so long as we have, in good heart, has had much to do with your contribution to our network.

Yours sincerely,  
Steve Collard  
Secretary



# Interesting Texts

## Woodstock

The 60s also saw the rise of multi-day rock festivals, the most famous of which is Woodstock, held in 1969 on Yasgur's farm in New York state. Some 400,000 attended over three days, causing massive traffic jams. Rain and mud only made things worse.

The singer Joni Mitchell was on her way to attend Woodstock but got stuck in New York airport and couldn't attend. Still, she wrote the following song, which became a hit and probably the best song that captured the spirit of Woodstock:

## Woodstock (the song)

I came upon a child of God  
He was walking along the road  
And I asked him where are you going  
And this he told me  
I'm going on down to Yasgur's farm \*  
I'm going to join in a rock 'n' roll band  
I'm going to camp out on the land  
I'm going to try an' get my soul free

We are stardust  
We are golden  
And we've got to get ourselves  
Back to the garden

Then can I walk beside you  
I have come here to lose the smog  
And I feel to be a cog in something turning  
Well maybe it is just the time of year  
Or maybe it's the time of man  
I don't know who I am  
But you know life is for learning

By the time we got to Woodstock  
We were half a million strong  
And everywhere there was song and celebration  
And I dreamed I saw the bombers  
Riding shotgun in the sky  
And they were turning into butterflies  
Above our nation

We are stardust  
We are golden  
And we've got to get ourselves  
Back to the garden

We are stardust  
Billion year old carbon  
We are golden  
Caught in the devil's bargain  
And we've got to get ourselves  
back to the garden

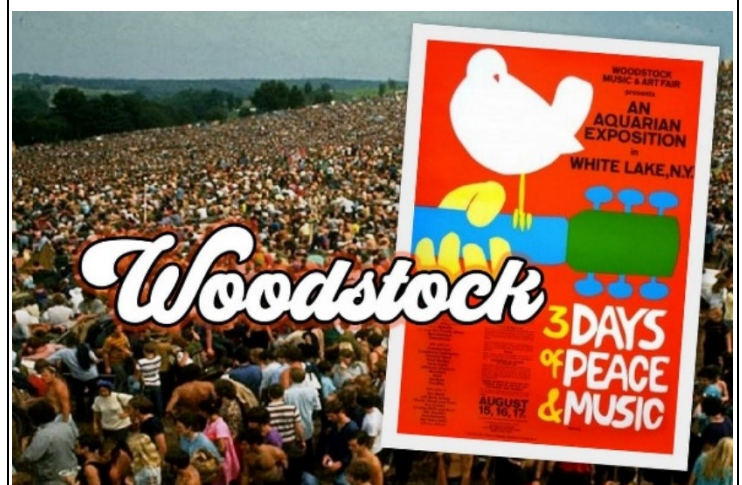
She wrote: "Woodstock, for some reason, impressed me as being a modern miracle, like a modern-day fishes and loaves story. For a herd of people that large to cooperate so well, it was pretty remarkable and there was tremendous optimism."

**Child of God** poetic description of the many hippie-like attendees.

**Get my soul free / caught in the devil's bargain** 60s attitude of escaping from the materialism and commercialism of the dominant culture

**We are stardust** lovely insight from modern cosmology and one that Lloyd Geering is particularly fond of. The atoms (other than hydrogen and helium) that we are composed of come from a previous generation of stars that were born, lived and died.

**We've got to get ourselves back to the garden** romantic desire for a simple agricultural life, reflected in the emergence of various communes that attempted to live off the land.



## Book Review

### The Making of a Counter Culture.

*Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition. Theodore Roszak London 1970.*

If you want to understand the spirit of the 60s, there is no better book than this. It is regarded as the bible of the counter culture. Indeed, the very phrase counter culture was coined by Roszak in this book and is now often written as a single word: counterculture.

This is surprising, because the book was written in the heat of the 60s upheaval.

Alan Watts wrote in 1969, "If you want to know what is happening among your intelligent and mysteriously rebellious children, this is the book. The generation gap, the student uproar, the New Left, the beats and hippies, the psychedelic movement, rock music, the revival of occultism and mysticism, the protest against our involvement in Vietnam, and the seemingly odd reluctance of the young to buy the affluent technological society—all these matters are here discussed, with sympathy and constructive criticism, by a most articulate, wise, and humane historian."

You can't begin to understand the counterculture unless you can empathise with the feeling that the always praised rational, modern, secular society is cramping the human spirit.

This society is complex and differentiated, so relies on the opinions of experts, devaluing those of lay people. It is committed to science and only recognises objective facts.

Roszak is a scholar with wide-ranging interests and a deep understanding of religion broadly understood, as well as a gift for writing very quotable sentences.

He also has a sensitive feel for the discontent that motivated the counterculture. He concedes that

questioning the establishment is not straightforward:

"It is not easy to question the thoroughly sensible, thoroughly well-intentioned but nevertheless reductive humanism with which the technocracy surrounds itself without seeming to speak a dead and discredited language (pxiv)."

The book is a valiant and articulate attempt to do that questioning.

"The hippie, real or as imagined, now seems to stand as one of the few images toward which the very young can grow without having to give up the childish sense of enchantment and playfulness (p40)."

Roszak analyses the 'technocracy' and so helps to make comprehensible why the then younger generation would rebel against the 'system.' It also analyses some of the thought leaders who influenced that younger generation.

Roszak gives us two images from other ages as parallels to the alienation felt by 60s youth. There are the Centaurs invading the gods' civilised festivities. And there are the early Christians invading the late Roman Empire and its civil religion:

"Hopelessly estranged by ethos and social class from the official culture, the primitive Christian community awkwardly fashioned of Judaism and the mystery cults a minority culture that could not but seem an absurdity to Greco-Roman orthodoxy. (p43)"

In Chapter 3, he looks at liberation through an analysis of Herbert Marcuse (author of *One-Dimensional Man*) and Norman Brown (author of *Life against Death* and *Love's Body*). While Marcuse takes an essentially empirical view of transcendence, denying it any religious quality, Brown (and Roszak) want to make room for visionary experience.

In Chapter 4, he looks at Allen Ginsberg, who became fascinated, first with Zen Buddhism and then with Hinduism.

Roszak's book was written in the midst of the 60s ferment, so has a somewhat fragmentary and preliminary character, but is nevertheless very suggestive and stimulating.

My thanks to John Craighead who gave me this book on long-term loan. *The Editor*

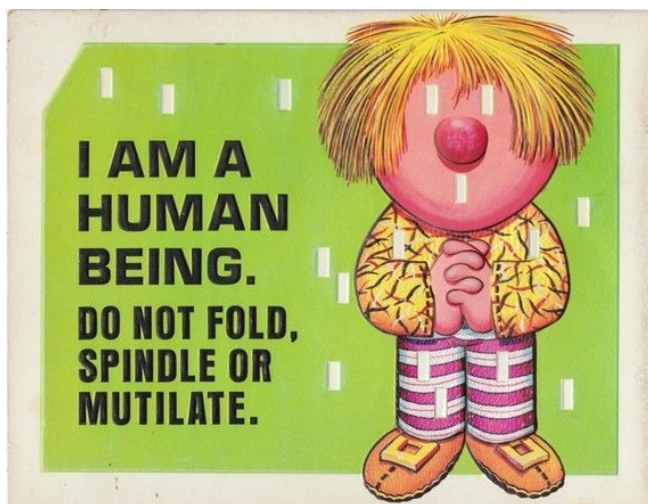
## One-dimensional Man

At the beginning of *One-Dimensional Man* Marcuse writes:

"The people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment, "meaning that under capitalism (in consumer society) humans become extensions of the commodities that they buy, thus making commodities extensions of people's minds and bodies. Affluent mass technological societies, he argues, are totally controlled and manipulated. In societies based upon mass production and mass distribution, the individual worker has become merely a consumer of its commodities and entire commodified way of life. Modern Capitalism has created false needs and false consciousness geared to consumption of commodities: it locks one-dimensional man into the one-dimensional society which produced the need for people to recognize themselves in their commodities.

## I am a Human Being: Do not Fold, Spindle or Mutilate

Along with "make love, not war" and "turn on, tune in, and drop out," "I am a human being; do not fold, spindle or mutilate" was one of the slogans created during the 60s.



Punch cards represented the very latest in technological efficiency. They were used with early computers to record data and program code, as the computers did not yet have ROM memory that survived turning the computer off. The instruction not to fold, etc was needed because the cards were sensitive to any physical damage; one damaged card was enough to ruin the operation of a whole computer program.

In picking up this instruction and applying it to themselves, 60s youth were protesting against the dehumanising effect of an ever-more efficient technology that excluded human values and feelings.

## Where have we failed?

In the cartoon below, a hippie couple are distressed to see their young son striding out the door with suit, bowler hat and briefcase: a business-savvy young gentleman. They are confronted with a younger generation that is embracing what they rejected in the 60s and wonder what went wrong. We could argue that this captures exactly what has in fact happened; the next generation reverted to Establishment thinking.



"Where have we failed?"

—The New Yorker  
May 11, 1968



## Book Review

### The American Soul Rush: Esalen and the Rise of Spiritual Privilege

By Marion Goldman. NYU Press 2012

The Esalen Institute was founded by Michael Murphy and Dick Price in 1962. It was a retreat centre in California for many who had loosened their ties to liberal Protestant denominations or Catholic congregations and embarked on a quest for a more personal and individual religious meaning.

Both founders grew up in liberal congregations: Michael served as an altar boy and Dick's father had renounced Judaism to become Episcopalian. But they wanted more than old doctrine and dry ritual.

Esalen was named after the American Indian Esselan tribe, who had used the site as a sacred burial ground. It made an enormous range of spiritual experiences and personal growth available to ordinary Americans who were disenchanted with mainstream religion.

The author, Marion Goldman, who is Professor of Sociology and Religious Studies at the University of Oregon, claims that hers is the first book on Esalen not to be written by an insider. She has interviewed many of the key people and researched the history of the Institute.

Her book uses two rather unusual concepts to articulate the significance of Esalen. One is 'spiritual privilege' by which she means a combination of knowledge of religions and culture generally, connections with elite social networks, economic resources that give the freedom to explore, and an affinity with spiritual traditions.

The other is 'soul rush', parallel to adrenaline rush, which refers to a sudden increase in interest in matters of the soul.

Esalen was part of a 60s soul rush; an explosion of interest in all sorts of alternative religious traditions and psychologies. There was a demand for new, more meaningful religion. The soul rush was made possible

because of an increase of people with spiritual privilege and it made that spiritual privilege available to a wide range of ordinary people.

Esalen awakened Americans and others to many new options for personal and spiritual growth. It was a "religion of no religion." Its myriad workshops, rituals and study groups provided an open, competitive marketplace of experience-oriented practice.

Esalen combined newer psychological approaches with inputs largely from Eastern religion. It wrested psychotherapy away from a focus on problems to one on personal growth. It celebrated the diversity of humanistic, Gestalt, encounter, existential and transpersonal psychologies. Dick Price's variant of Gestalt, Gestalt Awareness Practice, integrated aspects of Taoism, Zen and other Buddhist practices.

Underlying much of the psychological theory active at Esalen was psychodrama, which Goldman took time to explore as well, even though it wasn't explicitly offered there. She concluded that psychodrama fulfilled "the original and ancient functions of drama: the healing of the human spirit as a religious and communal experience.

Esalen was part of what came to be called the Human Potential Movement and three key thinkers (Fritz Perls, William Schutz and Abraham Maslow) played important roles there. Maslow's concepts of self-actualisation and peak experiences capture the heart of what Esalen was about.

Something of the spirit of Esalen came even as far as Dunedin, New Zealand. First Church and the Cameron Centre ran many programs, including 'growth groups' that owed something to Esalen's soul rush.

I must confess to still feeling a longing for the intense and slightly scary intimacy of such small group experiences. They were part of the magic of the 60s that we have largely lost.



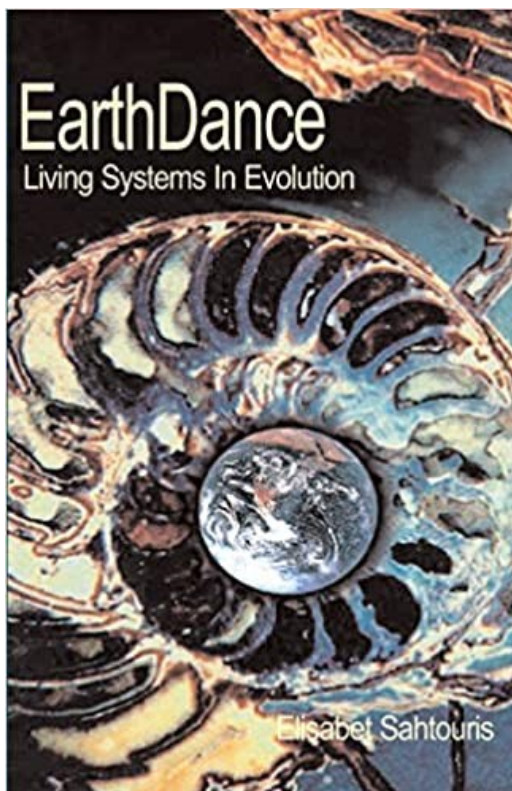
# Lessons from a Virus

## Deep Connections

The relatively recent protest group “Extinction Rebellion” published a cartoon in a recent newsletter, depicting two white coated scientists observing a bump in the graph marking the rise and decline of coronavirus in the human population, while behind them, an enormous threatening wave in the graph is about to break over the whole scenario. It is labelled “climate change.”

Can this virus teach us that our lives are so intertwined that the idea of viewing ourselves as islands – whether as individuals, communities, nations, or a uniquely privileged species – should be understood as evidence of false consciousness? In truth, we were always bound together, part of a miraculous web of life on our planet and, beyond it, stardust in an unfathomably large and complex universe.

I’ve been re-reading a book that makes this connection very clear: “Earthdance: Living Systems in Evolution” by the evolutionary biologist, Elizabet Sahtouris.



Her work builds on that of James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, repudiating the Enlightenment view of an inanimate clockwork universe, in which life is created and evolves:

“Our planet never was a ready-made home, or habitat, in which living creatures developed and to which they adapted themselves. For not only does rock rearrange re-arrange itself into living creatures and back, but living creatures also re-arrange rock into habitats – into places comfortable enough for them to live in and multiply.” (location 864).

In being stripped of what we need most by the threat of contagion, we are reminded of how much we have taken our connection and community for granted, abused it, and over-exploited it. Hence the gathering tidal wave we have generated: global warming. Under its threat, even the coronavirus pales into insignificance. Yet most of the world’s idiot political and business leaders can hardly wait to get back to their global warming ways.

When death stalks us it is not bankers we turn to, or corporate executives, or hedge fund managers. Nonetheless, those are the people our societies have best rewarded. They are the people who, if salaries are a measure of value, are the most prized.

But they are not the people we need, as individuals, as societies, as nations. Rather, it will be scientists, doctors, nurses, public health workers, care-givers, social workers and check-out staff who will be battling to save lives, and serve essential needs, often risking their own.

During this health crisis we may indeed notice who and what is most important. But will we remember their sacrifice, their value, after the virus is no longer headline news? Or will we go back to business as usual as the wealthy want to – until the next crisis – rewarding the billionaire owners of huge corporates, fossil fuel companies, and the financial-services parasites feeding off other people’s money?

In short, Western capitalist societies are far from the most efficient ways of organising ourselves, as Naomi Klein made clear in her book “*This changes Everything: Capitalism and the climate.*” It is becoming even clearer as the coronavirus crisis evolves. We are still

very much immersed in the ideological universe of Thatcherism and Reaganism, when we were told quite literally: “There is no such thing as society.” How will that political mantra stand the test of the coming weeks and months? Although somewhat softened here and there by the likes of the Helen Clark government, it still remains the basic style of our political and business world. We call it “neo-liberalism” although it is neither new nor liberal.

There is nothing unique about the coronavirus crisis. It is simply a foretaste of the longer term crisis we have wrought upon our world. As Britain sinks under floods each winter, as Australia burns each summer, as the southern states of the US are wrecked by hurricanes and its great plains become dustbowls, as atolls and coastal towns sink beneath the waves, as the climate emergency becomes ever more tangible, we will learn this truth slowly and painfully.

The naive may think the 2008 bank bailout was a one-off. But the failings of capitalism are inherent and structural, as the virus is already demonstrating, and the climate emergency will drive home with alarming ferocity in the coming years.

The shut-down of borders means the airlines are becoming insolvent. They didn’t save, they weren’t prudent. They are in a cut-throat world where they need to compete with rivals, to drive them out of business and make as much money as they can for shareholders. (Our government is one).

Now there is nowhere for the airlines to fly to – and they will have no means to make money for months. Like the banks, they are too big to fail – and like the banks they are demanding public money be spent to tide them over until they can once again rapaciously make profits for their shareholders. There will be many other corporations queuing up behind the airlines.

Sooner or later the public will be strong-armed once again to bail out these profit-driven corporations whose only efficiency is the central part they play in fuelling global warming and eradicating life on the planet. The airlines will be resuscitated until the inevitable next crisis arrives.

But it is not just that capitalism is economically self-destructive; it is morally vacant too. For example, in Britain, the National Health Service – once the envy of the world – is in terminal decline after decades of privatising and outsourcing its services. Now the same Conservative party that began the cannibalising of the NHS is pleading with businesses such as car makers to address a severe shortage of ventilators, needed to assist coronavirus patients. Survival rates will depend not on the common good, on our rallying to help those in need, on planning for the best outcome, but on the vagaries of the market.

Coronavirus has an important, urgent lesson to teach us. The one-dimensional capitalist consumerist culture that has evolved in a market driven world has brought blessings to many, but now threatens curses upon all. During the lock-down, we have had time and space to think about that other world: the world of spirituality, of compassion, of a broader sustaining mythology than the market. How can we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?