

Isolation and Disruption of Nature: Crises of Contemporary Human Lifestyles and Directions for Reflection

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The crises of contemporary human lifestyles not only refer to those arising from human actions that directly or indirectly impact nature, but also include those related to the deterioration of the relationship with nature. In particular, the growing alienation from nature poses profound challenges to public health, human well-being, and sustainable development.

Human society is gradually alienating into two extremes, both driven by material desires. In some Western societies, which have attained a high level of development, some people have great material satisfaction but are trapped in spiritual confusion and indulgence. In some less developed non-Western societies, many individuals are forced to enter highly repetitive and non-autonomous labor systems, and are “transformed” step by step into assembly line workers or similar laborers to obtain basic materials for survival and hope.

Many people in developed societies suffer from a heavy dependence on and overuse of modern technological products such as electronics, the Internet, automobiles, and air conditioners, and a reliance on indoor and sedentary living, resulting in their gradual alienation and isolation from nature. Some individuals have begun to lose the ability to perceive nature and the sense of a deep, intrinsic connection with it. Their bodies are getting obese and weak, and their minds are getting depressed. Cardiovascular diseases, cancers, diabetes, and obesity have become important causes of death in developed societies^{[1]~[3]}.

It is worth pointing out that social disparities in developed societies are also gradually reflected in environmental, lifestyle, and health disparities. These disparities are interrelated. The lower the income, the lower the social class, the more likely individuals are to have a lifestyle and health status that is characterized by an

“alienation from nature.” This group of people are more likely to be addicted to personal electronic devices and the Internet, more likely to consume too much fast or ultra-processed food, more likely to live in heavily polluted and artificial environments, more likely to be in a lifestyle that lacks necessary activities to gain physical and mental restoration, and, of course, more likely to suffer from serious illnesses.

In some non-Western societies, people might be “transformed” into laborers at the lower end of the globalized industrial chain. This dominating phenomenon also gives rise to the following significant problems of “alienation from nature.” First, people are severely alienated and deprived of their “natural personalities.” To earn a meagre income at the low end of the industrial chain, numerous people, especially young people in the vigorous stage of life, are compelled to engage in monotonous yet high-pressure forms of basic labor. Over time, such work gradually drains their mental vitality and physical energy. They are alienated into “tool people” who carry out tasks in automated industries and under computer algorithms. Although these people live in the city—since many manufacturing plants remain in urban areas—they rarely have sufficient free time or financial resources to enjoy the natural environments nearby; they are simply “inmates” of the city.

Secondly, less developed societies tend to have more intense urbanization and degradation of the rural social and physical environments. On the one hand, the influx of rural residents into the already crowded cities has objectively led to a further scarcity of natural resources per capita in cities, although those people have the absolute right to choose urban or rural life. On the other hand, with the transformation of rural environments, the rural nature is gradually removed from the lives of the “new urbanites” and can no

longer influence their physical and mental health in their daily lives.

Similar to developed societies, socio-economic disparities in less developed societies and subsequent disparities in living environments and health status are also significant. The main distinction lies in the fact that certain groups in developed societies, compared with their counterparts in less developed societies, typically possess greater material resources and more free time, and live in generally more favorable overall conditions. However, these improved conditions have not altered their alienated relationship with nature. Instead, this segment of the population has shifted from a “passive” to an “active” alienation from nature.

How to address such crises presents a significant challenge for both research and practice. The author does not presume to offer a comprehensive or definitive solution, but hopes this article may serve as a springboard for future scholars and practitioners, encouraging reflection and exploration in the following seven aspects.

1) Reconnect children and adolescents with nature, allowing them to play and grow in natural environments. Human childhood evolved in nature, and young people possess an innate affinity for nature. Providing opportunities to escape from oppressive, impoverished concrete jungles and monotonous prefabricated playgrounds, and to rebuild connections with nature, free from early and over tame experiences, are critical for building up a solid foundation for individual and societal well-being.

2) Help individuals disengage from excessive screen use and rediscover sensory intimacy with nature. Electronic device addiction has become a defining characteristic of contemporary lifestyles. While its prevalence is not entirely without justification, its adverse effects on physical and mental health are increasingly apparent. Future urban and landscape design should explore ways to encourage people to put their devices away, engage in physical activities, and reconnect with nature through real and multisensory interactions.

3) Create opportunities for restorative contact with nature amid the pressures of intense study, work, and social competition. Natural elements—particularly green and blue spaces—should be visible and accessible from everyday settings such as schools, manufacturing factories, office parks, courier routes and stations, shopping centers, and public transit routes and stations. In many urban areas, natural spaces should be physically accessible within a 5- or 10-minute walk. Attention must be paid to labor models driven by algorithms that encroach upon essential time for rest and recovery.

4) Transform gray infrastructure into green infrastructure. Traditional gray infrastructure in cities, such as levees, canals,

bridges, viaducts, roads, and reservoirs, has prioritized engineering performance. Future approaches should be informed by integrated planning and design goals that not only ensure basic urban functionality and security, but also embed therapeutic green and blue space qualities within infrastructure systems.

5) Protect natural landscapes in urban contexts—particularly in peripheral, renovated areas, and newly developed areas. Urban planning and architectural construction should be rooted in the conservation of ecological substrates, encompassing both macro systems such as mountains, waterways, wetlands, and soil, and micro elements like streams, trees, and wildlife habitats. Beyond preserving individual patches, it is vital to establish ecological networks that span underground, surface, and aerial dimensions, while also incorporating temporal dynamics into research and implementation.

6) Address the growing impacts of climate change by leveraging natural landscapes for multiscale climate regulation. In the context of global warming, extreme weather events will continue to intensify. The preservation and development of natural landscapes offer critical research and practice opportunities for regulating climate across global, urban, and site scales. Special consideration should be given to the vulnerabilities of marginalized countries and populations and to climate-induced disasters and social disruptions that threaten public health and well-being, such as flooding, drought, wildfire, land degradation, biodiversity loss, forced migration, regional conflict, and even war.

7) Continue to recognize the mental health benefits of natural landscapes. Mental health is poised to become one of the most urgent public health and social welfare concerns across both developed and developing countries in the coming decades. While material needs have been largely satisfied and physical health has been comprehensively taken care of, mental health problems are still largely neglected—at great costs to productivity, creativity, and overall well-being. The protection and creation of natural landscapes should thus become a central strategy for preventing and mitigating mental health challenges.

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疏离与破坏自然：当代人类生活方式的危机及思考方向

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当代人类生活方式的危机, 既包括人类直接或间接作用于自然的行为所带来的问题, 也包括因人类与自然关系的恶化而引发的自身生活方式困境。其中对自然的疏离趋势尤为值得关注, 它对公共健康、人民福祉和社会可持续发展构成了深刻挑战。

在物质欲望的驱动下, 人类社会呈现出日益分化的趋势。在一些经济高度发达的西方社会, 尽管物质生活已极大丰富, 部分人群却面临精神上的迷失与过度放纵。而在某些欠发达的非西方社会中, 不少个体为了争取基本的生存资源与生活机会, 被迫进入高度重复、缺乏自主性的劳动体系, 接受流水线式的工作模式。

发达社会的不少居民对电子产品、互联网、汽车、空调等现代技术产品存在严重依赖和过度使用, 长期的室内静态生活使他们与自然界逐渐疏远与隔离。一部分人开始丧失对自然界的感知能力, 也失去了与自然血脉相连、相依相存的融合感。他们的身体日益臃肿孱弱, 心灵也日益消沉和萎靡。心脑血管疾病、癌症、糖尿病、肥胖症已经成为发达社会居民死亡的重要原因^{[1]-[3]}。

值得指出的是, 发达社会的阶层差异也逐渐体现在环境、生活方式及健康层面上。这些差异彼此关联、相互影响。越是处于低收入、低社会阶层的居民, 越容易形成“远离自然”的生活方式和健康状态: 他们更容易沉溺于个人电子产品和互联网, 更容易摄入过多快餐和超加工食品, 更容易居住在充满污染、缺乏自然的环境中, 也更容易陷于缺乏身心恢复活动的生活中, 当然也更容易罹患严重疾病。

在非西方世界, 部分发展中国家的人群被“改造”为全球化产业链条中的低端劳动力。这一现象亦导致了以下显著的“远离自然”问题:

首先, 人的“自然属性”或“天性”被严重异化和剥夺。为了赚取产业链低端的微薄收入, 大量人群, 特别是正处于生命蓬勃阶段的青年人, 被迫从事枯燥却又充满压力的基础性劳动, 他们的思想和能量被逐渐耗尽。这些劳动者被异化为在自动化工业体系和计算机算法中执行命令的“工具人”, 他们虽然身处城市(因为大量制造业工厂仍位于城市区域), 但却很少拥有充足的自由时间和经济资源来享受城市及周边的自然环境——他们只是生活在城市里的“囚徒”。

其二, 欠发达社会往往存在更剧烈的城市化现象和乡村郊野的退化现象。一方面, 大量农村居民涌入本已拥挤的城市, 这在客观上导致城市中的人均自然资源进一步匮乏, 尽管他们有自主选择在城市或乡村生活的权利。另一方面, 随着乡村社会的变迁, 自然环境也逐渐淡出这类“新城市人”的日常生活, 无法对他们的身心健康产生持续影响。

类似于发达社会, 欠发达社会中的阶层差异, 以及与之相关的生活环境差异和健康差异同样显著。二者的主要区别在于, 发达社会中的部分人群相较于欠发达社会中的部分人群而言, 通常拥有更多的物质资源和自由时间, 也生活在整体条件更好的环境中。然而, 这些条件的改善并未改变其远离自然的生活方式。在这一过程中, 这部分人群只是从“被动地”疏离自然, 转变为“主动地”疏离自然。

如何应对这样的危机是一个重大的研究和实践问题。笔者无疑无法提供一个周全而确凿的答案。只希望借助此篇, 寄语未来的学者和实践者能从下面7个方面展开思考和探索。

1) 让儿童和少年重新回归自然, 在自然中玩耍和成长。人类的幼年发展于自然, 对自然有天然的依恋。让儿童和少年有机会离开压抑、贫

瘠的钢筋丛林和千篇一律的预制游乐场，重建与自然的联系，避免过早受到规训，是帮助个人和社会获得健康和幸福的重要基础。

2) 让人们从电子屏幕的沉溺中解脱，重新欣赏和亲近自然。电子产品已是当代人类生活方式的重要组成部分。虽然其存在具有一定的合理性，但由其沉溺造成的身心健康问题已然非常显著。未来的城市和景观设计应重视如何让人们将电子产品放进口袋，让身体活动起来，与自然产生真实的和多感官的互动。

3) 让人们在激烈的学习、工作和社会竞争中拥有片刻喘息的机会，看到自然、接触自然。人们应能在学校、制造业工厂、办公园区、快递路线及驿站、商场、公共交通沿线及站点看到自然的绿色和蓝色空间，步行5~10分钟即可进入自然景观。同时，应充分警惕并控制以算法为基础的从业模式对人们休息时间的挤占。

4) 将灰色基础设施转变成绿色基础设施。城市传统的灰色基础设施（如堤坝、渠道、桥梁、高架路、公路、水库等）通常强调工程功效，未来应设定更综合的规划设计目标，在保障城市的正常运行和基本安全的同时，通过规划与设计赋予其绿色和蓝色空间的疗愈功能。

5) 保护城市区域，特别是城市边缘、城市待更新区域和新规划城市区域的自然景观。在保护自然的前提下开展城市规划与建筑营造，不仅要保护自然山体、水系、湿地、土壤等大型自然景观，也要保护溪流、树木、栖息地等微小尺度的自然元素。不仅要保护和发展大小不一的自然斑块，更重要的是建立生态网络。这一网络可能横跨地下、地面与空中三个维度，同时还应引入时间维度的研究和实践。

6) 利用自然景观实现多尺度气候调节，应对日益严峻的气候变化影响。在全球气候变暖的背景下，极端气候将持续加剧。通过自然景观的保护和发展调节不同尺度上的气候状况（包括全球气候、城市气候和场地微气候）可能成为重要的研究和实践方向。应特别关注气候变化对弱势国家和人群的影响，以及由气候变化引发的威胁公共健康与福祉的自然灾害和社会问题，例如洪水、干旱、森林火灾、土地条件恶化、生物多样性锐减、被迫移民、地区冲突，甚至战争。

7) 持续重视自然景观对心理健康的促进作用。心理健康问题将成为发达国家和发展中国家未来几十年最严峻的公共卫生和社会福祉挑战之一。在基本物质需求已逐步满足、身体器质性疾病已可获得较为完备的医疗照护的背景下，心理健康问题却常被忽视。这种忽视将带来生产力、创造力和健康的巨大损失。未来，自然景观的保护与营造应成为预防和干预心理健康问题的重要途径之一。