

KEITH FARNISH

IN MY OWN WORDS: TIME'S UP!

A Terminal Lack Of Connection

It seems trite to say this, but the root of our destructive behaviour, as inhabitants of a planet on the cusp of ecological collapse, is that we are no longer connected: surely we are more connected than ever in our globalized, Internet-enabled, satellite ringed existence. Well, yes, but connection on whose terms? Everything has a price in the civilized world, and the price for our ability to connect to anyone we like at the click of a mouse button is our absorption into a system that values nothing that doesn't make a profit and keep the industrial machine ticking over.

Real connection has nothing to do with profit: real connection is old, as old as humanity – it takes us to a place and a time where our lives were irrevocably bound up in the breath of plants, the migration of animals, the knowledge that kept us safe and nourished in a life that was full and of our own making. For hundreds of thousands of years, in countless places across the globe, in myriad different tribes and communities, humanity connected deeply to the land, the sea and the sky – it mythologised that which it didn't understand, and respected everything that was essential to it's continued existence, whether it understood it or not. Connection then, as now, is what keeps life going on Earth, and without it we would fall like a sack of rocks into a deep well.

Splash! As easy as that.

The reason we are pulling the plug on our life-support system is not because humans have a natural tendency to destroy; it is just that there are groups of people who have created a system in which the majority of its participants see only one way to live. If you perform a role that benefits the economy in some way, either directly through trade, or indirectly by the application of the many laws, systems and processes that keep Industrial Civilization growing, then you are a part of that system, and you are perpetuating that singular belief.

Industrial Civilization sells us a dream that has nothing to do with real connection. The civilized dream is one of endless "progress" towards a future where the financial benefits flow up the hierarchy, and the only aspiration of humanity is to live a synthetic life devoid of anything we haven't manufactured ourselves. Industrial Civilization thrives on, and needs us to live, atomised, disconnected lives.

That is the foundation on which the solutions presented in Time's Up! sit: most people are not ready to change, but the people who are ready to change can change in astonishing and fundamental ways, and with their experience, can start to take the next group of people with them – and so it must go on. Being human does not divorce us from our basic need to survive, but if we are to survive then we must remember what really matters doesn't come from a shop; it doesn't come on wheels; and it doesn't come out of the mouths of politicians.

What really matters, is what matters to us.

So many environmental campaigners and groups take the view that we will be able to somehow turn around the vast tanker that is carrying humanity to its extinction, and in order to do so, everyone on board must start to move in a different direction, however small that change is. The truth is, we are not on a tanker: we never have been – we are individuals, families and communities each with our own means of propulsion, but caught in a rip current that is taking us to a place we must not go.

It's surprisingly easy to get out of a rip current: just swim sideways.

Time's Up! An Uncivilized Solution To A Global Crisis (Green Books) is available from Green Books (www.greenbooks.co.uk), Waterstones and many independent book shops. More information about the book can be found at www.timesupbook.com

Keith Farnish is a radical environmental writer, campaigner and father of two.