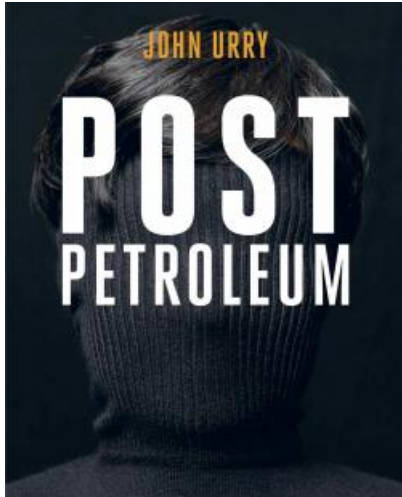


FORUM'S BOOKS

11/13/2014



Post Petroleum

13 November 2014

Oil is fundamental to life in contemporary societies. And yet, reserves will be depleted within a few decades. What impact will this have on the way we live and move in the future?

In this original book-object, John Urry imagines what will become of 'disconnected' societies, by formulating four 'post-oil' scenarios.

The author

John Urry

Presentation

In this original book-object, John Urry describes a world conditioned by an all-oil system. Our movement, possessions, and even our social relationships are entirely dependent on this rapidly-depleting energy source. He shows that the 20th century created the illusion of a future that, today, proves untenable, even in the medium term.

While everyone's attention is still focused on just how long this reprieve will last, John Urry shifts the debate, asking the much more fundamental question: "What happens next?"

What would a world without oil look like? How would our lives as producers and consumers play out in a world deprived of this resource? In spite of growing awareness of the depletion of oil reserves, these questions remain unanswered.

That is why the author alerts us to the need to prepare for post-oil now, and asks: without political awareness, how can our societies radically reinvent their relationship to energy and movement?

John Urry thus imagines what will become of 'disconnected' societies in the form of four 'post-oil' scenarios, and calls us to action.

His work is of particular importance to the Mobile Lives Forum, which aims to imagine

good mobile lives for the future and prepare for the mobility transition.

This text is transcript of a lecture given by John Urry to the Mobile Lives Forum's Scientific Steering Committee.

The Author

JOHN URRY is a major British theorist within contemporary sociology. He is a distinguished professor of sociology at Lancaster University, fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, and a founding academician of the Academy of Social Sciences. Since 2003 he has been the director of the Centre for Mobilities Research at Lancaster.

For the last two decades he has been concerned with mobilities and in particular the relations between space and society. He showed how flows and networks became more significant for sociology than the study of each bounded society. In the last few years he developed research examining the social implications of climate change and of shortages of energy.

He is an unusual researcher seeking to move the boundaries of sociology, not hesitating to use literary references or to summon diverse sources such as philosophy so as to support his claims. He has published some forty books on the media, consumption, culture, new services, mobility and globalization.

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**OIL IS FUNDAMENTAL
TO MOST ASPECTS**

through film, TV, literature and advertising in particular. This then spread to Europe, South America and Asia. This "history" - one shared by many of us across the planet - is really that of oil. If we consider the various types of mobilities, almost all depend on oil, that 'black gold' spouting from the ground since 1901.

OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES. YET, IT WILL RUN OUT IN THE COMING DECADES.

WHAT IMPACT WILL THIS HAVE ON THE WAY WE LIVE AND MOVE IN THE FUTURE?

- Part 2, Chapter 4

#04

DES SEIGNEURS DE GUERRE DANS UN MONDE DE PÉNURIE
WARLORDISM IN A WORLD OF SHORTAGES

04

THE EMERGENCE OF AN OIL-BASED CIVILISATION

As Thomas Homer-Dixon writes, black gold powers virtually all movement of people, foodstuffs and manufactured goods. There has been the emergence of a civilization founded on oil, it's remarkably versatile, practical and once extraordinarily cheap. It is storable, mobile and is often said to be the best source of energy after the sun. Almost all other fuels have a much lower EROEI (Energy Return On Energy Invested) ratio. However, unlike the sun, oil is a non-renewable resource.

Oil is therefore the most energy-dense resource, but its supply is limited. Hence, prices can increase and availability decrease rapidly. In other words, these unique traits have locked us in, dangerously binding us to oil. What is remarkable is that almost every society (except maybe North Korea) depends on it.

As we mentioned above, it provides almost all transport energy (the French railways being a striking exception). Only oil makes mobile lives possible. Such lives depend not only on food miles (necessary for the distribution of foodstuffs), but also on collegial, family and friendship miles, all of which are necessary for being a good employee, family member and friend. It has also powered ships since 1910s and 20s, when the British Navy switched from coal

The fourth scenario, what I like to call "warlordism", is where societies are characterised by frequent oil, gas and water shortages due to extreme weather events. American climatologist James Hansen, probably the US's most important climate change analyst, has written about the probability and possibility of breaking with everything that has made globalisation possible – mobility, energy, communications and inter-connections. This break, more than a mere decrease in carbon consumption, would necessitate a return to the local, a de-globalisation, an idea increasingly present in debates. In this new system, only the very rich would be able to travel. I imagine you have already bought your ticket for space travel with Virgin Galactic! This is now possible. This is a kind of Hobbesian dystopic vision of warlord-dominated regions.

In the UK in 2009, there was a segment on the BBC's popular ten o'clock news entitled the "Perfect Storm". Using evidence provided by John Beddington, chief government scientific advisor at the time, the report demonstrated the possibility and probability of a catastrophic storm taking place sometime between now and 2030. This storm of unprecedented force would result in food and water shortages as well as runaway climate change. The BBC report spoke of systems and suggested that, without reversing them, a chain of catastrophic events was likely to unfold, leaving much of the world's population poorer, less mobile, hungrier and more dependent on scarce resources. All of society would be affected by these developments. It was a kind of *Mad Max 2* appearing on the BBC news!

Former NASA scientist James Lovelock, formulator of



the Gaia hypothesis, said: "So is our civilization doomed and there would be a massive decline in population leaving

References

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Movement

Movement is the crossing of space by people, objects, capital, ideas and other information. It is either oriented, and therefore occurs between an origin and one or more destinations, or it is more akin to the idea of simply wandering, with no real origin or destination.

More

Mobility

Broadly, the word mobility can be defined as the intention to move and the realization of this movement in geographical space, implying a social change.

More

Keywords : Sustainable development, Lifestyles, Car, Système socio-technique

Disciplines : Social sciences, Urban studies, Prospective studies

Transport mode(s) : Automobile

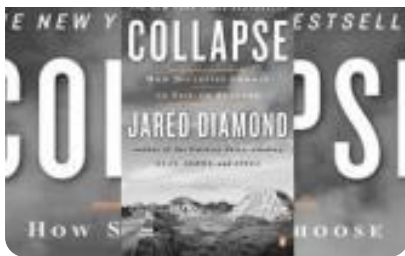


John Urry

Social Scientist

British sociologist John Urry (1946-2016) was Distinguished Professor at Lancaster University. He was co-founder and director of the Centre for Mobilities Research from 2004 to 2015 and, in 2015, he co-founded the Institute for Social Futures. He wrote seminal mobilities texts such as *Sociology Beyond Societies and Mobilities*.

From same author - See all publications



Treasure islands: hidden offshore worlds

Video by John Urry



Post Petroleum

Publication by John Urry



How will global warming turn mobility upside down ?

Chronicle with John Urry

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