

Electric Utopia

Now we have passed very peculiar laws, we are desperate to change ourselves into a new kind of sustainable society. The laws forget everything we have done for thousands of years. By law we are to be “all electric.” Even though we run faster, run farther, jump farther and higher than ever before. Through subsidizing solar electricity we can hold nature at arms’ length. Instead of sunlight we have light bulbs lit by photovoltaics and warmth from heat pumps. Instead of a breeze you have a fan powered by a distant wind generator.

Why can’t we remember that a few generations ago we lived fine on only solar energy. We should keep what is old and works and add what is new and works. Have we mingled ourselves with so many machines our own voices are lost? Accounts are kept of our use of oil, coal, gas, nuclear, and renewable energy. But the renewable energy skips the food we eat, the miles we walk or bike, the sun shining through windows and skylights, the sun lighting the earth, distilling our water and illuminating our moon. It only counts renewable energy converted to electricity.

Of course those who deal in electricity, light bulbs, air conditioners and electric motors would like more business but they’ll do fine competing with windows, skylights and natural breezes. We need not outlaw nature to enjoy technology. The two are natural friends. Let’s stop cooking the books, let’s stop counting motors but not muscles.

Centuries ahead we will build utopias on asteroids, moons and other planets. We will pay high rents for the best orbital addresses. Soon enough, we will pay for

giant solar reflectors, pay for the best of atmospheres. All life will depend on switches, valves, maintenance contracts and electric motors. Today we still live on paradise earth. We are glad some are practicing to leave, and also glad we are not yet passengers on their electric utopia.

Steve Baer 01/05/05