

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

In Search of Good Comfort

Dan Matthews · Thursday, April 26th, 2018

What characterizes modern humanity? Is it the hunt for novelty, new technology, adventure, new beginnings? Is it the appeal to science? Is it the interconnected nature of our daily existence, as exemplified by the internet? Is it diversity of perspectives and art caught up in the question of identity? Or is it something much more banal?

A new study on [what people would give up for better sleep](#) revealed that nearly 54 percent of people would quit alcohol, and 33 percent would change their political party affiliation. Other things people would give up for sleep include pizza, social media, TV, sex, and music. Really? An estimated 70 million people have sleeping problems (myself included). Clearly there's a problem here. Why aren't we comfortable in our own skin, in our own beds, and in our own homes?

I would argue that, perhaps more than anything, the quest for comfort and its utilitarian cousin, convenience, is why we're here, facing down a questionable future. Some of us are in the awareness phase, slowly coming to terms with what a daily preference for comfort and convenience has done to the world. Others are reactionary. They want to get back to a world where we didn't question comfort, we just seized it, like a child picking fruit off a low-hanging branch. If the fruit doesn't look good, throw it away.

Even those of us who are aware are addicted to comfort and convenience. Americans waste about a [pound of food per person every day](#), and it's the ones with the healthiest diets who waste the most. Healthy folks are buying the most fruits and vegetables, and it takes an effort not to let them go to waste. It's easy to throw away food that doesn't look good. Only 4 out of 10 supermarkets make an effort to reduce waste, with Walmart surprisingly perched at the top of the waste-reduction food chain. Trader Joe's and Whole Foods (markets favored by the cultural elite) are among those that make the least effort to reduce waste.

Wasted produce equals wasted water, and food waste ends up in landfills and emits methane gas that pollutes the atmosphere. In the long-term, today's comfort is tomorrow's climate catastrophe. Plastic keeps us safe, comfortable, and clean, but wasted plastic particles end up in the ocean and [even in the soil](#). Waste, dead animals, and climate change aren't the only byproducts of thoughtless comfort. Comfort can be more deadly in the short-term.

When the industrial revolution came around, we found easy ways to make our homes more comfortable, and one of those ways involved asbestos. Asbestos makes for good insulation material to keep us warm, and it's fire-retardant, but inhaling asbestos particles can cause a kind of fatal cancer called [mesothelioma](#). About 3,000 people are diagnosed with mesothelioma each year.

While the industrial revolution introduced the Earth to fossil fuels and plastics that will be our undoing in the long run, it also introduced the more immediate threat of asbestos.

Asbestos is one of those materials that's synonymous with the age of comfort and convenience. It's abundant, easy to use in all sorts of products, and it's a natural mineral that kept us from looking for a more complex solution. We need to stay warm, comfortable, safely insulated inside our homes. Don't take it for granted that everywhere you go in America, companies are doing their best to make you feel safe, comfortable, taken care of; the safer you feel, the easier it is to drift off into a deep sleep, wake up, and do your daily routine all over again without questioning the status quo.

Good Comfort

From any normal point of view, being comfortable would seem like a good thing — unless, of course, your life is threatened by wild animals and you're so comfortable you're oblivious. The story of comfort revolves around a lack of threats to our existence. For a long time, we fought and labored to create brief moments of peace, during which we experienced the feeling of comfort. Then, we didn't need to fight nearly as much anymore, and comfort became a goal in and of itself, where before, comfort was a result of peace.

Once comfort is a goal, and it's easy to achieve, then comes boredom, ennui, even anxiety. There's a buildup of psychic energy and a missing sense of the self. Nothing is risked and nothing is gained; you turn inward on yourself, and find yourself lacking.

I was struck recently by a photo blog on "[The Art of Intentional Travel](#)." To me, there are times when I travel with family that I feel it's sterile, well-planned, too comfortable, and the intent is to try and take advantage of what the vacation spot has to offer. But in travel blogger Shilpa Shah's case, when she talks about the art of intentional travel, she says, "I find that travel is the best way to learn about myself." She continues,

"Self-exploration is at the heart of getting away, and unfamiliar experiences that take you outside of your comfort zone challenge you in a way that's different from your day-to-day. This can fuel fresh perspectives, reveal unknown strengths and give renewed purpose."

This is a revelation: by getting outside of yourself, you find yourself. There might not necessarily be danger in unfamiliar experiences, but you're not in your familiar comfort zone, and this leads to a sense of renewal. The discharge of psychic and physical energy helps you peer deeper into the core of your own being.

That, I think, is when comfort is no longer a goal; it's a byproduct of the moments when you're at peace with yourself. That's true, good comfort. You could get caught in a blizzard and find you're able to make it back to the cabin through intuition and physical tests of your environment. Once you do get back to the cabin, to the comfort zone, it's comfortable in a way it never was before.

Photo by [Darius Bashar](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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