



Written by [James Howard Kunstler](#) on May 23, 2023

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Surviving Tech

The following is a Q and A with tech expert and writer James Howard Kunstler.

The New American: *What do authoritarian technocratic elites have in mind for AI tech?*

James Howard Kunstler: Control — of everything they can possibly control. That impulse is well underway, starting with control of our money and surveillance of our movements. Central bank digital currencies are on their way, with ghastly implications for our economic liberty. Authorities can track what you spend money on, ration it (disallow your purchases), limit your participation in all sorts of activities, punish you, take wealth directly from your account and call it “taxation.” There’s no end of chicanery and mischief they can apply. The diminishing returns of technology will also mess with us. For instance, surely robotic friendships will be marketed — even robotic “girlfriends” or “boyfriends.” They will prove to be addictive but ultimately unsatisfying — just like video games are. The lesson will be: “virtual” is not an adequate replacement for “authentic.” It will be a painful lesson to learn.

TNA: *An AI “utopia” may usher in a civilizational collapse, or may lead to a complete bifurcation of society between a powerful transhuman elite and a remaining natural human majority that lives without any access to even 20th-century levels of technological society. What happens then?*

JHK: Actually, we seem to be in a race between tech development and collapse. Personally, I believe we’ll get to collapse first because of our energy quandaries and their effect on reliable electric service and everything that goes with it. Even before collapse is upon us in earnest, we have entered a very disorderly phase of history. Our political life is positively psychotic now. The entire Left/Woke/Progressive/Transhumanist belief system is based on wishes that don’t comport with reality. The race-and-gender trips laid on us in recent years are based on absurdities and are all essentially hustles. What’s more, a furious reaction to all this political insanity is building, and will eventually overturn techno-despotism and all its subsidiary trips.

TNA: *What can the “common man” do to avoid a dystopian future?*

JHK: Resist, complain loudly, don’t cooperate, sabotage obvious attempts at despotism, speak out, organize in your community. Anyway, the remedy for techno-tyranny will be emergent — in the classic meaning of the word. It will arise from circumstances. Realize, too, that the meta-trend in this Fourth Turning (Howe and Strauss) or Long Emergency (my term) is for de-centralization and localization, not their opposites — and notice that the assumptions of the woke/transhumanist crazies all rest on increased centralization of power. Anything organized on a grand scale will fail in the years ahead — overgrown governments, global corporations, giant stores, giant colleges, you name it. Even professional sports with their mega-salaries and incessant jet travel is headed for the exits. You will find success riding that wave of downscaling and re-localization.

TNA: *How can citizens create a parallel society using technology and AI to promote prosperity and liberty rather than a “Matrix” style future, and what could such a parallel structure look like?*

JHK: Don’t expect computer tech and AI to be around very long, at least not in North America and Europe, for reasons I’ve already described. So, if you’re planning for your future, invest time and capital in old-tech tools and other long-lasting goods that do not depend on computer chips or dependable electric service. One good example of the highest old tech are machine tools that can make other tools, especially if they can be adapted to water power. This would be a good time to buy a supply of screws



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and fasteners, good saws, and sharpening files, etc. The truth appears to be that we are exiting the fossil fuel-powered industrial age and we will not be able to replicate it with so-called renewables. Alt energy, at this point, is a pathetic fantasy if you imagine we're going to keep running all the things currently running at their current scale. We're going medieval (or neo-medieval). This is going to be a time-out from what we think of as "progress," incessant technological innovation. Perhaps a very long time-out. Think of a way you can rig up a non-electric system for taking a hot shower. That will be the apex of luxury!

TNA: *What can concerned citizens do today to prepare for a potential near term tech-driven social dislocation and upheaval?*

JHK: Maintain a sense of humor. Our world is going to get more disorderly for a while as our circumstances sort themselves out. (The playwright Samuel Beckett said famously, "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness.") Realize that there is much you can't control. Remain situationally aware so you can defend yourself and your loved ones against the depredations of villains, crazy people, and imbeciles. Learn how to play a musical instrument and make music with your friends. Think up a more satisfying costume than business suits and mail-order country casuals of today. I will personally attempt to revive the custom of wearing a sword. (Very macho!) I'd like to see women trade in their pants for skirts and gowns. Be both lovers and warriors. Don't let any trips be laid on you.



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