A text dump on Dark Mountain

Paul Kingsnorth, John Jacobi, etc.

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I share their despair, but I'm not quite ready to climb the Dark Mountain

George Monbiot

To sit back and wait for the collapse of industrial civilisation is to conspire in the destruction of everything greens value

Mon 10 May 2010 20.30 BST

Those who defend economic growth often argue that only rich countries can afford to protect the environment. The bigger the economy, the more money will be available for stopping pollution, investing in new forms of energy, preserving wilderness. Only the wealthy can live sustainably.

Anyone who has watched the emerging horror in the Gulf of Mexico in the past few days has cause to doubt this. The world's richest country decided not to impose the rules that might have prevented the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, arguing that these would impede the pursuit of greater wealth. Economic growth, and the demand for oil that it propelled, drove companies to drill in difficult and risky places.

But we needn't rely on this event to dismiss the cornucopians' thesis as self-serving nonsense. A new paper in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences calculates deforestation rates between 2000 and 2005 in the countries with the largest areas of forest cover. The nation with the lowest rate was the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The nation with the highest, caused by a combination of logging and fire, was the United States. Loss of forest cover there (6% of its own forests in five years) was almost twice as fast as in Indonesia and 10 times as fast as in the DRC. Why? Because those poorer countries have less money to invest in opening up remote places and felling trees.

The wealthy nations are plundering not only their own resources. The environmental disasters caused by the oil industry in Ecuador and Nigeria are not driven by Ecuadorian or Nigerian demand, but by the thirst for oil in richer nations. Deforestation in Indonesia is driven by the rich world's demand for palm oil and timber, in Brazil by our hunger for timber and animal feed.

The Guardian's carbon calculator reveals that the UK has greatly underestimated the climate impacts of our consumption. The reason is that official figures don't count outsourced emissions: the greenhouse gases produced by other countries manufactur-

ing goods for our markets. Another recent paper in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences shows that the UK imports a net 253m tonnes of carbon dioxide, embodied in the goods it buys. When this is taken into account, we find that far from cutting emissions since 1990, as the last government claimed, we have increased them. Wealth wrecks the environment.

So the Dark Mountain Project, whose ideas are spreading rapidly through the environment movement, is worth examining. It contends that "capitalism has absorbed the greens". Instead of seeking to protect the natural world from the impact of humans, the project claims that environmentalists now work on "sustaining human civilisation at the comfort level which the world's rich people – us – feel is their right".

Today's greens, it charges, seek to sustain the culture that knackers the planet, demanding only that we replace old, polluting technologies with new ones – wind farms, solar arrays, wave machines – that wreck even more of the world's wild places. They have lost their feelings for nature, reducing the problem to an engineering challenge. They've forgotten that they are supposed to be defending the biosphere: instead they are trying to save industrial civilisation.

That task, Paul Kingsnorth – a co-founder of Dark Mountain – believes, is futile: "The civilisation we are a part of is hitting the buffers at full speed, and it is too late to stop it." Nor can we bargain with it, as "the economic system we rely upon cannot be tamed without collapsing, for it relies upon ... growth in order to function". Instead of trying to reduce the impacts of our civilisation, we should "start thinking about how we are going to live through its fall, and what we can learn from its collapse ... Our task is to negotiate the coming descent as best we can, whilst creating new myths which put humanity in its proper place".

Though a fair bit of this takes aim at my writing and the ideas I champion, I recognise the truth in it. Something has been lost along the way. Among the charts and tables and technofixes, in the desperate search for green solutions that can work politically and economically, we have tended to forget the love of nature that drew us into all this.

But I cannot make the leap that Dark Mountain demands. The first problem with its vision is that industrial civilisation is much more resilient than it proposes. In the opening essay of the movement's first book, to be published this week, John Michael Greer proposes that conventional oil supplies peaked in 2005, that gas will peak by 2030, and that coal will do so by 2040.

While I'm prepared to believe that oil supplies might decline in the next few years, his coal prediction is hogwash. Energy companies in the UK, as the latest ENDS report shows, are now beginning to deploy a technology that will greatly increase available reserves. Government figures suggest that underground coal gasification – injecting oxygen into coal seams and extracting the hydrogen and methane they release – can boost the UK's land-based coal reserves 70-fold; and it opens up even more under the seabed. There are vast untapped reserves of other fossil fuels – bitumen, oil shale, methane clathrates – that energy companies will turn to if the price is right.

Like all cultures, industrial civilisation will collapse at some point. Resource depletion and climate change are likely causes. But I don't believe it will happen soon: not in this century, perhaps not even in the next. If it continues to rely on economic growth, if it doesn't reduce its reliance on primary resources, our civilisation will tank the biosphere before it goes down. To sit back and wait for what the Dark Mountain people believe will be civilisation's imminent collapse, without trying to change the way it operates, is to conspire in the destruction of everything greens are supposed to value.

Nor do I accept their undiscriminating attack on industrial technologies. There is a world of difference between the impact of windfarms and the impact of mining tar sands or drilling for oil: the turbines might spoil the view but, as the latest disaster shows, the effects of oil seep into the planet's every pore. And unless environmentalists also seek to sustain the achievements of industrial civilisation – health, education, sanitation, nutrition – the field will be left to those who rightly wish to preserve them, but don't give a stuff about the impacts.

We can accept these benefits while rejecting perpetual growth. We can embrace engineering while rejecting many of the uses to which it is put. We can defend healthcare while attacking useless consumption. This approach is boring, unromantic, uncertain of success, but a lot less ugly than the alternatives.

For all that, the debate this project has begun is worth having, which is why I'll be going to the Dark Mountain festival this month. There are no easy answers to the fix we're in. But there are no easy non-answers either.

Get down off your Dark Mountain: you're making matters worse

Drawing people's attention to the enormous challenges we face is one thing; revelling in the collapse of society is quite another. Dark Mountain could learn from Douglas Adams, says Solitaire Townsend...

Solitaire Townsend for The Ecologist, part of the Guardian Environment Network
Fri 4 Jun 2010 11.27 BST

'The End of the Universe is very popular', said Zaphod... 'People like to dress up for it...gives it a sense of occasion.'

In Douglas Adams' The Restaurant at the End of the Universe diners enjoyed watching the obliteration of life, the universe and everything, whilst enjoying a nice steak.

When I first discovered The Dark Mountain Project I couldn't help secretly hoping a bunch of uber-cool hipsters were making an ironic analogy between our current climate challenge, and Adams' satire. Of course, it turns out there wasn't a drop of irony involved.

This project/art installation/book/festival, 'starts with our sense that civilisation as we have known it is coming to an end; brought down by a rapidly changing climate, a cancerous economic system and the ongoing mass destruction of the non-human world'.

Basically, the end of the world is nigh and there is sod all you can do about it. Extrapolate forward from their Principles of Uncivilisation and you'll find that a bunch of us are going to be washed away but a few survivors will live in harmony with nature.

This is pretty gloomy stuff, even for two ex-journalists (a breed who seem often rained upon). But Paul Kingsnorth and Dougald Hine have decided that life as we know it is over, the collapse is coming and it's time to essentially turn off and restart human (particularly western capitalist) systems.

An orgy of Armageddon

My mounting frustration with Dark Mountain isn't their brutal honesty about the problems, but a growing suspicion that, like the diners at the Restaurant, they are enjoying the show.

Their festival pamphlet reads like an orgy of Armageddon. A climate change session asks 'how will we choose to live out the last years of the Holocene and mark its passing?' Read on and commemoration begins to sound suspiciously like celebration. From biodiversity wipeout to financial crisis with a dollop of climate meltdown, all with a song, poem or workshop celebrating it. We have brought about a 'Capitalist Holocaust' and all the health, nutrition, education, women's rights and choice in our societies don't get a look in.

Aren't they just being brutally honest? Haven't all thoughtful people had their 'what's the point, we're all screwed anyway' moment?

Unfortunately the Dark Mountain message is playing right into a nascent and incredibly dangerous public narrative. The term 'pro climate change' is now showing 36,100 results in Google. Pro-climate change scientists are 'tricking' the data, pro-climate change liberals are manipulating the media, and pro-climate change spin doctors are in government.

If we're not careful environmentalists and climate change will end up 'on the same side'. We are becoming climate change's cheerleaders, we're so desperate for people to realise the magnitude of the looming threat that we begin to sound like fans. This narrative eats away at public trust, and can exile us to the problem side of the debate, rather than the solution.

But by implying we might actually want collapse, we strip ourselves entirely of the right to help prevent it. I'm sure the Dark Mountain founders didn't intend their 'brutal honesty' to play into this narrative. But self-flagellation always has a suspicious air of gratification about it.

An outcome of inaction

When a previously unimaginable threat looms there are always those prophesising the end of the world. And also always a few recommending hard work and a vision of a better future. Dark Mountain isn't a prophesy: it's the outcome of inaction.

I can't help wondering how Dark Mountain's philosophy would be taken in idealistic and progress-orientated countries like Brazil, China and India? They are facing the threat soonest and hardest, but President Mohamed Nasheed of the Maldives is hopefully representative of their response when he compares being a political prisoner with the climate fight: 'I could have lost my life if I'd given it up. By simply believing in life you can get out of situations. I believe in human ingenuity. We are not doomed. We can succeed and we must work along those lines.'

Yes, we've got the fight of our lives ahead of us. On that I utterly and entirely agree. But must we not fight utterly and entirely against that destructive change? Get down off that gloomy mountain and get to work.

'But what about the End of the Universe? We'll miss the big moment.'

'I've seen it,' said Zaphod, 'it's rubbish, come on, let's get zappy.'

Solitaire Townsend is co-founder of Futerra sustainability communications.

About the Dark Mountain Project

In 2009, two English writers published a manifesto. Out of that manifesto grew a cultural movement: a rooted and branching network of creative activity, centred on the Dark Mountain journal, sustained by the work of a growing gang of collaborators and contributors, as well as the support of thousands of readers around the world.

Together, we are walking away from the stories that our societies like to tell themselves, the stories that prevent us seeing clearly the extent of the ecological, social and cultural unravelling that is now underway. We are making art that doesn't take the centrality of humans for granted. We are tracing the deep cultural roots of the mess the world is in. And we are looking for other stories, ones that can help us make sense of a time of disruption and uncertainty.

> 'Dark Mountain is a radical project, and a brilliant one, capable of opening your eyes in the encircling twilight.'
> — Tom Jeffries, The Journal of Wild Culture

There's never been a simple answer to the question, 'What is Dark Mountain?' It's many things, but here are seven of them.

1. A conversation

It started, as lots of things do just now, on the internet. Dougald Hine and Paul Kingsnorth had been leaving comments on each other's blogs and this led to a conversation over email, then in quiet corners of pubs. Slowly, over the months, they found enough common ground to embark on a project together.

That project has taken many forms: a manifesto, an ongoing series of books, four annual festivals and far more events, collaborations and friendships. But among all that followed, it often seems that what has mattered most to people are the quiet conversations that happen around Dark Mountain, often late at night, around a campfire or on a computer screen. Conversations where we get to name our fears, our doubts, our uncertainties and our fragile hopes.

Read more about the origins of Dark Mountain.

> 'Through Dark Mountain I've got to know the most incendiary, challenging thinkers, writers and makers – far more earthily radical, visionary and mind-blowing than any other group or outlet I've come across in my life.'
> — Chris T-T

2. A manifesto

This twenty-page pamphlet took Dark Mountain out into the world, travelling further than its authors ever anticipated. It was written in the autumn of 2008, as the financial system shook to its foundations. 'All around us, shifts are underway which suggest that our whole way of living is already passing into history.' Not only the destabilisation of the project of economic globalisation which had dominated the preceding decades, but the fraying of the ecological foundations as a result of industrial exploitation.

Faced with this unravelling, the manifesto calls us to question the stories our societies like to tell about the world and our place within it: the myth of progress, the myth of human separation from nature, the myth of civilisation. And it claims a particular role for storytellers and culturemakers in a time when the stories we live by have become untenable. This is the project of 'Uncivilised' art and writing set out in the invitation which closes the manifesto.

Read the text of the manifesto online – or order the 2014 paperback edition with a new introduction.

> 'Much in contemporary thought is made up of myths masquerading as facts, and it is refreshing to see these myths clearly identified as such.'
> — John Gray

3. A series of beautifully-made books

In the pages of the Dark Mountain journal, you will meet the work of writers, thinkers and artists who have taken up the invitation made in the manifesto. Since our first issue, launched in Summer 2010, publishing these books has been the core activity of the project. Each issue takes the form of a beautifully-produced hardback where a wide mixture of voices and styles intertwine.

Since 2014, we have published two issues a year – and starting with Issue 8, each year's autumn book has broken from our established format to plunge deeper into a special theme (technology, poetics, the sacred, the land, fiction), while the odd-numbered spring issues return to the classic format and range of work. With each issue, we make a public call for contributions, so look out for the call-outs on this site, or sign up for our newsletter to make sure you hear about the next one.

Check out past issues of Dark Mountain – or subscribe to receive future books.

4. A gathering place

Before we had even published our first book, an invitation came to host a weekend of talks, performances and workshops in Llangollen, Wales. This led to the creation of Uncivilisation, an annual festival which we ran between 2010–13. It was through the festival that many of the current Dark Mountain team first met and got to know each other.

After four years, we decided it was time to lay down the responsibility of running a single annual event in one corner of the British Isles. But the opportunity to meet in person, rather than over screens, is still very much part of the life of the project – whether that is through collaborations with the organisers of larger festivals, local gatherings, talks, workshops or courses at the small schools created by Dark Mountain collaborators.

Read more about past Dark Mountain events – or look out for upcoming events.

5. A branching web of collaborations

This project started out with an invitation to writers and artists, people whose work could find a home within the pages of the books we wanted to publish. But it soon became clear that the manifesto was inspiring many other kinds of activity.

From a huge mural on the side of a closed-down art college in Doncaster, to a number one album in Norway, to a year-long artistic workshop at Sweden's national theatre – these are just a few of the unexpected manifestations of this widening web of collaborations.

Read more about the way that Dark Mountain has branched out beyond the pages of our books.

6. A bridge between worlds

It's Saturday morning at the second Uncivilisation festival. In the main tent, the speaker has thirty audience volunteers penned within a tight square of rope, reenacting the overcrowding of the cell into which he was thrust on his first day in a Russian prison. Among the other voices we hear in that session, there's an ex-Wikileaks hacker, a security activist working with resistance movements in North Africa and the Middle East, and a former banker from Ireland who speaks furiously about the system inside which he used to work.

On festival stages and in the pages of our books, we've sought to make Dark Mountain a bridge between worlds, a place of unexpected juxtapositions. For sure, those who are drawn to the conversations and collaborations going on around this project tend to have certain experiences in common. But we're not interested in creating a subculture, a shared identity in which we can take refuge. There are many voices here and no party line. We don't try to hide our differences, or to debate each other into submission, but we start from where we find ourselves.

Later that weekend, in the same tent, the storyteller Martin Shaw reminds us that old stories often start at the point where the wild knight of the woods rides in to Arthur's court. Change comes from the edges – but it doesn't come from staying at the edges, guarding our countercultural purity.

> 'These aren't the sort of people I've encountered in the protest and ecology movements of the recent past; these are the people we always felt we were failing to reach, failing to engage.'
> — Paul Graham Raven on Uncivilisation 2011

7. A labour of love

The Dark Mountain global distribution depot (otherwise known as Charlotte) swings into action at Southwold Post Office, October 2016.

For over ten years, Dark Mountain has been brought into being and sustained by the work of a growing and changing gang of friends and collaborators. There is no office. The books are stacked in a small Suffolk warehouse and sent out from a local post office. The collective that runs the project are scattered across several countries.

We all work as freelancers, living by our wits and fitting our work with this project in around the other jobs that help to pay the rent. We end up putting in far more time into the books, the events and this website than we can pay ourselves properly for. We do it because few things have felt more meaningful to us than being part of Dark Mountain.

A small grant from the Deep Ecology Foundation made it possible for us to keep going through the early years, but today the income that supports this project comes entirely from the sale of books and subscriptions, along with personal donations from our readers. That enables us to follow our own vision, rather than being taken off course by the pursuit of funding.

Thank you to everyone whose generosity has made our work possible.

Read more about Dark Mountain as an organisation – and meet the team responsible for running the project.

The Origins of the Project

‘After the manifesto was published, people tended to assume that Paul and I had been friends for years, but in reality it was written by two people who were still getting to know one another. We had met on the internet, reading each other’s blogs and recognising common ground. Both writers, both recovering journalists, both of us had been through intense periods of involvement with activism and arrived at a certain kind of disillusionment.’

— Dougald Hine, Introduction to the 2014 edition of *Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto*

‘I Resign’

It started with a blog post that Paul Kingsnorth published on 8 September 2007, announcing his resignation. When you work as a freelance journalist, it’s not obvious to whom you should direct a letter of resignation, but publishing it on the internet is one answer. That post was an eloquent, angry howl: a testimony to a loss of faith in the trade to which he had given the previous twelve years of his life.

During those years, Paul had written for most of the UK broadsheet newspapers, as well as magazines and publications around the world, appeared on TV and radio, and served as editor of the Ecologist magazine. He had sought to find ways of reaching a broad audience with stories about the environment and what we were doing to it, industrial society and its discontents, modernity and its victims, nature and its scars. Now he was at a breaking point: ‘I no longer believe that the media can say the things I want it to, to the people I want to hear it,’ he wrote, ‘and I don’t want to be involved.’

Then, right at the end of the post, he floated the possibility of something else, an idea that had been growing on him. It was an idea for a new publication, ‘not a magazine, exactly, not quite a journal either, but something between the two and somewhere else as well’:

> A publication which will match the beauty of its writing with the beauty of its design. A publication whose mission will be to reclaim beauty and truth in writing, but without sounding too pompous about it. A publication which will reject both celebrity culture and consumer society with equal vehemence. A publication which will celebrate our true place in nature in prose, poetry and art; which will hunt down ancient truths for modern consumption.

There was, he acknowledged, an irony in writing a post about leaving the media and ending it with a proposal to start a new publication. Perhaps this double movement laid a pattern for the project that was to follow. But at this stage, he was asking for help:

> What I really need are collaborators; fellow writers and artists who see a space out there for something deeply, darkly unfashionable and defiant, and who would like to help make it happen. This is a long journey, I imagine, which begins here. I need people of integrity and ideas to help me shape it and make it happen.

Another way of telling

In September 2006, Dougald Hine had walked away from his own career as a journalist at the BBC. The cycle of newsroom reporting felt too much like an industrial process: a production line in which the raw experience of people's lives served as material for the commodity called news. He was looking for another way of telling stories.

So when, a year later, he read Paul's resignation post, it echoed enough of his own experience to make him curious. He decided to write to this Kingsnorth guy and see if there was something they could do together.

If Paul brought an established reputation as an environmental writer, a fierce lyricism and a determination to write as honestly as possible about his own doubts and fears, then Dougald's contribution to the beginnings of Dark Mountain was his experience of bringing people together around projects, along with certain questions he'd been carrying for years about the role and power of stories.

Those questions had grown out of his university studies in medieval and early modern literature: somewhere along the journey to the modern world, the indirect ways of knowing that had once been the means of approach to the largest and most difficult aspects of experience had been put away, demoted to the status of children's stories and old wive's tales, for reasons that were tangled up with but not justified by the rise of science.

In another time, he might have followed this line of thought into an academic career, but instead he was drawn into a network of artists, activists, technologists and thinkers experimenting with non-institutional spaces of learning, places with names like the University of Openness or the Temporary School of Thought. Out of one of these experiments, there grew a project called School of Everything, an internet startup inspired by Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society*. It was this project that Dougald had thrown himself into after leaving the BBC – and so, before Dark Mountain came along, he was already focused on how the internet could be used to bring people together face-to-face.

A correspondence

The autumn of 2007 went by and it was not until December that Dougald finally got around to writing to Paul. What prompted him to do so was another blog post, written in response to the Bali climate summit, in which Paul wrote about the strange freedom of having given up, no longer believing that it was possible to 'stop climate change'. It was a first sketch of the early essays that he would go on to write for the Dark Mountain journal, and after reading it, Dougald sat down and wrote the email that would set their collaboration in motion:

> I recognise the paradoxical sense of hope that accompanies the loss of faith in the political system and all the official channels through which we're meant to try to 'change the world'. To a lot of good people, this sounds like heresy. Yet I'm heartened by the range of deep and thoughtful voices that have tried or are trying to articulate what things look like from here.

In the correspondence that followed, the two of them began mapping out some of the writers and thinkers in whose work they were finding inspiration. Dougald enthused about Ivan Illich, John Berger and Alastair McIntosh, Paul named poets such as Madeleine Worrall, Mary Oliver, Alice Oswald and Lynne Wycherley, not to mention Robinson Jeffers and Wendell Berry, while the two of them found common ground in their admiration for the novelist Alan Garner. As Dougald wrote at the end of that first mail:

> What interests me is that these writers come from such a range of traditions, write in different styles and for different kinds of publication, would disagree over plenty of things, but seem to share an unnamed affinity. I'd love to see a publication which grew out of that affinity – and if this sounds remotely like what you're planning, then I'd like to help.

The idea for a publication had been fermenting slowly, Paul replied: 'It's still not yet drinkable by any means, but I think I'm getting somewhere!' And it felt like they were close enough in their thinking to be worth exploring this together.

> I would like to produce something which looks at humanity in the round; steps outside the bubble of our civilisation to the real, wild world beyond; challenges human behaviour and ambition. I would like to promote what I

> have started calling 'uncivilised writing' – a clunky term, but one which is intended to describe writing which acknowledges our true place in the world, and writes from beyond the vantage point of a 'civilisation' which rapes the non-human world and enslaves our minds. I don't want dogmatism; I want a search for beauty and truth, an acknowledgement of the compromises we make in searching for it, but overall an attempt to look at our world in a different way.

At this point, the initial exchange of reference points began to flow into a conversation, thinking together and riffing off each other's ideas. Here is Dougald, picking up on Paul's description of the publication he had envisaged:

> Your idea of 'uncivilised writing' triggered a train of thought about 'uncivilised politics'. Strictly speaking, this is an oxymoron – politics, like civilisation, being urban by definition. For me, it suggests the deeply radical perspectives which open up when you step outside the city limits, beyond the pale of 'political reality', and recognise just how different the world looks with other sets of assumptions. This 'stepping outside' is associated with the shamanic figure evoked by Alastair McIntosh, identified by Garner as the "mearcstapa" or boundary-walker, echoed in Illich's description of himself as a "zaunreiter" or hedge-rider (an old German word for witch) and an "extravagant" thinker, literally one who "walks outside". There's a rich, outlandish set of associations here.

And as they discovered this common ground, the sense grew that there might be something larger here than only a publication:

> Boundary walkers, outsiders, hedge-riders – precisely! Precisely the people we should be writing for, the people we should be, the place we should be coming from. The idea of walking the edges, looking in on civilisation whilst being at the same time an inevitable part of it – a breakaway artistic republic of uncivilised thinkers and actors, rebelling against everything within that boundary, be it industrial society or mainstream 'green politics', but rebelling for a reason – this is precisely what I'd like to bring together. Not sure quite how! But probably these things evolve and can't be planned.

Months passed, Paul became a father, Dougald's startup raised investment, they went on emailing each other. Then in May 2008, the conversation left the screen, as the two of them sat down together for an evening at the Isis pub in Iffley and began to get the measure of each other. Over the rest of that year, as the global financial system juddered and started to unravel, the two of them went on meeting like this every few weeks, and the thoughts jotted in notebooks or email bullet-points began to take shape as something that you could call a manifesto.

Into the wild

On 17 July 2009, Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto was launched to a crowd of forty or so in a barn at the back of the same pub on the outskirts of Oxford where Dougald and Paul had met the previous year. The hand-stitched 20-page pamphlet, with an original print run of 300 copies, was published thanks to donations from friends and family.

What really launched this project, though, was the response in the British press over the months that followed. It began with an exchange between Paul and the Guardian columnist George Monbiot, published that August, and then John Gray's response to the manifesto in the New Statesman the following month.

It's not often a self-published, twenty-page manifesto is given a two-page lead review in such a magazine – and this coverage brought Dark Mountain to the attention of a wider audience more rapidly than it could have achieved otherwise. It also meant that many people's first encounter with the project was at the level of ideas and arguments, devolving into comment thread slanging matches. There was little here to indicate that this was intended to be a cultural project, a gathering point for those 'writers of all kinds, painters, musicians, sculptors, poets, designers, creators, makers of things, dreamers of dreams' to whom the manifesto was addressed.

But among the responses coming in that autumn, there were those from writers and artists whose work would feature in the first Dark Mountain book, to be published in the summer of 2010. And meanwhile, there was one response that came to shape the development of the project so much that it is hard to imagine what Dark Mountain would have become without it.

‘A festival happened to us’

Michael Hughes had walked away from his career as a psychiatrist a few years earlier. He and his family were living in Llangollen, where he had become involved in a project to renovate the Royal International Pavilion, home to the International Eisteddfod. Michael had been in touch with Paul for a while, and out of their conversations came an invitation: why not bring together some of the writers, artists and musicians starting to gather around Dark Mountain and organise a weekend event as part of the Pavilion’s relaunch?

It sounded so simple at the time. By May 2010, as the first Uncivilisation festival approached, everyone involved began to question their sanity. As Dougald wrote later:

> We had never organised anything like this, and our hosts were used to organising comedy nights and concerts for local audiences who bought their tickets, sat in their seats, enjoyed the show, applauded and went home. We were unprepared for the logistics of a festival and unprepared for the ways in which a festival comes alive. There were a hundred things wrong: plastic beer in plastic cups, a campsite too long a walk from the venue, a main hall where rows of seats faced a stage where speakers could barely see for the dazzle of the theatre lighting. Yet somehow, in spite of it all, this became a place where magic could happen.

Among the memories of that first year, there was the head-to-head encounter between Dougald and George Monbiot, which seemed to polarise the audience, only for them to be brought together again by Alastair McIntosh’s rhapsodic invocation of ‘the pilgrimage to the poet’s Dark Mountain’. The next morning, midway through Jay Griffiths’ talk, the brand new sound system broke down so comprehensively that the audience ended up leaving their rows of seats and sitting around her on the stage and the floor as she began again. And with that, a spell was broken, the face-off between speakers and spoken-to giving way to a shape as old as stories.

‘We got away with it,’ was Michael’s verdict afterwards. And for that reason, he went on, we should do it again next year and do it right. Together with Kat Dunseath, he put together a plan for how to run a Dark Mountain festival – and Uncivilisation found itself with a new venue, the Sustainability Centre in Hampshire, which would be its home for the next three years.

Perhaps the most important consequence of the festival was that it became the gateway through which others found their way to the core of the project – and the

place where Dougald and Paul began to step back, as others stepped forward, bringing the skills that were needed. By the final event in 2013, a larger collective was organising different parts of the festival, and many of those involved have gone on to run further Dark Mountain events or get involved in the publishing of the books.

The decision to bring Uncivilisation to an end was a practical one: trying to run both an annual festival and a publishing operation within the same tiny non-profit organisation stretched those involved too thin. As Dougald wrote, it was clear which one had to give:

> We didn't set out to start a festival, a festival happened to us. From those who came to it, we learned more about what Dark Mountain might be and what it might mean than we could ever have done at our desks. It felt good to have created it – and it feels good now to have brought it to an end.

For many of those who attended during those four years, the experience is captured in a review which Tom Stafford wrote for Now Then magazine:

> It seems like everybody who comes is a maker or doer of some kind – singers and songwriters, poets and writers, but also hackers, healers, disaster engineers and renegade bankers ... Again and again I found I could just sit down next to a stranger and very quickly we'd disappear down the rabbit hole – discussing peak oil or biotechnology, Hindu death cults or the problems with the publishing industry, prison reform or rap songs about cycling. All around, all weekend, people were meeting, talking and thinking, ideas crackling into the sky alongside the wood smoke and live music.

Beyond the foothills

Over the first couple of years, Paul and Dougald had run the project in their spare time, boosted by a team that came together around the festival – but by autumn 2011, it was becoming clear that this was unsustainable. Once again, it was Michael Hughes who stepped in, bringing together a funding proposal that led to a £10,000-a-year grant for the next three years from Doug Tompkins' Deep Ecology Foundation. Paul now took on the role of editorial director of the project, while Sophie McKeand became its first editorial assistant.

The second issue of Dark Mountain was published in early summer 2012, and the third a year later, with Adrienne Odasso joining the editorial team. Meanwhile, at the initiative of Marmaduke Dando, Dark Mountain released its first compilation album, From the Mourning of the World. Like the early books, this LP was made possible by a crowdfunding campaign to cover the costs of production. And Laurence

By this stage, Dougald had left the UK and settled in Sweden, continuing to be involved as an editor but having stepped back from the running of Dark Mountain. In spring 2013, it became clear that the project was heading for financial difficulties: with the third year of the Deep Ecology Foundation funding coming around, there was no likelihood of meeting the goal of becoming financially self-sustaining by the end of that period, and there was a risk that the project would run out of money within months. The downside of the crowdfunding approach was that a lot of effort went into reaching out to the same supporters each year, banging the drum for pre-orders and donations.

At this point, Dougald returned to work as managing editor alongside Paul, launching a new annual subscriptions model that would become the core of the project's ability to support itself. From now on, a clearer line would be drawn between the work of Dark Mountain as an organisation – publishing what soon became two books a year – and the wider tangle of creation and collaboration that had grown up around the project.

Others joined the editorial team – Nick Hunt from Issue 4, Charlotte Du Cann as art editor with Issue 5, Steve Wheeler and Em Strang as poetry editor from Issue 6 – and Sophie McKeand handed on the administrative role which she had developed to Charlotte and Mark Watson, who would become the anchor members of the operational team.

A feature in the New York Times magazine in April 2014 brought a new level of attention to the project in North America. Five years on from the publication of the manifesto, the Times could report that Dark Mountain was 'changing the environmental debate in Britain and the rest of Europe'. The following year, Dougald was

invited to work with Riksteatern, Sweden's national theatre, running a year-long Dark Mountain Workshop to explore the role of art under the shadow of climate change.

In 2017, the project crossed an important threshold, with the departure of the person with whom it had all started. As Paul wrote in his farewell post, it was time for him 'to come down off this mountain and see what I can do with what I found on the slopes':

> I leave this strange, messy, contradictory, wonderful, necessary thing I helped to birth in the hands of a group of people who I know will steer it onwards in new directions. There comes a point in any organisation when a founder, with his or her particular vision, has to step back to give new people and ideas some space to breathe. It's time to do that now; to leave this thing to move on without me, and with my blessing.

It seems a long time now since those early conversations over email and in the back rooms of pubs. This project has become a part of many people's lives, travelling further than its founders ever imagined. It has often weighed heavily on the shoulders of those who have taken responsibility for it. But some days, it does feel like that 'breakaway artistic republic of uncivilised thinkers and actors', the collective of boundary-walkers and hedge-riders, that they were dreaming of back when all this started.

The Manifesto

This is where it all began. A self-published pamphlet, born out of two years of conversations, crowdfunded over the internet, launched at a small riverside gathering outside Oxford in summer 2009.

Written by Paul Kingsnorth and Dougald Hine, it marked a first attempt to put into words the ideas and feelings which led to Dark Mountain. Think of it as a flag raised so that we can find one another. A point of departure, rather than a party line. An invitation to a larger conversation that continues to take us down unexpected paths.

You can read the full text of the manifesto here – or order the paperback edition, which includes a new essay from Dougald, reflecting on the first five years of Dark Mountain. The manifesto has been translated and published in Czech and Finnish, while draft translations exist in many other languages.

> Rearmament
> These grand and fatal movements toward death: the grandeur of the mass
> Makes pity a fool, the tearing pity
> For the atoms of the mass, the persons, the victims, makes it seem monstrous
> To admire the tragic beauty they build.
> It is beautiful as a river flowing or a slowly gathering
> Glacier on a high mountain rock-face,
> Bound to plow down a forest, or as frost in November,
> The gold and flaming death-dance for leaves,
> Or a girl in the night of her spent maidenhood, bleeding and kissing.
> I would burn my right hand in a slow fire
> To change the future ... I should do foolishly. The beauty of modern
> Man is not in the persons but in the
> Disastrous rhythm, the heavy and mobile masses, the dance of the
> Dream-led masses down the dark mountain.
> — *Robinson Jeffers, 1935*

I: Walking On Lava

> The end of the human race will be that it will eventually die of civilisation.
>
> — *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Those who witness extreme social collapse at first hand seldom describe any deep revelation about the truths of human existence. What they do mention, if asked, is their surprise at how easy it is to die.

The pattern of ordinary life, in which so much stays the same from one day to the next, disguises the fragility of its fabric. How many of our activities are made possible by the impression of stability that pattern gives? So long as it repeats, or varies steadily enough, we are able to plan for tomorrow as if all the things we rely on and don't think about too care- fully will still be there. When the pattern is broken, by civil war or natu- ral disaster or the smaller-scale tragedies that tear at its fabric, many of those activities become impossible or meaningless, while simply meeting needs we once took for granted may occupy much of our lives.

What war correspondents and relief workers report is not only the fragility of the fabric, but the speed with which it can unravel. As we write this, no one can say with certainty where the unravelling of the financial and commercial fabric of our economies will end. Meanwhile, beyond the cities, unchecked industrial exploitation frays the material basis of life in many parts of the world, and pulls at the ecological systems which sustain it.

Precarious as this moment may be, however, an awareness of the fragility of what we call civilisation is nothing new.

'Few men realise,' wrote Joseph Conrad in 1896, 'that their life, the very essence of their character, their capabilities and their audacities, are only the expression of their belief in the safety of their surroundings.' Conrad's writings exposed the civilisation exported by European imperialists to be little more than a comforting illusion, not only in the dark, unconquerable heart of Africa, but in the whited sepulchres of their capital cities. The inhabitants of that civilisation believed 'blindly in the irresistible force of its institutions and its morals, in the power of its police and of its opinion,' but their confidence could be maintained only by the seeming solidity of the crowd of like-minded believers surrounding them. Outside the walls, the wild remained as close to the surface as blood under skin, though the city-dweller was no longer equipped to face it directly.

Bertrand Russell caught this vein in Conrad's worldview, suggesting that the novelist 'thought of civilised and morally tolerable human life as a dangerous walk on a

thin crust of barely cooled lava which at any moment might break and let the unwary sink into fiery depths.' What both Russell and Conrad were getting at was a simple fact which any historian could confirm: human civilisation is an intensely fragile construction. It is built on little more than belief: belief in the rightness of its values; belief in the strength of its system of law and order; belief in its currency; above all, perhaps, belief in its future.

Once that belief begins to crumble, the collapse of a civilisation may become unstoppable. That civilisations fall, sooner or later, is as much a law of history as gravity is a law of physics. What remains after the fall is a wild mixture of cultural debris, confused and angry people whose certainties have betrayed them, and those forces which were always there, deeper than the foundations of the city walls: the desire to survive and the desire for meaning.

It is, it seems, our civilisation's turn to experience the inrush of the savage and the unseen; our turn to be brought up short by contact with untamed reality. There is a fall coming. We live in an age in which familiar restraints are being kicked away, and foundations snatched from under us. After a quarter century of complacency, in which we were invited to believe in bubbles that would never burst, prices that would never fall, the end of history, the crude repackaging of the triumphalism of Conrad's Victorian twilight — Hubris has been introduced to Nemesis. Now a familiar human story is being played out. It is the story of an empire corroding from within. It is the story of a people who believed, for a long time, that their actions did not have consequences. It is the story of how that people will cope with the crumbling of their own myth. It is our story.

This time, the crumbling empire is the unassailable global economy, and the brave new world of consumer democracy being forged worldwide in its name. Upon the indestructibility of this edifice we have pinned the hopes of this latest phase of our civilisation. Now, its failure and fallibility exposed, the world's elites are scrabbling frantically to buoy up an economic machine which, for decades, they told us needed little restraint, for restraint would be its undoing. Uncountable sums of money are being funnelled upwards in order to prevent an uncontrolled explosion. The machine is stuttering and the engineers are in panic. They are wondering if perhaps they do not understand it as well as they imagined. They are wondering whether they are controlling it at all or whether, perhaps, it is controlling them.

Increasingly, people are restless. The engineers group themselves into competing teams, but neither side seems to know what to do, and neither seems much different from the other. Around the world, discontent can be heard. The extremists are grinding their knives and moving in as the machine's coughing and stuttering exposes the inadequacies of the political oligarchies who claimed to have everything in hand. Old gods are rearing their heads, and old answers: revolution, war, ethnic strife. Politics

as we have known it totters, like the machine it was built to sustain. In its place could easily arise something more elemental, with a dark heart.

As the financial wizards lose their powers of levitation, as the politicians and economists struggle to conjure new explanations, it starts to dawn on us that behind the curtain, at the heart of the Emerald City, sits not the benign and omnipotent invisible hand we had been promised, but something else entirely. Something responsible for what Marx, writing not so long before Conrad, cast as the 'everlasting uncertainty and anguish' of the 'bourgeois epoch'; a time in which 'all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned.' Draw back the curtain, follow the tireless motion of cogs and wheels back to its source, and you will find the engine driving our civilisation: the myth of progress.

The myth of progress is to us what the myth of god-given warrior prowess was to the Romans, or the myth of eternal salvation was to the conquistadors: without it, our efforts cannot be sustained. Onto the root stock of Western Christianity, the Enlightenment at its most optimistic grafted a vision of an Earthly paradise, towards which human effort guided by calculative reason could take us. Following this guidance, each generation will live a better life than the life of those that went before it. History becomes an escalator, and the only way is up. On the top floor is human perfection. It is important that this should remain just out of reach in order to sustain the sensation of motion.

Recent history, however, has given this mechanism something of a battering. The past century too often threatened a descent into hell, rather than the promised heaven on Earth. Even within the prosperous and liberal societies of the West progress has, in many ways, failed to deliver the goods. Today's generation are demonstrably less content, and consequently less optimistic, than those that went before. They work longer hours, with less security, and less chance of leaving behind the social background into which they were born. They fear crime, social breakdown, overdevelopment, environmental collapse. They do not believe that the future will be better than the past. Individually, they are less constrained by class and convention than their parents or grandparents, but more constrained by law, surveillance, state proscription and personal debt. Their physical health is better, their mental health more fragile. Nobody knows what is coming. Nobody wants to look.

Most significantly of all, there is an underlying darkness at the root of everything we have built. Outside the cities, beyond the blurring edges of our civilisation, at the mercy of the machine but not under its control, lies something that neither Marx nor Conrad, Caesar nor Hume, Thatcher nor Lenin ever really understood. Something that Western civilisation — which has set the terms for global civilisation—was never capable of understanding, because to understand it would be to undermine, fatally, the myth of that civilisation. Something upon which that thin crust of lava is balanced; which feeds the machine and all the people who run it, and which they have all trained themselves not to see.

II: The Severed Hand

> Then what is the answer? Not to be deluded by dreams.
> To know that great civilisations have broken down into violence,
> and their tyrants come, many times before.
> When open violence appears, to avoid it with honor or choose
> the least ugly faction; these evils are essential.
> To keep one's own integrity, be merciful and uncorrupted
> and not wish for evil; and not be duped
> By dreams of universal justice or happiness. These dreams will
> not be fulfilled.
> To know this, and know that however ugly the parts appear
> the whole remains beautiful. A severed hand
> Is an ugly thing and man dissevered from the earth and stars
> and his history ... for contemplation or in fact ...
> Often appears atrociously ugly. Integrity is wholeness,
> the greatest beauty is
> Organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine beauty
> of the universe. Love that, not man
> Apart from that, or else you will share man's pitiful confusions,
> or drown in despair when his days darken.
> — *Robinson Jeffers, 'The Answer'*

The myth of progress is founded on the myth of nature. The first tells us that we are destined for greatness; the second tells us that greatness is cost-free. Each is intimately bound up with the other. Both tell us that we are apart from the world; that we began grunting in the primeval swamps, as a humble part of something called 'nature', which we have now triumphantly subdued. The very fact that we have a word for 'nature' is evidence that we do not regard ourselves as part of it. Indeed, our separation from it is a myth integral to the triumph of our civilisation. We are, we tell ourselves, the only species ever to have attacked nature and won. In this, our unique glory is contained.

Outside the citadels of self-congratulation, lone voices have cried out against this infantile version of the human story for centuries, but it is only in the last few decades that its inaccuracy has become laughably apparent. We are the first generations to grow up surrounded by evidence that our attempt to separate ourselves from 'nature' has been a grim failure, proof not of our genius but our hubris. The attempt to sever the hand from the body has endangered the 'progress' we hold so dear, and it has

endangered much of 'nature' too. The resulting upheaval underlies the crisis we now face.

We imagined ourselves isolated from the source of our existence. The fallout from this imaginative error is all around us: a quarter of the world's mammals are threatened with imminent extinction; an acre and a half of rainforest is felled every second; 75% of the world's fish stocks are on the verge of collapse; humanity consumes 25% more of the world's natural 'products' than the Earth can replace — a figure predicted to rise to 80% by mid-century. Even through the deadening lens of statistics, we can glimpse the violence to which our myths have driven us.

And over it all looms runaway climate change. Climate change, which threatens to render all human projects irrelevant; which presents us with detailed evidence of our lack of understanding of the world we inhabit while, at the same time, demonstrating that we are still entirely reliant upon it. Climate change, which highlights in painful colour the head-on crash between civilisation and 'nature'; which makes plain, more effectively than any carefully constructed argument or optimistically defiant protest, how the machine's need for permanent growth will require us to destroy ourselves in its name. Climate change, which brings home at last our ultimate powerlessness.

These are the facts, or some of them. Yet facts never tell the whole story. ('Facts', Conrad wrote, in Lord Jim, 'as if facts could prove anything.') The facts of environmental crisis we hear so much about often conceal as much as they expose. We hear daily about the impacts of our activities on 'the environment' (like 'nature', this is an expression which distances us from the reality of our situation). Daily we hear, too, of the many 'solutions' to these problems: solutions which usually involve the necessity of urgent political agreement and a judicious application of human technological genius. Things may be changing, runs the narrative, but there is nothing we cannot deal with here, folks. We perhaps need to move faster, more urgently. Certainly we need to accelerate the pace of research and development. We accept that we must become more 'sustainable'. But everything will be fine. There will still be growth, there will still be progress: these things will continue, because they have to continue, so they cannot do anything but continue. There is nothing to see here. Everything will be fine.

We do not believe that everything will be fine. We are not even sure, based on current definitions of progress and improvement, that we want it to be. Of all humanity's delusions of difference, of its separation from and superiority to the living world which surrounds it, one distinction holds up better than most: we may well be the first species capable of effectively eliminating life on Earth. This is a hypothesis we seem intent on putting to the test. We are already responsible for denuding the world of much of its richness, magnificence, beauty, colour and magic, and we show no sign of slowing down. For a very long time, we imagined that 'nature' was something that happened elsewhere. The damage we did to it might be regrettable, but needed to be weighed

against the benefits here and now. And in the worst case scenario, there would always be some kind of Plan B. Perhaps we would make for the moon, where we could survive in lunar colonies under giant bubbles as we planned our expansion across the galaxy.

But there is no Plan B and the bubble, it turns out, is where we have been living all the while. The bubble is that delusion of isolation under which we have laboured for so long. The bubble has cut us off from life on the only planet we have, or are ever likely to have. The bubble is civilisation.

Consider the structures on which that bubble has been built. Its foundations are geological: coal, oil, gas — millions upon millions of years of ancient sunlight, dragged from the depths of the planet and burned with abandon. On this base, the structure stands. Move upwards, and you pass through a jumble of supporting horrors: battery chicken sheds; industrial abattoirs; burning forests; beam-trawled ocean floors; dynamited reefs; hollowed-out mountains; wasted soil. Finally, on top of all these unseen layers, you reach the well-tended surface where you and I stand: unaware, or uninterested, in what goes on beneath us; demanding that the authorities keep us in the manner to which we have been accustomed; occasion- ally feeling twinges of guilt that lead us to buy organic chickens or locally-produced lettuces; yet for the most part glutted, but not sated, on the fruits of the horrors on which our lifestyles depend.

We are the first generations born into a new and unprecedented age — the age of ecocide. To name it thus is not to presume the outcome, but simply to describe a process which is underway. The ground, the sea, the air, the elemental backdrops to our existence — all these our economics has taken for granted, to be used as a bottomless tip, endlessly able to dilute and disperse the tailings of our extraction, production, consumption. The sheer scale of the sky or the weight of a swollen river makes it hard to imagine that creatures as flimsy as you and I could do that much damage. Philip Larkin gave voice to this attitude, and the creeping, worrying end of it in his poem Going, Going:

> Things are tougher than we are, just
> As earth will always respond
> However we mess it about;
> Chuck filth in the sea, if you must:
> The tides will be clean beyond.
> – But what do I feel now? Doubt?

Nearly forty years on from Larkin's words, doubt is what all of us seem to feel, all of the time. Too much filth has been chucked in the sea and into the soil and into the atmosphere to make any other feeling sensible. The doubt, and the facts, have paved the way for a worldwide movement of environmental politics, which aimed, at least in its early, raw form, to challenge the myths of development and progress head-on. But time has not been kind to the greens. Today's environmentalists are more likely to be found at corporate conferences hymning the virtues of 'sustainability' and

'ethical consumption' than doing anything as naive as questioning the intrinsic values of civilisation. Capitalism has absorbed the greens, as it absorbs so many challenges to its ascendancy. A radical challenge to the human machine has been transformed into yet another opportunity for shopping.

'Denial' is a hot word, heavy with connotations. When it is used to brand the remaining rump of climate change sceptics, they object noisily to the association with those who would rewrite the history of the Holocaust. Yet the focus on this dwindling group may serve as a distraction from a far larger form of denial, in its psychoanalytic sense. Freud wrote of the inability of people to hear things which did not fit with the way they saw themselves and the world. We put ourselves through all kinds of inner contortions, rather than look plainly at those things which challenge our fundamental understanding of the world.

Today, humanity is up to its neck in denial about what it has built, what it has become — and what it is in for. Ecological and economic collapse unfold before us and, if we acknowledge them at all, we act as if this were a temporary problem, a technical glitch. Centuries of hubris block our ears like wax plugs; we cannot hear the message which reality is screaming at us. For all our doubts and discontents, we are still wired to an idea of his- tory in which the future will be an upgraded version of the present. The assumption remains that things must continue in their current direction: the sense of crisis only smudges the meaning of that 'must'. No longer a natural inevitability, it becomes an urgent necessity: we must find a way to go on having supermarkets and superhighways. We cannot contemplate the alternative.

And so we find ourselves, all of us together, poised trembling on the edge of a change so massive that we have no way of gauging it. None of us knows where to look, but all of us know not to look down. Secretly, we all think we are doomed: even the politicians think this; even the environmentalists. Some of us deal with it by going shopping. Some deal with it by hoping it is true. Some give up in despair. Some work frantically to try and fend off the coming storm.

Our question is: what would happen if we looked down? Would it be as bad as we imagine? What might we see? Could it even be good for us?

We believe it is time to look down.

III: Uncivilisation

> Without mystery, without curiosity and without the form imposed by a partial answer, there can be no stories—only confessions, com- muniqués, memories and fragments of autobiographical fantasy which for the moment pass as novels.
>
> — *John Berger, 'A Story for Aesop', from Keeping a Rendezvous*

If we are indeed teetering on the edge of a massive change in how we live, in how human society itself is constructed, and in how we relate to the rest of the world, then we were led to this point by the stories we have told ourselves — above all, by the story of civilisation.

This story has many variants, religious and secular, scientific, economic and mystic. But all tell of humanity's original transcendence of its animal beginnings, our growing mastery over a 'nature' to which we no longer belong, and the glorious future of plenty and prosperity which will follow when this mastery is complete. It is the story of human centrality, of a species destined to be lord of all it surveys, unconfined by the limits that apply to other, lesser creatures.

What makes this story so dangerous is that, for the most part, we have forgotten that it is a story. It has been told so many times by those who see themselves as rationalists, even scientists; heirs to the Enlightenment's legacy — a legacy which includes the denial of the role of stories in making the world.

Humans have always lived by stories, and those with skill in telling them have been treated with respect and, often, a certain wariness. Beyond the limits of reason, reality remains mysterious, as incapable of being approached directly as a hunter's quarry. With stories, with art, with symbols and layers of meaning, we stalk those elusive aspects of reality that go undreamed of in our philosophy. The storyteller weaves the mysterious into the fabric of life, lacing it with the comic, the tragic, the obscene, making safe paths through dangerous territory.

Yet as the myth of civilisation deepened its grip on our thinking, borrowing the guise of science and reason, we began to deny the role of stories, to dismiss their power as something primitive, childish, outgrown. The old tales by which generations had made sense of life's subtleties and strangenesses were bowdlerised and packed off to the nursery. Religion, that bag of myths and mysteries, birthplace of the theatre, was straightened out into a framework of universal laws and moral account-keeping. The dream visions of the Middle Ages became the nonsense stories of Victorian childhood. In the age of the novel, stories were no longer the way to approach the deep truths

of the world, so much as a way to pass time on a train journey. It is hard, today, to imagine that the word of a poet was once feared by a king.

Yet for all this, our world is still shaped by stories. Through television, film, novels and video games, we may be more thoroughly bombarded with narrative material than any people that ever lived. What is peculiar, however, is the carelessness with which these stories are channelled at us — as entertainment, a distraction from daily life, something to hold our attention to the other side of the ad break. There is little sense that these things make up the equipment by which we navigate reality. On the other hand, there are the serious stories told by economists, politicians, geneticists and corporate leaders. These are not presented as stories at all, but as direct accounts of how the world is. Choose between competing versions, then fight with those who chose differently. The ensuing conflicts play out on early morning radio, in afternoon debates and late night television pundit wars. And yet, for all the noise, what is striking is how much the opposing sides agree on: all their stories are only variants of the larger story of human centrality, of our ever-expanding control over 'nature', our right to perpetual economic growth, our ability to transcend all limits.

So we find ourselves, our ways of telling unbalanced, trapped inside a runaway narrative, headed for the worst kind of encounter with reality. In such a moment, writers, artists, poets and storytellers of all kinds have a critical role to play. Creativity remains the most uncontrollable of human forces: without it, the project of civilisation is inconceivable, yet no part of life remains so untamed and undomesticated. Words and images can change minds, hearts, even the course of history. Their makers shape the stories people carry through their lives, unearth old ones and breathe them back to life, add new twists, point to unexpected endings. It is time to pick up the threads and make the stories new, as they must always be made new, starting from where we are.

Mainstream art in the West has long been about shock; about busting taboos, about Getting Noticed. This has gone on for so long that it has become common to assert that in these ironic, exhausted, post-everything times, there are no taboos left to bust. But there is one.

The last taboo is the myth of civilisation. It is built upon the stories we have constructed about our genius, our indestructibility, our manifest destiny as a chosen species. It is where our vision and our self-belief intertwine with our reckless refusal to face the reality of our position on this Earth. It has led the human race to achieve what it has achieved; and has led the planet into the age of ecocide. The two are intimately linked. We believe they must decoupled if anything is to remain.

We believe that artists — which is to us the most welcoming of words, taking under its wing writers of all kinds, painters, musicians, sculptors, poets, designers, creators, makers of things, dreamers of dreams — have a responsibility to begin the process of decoupling. We believe that, in the age of ecocide, the last taboo must be broken — and that only artists can do it.

Ecocide demands a response. That response is too important to be left to politicians, economists, conceptual thinkers, number crunchers; too all-pervasive to be left to activists or campaigners. Artists are needed. So far, though, the artistic response has been muted. In between traditional nature poetry and agitprop, what is there? Where are the poems that have adjusted their scope to the scale of this challenge? Where are the novels that probe beyond the country house or the city centre? What new form of writing has emerged to challenge civilisation itself? What gallery mounts an exhibition equal to this challenge? Which musician has discovered the secret chord?

If the answers to these questions have been scarce up to now, it is perhaps both because the depth of collective denial is so great, and because the challenge is so very daunting. We are daunted by it, ourselves. But we believe it needs to be risen to. We believe that art must look over the edge, face the world that is coming with a steady eye, and rise to the challenge of ecocide with a challenge of its own: an artistic response to the crumbling of the empires of the mind.

This response we call Uncivilised art, and we are interested in one branch of it in particular: Uncivilised writing. Uncivilised writing is writing which attempts to stand outside the human bubble and see us as we are: highly evolved apes with an array of talents and abilities which we are unleashing without sufficient thought, control, compassion or intelligence. Apes who have constructed a sophisticated myth of their own importance with which to sustain their civilising project. Apes whose project has been to tame, to control, to subdue or to destroy — to civilise the forests, the deserts, the wild lands and the seas, to impose bonds on the minds of their own in order that they might feel nothing when they exploit or destroy their fellow creatures.

Against the civilising project, which has become the progenitor of ecocide, Uncivilised writing offers not a non-human perspective—we remain human and, even now, are not quite ashamed — but a perspective which sees us as one strand of a web rather than as the first palanquin in a glorious procession. It offers an unblinking look at the forces among which we find ourselves.

It sets out to paint a picture of homo sapiens which a being from another world or, better, a being from our own — a blue whale, an albatross, a mountain hare — might recognise as something approaching a truth. It sets out to tug our attention away from ourselves and turn it outwards; to uncentre our minds. It is writing, in short, which puts civilisation — and us — into perspective. Writing that comes not, as most writing still does, from the self-absorbed and self-congratulatory metropolitan centres of civilisation but from somewhere on its wilder fringes. Somewhere woody and weedy and largely avoided, from where insistent, uncomfortable truths about ourselves drift in; truths which we're not keen on hearing. Writing which unflinchingly stares us down, however uncomfortable this may prove.

It might perhaps be just as useful to explain what Uncivilised writing is not. It is not environmental writing, for there is much of that about already, and most of it fails to jump the barrier which marks the limit of our collective human ego; much of it, indeed, ends up shoring-up that ego, and helping us to persist in our civilisational delusions. It is not nature writing, for there is no such thing as nature as distinct from people, and to suggest otherwise is to perpetuate the attitude which has brought us here. And it is not political writing, with which the world is already flooded, for politics is a human confection, complicit in ecocide and decaying from within.

Uncivilised writing is more rooted than any of these. Above all, it is determined to shift our worldview, not to feed into it. It is writing for outsiders. If you want to be loved, it might be best not to get involved, for the world, at least for a time, will resolutely refuse to listen.

A salutary example of this last point can be found in the fate of one of the twentieth century's most significant yet most neglected poets. Robinson Jeffers was writing Uncivilised verse seventy years before this manifesto was thought of, though he did not call it that. In his early poetic career, Jeffers was a star: he appeared on the cover of Time magazine, read his poems in the US Library of Congress and was respected for the alternative he offered to the Modernist juggernaut. Today his work is left out of anthologies, his name is barely known and his politics are regarded with suspicion. Read Jeffers' later work and you will see why. His crime was to deliberately puncture humanity's sense of self-importance. His punishment was to be sent into a lonely literary exile from which, forty years after his death, he has still not been allowed to return.

But Jeffers knew what he was in for. He knew that nobody, in an age of 'consumer choice', wanted to be told by this stone-faced prophet of the California cliffs that 'it is good for man ... To know that his needs and nature are no more changed in fact in ten thousand years than the beaks of eagles.' He knew that no comfortable liberal wanted to hear his angry warning, issued at the height of the Second World War: 'Keep clear of the dupes that talk democracy / And the dogs that talk revolution / Drunk with talk, liars and believers ... / Long live freedom, and damn the ideologies.' His vision of a world in which humanity was doomed to destroy its surroundings and eventually itself ('I would burn my right hand in a slow fire / To change the future ... I should do foolishly') was furiously rejected in the rising age of consumer democracy which he also predicted ('Be happy, adjust your economics to the new abundance...')

Jeffers, as his poetry developed, developed a philosophy too. He called it 'inhumanism.' It was, he wrote:

> a shifting of emphasis and significance from man to notman; the rejection of human solipsism and recognition of the transhuman magnificence...This manner of thought and feeling is neither misanthropic nor pessimist ... It offers a reasonable detachment as rule of conduct, instead of love, hate and

> envy... it provides magnificence for the religious instinct, and satisfies our need to admire greatness and rejoice in beauty.

The shifting of emphasis from man to notman: this is the aim of Uncivilised writing. To 'unhumanise our views a little, and become confident / As the rock and ocean that we were made from.' This is not a rejection of our humanity — it is an affirmation of the wonder of what it means to be truly human. It is to accept the world for what it is and to make our home here, rather than dreaming of relocating to the stars, or existing in a Man-forged bubble and pretending to ourselves that there is nothing outside it to which we have any connection at all.

This, then, is the literary challenge of our age. So far, few have taken it up. The signs of the times flash out in urgent neon, but our literary lions have better things to read. Their art remains stuck in its own civilised bubble. The idea of civilisation is entangled, right down to its semantic roots, with city-dwelling, and this provokes a thought: if our writers seem unable to find new stories which might lead us through the times ahead, is this not a function of their metropolitan mentality? The big names of contemporary literature are equally at home in the fashionable quarters of London or New York, and their writing reflects the prejudices of the placeless, transnational elite to which they belong.

The converse also applies. Those voices which tell other stories tend to be rooted in a sense of place. Think of John Berger's novels and essays from the Haute Savoie, or the depths explored by Alan Garner within a day's walk of his birthplace in Cheshire. Think of Wendell Berry or WS Merwin, Mary Oliver or Cormac McCarthy. Those whose writings approach the shores of the Uncivilised are those who know their place, in the physical sense, and who remain wary of the siren cries of metrovincial fashion and civilised excitement.

If we name particular writers whose work embodies what we are arguing for, the aim is not to place them more prominently on the existing map of literary reputations. Rather, as Geoff Dyer has said of Berger, to take their work seriously is to redraw the maps altogether — not only the map of literary reputations, but those by which we navigate all areas of life.

Even here, we go carefully, for cartography itself is not a neutral activity. The drawing of maps is full of colonial echoes. The civilised eye seeks to view the world from above, as something we can stand over and survey. The Uncivilised writer knows the world is, rather, something we are enmeshed in — a patchwork and a framework of places, experiences, sights, smells, sounds. Maps can lead, but can also mislead. Our maps must be the kind sketched in the dust with a stick, washed away by the next rain. They can be read only by those who ask to see them, and they cannot be bought.

This, then, is Uncivilised writing. Human, inhuman, stoic and entirely natural. Humble, questioning, suspicious of the big idea and the easy answer. Walking the boundaries and reopening old conversations. Apart but engaged, its practitioners always willing

to get their hands dirty; aware, in fact, that dirt is essential; that keyboards should be tapped by those with soil under their fingernails and wilderness in their heads.

We tried ruling the world; we tried acting as God's steward, then we tried ushering in the human revolution, the age of reason and isolation. We failed in all of it, and our failure destroyed more than we were even aware of. The time for civilisation is past. Uncivilisation, which knows its flaws because it has participated in them; which sees unflinchingly and bites down hard as it records — this is the project we must embark on now. This is the challenge for writing — for art — to meet. This is what we are here for.

IV: To the Foothills!

> One impulse from a vernal wood
> May teach you more of man,
> Of moral evil and of good,
> Than all the sages can.
> — *William Wordsworth, 'The Tables Turned'*

A movement needs a beginning. An expedition needs a base camp. A project needs a headquarters. Uncivilisation is our project, and the promotion of Uncivilised writing — and art — needs a base. We present this manifesto not simply because we have something to say—who doesn't?—but because we have something to do. We hope this pamphlet has created a spark. If so, we have a responsibility to fan the flames. This is what we intend to do. But we can't do it alone.

This is a moment to ask deep questions and to ask them urgently. All around us, shifts are under way which suggest that our whole way of living is already passing into history. It is time to look for new paths and new stories, ones that can lead us through the end of the world as we know it and out the other side. We suspect that by questioning the foundations of civilisation, the myth of human centrality, our imagined isolation, we may find the beginning of such paths.

If we are right, it will be necessary to go literally beyond the Pale. Out- side the stockades we have built — the city walls, the original marker in stone or wood that first separated 'man' from 'nature'. Beyond the gates, out into the wilderness, is where we are headed. And there we shall make for the higher ground for, as Jeffers wrote, 'when the cities lie at the monster's feet / There are left the mountains.' We shall make the pilgrimage to the poet's Dark Mountain, to the great, immovable, inhuman heights which were here before us and will be here after, and from their slopes we shall look back upon the pinprick lights of the distant cities and gain perspective on who we are and what we have become.

This is the Dark Mountain project. It starts here.

Where will it end? Nobody knows. Where will it lead? We are not sure. Its first incarnation, launched alongside this manifesto, is a website, which points the way to the ranges. It will contains thoughts, scribblings, jottings, ideas; it will work up the project of Uncivilisation, and invite all comers to join the discussion.

Then it will become a physical object, because virtual reality is, ultimately, no reality at all. It will become a journal, of paper, card, paint and print; of ideas, thoughts, observations, mumblings; new stories which will help to define the project — the school,

the movement — of Uncivilised writing. It will collect the words and the images of those who consider themselves Uncivilised and have something to say about it; who want to help us attack the citadels. It will be a thing of beauty for the eye and for the heart and for the mind, for we are unfashionable enough to believe that beauty — like truth — not only exists, but still matters.

Beyond that... all is currently hidden from view. It is a long way across the plains, and things become obscured by distance. There are great white spaces on this map still. The civilised would fill them in; we are not so sure we want to. But we cannot resist exploring them, navigating by rumours and by the stars. We don't know quite what we will find. We are slightly nervous. But we will not turn back, for we believe that something enormous may be out there, waiting to meet us.

Uncivilisation, like civilisation, is not something that can be created alone. Climbing the Dark Mountain cannot be a solitary exercise. We need bearers, sherpas, guides, fellow adventurers. We need to rope ourselves together for safety. At present, our form is loose and nebulous. It will firm itself up as we climb. Like the best writing, we need to be shaped by the ground beneath our feet, and what we become will be shaped, at least in part, by what we find on our journey.

If you would like to climb at least some of the way with us, we would like to hear from you. We feel sure there are others out there who would relish joining us on this expedition.

Come. Join us. We leave at dawn.

The Eight Principles of Uncivilisation

'We must unhumanise our views a little, and become confident

As the rock and ocean that we were made from.'

1. We live in a time of social, economic and ecological unravelling. All around us are signs that our whole way of living is already passing into history. We will face this reality honestly and learn how to live with it.

2. We reject the faith which holds that the converging crises of our times can be reduced to a set of 'problems' in need of technological or political 'solutions'.

3. We believe that the roots of these crises lie in the stories we have been telling ourselves. We intend to challenge the stories which underpin our civilisation: the myth of progress, the myth of human centrality, and the myth of our separation from 'nature'. These myths are more dangerous for the fact that we have forgotten they are myths.

4. We will reassert the role of storytelling as more than mere entertainment. It is through stories that we weave reality.

5. Humans are not the point and purpose of the planet. Our art will begin with the attempt to step outside the human bubble. By careful attention, we will reengage with the non-human world.

6. We will celebrate writing and art which is grounded in a sense of place and of time. Our literature has been dominated for too long by those who inhabit the cosmopolitan citadels.

7. We will not lose ourselves in the elaboration of theories or ideologies. Our words will be elemental. We write with dirt under our fingernails.

8. The end of the world as we know it is not the end of the world full stop. Together, we will find the hope beyond hope, the paths which lead to the unknown world ahead of us.

Gathering Places

It may have started online and in the pages of books, but Dark Mountain came alive through the many different shaped gatherings that sprang up around the project.

From the early Uncivilisation festivals, to firelight storytelling in the shadow of a shut-down art college in South Yorkshire, or the strange figures weaving through the city of Reading on a Saturday night – from the cellars of a theatre in Stockholm to mountainous retreats in the Spanish Pyrenees – the connections formed through these encounters have led in a hundred directions, travelling off the edge of our maps, or feeding back into the pages of future Dark Mountain books.

In this section, we've drawn together the traces into the beginnings of a history of Dark Mountain as a place where people gather. Meanwhile, you can find listings for upcoming gatherings on our Events page – or sign up to our newsletter for future announcements.

If you've ever organised a DIY event, you'll know that all the good intentions about documenting with photographs and video have a tendency to fall away amid the work of holding the show together. So we're hugely grateful to friends of Dark Mountain who have been generous in photographing our activities over the years – and in particular to Andy Broomfield and Bridget McKenzie, without whose efforts the photographic archive of this project would be very sparse.

We are always glad to hear from people with photographs and recordings of our past events, so if you have anything to add to this archive, please get in touch.

Uncivilisation

The Dark Mountain Festival 2010–13

Four years of Ucivilisation – collage by Bracketpress for Issue 5

The Uncivilisation festival was the annual gathering for the Dark Mountain Project between 2010 and 2013. The first festival took place in late spring at the Llangollen Pavilion in Wales, while the following three were held in high summer at the Sustainability Centre, near Petersfield in Hampshire. As well as providing a platform for talks, performances and workshops, the festivals were meeting places where the ideas behind the project could be discussed and experiences shared around a fire and under the stars.

These were village-scale events with 300 to 400 participants. Most people camped in fields and we did our best to source the food and drink from local producers.

Here's Paul Kingsnorth introducing the third gathering in 2012:

> It will be a good opportunity for a coming-together of like-minded souls at a time when much of what Dark Mountain began talking about two or three years back is beginning to play itself out on the world's stage. Talk of collapse, contraction, radical change and the overturning of certainties no longer seems like fringe stuff: it seems increasingly central to life here in the overdeveloped world, as it has been elsewhere for so much longer.
>
> What do we do with that knowledge? Answering that question is what this weekend is about.

Arch on the mountain above Llangollen (photo: Bridget McKenzie)

2010

The festival came about because Michael Hughes, who was working for the Llangollen Pavilion, approached the founders of Dark Mountain to host an event there. A wide range of speakers, musicians, artists and performers were invited with the idea of creating an 'unfestival', advertised as an antidote to the Hay literary festival (happening the same weekend at the other end of Offa's Dyke). It was a huge mix of sessions and events, showcasing the wild diversity of Dark Mountain in this initial phase.

There was also a pre-festival camp held over the week beforehand in the grounds of the pavilion, where the emphasis was on sharing skills, ideas and practical wisdom.

The festival attracted 400 people, with a mixture of performances, debates and arguments. The participants included Alastair McIntosh, George Monbiot, Jay Griffiths and Penny Rimbaud. The Saturday programme went under the heading 'What do you do, after you stop pretending?', while on Sunday the focus shifted to the search for 'New Stories', including a writers' discussion on the failures of literature to tell the stories of a collapsing world.

Dougald hosting a session with Jay Griffiths at Uncivilisation, Lllangollen, Wales 2010 (photo: Bridget McKenzie)

The music came from Get Cape Wear Cape Fly, Chris Wood, Chris T-T, Marmaduke Dando's Powerdown and Will Hodgkinson's Ballad of Britain; there was outsider art and photography installations; a theatre, a bookshop and a mysterious poetry caravan; a Dark Mountain cinema; and practical workshops on topics ranging from 'collapsonomics' to foraging for wild food.

This first festival was a chaotic experiment, but one which sowed the seeds for many of the live events, talks and courses that would manifest during the decade that followed. Many of those who would become the core team behind Dark Mountain together met for the first time in Llangollen.

Read more

'A politics worth fighting for' by Benjamin Morris.

'An alternative eco-festival going against the "green"', CNN

2011

Tipis and discussions at Uncivilisation 2012, Sustainability Centre, Hampshire (photo: Andy Broomfield)

In its second year, Uncivilisation shifted location, leaving the square space of a hall and going out into the woods and permaculture gardens of the Sustainability Centre. The main speakers and bands played in a marquee, surrounded by a cluster of stalls, tipis, an outdoor bar and a pair of campfires. A large yurt hosted some of the workshops and Ben Law's 'woodland classroom' housed writing and storytelling sessions, as well as the evening's Power Down performances.

Among the themes taken up in the 2011 event was the 200th anniversary of the Luddites, celebrated by revisiting the history of the rebellion and exploring the stories we tell ourselves today about work and technology.

The speakers and sessions included: Benny Wenda from the Free West Papua Campaign; the poets Mario Petrucci, Melanie Challenger, Em Strang and Adrienne Odasso; Vinay Gupta on parallel infrastructures for an uncertain future; land-based strategies

with coppicer, straw-bale builder and drystone waller Hywel Lewis. One session that passed into legend was the Collapsonomics Panel on the Saturday morning in the main tent, whose speakers included a disillusioned ex-banker from Ireland, a Russian prison reformer, an Icelandic hacker and a security activist providing support to movements in the Arab Spring.

There were also wild food foraging expeditions with Andy Hamilton and Fergus Drennan; writing workshops with authors including Nick Hunt; a demonstration of the scythe with Paul Kingsnorth, and a walk and talk, exploring the idea of pilgrimage with Adam Weymouth.

The weekend opened with Phil Minton and a Feral Choir recruited from the early arrivals at the festival site...

Read more
Download the full programme from Uncivilisation 2011.
'Apocalypse? Now We're Talking' by Charlotte Du Cann (The Independent)
Review by Amelia Gregory (Amelia's Magazine): part 1, part 2.

> 'You can expect the same mixture of the serious and the playful, of stimulation for the mind and the soul; a space to reflect on difficult questions, to be uplifted by powerful music, and to find friends to learn from and laugh with.'
> — Paul Kingsnorth

'Uncivilisation is what we are currently living through – the crumbling of myths and the formation of others. In this way the festival took me to the Outer Hebrides, through economic collapse in Iceland to civil unrest in Tottenham, on a sinking sail boat across the channel, and to the songlines of West Papua. I now think of it as a giant watercourse, a flood of stories, thoughts, ideas and reflections, and we were all contributory streams gathering pace as we went down towards the ocean.' — Jeppe Graugaard, The Pattern Which Connects

Telling a Siberian tale around the fire with Tom Hirons and Rima Staines, Uncivilisation 2012 (photo: Andy Samson for Aeon magazine)

2012

Two changes shaped the third Uncivilisation festival: firstly, we got rid of the microphones and loudspeakers. Everything, including the music, was unamplified. The atmosphere became more intimate, the gap between performers and audience less distinct.

Secondly, the centralised curation of the festival gave way to a set of different stages, hosted by different teams. During the daytime, there were three stages focusing on everything from writing to storytelling, art to analysis. On Friday and Saturday night, the Power Down music stages were directed by Marmaduke Dando and Chris T-T.

Installation marking the 20th anniversary of the UK road protests movement, Uncivilisation 2012 (photo: Bridget McKenzie)

Among the highlights of Uncivilisation 2012 were: a celebration and commemoration of the British road protest movement, and its legacy of creative radicalism and connection to 'place'; Feral Theatre's performance about the extinction of the Caspian Tiger; 'Light Leaves', a photographic installation in the woods; fireside storytelling and rites of passage work with Tom Hirons and Rima Staines; plus a 'free space' in which anyone could present their work.

This was also the year that the mythologist and storyteller Martin Shaw entered the Dark Mountain stage; Andy Letcher, of Wod, led the whole festival in a Brythonic dance, and the troupe behind 2011's Liminal returned with a series of mysterious, unscheduled interventions.

Read more

'Art, Protest and Walking the Boundaries' by Dougie Strang (Dark Mountain)
'Drumming in the Stories' by Paul Kingsnorth (Dark Mountain)
'Dispatch from the Wild Frontiers of Uncivilisation' by Ed Lake (Aeon magaazine)
'A Movement or a Stillness?' by Bridget Mackenzie (Learning Planet)
Photo notebook by Andy Broomfield

> 'There will be poetry about climate change, biodiversity loss, hedge funds, speciesism, wild places, wild mind, folklore, myth, interdependent relationships, extinction, farming and gender politics' — Em Strang, curator of the literary stage

Uncivilisation was defined as much by what happened at its edges as on its stages: practical outdoor workshops, from sheep hurdles to foraging, alongside mysterious appearances. In 2012 the troupe known as Mearcstapa, a crew of shamanic animals, lurked in welcome in the fields and around the nighttime fires. In 2013 The Rewilding Academy took us barefoot running and slow walking. Here Mark Watson introduces the medicinal properties of the wildflowers that flourish on this downland site.

Dougie Strang performing Badger Dissonance, Parachute Stage, Uncivilisation 2013 (photo: Bridget McKenzie)

2013

The fourth and final festival offered a rich menu of over 70 sessions spread across three stages, including a full programme for children. Large informal discussions, such as Rise and Root, alternated with more formal presentations, as when Jennifer Sahn (editor of Orion magazine) spoke about the end of nature writing, and novelist Margaret Elphinstone discussed *The Gathering Night*, her novel set during the Mesolithic. Dougald Hine held a session on the work of Ivan Illich, while Mark Boyle introduced his ideas on Wild Economics.

Meanwhile, away under the pines lurked the sight of a strange and beguiling Charnel House for Roadkill – and Ansuman Biswas had filled a yurt with an extraordinary array of unfamiliar musical instruments, emerging periodically to sound one of them across the site.

The Saturday night included an anarchic stand-up comedy set, while the more serious moments of the weekend included Andreas Kornevall leading us in the creation of a Life Cairn in memory of extinct species around the world. The teepees hosted a men's choir workshop and wild women's weaving sessions (stories and textiles); Martin Shaw returned with his drum and Siberian tales; Paul Kingsnorth gave the first ever reading from his novel *The Wake,* and two energetic evenings of music and song were held by firelight and candles on the woodland stage. An informal Sunday night ceilidh with Matt Wicking and others was a fitting end to the last in this run of festivals.

Read more

The website of the last Uncivilisation festival can still be found online.

My Pick of the Festival by Paul Kingsnorth (Dark Mountain).

The Snake in the Box by Charlotte Du Cann (Dark Mountain).

How Very Uncivilised by Raven Nielsen (Disobedient Child).

Review by Tom Jeffries (Wild Culture).

Farewell with Paul Kingsnorth Dougald Hine, Jack 'the Stag' Richardson, Ansuman Biswas and Sophie McKeand, Uncivilisation 2013 (photo: Bridget McKenzie)

A Farewell to Uncivilisation

Dougald Hine looks back on four years of the Dark Mountain festival in an essay for Dark Mountain: Issue 5.

The skies opened and all the waters in them fell at once. It was a rain so hard I remember the weight of it on my shoulders, so loud you had to shout to have a chance of being heard. Yet, uncommonly for England in summer, it was not a miserable rain. There was something triumphant about it.

Perhaps because we all knew we would soon be in vehicles, heading back to the sheltered lives we had come from. Perhaps because we had already endured a weekend of hard showers, woodland mists and other watery intrusions. But also because it felt somehow like a seal of approval, a full-throated elemental roar in answer to the voices raised here in the past three days, the past four years, at the last moment of the fourth and last Uncivilisation festival.

Insist too hard on the significance of a poetic coincidence and you will make people uncomfortable. Better to recount such moments as jokes the world seemed to join in with than as some kind of revelation, but my experience of those four festivals includes several of them. The first came that first year, before we had found the site in the Meon valley that became our home, when several hundred people gathered in Llangollen, unsure what to expect. The landscape was darker, wild and splendid, but the venue itself was a converted sports hall. We had never organised anything like this, and our hosts were used to organising comedy nights and concerts for local audiences who bought their tickets, sat in their seats, enjoyed the show, applauded and went home. We were unprepared for the logistics of a festival and unprepared for the ways in which a festival comes alive. There were a hundred things wrong: plastic beer in plastic cups, a campsite too long a walk from the venue, a main hall where rows of seats faced a stage where speakers could barely see for the dazzle of the theatre lighting. Yet somehow, in spite of it all, this became a place where magic could happen.

The moment it happened for me, that year, was on the Sunday, as Jay Griffiths spoke about the shapeshifting power of language only for gremlins to take hold of the sound system so completely that the technicians could barely coax a murmur from it. After a couple of minutes of confusion, the room reassembled, people sitting in circles around Jay on the stage and on the floor. And there, the spell was broken, the face-off between speakers and spoken-to giving way to a shape as old as stories.

From there on in, the memories seem to dance with each other, as we found ways to open the circle and let others step in, until I am not sure which of the things I remember happened to me and which I only heard about. The wild figures in the

fields, on the edge of sight. The late night tellings that bewitched us around the fire. The daylight stories of loss and pride, still fresh and urgent on the tellers' faces. The music that picked up at the place where words ran out. The rhythm of rain on the roof of a marquee. Thirty people penned inside a square of rope to reenact the memory of a Russian prison cell. The sharpening of a scythe. Laughter and fooling and horns and antlers. At the end of everything, a singer's voice going up into the night.

Gathering around the fire, Uncivilisation 2012 (photo: Andy Letcher)

Someone said, one Sunday morning, almost embarrassed, that this was the closest thing they had to going to church. All along, it was there, the awkward presence of something no other language seemed fit for, the wariness of a language that so easily turns to dust on the tongue. Here is one way that I have explained it to myself. A taboo, in the full sense, is something other than a reasonable modern legal prohibition: it is a thing forbidden because it is sacred and it may, under appropriately sacred circumstances, be permitted, even required. Now, the space that we opened together, as participants, was a space in which certain taboos had been lifted: some that are strong in the kinds of society we have grown up in, some that have been stronger still in the kinds of movement many of us have been active in. Not the obvious taboos on physical gratification—most of what they covered is now not prohibited so much as required, in this postmodern economy of desire—but the taboo on darknesses and doubts, on naming our losses, failures, fears, uncertainties and exhaustions. In response to our earliest attempts to articulate what Dark Mountain might be, people we knew—good, dedicated people—would tell us, 'OK, so you've burned out. It happens. But there's no need to do it in public and encourage others to give up.' Instead, it seemed, one should find a quiet place to be alone with the disillusionment. Perhaps become an aromatherapist. If I have any clue where the power of Dark Mountain came from—knowing that it came from somewhere other than the two of us who wrote the manifesto—then I would say it came from creating a space in which our darknesses can be spoken to each other. (From here, among much else, we may begin to question why the movements we have been involved in seem accustomed to use people as a kind of fuel.) By the second or third year of the festival, though, I found myself wondering if the sacred nature of taboo might not work both ways. If a group of people creates a space in which taboos are lifted, perhaps this in itself is enough to invoke the forms of experience for which the language of the sacred has often been used?

That is how I have explained it to myself, at least, for now; and if there is any truth in such an explanation, then it bears also on the role of those who take responsibility for creating such a space. We did not know, when we agreed—rather lightly—to that original invitation to host a weekend in Llangollen, that what we were creating was nothing so safe as a programme of talks, workshops and performances. Those elements were there, but they leave out much of what mattered most to those to whom the festival came to matter. The other, harder to name elements, which seem to have something to do with the sacred, call for another order of responsibility. The hard

thing is not to create a space in which taboos can be broken, but to do it without people getting broken.

I have been reading stories from the 1960s, counterculture stories, uncomfortable reading, because there are things I want to understand better about the much-mythologised moment in which all that took place. There are plenty of broken taboos in those stories, and no end of broken people. By comparison, we were weekend amateurs, going nowhere near so high or so hard or so fast, but someone who had been through those years and lived to tell the tales told me this festival was the closest he had known to a reawakening of what he knew back then. If so, then here is confirmation that the taboos in which there is power today are of a different kind, for there is more hedonistic excess on a Saturday night in any high street in England than there was in four years of our Uncivilisation.

In the end, I think we learned to carry the responsibility, to hold this kind of space with care, though it took the wisdom of others who joined us at the heart of the festival-making. Nothing in the process of writing prepares you for such work, for a writer's responsibilities are as bounded as the binding of a book, and the space from which writing comes is a solitary one.

We didn't set out to start a festival, a festival happened to us. From those who came to it, we learned more about what Dark Mountain might be and what it might mean than we could ever have done at our desks. It felt good to have created it—and it feels good now to have brought it to an end. After all, there are reasons why no one tries to start a publishing operation and an annual festival as part of the same small new non-profit business in the same year. Somehow, we got away with it, although the price was paid in the fraying of our wits, and also in the inevitable carelessnesses—most of them small, but none of them unimportant—that happen when you are always trying to do too much at once. There are also reasons why a journal which is increasingly international, and not exactly enthusiastic about air travel, might not want to spend half its year organising a single event in the south of England.

For the next while, then, we are going to concentrate on doing one thing and doing it with the care it deserves, the thing we thought we were doing in the first place: bringing together books like the one you hold in your hands. We brought Uncivilisation to an end while it still felt like a joy rather than a duty. But the sparks from all those late night campfires carried further and there are friends of Dark Mountain organising events in the Scottish lowlands, the former coalfields of South Yorkshire and no doubt other corners of the world.

When the horns had sounded and the thank you's and goodbye's had been shouted through the downpour, a circle of friends sat for a few minutes in the shelter of a yurt. We sat quietly, the silence broken after a few moments, as one after another spoke about what he or she had taken from being part of Uncivilisation. Few of us had met before that first gathering in Llangollen and our stories echoed something I have heard over and over, from people who came every year and from people who came only once.

A feeling of being less alone. For all the intensity of the mountain-top moments, what stays with us, what carries us through life, is this, the quiet magic of friendship.

Charnel House for Roadkill by Dougie Strang, Uncivilisation 2013,(photo: Bridget Mackenzie)

Installation at Uncivilisation 2010, Llangollen (photo: Andy Broomfield)

Nick Hunt leading a storytelling workshop, Uncivilisation 2012 (photo: Bridget Mackenzie)

Peening the blade, scythe workshop, Uncivilisation 2012 (photo: Andy Samson for Aeon magazine)

The Wolf and Red Riding Hood, Mearcstapa, Uncivilisation 2012 (photo: Bridget McKenzie)

Fire ritual to mark the final festival, Mearcstapa, August 2013 (photo: Bridget McKenzie)

Circulus, main stage, Uncivilisation 2010 (photo: Andy Broomfield)

Farewell led by Steve Wheeler, Uncivilisation 2012 (photo: Bridget McKenzie)

Persephone Pearl from Feral Theatre, Uncivilisation 2013 (Photo: Bridget McKenzie)

Performance of 'Liminal', directed by Dougie Strang, Mearcstapa, Uncivilisation 2011 (photo: Colin Perrett)

Charnel House for Roadkill by Dougie Strang, Uncivilisation 2013,(photo: Bridget Mackenzie)

Installation at Uncivilisation 2010, Llangollen (photo: Andy Broomfield)

Carrying the Fire

Scotland 2011 – present day

Gathering around the fire, Rannoch Moor, Scotland 2016 (photo: Jonny Randall)

> I seen he was carryin' fire in a horn the way people used to do and I could see the horn from the light inside of it ... he was fixin' to make a fire somewhere out there in all that dark and all that cold.
> — from 'No Country for Old Men' by Cormac McCarthy

Carrying the Fire began life as a smaller, northern cousin to the Uncivilisation festival. Initially held at Wiston Lodge in the Scottish Borders, each year's gathering featured talks, workshops and performance, with many of the core Dark Mountain crew involved, as well as speakers like Sara Maitland, Margaret Elphinstone, Alan Watson Featherstone, Jay Griffiths, Mike Small and Alastair McIntosh.

These gatherings provided a rare opportunity to sit round the hearth in a clearing in the woods, to share stories in good company and engage in the conversations at the heart of Dark Mountain: conversations about how we best live in an era of ecocide and economic collapse; about the stories that might guide us through a time of change and creative responses that dig deeper than those offered by our mainstream culture. It was also an opportunity to take time out and to explore the beautiful woods and permaculture gardens at Wiston, as well as to climb Tinto Hill, which rises over 2000ft to the back of the Lodge.

Read Dougie Strang's original posts introducing the programme for Carrying the Fire 2012 and the background to Carrying the Fire 2014.

Climbing Tinto Hill en route to build a Cairn for Lost Species, Carrying the Fire 3 (photo: Bridget McKenzie)

Carrying the Fire: Samhain

After three years at Wiston, Dougie Strang decided to change tack, scale down and create a more immersive experience. So in 2015, Carrying the Fire: Samhain took place on Rannoch Moor. Participants were instructed to board the 18.21 train from Glasgow to Fort William and alight at the remote Corrour Station.

On arrival, participants walked the mile across the moor in the dark to their base, the Loch Ossian Hostel, in silence and without torches. Thus began a weekend of explorations into the cultural and physical ecology of the moor. Central to the weekend were the mythic figures of the Cailleach and the bard, Ossian. Stories were told around the fire and on departure and woven around the weekend and its encounters:

Caroline Ross, a participant, wrote of her experience:

> It was not a psychological or therapeutic setting, but a deeply connected almost mythic space ... if you showed me a far-off society where Samhain was celebrated as we did at Carrying the Fire, I would go into exile from this country to live there with those good people and become part of that culture. Ceremony, gathering together and marking the passage of the year and of our lives ... my heart was at home.

Read Dougie Strang's Fàd a' Chaorain, an introduction to the Rannoch Moor gathering – and Dancing the Cailleach by Charlotte Du Cann, a reflection on the experience.

Fire in the Glens

The instructions were simple. You go out and stand in the land, you come back and relate what happened. What you say, what you do with what you know, is the thing that the Earth waits for. Your gift.

What is that story? You forgot it. Ah. Here is a hint.

Photo: Gavin MacGregor

Arrive in the dark.

Follow the stag.

Wait for the people to come round the hill.

Other Carrying the Fire events are planned for the future. For more information see the Carrying the Fire website or contact dougie@carryingthefire.co.uk.

The Night Breathes Us In

Festival of the Dark, Reading, March 2017

The Bearers underneath the arches of Reading Station (photo:: Georgia Wingfield-Hayes)

> To go in the dark with a light is to know the light.
> To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight,
> and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings,
> and is travelled by dark feet and dark wings
> — Wendell Berry

In March 2017, Dark Mountain presented The Night Breathes Us In as part of Outrider Anthems' year-long Festival of the Dark in Reading. At the Spring Equinox, we created an event which aimed to connect the seasonal shift in the year with the deeper flow of time, both circular and linear. A participative journey of story, song and fire, it was a creative exploration of the play of light and dark as expressed in the stories and myths that enrich our lives.

In the afternoon, we held a programme of talks and workshops under the trees of the municipal gardens. Then, as the light faded, the Kairos Collective took participants by the hand and led everyone on a lantern-lit procession through the streets, along a way-marked route of shadowed installations and performance to a secret location. This turned out to be an island on the Thames, where stories, music, poetry and the warmth of a good fire were shared.

The daytime workshops included:

Time Walk – the story of the Earth in a thousand paces *A* journey through time, of nearly five billion years, led by artist and theatre maker, Annabelle Macfadyen.

Dark Mountain: Issue 10 (Uncivilised Poetics) An introduction to the latest Dark Mountain anthology with readings and music.

Crossing the Bridge – navigating ourselves in Deep Time A group exploration of the ancestral calendar of the growing and solar year. A mythic look at the challenges and opportunities represented by the eight stations or 'doors' of the year, focusing on the Spring Equinox.

Singing the Dark A celebration of the songs and sounds of the dark. Taking inspiration from the habits of animals at night, using body and voice to begin exploring how darkness opens an elevated level of perception and sensory awareness.

Stepping Out into the Dark A series of collaborative games to help us to reconnect with our bodies. Through conversation, movement, partner work and imagination, the session explored what it means to step boldly out into the darkness of the unknown.

Holding the Fire An exchange of stories about warmth and holding true to our inner fire, inspired by Sicily's third-century activist, Lucia of Syracuse.

Procession and performance: The Night Breathes Us In

At dusk the lanterns were lit and our procession wove through and beneath the streets of Reading, crossing the weir bridge to an enchanted island in the Thames. A fire was lit and there the shared feast of stories, music, songs and poetry began, plus a delicious wild toast to the Spring!

Read more in A Part of its Breathing by Sarah Thomas.

Poster for Night Breathes Us In by Outrider Anthems

> Deep time is not just in the rocks and soils. It's built into our substance: bones, tissues and cells, and in the bacterial cohabitants inside us.
> — Mark Goldthorpe, Climate Cultures

'It was a lot of time to spend in the half-dark tent, but refreshing. And the 'outside world' was never absent. Later, when I looked at the photos I'd taken inside the twilight, I saw how the exposure had kept the camera's aperture open long enough to paint the black fabric walls almost transparent, the unseen sun revealing a shadowy world beyond the veil. Three simple ways that the 'outside' – human, more-than-human, solar – had pierced the surface for the *xhaaydla xitiit ghidaay.'*

— Mark Goldthorpe reviews The Night Breathes Us In for Climate Futures

Lanterns pave the way before the procession to the island, Forbury Gardens, Reading ((photo: Georgia Winfield-Hayers)

The Bearers' enigmatic character was developed over a weekend workshop. As Dougie Strang (creative director) writes: 'We saw them as crepuscular beings, crossing the boundary between day and night, leading the participants from the bright bustle of the streets, to the dark of the island. Black suits and bowler hats to mirror and subvert the uniform of the city.'

> We'll celebrate the dark and the community of people that has gathered; we'll let the night breathe us in.

Base Camp: The Dark Mountain Gathering

Embercombe, Devon 2016

Wing detail by Rebecca Clark (Issue 9/Base Camp programme)

Base Camp took place in the late summer of 2016 on the edge of Dartmoor in Devon. It was the first large-scale Dark Mountain event for three years, since the end of the Uncivilisation festival. Set among the lush woods, gardens and lake of Embercombe, the weekend unfolded within the feasting halls, teaching circles and gathering places of this centre, famously built along ecological and Native American lines.

At the heart of Base Camp there was a question: if we no longer believe the stories civilisation tells us, then what are the stories that might bring meaning and joy for the future? Since Dark Mountain began, it has looked at collapse and ecocide, felt grief and despair, found its roots in place and time, brought together fellow artists, writers and thinkers. So what do we need to know and speak to each other about now?

This was the territory we set out to explore during a weekend of talks, workshops, performance, encounter and conversation.

Panorama of Embercombe overlooking the sunflower gardens and orchards (photo: Warren Draper)

Like all good stories, our programme had a beginning, middle and an end: a welcome, a celebration and a farewell. Here was the outline plot.

Different Paths to the Mountain

A base camp is the transition point in any expedition. It's a pause, a taking of stock and a honing of intent. It's the place where things get real, where we can see the track before us begin to rise more steeply, leave behind what is no longer necessary and gather what really matters to move ahead.

In the introductory session held in the Centre Fire gathering hall, hosts Charlotte Du Cann and Dougie Strang invited everyone to take stock, share where we had come from and what had brought us to this Dark Mountain.

All photos by Warren Draper (unless otherwise credited)

‘What brings you to Dark Mountain?’ Editor Nick Hunt and Base Camp participant share stories (photo: Warren Draper)

Gathering at the Fire

After a full day of listening, discussion and participation, Saturday evening was about singing and dancing, with a grand ceilidh in the main hall. Then, in the dark, there was to be a procession to the woods, to gather at the hearth, to sit between the shadows and the flames and to sing and tell stories into the night. Surprises were promised – and arrived in the shape of weather!

Redrawing the Maps: The Return

Base Camp was about what we could take back with us for the rocky road ahead. How would the experiences of our time at Embercombe help us to make sense of a world that is falling apart? We set out to ascend an unknown and difficult path – and at the same time find ourselves descending into a forgotten valley that feels like home.

In this final collaborative session, everyone was invited to create the maps that would sustain us on this paradoxical return journey – in language, in culture, in myth, dreaming and action – maps that could cohere and connect and convene, and lead us towards the future.

The full programme (design by Andy Garside)

introducing the weekend, Centre Fire, Embercombe (photo: Warren Draper)

> The radical power of story is to open us up to an uncolonised imagination
> – Martin Shaw

‘... the whole room was leaning forward. We were waiting to catch the moment when the once-broken King and the wild sovereign Earth would finally be reunited. The atmosphere was so intense you could hardly breathe. All the logistics about climate change and consumerism, alt-right politics and Hollywood illusion, all our shattered dreams of progress had disappeared, and suddenly you knew what fundamentally, urgently, crucially mattered was for us to make this same reconnection in our deep collective soul. And that nothing would get us back on track as a people until we did.’

— Uncolonising the Imagination by Charlotte Du Cann

Embercombe mobile bar with sunflowers (photo: Bridget Mackenzie)

> By the end I felt as if we were all buzzing like bees in a beehive – that we'd briefly come together into a vibrant superorganism.
> — Robert Alcock (Base Camp participant)

Redrawing the Maps — final session. Eight maps based on eight strands of the gathering (photo: Warren Draper)

Report from Base Camp

Dark Mountain's 2016 Gathering began on Friday as the 'doors' swung open at 4pm. The events took place in different spaces within Embercombe's lush and well-loved fields and woods: around the Story Fire (Georgian Singing) by the lake (Water Creatures), in the medicine garden (Medicine Plant Encounters) and People's Circle (Field Sensing); the larger ones happened at Centre Fire, the centre's main hall. Friday night's magical singing and storytelling happened under the stars at the Hedgespoken stage.

Hedgespoken theatre on wheels was the stage for tales, ancient (The Castle of Melvales) and new (Sylvia Lindsteadt's 'Tatterdamelion')

Two mythmakers stormed the stage at the beginning and end of the weekend, Martin Shaw telling the Siberian story of *The Crow King and Red-Bead Woman* and David Abram telling an equally gripping story of his encounter with a Northern sea lion colony and a humpbacked whale.

The weekend was a mix of workshops, storytelling, music making, discussion, performance and a big ceremony to light the fire (well, actually candles as it was pouring with rain!) and drink a toast to the gathering with a delicious 15-strong flower and fruit mead, followed by Em Strang's heart-rending delivery of her post-apocalyptic poem, *Stone.*

However the main theme of the Camp was participation and there were many places where folk could take part in sessions physically (Rewilding the Heart, Water Creatures), and in discussions (Land Literacy and Farming on the Edge of Extinction, Council of Mothers, Escaping the Wreckage of Education). Dark Mountain editor Nick Hunt and nomadic artist Monique Besten teamed up to speak about walking across Europe and how to create a practice with your feet (accompanied by the paper ships made out of rubbish Monique collected on a walk to the Paris climate conference).

Books were of course a big strand with talks and readings from Paul Kingsnorth *(Beast)*, Martin Shaw (*Scatterlings*), Catrina Davies *(Living with Less; Notes and Songs from the Shed)* and Shaun Chamberlin, editor of David Fleming's major opus, the dictionary, *Lean Logic.*

There were also two sessions at the beginning and end of the weekend which involved everyone. Sunday afternoon's was a vast mapping of all the strands in the gathering

and the encounters that had taken place. Hosted by Base Camp's session holders they were: Myths and Storytelling; Arts and Community; Seeds for the Future; Walking and Singing the Territory; Rewilding the Body, Rewilding the World; and Rethinking Society.

– Charlotte Du Cann, Base Camp co-director

The Telling

Doncaster 2012–13

Mural by Phlegm at Church View, Doncaster

The Telling was a post-apocalyptic, powerdown event created by a local network in South Yorkshire, many of whom had been involved with Dark Mountain. It took place on a dark, dry and cold November evening in 2012 in the enclosed court of the old Church View art college in Doncaster. Beneath the newly-adorned walls of the disused building, amid flame, smoke and sound, a host of performers and storytellers brought the evening to life.

The Telling was dreamed into being by Warren Draper. Part One was stitched together by Warren Draper, Rachel Horne, Phlegm, Abi Nielsen, Tim Ralphs, Iona Hine, Ian Walker, Joie Rachel Caruthers, Tim Lee, Mr Fox, The New Fringe, Doncaster Central DevelopmentTrust, Say Yes To Arts, PermaFuture, PixieWorks and The Dark Mountain Project.

A second Telling took place in February 2013, followed by The Gifting, a DIY celebration of the gift economy in November of that year.

Read more on The Telling website – and in Warren Draper's post for Dark Mountain, 'To Tell of the Telling'.

> We have become so used to being constantly bombarded by noise, light and cleverness — in a 'shock and awe' attack on the senses — that the treat of firelight, acoustic music, and an unaided human voice has become truly magical.
> — Warren Draper

'Phlegm is one of the UK's foremost muralists. As street art becomes ever more mainstream, Phlegm stands head and shoulders above the rest – not just for his technical ability, but for his depth of vision. His painting create a world which is all his own. The characters and creatures that inhabit this world evolve over time and continuously explore new themes. When I first saw the post-apocalyptic courtyard of Church View, I knew we had found a stage for Phlegm's backdrop. We would light his work with fire-pits – ably controlled by **Mr Fox** – and there would be music and dancing and drinking and feasting and conversations and poems and storytelling.'

— Warren Draper

Dancing of the Foxes, The Telling 1, Doncaster 2011 (photo: Martin Pick)

Review of The Telling (Part Two)

On a cold February night I am standing in a courtyard in Doncaster, warming my hands on a cup of tea, stepping from side to side trying to get some warmth into my feet. The murmur of the crowd falls silent as a drum beat bursts out in the far end of the courtyard. A band of foxes emerge out of the dark, scrutinising the silent crowd.

They seem to be on guard as if they are keepers of some secret knowledge or wisdom. Then an accordion joins in with the drums, a red flare lights up the surrounding space and the foxes break out into dancing. Captivated by the mystery before me I forget about my cold feet and my tea for a while.

This is The Telling: a new kind of grassroots, power-down, artistic event which draws on various forms of storytelling, performance, music and craft to explore what living through a time of transition means. Born in the imagination of Warren Draper, The Telling is inspired by The Dark Mountain Project and created on a DIY ethos as a reaction against the debilitating effect of the entertainment industry on folk culture.

Warren explains, "We have become so used to being constantly bombarded by noise, light and cleverness – in a 'shock and awe' attack on the senses – that the treat of firelight, acoustic music, and an unaided human voice has become truly magical... something which I was desperate to share with as many people as possible."

The enchanting performances of Mr. Fox is just one of many that evening set in the post-apocalyptic Church View courtyard, which is adorned by a large mural by street artist Phlegm depicting and archer sitting in a giant horn shooting down human bones tied to floating balloons.

And the evening programme is just the culmination of a series of events and workshops that ran throughout the day: a pop-up cinema, the Sheffield City Giants (15 feet large puppets), bread-making, make-do-and-mend, a singing workshop, a talk on peace, and my absolute favourite: making iron in a clay foundry.

This diverse mix of activities and performances makes The Telling a place to be inspired and to learn practical skills at the same time. As Warren says, "I would say it is simply a space where we can converse honestly – in a diversity of mediums and disciplines – about the realities of collapse and transition; where we can develop the skills and stories which may yet help us to face those realities; and where we can sing, dance, feast, frolic and burn stuff!"

And the hope is that these kinds of spaces will grow beyond Church View: "Whatever The Telling is it has taken on a life of its own. Preparations are already afoot for the first Sheffield The Telling and there are whispers of other Telling events further afield". Having drawn a crowd on a freezing February night, I am sure this is not the last incarnation of The Telling.

— Jeppe Graugaard for Transition Free Press Spring 2013

Films and Videos

BOOK LAUNCH and FILM SHOW RECORDINGS

Since the pandemic in 2020 our **Dark Mountain book launches** have been held online and video recordings posted soon afterwards,. Here you can view them all in.one place, so do browse at your leisure!

The shows run approximately for 90 minutes and include introductions to the book by the issues' editors and producers, readings of prose and poetry by the contributors, a slideshow of the artworks, music, film clips and Q & A's with the audience.

You can find more information about the books and their editorial teams and contributors as well as how to buy copies in our online shop. All issues celebrated here are presently in stock. https://dark-mountain.net/shop/

Waiting in the Dark

In November 2020 we also ran an online screening of short films called **The Picture Show at the End of the World** that had been originally scheduled for a spring gathering in The Cube cinema in Bristol (then postponed). Hosted by filmmaker Jonny Randall, you can read the background and call out to this series in a post here and his response to some of the submissions here.

Thank you for watching and listening!

If you have any queries regarding Dark Mountain films or these videos do get in touch with our film editor Jonny Randall at info@dark-mountain.net. We hope to add video interviews from our archive soon.

Autumn 2022: Issue 22 –ARK

Cover for Issue 22 – ARK by Graeme Walker

What do you keep when the storm comes in, and the tide goes out?

Our latest issue is an ARK you might not expect. Its pages carry a cargo of another sort: stories gathered from the wreckage left by a flood that has already come, art and writing that reveal the beauty, resilience and strength found in being fully alive in a troubled time. Our seeds are collected from felled trees and activist frontlines; our disappearing creatures discovered in dreams, our artworks made with ochres from a polluted shoreline and peat from endangered bogs; with insect wings, limpet shells, unloved spruce needles, titling ocean horizons. A hold that treasures tales about what might happen next.

This ARK has been made in collaboration with the Wilderness Art Collective – a work of creative salvage, its cover and content pages, forged from abandoned archives and old typewriter keys.

Launch of Dark Mountain: Issue 22 – ARK from The Dark Mountain Project on Vimeo.

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May 2022: 'After Ithaca' and 'Loss Soup'

Covers for After Ithaca and Loss Soup with artwork by Meryl McMaster and Daro Montag

What is the role of writing in times of unravelling and loss? Can the written word help re-entangle our hearts and imaginations in the living breathing world?

Charlotte Du Cann and Nick Hunt celebrated the launch of their new nonfiction and fiction collections, *After Ithaca* and '*Loss Soup* with a talk and readings earlier this year. Follow their journeys as they navigate through the Anthropocene and the Underworld, ecological crisis and cultural change, grief and extinction, myth and fairy tale, in search of meaning and kinship with the ancestral Earth.

After Ithaca – Journeys in Deep Time and *Loss Soup and Other Stories* are Dark Mountain's first single-author collections, published in association with Greenbank Books.

After Ithaca and Loss Soup Online Book Launch – 26th May from The Dark Mountain Project on Vimeo.

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Spring 2022: Issue 21 'Comfluence'

Issue 21 cover artwork: 'Meander' by Cecily Eno

Dark Mountain: Issue 21 takes its inspiration from 'confluence'. The image of watersmeet, of two streams merging into one, has long had sacred connotations, as shown by the votive offerings left at the point where rivers meet.

From modern-day lycanthropy tales – inter-species minglings between human and animal – to the melting, freezing waters of the Antarctic Convergence; from intergenerational trauma to the disastrous coming-together of nuclear meltdown; from the collapsing 'Doomsday Glacier' to swirling microbial ecosystems deep within the human body; the contributions of the 60 writers and artists in this book join to make new patterns in this meeting of the waters.

This issue is a collaboration between Dark Mountain and saltfront, the environmental humanities journal based in Salt Lake City, Utah and dedicated to a radically new type of ecological storytelling.

Online Launch of Dark Mountain: Issue 21 from The Dark Mountain Project on Vimeo.

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Autumn 2021: Issue 20 – ABYSS

No. 2 from Russian Drone Paintings (Mir Diamond Mine, Siberia) by Lawrence Gipe

ABYSS brings an uncivilised eye to the mindset of extractivism: the insatiable, pathological drive to plunder the Earth's resources that has driven a seemingly endless expansion in consumption. From the hacked, fracked and exploded ground of the American West to tin mines in Cornwall and oil wells in Tajikistan; from 17th-century Dutch colonialism in Indonesia's Banda Islands to an activist escapade in New Zealand's Great South Basin; from lithium ponds in the Atacama Desert to the vanished rainforests of Borneo, the writers and artists in this book bear witness to this global pillage.

Inspired by the CODEX Foundation's project *EXTRACTION: Art on the Edge of the Abyss*, Dark Mountain's 20th issue plumbs the depths of the pit we have dug in order to see how deep we have gone, and where we might go from here.

Online Launch of Dark Mountain: Issue 20 – ABYSS from The Dark Mountain Project on Vimeo.

Spring 2021: Issue 19 'Requiem'

It's OK to Look by Graeme Walker

Dark Mountain's nineteenth issue was created, in collaboration with art.earth's Borrowed Time summit, as a memorial by 60+ artists and writers, a gathering of testimonies from people and places, griefwalkers and haunted lands. Ringed by the ashes of the burned forests of Australia and the Americas, its covers hold the honoured bones of dead creatures, reconfigured ceremonial staffs, the keening of poets, ancestral doorways, fallen feathers of the gyrfalcon, the wren and the black grouse, wreathed by leaves of roseroot from Greenland and milkweed seeds from Ontario, the sharp scent of Mexican marigolds that light our way to the Underworld.

Our key question in these unravelling times: *how can we face and properly lament what we have lost? How is the act of mourning requisite to the world's regeneration?*

Online Launch of Dark Mountain: Issue 19 from The Dark Mountain Project on Vimeo.

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November 2020 THE PICTURE SHOW AT THE END OF THE WORLD

Choir in shelter from 'Óshlíð: River Mouth\\ Slope' by Jonny Randall

Welcome in the beginning of winter with a Dark Mountain-slanted light show. Hosted by filmmaker Jonny Randall, the online event showcases some of the submissions we've received in response to our call-out for uncivilised films earlier this year.

A selection of short films are screened over the course of an hour, featuring: visual poetry; a cinematic meditation on the Cairngorms; surreal eco-horror animation; a collaborative ritual between artist and tree; voices on what it means to re-indigenise and a multispecies ethnographic collaboration between humans and donkeys.

The films are followed by a post-screening conversation with some of the filmmakers, as well as questions and reflections from the audience.

Featured Films:

I. HOW THE EARTH MUST SEE ITSELF
Produced by the National Theatre of Scotland and Scottish Sculpture Workshop.
Based on the book The Living Mountain by Nan Shepherd and performance project Into The Mountain by Simone Kenyon.
A film by Lucy Cash and Simone Kenyon

nationaltheatrescotland.com/latest/how-the-earth-must-see-itself-short-film-subtitled

II. HEALER
A film by Yixuan Maisie Luo

III. SCULPTING IN THE PYROCENE: A DISAPPEARING ACT
A film by Julie Williams

IV. EVERYTHING I NEVER DID, BUT NEVER LEFT BEHIND
Written and performed by Roger Bygott
Directed by Cory Kelly

V. LAND / SCAPE
A film by Michal Krawczyk and Giulia Lepori

VI. MADDER ISLE
Directed by Laura Spark

VII. EMERGENT SEAS: RE-INDIGENIZING THE GREAT LAKES
Written and Produced by Augustin of the Road and Lindsay Swann
Directed, Shot and Edited by Augustin of the Road

The Picture Show at the End of the World + discussion from The Dark Mountain Project on Vimeo.

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Autumn 2020: Issue 18 – FABULA

'Arial (sinking), American Garamond' © Fiona Banner aka The Vanity Press

Dark Mountain: Issue 18 – FABULA, is our first book dedicated entirely to uncivilised fiction. In its pages you will find short stories, flash fiction, illustrations and artwork that attempt to navigate the troubled times we're in, and the uncertain times ahead: from the bogs of a dystopian Ireland to near-future West Africa; from the drought-ravaged Australian Outback to the all-consuming Amazon. You will meet a vengeful river, litigious bears, a mythical forest guardian, the ghostly shades of America's wars, and be exposed to a global pandemic – but not the one you're expecting.

Teaching, Talks and Courses

'The Sum of All Knowledge' by Warren Draper (Issue 8: Techne)

From large-scale gatherings like the Uncivilisation festival, the focus of our gatherings has shifted over time towards more intimate events where we can go deeper into the territory of culture-making in a time of unravelling, digging beneath the assumptions of our culture. One form this takes is courses, workshops and retreats with members of the Dark Mountain team.

These events have ranged in style and content over the years: from year-long programmes run by co-founders Paul Kingsnorth or Dougald Hine to a weekend workshop led by poets Em Strang and Susan Richardson. They may be created in collaboration with other organisations or embedded within larger events like the CultureLab at the Centre for Alternative Technology in Wales or the Wilderness festival in Oxfordshire. Recently our teaching courses have gone online, as co-directors Charlotte Du Cann and Nick Hunt have hosted a series of nonfiction writing workshops during 2020–21 and a year-long series of creative workshops How We Walk Through the Fire with Dougie Strang.

Such events combine a chance to frame a creative inquiry, share uncivilised stories, focus on art, connect with nature and take part in solo journeys, group discussions and map-making. Whether an immersive workshop and 'conversation in the dark', or a performance and discussion at Breakdown Breakdown at ArtsAdmin, what they have in common is that they invite diverse groups of people to engage with each other and the craft of writing in ways that are not always possible in 'ordinary' time.

Fire in the Mountain workshio, Wales 2019

A different conversation

Each year we are invited to take part in different festivals to host workshops or take part in panel discussions. But perhaps our most valuable interactions take place when holding conversations around Dark Mountain themes:

> In an age of unravelling certainties – social, political, ecological – how do we chart a path between the extremes offered us: a gleaming technological utopia on one hand, and an apocalyptic collapse on the other? How do we de-story ourselves from the myths of Empire, and provide the breathing space for more honest ones to grow?

For The Hidden Civil War season of exhibitions and sessions in Newcastle upon Tyne, Charlotte Du Cann and Nick Hunt invited participants to create the cultural road maps we might need to sustain us in the times ahead. This was followed by storytelling and discussions around a fire in the Summerhill community gardens.

At Fire in the Mountain festival in Wales in 2017, five members of the Dark Mountain collective held a pair of immersive sessions: 'Cafe Apocalypse – The Conversation at the End of the World' and 'Testaments of Deep Time' explored the slower rhythms which underlie our moment-to-moment existence in industrial civilisation. In 2018 and 2019 we have returned to host similar sessions: readings and conversations around our latest books and host experiential workshops on finding meaning and connection in times of turbulence.

Teaching Courses

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How We Walk Through the Fire – December 2021 – 2022

How We Walk Through the Fire is a online series of creative workshops based around the ancestral solar year. It aims to forge a collective practice amongst writers, artists, and creative practitioners; and to host a culture that can both weather the storm and lay the tracks for a more 'biospheric' relationship with ourselves and the more-than-human world.

Each of the fires has explored different themes and approaches to this practice, from storytelling to plant medicine to performance – but all aim to foster resilience and radical kinship, and to strengthen our creative voices within an ensemble. Together we'll 'walk through the fire', letting go of what no longer serves, and discovering what might bring repair and regeneration to a world, and a culture, in crisis.

How We Walk Through the Fire workshops are hosted by Charlotte Du Cann and Dougie Strang who have created many immersive, dramaturgical events and teachings for Dark Mountain, based on reconnection with deep time and the mythology of place. **The final session Honouring the Ancestors currently taking place: https://dark-mountain.net/events/honouring-the-ancestors/**

Writer's Shack by Patrik Qvist

Finding the Words When the Story is Over – November 2020 – May 2021

Creative nonfiction writing courses with Charlotte Du Cann and Nick Hunt

What is the role of storytelling in a time when the stories have failed, when people have stopped believing in a happy ending? When there is nothing left to say, what is there left to say? This workshop explored the role of writing in these times of social and ecological unravelling, how to bear witness, and make meaning, as we navigate collapse.

Over two participatory sessions we looked at how to forge a writing practice that can hold uncertainty, and widen our attentiveness to the more-than-human world. Between the sessions, we walked into our local territories – urban or rural, civilised or wild – to help us ground these words, and ourselves, as the year shifted from darkness into light.

These were journey into what happens at the edges of things, in the gloaming and the twilight with group Zoom sessions, with time for a solo walk/encounter and a writing task during the week in between providing opportunities for working within a Dark Mountain frame, in-depth conversation with fellow writers, editorial feedback on texts and exploring relationship with the living world.

An early outing for Dark Mountain saw Paul and Dougald presenting the project several metres above the ground in Regents Park, London as guests of the Treehouse Gallery, August 2009.

(Photo: Andy Broomfield)

> You can see a mountain being exploited for its forests or minerals or tourism. But the mountain also exists in and of itself. It is Mountain in the way you are Human and that's an uncivilised relationship Dark Mountain explores.
>
> — Two Degrees Festival 2014

With Schumacher College, Devon

Five-day residential courses and month-long Zoom courses, led by Dark Mountain core team

Woman of the Horses by Kate Walters (from Issue 16 – REFUGE)

The Labyrinth and the Dancing Floor – October/December 2022 and June 2023

How can we break out of the modern industrial mindset that holds us captive, and find our feet on the dancing floor of Earth?

This course sets out to co-create an ensemble regenerative culture. teaching essential practices and tools to navigate times of descent, using story, myth, plant medicine and natural materials that help root us in place and time**.**

Led by Charlotte Du Cann, Nick Hunt, Caroline Ross and Mark Watson, we will follow in the mythic dance steps of Ariadne, waling into into the liminal spaces of our neighbourhoods, holding a dialogue with the land, regaining kinship with the other-than-human world, and engaging the head, heart, hands and imaginations of everyone taking part.

The online course is now ongoing. There will be a residential course next June (details coming soon) https://www.dartington.org/event/the-labyrinth-and-the-dancing-floor/

When the Mountain Speaks with Us – September 2021 and May 2022

How can we reweave our place back into the living fabric of a sentient Earth?

This participatory course sets out to explore the lexicon of the living world and to develop a collaborative culture that can remember our place within its many strands. Led by Charlotte Du Cann, Nick Hunt, Caroline Ross and Mark Watson, it aims to forge a co-creative practice that can challenge the dominance of the modern industrial mindset and regain our original kinship with the more-than-human world.

A core part of this investigation includes: gathering roots, dreams, materials and words. creating work to celebrate what we encounter, as human beings have been doing for millennia; reconnecting with our archaic bodies and remembering our ancestral kinship with plants and creatures and the elements.

Nick Hunt, Charlotte Du Cann, Mark Waton and Caroline Ross at Schumacher College, Devon, May 2021

Coming Down the Mountain – May 2019

What in this era of crisis are we being called upon to relinquish? How do we build deep resilience – and how do we restore life to places of cultural and ecological brokenness?

A five-day creative and collaborative exploration of the journey through the underworld and the alchemical path of ashes with Charlotte Du Cann and Dougald Hine.

Our quest was to find answers to core questions about the future, using methods drawn from theatre and ritual, collaborative writing exercises and conversations in the dark – as well as drawing on tools such as the Deep Adaptation framework developed by Jem Bendell.

Working with the ancient myth of Inanna's decent into the Underworld we went in search of clues with which to make sense of our lives and the times in which we are living – and tools for creating 'living-spaces' for this work within our communities.

Art At The End Of The World (As We Know It) – March 2017

At the heart of the Dark Mountain Project is the claim that the global crisis we are facing is not a crisis of politics, economics or technology, but a crisis of stories. The stories which our culture likes to tell itself about humanity's place on Earth and its relationship to the rest of nature are like bad maps, leading us towards unmarked hazards.

Participants were asked to bring a notebook, a clear head, and a sense of excitement – and to leave false hopes and all-encompassing solutions at home. For this course, Paul Kingsnorth and Dougald Hine were joined by Dark Mountain collaborators Mat Osmond and Martin Shaw.

New Stories At The Cliff Edge – June 2015

In the beautiful surroundings of Schumacher College, co-founders of Dark Mountain Paul Kingsnorth and Dougald Hine offered a residential course in which to prise apart the stories we grew up taking for granted – stories of inevitable 'progress', human centrality, technological and economic inevitability – and begin the work of assembling new ones, capable of making sense of the world in which we find ourselves.

New Stories was a course for writers, artists, thinkers, doers seeking to rekindle their own creative relationship with a rapidly-changing world, and draw on radical ways of understanding our current situation.

During the course, Paul and Dougald held a public talk in which they shared their reflections on the first five years of Dark Mountain.

Camp Breakdown Break Down, Aberdeenshire, Scotland 2014 Editors Nick Hunt and Charlotte Du Cann told the tale of Dark Mountain around the Camp fire and held a collaborative storymaking workshop around the Eight Principles of *Uncivilisation* in a (rather rainy!) field.

> We will look to the creation of stories, poems, narratives and worldviews by walking beyond the usual dustbowls of the civilised world. Weather patterns, badger trails, and deep pools of water will serve as teachers.

With Westcountry School of Myth and Story

Prophets of Rock and Wave – Dartmoor, 2011–17

In the wilds of Dartmoor, in the depths of winter, Paul Kingsnorth worked with mythologist Martin Shaw to create a weekend of mythology, story and moorland experience for writers who wanted to deepen their craft.

Over weekends spent in remote buildings, around fires and on the moors, these three-day immersions were an exploration of what it means to *un-civilise* our writing and our selves. Whilst promising the Earth, civilisation divorces us from it. But the stories our civilisation tells about itself are now unravelling. The intensity of that unravelling propels us into even greater disconnection from the wild.

Built around a traditional mythological tale told by Martin, these weekends were a combination of storytelling, teaching sessions, conversations and walks in wild places and served to break open participants in the service of their creative work.

Martin and Paul also teamed up in the summer of 2017 to present writing workshops based on 'The Myth of the Serpent' in California and New York.

Natural materials gathered for a workshop by Caroline Ross at Fire and Shadow, Scotland 2017 (photo: Caroline Ross)

> Can we stand outside the wires and lights of modern living and, however briefly, re-forge a visceral engagement with the intelligence of the wild? Can we look at the human story, as it were, from outside?

Participants at The Shadows of the Wild, Spain 2015

With Way of Nature

Shadows in the Wild – Spain, 2016

A week's course for 20 explorers held in the mountains of the Spanish Pyrenees to escape from the pressures of modern life and spend time considering the world as a whole, our place in it, and where we are all going now.

The course was a guided journey into wilderness of many kinds: hiking to a high mountain base and from there to go out on adventures that look to truth, to grief and to hope within our souls. The aim of the week was to consider, and seek to address, the challenges of living in an age of mass extinction and climate change.

Way of Nature supported this intellectual journey by providing tools to reconnect with ourselves and with nature and to open up to all of our senses and to travel out on a 24 hour 'solo' – a personal expedition to a special place in the wild.

Read Brian Calvert's reflections on this course in his essay, 'Confronting Despair in the Age of Ecocide'.

Fire and Shadow – Scotland and Romania, 2017

A experimental eight-month programme with Paul Kingsnorth and Way of Nature that took people out into wild areas and focused on the big questions in our lives and in the world.

A group of people were asked: how might we take the first steps in that 5000 year journey to reverse the effects of war? What values do we need? How should we live? How do we step back from the battle and still remain engaged in the world? What do we see when we look into the darkness?

In the course of two week-long retreats in wild parts of Scotland and Romania, connected by online and ongoing conversations over eight months, the aim was to come up with the answers to these questions and others.

For more on the background to Fire and Shadow, read 'What If It's Not a War?' by Paul Kingsnorth.

> I stood transfixed in the darkness, watching the storm and grinning like a lunatic, a tiny living part of a beautiful, heartbreaking world.
> — Brian Calvert (Shadows in the Wild)

Book Launches

2009 – present day

Hannah Lewis reads'On This Site of Loss' before 'The Day I Shot the Iliad' by Christos Galanis – Walking on Lava launch, Sept 2017 (photo: Nick Stewart)

The publication of a Dark Mountain book represents the culmination of work that stretches back for a year or more. So whenever possible, we have found a chance to celebrate this moment together with our readers. Our book launches are evenings of readings and music, artwork and interventions, a chance to meet the book's editors and contributors, as well as other people who are drawn to Dark Mountain. Oh, and of course, buy a copy of the latest book!

Recently, we have held many of these online and you can view them in our film and video section.

For in-person events, we've launched large and small, in cities and rural locations: in a tent in a public park in Reading as part of The Night Breathes Us In (*Issue 10*), at a Carrying the Fire gathering in the Scottish borderlands (*Issue 5*), and at the renovated Old Truman Brewery in London (*Walking on Lava*).

Our early books were often launched at the Uncivilisation festival. *Issues 2* and *4* were introduced by one the editors in the leafy space of the woodland theatre, including discussions with the audience about the books and their creation.

Issue 3 was launched in a pub in Liverpool with Sophie McKeand's band DKMTR and poetry from Eleanor Rees. We launched *Issue 8*: *Technê* at the Iklectik art lab, a pocket of green wildness, just a stone's throw from Waterloo station, and featured unforgettable speed demos of mead-making and up-cycling.

One of our favourite launches was in December 2014, when we celebrated the fifth anniversary of Dark Mountain, the publication of *Issue 6* and a new edition of the manifesto with a night at the Free Word Centre in London. The space was packed and buzzing – and for the first time the visual artwork from the book was presented alongside the written word.

In May 2017 we celebrated the launch of *Issue 11* in Bristol at the Wild Goose Space in the heart of St Werburgh's self-build community. The evening included readings from editors and contributors, talks from Caroline Ross and Mat Osmond about the book's artwork, an introductory soundscape from Ava Osbiston and interval music from local Bristol band My Octopus Mind.

Meanwhile do look below for a write up of Issue 12 held in Devon in December 2017.

News of recent launches

For *Issue 14 – TERRA* we held two events, one in a wild and stormy Cumbria with performance, percussion session, walk and ceilidh in October 2018, the other at The Baldwin Gallery in London on 22nd November.

Here is a recording of October's reading at **Sprint Mill** hosted by the book's editors and the Kairos Collective: https://bit.ly/2PUDuYa .

The launch of our 'fire' issue , no. 15 was held in the **Black Book Cafe** in Stroud in May 2019. For our anniversary *issue no 16 – REFUGE* we travelled to the East coast and were hosted by **Poetry in Aldeburgh** festival on Saturday 9th November.

Ava Osbiston talking about her artwork for *Issue 16 – REFUGE*, Aldeburgh Poetry Festival. 2019

In the spring 2020, we were hoping to launch issue 17 in our proposed gathering How We Walk Through the Fire. at the **Cube Cinema in Bristol**, but like most of the performance world we were forced by a global pandemic to cancel. Since then our events and launches have been held online. These have included a storytelling evening, a film show and the launches of the four latest collections: the autumn fiction *issue 18 – FABULA*, the spring 2021 'requiem' *issue 19* and spring 2022 issue 21 and our special all-colour *Issue 20 – ABYSS* and *Issue 22- ARK* (see below).

And white it is a shame not to meet in person, we are delighted to be able to include many more readers and contributors, as well as being able to share the videos after the event.

For a complete compilation of all launch recordings can be found in our Film and Video section: https://dark-mountain.net/about/gathering-places/films-and-videos/

Meanwhile here is a recording of the launch of our latest book ARK.

Launch of Dark Mountain: Issue 22 – ARK from The Dark Mountain Project on Vimeo.

For news of future launches and events, sign up for our mailing list.

Nick Hunt reads 'Loss Soup' from Issue 1 at The Orchard, London 2010

Dark Mountain editor, Tom Smith running the bookstall at Base Camp, Embercombe 2016 (photo: Warren Draper)

> I cherish every volume on my bookshelves, and much of the content, as well as the simple fact that Dark Mountain exists, have been important to me as bulwarks against despair

Manifesto, Oxford, 17 July 2009: *Uncivilisation* was launched in the riverside pub where Paul Kingsnorth and Dougald Hine first sat down to talk about writing it: the Isis Tavern on the outskirts of Oxford. Following music from Marmaduke Dando, Chris T-T and Get Cape, Wear Cape, Fly, the pair of them took to the stage to explain what this project was supposed to be, and to formally launch the manifesto. The audience of around 40 was a mix of friends, family, early supporters and curious onlookers. The adventure had begun.

Report from launch of Issue 12: SANCTUM

Dartington, Devon, December 2017

Our launch event began with an afternoon art workshop and a discussion of what 'the sacred' meant and what sacred art might look like. The book's art editor, Thomas Keyes introduced his work, tracing the unexpected connections between his background in graffiti writing and his more recent passion for illuminated manuscripts. We then went for a short walk outside, looking at natural forms, returning to the gatehouse to make our own art with ground natural pigments and parchment, incorporating the shapes and objects that we'd found on our walk.

The workshops were followed by an evening of readings, art and music. We hoped to encourage an atmosphere of deep contemplation with a share of critical thinking and healthy scepticism. The evening began with an interactive session where the audience were asked to imagine a situation that would be needed for a random object to be sacred to them. Each member of the audience was given, or chose, an object which would stay with them for the rest of the evening.

A candlelit night-walk through a small part of the gardens included appearances from mysteriously-lit, costumed creatures, poetry beside an ancient yew tree and silence and smoke in a circle.

Returning to the candle-lit hall, we allowed some layered improvised soundscapes to wash over us, made by David Osbiston on his guitar. Many of the contributors to this issue live outside the UK or have a restricted ability to travel, so for the first time we made use of contributions recorded and sent by video or audio: Dougald Hine introduced the evening from Sweden, while Craig Slee, James Nowak and Sylvia Linstead each read from their work. We ended the evening with Sylvia's recording of 'The Sibyl in the Book', the text which she wrote to claim the final pages of the book, and a beautiful song she recorded for us – a grandmother's lullaby.

Meanwhile, Steve Wheeler, Elizabeth Slade and Pelin Turgut were present to read from their books in person. Thomas Keyes talked us through his curation of artwork, including the logistics of sending out parchment he had made from the skin of twenty roadkill deer to artists around the world.

Between the recordings and readings, we had a set from Blythe Pepino of Mesadorm, whose moving and stripped back songs brought a feeling of humanity to the evening: we were just a bunch of people sitting in a room, after all.

The evening ended with a shared 'pot luck' meal and a further appearance from one of the Night Walk characters, framed with feathers and entering to the sound of a gong. Everyone was invited to place their object from the opening of the evening on a shared altar and we dispersed into the cold December night with a small glimmer of something sacred.

— Ava Osbiston, editorial assistant and launch manager for Dark Mountain

Roots & Branches

What started out as a movement of writers soon spread into something wilder and more unexpected, a tangle of brambles or the underground network of mycelium that links a forest into a living intelligence. In this section, we are starting to gather some of the fruits of this network and trace a few of the connections by which they came about.

These lines we trace are not Dark Mountain's doing: the credit belongs to those who found something in our work and ran with it, often in directions that would never have occurred to us, weaving what they found into a wider patchwork of influences and inspirations.

The stories that come back to us are full of strange turns and chance encounters: a book turns up in a pizza shop in a village in Iceland, a theatre director meets an old friend on a night train heading to the Arctic Circle, a philosopher points a choreographer towards the manifesto and it leads her to a whole practice of Uncivilised Dance.

Sometimes the result is an invitation which comes back to us, or a work whose traces make it into a future Dark Mountain book. In other cases, all that reaches us are rumours and echoes.

This section is an ongoing and inevitably partial project of documentation – and we look forward to hearing new stories of the chances, collaborations and creations which have been tangled in one way or another with Dark Mountain. If you have a story you would like to share with us, then please get in touch.

Dark Arts

The role of the visual arts within the Dark Mountain books has spread from a few colour plates in each issue to increasingly adventurous collaborations, while the invitation made in the manifesto has been taken up by all kinds of artists and arts organisations.

This section records some of the founding paths taken by visual artists around Dark Mountain, from street art murals to ephemeral rock paintings, from internet art to illuminated manuscripts.

Cover artists

There are plenty of words in a Dark Mountain book, but rarely any on the cover. Instead, the front of the book is given over to a commission from a guest artist.

From the Pied Piper figure painted by Rima Staines for Issue 2, to Stanley Donwood's branching linocut that wraps around Issue 7, to Will Gill's photograph *Pink Figure, Blue World* on Issue 11, these have set the tone and the aesthetic range of the project.

For those intrigued by the story behind these images, we always invite the cover artist to introduce their work within the pages of the book.

Visitors to the first Uncivilisation festival were greeted by this installation, created by Jaime Jackson as part of the iNTERTEXT project. A series of road signs marked the route to the festival venue with short excerpts from the Dark Mountain manifesto.

Read more on Jaime's website.

Do It With Others

A few weeks after the publication of the Dark Mountain manifesto, a mail arrived from Ruth Catlow at HTTP Gallery in north London, inviting us to collaborate. Since the 1990s, Ruth and Marc Garrett have worked as Furtherfield, creating and hosting platforms for collaborative, networked art.

In response to our manifesto, they proposed an email-art project – DIWO (Do It With Others) at the Dark Mountain – in which participants on the NetBehaviour mailing list would take the manifesto's text as a starting point for works that would be reworked and remixed by other members of the list, culminating in a collaboratively curated exhibition at HTTP Gallery between November and January 2009–10.

As Furtherfield describe the project:

> [The manifesto's] challenge was offered to network-minded artists, technologists, writers and activists as a provocation – to work together to re-envision the narratives and infrastructures that govern our relationships with the natural world, and how they might be unravelled and rewoven to reconfigure our place in it.

One of Dark Mountain's co-founders, Dougald Hine, was invited to participate in the process as a guest artist.

In the early days of the DIWO project, it became clear that the manifesto had indeed provoked some of the regular members of the list, and the strongly-worded exchanges which took place during this phase would go on to form the basis for a performance at the exhibition's opening. Dougald took 12,000 words of emails sent

to the list over a 48-hour period and created a 12-minute script for 12 voices; the participants sat around a dinner table in the gallery, reading each other's words aloud, experiencing the force of words originally bashed out through keyboards and screens, when spoken to someone who can look you in the eye.

Those initial collisions on the mailing list gave way to weeks of collaboration, branching out in many directions, as artists around the world built on each other's work to create a set of responses to the manifesto.

As part of the DIWO at the Dark Mountain project, Neil Jenkins of netpraxis created a remix of his work, Exquisite Copse, using the text of the DIWO discussions as a starting point. A play on the Surrealist game Exquisite Corpse, Exquisite Copse visually rewrites existing works of literature into a forest of word trees, from 'seed' words chosen by visitors.

Try Exquisite Copse at the Dark Mountain and grow your own word trees from the text of the DIWO discussions.

A horn of plenty

It must be the largest single work to have come out of the collaborations around Dark Mountain: a vast mural across the side of the old Church View art college in Doncaster, created by the renowned muralist and comic artist Phlegm.

The mural was created over several weeks in 2012 as a backdrop to The Telling, a series of uncivilised events organised by a group including the artists Horne+Draper. In Warren Draper's photos, you can follow Phlegm's work-in-progress.

Slide 01 / 06

Over the months that followed, these images would loom over firelit scenes as the folk singer Jon Boden, the storyteller Simon Heywood and the artist and poet Rachel Horne were among the performers who brought The Telling to life.

In February 2018, The Portico in Manchester was home to a solo exhibition from the artist Sophie Tyrrell. The work shown in The Uncivilised Sun draws on the Dark Mountain manifesto, exploring traditions in myth, folklore and popular culture, the idea of 'uncivilisation' and the alternative histories we share across borders and among peoples.

Learn more about Sophie's work on her website.

The skins of twenty deer

It started with an essay on the history of art and civilisation which Thomas Keyes sent in response to the first issue of Dark Mountain. The essay itself didn't quite hit the mark, but something about it intrigued us, and when Dougald travelled to Scotland that autumn, he arranged to meet up with its author. In a cafe in Edinburgh, Thomas talked about the strange journey that had led him from Belfast to the Black Isle, and mentioned a piece he had been playing around with – part recipe, part essay, inspired by cooking dinner for his kids from a roadkill pheasant. 'Finish that piece,' Dougald told him, 'I want to read it.'

'Following the Roe to Bennachie', Thomas Keyes

'October Black Isle Pheasant Stew' was published in the next issue of Dark Mountain, and over the books that followed Thomas's writing featured repeatedly, as did his artwork. Once a graffiti writer in Belfast, he had adapted to his new surroundings in the Scottish Highlands, collecting the bodies of roadkill deer, butchering them for the meat that could be salvaged and teaching himself how to tan their hides. These he would stretch and use as canvases on which to paint scenes of the deer in life, using pigments made from plants foraged in the woodlands where they had lived.

His research into the techniques of parchment-making led Thomas to the illuminated manuscript tradition which had flourished in Scotland and Ireland some 13 centuries ago, and here he found an unexpected return to the graffiti culture in which he had begun: the monastic scriptorium as much as the graffiti team had been a collective artistic enterprise, centred on the pursuit of 'letters with style'.

The turn towards working with illuminated manuscript techniques came just as the Dark Mountain editors began thinking about a special issue on the theme of the sacred and the connection seemed obvious. So Dougald and Steve Wheeler approached Thomas to join the team for *Issue 12: SANCTUM*, as lead artist and art editor. This role expanded into a larger artistic project in which Thomas brought together a gang of collaborators who would create 'incipit' pages for each of the thirteen pieces of writing that made up the spine of the book, along with 'window' images that would interrupt each text.

Thomas Keyes cuts parchment for the artists collaborating on Issue 12: SANCTUM

Incipit page by Thomas Keyes, Issue 12: SANCTUM.

Window art by Rima Staines, Issue 12: SANCTUM

Incipit page by Thomas Keyes, Issue 12: SANCTUM

Window art by Caroline Ross and marginalia by Rima Staines, Issue 12: SANCTUM

Incipit page by Drury Brennan and Thomas Keyes, Issue 12: SANCTUM

Thomas Keyes at work making parchment for Issue 12: SANCTUM

Thomas Keyes cuts parchment for the artists collaborating on Issue 12: SANCTUM

Incipit page by Thomas Keyes, Issue 12: SANCTUM.
Slide 01 / 07
The team responsible for the artwork in *Issue 12: SANCTUM* created dozens of original paintings and drawings, a collaboration that represented an extraordinary dedication. The contributors were Drury Peregrine Brennan, DOG DC5B, Michael Dudeck (M), Marcelle Hanselaar, Thomas Keyes, Anthony Mastromatteo, Rik Rawling, Caroline Ross and Rima Staines.

Mattias Jones created this giant line drawing in November 2011 for an exhibition in north Wales. It was inspired by the Dark Mountain Project and by a real dark mountain – Cnicht, in Snowdonia. Matt later recreated a version of this image for the cover of *Issue 3*.

The Sounds of Uncivilisation

> 'In the dark times
> Will there also be singing?
> Yes, there will also be singing.
> About the dark times.'
> — Bertolt Brecht

You could say that music was part of Dark Mountain from the beginning. When we launched the manifesto to a crowd of forty or so friends and family in 2009, there were three singer-songwriters on the bill – Marmaduke Dando, Chris T-T and Get Cape, Wear Cape, Fly – each of whom would become collaborators of the project.

Yet at that stage, we were setting out to create a literary journal: a collection of words and images, work that could find its home among the pages of a book. Then we started hearing from artists who were writing songs inspired by what they were reading.

If This is Civilisation...

Of all the performers who gathered around Dark Mountain in its early days, no one played a larger role in bringing music to the heart of the project than Marmaduke Dando, 'the bard of disempire'. He brought the Powerdown electricity-free club nights he had been running in London and turned the format into a fixture of our Uncivilisation festivals.

His debut album *Heathcliffian Surly* (2010) featured a series of tracks that took up the themes of the manifesto, delivered in the manner of a Vaudeville crooner and a nod towards DH Lawrence. *If This is Civilisation* snarls at 'The deeply satisfying myth of progress, that faceless object that offers divine purpose', before weaving in Robinson Jeffers' lines, 'I would burn my right hand in a slow fire / to change the future...'

It's not only Marmaduke's own releases that mark his contribution to an uncivilised discography. He was also responsible for the release of two compilation albums of music made by Dark Mountain artists.

The first of these albums, *From the Mourning of the World* (2013) was released as a vinyl LP with a gatefold sleeve featuring the art of Rima Staines. The track list includes contributions from Jon Boden, Rebecca Jade, Chris Wood and Bethia Beadman (duetting with Mike Mills).

This was followed in 2015 by *Reading the Ashes*, a digital album that featured the work of other friends of Dark Mountain including Angela Faye Martin, Telling the Bees, and Billy Bottle and the Multiple, many of whom had appeared on the Powerdown stage at Uncivilisation.

The influence of Dark Mountain runs through the later recordings of the singer-songwriter Chris T-T, but it doesn't stop there. Chris has also contributed to the Dark Mountain books: his story *Five Dead Badgers* appeared in our third book, while a selection of his Empties photos (left) were published in Issue 2.

Read more about what Dark Mountain means to Chris T-T in this interview with Gut Feelings zine.

Music for People in Trouble

The Norwegian singer-songwriter Susanne Sundfør had been following Dark Mountain for years, but the turning point came when she travelled to the Pyrenees to take part in a retreat with Paul Kingsnorth and Andres Roberts. That experience fed into the writing of her fifth album, *Music for People in Trouble* (2017).

Talking to the NME in May 2018, she explained the significance the project has had for her:

> A lot of environmentalists are angry with Dark Mountain because they're so pessimistic. But for me ... I feel like in order to fight the people who are making this world a worse place, you've got to face your fears and face reality ... I understand why it can be intimidating to start reading them, but to me it was very liberating, because what I felt was, "oh, somebody else is also thinking about those things, and here's a world of artists who are sharing these ideas, and I finally feel like my voice is heard."

The album weaves together themes of trouble, personal and planetary, building towards the closing track, *Mountaineers*, an anthemic duet with John Grant.

Dark Mountain Music

A mail arrived from the other end of the world, from Melbourne trio The General Assembly, telling us that they had recorded an EP inspired by our manifesto. Hearing these tracks, it felt like the music picked up at the place where our words ran out.

By good fortune, lead singer Matt Wicking was in Europe in the summers of 2011 and 2013, so on both occasions we invited him to play at Uncivilisation. His performances on-stage were memorable, but most lingering of all was his voice around the campfire on the final night of our final festival, rising into the late summer sky.

Years passed and we kept in touch the way people do these days, occasional messages over Facebook, a Skype call once in a while. There was an album coming and it was taking its time. Then in November 2016, the morning after the US presidential election, Matt sent us a new track, *Things Fall Apart*. It felt like the only thing we wanted to publish that day:

The following year, the album itself – *Vanishing Point* – arrived:

> Inside a mysterious radio tower on the wild coast of Tasmania, a boy finds a book with his initials on the cover. To his alarm and fascination, it maps out his entire life – from birth to death.
>
> As he reads, the radio beacon crackles to life and "a sea of voices fills the room", calling him to see the power in his wildness, to give in to the wonder and confounding complexity of life.

Vanishing Point has been celebrated by reviewers and is one of the most accomplished soundscapes so far created by the musicians involved in Dark Mountain.

Early one morning at the first Uncivilisation festival, Sam Duckworth (aka Get Cape, Wear Cape, Fly) stumbled upon a screening of Mario Petrucci's film, *Heavy Water*. The juxtaposition of Petrucci's poetry and the images of Chernobyl haunted him, and fed into the writing of the track *Angels in the Snow* which appeared on his 2011 album, *Mannequin*. The journey came full circle when the film's directors, David Bickerstaff and Phil Grabsky, agreed to the use of their footage to create the accompanying music video.

My Hands are Tied

We regularly get asked about the song that accompanies the film about subscribing to Dark Mountain. It's a track called *My Hands Are Tied*, taken from Evi Vine's 2015 album, *Give Your Heart to the Hawks*. Here's the full version with the official video:

Evi and her collaborator Steven Hill first got in touch with us in 2014 when they were hiding out in the woodlands of greater Berlin, working on that album. The tracks they recorded there are seeped in the words of Robinson Jeffers and Henry David Thoreau.

Later that year, we had the chance to invite Evi and Steven to play at the launch of our sixth book at the Free Word Centre in London.

While we are on the subject of Henry David Thoreau, it seems appropriate to introduce the work of the artist known these days as Billie Bottle. Together with their band, The Multiple, Billie recorded an entire album inspired by Thoreau's poetry. *Unrecorded Beam* inhabits the disputable lands between folk and jazz, infused with memories of the Canterbury scene of the 1970s. You could say Billie's connection to Dark Mountain goes back furthest of all the musicians around the project, since Billie and Dougald spent their teens singing in folk clubs and busking on high streets together around the northeast of England.

Listen to Unrecorded Beam on Bandcamp.

Stages & Scenes

The invitation made in the Dark Mountain manifesto has been taken up by playwrights and directors, storytellers, comedians, choreographers and dancers.

Here we tell some of the stories of those who have taken the call to make 'uncivilised art' beyond the pages of the written word and into spaces of theatre, live art and ritualised performance.

The Kairos Collective

Rannoch Wolf by Dougie Strang. (Photo: Em Strang)

As the Glasgow to Fort William train curves across the wild landscape of Rannoch Moor, the passengers catch sight of a pack of creatures running across the hillside. Could they be... wolves? Or wolf people?

The Rannoch Wolf Pack grew out of an annual solo performance by Dougie Strang, a storyteller and performance maker who has been at the heart of the Dark Mountain Project from its early years. Whether as the organiser of the Carrying the Fire

events, or through installations and one-to-one performances such as *Charnel House for Roadkill* first shown at the Uncivilisation festivals, Dougie's work has taken us into the territory of folk theatre and ritualised performance.

In recent years, he has worked as part of the Kairos Collective, a performance laboratory and 'uncivilised' theatre troupe, gathering twice a year to deepen their exploration of immersive, physical theatre.

The group's work is staged out of doors, embedded within the landscape and includes events such as *The Night Breathes Us In*, a lantern-lit procession through the streets of the city of Reading, leading to an island in the middle of the Thames and an evening of story, performance and fire.

In 2018 the Collective appeared for the launch of Dark Mountain: Issue 14 , held in a mill and barn in a wild and stormy Cumbria, with performance and interventions based alongside the river Sprint.

In 2019 the Collective's Charlotte Du Cann and Dougie Strang took a performance double-bill and conversation called A Dance Down the Dark Mountain to two theatre festivals, Winterwerft in Germany and Unfix in Glasgow.

Due to the pandemic, our much-anticipated creative gathering How We Walk through the Fire in Bristol was postppned. Subsequently much of what Dark Mountain does has gone online, and the group has diversified, running an uncivilised short film night The Picture Show at the End of the World and a storytelling event In the Company of Wolves with four different storytellers relating wild and mythic tales.

Kairos Collective rehearse for Issue 14: TERRA launch at Sprint Mill in Cumbria

The choreographer Emelie 'Empo' Enlund was introduced to the Dark Mountain manifesto by the philosopher Per Johansson, presenter of a popular Swedish podcast series. Emelie took the manifesto's call for 'uncivilised art' and started developing a practice of 'uncivilised dance' that has fed into productions such as *We Love Holocene* (Dansens Hus, Stockholm, 2017).

The Dark Mountain Workshop

The theatre director Måns Lagerlöf had been wrestling with the knowledge of climate change, reading book after book, wondering what use it was making theatre when the world is on fire. A chance encounter on a train with an old friend who was now working at the Stockholm Resilience Centre led him to the Dark Mountain manifesto. It was, he said, the first text that had given him a sense that what art knows might have some role in how we find our way through the mess the world is in.

A few years later, Måns was appointed artistic director of Riksteatern, Sweden's touring national theatre – and just as he received this appointment, he discovered that one of the manifesto's authors, Dougald Hine, was now living in Sweden. After a couple of meetings, they agreed that Dougald would come to work with Riksteatern for two years as leader of artistic and audience development.

This led to the creation of The Dark Mountain Workshop, a group of fourteen artists from within and beyond the performing arts in Sweden, who met for a day each month from October 2015 to May 2016. The group came together around the question: what do we do, as artists, living under the shadow of climate change?

Each month, the group was joined by a guest artist from the wider Dark Mountain network. These guests included Ansuman Biswas, Monique Besten, David Abram and Maddy Costa.

At the end of the day, the doors of the workshop space were opened and the public were invited to join us for The Village & The Forest: A Night with the Dark Mountain Workshop.

Jesper Weithz reads at The Village & The Forest, May 2016.

The Village & The Forest, Södrateatern, Stockholm, November 2015. (Photo: Benoit Derrier)

Ansuman Biswas at The Village & The Forest, November 2015. (Photo: Benoit Derrier)

As a guest of the Dark Mountain Workshop, Charlotte Du Cann visits the Spherical School, Järna, December 2015.

Monique Besten at The Village & The Forest, Södrateatern, Stockholm, March 2016.

David Abram in action at The Village & The Forest, Södrateatern, Stockholm, April 2016.

Liv Elf Karlén hosts a conversation at The Village & The Forest, May 2016.

Jesper Weithz reads at The Village & The Forest, May 2016.

The Village & The Forest, Södrateatern, Stockholm, November 2015. (Photo: Benoit Derrier)

Slide 01 / 07

Off the page

Sometimes work that starts out in the pages of Dark Mountain will take on a life of its own. We know of at least four short stories that have been adapted for the stage after appearing in our books.

Loss Soup by Nick Hunt (*Issue 1*)

This short story about a roll call of extinct species and languages was turned into a live performance at Uncivilisation 2012, directed by Caroline Hunt and performed by

Adam Peck. It was also used as inspiration for *The Liturgy of Loss* at Uncivilisation 2013, performed by Nick Hunt, Laurell Turner, Chris Rusbridge and Ellie Rusbridge.

In 2017 'Loss Soup' was adapted for a youth theatre performance at the Barbican Theatre, Plymouth as part of their summer festival.

To the Bone by Nick Hunt (*Issue 1*)

This short story about the clubbing to death of a mythical Welsh lake monster was adapted as a stage performance by Caroline Hunt, and performed at the Tobacco Factory Theatre, Bristol, in 2010.

Joe Hall in Butterfly Man at the Tobacco Factory Theatre, Bristol.

Butterfly Man by Mike Edwards (*Issue 4*)

Mike Edwards' account of depression sparked by the loss of butterflies was adapted as a theatre production by Caroline Hunt and Dan Jones and performed at Bristol's Mayfest in the Tobacco Factory Theatre in 2014.

Twelve Characters in Search of an Apocalypse by Andrew Boyd (*Issue 11*)

This piece by Andrew Boyd about collapse and unravelling has evolved into an ongoing series of public events and community dialogues in England and Wales, organised by Giraffe Social Enterprises.

Where the Words Run Out was a performance commissioned for AHA! Festival, Gothenburg in November 2017. On stage are two dancers (Alex Dam, pictured, and Sara Rousta) and a writer (Dougald Hine). There is no music. The three of them have agreed to inhabit the space where language reaches its limit, to wait at the point where a sentence tails off, until a gesture or a word arrives from the silence.

New stories, old stories

Martin Shaw performing at Base Camp, 2016. (Photo: Warren Draper)

'It is time to look for new paths and new stories,' declares the Dark Mountain manifesto, but from early on in the life of this project, we have been reminded of the role of old stories – not least by the magnificent storytellers who have been drawn to this project.

'The stories we need turned up, right on time, about 5000 years ago,' writes Martin Shaw in *Issue 7*. And Martin's tellings of old stories from near and far have been among the most memorable performances at Dark Mountain events. From the Arthurian wildness of *Lady Ragnell* at Uncivilisation to the Yakut tale of *The Crow King and the Red Bead Woman* at Base Camp, the stories show up with an urgency that bears out Martin's insistence: 'This is nothing to do with a long time ago!'

As well as performing regularly at our events, Martin has collaborated closely with members of the Dark Mountain team, running a series of weekend courses – Prophets

of Rock and Wave – with Paul Kingsnorth, and touring Sweden together with Dougald Hine.

Dark Mountain collaborators Paul Kingsnorth, Mark Rylance and Martin Shaw at the Edinburgh International Book Festival (Photo: Alan McCreedie)

Other storytellers who have been good friends to Dark Mountain include Rachel Rose Reid – who brought her and Robin Grey's show *Three Acres and a Cow* to the Base Camp gathering in 2016 – and Tom Hirons, whose late night tellings around the fire at Uncivilisation held hundreds of festival-goers in their spell, leading us into the worlds of *Baba Yaga* and *Ivashko Medvedko* (Little Ivan, Bear Child), accompanied by the music and images of Rima Staines.

In 2014, longtime Dark Mountain collaborators Tom Hirons and Rima Staines crowdfunded the creation of Hedgespoken, a travelling theatre on the back of a vintage Bedford truck. Here they are at Base Camp, the Dark Mountain gathering.

Read more about where to find Hedgespoken (and how you can support it) on the website. (Photo: Warren Draper)

The Organisation

The roots and branches may reach a long way, but at the core of Dark Mountain there is a small organisation run by a handful of people. We are funded by sales and subscriptions for our books, together with donations from supporters. On this page, you can read more about the structure of the organisation, the way we make decisions and the history of how the project has been funded.

The Structure

As the project grew from an informal collaboration between two writers into a larger team, we've gradually created structures that share the responsibility and provide sufficient stability to make our work sustainable. Our aim is to be a *do*-ocracy, where those most involved in the work of the organisation have the most say in the decision-making.

As of 2018, there are three collectives that are responsible for our work:

- **The Publishing Collective** meets monthly (usually over Skype) and is responsible for the day-to-day running of the project, including financial decisions. It is made up of everyone who works with Dark Mountain on a regular basis (as of 2019, Charlotte Du Cann, Nick Hunt, Ava Osbiston and Mark Watson) plus up to two other editors involved with recent or forthcoming books.

- **The Editorial Board** meets quarterly and is responsible for the longer-term editorial direction of Dark Mountain, including decisions about appointing new editors and themes for special issues. It is made up of the longest-serving editors currently involved with Dark Mountain. As of 201, its members are Cate Chapman, Charlotte Du Cann and Nick Hunt.

- **The Dark Mountain Steerers** is a collective which meets annually for a few days. Its members are responsible for holding the culture of Dark Mountain, keeping the fire alight, asking whether we are still on course and, ultimately, deciding when it is time to bring this project to an end. Its members all have a long-standing connection to the project and are a mixture of those deeply involved in the practical running of Dark Mountain and those who are able to offer us perspective from a little further out. As of 2018, its members are

Charlotte Du Cann, Nick Hunt, Ava Osbiston, Dougie Strang (Chair), Mark Watson and Steve Wheeler.

In addition to these groups, there is an editorial pool made up of those who have worked on one or more issues of Dark Mountain. Each issue has its own editorial team, typically with three or four editors, one of whom will act as producer – a role that involves coordinating the work of the editors and working closely with our typesetter, Christian Brett of Bracketpress, who is the only person to have worked on every single Dark Mountain publication from the manifesto onwards.

The editorial team is supported by an editorial assistant and volunteer readers who are the first point of contact for submissions to Dark Mountain. All submissions are read by at least two people, one member of the reading team and one of the book's editors, before a decision is made.

Events and Collaborations

In the early days, we used to run the Uncivilisation festival and publish the Dark Mountain books as part of the same small non-profit business. When we brought the festival to an end in 2013, one of the reasons for doing so was that trying to run both operations left us stretched too thin.

From then onwards, we have drawn a line between Dark Mountain as an organisation and the wider cultural movement which surrounds this organisation. That movement is made up of our readers, subscribers, supporters, collaborators and contributors – and without it, the organisation would have no purpose.

Dark Mountain as an organisation is responsible for publishing the books and dealing with the consequences, including all of the practical work that this entails, as well as the flow of enquiries, invitations and responses which this generates. It is also responsible for this website, which is the main route through which our work meets the world.

The wider cultural movement around Dark Mountain is made up of a web of associations and collaborations. When it seems appropriate, these collaborations also go under the name of Dark Mountain (as with many of the events you will find listed on this site), reflecting the involvement of members or close collaborators of our team.

The Steerers collective is responsible for our relationship with this wider movement. This includes making decisions about invitations to collaborate and how the Dark Mountain name can be used.

If you are interested in collaborating with us, please get in touch.

Funding This Work

Throughout its existence, the Dark Mountain Project has been funded primarily by sales of the books we publish, subscriptions to future issues and donations from our readers. This has allowed us to follow our own judgement, to pursue the vision that led us to this work in the first place, and to respond to what we've learned along the way.

Between 2012 and 2014, we received a grant of £10,000 a year from the Deep Ecology Foundation to support the core costs of an organisation that was growing beyond something that we could run in our spare time. This was followed by a further grant of £5,000 a year between 2015 and 2017. We remain deeply grateful to the late Doug Tompkins for his generosity in providing this funding with a minimum of strings attached. (You can read Paul's tribute to Doug elsewhere on this site.)

We have also received occasional donations from private individuals which have made a significant contribution towards our ability to keep doing this work. In the interests of transparency, we should acknowledge one case in which we received a donation from a public figure, the environmentalist and Conservative MP Zac Goldsmith. He had worked with Paul at the Ecologist magazine and was among the list of friends, colleagues and associates we contacted in 2009 when raising funds to publish our manifesto. In response, he sent us a one-off personal donation of £1000.

As of 2018, our activities are entirely funded through book sales, subscriptions and smaller donations from readers.

The Dark Mountain Project is wholly independent of political parties, religious organisations, social movements, business interests or the like, and will remain so.

The Company

The Dark Mountain Project Ltd exists as a company limited by guarantee, the simplest non-profit structure available under UK company law.

For official purposes, two company directors are appointed by the Dark Mountain Steerers collective. As of 2018, these positions are held by Charlotte Du Cann and Nick Hunt.

Our company number is 07123515 and our registered office address is 1 Gratitude Road, Bristol, BS5 6EH, UK.

The Dark Mountain Team

Behind the books and the website, there is a small group of people who hold this project together. We don't have an office, we're scattered across several countries, and none of us works full-time with Dark Mountain: we are all freelancers, fitting our work here around the other jobs that help to pay the bills. But each of us got involved with Dark Mountain because something here called to us deeply.

The publishing collective

This is the core team, the people who are currently involved with the running of Dark Mountain from month-to-month.

Charlotte Du Cann (co-director) is responsible for both editorial and operational aspects of our work. She is the editor for our online publication and has written for many issues of Dark Mountain, organised events and teaching courses, and as our first art editor she shaped the visual language of the books. Once upon a time, Charlotte was a features and fashion journalist in London. Then she spent a decade travelling, mostly in the Americas, before settling in Suffolk to write a series of books about mythos and reconnecting with the Earth, starting with *52 Flowers That Shook My World.* and most recently with *After Ithaca – Journeys in Deep Time.* Currently also hosting the year-long How We Walk Through the Fire workshop with Dougie Strang

Nick Hunt (co-director) is an editor, contributor and part of the core organising team. His involvement with Dark Mountain began as a writer of fiction: two of his stories, 'Loss Soup' and 'To the Bone', appeared in our first book, and he joined the editorial team from *Issue 4*. Nick's first book, *Walking the Woods and the Water*, is an account of a walk across Europe in the footsteps of Patrick Leigh Fermor. This was followed by *Where the Wild Winds Are*, a journey along the invisible pathways of four of Europe's great winds, *The Parakeeting of London: An Adventure in Gonzo Ornithology,* and *Outlandish: Walking Europe's Unlikely Landscapes.* His first collection of short fiction, *Loss Soup and Other Stories*, was published in 2022.

Ava Osbiston has been our editorial assistant, since 2015, responsible for managing our submissions process working with a team of readers. She also helps to coordinate in person and online events and book launches for the project and has been responsible for the Find the Others online strand. Most recently she has been Art Editor for *Issue*

21. Ava is fascinated with creativity in its rawest and most authentic forms and how we can explore connection and creativity in community, she brings this curiosity to her Integral coaching practice. She also plays improvised soundscapes and is a painter and a maker in many forms.

Mark Watson is our subscriptions and distribution manager, the person who will be in touch when you subscribe to our books or if you need help with an existing subscription. He is also the main proof-reader for many of our books and responsible for overseeing the stock of Dark Mountain books. Visitors to Dark Mountain events may remember Mark's plant medicine walks, or his dynamic demonstration of how to make mead at the launch of our Technê issue. Currently also teaching Plant Dialogues for How We Walk through the Fire and The Labyrinth and the Dancing Floor workshops with Schumacher College.

Editors, readers and steerers

In addition to the members of the Publishing Collective, we have a pool of editors who have worked on one or more issues of Dark Mountain.

Cate Chapman's poetry brought her to Dark Mountain, starting with 'Protest Poem', published in *Issue 6*. She joined the editorial team for *Issue 10: Uncivilised Poetics* and has gone on to work on *Issue 11* and as poetry editor on *Issues 13, 15* and *16.*

Philip Webb Gregg came along to the launch of *Issue 14 – TERRA* for a quick chat and never left. He helped edit *Issue 18: FABULA* and *Issue 22: ARK* and has frequently lent a hand with reading, online editing and newsletter production. He lives in a shed at the end of his garden in Cambridge.

Sara Hudston has written non-fiction pieces for the website and contributed to issues 13, 14 and 15. She was one of the editors for *Issue 15*. She lives in rural Dorset.

Neale Inglenook first appeared with a stunning short story for *Issue 6* and has continued to contribute both essays and fiction, frequently based on the life and work of the poet and fellow Californian Robinson Jeffers. He has been an editor on Issues 17 and 22: ARK and is a contributing editor for the online publication.

Thomas Keyes has been a contributor to Dark Mountain since its second issue, when we published his recipe for *October Black Isle Pheasant Stew.* His essays and artwork featured regularly in later books. Then in 2017, he came on board as lead artist and art editor for *Issue 12: SANCTUM*, making parchment from the skins of roadkill deer and bringing together a team of artists, somewhere between a monastic scriptorium and a graffiti crew.

Anthea Lawson is an author, campaigner and Dark Mountain editor for I*ssues 16: REFUGE* and *21.* Her book *The Entangled Activist: Learning to recognise the master's tools* is published by Perspectiva Press. She lives in Devon.

Michael McLane's nonfiction appeared in Issue 6 of *Dark Mountain* and his poetry in issue 13. He is one of the founders of *saltfront: studies in human habit(at),* which is based in Salt Lake City, Utah. He currently lives in New Zealand/Aotearoa, where he is pursuing a doctoral degree at Victoria University through the International Institute for Modern Letters. His sharp poetry editing skills have been invaluable on *Issues 19. 20: ABYSS and 21.*

Mat Osmond's illustrated poems featured in the first two issues of Dark Mountain and his words and images have travelled with the project ever since. In 2017, he joined the team for *Issue 11* as a guest art editor. Mat is based in Falmouth, Cornwall.

Joanna Pocock published her first piece of writing with Dark Mountain, in 2014 after moving from East London to Missoula, Montana. This essay about wolf trapping along with several other pieces became part of her book, *Surrender* (Fitzcarraldo Editions). She was the art editor of *Issue 18 -FABULA* and has been on the editorial team for *Issue 19,* 20: ABYSS and 22: ARK.

Eric Robertson's story *Wet Sage and Horse Shit* opened *Issue 4* of Dark Mountain. Based in Salt Lake City, he is one of the founders of the journal *saltfront*, who have been known to describe themselves as the Ramones to Dark Mountain's Sex Pistols. In 2018, he joined the team to edit *Dark Mountain: Issues 13* and *15, 18* and *21.*

Bridget McKenzie has contributed to various issues, and was the guest art editor for *Issue 15.* She has been director of Flow Associates since 2006, following 14 years in roles managing cultural education, including Education Officer for Tate and Head of Learning at the British Library. She is a trustee for ONCA, adviser for Culture Unstained, an initiator of Culture Declares Emergency, and the founder of Climate Museum UK.

Jonny Randall is a filmmaker and community arts practitioner. He recently curated The Picture Show at the End of the World, an online event which marked Dark Mountain's first foray into showcasing uncivilised filmmaking. He has also contributed writing to the online publication and performed with the Kairos Collective at various events, including Base Camp, The Night Breathes Us In (as part of Reading's Festival of the Dark) and the launch for *Issue 14: Terra,* at Sprint Mill in Cumbria.

Tom Smith's essay *The Focal and the Flask: Vignettes of a Philosophy of Technology* had been published in *Issue 6*, so when it came to putting together a team for the following autumn's *Technê* special issue, he was a clear choice. Since then, he has gone on to be a member of the editorial team for *Issues 9,* 13, and *20: ABYSS.* fitting his work with Dark Mountain alongside completing a PhD at the University of St Andrews. He now a lecturer and lives in Germany.

Dougie Strang. After coming to the first *Uncivilisation* festival, Dougie invited Dark Mountain to Scotland for the first in what would become a series of Carrying the Fire gatherings. He has taken Dark Mountain into the borderlands of live art, theatre and ritual, creating events and performances that linger in the imagination. Co-director of Base Camp, the Kairos Collective, and the current year-long How We Walk Through the Fire workshop with Charlotte Du Cann.

Steve Wheeler came along to an early Dark Mountain event in a treehouse in Regents Park in the summer of 2009. After contributing to the early books, he joined the editorial team for *Issues 6, 7, 8, 11 15* and 17 At a Steerers' meeting in 2014, he raised the idea of a special issue on the sacred – and three years later, he worked with Dougald as lead editors for *Issue 12: SANCTUM*, which grew out of that idea. He edits the Becoming Human section for the online publication.

In addition to the usual editorial roles, *Issue 12: SANCTUM* saw the appointment of two Marginalians, a role created and exercised by **Sylvia V. Linsteadt** and **Rima Staines**. Both longstanding contributors to Dark Mountain, they filled the margins of this special issue with a commentary in words and images, before claiming the final pages of the book as their own.

The work of the editors is supported by the efforts of our readers, **Hattie Pierce** and **M.E. Rolle**, who work alongside Ava to read all submissions to the books. Every submission is also read by at least one of the book's editors. In addition to this role, Harriet also worked as an assistant editor on *Issue 13* and proofreader for *Issue 18. – FABULA* and *21.* She is in charge of Dark Mountain's social media.

Over the years, our books have benefited from the keen eye of various proofreaders. As well as those who have also worked in other editorial roles, these have included **Iona Hine** and **Alice Martin**.

The Steerers collective is made up of some of the longest-standing members of the Dark Mountain team.

Roll of honour

As this project approaches its second decade, it owes a debt of thanks to those who went before and whose work has made its continuing existence possible. The following are among those whose contributions deserve acknowledgement.

As the project's co-founder and the person who first caught sight of the possibility that became Dark Mountain, **Paul Kingsnorth**'s contribution to this project can hardly be overstated. In our early issues, he charted his journey as a 'recovering environmentalist' through a series of widely-discussed essays which were, for many readers, the gateway to this project. He carried the weight of running the project in its early years and served as an editor on our first eight books. In 2017, he decided it was time to lay down his responsibilities at Dark Mountain in order to pursue new projects.

Dougald Hine is co-founder of Dark Mountain. He was responsible for developing the organisation of the network and setting up new projects. Together with Paul Kingsnorth, he wrote the manifesto that brought this project into being, and he was an editor for the first five books, returning in 2017 for the SANCTUM special issue. Originally from the northeast of England, these days Dougald lives in the Swedish city

of Västerås. In 2018, he and his partner Anna Björkman launched HOME: a school for culturemakers.

Michael Hughes played an essential role in the early years of this project. The first Uncivilisation festival was his initiative and he took responsibility for developing a longer-term plan for events, as well as starting to set us on a sufficiently business-like footing to go on doing the work this project exists to do. If Dark Mountain has survived well beyond the life-expectancy of the average small literary journal, Michael's advice in the early years played no small role in that.

Adrienne Odasso's poetry appeared in the first issue of Dark Mountain and she spoke at the inaugural Uncivilisation festival. Soon afterwards, she became the third member of the editorial team, working on *Issues 3, 4* and *5*, broadening the range of voices which found their way into our books.

Em Strang was another early contributor to Dark Mountain, with her poetry featuring regularly in the books from Issue 2 onwards. She served as a member of the Steerers collective and from *Issue 6*, she became our first specialist poetry editor. Over the issues that followed, her focus broadened the range of poetry finding its way into our books, culminating in her work as lead editor for *Issue 10: Uncivilised Poetics*.

Sophie McKeand came to manage our second festival in 2011 and stayed on to become the first editorial assistant at Dark Mountain, supporting Paul and the rest of the editorial team. Besides handling a growing administrative workload, she also contributed creatively to the project, with her poetry appearing in several issues of Dark Mountain and her band Metaforestry playing at Uncivilisation.

Marmaduke Dando played at the launch of the Dark Mountain manifesto and went on to curate the memorable Powerdown evenings at Uncivilisation, as well as serving on the Steerers collective. He was responsible for bringing together *From the Mourning of the World* and *Reading the Ashes*, two compilation albums of music from artists associated with the project, as well as producing the *Uncivilised Poetics* CD that accompanied Issue 10 of Dark Mountain.

The Dark Mountain logo was created by the artist **Steven Levon Ounanian**, an early friend of this project. He also gave a memorable performance of his poem, 'God's Own Drunk', at the close of the manifesto launch.

Laurence Lord's artwork has appeared in several issues of Dark Mountain. He was also single-handedly responsible for building and maintaining the earlier version of the Dark Mountain website (2013–18), an essential contribution to the project. He has handed on that responsibility, but the pen-and-ink drawing that you will find in the footer of the present site is his work.

Dark Mountain in the Media

From its earliest days, this project has attracted a striking level of attention. Our twenty-page, self-published manifesto was given a two-page lead review in the New Statesman and debated in the pages of the Guardian. By its fifth anniversary, the New York Times could introduce Dark Mountain to its readers as a project that was 'changing the environmental debate in Britain and the rest of Europe.'

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Many people have found their way to Dark Mountain through the media coverage which the project receives. At the same time, that coverage has taught us how difficult it is to describe Dark Mountain; indeed, how little consensus there is on what kind of thing Dark Mountain is. We've been called 'the world's slowest, most thoughtful think tank' (Geographical magazine) and 'a form of psychosis ... [that] threatens to create many more corpses than ever dreamed of by even the Unabomber' (Bryan Appleyard, New Statesman).

Slowly, we came to understand that the difficulty in summing up the project, while frustrating for a journalist on a deadline, is part of what makes it work. When people hit up against Dark Mountain, either they bounce straight off the side (in indifference or indignation), or else something here speaks to something in their own experience, and that sense of recognition causes them to slow down, to puzzle their own way into what is going on.

One sign of this is that those who come to report on or document Dark Mountain often end up crossing the line and getting involved in the project itself. Charlotte Du Cann came as a newspaper reporter to review our second festival for The Independent – and stayed to become one of the core members of the team.

We are always open to enquiries from journalists, especially those who have taken time to get a feel for what Dark Mountain might be. Use the Contact page to get in touch with us.

Meanwhile, on this page, we've brought together a selection of the coverage which Dark Mountain has received over the years.

'A lot of environmentalists are angry with Dark Mountain because they're so pessimistic. But for me ... I feel like in order to fight the people who are making this world a worse place, you've got to face your fears and face reality ... I understand why it can be intimidating to start reading them, but to me it was very liberating, because what

I felt was, "oh, somebody else is also thinking about those things, and here's a world of artists who are sharing these ideas, and I finally feel like my voice is heard."'

Susanne Sundför talks to the NME about the importance of Dark Mountain for her music, 22 May 2018.

'We see things in the daylight, but in the night we have dreams and we process the things that we've seen and try to make sense of them, try to find a way of weaving them into our knowledge of ourselves and our ideas of ourselves in the world.'

Dougald Hine talks to Frontier magazine's Tristan Marantos about the role of darkness in how we make sense of the world, Spring 2018.

'The response that the Dark Mountain Project is interested in is writing about the world in a way which doesn't put people front and centre.'

In the January 2018 episode of the podcast Diane: Entering the Town of Twin Peaks, one of the presenters uses Dark Mountain to help make sense of David Lynch's cult TV series. (Starts around the 14 minute mark.)

'What I value is their clear eyed appreciation of the vulnerability of human life and the way we live it. So, for example, in the opening section of the manifesto of the Dark Mountain project we find the following sentence: "The pattern of ordinary life, in which so much stays the same from one day to the next, disguises the fragility of its fabric." And that, to me, is absolutely right.'

Dark Mountain makes an unexpected appearance on BBC Radio 4's Thought for the Day with Rev Dr Giles Fraser, 10 January 2018.

'For me, it's about regrowing a living culture, among the ruins.'

Dagens Næringsliv is Norway's financial newspaper. In November 2017, they sent a reporter to the launch of SANCTUM, the twelfth Dark Mountain book, in Uppsala, Sweden. The result was a six-page feature (in Norwegian), published in their D2 magazine in January 2018.

'Many of the pieces in *Walking on Lava* are as sad as they are angry, as solemnly nostalgic as they are well informed. This is not a criticism. The human propensity towards sentimentality, so often seen as a weakness, could be mankind's saving.'

Ben Myers reviews Dark Mountain's selected works for the New Statesman, 28 August 2017.

'John, a lanky, buzz-cut 40-something, had come to see most people around him as wasteful and oblivious. He'd look out from his place in the city and see offices empty, lights on, row after row, and despair. "I'm a person who has lost almost all hope," he told us. Now, though, John took the lead, his long legs carrying him at a brisk pace. I felt lighter, too, in this strange column of dark-mountaineers. At the end of an arduous section of trail, we stopped to catch our breath. John was smiling now, sweating. "I think we're doing something right," he said. "I think so," I replied.'

Brian Calvert joined Paul Kingsnorth for a retreat in the Pyrenees. Among the results of the experience was his essay, So what if we're doomed?, which appeared in High Country News on 24 July 2017.

'Through Dark Mountain I've got to know the most incendiary, challenging thinkers, writers and makers – far more earthily radical, visionary and mind-blowing than any other group or outlet I've come across in my life. Interacting with them and their networks, some becoming friends, made a fundamental shift in how I see the future and my life. It's huge for me.'

The musician Chris T-T talks to Gut Feelings zine about the influence of Dark Mountain on his work and his life, 30 August 2016.

'The Dark Mountain Project ... is less an attempt at taking environmentalism in a new direction, and more about creating a sensibility and an acceptance that the current industrial life, as led by approximately 1.5 billion people, might be completely unsustainable.'

Tom Hart reports from Dark Mountain for Geographical, the magazine of the Royal Geographical Society, London, 11 May 2015.

'When you ask Kingsnorth about Dark Mountain, he speaks of mourning, grief and despair. We are living, he says, through the "age of ecocide," and like a long-dazed widower, we are finally becoming sensible to the magnitude of our loss, which it is our duty to face.'

Daniel Smith came to the final Uncivilisation festival in 2013 and interviewed many of those involved in Dark Mountain. The result was a profile of Paul Kingsnorth and the project he co-founded, published in the New York Times Magazine of 17 April 2014.

'These aren't the sort of people I've encountered in the protest and ecology movements of the recent past; these are the people we always felt we were failing to reach, failing to engage. Somehow, an urge toward personal resilience and preparedness has replaced the hope that the government will get it all sorted. Instead of reassurances, they're looking for new stories into which they can write themselves, and new solutions they can take home with them.'

Paul Graham Raven comes to Uncivilisation 2012 to meet 'the collapsonomics crowd' and is surprised by the mix of people he finds. Arc 1.1, 2012.

'It seems like everybody who comes is a maker or doer of some kind – singers and songwriters, poets and writers, but also hackers, healers, disaster engineers and renegade bankers ... Again and again I found I could just sit down next to a stranger and very quickly we'd disappear down the rabbit hole – discussing peak oil or biotechnology, Hindu death cults or the problems with the publishing industry, prison reform or rap songs about cycling. All around, all weekend, people were meeting, talking and thinking, ideas crackling into the sky alongside the woodsmoke and live music.'

Tom Stafford reviews our Uncivilisation festival for Now Then magazine, Issue 42, September 2011.

Early coverage

On Dark Mountain as a project

'We were learning how to become grown-ups.' Aeon Magazine is faintly bemused by Dark Mountain. September 2012

'Dark Mountain ... is about facing the reality of the matter.' STIR magazine reviews the Project three years in. August 2012

'This engagement of narratives in re-imagining and shifting the way we live drew my attention' – Jeppe Graugaard writes about Dark Mountain and academia. January 2012

'The Dark Mountain project tells us the things we don't want to hear, and it is a no-nonsense Zen-like response to the 'age of ecocide' that our civilisation is causing.' The Huffington Post interviews Paul Kingsnorth. October 2011

'I cannot make the leap that Dark Mountain demands' – George Monbiot takes issue with the Project in the Guardian. May 2010

'All we did was give it a name. Where it goes next is anybody's guess' – Paul Kingsnorth explains Dark Mountain in The Guardian. April 2010

'It may be the most honest attempt at literature we've seen – and that alone marks it as a kind of success we have been lacking' – Sharon Astyk on Dark Mountain. February 2010

'A root-and-branch challenge to the foundations of a culture of consumption' – Boyd Tonkin writes about Dark Mountain in The Independent. November 2009

On the Dark Mountain books

'Dark Mountain is a radical project, and a brilliant one, capable of opening your eyes in the encircling twilight.' The Journal of Wild Culture reviews book 3, December 2012

'It appears that the editors are first and foremost trying to change mainstream thought processes: not easy to do and frequently unappreciated.' – The Ecologist reviews Dark Mountain book 2. August 2011

'The stimulus of Dark Mountain transports many of us into a deeper paradigm of seeing and being' – Alastair McIntosh reviews Dark Mountain book 1. June 2010

'This slim pamphlet aims to demolish contemporary beliefs about progress, industrialism and the place of human beings on the planet, and up to a point it succeeds' – John Gray reviews our manifesto in the New Statesman. September 2009.

On Dark Mountain events

'Uncivilisation is no ordinary summer festival. People have come here not to escape from reality, but to face it' – The Independent reviews Uncivilisation 2011. August 2011

'We all need to confront our own stories we hold about the world and face reality ourselves if we are to be able to contribute to these new stories.' Part Time Peasant reviews the 2011 festival. September 2011

'There was a dark cloud over the sleepy Welsh town of Llangollen last month' – CNN reviews the first Uncivilisation festival. June 2010

'Uncivilisation was a kindling of consciousness, a communion, and a rare opportunity to begin the process of "reconstitution"' – OpenDemocracy on our first festival. June 2010

Issue 22

We are excited to reveal the publication of our twenty-second book, available now from our online shop. The Autumn 2022 all-colour special issue takes the shape of an ARK with a cargo of testimonies, stories and artwork gleaned after the flood. Over the next few weeks we'll be sharing a selection of pieces from its pages. Today we invite you to join our band of scavengers on the shoreline with the editorial and introduction to the themes of our log book. With cover and contents pages by Graeme Walker and liminal artwork by Angela Cockayne.

What do you keep when the storm comes in, and the tide goes out?

Dark Mountain: Issue 22 is not an *ARK* you might expect: a store of testimonials from the custodians of a planet in peril, a seed bank to buffer us against an uncertain future, or a queue of iconic animals rescued from extinction, a museum hoard of civilisation's spoils.

Instead its pages hold a cargo of another sort: an assemblage of stories gathered from the wreckage left by a flood that has already come, art and writing that reveal the beauty, resilience and strength found in being fully alive in a troubled time. Our seeds come are collected from felled trees and activist front lines in Aoteroa New Zealand and middle England, from a community surviving a bushfire in Australia, from guardians in the Amazon defending the forest against gold mining, along the banks of 16 compromised rivers in North America. Our disappearing creatures are held in dreams, in the grief of a mother who lost her rebel son; our artworks made with ochres from the desert and polluted shoreline, with peat from endangered bogs; words and images wrought from remembered bird song, insect wings, gourds, microorganisms, unloved spruce needles, tilting ocean horizons. A hold that treasures tales about what might happen next.

This ark has been made in collaboration with the Wilderness Art Collective – a work of creative salvage, with a cover and content pages forged from the flotsam of abandoned archives and old typewriter keys, its editorial collected from these water-damaged fragments shored against our ruin. Most of all, it is a testament to the imagination of writers and artists, gleaners in a world that has lost its way, to show how we can build and regenerate an Earth-centred culture from what has been bequeathed us on a vanished tide.

ARK contents pages by Graeme Walker

EDITORIAL

Notes on The Finding of This Logbook

> Tear down the house and build a boat!
> Abandon wealth and seek living beings!
> – *The Epic of Gilgamesh*
> Translated by Maureen Kovacs

We went down to the shoreline as we do, with our nets and baskets, to see what had been left behind. The storm and the king tide had washed mud up to the branches of the trees, those that remained and were not torn out and taken back by the sea. A few of their derelict forms lay stranded on the flats, halos of roots writhing toward the sky. Around them the mud was carved by small watercourses, like a map of a lost continent, or inverted blood vessels, the mark of the sea's departure.

What we found deposited by the tide: boards waterlogged and broken at the ends, as though the surf had chewed them apart; bright shards of plastic going pale in the sun; sodden cardboard; thin films of tape. So much was clearly flotsam of some lost vessel. A chest wrapped in bands of iron; a painting depicting heaven and hell, though tipped on its axis and half buried in mud; a pile of matted canvas, tent or sail or burial shroud; a crumpled mask; a carved flute; a knot of human hair. It was not so easy to say the origin of other things: an erratic granite boulder on this shore of shale and mud; a cactus somehow taking root on a bare peninsula; fungi fruiting from the shaded mould; chips of ochre in the silt; the yellow bloom of a wild sunflower; a clump of woody heather, black soil still clutched in its roots.

Had they come on the tide or been revealed by the tearing of the waves? Everything in flux, every object melancholy in its broken edges, speaking of a lost home. Everything luminous in its disjointed mosaic beauty.

We went to see what we might save, what might be of use, what exquisite scrap we might glean. We paused at the edge of the forest, where the mudflats begin. Scanning for salvage, we were met with the scent of this small cold stream emerging from the stone, flowing down to meet the rotting sea wrack, reflecting shards of light on the tree trunks. The electric shrilling of cicadas. The flash of an antler in the dappled light of the forest, caught in the corner of the eye. The sounds of now-rare birds off in the woods: nightjar, blue tit, mistle thrush. Turtledove, dunnock, carrion crow.

We shaded our eyes to follow a line of prints toward the tideline, large ovals with the marks of claws, slowly filling with water. The curving ribs of a ruined craft rose before the horizon's clouds. As we blinked against the sharp light, the colours of the world seemed to invert, the foaming waves turning storm-black, the boat keel white as bone.

Some things were left intact: beside the little stream, as though in memorial to the vessel that had carried it, rested a child's toy boat still bearing its enduring passengers. A coat with words stitched into its fabric, folded as if to pillow some absent head. And this book, found held in the crook of a tree limb, as though set on a shelf by the hand of the tide.

The Great Unravelling by Angela Cockayne

If you take out an annual subscription to Dark Mountain you can buy this issue for a reduced price.

To celebrate *Dark Mountain: Issue 22*'s release, do join us for an online launch on Tuesday 25th October starting at 19:30 BST. To book a place on board just follow this link. We hope to see you there!

IMAGES Cover and Content Pages artwork by Graeme Walker

After the flood, our digital lives rusted away, papers from the world's libraries float to the surface, to be collected and reassembled by future explorers and archivists.

I designed three fonts for this issue: 'O Brother' is based on my old Brother typewriter, 'Discontinued' and 'Issue' are both based on rubber stamp sets in my collection. A fourth font, Telegraphem, was designed by Volker Bussse,. Many of the engravings and drawings were source from the Internet Archive's extraordinary public domain book images repository.

Graeme Walker is an artist who makes contemplative objects, paintings, poetry and stories; philosophical prompts that explore paradoxes in our relationship between life, mortality and nature, and questions around the cultural inhibition and release of agency. His work calls humanity to resist nihilism by entering into aliveness, meaningfulness and potency. All the fonts Graeme made for this edition can be freely downloaded from graemewalker.art/fonts

'The Great Unravelling' by Angela Cockayne from *Radical Fauna*

'The truth was cooked, the gulf too wide, no one knew what to believe'.

Wax birds, beach plastic, oil, crustacean, wire

Radical Fauna is a commentary from a compendium of chimerical creatures in the closing days of the Anthropocene and the first bewildering days of a new age yet to be defined. These 'strandliners' – ever-changing tidal offerings – are the remains of the day, an era, of millennia, and the last 500 years of oceanic discovery, enlightenment and annihilation, all in the blink of a planetary eye,

Working as an artist and curator **Angela Cockayne** uses found objects to create artworks that comment on the human predicament within the natural world. Her recent project 'Ark Embrace' repurposes an old fishing vessel as a contemporary ethical cabinet of curiosity housing over 500 artworks to explore our relationship with the ocean and its mythologies. *Radical Fauna,* a limited edition publication was released this week at Hweg Gallery Penzance, UK.

Exquisite Corpse

We are excited to reveal the publication of our twenty-second book available, now from our online shop. The Autumn 2022 all-colour special issue takes the shape of an ARK with a cargo of testimonies, stories and artwork gleaned after the flood. Today, in our final extract from its pages, Micheál Mac Gearailt weaves sensuality, ancient language and dystopian present in a tale of activism against the Irish forestry industry. With visceral images by William Bock of the Wilderness Art Collective

May Daily #18, Spruce, Ireland by William Bock

Micheál Mac Gearailt
is from County Clare, Ireland. His short stories are love letters to the bogs and forests of his home and the ghosts of its old language. His primary work is in archaeology and ecology, and he is undergoing a BA in Celtic Languages and Culture in Utrecht University.

3rd November, 2022

- ISSUE 22 – ARK

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The soil was first deified here in 1989, our Summer of Love.

We youths were wrangled by the horns from the cities and sent, with nothing but our strong freckled shoulders, up to the mountains. The first days were spent gouging out drains and burrowing deep into the earth, the nights dancing to Paul Desmond in the ruins of the rebel villages.

A day of excavation would leave your jaw locked and fingers in a claw; the boys'd have to crack a smile to the girls, who would inevitably rub it out. As we moved up to the peaty sections, the diggers' naked bodies were left with an oily, stygian pelt; we wore it as a mark of pride, and soon couldn't get turned-on without it. We'd lie in the sun, bodies melting into one another, chewing on bundles of pine needles with relish.

The planting happened naturally, almost unconsciously, in the midst of a great solar orgy; our bodies became vectors, our mouths fertilisers.

Our work is grown now, as am I. The sitka spruces shoot above my head, each one shivering slightly in recognition as I stroll past. Inspections are the highlight of the job.

The model stopped being profitable long ago; now it's done purely for the sex appeal.

Something wafts through the herbicide smell. Decay. I turn the corner; in the slatted light on a pair of sitkas, two rebels hammered to the trees as warnings. Pity. Nails ruin the scales of a bark.

A wasted tree always puts me off. I move across the avenues, find a good spot and unbuckle my belt.

Sitka Spruce Plantation, Ireland by William Bock

*

He rises unsteady – pulling out with a grimace – and swells. Undulates, groans. Just as quick, satisfaction is overcome again – endless hunger.

He grabs his clothes draped on a branch. Struggles into them. Cold light makes its way to his skin from above; *fuck*, *I'm getting pale*.

As he buckles his belt with hands large for grasping, a flicker of colour licks his eye. Movement along the slope, just visible down the barrel of the drainage trench. His hackles rise, he drops down, and moves to stalk.

Sitka Spruce Plantation, Ireland by William Bock

Voices are unwelcome beneath sitka's mantle. This place is a tomb to iconophilia, a monolith to absolute consolidation. Plantations were always intended as the logical conclusion to Eden – endless sex, endless conquest.

He slows his approach and watches from a ridge.

Three hulking forms move slowly through the forest; the lolling stroll of a cow fresh after milking, and the grace of a slug climbing across pebbles.

The first is the largest; her lank flaxen hair curtains her face as she marches, step by cadenced step, breasts swinging slowly under an ill-fitting woollen jumper. The load on her back is enormous, microwaves and electrical cables, butchering knives and tinkling glass bottles, all tied together in a great spitball. Twigs pop and fly off her shoulders.

The second is taller and gaunter, her back straddled with a few tattered clothes, hands to the ground in an act of acrobatics; she feels under the pine needles and round the burgeoning roots as she walks. He cannot see her face, but can tell her sight is poor; her hands are her eyes.

The third is the smallest, sickly and yellow. She carries almost nothing, but walks with a humpback and walking stick. Every few steps she stops; tastes the air with the flick of a tongue – sighs, as if to expire – and is berated by the sister in front.

> The planting happened naturally, almost unconsciously, in the midst of a great solar orgy; our bodies became vectors, our mouths fertilisers

'Will you come on ta fuck? Tisn't anything here.' Her voice is gravel and car engines.

'We're close, so we are.' A dogged whisper.

'Yera, I'll give you close.'

The middle one smiles, grabs a cigarette sitting on her ear, and lights. A slow pull, exhale, fag stays in the mouth while the hands return to the ground. Her voice is ashes and alder leaves. 'She's on the ball. We're not far off.'

The big one takes heed of this. 'I'll slow myself so.'

They don't let them age like this in the lowlands anymore. *Fucking rough.*

He follows them along the ridge; they continue their bickering, moving ever down the mountain. Funeral procession, cultist caravan.

A clearing is reached, where a sitka has fallen. The ground has begun to eat it, and the whiff of rot is like a bomb. He squirms at the sight, and feels his scrotum tighten. The sitkas around the clearing lean in, scrambling inward and upward for the light, as if in a dance circle.

The little one yelps. 'Tis here.'

The big one turns to the tall one. Raises an eyebrow in question. He steps backward, almost seen. Big's face is a perpetual smirk, frozen to one side and complimented by a squint.

Tall one lets her gaunt, splotchy hands be consumed by the dead growth. Feels around. 'Tis.'

She rises, smiles, snaps her head to face him. Her eyes are milk, and he freezes. She nods. The fat one turns her head too, blinks, laughs. 'Young man – yes yourself! Will you come here and give us a hand or what?'

Fuck.

He cocks his chest and descends the slope. Breaks into a toothy smile.

'Afternoon ladies.' *Pigs.*

Fatty and lamppost smirk. The sick one eyes him with curiosity.

The big one fills the silence. 'Well young fella. Are you joining our evening stroll?'

'Identification please.'

'It's a pilgrimage of sorts.'

'Identification.'

'A band of merry men. Strawgirls.'

Lamppost spits out her cigarette, puts her hand carefully on the fat one's shoulder. 'Whisht.' She turns to him. 'We're in processing.'

'Awaiting allocation?'

'We are. On our way to town now. The roads are blocked.'

'With what?'

'Flood warnings. Rain on the way.'

'Oh.' *Those fucking eyes.* 'ID please.'

She nods. The fat one groans in exasperation. They raise their arms and roll up their sleeves.

He recognises the tattoos. McKee sisters. One of the last families holding out in this jurisdiction, they lived in a rancid cabin on the western slopes. Admin had been

dogging them to sell out for years, to no avail. He had always wanted to try them himself. Who got there first? Eager cunt.

The axiom leaves his tongue automatically: 'Thanks for choosing a green future.' *Smile, goddamn it.*

He awaits the agreed response. Yellow-skin bobs her mouth up and down, lardy chews invisible cud, and the third continues to stare. Nothing. *Fine.*

Suddenly the fat one – the foremost, he knows from their file – has a shovel in her hand. She moves quickly, almost alluringly, until she is grasping his arm and her skin is sandpaper and the shovel is in his hands large for grasping. 'Love, we gave ye a good price for the house. Will you dig out something for us? We lost it years back and've remembered where tis.' She tightens her grip. *Are her nails drawing blood? Yes? Oh.*

Sitka Spruce Plantation, Ireland by William Bock

He finds himself cutting into the soil; it is dry, and does not weep. His arms become jelly. It is perverse; murderous; wondrous. The sisters watch around him, as the conifers bow ever inwards. Eventually he throws away the shovel and dives into the soil, as the old instincts kick in. They speak above him all the while.

'Why did we bury her in *parkbawn*?'

'This isn't parkbawn you eejit, this is *barnawee.*'

'Barnawee? My teeth have more gaps than this place. Not a gust of wind here either.'

'Gobshites the both of you. Sure tisn't barnawee tis *barnaneeg.*'

'What'd that make it?'

'Deer gap.'

'Not a deer here.'

'Not a wind here either.'

'You're both wrong anyway. 'Tis *riskamoge* we buried her in.'

'It's *reyinscavoge.*'

'Fuck off with that. Oul' Long John gave you that one, man is far gone. Probably had his teeth in wrong. Sure his people are blow-ins.'

'I'm telling you he's right.'

'Gwan down to the *halla* so and move in with him.'

'I will so.'

Ring Fort, Ireland by William Bock

When he wakes he is digging. When he dreams, he is digging. He is digging for seconds, hours, years, unending, for a single instance lolling in the ecstasy of youth that once was. Brown beautiful needles and stems and fibrous roots and humus; great writhing clay temples and sandstone boulder gods.

> Dig too deep, and old monsters arise. A musky, oxygen-rich scent rises from the spoil heaps. Wild garlic and buttercups are sprouting

A scratch; nails against limestone.

He blinks, stumbles. Hands on the scruff of his neck, and he is dragged from the hole. No more than three feet deep. The sisters jump in as he watches from the dirt pile above. Like three rats with great cancerous growths on the backs, they scrape away at the emerging structure, meticulous and frenzied. Toasters and blankets fall from their backs. Their breath heaves through the clearing, rebounding off the conifer wall. The clearing becomes church, the heaving a requiem chant.

The well within is dry. The corpse inside its tumbled drystone wall is badly wrapped in black tarpaulin, with lumps of clay sticking to eyelashes and little gleaming slugs feasting round the fleshy diaphragm.

They rewrap the body with slow, waltzing flourishes; a well-practised dance. They emerge from the hole, walking downhill; each sister with a hand on the tarpaulin, whose load swings between them, almost as if swaying by itself.

They sing. Beautiful and terrible. Off-key.

Sallie Woodland, Ireland by William Bock

'*Moy more iss tolock*
Far marve in awr gyle
Sooleen sa farkeen
Iss droleen an ayle!'

'Come on mammy, one last dance!'

'Off to ride the furze!'

May Daily #31, Graveyard, Ireland by William Bock

*

He sits, and hours pass. He is alone. Placenames ring through his head.

Dig too deep, and old monsters arise. A musky, oxygen-rich scent rises from the spoil heaps. Wild garlic and buttercups are sprouting. A film of water has risen to the pebbly base of the well. Bubbles pop and stutter as it slowly rises.

Standing, he heaves. Pine needles spew from his mouth, covered in sticky, resinous bile. He blinks, breathes, and for the first time looks down at his great beautiful hands. The man takes a step, leaving the clearing that was once *Bearna Luachra*. He walks down the mountain.

*

Two overseers look out over the hills in horror. The flood came from nowhere, carrying with it the shallow-rooted sitkas in a groaning, heaving march, a slow sluggish army or brown listless tsunami sprawling downwards. The trees move past them almost casually, as if out for an evening stroll. They wobble and bend with the current as half-buried legs flailing above-ground. The mountain itself is coming undone.

It's a matter of hours until the mudslide reaches the city. Reports have been flowing in; felling machines have been wrecked, bridges bombed and broken. Willows, furze and bluebells are sprouting in the deadzones. The surviving sitkas are being cut – no, fucking *chewed* – by something in the plantations.

A mad prophet is wandering through the forests, into the lowlands, to preach dangerous names.

If you take out an annual subscription to Dark Mountain you can buy this issue for a reduced price.

Exquisite Corpse – Collaboration Process:

The story began with William's desire to explore the concept of *meitheal* (an Irish term for neighbours gathering to save the hay, crops, turf) and Micheál's anger at the Irish commercial forestry model.

We wanted to see how these two forces would react with one another – how to mediate between a human culture that is oral and diverse, and a resource extraction process that is silent and monolithic. What is our contribution to the Ark as west-Irelanders?

One answer: through native place names, invocation of land, and the suggestion of direct action. The place names are all real field names. These ones are in the East Clare hills, now consumed by forestry – the form no longer reflects the name.

The photographs were taken by William while walking, observing, interacting with the landscape. They are located in a Sitka plantation in West Cork: two recent images taken in native Irish woodlands in Skibbereen and Co. Clare and two taken during lockdown in May 2020.

Ultimately, this piece is a desperate scream from its authors, who believe that if one digs deep enough and speaks these names, old wells can erupt and sweep away these monocultures.

William Bock is an interdisciplinary artist working internationally exploring relationships between people and the environments they inhabit. He uses photography, field recording, performance and installation to delve into the experiences of living between cultures, landscapes and identities in the context of a changing climate. William is recipient of the 2022 Irish Arts Council Arts Participation Bursary. williambock.com

Voices of Ochre

We are excited to reveal the publication of our twenty-second book, available now from our online shop. The Autumn 2022 all-colour special issue takes the shape of an ARK with a cargo of testimonies, stories and artwork gleaned after the flood. The edition was in part formed by the collaborations between artists from the Wilderness Art Collective and Dark Mountain writers. Here WAC artist Catalina Christensen discusses ochre practices with Heidi Gustafson from the Ochre Sanctuary, alongside their pigment collections and artwork.

Ochre Steel by Heidi Gustafson
Catalina Christensen and Heidi Gustafson
Catalina is a Colombian artist based in London and inspired by nature. IShe is creating a pigment collection that started with Colombian pigments and now also contains pigments from Spain and the UK and from other pigment people around the world. Heidi is an artist and ochre specialist based in the rainy, volcanic Cascade foothills of rural northern Washington, USA.
31st October, 2022

- FROM OUR BOOKS
- ISSUE 22 – ARK
- UNCIVILISED ARTS

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Catalina Christensen and Heidi Gustafson are artistic researchers who gather and keep collectives of ochres – rocks, clay, vials of dust and muck — in their respective studios in the UK and US. Catalina, a member of the Wilderness Art Collective, collects and makes pigments as an art practice. Heidi looks after an Ochre Sanctuary, which holds hundreds of ochres sent from citizens worldwide, like a creative earth seed bank.

We think of ochres and earth pigments as kin and as creative power. We listen to ochre talk. Our paintings speak rock. Sometimes we translate further. Sometimes we

don't know what is going on. This primal art of taking rock to paint is very old, as old as humanity. We are in a 300,000-year-old lineage of people leaving a colourful mark behind – an ancient creative process we seek to carry, protect and continue for generations to come.

These paintings are made from two places, geologic landforms. We tried to let them talk to one another. Catalina made hers first. Then Heidi's ochres responded. Instead of trying to translate them, we thought it best to share our process and let the pigments speak for themselves.

HG
Tell me about where your ochres are from?

CC
I was born in Colombia. From an early age I have been interested in rocks and colour. My family used to visit the small town of Villa de Leyva that is surrounded by a desert called La Candelaria, where you could collect fossils and where colourful rocks were scattered all over the ground. Today, the fossils are long gone, but the colourful rocks are still there. The ochres in the painting and display come from this desert. The area was a sea until the rise of the Andes millions of years ago, as a result of the collision between the continental South American Plate and the oceanic Nazca Plate. Once the water receded, the area was covered with the marine fossils and ochres.

An unexpected encounter with some rock paintings, made by the Muisca people who inhabited the area until the Spanish conquest in the 16th century, formed the inspiration to start gathering and processing the ochres to use in my works. The Muiscas created a series of petroglyphs and pictographs utilising red pigments made from cinnabar and ochres, as well as charcoal and chalk. There are also many Muisca sacred places in the area. Unfortunately, during the 1530s many leaders and members of the community were massacred and a heavy process of acculturation resulted in the loss of many of their traditions. For example, the Muisca language was prohibited in 1770. My work with pigments has allowed me to connect with the spiritual leader of the Muiscas, Suaga Gua Ingativa Neusa, and their efforts to be recognised and to protect and share their patrimony and ancestral knowledge.

Catalina Christensen – Pigments
Heidi Gustafson – Pigments

CC
And you? Where are yours from?

HG

I was born and raised in north-west Washington (Duwamish and Coast Salish ancestral land), and I live a couple hours from one of the first steel-making plants probably on the entire West Coast. The land carries trauma of my culture (Euro-American), and these are places I feel ancestrally important to connect to. To make steel you have to cut down old-growth forests for fuel, and mine land to get the ochres and rocks that are incinerated into molten iron. Steel, of course, is what scaffolds civilization's dangerous and wild expansions (railroads, nails, weapons, industrial machines and on and on into today).

Today this place is a beach where the waves gently come ashore with an orange glow, from bacteria that live off the iron that has sunk into the sand. Signs say it is an unsafe place, but to me it's a beautiful place in recovery. I gathered a few ochre rocks that had escaped their fate as steel, a brick from the old beehive charcoal kiln, and the very smoky-smelling old-growth charcoal that has transformed into soil that grows yarrow and grasses and deliquescing ink mushrooms on the banks.

HG

Could you share how you process your ochres into pigment?

CC

The ochres are gathered and separated by colour and then washed. Afterwards each colour is ground by hand in a similar way to how it has been done over the centuries. I utilise a bigger stone and fossils to do the grinding, always leaving a small rock for reference. I use a sieve to separate the different particle sizes. Afterwards, each size is washed to get rid of impurities, by mixing with water and letting the pigment sink to the bottom, then discharging the water until it is clear. Then they are poured and smeared into a thin layer in slabs and left to dry. A final grinding is done and the pigments are ready to be used or stored.

Ancestral Connection by Catalina Christensen

For me, the gathering and processing of the ochres is an artistic endeavour. The created pigments are as important as the works created with them, and that is why I like to include pigments in my exhibitions. Rocks and pigments are intrinsically linked with humans; it is a primal relationship, but most people are too busy and distant from nature to engage with it.

Working with ochres connects me to our ancestors and allows me to preserve an ancient tradition that started in Kenya over 285,000 years ago. It also enables me to

show the beauty of the Earth, and hopefully inspire people to protect it as well as preserve the ancient sites of our ancestors.

HG

I agree with you. And I process mine similarly, minus all the extra refinement. I just ask the rocks if they mind being crushed. And thank them. I break a little bit in a mortar until it is fine. Sieve. And add water. Pray for Earth.

The Ones Still Dancing When the Lights Go Out

Two poems from our latest issue

We are excited to reveal the publication of our twenty-second book, available now from our online shop.. The Autumn 2022 all-colour special issue takes the shape of an ARK with a cargo of testimonies, stories and artwork gleaned after the flood. Over the next few weeks we'll be sharing a selection of pieces from its pages. Today Theophilus Kwek and Michael Guida apply their sharp poetic eye to the more than human worlds of insects, reptiles and song birds in times of extinction. With artwork by Lousia Crispin.

Glimpses by Louisa Crispin
Michael Guida and Theophilus Kwek
Michael is a writer and historian of nature in modern British culture. His first book is *Listening to British Nature: Wartime, Radio & Modern Life, 1914– 1945* (Oxford, 2022). Theophilus has published four poetry collection and his work has appeared in the Guardian, Times Literary Supplement, Mekong Review and elsewhere. Hs latest collection is *Moving House* (Carcanet Press).
27th October, 2022

- DARK VERSE
- FROM OUR BOOKS
- ISSUE 22 – ARK

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Parable of Feet and Wings

They're at it again, the pair of them,
scuttle and cackle and scuttle and hiss,
spooky because it's coming through
the rolled-up poster I've stashed behind
my desk. All month long, nights flush
with hot rain, then first thing you see
the room's four corners slick with wings,
bones from a feast. From somewhere
down the labyrinth that's under my bed –
a guilty laugh. Or not: nature's appetite,
says Dad, as he sweeps the glistening
film off the floor. Each perfect teardrop
snapped at the stem, a parachute made
to land a body somewhere safe or catch
a drift of tropical air above a reading-
lamp. Here, you'd best get used to it.
The cloud of ants, the geckoes' joy,
small carnage. That's all there is to it.

⊠

I think of a time when, clad unwillingly
in green, I stood sentry for a night in
a whitewashed post watching the shut
gates of the camp. Just keeping awake,
barely, the sharp knob of a rifle's scope
slung against my ribs. Across the hard
grey square of the floor with their heads
bitten clean were the carcasses of ants –
often, with feet and wings intact. The
culprits? They made a whole show of it:
now slouching in wait beneath the light's
bare electric coil, now tussling in full
view over a spent creature's parts. Not
for any lack but seemingly, the fun of it.
When the sky softened into morning
the others found me still transfixed,
by the sight of the night's last travellers
falling, exhausted, then hauled away.

⊠

Harmless, really. And even sometimes a picture of good, the way they build whole civilisations out of the soil. Industrious. Not without grounds, our own distrust builds – against their flightier cousins who shimmer about the lights. In the dimming years of Empire, some would later say, the chandeliers at the Raffles ballroom had never burned so bright. Oh, look how they burned. In the days that followed we learned nothing lasts in these parts except what takes to the earth unseen, gnaws through mud till the foundations hold. (Not in this heat anyway, which has felled kings and their men.) I digress. It is the heat that draws both the geckoes and their prey, long-limbed and free, the ones still dancing when the lights go out.

⊠

Imagine my surprise when I found out that these winged apparitions were not a different breed. When the storms come, a colony has two choices. Lose the walls and chambers of their mud-slicked nest to wet decay, or send their best sojourners out – doves from an ark – that elsewhere some hardy offshoot of their own might burrow, thrive. A mystery, if only to our earthbound eyes, that love by any other name is flight. (Now, how much more vicious in this light appears the geckoes' appetites! Though this too, may be a trick of the eyes.) Stoop close and see. How fraught and, unburdened by metaphor, how free: each whip of a tail, each graceful taking to the air; which ones each season leave earth behind, and yet are there.

– Theophilus Kwek

Video Player

00:00

04:47

Theophilus Kwek reads his poem for the recent ARK launch

***

Song Lines

There was the time when the bush-bustle and chatter by the road at St Saviour's Priory stopped you. A pulse of voices and wing work. That streaming of little brown birds from this bush to another and then back again. Their force field held you there.

How, though, to move on from this roadside fascination? Wait a while until something of this has settled inside and you can walk off with it, that's how.

Over the years you found the scintillations of birdlife had taken nest within the chest cavity where they continued to twitch and twitter as you went along. A sparrow even was good enough to have made a lasting impression and taken lodge within you. Together you made song lines through the streets.

Oh, but modern birds have been downed and poisoned and chased away. Bits of birds accumulated under hedgerows during the worst winters and the fatal seasons of flu. But still they came out with their tunes after everything, freshening up the sky, musicking our minds. Sometimes they could only be imagined through the great roar of civilisation. Yet they were so often with us. The freckled song thrush anyway could not stop his exuberant repertoire. He had been calling out each year since hominid ears first pricked into sensation, giving education in elocution and aesthetics.

When we could, we trapped those declamations of the air, brought them indoors for close communion. Possession brought attention. Side 1A: nightingale, cuckoo. Side 1B: blackbird, throstle, pied woodpecker (drum), green woodpecker. Side 2A: robin, wren, dunnock, turtledove, woodpigeon. Side 2B: chaffinch, willow wren, whitethroat, great tit. Knowledge and delight.

Solidified now, there were others to hear from the archive. Skylark in the air, skylark on the ground, curlew, woodlark, tree pipit, redstart, blue tit, willow tit, chiffchaff, mistle thrush, stock dove, heron, nightjar, wood wren, blackcap, garden warbler, little owl, carrion crow, jackdaw, jay, magpie, rook. A catalogue, a library, a vault of cosmic waves frozen in black shellac.

Today at least a blackbird on his bent aerial will still broadcast into the evening scene. In turn, another orange beak within sight and earshot makes his contribution as the first bird pauses. This reasoned to and fro between rivals remains a bloodless performance of rights. Up there on the rooftops, these two call beyond territory, messaging to the gods. They are intermediaries to a symposium in the sky. That is why we need to listen.

You heard once a flute made from the femur of a dead bird sing out a lonely, bleached sound. But we have no feathers or hollow bones in our pockets to take with us. Those charms were lost. Yet something of the songs remains within and without. Some must become anthems, sung by all creaturely comrades (them and us) until the bells ring in tune. All the worldly crowd breathing and singing together. How else to remember?

– Michael Guida

If you take out an annual subscription to Dark Mountain you can buy this issue of ARK for a reduced price.

IMAGE – Louisa Crispin
The FlightPath
Graphite on paper
The FlightPath series explores the materiality of graphite media whilst considering the plight of our less popular insects. The narrative is focused on wildlife corridors, the importance of a network of routes between habitats to ensure diversity, and aims to resolve the tension between abstraction and figuration while encouraging open discussion. These concertina sculptures have focused my attention on the barriers to nature as I catch glimpses of insects between the folds and struggle to find empty space to draw a fly within the marks. It'sbecome a metaphor for the struggle in nature but also a symbol of hope as conversations begin.

Entranced by the cycle of growth and decay, artist **Louisa Crispin** captures the details on beautiful smooth paper using ultra sharp pencils and graphite powder. She is a member of the Free Painters and Sculptors, the Society of Graphic Fine Art and a Fellow of the Society of Botanical Artists. She sells her work mainly through selected galleries in the UK. louisacrispin.co.uk

Keepers of the Spring

We are excited to reveal the publication of our twenty-second book, available now from our online shop. The Autumn 2022 all-colour special issue takes the shape of an ARK with a cargo of testimonies, stories and artwork gleaned after the flood. Over the next few weeks we'll be sharing a selection of pieces from its pages. Today Dark Mountain artist Caroline Ross tends an ancient well in a practice of ceremony and reflection, dwelling on the role of women as water guardians and ancestral story keepers. With artwork by US riverkeeper Basia Irland from the 'Gathering of the Waters' projects.

Basia Irland: Saskatchewan River Delta Backpack Repository. Canada
Caroline Ross
is a natural materials artist and tai chi teacher living on the south coast of England. She is a member of the Wilderness Art Collective and a regular contributor to Dark Mountain.
20th October, 2022

- FROM OUR BOOKS
- ISSUE 22 – ARK

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Earlier that day I had begun to clean the well, or spring, or spring-fed ten-foot-long watercourse (no one agrees on what to call it). Overlooked by fishing huts in a cove tucked away on the Isle of Portland, Dorset, it doesn't have a saint's name or even a common name, as far as I can tell. I'd been coming to the cove frequently for a couple of years, learning to fish, learning to rest, sleeping with the sound of the sea and waking to the call of the kestrel as it hunted for lizards. That year, I often felt drawn to sit beside the well in the shade of the pollard ash, and wondered if it had always been filled with the strange rounded oblong quarry rubble pebbles that cover the beach and which children feel obliged to throw into the water.

For no real reason I could explain, other than a strong physical urge, I began to remove a few of the hundreds of stones from the watercourse. Then, wearing rubber gloves, crocs, combat trousers and an old T-shirt, the day passed in meditative heavy lifting, subliminal grunting, and the occasional curse when I found broken glass or litter. The rubbish went in my bin, to be packed up the 150 stone steps to the bins at the clifftop later. The pebbles formed a huge mound to the side – I would deal with these the next day. After two hours, I was sitting on the top step looking down at what was now a small pool of slowly clearing fresh water, wondering how I could move all the silt and sand that had built up over the years, which now muddied the well.

After a mug of tea, I got the broom from my hut, and slowly, like some eccentric Zen cleaning lady, developed a way to sweep the detritus down to the outflow. I couldn't just sweep; all the eddies would immediately return the mud to the source of the movement in fractal patterns straight out of the Mandelbrot set. Somehow, incredibly slowly, I had to push the silt down, then, suddenly draw the broom back to form a barrier to the backflow of the dirty water. If I hurried, the well silted up. If I did not sweep at all, the well remained silted up. I could not have asked for a better koan.

> After a mug of tea, I got the broom from my hut, and slowly, like some eccentric Zen cleaning lady, developed a way to sweep the detritus down to the outflow

Two hours later, tired and quiet, I sat back down to look at the first sparkling white sand I had ever seen in the well, at the bottom of two newly excavated old stone steps. As I was staring into the water, feeling the ache in my back and looking at the holes in my gloves, a woman in old shorts, sporting a deep tan and thick black mascara approached the standpipe tap by the well and said, 'The steps go deeper down, you know, there's another two. Glad to see you're doing that now. I used to do that, but I can't now since my hysterectomy, see. It's always such cold water, mum used to send me down here every day to collect it for the bucket to keep the milk jug cold. It always runs, it's the only year-long running water on the whole island, this is. Really special, it is. Shame about the rubbish, the kids, they don't know anymore. Think it just comes out of a tap. Don't give it any thought. Anyway, as I said, so glad you're doing that now. I'm Margery, what's your name? Caroline? You have the huts just here, don't you? Anyway, going to go catch the last of the sun now. Nice to meet you. See you later. You're doing a great job there. Bye, love, bye.'

My face prickled and the hairs on the back of my neck stood up as I watched Margery flip-flop away between the toilet block and the front beach huts to catch the afternoon sun before it tucked behind the south cliffs of the cove. Everything I thought I knew about myth, responsibility and transmission was thrown upside down in an instant by this affable Dorset woman.

And with my ears ringing, and something between a sob and a giggle in my chest, it occurred to me that it is nothing like it says in the books. When the old keeper of

the holy well passes on the sacred task of protecting the waters, there aren't any capes or bells or dancing cherubs or goblets of wine, nor any ceremony beyond the unselfconscious, convivial oversharing that ordinary Dorset people recognise as *good manners*. As I sat, sweaty and scratched, in my baggy army-surplus trousers, I remembered all those Pre-Raphaelite paintings (which I secretly loved as a teen, and still love, despite myself) full of adolescent pale naiads, surrounded by their long, untangled hair. And I thought, Dante Gabriel Rosetti and J.W. Waterhouse would not be at all impressed with my scant bleach blonde ponytail and lack of flowing robes.

Only months before, while in the Cairngorm Mountains, I had been talking to the writer and performer Dougie Strang of his plan to visit ancient wells and springs in his native Scotland and to clean them. To return to the seasonal practice of our ancestors, which was to clear, maintain and protect our local water sources in the many thousands of places in the British Isles and Ireland where water rises to the surface as a spring and flows into streams or gathers in wells. These sources are the original holy places of these islands and their fresh, clean waters sustained both humans and all creatures.

Welsh myths and many stories from around the British Isles and Ireland speak of a time before keepers of the wells were disrespected. Traditionally women, the guardians of fresh water were always to be treated with reverence and never to be threatened. The stories also say that there came a time when warlords, bandits and eventually ordinary people no longer kept to this sacred agreement. This is when curses rained down on the land. It may be that these are allegories for a moment in history where land use and 'ownership' changed dramatically. When social mores and reverence for nature, as a place full of gods and spirits, changed to other ways of seeing the earth, and the transition to a faraway, authoritarian male god.

What is certain is that we are still in the era of disrespecting water. My own local water board has been fined millions of pounds for pumping raw sewage into the sea and rivers. The Environment Agency in England, the public body statutorily tasked with protecting the land, air and waters, has just publicly stated it no longer has enough funding to follow up any but the most egregious or toxic examples of pollution. Wild swimmers come home ill with gastric bugs caught from untreated human effluent. Not a single river in my country is considered entirely safe to swim in.

> Traditionally women, the guardians of fresh water were always to be treated with reverence and never to be threatened

It is not only neglect; it is amnesia. The UK has countless places named for springs, wells, rivers and bodies of water, or with one of the ancient words for water in a landscape embedded in the name. To name a handful: Liverpool, Blackpool, Wells, Bath, Puddletown, Oxford, my hometown of Bournemouth (literally, 'where the stream meets the sea'). Along with the many iterations of words for 'hill', water is perhaps the most common aspect of a name for a village, town or city in the country. And yet we move around our landscape as though the waters did not exist or were merely an encumbrance to the free flow of traffic.

In 2009 Transport for London (TfL) caused uproar by removing the River Thames from public transport maps, deeming it unnecessary and causing the map to be 'too cluttered'. Due to public demand, the light blue graphic representation of the Thames was swiftly reintroduced and still winds its famous looping shape across all official transport maps. The Thames is the geographical border between north and south London and is the great river into which all the smaller rivers of London drain. It is not a simulacrum. In seeking to obliterate the simple visual representation of the real, essential for orientation, TfL's actions were only one of many instances of the abstracting and flattening influence of the machine mindset upon the land.

From the late 1960s to 1970, a new bypass called the Wessex Way was built where I live, passing through Bournemouth and cutting a score of roads in two, permanently dividing the areas of Charminster and Boscombe. My mother, now in her mid-70s, recalls with amusement the consternation of the road builders, when time after time the excavations for the Springbourne underpass kept unexpectedly filling up with water. 'Springbourne' means literally 'where the source of the river rises'. The clue was in the name, or would have been, if they had remembered why things were named originally, based on the physical nature of the land itself. Expensive draining systems and pipes were laid, and after many delays the underpass and roundabout were completed.

Three years ago, the eel returned to the well in the cove. Margery said it used to come every year, and of course she knew it was not the same eel, but the strong physical urge in each new generation of eel was the same. The black eel writhed up the white stone beach and then slid down into the freshwater channel to the source of the spring. Sadly, the sweet water led nowhere for it to spawn. It met cold hard Portland stone right where the water bubbled up, as there are only ten feet of 'stream'. After a day, a local man lifted the eel gently into a sandcastle bucket and released it back into the sea. Until I cleared the channel, it could not have come up, so it felt auspicious that it could visit briefly, following its primal urge, even if it was swiftly returned to the brine.

Later that week, I was doing one of my periodical clean-up days, quietly lugging rocks and sweeping algae and mud, getting covered in gunk. A local girl of around eight or nine years old watched me work.

After a few minutes she walked up and said, 'Can I do that?'

I said, 'Yes, anytime, if you'd like to.'

She replied, 'One day when I'm a grown up, can I be the one who cleans the spring?'

And with a shiver of recognition I said, 'Yes. Yes, of course. Just come and find me.'

IMAGE – Basia Irland, Saskatchewan River Delta Backpack/Repository. Canada 2017. Created within the Saskatchewan River Delta with the help of the Swampy Cree Tribe and professors and students from the University of Saskatchewan.

Constructed from local willow branches and water plants. Bottles attached to buck-skin pouch (gifted to me by a member of the Swampy Cree Tribe) containing native seeds, berries and plants of the region. A pouch fastener made from a deer-chewed branch and glass bottles attached to the outside, which create sound when walking.

The *Gathering of Waters* projects establish cooperative relationships between people and connect diverse cultures along the entire length of rivers, emphasising that we all live downstream, and need to work together to face watershed challenges. The sculptures accompanying these river journeys are wearable 'repositories' constructed from local materials which archive the relics and stories of each river project. They hold the scientific data, canteens, logbooks, watershed maps, water samples for analysis, photographs, video documentaries, and other relevant art objects and information. In this way the diversity of life along the river is celebrated again and again as the canteen and logbook are passed downstream, hand to hand.

Fulbright Scholar **Basia Irland** is an artist, author and activist who creates international water projects. Through her work, Irland offers a creative understanding of water while examining how diverse communities of people, plants, animals and other beings rely on this vital element. She is Professor Emerita, Department of Art, University of New Mexico, where she established the Art & Ecology program. basiairland.com

Kōrero

We are excited to reveal the publication of our twenty-second book available, now from our online shop. The Autumn 2022 all-colour special issue takes the shape of an ARK with a cargo of testimonies, stories and artwork gleaned after the flood. Over the next few weeks we'll be sharing a selection of pieces from its pages. Today, from Aotearoa New Zealand, a conversation between activists: Siana Fitzjohn speaks with mental health nurse Josie Butler about myth, Māori culture, and a threatened Kauri tree. With arboreal artwork by Rainey Straus.

Nest by Rainey Straus
Siana Fitzjohn
is an environmental activist and writer living in Aotearoa, New Zealand. She organises non-violent direct actions in coal mines with Extinction Rebellion, and her latest project is to film industrial fishing trawlers. Siana writes creative non-fiction, often with a focus on loss.
19th October, 2022

- FROM OUR BOOKS
- ISSUE 22 – ARK

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When Josie Butler threw a dildo at Steven Joyce on national news, it hit him square in the face. Josie was a mental health nurse; Steven Joyce was a member of parliament, Minister for Economic Development. It was 2016, on Waitangi grounds, where Te Tiriti had been signed by Māori chiefs and British colonisers. The document was supposed to form the foundation of a functional relationship. It didn't work out that way. In 2016 the National Party was in power, and Josie did what many in Aotearoa might have dreamed of doing if only we'd had the imagination. If anyone deserved to be hit in the face by a large flying rubber cock it was a member of the National Party.

Josie laughs as she recalls, 'I didn't realise I'd hit him in the face.'

Lucky for us, she did.

*

Nine hundred kilometres south, in a garden in Ōtautahi, is a Kauri tree. Fifty year-long rings of life enclose its woody beginning. The man who planted it helped set up an urban community, a small stand against the 'progress' taking place around them. A big red brick house, a smaller bungalow and some cottages, linked by a big garden. The Kauri roots took their tender hold in the earth. Three rings in from the surface of the trunk, Josie and the Kauri meet when she moves into the cottage in the garden.

The man who planted the Kauri had gone on to chair the Waitangi Tribunal, watching the country grapple with a history of broken promises, the guttural cry of cultural genocide too loud for most of us to hear.

*

An online search for the mental health crisis in Aotearoa brings up 14,300,000 results in less than half a second: 'The definition has been expanded to refer to problems in community mental health and in mental health services (MHS) as a whole. A mental health crisis has been widely used to describe the state of New Zealand's mental health.'

It's the river that wandered through your childhood that isn't there anymore.

> With each ring of light and water turned to wood, the community came and went from the big red brick house in the garden

*

Josie rolls a cigarette.

'I wasn't always going to become a nurse. I was working in England and heard about what was happening in Sudan and decided I wanted to help people. My boss at the time suggested nursing. I don't like biology or maths or needles or blood, but I flipped a coin and the coin said yes. It's the coin I use for all big life decisions.'

She takes a coin from her bag. 1933. 'I found it when I was peeing on the side of the road in Port Levy. After I did my training I kept getting in trouble for spending too much time with patients, having big yarns with them when I was only meant to be taking their blood pressure. So it made sense for me to become a mental health nurse.' She laughs. 'I like talking with people.'

*

In the garden, the Kauri edged slowly wider with each long breath. Pushed into the soil, stretched into the sky. People in the community gave birth to others and buried placentas at the foot of the trees in the garden.

It's the land of your soul giving way. The soils of the psyche loosened when the trees were stripped back.

*

'We have ten suicides a year in hospital. One of my patients was standing with a noose around her neck so I started singing Beyoncé's "I'm a Survivor". And yeah...', Josie chuckles, 'it worked. She's still alive.'

*

With each ring of light and water turned to wood, the community came and went from the big red brick house in the garden. In an early ring of growth, the community hosted early meetings of the anti-apartheid movement. To the Kauri, their movements are fleeting as the rustle of leaves in a north-west breeze.

It's a mountain removed. The peak of joy in your heart levelled flat. You're nowhere you know. And nowhere knows you.

*

Josie shrugs, puts the cigarette in the corner of her mouth and reaches for a lighter. 'The majority of mental health issues come from colonisation. And Māori get treated differently in every single health and social service. I had one Māori patient who called the police because her partner had just beaten her up. She ran away from the house and when the cops drove past they saw her hiding, and arrested her for an unrelated crime in another part of town. It took ages for them to work out that they'd made a mistake. She lost all trust in the police after that, of course. And that's a standard day,' Josie pauses. 'Imagine trying to navigate that system without anyone to advocate for you – even *with* someone to advocate for you.'

In 2019, Josie let off a flare on parliament grounds.

*

In the garden, 11 rings back in the memory of the Kauri tree, there was a shake. The community shook. The big red brick house shook. Everything shook. The Kauri roots gripped the liquefying soil and held, as the earth shook the city from its foundations. In the red brick house, cracks appeared. Slowly, the cracks grew through the community too. The big brick house is too costly to make safe again and there's talk of selling up and leaving. The Kauri goes on growing.

It's a forest burned down. Your mind's canopy ablaze, neural pathways smoking.

*

Josie flicks her lighter, inhales.

'I love that Kauri. It made me feel connected to the history and the lifeforce of the land, part of what we call the *mauri*. It holds a bit of the essence of all those who have been there, in my mind it's a badass anti-capitalist mauri. A young girl who lived in the commune many years ago died of leukaemia, and the community wrote messages to her and placed some of her special treasures under another tree in the garden, the golden totara. That tree holds part of her memory.' She flicks ash into a glass tray on a wooden barrel. 'During the first lockdown I had to isolate because of being a nurse, so my only companions were the trees. I sat in the garden and watched the birds and wildlife that call them home. When I'd come home from work I would talk to the trees and tell them about my day. Over time I've watched them grow, and grown to love them.'

*

Josie presses herself to the bark. Time that passes through the community settles into layers of the Kauri's trunk. With each brush of a hand across bark, each tread in the soil above the root tips, each drip of sweat flicked towards its trunk. Somewhere

amongst those early wooden rings is the one where the community hosted the first meetings of the anti-nuclear movement. A few rings out from the centre, the first meeting for Women's Refuge was held in the red brick house, while the Kauri grew gently nearby

Our mental health crisis. A flood with no ark waiting.

*

Josie lets out a long exhale. 'The thing that led to me becoming an activist was a patient of mine. She'd been raped and was trying to get through to the helplines but nobody picked up. After her seventh call didn't get picked up, she attempted suicide. That happened because the National Party cut funding to rape crisis and domestic violence services. That's when I started getting political.'

*

In the beginning, Papatūānuku Earth Mother and Ranginui Sky Father were bound in a tight embrace.

'But yeah, I love that Kauri. I used to *hongi* it daily.'

There they may have remained, love-locked, if it weren't for a tree.

'Then one of my patients killed themselves...'

The Kauri tree pushed apart the entwined lovers.

'...and two weeks later another patient ended up... I can't talk about it.'

And, as it grew, light streamed into the world.

'And I couldn't do it anymore.'

When the Kauri tree pushed Papatūānuku and Ranginui apart, freshwater flowed into the world for the first time.

*

It's night time in the garden. The city noises are far away and the grass is silver with dew. A Kauri tree is held by a human in a long embrace. The rough of the bark against her cheek. Fifty years of life hold solid in her arms. Fifty years of roots spread beneath her feet in the soil. The branches grow out above her head. Point to the sky. Tears run down the trunk.

Inside the Kauri's core it's dark. The middle made of light, where light no longer exists. What exists there, in the dead centre. What's it like there. Can we be there? In the centremost thread of the Kauri, woven into its beginning. Still. Surrounded by time turned solid. No light to touch us until we are laid open. By decay or by windfall. Or chainsaw.

Our mental health crisis. Losing the person who gave colour to your life.

*

Josie looks away. 'I took a couple of weeks off work but decided I couldn't go back. So I applied to be the nurse at the local *marae*. It's a few minutes' walk from home. And I got two ducks. They're a bit of happiness in my world.'

She takes a drag of her smoke. 'Finally I can practice mental health using Māori methods. There is one woman I see who's severely psychotic, and we figured out it was a spiritual issue, so we got her spiritual healing, and it has massively reduced her

psychosis. That's unheard of without medication. At my old workplace we'd have been expected to medicate her heavily.'

Josie stubs out the cigarette. 'I dunno if this is relevant, but before I see a patient I check in with the universe, to make sure it's not just me.'

*

Some members of the community decide they want to sell the garden, the trees, the big red brick house and the cottages. The earth the Kauri holds in its roots. The ring upon ring of its history. The living outer layer of its present.

Our mental health crises are threads of life undone, yet to be woven back into the fabric of the world.

*

> *It's a mountain removed. The peak of joy in your heart levelled flat. You're nowhere you know. And nowhere knows you*

We get drunk in the big red brick house by candlelight. A small heater struggles to heat the ballroom, with its wooden floors and high ceilings. Shadows flick over the peeling walls.

'All that history has created a mauri. A lifeforce in the land. That's what makes me feel connected. I don't live on my ancestral land. It felt special to find land in Ōtautahi that I could feel that connection and belonging to. That's why I've found the process of a predominantly Pākehā group strongly pushing to sell the land so hard.'

Josie takes a spray can from her bag.

'They want to move on and get the most money they can from selling. Which means it will go to a developer and the whole thing will get bowled most likely. Even though one of the founding principles of the community was that it would be anti-capitalist. Even though this place has all this activist history.'

She shakes the can and traces on the torn wallpaper:

Josie

Ngapuhi

Muaupoko

Loves i tenei kainga

'It's the trees I care about. If the land gets sold they'll be gone so quickly. I think it's pretty special to have a Kauri tree that old in the heart of the city. And all those people whose placentas are buried underneath the trees – they should probably be told that those trees could be cut down, maybe it will affect them? But at the community meeting I got told that I was trying to use my Māori perspective to get my own way.'

The morning comes late. Grey and dusty. Josie groans.

'I should go apologise to the heritage building I graffitied.'

*

Fire Clearing by Rainey Straus

The human hugs the Kauri. The tree that grew through five decades of community comings and goings from the garden, a garden that knew them. The Kauri, so quiet to quick listeners. So slow to fast movers. So old to the short-lived. Relatives of this Kauri have lived a 50-year-long life 50 times over. She packs her belongings and leaves.

Our mental health crisis is land let down. And people.

*

'That's why they call it the fight with no end,' Josie gestures. 'But you're not alone. You're part of a huge thing.'

*

When Josie Butler threw a dildo at Steven Joyce it hit him square in the face on national television. It was 2016, on Waitangi grounds. Josie was a mental health nurse and Steven Joyce was a member of parliament. The National Party was in power, and Josie did what many in Aotearoa might have dreamed of doing if only we'd had the imagination.

She laughs as she recalls: 'I'd wanted to throw it at John Key but he never showed up. I was ready to go to jail and everything, got my flatmates to show me how to make a shiv out of a toothbrush.'

If anyone deserved to be hit in the face by a large flying rubber cock in 2016 it was Prime Minister John Key. His government repealed protection for trees in urban environments. They fell in their thousands, still falling.

*

In the beginning, Papatūānuku Earth Mother and Ranginui Sky Father were bound in a tight embrace. There they may have remained, love-locked, if it weren't for a Kauri. The tree pushed apart the entwined lovers and, as it grew, light streamed into the world.

Trunk toppled and rootless. Roots clinging to the earth with no body to hold steady. Our mental health crisis is a tree cut down. Tree that held the sky aloft. Tree that stopped the earth rushing up to swallow you whole. Earth and sky collapse with us between them.

With each tree fall we edge towards the dark.

IMAGE – Rainey Straus

Nest / Fire Clearings #1

Cyanotype

These artworks are artefacts of my desire to know the land. My process involves walking sites repeatedly and producing multiple images at points along a trail. I use the cameraless cyanotype process to make images and, later in the studio, combine these

impressions into larger compositions that express the hidden energies of a site. Nest was created at my home in California and Fire Cleaning #1 at Point Reyes National Seashore.

Rainey Straus has shown artwork at the Yerba Buena Centre for the Arts, the San Jose Museum of Art, and the Canadian Design Exchange Museum. Publications include Aeonian Magazine, Unpsychology Magazine, and Sculpture Magazine. She holds a BFA from SUNY Purchase and an MFA from the California College of the Arts.

Issue 21

We are excited to reveal the publication of our twenty-first book, available now from our online shop. The Spring 2022 issue is a collection of non-fiction, fiction, poetry and artwork that revolves around the theme of confluence. Over the next few weeks we'll be sharing a selection of pieces from its pages. Today, we bring you the editorial, with cover artwork by Cecily Eno.

The Editors

15th April, 2022

Watersmeet

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus used a term to explain existence: *panta rhea*, 'everything flows'. Things and people never *are,* but are always 'becoming'. Yet constant change is disturbing to human minds caught in dualities, and, when threatened with upheaval, many of us seek refuge in illusions of stability. According to Heraclitus this is a fool's errand – like flowing water, we are always 'coming to be and departing'. Everything is in flux, nothing in existence stays the same: 'It is impossible to step into the same river twice.'

Two and a half thousand years later, the botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer described the 'grammar of animacy' running through the Potawatomi language. The word 'bay' is not a noun, something fixed, but a verb – *wiikwegamaa*, 'to *be* a bay' – with the implication that 'for this moment, the living water has decided to shelter itself between these shores, conversing with cedar roots and a flock of baby mergansers. Because it could do otherwise—become a stream or an ocean or a waterfall.' All are possible verbs, she writes, in a world where everything is alive.

To the Western rationalist mind, this can be slippery, hard to grasp. The extractive civilisation currently laying waste to the planet not only depends, in large part, on denying the animacy of anything that isn't human, but also on fixed, stable states and tidy definitions: human and animal; civilised and wild; animate and inanimate; subject and object. Yet ironically this culture's actions are making reality ever *less* stable, as the composition of the atmosphere changes and the very fabric of life unravels – inviting another, darker 'becoming' that imperils our own survival. That is one of the human dilemmas we explore in this book. How do we learn to merge with and adapt to what threatens to undo us?

How do we learn to merge with and adapt to what threatens to undo us?

Dark Mountain's 21st issue takes its inspiration from *confluence*: the act or process of blending together; the meeting of two rivers. The image of watersmeet, archetypal and evocative, can be found throughout the book, but we also sought writing and artwork that goes beyond watery metaphors and investigates confluences that happen at other levels.

From the United States come modern-day lycanthropy tales, convergences between human and animal. This merging of realities is reflected in Esther May Campbell's photographs of children and animals overlapping at dawn and dusk, meeting spatially but not temporally, while the artwork of Gustaf Broms collides the human with the

arboreal. In Jane Smith's decidedly urban story of a pigeon trapped in a supermarket, we see an example of a synanthrope, an animal that has adapted to the human environment. Such inter-species minglings have the effect of breaking down boundaries, but they also have affective impacts that run in the other direction, reminding how far we have removed ourselves from all that is wild – and with what consequences.

There are human confluences here, too: between generations, between conceptions of relationship and between epistemologies. One short story observes the interchange between two individuals from the locked-in viewpoint of an elder whose brain injury leaves her unable to communicate verbally with her adult daughter, yet radically open to the more-than-human. Wren Schulte follows a river back through time in search of ancestors who can bear the weight of intergenerational trauma, while elsewhere we are introduced to oddkin relationships that defy the usual social categorisations. An interview with the writer and critic Minna Salami opens up the perspectives of intersectional black feminism on knowledge and environmental breakdown, and explores the generative possibilities of learning to think with rivers.

We bring you dispatches from far-flung locations: from squelching Panamanian swamps to an Alaskan mountain range – and from there to the icy moons of Jupiter. From Ireland, Kate Moore introduces us to the 'geomyth' and points in the landscape that, like *axis mundi*, join the present and past to the mythic, this world to the Otherworld. Meanwhile in Antarctica, with the 'Doomsday Glacier' on the point of collapse, Stephanie Krzywonos explores the ruins of Cold War dreams to bring nuclear power to the so-called 'last great wilderness'. The idea of disastrous nuclear convergence is also broached in Jonathan Travelstead's poem about the 'liquidators' sacrificed in the Chernobyl clean-up attempt, and in Oliver Raymond Barker's photographs of the land around Britain's only nuclear submarine base – images brought to light by a backpack-mounted camera obscura.

Other contributions to this book delve deep into the human body. From a ramshackle farm in New Mexico, Steven Morgan asks tricky questions about health and death through his journey with autoimmune disease, and an interview with Sophie Strand reveals the human body as a microbial ecosystem, an interstitial web of life that, in its interconnectedness, reflects the mycelial intelligence of trees. On a microscopic level, the individual breaks apart: our 'selves' are swirling convergences of bacteria, yeasts, fungi and innumerable other organisms without which not only would we not be alive – we would not *be* at all.

This book itself is a confluence of sorts. A number of pieces in these pages originally appeared in *saltfront*, an environmental humanities journal founded in Salt Lake City, Utah, inspired by Dark Mountain's early work and dedicated to a radically new type of ecological storytelling. Editors Eric Robertson and Michael McLane, respectively based in Utah and in New Zealand's North Island, joined three Dark Mountain editors scattered around the south-west of England, working across different time zones and different ecologies. Such a collusion was only made possible by the techno-confluence of the internet. On the surface, this might sit strangely with our focus on the rooted

and grounded, but such contradictions are embedded in the reality we live in. Part of this book's intention is to steer away from fixed positions — the false certainties of 'saving the world' narratives on one hand and 'we're doomed' on the other – and to navigate the trickier currents found between the two.

Hanging over all these pieces is the inescapable reality of the confluence of catastrophes we face: climate, ecological, political, cultural and existential. 'Collapse', as Sophie Strand notes, 'is when things that shouldn't be connected merge.' As the converging viral streams of the Covid pandemic show, connectedness is not necessarily 'good', whatever new age platitudes of oneness and wholeness might suggest. The climate disaster unfolding around us is itself a convergence between the breakdown of ancient organic matter and modern industrial ambition, technology, greed and carelessness, a calamitous meeting of worlds.

> In this planet-wide collective derangement, as certainties warp and melt away, we are given a vision of our own bewilderment

This is eerily reflected in Ceda Parkinson's dreamlike short story about the moon being drawn into collision with the Earth, an orbital coming together that produces ever stranger behaviour in those helplessly watching its approach. In this planet-wide collective derangement, as certainties warp and melt away, we are given a vision of our own bewilderment, as disparate channels flow into each other and catastrophes impend. In the white noise of this chaotic merging, do we try to find solid ground, to hold fast in the roiling current that threatens to carry us away? Do we attempt to dam the tide? Or do we look to Heraclitus's panta rhea, 'everything flows', as we try to navigate down the unknown river?

In the spirit of confluence, there is no one answer. But we hope the contributions of the 60 writers and artists in this book join to make new patterns in this meeting of the waters.

Please join us for the online launch of this book on Thursday 21 April at 7.30pm BST. The event will feature a confluence of writers, editors and artists, with readings from selected pieces, a presentation of the book's artwork and time for questions and conversation. It's free, but you need to register here.

Cover image: *Meander* by Cecily Eno

This ink piece was created through the repetition of simple motifs, allowing the form and character of the image to arise organically. It is at once a map, a meditation and a mandala; an expression of, and for, the wandering pen and meandering mind.

Meander (verb): to follow a winding or intricate course //to wander at random

Meander (noun): a turn or winding of a stream //an ornamental pattern of winding or interlocking lines

Cecily Eno is an illustrator whose intricate, suggestive designs focus on interplay and connection. Her drawings – while fictional – are curiously familiar; reminiscent of anything from microscopic cell structures to galaxies. Change, habit, evolution and relationship are explored through the meditative drawing process, where thought patterns compound into visual patterns.

Glimpses of a Day in the Sun

We are excited to announce the publication of our twenty-first book, available now from our online shop. This year's spring issue takes its inspiration from 'confluence'. In today's extract from the book, Alexander Fredman leads us deep into the Florida Everglades, into convergences of land and water, civilisation and wildness, capitalism and collapse. With artwork by Fatemeh Burnes.

'Wonderland' by Fatemeh Burnes, from Issue 21

Alexander Fredman

grew up in Miami, Fl and now lives in Columbia County, New York, where he is trying to start a farm. He studied History at Brown University with a focus on Environmental History, and is currently pursuing an MFA at The City College of New York.

29th April, 2022

- ISSUE 21

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There's something fuzzy about my memories of food. The visuals lag. The audio, in most cases, is missing – it emerges only in blips, only when the memory materialises in some slow and surprising way. The images are colours more than objects; the significance lies in the taste. When I recount memories I recount feelings, and emotions, and the particular ways that these experiences affected me.

I will get this all wrong.

*

It is 2000 or 2003; the fruit in question are oranges or key limes or lemons, maybe all of those possibilities. We are at the house on SW 82nd Street, white wood with tin roof. The man from the agency that controls agriculture in Florida is coming house by house. We are lucky to receive a warning call from a neighbour. We are lucky again that most of our citrus trees are planted in large terracotta pots. My parents and older brother lug these pots inside, rolling them tilted on their edges. I walk along with them, my hand reaching to the pots in some effort to help.

The man arrives; he is in khaki pants and shirt. He shows my mother a letter. He is under order to go house by house and cut down any citrus trees. You see, there was a deadly invasive bug spreading through South Florida. Or maybe it was a disease; no, I think a bug. A beetle, I imagined. And in an effort to protect the valuable citrus industry, someone decided that the best course of action was to destroy any non-commercial citrus trees in the given area, preventing the bug from spreading further.

The man in the khaki walked through our yard, searching for citrus. He must have noticed the depressed earth where the terracotta pots had sat. He probably knew what was up. He couldn't come inside. Our citrus trees sat on towels inside our family room. A few hours passed before we rolled the trees back outside. It felt dangerous; I think I felt guilty. I've avoided looking further into that citrus disease or invasive bug. I haven't asked my parents for details. I haven't googled it.

Years later I'm sitting at El Palacio de Los Jugos. This treasured juice spot lies just before the border of the Everglades National Park. Its pleasures mount in heaping piles of guava and papaya, berries of all sorts. And every variety of citrus. The oranges are gargantuan and misshapen, blistered and lumpy. The juicers are large, mechanical, cruelly efficient – all the better. Can you imagine the lines if they juiced by hand? Ha. Of course, that charm is gone, replaced by a new charm: a charm all too fitting in a landmark juice shop perched on the edge of a city on the edge of collapse.

Juice does strange work out here. It prompts a set of new relationships; it is, in its distilled form, the final product of a whole series of social interactions. The juice is not simple. The juice asserts a naturalised authenticity; the juice exemplifies a set of ideological and political goals. The invasive bug, if there even was an invasive bug, produces something peculiar too. It drove a particular set of social relations which were based largely on a particular set of economic interests. These economic interests do not exist in isolation. Juice is not simple. That bug is not simple. And together they create something muddled and intertwined, a vivid and thick reality so representative of what Miami might be.

*

Matheson Hammock Park. Perhaps it's the best representation of Miami's duality. The park lies on both sides of Old Cutler Road, extending to Biscayne Bay in the east. Protected mangrove forests occupy much of the park. They're crisscrossed by walking paths, passable only at low tide. The small beach and protected inlet make for a popular family destination. Then there's another aspect of Matheson Hammock: a marina holding hundreds of yachts and recreational fishing boats. Just beyond the marina sits the Red Fish Grill, a lovely (and pricey) restaurant perched right by Biscayne Bay.

And the history of Matheson Hammock Park: a benevolent rich man's gift to the city. A slice of land that would now be worth ungodly amounts on the open market. Its 630 acres would make for a gleaming new fortress – after all, the rest of Old Cutler Road is marked by gated community after gated community. Inside lie houses with their own secondary gates. Most of Miami's coastline is restricted, gated, privatised.

Matheson Hammock is one of the few spots in the area where bay access is relatively open, democratised to an extent.

It was at Matheson Hammock that I would often go fishing as a kid. Normally I pulled up small yellowtail snappers, perhaps a black grouper or the occasional barracuda. It was the barracudas that excited me the most – long and lean, silver scales throwing colours where the sunlight hit. I imagined them as nearly-sharks, something dangerous, mean even. They were quick, ruthless. A different story: fishing with my father in the Florida Keys, a six-foot long barracuda snapping in half the hogfish on my line...the ones at Matheson Hammock never got that big, not that I saw. Let's say it was 2005 when there was something red striped and spike crowned on my line. A lionfish. I didn't know that then. I was advised by a nearby fisherman not to touch the fish. The man removed the fish from my line with gloves. I don't think he killed it.

It was years later that I knew what that fish was; first, as an exotic aquarium fish. And then as an invading marauder, a destroyer of reefs, a mythologised killer from the Indo-Pacific.

The Miami newspapers took up the story, running brilliant underwater photographs of reefs as bare as asphalt; stripped of nearly all life. Only the lionfish remained, slowly circling the dead reef. I remember seeing videos of the scene. The lionfish looked like sentries on night shift, moving in irregular loops. That's where the narrative ended; there was no epilogue, no *where-are-they now?* for the reefs stripped bare.

But how do we think about the lionfish itself? The lionfish was a scapegoat. A guilty scapegoat, but a scapegoat nonetheless. Florida's reefs weren't thriving prior to their invasion. Wastewater has flowed into Biscayne Bay for centuries; acid levels are higher than ever before. Recreational boats tore through seagrass and reef systems. Most of the manatees in the area have large lacerations on their backs, the result of careless boaters. Biscayne Bay – and Florida's waters more generally – have been in trouble for a long time. But most of those other problems are too abstract to fully ascertain. The lionfish seems like a problem that can be solved.

And yet little progress has been made. The efforts at population control haven't done enough. Many people argue that the answer is culinary. Lionfish have a firm sweet flesh, not unlike red snapper. Some restaurants in Miami have begun serving lionfish – I've tasted it in a sublime ceviche. If lionfish became popular, then the classic fishing and overfishing story could unfold. Maybe, as was the case with the North Atlantic Cod stock or Chilean Sea Bass, we could trigger a full-scale population collapse.

It's an undeniably grim possibility. It feels immoral to repeat such a clear human folly. And to do so on purpose! It brings to light some bad associations, like how it might feel gratifying to cause collapse. Like how it will create an entrepreneurial opportunity based upon the destruction of a species. And how, if lionfish meat becomes popular, its popularity won't be limited to south Florida. And if the Florida population crashes, the desire for lionfish meat won't simply end. The hunt will continue to the lionfish's native habitat, and the seller's zeal will only increase with scarcity.

> It brings to light some bad associations, like how it might feel gratifying to cause collapse. Like how it will create an entrepreneurial opportunity based upon the destruction of a species.

The fight against nonnative species like lionfish relies upon a rhetoric of *invasion*, which posits a unified enemy. In this framework the lionfish is understood as neither acting agent nor as simple, unthinking blight. The lionfish isn't merely doing what comes naturally to it, and it is not simply trying to survive. The rhetorical movements surrounding *invasive species* remove human culpability, but they also suggest an ideological identification on the part of the lionfish. The lionfish is homogenised and standardised, transformed into a reproducible unit with no purpose beyond destruction, beyond *invasion.*

*

Out west I ate alligator. Of course, the west in question is relative. In truth we are barely an hour outside of Miami. The wetlands stop in straight lines to the west of Miami. Straight lines that sometimes move westward, that make you think – *is there a place beyond this*? I swear there hadn't been a place beyond this. We're seated at a small, heavily themed restaurant in the Everglades. Its walls feature fish mounted on warped cedar planks. My memory is hazy; this very well might be a constructed past.

The alligator was cut in small pieces, battered and fried. I was duped into eating it – my dad had told my brother and me that it was chicken. We quickly realised his lie: its stringy texture, its vaguely freshwater taste. The restaurant was built on stilts, propped above a small slough amidst the marshland. Airboat tours were offered outback. Another time, being told: airboats have flair, but you don't want all that noise. Better off in a canoe if you want to see anything good.

I imagined that the alligator I was eating was plucked from those particular wetlands.

The alligator wasn't plucked from those particular wetlands. It wasn't from the Everglades at all. It would have been raised on a farm, somewhere in East Texas or Vietnam or North Florida. It would then be shipped back to the place that the alligator represents. It forms a funny sort of supply chain, the product moving back to the particular landscapes that the alligator inhabits, so it can be eaten in this particular sort of corny swamp themed restaurant.

Alligator farms are eerily sedate places. The alligators are piled upon one another, basking in the sun surrounding a pool of murky water. Alligators grow slowly, and so an alligator farm is in it for the long haul. Some of them do double duty as roadside zoos, allowing visitors to view the alligators before their time comes. I've visited attractions like this. They dot the rural two-lane highways all throughout Florida. Next to the alligator ponds sit small wooden buildings with tanks of snakes or cages of birds. The air is thick and still and musty, and you will have no choice but to spend $2.49 on a two litre soda in the gift shop.

The alternate purpose of the business is shielded from visitors, most of whom are unaware of the alligators' eventual destiny as fried nugget or Prada handbag. There is always one alligator bigger than the rest, and it'll be named something absurd, Shaq or The Hulk or whatever, and some guy working for the farm will wrestle him.

These little alligator farms act in economies large and small, forming networks that bridge gaps in space and time. These economic networks connect the rural American South to Milan; they transmute alligators to carcasses to hides to shoes. The alligator's meat and skin adopt new subjectivities based upon context. The meat may serve as a gimmicky treat in a swamp themed restaurant in the Everglades, while the adjacent skin occupies a very different cultural space.

Dyed red or black or emerald, the particular patterns and textures of gator skin serve to signal status. But this wasn't some predetermined end. The luxury market didn't decide the form of the alligator. Alligator skin evolved through particular evolutionary pressures and adaptations; it is a deliberately functional feature during the alligator's life. This functional quality doesn't disappear after slaughter, but it does morph. Alligator skin's function shifts in each step of the process. It is relational and dependent, a reality formed through the varying and contingent actions of people, animals, and things throughout the process.

In the Miami area these identities coexist. There is alligator as alligator, common throughout the Everglades but also inhabiting the canals and lakes of urban and suburban Miami. There is alligator as nugget, as was the case for the imposter meat my dad fed me. And there is alligator as luxury, adorning the shoes or handbags of Miamians throughout the city. These varying subjectivities do not simply inhabit a partitioned landscape. They do not exist in different worlds, because there are no different worlds.

*

This will end with water. In truth this has been about water all along.

The history of Miami is a history of moving earth. Of building islands and of cutting canals. Reconfiguring the relationship between land and water. The first canals were dug to drain the Everglades; subsequent canals were dug to create valuable waterfront property. Whole neighbourhoods are organised around mazes of these regimented canals. Real estate listings boast about how big a boat you can moor at your back door. These two purposes of canals serve the same mission – they both were, in essence, economic choices. The draining of the Everglades aimed to create farmland and to help drive migration to Florida; the dredging of Miami's canals aimed to create amenities for the residents of Miami's wealthy coastal neighbourhoods.

A lot of what's written about Miami hones in on this history. The supposed artificiality of the built city provides a convenient critique for
the hack commentators who draw a link between an artificial island and a plastic surgery clinic. It's easy enough for someone to shout, *fake, fake, fake* – that the city is, and the people are *fake*. It all fits neatly together. It's a critique devoid of substance or meaning. It is merely a celebration of one's own ideals. There is nothing fake about this constructed landscape. Despite its partially human origins, it still presents a space for

unsanctioned life, for disruptive behavior, for interactions of all sorts between species of all sorts.

The interactions occur on wet leaves and in crevices chipped away from corroding seawall. On lawns with sprinklers running as the rain falls.

I often think that Miami is intelligible only through water. Its flows and disruptions, the ways it travels through the city – the ways it shapes and reshapes it. The water is dispersed and consolidated; it is in truth so many different waters.

> In the limestone bedrock, which filters some of the best drinking water in the nation. It's soft, slightly sweet, lacking any metallic ting...
>
> In the runoff from lawns sprayed thick with fertilisers. Biscayne Bay grows warmer, more acidic.
>
> In the thunderstorms, every summer afternoon...the city continues but is affected, shifted, sidelined. Clouds throw daggers over the ocean. The rainwater pools on spongy earth. The park across the street from my house transforms into a standing body of water an acre in size. And the growth. You see it in the orchids sprawling across live oaks, roots extending up, glistening green as they swell and reach.
>
> And the waters condensed from air: you see the window mounted air conditioners dripping like sap, drumming a steady rhythm. It's a sound that blends with the cicadas and the traffic noise, a symphony of Miami summers. Air conditioners built this city. I realise that it's ridiculous to attribute Miami's post-war development to one single factor, but air conditioning would be a worthy contender. With air conditioning Miami became comfortable year round, and the city changed. The buildings adopted new forms; houses no longer had to be optimised for cross ventilation. The hallmarks of old Floridian architecture fell away. Gone were the pitched ceilings and covered porches.

Scenes like this make me think that, of all possible distinctions or definitions, this is an epoch of oversaturation. Little signs of humanity, percolating throughout the landscape. A lawn swelling and quaking, trying to swallow all it can. The waters are marked by human intrusion; small chemical markers of us. And so the soils, the fish, the gators and the sawgrass.

Water gives Miami form. It makes Miami make sense. And it is water that threatens Miami the most. Water that crawls up the storm drains, flooding the streets. Water that softens stone, that tears away at jetties.

> It is water that threatens Miami the most. Water that crawls up the storm drains, flooding the streets. Water that softens stone, that tears away at jetties.

And nobody in Miami seems to be paying much attention. But that's not true. Plenty of people are paying attention. They're just paying attention to the wrong things. There seems to be a shared delusion that the rich will be hit the hardest. That's the gist of the arguments that run in the popular press. Property values will plummet; waterfront estates will be obliterated; the tourism sector will suffer. The poor are overlooked – that's not new. But in the strange logic of sinking Miami, the poor will turn out alright. There is some degree of truth in the geography of these dynamics. Miami's wealthiest neighbourhoods are clustered on the coast, and housing costs decrease as you move further from the water. But that is to say nothing of the effects of prolonged economic oppression, which will only be amplified as the city enters crisis mode. The deaths of the poor are a continuation, linked with harsh metal wires to the deaths inflicted by (and take your pick): the lingering relics of slavery or our healthcare system or law enforcement or the war industry.

With environmental disruption, the means of murder will be multiple, will be disparate, will be concealed by so many different names. The murder of displacement and racialisation; of drowning; of being electrocuted by fell power lines; of rising waters and rising ethnonationalism; of a financial collapse, the burden borne by the poor. We've got a hell of a lot more on the way. The forthcoming climate disaster is going to be chock full of slow death. There'll be quick deaths, too, and violent deaths, and climate-inflicted war – but the bulk of it all is going to be slow. Millions of deaths, overlooked because their horrors creeped up in small degrees. Crops will fail and disease will spread. You think the traumas will be over when the dust settles. But they won't be. The effects will reverberate, will compound and spread. And yet soft killings don't spark outrage. Sadness, yes, and mourning, and tragedy – depoliticised tragedy, a how-could-God-let-this-happen type of tragedy.

Despite the warnings Miami continues to grow. Property values have exploded since the financial crisis. This is especially true of waterfront properties, such as those on the various elite islands of Miami Beach. Star Island, Palm Island, Indian Creek – these havens for celebrities and business magnates have gone from pricey to exorbitant. Five bedroom italianates are torn down in favor of ten bedroom contemporaries, replete with every amenity you could imagine. These hulking steel and glass contraptions resemble supervillain lairs, forming the sort of architecture that's never quite right, never quite fitting no matter its location.

The Miami of the speculative imagination will grow and expand, will luxurise, will reap the evanescent rewards of a manufactured artistic hub and a constructed geography – much of the most valuable land in Miami is new land, perfectly shaped islands built for the purpose of development. The future is always bright until it isn't.

Then again, for those with power or capital, maybe it does always work out in the end. Barring full revolution, those in power can abscond to higher ground, can take what they can carry (a yacht full of stuff is plenty) and land in a new place. Maybe that new place will take on the role of Miami. Give it the name too – future inhabitants

can imagine it in line with the old sunken city. It can be a warning. The water, our Vesuvius.

Meanwhile, Miami continues to sell itself as a global city. And it is, kind of. It's a metropolis of near-hits, of condo towers that feel almost like New York and restaurants that, in the dim light, might be in London or Tokyo or Paris. It's a city still marked by a certain parochialism; by the parochialism of capitalism as purity, as unabashed and unselfconscious speculation. It's capitalism without the cloak of embarrassment; without, to any significant degree, opposition. It's a city where a real estate developer can still look someone in the eye and say, yes, see those mangroves over there? Imagine a mansion in their place. Buy the land for X, and spend X on construction, and sell the whole shebang for five times X.

*

There's a place in Miami, not far from where I grew up, where if you time it right you can make an island for yourself. At Matheson Hammock take a walk down the path through the mangrove forest when the tide is low, find a bench along the way, and wait. The incoming tide will first saturate the spongy earth then settle above, submerging the path and leaving you marooned on the bench. Sit cross-legged so your shoes don't get wet; bring a book and read until the water recedes. You can play at submersion, toe the line as the water continues to rise, as you think – maybe this time it won't reverse course.

Originally published in *saltfront*

IMAGE: 'Wonderland' by Fatemeh Burnes
Oil on canvas
'Wonderland' is an autobiographical visual poem that is 72 × 108 inches in size. I regard it as a fantastical reexamination of 'Land', a compounding of 'land' and 'wonder'. It is a land that owns us, not that we own – or do we? It is the land that lies here and lies there, crossing over. It is a grasp of the umbilical cord attaching man and nature. It deconstructs and reconstructs the maps familiar and unfamiliar to us, finding the home that was never built and the everlasting bubbles.

Fatemeh Burnes' artwork focuses on nature and human nature, looking at modern events and tragedies, ecological and social, and how those events manifest in contemporary life. Over the last three decades Burnes has exhibited nationally and internationally, curated over 100 exhibitions, authored numerous publications, and conducted art-education documentaries. Her most current work has taken an autobiographical turn in the context of her experience as an immigrant and as a woman. fatemehburnes.com

The Nameless Are In Me

We are excited to announce the publication of our twenty-first book, available now from our online shop. This year's spring issue takes its inspiration from the theme of 'confluence'. Today's extract showcases two startling and visceral poems from the collection: 'Stansbury Swarm' by Joel Long and 'Nigredo of the Bull' by Finn Haunch, with embodied artwork by Gustaf Broms.

'Perforated Realties' by Gustaf Broms, from Issue 21

Finn Haunch and Joel Long

Finn Haunch is a poet based in Newcastle. He is interested in the connections between theology, psychology and the occult. He works as a bookseller and has been published by *Ink, Sweat & Tears*. Joel Long's book *Winged Insects* won the White Pine Press Poetry Prize. He is the author of *Lessons in Disappearance* and *Knowing Time by Light* as well as the chapbooks *Chopin's Preludes* and *Saffron Beneath Every Frost*. He lives in Salt Lake City.

26th April, 2022

Stansbury Swarm

The nameless are in me, small flying
things, smoke parts that cover the island,
too big for smoke; they are alive. They move
toward blood with will. I come for beauty,
but there is swarm, scarf a mile wide,
flying insects that cover skin like foam.
I pull my hand across my arm, clean moment,
then covered again, light, blue cream,
lemon cream, honey the hills, the flies
biting me, not enough to distract me
from suffocation, flies fill the air so;
I breathe them, they stick the passage
between air, blood. I know nothing is not
infected with insects. I believe where
they are not, hair brushing against my ear,
I kill with the swipe of my hand. The island
is a hair shirt, woven fibres of angel wings.
I will not be done this day three days,
and then, parts of the skin remember,
remind of the sun dowsed in salt water
where little cares to live but colour and light,
and air that makes things live we do not want.

– Joel Long

Nigredo of the Bull

i.

Clump of roots & rabbit holes — crow hill
probably, thereabouts — my boots
slope the squelched loam, the smooth wet grass
grows underfoot, gives way unto my weight:

& of a sudden, like a man out of black sun,
my uncle — broken spectacles glued
up with tape,
that broken nose &
bottle in his pocket: dry-stone waller
for our right-of-way —
the condensed
overcast overhead; king of the crossroads,
route into the underworld, door under the hill.
My uncle in his overcoat, his long hair &
uncartilaged knees, whose soles burned
from the black sun beneath him.
Moors all around him: those top-heavy boards
smother the black sun. The heat in the stones.

ii.
Three of the bright ones on the rock. Their
blank faces,
their beautiful palms lined
with a ptolemaic map, the route to the soul —
word goes that when they fuck
for the very first time
dry, dead heather bursts into flame,
a gun goes off in the dark —
all for that groin-shattering joy.

iii.
Under the occulum, wet sun-hole dripping
manna — the horned *bulla*.
This is the indictment of the flesh.
This is the work of the Hierophant —
flesh nailed
to flesh.
Four shadows on the four panels.

There was a green sword suspended in the air,
poised above the shoulder blades and
unless you knew where
to look,
where to hold your breath,
where
a steel crescent pierces septum, snot —
without any of this, there is only a bull
in an eighteenth-century shed, penned
between four posts, tethered below
& above — the occulum snorts, contracts
to a pinpoint: the rainlight weakens.

iv.

Out of that disembowelled dark, like the caves of
lascaux — where aurochs were scratched
over stone, *bos taurus* in charcoal
reverse constellated — the enormous sweep
of snow, and above it all
were the three bright ones with their blank
incredulous features.
They pointed to
a mound in the distance, snow was upon it
& upon the snow were three turbine whose blades
become the body of the christ —

these were the geometries of the faith;
these were the watchers;

these were some of the things
you could see
under a black sun.

– Finn Haunch

'Stansbury Swarm' was originally published in *saltfront*

IMAGE: 'Perforated Realities' by Gustaf Broms
Still from video
This work started out as a diary during 2020, an attempt at a dialogue, through a daily interaction between the organic surroundings and my own body. Being in a time and place, where identification with the thin membrane of skin, as container of self, is

slowly dissolving, as borders between beings evaporate, the environment disintegrating into a myriad of sentient beings.

Gustaf Broms was born in Sweden in 1966. He currently lives and works in the Vendel forest. Gustaf's practice is engaged with the exploration of the nature of consciousness. He started off working with photography and installation, but now works with performance that look at concepts of inner/outer and movement/stillness, working with his own body as the tool for examining these processes. The constant question is, 'why are the dancing atoms of this body not merging with the dancing atoms surrounding it?' orgchaosmilk.org

My Body, The Ancestor

A mycelial conversation with Sophie Strand

We are excited to announce the publication of our twenty-first book, available now from our online shop. This year's spring issue takes its inspiration from 'confluence'. In today's extract from the book Charlotte Du Cann talks with the poet and ecological storyteller Sophie Strand, about interstitial thinking, unruly connections and how to hold a 'deep life' practice. With mycelial artwork by Graeme Walker.

'Mycelial Threads' (detail) by Graeme Walker

Charlotte Du Cann
is a writer, editor and co-director of The Dark Mountain Project. Her most recent book, *After Ithaca* is about recovering our core relationships with the mythos and sentient Earth, revolving around the Underworld tasks of Psyche. She teaches ensemble creative practice and lives on the wild salty edge of East Anglia.

22nd April, 2022

- ISSUE 21

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Her words caught my eye: a lament for a robin, its wing like a sundial on the road for Dark Mountain's 'requiem' issue. She startled me: speaking about becoming compost for the future at the Borrowed Time summit on death, dying and change. And yet her stories are all vibrantly entangled with life: the nectar-seeking of hummingbirds, the anarchy of the vegative god Dionysus, the fortitude of the hermit crab who waits on the strand for others to appear, so they might simultaneously exchange shells they have outgrown: that moment of vulnerability, of exposure, we need to inhabit a different form. How life happens in between states, a collective dance we don't always see yet is everywhere all about and inside us.

Poet and writer Sophie Strand lives in a liminal world, at the confluence of a river and a creek in the Hudson Valley. Her 'ecological storytelling' taps into the interstitial

web of life, where metaphors act as bridges to other dimensions, criss-crossing like the hyphae of fungi, and delve into the microbial underworld. Some of her acute sensitivity to the natural world has been catalysed by trauma and an incurable condition that sends her body into meltdown at unpredictable times.

I wanted to talk with Sophie because she speaks of opening out and connecting in a culture of closing down and control, of merging with others in a time of individualism and constriction. In a series of luminous short essays she writes of a practice of 'deep life' whereby we can 'stitch ourselves back' into our local territories and feel and think as ecosystems. We spoke across the continents and waterlands one winter's day.

Charlotte Du Cann

Your writing and Dark Mountain both focus on weathering collapse when the current responses to planetary crisis are to try to save and fix. How do you use this as a metaphor in your writing?

Sophie Strand

Collapse can be the most generative experience. We can't manage an ecosystem! What hubris to think human beings can enter into millions of interconnected, complicated, refluxing, pricking, stinging, collaborating relationships, and manage it. Just as we can't organise an ecosystem, we can't plan collapse. We can't narcissistically techno-fix a way through this. We have to enter into it.

I'm in a body that does collapse sometimes. I can take all the right medicines, take care of myself and it will still melt. Contracting around that inability to control myself limits my improvisational ability to dance with uncertainty. Collapse is when things that shouldn't be connected merge. When the river overflows its banks and inundates the soil and washes things away is the moment when materials and elements that would never meet each other, touch. I think there is something inherently haptic (in the sense of meaning touch and also fasten) in this. It's what hyphae do in the soil when they connect plants and trees: that mycelial interrogative intelligence that fastens things together by touching. For me the intelligence of collapse is in the unruly, funny, uncanny connections that happen by the nature of emergent systems.

CDC

Mycelial intelligence emerges strongly in your writing. How did you stumble into this teeming world underneath the surface of things and engage in those life systems?

SS

I grew up in the woods and I loved decay and rootlets and mushrooms. I connected them with fairytales and to the magic which isn't necessarily 'good' but chaotic, in the trickier sense of fairies being capricious and unpredictable. But then I became mysteriously ill at the age of 16 and couldn't be diagnosed. At the same time I became interested in mycorrhizal networks and rhizomatic thinking as a philosophical lens. Then, at the point that these concepts became a key part of my poetic, ecological inspiration, I finally got diagnosed with my condition which was connective tissue

disease (EDS). It felt as if I had been seeded genetically with this passion because fungi are the connective tissue of the soil, holding it together, creating highways for bacteria, breaking down dead matter and providing nourishment for other beings. And what I needed was healthier connective tissue.

So for me it's become a frame: how can we wed our personal wounds with the wounds of something more-than-human? How we look at our physical ailments, our psychological anguish not as something that teaches us about ourselves but that reorients us to something else outward.

CDC

Did your practice to explore 'deep life' arise out of your condition also?

SS

My life goes through bottlenecks, and the practice emerged out of an oscillation with going in and out of restricted mobility and illness. The pandemic has been a megaphone for this experience. There is too much information, we can't hold it all in our minds, and there's a problematic idea that we feel we need to know everything to be environmentally active. But it is impossible and it paralyses people. What is more interesting to me is to ask: what is happening within a five mile radius of my home, what are the invasive species that live here? What is the Indigenous history, can I go out and walk every single day? Can I find a sit spot? Can I begin to gather a council, a world of witnesses that constitute me relationally?

The air I am breathing is infused with the microbiome: with pheromones, with smells, with pollen, the spores of a very specific place. It is easy to be focused on charismatic causes, old growth forests that are whole continents away, or animals that are very attractive, but the truth is the thing that holds you and metabolically constitutes you is your home, so how can you go deep with a home?

I was inspired by adrienne maree brown and their work on how movements are often very superficial, a mile wide but an inch thick, so the connections are not resilient. Resilient ecosystems have that tight-knit connectivity that make a landscape or environment able to shift and adapt intelligently to ecological pressure, to anthropogenic activity. So I am much more interested in the inch-wide, mile deep movement, where the connectivity is so intense and intimate it actually helps people and other beings survive.

> I am much more interested in the inch-wide, mile deep movement, where the connectivity is so intense and intimate it actually helps people and other beings survive.

CDC

A lot of our approach to the ecological crisis uses the lens of science. In the sense your writing is an exercise in imagination, what role do you feel imagination plays to help penetrate these deeper levels?

SS

I gained my main inspiration for deep life from the philosopher Gaston Bachelard, who used scientific facts in his work but infused them with a healthy dose of miracle mind and imaginative poetic sensibility. Bachelard believed that poetry was the closest way to get to the truth, not facts, and this is also how I function. Science is a useful tool, a way of asking questions. But we can also invite more people into these interrogative relationships with their ecosystems, landscapes and local issues, not by creating a sterile language but by infusing this interrogative tool with sensuality, by embodying it. I'm interested in enfleshing ideas rather than shaving them down. Can we use science to root us back into the landscape?

CDC

If writing and art can create a culture that faces crisis, rather than distracting from it, do you feel this poetic imagination helps us navigate what is happening in the world?

Photograph by Harper Cowan

SS

We have a problematic cultural aversion to beauty being useful. Poetry is connected to my ideas about beauty. Not an objectified artificial glamour but beauty as being the thing we are attracted to, in the way a bee moves towards a flower and incidentally pollinates it. As you pay attention to what you love and what you are attracted to, it will guide you into your ecological niche, where you are most useful.

So if we pay attention to the poetry in our lives, it shows us where we belong. Acting like an acupuncture needle in a landscape, we will find the beings, the issues, the stories, we need to provide a mouth for.

CDC

You speak about being a mouthpiece for the expression of the more-than-human world and that sometimes the knocks and difficulties we undergo are actually an invitation to open, and allow a wound to be a doorway, and allow other forms to speak through us, to be an expression in words and song and image for the planet. What has been your experience of that process?

SS

I think the dominant cultural paradigm is we must be constantly progressing, integrating, healing, so that we can get back to work, and that for survivors of violence and sexual trauma, and illnesses that don't have a cure, those narratives don't work, they don't map on to our lived experience.

So instead of thinking we are always failing, narratively and physically, what would it mean to recontextualise these wounds as portals? As connective tissue. Although we are more porous how does that porousness allow us to understand microbial life, 'smalls', beings that don't necessarily get our attention? I've done a lot of healing and therapy, but I've never been fixed, so instead of problematising that incompleteness,

that liminality, I've tried to think of it in terms of process philosophy, so I am a doorway which matter flows through, and my experiences have opened that door wider. Instead of trying to close it all the time and enter back into a legibility culturally, what if I open that 'door' wider and open it so that I can be in service to the general aliveness and not to my particular aliveness?

CDC

You also speak about your work as creating compost or soil for other beings later on. This is a whole different attitude to writing and requires a different kind of generosity.

SS

If we look at the history of storytelling, it was not about individual authorship. Homer is actually a practice, people stepped into the role of Homer; in the same way as when composing Orphic hymns, people became Orpheus. You embodied Orpheus. This is important because of my condition. I have stories I want to tell, things I care about, but I also know that my individual life may not be long enough or hardy enough to complete this work. So what if I reframed authorship and took it out of modernity and said: what if I am making good soil, what if I am beginning the composting process of these ideas, so my particular life is not the only vehicle of its completion? What if someone else can come plant in this soil and sprout something else? So when I make art these days it is about creating space which other people can enter into, it's not about me as an individual charismatic author.

CDC

You write in one of your essays of perceiving your body as an ancestor, an assemblage of ecosystems, how do you tap into that kind of awareness?

> Instead of thinking we are always failing, narratively and physically, what would it mean to recontextualise these wounds as portals? As connective tissue.

SS

This porousness that was caused by trauma and illness gave me a big sense of myself as an instrument being played – by microbes, by yeasts, by fungi, by other people. So sometimes the music that comes through me is not my own. And then when I read more about the science of the gut-brain axis, and about deep time and the history of our cells, I was given a comforting lens that I am a collaboration. When we focus on an individual sense of ourselves, it can act and feel like a weight. We always have to be an author, to know what the next best step is, and be in control of our lives. But if we think of ourselves as being a kind of ecosystem, we can understand that we are sometimes acting intuitively, in relationship with something else that is authoring us.

So in the essay, 'Your Body is an Ancestor', what I was thinking about is that we don't need to create rituals. Our body is a ritual, our cells are a product of anarchic queer lovemaking whereby mitochondria and ancient prokaryotes fused to create the cells that build our bodies today. We are the product of these fusions.

In relation to confluence, there is a neo-Darwinian idea that evolution is an arrow of time that it is always pulsing forward, but the truth is that just as evolution is about forking, it is also been about fusing: these transversal intimacies, whereby beings and species suddenly and chaotically, unpredictably exchange information and fuse. Lichen is a good example, as it is an algae, sometimes a yeast, sometimes other bacteria, and a fungus, collaborating to create a new being. It is one of the dominant refrains in evolution that life is not just about forking. And I get this from fungi and *anastomosis,* which is a term from mycology and ecology when hyphae come back and fuse together, that moment of confluence, that anastomosis which means to provide a mouth for. Those moments of fusing, or collaboration and confluence, are about providing a mouthpiece for something else.

Then it is less that we are individual species and more that we are relational. All thinking, all beings are interstitial. Thinking happens between mythic gradients, between beings, between conversations, between those ideas, those relational units where our roles are played out.

CDC

How does this affect us as storytellers and writers in a culture where everything is about the stars shining in the sky rather than the dark spaces in between, the invisible relationships that happen? Do you ever see your writing as acting like a mushroom in the sense of breaking things down, so that another form might happen?

SS

I think the most important aspect of my writing is that it doesn't happen in solitude. I share my work publicly on social media, and I open it up to critique and conversation, so my writing happens not in me or in my readers but in the spaces in between. It is always being moulded and adapted according to the conversation. There's an idea that you have to write in secret, come up with your own ideas and publish them in this sterile, finished product. But this is a very alphabetical, textual approach and it is also a recent idea. Stories and myths and scripture were originally oral and adaptive to changing social and ecological conditions and political climate. So I think the main thing about this interstitial space is always inviting my readers in to change me, to risk being changed by our conversation.

You can read the full version of this conversation in *Dark Mountain: Issue 21.* If you take out an annual subscription to Dark Mountain you can buy this issue for a reduced price.

IMAGE: 'Mycelial Threads' by Graeme Walker
Acrylic on board
I made this artwork for my anorexic friend to explore the complex, mycelium-like interconnections of her personal history – rather than addressing the symptoms alone, which are like poisonous fungi, popped up in the forest. They may be what everyone can see, and what they immediately want to treat, but it is in exploring the giant,

hidden, underground web, out of which these toxic bodies fruit, that will give her true understanding.

Graeme Walker is an artist who makes contemplative objects, paintings, poetry, stories; philosophical prompts; paradoxes on our relationship between life, mortality and nature; questions around the cultural inhibition and release of agency. His work calls humanity into potency, into meaningfulness, as a way of resisting nihilism. graemewalker.art

Sophie Strand is a writer based in the Hudson Valley who focuses on the intersection of spirituality, storytelling and ecology. Her first book of essays *The Flowering Wand: Rewilding the Sacred Masculine* is forthcoming in Fall 2022 from Inner Traditions. Her eco-feminist historical fiction reimagining of the gospels *The Madonna Secret* will also be published by Inner Traditions. You can follow her work on Instagram: @cosmogyny and at sophiestrand.com.

The Unfathomable Heart

We are excited to announce the publication of our twenty-first book, available now from our online shop. This year's spring issue takes its inspiration from 'confluence'. Today's first extract is from Stephanie Krzywonos' piece about the Antarctic Convergence and the ruins of nuclear power in the world's so-called 'last great wilderness', with photographs by the author. Accompanied by Veera Kaamos Pitkänen's collage artwork 'Revelation of the Mole'.

'Revelation of the Mole' by Veera Kaamos Pitkänen, from Issue 21

Stephanie Krzywonos

migrates between Antarctica and North America. She is currently working on a memoir about Antarctica as a living place, grief, womanhood, and cycles of descent and rebirth. Excerpts have appeared in *The Willowherb Review, Kosmos Journal,* and more.

19th April, 2022

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> How does it feel to become a drop of water, and then to re-enter,
> to dissolve back into the whole?
>
> – Ingrid Horrocks

The PM-3A nuclear reactor, the only one humans have ever built in Antarctica, was supposed to 'revolutionise' human access to the continent through abundant and clean energy. In 1972, after operating for only ten years, the US Navy shut down 'Nukey Poo' because of its 'numerous malfunctions', a 'suspected crack' in its containment vessel, and the financial cost of investigation and repair. A leak would harm the environment and break the Antarctic Treaty, which forbids the dumping of nuclear waste in Antarctica, this 34-million-year-old winter, 'the Ice', as we call it. The truth is that Nukey Poo earned its nickname because of the frequency and volume of leaks from

its containment vessel. The removal plan disclosed that three cracks had already been welded shut, but not before allowing nuclear waste to seep into the ground.

The US Navy relocated 11,067 tonnes of radioactive earth to the United States. By 1979, decommissioning was complete. What remains of Nukey Poo are these two wooden platforms, still pounded into the side of Observation Hill, a steep lava dome covered in scales of scree. Large metal sheets – canvases for wind and snow to splotch rust and scratch and nick paint – are still affixed to the floors of two decaying platforms. I've been putzing between them, surprised by the amount of debris still littering the ground after 42 years. This morning's sallow light highlights the junk. Rusted screws, bolts, nuts, washers and wires. Bits of insulation. String. Rubber. Unidentifiable corroded metal scraps. Even bits of porcelain. All mingling with volcanic rock and dirt.

Observation Hill pimples the edge of Ross Island. From here, I can view a thin line: the meeting of the Ross Ice Shelf – a Spain-sized glacier and the world's largest floating body of ice – and the frozen Ross Sea. This juncture is the furthest south the open ocean exists. Three white wind turbines belonging to Scott Base, our neighbouring station, crown a nearby hill to the left. Below, at the base of Ob Hill, a scattered cluster of buildings make up McMurdo, the American research station where I work and the largest on the continent. Enormous fuel tanks – at least ten – are its most striking structures. Three letters – 'NSF' – emblazon the top of the closest tank.

The National Science Foundation now runs the US Antarctic Program instead of the military. I don't typically visit the nuclear plant rubble on Ob Hill to think about energy consumption or environmental catastrophe. I come to this hill to watch whales, clouds, birds, light. A smoking volcano. Distant glacier-drizzled indigo mountains. Mostly I witness the water. The sea's surface, frozen or liquid, changes like a face. I love watching its subtleties, how its personality comes through as crushed ridges of blue-sheened shards arching towards the sky. Or as the rhythmic lapping of waves touching land. Or its evolution from grease ice to pancake ice to a thin crust, thickening into sea ice as the temperature lowers.

Two islands hunker next to each other in the distance, White Island and Black Island, one like a penguin on its back, the other like a penguin on its belly. Between the islands, due south, you'll find a groomed snow road to the interior of the continent. South of here, beyond the mountains and islands, it's ice, a flood of ice. Antarctica is home to most of the world's ice and snow and its highest population of glaciers. But ice is not just ice.

McMurdo and nuclear power plant platform as seen from Observation Hill. (photo: Stephanie Krzywonos)

About 1,200 miles from Ob Hill, on the edge of West Antarctica, lives a glacier named Thwaites, a colossus, one of the biggest glaciers in the world, about the size of Great Britain or Florida. Its size is not why we are afraid of Thwaites or why it's famous. *Rolling Stone* nicknamed Thwaites 'the Doomsday Glacier'. A few call Thwaites a

monster. Officially, Thwaites the glacier is named after Fredrik T. Thwaites the man, a glaciologist from Wisconsin. I wish I knew what Thwaites the glacier's real name is, what it calls itself pronounced in the tongue of glaciers.

To us, Thwaites is mysterious. We are working to pry its secrets open. I am one of many who are working to support the work of the International Thwaites Glacier Collaboration, a robust four-year-long collaboration primarily between British and American research programmes. The collective goal is to understand Thwaites and ultimately to predict its 'death'. The eight research projects have acronyms like GHOST, PROPHET, MELT and TIME. People have journeyed by ice in tractor trains to Thwaites – no small feat. They've arrived on the back of the glacier, gliding to a halt on tiny aluminium planes outfitted with skis instead of wheels. They've melted hunks of Thwaites, their only source of freshwater, for drinking and cleaning. Thwaites has filled their bellies, their bloodstreams, and their cells.

From the surface, researchers have bored holes into Thwaites, lowered instruments and detonated explosives inside of its guts – a large-scale ultrasound – to understand the depths, the insides of their subject. They've also arrived by sea, sending robots under the water, underneath its body, to measure. They peer at the crumbling edges of glaciers from boats called icebreakers, whose muscular hulls can crush their way through sea ice: South Korea's RV *Araon;* Britain's HMS *Protector,* RRS *Ernest Shackleton,* and RRS *Sir David Attenborough*; and the US's RV *Nathaniel B. Palmer.*

> When you step onto its surface, you step onto a solid cloud. The two-miles-thick ice in West Antarctica is a remnant of clouds drifted to Earth, frozen for millennia.

From the nuclear ruins I can view McMurdo's port, Winter Quarters Bay, whose bottom is coated with garbage. When the *Palmer*, a cheerful-looking orange and yellow research vessel, pulled into this harbour a few years ago, logistics contractors like me – the majority of people in Antarctica and the ones who make scientific research possible – were invited to tour the ship. There's a maritime romance to it. Tables and chairs bolted to the floors. Porthole windows. Large maps in the captain's bridge. The namesake of the research vessel is unfortunate. In 1820, Nathaniel B. Palmer, only 21 and already a captain, led one of the first groups of westerners to encounter the continent. Palmer, an American seal hunter, didn't only see the glaciers curling over the hard ragged edges of the continent. When he saw fur seals and elephant seals, he saw potential profit. So when humans first came here we slaughtered many seals. Whales too – those great supple beings – were systematically hunted to near extinction. Right whales. Sperm whales. Grey whales. Humpbacks. Blues. Fins. Seis. Minkes.

In 1925, an Antarctic whaler wrote: *'The water in which the whales float, and on which we too are riding, is blood red.'* Between 1918 and 1984, humans killed about 1.6 million whales in the Southern Ocean. That combined biomass was equal to the whole of humankind. In 1986, most nations agreed to suspend whale hunting. Right

now, Western powers are squabbling over harvesting krill, small crimson creatures who travel together in hypnotic red clouds like murmurations of starlings. We mostly turn krill into food for our pets, but also into cosmetics, like anti-aging serums, and pharmaceuticals. Krill's bodily oils are good for our physical hearts.

Humans have not always approached Antarctica to overharvest, nor were westerners the first people to experience Antarctic waters. Ui-te-Rangiora, an expert 'wayfinder' from present-day Rarotonga in the Cook Islands, sailed south and led a group of ancient Polynesians around ad650. They encountered floating ice and called the area Tai-uka-a-pia, 'sea foaming like arrowroot', a fine white powder with which they were familiar. The relationship between the ocean and ancient peoples in Oceania was intimate. Wayfinders knew the languages of clouds, water and stars and navigated with them, being carried from small island to small island by water in the vast Pacific.

The art of wayfinding, often taught orally through song, demands all the senses. For wayfinders, attunement to the ocean is attunement to one's body. The sun, moon and stars guide, but if clouds obscure, there are other signs. Driftwood, seaweed. Subtle shifts in the water's hue. The kinds and behaviours of birds. The presence, shapes and colours of clouds. Rain and the direction and qualities of wind. Wayfinders decipher the shapes, motions, and direction of water, reading swells, waves, and ripples like script. Ancient peoples employed pigs as wayfinders on their boats, whose keen snouts navigate by the distant smell of atolls. One wayfinding technique – to get the best felt sense of things – is to rest one's genitals on the bottom of the boat.

Wayfinding technology – knowing the patterns of nature, the language of water – survived western colonialism. In his 1978 book, *The Voyaging Stars*, David Lewis recounts learning from Kaho, a blind wayfinder who asked his son, Po'oi, where certain stars would appear. Kaho directed Po'oi to steer into a wave so he could taste the spray in his mouth and feel the water on his skin. The blind man then plunged his whole arm in the water to feel its movement, its remembrances. *'"This is not Tongan water but Fijian," he announced. "The waves are from Fiji Lau group near Lakemba Island. Let us alter course to the westward." Next morning they duly sighted Lakemba.'*

The frozen Ross Sea and Transantarctic Mountains (photo: Stephanie Krzywonos)
We are afraid of Thwaites because of what its transformation means for us, our homes and ways of life. Researchers estimate how many billions of tonnes of its body melt every year and what percentage of annual sea level rise that constitutes. It's a *lot*. They say that a key part of Thwaites's body – its ice shelf, its body part that floats over the ocean – will disintegrate within ten years. They also describe Thwaites's ice shelf as a 'cork' or a 'dam' holding back the mass of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet, an icescape we call 'the flat white'. When you step onto its surface, you step onto a solid cloud. The two-miles-thick ice in West Antarctica is a remnant of clouds drifted to Earth, frozen for millennia. In West Antarctica, all appears still. But underfoot, the ancient ice is moving. My lifetime is too short to perceive it. How exhausting it must be for Thwaites to shoulder that bulk, at least 3,200,000 gigatonnes! Researchers describe Thwaites as

'vulnerable' and 'unstable', steadying itself by holding onto land under the sea like a cane. They speak of Thwaites 'losing its grip'. Perhaps Thwaites is letting go.

After the ice shelf disintegrates, researchers predict an 'ice cliff failure event' when the rest of Thwaites's flesh will speed up and leak into the sea. People have calculated how many feet the ocean will rise when Thwaites's entire body liquefies. Afterwards, when all the West Antarctic glaciers behind follow, the sea level will rise five times that amount. The word 'collapse' has been used as a rhetorical catch-all to describe these series of events, ranging from the onset of Thwaites's ice shelf shattering to the bulk of West Antarctic glaciers circling the drain. As Bethan Davies, a glaciologist, notes: 'collapse' is slow. Time scale models give vast ranges for the disintegration of West Antarctica, from hundreds of years to begin to millennia to complete.

A few weeks ago, I strolled atop the surface of the frozen Ross Sea with Marianne, a seismologist and geophysicist awaiting her chance to spend time with Thwaites. Antarctica is not one homogeneous slab, but a kaleidoscope of ice, intertwined frozen bodies moseying towards the sea. To Marianne, topographical maps of Antarctica showing glaciers' velocities in various colours make the continent look like a human organ. Its currents, its rivers of ice streaming into the sea resemble veins, arteries, aortas. The whole thing an unfathomable heart pumping blood.

Researchers like Marianne are investigating all the factors that are lead-ing to Thwaites's metamorphosis. The shifting location of the polar vortex – the swirl of air around the continent – is altering wind patterns, driving warmer water towards Thwaites, changing it from below. We describe tidal pumping, one of Thwaites's natural bodily functions, as problematic – for us. When the tide causes the floating part of its body to rise, the pressure sucks warm water into Thwaites's 'grounding zone', the confluence where its frozen belly, the land and the water meet. The tide goes out, ice lowers, but the warm water is trapped underneath, morphing solid to liquid.

This is an excerpt from a longer version that appears in *Dark Mountain: Issue 21.* If you take out an annual subscription to Dark Mountain you can buy this issue for a reduced price.

IMAGE: 'Revelation of the Mole' by Veera Kaamos Pitkänen.
Hand cut paper collage
This artwork brings into focus the voiceless in our society – the overlooked, insignificant or small. The collage is based on an apocalyptic nightmare the artist had as a child, where she was trapped inside the body of a mole while the world was ending. Wanting to reinterpret the dream, she empowers the little mole. Small yet capable, it defies and conquers death, banishing despair and helplessness.

Veera Kaamos Pitkänen is a Finnish collage artist. Her work draws inspiration from the study of art history, literature, esotericism, environmental disaster and comparative religion. Pitkänen's work has been exhibited and appeared in various formats in nine different countries.

Issue 20

Our new autumn journal Dark Mountain: Issue 20 – ABYSS is now here!

We are excited to announce the publication of our twentieth book, available now from our online shop. This year's special issue is an all colour collection of prose, poetry and art that delves into the subject of extractivism. Over the next few weeks we'll be sharing a selection of pieces from its pages. Today, we begin with the book's editorial and cover by Lawrence Gipe.

15th October, 2021

The Pit

> Standing on the brink, before the towering back wall of the Berkeley, whose semi-circular sloping terraces resemble a gigantic Greek amphitheater, one is overtaken by a sense of doom...Viewed from the edge, the pit is a *théâtre du sacrifice*. The gateway to dominion is also a staircase to hell – Milton's 'wild Abyss', the womb and grave of nature.
>
> – Edwin C. Dobb, 'The Age of the Sacrifice Zone', *EXTRACTION: Art on the Edge of the Abyss*

In 2016, tens of thousands of snow geese, midway through their winter migration from Alaska to northern Mexico, diverted from their route in order to avoid a storm. Many landed on a blue lake at the bottom of a deep crater. But the water was not right; it hurt. Within minutes the exhausted birds were dropping dead in their thousands. Officials from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, examining the corpses afterwards, found burns inside their bodies, evidence of the cadmium, copper, arsenic, zinc and sulphuric acid they had sought to shelter on. This deadly toxic soup was what filled Montana's milelong Berkeley Pit, leftover tailings from Butte's heyday as the copper mining capital of the world, now one of the largest environmental clean-up sites in the country.

In 2020, the poisoned rivers, the hacked, fracked and exploded ground, the countless wounds from the thousands of mining projects in the American West inspired Peter Koch, founder and director of the CODEX Foundation, a California-based arts non-profit, to launch a project called *EXTRACTION: Art on the Edge of the Abyss*. This 'multimedia, multi-venue, cross-border art intervention' invited artists from around the world to examine all forms of extractive industry, from open-cast mines in Butte to the exploitation of water, minerals, timber, coal, sand, animal and marine life, and the innumerable other 'resources' that fuel the global economy. *EXTRACTION* co-founder Edwin C. Dobb, who passed away in 2019, called this the 'age of the sacrifice zone', after an official government term for the areas that are left despoiled as the accepted collateral damage of so-called 'progress'.

Dark Mountain's 20th issue, ABYSS, is a response to that project's call, bringing an uncivilised eye to the mindset of extractivism: an insatiable, pathological drive that has fuelled a seemingly endless expansion in energy use, manufacturing and economic activity. Just as our consumption appears to have no end in sight, there are no geographical limits: as mining or drilling operations shut down in one part of the world,

having exhausted their seams or become economically unviable, new ones open up elsewhere – many of them to power the so-called 'green' technology boom.

Governments and billionaires dream of extending this frontier deeper and higher than ever before, from deep-sea mining on the ocean floor to plundering the minerals of other planets. Impelled by the need to take, take, take, the appetite of extractivism is all-consuming and unending.

In ABYSS , Alnoor Ladha and Martin Kirk write that we are living in the age of wetiko, an Algonquin term for a cannibalistic spirit that spreads like a virus. Amitav Ghosh draws the link between capitalist imperialism today and the 17th-century Dutch colonists in Indonesia's Banda Islands, who massacred the indigenous population in order to gain control over the trade in nutmeg. And in South Africa, colonised for its mineral wealth and fertile land, Sage Freda writes of how environmental and human exploitation are inextricably linked; the more we wreck and ravage the Earth, the more deeply we damage ourselves. As wetiko spreads across the world, all of us – and all other species – end up living and dying in the sacrifice zone.

From the Amazon to the Niger Delta, the Atacama Desert to the Minnesota wetlands, communities and indigenous people are attempting to defend the living world from devastation. Many contributors to *ABYSS* are part of the pushback against the pillage: from the protest camp at the proposed lithium mine at Thacker Pass, Nevada, and from a deep-sea oil rig in New Zealand's Great South Basin, we bring you stories from the activist front line. Derrick Jensen, Lierre Keith and Max Wilbert take us to China's giant black lake full of toxic run-off from the rare-earth metal mining that powers our laptops and phones. And we meet a Romanian peasant farmer whose fight against fracking and open-cast mining has helped to save one of Europe's last medieval landscapes.

> How do we remain fully human while so much around us is being destroyed, especially as we (at least, some of us) enjoy so many of the material benefits that devastation brings?

Extractivism's story can be told through these struggles, as it can be told through statistics: that China now consumes more sand for concrete and cement every three years than the US consumed in the entire 20th century; that wild animal populations have decreased by 60% in the last 50 years. But this book also tells the story of how extractivism feels – how do we remain fully human while so much around us is being destroyed, especially as we (at least, some of us) enjoy so many of the material benefits that devastation brings? The fiction and poetry in this book navigate this tricky terrain, from Claire Wahmanholm's haunting depictions of glaciers melting on the page to Tacey Atsitty's wrenching depiction of the poisoned water supplies of the Diné in the American Southwest.

Photography, observes Richard Misrach, is a profound means of bearing witness. Many images in this all-colour issue come from the EXTRACTION project, giving

evidence of the otherwise invisible toll of our voracious appetites, from David Maisel's turquoise lithium ponds in the Atacama Desert to Lawrence Gipe's stunning cover image depicting the largest hole on the planet in Siberia. Noble views of sublime natural landscapes give way to surveys of industrial ravages, as artists behold the world's dams, tailing ponds, abandoned mines, oilfields, slag heaps and quarries, and the walls of granite, marble and coal that lie beneath. Among the litany of disappeared places, Jaime Black's *The REDress Project* alerts us to the absences of indigenous women in Canada, while Aboriginal artist Betty Muffler shows the scale and beauty of the Earth repair required in her post-nuclear work, *Healing Country*. This is the world we do not see: the reality that powers the illusion of our spellbound lifestyles, with our sparkly wedding rings, our magical keyboards, our salmon and steak dinners, our electric cars gliding towards the emerald green cities of the future.

Once you start looking through the lens of extractivism, you start to see it everywhere – in the intellectual industries' absorption of organic life and culture to feed its never-ending appetite for analysis and codification; in the teetering stacks of digital finance, each newly created layer of speculative instrument appropriating value from the one below it; and in the exploitation of 'human resources', making ever-greater demands on workers' psychological and physical labour while demanding they carry ever more of the economic risk. And the suspicion arises that, behind all these manifestations of extraction, lies the same emotional and metaphysical vacuum – a hole in the heart as long and wide as the Berkeley pit: unappeasable, irrational, and ultimately incapable of ever being filled.

IMAGE: No. 2 from *Russian Drone Paintings*
(Mir Diamond Mine, Siberia)
Oil on canvas
Courtesy of the artist
Gipe's latest series, *Russian Drone Paintings* is based on images taken by drones for news programmes and surveillance posted on the government–run RUPTLY Network. Each painting consists of a frozen frame from this feed with subjects like pit mines in Siberia, bombings in Syria, ghost towns on remote mountains, towns abandoned because of radiation, and other residual evidence of interventions into nature.

Lawrence Gipe's practice engages the postmodern landscape and the visual rhetoric of progress, in media that ranges between painting, drawing, video and collaborative curatorial projects. Gipe has had 60 solo exhibitions in galleries and museums in New York, Beijing, San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, Munich, Berlin and Düsseldorf. Currently, he splits his time between his studio in Los Angeles, CA, and Tucson, AZ, where he is an Associate Professor of Studio Art at the University of Arizona.

Remembering Water

'This year the fires came early' – Steven Morgan journeys across the American wilderness to escape a raging inferno while battling an autoimmune disease, finding parallels between his porous body and a dying world.

Bob Marshall Wilderness ,Montana. Before the fires (photo: Steven Morgan)

Steven Morgan

is an artist and mental health trainer who lives in an aluminium box on wheels throughout the mountains and deserts of the Western United States. A wanderer of moods, he enjoys the many travails of long, long walks.

12th April, 2022

- PLACE & TIME

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Once my body began viciously attacking itself, I took to living on the road. Having suffered too many winters holed up in Vermont drawing childish depictions of the sun, I yearned for the big sky out west. I'd work a computer by day, hoot with owls by night (being doomed to a life of chronic pain has the virtue of simplifying plans). Though I harboured no doubt — given encroaching machines — that the withering of wilds would eventually parallel that of my bones, I figured the future was a ways off.

This year the fires came early. I was in the Montana wilderness, gulping glacier water and tracking grizzly bears, when the bluest sky morphed into a weary haze. A thick stink of smoke followed, and my little home, 65 square feet of aluminium on wheels, failed as my shell. The nearest clean air was on the Olympic Peninsula, a thousand miles away off the coast of Washington. And so I drove all day and night, through bloody milk fermenting above Missoula — where vacationing anglers still stubbornly cast their lines, past Idaho forests made ghoulish by wispy orange fingers, over jagged Cascade mountaintops disappearing into a smudge. Safely sealed within my car, I chain-smoked the entire ride.

Once on the Peninsula, home to the largest rainforest in the lower US, I finally breathed. The next morning, strolling into a valley of giant cedars, I was shocked to discover that their soft crimson fur had become worn and brittle, like old paper. Then I glanced down at the understory, which had just weathered a hundred degrees of something alien called a 'heat dome', and saw the mosses were dry. Here — the wettest area in the lower US — was a tinderbox, and my bare feet no longer sank in, but cracked the desiccated forest floor.

I can't make sense of the death of the world. I won't call it change; I won't call it a geological epoch; I won't apply evolutionary logic to the presence of living decay.

Something happened to me out there. I'd been focused all year on recovering from yet another devastating autoimmune flare and its attendant thoughts of suicide, but I could no longer keep my focus inside. I understood, at that juncture, two truths: one, that my body was too porous to be mine; two, that the world I loved and who loved me was no longer, would never be again, and that the future was not a ways off, but now, everywhere.

I can't make sense of the death of the world. I won't call it change; I won't call it a geological epoch; I won't apply evolutionary logic to the presence of living decay. The world I loved was made of glacier melt and spongy mosses, of loons and cottonwood arms, of wet spiderwebs and tender saguaros hiding shyly behind swirls of spikes. That world is not just dying: it is going to die, and soon. I am completely lost.

Meanwhile, the machines swallow — the land, yes, but the land in us too. They coagulate the porous places where our bodies meet other minds, trapping us inside when outside is too thick with haze to see into. That we would digitise the capacity for connection alongside that love retreating from the parched world is not accidental, but orchestrated, maybe nefariously so. Though a two-dimensional glare will, blessedly, extinguish the three-dimensional coals simmering inside its casing, the same machinery through which we flee the world burns the places to which we run.

Once the smoke finally cleared, I headed from the coast back into the interior. Across a thousand miles of hot flats and canyons, my dehydrated thoughts wandered aimlessly. I'd grown tired, so tired of childishness that even the shining sun felt oppressive. I wanted thumping rain.

Rocky Mountains, Colorado. A council of peaks (photo: Steven Morgan)

Suddenly, on the horizon, soaring Rocky Mountains crept into view. Up there in their council of peaks, I saw the earth and sky gods still gathering in clouds to trade on precious elements, and I felt wet with remembering.

I remembered sage Lao Tzu, thousands of years ago in the Chinese kingdom, so withered by civilised life that he retreated once and for all into the wilderness. On his way out, the city's gatekeeper asked him to record his knowledge, and the result, 81

passages known as the Tao Te Ching, is a perennial wisdom. What did the elder know? Water: how water bends around the hardened, how water fills the empty vessel, how water never dies.

All streams flow to the sea
because it is lower than they are.
Humility gives it its power.

When the world is on fire, use water.

Should the trend hold, this spring the Western US will hold water again. It will thus be a year of forgetting. The cows will merrily graze the desert creosote bushes, thirsty almond trees will flower. Vitally, the machines will stay on.

But we can't go on like this.

My pain is like this dam, a barrier siphoning fantasy from reality, a halting of natural flows that draws my attention to places of division.

The cold quench of October has arrived, and I am camped at a reservoir in southern Colorado. To the east, the Dolores River (now a creek) slowly trickles in; to the west, beyond the concrete dam, she's reduced to disjoining puddles. On this moonlit evening, I am on the shore staring catatonically into the mass of liminal water. My pain is like this dam, a barrier siphoning fantasy from reality, a halting of natural flows that draws my attention to places of division.

Hand-carved mahogany spoon (photo: Steven Morgan)

So I do what I always do when the currents fail: I carve wood, that I might aim these repetitive cuts towards something lasting. Carefully, patiently, a spoon finds its way out of the block, covered in dust. As I dip it beneath the water's surface, the moon glows in the bowl's baptised face, revealing all at once the shape of the wood's immanent grain: wavy and curving.

For the road I once called yearning circles back to memory. Yes, the future came faster than forecast, but it's been seen before. In the vision, there is no engineering solution, no dimming the fire-breathing sun. There is only the land, and us, and an empty vessel. A stream still flows nearby.

Rendering the Animal

We are excited to announce the publication of our twentieth book, available now from our online shop. This year's special issue is an all colour collection of prose, poetry and artworks that delves into the subject of extractivism. As well as mining minerals, human civilisation has mercilessly extracted the animal and plant kingdoms. 'We are the Big Hole people, our appetite a chasm into which the living world is poured' writes Rob Percival in this final post from 'ABYSS', an excerpt from his essay on the shocking business of the modern slaughterhouse. With photograph by Christopher Boyer.

Pronghorn Killed by Train, Blaine County, Montana (48.454867°, –108.468977°) by Christopher Boyer

Rob Percival

is the author of *The Meat Paradox*, scheduled for publication in the UK and US in February 2022. He is also Head of Food Policy for the Soil Association.

3rd November, 2021

- ISSUE 20 – ABYSS

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In his 1906 novel, *The Jungle,* Upton Sinclair offers a vivid account of Chicago's stockyards:

> All day long the blazing midsummer sun beat down upon that square mile of abominations: upon tens of thousands of cattle crowded into pens whose wooden floors stank and steamed contagion; upon bare, blistering, cinder-strewn railroad tracks, and huge blocks of dingy meat factories, whose labyrinthine passages defied a breath of fresh air to penetrate them.

Sinclair recalls the 'rivers of hot blood, and car-loads of moist flesh, and rendering vats and soap caldrons, glue factories and fertilizer tanks, that smelt like the craters of hell'. The rendering vats were integral to the operation. 'No tiniest particle of organic matter was wasted,' he observes of Durham's, a fictional rendering plant.

> Out of the horns of the cattle they made combs, buttons, hairpins, and imitation ivory; out of the shinbones and their big bones they cut knife and toothbrush brush handles, and mouth-pieces for pipes ... From such things as feet, knuckles, hide clippings, and sinews came such strange and unlikely products as gelatine, isinglass, and phosphorus, bone black, shoe blacking, and bone oil.

The rendering rooms were built around open vats of acid set into the floor, into which the carcasses of animals were deposited. Exhausted workers would occasionally fall in, and 'when they were fished out, there was never enough of them left to be worth exhibiting.' Sometimes these workers would 'be overlooked for days till all but the bones of them had gone out into the world as Anderson's Pure Leaf Lard'.

Sinclair spent seven weeks in the stockyards researching his novel. He dressed in the dishevelled and filthy clothes of a labourer, and he interviewed dozens of workers, priests, bartenders, policemen and politicians. *The Jungle* would become one of the most politically influential novels in American history. The public outcry at the unsanitary conditions of the meat processing plants was so loud that President Roosevelt saw fit to dispatch fact-checkers to Chicago to confirm the accuracy of the novel's claims. They duly reported that the situation was just as bad as Sinclair had described. *The Jungle* had provided the first popular exposé of the animal industries, and an early portrait of consumer capitalism.

The Chicago stockyards received another visitor shortly after the publication of *The Jungle*. Like the protagonist of Sinclair's novel, the visitor 'watched the men on their killing beds, marvelling at their speed and power as though they had been wonderful machines.' The brute speed and efficiency of the slaughter line seemed almost miraculous, as each man was allocated a discrete and menial task – hoist, slash, snip, snap – with these tasks orchestrated into a concert of fierce productivity. Henry Ford, the industrialist and founder of the Ford Motor Company, saw an opportunity.

> Fordism is typically understood to have originated in Ford's car manufacturing plant in Michigan, but its true roots lie in the Chicago stockyard

'Fordism' describes the mass production and consumption of standardised consumer goods, wherein unskilled workers assemble preformed parts and are provided with wages such that they can afford to purchase the fruits of their labour. While contemporary capitalism is a more multifaceted affair, dealing in digital abstractions as much as material goods, the mass consumption of standardised products remains intrinsic to its logic. Fordism is typically understood to have originated in Ford's car manufacturing plant in Michigan, but its true roots lie in the Chicago stockyard. In a poignant inversion, Ford translated the efficiency of the slaughter line into the efficiency of the automobile production line. The disassembly of animal bodies was transmuted into the assembly of consumer goods.

While animals disappeared from view in the emerging animal industries, consumer products began to quiver and gasp with a life of their own: the car, the sneaker, the smartphone. More than mere goods, these products became imbued with life in the distorted animism of the marketplace, mimetic of the vanished animals whose rendered remains were used in their manufacture.

While the slaughter line provided the logic of mass manufacturing, the rendering industry provided the raw materials for imperial propaganda. The history of colonialism can be told, in part, through the story of soap. 'The first step towards lightening THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN is through teaching the virtues of cleanliness,' one early advert declared. 'PEARS' SOAP is a potent factor in brightening the dark corners of the Earth as civilization advances, while amongst the cultured of all nations it holds the highest place – it is the ideal toilet soap.' The soap vats described in Sinclair's novel produced tallow from rendered beef and mutton fat, and when mixed with sodium hydroxide (also known as lye), the tallow would produce soap. 'Toilet soap' became the emblem of American and British colonialism, the speciesism of the stockyard translated into the racism of white supremacy.

'Toilet soap' became the
emblem of American and British colonialism, the speciesism of the stockyard translated into the racism of white supremacy

The rendering industry also provided the raw materials for the distraction industry, namely gelatine, a protein extracted from the skin, bones and connective tissues of cattle, sheep and pigs. Gelatine binds light-sensitive agents to a base so that images can materialise, and was used in early film and photography. Indeed, when the word film was first used in the context of cinema, the word referred directly to the gelatine coating upon the photographic material. While there is, of course, great potential for artistry in photography and cinema, the modern entertainment industries more often serve to distract subdued populations from the social inequity, ecological degradation and loss of meaning intrinsic to consumer society. Digital film is more commonly used today, but the use of rendered remains persists, with animal cholesterol a component of the liquid crystals that make up the screens of televisions, computers, smartphones and tablets. If you are reading these words on a screen, you are gazing through distilled residues of slaughtered animals.

As Nicole Shukin documents in her book, *Animal Capital,* consumer capitalism has been entangled with animal exploitation from the beginning. The American stock market opened amid the noise and stench of Chicago's stockyards, focussed upon the trade of 'livestock'. The 'branding' which is ubiquitous to modern corporate marketing began with the branding of an animal, logos imprinted on our retinas as heated metal was pressed onto the animal's flesh. Modern consumer capitalism, Shukin writes, excels in 'trafficking animal remains (the business of recycling animal trimmings, bones, offal, and blood back into market metabolisms).' The animal industries have evolved in

contemporary conditions into a cannibalistic super-organism, a capital metabolism fed on rendered remains.

*

The meat industry has never only been the meat industry. Industrial animal agriculture was initially made possible by the rendering of animal body parts, the economics of production requiring that capital was extracted from the whole carcass. The flesh alone would scarcely cover the costs – the value was in the by-products: hides and skins, wool and hair, fat and oil, soap and pharmaceuticals, fertilisers and feed. Rendering also took care of an escalating disposal problem as production intensified. This remains the case today. Roughly 50% of the cow is considered inedible by Americans. Rendering these remains diverts 28 billion kilograms of waste from landfills each year, generating an industry worth more than USD$25 billion.

There is an ecological rationale to rendering, though this rationale must be extricated from the rhetoric of the animal industries. The North American Renderers Association will tell you (and I quote) that –

Rendering is Recycling: Rendering is the cooking and drying of meat and/or other animal by-products not used for human consumption in order to recover fats and proteins.

Rendering is 'The Original Recycling': For hundreds of years renderers have been recycling unwanted meat into animal food and fertiliser used to grow the next generation of food.

Rendering is Green and Sustainable: Rendering yields far fewer emissions than and filling or composting. Rendered products help animal agriculture and other customers reduce their environmental footprints and become more sustainable.

There is some truth in these claims, and there are very good reasons to render animal remains. If we are to farm animals, it makes sense to use the whole carcass. If we are to eat animals, it makes sense to eat 'nose to tail', and to extract as much utility and nutrition from the creature as possible. There are good reasons to think we should be farming animals, albeit in a carefully defined context. Most modern agriculture relies on fossil fuel fertilisers and mined rock phosphate, a dwindling non-renewable resource. Organic farming manages without these synthetic inputs, but this typically requires animals for fertility cycling. Manures transfer and recycle nitrogen, enriching the soil.

Rendered bones and teeth contain phosphorus, necessary for plant growth. In organic farming, such rendering is enacted in service of regeneration. The life of the soil dictates the role of animals in the system, and animal populations are capped according to the availability of sustainable feed. Industrial animal farming obeys a very different logic. Animals are fed on crops grown using fossil fuel inputs, often on land that has been converted from wild habitat. 'More meat' is the mantra, while the animal's rendered remains are returned to the market as capital. Oleic acid for shampoos, cleansers and creams. Glycerine for glues, solvents and explosives. Stearic acid for rubber. This

is 'recycling', though it is recycling rooted in escalating extraction and exploitation, indifferent to regeneration or ecological return.

'They use everything about the hog except the squeal,' Sinclair observes, in one of the novel's most memorable lines. In contemporary consumer capitalism they go one further, bottling the squeal and selling it as greenwash. The animal industries might claim sustainability, but it is a miasma masking the insatiable appetite of the market.

(this post is an extract from a longer essay by Rob Percival in the issue)

IMAGE Pronghorn Killed by Train, Blaine County, Montana (48.454867°, –108.468977°) by Christopher Boyer
Photograph
During the harsh winter of 2011, the snow was so deep that the only place the animals could travel were ploughed highways and railroad tracks which are slightly elevated and therefore blown free of snow by the wind. Carcasses were scattered along more than 100 miles of track, with the worst being near Hinsdale, Montana where approximately 145 animals were bunched up at a bridge when the train ploughed through.It was a demonstration of the unanticipated and unfortunate synergies when the rhythms of nature merge with the discord of infrastructure.

Christopher Boyer's professional work in aerial survey, mapping and photography has allowed him to become a full-time student and chronicler of a changing planet. Flying low between projects affords him the freedom to document the stories and patterns revealed in gorgeous and tragic landscapes throughout the American West.

The Diamond and the Glacier

We are excited to announce the publication of our twentieth book, available now from our online shop. This year's special issue is an all-colour collection of prose, poetry and artwork that delves into the subject of extractivism. The poems set within the pages of *ABYSS* begin with a 'stolen' diamond and end with a melting glacier. Here, Bhanu Kapil and Claire Wahmanholm stand in the dark before exhibits of both, and bear witness to the collapse of empires and the natural world. With ice and seed artwork by Basia Irland.

Tome 1 by Basia Irland
Bhanu Kapil and Claire Wahmanholm
Bhanu is a Fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge, and is the author of several books of poetry, most recently *How To Wash A Heart* (Liverpool University Press), which won the TS Eliot Prize. In 2020, Claire is the author of *Wilder* (Milkweed Editions, 2018), *Redmouth* (Tinderbox Editions, 2019), and the forthcoming *Meltwater*(Milkweed Editions, 2023).
29th October, 2021

- DARK VERSE
- FROM OUR BOOKS
- ISSUE 20 – ABYSS

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The Protest

The first hands to touch it were brown, I'm guessing. Who washed it? Cut, mis-cut, re- cut, it ended up on the armband of a child emperor, Duleep Singh. Was ceded. Now glinting. Presented to Queen Victoria on 3rd July, 1850, a day without weather. Was it raining, for example, on the day of the ceremony?

‘No one feels more strongly than I do about India or how much I opposed our taking those countries and I think no more will be taken, for it is very wrong and no advantage to us. You know how I dislike wearing the Koh-i-Noor’, wrote the Queen to her daughter, in one of the earliest recorded examples of white colonial guilt.

Perhaps I cannot begin this beautiful story without noting that this guilt did not prevent or inhibit the ongoing suction of mineral, vegetal and structural resources at a scale reminiscent of gluttony but causing only intellectual discomfort, rather than physical duress, to the gluttons themselves.

And so it was that the day began, oily with rain, dripping cold down our necks as we waited for the bus to Harrow. ‘Do you want to skip school?’ asked my mother, once my father was out the door. Click. A lazy child, happy to eat toast by the fire and read my book, I said yes. My sister was a baby. I remember the red and white striped buggy from Mothercare, and that the rain hissed and boiled as it bounced off the pavement, leaving a pattern of indigo and yellow dots behind my eyelids when I looked away. A bus, then two trains. The smell of wet wool.

At the Tower of London, my mother bought our tickets. Into the pocket of the Tower we went. ‘Here,’ said my mother, giving me the buggy’s reins. Without preamble, she took her position next to the display case. There it was, the diamond itself, unshattered, in synthesis with the crown.

A single ray of light bounced off the diamond and another from my mother’s tooth. Is this why we still don’t have a home? Is it because we are mad, or that our own place in the chain of inherited wealth, derived from the labour of others, was broken? In the mythology of my paternal strain, for example, there were cotton fields. In Lahore, my grandmother changed her sari to match the colour of the sun as it moved across the morning sky: scarlet, then orange, then light pink silk with butterflies or paisley swirls embroidered with silver thread.

Let it rain. Let the memory of the homes of my ancestors wash away with the homes themselves.

The Tower of London is warm and dry. My sister is a quiet baby. My mother is focused. Thus, the protest begins. ‘Give it back,’ screams my mother. ‘You took it from us.’ What I recall is the darkness of the room in which the Crown Jewels were displayed, a decision based on preservation but also the drama, I suspect, of the diamonds, rubies and emeralds floating in the glass boxes, the navy-blue necks and throats constructed from velvet.

Jewels were displayed, a decision based on preservation but also the drama,
I suspect, of the diamonds, rubies and emeralds floating in the glass boxes

My mother screams and screams, and soon the Beefeaters appear. On either side, their gloved hands grip her upper arms with a firmness familiar to me from education. ‘You bastards,’ screams my mother, as the tourists and schoolchildren on day trips from their various boroughs or parts of the country press back against the walls. Do they remember this day as vividly as I do? ‘It doesn’t belong to you.’

This morning, at the dentist, 45 years after the day I'm recalling from my childhood, the day of my mother's protest, I flinched from the pain of a deep cleaning. Unbidden, from nowhere, from deep within my own body, came the image of an egg balanced on a railway platform. I was an egg, I thought, inside my mother's body, in the weeks that followed the implementation of the Radcliffe Boundary Award.

'We had no milk, no water, no food, no toilets. My grandfather gave me a mango the night before we left. He said, "You're taking the mango to India and when you get there it will be ripe. You love mangoes, baby." So, I kept it in my coat. All around us, spread out in every direction, were dead bodies, and we slept there for seven nights,' said my mother, at bedtime, once. I realise now that she was a young woman when she was my mother, and not an old woman. Her experiences were fresh. Extraction displaces the biome, the muddy environment as much as the object itself.

Walking home from the bus-stop, my mother stopped in front of Keeley's house. Keeley, a classmate, seven years old like me. Her parents opened the door. 'Can we use your toilet?' asked my mother. 'We're eating dinner,' said Keeley's parents. 'But we need to use it,' said my mother, 'desperately.' In we went. And then: 'Can we eat our lunch here?' Keeley's parents, clearly uncomfortable, let us into the conservatory, where my mother unwrapped our packed lunch of parathas and achar. I remember only the cardinal feeling of shame, an emotion so excruciating it might as well be a colour or dye, turning the body red.

I don't recall experiencing embarrassment when my mother, without warning, transgressed all social bonds to protest the Koh-i-noor's proximity to the wrong Kings and Queens, and with the proviso that, in its native context, successive possessions were also contested by regional domains.

Migration has a cost.

That's the wrong sentence, but the unfamiliar note is the one I want to end on, as the protest was unsuccessful, and only lives in the psyches of a) the two or three Beefeaters in the room that day, b) the other visitors, c) my family members.

What I also remember: the bright green grass and the ravens, gleaming, silky and black, on the Tower lawn. With a shove, my mother was expelled from the interior by the Yeoman Warders. The Ravenmaster was waiting on the ramp with his pitchfork to herd her along. I jutted and pricked my way through the crowd, to find her, my mother, sobbing inconsolably on a wall.

Below us, the Thames roared up and spat light green and golden foam into our eyes and onto our legs.

– *Bhanu Kapil*

Glacier (1)

The room was huge and cold. The glacier's skin smelled like pine, snowcloud, bog, lichen. There were stanchions around the ice so the audience wouldn't touch or lick its weeping face. Some people had brought their children. Our brains stuttered. Who could ever – What would possess – Who would want – I didn't like the exposure. Whenever I heard a spurt of knee-high laughter, whenever one looked up at me thinking I was its mother, I felt stripped of another layer of clothing. Everyone knows that children smell fear, but they smell shame even better. By the time the lights dimmed I was naked and didn't know what to do with my hands and arms. I couldn't cover everything. For an additional five hundred dollars you could mount a ladder and point a hair dryer at the glacier for two minutes. With your gun of hot air you could shape the surface into pits – a gentle divot for an eye, a more forceful one for a mouth. You could make sweat run from armpits, from the small of a slick back. Any meltwater was yours to keep. We had heard that some people had vials from all five glaciers lined up on their mantles like Hummels. Pictures were free but we didn't take any. It felt pornographic – all that melting, all those crowds. One couple recorded their entire session, the machines blinking and blinking, their voices tangling as they narrated. I stared at the ceiling. I rubbed the ticket stub in my pocket until it pilled into pulp. We didn't talk in the car. When we got home I was so thirsty. Like wanting to have sex after a funeral. I stood in the shower and let the water spray haphazardly into my mouth. There was so little I hardly had to swallow. I bent over the sink and cupped my hands to my mouth over and over and over again. I put my mouth directly over the faucet and hummed. This sounds like a metaphor but isn't. I'm just talking about water.

– *Claire Wahmanholm*

IMAGE: Tome I by Basia Irland
Mountain Maple, Columbine Flower, Blue Spruce seeds
(from 'ICE RECEDING/BOOKS RESEEDING')

ICE RECEDING/BOOKS RESEEDING are artworks, created alongside communities and scientists around the world: river water is frozen, carved into the form of an open or closed book, embedded with a global cross-cultural ecological language consisting of local native seeds, and placed back into the stream. These sculptures depict problems, including receding glaciers and dangerous outflow from mines, and a suggestion for action – reseeding riparian zones to reduce some of the effects of climate disruption through plants and to bring attention to the overwhelming number of streams that are adversely affected by toxic mine drainage.

Fulbright Scholar, **Basia Irland** founded the Arts and Ecology Program, University of New Mexico; authored *Water Library* and *Reading the River*; had a major retrospective in the Netherlands and will represent the United States in the Cuenca Biennial, Ecuador. Her water projects are featured in over 70 international publications. basiairland.com

Eat the Sky

We are excited to announce the publication of our twentieth book, available now from our online shop. This year's special issue is an all-colour collection of prose, poetry and artworks that delves into the subject of extractivism. Among its strand of uncivilised fiction pieces, Philip Webb Gregg recounts a disturbing tale of devouring and disappearance. With artwork by Anika Nixdorf.

The Poisoning by Anika Nixdorf
Philip Webb Gregg
writes odd things for interesting places. Most of his work focuses on the disconnect between human nature and nature nature. He lives on the road in Europe and makes his living as a freelance scribbler. He's a frequent contributor and occasional editor for the Dark Mountain Project.
26th October, 2021

- FROM OUR BOOKS
- ISSUE 20 – ABYSS

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It was while waiting for the weather on the six o'clock news that Boca first felt the urge to eat the television. It was a subtle thing, to start with. Not so much a hunger as a lukewarm lust. They felt it in the small of their back and the muscles that ran across their ribs. A sort of gnashing, as if their insides had teeth and they were grinding.

There had been a massacre and dead bodies were thronging the beaches. Loose heads lolled freely in the surf. *Refugees*, said the handsome interview lady. *Terrorists with mortars.* Boca remembered that word in particular: mortars. The local police/army/private security force couldn't quite understand how they had acquired mortars. In the interview he kept saying it, over and over, in his distinctive accent: *I really don't know where they could have got the mortars. The mortars.*

The more Boca watched the more they felt convinced the screen was complicit in these urges. Somewhere beyond the pixels, they knew, there were eyes peering back at them, inviting them toward some forbidden combination of slick consumptive desires, pressing back any hovering ideas of normalcy.

Next came politics. The handsome interview lady – who, Boca realised with a pang, was not a lady at all, but a man with soft, round features – was speaking to another, much older man in a pin-striped suit about the state of things: there was no doubt about it. Things were in a state.

They had graphs and pie charts to illustrate the situation. Somebody who had missiles had been rude to somebody else – also in possession of missiles – and there was a general concern that these missiles were unlikely to miss. They consulted other experts as flags waved menacingly in the background. The handsome interview lady-man kept asking the same questions in an increasingly insistent tone. The answers never changed, but the repetition added televisual value.

Boca blinked and tried to focus on something else. They got up and walked into the next room to glance at their laptop. They sat down again and took out their phone. They scrolled and scrolled, but it made no difference. The screens all spoke the same.

And finally, before we go to the weather, the handsome interview lady-man was saying, *we have a brief review on the state of the climate and ecological emergency today.* At this point the screens seemed to howl and Boca's ears were filled with the sound of twisting guts and masticating food.

Boca bit down. The remote made a hard crunch like cereal between their teeth. At first the plastic was impenetrable, but after a while it relented and the remote began to yield to Boca's intentions. Buttons like dried meat. Batteries like hot zest. Soon it was nothing but a drool of circuitry on the wooden floorboards. Boca was on their knees before the television, stroking the face of the screen as the unseeing eyes of the presenter blinked and blinked.

It was only later, with a mouth full of disasters and glass, that Boca realised they'd never reached the weather.

*

Things happened fast in the weeks and months after that. Boca's town was small, in an inlet by the sea. Small towns are famous for having many secrets that everybody knows. Boca knew they had to be careful.

They took to going out only at dusk and dawn. Something in the horizon of neither one thing nor the other appealed to them. It wasn't long before they had the idea to pick-off the streetlights. It was the sensible progression, and Boca felt a certain affinity with them. Nobody really notices streetlights, not even when they vanish.

> Concrete was a particular taste. Sour and gritty, like dregs. Pretty soon everything began to taste like concrete.

The metal was hot in their mouth, rusty, worn and salt-kissed. Boca would grimace as the awkward bolts, wires and bulbs fell into their throat. They weren't particularly

good to eat. But something in the way they shone – naked bright and seething – made Boca's insides throb.

The streetlights weren't enough. Boca progressed to road-signs, wheelie bins; a couple of phone-boxes that had become micro-libraries. Boca chomped them down bite by bite. They were strict and considerate in their search for things to eat, though, removing any small weeds and avoiding insects as much as possible as they tore and chewed at the harsh metal and cold plastic. Concrete was a particular taste. Sour and gritty, like dregs. Pretty soon everything began to taste like concrete.

It was around this time the rumours began to circulate. The townspeople discovered uncertainty on their lips, murmurings about how much dimmer and emptier the streets were these days. Old women sat at home, afraid to go out, whispering across their clothes lines. The council even sent out a phalanx of electricians, to repair the missing lights.

It didn't do any good. The town only got darker and simpler and quieter as the fast-food joints and the kebab vans disappeared in the dusk, one by one, leaving only a few chewed steering wheels and linoleum floors behind. Other restaurants went too. Classy places, with expensive insurance – so the owners didn't overly mind. But then it was supermarkets, warehouses, even a 5-tonne fishing trawler. Gone, in the gore-dawn light.

People walked the streets armed with bits of wood and knives. They snapped at each other, argued and made up. They made WhatsApp groups, formed teams of working action circles and marched on the town hall, only to find it had disappeared overnight, leaving behind a few stunned security guards whose clothes had been eaten off.

*

Excuse me, do you live around here? – it was the handsome interview lady-man from the news, standing on the pavement with a mic. Not far away a large woman held a camera on her shoulder. She cast left and right, filming the empty space where the school had been the day before.

What, said Boca?

We're doing a piece for the news. Are you from here? I know it's early, we wanted to get the morning light. And there's no-one else around. Would you mind?

Uh, Yeah. I suppose-

Great! Thanks. Great. This won't take a minute.

Boca stood in front of the camera for fifteen minutes while the handsome interview lady-man asked the same questions over and over. It was less entertaining in person, and Boca found themselves simultaneously irritated and aroused.

OK we're done! Thanks again. That was great, yeah. Hey, my name is Henry, by the way. We were going to go to Costa, if it's still there. Haha. Would you like to grab a coffee with us? That was a great interview. And maybe some breakfast? I'm starving.

Ah, said Boca.

*

Henry had skin like honeycomb, pitted and waiting with flavour. Boca dutifully hived it clean. They adored the rough curve of Henry's kneecap and the narrow glint in their eye that said: *Do it again. Do it again.* There was something deep in the core of Henry that encouraged repetition.

For their part, Boca did not go unsatisfied. Henry knew a thing or two about people and things that didn't fit between the boundaries. *It's my job, darling*, he would say, as he fitted snugly between the boundaries. *And though I say so myself, I'm great at it.*

> There was something about him that was overflowing with life, something cartwheeling inside him that tasted like light. Like swallowing sunshine itself.

Afterwards Boca found themselves awake at night, inexplicably not-hungry. They watched the grey ceiling for hours as the grinding in their guts quietly eased. They tasted Henry in their mouth, slick across their lips, and compared him to all the other flavours. Steel, polycarbonate plastic, cement, iron, oak, wool, oil paint, ceramic, paper, cork, cotton, cardboard, silver, diamond. Nothing came close. There was something about him that was overflowing with life, something cartwheeling inside him that tasted like light. Like swallowing sunshine itself. For the first time in months and months Boca felt full. They closed their eyes and dreamt of the weather.

Outside, everyone was confused. The street patrols and hasty vigilantes all felt bored and a bit embarrassed when nothing happened for day after day, and then week after week. People began to feel victorious. They thought their blustering and home-made weapons had worked. They started making plans and talked with confidence about rebuilding the restaurants, the shops, the town hall. They smiled at each other in the streets full of scaffolding and shook hands as they passed.

Meanwhile Boca couldn't find a way to get out of bed. Every time they tried Henry would lasso them with a kiss on the shoulder or a playful yank of their underwear. It was an imprisonment of pillows, sheets and sweat.

Midway through the third week Henry got a phone call and broke the cage. *I'm sorry, darling, but you know I can't stay. The story's gone. Nothing's happening. I need to work, there's nothing here.*

Boca had a lungful of words but they wouldn't come out. Couldn't find the lock or the hinge or even the door. They stayed quiet while Henry packed up all his clothes. His phone charger from behind the drawers. His wedding ring from the bedside table.

Listen, it's been really great, OK? Really fucking great. If you're ever in Shoreditch, text me. Yeah?

Just as he was twisting the handle the light caught him across the shoulders and Boca saw that he was made not of flesh, but simpler things. His flavour was different, yes. But not unique. Not unreachable. Not at all unlike the gristle of bricks or the tang of oil. At that moment Boca's whole body hummed. A sound that drove beyond feeling.

Beyond teeth and throats and bellies. Beyond what lay between their legs, between their ribs. Beyond sadness and beyond love.

Wait, they said, crossing the room to meet him. *Please Henry? One last kiss. I just want to say goodbye. That's it. Come here.*

Boca opened their mouth wide, wide, wide. And bit down.

*

The town had gone. All that was left was rubble and the lights of half-hearted sirens, unseen and unheard. A week or two before, there had been a frenzy of voices. Running and falling. Crying children. Crying stones. Crying gulls from the sea. And now everything was quiet.

They scooped the earth with bleeding nails. Great handfuls of grit and worms fell through their fingers. Bones and fossils. Ancient skeletons of unimagined beasts. Gold, crystals. A buried civilisation. They ate and ate and time went by. Never had they felt so close to being satisfied. Not even when the tanks had come and the bombs had fallen and Boca had snaffled them whole, their hot breath making squalls in Boca's gut. That had been good, yes. But not as good as this.

They ate a hole the size of a city into the hard rock and stone, digging tunnels, deep as skyscrapers with their teeth and hunger. For miles and miles, they moved through the dark, only stopping when they felt an intense warmth growing closer, closer. This is what they'd come for. Here was the prize and punishment of their craving. Boca scooped great greedy handfuls of dripping magma from the fissures in the rock and pressed it to their lips.

For a long time they did this, in anguish and ecstasy, until at last they felt something near to fullness, an emotion akin to closure, bubbling with the fury in their stomach. But as they emerged from the tooth-marked cave, they felt a new need overcome them. A thirst, so hot and dry it cracked Boca's insides and left them gasping. They came out facing the sea and grinned a bloody, burning grin.

The oceans didn't last long. As soon as one went down, they all followed willingly. It was like pulling the plug on a great fish-filled bathtub. The whales sang as they tumbled down their throat, and some of the plastic nets caught on their teeth, but Boca didn't mind. They just kept their eyes closed and focused on swallowing.

Eventually, it ended. Boca opened their eyes and saw that everything was truly, irredeemably, empty. A scrap of dead meat, lolling freely in a surf of sky. And yes, they were relieved, but somehow it still wasn't enough.

Boca looked up, and opened wide.

IMAGE: The Poisoning by Anika Nixdorf
Watercolour on paper

When the illusion that I am isolated from the safe holding of the Earth prevails, when I hold the belief that I am a stranger to that life-sustaining source, my inner landscapes become turbulent and gnarly. Addiction blooms and shame puts down its roots. From that place I take. Take, take, take. Repeat. Survive. But looking closer

I find the turbulence is rage unexpressed and the gnarls are grief untended, and the experience of disconnection is both the
cause and the effect of taking more than I can give back.

London-based artist **Anika Nixdorf** explores the symbolic imagery of the unconscious mind through her surreal and experimental watercolours. Her fluid compositions convey a human disconnection from and reconnection to the natural world. Each piece is a therapeutic process through which she seeks to find and heal wounded and alienated parts of herself.

Future Mountains

We are excited to announce the publication of our twentieth book, available now from our online shop. This year's special issue is an all colour collection of prose, poetry and artwork that delves into the subject of extractivism. In today's post from the book, Molly Sturdevant holds her child and her father's ashes, as she stands by the devastated forests of West Fork and the Animas River in the wake of the Gold King Mine disaster in Colorado. With painting by Erika Osborne.

Hoover Gates lby Erika Osborne

Molly Sturdevant

Molly's work appears in numerous places, including Orion Magazine, Newfound, X-R-A-Y Literary Magazine, the Great Lakes Review, the Nashville Review, and About Place Journal. A finalist for the Montana Prize in Fiction and a Pushcart nominee, she is currently completing a novel set in the Leadville, Colorado mining district.

22nd October, 2021

- FROM OUR BOOKS
- ISSUE 20 – ABYSS

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In the summer of 2015, on an ordinary July morning, the Animas River suddenly turned bright orange and began to stink.

It's a historic, much-loved river that is variably fast, slow, narrow, and in some places wide. The river makes its way from the snowmelt sources in the steep 14,000-foot peaks of the San Juan Mountains down through the Animas Gorge, passing through small but popular towns and tourist destinations. The river is a being and a life; it is also a source of drinking water, a place for fishing, the riding of rapids and relaxed floats on old rubber tires.

I stand on the edge of a bike trail not far from City Market in Durango, Colorado, holding my infant son on my hip, wondering if I should cover his nose and mouth. The orange colour is thick, it isn't subtle. The smell is noxious, especially if the updraft is caught in the shifting breeze and sent directly toward your face.

A gold mine above Silverton Colorado that was started in 1887 had been pooling leached water for a century, near the 10,000-foot elevation mark. It has extremely deep tunnel systems, surrounded by peaks of up to 13,000 feet.

Mountains are beings with ingenious systems in place. Their hydrology balances snowmelt and rain and serves fast-moving rivers that are the lifeblood of millions of creatures in the west. A mine disrupts a mountain's hydrology, exposing its interior water to air (oxygen, sulfites), making that water acidic and creating a kind of natural smelter that refines other metals: arsenic, mercury, lead, zinc, aluminium.

The bulkheads that were put into the Gold King Mine by each successive departing owner were partial, reluctant concessions to equally weak demands for responsible clean-up. On that morning in 2015, the backfill and pipe that had been recently installed gave way, and the water gushed downslope through the watershed as far as New Mexico and Utah.

The Gold King is only one mine. There are hundreds of defunct, collapsed, flooded mines in Colorado. In the San Juans, water monitors before the Gold King Disaster estimated that hundreds of gallons per minute of waste water are leached into the greater watershed. It has always shown up in fish surveys, but it hadn't yet turned a river orange.

My sister and I stand there with our sons, watching the river. We stand with tourists and townspeople hovering along the edge of the bike paths and crouching low by the boat and tube put-ins, watching the water rush through, orange as orange juice.

It is bright like a Christo wrap, like his orange 'Valley Curtain' work in Rifle Gap. Christo's installation went up in 1972, the same year the Clean Water Act required mining companies to be held responsible for cleaning up after themselves. But, here we are.

*

> When I talk to my son about mountains, I find myself describing something other than what we see.

When I talk to my son about mountains, I find myself describing something other than what we see.

In the fall of 2014, about four months after my dad's death, I went home for the ceremony and the spreading of his ashes. I breastfed the baby on the flight to Denver, and then again on the small, regional plane that took us to Durango. I still hadn't cried. We drove with close friends and family up a long dirt road, then hiked to one of my dad's favourite spots.

I see my father's ashes lift out from the hands of my two brothers, a grey cloud. It dissipates. Some people hug in the silence. I don't want to be touched or looked at. The wind is shifty. I am carrying my child in a wrap tied around me. Wind lifts my hair, wind lifts his hair, the breeze moves us. The mountain is bright except for the shadow of a passing cloud. The aspens radiate yellow.

I think of camping with my father, always camping. Or just putzing in the woods. Hiking the Calico Trail, cultivating a sense of contentment with the same trees, the same smell of lodgepole or scrub oak, pointing out just how thick the red willow is over and over again every year, until it was no longer really about the red willow but a way of checking in, saying hello, repeating and declaring the persistence of love over time.

The red willow down there is bright this year.

It sure is.

A few weeks after the toxic water burst out of the Gold King Mine, I am driving along a familiar stretch of highway through the Weminuche Wilderness. I am with my sister, brother-in-law, my son and my nephew. I look out and see the one-year-old scars of the West Fork Fire. It is spellbinding.

My family members are all silent, sullen, they've already seen it, but I haven't. The eagle eyries are shorn, the ponderosa and fir are husks, charcoal, the entire montane landscape grey, black, and silver. This is the first time we've taken this drive. We do it in complete silence. Not even music, no radio.

Shh, child, no. This isn't how it looks, not *actually.* This is some exception. It's been bad for a couple seasons. It will be fine. I'll find you some real, original scenery, I promise I will. Sometimes I think I'll tell my son: you were born in the Anthropocene. Your grandfather and I, his daughter, were born in the Holocene. It was nice then. Spring was no tornado, winter was a thing in the wind around mid-November, a vee of geese leaving, early bright flakes falling.

*

Our focus on purpose and progress pervades our writing and storytelling. The story of the Gold King Mine Disaster as it's often told around town in Durango overlooks accidents even to this day. It usually begins by noting that the Gold King Mine was a 'triumph of perseverance' by one lone Swede, Olaf Arvid Nelson, even referred to as 'The Mighty Swede'. No one begins the story almost a decade earlier, when the Brunot Agreement took four million acres from the Utes, opening that land to mining in western Colorado.

What you won't often hear after the nod to the industrious Swede, is what happened in the century after. While the project didn't pay out in Nelson's life, it traded hands between various absentee owners a few times, had a heyday of production, burnt down in major ways a couple times around 1900, became the site of a deep-tunnelling project that would be alternately abandoned and revisited throughout the mid-20th century, became the site of notorious deaths by collapse, and paid out in more diverse metals for a while. In all this time, it was a source of tailing pond drainage, wastewater pollution, arsenic and lead run-off, massive fish die-off, animosity between the residents of downriver Durango and those upstream in Silverton – and eventually it became part of a vast network of Superfund sites consisting of deep, toxic pools.

After skipping all that, the story often leaps towards the common notion that the sole cause of the catastrophic breach in 2015 was the result of some 'untrained' En-

vironmental Protection Agency guys mucking around with the backfill that morning. The century's tale of *take, kill, abandon, repeat* is largely omitted.

Another omission: we only pay attention when we can see the properties of a thing and ascribe to them value or horror. The premium placed on vision at the expense of all other ways of knowing and being has resulted in a paralysis of our ability to participate in solutions.

I think I'll tell my son: your grandfather liked to understand the insides of things, how they work. He taught air conditioning and refrigeration for a living, and he was ultimately a systems thinker and an ecologist ahead of his time. Let's not run ourselves ragged looking for a pure mountain. After all, everything in it comes out. Everything in us was in it. Everything relies on rivers of exchange. Everything shows up somewhere. I am the leached toxins, and you are of me.

The smell of pine pitch on a hot day. Geese. Chlorine, fluoride, BPA. The ingenuity of trout. Asteroids. Cats. Sports. Comedy. Catching the bus before the clouds break. April.

I am breastfeeding my son on a bench on the Lakefront one afternoon. Chicago has an all-or-nothing look. All: the collection of skyscrapers. Nothing: the lake. He and I occupy our little bench between them. Women I know are circulating familiar findings about breastmilk toxicity:

Total BPA was detected in 93% of urine samples in this healthy infant popu lation aged 3–15 months who were without known environmental exposure to BPA.1

> The notion of the Anthropocene hinges on recognising the omnipresence of the effects of pollution and industrialisation in formerly 'untouched' places

The notion of the Anthropocene hinges on recognising the omnipresence of the effects of pollution and industrialisation in formerly 'untouched' places. But this in turn reifies the idea of separating out and sparing a pure, 'virgin' wilderness, which is a key to permitting pollution in some places rather than others, as if they could be kept separate. Thinking beyond extraction has to do more than permit degradation by segregation.

Really, son, everything is the same stuff, there is just perpetual shifting and transformation. Got that? The key here is not to take, own, or hoard, but to tend to whatever causes mutual flourishing in your biotic community. Let me hear you repeat it so I know you heard me.

A *Yale Environment 360* article is also circulating among my students. I am glad it is, though it is one of those 'stunners' that often leaves them thinking: well if it's that bad, and we can't even see how bad, we can't really do anything about it. The clip doing the rounds is this:

Public awareness of plastic pollution in the ocean has largely been driven by the discovery of floating masses of plastic, such as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, which

is roughly the size of Texas. But of the 10 million tons of plastic waste that enter the oceans each year, these floating patches account for just 1 percent. The other 99 percent is believed to reside in the deep ocean.2

It is in fact the language of production – tied to the language of extraction and industry – that paralyses us in these moments. Without an obvious path to an immediately material, visible and potentially successful action – as a response to a problem – we give up. Opposition to rapaciousness, however, cannot just rely on an individual's actions – it must be part of the communal will for change.

We have yet to grasp a vocabulary and a grammar of non-extractivism, as described by Kathryn Yusoff in her book *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. The opposite of 'taking' is not just 'giving,' but a word for what it is hasn't found a home in extractivist registers. Even 'giving' adds to the surplus of material that is already too much. Giving only feels good to the taker in an extraction culture.

*

We can't live by desperately carving a distance between ourselves and the problem. There has to be an economy and an aesthetic that is purged of the urgency of taking, freeing us from our need to see in order to believe. I propose that it might be a register of pleasure and presence. Nothing threatens a neoliberal capitalist economy like being content – not making anything, not buying new things.

There is a passage from John Locke's *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, in the chapter 'Of Property', that always rightly annoys my students. It is the claim that any land that is not used or improved for man's benefit is not just wild or in some natural state, it is *waste.* Wild is pre-wasted, wasted already in its untouched state. It becomes a duty to take.

> Extraction grammar is inescapable in ecological, nature-loving registers too. The anxiety that permeates us comes in the form of knowing that every open space is vulnerable

Extraction grammar is inescapable in ecological, nature-loving registers too. The anxiety that permeates us comes in the form of knowing that every open space is vulnerable. Every gorgeous view is held together by some document, permit, or legislation with its own date for review. Every good thing I show my child I hope lasts for a while. I hope it remains undeveloped. I wonder what controversies might be lingering over it while we admire it. I get caught up in a desire to acquire it and protect it. I'm caught between two anxieties, trading mourning for fear.

How do we get outside of this? It isn't news that the laptop we require for writing uses extracted metals, or that my highway drive or flight home uses fossil fuels and extracted metals. Doing fewer or none of those things, finding other ways to do them, working on greener materials for these same processes, are all worthy, essential projects. But how can we even begin to substantiate those actions without a way of being and a language that speaks beyond extraction?

We're full of plastic. The mountains we grew up with are different now. Rather than scramble to get the last 'pure' view or evaluate properties according to how they affect us, we need to develop a vocabulary that celebrates and describes a continuum. A poetics of experience with others.

My dad's flesh and bone is on the mountain, in the mountain, in the watershed. We're already caught up in the tide, swimming, drinking.

I have good news, son. We're waiting for nothing, you have nothing to show, or prove, or do. There was always something thrilling about the idea of finding something. But be thrilled at experiencing what is already there. Understand yourself as always having been in matter, now taking this form. We need no more matter. Leave no obelisk of granite for me, or for you, but come back to the mountain as oak, as rain, stone, the first snow, the first crocus, the first pea shoot, the moon, a lion's roar.

(This extract od 'Future Mountains' is taken from a longer essay in the book)

IMAGE; Hoover Gates by Erika Osborne
Oil on canvas

Hoover Gates references, in composition and title, a wood engraving done by Thomas Moran after participating in the second John Wesley Powell expedition down the Colorado River. The etching, titled The Gate of Lodore, was
printed in Scribner's Monthly in January 1875 and depicts towering canyon walls, racking light and a grand river.

The Hoover Gates plays with the visual language of this etching as a way to comment on the contemporary state of the river – dammed and controlled. The sublimity is found in the scale and mark of what is man-made, not in the canyon itself.

Erika Osborne is a working artist and professor at Colorado State University in the US. She recently received a Fulbright fellowship to do research and create artwork in Mexico. Erika's work has been exhibited extensively and she is a contributing author for journals and books such as *Arts Programming for the Anthropocene: Art in Community and Environment.*

Voices from the Coal Face

We are excited to announce the publication of our twentieth book, available now from our online shop. This year's special issue is an all colour collection of prose, poetry and stunning artwork that delves into the subject of extractivism. Over the next few weeks we'll be sharing a selection of pieces from its pages. Today, Paul Feather speaks directly from the Thacker Pass lithium protest camp in Nevada and Erika Howsare from the coal and fracking legacy of Pennsylvania. With performance still by Jaime Black.

they tred to bury us by Jaime Black
Paul Feather and Erika Howsare
Paul's writing owes much to the good sense and insight of Terra Currie. They live together with their daughter in the piedmont of southern Appalachia. Erika grew up in Washington County, Pennsylvania, US, and now lives in the Blue Ridge of Virginia. She's published two books of poetry and is currently at work on a non-fiction book about the relationship between people and deer, to be published in 2024.
19th October, 2021

- FROM OUR BOOKS
- ISSUE 20 – ABYSS

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Go Down Swinging

You are wise to collect your wits, and there's no shame in running away. There are not so many refuges left.

It is good to find refuge in these books of stories: something that makes sense when not much else does. We need these stories to understand why there are machines out there killing just about everything. Digging everything up. And we need these stories to understand how it came to be that we're part of that killing. Why it is that the words in our minds and the food in our bodies and the things we touch and the way we spend our time are all so very deadly. It's hard to know what to do with that; you can't look at it straight on at first. No, not at first. And yet, we should remember that this refuge of words is a privilege, and that it isn't bound to last. It's a luxury to wonder how we got this way and what to do about it. This is nothing to be ashamed of. We are outspent and outgunned. We do well to hide and wonder.

But while we hide among our stories, the killing and the digging goes on. There are other refuges not made of words but of sagebrush or forest or water and rock, and they are falling one after another. And when the stories have all been told and the fortnights drag on, don't you grow tired of hearing the digging of that great machine? And don't you know that every bit of Earth that it digs up makes it stronger and makes us weaker?

And don't you know that we must one day don the armour we have forged in this refuge made of words to stand in a refuge made of place? Stand. Go down swinging if that's what it takes.

That's what it takes.

I am standing in one of these places now: the high desert of a mountain pass, a beleaguered refuge of old-growth sagebrush, eagles, and forgotten tongues.

Words do not stop bulldozers

Have you your wits about you now? Have you caught your breath and summoned the steadfast faith that is our only shield against this onslaught? There's something a Navajo woman told me, but wait! – do we need another story? Maybe. Maybe some of us do, and so I will tell you what this woman told me, but I'd like to ask you first: how will you know when storytime is over?

These refuges will not hold.

You don't need to know so very much

The natural world and future generations do not have rights, and corporations do. It's really that simple. To say that our legal system exists to protect corporations that accumulate wealth by extracting minerals and murdering both land and water is a gross understatement. The law mandates this destruction. It is a mathematical formula, an a priori, a physical requirement. If you are not breaking the law, normalising the breaking of laws, or enabling others to break the law, you are on the wrong side of the law. The wrong side of life. Enough.

It is still possible to flee – for some of us – but maybe not for long.

Refuges remain.

Protect them.

Cosmology

The woman picks up a handful of dust from the ground beside the fire. This dust has been blowing in my face all day and lies thick over the plastic tables that hold cookware, bottles of water and bags of fruit. We are sitting behind plywood windbreaks, but the heat doesn't reach far from the fire. She shows me the handful of dust and assures me that it is sacred. Every mote.

Indeed, there are no unsacred places.

'If someone doesn't know this,' she says, 'that we are here to protect the Earth, that this is the meaning of our existence,' she says, 'they are bound to become confused and lost,' she tells me as we stand here to block the people who will come with machines and guns to murder this mountain for the lithium under our feet.

In this place there is little respite from the wind, but fish once thought extinct still spawn in mountain streams; and birds with nowhere else to go still make their nests; and stories that give ancient people ancient claim to an ancient place can still be told in the place where they happened.

They will come to kill this place with their machines and their guns so they can ship the ore to Reno to make batteries for electric cars and money for billionaires. We will stand here when they come. We'll stand or go down swinging here at Thacker Pass.

I am standing under a high desert sky where there are no trees and no lights. There are stars.

Many more words will just get in the way

– Paul Feather

The Breaker Boy

My mother's grandfather was a breaker boy.
Pennsylvania. Bituminous.
Meaning:
You do what you gotta do.
With your beautiful body.
With your eight-year-old body.
Lean over the chute as the raw coal passes.
You sort it.
For the casting of iron objects such as cannon.
Impurities.
With your child's boots you stop the flow of geology.
Ten hours a day, six days a week.
With your savage body you break it into types.
Rock, slate, sulphur, ash (they called it 'bone'), clay, soil.
Or seeds, fossils, nests.
Picking out the slate. Darkness from darkness.
With your threatened fingers you divert the conveyor belt.
With your cold lungs.
They wore lamps on their heads to see through the coal dust.
This would have been forty to fifty cents a day, would have been 1890s, maybe.
Maybe seeing amputations by conveyor belt.
With your bloody fingertips from the passing angles. A trick:
Piss on your hands to toughen them up.
You learn what you gotta learn.
With your hearing damaged, with your unforgiving wooden seat above the chute.
With your back deformed from hunching, having come off the farm, dreaming of 'moving up' to mine work.
James Campbell, father of Mary and two others.
Maybe seeing a boy get crushed and his body left in the gears until the end of the day.

With your memory you blacken this.
So production would not stop.
Black lung.
Or a body ground into pieces in the coal crusher. Nine-year-old, ten-year-old.
Occasionally.
Impurities.
You hit what you gotta hit.
Creating a fracture network.
A trick: As coal people we evolve.
My brother's friends are fracking men.
Pennsylvania. Marcellus.
Map: A thick clot of wells. A dark brown colour.
A production graph angles up like a coal chute.
Driving to the site.
Class II injection wells store salt water and other fluids produced.
That the land is entered. That the bodies are extracted into trucks.
This is maybe since 2009.
You take what you gotta take.
With your mixture of sand, water, proprietary chemicals.
My mother's neighbours are fracking women.
With your hand you sign the lease. The hill is soon converted to a well pad.
A friend who decided to apply: Mechanical aptitude, a willingness to work long hours.

Thousands of jobs created directly or indirectly or induced by the hive of wells.
Talking on the phone, planning to fish on the weekend. Happen to live in the densest part of Marcellus. Racking up overtime.
Washington County. 1,146 wells, more than one per square mile,
number one fracking county in PA.
'Six figures'.
The acquisition, the mixing, the injection, the collection, the management.
Impurities.
To listen to the frack thrum under the hill where you sleep. So production does not stop.
To build plants, high-pressure pumping equipment, helping to make the holes, truck

the pipe, truck the three types of water, truck the drilled gas.
A rural place remains in the interstices of a factory. We say coal*field*, gas*field.*
A trick: Time and a half, that $22 an hour becomes $33.
Having grown up not poor but drained. You feel like you might be doing better.
A well pad out the window and pipeline and water trucks.
A friend who fixes drilling equipment. A friend who moves earth.
Neighbours who accept the offer.
With your insured hands you drive the trucks hauling water.
Just to get outside.
Map: Well sites arcing softly lower left to upper right,
along the ripples of the old formation.
Magic is deep underground.
All you have to do is let them use your land. And drink city water.
Meaning: You gotta know when to fold 'em.
With your injection you reach another level. A graph angling up.
Coal or gas is a way to expand.
Believable. Easier. It's printed right on your check.
With your drained hands you spend it, with your worn hills you sell it.
Carbon on the lashes, methane in the firmament.
Coal or gas is a way to warm up.

– Erika Howsare

IMAGE: they tried to bury us by Jaime Black
Performance still

Jaime Black is a multidisciplinary artist of mixed Anishinaabe and European descent who lives and works in Winnipeg, Canada. Black's practice engages in themes of memory, identity, place and
resistance and is grounded in an understanding of the body and the land as sources of cultural and
spiritual knowledge. jaimeblackartist.com

Issue #1

Loss Soup

Dark Mountain: Issue 1, our very first collection of uncivilised writing and art, is now available. Over the next few weeks, we're going to share a little of what you'll find in its pages. Today, we present a short story by Nick Hunt.

Nick Hunt

Nick is the author of three books about walking and Europe, the most recent of which is *Outlandish*, a work of gonzo ornithology, *The Parakeeting of London*, and a collection of short fiction, *Loss Soup and Other Stories*. He works as an editor and co-director for the Dark Mountain Project, and has contributed short stories and essays to many of its issues.

20th August, 2009

- FROM OUR BOOKS
- ISSUE 1

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Figure 1a: the dining hall. Located, it seems, in an abandoned subway tunnel, panelled incongruously in teak, mahogany and other unsustainable hardwoods. Lit by dim, recessed lights that give the room an atmosphere of twilight. Walls dustily cluttered with half-completed objects, broken bits of statuary that appear familiar at first glance, and at second glance unrecognisable. Things that make you say to yourself, 'I'll have a closer look at that later,' but, of course, you never do.

Figure 1b: the dining table. It stretches the full length of the hall, and appears to be constructed from railway sleepers, or planks from some old galleon. It must weigh many tonnes. Glancing beneath, you see it is supported by a forest of legs of many different shapes and sizes, cannibalised from tables, chairs, pedestals, crutches, walking sticks. Laid out upon the bare expanse of wood are two rows of dusty glasses, two rows of earthenware bowls, and some wooden spoons.

Figure 1c: the diners. At first you assume there are scores of them, but later adjust your estimate to just a few dozen. Calculating numbers is surprisingly tricky, due to the insufficiency of light and the peculiar amorphousness of facial features. Various races

are represented here, and there's an equal ratio of women to men, but around this table they all appear generic. It's not helped by the fact they keep changing position without you noticing them move. You turn away from the man to your left, a Slavic gentleman with impressive moustaches, and when you turn back it's an old Asian lady with spectacles like the lenses from antique telescopes. But it's hard to be sure. Your concentration keeps slipping. Perhaps this is still the same person, with a different facial expression.

Figure 2: the egg-timer (a). It stands at the furthest end of the table, about the height of a grandfather clock, a truly impressive object. A baroque monstrosity of piped and fluted metal, like something from the palace of the Tsars. The dirty golden sand hisses audibly from the top chamber to the bottom, and an ingenious pivoting mechanism allows the whole thing to be rotated when the bottom chamber is full. This task, you imagine, will be performed by the diners sitting on either side, who are watching the sand's flow closely. But the top chamber isn't empty yet.

Figure 3a: the soup tureen. It is wheeled in on a serving trolley, and lifted onto the table by three waiters. Its arrival elicits little excitement from the assembled diners, though you, a first-timer, are awed by its size. 'Could fit a whole lot of soup in there,' you scribble on the first page of your notebook. But the tureen, as far as you see, has yet to be filled.

Figure 3b: the ladle. It's a big one.

Figure 4: the observer. This is you. You still can't quite believe you've been chosen to attend the fabled annual Dinner of Loss, but here you sit, notebook on table, wooden spoon in hand. A poorly accredited freelance journalist with a vague interest in 'disappearing things' – you've written articles on language extinction, vanishing glaciers, memory loss – you received the invitation three days ago, and cancelled all previous engagements. You've come across mention of the Dinner of Loss in the course of your researches, of course, but were doubtful if the rumours were true. As far as you know, one lucky observer is invited to attend every year, but you can't imagine how the organisers came to choose you.

You came here in an ordinary taxi, though half expecting to be blindfolded and spun around for disorientation. You entered through an ordinary door, following the instructions. You descended several flights of stairs, walked down a mothball-smelling corridor, entered the long dining hall, and found your place-name waiting.

You've been here about forty-five minutes. The dinner is due to begin.

Figure 5: the gong. It gongs. A silence settles around the table.

Figure 6: the first intonations. Delivered by one diner after another, passing around the table in turn, at a steady metronomic pace, in an anticlockwise direction. Running, as far as you can note, as follows:

'The auroch. The Barbary lion. The Japanese wolf. The giant short-faced bear. The upland moa. The American bison. The broad-faced potoroo. The American lion. The elephant bird. The Caucasian wisent. The cave bear. The Nendo tube-nosed fruit bat.

The Darling Downs hopping mouse. The dwarf elephant. The Syrian wild ass. The St. Lucy giant rice rat…'

You scribble as fast as your biro can go, but the separately-spoken intonations dissolve into a quiet cacophony of names, murmuring like a disturbed sea, with little rhyme or rhythm. They don't appear to follow any order, whether categorical or chronological. Your writing degrades into improvised shorthand you're not even sure you'll be able to read.

'The ground sloth. The pig-footed bandicoot. The Balearic shrew. The Ilin Island cloudrunner. The Arabian gazelle. The Schomburgk's deer. The sea mink. The Javan tiger. The tarpan. The great auk. The Alaotra grebe. The Bermuda night heron. The laughing owl. The bluebuck. The quagga. The western black rhinosaurus. The Sturdee's pipistrelle. The turquoise-throated puffleg…'

At last the intonations stop. Page after page of your notebook is covered in increasingly frenetic scrawls. You think perhaps an hour has passed, but since they removed your watch at the door you have no way of knowing. The only indicator of time is the giant egg-timer down the table, the snakey sand still hissing inside, though the top chamber still isn't empty. Your writing hand throbs painfully, and you're glad of the few minutes' interregnum in which each diner finds their glass has been filled with wine at some point during the proceedings. Following the lead of the other diners, you raise your glass into the air, casting wobbling wine-shadows over the wood.

'Lost animals,' a voice concludes quietly. And as the glasses chime together, the trio of waiters re-enters the hall bearing a steaming vat.

Figure 7: loss soup (a). The waiters approach the soup tureen. You rise from your chair to get a better look, thrilled to be witness to the fabled soup itself, and a slight tut-tut of disapproval issues from the diners beside you. You disregard this. You're a journalist. You can't help but elicit disapproval at times. You lean across the table, on tiptoes, to get closer to the action.

Actually, there isn't much to see. The waiters remove the tureen's heavy lid and upend the steaming vat. You strain to get a good look at the soup as it sloppily cascades into the tureen, but all you can make out is a viscous gruel, thickened occasionally with matter you can't from this distance identify, a greasy sludge of no definable colour. Although the vat is of no small proportions, you guess the soup that has been poured must cover only an inch or two at the base of the vast tureen. When the gush comes to an end the waiters shake the last drops out, replace the cumbersome china lid, bow to no-one in particular, and retire.

Figure 8: the second intonations. Before you are even resettled in your seat, the next round has begun.

'Geeze. Nagumi. Kw'adza. Eyak. Esselen. Island Chumash. Hittite. Eel River Athabaskan. Lycian. Kalkatungic. Moabite. Coptic. Oti. Karipuna. Totoro. Ancient Nubian. Yahuna. Wasu. Old Prussian. Old Tatar. Modern Gutnish. Skepi Creole Dutch…'

You begin to feel a little light-headed. Your biro loses track. You are forced to resort to abbreviations you despair of ever deciphering. But still, you must attempt to keep pace with the murmuring litany of names, must try to record as many as you can, for they are fast disappearing.

The air itself seems to draw them in. They have no body, no substance. The sounds are like vapour, amorphous, removed from reality.

'Akkala Sámi. Old Church Slavonic. Bo. Kseireins. Scythian. Cuman. Pictish. Karnic. Etruscan. Wagaya-Warluwaric. Edomite. Tangut. Ammonite. Minaean. Phoenician. Ugaritic. Basque-Icelandic pidgin…'

'Lost languages,' the soft voice says, dropping at last a tangible sound – if there can exist a thing – into a silence you hadn't been made aware of. Glasses clink. You have missed the toast. You are still trying to scribble last names before the sounds go out of your head. But it's no good, you can't remember.

Figure 9: loss soup (b). Again, the waiters bring the vat, and you get to your feet to see the gruel slide like an oil slick into the tureen, billowing up clouds of steam. It gives a thin, faintly saline smell. The lid is replaced. The table settles down. The sand inside the egg-timer whispers to itself in the corner.

Figure 10: the third intonations.

'The Fijian weinmannia. The Skottsberg's wikstroemia. The Prony Bay xanthostemon. The Maui ruta tree. The root-spine palm. The Franklin tree. The Cuban erythroxylum. The fuzzyflower cyrtandra. The Szaferi birch. The Cuban holly. The Hastings County neomacounia. The Yunnan malva. The toromiro. The Mason River myrtle…'

'Lost plants and trees,' says the voice, and you have the sensation of a door softly closed, a latch slipping down inside. Again, you weren't aware the litany had ended. Your biro moves across the table, overshooting its mark. It occurs to you that much time has gone. You were lost in the murmuration, and when you skip back over the pages you find that your notebook is almost full. Hurriedly you fumble in your journalist's pouch in search of a replacement. Glasses clink mildly around the table. You have missed the toast again. The waiters bring the vat.

Figure 11: loss soup (c). The giant tureen still echoes emptily as the soup crashes into the china depths. It looks as if an ocean could slide in there. The oily smell rises unpleasantly, saturating the air around. The smell makes you uncomfortable. It's better to breathe through your mouth.

Figure 12: the fourth intonations.

'The arctops. The sycosarus. The gorgonops. The broomisaurus. The eoarctops. The cephalicustriodus. The dinogorgon. The leontocephalus. The inostrancevia. The pravoslaveria. The viatkogorgon. The aelurognathus tigriceps.'

'Gorgonopsians,' says the voice. You don't even know what this word means. You check the egg-timer timidly, shaking the cramp from your pen-clawed hand, but the sand is still flowing down, a never-ending stream.

Figure 13: loss soup (d). Another greyish slurry emits from the vat, frothing as it hits the china walls. You notice some of the diners' mouths are shielded with scented handkerchiefs. The stink is becoming immense.

Figure 14: the fifth intonations.

'The Gallina. The Karankawa. The Anasazi. The Caribs. The Thraco-Cimmerians. The Lusatians. The Khazars. The Kipchaks. The Sassanids. The Great Zimbabweans. The Olmecs. The Hittites. The Etruscans. The Babylonians. The Picts. The Fir Chera. The Gauls. The Philistines. The Tasmanian Aborigines. The Copts. The Yeehats. The Sumerians. The Cathaginians. The Calusa. The Taino. The Ojibwa. The Mohicans. The Cahokia. The Aquitani. The Vindelici. The Belgae. The Brigantes. The Maya. The Dal gCais. The Ui Liathain. The Thracians. The Hibernians. The Kushans. The Macedons. The Amalekites. The Hereros. The Zapatecs. The Atakapas. The Zunghars. The Harappans. The Mughals. The Magadhas. The Moabites. The Pandyans. The Nazcans. The Timurids. The Seljuks. The Huari. The Chachapoya…'

You find yourself filled with a sense of despair. There appears no meaning behind these names. There is nothing to clutch onto here, they scarcely seem worth the breath they're spoken with. You halt your hopeless scribbling – already you have skipped dozens, scores, perhaps hundreds have not been committed to paper, you will never recall them now – and scan instead the line of faces seated around the dining table, pointlessly and passionlessly intoning. They have no features, no identifying markings. They have reverted to a monotype. Ethnically, sexually and culturally dilute. It's as if every race in the world has been boiled down to its component paste and stirred together into a beige-coloured blandness.

In increasing journalistic desperation, you search for something, anything. Some clue as to who these people are, or more importantly, why they care. But do they care? Why are they here? You try to remember what you have heard in the past about the Dinner of Loss, but find even this has slipped away. What is this roll call supposed to be for? What are you meant to be observing?

You close your notebook, and then your eyes. You'd like to close your nose as well, but the reek of the soup is all-pervading, it's already inside your skin.

Figure 15a: the egg-timer (b). The silence is more general than before, and it takes you a while to understand why. The sand. The sand has finally stopped hissing. You open your eyes, and see that the diners have turned their heads to the far end of the hall, where, sure enough, the top chamber stands empty, and the bottom chamber is full.

Figure 15b: the egg-timer (c). More servants appear, and commence an operation that involves a set of tiny keys, which they use to loosen the brackets that holds it together. You realise the entire egg-timer unscrews, to divide the top from the bottom chamber. The empty top chamber is leant against the wall, while it takes six men to carry the bottom, staggering towards the dining table with the great sand-filled glass bell.

Somehow they lift it onto the table, and then clamber up on the table themselves, dragging it over to the soup tureen. Amid much grunting and strenuous groans, the sand is poured into the soup, every last grain shaken out of the chamber. Then the concoction is thoroughly stirred with the oversized ladle.

The pungency of the odour mounts. The diners are gagging politely. You pull your sweater over your face and try not to breathe it in.

Finally the servants do the rounds, ladling soup into each wooden bowl.

'Ladies and gentleman, loss soup,' says the voice, with infinite sadness.

Figure 16: loss soup (e). You stare in some horror at what lies before you. It reeks of bilges, dishwater. An oily film slides on its surface, and when you poke it with the spoon you disturb partially suspended bands of sallow browns and greys. Occasionally a translucent lump of matter rises to the surface, slowly revolves, and then sinks back into the anonymous slop. The sand forms a silt at the bottom of the bowl, something like Turkish coffee.

You cannot remember what you expected, but surely it was something better than this. Perhaps you imagined them swimming down there – shades of the Kipchaks, the wisents, the grebes, the canopies of long-extinct trees, intimations of dead Aboriginal tongues, the auroch and the Neanderthal, Homo floresiensis, the glaciers, megafauna – but you find yourself confronted instead with a sewer-stinking broth. There's not even any wine left to wash the stuff down. Is this perhaps some awful joke?

You look around. The diners are eating, ferrying the soup from their bowls to their mouths with mute determination. The liquid dribbles from their loose lips, splashing back into the bowls. Apart from the pitter-patter of soup drops, the only sound around the table is the steady champing of teeth against sand. Throat muscles clench and gulp. They are actually swallowing the stuff.

Somehow, as unlikely as it seems, you find yourself incredibly hungry. You feel as if you haven't eaten for weeks. You've lost track of how long you've been in this place. Your stomach aches with emptiness, a hunger of bottomless proportions. Steeling your nerves, you take a spoonful and bring it towards your mouth. But something tells you that would only make it worse. You just can't do it. An enormous sadness grips you. Your spoon tips and the soup splashes onto the open page of your notebook, soaking through the paper and blotting the words.

You put the notebook back in its pouch and weakly rise to your feet.

'I'd like... I'd like to add my own,' you say, holding up your empty glass. Hollow eyes swivel, but no-one speaks. 'My contribution... Such as it is. I lost my father. I mean, we don't speak. We don't know who each other are anymore. And long before that, I lost a toy that wouldn't have meant much to anyone, but for me it was the only thing that seemed at all important. I left it under a tree in some woods. I used to think about it getting rained on. And... and I lost many friends. One in particular. I guess he decided he didn't see the value in our friendship anymore. I lost contact with all my old girlfriends, and even the ones I stayed in touch with, I've lost them forever too. And I lost a love that needn't have been lost. I could have kept it alive but I chose

not to. And... I've forgotten certain smells and ideas. What the light was like at this or that moment, things I thought I could never forget... Someone's face, someone else's name... Who I was before...'

The words trail off. You've lost yourself now. Something tugs dully at the back of your mind, and for a moment you almost know what it is, but then it disappears like everything else, and you sit back in your seat.

The diners stare at you gloomily. Their jaws continue working up and down. The only sound is the sound of champing sand.

Finally you bring the soup to your lips. It doesn't taste of anything at all.

The Falling Years

An Inhumanist Vision

Dark Mountain: Issue 1, our very first collection of uncivilised writing and art, is now available. Over the next few weeks, we're going to share a little of what you'll find in its pages. Today, we present an essay by John Michael Greer.

John Michael Greer

is the author of The Archdruid Report, a weekly blog on peak oil and current affairs, as well as more than forty books on subjects ranging from nature spirituality to the future of industrial society.

21st August, 2009

- FROM OUR BOOKS
- ISSUE 1

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I

Robinson Jeffers' name is hardly one to conjure with these days. The odd anthology of American poetry occasionally quotes his less troubling nature poems, and a few tourist shops in Carmel and Monterey have made a minor industry out of him, the way other towns lionize dead rock musicians or football stars. Outside of these limited circles, it's not often one hears of him.

Not until 2001 did a solid collection of his major poetic works appear – try to think of another major 20th century poet who was nearly forty years dead when this first happened – and The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers set only the quietest ripples in motion. Gone are the days when Jeffers was so controversial that his own publishers put a note in one book of his poems distancing themselves from his views. Those who play at rebelliousness in contemporary letters might take note: make a show of iconoclasm in acceptable ways and you can count on a lasting reputation; stray into actual iconoclasm, rejecting the fashions of the avant-garde along with those of the mainstream, and the world of culture will forget you just as soon as it can.

A few details will put this extraordinary figure in his proper setting.[1] Born in 1887, he belonged to the same generation of American poets as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Like them, he saw the facile modernist faith in progress refute itself in the cultural sterility of the Gilded Age and the crowning catastrophe of the First World War, and went in search of stronger foundations for his poetry. Eliot found his Archimedean point in a willed acceptance of Christianity; Pound, less successfully, tried to cobble together a tradition of his own from a rag-heap of sources embracing everything from Provençal minstrelsy to fascist economics. Both turned to Europe for a sense of depth they could not find on American soil.

Jeffers took a more daring approach. In the years just before the First World War, when Eliot and Pound were rising stars in a poetic galaxy rotating around the twin hubs of London and Paris, Jeffers moved to a sparsely settled stretch of the California coastline near Carmel, where he built a house and, later, a stone tower with his own hands.[2] His quest for foundations could not be satisfied at any merely human depth, and finally came to rest in nature itself.

He called his theory of poetry 'inhumanism,' and sketched it in uncompromising terms: 'It is based on a recognition of the astonishing beauty of things and their living wholeness, and on a rational acceptance of the fact that mankind is neither central nor important in the universe; our vices and blazing crimes are as insignificant as our happiness. [...] Turn outward from each other, so far as need and kindness permit, to the vast life and inexhaustible beauty beyond humanity. This is not a slight matter, but an essential condition of freedom, and of moral and vital sanity.'[3]

Put another way, the core of inhumanism is the principled rejection of anthropocentrism, and the pursuit of what might as well be called an ecocentric standpoint: one in which nature takes centre stage, not as a receptacle for human activities, emotions, or narratives, but as itself, on its own inhuman terms. It's an appallingly difficult project, difficult enough that Jeffers himself couldn't always sustain it; critics have pointed out the places in Jeffers' verse where poetry gives way to lecture, or descends into an inverted sentimentality that wallows in images of suffering and despair. When Jeffers achieved the task he set himself, though, the results are stunning: for a moment, at least, the claims humanity loves to make on behalf of its own importance fall silent before a universe that was busy with its own affairs for billions of years before us and won't take the time to notice our absence when we are gone.

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[1] I have used Melba Berry Bennett's The Stone Mason of Tor House (Ward Ritchie, 1966) and Arthur B. Coffin's Robinson Jeffers: Poet of Inhumanism (University of Wisconsin Press, 1971) for this brief sketch.

[2] It's a curiosity of poetic history that Jeffers and Yeats, one of the few modern poets Jeffers praised, both built themselves stone towers in the years following the First World War.

[3] From 'Preface to The Double Ax and Other Poems,' in Hunt, ed., op.cit., p. 719 and 721.

Jeffers is thus among the few figures in literature to grasp the core feature of the universe revealed by Darwin and his successors, the perspective that the late Stephen Jay Gould called 'deep time' – the sense of human existence as an eyeblink in the long history of the planet. His answer to the spread of suburban sprawl over his beloved Point Carmel is typical:

> It has all time. It knows the people are a tide
> That swells and in time will ebb, and all
> Their works dissolve. Meanwhile the image of the pristine beauty
> Lives in the very grain of the granite,
> Safe as the endless ocean that climbs our cliff. – As for us:
> We must uncenter our minds from ourselves;
> We must unhumanize our views a little, and become confident
> As the rock and ocean that we were made from.[4]

As poetics, this is hard enough. As a programme for any more pragmatic engagement with the world, it poses a staggering challenge. Jeffers didn't shy away from the places where poetics and politics intersect; Shelley gave him a sense of the poets' role as the world's unacknowledged legislators,[5] and he addressed the political arena directly in such poems as 'Shine, Perishing Republic' and 'The Day is a Poem.' Still, his politics – like his poetics – found few listeners. Most of the few critics who discussed his work at all slid past the complex political vision that frames much of Jeffers' work with a few comments about 'isolationism,' and maybe a nod to Spengler and Vico. Jeffers' prophetic ear was exact, but no one else was listening:

> There is no returning now.
> Two bloody summers from now (I suppose) we shall have to take up the
> corrupting burden and curse of victory.
> We shall have to hold half the earth; we shall be sick with self-disgust,
> And hated by friend and foe, and hold half the earth – or let it go, and
> go down with it.[6]

Still, Jeffers knew as well as anyone that poets' legislation needs time to have its effect. The rising spiral of environmental crises shaping today's headlines marks, I have come to believe, the point where Jeffers' vision becomes a historical fact, and his inhumanism a centre of gravity toward which any meaningful response to the predicament of industrial society must move. In saying that, I'm not claiming that

[4] From 'Carmel Point,' in Hunt, ed., op. cit., p. 676

[5] Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry;' see also Coffin, op. cit., p. 18.

[6] From 'Historical Choice,' in Hunt, ed., op. cit., pp. 580; this poem was written in 1943.

responses to our crisis ought to move toward inhumanism; I'm saying that they will do so, even if those who think they are defending the environment have to be dragged kicking and screaming along that route.

I say that with some confidence because most of the journey has already happened. The anthropocentrism that runs through the environmental movement, even, or rather especially, among those who most bitterly condemn humanity and all its works, seems to me to mark a final, frantic attempt to cling to the illusion of a human-centred cosmos. As today's environmental narratives join the ruins of earlier lines of defence in history's compost heap, it's not easy to imagine any place where anthropocentrism can stake a further claim against the massed inevitabilities of nature. At that point Jeffers' inhumanism offers a glimpse at the foundations on which human thought will have to rebuild itself.

II

The environmental movement as a social phenomenon still awaits its historian, though there have been capable histories of the ecological ideas that have inspired it.[7] A first approximation, though, shows three overlapping periods of environmental activism, each with its own distinct narratives and purposes.

The first was the period of recreational environmentalism, and ran from the late 19th century through the 1960s. Environmental rhetoric in this period focused so tautly on the value of nature as a recreational resource that its opponents, without too much inaccuracy, could accuse conservationists of simply wanting the government to subsidise their vacation spots. Though it's easy to dismiss the period in retrospect, its great achievement – the invention of the national park concept and its deployment over much of the industrial world – marks a historical watershed of some importance. For the first time since the felling of the old Pagan groves, the Western world recognised the point of setting aside space for nature on its own terms.

The second phase, from the early 1960s through the 1980s, was the period of sentimental environmentalism. The spark for the transition was Rachel Carson's epochal Silent Spring, which brought extinction out of scientific journals and into the public sphere. The results shared far too much with the rest of the popular culture of the time to accomplish much – the baby seals whose Holly Hobby faces made them the mascot of the movement, for example, received far more attention than many more substantive issues – but the underlying shift in awareness is worth noting. For a significant number of people, feelings of loyalty and love once fixed firmly within the human sphere widened to embrace nonhuman nature.

The third phase followed promptly. The first stirrings of apocalyptic environmentalism appeared while the age of sentimental environmentalism was barely underway, and once it worked its way out of the fringes it quickly borrowed the same durable tropes about the end of the world that proved their appeal in other contexts. The

[7] See particularly Donald Worster's Nature's Economy (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

last two decades have accordingly seen all the usual changes rung on the theme of an imminent Judgement Day, with Gaia pressed into the role more usually filled by an avenging Jehovah.

Surf the web or visit a bookstore and the resulting sermons may be found without too much effort. Alongside claims that a future of ecological horror – sinners in the hands of an angry biosphere! – can be averted if we renounce our wicked ways and get right with Gaia, you can find claims that it's already too late and the wrath of an offended planet will turn sinful humanity into so much compost, upon which the righteous remnant will presumably plant the organic gardens of the New Green Jerusalem. Gospels backstopping these sermons with a giddy range of dubious historical mythologies have flooded the market at nearly the same pace.

It's crucial to recognise the hits as well as the misses of apocalyptic environmentalism. Many of the issues that underlie claims of imminent Ecogeddon are quite real, though some have been exaggerated to the point of absurdity. Where these narratives fail is in forcing the ecological crisis into anthropocentric narratives that falsify far more than they explain.

The function of apocalyptic myth, after all, is to console the unimportant by feeding them fantasies of their own cosmic significance. It's thus no accident that, for example, the seedtimes of apocalyptic ideas in Judaism have been epochs when Jews were a powerless minority whose beliefs and hopes were of no concern to anyone but themselves, just as the apocalyptic strain in today's Christianity clusters in the regions and classes most heavily marginalised during the era of economic contraction the media papered over with the euphemisms of 'globalisation.' The environmental apocalyptic narrative is partly a reaction to the impact of deep time on our collective sense of self-importance: faced with a planetary history in which geological forces and mass extinctions hold the important roles, we've tried to claim the role of a geological force and a cause of mass extinctions.

That probably couldn't have been avoided. Like the phases before it, apocalyptic environmentalism inevitably got tripped up by the anthropocentricity it tried to escape. Recreational environmentalism reached for the insight that we owe nature space of its own, and fell back to thinking of nature as a resource for outdoor holidays. Sentimental environmentalism reached for the more challenging insight that we owe nature the same bonds of love and loyalty more usually applied to family, community, and nation, and fell back to thinking of nature as a resource for emotional indulgence.

Apocalyptic environmentalism, in turn, reached for the most challenging insight of all: the recognition that we owe nature our existence, and could follow the dodo and the passenger pigeon into extinction if we mess up our relations with the rest of the world badly enough. Like its predecessors, its reach exceeded its grasp, and it fell back to thinking of nature as a resource for narratives that celebrate the supposed uniqueness of humanity just as obsessively as ever. Portraying humanity as the uniquely destructive ravager of nature, after all, is just as anthropocentric as portraying it as the uniquely creative conqueror of nature. The resemblance between the concepts is not accidental;

like a spoiled child who misbehaves to get the attention good behaviour won't bring, we're willing to see ourselves in any role, even the villain's, as long as we get to occupy centre stage.

III

Still, talking about the anthropocentric obsessions of today's ecological thought in general terms is less helpful than catching sight of those obsessions in their native habitat, in the collective conversation that shapes our world. Nothing is as easy as denouncing an abstract representation of a habit of thought on which one's thinking continues to be based. Think of the way that 'dualism' was all but burnt in effigy a few years back by a flurry of liberal religious writers who insisted that all religions without exception are either dualist or nondualist, and dualism is absolutely evil while nondualism is absolutely good![8]

No doubt we'll shortly see a critique of anthropocentrism along the same lines: arguing, perhaps, that the habit of anthropocentric delusion is what sets our species apart from the rest of nature and marks us out for some uniquely tragic destiny or other. Thus it's crucial to get past the label, and examine specific ways that anthropocentrism distorts the response of today's environmental movement to the incoming tide of ecological crisis.

Compare the recent and continuing furore over anthropogenic climate change to the more muted response to the rapid depletion of the world's remaining petroleum reserves, and one such distortion stands out clearly. Both these problems are unquestionably real;[9] both were predicted decades ago, both could quite readily force modern industrial civilisation to its knees, and both are already having measurable impacts around the world.

Yet the response to the two differs in instructive ways. Anthropogenic climate change has become a cause célèbre, splashed across the mainstream media, researched by thousands of scientists funded by lavish government grants, and earnestly discussed by heads of state at summit meetings. Nothing is actually being done to stop it, to be sure, and most likely nothing will be done; not even the climate campaigners who urge drastic action in the loudest voices and most extreme terms have shown much willingness to accept the drastic changes in their own lives that would cut carbon dioxide emissions soon enough to matter. Still, the narrative of climate change has found plenty of eager listeners around the world.

[8] Matthew Fox's The Coming of the Cosmic Christ (Harper & Row, 1988) is a particularly embarrassing example; pp. 134–5 includes a handy table of polar oppositions, in which one side is 'dualist' and thus evil, and the other 'nondualist' and thus good.

[9] There seems little point here in revisiting the overwhelming evidence backing both humanity's role in climate change and the progressive and severe depletion of accessible oil reserves. Those who already recognise the severity of both problems will need no convincing, while those who disagree with either aren't likely to listen to another review of the facts.

None of this has happened with peak oil. The evidence backing the claim that the world has already passed the peak of petroleum production, and faces a future of declining energy and economic contraction, is every bit as solid as the evidence for anthropogenic climate change;[10] the arguments opposing it are just as meretricious, its potential for economic and human costs is as great, solutions are as difficult to reach, and it can feed apocalyptic fantasies almost as extreme as those that have gathered around climate change. Still, no summit meetings are being called by heads of state to discuss the end of the age of oil; there has been no barrage of mainstream media attention concerning it, and precious few government grants. Climate change is mediagenic; peak oil is not.

A core difference between the two crises explains why. Climate change, as a cultural narrative, is a story about human power. We have become so almighty through technological progress, the climate change narrative argues, that we threaten the Earth itself. The only limits that can prevent catastrophe are those we place on ourselves, since nothing else can stop us; and even our own efforts might not be enough to stand in our way. It's nearly a parody of the old atheist gibe: to prove our own omnipotence, we've made a crisis so big that not even we can lift it out of our way.

Peak oil as a cultural narrative, on the other hand, is not a celebration of human power but a warning about human limits. At the core of the peak oil story is the recognition that the power we claimed was never really ours. We never conquered nature; we merely stole some of the Earth's carbon and burnt our way through it in three short centuries. All the feverish dreams and accomplishments of that era were simply the results of wasting a vast amount of cheap fuel. Now that the easy pickings are running out, and we have to think about getting by without half a billion years of stored and concentrated solar energy to burn, our fantasies of power are proving unexpectedly fragile, and the future ahead of us involves more humility and less grandiosity than we want to think about.

One rich irony here is that the limits imposed by peak oil are, among other things, limits on our power to destroy the world via climate change. The IPCC projections of climate change assume that the world's nations can increase their coal, oil, and natural gas consumption straight through to 2100. Doubtless they would do so if they could, but the fact remains that they can't. Conventional petroleum production peaked in 2005 and has been declining since then; unconventional petroleum production, even if it recovers from the slump following the crash of 2008, will tip into decline well before 2015; natural gas is on schedule to reach its peak by 2030, and coal by 2040.[11] As those peaks pass, fossil fuel consumption will decline, not because we want it to decline but

[10] For a good general survey, see Richard Heinberg's The Party's Over: Oil, War, and the Fate of Industrial Societies (New Society, 2003).

[11] See Richard Heinberg, Peak Everything (New Society, 2008) for a detailed discussion of these resource peaks and their consequences.

because our ability to extract fuels from the ground runs into geological limits. This awkward reality has not found its way into the climate change debate; nor will it, until the anthropocentric foundations of that debate are seen for what they are.

The same point can be made even more forcefully of the greater irony that surrounds the climate change debate: the fact that the shifts in global temperature painted in doomsday terms in today's media are modest, in scale and speed, compared to those Earth has experienced many times before. A mere 11,000 years ago, at the end of the last ice age, global temperatures jolted up 15°F. in under a decade[12] – a heatwave more severe than the wildest scenarios in circulation these days. Nor was this anything novel; the Earth's long history is full of such events.

Since the beginning of the Pliocene epoch some ten million years ago, Earth's climate has been in a phase of severe cooling, and for four-fifths or so of the time that life has existed on this planet global temperatures have been far warmer than the IPCC's worst case scenarios imagine. When the Earth's climate is normal, on this inhumanly broad scale, most of its land surface is covered by jungle, and ice caps and glaciers do not exist. A reversion to that normal temperature would obliterate our industrial civilisation with the inevitability of a boot descending on an eggshell, and could well push our species over the edge into extinction, but the usual adjustments would soon bring the biosphere into balance, as they have after the other climate changes of the planetary past. The fact that we will not be around to see this, if it comes to that, concerns no one but ourselves.

These ironies, furthermore, have direct practical implications. While anthropogenic global warming is a real and serious problem, its consequences are subject to natural limits that current thinking, fixated on images of human triumphalism, is poorly equipped to grasp. Meanwhile, another real and serious problem – the depletion of the nonrenewable energy resources that prop up today's industrial economy and keep seven billion people alive – gets next to no attention, because it conflicts with those same triumphalist obsessions. It's no exaggeration to say that the modern world might solve the global warming crisis and then collapse anyway, because it only dealt with those of its problems that proved congenial to its self-image.

IV

Sometimes, when sleep keeps its distance in the small hours of the night, I wonder if the grand purpose for which humanity came into being was simply that Earth needed a species good at digging to pull a few billion tons of stored carbon out of the ground and nudge up its thermostat a bit. During daylight hours, I don't actually believe this; if the Earth has conscious purposes we will almost certainly never know, and if by some chance we do find out, our chances of understanding those purposes are right

[12] This figure, along with supporting research, is cited in Richard B. Alley, The Two Mile Time Machine (Princeton University Press, 2000).

up there with the chance that a dust mite in Mozart's wig could have understood his music or his marital problems.

It's easy to dismiss reflections such as these as a display of misanthropy. Still, it shows no contempt for an individual to recognise that he or she isn't more important than anyone else in the world. Personal maturity begins, after all, with letting go the infantile self-regard that puts the ego and its cravings at the centre of the cosmos. It's arguably time to apply that same insight to humanity as a whole. As Jeffers wrote:
It seems to me wasteful that almost the whole of human energy is expended inward, on itself, on loving, hating, governing, cajoling, amusing, its own members. It is like a newborn babe, conscious almost exclusively of its own processes and where its food comes from. As the child grows up, its attention must be drawn from itself to the more important world around it.[13]

The environmental crises of the present bid fair to make that shift in attention inevitable, no matter how hard we fight to keep ourselves at the centre of our own imagined universe; and in the process most of the presuppositions of human thought will have to change. Crucially, we will be forced to come to terms with the fact that no special providence guarantees our species the fulfillment of its hopes, or even its survival. Sooner or later humanity, like every other species, will become extinct, and it's a safe bet that the history that unfolds between the present moment and that hopefully distant time will be just as sparing of Utopian dreams fulfilled as has human history so far.

This doesn't deny us the possibility of improving our lives, our societies, and our relationships with the cosmos that surrounds us; it does mean that those improvements, like everything else in the real world, will take place against a background of hard natural limits that will inevitably restrict what can be attained.

One consequence is that the faith in perpetual progress that forms the unacknowledged state religion of the modern world faces a shattering disillusionment. Progress as we have known it amounts to little more than the race to find ever more extravagant ways to burn cheap, abundant fossil fuels. Those fuels are no longer as cheap or abundant as they once were; in the not too distant future, they will be scarce and expensive, and not all that much further down the curve of history they will be so scarce, and so expensive, that burning them to power what remains of an industrial society will no longer be a viable option.[14]

Nor can we simply count, as too many people are counting, on the hope that some other energy source equally cheap, convenient, and concentrated will come along just as we need it. The fossil fuels we burn so blithely today are the product of hundreds

[13] letter from Jeffers to Rudolph Gilbert, in Gilbert's Shine, Perishing Republic: Robinson Jeffers and the Tragic Sense in Modern Poetry (Haskell House, 1965), frontispiece.

[14] I have discussed these points in much more detail in my book The Long Descent (New Society, 2008).

of millions of years of complex ecological and geological processes. At the dawn of our now-receding Age of Excess, they represented the single largest concentration of readily accessible chemical energy in the known solar system. Insisting that an industrial civilisation dependent on this vast surplus can thrive on the sparser and less concentrated energy flows the Earth receives from the Sun day by day – which is what most current advocates of 'sustainability' propose – flies in the face of ecological and thermodynamic reality; it's as though someone who won a huge lottery payoff, and spent it all in a few short years, insisted he could keep up the same extravagant lifestyle with the income from a job flipping burgers for minimum wage.

Instead of fantasising about the kind of future we want humanity to have, in other words, or confusing our daydreams with our destiny, we need to start thinking hard about what kind of future humanity can afford, and taking a hard look at social habits that require levels of energy and resource inputs we won't be able to maintain for much longer. A rethinking of this kind is not optional; if we refuse it, nature will do the job for us. Ecology teaches us that every species either evolves ways to limit the burden it places on nature or suffers from limits imposed on it by outside factors, and we are no more exempt from that law than we are from the law of gravity.

At this moment in history, only a massive worldwide effort of more than wartime intensity might have even a modest chance of managing a controlled descent from industrial civilisation's extravagance to some more durable form of society. The window of opportunity for so staggering a project is narrow, if it has not already closed, and the political will that would be needed to carry it out is nowhere in sight. Thus the same sort of uncontrolled descent that ended the history of so many earlier civilisations has become the most likely future for ours. Certainly this was Jeffers' view:

> These are the falling years,
> They will go deep,
> Never weep, never weep.
> With clear eyes explore the pit.
> Watch the great fall
> With religious awe.[15]

Still, it's precisely in the troubled years ahead of us, as our civilisation stumbles down the long broken slope toward a future that will make a mockery of our fantasies of progress and cosmic importance, that Jeffers' perspective offers its most important gifts. It's the man or woman who comes to terms with the inevitability of his or her own death that best knows how to grapple with life. In the same way, Jeffers' inhumanist perspective can be a crucial source of strength now, and even more so in time to come. When we realise that human history is nothing unique – from nature's perspective, we're simply one more species that overshot the carrying capacity of its environment

[15] From 'For Una,' in Hunt, ed., op.cit., pp. 565–567.

and is about to pay the routine price – we can get past the habit of wallowing in a self-blame that's first cousin to self-praise, face up to the hard choices ahead, and make them with some sense of perspective and, at least potentially, some possibility of grace. Humanity cannot and need not bear the burden of being the measure of all things, Jeffers is telling us, for a saner and stronger measure is all around us:

> Integrity is wholeness, the greatest beauty is
> Organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine
> beauty of the universe. Love that, not man
> Apart from that.[16]

Notes

[16] From 'The Answer,' in Hunt, ed., op. cit., p. 522.

I Went Looking for the Wild One

Dark Mountain: Issue 1, our very first collection of uncivilised writing and art, is now available. Over the next few weeks, we're going to share a little of what you'll find in its pages. Today, we present the opening poem by Rob Lewis.

Rob Lewis

is a poet, activist, house painter and musician, whose writings have been published in *Dark Mountain, Cascadia Weekly, Manzanita, The Atlanta Review, Southern Review* and other publications.

22nd August, 2009

- DARK VERSE
- FROM OUR BOOKS
- ISSUE 1

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I went looking for the wild one, the howler, the vatic tramp.
The one for whom the wounded hills are body burns, whose
blood is stained with the old love-wine of poet and earth,
warrior poet, slinging battle flak out at the static
shattering polite conversations everywhere.

I looked in the anthologies, listening for echoes,
traced for signs in the quarterlies, magazines, best of's.
I learned it's been a good year for poetry. Grants and awards
keep coming in. Contests and prizes are proliferating,
The wise grey consensus counsels a return to the classics.

Meanwhile, poor scientist holds extinction
in a palm full of numbers
with nothing but data
to howl with.

Dark Thoughts

Time to Look Down (artwork from first Uncivilisation Festival 2010

How do we make sense of the world, as we start to disentangle ourselves from the stories we grew up taking for reality itself?

In this section, you'll find Dark Mountain contributors thinking about the largest questions and asking what it means to live in times like these.

Dark Ecology

> Take the only tree that's left,
> Stuff it up the hole in your culture.
> – Leonard Cohen
>
> Retreat to the desert and fight!
> – D.H. Lawrence

The handle, which varies in length according to the height of its user, and in some cases is made by that user to his or her specifications, is like most of the other parts of the tool in that it has a name and thus a character of its own. I call it the snath, as do most of us in this country, though variations include the snathe, the snaithe, the snead and the sned. Onto the snath are attached two hand grips, adjusted for the height of the user. On the bottom of the snath is a small hole, a rubberised protector and a metal D-ring with two hex sockets. Into this little assemblage slides the tang of the blade.

This thin crescent of steel is the fulcrum of the whole tool. From the genus blade fans out a number of ever-evolving species, each seeking out and colonising new niches. My collection includes a number of grass blades of varying styles — a Luxor, a Profisense, an Austrian and a new, elegant Concari Felice blade that I've not even tried yet — whose lengths vary between 60 and 85 centimetres. I also have a couple of ditch blades (which despite the name are not used for mowing ditches particularly, but are all-purpose cutting tools which can manage anything from fine grass to tousled brambles) and a bush blade, which is as thick as a billhook and can take down small trees. These are the big mammals you can see and hear. Beneath and around them scuttle any number of harder-to-spot competitors for the summer grass, all finding their place in the ecosystem of the tool.

None of them, of course, are any use at all unless they are kept sharp, really sharp: sharp enough that if you were to lightly run your finger along the edge you would lose blood. You need to take a couple of stones out into the field with you and use them regularly — every five minutes or so — to keep the edge honed. And you need to know how to use your peening anvil, and when. Peen is a word of Scandinavian origin, originally meaning 'to beat iron thin with a hammer', which is still its meaning, though the iron has now been replaced by steel. When the edge of your blade thickens with over-use and over-sharpening, you need to draw the edge out by peening it — cold-forging the blade with hammer and small anvil. It's a tricky job. I've been doing it for

years but I've still not mastered it. Probably you never master it, just as you never really master anything. That lack of mastery, and the promise of one day reaching it, is part of the complex beauty of the tool.

Etymology can be interesting. Scythe, originally rendered sithe, is an Old English word, indicating that the tool has been in use in these islands for at least a thousand years. But archaeology pushes that date much further out; Roman scythes have been found with blades nearly two metres long. Basic, curved cutting tools for use on grass date back at least ten thousand years, to the dawn of agriculture and thus to the dawn of civilisations. Like the tool, the word, too, has older origins. The Proto-Indo-European root of scythe is the word *sek*, meaning to cut, or to divide. Sek is also the root word of sickle, saw, schism, sex and science.

*

I've recently begun reading the collected writings of Theodore Kaczynski. I'm worried that it may change my life. Some books do that, from time to time, and this is beginning to shape up as one of them.

It's not that Kaczynski, who is a fierce, uncompromising critic of the techno-industrial system, is saying anything I haven't heard before. I've heard it all before, many times. By his own admission, his arguments are not new. But the clarity with which he makes them, and his refusal to obfuscate, are refreshing. I seem to be at a point in my life where I am open to hearing this again. I don't know quite why.

Here are the four premises with which he begins the book:

1. Technological progress is carrying us to inevitable disaster;
2. Only the collapse of modern technological civilisation can avert disaster;
3. The political left is technological society's first line of defence against revolution;
4. What is needed is a new revolutionary movement, dedicated to the elimination of technological society.

Kaczynski's prose is sparse, and his arguments logical and unsentimental, as you might expect from a former mathematics professor with a degree from Harvard. I have a tendency towards sentimentality around these issues, so I appreciate his discipline. I'm about a third of the way through the book at the moment, and the way that the four arguments are being filled out is worryingly convincing. Maybe it's what scientists call 'confirmation bias', but I'm finding it hard to muster good counter-arguments to any of them, even the last. I say 'worryingly' because I do not want to end up agreeing with Kaczynski. There are two reasons for this.

Firstly, if I do end up agreeing with him — and with other such critics I have been exploring recently, such as Jacques Ellul and D.H. Lawrence and C.S. Lewis and Ivan

Illich — I am going to have to change my life in quite profound ways. Not just in the ways I've already changed it (getting rid of my telly, not owning a credit card, avoiding smartphones and e-readers and sat-navs, growing at least some of my own food, learning practical skills, fleeing the city, etc) but properly, deeply. I am still embedded, at least partly because I can't work out where to jump, or what to land on, or whether you can ever get away by jumping, or simply because I'm frightened to close my eyes and walk over the edge.

I'm writing this on a laptop computer, by the way. It has a broadband connection and all sorts of fancy capabilities I have never tried or wanted to use. I mainly use it for typing. You might think this makes me a hypocrite, and you might be right, but there is a more interesting observation you could make. This, says Kaczynski, is where we all find ourselves, until and unless we choose to break out. In his own case, he explains, he had to go through a personal psychological collapse as a young man before he could escape what he saw as his chains. He explained this to an interviewer in 2001:

> I knew what I wanted: to go and live in some wild place. But I didn't know how to do so ... I did not know even one person who would have understood why I wanted to do such a thing. So, deep in my heart, I felt convinced that I would never be able to escape from civilisation. Because I found modern life utterly unacceptable, I grew increasingly hopeless until, at the age of 24, I arrived at a kind of crisis: I felt so miserable that I didn't care whether I lived or died. But when I reached that point a sudden change took place: I realised that if I didn't care whether I lived or died, then I didn't need to fear the consequences of anything I might do. Therefore I could do anything I wanted. I was free!

At the beginning of the 1970s, Kaczynski moved to a small cabin in the woods of Montana where he worked to live a self-sufficient life, without electricity, hunting and fishing and growing his own food. He lived that way for twenty-five years, trying, initially at least, to escape from civilisation. But it didn't take him long to learn that such an escape, if it was ever possible, is not possible now. More cabins were built in his woods, roads were enlarged, loggers buzzed through his forests. More planes passed overhead every year. One day, in August 1983, Kaczynski set out hiking towards his favourite wild place:

> The best place, to me, was the largest remnant of this plateau that dates from the Tertiary age. It's kind of rolling country, not flat, and when you get to the edge of it you find these ravines that cut very steeply in to cliff-like drop-offs and there was even a waterfall there ... That summer there were too many people around my cabin so I decided I needed some peace. I went back to the plateau and when I got there I found they had put a road

> right through the middle of it... You just can't imagine how upset I was. It was from that point on I decided that, rather than trying to acquire further wilderness skills, I would work on getting back at the system. Revenge.

I can identify with pretty much every word of this, including, sometimes, the last one. This is the other reason that I do not want to end up being convinced by Kaczynski's position. Ted Kaczynski was known to the FBI as the 'Unabomber' during the twenty years in which he sent parcel bombs from his shack to those he deemed responsible for the promotion of the technological society he despises. In those two decades he killed three people and injured twenty-three others. His targets lost eyes and fingers and sometimes their lives. He nearly brought down an aeroplane. Unlike many other critics of the technosphere, who are busy churning out books and doing the lecture circuit and updating their anarcho-primitivist websites, Kaczynski wasn't just theorising about being a revolutionary. He meant it.

*

Back to the scythe. It's an ancient piece of technology; tried and tested, improved and honed, literally and metaphorically, over centuries. It's what the green thinkers of the 1970s used to call an 'appropriate technology' — a phrase which I would love to see resurrected — and what the unjustly-neglected philosopher Ivan Illich called a 'tool for conviviality'. Illich's critique of technology, like Kaczynski's, was really a critique of power. Advanced technologies, he explained, created dependency; they took tools and processes out of the hands of individuals and put them into the metaphorical hands of organisations. The result was often 'modernised poverty' in which human individuals became the equivalent of parts in a machine rather than owners and users of a tool. In exchange for flashing lights and throbbing engines, they lost the thing that should be most valuable to a human individual: autonomy. Freedom. Control.

Illich's critique did not, of course, just apply to technology. It applied more widely to social and economic life. A few years back I wrote a book called *Real England*, which was also about conviviality, as it turned out. In particular, it was about how human-scale, vernacular ways of life in my home country were disappearing, victims of the march of the machine. Small shops were crushed by supermarkets, family farms pushed out of business by the global agricultural market, ancient orchards rooted up for housing developments, pubs shut down developers and state interference. What the book turned out to be about, again, was autonomy and control: about the need for people to be in control of their tools and places rather than to remain cogs in the machine.

Critics of that book called it nostalgic and conservative, as they do with all books like it. They confused a desire for human-scale autonomy, and for the independent character, quirkiness, mess and creativity which usually results, with a desire to retreat to some imagined 'golden age'. It's a familiar criticism, and a lazy and boring one.

Nowadays, when I'm faced with digs like this I like to quote E.F. Schumacher, who replied to the accusation that he was a 'crank' by saying: 'A crank is a very elegant device. It's small, it's strong, it's lightweight, energy efficient, and it makes revolutions.'

Still, if I'm honest I'll have to concede that the critics may have been onto something in one sense. If you want human-scale living, you doubtless do need to look backwards. If there was an age of human autonomy, it seems to me that it probably is behind us. It is certainly not ahead of us, or not for a very long time; not unless we change course, which we show no sign of wanting to do.

Schumacher's riposte reminds us that Ivan Illich was far from being the only thinker to advance a critique of the dehumanising impacts of mega-technologies on both the human soul and the human body. E.F. Schumacher, Leopold Kohr, Neil Postman, Jacques Ellul, Lewis Mumford, Kirkpatrick Sale, Jerry Mander, Edward Goldsmith: there's a long roll call of names, thinkers and doers all, promoters of appropriate energy and convivial tools, interrogators of the paradigm. For a while, in the sixties and seventies, they were riding high. Then they were buried, by Thatcher and Reagan, by three decades of cheap oil and shopping. Lauded as visionaries at first, at least by some, they became mocked as throwbacks by those who remembered them. Kaczynski's pipe bombs, plugged with whittled wood, wired up to batteries and hidden inside books, were a futile attempt to spark a revolution from the ashes of their thinking. He will spend the rest of his life in Colorado's Federal Administrative Maximum Facility Penitentiary as a result — surely one of the least human-scale and convivial places on Earth.

But things change. Today, as three decades of cheap fuel, free money and economic enclosure comes to a shuddering, collapsing halt, suddenly it's Thatcher and Reagan, and the shrieking, depleting faithful in the Friedmanite think tanks, who are starting to look like the throwbacks. Another orthodoxy is in its death throes. What happens next is what interests me, and worries me too.

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Every summer I run scything courses in the north of England and in Scotland. I teach the skills I've picked up using this tool over the past five or six years to people who have never used one before. It's probably the most fulfilling thing I do, in the all-round sense, apart from being a father to my children (and scything is easier than fathering). Writing is fulfilling too, intellectually and sometimes emotionally, but physically it is draining and boring: hours in front of computers or scribbling notes in books, or reading and thinking or attempting to think.

Mowing with a scythe shuts down the jabbering brain for a little while, or at least the rational part of it, leaving only the primitive part, the intuitive reptile consciousness, working fully. Using a scythe properly is a meditation; your body in tune with the tool, your tool in tune with the land. You concentrate without thinking, you follow the lay of the ground with the face of your blade, you are aware of the keenness of its edge,

you can hear the birds, see things moving through the grass ahead of you. Everything is connected to everything else, and if it isn't, it doesn't work: Your blade tip jams into the ground, you blunt the edge on a molehill you didn't notice, you pull a muscle in your back, you slice your finger as you're honing. Focus — relaxed focus — is the key to mowing well. Tolstoy, who obviously wrote from experience, explained it in *Anna Karenina*:

> The longer Levin went on mowing, the oftener he experienced those moments of oblivion when his arm no longer seemed to swing the scythe, but the scythe itself his whole body, so conscious and full of life; and as if by magic, regularly and definitely without thought being given to it, the work accomplished itself of its own accord. These were blessed moments.

People come on my courses for all kinds of reasons, but most want to learn to use the tool for a practical purpose. Sometimes they are managing wildlife reserves or golf courses. Some of them want to control sedge grass or nettles or brambles in their fields or gardens, or destroy couch grass on their allotments. Some of them want to trim lawns or verges. This year I'm also doing some courses for people with mental health problems, using tools to help them root themselves in practical, calming work.

Still, the reaction of most people when I tell them I'm a scythe teacher is the same: incredulity or amusement, or polite interest, usually overlaid onto a sense that this is something quaint and rather silly that doesn't have much place in the modern world. After all, we have strimmers and lawnmowers now, and they are noisier than scythes and have buttons and use electricity or petrol and therefore they must perform better, right?

Now, I would say this of course, but no, it is not right. Certainly if you have a five-acre meadow and you want to cut the grass for hay or silage, you are going to get it done a lot quicker (though not necessarily more efficiently) with a tractor and cutter bar than you would with a scythe team, which is the way it was done before the 1950s. Down at the human scale, though, the scythe still reigns supreme.

A growing number of people I teach, for example, are looking for an alternative to a brushcutter. A brushcutter is essentially a mechanical scythe. It is a great heavy piece of machinery which needs to be operated with both hands and requires its user to dress up like Darth Vader in order to swing it through the grass. It roars like a motorbike, belches out fumes and requires a regular diet of fossil fuels. It hacks through the grass instead of slicing it cleanly like a scythe blade. It is more cumbersome, more dangerous, no faster and far less pleasant to use than the tool it replaced. And yet you see it used everywhere: on motorway verges by council workers, in parks by municipal gardeners; even, for heaven's sake, in nature reserves. It's a horrible, clumsy, ugly, noisy, inefficient thing. So why do people use it, and why do they still laugh at the scythe?

To ask that question in those terms is to misunderstand what is going on. Brushcutters are not used instead of scythes because they are better, they are used because

their use is conditioned by our attitudes to technology. Performance is not really the point, and neither is efficiency. Religion is the point; the religion of complexity. The myth of progress manifested in tool form. Plastic is better than wood. Moving parts are better than fixed parts. Noisy things are better than quiet things. Complicated things are better than simple things. New things are better than old things. We all believe this, whether we like it or not. It's how we were brought up.

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The homely, pipe-smoking, cob-and-straw visions of Illich and Schumacher take us back to what we would like to think was a kinder time; a time when noone was posting bombs out in pursuit of a gentler world. This was the birth of what would become known as the 'green' movement. I sometimes like to say that the movement was born in the same year as me -1972, the year in which the fabled Limits to Growth report was published by the Club of Rome — and this is near enough to the truth to be a jumping-off point for a narrative.

If the green movement was born in the early 1970s, then the 1980s, when there were whales to be saved and rainforests to be campaigned for, were its adolescence. Its coming-of-age party was in 1992, in the Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro. The 1992 Earth Summit was a jamboree of promises and commitments: to tackle climate change, to protect forests, to protect biodiversity and to promote something called 'sustainable development', a new concept which would become, over the next two decades, the most fashionable in global politics and business. The future looked bright for the greens back then. It often does when you're twenty.

Two decades on, things look rather different. This year, the bureaucrats, the activists and the ministers gathered again in Rio for a stock-taking exercise called 'Rio +20.'It was accompanied by the usual shrill demands for optimism and hope, but there was no disguising the hollowness of the exercise. Every environmental problem identified at the original Earth Summit has got worse in the intervening twenty years, often very much worse, and there is no sign of this changing.

The green movement, which seemed to be carrying all before it in the early 1990s, has plunged into a full-on midlife crisis. Unable to significantly change either the system or the behaviour of the public, assailed by a rising movement of 'sceptics' and by public boredom with being hectored about carbon and consumption, colonised by a new breed of corporate spivs for whom 'sustainability' is just another opportunity for selling things, the greens are seeing a nasty realisation dawn: despite all their work, their passion, their commitment and the fact that most of what they have been saying has been broadly right — they are losing. There is no likelihood of the world going their way. In most green circles now, sooner or later, the conversation comes round to the same question: what the hell do we do next?

There are plenty of people who think they know the answer to that question. One of them is Peter Kareiva, who would like to think that he and his kind represent the

future of environmentalism, and who may turn out to be right. Kareiva is chief scientist of the Nature Conservancy, an American NGO which claims to be the world's largest environmental organisation. He is a scientist, a revisionist and one among a growing number of former greens who might best be called 'neo-environmentalists.'

The resemblance between this coalescing group and the Friedmanite 'neo-liberals' of the early 1970s is intriguing. Like the neo-liberals, the neo-environmentalists are attempting to break through the lines of an old orthodoxy which is visibly exhausted and confused. Like the neo-liberals, they are mostly American and mostly male and they emphasise scientific measurement and economic analysis over other ways of seeing and measuring. Like the neo-liberals, they cluster around a few key think tanks: then, the Institute of Economic Affairs, the Cato Institute and the Adam Smith Institute; now, the Breakthrough Institute, the Long Now Foundation and the Copenhagen Consensus. Like the neo-liberals, they are beginning to grow in numbers at a time of global collapse and uncertainty. And like the neo-liberals, they think they have radical solutions.

Kareiva's ideas are a good place to start in understanding them. He is an outspoken former conservationist who now believes that most of what the greens think they know is wrong. Nature, he says, is more resilient than fragile; science proves it. 'Humans degrade and destroy and crucify the natural environment,' he says, 'and 80 per cent of the time it recovers pretty well.' Wilderness does not exist; all of it has been influenced by humans at some time. Trying to protect large functioning ecosystems from human development is mostly futile; humans like development, and you can't stop them having it. Nature is tough and will adapt to this: 'today, coyotes roam downtown Chicago and peregrines astonish San Franciscans as they sweep down skyscraper canyons ... as we destroy habitats, we create new ones.' Now that 'science' has shown us that nothing is 'pristine' and nature 'adapts', there's no reason to worry about many traditional greens goals such as, for example, protecting rainforest habitats. 'Is halting deforestation in the Amazon ... feasible?' he asks. 'Is it even necessary?' Somehow, you know what the answer is going to be before he gives it to you.

If this sounds like the kind of thing that a US Republican Presidential Candidate might come out with, that's because it is. But Kareiva is not alone. Variations on this line have recently been pushed by the US thinker Stewart Brand, the British writer Mark Lynas, the Danish anti-green poster boy Bjorn Lomborg and the American writers Emma Marris, Ted Nordhaus and Michael Schellenberger. They in turn are building on work done in the past by other self-declared green 'heretics' like Richard D. North, Brian Clegg and Wilfred Beckerman.

Beyond the field of conservation, the neo-environmentalists are distinguished by their attitude to new technologies, which they almost uniformly see as positive. Civilisation, nature and people can only be 'saved' by enthusiastically embracing biotechnology, synthetic biology, nuclear power, geo-engineering and anything else with the prefix 'new' that annoys Greenpeace. The traditional green focus on 'limits' is dismissed as naive. We are now, in Brand's words, 'as Gods', and we have to step up and accept

our responsibility to manage the planet rationally through the use of new technology guided by enlightened science.

Neo-environmentalists also tend to exhibit an excitable enthusiasm for markets. They like to put a price on things like trees, lakes, mist, crocodiles, rainforests and watersheds, all of which can deliver 'ecosystem services' which can be bought and sold, measured and totted up. Tied in with this is an almost religious attitude to the scientific method. Everything that matters can be measured by science and priced by markets, and any claims without numbers attached can be easily dismissed. This is presented as 'pragmatism' but is actually something rather different: an attempt to exclude from the green debate any interventions based on morality, emotion, intuition, spiritual connection or simple human feeling.

Some of this might be shocking to some old guard greens — which is the point — but it is hardly a new message. In fact, it is a very old one; it is simply a variant on the old Wellsian techno-optimism which has been promising us cornucopia for over a century. It's an old-fashioned Big Science, Big Tech and Big Money narrative, filtered through the lens of the internet and garlanded with holier-than-thou talk about saving the poor and feeding the world.

But though they burn with the shouty fervour of the born-again, the neo-environmentalists are not exactly wrong. In fact, they are at least half right. They are right to say that the human-scale, convivial approaches of those 1970s thinkers are never going to work if the world continues to formulate itself according to the demands of late capitalist industrialism. They are right to say that a world of nine billion people all seeking the status of middle class consumers cannot be sustained by vernacular approaches. They are right to say that the human impact on the planet is enormous and irreversible. They are right to say that traditional conservation efforts sometimes idealised a pre-industrial nature. They are right to say that the campaigns of green NGOs often exaggerate and dissemble. And they are right to say that the greens have hit a wall, and that continuing to ram their heads against it is not going to knock it down.

What's interesting, though, is what they go on to build on this foundation. The first sign that this is not, as declared, a simple 'eco-pragmatism' but is something rather different, comes when you read paragraphs like this:

> For decades people have unquestioningly accepted the idea that our goal is to preserve nature in its pristine, pre-human state. But many scientists have come to see this as an outdated dream that thwarts bold new plans to save the environment and prevents us from having a fuller relationship with nature.

This is the PR blurb for Emma Marris' book *Rambunctious Garden: Saving Nature in a Post-Wild World*, though it could just as easily be from anywhere else in the neo-environmentalist canon. But who are the many 'people' who have 'unquestioningly

accepted' this line? I've met a lot of conservationists and environmentalists in my time and I don't think I've ever met one who believed there was any such thing as 'pristine, pre-human' nature. What they did believe was that there were still large-scale, functioning ecosystems which were worth getting out of bed to protect from destruction.

To understand why, consider the case of the Amazon. What do we value about the Amazon forest? Do people seek to protect it because they believe it is 'pristine' and 'pre-human'? Clearly not, since it's inhabited and harvested by large numbers of tribal people, some of whom have been there for millennia. The Amazon is not important because it is 'untouched'; it's important because it is wild, in the sense that it is self-willed. It is lived in and from by humans, but it is not created or controlled by them. It teems with a great, shifting, complex diversity of both human and non-human life, and no species dominates the mix. It is a complex, working eco-system which is also a human-culture-system, because in any kind of worthwhile world, the two are linked.

This is what intelligent green thinking has always called for: human and nonhuman nature working in some degree of harmony, in a modern world of compromise and change in which some principles, nevertheless, are worth cleaving to. 'Nature' is a resource for people, and always has been; we all have to eat, make shelter, hunt, live from its bounty like any other creature. But that doesn't preclude us understanding that it has a practical, cultural, emotional and even spiritual value beyond that too, which is equally necessary for our wellbeing.

The neo-environmentalists, needless to say, have no time for this kind of fluff. They have a great big straw man to build up and knock down, and once they've got that out of the way, they can move on to the really important part of their message. Here's Kareiva, giving us the money shot in Breakthrough Journal with fellow authors Michelle Marvier and Robert Lalasz:

> Instead of pursuing the protection of biodiversity for biodiversity's sake, a new conservation should seek to enhance those natural systems that benefit the widest number of people... Conservation will measure its achievement in large part by its relevance to people...

There it is, in black and white: the wild is dead, and what remains of nature is for people. We can effectively do what we like, and we should. Science says so! A full circle has been drawn, the greens have been buried by their own children, and under the soil with them has gone their naive, romantic and anti-scientific belief that nonhuman life has any value beyond what we very modern humans can make use of.

'Wilderness can be saved permanently,' claims Ted Kaczynski, 'only by eliminating the technoindustrial system.' I am beginning to think that the neo-environmentalists may leave a deliciously ironic legacy: proving the Unabomber right.

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In his book *A Short History of Progress*, Ronald Wright coins the term 'progress trap'. A progress trap, says Wright, is a short-term social or technological improvement which turns out in the longer term to be a backward step. By the time this is realised — if it ever is — it is too late to change course.

The earliest example he gives is the improvement in hunting techniques in the Upper Palaeolithic era, around 15 000 years ago. Wright tracks the disappearance of wildlife on a vast scale whenever prehistoric humans arrived on a new continent. As Wright explains: 'Some of their slaughter sites were almost industrial in size: 1000 mammoths at one; more than 100 000 horses at another.' But there was a catch:

> The perfection of hunting spelled the end of hunting as a way of life. Easy meat meant more babies. More babies meant more hunters. More hunters, sooner or later, meant less game. Most of the great human migrations across the world at this time must have been driven by want, as we bankrupted the land with our moveable feasts.

This is the progress trap. Each improvement in our knowledge or in our technology will create new problems which require new improvements. Each of these improvements tends to make society bigger, more complex, less human-scale, more destructive of non-human life and more likely to collapse under its own weight.

Spencer Wells takes up the story in his book *Pandora's Seed*, a revisionist history of the development of agriculture. The story we were all taught at school — or I was, anyway — is that humans 'developed' or 'invented' agriculture, because they were clever enough to see that it would form the basis of a better way of living than hunting and gathering. This is the same attitude that makes us assume that a brushcutter is a better way of mowing grass than a scythe, and it seems to be equally erroneous. As Wells demonstrates, analysis of the skeletal remains of people living before and after the transition to agriculture during the Palaeolithic demonstrate something remarkable: an all-round collapse in quality-of-life when farming was adopted.

Hunter-gatherers living during the Palaeolithic period, between 30 000 and 9000 BCE, were on average taller — and thus, by implication healthier — than any people since, including people living in late twentieth-century America. Their median lifespan was higher than at any period for the next six thousand years, and their health, as estimated by measuring the pelvic inlet depth of their skeletons, appears to have been better, again, than at any period since &emdash; including the present day. This collapse in individual well-being was likely due to the fact that settled agricultural life is physically harder and more disease-ridden than the life of a shifting hunter-gatherer community.

So much for progress. But why in this case, Wells asks, would any community move from hunting-gathering to agriculture? The answer seems to be: not because they wanted to, but because they had to. They had spelled the end of their hunting-gathering lifestyle by getting too good at it. They had killed off most of their prey and

expanded their numbers beyond the point at which they could all survive. They had fallen into a progress trap.

We have been falling into them ever since. Look at the proposals of the neo-environmentalists in this light and you can see them as a series of attempts to dig us out of the progress traps that their predecessors knocked us into. Genetically modified crops, for example, are regularly sold to us as a means of 'feeding the world'. But why is the world hungry? At least in part because of the previous wave of agricultural improvements — the so-called 'Green Revolution', which between the 1940s and 1970s promoted a new form of agriculture which depended upon high levels of pesticides and herbicides, new agricultural technologies and high yielding strains of crops. The Green Revolution is trumpeted by progressives as having supposedly 'fed a billion people' who would otherwise have starved. And maybe it did; but then we had to keep feeding them — or should I say us? — and our children. In the meantime it had been discovered that the pesticides and herbicides were killing off vast swathes of wildlife, and the high yield monoculture crops were wrecking both the health of the soil and the crop diversity which in previous centuries had helped prevent the spread of disease and the likelihood of crop failure.

It is in this context that we now have to listen to lectures from the neo-environmentalists and others insisting that GM crops are a moral obligation if we want to feed the world and save the planet: precisely the arguments that were made last time around. GM crops are an attempt to solve the problems caused by the last progress trap; they are also the next one. I would be willing to bet a lot of money that in forty years time, the successors of the neo-environmentalists will be making precisely the same arguments about the necessity of adopting the next wave of technologies needed to dig us out of the trap that GM crops have dropped us neatly into. Perhaps it will be vat-grown meat, or synthetic wheat or some nano-bio-gubbins as yet unthought of. Either way, it will be vital for growth and progress, and a moral necessity. As Kurt Vonnegut would have said: 'so it goes.'

Where will this end, assuming it ever does? The late American wilderness writer Edward Abbey is mocked by Peter Kareiva for supposedly romanticising the time he spent alone in the deserts, forests and rivers of the United States in the middle of the twentieth century. Abbey had committed the cardinal sin of writing powerfully about an emotional response to nature. Still, if I were forced to choose between the two men's views of where this was all leading, I'd choose Abbey's any day. He saw us sleepwalking towards a future that was:

> ...nuclear-powered, computer-directed, firmly and thoroughly policed. Call it the Anthill State, the Beehive Society, a technocratic despotism — perhaps benevolent, perhaps not, but in either case the enemy of personal liberty, family independence and community sovereignty, shutting off for a long time to come the freedom to choose among alternate ways of living.

> The domination of nature made possible by misapplied science leads to the domination of people; to a dreary and totalitarian uniformity...

'Romanticising the past' is a familiar accusation, made mostly by people who think it is more grown-up to romanticise the future. But it's not necessary to convince yourself that Palaeolithic hunter-gatherers lived in paradise in order to observe that progress is a ratchet, every turn forcing us more tightly into the gears of a machine we were forced to create to solve the problems created by progress. It is far too late to think about dismantling this machine in a rational manner — and in any case who wants to? We can't deny that it brings benefits to us, even as it chokes us and our world by degrees. Those benefits are what keep us largely quiet and uncomplaining as the machine rolls on, in the words of the poet R.S. Thomas, 'over the creeds and masterpieces':

> The machine appeared
> In the distance, singing to itself
> Of money. It song was the web
> They were caught in, men and women
> Together. The villages were as flies
> To be sucked empty.
> God secreted
> A tear. Enough, enough,
> He commanded, but the machine
> Looked at him and went on singing.

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Over the next few years, the old green movement that I grew up with is likely to fall to pieces. Many of those pieces will be picked up and hoarded by the growing ranks of the neo-environmentalists. The mainstream of the green movement has laid itself open to their advances in recent years with its obsessive focus on carbon and energy technologies and its refusal to speak up for a subjective, vernacular, non-technical engagement with nature. The neo-environmentalists have a great advantage over the old greens, with their threatening talk about limits to growth, behaviour change and other such against-the-grain stuff: they are telling this civilisation what it wants to hear. What it wants to hear is that the progress trap which our civilisation is caught in can be escaped from by inflating a green tech bubble on which we can sail merrily into the future, happy as gods and equally in control.

In the short term, the future belongs to the neo-environmentalists, and it is going to be painful to watch. In the long-term, though, I'd guess they will fail, for two reasons. Firstly, that bubbles always burst. Our civilisation is beginning to break down. We are at the start of an unfolding economic and social collapse which may take decades or

longer to play out — and which is playing out against the background of a planetary ecocide which nobody seems able to prevent. We are not gods, and our machines will not get us off this hook, however clever they are and however much we would like to believe it.

But there is another reason that the new breed are unlikely to be able to build the world they want to see: we are not — even they are not — primarily rational, logical or 'scientific' beings. Our human relationship to the rest of nature is not akin to the analysis of bacteria in a petri dish; it is more like the complex, love-hate relationship we might have with lovers or parents or siblings. It is who we are, unspoken and felt and frustrating and inspiring and vital and impossible to peer-review. You can reach part of it with the analytical mind, but the rest will remain buried in the ancient woodland floor of human evolution and in the depth of our old ape brains, which see in pictures and think in stories. Civilisation has always been a project of control, but you can't win a war against the wild within yourself.

Is it possible to read the words of someone like Theodore Kaczynski and be convinced by the case he makes, even as you reject what he did with the knowledge? Is it possible to look at human cultural evolution as a series of progress traps, the latest of which you are caught in like a fly on a sundew, with no means of escape? Is it possible to observe the unfolding human attack on nature with horror, be determined to do whatever you can to stop it, and at the same time know that much of it cannot be stopped whatever you do? Is it possible to see the future as dark and darkening further; to reject false hope and desperate pseudo-optimism without collapsing into despair?

It's going to have to be, because it's where I am right now. But where do I go next? What do I do? Between Kaczynski and Kareiva, what can I find to alight on that will still hold my weight?

I'm not sure I know the answer. But I know there is no going back to anything. And I know that we are not headed, now, towards convivial tools. We are not headed towards human-scale development. This culture is about superstores, not little shops, synthetic biology not intentional community, brushcutters not scythes. This is a culture that develops new life forms first and asks questions later; a species that is in the process of, in the words of the poet Robinson Jeffers, 'break[ing] its legs on its own cleverness.'

What does the near future look like? I'd put my bets on a strange and unworldly combination of an ongoing collapse which will continue to fragment both nature and culture, and a new wave of techno-green 'solutions' being unveiled in a doomed attempt to prevent it. I don't believe now that anything can break this cycle, bar some kind of reset: the kind that we have seen many times before in human history. Some kind of fall back down to a lower level of civilisational complexity. Something like the storm that is now visibly brewing all around us.

If you don't like any of this, but you know you can't stop it, where does it leave you? The answer is that it leaves you with an obligation to be honest about where you are in history's great cycle, and what you have the power to do and what you don't. If you think you can magic us out of the progress trap with new ideas or new

technologies, you are wasting your time. If you think that the usual 'campaigning' behaviour is going to work today where it didn't work yesterday, you will be wasting your time. If you think the machine can be reformed, tamed or defanged, you will be wasting your time. If you draw up a great big plan for a better world based on science and rational argument, you will be wasting your time. If you try to live in the past you will be wasting your time. If you romanticise hunter-gathering or send bombs to computer store owners you will be wasting your time.

And so I come to this point, and I ask myself: what, at this moment in history, would not be a waste of my time? And I arrive at five tentative answers.

One: Withdrawing. If you do this, a lot of people will call you a 'defeatist' or a 'doomer', or claim you are 'burnt out.' They will tell you that you have an obligation to work for climate justice or world peace or the end of bad things everywhere, and that 'fighting' is always better than 'quitting'. Ignore them, and take part in a very ancient practical and spiritual tradition: withdrawing from the fray. Withdraw not with cynicism, but with a questing mind. Withdraw so that you can allow yourself to sit back quietly and feel — intuit — work out what is right for you, and what nature might need from you. Withdraw because refusing to help the machine advance — refusing to tighten the ratchet further — is a deeply moral position. Withdraw because action is not always more effective than inaction. Withdraw to examine your worldview: the cosmology, the paradigm, the assumptions, the direction of travel. All real change starts with withdrawal.

Two: Preserving non-human life. The revisionists will continue to tell us that wildness is dead, nature is for people and Progress is God, and they will continue to be wrong. There is still much remaining of the Earth's wild diversity, but it may not remain for much longer. The human empire is the greatest threat to what remains of life on Earth, and you are part of it. What can you do — really do, at a practical level — about this? Maybe you can buy up some land and rewild it; maybe you can let your garden run free; maybe you can work for a conservation group or set one up yourself; maybe you can put your body in the way of a bulldozer; maybe you can use your skills to prevent the destruction of yet another wild place. How can you create or protect a space for nonhuman nature to breathe easier; how can you give something which isn't us a chance to survive our appetites?

Three: Getting your hands dirty. Root yourself in something: some practical work, some place, some way of doing. Pick up your scythe or your equivalent and get out there and do physical work in clean air surrounded by things you cannot control. Get away from your laptop and throw away your smartphone, if you have one. Ground yourself in things and places, learn or practice human-scale convivial skills. Only by doing that, rather than just talking about it, do you learn what is real and what's not, and what makes sense and what is so much hot air.

Four: Insisting that nature has a value beyond utility. And telling everyone. Remember that you are one lifeform among many and understand that everything has intrinsic value. If you want to call this 'ecocentrism' or 'deep ecology', do it. If you

want to call it something else, do that. If you want to look to tribal societies for your inspiration, do it. If that seems too gooey, just look up into the sky. Sit on the grass, and touch a tree trunk, walk into the hills, dig the garden, look at what you find in the soil, marvel at what the hell this thing called life could possibly be. Value it for what it is, try to understand what it is, and have nothing but pity or contempt for people who tell you that its only value is in what they can extract from it.

Five: Building refuges. The coming decades are likely to challenge much of what we think we know about what progress is, and about who we are in relation to the rest of nature. Advanced technologies will challenge our sense of what it means to be human at the same time as the tide of extinction rolls on. The ongoing collapse of social and economic infrastructures, and of the web of life itself, will kill off much of what we value. In this context, ask yourself: what power do you have to preserve what is of value — creatures, skills, things, places? Can you work, with others or alone, to create places or networks that act as refuges from the unfolding storm? Can you think, or act, like the librarian of a monastery through the Dark Ages, guarding the old books as empires rise and fall outside?

It will be apparent by now that for the last five paragraphs I have been talking to myself.

These are the things that make sense to me right now, when I think about what is coming and what I can do, still, with some joy and determination. If you don't feel despair, in times like these, you are not fully alive. But there has to be something beyond despair too; or rather, something that accompanies it, like a companion on the road. This is my approach, right now. It is, I suppose, the development of a personal philosophy for a dark time; a dark ecology. None of it is going to save the world — but then there is no saving the world, and the ones who say there is are the ones you need to save it from.

*

For now, I've had enough of writing. My head is buzzing with it. I am going to pick up my new scythe, lovingly made for me recently from sugar maple, a beautiful object in itself, which I can just look at for hours. I am going to pick it up and go out and find some grass to mow.

I am going to cut great swaths of it, my blade gliding through the vegetation, leaving it in elegant curving windrows behind me. I am going to walk ahead, following the ground, emptying my head, managing the land, not like a god but like a tenant. I am going to breathe the still-clean air and listen to the still-singing birds and reflect on the fact that the Earth is older and harder than the machine which is eating it — that it is indeed more resilient than fragile — and that change comes quickly when it comes, and that knowledge is not the same as wisdom.

A scythe is an old tool, but it has changed through its millennia of existence, changed and adapted as all life does. Like a microchip or a combustion engine it is a technology

that has allowed us to manipulate and control our environment, and to accelerate the rate of that manipulation and control. A scythe, too, is a progress trap. But it is limited enough in its speed and application to allow that control to be rolled out in a way that is understandable by, and accountable to, individual human beings. It is a compromise we can control, as much as we can ever control anything; a stage on the journey we can still understand.

There is always change, as a neo-environmentalist would happily tell you; but there are different qualities of change. There is human-scale change and there is industrial-scale change; there is change led by the needs of complex systems and change led by the needs of individual humans. There is a manageable rate of evolution and there is a chaotic, excitable rush towards shiny things perched on the edge of a great ravine, flashing and scrolling like sirens in the gathering dusk.

When you have mown a hayfield, you should turn and look back on your work admiringly. If you have got it right, you should see a field lined with long, curving windrows of cut grass, with clean, mown strips between them. It's a beautiful sight, which would have been familiar to every medieval citizen of this old, old continent. If you were up at dawn, mowing in the dew — the best time, and the traditional one to cut for hay — you should leave the windrows to dry in the sun, then go down the rows with a pitchfork later in the day and turn them over. Leave the other side of the rows to dry until the sun has done its work, then come back and 'ted' the grass &emdash; spread it out evenly across the field. Dry it for a few hours or a few days, depending on the weather, then come back and turn it over again. Give it as much time as it needs to dry in the sun.

After that, if the rain has held off, you're ready to take in the hay.

Orion & Dark Mountain, 2014

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Ted Kaczynski and Why He Matters

John Jacobi
6th May, 2016

The Unabomber Affair

Ted Kaczynski, also known as the 'Unabomber', is a US terrorist known for his 17-year bombing campaign as the terror group 'FC', which targeted individuals involved in technical fields like computing and genetics.

In early 1995, the *New York Times* received a communique from FC in the mail:

> This is a message from FC...we are getting tired of making bombs. It's no fun having to spend all your evenings and weekends preparing dangerous mixtures, filing trigger mechanisms out of scraps of metal or searching the sierras for a place isolated enough to test a bomb. So we offer a bargain.

The 'bargain' offered by the group was simple: publish its manifesto, and it will stop sending bombs.

The manifesto, entitled Industrial Society and Its Future, was a 35,000 word polemic detailing the threats that industrial society posed to freedom and wild Nature. At the crux of the document's analysis was a concept called 'the power process', or an innate human need to engage in autonomous goal setting and achievement. Despite this psychological necessity, 'in modern industrial society, only minimal effort is necessary to satisfy one's physical needs.' As a result of the mismatch between human need and industrial conditions, modern life is rife with depression, helplessness, and despair, and although some people can offset these side-effects with 'surrogate activities', the manifesto says that these are often undignifying, menial tasks. Interestingly, these concepts have numerous parallels in contemporary psychology, the most notable similar idea being Martin Seligman's concept of 'learned helplessness'.

Ultimately, the manifesto extols the autonomy of individuals and small groups from the control of technology and large organisations, and it offers the hunter-gatherer way of life as a vision of what that kind of autonomy might look like. Still, the end of the manifesto only argues for the practical possibility of revolution against industry (rather

than a complete return to hunter-gatherer life), and it outlines some steps to form a movement capable of carrying out that revolution.

Up until FC tried to force the publication of the manifesto, the FBI had referred to the group as the work of a single terrorist. But the proposal put the agency in a difficult situation: it had a policy of not negotiating with terrorists, but was in no position to reject this one's offer. By that time, the FBI had been searching for the Unabomber for 17 years and had little to nothing to show for it. Much of what they did have to work with, such as the profile that pinned him as a blue collar airline worker, turned out to be complete nonsense. Even the famous FBI sketch looked nothing like the man they later captured.

Worse for the FBI, the Unabomber was determined to strike until they agreed to the offer. Shortly after sending their proposal, FC sent a bomb to a timber industry lobbyist, who became the third death in the bombing campaign. Later, two Nobel Prize winners received letters warning them that 'it would be beneficial to [their] health to stop [their] research in genetics.' Finally, to make the offer even more convincing, FC sent a hoax bomb threat that delayed two flights and shut down California's airmail system for almost the entire day.

Hoping that it would allow someone to identify the perpetrator, the FBI encouraged the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* to publish FC's manifesto. The two newspapers took the advice, and the manifesto was soon published as an eight-page insert to the *Washington Post*, with publication costs partly funded by the *Times*. From that point on, the agency officially classified the Unabomber as 'serial killer rather than a terrorist with a political agenda, as was originally hypothesized.'

The FBI was right about the manifesto: it did help someone identify the author. Shortly after the work's publication, David Kaczynski contacted a lawyer to share his suspicion that the Unabomber was his brother, Ted. After examining the submitted evidence, the FBI raided the man's home, finding everything they needed to put him on trial for the crimes of the Unabomber.

When Kaczynski was apprehended, he looked dirty and dishevelled, with an unwashed body and torn clothing and hair that reached in every direction. It was a typical look for Montana men in the winter, but it nevertheless solidified the media image of the man as a lone wingnut. In reality, Kaczynski was very likely a genius. He was accepted into Harvard at the age of 16, later went to the University of Michigan for his Masters degree, and then taught at Berkeley as an assistant professor. His doctoral thesis solved several difficult problems relating to 'boundary functions', which even Kaczynski's maths professor, George Piranian, could not figure out. 'It's not enough to say he was smart', Piranian said.

But Kaczynski decided that university life was not for him, and he soon left Berkeley to build his own cabin in a remote area of Montana, where he lived without running water and electricity. One FBI investigator said to the man upon his arrest, 'I really envy your way of life up here.'

After a circus of a trial, Kaczynski ended up pleading guilty to the Unabomber crimes, and in turn he was given a life sentence and sent off to the Supermax facility in Florence, Colorado. Today, he diligently responds to letters he receives, and he is working on publishing an upcoming book, *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How.*

The Response to Kaczynski

> The Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race. They have greatly increased the life expectancy of those of us who live in 'advanced' countries, but they have destabilized society, have made life unfulfilling, have subjected human beings to indignities, have led to widespread psychological suffering (in the Third World to physical suffering as well) and have inflicted severe damage on the natural world. The continued development of technology will worsen the situation.
>
> — Industrial Society and Its Future, paragraph 1

Although it is easy to dismiss Kaczynski as crazy, a wingnut, beneath consideration, support for his ideas is not hard to come by. Critiques of technology similar to those outlined in the manifesto have long been available underneath the names of famous thinkers. In 1863, for example, British essayist Samuel Butler wrote in 'Darwin Among Machines':

> Day by day, the machines are gaining ground upon us; day by day we are becoming more subservient to them...the time will come when the machines will hold the real supremacy over the world and its inhabitants...Our opinion is that war to the death should be instantly proclaimed against them. Every machine of every sort should be destroyed by the well-wisher of his species.

Consider how eerily close Butler's statement is to the recent warnings about artificial intelligence made by Stephen Hawking, Bill Gates, Steve Wozniak, and Elon Musk (all of whom nonetheless continue to advocate for technical progress).

The response to the manifesto, while certainly not without a fair share of criticism, included many positive comments from well-adapted and successful members of society. One of these people, Bill Joy, was the inventor of the Java programming language and the founder of Sun Microsystems. In other words, he could easily have received a bomb from FC. Yet in 2000 Joy wrote his now-famous essay 'Why the future doesn't need us', in which he describes his troubled surprise when he read an incisive passage on the threat new technologies pose — only to discover that the passage was pulled from the Unabomber Manifesto. 'He is clearly a Luddite,' Joy writes, 'but simply saying this does not dismiss his argument; as difficult as it is for me to acknowledge, I saw some merit in [his] reasoning...'

Other reactions have been similar. Journalist and science writer Robert Wright famously stated, 'There's a little bit of the Unabomber in most of us.'

And political scientist and UCLA professor James Q. Wilson, the man behind the famous 'broken windows theory', wrote in the *New York Times* that the manifesto was 'a carefully reasoned, artfully written paper... If it is the work of a madman, then the writings of many political philosophers — Jean Jacques Rousseau, Tom Paine, Karl Marx — are scarcely more sane.'

Perhaps most striking, however, was how much the general public expressed adoration and fascination with the Unabomber. 'I've never seen the likes of this,' said one criminologist, 'Millions of people ... seem to identify in some way with him.' Kaczynski was arrested and on trial during the early age of the internet, and fan websites quickly popped up all over, including the famous Usenet group, alt.fan.unabomber. Stickers appeared that said 'Ted Kaczynski has a posse'; t-shirts appeared that had the famous Unabomber sketch and the word 'dad' printed on it; and many organisations contributed to a nationwide 'Unabomber for President' campaign. 'Don't blame me,' one campaign ad said, 'I voted for the Unabomber.'

Even now Kaczynski has his open advocates. For example, David Skrbina, a philosophy of technology professor at the University of Michigan, corresponded with Kaczynski for years, edited a book by him, and has written several essays supporting genuine engagement with Kaczynski's works. One of the essays is provocatively entitled 'A Revolutionary for Our Times'.

Despite all this, Kaczynski's ideas are some of the least-talked-about aspects of the Unabomber affair. Instead, people tend to focus on the man's family drama, his early life, or various conspiracy theories, such as the idea that Kaczynski was the Zodiac Killer. When his ideas finally do appear for consideration, they are oftentimes dismissed with inane comments on the 'academic style' of the manifesto or the unoriginality of its critiques of technology. Even more often, the ideas are dismissed with a statement on Kaczynski's mental state: 'He's crazy, a wingnut, beneath consideration'. And then, of course, there are the moral arguments, some asserting that the violence was unjustified for the stated or assumed goals, and some asserting that violence is never OK.

All of these arguments are terrible ones. Not only do they fail to address the central points that Kaczynski raises, most of the time they are unfounded or flat out wrong, and at least some of the time the arguments' logical conclusions would be uncomfortable or appalling to the very people who argue them. Let's take a closer look.

Was Kaczynski insane?

> The industrial-technological system may survive or it may break down. If it survives, it MAY eventually achieve a low level of physical and psychological suffering, but only after passing through a long and very painful period of adjustment and only at the cost of permanently reducing human beings

> and many other living organisms to engineered products and mere cogs in the social machine. Furthermore, if the system survives, the consequences will be inevitable: There is no way of reforming or modifying the system so as to prevent it from depriving people of dignity and autonomy.
>
> — Industrial Society and Its Future, paragraph 2

Most of the evidence used to show that Kaczynski is insane comes from his chaotic and pitiful trial. But this idea is has been thoroughly debunked. For one thing, every person I know of has confirmed that Kaczynski is not obviously insane, and most have suggested the opposite, including the journalist William Finnegan, many of his college professors, many individuals who encountered him in Montana, professor David Skrbina, and even the judge during Kaczynski's trial.

On 7 January 1998, Judge Burrell said:

> I find him to be lucid, calm. He presents himself in an intelligent manner. In my opinion, he has a keen understanding of the issues. He has already seemed focused on the issues in his contact with me. His mannerisms and his eye contact have been appropriate. I know there's a conflict in the medical evidence as to whether his conduct, at least in the past, has been controlled by any or some mental ailment, but I've seen nothing during my contact with him that appears to be a manifestation of any such ailment. If anything is present, I cannot detect it.

Indeed, all throughout the Unabomber trial, Kaczynski's mental health was a recurring point of tension between him and his lawyers. Kaczynski absolutely did not want to be portrayed as insane, even anticipating in his pre-arrest journals that the media would attempt to paint him as 'a sickie' if he was ever captured. In true Orwellian fashion, this fear was used as one of the main pieces of evidence that Kaczynski was insane, and the only other primary piece of evidence was his political views and writings. For example, in her psychological report Dr Sally Johnson cites Kaczynski's 'clearly organized belief system that he was being harassed and harmed by modern technology'.

Several factors compelled almost all involved parties to declare Kaczynski insane, most of all an ethical one. Kaczynski's defence team was bound by personal or, at the least, professional ethics that compelled them to avoid the death penalty at all costs. The only sure-fire way to do this, they believed, was to present Kaczynski's mental health as a mitigating factor. William Finnegan wrote in *The New Yorker*, 'There was never any real doubt that Kaczynski was legally sane. But his lawyers believed that the degree of his culpability for his crimes could be made to depend on his psychiatric classification — the more serious the diagnosis, the less his culpability.'

Because of Kaczynski's aversion to the strategy and his defence team's repeated dishonesty, Kaczynski requested to be represented by the civil rights lawyer Tony

Serra, but Judge Burrell denied his request. When the man then requested to represent himself, Burrell ordered a psychological evaluation to see if he was fit to stand trial. The result was an evaluation conducted by Dr Sally Johnson, who, as was mentioned, cited Kaczynski's belief system, rejection of being mentally ill, and family troubles all as evidence that the man had a psychological disorder. Johnson concluded with a 'provisional diagnosis' of paranoid schizophrenia that was 'in remission' at the time, and she declared Kaczynski fit to stand trial. Still, stricken with a sudden case of amnesia regarding the man's sanity, Burrell denied Kaczynski's request.

The only other party to assert that Kaczynski was insane was his family, specifically his brother, who turned him in, and his brother's wife. But they, like the legal defence team, expressed a deep desire to keep Kaczynski from receiving the death penalty. Furthermore, given that the Kaczynski family had rather strained relationships, their testimony is at worst unreliable and at the least insufficient for declaring Kaczynski insane.

Closely related to the idea that Kaczynski was insane is the idea that Kaczynski is a sadist. But the man showed explicit compassion for at least some of the people who were harmed or could have been harmed from the FC bombs. In one letter to the *New York Times*, FC wrote:

> ...we will say that we are not insensitive to the pain caused by our bombings.
>
> A bomb package that we mailed to computer scientist Patrick Fischer injured his secretary when she opened it. We certainly regret that. And when we were young and comparatively reckless we were much more careless in selecting targets than we are now. For instance, in one case we attempted unsuccessfully to blow up an airliner. The idea was to kill a lot of business people who we assumed would constitute the majority of the passengers. But of course some of the passengers likely would have been innocent people — maybe kids, or some working stiff going to see his sick grandmother. We're glad now that that attempt failed.

Similarly, in his journals, one can observe Kaczynski struggling with his feelings toward John Hauser, who opened a bomb left in UC Berkeley's computer science building. He wrote that he was 'worried about [the] possibility that some young kid, undergrad, not even computer science major, might get it.' He also wrote 'I must admit I feel badly about having crippled this man's arm. It has been bothering me a good deal.' Still, he goes on to argue that the bombing was justified, as Hauser was a pilot and aspiring to be an astronaut, 'a typical member of the technician class'. Later in his journals he mentioned Hauser again to say, 'I am no longer bothered by this guy partly because I just "got over it" with time, partly because his aspiration was so ignoble.'

In other words, in Kaczynski's eyes his ideology legitimated his killings, not his personal psychological satisfaction. Thus, in order to understand and face the real implications of the UNABOM case, we need to come to an understanding of the worldview presented or hinted at in Kaczynski's writings, including the infamous Manifesto.

Was Kaczynski's ideology opportunistic?

> If the system breaks down the consequences will still be very painful. But the bigger the system grows the more disastrous the results of its breakdown will be, so if it is to break down it had best break down sooner rather than later.
>
> — Industrial Society and Its Future, paragraph 3

Two arguments challenge the idea that Kaczynski justified (and continues to justify) his actions in light of his ideology. One, an implicit argument that functions as backup to the 'Kaczynski was crazy' thesis, claims that the entire ideology was a ruse, just a way to fulfil the man's own emotional angst. The other, explicitly argued for most prominently by the journalist Alston Chase, argues that the ideology had two parts: a libertarian one and an environmentalist one. The latter, Chase suggests, was used to draw support for the real source of Kaczynski's political motivation, a love of freedom.

The first is actually a reasonable argument, given the limited journal excerpts and information the public was given about Kaczynski. The man often made statements in his journals that, standing alone, suggested that his own emotional satisfaction was all that motivated his killings. These statements were a huge part of the case against him.

For example, about Hauser, the aspiring astronaut, Kaczynski wrote, 'But do not get the idea that I regret what I did. Relief of frustrated anger outweighs uncomfortable conscience. I would do it all over again.' Pulled from the context of the entire passage, some of it mentioned above, it certainly sounds as if Kaczynski was only interested in emotional relief. But if the context already given was not enough, consider what Kaczynski wrote immediately after:

> So many failures with feeble ineffective bombs was driving me desperate with frustration. Have to get revenge for all the wild country being fucked up by the system....Recently I camped in a paradise like glacial cirque. At evening, beautiful singing of birds was ruined by the obscene roar of jet planes. Then I laughed at the idea of having any compunction about crippling an airplane pilot.

Once again, ideology plays a fundamental role in Kaczynski's justification. This passage should inspire some empathy from anyone who has seen a wild place they loved become torn apart for development, a part of the man's motivation that is rarely ever talked about. We hear about his bombs and his dirty clothes, but we have not been shown the forests that he loved or the rivers that he drank from. In at least two interviews, both of which have received suspiciously little attention, Kaczynski gives us a glimpse into the kind of life he lead in Montana. One passage in particular stands out:

> "This is kind of personal," he begins by saying, and I ask if he wants me to turn off the tape. He says "no, I can tell you about it. While I was living in the woods I sort of invented some gods for myself" and he laughs. "Not that I believed in these things intellectually, but they were ideas that sort of corresponded with some of the feelings I had. I think the first one I invented was Grandfather Rabbit. You know the snowshoe rabbits were my main source of meat during the winters. I had spent a lot of time learning what they do and following their tracks all around before I could get close enough to shoot them. Sometimes you would track a rabbit around and around and then the tracks disappear. You can't figure out where that rabbit went and lose the trail. I invented a myth for myself, that this was the Grandfather Rabbit, the grandfather who was responsible for the existence of all other rabbits. He was able to disappear, that is why you couldn't catch him and why you would never see him... Every time I shot a snowshoe rabbit, I would always say 'thank you Grandfather Rabbit.'"

In another story, he explains how one of his favourite spots in the Montana forests was developed, leaving him heartbroken — the event that finally pushed him over the edge. The story sounds very similar to the ones that conservationists and environmentalists tell to explain why they fight. Indeed, Kaczynski is really only different from these wilderness-loving men and women because he killed in response to the devastation he saw. This makes all the difference for some people, but, as we will see, this is probably missing the point.

Nonetheless, Kaczynski does often speak of his actions in terms of 'revenge', which is, after all, an emotional justification. But again, most of these entries are still accompanied by ideological justification.

For example, in 1972, six years before the first Unabomber package, Kaczynski wrote 'About a year and a half ago I planned to murder a scientist — as a means of revenge against organized society in general and the technological establishment in particular...'

Later, after he had sabotaged some motorcycles and logging equipment around where he lived, he wrote that his acts were

> particularly satisfying because it was an immediate and precisely directed response to the provocation. Contrast it with the revenge I attempted for the jet noise. I long felt frustrated anger against the planes. After complicated preparation I succeeded in injuring the President of United Air Lines, but he was only one of a vast army of people who directly and indirectly were responsible for the jets. So the revenge was long delayed, vaguely directed and inadequate to the provocation. Thus it felt good to be able, for a change, to strike back immediately and directly.

It seems that a better explanation for Kaczynski's framework for 'revenge' has more to do with hopelessness than anything else. For years before he began his bombings, the man and his brother spoke to each other about the topics in the manifesto. This was, after all, the reason he was captured. Kaczynski also wrote about technological society, freedom, and wild Nature around that time and earlier. When he quit his position at Berkeley, he told his boss, 'I'm tired of teaching engineers math that is going to be used for destroying the environment.' And in 1970 he even wrote a letter to the editor of a local newspaper, in which he criticises one man's suggestion that environmental problems are caused by excessive individual freedoms and could be remedied with collectivism. 'Actually,' Kaczynski writes, 'most of the problems are direct or indirect results of the activities of large organizations — corporations and governments.'

In other words, it's highly unlikely that Kaczynski did not hold dear at least a significant portion of his ideology, and 'getting revenge' was the least he believed he could do in response to the intense devastation that industry was (and is) causing. That he had to justify his actions in emotional terms was not a sign of his emotional instability, but of his perceived isolation, the sense that by himself he could not do much to truly make the difference that was required. This was perhaps the primary reason Kaczynski engaged in isolated acts of sabotage and terrorism — all the more reason to reiterate that Kaczynski is not alone, and neither are those wilderness-loving men and women who feel hopeless now.

If anyone doubts that this was the case, let him read the very last entry in Kaczynski's journal before he was caught: 'My opposition to the technological society now is less a matter of a bitter and sullen revenge than formerly', he wrote. 'I now have more of a sense of mission.'

Chase suggests that Kaczynski was indeed passionate about a portion of his ideology — but the environmentalist part, he says, was just pure opportunism. However, among other things, this assertion fails to take into account Kaczynski's professed love for Nature in his early life and journals, all more than enough to show that Chase was far off the mark. Nonetheless, one quote from his journals stands out as particularly damning:

> ...I don't even believe in the cult of nature-worshippers or wilderness-worshippers (I am perfectly ready to litter in parts of the woods that are of no use to me—I often throw cans in logged-over areas or in places much frequented by people; I don't find wilderness particularly healthy physically; I don't hesitate to poach).

However, in order to understand this entry, one has to understand the particular strand of environmentalism that Kaczynski was influenced by, which was best embodied by a towering figure in the environmentalist movement, Edward Abbey, and the characters in Abbey's most famous work, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. *The Monkey Wrench Gang* is a novel about a group of rambunctious, beer-loving rednecks who,

frustrated with the industrial development of the American West, began committing acts of sabotage, such as cutting down billboards, pulling up survey stakes, and pouring sugar into the tanks of heavy equipment vehicles. The book inspired several groups, including (probably) the Bolt Weevils, who sabotaged power-line development in Minnesota during the 1970s, and Earth First!, a movement started in the 1980s and known for tactics like those described in Abbey's novel.

Abbey, who consistently lived up to the 'rednecks for wilderness' image, once made a statement very similar to Kaczynski's: 'Of course I litter the public highway,' the man said. 'Every chance I get. After all, it's not the beer cans that are ugly; it's the highway that is ugly.'

The goal of the Ed Abbey kind of environmentalism (if you can call it that) is intimately linked to the notions of wildness and freedom. Further regulations are not the solution, but part of the problem. That industry and complex society require so much restriction on the freedom of individuals and small groups is a good reason to love wilderness and throw out the stuff destroying it.

The sentiment isn't all that uncommon. In one stand-up routine George Carlin talked (or ranted, as he does) about Earth Day, environmentalism, and 'saving the planet':

> I'm tired of these self-righteous environmentalists, these white, bourgeois liberals who think the only thing wrong with this country is that there aren't enough bicycle paths. People trying to make the world safe for their Volvos. Besides, environmentalists don't give a shit about the planet, they don't care about the planet... You know what they're interested in? A clean place to live. Their own habitat. They're worried that someday in the future they might be personally inconvenienced... Besides, there is nothing wrong with the planet... The planet is fine. The people are fucked. Difference. Difference... The planet is doing fine, been here four and half billion years. Ever think about the arithmetic? Planet has been here four and a half billion years. We've been here, what, 100,000, maybe 200,000, and we've only been engaged in heavy industry for a little over 200 years. 200 years versus four and a half billion. And we have the conceit to think somehow we're a threat?... The planet isn't going anywhere — we are. We're going away. Pack your shit folks.

Another comedian, Louis C. K., expresses a similar sentiment:

> One day I threw a candy wrapper on the street. I didn't do it [maliciously], like 'Take that shit, street.' I did it cuz I was like, you know, shaking, I wanted the candy. Anyway I was with a friend who said to me, 'You just littered on the street. Don't you care about the environment?' And I thought about it and, you know what, I was like, 'This isn't the environment. This

> is New York City. This is not the environment. This is where people live. New York City is not the environment, New York City is a giant piece of litter. It's like the giantest — next to Mexico City, the shittiest piece of litter... So if you have a piece of litter, what're you supposed to do with it? You throw it in the pile of litter! Cuz if you don't, if you put it in a receptacle, then it gets collected, and it gets taken to a dump, and a landfill, and then it goes on a boat, and it goes out and gets dumped in the ocean and some dolphin wears it as a hat on its face — for ten years.

In other words, Kaczynski's ideology isn't the urban environmentalism pushed by liberals and activists. It's a love of Nature that's inseparable from a love of freedom, very much the kind of love that non-activist nature-lovers profess already. But this is an uncomfortable fact to recognise, of course, because it makes Kaczynski's ideology dangerous.

What about the deaths?

> We therefore advocate a revolution against the industrial system. This revolution may or may not make use of violence; it may be sudden or it may be a relatively gradual process spanning a few decades. We can't predict any of that. But we do outline in a very general way the measures that those who hate the industrial system should take in order to prepare the way for a revolution against that form of society. This is not to be a POLITICAL revolution. Its object will be to overthrow not governments but the economic and technological basis of the present society.
>
> — Industrial Society and Its Future, paragraph 4

One argument I have avoided addressing until now is that Kaczynski's actions were wrong because killing is wrong. This is, most importantly, because the moral status of Kaczynski's terrorism does not discount his ideas, which can stand or fall on their own. Indeed, many have argued that point exactly, including Bill Joy and Skrbina. Another reason, though, is that anyone who truly believes the argument can't be persuaded otherwise. If killing is always wrong, of course Kaczynski's actions are wrong.

But I don't think many people actually believe that killing is always wrong. In an unpublished text, Kaczynski mentions that only three kinds of people make this argument: conformists, cowards, and saints. 'The first two,' he writes, 'are beneath contempt and we need not say anything more about them.' But the saints, he says, could be useful to 'keep alive the ideal of kindness and compassion', especially since a revolution would likely be a pretty ugly affair. And he's right. While some certainly do oppose all violence on principle, the majority of people pushing for nonviolence fall into one of the first two categories, and there's no real way to respond to any of them.

In other words, most people recognise that it is sometimes okay to kill. Self-defence is the most obvious example, but there are arguable justifications for all kinds of wars, assassinations, and other violence. It seems that the problem many people have with Kaczynski isn't necessarily that he killed, but that his killings were unjustified in some way. And, whether reasonable or not, because Kaczynski's violence and its legitimacy is one of the most important considerations for people assessing the Unabomber affair, dismissing it as 'not relevant to the legitimacy of the ideas' is insufficient. So I will investigate Kaczynski's violence and various possible justifications for it.

Bear in mind, however, that discussions about the legitimacy of violence depend heavily on inarguable moral principles, so past a certain point, much of the discussion around political violence is beyond consideration to some readers. It is up to them, then, to decide what kind of violence is morally legitimate. Here I only examine whether Kaczynski's actions were justifiable assuming his arguments are valid.

Finally, note that this discussion is bogged down by an important consideration: the goal of Kaczynski's terrorism. He states in one FC communique, 'Don't think that we are sadists or thrill-seekers or that we have adopted terrorism lightly. Though we are young we are not hot-heads. We have become terrorists only after the most earnest consideration.' Indeed, anyone who has interacted with Kaczynski knows that the man, meticulous to the utmost degree, was probably well aware of what he was doing. Still, we are left with only two ends. First, of course, is the implicit end of revolution. And second is the explicit statement in several places that FC was interested in 'propagating anti-industrial ideas' and getting its message before the public. So we might ask the question: was Kaczynski justified in killing to propagate anti-industrial ideas for the long-term goal of revolution?

Perhaps the FC bombings were unjustified because Kaczynski had other means available: democracy, free speech, the mass media, etc. Anyone who makes this argument, however, should also be prepared to argue that political violence is acceptable if all of the justifiable avenues of political expression are closed. I'm fairly confident that when this fact is brought up, many people would default to the 'nonviolence' position described above. But assuming that a person is prepared to accept the implication of his argument, he ought to consider a few facts.

For one thing, Kaczynski was well-aware of these avenues of political expression. The 1971 essay used as evidence against him actually concluded with a programme for legal action. It suggested that people form an organisation that would lobby for the government to defund scientific and technical research, which was the only 'halfway plausible' solution Kaczynski could think of at the time. Yet by the end of the essay it is clear that the solution is very plainly implausible, which would no doubt leave anyone concerned with the cited issues feeling rather hopeless. Furthermore, if one accepts the arguments given in the manifesto (especially paragraphs 99–132), revolution, even if extremely improbable, is still the only solution likely to solve the problems in a satisfying manner. According to those arguments, other political avenues are closed. This does not necessarily mean that Kaczynski's bombings were justified, but it does

mean that, assuming he was right, they should be considered justified only insofar as they promote revolution.

And, as uncomfortable as this might make some, the man's terrorism was profoundly successful at getting his ideas in front of an enormous population. Not only was the manifesto published, in full, by the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, it was also published in numerous smaller publications; it was placed all over the internet, including one of the first internet portals, Time Warner's Pathfinder; it was stored in government and legal databases and archives that would ensure his ideas lived on indefinitely; and it elicited the insight and commentary of countless intellectuals and public figures, among other things. In all, the manifesto reached an astoundingly large audience, which mostly consisted of everyday Americans, and which ensured that even if no individual or group took the ideas seriously immediately after publication, it would remain stored in countless places, waiting for potential future actors to be inspired. As of yet, no one has suggested a plausible alternative that Kaczynski could have taken to publish his text with the same amount of influence, response, and immortality that he achieved through his terrorism. As Skrbina puts it, 'In the end, we are appalled by Kaczynski — because he won.'

Still, some say, no revolution has happened yet, so his actions can't have been that effective. Yet the manifesto was published and Kaczynski caught only 20 years ago. Considering that 69 years separated the publication of *The Communist Manifesto* and the beginning of the Russian Revolution, it is unreasonable to demand that Kaczynski's Manifesto already have made as large an impact in a third of the time. Furthermore, there is reason to believe that revolution is in the air. In particular, some of Kaczynski's political partners in Spain have been fairly active. And although Kaczynski has broken contact with anarcho-primitivists because of ideological disagreements, he's had a demonstrable impact on many in the anarcho-primitivist and green anarchist movements, who were largely to blame for the 1999 Seattle Riots. He's also had a demonstrable impact on Derrick Jensen, a co-founder of Deep Green Resistance, and Earth First!, a radical environmentalist organisation known for direct action tactics and 'monkeywrenching' (the one based on Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang*). Again, Kaczynski and his political associates have strong ideological disagreements with all of these groups, but that he remains so influential within them is a testament to how powerful of a force his ideas are.

Others might argue that even if Kaczynski's terrorism was successful, it is not necessarily justified. And this is true. But the manifesto argues that if there is no revolution, the consequences of technological development will be absolutely disastrous. If Kaczynski is correct, and if his terrorism was successful at furthering his revolution, then the consequences of his violence might very well have been miniscule compared to the threat. We see this kind of logic at work all the time. The military drops bombs on houses with civilians inside because it's more important to kill the terrorists in there with them. Grandfather Smith shoots a potentially dangerous dog in the head because it's more important for his grandchildren to be safe. And so on. Given that Kaczynski

believed that what is at stake is our freedom and our wild Earth, it's not hard to see why he saw his violence as justifiable.

Finally, some people argue that Kaczynski's specific targets were unjustified. They argue that he was indiscriminate and his targets innocent, and that this was what made his violence illegitimate. But Kaczynski was far from indiscriminate. In fact, he has stated repeatedly that he deplores indiscriminate violence.

More to the point, almost all of his targets were, as he puts it 'typical member[s] of the technician class', who include 'scientists, engineers, corporation executives, politicians, and so forth who consciously and intentionally promote technological progress and economic growth.' These people are 'criminals of the worst kind', and Kaczynski predicts that a revolutionary movement is likely to demand that they be punished.

Again, the idea itself can be challenged, but on his own terms was Kaczynski justified? He was, mostly, except for three instances, and the FC communiques express explicit regret for two of them — see the quote above concerning Patrick Fischer's secretary and the airliner. The third instance was the bomb placed in the University of Utah's computer science building. If it would have succeeded at going off, the bomb would have lit an entire hallway on fire and trapped students in their classrooms — certainly the level of indiscriminate violence that Kaczynski deplored. Put shortly, not even Kaczynski could have offered justification for this. He did, however, mention it in passing in one FC communique:

> We would not want anyone to think that we have any desire to hurt professors who study archaeology, history, literature or harmless stuff like that. The people we are out to get are the scientists and engineers, especially in critical fields like computers and genetics. As for the bomb planted in the Business School at the U. of Utah, that was a botched operation. We won't say how or why it was botched because we don't want to give the FBI any clues. No one was hurt by that bomb.

Other than those three instances, Kaczynski's targets are not surprising in light of his ideology, how responsible he perceived the technician class as being for ongoing technological problems, and his ideas on retribution. Dr Charles Epstein, for example, was a world famous geneticist, Percy Wood the president of United Airlines, and Diogenes Angelakos an important researcher in the field of micro- and electromagnetic waves. And although nowadays, in the age of smartphones, people may not understand why Kaczynski targeted computer store owners (twice), he did so about four years before the birth of the internet, at a time when personal computers were still the territory of big businesses, universities, and nerds. Computer stores at the time were mostly renting out whole sets of personal computers for businessmen and universities, making them an infrastructural target in line with Kaczynski's other actions.

There's also the question of why Kaczynski targeted universities and university professors rather than individuals who had more obvious and tangible impacts on technical

development. Part of this, as FC explained in a communique, was strategic. Universities had weaker security and professors less of a reason to be wary of a suspicious package than large businesses and businessmen. But universities are no less responsible for technical development than big businesses, and in many ways they are more so. University research laboratories and university funding are the backbone of much of the research being done in the fields of genetics, artificial intelligence, and biotechnology. As one paper put it, 'Since the 1970s, research universities have been widely recognized as the core of this nation's science and technology system.' Furthermore, according to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, every university targeted by the Unabomber is classified as as having 'very high research activity', the highest classification for a research university. This clearly makes the universities rational targets for the Unabomber.

Final thoughts

All this is not to say that Kaczynski was correct about revolution. As Skrbina says of the manifesto, 'The logic is sound. However, we are free to challenge any of the premises.' But a discussion about revolution would require actually engaging with Kaczynski's ideas, not dismissing them, as has been the dominant response so far. Such engagement ultimately brings us to the final argument: that Kaczynski's bombings were unjustified because his ideas were wrong.

This argument is the strongest one that can be made against Kaczynski, as it cuts off the strength of his analysis. Those who really want to challenge the ideas presented in the manifesto will have to provide real evidence against his premises, such as the idea that the good of technology cannot be separated from the bad; and they will have to provide an alternative value set that challenges the idea that freedom and wild Nature are primary.

I say 'have to' because it truly is no longer optional for anyone who disagrees with Kaczynski. The idea that Kaczynski is crazy simply doesn't hold, and the ideology presented in the manifesto makes a lot of sense to a lot of people. Furthermore, the issues cited in the manifesto are real and pressing. Artificial intelligence, biotechnology, climate change, antibiotic resistance, mass surveillance, the sixth mass extinction — all are rapidly taking centre stage in world politics, and with them the scientists and engineers, whom the general public is coming to realise have an inordinate amount of control over the circumstances of modern life. It's very likely that some form of anti-technology populism is going to replace what was once an anti-government populism; whereas the main objects of disdain were once politicians, the new objects of disdain will be scientists and engineers, as well as technology itself.

Already we can see this sentiment in action. In the past few years we've seen TV shows about wilderness and outdoor-living, often with a tinge of anti-technological sentiment, skyrocket in popularity: *Mountain Men, Naked and Afraid*, and *Duck Dynasty*

are just a few of the more popular examples. Books, too, like *Wild* by Cheryl Strayed or *A Walk in the Woods* by Bill Bryson, push a similar message of freedom, a search for purpose and meaning, and spiritual renewal in a decadent, materialistic world.

On the other end, complaints about ubiquitous technology are becoming popular as well. TV shows like *Black Mirror* convey a fundamental scepticism toward the idea of technical progress, and books like *A Short History of Progress, Our Final Hour*, and so on are all questioning, to various degrees, the technologies that dominate the modern world.

Most notably, it's pushing into the political arena. Environmentalist sentiments are extremely popular today, and young people feel the need to address problems like climate change and the sixth mass extinction. Furthermore, because of the way the problems are being ignored, sometimes by economic necessity, radicalisation occurs easily among environmentalists. In fact, the FBI lists environmental terrorism, not Islamic terrorism, as the top domestic terrorism threat in the US.

If that isn't enough, all this is taking place on a stage that is largely being determined and shaped by the environmental problems that take centre stage in Kaczynski's thought. Much of the instability that is occurring and will occur in the coming years is and will be magnified tenfold by climate change. One headline in the *New York Times* states 'Researchers Link Syrian Conflict to a Drought Made Worse by Climate Change'. A headline in the *Guardian* reads 'Global warming could create 150 million 'climate refugees' by 2050.' And the WHO has issued increasingly urgent warnings concerning antimicrobial resistance, which could, combined with modern transportation systems and densely populated city living, cause a global pandemic, or at least a very formidable one.

Clearly, Kaczynski was right about a lot, and unless someone offers a good challenge and alternative to his core ideas, the notion of 'freedom in wild Nature' is only going to continue attracting adherents. Dismissing the man as crazy, a wingnut, beneath consideration — well, that's not going to work for much longer.

Incidentally, I agree with Kaczynski. Wild Nature matters, industry is destroying it, and the only real way out is the collapse of industry. For sure, various aspects of the manifesto deserve criticism, especially the parts regarding strategy, but on those three points Kaczynski is on solid ground.

In regards to the man's actions, I find myself in a tough spot. I absolutely do not condone indiscriminate violence like the kind practised by radical Islamists, and I tend to agree with Lenin that even highly targeted acts of individual violence are a terrible tactic for a revolutionary movement. A primary role of revolutionaries is to spread social values, and terroristic acts of violence are usually a sign of weakness on this front. Furthermore, while those supporting growth and progress are indeed 'criminals of the worst kind', I have a hunch that Kaczynski overestimated how responsible some individuals are for our current predicament.

Nevertheless, it's hard to overstate how successful Kaczynski was, and the man has a tendency to be right about things, mostly because he is (almost overly) meticulous

about every detail. No doubt he applied the same attention to detail to his 17-year campaign. So as incompatible as it is with my views generally, it's hard to say that Kaczynski could have done something else and achieved his goals as successfully. Still, even he is quick to tell those writing him letters that he does not think another Unabomber would be helpful for a revolutionary effort. The primary work to be done now, he says, is building cores of committed individuals who can sustain a revolutionary movement. And as I said already, I agree. In any case, I ultimately still defend my initial statement about Kaczynski's violence: the ideas stand and fall on their own, and right now they're still standing.

I am not arguing that everyone will come to the same conclusions. Indeed, those who simply don't care about wild Nature and the freedom found in it won't be very moved by the manifesto; neither will those who are convinced that technical development can be controlled by humans. But the piece is worth the read, and with complete conviction I can say that it is not only the best way to engage with the Unabomber affair, but that it is one of the most important ways to engage with the problems of our modern world.

Taking Rewilding Seriously

John Jacobi
31st July, 2017

> It is, it seems, our civilisation's turn to experience the inrush of the savage and the unseen; our turn to be brought up short by contact with untamed reality.
> — *Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto*

Wildness is the Focus

Rewilding has become something of a fad. The internet and libraries are chock full of instruction manuals for using primitive medicine, making primitive tools, adopting primitive religious thought... Often attached are calls to 'awaken our inner primal spirit.' This seems like rewilding, right?

Wrong. Rewilding, when applied to human beings, cannot only be about lifestyle changes. Of course, you can't live in nature if you don't know how to build a shelter or identify plants. You can't immerse yourself in the wild without basic navigation skills. But the rewilding *fad* has got it mostly wrong: it isn't about selling a way to become independent of civilisation; it is about selling an aesthetic, an appearance of authenticity, much like Whole Foods stores are designed to look like local farmer's markets.

For example, on the issue of navigation: would it be more useful for people to start with a compass, or to start with the stars? Obviously, most industrial humans, who can name at most a handful of constellations, would not want to navigate by the stars. But the rewilding trend is to start with the stars because that's what our primitive ancestors did.

And on the issue of plant identification: would it be more useful for people to learn our more-than-adequate scientific classification system, or to learn an indigenous taxonomy? The answer is clear, yet I've spoken to a handful of people who have explicitly avoided learning scientific taxonomy *because it's scientific*, and, therefore, unnatural.

Eventually, we have to ask ourselves: are we trying to *rewild* — to increase our autonomy from artificial systems — or are we trying to look interesting?

The Land Comes First

There's a worse side-effect. Rewilding, originally, had little to do with human lifestyles at all. It came from the Earth First! movement, when the founders — particularly Dave Foreman and Howie Wolke — outlined their vision of a vast ecological reserve system in North America. Unlike previous reserve systems, this one included presently non-wild land, because Earth First!ers believed that wildness could be restored by removing artificial systems and edifices, like dams. Foreman writes, 'We must ... reclaim the roads and the plowed land, halt dam construction, tear down existing dams, free shackled rivers, and return to wilderness millions and tens of millions of [acres of] presently settled land.'

It was a radical vision, and although controversial at first, it is now fairly well accepted within conservation biology. In fact, connecting wildlands is one of the foremost concerns of the current conservation movement. Doing so provides a large enough habitat for predators and large mammals, and it reduces species extinctions, which tend to increase as wild areas become isolated 'islands'. Much of the popularity of these concepts is due to the work of the Wildlands Network, also founded by Dave Foreman after he left the Earth First! movement in the mid-'80s.

Now, it could be that conservationist rewilding and personal rewilding are simply two different kinds of rewilding. In fact, Wikipedia currently has an entry for 'Rewilding (conservation biology)' and 'Rewilding (anarchism)'. But I suspect that the two have too much in common to be considered entirely separate concepts.

If someone were to ask me why I am interested in rewilding, I would explain that I do not want to be constrained by the artificial systems of civilisation; that I would much rather live in nature and put in the work required to survive. In other words, it would appear as though my vision of rewilding is included under the 'Rewilding (anarchism)' entry. But I also believe that Foreman got it right: land *must* come first. Part of the whole philosophy behind rewilding is an acknowledgement that humans are not as important as civilised culture believes them to be. We are largely the product of our environment and our relationship to our environment, just like animals. This is why you can't rewild an animal in a zoo. It needs a wild habitat first. In the same way, we can't teach humans skills to rewild and then tell them it's fine to keep living in civilised conditions. They need a habitat to rewild. To believe otherwise is an error called *lifestylism*.

Again, while my motivation for rewilding is a personal desire to live outside the bounds of civilisation, in practice *rewilding must prioritise the land*. This isn't to suggest a chronology for rewilding. I'm not saying 'preserve land, then learn skills.' I'm saying that while we do both, our emphasis must be on habitat.

Start from the Present

Outside of the culture of the fad, people despair: rewilding is impossible, a pipe-dream, they say. I call this *nihilism* (not the same as philosophical nihilism), and it, too, results from a faulty conceptual framework. For example, nihilists tend to assume that successful rewilding always achieves its ideal, or that successful rewilding must achieve its ideal immediately. But if I want to live a life less controlled by artificial systems, any decrease in those systems' power is a step on the ladder of rewilding. And, in regards to land, rewilding practices have been profoundly successful.

The trick is to conceive of rewilding as a *practical* project to decrease the influence of artificial systems over nature (including human nature). Consider Yellowstone. When wolves were eradicated, the whole ecosystem suffered. Elk overpopulated the area, and their grazing led to a decrease in the beaver populations. When wolves were reintroduced, they preyed on the elk and artificial impacts decreased, eventually washing out of the landscape to a profound degree. Of course, Yellowstone isn't the wildest place on Earth, but wolf reintroduction shielded it from the impact of artificial systems, so made it wilder.

Similarly, zoos frequently preserve populations of animals that they later reintroduce to the wild. They do this by dealing with the situation practically: teach the captive animals the skills they need to live in the wild, then slowly reintroduce them. Keep tabs on them, fix any problems that come up, and try again.

We should take the same approach when rewilding our own lives. Start with outlining all the most important skills you need to learn: how to build shelters, how to identify plants... In every case, be sure to limit your efforts to a tractable problem. Don't learn how to identify every plant, only the plants in regions you will be testing your skills in. And don't try to solve every problem. Some things just aren't going to fall into place until nature, not civilisation, becomes your tutor.

None of this is to say that we can achieve everything we would like to. Extinct species are a permanent problem. And no 21-year-old who was raised in a highly populated city is going to live an entirely wild life — ever. In addition to recognising that we have real, achievable goals, we also need to recognise the proper place for *mourning*. The move from conservation to rewilding has been touted as a positive vision, a way to move away from the dourness of old environmentalism and conservation. In a certain sense this is true. But the necessity of rewilding is a sad fact about modern life: civilisation has destroyed so many wild areas that we need to restore some before we can fully live by our values.

Sophisticated nihilists will admit that short-term rewilding efforts may very well achieve their goals, but that in the long term, civilisation is bound to destroy wild nature. I do not think this is true, but even if it was it would not be enough to put an end to all rewilding efforts. If the situation is utterly hopeless, with no chance of successful long-term conservation, no chance of rewilding, no chance of industrial decline or collapse, this is only enough to convince lukewarm wills to abandon action.

The indomitable spirit, typified by his inability to live without the wild and his frankly reckless willingness to make huge sacrifices for it, would not be able to stomach stillness in captivity. Consider Geronimo, who led natives in battles against colonial powers for 36 years, evading capture and escaping captivity several times. After being detained by General Nelson Miles as a prisoner of war, Geronimo eventually acquiesced to civilisation, allowing himself to be an exotic attraction at fairs. Yet on his deathbed he proclaimed to his nephew, 'I should have never surrendered. I should have fought until I was the last man alive.'

I write, then, for individuals like Geronimo — individuals who can earnestly and without reservation shout that most appropriate battle cry: 'Live wild or die!'

Rebuke the Idols of Civilisation

> And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images, and cast your carcases upon the carcases of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you.
>
> — Leviticus 26:30

Lately a new kind of rewilding has been gaining ground: the 'rewilding' of ecomodernists. Ecomodernism claims that technological progress will 'decouple' civilised people from the land, allowing them to continue living comfortable, modern lives while reducing their influence on the nature around them. Accelerate technological progress; intensify production in civilised areas through aquaculture and industrial farming; shuffle rural people into cities: this, they say, leaves and will leave vast regions of the Earth to the wild.

Outside of the decoupling thesis, ecomodernism's version of rewilding is more obviously revisionist. For example, some ecomodernists advocate 'de-extinction', or using biological technologies to revive extinct species, so that they can reintroduce those species to their once native habitats. While considering these ideas, I have always been struck by a comparison with the Jewish concept of *tikkun olam*, 'to repair the world'. In recent years, left-wing Jewish groups have utilised this concept to push a narrative of progress, emphasising the fight for social justice as the most important element. But the man who taught me of *tikkun olam* repudiated these hubristic interpretations, stressing that the concept came from the *Aleinu* prayer, in which the Jewish people collectively pray for God to 'remove all idols from the Earth, and to completely cut off all false gods; to repair the world.' As I learned it, these idols include man's unending faith in himself to fix the world.

The debate about rewilding is the like the debate about *tikkun*. Ecomodernists have declared that 'this is the earth we have created', so we should 'manage it with love and intelligence' to create 'new glories'. They call this 'rewilding'. But rewilding is not about continuing technical domination; it is about removing the idols of Progress, the dams, the roads, the corporations — and this includes man's unending faith in himself.

Many ecological philosophers and conservationists have already tackled the problems with ecomodernism. Eileen Crist writes:

> Importantly, modern development proceeds by converting and exploiting a massive portion of the natural world, and that particular portion is not one humanity is decoupled from. The portion of the biosphere that modernization assimilates, humanity is and will be very much coupled with; except that "coupled" is hardly the right word — comprehensively dominated is a more accurate depiction [...] On all fronts, industrial food production is a ruthless, machine-mediated subjugation of land and seas as well as of wild and domestic beings.

But Crist critiques ecomodernism from the perspective of bio- or ecocentrism — the original philosophical justifications Dave Foreman and others gave for rewilding — and ecocentrism, too, has some problems. It is a strain of ethics in the Deep Ecology tradition that argues that nature has intrinsic moral worth. Theorists argue over the unit of moral worth — is it the organism, the ecosystem, the biosphere? — but the end result usually looks the same: ecocentrists protect nature because nature is deserving of their moral consideration. And when they are against civilisation, they are against it for the sake of nature. Among other things, this idea leaves room wide-open for decoupling strategies. The ecomodernists are right: under this version of ecocentrism, accelerating the development of civilisation is desirable if it results in more wild lands. It can only be rejected if we proudly claim that the whole point of preserving the wild is because we want to experience and ideally live in wilder conditions. And there are even bigger problems with the philosophy.

Some argue that ecocentrism follows an observable trend of humans expanding their altruistic capabilities from the band to the tribe to the nation and now to all of humanity. The next step, clearly, is to include non-human life. But this argument ignores an important point: an expanded 'moral circle' depends on and is the result of civilised infrastructure. Biologists have found that altruism in organisms, while an important part of their evolutionary strategy, evolves to only a limited degree. In humans, it seems as though natural altruism is limited to about 150 people, after which groups need to devise rules, rituals, and other regulatory mechanisms to maintain cohesion. Of course, the exact number is irrelevant. The issue is that altruism beyond a certain point has to be instilled. This is the difference between *solidarity* — the altruism of natural man — and *civility*: the altruism of civilised man.

Norbert Elias writes about a historical example of moral cultivation in the first volume of his magnum opus *The Civilizing Process*. Elias argues that, instead of simply adopting European social mores, the people of the Middle Ages underwent a long period of education that shaped their behaviour through shame, guilt, disgust, and other such feelings.

For instance, Elias reviews several etiquette manuals and points out that commands now reserved for children were being issued, regularly, to adults. People of the Middle

Ages had to be told not to defecate on staircases and curtains, not to touch their privates in public, not to greet someone who is relieving themselves, not to examine their handkerchief after blowing into it, not to use various pieces of public fabric as handkerchiefs, not to use their eating spoon to serve food, not to offer food that they have bitten into, not to stir sauce with their fingers...

Beyond direct instruction, European society also developed taboos around sex, defecation, and urination; they passed laws; and they made non-compliance of cosmic importance by employing Christian dogma. In other words, the European 'second nature' developed only through multiple, interlocking systems and over a long period of time.

Elias argues that instilling a second nature into Europeans became necessary because right around the same time the patchwork of feudal territories, chiefdoms, and cities were being consolidated into much larger state-based societies. Nowadays, with states and their systems of education already established, a large-scale social transformation is unnecessary, and citizens usually go through the same processes of education in their youth.

Today the dominant ideology of global civilisation, in terms of power, is secular humanism. Among other things, this asserts that all of humanity belongs to a single moral community, and that each member of this community has a moral obligation to recognise all others' rights and intrinsic dignity, which, conveniently, includes the right to live industrially. This is the ideology preached by the United Nations, universities, NGOs, and progressive corporations like Facebook. Connectedness between people becomes an important goal; development, another. The ideology is sustained by civilised infrastructure, like mass communication and transportation systems. Without it, humanism is untenable. Ecocentrism would be similarly untenable, because it further enlarges the moral circle to include non-humans. The trick, however, is to reject the artificial moralities completely.

Let me be clear. *Solidarity*, cooperation and altruism in small, natural social groups, is necessary for human flourishing. The human animal needs mates, parents, peers, elders to go beyond simply surviving and to live well. But *civility* must be instilled; it is a technological modification. Consider Freud's thoughts on the matter in *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, in which he writes that one of the characteristic elements of civilisation is '..the manner in which the relationships of men to one another, their social relationships, are regulated — relationships which affect a person as a neighbour, as a source of help, as another person's sexual object, as a member of a family and of a State' (much like social manners began to be regulated in the Middle Ages).

But Freud warns that the repressed elements of human nature may express themselves in two ways. On the one hand, these desires might be redirected toward problems within civil life '... and so may prove favourable to a further development of civilisation.' On the other hand, these desires 'may also spring from the remains of their original personality, which is still untamed by civilisation and may thus become the basis ... of hostility to civilisation. The urge for freedom, therefore, is directed against particular forms and demands of civilisation or against civilisation altogether.' Rewilding cannot

be about trying to create a particular form of civilisation, like expanding its concept of justice to include non-humans. Rewilding will involve casting off the chains of artificial regulations that currently bind our 'original personality, which is still untamed'.

This kind of rewilding won't look at all like the kind that is found on websites with e-stores, on Instagram profiles, or in lifestyle magazines. It will, in fact, be regarded extremely negatively. For instance, in 1785 a group of freed and runaway slaves and white indentured servants settled in a wilderness area now known as Indianapolis. Peter Lamborn Wilson writes:

> They mingled with Pawnee Indians and took up a nomadic life modeled on that of local hunter-gatherer tribes. Led by a 'king' and 'queen,' Ben and Jennie Ishmael, [...] they were known as fine artisans, musicians and dancers, abstainers from alcohol, practitioners of polygamy, non-Christian, and racially integrated [...] By about 1810 they had established a cycle of travel that took them annually from Indianapolis (where their village gradually became a city slum) through a triangle formed by the hamlets of Morocco and Mecca in Indiana and Mahomet in Illinois ...
>
> Later 'official' white pioneers detested the Ishmaels, and apparently the feeling was mutual. From about 1890 comes this description of an elder: 'He is an anarchist of course, and he has the instinctive, envious dislike so characteristic of his people, of anyone in a better condition than himself.' [...] The observer continues: 'He abused the law, the courts; the rich, factories — everything.' The elder stated that 'the police should be hanged'; he was ready, he said, to burn the institutions of society. 'I am better than any man that wears store clothes.'

Are we ready to be viewed like the Ishmaels?

Live Wild

Rewilding is an excellent framework for people who want to abandon civilisation, but it's time to take it seriously. We cannot engage in the error of lifestylism — we must leave the zoo to rewild, and we must hold humans to the same standard as non-humans. And we cannot mistake rewilding for a progressive project — the point is to decrease the stronghold of artificial systems, not increase it. Foreman, in the first newsletter for Earth First!, put it well: 'Not blind opposition to progress, but wide-eyed opposition to progress!'

Journeys

Dark Mountain began as an exhortation to leave the comfortable citadels and find the small paths that lead into the unknown, beyond the horizon of the world as we have known it.

This section is a home for writing about journeys in their many forms, the inner no less than the outer.

Peace and Fire; Walking, war and wildfires in Slovenia

Putting one foot in front of the other has long been a theme in Dark Mountain – both in order to look back at the terrain we have travelled so far, and to look forward at what is to come. To continue our occasional online series about walking, Nick Hunt spends ten days hiking the Walk of Peace trail in Slovenia from the Julian Alps to the Adriatic Sea, tracing a 20th-century front line through a landscape newly scarred by 21st-century wildfires.

Burned trees above Renče, Slovenia (Photo: Nick Hunt)

Nick Hunt

Nick is the author of three books about walking and Europe, the most recent of which is *Outlandish*, a work of gonzo ornithology, *The Parakeeting of London*, and a collection of short fiction, *Loss Soup and Other Stories*. He works as an editor and co-director for the Dark Mountain Project, and has contributed short stories and essays to many of its issues.

19th October, 2022

- JOURNEYS
- PLACE & TIME

An old man with a wheelbarrow pointed up towards the hill. 'It was fire everywhere. And bombs. From First War. Bad.' On a smudged mobile screen he showed me wobbly footage of a opaque, gritty wall of smoke underneath a yellow sky, the sun choked, his friends and neighbours gathered in small frightened herds. Gazing at the burning woods above their village, waiting.

Now, six weeks afterwards, those woods looked like calligraphy: still green in parts, flecked with orange, patched with random blobs of black that splashed and spilled

across the hill, like something almost legible. But there were actual letters too, a name, spelled out in stones. TITO. As in Josip Broz, dictator of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, an entity – like those woods – that now lies in ashes.

I walked up to that TITO sign, a steep climb up a winding road, through a charred cathedral of resinous, twisted stumps. The flames had been specific, touching one tree and not the next, flash-frying the needles of the pines to an eerie umber here, sparing a green branch there, while everything else was black. The soil was black. The rocks were black. Downed cables from a power-line were draped from the charred canopy. But the stones that spelled that name were white, unscorched by flames.

There are other signs like this in what is now Slovenia, particularly in the south-west, which borders Italy. Italians answered them with their own VIVA ITALIA! signs, a silent shouting match conducted across no man's land. Even before the wildfires, this was troubled ground. Before this was Slovenia, before this was Yugoslavia, it was a province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, invaded in 1915 by an expansionist Italy. Between then and 1917 – in the 'First War', as the old man said – Italian and Austro-Hungarian troops fought twelve brutal battles here, entrenched on rocky slopes and tunnelled into mountainsides. Over 1.5 million men were killed or maimed.

After the war, despite losing every battle, Italy took the land anyway, and ethnic Slovenians were persecuted under Fascism. Mussolini declared a nearby mountain, Sabotin, a *zona sacra* (sacred zone) and went on a megalomaniacal spree of building giant ossuaries to house the bones of the glorious dead – the Italian dead, of course. The landscape in effect became a vast mausoleum. Then came the 'Second War', cycles of murderous revenge, Nazi invasion and entire villages razed. Later this became the front line between communism and capitalism. The last deaths on that border occurred in 1991: two Romanians gunned down by Yugoslav border guards. Today, at last, there is peace.

Or rather, peace and fire.

The giant T, I, T and O lay in a broad clear-cut so the letters could be seen from the valley far below. The socialist strongman's name had acted as a firebreak. If that was a symbol of anything, it was hard to know quite what. But there could be no better symbol than the bombs.

Valley in the Julian Alps on the Walk of Peace (Photo: Nick Hunt)

For ten days I had walked through the Julian Alps to the north following a trail called the Pot Miru (Walk of Peace). The pathway traces the front line of the old Isonzo Front, connecting trenches, fortifications, underground cave networks, cemeteries, charnel houses and monuments to the fallen. There was war iron everywhere: rusted vehicle parts, shell casings, anonymous lumps of scrap and century-old barbed wire tangled in the earth like thorns. I had seen the roots of trees enveloping flattened ration tins, the rich loam of beech forests consuming what was left behind. Unknown tonnes of ordinance were thinly buried beneath my boots, forgotten about for a hundred years.

When this summer's fires came, they were remembered.

The 2022 wildfires were the worst in Slovenia's history. Starting over the border in Italy – an odd historical resonance – they quickly spread across the Karst, the pine-covered limestone plateau between the mountains and the sea, and burned for 17 days, destroying 350,000 hectares of forest. Miraculously no one died. Correction: no humans died. But the roll call of animals – foxes, boar, jackals, rodents, snakes, lizards, insects, birds and all the other living things that could not escape the flames – must easily have dwarfed the bones in Mussolini's ossuaries. An unprecedented drought and the region's notorious Bora wind made the inferno bad enough, but it was exacerbated by First World War shells and grenades randomly exploding in the intense heat of the flames.

Wildfires around the TITO sign near Renče, Slovenia (Photo: courtesy of Tuzizem Miren-Kostanjevica)

In a village called Kostanjevica, on the far side of that blackened hill, I met one of the firefighters who had helped to stop the fire. 'It was a war zone,' he said. 'We worked in twelve-hour shifts. The flames reached 40 metres high, you couldn't see anything at all. There were bombs exploding all the time, it meant we could not fight the fire because they could be anywhere. How many? I have no idea. After 70 we stopped counting.'

He was from Pannonia, the region bordering western Hungary, unused to this mountainous terrain. Six weeks later, he had returned for a commemoration. In the centre of Kostanjevica 400 T-shirts hung on lines, each of them a tribute to one of the volunteer fire departments that had been assembled from every part of Slovenia – along with aircraft and other support from Italy, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia and Serbia, countries that had once sent their children to fight and die here. The T-shirts flapped like prayer flags, which in a way they were. The word HVALA (THANKS) was painted in big letters on the road.

Firefighters' T-shirts in Kostanjevica (Photo: Nick Hunt)

When the smoke had cleared, much of the Karst had reverted to a battlefield, with trenches and shell craters exposed beneath black, shattered stumps. It reminded me of lines from Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, which is set exactly here, amid the carnage of that front: 'The forest of oak trees on the mountain beyond the town was gone. The forest had been green in the summer when we had come into the town but now there were the stumps and the broken trunks and the ground torn up.' Now it seemed that fictionalised history had returned as modern fact. It was, the firefighter later said, like the war had never gone away.

> At first I thought that this summer's fires connected things that were far apart: the buried violence of Europe's past and anthropogenic climate change.

Of course, as the cliche goes, there is no 'away'. Nothing goes anywhere – especially not the past. At first I thought that this summer's fires connected things that were far apart: the buried violence of Europe's past and anthropogenic climate change. Things that were separate and distinct, with hard borders like Yugoslavia. But a border didn't stop the flames. And borders won't stop the future. The global heating that caused the drought that made these forests vulnerable, that turned their timber tinder-dry, was fuelled by the 20th-century drive for empire, industrialisation, progress, oil, gas and steel – the smog of war and wildfires is the same cloud, intermingled. Some other lines of Hemingway's: 'Perhaps wars weren't won anymore. Maybe they went on forever. Maybe it was another Hundred Years' War.' He was right, but war takes different forms. The war on nature has lasted much more than a hundred years.

Koritnica River (Photo: Nick Hunt)

As I walked the Walk of Peace I regularly experienced cognitive dissonance, a disconnect between the beauty and the horror that lay beneath. My path led over mountain peaks, into valleys deep and cool with beech, along pristine rivers of an unimaginable emerald green, past gorges, roaring waterfalls and alpine meadows bright with flowers, and picture-perfect villages draped in grapevine and carnations. But that Edenic beauty lay on top of devastation. Of course this is nothing new – we know all life is built from death. But perhaps the fires burned away a veil of separation. Fire rips through layers of time, collapsing not just centuries but compacted billions of years – carbon fuels are sunlight stored since the time of dinosaurs. Everything is being revealed, all the death that never went away. Apocalypse (*apokalupsis*) means 'revelation'.

Some days before the trail arrived at the scorched hillside of the TITO sign, it had led me over a mountain called Mrzli Vrh. Here was another battlefield, one of the most notorious, and – unlike in other parts where beauty had restored itself – this one really felt like it, as if the earth beneath me had never quite recovered. I lost my way in pastureland where the ground was shattered and disturbed, a mess of broken rock, fallen trees and spoil heaps, littered with rusted scraps of iron and scarred with old trenches. Across this strategic slope Italian and Austro-Hungarian troops had fought for 29 months, in trenches only 20 metres apart, with machine guns, mines, poison gas, bayonets and flamethrowers. To protect themselves from the constant shelling they slept underground in caves.

In one of those caves – a tunnel gouged into the rock by Hungarian troops – I found a concrete altar inscribed with the Magyar words SZŰZANYÁNK MÁRIA LÉGY NÉPED OLTALMA: OUR MOTHER MARY BE THE PROTECTOR OF YOUR PEOPLE. Above it, among guttered candles, stood a statue of the Virgin. By that time I had been inured to tales of horror from the war, but something about her being there affected me quite deeply. The image of those weary men lying in filth and

darkness, frightened, maimed, suffering, such a long way – like that firefighter – from the Pannonian flatlands of their home, waiting in this womb of rock only to emerge to die, placing a statue of a kind woman in an alcove here, lighting candles around her and presenting her with flowers.

New growth, charred forest (Photo: Nick Hunt)

Not far along the beech-wood road above the steep valley below, a battered vehicle was parked. A young farmer was engaged in a private ritual. He was cementing two objects in an alcove in the rock that walled one side of the road (the other side was a precipice): a ceramic Virgin and a First World War shell case. Switching to broken English when he realised I wasn't Slovenian, he told me he was giving thanks for what had happened four years ago that day: his tractor had slipped off the cliff and he had been saved by a miracle, caught in the branches of a tree (OUR MOTHER MARY BE THE PROTECTOR OF YOUR PEOPLE). The shell case, cut open at the top, was a vase for holding flowers.

'I'm glad you're alive,' I said, which I'd never said to a stranger before – or perhaps never to anyone.

He shook my hand. 'And you as well.' Then he went back to his work.

Four days later on the Karst, walking through that place of fires, I saw an eagle circling. When I stopped, I noticed the ground on which I walked. The earth was black, the rocks were black, but there was movement on a tiny scale: beetles, bees and butterflies, small life that had survived the flames, and already the surprising green of new growth bursting up. 'I'm glad you're alive,' I said. Maybe something answered.

In Search of Isatica; A journey in relationship with the colour blue

Painters for centuries have been entranced by the colour blue, from the cerulean skies of Giotto to the aquamarine seas of Raoul Dufy. But what happens when the colour is explored in its own right in a culture undergoing tectonic shift? Artist Louisa Chase follows a blue road home to the Lincolnshire fens, where fields of woad once grew

Journey into Woad: Breast Map bty Louisa Chase Woad and linseed oil
Louisa Chase
grew up in Lincolnshire, England, lived the last 18 years in Aotearoa New Zealand, and has recently re-located to Lincoln. As an artist, she works through embodied inquiry at the crossroads of geography, psychology, cultural history and personal experience.
5th October, 2022

- BELONGING
- JOURNEYS
- PLACE & TIME

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It began as a kind of experiment. During the isolation of the pandemic I had become obsessed with making paintings purely with blue paint; a kind of paring down, a search for essence. It was February, the height of summer in the southern hemisphere. Surrounded by blue skies and ocean, *Out of the Blue* emerged as a guiding theme for the artwork I was making.

Times of disintegration demand new habits of thinking, new ways to engage with the world. I began to wonder what it would mean to *journey* with something as abstract as a colour, to cast aside all ideas of being in control and allow myself to be taught?

What would it be like to live the knowledge that a colour, like everything else, has agency? Could I allow myself to fall fully into the colour and allow it to alchemically transmute my life?

To *journey* is to travel beyond the immediately visible; beyond physical, psychological, societal, cultural, and temporal horizons. Eighteen years ago I made a very long journey. With my young, typically Western nuclear family I migrated to Aotearoa New Zealand from England, one of a diaspora of around 300,000 British citizens who make the choice to leave their homeland every year motivated by work, adventure, or the desire for a better life. In a society largely removed from a sense of connection with place, diffuse and pervasive loss of connection is a strong motivator to keep moving in search of some kind of belonging.

On arrival we found a land covered in vast swathes of green. The skies have an intensity of colour and light I had never experienced, and the ocean frequently displays and reflects intense blues.

Perhaps this is where it began, like the gradual spreading of watercolour paint on wet rag paper. In these vast empty landscapes everything is infused in everything else; the rain-soaked mosses and lichen; the loose scree surfaces of volcanic mountain sides which slide and shift underfoot, breaking any illusion of solidity normally associated with mountains; the braided rivers whose paths dissect and dissolve the land with the falling rains; bottomless reflections of sky on shiny wave-soaked beaches, into which it seems you could stumble and fall forever.

Ancestral Shadows

I always felt like a visitor in this place. For years the sense of dislocation and the search for belonging that I have heard many migrants speak of was visceral. In searching for relief from the sense that a part of my body and spirit had been misplaced, I began to seek comfort in listening to and working with the land where I was; the land my feet moved across every day. Placing my body on the cool earth, gathering clay for pigment-making, and moving with the wind supported a gradual integration and growing love for the land I had chosen to live with. Blue led me into an exploration, through photography and video, of ancestry, and the complex feelings and emotions relating to the place of *tau iwi;* a Māori term often used to refer to new migrants or visitors in Aotearoa New Zealand.

And then, perhaps unsurprisingly, blue brought me to a crossroads. It seems that in every journey there is a crossroads. One evening over dinner, during a conversation about blue, my daughter mentioned *woad* and I was hooked.

Reconceived Corporeality by Louisa Chase. Woad, gum arabic and photographed body shadow.

Woad, *Isatis tinctoria* has been grown in Europe for at least 10,000 years. It is an ancient dyer's plant, native to the Middle East and Turkey, yielding a blue pigment that by Medieval times was in use across Europe. As the only light-fast blue available it was used in such diverse contexts as the Bayeux Tapestry, illuminated manuscripts, as a body paint, a textile dye for uniforms, and now in contemporary contexts for home

furnishings, textile art and clothing. From the late Middle Ages, indigo from Asia slowly began to replace woad in Europe as a less expensive alternative. Eventually the introduction of cheaper synthetic dyes and pigments made the labour-intensive production and processing of woad unviable.

I was living on the other side of the world, discovering that the last working woad mill in Britain, which was dismantled in 1932, had been just a few miles from where I grew up in the Lincolnshire Fens. The landscape through which I regularly cycled as a teenager would have once been yellow, not with oil seed rape, but with woad flowers. So I planted woad plants in our New Zealand garden and began making paint with woad powder and traditional binders and using it to make body prints. In the course of the daily nurturing and handling of this sturdy member of the *Brassicaceae* family I felt a strong call to return home. It came at a time when my elderly parents were adjusting to the increasingly ill health of my Dad. I gave notice on my rented studio, put everything in storage, landed at Heathrow as spring got underway, and made my way back to the Fens.

> Once with the land, the physical act of wandering the fields and lanes where woad used to be grown release[d] a flood of information and connections

Once with the land, listening viscerally for waymarkers, the physical act of wandering the fields and lanes where woad used to be grown seemed to release a flood of information and connections through synchronistic meetings, including the local author of a historical research article on woad, Jane Keightley, who lent me *Woad in the Fens* written by Norman T. Mills in the 1970s.

According to Gerard, quoted in Mrs Grieves' *A Modern Herbal*, women and girls 'painted their bodies blue with woad and went naked to some of their sacrifices'. It is said to have been used to paint the bodies of warriors to make them more fearsome in battle, and that through this use its antibiotic, anti-inflammatory, and styptic properties became well known. The old herbalists warned against using it internally whilst some modern herbalists will quite happily recommend making a tea or decoction with it. More recently it has been found to be a rich source of alkaloids and flavonoids, as well as having anti-inflammatory, anti-tumour, antiviral, and antioxidant properties. Perhaps this is the reason that dyers were known to never get arthritis.

On the Lincolnshire woad farms, whole families devoted their lives to the cultivation of woad, sometimes moving around to the different locations in which it was grown, passing specific woad farming jobs down through the generations. It was hard physical labour, profitable for some but damaging for many others.

Kawakawa leaf (photo: Louisa Chase)

Back in the studio, in using the woad powder with natural binders, another teaching began to emerge. The gritty nature of the pigment meant that the prints I was making had gaps and spaces in them. This began to fascinate me. It was as if the negative spaces were almost more important, and most certainly had something to say. I recalled

a leaf I had photographed where it lay decaying on the ground near a waterfall, and how the gaps in that leaf spoke to me more directly than the remaining leaf material.

So I began to live life with more gaps, more pauses, more spaces. I experimented with regular movement practices to try and interpret how the negative and positive spaces in the leaf and the prints felt in the body, and through this process it became clear that what I was needing to understand was that *rest is a radical act.* To rest, to pause, or even to move very slowly, perhaps walking barefoot on a forest path, is to allow space for us to catch up with ourselves. Rest and pause create space to receive, space for our souls to find us, space to hear the other stories that are drowned out by busyness, space to feel, see and hear those new and tender budding things on the edges of awareness. If we are to shake the narratives of consensus reality perhaps we need to see rest as a radical act and agent of change.

De-centring the human may be a huge task from where we are now: firmly embedded in a fast, busy, industrialised human-centric culture, largely unaware of our own conditioning. But perhaps rest, pause, and listening on the edges can help us to hear our own particular next step, one footfall after another. Perhaps rest can help us locate, as Mary Oliver puts it, *our place in the family of things.*

Perhaps rest, pause, and listening on the edges can help us to hear our own particular next step, can help us locate, as Mary Oliver puts it,*our place in the family of things.*

But what of Isatica? Isatica was the name of a small hamlet, consisting of cottages, a school and a woad mill near Brothertoft in Lincolnshire, built by Mr J. Cartwright in the eighteenth century. It was named from the Latin term for woad, *Isatis tinctoria.* Today there is no trace of the settlement. Apart from a brief mention in the literature on woad there is nothing to mark its existence. It has, like so many things in the marshy liminal fenlands, dissolved into the mists of time. In this ethereal landscape, transience and ephemerality are the guiding forces. The land that was re-claimed through man-made drainage systems, forever changing the indigenous fenland way of life that depended upon wildfowling, fishing and reed-cutting, is sinking and already returning to the sea. Ecological zones here are ever-shifting. Perhaps it is the case that the edges of awareness can be more easily accessed in places like these.

So perhaps woad blue is illuminating a story of transience; to value and learn from the past but, like the settlement of Isatica, to accept complete disintegration.

Perhaps this apprenticeship to a colour highlights the value of going to ground, to pause, rest, and only then to regenerate; to live and create anew from the charnel ground of the changing world in which we stand. Perhaps in the gaps it is possible to listen for new and emergent ways to relate and journey with the place and time we walk within.

And perhaps it invites a new relationship with the world, predicated upon practices of *living in response*. If the background music of the migrant experience is the call to home, perhaps this can be heard as a call to re-orientate, to relocate according to the internal as well as external compass; coming home in a rootless time, guided by a plant and a colour.

Pilgrimage; On Matters of Grief

Putting one foot in front of the other has been a theme in Dark Mountain ever since the manifesto invited a group of travellers to turn their backs on civilisation and scale the foothills of the unknown – both in order to look back at the terrain we have travelled so far, and to look forward at what is to come. Over the years long-distance walkers, walking artists, activists, pilgrims and wanderers of all other kinds have shared their stories in our pages. Today, in our online walking series Ian Nesbitt sets out on a post-pandemic pilgrimage along the Old Way.

Book Of Visions, Old Way pilgrimage #1: Southampton to Chichester. Images by David Hand.

Ian Nesbitt

is an artist, filmmaker, pedestrian and tentative post-activist based in Northern Britain. Since 2008, his work has regularly explored notions of pilgrimage, including as the subject of three self-produced feature length films – *Arise You Gallant Sweeneys* (2009), Taking The Michael (2012), and *Acts Of Quiet Resistance*(2019). Writing is a recent venture and this is his first published piece.

2nd February, 2022

- JOURNEYS

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The Old Way is a recently uncovered Mediaeval route for European pilgrims, winding 220 miles through the rolling chalk uplands of Southern England, from Southampton to Canterbury. In late 2019, I planned a pilgrimage along it 'collecting and sharing acts towards and visions of a positive future society'. I was due to set out in April 2020. As the pandemic hit and deepened over the course of the year, so did my doubt in the face of questions like 'What does a positive future look like right now?' and 'Is it possible to be visionary in the face of such uncertainty?'. When setting out eventually began to look possible, this space of collective yearning for positive futures felt insufficient as a response to what we were living through. What of the grief and trauma of our entangled realities? What of the things that don't make sense yet?

What shone in the wreckage of my pre-pandemic thinking was something that Dougald Hine, co-founder of Dark Mountain and A School Called Home, had written to me, in support of the original crowdfunder, in which he described the planned walk as 'an act of weaving, stitching together the torn fabric, starting from where we find ourselves.' Where I found myself was enshrouded in grief; not from any one easily identifiable source, nor necessarily my own grief, but as a texture or body of shifting matter. Stepping out from there, this piece is the story of those first few days of walking, finding my feet as I pick my way through the internal and external debris of modernity and pandemic.

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Water

In August 2021, I cross the Solent by ferry from the Isle of Wight, so that a pilgrimage I am setting out on can begin as I set foot on the main (is)land. Why I do this isn't clear, the kind of gut intelligence that I sometimes have to follow but can't articulate immediately. In hindsight, I speculate that the passage across the Solent marks a moment of transition. I step out of the drifting life raft and tether myself to an intention. Or I stumble into the initiation that I don't know how to look for. Or I pay the ferryman to deliver me into the underworld. From another later point it may look or feel like something else. Such is the nature of grief. Such is the nature of us.

The day before setting off, I read an article from that day about Southern Water being fined £90 million for historically dumping billions of litres of raw sewage into the Solent, and yet continuing to do so into Chichester Harbour, just along the coast. This is one of the most highly protected marine environments in the country, whose shores I will walk, but maybe, on second thoughts, not swim in, in the coming days. In the run up to the COP26 talks in Glasgow, the UK parliament will vote against a bill forcing water companies to 'take all reasonable steps' to avoid dumping raw sewage into British waterways.

This is a pilgrimage of chapters. A few days walking, home, then back again a few weeks later. This is the first chapter. Rosie, my fellow pilgrim on this stretch is from the Isle of Wight. Apparently native islanders are known as 'caulkheads'. To caulk means to fill or close seams between a ship's plating in order to make it watertight. One explanation is that islanders have historically been engaged in such work in the boat yards of Portsmouth and Southampton. Folklore offers another, that islanders' heads are full of caulk and they therefore cannot drown. Rosie speaks of her compulsion for outdoor swimming during a period of multiple personal griefs. She tells me of the need

to feel water flowing through and around her, of how the body's diffusion into some larger, deeper and more fluid body allows release.

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Cloud

An image haunts me from a piece of footage I shot but never used. The camera is behind three shadowy figures. A taller figure looms, possibly protectively, over the other two. The time is dusk. All three heads are raised, looking expectantly towards the dense swirl of a murmuration. In my imagining of what could have been, or could still be, I hear cascading organ music accompanying the footage.

In a murmuration, there are seven other birds whose movement each starling responds to. Seven neck vertebrae in the bodies of mammals. Seven stages of grief.

Mud

I spend the third night in a copse of oaks overlooking Langstone harbour, which, before the waters rose, was a Bronze Age cremation ground. In the morning, the mud is revealed by the tide and I sip tea and gaze out, imagining pyres and plumes of smoke dotting the landscape .

A Medieval pilgrim route doesn't routinely pay heed to the contemporary requirement for wayfarers to travel exclusively through rural beauty spots. I pass through human communities where successive histories of violence, oppression and alienation pile up, where mistrust, grief and pain slosh around my ankles as I wade through, keenly feeling the foolishness, helplessness and sadness of trying to address those histories by walking. Sometimes, as an outsider passing through, I become a vessel for receiving that mistrust, grief and pain and carrying it out beyond the edge of the village before finding my own ways to compost it.

The sin-eater is a historical figure, seemingly originating in the Welsh borders, whose job it was to attend funerals and eat a meal of bread and ale over the corpse of the deceased, thus absolving them of their sins and absorbing them into their own body. Bertram S. Puckle, in his 1926 book on funeral customs, tells us that the sin-eater was were 'abhorred by the superstitious villagers as a thing unclean, ... cut off from all social intercourse with his fellow creatures' and living 'as a rule in a remote place by himself' . Their marginal and folkloric standing means that we have no first person accounts of the life of a sin-eater, so we can only speculate on what rituals they would undergo to absolve themselves.

> How might a collective ritual look, by which the villagers might share and work together through the challenges of modernity laid at their door? What might lay on the other side of such work?

How might a collective ritual look, by which the villagers might share and work together through the challenges of modernity laid at their door? What might lay on the other side of such work?

Air

As I walk, there are places where ancient spirits crowd the hedgerows, fighting for the right to breathe amongst layer upon layer of corporate, state and private land ownership. Their presence is malevolent because they are angry and humiliated at having been mistreated. I want to bring them into my sense of this very long and thin place, whose history I'm trying to walk myself into, and back into my sense of myself, but I'm scared of how their stories will land in me. I don't know if I'm equipped to hear their truths, let alone carry them. I am complicit in their oppression. A friend asks if I'm certain of that. Yes, I reply.

Earth

I am drawn into a churchyard, summoned by a vast and ancient yew tree, ingloriously propped up by a number of brand new wooden beams. There are over five hundred churchyards in England that contain yew trees older than the churches themselves. An information board proclaims that the tree is estimated to be one thousand six hundred years old.

I fear that knowing when a body is ready to return to the earth is one of the capabilities we have lost in this part of the world; to appreciate the dignity of death and to mourn the indignity of extended life only made possible by technology. I have a feeling that our presence in the world should now be characterised by silence, listening and engaged solidarity. I fantasise about world leaders sitting in a listening circle, hearing each others' grief and doubts, without responding or attempting to problem solve.

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Wood

On the fourth night of walking, I sleep the night in the ancient yew forest at Kingley Vale, overlooking the expansive tidal flats of Chichester Harbour. *Taxus Baccata.*

The English Yew. The tree of death. At dusk I find a memorial to Alan R. Walsh – born 1.1.1937 died 14.8.2021 – written in chalk on a stile. Life and death in a chalk landscape, to be washed away with the next rain. During the night I too bleed into my surroundings as a tawny owl settles on the yew branch above me, to which I have tied my shelter, hooting its way into my dreams for what seems like hours. I become part-owl as I sleep. There is a branch of Christian mysticism which associates owls with the deep wisdom that darkness can teach us.

Grief

There are those who have told me that it isn't a 'real' pilgrimage, that the whole thing should be undertaken in one go or not at all. It is true that this version doesn't make space for the kind of experience of pilgrimage that I'm used to – the passage through pain, repetition and boredom, to noticing and listening, and eventually to a humility I haven't found in any other way. On the other hand, that begins to feels like a hero journey to me, as if I have some faith in my own power to manifest change in the world. I confess that I did once have that faith. I even confess that this journey, in its original conception, was founded on a version of that faith. Now? Not so much.

> What can be said for this modular version of pilgrimage is that it doesn't separate pilgrimage from the rest of life ... doesn't demand that the pilgrim return with a great booty of learning and experience?

What can be said for this modular version of pilgrimage is that it doesn't separate pilgrimage from the rest of life? It doesn't ask as much, in that it doesn't demand that the pilgrim return with a great booty of learning and experience. It is more quietly generative, allowing a more objective view of my own pilgrim's progress. It entangles pilgrimage and daily existence; the two become acquainted and mutually affective. It makes space for a slowness of emergence, the stages of which can be considered even as they dissolve into the next. These between-times allow me to perceive grief from a distance – in the weave of conversations with my co-pedestrians, in passing exchanges and glances from passers-by, and folded many times into the landscape.

For the human body, pilgrimage on foot is a respite from grief. The combination of steady tramping, exhaustion, not knowing where the next meal is coming from, and the nightly search for somewhere to sleep, doesn't leave space for sorrow. More than that, grief moves into our joints with each step; no longer a hanging cloud, it seeps into the body. It becomes us. For the extended body, as noted pilgrim and peace activist Satish Kumar notes, pedestrianism brings the walker into relations with everything else. In his teaching and writing about dis/enquiry, Bayo Akomolafe suggests 'de-centring the anthropological figure as the central researcher and storyteller and learning to listen to the world'. I once wrote of how pilgrimage draws me into a kind of universal feral

knowledge, a history and future that includes me and all those who have walked here before and will in the future. And there too lies grief.

There's a well-known children's' book that I read to Ella, our four year old, sometimes, in which a family, on a walk to find a bear, keep coming up against bogs and rivers and storms and forests and narrow caves. When they come across a new obstacle they all chant 'we can't go over it, we can't go under it, oh no, we've got to go through it!'.

Walking off the South Downs towards Chichester, the first leg completed, the refrain echoes more expansively. When the family finds the bear, they all run home to bed and hide under the covers. By the time our culture faces the bear, we will have exhausted all options for retreat, so it seems like our story might be about the nature of our relationship with the bear. As I have found, it could be that grief is as good a place as any to start. I'm already looking forward to being back here in a few weeks to set out on the next leg, but for now, I lay my staff beside me on a bench at Chichester station, and close my eyes, comforted by the immediate prospect of running home to bed.

Ian's films about pilgrimage can be viewed online by emailing a request to: info@outsidefilm.org.uk . For more writing about this pilgrimage, and to follow the project as it unfolds, please visit: .thebookofvisions.net/blog/

How We Walk Through the Fire's third spring equinox workshop will be focused on the practice of walking and engagement with the elements. *Walking into the Wind* will be led by writer and walker Nick Hunt, with Charlotte Du Cann and Dougie Strang, on 19th and 26th March, and forms part of a year-long creative exploration, tracking the ancestral, solar year.

Paul Kingsnorth, John Jacobi, etc.
A text dump on Dark Mountain

dark-mountain.net