

at the heart of earth, art and spirit
Resurgence

Writing Guidelines

RESURGENCE WRITERS' BRIEF

The new Resurgence Writers' Brief is designed to help you – the freelance writer – understand better the internal workings of the magazine so that you can more confidently pitch the right kind of ideas for the right sections.

Under each section, we've included examples of recent articles we have published in the magazine to illustrate the brief for that section.

One key thing to remember is that we are bi-monthly and in the readers' hands for two-and-a-half months, which means we have to be careful about topicality.

It is also worth noting we are an international publication; distributed in the USA, Australia, Japan, South Africa and the UK.

Here are five very general guidelines that we adhere to when commissioning and considering unsolicited articles.

1. Non-academic & jargon-free: no references or footnotes please!
2. We have a bio-centric perspective; Resurgence represents nature with a capital 'N.'
3. We only use non-violent and respectful language in our articles.
4. We encourage a healthy and positive perspective.
5. We are non-campaigning and unbiased.

FRONTLINE

This section is a selection of grass-roots around-the-world news, normally compiled by contributing editor, Lorna Howarth, or in-house. If you know of projects deserving of this kind of publicity, please contact editorial@resurgence.org.

[See examples of Frontline articles](#)

UNDERCURRENTS

Following on from Frontline, Under-currents are the longer and more in-depth features on the projects that have emerged from the grass roots. Think of these as the new and emerging ideas; environmental and spiritual. The usual word count for

an Undercurrents feature is 1,200.

[See examples of Undercurrents articles](#)

KEYNOTES

Following on from Undercurrents, our Keynotes feature is usually a four-page article written either by or about an established opinion-maker. These articles can be environmental, spiritual, esoteric, political or a mix of all these. The important thing is that the reader gets the sense of a 'strong' voice speaking with clarity and credibility. The usual word count for Keynotes features is 2,500.

[See examples of Keynotes articles](#)

THE 'BIG FEATURE'

We are always open to ideas for the Big Feature, which is actually a collection of features around the same topic/theme. For example, Consciousness (Sept/Oct 2009); Resilience (Nov/Dec 2009); and Liberty (Jan/Feb 2010). The topic itself has to have depth and will be given an international focus in the magazine i.e. developed and developing countries. That said, the topics are generally selected in-house, several months before publication. For more information on upcoming topics for 2010, please contact editorial on 01237 441293.

[See examples of Resurgence features](#)

BIOCULTURAL DIVERSITY

In a bid to enhance the authenticity of this section, we are really keen to include more Bio-Cultural Diversity features written by writers indigenous to that part of the world that is under discussion in the article. We also run bio-cultural diversity pieces written by authoritative experts, investigating bio-cultural & diversity issues and shining a light into those corners that may otherwise remain in the shadows. The key thing to remember is that these are not standard travel pieces giving a visiting Westerners 'impressions' of a locality and its challenges. The usual word count for bio-cultural diversity articles is 2,000 words.

[See examples of Biocultural Diversity articles](#)

REGULARS:

We tend to run between six and seven of our Regulars, which can be one- or two- page articles. Obviously, a number of our Regulars are written by commissioned Resurgence columnists, but we do welcome proposals for those outlined below.

The word count for a one-page article is 600-800 words.

[Pioneers/Visionaries/Political](#)

As the name suggests, these are profile (or comment) pieces written either by or about high profile people who actively make a difference and have something to say about the way we live (environment/policies/esoteric matters) and how to improve society. They may have set-up a ground-breaking

project, got the law changed, written a pioneering book, banged the drum long before anybody else...etc etc. Usually based on a face-to-face interview, in essence, this needs to be an article that challenges the status quo.

[Nature Writing](#)

This series started in 2008 with an invitation to published nature-writers to introduce the nature-writer(s) that inspire(d) them to Resurgence readers. This brief is on-going, but we have broadened it to include non-published writers and their proposals. The emphasis of this slot remains on the language writers use to engage their readers and involve them in nature. You must be passionate about nature and knowledgeable about this genre. This is not the 'I went for a nice walk in the woods' or a poetry slot! This is usually a double-page spread and 1,200 words.

[Sense of Place](#)

This is a very broad brief; a sense of place can be literal (in time and space) or more inward-looking and esoteric. It needs to be an evocative and intimate piece of writing that takes the reader on that same journey which makes it one of our more personal writing sections. It can link to a project/course or other kind of trip that has a profound impact on the writer. Again, although the piece will make the reader want to 'go there' too, this is not a travel piece. This is also a double-page spread and 1,200 words.

[Slow Travel](#)

If you cycled, walked, ran, swam, trained, rode a horse or a camel, sailed, rafted, hitch-hiked, canoed, skated, skied, glided or skipped somewhere then you qualify for the Slow Travel section. In other words, you did anything but fly! Slow Travel articles are all about the journey, more than the destination, which is good old-fashioned travel writing! Usually, a double-page spread and 1,200 words.

[See examples of articles from our Regulars section](#)

ARTS & CRAFTS

If you specialize in this area, then do let us know of any upcoming exhibitions/artists/craftsmen and women whose work has an environmental or ecological foundation.

[See examples of articles from our Arts and Crafts section](#)

[Click the underlined links or colour coded quick links below to jump straight to the examples.](#)

NEWS FROM THE GRASSROOTS

written and edited by Lorna Howarth

UK

ACTIONS THAT COUNT

Climate change activists celebrate two major 'victories'.


If you think that your small actions cannot make any difference in the world then perhaps it is time to recall the words of Margaret Mead, who once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." And a group of people going under the banner of Climate Camp can claim responsibility for such change, as news broke that the huge electricity generator E.ON had announced plans to shelve the proposed building of the Kingsnorth coal-fired power station and, in the same week, that BAA had withdrawn plans for a third runway at Heathrow.

Climate Camp activists have staged high-profile events to raise awareness of the unsustainable growth of coal-fired power stations worldwide, focusing on Kingsnorth in particular, which would have been the first coal-fired power station to be built in the UK for more than thirty years. Despite E.ON claiming that they would be using 'clean' technology, if built, Kingsnorth would emit between 6 and 8 million tonnes of CO₂ every year. If all the new coal plants proposed for Britain are built, an extra 50 million tonnes of carbon dioxide a year will be pumped into the atmosphere – almost a tenth of the UK's current total emissions. These proposals make a mockery of the UK's stated aim of reducing carbon emissions by 80% by 2050.

Similarly, Climate Camp have held demonstrations against the building of a third runway at Heathrow – creating a high-profile argument against the irrational logic of a government that ostensibly supports reducing carbon emissions whilst also backing plans for

a third runway. Climate Camp protesters were delighted when *The Times* announced: "The airport operator BAA has bowed to opposition to a third runway at Heathrow airport. It will not submit a planning application before the general election and will not sign large contracts to 'bounce' a future Conservative government into accepting it."

"This is an amazing victory which shows how ordinary people can take back power."

Climate Camp campaigners were delighted. Activist Dennis Stevens said: "This is an amazing victory which shows how ordinary people can take back power from corporations and government." Activist Emma Jackson said: "E.ON and BAA know that the days of committing climate crimes are over." 

www.climatecamp.org.uk
www.leaveitintheground.org.uk

GUYANA

LOW-CARBON COUNTRIES

Guyana's call to action for climate resilience and low-carbon development.

As this Frontline column went to press, the run-up to the climate change conference in Copenhagen was gathering pace. There was much talk of technical and policy-driven solutions, but as time ticked by, one 'rainforest nation' – Guyana – had already produced a 'Low-Carbon Development Strategy' and was already actively working towards protecting its rainforests, people and economy.

Guyana's president, Bharrat Jagdeo, says, "We want

to be part of a global coalition that stimulates innovation and creativity to enable us to leapfrog over the high-carbon development path that today's business-as-usual trajectory suggests we must follow." To this end, Guyana would be seeking international agreements and partnerships, at the Copenhagen Climate Summit and beyond, that will make it more economically viable to leave rainforests standing than to cut them down.

Guyana's rainforest is bigger than England, and provides amongst countless other 'ecosystem services' an enormous sink for greenhouse gases. Yet global carbon markets place no value on the contribution forests make to the world's economy. Instead, it is entirely legal and economically rational for Guyana to cut down its rainforests, brimming as they are with biodiversity – including the endangered jaguar – for timber extraction, post-harvest agriculture and mineral extraction. The value of this forest is estimated to be the equivalent of an annual annuity payment of US\$580 million.

However, as Guyana's president has acknowledged, generating this kind of income, while economically 'logical' for the country, would have significant negative consequences for the world, reducing the critical ecological services that Guyana's forests provide. Conservative estimates of the economic value provided by Guyana's forests to the world suggest that, left standing, they contribute US\$40 billion annually to the global economy. President Jagdeo is aware that our economic systems are utterly irrational and he doesn't want to commit

"We want to leapfrog over the high-carbon development path that today's business-as-usual trajectory suggests we must follow."

his country – or indeed the world – to a path that leads to devastation.


Currently, there are no trading markets in existence for environmental services, but to redress this short-sightedness, Guyana is working with the visionary Norwegian government to develop market-based incentives that are proportional to the climate change mitigation value provided by forests. These two governments have agreed to work together to provide the world with

a model of how to quickly implement policies to avoid deforestation. Earlier last year, the prime minister of Norway, Jens Stoltenberg, and President Jagdeo announced a partnership to support "the creation of low-carbon employment" and the financial mechanisms to support this.

Their low-carbon development trajectory includes hydro-electric generation that doesn't "entail significant forest disturbance"; growth in 'ecotourism' by partnering with small, local companies that place a high value on the protection and enhancement of Guyana's natural assets; producing biofuels from bamboo and sugar cane without impacting on food security; and sustainable forestry products.

Admittedly, some of their development procedures seem less 'low-carbon' in spirit, like the road transport link to Brazil, but the strategy also infers that this will facilitate local (or at least intercontinental) trade, rather than global trade, and this is a step in the right direction. Likewise the biodiversity and pharmaceutical/medical research and agri-business policies give some cause for concern – but the policies in general seem progressive and enlightened, putting low-carbon development at the heart of decision-making.

Guyana's low-carbon development strategy sets a precedent for other developing nations, because it has vision: it values its young people and natural assets wisely and is not seduced (or so it seems) by consumerism or economic growth at all costs. The government is

actively working with its people to adapt to climate change through measures such as replanting mangrove forests and building dykes and canals, seeing that as true security for the future. I admit to knowing little about Guyana's history, but if its draft policy documents are anything to go by, there are bright rays of hope for its future and for all the Southern hemisphere. 

www.lcds.gov.gy

UK

CARE FARMING

A new paradigm for social health care with positive benefits for the entire community.

The Japanese visionary and environmentalist Masanobu Fukuoka once stated that "the ultimate goal of farming is not the growing of crops, but the cultivation and perfection of human beings". This sentiment is at the heart of 'care farms' which aim to combine care and meaningful work in the supportive natural environment of farms, woodlands and market gardens for some of society's most vulnerable people. Care farming provides a healthy daily structure for the participant 'farm helpers', building confidence and supporting people to develop their social and practical skills.

Three fundamental ingredients make care farming so successful: the connection with Nature, the connection with other people and the connection with meaningful work and a healthy daily structure. People experiencing mental health issues or depression find themselves with negative thought spirals that engender low confidence and low self-esteem. Stepping out of their front door into the wider world is often challenging, but knowing that they are going to spend a day working in the natural environment with people who understand their difficulties can significantly support their healing process. Farm helpers do not feel they are 'in therapy' but rather they are simply making friends and doing something useful for society in the form of providing healthy, nutritious food.

Another group of farm helpers successfully using care farms are young people excluded from school. Around 10,000 students are excluded from school in England and Wales every year, yet many young people whom teachers felt were "unteachable" in the classroom become engaged and redirected through spending time on a care farm, finding that they can release their immense inner energy and creativity through their hands in practical ways.

It is interesting to see how the



Hoatzin balancing on branch, Guyana

PHOTO: FLIP DE NOOYER/FOTO NATURA/MINDEN PICTURES/NGS

NEWS FROM THE GRASSROOTS

ECUADOR

KEEPING OIL IN THE GROUND

Peter Bunyard explains how the Yasuni Initiative sets a precedent for rain-forest nations to protect their natural capital.

In absolute contrast to the recent terrible events resulting from the Peruvian government's determination to develop its petroleum reserves in the heart of the Amazon – when as many as 100 Indigenous people and their supporters may have been killed in clashes with police and army – its neighbouring country Ecuador has offered to keep oil in the ground for perpetuity and so protect its rainforests, biodiversity and Indigenous peoples.

Ecuador's proposal for 'avoided oil extraction' is focused on the Yasuni National Park, which covers some 928,000 hectares and has extraordinary biodiversity, with one hectare of rainforest harbouring an average 655 distinct species of tree and bush – a number greater than the total number of native tree species in the entire United States and Canada. Meanwhile, the Ecuadorian government will continue to respect the desire of Indigenous peoples to live in isolation in the park.

Some 20% of Ecuador's known recoverable petroleum reserves are to be found in the Yasuni National Park and therefore the country is prepared to commit itself to leaving 846 million barrels of heavy oil in the ground. And if, as is likely, more oil were discovered, that too would be subject to the same jurisdiction, thereby preventing its exploitation.

Were the 846 million barrels of oil to be exploited – a daily production of some 107,000 barrels for thirteen years, followed by dwindling production over the next twelve years – that consumption would result in the emission of 407 million



A young boy swims under an oil pipeline in Ecuador

PHOTOGRAPH: REUTERS/GUILLERMO GRANJA GG/KS

metric tons of carbon dioxide.

In return for leaving the oil untouched, Ecuador has proposed the establishment of a capital fund administered by an international trust fund, with guarantees in the form of Yasuni Guarantee Certificates that the oil will remain underground forever. Ecuador is looking for the fund to have a value equivalent to at least half the earnings the country would receive were it to extract the oil. The present net value of the oil, if exploited would amount to some US\$7,000 million, which coincidentally is not far from the value of the carbon offsets as Certified Emission Reductions (CERs) that would result from avoiding greenhouse-gas emissions.

Ecuador's daring and unprecedented initiative, if supported by the international community, would go much further than simply preventing greenhouse-gas

emissions from the consumption of the oil. The capital fund would allow Ecuador to fulfil its aims to a) protect National Parks and native forests over 38% of the national territory; b) carry out reforestation and forestation of 1 million hectares; c) substitute renewable energies for fossil-fuel-based thermo-electric power generation and d) invest in the social agenda of Indigenous peoples. And, of course, the proposal would prevent 407 million metric tons of CO₂ from getting into the atmosphere.

The international community via the COP15 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen this December must give priority to this kind of groundbreaking initiative – for all our sakes. ■

Peter Bunyard is science editor of the *Ecologist* and author of *Extreme Weather*, Floris Books, 2007.

CANADA

VANCOUVER – THE GREENEST CITY IN THE WORLD?

Allan Badiner extols the virtues of a city that is embracing the seismic shift towards a green economy.



Life long Vancouverite Blain Spencer takes his bicycle out for a spin
PHOTOGRAPH: REUTERS/MIKE BLAKE

Birthplace of Greenpeace, and a leader in hydroelectrics, Vancouver draws 90% of its power from renewable sources and is now preparing to use wind, solar, wave and tidal energy to significantly reduce its fossil-fuel use.

Vancouver's dynamic young mayor, Gregor Robertson, wants Vancouver to be the North American hub for green jobs and sustainable industry, and to "capitalise on what is now globally a seismic shift toward a green economy". Robertson envisions the city attracting new green businesses that will "thrive as they roll out their goods and services to other cities that are still playing catch-up".

Those "other cities" in North America racing to be the world's greenest include Toronto, San Francisco, Portland, Santa Monica, Austin and Chicago. However, according to *The Vancouver Sun*, Vancouver is still well behind Reykjavík, Copenhagen, Stockholm and Amsterdam when it comes to its shade of green. London, Sydney, Barcelona and Bogotá are also in the competition.

Robertson recently enjoyed a sweet victory with the initiation of bicycle lanes on a major city bridge. While most of the local media, business groups

and politicians denounced the plan – predicting it would pave the way for his defeat in the next election – the new lanes did not disrupt traffic, and the public responded enthusiastically.

For one- and two-family dwellings, Vancouver already has the greenest building code in North America. New homeowners now stand to save up to 30% on their energy bills, use less water and have healthier places to live.

Host to the Olympic Winter Games in 2010, the city has constructed a nine-block 'green' Olympic Village, where 10,000 athletes will stay, which will become environmentally friendly apartments after the games. Half of the buildings will have green roofs, providing insulation and reducing the energy needed to heat or cool them.

Environmentalist David Suzuki, who warns that climate change could eliminate ice skating, cross-country skiing and low-elevation downhill skiing by 2050, has partnered with Vancouver to reduce the size of the 2010 Games' carbon footprint.

The city's aspiration to become the greenest in the world may be what makes Vancouver the most future-

focused, particularly in light of the intensifying climate crisis. The realisation that our lifestyles are not just injurious to the Earth, but literally suicidal, grows apace. In Vancouver, all development issues, all policies and all actions may soon be viewed through the lens of this looming crisis.

Long arguing for the inevitable decentralisation of political power, professor Warren Magnusson from British Columbia has promoted the idea of 'radical municipalism': that global cities will open the political space for new forms of social and political life.

Radical municipalism may well be one of the strategies that gives Vancouver – indeed cities and towns throughout the world – a fighting chance to adapt to and address climate change, when the larger political entities, provinces, states and nations are too slow to act decisively. ■

Allan Badiner is a writer and activist and editor of *Dharma Gaia*; *Zig Zag Zen*; and *Mindfulness in the Marketplace*.

INTERVIEW with FIONA REYNOLDS

“The need of quiet, the need of air, the need of exercise and ... the sight of sky and of things growing seem human needs, common to all.” – Octavia Hill

The POWER of TRUST

Rachel Fleming interviews Fiona Reynolds, Director General of the National Trust, which, with its 3.7 million members, is in a good position to take a lead in the sustainability agenda.

The National Trust was founded in 1895 by three philanthropists, one of whom was Octavia Hill. Concerned by the impact of uncontrolled development and industrialisation on the nation’s health and psyche, they set about forming a trust that would protect countryside, coastline and beautiful buildings for every person, rich or poor. Now, more than a century later, the inventory of land and history available to us as a result of their vision totals an impressive 612,000 acres of countryside, more than 700 miles of coastline and upwards of 200 buildings and gardens of outstanding interest and importance. These assets are held in perpetuity, so their future is as secure as possible, and the stories they tell, which link the past to the present and the future, give us a tremendous reminder of our history and place. It is these stories, along with a sense of continuation and evolution, that inspire the current Director General of

the National Trust, Dame Fiona Reynolds. “I feel as though I am picking up the baton that was passed on by Octavia Hill,” says Fiona. “The values she held are remarkably similar to those we are talking about today. She wanted open-air living rooms for the poor at a time when green fields were being gobbled up and beauty wasn’t on the agenda at all. She wanted green spaces for children to feel the grass under their feet. This was a time when the government was more excited about empire, wealth generation and progress, but the founders of the National Trust didn’t buy this. They knew that there were other values that were important to preserve.” These values are still alive today, if the membership of the National Trust is anything to go by: current membership figures stand at more than 3.7 million, with visitor numbers up around 20% on last year’s despite the economic downturn. “At one level the recession has been a crisis,” says Fiona, “but at another it has



Fiona Reynolds PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY THE NATIONAL TRUST

been an opportunity. It has allowed people to re-evaluate their priorities and look at what really makes them happy. For decades the general assumption has been that happiness is about having more ‘stuff’, but the work we are doing here at the National Trust is in direct response to an insatiable public demand for the simple pleasures of life – a walk on the beach, a beautiful view – things that are priceless but not valued by a busy world. “In the spring more people came to see the snowdrops and the daffodils than usual,

and they came to walk in the bluebell woods. You don’t need lots of money to enjoy these things, and people are finding that they are more rewarding than shopping. The public want to have access to these pleasures, just as our founders predicted. They want to connect with Nature again and I think there’s definitely a move towards rediscovering what’s special about our own environment, which has tremendous diversity and beauty and depths of possibility.”

There are undoubtedly bigger and more unpredictable changes afoot than the economic recession – such as climate change – and, for the National Trust, looking after so much of the nation’s land and history, this is surely a huge responsibility. “The climate change debate is an interesting one for us,” Fiona agrees. “I think of us as the nation’s ‘canary in the coal-mine’ because owning so much land and coastline puts us in a good position to spot trends before others do. And, yes, there are certainly big changes happening such as coastal inundations, storm surges and extreme events which mean that some of the landscapes we have thought of as enduring will not be. But as well as raising the alarm and accepting that we can’t turn these things back, we also feel it is our job to show what can be done to minimise the risks and point us towards a sustainable future.”

The Trust currently owns the best part of forty villages, all of which will be retro-fitted for energy efficiency in a drive to cut fossil-fuel dependence. There is also a huge push towards local food production and the revival of kitchen gardens, orchards and schemes for community involvement on the land.

TRUST IN NUMBERS

612,000: Number of acres held in trust by the National Trust
700: Number of miles of coastline managed by the Trust

The organisation is certainly in a good position to take a lead in the sustainability agenda, not least because many of the estates it manages were originally built to run as sustainable enterprises. The needs of the estates would have been self-generated: energy in the form of wood and charcoal, food from their farms and kitchen gardens, grain for the mills and sheep’s wool for cloth. At locations all over the country, these principles are slowly being brought back as an inspiration for how we can live today. “A good example of this is Castle Drogo on

Dartmoor, which has an old water-powered electricity generator, the original power supply,” says Fiona. “Reviving that as a 21st-century phenomenon is exciting. Then there’s Gibson Mill in Yorkshire, which was built to be self-sufficient for power in 1701, but it fell out of use a hundred years ago. We have now fixed it to run entirely off-grid from a mix of water-generation, solar power and wood-burning fuel. These are just two examples of how we are looking at good practice in a historical context and helping people to see what they could do in their own homes. If you think that changing to a low-energy light bulb is difficult, you should try it for some of our chandeliers!”

“In the spring more people came to see the snowdrops and the daffodils than usual, and they came to walk in the bluebell woods.”

“I also think food is completely inspiring,” she continues. “With the work we are doing on food, we seem to be tapping into something with enormous resonance, almost like a *cri de cœur* from the population. We have lost touch with something that is so fundamental to our lives – the feeling of authenticity and good health that comes from eating home-grown food in season. We’ve really been encouraging ‘grow-your-own’ across our properties this summer, with free seeds, gardening demonstrations and experts on hand so that visits to National Trust properties can be times where you can really take part and learn something. We’ve also had ‘Wild Child’, where we encourage children to get their hands dirty and connect with Nature in a practical way – like days out building dens when we were children. At the end of the day, the National Trust is not an antidote any more. It’s not a place where you come to forget. It is more about being part of something – an inspiration on how to live.”

It’s an important time for the National Trust, which finds itself at the heart of what we as a nation will leave as a legacy for future generations. Will there still be green spaces for children to feel grass under their feet as Octavia Hill intended, and will the buildings tell a story of how we turned back to a sustainability that was inherent in their construction? What will be the new shape of the land once we have adapted to the worst of a changing climate, and will our local communities be stronger for it?

It’s a big job for Fiona at the helm, carrying the baton of Octavia Hill through different but very similar times. “So many people still see us as telling stories about the past,” she concludes, “but today we are as much about telling stories of the future. We are all going through a period of readjustment and reprioritisation but I do think that people want to feel optimistic about the future, they want their children to grow up in a positive world and they want to do their bit. Whilst we live in a constant cacophony of sound, it’s important to listen to our own inner voices about the fundamentals of what really matters. Our membership numbers show that it’s the simple pleasures that really matter to a lot of people.”

www.nationaltrust.org.uk

Rachel Fleming is Editor of The Source magazine.



A wasted heap of scrapped cars



A pile of old circuit boards

PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRIS JORDAN

ZERO WASTE

“Zero waste is the mark of a civilised society.”

– SATISH KUMAR

Waste is the shadow side of the economy. Stripped of desire, it weighs like a corpse around the necks of the living. It is placed in black bags and transported, like the dead, to sites of exclusion – to landfills and incinerators, the graveyards and crematoria in the kingdom of objects.

From the perspective of policy, waste has first and foremost been seen as an issue of public health, something that needs to be removed from society as quickly and cheaply as possible. What has developed in response is a system of mass disposal, where household rubbish is collected and disposed of as a single stream of mixed waste. Scale and speed have been

everything. Mass production has generated as its counterpart mass waste.

Mass waste is not simply the discards of mass consumption. It also comprises the waste generated at each phase of production, in mines or fields, in factories and shops, all of which far exceed consumer waste. In England, ‘producers’ account for 91% of national waste. With

food, for every kilo we eat, ten kilos of waste is generated along the food chain. For consumer goods the trail of waste can be much greater. A car that weighs a tonne takes seventy tonnes of material to produce. Waste is the leviathan of the modern industrial system.

Over the past thirty years there has been a growing recognition that this system of extensive exploitation of the material world cannot be sustained. It is not just a question of the profligate use of materials: it is also the energy it takes to process the materials, and the ever mounting problem of disposal.

In many countries the trigger for change has been political – the opposition by local communities to extraction and logging at one end of the chain, and to new landfills and incinerators at the other.

But what started as primarily a movement of resistance has turned into a movement of alternatives.

The case is highlighted by organic waste. In England, we throw away a third

“Much of what had been discarded as waste is potentially a source of value: recyclers in cities now refer to waste as ‘urban mines’.”

of all the food we buy. In the pre-modern period much of this would have been composted or given to pigs and chickens. But urbanism and food regulation broke this cycle and resulted in a double loss. Not only did the land lose a major source of nutrients, but food waste was

concentrated in landfills where, coupled with garden and other organic waste, it became a significant contributor to climate change.

However, as evidence grew about soil degradation and erosion, the environmental impact of artificial fertilisers, and the potential role of compost-improved soils for the prevention of flooding and for the sequestration of carbon, the pressure

rose to restore the biological cycle. In the UK a community composting movement grew up. Municipalities encouraged home composting and introduced ‘green’ collections. By 2003, 2 million tonnes of organic waste were being composted at 325 facilities nationwide.

Resilience: the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganise while undergoing change, so as to retain essentially the same function, structure, identity and feedbacks.

RESILIENCE THINKING

Why 'resilience thinking' is a crucial missing piece of the climate-change jigsaw and why resilience is a more useful concept than sustainability.

In July 2009, UK Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change Ed Miliband unveiled the government's UK Low Carbon Transition Plan, a bold and powerful statement of intent for a low-carbon economy in the UK. It stated that by 2020 there would be a five-fold increase in wind generation, feed-in tariffs for domestic energy generation, and an unprecedented scheme to retrofit every house in the country for energy efficiency. In view of the extraordinary scale of the challenge presented by climate change, I hesitate to criticise steps in the right direction taken by government. There is, though, a key flaw in the document, which also appears in much of the wider societal thinking about climate change. This flaw is the attempt to address the issue of climate change without also addressing a second, equally important issue: that of resilience.

The term 'resilience' is appearing more frequently in discussions about environmental concerns, and it has a strong claim to actually being a more useful concept than that of sustainability. Sustainability and its oxymoronic offspring sustainable development are commonly held to be a sufficient response to the scale of the climate challenge we face: to reduce the inputs at one end of the globalised economic growth model (energy, resources, and so on) while reducing the outputs at the other end

(pollution, carbon emissions, etc.). However, responses to climate change that do not also address the imminent, or quite possibly already passed, peak in world oil production do not adequately address the nature of the challenge we face.

Let's take a supermarket as an example. It may be possible to increase its sustainability and to reduce its carbon emissions by using less packaging, putting photovoltaics on the roof and installing more energy-efficient fridges. However, resilience thinking would argue that the closure of local food shops and networks that resulted from the opening of the supermarket, as well as the fact that the store itself only contains two days' worth of food at any moment – the majority of which has been transported great distances to get there – has massively reduced the resilience of community food security, as well as increasing its oil vulnerability. One extreme, but relevant, example of where sustainability thinking falls short was Tesco's recent 'Flights for Lights' promotion, where people were able to gain air miles when they purchased low-energy light bulbs!

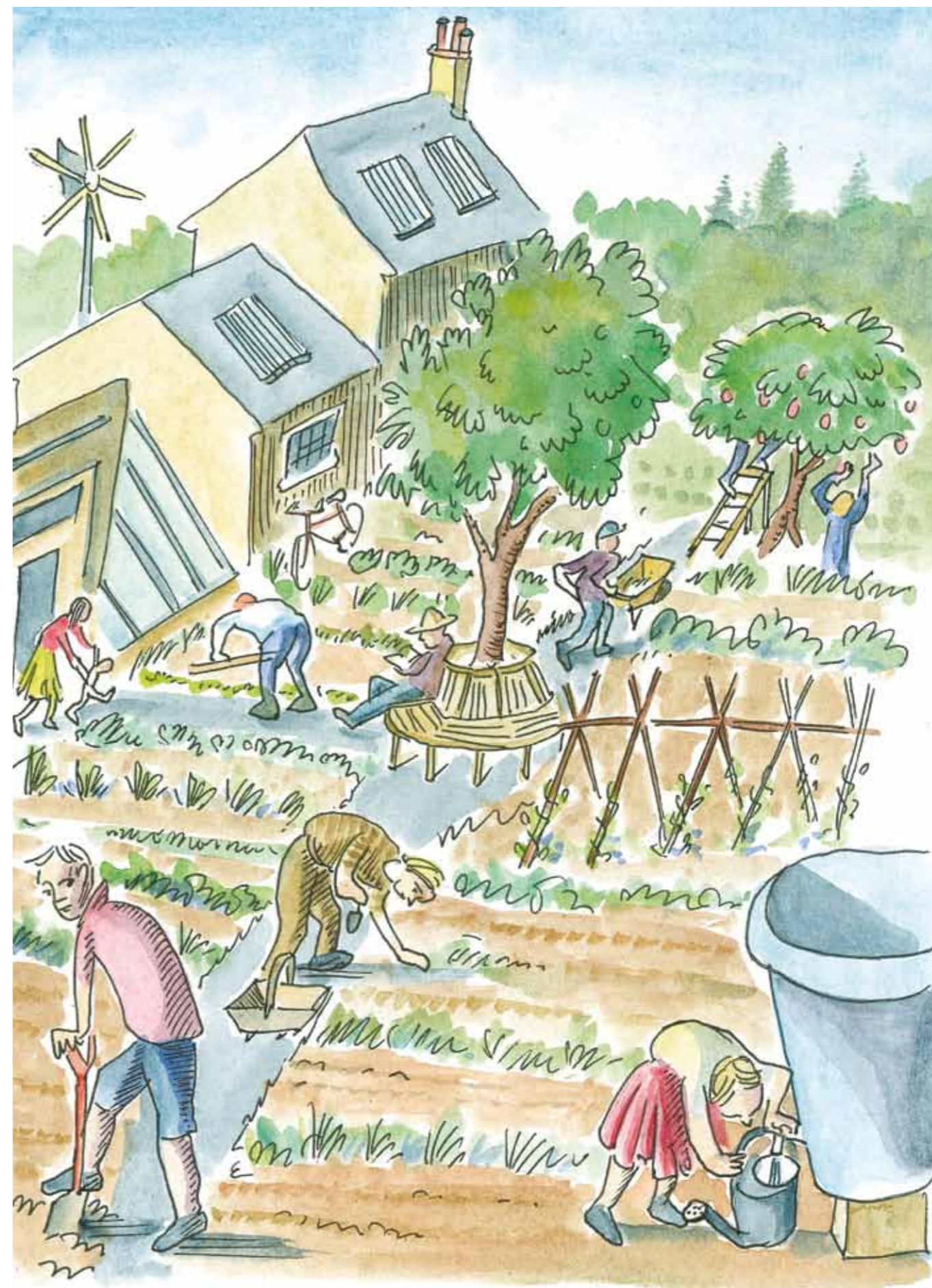
Some people believe that we can move from our current 'high carbon' model, where goods are transported at great distances, to a 'low carbon' information economy, where it is ideas that are exchanged rather than goods, and where we operate in a virtual world with few impacts. Yet such an economy still depends on fossil fuels: to power the vast

internet servers as we check our morning emails, not to mention the breakfast we eat and the coffee we drink that continue to be sourced from far and wide, often with a disastrous impact on the local food systems that would have supported us in the past. Despite the temptation to believe otherwise, we still operate in the physical world with very real and pressing energy and resource constraints.

The concept of resilience emerged from within the ecological sciences as a way of looking at why some systems collapse when they encounter shock, and some don't. The insights gleaned now offer a very useful overview for determining how systems can adapt and thrive in changing circumstances. Resilience within communities, for example, depends upon

- ♦ Diversity: a broader base of livelihoods, land use, enterprise and energy systems than at present
- ♦ Modularity: not advocating self-sufficiency, but rather an increased self-reliance; with 'surge protectors' for the local economy, such as local food production and decentralised energy systems
- ♦ Tightness of feedbacks: bringing the results of our actions closer to home, so that we cannot ignore them

A recent report by the think tank



ILLUSTRATIONS: HUGH DUNFORD WOOD



DEMOS, *Resilient Nation*, raised the question, “Resilient to what?” Are we building resilience in the face of peak oil and climate change, or of terrorism and pandemics? While it is clearly not an either/or situation, I would argue strongly that peak oil and climate change are so far-reaching and destabilising that we really must give them precedence, the solutions that arise being markedly different from addressing terrorism or pandemics. But what would this kind of resilience thinking look like in practice?

For many years, those writing and campaigning on relocalisation have argued that it is a good idea because it produces a better, more equitable economy. Now, as the potential impacts of peak oil and climate change become clearer, an additional and very strong argument has emerged: that as the net energy underpinning society inevitably contracts, so the focus of our economies and our daily lives will inexorably shift, at least in terms of manufacturing and trade, from the global to the local.

It requires a huge amount of cheap oil thundering around the superhighways and shipping lanes of the world to bring to our shops the things we now feel we need, much of which we would have grown or made ourselves not all that long ago. But creating a different way of doing things takes time, resources and proactive and creative design.

Often, climate-change thinking doesn't question the notion that higher rates of consumption lead to individual happiness – it focuses rather on low-carbon ways of making the same consumer goods. Yet as we enter the world of volatile oil prices, resource constraints, and the need to situate ourselves more within the local economy than the global one, we will need to link satisfaction and happiness to

other less tangible things like community, meaningful work, skills and friendships.

When I give talks on this subject, there are always some who interpret the concept of increasing localisation to mean that building resilience in the West – increasing national food security, rebuilding local manufacturing and so on – will by necessity lead to increased impoverishment in the developing world. I don't believe this to be the case. Will the developing world be lifted out of poverty by continuing to dismantle its own food resilience and becoming

“We have a paucity of stories that articulate what a lower-energy world might sound like, smell like, feel like and look like. What is hard, but important, is to be able to articulate a vision of a post-carbon world so enticing that people leap out of bed every morning and put their shoulders to the wheel of making it happen.”

increasingly dependent on global trade, which is itself massively dependent on the cheap oil we can no longer rely on? Is the way out of poverty really an increasing reliance on the utterly unreliable? Rather than communities meeting each other as unskilled, unproductive, dependent and vulnerable settlements, they would meet as skilled, abundantly productive, self-reliant and resilient communities. It is a very different quality of relationship, and one that could be hugely beneficial to both.

In any event, work by people such as Mike Davis in his book *Late Victorian Holocausts* shows how the impact of famine was enormously magnified by the forced introduction of India into the international money/cash-crop nexus.

As Amartya Sen has shown, famine occurs more from the way in which food is distributed, and inequality, than from food shortage. Even that analysis now needs to be revisited from a ‘resilience’ perspective. Over the last few years we've started to see clear impacts of tying the developing world into global commercial food webs, as food prices rose in step with oil and fertiliser prices. In fact, I'd argue that tying developing-world food producers into the globalised system leads to their exposure to both food and money shortages.

The need to cut carbon emissions is even more urgent than the government's Transition Plan acknowledges. NASA scientist James Hansen, one of the world's leading climate scientists, now argues that we have already passed the climate tipping point at our current level of 387ppm, when the safe level of carbon in the atmosphere is at most 350ppm. While the UK government argues that we need to stay below 450ppm, it is clear that even that is a huge ask. If you were to step outside your front door today and ask the first ten people you met what your town or city might look like in ten years' time if it began today to cut its emissions by 9% a year starting today, I imagine most people would say something between the Flintstones and Mad Max! We have a paucity of stories that articulate what

a lower-energy world might sound like, smell like, feel like and look like. What is hard, but important, is to be able to articulate a vision of a post-carbon world so enticing that people leap out of bed every morning and put their shoulders to the wheel of making it happen.

Resilience thinking can inspire a degree of creative thinking that might actually take us closer to solutions that will succeed in the longer term. Resilient solutions to climate change might include community-owned energy companies that install renewable energy systems in such a way as to generate revenue to resource the wider relocalisation process; the building of highly energy-efficient homes that use mainly local materials (clay, straw, hemp), thereby stimulating a range of potential local businesses and industries; the installation of a range of urban food production models; and the re-linking of farmers with their local markets. By seeing resilience as a key ingredient of the economic strategies that will enable communities to thrive beyond the current economic turmoil the world is seeing, huge creativity, reskilling and entrepreneurship are unleashed.

The Transition Movement is a rapidly growing, ‘viral’ movement, which began in Ireland and is now under way in thousands of communities around the world. Its fundamental premise is that a response to climate change and peak oil will require action globally, nationally, and at the scale of local government, but it also needs vibrant communities driving the process, making unelectable policies electable, creating the groundswell for practical change at the local level.

It explores the practicalities of building resilience across all aspects of daily life. It catalyses communities to ask, “How are we going to significantly rebuild resilience in response to peak oil and drastically reduce carbon emissions in response to climate change?”

By putting resilience alongside the need to reduce carbon emissions, it is catalysing a broad range of initiatives, from Community Supported Agriculture and garden-share schemes to local food directories and new Farmers' Markets. Some places, such as Lewes and Totnes, have set up their own energy companies, in order to resource the installation of renewable energy. The Lewes Pound, the local currency that can only be spent in Lewes, recently expanded with the issuing of new £5, £10 and £20 notes. Stroud and Brixton are set to do the same soon.

The Scottish government is using its Climate Challenge Fund to fund Transition Scotland Support, seeing Transition initiatives as a key component of the country's push on climate change (and thanks also to that fund, a number of Transition initiatives have received substantial financial support: for example, Transition Forres received £184,000 and has become a real force for local resilience-building). In England, Somerset and Leicestershire County Councils have both passed resolutions committing themselves to support local Transition initiatives. What underpins these responses is the idea that meeting our climate emissions responsibilities and preparing proactively for the end of the age of cheap oil can either be seen as enormous crises, or as tremendous opportunities.



It is clear, as Jonathon Porritt argues in *Living Within Our Means*, that attempting to get out of the current recession with the thinking that got us into it in the first place (unregulated banking, high levels of debt, high-carbon lifestyles) will get us into a situation that we simply cannot win. A friend of mine who works as a sustainability consultant in the North West talks of a meeting he had with a leading local authority there. Having read their development plan for the next twenty years, he told them, “Your Plan is based on three things: building cars, building aeroplanes and the financial services sector. Do you have anything else up your sleeves?” As John Michael Greer says, we're in danger of turning what could still be a soluble problem into an insoluble predicament. Transition is an exploration of what we need to have ‘up those sleeves’, an optimistic exploration of the practicalities of relocalisation, creating, as Jeremy Leggett puts it, “scaleable microcosms of hope”.

However, resilience is not just an outer process: it is also an inner one, of becoming more flexible, robust and skilled. Transition initiatives try to promote this through offering skills-sharing, building social networks and creating a shared sense of this being a historic opportunity to build the world anew.

Navigating a successful way through climate change and peak oil will require a journey of such bravery, commitment and vision that future generations will doubtless tell stories and sing great songs about it. But as with any journey, having a clear idea of where you are headed and the resources that you have at your disposal is essential in order to most skilfully maximise your chances of success. If we leave resilience thinking out, we may well end up an extremely long way from where we initially thought we were headed.

Rob Hopkins is co-founder of the Transition Network and is the author of *The Transition Handbook*.



PHOTOGRAPH: JEREMY WOODHOUSE/PHOTOLIBRARY

Easter Islanders lived beyond the means of their environment; their once-abundant civilisation was decimated by their unsustainable use of natural resources. The islands are yet to recover. This is a salutary tale for the rest of humanity.

“How much longer can politicians remain in total denial about the literal impossibility of continuing with economic growth as we know it today?”

state of the environment, this is a cause of celebration, tempered by the deepest concern for those worst affected by the recession. Capitalism’s dramatic collapse offers at least some chance of a belated reconciliation between the pursuit of economic prosperity on the one hand and the protection of the life-support systems on which we all depend on the other.

We now know the economic boom-times of the last fifteen years or so were built on a vortex of artifice. During that time, our self-deception knew no bounds. Just as house prices do not (and never will) go on rising indefinitely over time, so our use of finite resources cannot go on expanding indefinitely over time. The so-called laws of the market never have and never will take precedence over the laws of thermodynamics. Like all outlaws, we’re now being punished for our transgressions – and climate change is just the scariest of the retributions that may be visited upon us if we don’t change our ways very profoundly and very quickly.

In the face of such persistent acts of self-deception, it’s clear that changing our ways is proving difficult for humankind. Paradoxically, however, I am more optimistic about the prospects of us doing this now than I was this time last year, for three reasons:

1. The sheer intensity and depth of the collapse has blown away years of ideological fantasising about the superiority of deregulated, debt-driven, finance-based capitalism.
2. The overwhelming evidence about climate change and its rapidly accelerating impacts leaves our politicians with less and less space to hide.

3. The rebirth of America as witnessed in the election of President Obama is absolutely fundamental. There was no solution to the world’s converging crises with George Bush in the White House. That doesn’t mean that Obama will deliver, and it is extremely unwise to heap such expectations on any one person. But at least the potential is there, on climate change, on security issues, on nuclear disarmament, on Palestine, on a transformed global economy – and it just wasn’t there before.

Even before the uplift in people’s spirits that the election of Obama seemed to bring, there was no shortage of ambitious plans starting to emerge to address the so-called triple crunch: the credit crunch, the oil crunch and the climate crunch. Perhaps the most impactful of these has been the Green New Deal, published in June 2008 by a group of progressive UK NGOs. But there is as yet no over-arching consensus that what is needed is a root-and-branch transformation of capitalism. Most of the strategies and specific policy proposals fall into the category of fixing what has gone wrong and then getting back to some of the certainties that obtained prior to the credit crunch.

At its heart, what we need is genuinely sustainable development, which comes right down to one all-important challenge: is it possible to conceptualise and then operationalise an alternative model of capitalism – one that allows for the sustainable management of all the different capital assets on which we rely, so that the yield from those different assets sustains us now as well as in the future?

BUT WHO REALLY cares about alternative models of capitalism? As we’ve seen, “just fix it” appears to be the dominant mood. The problem is that without an alternative framework we might just be fixing the wrong bits for the wrong reasons, thus guaranteeing the wrong outcomes. President Obama has already indicated his determination to put in place a US\$150 billion ‘green jobs’ package, with the emphasis on enhancing energy security within the US through renewables and energy efficiency. UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown is talking about a somewhat more modest set of interventions in a new stimulus package, some of which will be geared to today’s low-carbon imperative. But most ‘recovery spending’ will make things worse from a sustain-

16 LIVING WITHIN OUR MEANS

If we are to avoid the ultimate recession, the only available global solution lies in designing a sustainable capitalism. Our goal should not be to just come out the other side of recession as fast as possible with as little damage done as possible, but to build the foundations for a system of wealth creation that simultaneously addresses both the climate crunch and the oil crunch.

We’ve been living beyond our means for a long time and now it’s all blown up in our faces. The shock to the system from the near-collapse of our global banking industry has been traumatic. Even so, it will be as nothing compared to the near-imminent collapse of the ecological systems on which we depend. And the two are intimately connected. But in all the intense coverage of the economic recession, there’s been surprisingly little reference to environmental issues.

There will be little chance of engineering any kind of meaningful response to

either crisis unless we understand that the ‘living beyond our means’ that has been going on for decades has led both to massively over-leveraged balance sheets and to a massively over-leveraged use of the natural world. Yet it seems to have become received wisdom that environmental issues should now be put on the back burner, given the ferocity of the economic recession. However, I believe that the convergence of these two crises should be seen both as the perfect storm warning that it is, and as an astonishing opportunity to confront and resolve both crises without further delay. It seems strange to say this, but maybe we’ll all look back on

the collapse in the global economy and recognise it as precisely the shock to the system we so desperately needed.

There are two powerful reasons to see things in this counter-intuitive way. First, instead of treating each crisis as a stand-alone phenomenon, even the most cursory examination of the underlying causes reveals the same inherent dysfunctions within this particular model of capitalism. Second, in the same way that our capital markets imploded for lack of proper regulation, our carbon-intensive economies are about to implode – socially and environmentally – for lack of proper regulation of emissions of green-

house gases. Which means, quite simply, that the only available global solution to our economic crisis lies in addressing our sustainability crisis through what is rapidly becoming known as a ‘Green New Deal for the 21st Century’.

If our politicians could focus on this extraordinary opportunity, especially at a time when the reputation and standing of the United States have been so powerfully enhanced by the election of Barack Obama as President, we would have a unique chance of securing a genuinely sustainable future for ourselves and all those who come after us. But economic paradigms do not die easily and this particular paradigm has taken a very firm hold on the collective psyche of the human species. It will be defended ferociously by a self-serving elite of massively powerful beneficiaries.

MANY COMMENTATORS HAVE arrived at the conclusion that the role of America as the principal driver of the global economy is to all intents and purposes finished. And with it will go the particular variant of capitalism that has reigned supreme over the last thirty years. For those concerned about both society and the

ability perspective, rather than better.

Our goal should not be to just come out the other side of recession as fast as possible with as little damage done as possible, but to build the foundations for a system of wealth creation that simultaneously addresses both the climate crunch and the oil crunch. Though this is not the place for any kind of detailed manifesto, here, in brief, are some key areas where political interventions now need to be prioritised, to bring about a new, sustainable capitalism:

Recapitalisation Strategies. Governments are already discussing how to recapitalise financial institutions, but we need a radically different kind of recapitalisation programme that puts the foundations of our economies (namely, the life-support systems that underpin all economic activity) onto a genuinely sustainable footing. All the devastating problems now associated with this particular model of deregulated, debt-driven, capitalism have also been at work in our chronic mismanagement of natural capital. We've aggressively drawn down on Nature's capital assets, liquidating natural capital to generate current income. In the process, Nature's balance sheet is now over-leveraged to an astonishing extent, creating a burden of debt that there is little prospect of paying back in this generation. We have not only been living beyond our own means, but well beyond the means of future generations as well.

The only appropriate response to this is a massive recapitalisation programme to restore Nature's balance sheets. One such programme is REDD – Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation. The basic idea is a simple one: the countries that have forests are poor, and cannot afford (it is argued) not to develop them. Their full value as carbon stores and climate regulators is not prop-

erly reflected in the market price paid for the timber from them. But now that we've come to recognise the full value of those all-important services, all we need to do is agree on a price for those services and make over to the 'owners' of those forests an equivalent per-hectare payment to compensate them for the "profits foregone" for keeping their forests intact.

A real head of steam is now building up around this REDD approach – as is the criticism! NGOs are not persuaded that setting up a scheme based on carbon trading or the profit motive will ever really work. They have raised compelling concerns regarding land rights, poor governance in the countries concerned, corruption, the interests of indigenous

“We have been living not only beyond our own means, but well beyond the means of future generations as well.”

people, and illegal logging.

This is just one of the planet-scale interventions that need to be brought forward to address the increasingly urgent challenge of climate change and the recapitalisation of Nature's balance sheet. For years, experts like Lester Brown have been urging countries to think about recapitalisation in different ways, via Earth Restoration Budgets, where we stop building up unsustainable levels of 'natural debt' and start restoring natural capital and ecosystem services in ways that simultaneously protect the livelihoods of some of the world's poorest people.

A Green New Deal. At the heart of the Green New Deal lies the assumption that

governments find themselves with an unparalleled opportunity to start implementing the kind of practical, low-carbon programmes that have proved so elusive to date. Whatever else a Green New Deal may include, it certainly entails massively and urgently ramping up our investments both in energy efficiency (in our homes, schools, hospitals, offices, factories, shopping malls and all forms of transportation) and in renewables (both large-scale – particularly onshore and offshore wind – and micro-generation). This means executing a bold new vision for a low-carbon energy system that will include making every building a 'power station'. The energy efficiency of tens of millions of properties will be maximised, as will the use of renewables to generate electricity. It also means creating and training a 'carbon army' of workers to provide the human resources for a vast environmental reconstruction programme.

So, the positive spin-off from the Green New Deal will be the creation of hundreds of thousands of sustainable green jobs – the "double-dividend" – and, as such, the low-carbon economy is an essential component of economic recovery. Gordon Brown himself is talking of 4,000 new jobs in this area.

Sustainable Economies. For the last forty years, a distinguished but largely ignored cohort of economists have sought to demonstrate to politicians that "the pursuit of material progress through exponential economic growth" was an unattainable goal even when it was first adopted back in the 1950s, and that it remains as unattainable as ever today. In a new report from the Sustainable Development Commission (*Prosperity without Growth?*) Professor Tim Jackson (Economics Commissioner on the SDC) has refreshed this debate in an extraordinarily compelling and challenging way. One really has to

ask just how much longer politicians can remain in total denial about the literal impossibility of continuing with economic growth as we know it today. The contours of an economy freed from dependence on exponential economic growth need to be debated much more vigorously. Personally, I believe we must retain a commitment to market-based economics, but those capital markets must be subjugated – in other words, made servant to the kind of economy that we now need – rather than be allowed to dominate the economy. I would also advocate strict limits on leverage ratios, the 'de-merging' of financial conglomerates, the outlawing of speculative practices, and other strategic measures. Many would go even further than this. There's a growing campaign to strip banks of their right to create credit (and then charge interest on it), and to return that right to central banks.

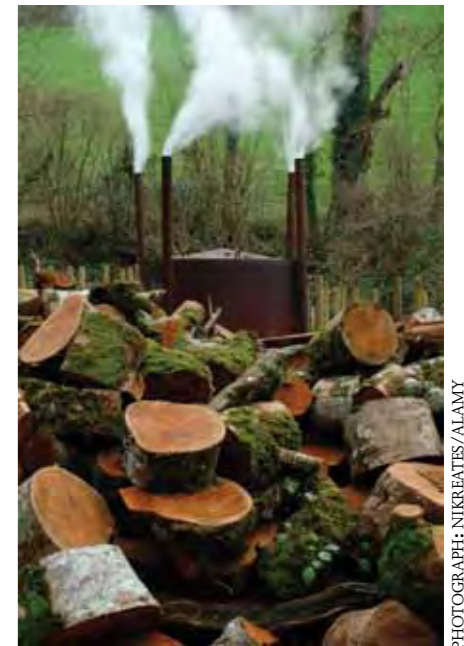
This must also be the best possible time for the UK government to renew its erstwhile commitment to Ecological Tax Reform – shifting far more of the burden of taxation away from jobs, value added and wealth creation and onto waste, inefficiency and emissions of CO₂. It is also time to think even more radically about non-fiscal mechanisms for reducing wealth disparities. Having sorted out a minimum wage entitlement for the poorest in the UK, there are now a number of Labour MPs who want the party to explore some kind of maximum wage.

As well as personal taxation, this is surely the time to re-think the whole question of corporate taxes and, in particular, the use of tax havens. This has increased rapidly over the last few years, with 'capital mobility' now largely unfettered, and some estimates tell us that more than half of global trade is routed through tax havens. This requires unflinching government leadership.

SO, WILL WE do what needs to be done to avoid what I've called "The Ultimate Recession"? These few months are going to be precious beyond belief. If we neglect that opportunity, and revert back to 'business as usual, growth at all costs', then it seems clear that our path to a sustainable future will be infinitely more troubled and painful. We have a unique opportunity to deconstruct the illusions that underpinned the boom and bust of recent times; to understand that these are the self-same illusions that have precipitated today's near-terminal environmental meltdown; and to use that knowledge to construct the foundations for a global economy that will have at least a reasonable prospect of steering us through to a secure and sustainable future.

Since I wrote *Capitalism As If The World Matters*, I've been asked endlessly whether I still believe that any capitalist system could bear the weight of radical decarbonisation, a deep and lasting redistribution of wealth, and a dramatic rebalancing of our relationship with the natural world, as well as a new-found determination to get on top of the problem of continuing population growth. My answer is still "Yes", because I can see how that particular variant of strictly sustainable capitalism could work. But my optimism on that score diminishes by the year. Short-termism and outright denial remain dominant.

As far as the UK government is concerned, there is no serious indicator that it is using the current crisis to rethink the way we live and the way we create wealth – unless it be in the oblique commentaries of both Ed and David Miliband. There is as yet no sense of relief that it has, in effect, been liberated from its servitude to the amoral imperatives of free-market economics. All that seems to matter is getting back to the same old consumption-



A charcoal-making smoking kiln.

driven, debt-burdened 'growthism' that got us into the current mess. However absurd this may be, 'Living Beyond Our Means' still seems to have become the central tenet of recovery for a government that has simply lost its way.

I believe it is no exaggeration to say that the destiny of people in the UK will be shaped for many years to come by the decisions taken over the course of the next two years. Unless we put the imperative of living within our means absolutely at the heart of everything we do to dig ourselves out of this particular recession, then any economic reprieve will be short-lived and the ultimate recession will be upon us.

Jonathon Porritt is Founder Director of Forum for the Future and Chair of the UK Sustainable Development Commission. *Living Within Our Means* is available from www.forumforthefuture.org; *Prosperity without Growth* is available from www.sd-commission.org.uk

Middelgrunden is the world's largest co-operatively owned off shore wind farm, with 20 turbines and a 40MW output.

PHOTOGRAPH: NIELS POULSEN/ECOSCENE



AT DEATH'S DOOR

Death is a much more mysterious process than the mere switching-off of life.

Since Raymond Moody began writing about near-death experiences in 1972, a large number of scientific studies in this area have been undertaken. The International Association for Near-Death Studies has just published a book detailing the major research papers and the current scientific understanding of the near-death experience (NDE). It is clear that there is a marked cultural component to the NDE and it is also clear that there is no adequate scientific explanation for the experience itself.

Some facts do stand out: those who have an NDE are altered by it. The initial findings that people became more spiritual, less materialistic, more family orientated and less work orientated have been confirmed. It seems that after these experiences people are more loving and compassionate. The fundamental questions of why the NDEs are similar within cultures, and relatively common (10% of the population have been found to have them) have not been adequately answered. The common scientific explanations – sleep disorders, disordered oxygen or carbon-dioxide levels, anaesthesia, drugs, release of endorphins – certainly don't apply to every NDE, and it is very difficult to argue that they apply to any NDE. So this very important experience has yet to be explained scientifically.

There is, however, the possibility that those NDEs which take place during cardiac arrest may give us some fundamental clues towards an explanation. About 30% of these patients say they leave their bodies during the NDE and watch the resuscitation process, usually from the ceiling. We know that during a cardiac arrest the brain is non-functional, so this observation raises the question of whether mind and brain are separate in a way not accepted by contemporary science.

Last year at the United Nations the AWARE (AWAREness during REsuscitation) project was launched by Sam Parnia, a medical doctor currently working in New York. This project is studying awareness during resuscitation from cardiac arrest. To be certain that the NDE is taking place during the resuscitation process when the brain is non-functional, it is essential that those who say they leave their bodies are able to note some specific piece of information which they can report when they recover. To that end, boards with specific patterns on them have been placed in those areas of the hospital where cardiac arrests are likely to take place. So far over eighteen

hospitals in the UK, six in the USA, one in France and one in Austria are taking part in the study. The boards have been so placed that if the patient does leave their body and look back at it – which is commonly reported to be what happens – then they will see the pattern on the boards and can report this on recovery. This study will continue for the next three years and it will be fascinating to discover what light this can shed on the subject.

My colleagues Sue Brayne, Hilary Lovelace and I have just completed a study of two hospices, a nursing home and a palliative care team with the aim of finding the frequency of end-of-life experiences. The experiences are 'deathbed coincidences', and also various parapsychological events which occur around the time of death. A deathbed coincidence is the appearance of a dying person to a close relative or friend at the moment of death. The form of the communication depends on the mental state of the recipient at the time of the visit. If the recipient is awake then they may experience a strong feeling that something is wrong with someone they are close to or, more often, an inexplicable feeling of unease, or even grief, which they only later discover occurred at the time of that person's death. A few people see light which has a special meaning to them, or they get a sense of the person's presence; occasionally even that they have died and have come to say goodbye. These experiences are usually interpreted by those receiving them as being helpful and supportive.

If the recipient is asleep then the visit from the dying person is in the form of a dream, and is usually much more visual and specific. These dreams are usually described as extremely vivid and meaningful and not like a usual dream. The dying person gives a message that they are all right and that the recipient is not to be worried. Often the person visited does not know their friend is dying or even ill, and distance seems to be no barrier to receiving the 'message'. Again, these dreams are found to be helpful and supportive. They are relatively common in our study as over 55% of the carers had been given accounts of

“It is much more as though life itself is built into the very fabric of the universe.”



The Cells of Night, painting by Cecil Collins


COURTESY: TATE IMAGES

deathbed coincidences in the previous year. The interesting feature of these experiences is that they only occur between people who have a close relationship, or have done so in the past. We have had no accounts of this happening between casual acquaintances. This suggests that the same mechanism that takes place during mental telepathy between those who know each other well is involved.

Other related phenomena occur which require a broader interpretation. We have had many stories of clocks stopping at the time of their owner's death, and many of these cannot then be started again.

It is not only pendulum clocks: electric clocks with an LED display reportedly do the same. Nurses have told us that at the time of death alarms in the hospice will ring, televisions will stop working, and other mechanical failures will occur. Animal stories are also common: birds that come and sit on the hospice window as the person is dying; dogs and cats, especially the personal pets of the dying person, will also behave strangely, usually howling or barking. Light is sometimes seen surrounding the body at the time of death and there are also accounts of something resembling a mist, haze or

cloud seen leaving the body.

These phenomena suggest that death is not a simple switching-off of life. It is much more as though life itself is built into the very fabric of the universe. When this fabric is 'torn' by the act of dying, quantum non-local events seem to take place. Our studies have shown that these events are not uncommon, and further work is required to define the very wonderful and complex nature of the death process itself. 

Peter Fenwick is a Consultant Neuropsychiatrist and Neurophysiologist.

VIDEOPHILIA



Televisions and computers have not only hijacked childhood, but created the ecological equivalent of an attachment disorder. Separation from Mother Nature causes a failure to bond properly with and establish a caring relationship for the natural world.

AS THE SHEER number of hours children spend in the virtual as opposed to the real world increases dramatically, new studies are showing how electronic media have directly displaced children's time spent in Nature and their concern over the environment.

Across the entire industrialised world, the decline in children's contact with Nature has been evidenced. For example, in the US there has been a 25% drop in visits to the countryside in the past twenty years, as one study

recently found. Another study commissioned in 2007 in the UK found that of 1,000 pupils across England, one in five never visits the countryside and a further 17% have only visited it once or twice.

The biologists Oliver Pergams and Patricia Zaradic, authors of the American study mentioned above, pointed to "a fundamental shift away from an appreciation of Nature – biophilia – to videophilia, the new human tendency to focus on sedentary activities involving electronic media." They also voiced

serious concern about the ecological implications. "We don't see how this can be good for conservation," Pergams said. "We don't see how future generations, with less exploration of Nature, will be as interested in conservation as past generations."

We're witnessing the ecological equivalent of an attachment disorder whereby the child's separation from

Above: A young child, transfixed by his MP3 player
PHOTOGRAPH: RICH LEGG/ISTOCK PHOTO

Mother Nature causes a failure to bond properly with her and to go on to establish and maintain a caring relationship thereafter.

To compound matters, the time that children spend in front of the screen (TV, DVDs, computers) also directly affects their wellbeing in ways we could never have imagined. A formidable body of medical evidence implicates television as a primary factor affecting school performance and educational outcome. For all age groups, a direct relationship is emerging between the amount of time spent watching television and children's ability to learn and perform in school later, irrespective of the quality of the programmes watched.

US National Institutes of Health, Yale University and the California Pacific Medical Center have just published an analysis of 173 studies conducted since 1980 in one of the most comprehensive assessments to date of how exposure to electronic media affects the physical health of children and adolescents. Three-quarters of all those studies have found that increased media viewing is associated with negative health outcomes. A dose-response relationship is often found between the number of hours viewed per day and physiological effects, again irrespective of the educational quality of what a child watches.

In obesity, for example, Harvard researchers reported that beyond merely displacing physical activity, TV slows the metabolism and burns fewer calories compared with other sedentary activities such as sewing, reading, writing or driving a car. Another study found that children's resting metabolic rate decreased as average weekly hours of TV viewing increased.

Watching television also makes us eat significantly more, even if we are not physically hungry. A recent US study found that even children who watched a below-average amount of television ate roughly the equivalent of an extra meal a day more than those who watched none.

Another study conducted at the Dunedin School of Medicine, New Zealand, tracked the television viewing habits and health of 1,000 children over twenty-six years. It found that children who watched more than two hours of television a day between the ages of five and fifteen developed significant health risks many years later: 15% of cases of raised blood cholesterol, 17% of obesity, and 15% of reduced cardiovascular fitness were linked to the tel-

evision viewing that took place years before when the adults were children, irrespective of other factors.

EVEN AT THE day's close, when children should be sleeping, the screen has effects hours later. New research has found a significant relationship between exposure to screen technology and sleeping difficulties in different age groups ranging from infants to adults. A study of 2,068 children at the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Washington has found that television viewing among infants and toddlers is linked with irregular sleep patterns. The number of hours of television watched per day was independently associated with both irregular naptime schedules and irregular bedtime schedules. Another study of five- to six-year-olds by the University of Helsinki found that both active TV viewing and passive TV exposure were related to shorter sleep duration, sleeping disorders, and overall sleep disturbances. Moreover, passive exposure to TV of more than two hours per day was strongly related to sleep disturbances. Remember that this amount of screen time is actually less than the average.

The implications may be serious. Stanford University Medical Center has found evidence that a lack of sleep can significantly alter levels of the hormone melatonin, a powerful antioxidant. Reduced amounts of melatonin may result in a greater chance that cell DNA will produce cancer-causing mutations. Melatonin is also sleep-promoting. As it grows dark, melatonin levels rise and help facilitate sleep. Researchers have reported that when children aged six to twelve stayed away from their TV sets, computers and video games, their melatonin production increased by an average 30%. It appears that the screen viewing suppresses natural melatonin levels, particularly affecting younger children at a pubertal stage when important changes in melatonin's role take place.

And the story continues. Screen advertising or simply the lifestyles and values portrayed in screen media are more readily accepted than if children read them in text form. There are some striking similarities between the act of watching television and hypnosis. Both involve a reduction in activity of the brain's frontal lobes, the parts used for critical analysis and impulse control. Herbert Krugman found that within thirty seconds of starting to watch television our brains become less able to make judgements about what we see

and hear on the screen, treating incoming information uncritically. What surprised him was how quickly this change happened.

Further research revealed that our brain's left hemisphere, which processes information logically and analytically, becomes subdued while we are watching television, allowing the right hemisphere, which processes information emotionally and uncritically, to function unimpeded. Krugman concluded, "Television is a communication medium that effortlessly transmits huge quantities of information not thought about at time of exposure," a long-winded way of saying that TV brainwashes you.

THE EFFECTS OF electronic media are too many to cover here, but it's clear that we must restore a healthy ratio of real versus virtual life experience to our children's lives. If we exchanged even half of the time children spend in front of a screen for time spent in Nature, the world would certainly be a better place. 🌿

Aric Sigman is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine and lectures on the effects of electronic media on childhood psychology. He is author of *Remotely Controlled: How Television is Damaging our Lives*.



Children engrossed in a Nature documentary
PHOTOGRAPH: RENÉ MANSI/ISTOCK PHOTO



Tuvans ride horses and gather for a wrestling festival close to the Mongolian border on Lake Tere Khol - the beginning of the Gobi Desert can be seen in the background

BALANCING ACT

Since the demise of the Soviet Union, there has been a resurgence of cultural life in Tuva, but there is now a new divide between the old nomadic ways and the lure of a more contemporary lifestyle.

The sun is setting on Sacred Mountain, close to the border with Mongolia, in southernmost Tuva, one of the least-known regions in Siberia. In a rocky alcove inside the mountain, a group of female shamans conduct a traditional ceremony. One woman, clothed in long furs and a headdress made from the feathers of predatory birds, offers food to fire spirits. Behind her, another shaman ties prayer flags to a tree – white to symbolise air; green and yellow for earth and water.

Ringed by 2,000-metre-plus mountains and far from the major trade routes, Tuva’s ancient civilisation has remained largely intact. A vast expanse, which includes some of the most remote and unspoiled natural beauty

in the world, it is also home to endangered species such as the snow leopard and the mountain ibex.

Since the demise of the Soviet Union there has been a resurgence of cultural life in Tuva. Nomadic lifestyles and migration patterns have returned and shamanism and Buddhism are once again flourishing. Interdependence with Nature is deeply ingrained in the Tuvan psyche and fundamental to the Tuvan way of thinking. There is a strong tradition of respect for natural places: every person has an *α*, a master or spirit guardian.

Saya Chopuy, who now lives with her family, sheep and cattle in a yurt homestead in the Erzín Kozhuun district, says, “We were told during Soviet times that our

traditions were those of a backward people. But I am happiest when we are moving. A simpler life is best. I want my grandchildren to grow up knowing about their culture – to respect older people and to worship the spirits of Nature.”

But Tuvans now face a new dilemma. The area is rich in minerals such as iron ore, bauxite, coal, gold and cobalt. There is the potential to start a very profitable mining industry. Plans to build a railway to service the mining industry and create jobs are under way but opinion is deeply divided. Those in favour say it could create jobs and lead to the eventual construction of a passenger railway, which could open up the country to tourism. Critics, including the Minister of Labour, are sceptical and believe the potential for corruption is huge. In addition, the proposed train route would go through one of the most famous burial grounds in Siberia, dating back to ancient times.

The Tuvans’ respect for Nature means they are circumspect about developing a mining economy. Acutely aware of their position as custodians of one of the great natural wildernesses, they believe that if they are encouraged to forget and undervalue their own culture and environment, then their traditions and core values – which are already under threat – could be lost.

Dalana Kadygo is the Tuvan co-ordinator of a new joint project by World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Russia and Oxfam, which aims to promote new and sensitive patterns of economic development in Tuva whilst protecting traditional ways of life.

“Many of Tuva’s goods are now imported,” says Kadygo. “Our chickens come from the US and our milk from the Netherlands. Imagine this for us Tuvans who pride ourselves on being an agricultural society! All these imported products are replacing traditional

produce. We need to increase our own productivity and thereby create jobs.”

Planned activities include improving the quality of traditional breeds of livestock, reintroducing abandoned traditions such as felt-making for clothing and yurts, and the restoration of local crafts, and improving access to local and regional markets. External support will be provided in the form of advice and micro-finance.

“This project is so needed and relevant right now in Tuva,” says Kadygo. “Traditionally, Tuvan people are very hard-working. They are used to providing everything for themselves. So we believe that this project will allow local economies to develop as small businesses grow up, and our hope is that people will return to their traditions understanding that, with hard work, they can improve their lives.”

Oxfam and WWF’s work will also provide protection to rare species such as the snow leopard and the argali wild sheep, with a view to taking some pressure off wild resources through improved economic prospects. Activities will include involving local communities in national park planning and development, training and supporting national park staff to offer better protection and conservation of wildlife.

“This project will build more sustainable livelihoods for rural people, and improve the local economy and the value of agricultural produce,” says Nicholas Colloff, country director for Oxfam Russia.

“The challenge will be integrating rural sustainable development with conservation, but if we develop a vibrant model for this in Tuva, WWF Russia will replicate this work in many remote, impoverished parts of Russia where Indigenous people live precarious existences.”

Angela Robson is a writer and BBC broadcaster.



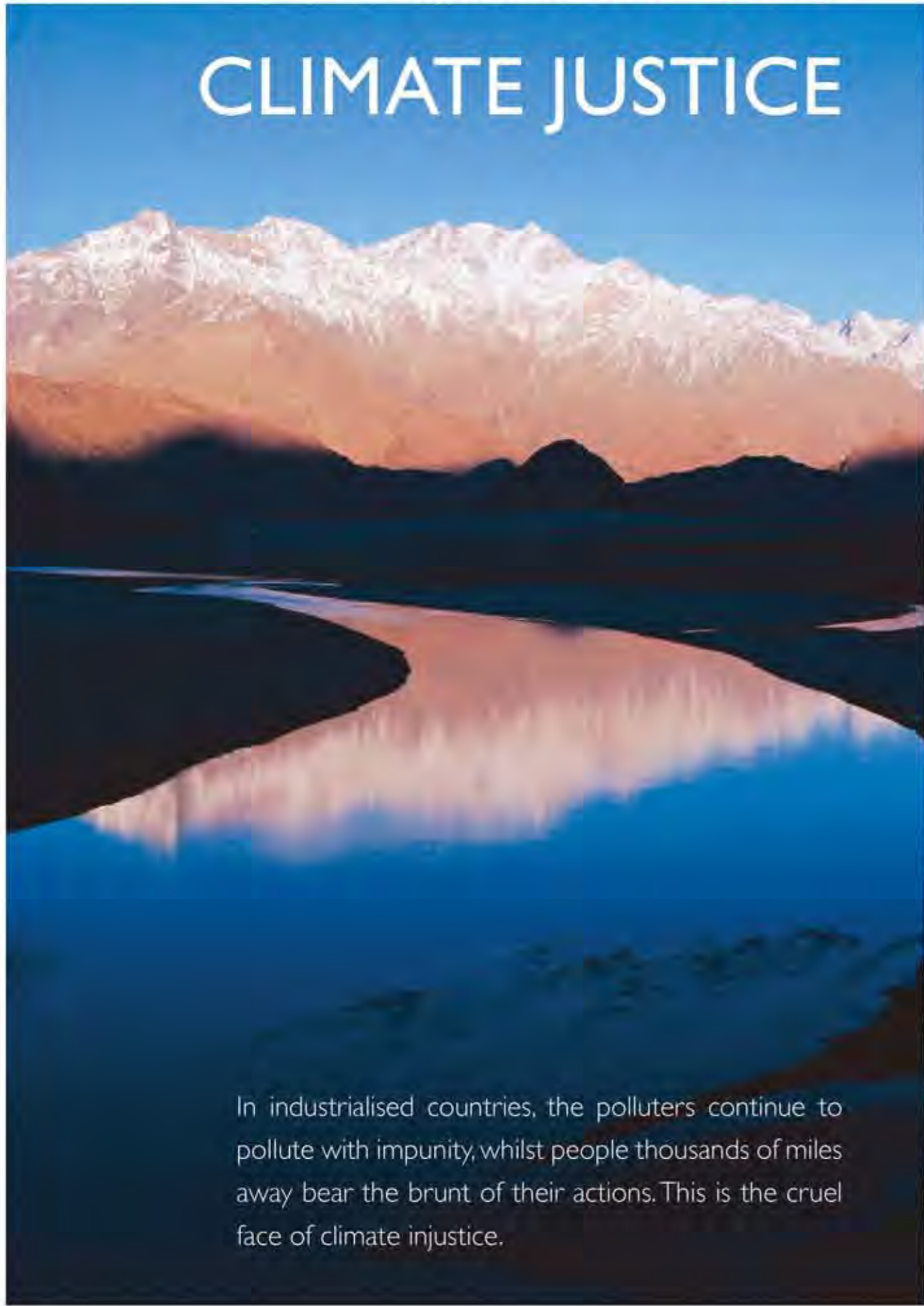
Female shamans gather at Sacred Mountain to perform a ritual, making offerings to the spirits

“The challenge will be integrating rural sustainable development with conservation.”

– Nicholas Colloff
(Oxfam Russia)

PHOTOGRAPHS: KATE BOOKS

CLIMATE JUSTICE



PHOTOGRAPH: ROBERT HARDING PICTURE LIBRARY LTD/ALAMY

In industrialised countries, the polluters continue to pollute with impunity, whilst people thousands of miles away bear the brunt of their actions. This is the cruel face of climate injustice.

I write from Ladakh, where we are studying the impact of climate change and evolving participatory adaptation and disaster-preparedness strategies with local communities. Whilst the melting of ice in the Arctic and Antarctic due to global warming and climate change is reported frequently, the melting of the Himalayan glaciers goes largely unreported, even though many more people are impacted.

Presently 10% of the Earth's landmass is covered with snow and ice, with 84.16% in the Antarctic, 13.9% in Greenland, 0.77% in the Himalayas, 0.51% in North America, 0.37% in Africa, 0.15% in South America and 0.06% in Europe. Outside the polar region, the Himalaya Range has the highest concentration of glaciers: 9.04% is covered with glaciers, with a 30–40% additional area covered with snow.

The glaciers of the Himalayas are the 'Third Pole'. They feed the giant rivers of Asia and support half of humanity. In Ladakh, the northernmost region of India, all life depends on snow. Ladakh is a high-altitude desert with only 50mm of rainfall annually. Its water comes from the snow melt – both the snow that falls on the land and provides the moisture for farming and pastures, and the snow of the glaciers that gently melts and feeds the streams that are the lifeline of Ladakh. For centuries snow has supported human survival in Ladakh.

Climate change is altering this. Less snow is falling, so there is less moisture for growing crops. In village after village, where snow-melt on the fields was the only source of moisture, we are witnessing the end of farming. Reduced snowfall also means less snow in the glaciers, and less streamflow. The shorter period of snowfall prevents the snow from turning into hard ice crystals, so more of the glacier is liable to melt when the summer comes.

Climate change has also led to rain rather than snow falling, even at higher altitudes. This also accelerates the melting of glaciers. Heavy rainfall, which was unknown in the high-altitude desert, is now a frequent occurrence, causing flash floods which wash away homes and topsoil, trees and livestock. Climate refugees are already being created in Himalayan villages. One of the displaced women said to me, "When we see the black clouds, we feel afraid."

The arrival of black clouds and the disappearance of white snow in the cold desert is how climate change is entering the life of the Ladakhi communities. They did not cause the problem, but they are its victims. This is the direct and cruel face of climate injustice: the polluters continue to pollute – so far, they are insulated from the impact of their own actions – whilst other people, thousands of miles away, bear the brunt of greenhouse-gas pollution.

“The glaciers of the Himalaya are the 'Third Pole'. They feed the giant rivers of Asia and support half of humanity.”

India has 5,243 glaciers covering an area of 37,579km². The Gangotri glacier, source of the river Ganga, is receding twenty to twenty-three metres per year. Milam glacier is receding thirty metres a year; Dokrani is retreating fifteen to twenty metres a year. The receding of the glaciers has accelerated with global warming. The rate of retreat of the Gangotri glacier has tripled in the last three years. Some of the most devastating effects of glacial meltdown occur when glacial lakes overflow and the phenomenon of 'glacial lake outburst floods' takes place.

Climate change thus initially leads to widespread flooding but, over time, as the snow disappears there will be drought in the summer. In the river Ganga, the loss of glacier melt could reduce July to September flows by two-thirds, causing water shortages for 500 million people and for 37% of India's irrigated land.

Glacial melt in the Himalaya is the largest source of fresh water for northern India and is also the source of the Ganges, Indus, Brahmaputra, Mekong, Irrawady, Yellow and Yangtze rivers. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), "Glaciers in the Himalaya are receding faster than in any other part of the world and if the present rate continues, the likelihood of them disappearing by the year 2035 and perhaps sooner is very high if the Earth keeps warming at the current rate." According to the IPCC report the total area of glaciers in the Himalaya will shrink from 193,051 square miles to 38,000 square miles by 2035.

The lives of billions are at stake. That is why we have started a participatory

process for Himalayan communities to engage in the discussion on climate change, including issues of climate justice, adaptation and disaster preparedness. In terms of numbers of people impacted, climate change at the 'Third Pole' is the most far-reaching. And no climate change policy or treaty will be complete without including the Himalayan communities.

The government of India has set up a National Climate Action Plan, which has

eight missions. One of the missions is for sustaining the Himalayan ecosystem. However, the voices of the Himalayan communities are missing in the mission. The Action Plan states: "A mission for sustaining the Himalayan ecosystem will be launched to evolve management measures for sustaining and safeguarding the Himalayan glacier and mountain ecosystem. Himalaya being the source of key perennial rivers, the mission would, *inter alia*, seek to understand whether and the extent to which the Himalayan glaciers are in recession and how the problem could be addressed. This will require the joint effort of climatologists, glaciologists and other experts."

Local people only get introduced into the mission to protect forests: "Community-based management of these ecosystems will be promoted with incentives to community organisations for the protection and enhancement of forested lands."

However, climate change is about more than forests. It is about flash floods and drought; it is about planning for a future that is not like today. For this, local people need to be partners in monitoring and planning. No government machinery, no matter how sophisticated, can know every mountain, every glacier, every stream and every field. Local people are the experts on local ecosystems and the changes in their ecosystems due to a destabilised climate. It is this expertise which needs to be mobilised in order to evolve timely strategies for adaptation.

Vandana Shiva's latest book is *Soil Not Oil*, published by Zed Books.

PIONEERS • AMANDA PISANI

Green Compassion

“Start with a seed,” says Marc Barasch, founder of The Green World Campaign, who is pioneering simple and direct ways to reforest the Earth.

It’s amazing what one seed can grow.” With the seed of an idea, Marc Barasch has started a global campaign to help ‘re-green’ the planet. And while the growing manifestation of his vision is impressive, his unconventional method of starting an innovative philanthropic organisation is even more so.

When I first spoke with him in the spring of 2005, he had recently published his fourth major book in an acclaimed series on wholeness, entitled *The Compassionate Life*. In the course of his research, he sought out people who had made extraordinarily deep commitments of service to others. “I was struck”, he says, “by the joy they took in living from the heart.”

When his mother developed a terminal illness in the midst of his book tour, it accelerated his own personal change. “My mom was a real giver,” he says. “In her final days, I realised that I’d searched the world for examples of altruism, but I’d had one at the breakfast table as I was growing up.” His mother had left him with a small inheritance, enough to live for a year, and he “felt moved to use it to ‘give back to the world’, as a way of honouring my mother and the people that I had met along my path.”

Barasch began what he thought of as an experiment: “I decided I’d treat this juncture in my life as a blank canvas, sketch an intention to achieve some good, and let life paint it in.” He took a hiatus from writing, making a practice of answering invitations without asking too many questions, just to see where they would lead. A day before he was to return home from a trip to Los Angeles, a philanthropist friend invited him to meet some people who had been planting trees in the developing world. Barasch found himself fascinated by a presentation on agroforestry, a system of planting trees and crops together, dating back to the ancient Mayans. This synergistic method, he learned, produces a wealth of benefits, not only for the soil and the local communities that depend on it, but also for the planet as a whole: each tree planted sequesters a ton of carbon in its lifetime.

It is an age-old practice. “The first Western visitors to the Amazon”, Barasch notes, “didn’t recognise that these Indigenous systems were even agriculture. Instead of cleared fields planted in neat rows, here were trees, crops and herbs grown together in natural accord. Vast deposits of

nutrient-rich soil first thought to be volcanic deposits are now known to be the result of thousands of years of deliberate composting. Swathes of the ‘wild jungle’ were actually agroforestry projects!

“I was excited by the idea that humans have long lived in a co-creative relationship with the natural world. Through the right practices – I call it ‘regenerative ecology’ – it is possible to re-green enormous areas of barren land around the world with relatively minimal resources: seeds, education, community labour, a little capital and lots of caring.”

Barasch decided to start the Green World Campaign (GWC), to provide simple, direct ways for people to work together to reforest the Earth and help combat climate change. Founded in 2006, GWC is now a growing nonprofit organisation whose goal is to plant millions of trees, restoring the ecology and economy of the world’s poorest places.

Barasch says the slogan that occurred to him – “It’s amazing what one seed can grow” – has become a kind of animating principle. “The first seed was resolving to just start at my kitchen table, to do one small thing followed by another, to adopt an ethos of openness to who or what might show up.” He was gratified when help materialised, often through unexpected synchronicities. A philanthropist friend agreed to act as nonprofit fiscal sponsor. A digital designer from Japan volunteered to create an elegant website. A retiree from the World Bank started donating time, as did the former manager of an anti-malaria project in West Africa. An Indian satellite company began advising Barasch on geospatial monitoring of tree growth.

Barasch relates how he was once handed a plane ticket to Ethiopia to observe some early pilot projects that the Campaign had funded. He stopped off en route in London, where he was offered housing by a friend of a friend who turned out to be an environmentalist member of the British nobility. Enconced for a week in a marchioness’s town house, Barasch learned from his host about an Ethiopian group that helped Indigenous forest people to restore their ecosystem. When he was in Addis Ababa, he looked up the group, and soon they became charter members of the Green World Campaign.

“I’ve been choosing projects that take a genuinely holistic approach,” Barasch says. “This particular group, MELCA (Movement for Ecological Learning and Community Action), turned out to be a hub of the African Biodiversity Network. They strengthen forest peoples’ ability to be natural stewards of the land, encourage elders to teach schoolchildren traditional knowledge, create maps of sacred sites and rare species, and help protect Indigenous land rights. They also partner with villages to plant trees in sustainable ways. Our pilot projects with them and other groups planted 100,000 trees in Ethiopia.”

Not long after Barasch returned, he happened to go to a party at the environmentalist Paul Hawken’s house and met associates of a Mexican organisation called *Naturalia*, which was working in surprisingly similar ways. “*Naturalia* was helping villages of the native peoples to restore their local ecology through tree-planting. They were getting schoolkids involved, protecting biodiversity, and mobilising the public to replant the hills around Mexico City.” They, too, viewed their work as putting spiritual principles into practice, and were, in effect, a mirror image of MELCA half a world away.

“I felt I was discovering a self-emergent movement. I saw how the GWC could help form a network of people who were combining holistic concepts with hands-on ways to help people and planet.” Barasch’s approach is an extension of the definition of compassion he suggests in his book: “realising that everything is inextricably connected to everything else, and being willing to act on that knowledge”.

This is reflected in his own integral approach: “It’s not just about

trees. It’s also about reducing poverty, even about peacemaking.” Barasch observes that the diminution of natural resources in equatorial regions forces groups to compete for fertile land. “Desperation breeds conflict and war. The genocide in Rwanda was not just over ethnic differences, but also over scarce arable land and water resources. If we plant trees that help recharge aquifers, increase biodiversity and encourage sustainable food production, we’re also resolving potential conflicts. I sometimes think of the whole thing as just ‘green compassion.’”

Barasch is excited by the little-understood process some scientists call ‘emergence’. “When I put my career on hold, my friends were a little worried that I was doing nothing. But I told them that I was practising not-doing, the Taoist strategy of allowing things to unfold, of trusting that patterns emerge from seeming randomness. What seems to be nothing germinates something.

“Look at a seed: you have to wonder how anything could possibly emerge from this tiny dot of inert matter buried in the dirt. But a seed is not so much a physical object as it is the germ of an idea. It’s the information

“It’s not just about trees. It’s also about reducing poverty, even about peacemaking.”

contained in the seed that mobilises elements in the soil to join the dance that produces these towering living structures. I think that for a person, or an organisation, to function like a seed, requires not just action but being receptive to the universe’s inherent intelligence.

“If we trust that there is something within each of us, within each situation, that already knows how to unfold itself, that just needs light and nourishment, we potentiate almost magical creative forces.

“The poet Rilke once addressed God in this way: ‘As a tiny seed, you sleep in what is small; and in the vast, you vastly yield yourself.’ The planet has arrived at an epochal crossroads, a tipping point. Maybe we are all seeds being summoned to awake and ‘vastly yield ourselves’. To start small, right where we are, but dream big. I see the Green World Campaign as a way to plant a seed of spirit in the soil of the world. From my own experience, once that seed is planted and cared for, it’s not unrealistic to expect something marvellous to come up.”

For more information visit www.greenworld.org

Marc Ian Barasch has written an award-winning series of books on wholeness: *The Healing Path*; *Remarkable Recovery*; *Healing Dreams*; and *The Compassionate Life*. He created the Emmy-winning environmental special *One Child, One Voice*, broadcast through CNN’s global affiliates to an audience of two billion people.

Amanda Pisani is former Editor-in-Chief of *Science of Mind* magazine and is now a freelance writer and editor.



Marc speaking in LA

PHOTOGRAPH: KSENIYA FEDOROVA

NATURE WRITING • JOHN MOAT

John Moat introduces the intimate writing of Peter Please, whose meditations on an “ordinary” place extend our own knowledge of the living world.

Clattinger



A white orchid in the meadow at Clattinger Farm

PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY STEVE COVEY/FLICHR

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Peter Please tells us that he was influenced, above all, by W. H. Hudson, whom he describes as “that great traveller-naturalist, the quintessential traveller in little things. He was always in search of the ordinary – such as birdsong, old hawthorn trees, city and rural peoples – yet through his vision helped to give back to us an aesthetic for the commonplace.”

A Nature Writer isn’t someone who writes about Nature, but someone who, by making accessible to us a first-time experience of the living world in its being, extends our territory. He or she, always by way of a unique heart-register, draws the receptive reader into the present and ever-new presence of Nature. That said, I don’t know any writer more able than Please to convey us into the stillness, the breathing imminence of what may sometimes be a quite extraordinary byway of the land – fermenting the commonplace into experience we will never forget. For instance:

“Frantic burrowing of insects make me stop by this strange weeping salix. The hefty baseline of a queen bumblebee says that the nectar is flowing. The bumblebees are almost as big as catkins and have the

backsides of baby elephants. I see old familiars, the yellow swarming fly, not in vast numbers but in ones and twos, sandy in the sun and hoppers on land. The jet-black fuselage, shiny and big against the yellow pollen fields, must be the picture-winged fly (*Sepsis fulgens*); they walk like ants paddling their wings. Still shiny green-bottles, washed-out house flies, dreary dung flies, a tiny ichneumon, a striking solitary bee all slink or hobble into view. Hoverflies, broad-headed, fat wafer bodies with horse-riding legs, work methodically at each catkin; the honey bees frantically fill their honey bags. I notice the solitary bee again, more rufous, quick flying in a straight line. An independent character. This is the opening of the insect year when salix is in flower, as ivy is the door which closes it in winter.

“A two-spot ladybird closely resembles the nutty sheaves of the catkins. The dung fly is nut brown, brackish green as a country gentleman with short brown corduroys. I, alone, still feel tight in my

winter’s shell, in a torpor. I often wonder how seasonal or self-induced this is. I find it hard to loosen this pen, let down this winter’s drawbridge. I am still frozen with little to give or feel. I am hundreds of years old at the moment. I don’t know what’s happening in my life. The insects are only interested in the flowers, none

“A Nature Writer isn’t someone who writes about Nature, but someone who, by making accessible to us a first-time experience of the living world in its being, extends our territory.”

venture into the woody interior of *Salix caprea* ‘Pendula’. When the clouds come, only the yellow swarming flies remain.” (Upton Cheney, 21st March 1992)

Please worked in English and Scottish journalism before training as an organic gardener at Findhorn in the mid-seventies. Then he worked for a while in therapeutic gardening. During the 1990s

he was a storyteller in schools, museums and woodlands. He has been made an Honorary Bard by the Druidic Gorsedd of Caer Baddon. He has written novels, and the remarkable *Holine* trilogy, journals of his wandering and travel. And most recently *Clattinger*, which is a... well, let him tell you:

“Clattinger is so ordinary, I say to others. Every day of the week you would pass it by; a few flat fields, some enclosure hedgerows, a few big trees. There is nothing to attract your attention. This jewel is not given easily.

“I, like others, had seen the green-winged orchids in their thousands. I had never seen anything like it. I kept going back. I went in every season, in the rain, the fog, when the grass was scrubbed clean and the flowers were only a memory. Although it is carefully managed, Clattinger Farm (SSSI) is one of the few wildlines where nothing is sown or planted. Here everything has arrived by chance. Not like the fields of wheat and mustard grass which have to pay their way.

“I went alone with my journal. I walked the margins of these fields perhaps two dozen times, every time going the same

way, as fixed as any badger on its nightly foraging. I stopped at the pool in the elbow of two fields, by the five-bar gate, the cattle trough, the end of the field where the fritillaries grow, and other places. They had different moods and elements, and I recorded them in my journals. I made a history of places that people pass by, and likewise of my responses. I liked this time out, but I won’t say from the real world. There was a lot here more real than that.

“And what did I find? The fool in me, for sure. I buttered no parsnips. I fed the child that loved to meander, not follow signposts. I remembered the joy of discovery, like seeing the way a grass-blade speared dew drops, the smallest at the top, the fattest at the bottom; identifying insects such as the sunfly with its totemic yellow stripes. I liked my private, hidden world and by some transmission I liked the hidden meanings I found in Nature.

“I felt wonderfully foolish doing absolutely nothing. I was alone in my world and this heightened the sense of my uniqueness, my right to exist, yet paradoxically all the while I felt myself to be attached by invisible strings to everything that I could see – roots and snipe and oak – and that meant that I could never be alone.

I like the way the worlds cross over if we let them – the childish with the formal; the poet with the expert; insects and cities; the sceptic and the campaigner; knowing and not knowing and not caring if we fail. These strange juxtapositions bring back the familiar to view.

“So this is a playful book of poetic sketches, my own sign/sing/nature of Nature, of twenty-six new words to record what I found. There just aren’t enough words to describe the inside moments of our lives – yet all the time I have been looking at the real world, what’s in front of me. The graffiti is developed from my handwriting, illegible even to myself. I exaggerated it until it had a life of its own. *Instamori* – the little death between moults, the space between. This feels like one of those moments.”

Clattinger: An Alphabet of Signs from Nature by Peter Please is available from www.peteralfredplease.co.uk

John Moat is a poet, painter and writer. His most recent book, *The Best (Including Quite the Worst) of Didymus*, is available for purchase at £7.99 from www.resurgence.org www.johnmoat.co.uk

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White Room

PHOTOGRAPH: JILL ENFIELD

hand-tooled leather bindings, faded ink signatures and pencilled annotations strive to tell stories, and often succeed. I gather the books together. Some were pillaged in 1865. Others at sister plantations were dispersed in that and various other ways. I bring them home.

In letters and snippets of diaries, ledgers and bills of purchase and sale, in wills and inventories for probate, in agricultural censuses, in interviews with the oldest survivors on the land, in iron-enclosed grave plots deep in thick forests, in crumbled moss-covered brick mounds that mark old home sites, the picture slowly emerges of who and what we were.

It is the record of my kin on the land and of their neighbours and community. It is a story assembled out of fragments into a base strong and solid enough to build upon and sustain those who dwell thereupon. Like the worn stones of Irish round towers, the story speaks of foundations, solid building blocks to lay in courses as the stonemasons do in the stonemason's art.

We rightfully speak so often today of sustainability in a world of finite and diminishing resources, but few sound the need to anchor the world in stories of well-loved places that have their own way of sustaining. Stability is the essence of their design.

To love a place well, one has to know it well: its history, its flora and fauna, both the certainties and caprices of its seasons, its deep traditions, the land in night and day and the creatures that move there, often silently and unseen. Patient and slow observation is a key to that knowing, close-seeing and careful rumination upon it. To know that place well, one has to live there over a long duration, preferably of generations.

One of the besetting sins of the day is alienation, disconnection from community, land, place and tradition. Another is the isolation that results. These both lead to fragmentation of the individual psyche into shards reminiscent of the splintered china pieces I find under foot. But one of the words not often mentioned in the malaise called Modernism is 'deracination'. Perhaps we all take rootlessness so much for granted that we move at a whim as a matter of course without even thinking. It has become a defining feature of modern life. Everything seems to be in frantic motion or on wheels, even our houses. We pick up and relocate capriciously, going where the more lucrative job is or where the most economically advantageous retirement site happens to be.

Wendell Berry, that wise essayist-novelist-poet of Kentucky, who tills the soil in the county of his birth and knows his place about as well as human can, has defined 'abuse' for us in the most telling way – abuse, whether of people, resources or land. "Use without love is abuse," he declares.

Deracination, which prevents an intimate knowledge of place, leads inexorably to abuse of people, resources and place. Staying put on the land more often than not has the opposite effect; that is why it is not encouraged by the powers that be. It makes abuse more difficult and prevents commodification for quick profit. Tradition is

the nemesis of the commodifiers. Committing oneself to a well-loved place is one of the oldest covenants of civilised people. It is a primary enemy of so-called progress as defined by the materialists of industry, and of promoters, marketers, and other such hucksters.




Greenwich Barn

PHOTOGRAPH: JILL ENFIELD

Tate was indeed right: the task of the civilised intelligence is perpetual salvage. If the planet is to continue to sustain us, that must be a primary mission embarked upon quietly but resolutely. To be civilised is to focus attention on the smallest dooryard things of home, to defend them against greed, exploitation and abuse, to cherish them, sacrifice for them, and hopefully pass them on to the succeeding generation unbroken and perhaps even strengthened against future fracturings.

Creating a heaven on Earth is too big a task for the finite mind of mortal man, but as far as it is possible it will first be a matter of revering and protecting the smallest dooryard things.

In my opinion, it will most certainly not be a product of the pavers of the world, the real-estate developers, industry, chambers of commerce, government think-tanks, and big plans, big ideas, big outlays of cash, and big and bigger schemes.

Abstraction is the arch-enemy of dooryard things. The old-fashioned rose that Great-grandmother planted at the back door never ceases to surprise each spring after a bleak winter with its modest pastels and fragrance. Its faithful coming over the years bears its own testimony that abstractionists can never fathom. Its fragile petals put all their bad big ideas to shame. It is heaven on Earth enough for me. The wise saying of the ancient Greeks is pertinent here and might bear repeating in this restless time: "As deep our roots in Earth, so high our branches to the sky." 

James Everett Kibler is the author of *Our Fathers' Fields*, winner of the Fellowship of Southern Writers Award for Nonfiction and the Southern Heritage Society's Literary Achievement Award.

“To be civilised is to focus attention on the smallest dooryard things of home...”

Perpetual Salvage

Patience and slow observation are key to knowing a place well.

And to know a place well and to love it is the basis of sustainability.

Allen Tate, that famous 'fugitive-agrarian', wrote in 1948 that the task of the civilised intelligence is perpetual salvage. I have found that the culture of the American South, tattered though it may be by a war on its own soil that claimed more lives by percentage than the societies engaged in the world wars, still exhibits its vestiges most literally beneath my feet. I live and write in a two-centuries-old plantation house in the county of my birth in South Carolina. There, shards of the past rise to the top of the soil in broken pearl-ware pieces, feather-edged china, transfer-ware dishes, bits and pieces of glass that served in their time and still come to remind us of the hands that touched them and the dramas these people lived out.

Just last week I reclaimed from an antique dealer a well-used collection of sheet music from antebellum

times that was the basis for a sister plantation's evening entertainments on the pianoforte, harp and guitar. I know from letters extant in the family who lived there that in February 1865 the delicate pianoforte was kicked to pieces and the mother-of-pearl-inlaid Spanish guitar that played these notes was dashed by soldiers against a tree. The musical instruments were cruelly destroyed before the eyes of the women of the house.

My home once had its own pianoforte, and no doubt the same melodies sounded there. As I brought the volume home, its pages yielded more than music when a young friend resurrected the songs on her harp and hummed the melodies no doubt unheard for a century and a half.

Books from the library at the great house, scattered now for so many years, turn up here and there. Their



PHOTOGRAPH: ROBERT HARDING PICTURE LIBRARY LTD/ALAMY

Where the desert meets the Atlantic ocean – Skeleton Coast Park, Namibia

Sahara's Eternal Mirror

“At least by travelling as a passenger, I reasoned, I would be hitching a lift – a barnacle to the freighter’s whale.”

Leaving London at night, the cool breeze brushing my cheeks, it was almost impossible to imagine the searing heat of Africa that waited for me at the other end of the voyage. It was late May, and I was standing on the deck of a 57,000-ton freighter bound for Ghana. Thirteen storeys up, and I was higher on a boat than I had ever been in a building. The lights and dark shapes of the Docklands drifted past silently, the only noise the occasional shattering boom of the ship’s horn reverberating through the emptiness of the Thames.

Slow Travel was something of a new concept to me, and on hearing about it deep in the wilds of Devon a few months before, I had swilled it round like a new wine, tasting it, testing it out. Of course, it didn’t take much to

have me signed up in theory. I love to travel but of late I had been feeling disenchanted with what travel does to the planet. I was suffering from a bad case of carbon guilt, and my long-haul days were looking numbered.

So when the opportunity came up to fulfil a lifelong dream to go to Africa, naturally I leapt at it – but this time I wondered if it were possible to get there without the carbon footprint to match. I had dreamed of going to Africa ever since I was a child, even going to university to study the exotic continent for three years without ever having seen it. Now, finally, after ten years of anticipation, my chance had arrived. I planned to do voluntary service in Northern Ghana, planting trees and learning about Dagaare culture. Inspired by the writings of Malidoma Patrice Somé, I was interested in a culture that placed trees as the highest form of consciousness, followed by animals, followed, of course, by humans. Humans, naturally, came lowest on the evolutionary rung. Now here was a culture to learn from.

Research came to my rescue, and the site www.seat61.com. Cargo boats still take the long-haul trip round Europe and down to the coast of West Africa. Here was the chance to actually feel the transition from the northern latitudes to the tropics, to witness the changing ocean and wildlife, to see the coastlines of countries along the way. To go from the north to the south by boat was the way travellers had arrived in Africa for thousands of years. It was the kind of journey of which one of my heroes, Chatwin, Brody or Theroux, would be proud. Of course, short of walking, swimming or riding a horse, getting from A to Z anywhere nowadays comes with a carbon footprint, and the slow boat was no different. At least by travelling as a passenger, I reasoned, I would be hitching a lift – a barnacle to the freighter’s whale.

BY NOW, THOUGH, something else was growing inside of me that had begun to covertly overtake the ethics of my journey. Simply put, something about the idea of Slow Travel had enchanted me. Going by boat, train, camel or donkey spoke to me of old-fashioned travel, of romance. More than just carbon reduction, Slow Travel is a philosophy, a way of life, a way of laying yourself open to the unexpected. Slow Travel, it increasingly seemed to me, is travel for the travel connoisseur.

Of course, all of this, safe on land in Devon, had been the theory. Now, on this steel colossus facing the open ocean, I was staring into the face of theory put into practice. Along with four other passengers and twenty-seven Swedish sailors, I was at the start of an adventure that would take me from the grey docks of Tilbury, London, all the way round the top-western corner of France and down through the Bay of Biscay, to finally hug close and journey around the magnificent, shimmering coast of Africa. It was scheduled to take two weeks and, in the changing climate of late April, would take me from the end of the cold northern winter to the end of the hot, dry summer of West Africa.

Once we were out alone on the ocean, the sense of having entered a different world was all-embracing. The space was dizzying, infinite. It stretched out before

“Slow Travel is travel for the travel connoisseur.”


us, in the distance grey storms sweeping heavily from one side to another, only to reveal great shining patches of light that beckoned like the Elysian fields. Other days, cloud-shadows would race each other to paint turquoise and indigo shadows, patchworked and jigsawed, in endless racing brushstrokes. Though each day was different, the ocean seemed oblivious to our enormous metal megalith. Through the vast expanse of sky, only flocks of birds accompanied us, heading, like me, across unknown waters to distant lands.

I WAITED EXCITEDLY for the first sight of land. It is one of the peculiarities of travelling by sea, though, that I felt Africa before I saw it. As we sailed out of the Bay of Biscay, a week after leaving Europe, a warm wind came first, followed by a subtle changing scent on the breeze, of spices, of sand, a distant awareness of impossible heat. I was out on the deck, but could not stop the irresistible urge of my body to turn eastwards to identify the source. There on the horizon rose up a single yellow shimmering line that forever gouged itself into my imagination. It was the Sahara – as seen from the sea – a baking, eternal mirror it was possible to see from many miles away. I breathed in my first sight of Africa.

AS THE WATERS around us turned from slate grey to deep blue, we approached the long, hot coast. The warm breeze was now a constant. Dolphins came to race the bow of the ship in pods of twenty or more, and in the distance the black backs of whales surfaced and dived. Before me lay a coast that had seen colonialism, slavery, Islam and Christianity, missionaries, tradesmen, armies and nomads, all trekking across the long, dusty, yellow dunes to the scudding tides of the Atlantic.

With Africa now close enough to touch, we took in some port-stops – a brilliant doorway to the shining continent. In Dakar, the broken spires of mosques mingled with shabby markets. In Cotonou, giant snails the size of my hand crawled through pyramids of wicker baskets, and voodoo stalls teetered under the weight of the heads of crocodiles, snakes and monkeys. In Lagos, we sailed downriver into the heart of the city, seeing the reflection of our giant white ship on gleaming skyscrapers on the right, whilst tiny fishermen waved to us from their coracles and island huts on our left.

Later at night, I swam in phosphorescent waters that mirrored the stars above us, and afterwards watched my stark moonshadow painted on the deck, felt the warm breeze blowing over me, and listened to the mysterious sound of silence. Above me, stars were scattered across the sky like a flung handful of sparkling water droplets. Beneath them, standing on the gently swaying deck of the *Grande Argentina*, I could almost feel the world turning.

When we arrived in Accra, Ghana, I felt the adventure that lay before me with growing anticipation and excitement, but also not a little sadness. Although I was thrilled to see Africa, I wasn’t sure I was quite ready to leave my sea adventure behind. It had given me the opportunity to truly arrive, with all parts of myself, not just a suitcase and a mind left behind in England. Slow Travel, I had found, is what real travel is all about – being present, feeling alive, and most of all, allowing yourself enough time to fall in love with difference, every moment. 

Stephanie Strong travelled to Ghana with *Grimaldi Freighters*. Further information on international travel by freighter can be found at www.seat61.com

Music and Place



Siyaya perform at WOMAD 2008

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PHOTOGRAPH: TREVOR EALES

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Has the dislocation of 'world' music from its context in community and place led to multicultural mediocrity?

In the late 1970s, when rock music had become a little too pompous for its own good, the adventurous aficionado had, broadly speaking, two ways out: the do-it-yourself three-chord frenzy of punk – an energy-fuelled retreat from over-sophistication and commercialism – or the exploration of music from other cultures. Not that Balinese *gamelan*, Sufi *qawwali* singing or the *soukous* rhythms of dance music from Zaire were as simple as they first appeared, but there was a freshness there that appealed to the jaded ears of a generation.

I recall the thrill of first sampling ethnomusicological recordings on the French label Ocora and then hearing the Master Musicians of Jajouka when they were brought to the UK in 1980 by pioneering promoter Rikki Stein. It was as if we were being exposed, as we sat entranced at the feet of these master technicians of Moroccan musical healing, to the ancient taproots of the music we had grown up with: jazz, blues and rock.

I remember bumping into Peter Gabriel at a Talking Heads concert in London at the end of the seventies and both of

us admitting that we were a little bored with rock and that it was African or Asian music that really excited us. We were by no means alone, and when this conversation and others grew, a few years later, into WOMAD (World of Music and Dance), the first British festival devoted to music from around the world, there was no doubting that this was a new movement, which would soon adopt the somewhat clumsy label of 'world music'.

At the first WOMAD festival at Shepton Mallet in 1982, the organisers had booked acts with insatiable eagerness. There was too

much to choose from but the quality was superb: from the miraculous Dagar Brothers of India to the tempestuous Drummers of Burundi and from The Beat to Les Musiciens du Nil. At each subsequent festival, artistic director Thomas Brooman came up with delights to blast our ears open: Youssou N'Dour one year, the Bhundu Boys another and the show-stopping virtuosity of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, to name but a few.

From the start the festival took education very seriously: there were workshops in which artists put their music in context or talked about their instruments. They would

often get the audience to sing or dance along and there was undeniable charm in the proceedings – albeit imbued with a touch of self-consciousness and the naive excitement aroused by exotic novelty.

WOMAD followed the example of camping-based rural festivals, re-creating for a weekend the feel of a village. The ethnic market at WOMAD was always a crucial element of the event, providing guilt-free and 'culturally correct' shopping therapy for mostly anti-consumerist festival-goers. There were unusual imported clothes and fabrics, musical instruments

and jewellery, as well as books and CDs.

HOWEVER MUCH I value and enjoy WOMAD and similar festivals, I have felt uncomfortable, at times, being there. It is a weird kind of malaise, not least as it is mixed up with real excitement, a kind of guilt perhaps and all kinds of other complicated feelings. I had first felt something of this unease when I travelled to Morocco in 1982, just before WOMAD was created, in search of sounds to rival the brilliance of the Musicians of Jajouka. I wrote about this trip in *Resurgence*, a



Works by Banksy

STREET ART • ANDY CHRISTIAN

BANKSY

Has the commodification of Banksy's art taken the edge off his work?

Subversive, witty, cultish, street-wise, satirical, activist: these among others are words that seek to define the artist called Banksy. He delights in denying descriptions of himself just as he ducks attempts at establishing his identity. What is undeniable is that he has created a cultural chemistry that has engaged the public: up to 6,000 people each day queued for three hours or more to get into his exhibition in the Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery, this summer.

His audience ranged from parents with infants to people well into their senior years; local residents coming to celebrate this 'son of their city', and those magnetised from afar by his mythology. There were whole family groups whose teenagers are normally disengaged as they obsessively text friends, but in this enormous queue teenage eyes were engaged as they

chatted with their neighbours in the line. They were there sharing a common curiosity. This was a museum queue like no other: waiting to see the work of a graffiti artist lauded by critics and exhibiting work in a place where not so long ago he would have smuggled it in and placed it on illicit display.

Banksy was probably relishing it all. But was this exhibition compromising the principles of street art? It was certainly a long way from the sharp 'stencil art' made by the lone urban guerrilla graffiti artist he once was, giving rise to the question of whether his 'anonymity' is merely part of a deliberate stance to enhance the mystery.

It would be all too easy to romanticise Banksy's work. I think he has been both lucky and canny. Because his stencilled images usually first appear on the street, people are attracted to his daring, to his illegal interventions and

to his evident dark humour. He is working during a period when the public in general feel alienated from elected representatives and discontented with many aspects of the establishment. Banksy has sparked the traces of their dissidence. He provokes smiles at a bleak time.

Banksy originally seemed to be challenging the conventions of the art world, but the editions of spray-painted stencilled canvases, the approval of Damien Hirst, who has collected his work, and the scramble by the 'fashionable set' to scoop it up point more and more to Banksy's acceptance of some aspects of these conventions. If Banksy is to hold on to the radical ground he once commanded, he needs to keep undertaking risky interventions on our streets.

The street-art movement is well over thirty years old; indeed, forms of graffiti can be found as drawings and writing from Roman times onwards. In 1979 John Fekner stencilled the Pulaski Bridge in New York City with the slogan 'Wheels Over Indian Trails', making an acute reference to the marginalised and dispossessed Indigenous people. London saw the Free George Davis campaign use painted slogans in the same decade to huge effect as tall buildings were scaled to bring injustice to notice. In Paris Blek le Rat continues to stencil consciousness-raising images on the streets, as he has done since 1981.

Banksy is quick to acknowledge Blek le Rat's influence, but his own ambitions have moved him towards the mainstream. There is a sense that the co-operation with galleries, the prints, the merchandise and the move to humorous gallery installations are a distraction. Something about the idea of the sale of 'street art' and the evidence of a productive and protective organisation around Banksy is unsettling.

The Bristol show was called *Banksy versus Bristol Museum* – but there was no evidence of struggle. This was Banksy in the museum with all their help and co-operation. Paintings by 'A Local Artist' were substituted in rows of conventional rural landscapes, and the 'Local Artist' had added burnt-out cars to rather badly painted pastiche landscapes. Other well-known works were wittily 'adjusted' but the inclination was for sensation rather than subtlety. Unarguably visitors were drawn to look at other works as they engaged in the game of 'hunt the Banksy' but I was left feeling that many of his offerings were a bit light-weight.

Caged models of animals delighted children and some adults. A hen watched as her chicken-nugget chicks pecked at a dish; witty at best but hardly something to make a complex sculpture about. Similarly, a leopard-skin coat wagged its tail from its perch on a branch. They left no mystery, raised no really new issues, and work on a single level. It felt like entertainment, even if it was of a waspish kind.

In the aisles of the ground floor, casts of famous statues had been replaced by altered works. Michelangelo's *David* had become a suicide bomber, and others had been turned into a compulsive shopper and a bag lady. There were acute reminders of the widening gap between

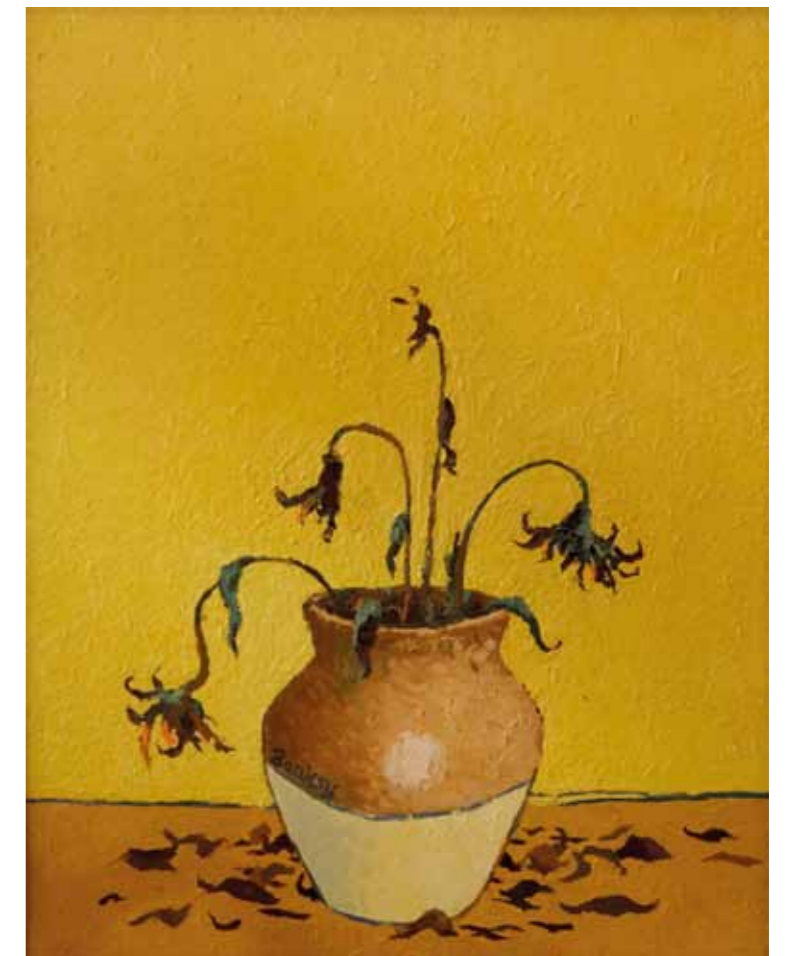
the rich and the poor. It is in such works that Banksy seems to be most effective. We are needled into a state of alertness, of shame even.

The ironic, idyllic paintings of beach play on the segregation wall in Palestine, like the edgiest work Banksy has made in cities, seem to me to be the strongest work. If we are moved when confronted by our unconscious acceptance of malevolent change, whether it is the bullish tactics of the Israelis or the slide to a surveillance society in Britain, then Banksy has succeeded. If part of what art can do is to make us consider the world differently, then these works are powerful in that sense.

It could be argued that the humour of other works might lead his fans to the more serious imagery but I think they lead to dilution. The vast pink 'BORING' sprayed by fire extinguisher over one of the blank façades of the Southbank Centre by the Thames in London is pretty much as dull as Banksy gets. It's a modernist building that gained that kind of comment from its inception, so apart from reflecting a popular view, the act of doing it is itself a bit of a yawn.

Banksy has caught the public mood. People are delighted by his gift of a major exhibition to the city of Bristol. In his best work he stirs things up, unsettles us and exposes. But he has become an organisation, and the danger of that is in the risk of losing a sense of clarity and the edge of radical quality. K

Andy Christian is a writer and art consultant.



at the heart of earth, art and spirit
Resurgence

Writing Guidelines