



oasis

School of Human Relations

WAKE THE FUCK UP

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ALARM CALL OF OUR AGE

Surely there can't be anyone who is in any doubt. If not the forest fires, then the flooding. If not the ice caps and glaciers then the coral reefs. If not the polar bears, then the sharks and whales, the manatees and tigers, the song birds, butterflies and bees.

Oh, the bees. "Colony Collapse Disorder". How we sanitise murder, make it academic, some kind of mysterious disease. No, let's name things for what they are. This is wholesale planetary destruction. Man-made, suicidal, out-of-control Earth-destruction. Everywhere. Continuous. Systemic and baked in. It's not just about climate change. It's about the murder of an entire planet.

I have a theory, or maybe it's more of a hypothesis. Recent discoveries in the field of epigenetics suggest that learnt behaviour and lived experiences can be passed on to future generations. Mice were given an electric shock every time they smelt a cherry. Their children were born afraid of cherries. Their DNA was naturally altered so the memory could be passed on as a warning. I believe this mechanism holds true for humans too. Somewhere in the mists of time, many of our ancestors experienced the moment of societal Collapse. When Rome fell, or Egypt. The Aztec or Inca, Greater Zimbabwe, Ankor, Easter Island. We carry this memory in our bones. And some of us sense it now. The moment of deepest peril. When everything, yes everything, is at stake.

Do you feel it? A lingering dread in your stomach. An irrepressible urge in your legs to get up and walk out of the city before it falls. A boiling rage in the centre of your chest. The urge in your throat to scream "Wake the FUCK up!" or "Stop! Now! Before it's too late. Stop everything!"

Surely there can't be anyone left who hasn't noticed. You would have to be living under a rock. Yet we're carrying on as if nothing's happening. Fiddling while Rome burns. Rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. You see, we even have pithy sayings for this moment.

What's that about? That we carry on, doing more of the same?

Is this the biggest ever case of collective Cognitive Dissonance? Are we some kind of crack-addict in need of a family intervention? Who's going to sit us down and pack us off to rehab? So people, this is it. This is the moment. Everything is at risk and everything is to play for. It's going to get hairy. There will be chaos. There will be death and disease. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse will hold sway across the globe. And yes, it will be the poorest and most vulnerable who will feel it most. Ecological breakdown in an unequal world is a racist, patriarchal beast.

Chances are it's too late now to avert disaster. But we may be able to avoid extinction. We don't know for sure but we don't need to either. We can face catastrophe with dignity. We can face it together or we can fall upon each other. The choice is ours. Pulling together, pooling our creativity and passion we stand a chance. Turning upon one another is our death sentence. So people, it's now or never. If you've ever wondered what you're here for, or whether now is the time to step up, the time of doubt is over. We don't have to have all the answers, we just need to step in with openness and a will to collaborate. The eyes of the future are watching. Its inhabitants are calling us on.

GET ANGRY, WITHOUT GETTING EVEN



After denial has been shattered, what next? If the world woke up, what would we feel? Fear? Dread? Sadness and grief? There would likely be anger. Let's talk about anger for a minute.

Yes. You have the right to be angry. Yes, it's OK to want to find someone to blame. Yes it's right to point out that the richest 10% of the world's population account for half (yes, half) of humanity's environmental impact. We're not all in this together. Don't let anyone tell you this is about population alone. Or that a change to your lifestyle is the most important thing. Extreme wealth creates ecological destruction. It accelerates it. This has always been true, throughout all of human history.

No, it's not "othering" to point the finger at the super rich, at men queuing up for a joy ride into space instead of paying their workers a living wage. This is called speaking the truth. Holding to account.

Are these people to blame? Not quite. They are a symptom of the disorder affecting human civilization. It's the system that's to blame. These folks are just taking advantage of a loaded and incredibly dysfunctional economy. Let's treat the cause, not the symptoms. Causes are always systemic. They show imbalance, a need for something different.

So, yes, it's OK to be angry about being put in this position, having to face the destruction of everything you love. Yes, anger is a natural reaction to the prospect of your children living in a desert or dying in a heatwave or killed in a flood or a war over water.

Let's be clear. For many in the world these things are already a bitter reality. The Climate and Ecological Emergency is not a distant possibility. It is here and now. And yes, it's OK to be angry about the racism and injustice of that.

In fact, if you're not angry, you're probably not paying attention.

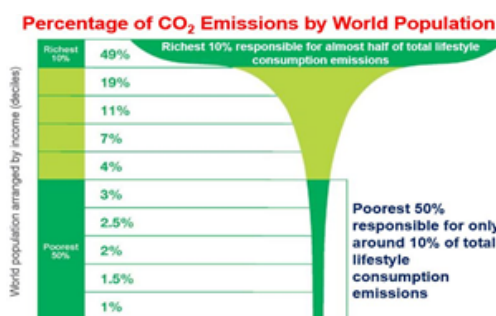


Photo: 1 Oxfam

FORGET THE TECH HEADS

And don't get me started about "Bargaining", the point where we try to negotiate our way out of the inevitable. This is where my blood really boils. All those tech addicts getting excited over this or that invention that will save us. For Chrissake, have some common sense: if you want Carbon Capture and Storage, there's a thing for that. It's called nature. It's the sea, and the soil. It's the forest and the peat bog. Stop destroying this stuff. Then start restoring it. Get out of your sterile labs and get your hands dirty!

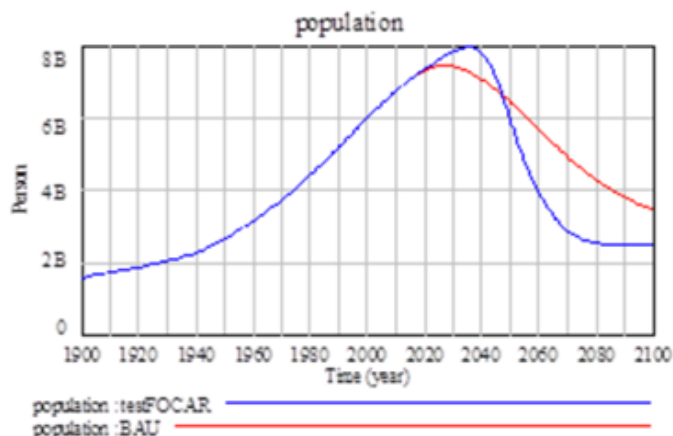
Technology will not save us. That's just more of the same shit as got us in this mess. You know who's the greatest scientist who ever lived? Einstein. And you know what he said about the mindset that got you into a mess. Yep. You can't use it to get out again.

In an economy where real-world impacts are externalised, where pollution and child labour, and deforestation are not costed in, any human technology will inevitably cause MORE destruction that it solves. There is no exception. There is no silver bullet. There is no get out of jail card. This is the way the economy makes a profit. It's the way it grows - by destroying nature. As for the economy, so for the technologies it produces, the commodities it sells.

If you only look at one graph about the Climate and Ecological Emergency, make it this one. It's a computer model produced at the University of Melbourne. The red line shows the impact on world population of the Business As Usual scenario. Global warming and pollution cause collapse sometime in the coming two decades and population falls to around three billion. Billions die of starvation and disease. It's an horrendous prospect.

Now take a look at the blue line. This shows what happens if we move to cleaner technologies. What does it show? We get an extra decade of growth (economic and population) but then the crash is faster and deeper. The extra decade destroys so much more of the planetary ecosystem that even more people perish in the long run. If that doesn't mess with your head, nothing will.

Only restoration of natural habitats and natural eco-systems will restabilise the world. You want to stop flooding - restore the water cycle. You want to stop global heating, plant vegetation. You want to restore coral reefs, stop polluting the air and water. Simple. You cannot invent your way out of a technological nightmare.



FEEL THE PAIN AND DO IT ANYWAY



You'll have to give me a moment. I'm too worked up. Too incredulous. Let me breathe. Let me take a moment so I can let the pain sink in, so I can really feel the darkness in my body. What comes after the denial, the anger and the futile attempts to avoid the inevitable? Oh yeah. The Dark Night of the Soul, when reality bites and there's no escape.

Be careful, this grief is a bottomless pit. It will suck you down into the depths where the water is heavy and the light never reaches. Can you name the things that have gone extinct? Wait. That's another misnomer. This passive framing is a form of denial or deceit. They didn't go extinct. We made them extinct. We drove them to extinction.

How long would it take to name them? How long would it take to stage a funeral for each species, to do them the honour of even noticing? How heavy would your heart be then? There's too much to grieve: all the things that have been lost. All the possibilities that will never transpire. All the loves that will never bloom. And the thing that makes me saddest? The mothers who decide not to be mothers, who feel they cannot bear to bring a child into this future. What does that say about who we have become? That the most natural instinct we possess, to create new life, has become a burden too heavy to hold.

If you're lucky you might lose yourself in the Dark Night of the Soul. Sinking into the grief you will lose your sense of knowing. Everything you ever thought you believed will seem irrelevant, a mirage. And maybe you will find yourself again in a renewed sense of what's essential in the face of such annihilation.

If you're not angry, you're not paying attention. If you are not grieving, you have yet to let it all in.

YOU CAN'T SAVE THE WORLD

But grief, like any emotion, any experience, can be addictive. It is a quagmire, quick sand, a bog that pulls at your boots and won't let go. When you're ready, when you have done the grief justice, take those boots off and walk with your feet on the firm soil.

There is acceptance here. There is always acceptance from Mother Earth. She never judges, never rejects. She gives without fail. And takes in equal measure. She will take your grief and turn it back into love. She will hold you until your heart is healed. Lie down. Float in the sea. Sit with your back to a tree. You are held here. Healed here. Renewed here.

The path out of grief comes from acceptance. Of course the grief never really goes, but maybe we get less accustomed to feeling it. And if we acknowledge, deeply with our bodies, that we can't change the situation, then maybe we can move on.

So repeat after me. I cannot save the world. Not alone anyway. And maybe it doesn't need saving. It's bigger and older and wiser than we are. Thinking that humanity is all-powerful is part of the mindset we need to get over. COVID has been trying to teach us this lesson for the past two years. How the proud and mighty fall, brought to our knees by the smallest of microbes.

Can we save ourselves? Who even knows what that might mean. What would the two billion look like who have survived the collapse of everything we know? What would they live on? How would they organise? What are their hopes and fears, their legacy for our children's children?




Acceptance means knowing we don't have all the answers. That it's going to get tough. Really tough. That we'll have to pull together and stick together no matter what. This means holding our differences lightly and our common humanity with every ounce of energy we can muster. And as things get more chaotic, more uncertain, more scary, we're going to have to be OK with not a single shred of certainty. We're going to have to resist the temptation to reach for reassurance in old answers, systems, approaches. Nothing we've tried before has worked. All bets are off. Only leaning into and embracing uncertainty will do.

Can we hold our nerve? Can we return to nature? Can we stop and listen long enough to ride the wave of emergence? Have we seen enough of the future to know which way to turn? The future we crave can be glimpsed somewhere through the flames and floodwaters. It's in an economy in service to the planet. It's in communities who see beauty in diversity. In children, sat alongside elders at the heart of every town and village. In people breathing life back into the landscapes and city streets they walk through. These few things can guide us; the rest we'll need to create together along the way.

Can we make it? Who knows. I'm going to give it my best shot. How about you?



A low-angle photograph looking up at a large tree with dense green foliage. Sunlight is streaming through the branches, creating a dramatic pattern of light rays (crepuscular rays) that fan out across the sky. The light is warm and golden, contrasting with the dark shadows of the leaves.

Our world is being transformed. In every country, on every continent, ordinary people are doing extraordinary things. They are greening cities, bringing diverse communities together, supporting each other through the pandemic.

Together, these initiatives are building a new human civilisation, from the ground up. This is a civilisation that cares deeply about people and planet. It dares to dream big and act small. It is the future. Here and now.

At the same time, something else is happening. A rapacious economy beyond political or social control is steadily destroying life on Earth.

We face a stark choice between these two futures. Which will you choose? In this heart-felt call to action we ask you to face into what's coming and wake up to its danger and its potential.

Then we invite you to move on to our ground-breaking series Navigating the Unimaginable. Here we share the perilous state the world is in, provide numerous examples of grass-roots innovation and sketch out a framework for action. If you want to get behind the brighter future, join us in shaping it. Whether you're an individual, a community, a business or a government, we all have a part to play. We all have crucial choices to make.

This is the challenge of our age: to build resilience in self, community and planet, to move from destruction to regeneration.