

Soil



**Hanze
University of Applied Sciences
Groningen**

Research Centre Art & Society

Soul

Society

I would still plant my apple tree

On Earthbound, the program of the
research group Art & Sustainability

Jan van Boeckel

10th May, 2021

share your talent. **move** the world.

I would still plant my apple tree

'I would still plant my apple tree'

On *Earthbound*, the program of the
research group Art & Sustainability

Publication on the occasion of the inauguration of
Dr. Jan van Boeckel as Professor of Art & Sustainability
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Jan van Boeckel, 10th May, 2021

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Our relationship with the world is dysfunctional in many regards, and not only because our Western way of life undermines the abounding biological and cultural diversity with which we have co-evolved. Many developments that can be observed around us are extremely odd and new, and give cause to feelings of fear and uncertainty. One can try and hide from these changes taking place in our lifeworld, or even deny they occur. Or, we may overestimate our capacities, saying: “We just need to roll up our sleeves, address the problems and get the job done!”

I would suggest that there is also another, more difficult path to take. One can choose to situate oneself right in the relative calm of the *eye* of the storm. American writer and essayist Rebecca Solnit succinctly encapsulates such a stance as follows:

...to be lost is to be fully present, and to be fully present is to be capable of being in uncertainty and mystery. ... The job of artists is to open doors and to invite in the unknown, the unfamiliar. To calculate on the unforeseen is perhaps exactly the paradoxical operation that life most requires of us.¹

The research group Art & Sustainability at the Hanze University of Applied Sciences strives to support artists and designers who aim to enter this space of vulnerability by providing tools and a dynamic frame of reference, with the expectation that these may be of assistance when they contribute to the ongoing discourse and work for change. Moreover, it is the expectation that they will profit from the ability to “invite in the unknown” in their professional practices. The research programme *Earthbound* is based on a coherent philosophy that consists of the elements *soil*, *soul*, and *society*. At the heart of it is a recognition and affirmation of the inner and

cultural dimensions of sustainability (*soul*), besides and in interplay with its ecological aspects (*soil*), and social and economic dimensions (*society*). The word “earthbound” has a double meaning: as the Earth being the context from which we cannot untie ourselves (“There is no planet B”) and the place where our journey is steering toward; the destination we are “bound for”.

Society is changing so fast that it is quite difficult to predict how the professional practice of artists will develop in the coming years. Some say that Covid-19 is only a prelude to more comprehensive

forms of social and ecological system breakdown that await us. If this is indeed the case, then an “imaginative response-ability” is called for; to be able to face and weather these storms.

From this perspective, it could well be that future artistic practices will be rather different from what we can anticipate now. *Earthbound* aims to have societal impact by creating space for how artistic perspectives can inform

our understanding of what a transition towards a more sustainable society might entail. It wishes to contribute to art and design students’ overall education, in such a way that they have the audacity to be present, in the present, to what might present itself. To develop frames of references and imaginaries together with them, that may serve as a basis to understand and engage with both unprecedented and pressing existential questions, while simultaneously maintaining a level of equanimity amidst times of paralysing uncertainty. Today’s challenges ask for actors who are not only resilient and versatile but also creative and radical (in its original meaning of “going to the roots” of prevailing issues). The expectation is that



Where the tides ebb and flow, art work by Pedro Marzorati, 2008.
Photo: Pat van Boeckel

¹ Solnit, R. (2006). *A field guide to getting lost*. Edinburgh: Penguin Books, pp. 5-6.

this will make them stronger, more agile, and above all, more imaginative. In this way they are hopefully better equipped to apply their artistic skills and practices in the world.

Being sensitive to the pattern that connects

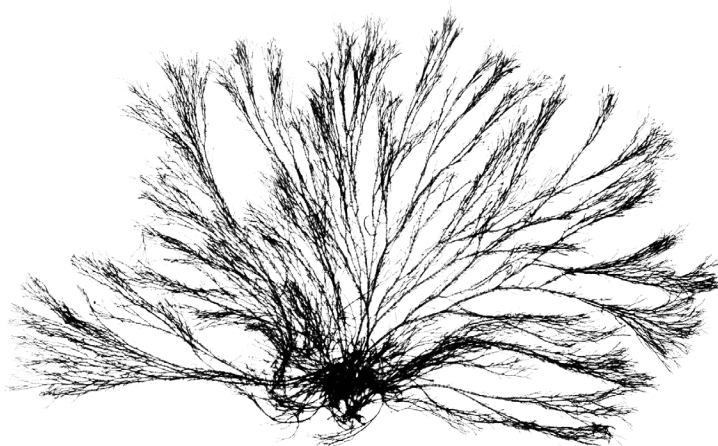
One of the contemporary research fields that *Earthbound* is informed by is *ecological aesthetics*. In the words of American/South African interdisciplinary artist Nathaniel Stern, this is fundamentally a call to constantly keep in our mind and actions the interests of the world and its inhabitants – human and other than human. Stern argues that ecology, aesthetics and ethics are inherently interrelated and together form the cornerstone of innovative practices in contemporary art.²

An ecologically and environmentally informed aesthetics, furthermore, finds a strong anchor point in a praxis of open-ended and embodied engagement with the world: entering into a dialogue that sets out from one’s own corporeal presence and sensory experiences. Such “knowing from the inside”³ can provide a degree of counterbalance when emphasis may become too one-sidedly on indirect (and often exclusively digital and virtual) modes of relating to other humans and the more-than-human world. Perception always involves the experience of an active interplay between the perceiving body and that which it perceives.⁴ The most immediate channel that provides us with information about our entanglements with nonhuman others is our sensorium. There is an interesting and relevant connection between opening our senses to the world and the etymological source of the word “aesthetics”. The term is derived from the Greek word *aisthesis* which means both sensory experience and feeling. *Aisthēta* means “perceivable things” and *aisthētai* means “perceiving”. Only later did the derived term aesthetics begin to refer to philosophical discussions about the essence of art, beauty, and the sublime. Gregory Bateson, known for his “ecology of mind”, sees as the essence of aesthetics, that one is sensitive to what he calls “the pattern that connects all living things”.

² Stern, N. (2018). *Ecological aesthetics: Artful tactics for humans, nature, and politics*. Lebanon, NH: Dartmouth College Press.

³ This refers to the aim of a five-year international research project (2013–2018) at the University of Aberdeen, led by Professor Tim Ingold, which was entitled: *Knowing From the Inside: Anthropology, Art, Architecture and Design*. <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/research/kfi/>

⁴ Cf. Abram, D. (1997). *The spell of the sensuous: Perception and language in a more-than-human-world*. New York: Vintage Books p. 57.



Rather than wanting to unravel things further and further as a scientist would typically do and to subdivide them into ever smaller units, Bateson was interested in inter-relationships. He formulated it poetically as follows:

*What pattern connects the crab to the lobster and the orchid to the primrose, and all the four of them to me? And me to you?*⁵

⁵ Bateson, G. (1979). *Mind and nature: A necessary unity*. New York: Bantam, p. 8.

In the relatively new field of ecological aesthetics, such an orientation is one of the starting points for study and research.



“What is the pattern that connects?”
Photo: Olivier Pé

Approaching the world with fresh eyes

*Art is one of man’s antennae stretched out to sense the world. It is a way of existing and of understanding one’s existence.... By sensitizing our perceptions, it makes us susceptible to new information, which may not necessarily come to us in the form of language.*⁶

⁶ Rauhala, O. (2003). *Nature, science and art*. Helsinki: Otava Publishing Company, p. 24.

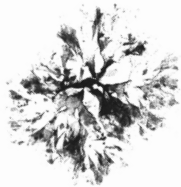
In this way, Finnish artist Osmo Rauhala seeks to highlight a particular element of what art can add to our world. By attending to art and by participating in artmaking, a person has unique, often non-cognitive and non-verbal opportunities to interpret and explain his or her experiences in the world. Art tends to reach the sensory, perceptual, emotional, cognitive, symbolic, and creative dimensions of human beings. By creating and contemplating art, people can come into closer contact with deeper levels of their psyche. At the same time, artistic activities nourish and guide our sensitivity to the world, our lives. They can sharpen and refine our perception to the mystery of the things around us. “Artistic flavour”, says the Finnish art pedagogue Meri-Helga Mantere, “comes from both delicate and rough beauty, sensuous experience, from surprises and awe, inner movement (emotion) of heart and soul.” Much of this, she adds, is not called art but is an aesthetic and spiritual quality of anyone’s life, and it can be enjoyed without burdening the environment.⁷

⁷ Mantere, M.-H. (2004). *Coming back to the senses: An artistic approach to environmental education*. <http://www.naturearteducation.org/Articles/Coming%20Back%20to%20the%20Senses.pdf>

Through art, we can approach the world with fresh eyes. Art can touch us. It may catch us off-guard, or hit us unexpectedly. We may be overcome by awe: we feel amazed, astounded, struck dumb. The term “aesthetic arrest”⁸ conveys this sense. We are stopped in our tracks. Art can throw us out of kilter, provoke or challenge us. Even deeply disturb us. This estrangement or defamiliarisation is an important quality of art. It helps us to review and renew our understandings of everyday things and events which are so familiar to us that our perception of them has become routine.

⁸ Concept coined by Joseph Campbell (1968) in his *Creative mythology* (Volume 4 of *The masks of God*). New York: Penguin.

One way of determining whether research themes would be relevant or urgent enough to be taken up by the research group Art & Sustainability, is by weighing to what extent art may have something new and (art) specific to offer, and even more so when coming up against challenges brought forth by the level of complexity and instability of our current predicament. Of enduring uncertainty in the context of the rapid social and ecological changes that are taking place while we work towards a transition to a sustainable society. Not by providing “merely” illustrations or neat designs – as the proverbial “icing on the cake” – to the products of others, but by partaking in the conversation from the position of being an equal partner bringing in a supplementary or new perspective on things. In addition, one can expect that artistic orientations sometimes lend a little more room to resist binary oppositions (either/or – and black-and-white thinking) and to persevere amidst paradoxes, contradictions and paralysing doubt.



The sustainability of everything

⁹ Source: <https://www.iisd.org/about-iisd/sustainable-development>

¹⁰ “*Becoming earthy; imagining new futures*” is the title of an art and ecology project of the Scottish organization The Barn in 2020. The title reflects, in the words of the organizers, “a need to develop a shift in perspective towards care for the thin skin of the earth that is the atmosphere and the topsoil on which all life depends”. For more, see: <https://www.thebarn-arts.co.uk/article/open-call-for-applications-for-arts-and-ecology-seminar-series>

¹¹ Regenerative design is a process-oriented whole systems approach to design. Here, the term “regenerative” describes processes that restore, renew or revitalize their own sources of energy and materials. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regenerative_design

Nowadays, the word “sustainability” is quite a catch-all term. Since the launch of the term sustainable development in *Our Common Future*, also known as the Brundtland Report in 1987 (“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”),⁹ critics have pointed out that the contraction is actually an oxymoron: two words are combined that can contradict each other in their literal meaning. After all, “development” often refers to continued economic growth and expansion while its sustainable limits seem to have already been crossed, whereas the word “sustainability” often prompts associations with recycling and circular design.

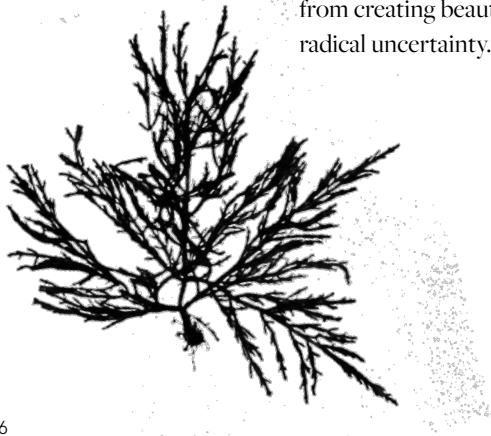
Currently the concept of “regeneration” is gaining traction. It pertains to restoration, remediation and/or renewal. A new generation of sustainability professionals is arguing for a shift in emphasis towards a regenerative approach, in which one moves *with* nature instead of relying mainly on “techno-fixes”. Here, the needs of the *ecosystem* provide both a frame of reference and an overarching context for developing and assessing one’s actions. A fitting term here is “becoming earthy”.¹⁰ Cases in point sprouting up are regenerative agriculture and regenerative design¹¹.

Anthropologist Tim Ingold was once asked to speak on the theme of sustainability in relation to subjects such as art and science; citizenship and democracy; and love and friendship. Pursuing such a holistic approach inspired Ingold to talk about “the sustainability of everything” – encompassing both products and processes. When making a transition to a sustainable society, can one conceive of items and ways of behaving that should *not* be made sustainable? In this way he wanted to start a discussion, not only about the use of the term, but in a broader sense, about the often-prevalent one-sided focus on thinking about sustainability

in terms of quantities and things, rather than processes.

The research strands and initiatives that our research group envisions emanate from such an expanded concept of sustainability. The three main pillars that people generally associate with sustainability are society, the environment, and the economy – in other words: social, environmental, and economic sustainability. This often translates into the convenient three-fold catchphrase of *people, planet, and profit*. Satish Kumar, Indian thinker and founder of the Schumacher College, a renowned international college for ecological studies in England, came up with the idea to look for a more appropriate and expressive triad, and suggested *soil, soul, and society* as a more fundamental sustainability philosophy.¹² Caring for the natural environment, maintaining personal well-being, and upholding human values, he says, are the three moral imperatives of our time. At the research group Art & Sustainability we follow up on this suggestion, bringing it to the core of the research programme that is to be developed. The broad, kaleidoscopically diverse palette of voices, personal narratives, and theoretical reflections presented here, can be seen as an attempt to provide more elaborate underpinnings for making this choice. The three elements will thereby not be confined to clearly demarcated niches, but intertwine with each other. The potential of art and artistic practices is looked at from several perspectives, from creating beauty in everyday life to engaging with paradox and radical uncertainty.

¹² Kumar, S. (2015). *Soil, soul, society: A new trinity for our time*. Brighton: The Ivy Press.



soil



SOIL

SOUL

SOCIETY

¹³ Linda Jolly, in M. Ellingsen (Host.) (2020, December 31) Hva er poenget med økologisk mat og landbruk? (No. 8) [Audio podcast episode]. *NMBU-podden*. <https://nmbupodden.libsyn.com/8-hva-er-poenget-med-ologisk-mat-og-landbruk>.

¹⁴ See e.g. Paustian, K. et al. (2019). Soil C sequestration as a biological negative emission strategy. *Frontiers in Climate* 1(8) 1-11. <https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fclim.2019.00008>

¹⁵ Crippa, M. et al. (2021). Food systems are responsible for a third of global anthropogenic GHG emissions. *Nature Food*, 2, 198–209.

¹⁶ Kumar, S. (2013, September 16). Satish Kumar: The link between soil, soul and society. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/satish-kumar-soil-soul-society>

Soil, the ground – consisting of the elements of water, earth, air and fire – is the source of all life, says Satish Kumar. Everything comes from the soil and returns to the soil. Therefore he puts it first: soil represents nature and sustains the entire life-system. And if one’s external body is the *soil*, he continues, then one’s inner body is one’s *soul*. The inner landscape of spirituality and the outer landscape of sustainability are intricately linked. A person who cultivates the soil to grow food to nourish his body, thus also cultivates his soul, and with it love, compassion, and beauty to achieve harmony both inside and outside. What is becoming more and more apparent is that, as biologist Linda Jolly puts it, “the real biodiversity is not in the tropical rainforest, but in the soil below our feet”.¹³ Lately, the soil is increasingly in the spotlight because of its still largely unacknowledged potential to store CO₂, for example through soil carbon sequestration. At the same time, the degree to which current agricultural systems impact the climate is becoming more and more apparent. Our food systems pump out one-third of global greenhouse emissions – 34% – every year, according to the latest research.¹⁵

In addition, *soil* can also be understood in a metaphorical sense, as a breeding ground for culture, creative power, and for what nourishes our spirit. For new ideas to resonate with others, they need “to fall on fertile ground”.

Kumar underlines that we need to embrace all of *society*. We need to solve social problems of poverty and wars with imagination, compassion, creativity and forgiveness. What is needed is a shift from self-interest to mutual-interest of the whole human society. As Kumar summarizes it: “If we can have a holistic view of soil, soul and society, if we can understand the interdependence of all living beings, and understand that all living creatures – from trees to worms to humans – depend on each other, then we can live in harmony with ourselves, with other people and with nature.”¹⁶

We have to get the soil right

This threefold connection, albeit phrased in a different choice of words, also surfaced in an online presentation by Sir Ken Robinson in the summer of 2020. Three months before he passed away, this leading advocate for more art in education drew a remarkable parallel between the importance of cultivating farmland respectfully and sustainably, and educating children. Robinson first sketched that the industrial revolution in agriculture has led to increased agricultural yields, but that this was also a catastrophic failure, because the new agricultural systems were simply not sustainable. After all, industrial farming was mainly focused on output – more, bigger, better. The focus was on the crop, the plant. The result, in Robinson’s account of this development, was that the soil was either degraded or eroded all around the planet. Everything that grows depends on the very thin layer of soil that covers only a part of the earth, and the condition of this “outer skin” has currently deteriorated considerably or been washed away.¹⁷

By contrast, in organic and sustainable farming, the emphasis is on diversity, according to Robinson. Different crops are grown in close proximity so that they create their own natural protectiveness. They create conditions in which insects – and the wildlife that depends on them – can flourish. The major difference, however, is that in sustainable versions of agriculture the emphasis is not on the plant itself, but on the soil. Sustainable farmers know: “We have to get the soil right!” And if that soil is healthy, through natural processes of cultivation, Robinson points out, then the crops on that soil will also thrive. For even though we have had great success in the short term with our industrial systems for agriculture, we have also paid a catastrophic price for this approach, which we are currently seeing

¹⁷ The view that Robinson presents here is contested. William Ruddiman, amongst others, points out that the so-called “industrial view” holds that most significant impacts have occurred since the early industrial era, i.e., after the midst of the nineteenth century. The alternative, “early-anthropogenic view” (of which Ruddiman is a proponent) asserts, however, that large impacts of human land-use happened already thousands of years earlier. Ruddiman, W.F. (2013). *The Anthropocene. Annual Review of Earth and Planetary Sciences*, 41, 45–68.

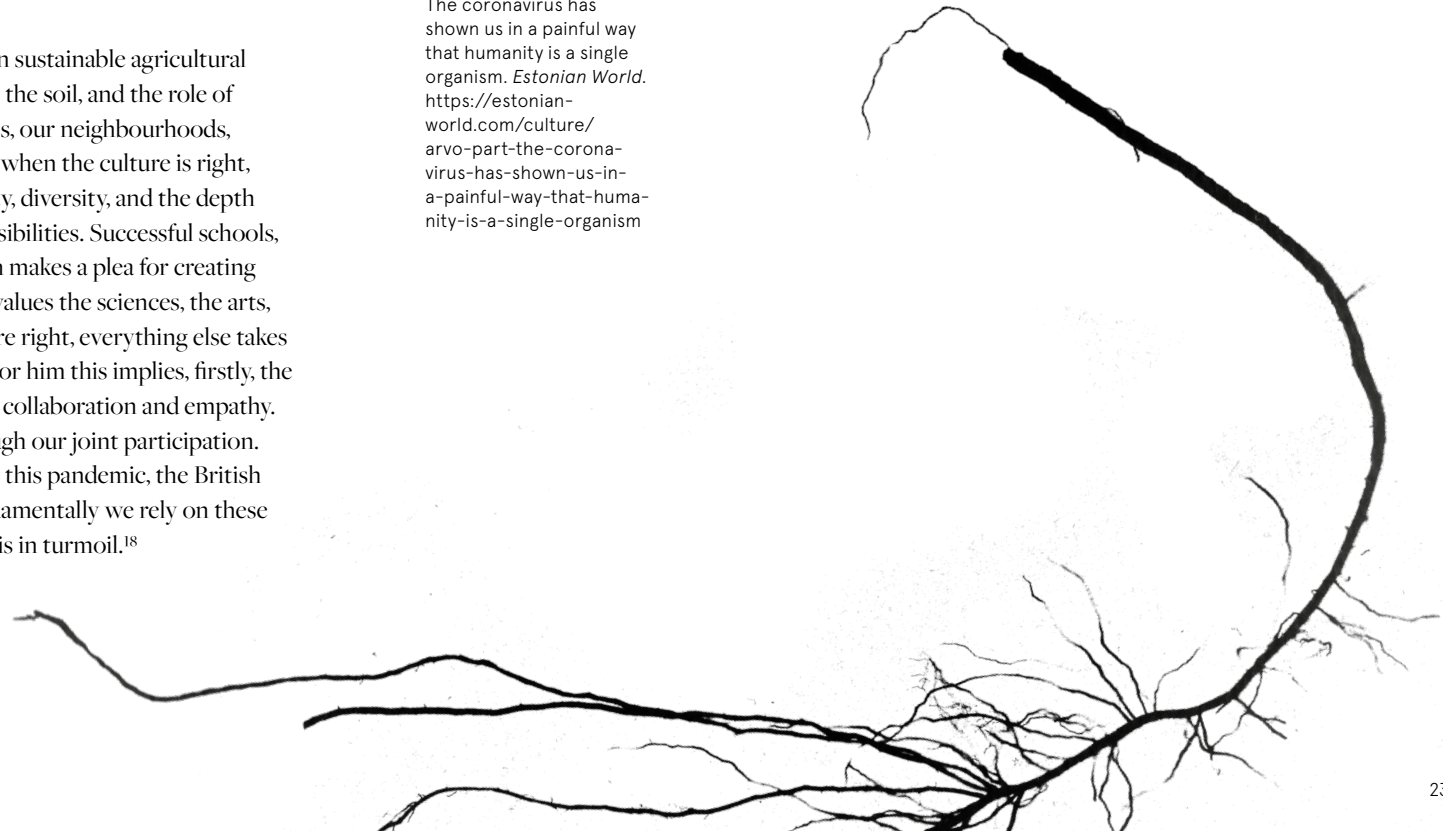
in the climate crisis. In Robinson's view, we will have to relate to the earth in a fundamentally different way, and in order to achieve that, we'll also have to start thinking in new ways. Because, as he sees it, we have essentially replicated the same mistakes in our social systems, especially in education. After all, our educational systems are mainly focused on output, on yield. Children are put through these systems with a one-sided focus on test data, on scores, on graduation rates, et cetera. For Robinson, this policy is ultimately as pointless as it is unsustainable, because just as in the agricultural systems he discussed, it is fundamentally based on industrial principles. Human beings, however, he goes on to say, only tend to thrive under certain specific circumstances, and wither under other circumstances – like the rest of life on earth.

Robinson draws a parallel between sustainable agricultural systems that are based on cultivating the soil, and the role of culture in our communities: our cities, our neighbourhoods, our schools. People flourish, he says, when the culture is right, when we recognize their individuality, diversity, and the depth of their talents – all their infinite possibilities. Successful schools, he insists, focus on culture. Robinson makes a plea for creating a mixed culture in schools: one that values the sciences, the arts, and technology. "If you get the culture right, everything else takes care of itself" he says, summing up. For him this implies, firstly, the presence of a culture of compassion, collaboration and empathy. Of social structures that thrive through our joint participation. If we have found out *anything* during this pandemic, the British pedagogue underlines, it is how fundamentally we rely on these sorts of processes, when everything is in turmoil.¹⁸

¹⁸ AnswerTheCall (2020, May 7). *My thoughts for the Call to Unite* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/QU4Q17t4muY>

¹⁹ Rodrigo, I.M. (2020, September 10). Arvo Pärt: The coronavirus has shown us in a painful way that humanity is a single organism. *Estonian World*. <https://estonian-world.com/culture/arvo-part-the-coronavirus-has-shown-us-in-a-painful-way-that-humanity-is-a-single-organism>

Estonian composer Arvo Pärt has made a similar observation about the Covid-19 pandemic. In his view it has created a situation, where all possible problems and shortcomings are revealed on every level: "The current crisis does not spare anyone; in the state of emergency everyone reveals their true 'worth', which can no longer be hidden. No-one knows how we will come out of this, but we all know that nothing will remain the same." Pärt believes that the coronavirus has showed us in a painful way that humanity is a single organism and human existence is possible only in relation to other living beings. He expects a particularly deep impact on artists: "Any adversity makes [them] move closer to what is important, essential."¹⁹



To stop and give beauty time

Now, where does art come in? What is the role of artists in meeting the challenges of our time? The first association that may come to mind is with what is commonly seen as the core preoccupation of aesthetics, namely a concern with the nature and appreciation of beauty. It is important to underline here that beauty is different from merely nice or picturesque. In decay, death, and even in ugliness there can be a specific type of beauty. Analogously, there is the field of negative aesthetics which focuses on qualities such as vulgarity, grotesqueness, repulsiveness, and disgust.²⁰

Satish Kumar is fond of quoting the Sri Lankan art historian Ananda Coomaraswamy, who said: “An artist is not a special kind of person, but every person is a special kind of artist.”²¹ He believes we will be ill-equipped to care for the soil, nourish the soul, and nurture society without the power of imagination manifested through the enchantment of art:

*Beauty is the food for soul. It is essential and not a luxury. Beauty is for everyone and not for the few. Being beautiful is more than being pretty. When something is in the right proportion, right balance and right relationship, then we experience a sense of harmony, a sense of comfort and joy, a sense of ease and well-being. That is the beauty experience; it is more than outer appearance, more than a visual pleasure. Beauty is a blissful source of fulfilment.*²²

Connecting with beauty, appealing to the senses, has come under great pressure as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. Ken Robinson pointed at the great suffering that has been afflicted on many people during the pandemic through their mandatory isolation. He referred to the terrible prices people have been paying in terms of their mental health. But then, he added, the way they dealt with it was

²³ AnswerTheCall (2020, May 7). *My thoughts for the Call to Unite*.

by turning to creative work, to painting, to music, to collaboration, to joining together through collective projects.²³

Seen in a wider perspective, maybe the way we approach people – especially the younger generation – about the ecological crisis and support them in facing it should be fundamentally different. Finnish art educator Sara Tobiasson relates the following experience on her blog:

Today one of the youngsters I get to borrow during the days sighed and said: “I’m so tired of saving the world. Can’t we do something else for a change?”

... In the classes for biology and geography there has been one environmental problem after another that we have tried to understand and come up with a solution for. Too many crises. And I see that the disasters that the Western civilization has built up are now thrown in the arms of the young generation. It rolls over them through every media, and it probably just makes them numb.

Tobiasson writes how she tries to find a way out of this negative spiral.

*After young J said he was tired of saving the world I realized we have to work the other way around. Through learning to stop and give beauty time one probably saves the world a little. We all influence each other in so many ways, and especially when one has the ability to share what’s amazing and untamed in this world he or she plants a seed than can become a garden.*²⁴

Art and this connection to beauty, is vital to the resilience of a culture. For this reason, American psychologist James Hillman argued that the ecological crisis is ultimately an *aesthetic* crisis. He did not believe that providing even more information would in itself encourage people to change their behaviour:

²⁰ Berleant, A. (2011). Negative aesthetics in everyday life. *Aesthetic Pathways*, 1(2), 75–91.

²¹ Coomaraswamy, quoted in Kumar, S. (2015). *Soil, soul, society*, p. 12.

²² Kumar, S. (2015). *Soil, soul, society*, p. 43.

²⁴ Sara Tobiasson, quoted in Van Boeckel, J. (2009). Arts-based environmental education and the ecological crisis: Between opening the senses and coping with psychic numbing. In B. Drillsma-Milgrom & L. Kirstinä (Eds.), *Metamorphoses in children’s literature and culture* (pp. 145–164). Turku, Finland: Enostone.

The motivation must come from below the superego, from the id of desire. We must first be moved by beauty. For then love is aroused. When you love something, then you want it near, not to be harmed. What evokes love? As has been said in many places and felt by any one of us. It's beauty... Beauty astounds and pulls the heart's focus toward the object, out of ourselves, out of this human-centred insanity toward wanting to keep the cosmos there for another spring and another morning. This is the ecological emotion, and it is aesthetic and political at once.²⁵

²⁵ Hillman, J. (1996).
Aesthetics and politics.
Tikkun, 11(6).



Healing gardens

An area where ecology and aesthetics clearly intertwine (both in the latter field's orientation to contemplating beauty and perceiving the world through the senses) is in the therapeutic use of gardens, sometimes referred to as "healing gardens".

Before elaborating on the potential of such gardens as an antidote to stress and sources of mental regeneration, here is first the story of Johan Ottosson who, together with Professor Patrick Grahn of the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), was one of the seminal scholars and practitioners who developed the concept and practice of *rehabiliteringsgårdar* (therapeutic gardens) in Sweden.

In January 1991, at the age of 39, Ottosson was cycling to work when he was hit by a car, and suffered severe head and brain injuries. He has no recollection of the accident or the period immediately thereafter. Even several years after the accident, he could no longer read nor write. Instead, he developed a personal system of symbols and was aided by computers, tape recorders and secretaries.

In parallel with the qualified care he received, he sought out nature and found his own path to rehabilitation in the beautiful nature around the hospital of Orup, once built as a sanatorium. He noticed how he, in his despair, could find comfort among rocks, mosses, trees, and water. Here, nothing bothered him and this was important for he had a need to be at peace, to be able to build up his strength at his own pace. He discovered that it was easier to meet the stable stones, safely stacked in long stone walls and testifying to diligent and laborious work, than the more complex spring greenery, for example.

In the early stages, Ottosson took walks around the hospital grounds where he was recovering. Short ones at first, staying close to the hospital, and longer and farther as he began to find his way. One of his problems after the accident was a state of confusion. There was always a risk that he might not find his way home.

The need to be out of doors was countered by a fear of getting lost. However, this fear did not stop him, and, although he could not explain it, making his daily walks seemed urgent and important. In those early days after the accident, many of his impressions from the natural surroundings were connected with stones. An untouched stone with its cover of lichen and moss in various shades of green and grey gave him a sense of security through its timelessness, its calm and harmony. He liked being alone with them. In his own words: “tears that fall on a warm stone slab evaporate, disappear, and, with them, part of the sorrow”. When spring came, it was an unwelcome change, reminding him of his own weakened condition. He felt stressed. The change of nature made demands on him, he experienced. The green colour caught his attention, but he himself was not ready to adopt a new spring in his life.

In an essay about his recovery process, on which this account is built, “The Importance of Nature in Coping with a Crisis”,²⁶ Ottosson relates that the first individual plants for which he developed a special feeling were big trees: “The similarity between a stone and a big, old tree was something he felt without knowing why; perhaps it was the timelessness.” Meticulously, Ottosson describes – written in the third person singular – how his world slowly expanded, walking on pathways and sitting at the seashore.

While out on his walks he did not feel inferior to anyone. Nature treats us all the same, and he was reminded of his injury less often than when in the company of people. Sometimes he even felt that the injury had given him deeper insight into the meanings of life and a stronger sense of communion with Nature. Many of the difficulties he experienced and still experiences after the accident are due to the demands of our technologized and achievement-oriented culture. Out in Nature – to which people have been attuned since time immemorial – we experience more basic sensations and we perceive more basic signals that penetrate more directly our psyche.²⁷

²⁶ Ottosson, K. (2001). The importance of nature in coping with a crisis: A photographic essay, *Landscape Research*, 26(2), 165-172.

²⁷ Ottosson, J. (2001). The importance of nature in coping with a crisis, p. 171.

²⁸ Ottosson, J. (2007). *The importance of nature in coping: Creating increased understanding of the importance of pure experiences of nature to human health*. [Doctoral dissertation]. November 2007. Alnarp, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, p. 10.

²⁹ Stigsdotter, U.A., & Grahm, P. (2002). What makes a garden a healing garden? *Journal of Therapeutic Horticulture*, 13, 60-69.

³⁰ It should be mentioned here that there is a great diversity in how people experience space; some may actually feel uncomfortable with borders. The Pueblo communities in the United States, for instance, appreciate open corners, as these “let the winds and spirits go through” (thanks to Judith van der Elst for pointing this out).

Looking at his own experience, Ottosson writes that in situations of crisis people need “stable” environments in order to feel well, and it may help to revert to simpler relationships. For him, the most complex relationships were to other people, and the simplest were those between him and inanimate objects, such as stones. Plants and animals fell somewhere in between.

Despite the fact that Johan Ottosson lost his ability to read and write, he was able to return to his workplace at SLU with a number of aids. There he came in contact with Patrik Grahm who encouraged him to start doing research. Grahm lent him a number of scientific works and Ottosson delved into them immediately. Among other things, he found that his experiences were exactly in line with researcher Harold Searles’s relationship theory, which states that humans do not cope with complex social relationships when they have been hit by a crisis. It is easier, for example, to spend time with animals that do not make such high demands. It is even easier to spend time with plants and the least complicated thing is, as Ottosson himself experienced, to relate to stones. He recognised his own experience and began his research work, with Grahm as his supervisor. Six years later, in 2007, with the assistance of others (e.g. physically typing out for him what he wanted to commit to paper), Ottosson defended a highly personal doctoral thesis on the theme, entitled “The Importance of Nature in Coping”²⁸

Together with Professor of Landscape Architecture Ulrika Stigsdotter, Grahm tried to identify what makes a garden a healing garden.²⁹ The first important feature they identify is that it should be possible to experience the garden as a whole, marked off from the surroundings. It is significant how the border is shaped, since this edge may be regarded as the “outer wall” of the garden. A hedge, a wall, or a fence helps to delimit the garden from the surroundings and may, if it is well designed, give the visitor a feeling of being outside of public life and of being safe.³⁰ Stigsdotter and Grahm categorized theories on the healing effects of gardens, stemming

from different research disciplines, and came up with three different schools: (i) *The Healing Garden School*: here, the health effects are derived, above all, from the experiences of the garden space as such: its design and contents; (ii) *The Horticultural Therapy School*: in this orientation the health effects are derived primarily from the activities in the garden space; and (iii) *The Instorative School*: which holds that the health effects are due to the fact that the garden (its shapes, colours, odours, etc.), plus the activities that can be carried out there, give the visitor a feeling of belonging and identity and may help to restore self-esteem. Perhaps neurologist and writer Oliver Sacks summed it up best: “I cannot say exactly how nature exerts its calming and organizing effects on our brains, but I have seen in my patients the restorative and healing powers of nature and gardens, even for those who are deeply disabled neurologically. In many cases, gardens and nature are more powerful than any medication.”³¹

Over the years the rehabilitation gardens at the SLU’s Alnarp campus in in Southern Sweden have developed further. Nature-supported rehabilitation is currently offered for employees on long-term sick leave and for people with mild to moderate mental illness.

In 2015 a pilot project started, focusing on nature-based explorations for newly arrived refugees and the first findings were so promising that the project was prolonged. Studies showed that being part of the project had a clear impact on the health, language skills and personal development of participating refugees. Work in the garden paired with health-promoting activities made the participants feel significantly better. “Almost all of them say that they feel calmer and happier and that they find it easier to take the next step in the process of getting settled in Swedish society”, says Anna Geite, operations manager of Alnarp’s Rehabilitation Garden. And she continues: “We see how the participants gradually manage to take part in the activities offered, thereby following the shift of the seasons. It can be anything from sowing and planting to increasing their physical exercise and thus their well-being and health.

³² Neldestam, A. (2016, May 18). Lyckat pilotprojekt för nyanlända i Alnarps rehabträdgård fortsätter. SLU. <https://resurs.slu.se/lyckat-pilotprojekt-for-nyanlanda-i-alarps-rehabtradgard-fortsatter/>

³³ McDonald, R. et al. (2016). *Planting healthy air: A global analysis of the role of urban trees in addressing particulate matter pollution and extreme heat*. Arlington, VA: The Nature Conservancy, p. 24.

The goal is to activate and open up for your own creative ideas about which employment can be suitable for each individual.”³²

Returning to the aesthetic element of creating a healing garden, it is here that beauty and sensory experience interplay and mutually reinforce each other. The way we as humans can benefit from the presence of gardens naturally also stretches beyond their therapeutic value. A garden, in a very basic sense, is a piece of “nature” that is designed by humans. It can harbour a manifold of elements and functions. It is a source to harvest vegetables, herbs, medicine, natural pigments, fibres, honey, et cetera. But there is much more. A garden can be an excellent location for carrying out educational activities. Or it can simply be a place to come together with others, or to relax and find peace and quietness.

Gardens store carbon; they enhance biodiversity, for instance by providing a refuge to insects. Especially in cities, community gardens can be a place to put organic household waste to use, through its composting to humus. Gardens provide cooling on hot days and can absorb water, especially during heavy precipitation events. It is now widely acknowledged that trees in metropolitan environments purify the air from dust-particles;³³ moreover, various types of plants can be used in bioremediation processes to remove, transfer, stabilize, or destroy contaminants in the soil and groundwater.

A city garden can be place of connection – to be with friends and with others in the neighbourhood. From an aesthetic (and, therefore, also an art and design) perspective, there are of course the ornamental aspects, the colours and shapes, but also the odours, the sounds, the tastes of a garden – how it talks to all of our senses.

Linda Jolly of the Norwegian University of Life Sciences has been an expert in organic gardening for several decades. She was one of the initiators of the Living School project in Norway, which aimed at using gardens and farms as a pedagogical resource. In her view, one of the qualities that a garden provides is that being there can put one’s attention to the processes of life in a very direct way.

³¹ Sacks, O. (2019, April, 18). Oliver Sacks: The healing power of gardens. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/18/opinion/sunday/oliver-sacks-gardens.html>

Jolly's mentor was pioneering organic gardener Alan Chadwick, who had a profound influence on the organic farming movement. In 1967, he founded the Chadwick Garden at UC Santa Cruz, the first organic and bio-intensive garden at an American university. Chadwick held, as Jolly relates in a recent interview, that the beauty of a vegetable garden is actually its most central aspect: "It is through the beauty of what you are doing, that the respect, and the consciousness of nature around you, is developed."³⁴

A garden is not only a physical entity. There is an intensive connection between the garden and the gardener. In a sense, one could regard the gardener as the mental centre of the garden; through the garden work he or she becomes *aligned* with it. As Jolly puts it, a gardener *listens* to what a place asks for. She learned from Chadwick that when composing a garden, one needs to be able, in the mind's eye, to see it grow through the next hundred years. (The title of a biography of Alan Chadwick points to this – that there is, indeed, "a garden in the mind".³⁵) One has to see how its composition changes from year to year, from season to season. Chadwick worked with beds of perennials, and he felt that it should look like it was in full bloom at least *ten* months in a year; Jolly recalls: "At one point it could be that everything was just blue, or everything just white, but you planted it such, that it always would look like it was in full bloom."

Philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological study of perceptual experience discloses the deeply participatory relation of humans to things and to the earth. He quotes Paul Cézanne, who, when he was painting, felt that "the landscape thinks itself in me ... and I am its consciousness."³⁶

There are also the interactions, exchanges and reciprocal relationships between a garden and its wider environs, the surrounding landscape. In his book *Landscapes of the Mind: Worlds of Sense and Metaphor*;³⁷ J. Douglas Porteous delves into the myriad of sensory and existential perceptions through which we encounter the worlds

around and within us. He coins the concept of *otherscapes*, which can have the form of a Smellscape, Soundscape, and even Bodyscape.

A special source of inspiration when contemplating the potentialities of giving shape to our green environment can be the work of Piet Oudolf, a celebrated and internationally renowned Dutch landscape and garden designer. All his work, he says, is related to trying to recreate the spontaneous feeling of encountering plants in nature. Oudolf is able to compose a garden where the plants work well together year-round – in his own words – throughout the phases of birth, life and death. His gardens – often combinations of long-lived perennials and woody plants that are rich in texture and refined in their choice of colour – stir a deep emotional resonance. His work has even inspired the "ecology meets design" New Wave Perennial Planting Movement.

Piet Oudolf takes inspiration from nature but employs artistic skill in creating planting schemes. He does this on the basis of a considerable understanding of plant ecology. His aesthetic doctrine is that a plant's structure and form are more important than its colour. He is interested in the life cycle, how plant material ages through time. In an interview he explains: "You see a lot with dead plants. The shapes and forms, the seed heads in contrast with the grasses. When it freezes it looks even better. If you have beautiful plants, it doesn't mean your garden is beautiful. "Something is complete when everything works together."³⁸

In his design, Oudolf looks at factors such as a plant's structure, colour, texture, and the way it performs in the landscape. For him, this goes beyond functional or use value.

³⁷ Porteous, J.D. (1990). *Landscapes of the mind: Worlds of sense and metaphor*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

³⁸ Piet Oudolf, quoted in McGrane, S. (2008, January 31). A landscape in winter, dying heroically. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/31/garden/31piet.html>

³⁴ KVANN - Norwegian Seed Savers (2021, March 20). Video portrait of Linda Jolly, student of Alan Chadwick. [Video]. <https://youtu.be/fTkaxAufnkE>

³⁵ Lee, P.A. (2013). *There is a garden in the mind: A memoir of Alan Chadwick and the Organic Movement in California*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

³⁶ Merleau-Ponty, M. (1993a). Cézanne's doubt. In G.A. Johnson (Ed.), *The Merleau-Ponty aesthetics reader* (pp. 59–75). (M. Smith, Trans.). Evanston: Northwestern University Press. (Original work published 1945).



“A gardener listens to what a place asks for.”

Photo: Jan van Boeckel

As Oudolf writes in the book *Planting: A New Perspective*, co-authored with British garden designer Noel Kingsbury:

*Planting has to please people, for people are part of the ecology too. In order for natural environments to be valued by humans they have to be liked – simply functional plantings which satisfy technical criteria for sustainability or biodiversity but do not satisfy human users are in the long run doomed, because nobody will care for them enough to campaign for them when they are threatened by other potential users on this over-crowded planet or simply through lack of care.*³⁹

³⁹ Kingsbury, N., & Oudolf, P. (2013). *Planting: A new perspective*. Portland, OR: Timber Press, p. 41.

Allowing a garden to decompose, in Oudolf’s view, meets an emotional need in people: “You accept death. You don’t take the plants out, because they still look good. And brown is also a colour.”⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Piet Oudolf, quoted in McGrane, S. (2008).

A terrain that has hardly been explored is where the design of therapeutic gardens, such as the one in Alnarp, could tune in more mindfully with aesthetic sensibilities such as those of Piet Oudolf and other people with artistic orientations, and this could be one of the new research fields of *Earthbound*.

⁴¹ VoyageHouston (2019, September 26). Meet Timothy Hammond of Big City Gardener in Inner Loop. <http://voyagehouston.com/interview/meet-timothy-hammond-big-city-gardener-inner-loop>

Relatability

A garden can be a delight to the senses. Naturally it can also, and even in the first place, be developed to grow food. Through cultivating one’s own food, both one’s self-esteem and sense of relative economic independence rises. Timothy Hammond started Big City Gardener in the city of Houston, with the aim of showing people how to grow their food and letting them experience that it is possible to have a backyard garden. He works with at-risk youth, teaching them entrepreneurial and gardening skills. As a marketing manager he helps to bring fresh produce to an area that does not have direct access to it. Asked what he would hold as essential to success, he immediately answers with the word “relatability”, adding: “When I educate people, my goal is always to show them that gardening is something they can do. It is something that has been done since the beginning of time by every civilization.”⁴¹





“Allowing a garden to decompose.”

Photo: Jan van Boeckel

soul



SOIL

SOUL

SOCIETY

Scientific reports tell us that more than three quarters of flying insects in Europe have vanished. The permafrost is thawing. Several coral reefs are dying. And yet, in most places, Norwegian writer, journalist philosopher, and painter Anders Dunker notices, things appear normal. To many people, it still seems entirely possible to convince oneself that the world will just carry on.⁴² For those who do not recoil from looking our predicament straight in the face, and who are conscious of the trials that the ecological crisis poses to society, the question is how to find a perspective in the midst of challenges that – both individually and combined with each other – seem too great to meet. Protest movements such as Extinction Rebellion are an expression of this existential fear and feeling of despair. The experience of such a “dark night of the soul” can be very real, for what can younger generations still base their hopes on? One could call this existential vacuum, with a Jungian term, the “shadow” of our present existence. Bruno Latour says bluntly: “Each of us thus faces the following question: Do we continue to nourish dreams of escaping, or do we start seeking a territory that we and our children can inhabit? Either we deny the existence of the problem, or else *we look for a place to land.*”⁴³



⁴² Dunker, A. (2020). *Rediscovering Earth: Ten dialogues on the future of nature*. New York: OR Books, p. 1.

⁴³ Latour, B. (2018). *Down to earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, p. 5.

Taking responsibility for the world

A sign of the times is that in the midst of a gripping feeling of despondency, movements like *BirthStrike* are springing up: women and men who have decided not to have children in response to the coming “climate breakdown and civilisation collapse”. According to Blythe Pepino, co-founder of *BirthStrike*, the initiative is a “radical acknowledgment” of how the looming existential threat is already “altering the way we imagine our future”.⁴⁴ An additional reason for couples refusing to procreate is that, given the current state of the world, they resolve not to increase their own ecological footprint through creating a new life. Making such a profound existential decision, acting upon a deeply and personally felt responsibility, stands in an arresting contrast to Hannah Arendt’s remarkable proposition, which she presented in her text “The Crisis in Education” of 1954. Of course written for another time and addressing different challenges, Arendt suggested that “anyone who refuses to assume joint responsibility for the world should not have children and must not be allowed to take part in educating them”.⁴⁵

An additional aspect to take into account is that anyone who is concerned about the ecological crisis and wants to make an effort to grapple with it must also be able to face up to the ongoing destruction of nature and the environment. Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche already said: “...when you stare for a long time into an abyss, the abyss stares back into you.”⁴⁶ And American ecologist Aldo Leopold expressed it this way:

⁴⁴ Blythe Pepino, cited in Hunt, E. (2019, March 12). *BirthStrikers: meet the women who refuse to have children until climate change ends*. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/mar/12/birthstrikers-meet-the-women-who-refuse-to-have-children-until-climate-change-ends>

⁴⁵ Hannah Arendt, cited in Straume, I.S. (2020). *What may we hope for? Education in times of climate change*. *Wiley Constellations*, 27, 540–552.

⁴⁶ Nietzsche, F. (2003). *Beyond good and evil: Prelude to a philosophy of the future*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, p. 69.

One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds. Much of the damage inflicted on land is quite invisible to laymen. An ecologist must either harden his shell and make believe that the consequences of science are none of his business, or he must be the doctor who sees the marks of death in a community that believes itself well and does not want to be told otherwise.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Leopold, A. (1966). The Round River: A parable. In Luna B. Leopold (ed.), *Round River: From the journals of Aldo Leopold*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 165.

⁴⁸ E.J. Milner-Gulland, cited in Hance, J. (2009, June 24). Proving the 'shifting baselines' theory: How humans consistently misperceive nature. <https://news.mongabay.com/2009/06/proving-the-shifting-baselines-theory-how-humans-consistently-misperceive-nature/>

⁴⁹ TEDxHamburg. (2017, August 1). *How silence can lead us to a sustainable world, with Laura Storm* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/r1oLAsy5mJ4>

However, this sense of living in a world of wounds is itself a fluid condition. The so-called “shifting baseline syndrome” describes the situation in which over time knowledge is lost about the state of the natural world, because people don’t perceive changes that are actually taking place. In this way, people’s perceptions of change are out of kilter with the actual changes taking place in the environment, according to E.J. Milner-Gulland, Professor of Biodiversity at the University of Oxford. And she adds: “Generational amnesia is when knowledge is not passed down from generation to generation. For example, people may think of as ‘pristine’ wilderness the wild places that they experienced during their childhood, but with every generation this baseline becomes more and more degraded.”⁴⁸

The toughening of one’s armour can eventually lead to bitterness, apathy or even a burn-out or worse when the body finally pulls the emergency brake. That is why it is very important that, in working towards a sustainable society, sufficient attention is also paid to the dimension of inner sustainability. In the words of Laura Storm, founder of the organisation Sustainia, it is ultimately about the following: “living your life sustainably from the inside-out”.⁴⁹

Putting your own oxygen mask on first

But there is more to that. For only if we take good care of ourselves, are we also able to help others and bring about change. Buddhist therapist Joan Halifax, who specialises, among other things, in the training of people working in palliative care, has a poignant image of such attentiveness to oneself, which she derives from air travel. She says that to be attentively and caringly towards others, tuning into them and into how they see the world, is not how psychologists, doctors, nurses just as mothers are typically trained: “We don’t really put our own oxygen mask on first, if you will, we’re immediately going to the other.” Instead, she recommends a practice of first assessing carefully the ground from where one is perceiving, feeling, and sensing *oneself*, and only then to drop into the experience of others, trying to find resonance. For Halifax this means to really slow down the whole process of care.⁵⁰

As the current conditions of our economic system have become untenable or undesirable, a fundamental alteration of the nature of the system is needed, which is often referred to as a transformation to sustainability. But such a transformation requires, according to Professor of Socio-Spatial Planning at the University of Groningen Ina Horlings, a shift in people’s values, and this she identifies as the domain of “the inner dimension of sustainability”, or – in the same words as those of Storm above – “a change from the inside-out”. Here, Horlings wants to point to values both on a personal and on a collective, cultural level. Personal values refer to people’s motivational values and to the ways they make sense of their environment symbolically. Whereas cultural values, as Horlings explains, express themselves on an overarching level of worldviews and value-systems; they have a mediating role in practices and styles of behaviour (e.g. in cultural food patterns). The individual and collective are interdependent dimensions of inner transformation processes, and cannot be

⁵⁰ BOS webredactie. (2014, June 27). *Joan Halifax on compassion, BOS BoeddhaDag* Amsterdam [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/hA-QzG7nZas>

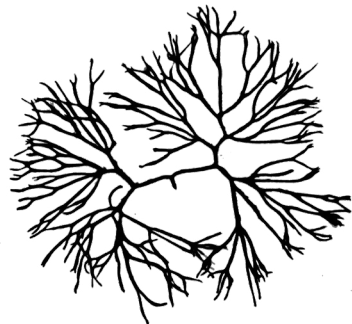
⁵¹ Horlings, L. (2015). The inner dimension of sustainability: personal and cultural values. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 14 (163–169), p. 165.

⁵² Woiwode, C. et al. (2021). Inner transformation to sustainability as a deep leverage point: fostering new avenues for change through dialogue and reflection. *Sustainability Science*, 1.

seen in isolation according to Horlings.⁵¹

Scholars commonly portray inner transformation as being concerned with the development, growth, and evolution of our “inner being” and “inner presence”, which in itself is part of our physical and embodied existence. Concepts related to inner transformation are, for example: mindsets, consciousness, self, and awareness. Terms such as “personal sustainability” and “personal spheres of transformation” are used (e.g. by Horlings) to describe inner transformation in relation to sustainable development.

Through awareness practice, a recent study⁵² suggests, humans are able to unravel and enhance this understanding of the innermost source of their self.



Not the end of the world full stop

Even while we attempt to work for change from the inside-out, and we do indeed follow the recommendation of putting our own oxygen mask on first, it may still be wise for us to have at least *part* of our mental make-up prepared for the probability that the desired transition to a coherent sustainable society will not be made – or at least not in time. A movement of writers and artists that takes this point of view into account is *The Dark Mountain Project*, which was founded in 2009. In their “Manifesto” they explain:

*We live in a time of social, economic and ecological unravelling. All around us are signs that our whole way of living is already passing into history. We will face this reality honestly and learn how to live with it. We reject the faith which holds that the converging crises of our times can be reduced to a set of “problems” in need of technological or political “solutions”. We believe that the roots of these crises lie in the stories we have been telling ourselves. We intend to challenge the stories which underpin our civilisation: the myth of progress, the myth of human centrality, and the myth of our separation from “nature”. These myths are more dangerous for the fact that we have forgotten they are myths.... The end of the world as we know it is not the end of the world full stop. Together, we will find the hope beyond hope, the paths which lead to the unknown world ahead of us.*⁵³

⁵³ Kingsnorth, P., & Hine, D. (2009). *Uncivilization: The Dark Mountain Manifesto*. The Dark Mountain Project (slightly edited). Source: <https://dark-mountain.net/about/manifesto>

⁵⁴ See: <https://deepadaptation.info>

People in the more recently arisen *Deep Adaptation* community⁵⁴ also maintain, on the basis of extrapolation to the future of developments already triggered by climate change, that social collapse or breakdown may have become inevitable during our lifetime.

The concept of Deep Adaptation was coined by British Professor of sustainability leadership Jem Bendell. The term social or societal collapse refers to an uneven ending to our current means of sustenance, shelter, security, pleasure, identity and meaning. Others may prefer the term “societal breakdown” when referring to the same process. The term Deep Adaptation is then used to explore how to respond to that:

*We don't know exactly what will happen, but we understand that, at the very least, disruption of the biosphere and climate is forcing us to change how we live, and may lead to global societal collapse. Deep Adaptation is a way of framing our current global situation that can help people to refocus on what's important in life while our social order collapses under the weight of its own consumption, pollution, and inequality. We are finding new ways of being with ourselves and being together, no matter what happens.*⁵⁵

It is expected, among other things, that people will compete with each other due to scarcity of food resources and due to the pressure of the displacement of people from areas where global warming has made a detrimental impact. It must be noted though that there is also critique levelled by other scientists. Thomas Nicholas, together with others, argues that the claim, that runaway climate change has made societal collapse inevitable, is not only wrong, but that it undermines the cause of the climate movement. They argue that Bendell’s “doomism” relies heavily on misinterpreted climate science that undermines the credibility of his claims.⁵⁶ That may or may not be the case. Still, there are also others, such as Associate Professor of Philosophy Rupert Read, who state that although the inevitability of societal collapse can be debated, its likelihood means that the concept of Deep Adaptation is important to engage with.⁵⁷

Extending the glide

One of the suggested responses to the risks of climate-induced societal breakdown is something that Bendell calls “extending the glide”. A few years ago, he gave a lecture on the subject of Deep Adaptation in Australia and afterwards a woman came up to him. Trained as a pilot in the Outback, she mentioned to him that as part of her training she was required to perform a rather eerie exercise called “extending the glide”. The point of it was that if one’s aircraft engines suddenly fail, one should try to prolong one’s glide for as long as possible to have more time to find a safe place for an emergency landing. But one should also do this for the reason that there is always a chance that the engines could suddenly start up again. And then the woman added: “That’s what you’re inviting us to start working on: how do we extend the glide?”⁵⁸

There are two aspects to this aviation metaphor. One: if the path to social collapse seems inevitable, how can we stretch the movement towards it in time to make a softer landing, and how can we best prepare for that process? Two: there is always a chance – even if it is so small or unlikely – that an upward movement can be made in the “glide” at some point. “Hope beyond hope.”

Such orientations can be dismissed as overly pessimistic dystopias, as dark visions of prophets of doom. In the meantime, however, more and more scientific studies support the finding that the climate emergency, and the ecological crisis in general, is both deepening and widening. The daily headlines in the media report that desertification, the extinction of species, the forest fires in California and elsewhere, are once again worse than we thought. It evokes a feeling of powerlessness in many people, overwhelmed by all the bad news. (One example out of many is that the bushfires which raged across Australia from June 2019 to February 2020 created a crisis that, according to the world’s leading conservation organisation,

⁵⁵ Source: <https://www.deepadaptation.info/about>

⁵⁶ Nicholas, T. Hall, G., & Schmidt, C. (2020, July 14). The faulty science, doomism, and flawed conclusions of Deep Adaptation. <https://www.open-democracy.net/en/oureconomy/faulty-science-doomism-and-flawed-conclusions-deep-adaptation/>

⁵⁷ Read, R. (2019, February 8). Climate change and deep adaptation. *The Ecologist*. <https://theecologist.org/2019/feb/08/climate-change-and-deep-adaptation>

⁵⁸ Hine, D. (2018, March 29). *Extending the glide: An interview with Jem Bendell*. Dark Mountain. <https://dark-mountain.net/extending-the-glide>



Kitka River, 2004 (triptych), part of *Museum of Nature* series. Artwork by Ilkka Halso

WWE, was one of the worst wildlife disasters in modern history. The fires killed or displaced nearly 3 billion animals. In total, 143 million mammals, 2. billion reptiles, 180 million birds, and 51 million frogs were harmed.⁵⁹⁾

⁵⁹ Vernick, D. (2020, July 28). *3 billion animals harmed by Australia's fires*. WWF. <https://www.worldwildlife.org/stories/3-billion-animals-harmed-by-australia-s-fires>



Fearing fear itself

⁶⁰ Both ecopsychology and ecotherapy – bringing together the principles of ecology and psychology – aim to expand psychology in such a way so that it also includes practices that happen outside of the four walls of the therapy office. The term ‘ecopsychology’ was first used by a cultural historian Theodore Roszak in 1992. It partly builds on what is known as the *Biophilia hypothesis*, coined by Edward O. Wilson in 1984. Wilson theorised that humans have an inbuilt emotional connection to nature. Ecopsychology seeks to help people to become aware of this intrinsic link and to restore this bond where it has been broken. This has become an increasingly prominent concern in industrial societies where ecopsychology is seeking to redress the destructive relationship that often exists between people and the earth. Ecotherapy is defined as “psychotherapeutic activities (counselling, psychotherapy, social work, self-help, prevention, public health activities) undertaken with an ecological consciousness or intent.” D.J. Doherty, (2016). In M. Jordan & J. Hinds (Eds.) *Ecotherapy: Theory, research & practice*. London: Palgrave, p. 14.

There is ground to assume that our existential fears cannot be so readily suppressed – they can manifest themselves, for example, in the form of a nightmare. Ecopsychologists and ecotherapists⁶⁰ point out that part of the mental and physical disorders that occur in this day and age can be traced back to the stress and disharmony that “settle themselves”, as it were, in one’s own body. And even if Dark Mountain and Deep Adaptation may see the future in too gloomy a light, the phenomenon of the rise of both communities is in itself an expression of a growing sense of unease and insecurity. Both can be seen as social, cultural, and, in the case of Dark Mountain, also pervasively artistic responses to the climate emergency.

Having and sharing with others one’s (even if still mostly elusive) feelings of despair about the future may constitute a factor with its own real and concrete impact in and on the rest of society, when people start acting, perhaps impulsively, on the basis of those fears. Such a causal connection, of worrying about how the mental might impact the social was famously expressed by Winston Churchill during the Second World War with his statement: “We have nothing to fear but fear itself.”

On the Deep Adaptation Forum it is stated that there are broadly two paths forward. One focuses on outer adaptation: working on practical measures to support wellbeing, ahead of and during collapse (e.g. regenerative living, community-building, policy activism). The other, inner adaptation, recalling Horlings’s concept of the inner domain of sustainability, focuses on exploring the emotional, psychological, and spiritual implications of living in a time when societal disruption is likely, inevitable, or already happening.

Apathy as a miracle of protection

American psychotherapist Renee Lertzman has a surprising perspective on the reaction of many people to the overwhelming news of imminent ecological disaster. They retreat and pull a blanket, as it were, over their sensory organs and emotional world in order to shield themselves from the outside world in that way. Such a reaction has – paradoxically enough – survival value. She quotes the psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Harry Stack Sullivan, who stated in 1970: “Apathy seems to me to be a miracle of protection by which personality in utter fiasco rests until it can do something else.”⁶¹ Lertzman is convinced that most people *do* care about the ecological crisis. Every human being has the ability to “work through” their, what she calls, “environmental melancholia”.⁶² They can do that, she says, by reconnecting with their creative commitment to the world. However, people do not, as a matter of course, translate what they find important into action. People often react irrationally to fear; their perception of reality can become distorted. Lertzman therefore considers the ability to tolerate discomfort and insecurity to be extremely important. Being able to be curious, without constantly listening to one’s “inner critic”, is useful: the trick is to acknowledge how disturbing our current reality is, but at the same time to want to investigate that reality too.

Again, this is an area where art can contribute something vital to the conversation. For the Mexican performance artist, writer and activist Guillermo Gómez-Peña this is an important task for artists: “to keep the wound open; make it hurt a bit, not to heal it.”⁶³

The dimension of soul in this context, as stated before, refers to the inner dimension of sustainability. It is important that our feelings of compassion also stretch out to our own selves, that we remain aware of those areas where we can find physical and spiritual nourishment: healthy eating, sufficient exercise, but also to be in contact with and to develop one’s own spiritual resources.

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⁶¹ Lertzman, R. (2015). *Environmental melancholia: Psychoanalytic dimensions of engagement*. London & New York: Routledge, p. 32.

⁶² Lertzman, R. (2015). *Environmental melancholia*.

⁶³ Gómez-Peña, G. (2017). Artists’ book: Instructions. In G. Gómez-Peña, F. Rice & J. González (Eds.) *Doc/Undoc: Documentado/Undocumented: Ars Shamánica Performática*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, p. 28.

Beautiful acts

Following Immanuel Kant, the Norwegian ecophilosopher Arne Naess makes a distinction between a moral act and a beautiful act. When people fulfil a moral obligation, they often feel compelled to go against what they normally would want to do, that is, against their own inclinations. According to Kant in 1759, an act deserves the name moral act if it is solely motivated by respect for the moral law: you do it simply because it is your duty; there is no other motive.⁶⁴ But then, Naess explains, people are often inclined to care for other people and animals for reasons *other* than adhering to moral law. They do it through inclination. They feel like it. When people thus in practice do what the moral law requires of them but do it through inclination, Kant held, they “act beautifully”. Whereas if you act for example to protect nature because of the moral law, you don’t act beautifully, but morally. The beautiful act, in Kant’s view, is a morally complete act because it is benevolent. Benevolent action expands our love to embrace the whole of life. Naess finds it promising for the protection of the planet, that more and more people are led into situations where they do things out of inclination. To him, this is important; he feels that the human force of inclination is tremendously bigger than the force or motivation to act morally.

⁶⁴ Kant, I. (1999). The fundamental principles of the metaphysics of morals. In J. Arthur (Ed.), *Morality and moral controversies* (pp. 24–33). 5th ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

⁶⁵ Bill Devall on Arne Naess, in Van Boeckel, J. (Director). (1997). *The call of the mountain: Arne Naess and the deep ecology movement*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wf3cXTA-qS2M>

⁶⁶ Arne Naess, cited in Van Boeckel, J. (2019). *An optimist for the twenty-second century: Meeting Arne Naess high up in the mountains*. <https://openairphilosophy.org/an-optimist-for-the-twenty-secondcentury-meeting-arne-naess-high-up-in-the-mountains>

One way to nourish inclination for Naess is through our interaction with children. As he says with his characteristic “serious lightness”:⁶⁵

“What are you seeing there? There is nothing to be seen.” And then you could say: “Look at this!” And you show your inclination to see the beauty and the marvel of life. You don’t trample on it. Then children easily get to be inclined to behave properly. Another example. If you have a lot of insects on the window, parents might decide to kill them with some poison. But they also have the opportunity to try to catch these insects, not hurting them but taking them all the way out! The small children could try to help the insects out. I would say to them: “They like to go out, you see! Just as you would like to get out, they would.” And they identify with these insects. That takes no time for children. If the parents behave properly, it’s not difficult to get children inclined.”⁶⁶

In Naess’s view, there is too little understanding in society that fostering inclination is essential in every aspect of socialisation and acculturation and therefore also in fighting the global ecological crisis. Moralising, for him, is too narrow, too patronising. It is his conviction that the invitation to act beautifully, to show beautiful acts rather than to talk about them, to organise society with all this in mind, can be a decisive factor that may decrease the unsustainability of our present way of living.

According to Naess, through spiritual or psychological development, we can learn to identify not only with other people, but also with animals and plants, and even with ecosystems. We can learn to see ourselves in those other creatures. Through recognising something of ourselves in our natural environment it, in a fundamental sense, becomes more part of us. Then we are more inclined to want to protect it deep from within ourselves as well. We don’t experience it as toil, as something we reluctantly do because that’s

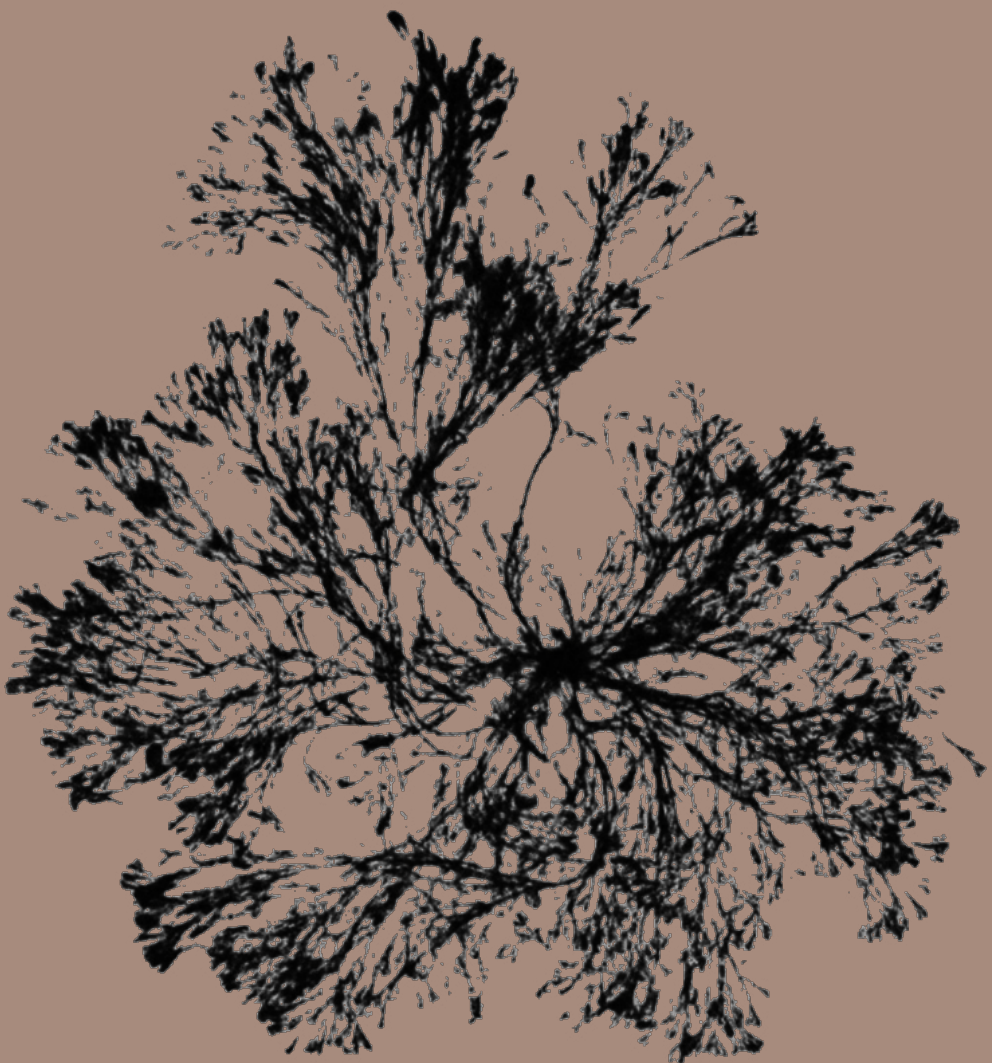
the way it should be. In fact, it is much more difficult, according to the Norwegian ecophilosopher, to bring about change by lifting our finger and telling others what they *ought* to do.

Analogously, it perhaps makes sense to approach the climate crisis not exclusively by foregrounding people's supposed ethical duty to act in another way. Presently, it often seems that the necessary deeds that need to be carried out are a huge sacrifice, like performing a moral act that one would rather not carry out. That is why Naess advocates kindling people's intrinsic motivation. In the transition to a sustainable society, these "beautiful acts" can be of great significance. After all, the encouragement to become more sustainable can easily be seen as a restriction of someone's happiness and freedom, assuming that you may have to give up something. With his slogan "Richness in ends, simpleness in means!"⁶⁷ Naess wants to indicate that a life with limited (or basic) means does not necessarily mean that someone's aims necessarily have to be limited. Those aspirations, if they are rich in beauty and meaning, can still be "rich" and compelling. And it is also here, that art can contribute substantially to the conversation.

⁶⁷ Breivik, G. (2020). 'Richness in ends, simpleness in means!' on Arne Naess's version of deep ecological *friluftsliv* and its implications for outdoor activities. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17511321.2020.1789719>



society



SOIL

SOUL

SOCIETY

The idea of “being earthbound” is that, as human beings, we are inevitably grounded in our connection with the *soil*. Standing with both of our feet in the earth, as it were, we are part of the ecological web of “the pattern that connects”. This entanglement forms, quite literally, a necessary foundation for the *soul* to flourish, and, through that, for the existential dimension of our inner sustainability to be addressed. From here, the step towards upholding human values follows quite naturally. This, for Satish Kumar, is the dimension of society, the manifold of human communities that we are part of. Education plays a vital role here. The presence in the social fabric, for instance, of a teacher who, as Dutch Professor of Education Gert Biesta argues, actively puts his or her pupils in a position in which they can let themselves “be addressed by the world”.⁶⁸ One may hope that it is through processes of what Biesta calls “subjectivation” that young people may eventually be inspired or prompted to perform “beautiful acts” on their own accord, although evidently this can and should never be forced upon them.

⁶⁸ Biesta, G. (2017). *Letting art teach*. Arnhem, Netherlands: ArtEZ Press, p. 39.

Embracing paradox

One of the assumed “21st century skills” that is often neglected, is the ability to cope with paradoxes, contradictions and uncertainty. In times of extremely rapid changes and the occurrence of new, often unprecedented, phenomena – the dissemination of fake-news and conspiracy theories, the hall of mirrors within social media bubbles, the sudden pop-up of a “new normal”, to name a few – there resides survival value in being able to cope with quickly spreading confusion, and growing frustration and despair. In an interview, French philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin is firm in saying that the emergence of the virus should remind us that uncertainty remains intrinsic to the human condition:

I do not live in constant anxiety, but I anticipate more or less catastrophic events will arise. I am not saying that I had foreseen today's epidemic, but to give an example, I have been saying for years that with the degradation of our biosphere, we should be ready for disasters. “Expecting the unexpected” is part of my philosophy.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Morin, quoted in Lecompte, F. (2020, September 4). *Uncertainty is intrinsic to the human condition*. CNRS News. <https://news.cnrs.fr/articles/uncertainty-is-intrinsic-to-the-human-condition>



⁷⁰ In German: “Und wenn ich wüsste, dass morgen die Welt in tausend Stücke zerbräche, ich würde heute noch einen Apfelbaum pflanzen.” This statement has been attributed to Martin Luther (the German Professor of Theology, 1483-1546), but there is no written record of the reformer speaking these words. Apparently, the first written evidence of this saying dates back to the year 1944 and comes from a priest by the name of Karl Lotz. See: Brownlow, M.R. (2018, May 6). “I have called you friends.” <https://www.norwichcongregational.org/assets/5.6.18-i-have-called-you-friends.pdf>

⁷¹ Bateson, N. (2020, September 9). *Hallway of hallways*. Medium. <https://norabateson.medium.com/hallwayof-hallways-a5829f872194>

Here too, art can be an important factor. For one particular way of looking at artistic expression is to see it as an ongoing exercise in not choosing *either* one of the two horns of a dilemma, but rather letting the two opposite poles coexist for a while. Or exposing the contradiction as a false contradiction and disregarding it. But also: to embrace the paradox and to regard it as a creative opportunity and maybe to come up with a third, not yet discovered option or intervention. “Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree.” This remarkable statement, often attributed to Martin Luther,⁷⁰ is in fact an impossible – in any case contradictory – point of view. But perhaps precisely because of its radical absurdity, it can also be appreciated as a source of hope.

Often our short-term, goal-oriented approach only causes the original problem that we seek to address to become even bigger. According to filmmaker, writer and educator Nora Bateson this is because we start from an erroneous point of departure: “trying to fix the wrong context of broken”.⁷¹ In doing so, we overlook that the discomfort or suffering that we are trying to fix may itself not be the problem, but the result of something that is occurring on another level. To illustrate her point, she contends that in the case of a physician making a diagnosis, the issue may not be whether or not it is a correct one, but rather that the poisons that are present in our food, water and air, and the stress we are exposed to continuously, are phenomena that are *outside* the frame of reference of what medication is able to influence.

Transition Design

In today’s world, we are plagued by problems that are complex, systemic and apparently unsolvable. Such problems are called “wicked problems”, which can’t be solved with the same strategies of knowing that have resulted in these problems. Human induced climate change is the quintessential wicked problem of our time. It is a phenomenon that is difficult to confront with prevailing ways of thinking and behaving. According to Professor Terry Irwin, director of the Transition Design Institute, it is characteristic of wicked problems that they are comprised of seemingly unrelated but yet interdependent elements, each of which manifest as problems in their own right, at multiple levels of scale. The ability to solve wicked problems, she says, will call for new ways of thinking about design, our world and the human presence in it.⁷² To combat wicked problems of sustainability, it is vital to be aware of their interconnectedness. In their reflections on an adequate pedagogy for encountering climate change, Educational science researcher Anna Lehtonen and a group of colleagues argue that transdisciplinary knowing will be very relevant here. In their view, there is a need for complementary use of artistic, embodied, experiential, symbolic, spiritual, and relational learning, especially in the vital educational task of reconnecting learners to the earth.⁷³

Situations have become so complex that each intervention that tries to solve one problem runs the risk of creating new problems which in their turn only enlarge the original problem or introduces a new problem in addition to the already existing problems. Two examples related to the climate crisis may illustrate this. The first is the huge increase in the purchase of air conditioners in households, in order to provide some cool air in increasingly hot summers. This air conditioning is powered by energy which, if not sustainably generated, will itself contribute to the phenomenon of the earth

⁷² Irwin, T. (2012). In S. Harding (Ed.). *Grow small, think beautiful: Ideas for a sustainable world from Schumacher College*. Edinburgh: Floris Books.

⁷³ Lehtonen, A. et al. (2018). A pedagogy of interconnectedness for encountering climate change as a wicked sustainability problem. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 199, 860-867.

getting warmer and people having to find more cool air. The second example is that aircrafts must soon be able to carry more passengers in order for airlines to accumulate the capital needed to replace their obsolete, kerosene-guzzling aircraft with more durable ones.⁷⁴

These are both simple illustrations of the kind of vicious circles from which it is difficult to escape. It is like an *ouroboros*: a snake or a dragon biting its own tail and thus forming an eternal circle. What seems to be needed is a creative impulse to get out of that situation; we have to go up one level, as it were, to be able to see a bigger picture.

One can think here of an initiative such as Transition Design as an attempt to make this move. As it describes itself, Transition Design is a transdisciplinary approach aimed at addressing the array of wicked problems confronting 21st century societies: climate change, forced migration, political and social polarisation, global pandemics, lack of access to affordable housing/healthcare/education, and many others. It underscores that these problems are interconnected, interdependent and always manifest in place and culture-specific ways. To address these challenges, new knowledge and skill sets are required. In the spirit of Ingold's "sustainability of everything", Transition Design insists that *entire* societies must transition towards more sustainable, equitable and desirable long-term futures. Moreover, such transitions will require intentional, systems-level change. Practitioners within the Transition Design approach argue that many of the problems we encounter at the level of our everyday lives (work, home, recreation, etc.) are actually symptoms of much bigger problems that are situated at higher levels of scale. And at these higher levels, wicked problems are always in their turn connected to multiple other wicked problems. Conversely, "problem clusters" at a higher level are connected to myriad problems at lower systems levels. Wicked problems took decades or longer to become wicked and are likely to take decades to transition towards resolution.

⁷⁴ See: <https://transition-designseminarcmu.net>

Therefore, it makes sense to frame them within radically large, spatio-temporal contexts that include the past, the present, and the future.⁷⁵



⁷⁴ Van Ammelrooy, P. (2020, September 3). De helft minder vluchten, maar nog steeds zijn vliegtuigen halfvol. Waarom dan toch de lucht in? *De Volkskrant*. <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuwsachtergrond/de-helft-minder-vluchten-maar-nog-steeds-zijn-vliegtuigen-halfvol-waarom-dan-tochde-lucht-in-b3ab55a8/>

The art and science of public conversation

At the level of *society*, in the triad of soil, soul, and society, it is also necessary to enter into conversations with people who hold different opinions and worldviews, and to dare to step out of the safety of one's own social bubble. This is only possible if one allows for a certain degree of vulnerability and is prepared to explore how one can make new connections to others. Such processes, too, can be initiated or designed in an artistic way, and facilitated by artists. Professor of Educational & Social Futures Keri Facer refers to this as "the art and science of public conversation" about the future that we want.⁷⁶ One could try to think of what kind of gentle artistic interventions could help, when seeking answers to questions such as: How to initiate (and sustain) such conversations across different backgrounds and life experiences? How to talk in public with each other under polarizing conditions, alienation, growing inequalities and misinformation? How to enter into a dialogue with each other about the sustainable futures we may aim for, under conditions of radical uncertainty? What allows conversations to deepen and assumptions about the future to be challenged? How do we envision possibilities for alternative futures?

For years, Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson has been exploring the possibilities of embodied experiences that can sharpen people's awareness of their surroundings and each other. Our sensory awareness allows us to "think through our bodies". In his work, Eliasson creates immersive art installations and sculptures and often when he does this, he makes use of natural phenomena, particularly light. In an interview, he tells about his show at Tanya Bonakdar Gallery in New York.⁷⁷ His aim is to give viewers, in his own words, "a chance to 'exhale'." He tries to establish this by challenging visitors and at the same time leaving them with a sense that they are seen. The impetus to these new works of light and

projections were Eliasson's reflections on how everything was changing. The wildfires, the climate crisis, the election of Donald Trump. And then came Covid-19. He realized that the year of 2019 was just the warm up:

So I thought a lot about how everything seemed to escalate, and the kind of destabilization that came out of that. Because I have worked with stress reduction and meditation, I was very intrigued by exhale and relief, so from the beginning, I wanted to do an artwork that was somehow welcoming this notion of the exhale.

In general, Eliasson's concern is with our being constantly overstimulated. The omnipresence of social media poses a challenge when we seek concentration.

But additional concerns animate his new series of works. The artist points at the increasing sense of polarisation in society. In case of disagreement, he finds that people often don't seek to address conflict in other ways than turning it into abuse.

It would be great if we could come together and sit. We don't have to hold hands in a circle and smoke, just to host the view of someone else, acknowledging it's not my view. It is these spaces that I think culture is capable of [creating]. When I talk about relief, it is also in the sense of, "I have courage again, to be with someone who is different." What is the fastest way to make a populist into a humanist? It is to look them in the eye, hold their hand, and to listen to them.

Eliasson has found a working principle that powerfully demonstrates how art can open up to conversations with people who do not agree, for example, with a fundamental transition to a sustainable society. When someone is present to a work of art that he or she identifies with, it can be as if the artwork is giving structure or language to

⁷⁶ Keri Facer, email message to author, December 4, 2020.

⁷⁷ Lauter, D. (2021, March 5). 'The fastest way to make a populist into a humanist is to listen': Artist Olafur Eliasson on how his latest work encourages empathy. *Artnet*. <https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/olafur-eliasson-interview-tanya-bonakdar-1947948>

something one alone was not able to articulate or express.

The artwork, says Eliasson, suddenly creates this situation where such a person feels heard: “Feeling heard makes you feel validated. An incredibly fundamental sentence that I will use for a title someday, is, ‘You’re good enough as you are.’ You’re already doing a lot. Let’s start from here.” Art alone, he says towards the end of the interview, won’t make you more empathetic. But art does ask things and adds to a state of indecisiveness – of just not knowing: “I think it’s actually wonderful to say, ‘Well, I am taking it in, and then I will let you know how I feel. I actually don’t even know how I feel anymore.’”

Maybe the only way to come closer to some answers to these questions of how to engage in conversations with others who disagree about the desirability of a transition to a more sustainable society is simply by probing one’s way forward. To set up pilot projects and to value them as instances of experiential learning. Talking about ecosystems, but also about systems in general, Gregory Bateson once somewhat puzzlingly said: “For a system to be *truly* complete, *incompleteness* must also be part of it.” It is at this point where a system “learns to learn”.⁷⁸ If the system doesn’t do that, it becomes static, and eventually dies. And it is in the (even if only temporary) embrace of states of incompleteness and to find ways of acting and creating in them that perhaps the greatest power of art lies.

⁷⁸ Gregory Bateson, cited in Van Boeckel, J. (2011). *When we find meaning in art, our thinking is most in sync with nature: A review of ‘An Ecology of Mind’ – the Gregory Bateson Documentary*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/278023015>

Mindful schizophrenia

After an eight-year period of impasse, creative silence and spiritual search, Estonian minimalist composer Arvo Pärt performed again in 1976. The composer had withdrawn from musical and social life. In this crisis, he began to experiment with different styles of composing. Pärt re-emerged as a composer with music created in a self-invented compositional technique, that came to be called “the tintinnabuli style”, inspired by Gregorian chants, early polyphony and the sound of bells. The works often have a slow and meditative tempo. A tintinnabulic composition consists of two connected voices: a melodic voice and a tintinnabulist voice. The melodic voice is composed according to strict rules and moves diatonically in stepwise motion. The other voice, the tintinnabulist voice, must remain as close as possible to the melodic voice.

The two different voices are connected on the basis of morality. The tintinnabuli voice symbolises the domain of forgiveness, of morals and conscience. The melodic voice embodies the daily egoistic life of sin and suffering. The heterogeneity is left intact, they flow parallel to each other, as it were. According to Professor of Theology and musician Peter Bouteneff, much of the effect of Arvo Pärt’s work derives from how it speaks to people’s deepest sense of the interpretation of conflicting realities: “This music says that there is no joy not tinged with grief, and no suffering beyond redemption.”⁷⁹ This interweaving is like a two-fold spirit that holds two seemingly incompatible qualities: “joyful sorrow”, or “bright sadness”. Inevitably mixed, they express the multiform experience of our existence. This corresponds deeply with the Orthodox Christian tradition that has guided Pärt’s work. Here there is the conviction that grief and sorrow may engender something creative, something beautiful, something that will bear the traces of the sorrow whence it came.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Bouteneff, P.C. (2015). *Arvo Pärt: Out of silence*. Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, pp. 140-141.

⁸⁰ Bouteneff, P.C. (2015). *Arvo Pärt: Out of silence*, p. 168.

Pärt was once interviewed by Icelandic musician and artist Björk about the two different voices in his music:

[Björk:] *There is question and answer, the different voices, inside your music. It is almost like Pinocchio and Little Cricket. So one is like human and always doing mistakes or pain, or making pain to others. And the Little Cricket is more like, comforting him or telling him...*

[Björk makes commanding gestures with her index finger] *Do you feel it is inside your music, or I imagine?*

[Arvo:] *I am very happy that you talk about it. It is really so. This new style consists of two ways, two sides. So that one line is my sins, and another line is forgiveness for these sins. Mostly the music has two voices. One is more complicated and subjective. But another is very simple, clear, and objective. But Pinocchio is a good thing [smiles].*⁸¹

⁸¹ Interview of Björk with Arvo Pärt, as part of a 1997 BBC documentary on “Modern Minimalists”. <https://www.bjork.fr/bjork-arvo-part-Modern-Minimalists-BBC-1997>

⁸² Bouteneff, P.C. (2015). *Arvo Pärt: Out of silence*, p. 141.

⁸³ Arvo Pärt, in Supin. D. (Director) (2002). *Arvo Pärt: 24 preludes for a fugue* [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/dRwTgme1_KE

Bouteneff mentions that critics and observers have also invoked images for the two qualities held in Pärt’s compositions: “One is the vulnerable, human, voice that is straying and sometimes pained, the other is the stable, divine or angelic voice that consoles.”⁸²

The voices of both grief and sin on the one hand, and joy, compassion, forgiveness on the other, manifesting themselves simultaneously but never fading each other out, suggest a split, a persistent divide. (In Pärt’s own words: “Like two people, whose paths seem to cross and then they don’t.”)⁸³ One could argue that this represents a form of schizophrenia, at least when one goes back to its etymology, were it refers roughly to a “splitting of the mind”. The Greek *schizein* (“to split”) and *phrēn* (“mind”). The term schizophrenia used to be associated with split personality by the general public, but that usage went into decline when split personality became known as a separate disorder, first as multiple identity disorder, and later as dissociative identity disorder.

Embracing the concurrence of a multiplicity of two or more distinct or even contradictory voices can perhaps be appreciated as a form of “*mindful* schizophrenia” (understood not in its clinical meaning of a mental disorder that is characterised by significant alterations in perception, thoughts, mood, and behaviour, but in its – now defunct – original meaning of “a split mind”). The mindfulness consists of accepting being engaged in situations and practices that are (or appear to be) in contradiction with each other, but to do so with one’s full awareness: exercising the practice of deliberately bringing one’s attention in the present moment without judgment. In one of his songs, country singer Waylon Jennings expressed this state of consciousness as this: “*I’ve always been crazy, but it’s kept me from going insane.*”⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Source: <https://genius.com/Waylon-jennings-ive-always-been-crazy-lyrics>

In a letter that he wrote to his brothers in 1817, Romantic poet John Keats first expressed his idea of “negative capability”. Asking himself what quality went to form a “Man of Achievement” – such as, for example, Shakespeare – he came to realize that such a man is, first and foremost, “capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.” Basically, it is the ability to accept that not everything can be resolved. Keats had a high regard for receptive intuition, for which the intellectual self could be standing in its way. Negative capability can be understood as an ability to contemplate the world without the desire to try to reconcile contradictory aspects: embracing uncertainty and ambiguity, and being willing to live with mystery. What this requires is being able to remain in a state of restlessness without at every instance impatiently looking for additional information.

Others, next to Keats, have also argued that there is a certain quality in maintaining a tolerance for doubt. In the words of English author and social critic Os Guinness, in his book *In Two Minds*, “To believe is to be ‘in one mind’ about accepting something as true; to disbelieve is to be ‘in one mind’ about rejecting it.

⁸⁵ Guinness, O. (1976). *In two minds: The dilemma of doubt and how to resolve it*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, p. 25.

To doubt is to waver between the two, to believe and doubt at once, and so to be ‘in two minds.’⁸⁵

Clinical psychologist and educator Maureen O’Hara believes that the current existential predicament of humanity also offers a learning opportunity – that is: if we take steps to avoid possible cultural and psychological meltdown. What is needed, she argues, is a cultivation of “the necessary capacities of mind to live well in an unavoidably uncertain world.” Approvingly, she quotes American novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald: “The test of first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function. One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and *yet* be determined to make them otherwise.”⁸⁶ A graphic depiction of such a position of “mindful schizophrenia” is the illustration of Baron Münchhausen pulling himself out of a mire by his own hair.⁸⁷ In our time, says O’Hara, we need the capacity to hold not just two opposing ideas at the same time but many, and we have to resist the desire for easy certainty and premature closure. There is a need to invent different kinds of socialising experiences, so that people learn to see the world through new eyes and to take in its complexity without becoming overwhelmed by it.

American eco-philosopher Joanna Macy is a scholar of Buddhism, general systems theory and deep ecology. She also tries to balance walking on two different tracks simultaneously. More than 30 years ago, she started



Baron Münchhausen pulling himself out of a mire by his own hair. Etch by Gustave Doré, ca. 1862.

⁸⁶ F. Scott Fitzgerald, quoted in O’Hara, M. (2005). *The challenge for education in uncertain times*. Paper presented at the General Assembly of the World Academy of Arts and Sciences, Zagreb, Croatia, November 2005. http://maureen.ohara.net/pubs/zagreb_final.pdf

⁸⁷ Baron Münchhausen (German spelling) is a fictional German nobleman created by the German writer Rudolf Erich Raspe in his 1785 book *Baron Munchausen's narrative of his marvellous travels and campaigns in Russia*.

⁸⁸ Kreilkamp, A. (2014, April 2). *Joanna Macy: On how to prepare internally for whatever comes next*. <https://www.exopermaculture.com/2014/04/02/joanna-macy-on-how-to-prepare-internally-for-what-ever-comes-next/>

⁸⁹ Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, MD: Duke University Press.

doing workshops (“The Work that Reconnects”), aimed at people who are pushing for change but who have hit the wall in despair about the state of the world. On one level, she says, these efforts are to help people be better activists – more resilient, creative, responsible and effective. On a more elemental level, she is doing this work “so that when things fall apart, we won’t turn on each other [emphasis added].” Adding, “If we are going to go out, then we can do it with some nobility, generosity and beauty, so we do not fall into shock and fear.” Macy calls this ambivalent position “that knife edge of uncertainty”: it entails averting that we turn on each other *and* simultaneously to see crisis as an opportunity for creativity: “Going to pieces can open us up to new perceptions and responses.”⁸⁸

If we indeed affirm the inevitability of the condition of what we have called here “mindful schizophrenia”, of living in “sin” through the “guilt” of inevitably having an ecological or carbon footprint, how do we then prevent that it evolves into (or is a disguise for) a real pathology, an actual “split personality”? One could argue that the psychological defence mechanism of cognitive dissonance (declaring one thing but doing the other, without being aware of their inconsistency) is exactly an expression of that.

On the other side, how are we to know whether or not our upright affirming of the condition of being split (and still trying to make the best of it), does not yet constitute *another* form of “make-believe”, of again deceiving ourselves? That we, as it were, “sweep under the carpet” that there is a problem of practising a contradictory lifestyle and we can easily shake off this sense of guilt?

The biggest challenge that “mindful schizophrenia” poses is possibly a deeply existential one. How is it for young people to decide whether to have children, to seek meaning in life, when one knows/feels/fears that the world is falling to pieces? How to admit and even value one’s feelings of eco-anxiety and climate grief (“staying *with* the trouble”, as Donna Haraway has called it),⁸⁹ and still find inspiration and courage, for instance to make art?

Why not regard the latter as a complete waste of one's precious time, in face of the need to engage the overruling climate emergency? And then, when one has put everything else aside for this, there is the risk of entering into a tunnel-vision which sooner or later may lead to a burn-out, turning numb or becoming cynical. For, as an antidote, one also has to attend to the needs of one's inner dimensions, the life of the senses. To occasionally tune in aesthetically to the "pattern that connects", and to take moments to "stop and give beauty time".

It is at this point, that we, once again, turn towards Gregory Bateson. A concept that is central in his work is the "double bind". A double bind is, plainly put, a situation where one is confronted with contradictions and at the same time there is no solution for escape. Bateson compared the double bind situation to a set of paradoxical instructions that might be given by a Zen master to his disciple: "The Zen master ... holds a stick over the pupil's head and says fiercely, 'If you say this stick is real, I will strike you with it. If you say this stick is not real, I will strike you with it. If you don't say anything, I will strike you with it.'" Clearly, there is no escape from this "trial", at least not in terms of logic. The only way that the pupil might break out of this immobilizing context is by making some kind of "jump". Again, Bateson: "The Zen pupil might reach up and take the stick away from the master – who might accept this response..."⁹⁰ Remarkably, Bateson held that the experience of double bind may actually promote creativity. On the other side of it, there is another stage of wisdom. A double bind motivates evolution. The only option is to "grab the stick" – the third alternative to survive. As Nora Bateson, Gregory Bateson's second daughter explains in her film *An Ecology of Mind*: "It is a creative imperative. It's the moment when – because this doesn't work, and that doesn't work – something else needs to be improvised."⁹¹

⁹⁰ Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an ecology of mind*. New York: Ballantine, p. 208.

⁹¹ Bateson, N. (Director). (2010). *An ecology of mind: A daughter's portrait of Gregory Bateson* [Motion picture]. United States.

It is appropriate here, to dwell for a moment on an interesting and important difference between improvisation and innovation, as Tim Ingold and Elizabeth Hallam point out. It is not, that the one works within established convention, while the other breaks with it. Rather, improvisation characterizes creativity by way of its processes, innovation by way of its products: "To read creativity as innovation is, if you will, to read it backwards, in terms of its results, instead of forwards, in terms of the movements that gave rise to them." The improvisational creativity they foreground is that "of a world that is crescent rather than created; that is 'always in the making' ... rather than ready-made."⁹² As they insist, the power of the generative quality of improvisation it is not conditional upon judgements of the novelty of the forms it yields.



Portrait of Zen master Wuzhun Shifan, painted by a Chinese artist in 1238.

⁹² Ingold, T. & Hallam, E. (2007). *Creativity and cultural improvisation: An introduction*. In T. Ingold & E. Hallam (Eds.). *Creativity and cultural improvisation*. Oxford: Berg, pp. 2-3.

Earthbound is a project that aims to bridge, in some way, the apparent dichotomy between, on the one hand, an unconditional embrace of the notion of “art for art’s sake”, and, on the other, having a too exclusive interest in how art can be applied. This endeavour is not about squeezing art into a straitjacket; instrumentalising it in order to accommodate the special interests of its clients. An artistic way of encountering the world is, at its best, about “knowing from the inside”, through one’s artistic practices. Inviting in the unknown with an open mind, giving expression to how it feels to be alive. Be it through fine arts, music education, design for transition, or any other orientation: at the core lies its “relatability”. How do we, with and through art, find ways to enter into new meetings and conversations, across different backgrounds and life experiences? British sculptor Antony Gormley puts it this way:

I think that art can absolutely be a catalyst for a process of understanding, a kind of empathy, a process of engagement. It is only really in the last five hundred years, in Western terms, that art has become singularly about high-valued decoration and the elite. I think it is a very good thing to go back to other models of art, where it is much more about a collective expression of what it feels like to be alive. So, if we take an anthropological model and think of the songs, the dances, the kinds of architecture of non-urban, non-literary societies, I would say they are profoundly artistic. Art finally is the way that life expresses itself.⁹³

⁹³ Van Boeckel, J. (2010). An interview with Antony Gormley. *Resurgence*, 260. <https://www.resurgence.org/magazine/article3112-an-interview-with-antony-gormley.html>

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