

# THINKING ABOUT BUILDING

PHYSICS ROOM  
25 Oct - 7 Dec  
2014

CONVERSATION 1: JESSICA HALLIDAY

ANDREW JUST

## PAGE LAYOUT

[illegible]

# TALKING

AJ:

What I love about talking, especially talking with you, is the discovery of content and meaning, digesting what the fuck stuff is actually about and obviously we're such geeks it always revolves around architecture. But our understanding of architecture is pretty comprehensive and how it relates to everything else isn't it?

## CONVERSATION...

I have written, and find it very useful, but I love the stimulus of conversation, and often this informs the writing. The dialogue, the discovery, and the pace of how thinking changes and develops are wonderful with talking.

I recently heard a Harvard economist speak who has been interrogating why cities even exist (a very interesting hypothesis/argument that begs a diversion). The main reason he thinks is for human interaction (makes sense). He explained, that even in our time of amazing communication technology, 'the more complex an idea, the more it requires face-to-face communication' (also makes sense).

# ARCHITECTURE?

AJ: What I love about talking, especially talking with you, is the discovery of content and meaning, digesting what the fuck stuff is actually about and obviously we're such geeks it always revolves around architecture. But our understanding of architecture is pretty comprehensive and how it relates to everything else isn't it? So, I've been thinking more on what I'm wanting from this exercise and I think it's discovering the meaning or the values, the purpose behind them, whatever, how move is made. It's something I find we often do is discuss the ethics or the what needs to happened and it's always verbal. I kind of think of architecture or whatever - the arcades project or something - they come out as articulations of those considerations in a way.

Seems a bit corny, but I always think architecture is about life. Articulation of ideas, values, aspirations... This is part of the reason I love it, anything one learns about life can and should influence what we create and do, through our architectural knowledge and skills.

This is not to say it should be totalising and/or dominating, and it also does often make me seriously question many of the assumptions of what 'architecture' actually values. However, as with anything soft, questioning these things is pretty fundamental.

I also don't believe Architecture to be a pure statement of ideas. It is also a shaping and a proposing of ideas and values/ways of life... A testing, trialling and learning. And ideas, values, aims, life itself is always changing anyhow.

I recently had the pleasure of meeting Pamille Berg...An amazing person. With her clarity of intellect she stated beautifully (unfortunately I paraphrase); 'excellence in design is how well we address the issues of our time'. Which begs the very good question of what are the issues of our time? This is where I think the Dark mountain manifesto makes a very interesting provocation.

## DRIVERS?

- AJ: No, exactly. Think and do and do and think.
- JH: Yea.
- AJ: It's such a beautiful way to do it. But this is what I mean and why it seems ridiculous to me to make a manifesto as such like a set of points so much as kind of reflect on where we're at and what we've learnt and those kinds of provocations. I think a lot of it comes to that process and the drivers. **What are the drivers?**
- JH: **Now see that's probably more interesting** than / how do you separate that from intent because I think sometimes the / no, I don't think I have this thought properly formed actually.
- AJ: We never have it properly formed that's the beauty of it.

What are we actually talking about?

A manifesto of statements seems ridiculous, but then, at the same time, manifestos are always fluid too aren't they. Hence attraction to this conversational manner, at least to begin.

Rather than the meaning behind our work or such, what about trying to discover the drivers/motivations behind what we do?

Makes me think of defining something (especially in creative activity) feels too much a deductive exercise, but discovering why or what something does, is straight away additive/creative. Though, to be fair, this doesn't necessarily make it a useful list!

## HOW WE TEST IDEAS

AJ ...So, I've been thinking more on what I'm wanting from this exercise and I think it's discovering the meaning or the values, the purpose behind them, whatever, how move is made. It's something I find we often do is discuss the ethics or the what needs to happened and it's always verbal. I kind of think of architecture or whatever - the arcades project or something - they come out as articulations of those considerations in a way.

JH: Do you not sometimes think though it's that it's not sometimes / often we don't know what we're doing though. Do you know what I mean?

AJ: Yea.

JH: The arcades project to me is a perfect example.

AJ: [Laughs] it really is.

JH: Of not really / and so is Festa.

AJ: Yea.

JH: An example of not really knowing what we're doing and constantly discovering through doing which is something that architecture can't afford to do.

AJ: No, exactly. Think and do and do and think.

Actually, debating what it is we talk about and how and why. But also exposing the limits of architecture. HOW WE TEST IDEAS.

It seems to me that writing, thinking, talking is a much less resource-heavy way to test ideas. We draw, model, collage to test ideas architecturally. We prototype and we build to further test them. I think the thing we actually forget is that we are still testing architectural ideas once they are actually built. The design and construction of many buildings is merely a fraction of their existence, and their trialling.

Seems almost a scale of risk and importance associated....is such a privilege and a responsibility to build 'permanent' architecture. The resources involved, resources, energy, emotion, skills, always astound me. And is there correspondingly a reverse scale of freedom in testing ideas?

# AGENCY!

- JH: Yea, I think part of it is the agency, I think. One of the remarkable things about the transitional movement is suddenly discovering that you do have some and so often in the past agency is I think pre-earthquake times
- AJ: Relegated many steps away from us.
- JH: Exactly and it was formalised through usually political processes.
- AJ: And economic.
- JH: But economic through exclusion really, you know. Who would have the agency / who would get to build the big architecture project?
- AJ: Yea, very few people.

I often wonder, do we actually have the mandate to do this? We criticise others who assume (or even have) the mandate, but have we? Especially complicated when it comes to the public realm.

Agency, empowerment, various other words, is a curious thing. Who has agency, why, and towards what ends (and values) do they use it? How is and should it be distributed?

Which of course starts questions about our entire political (and many other) systems.

## RESPONSIBILITY/OPPORTUNITY

JH: I never ever imagine that we would have this level of agency but part of that is dangerous too.

AJ: Oh, yea.

JH: Part of it is really dangerous. I just think there's so much privilege in it [interrupted]

AJ: Well, and there's responsibility as well.

JH: There's responsibility, yes.

AJ: With responsibility comes opportunity as well and I'm not sure if everyone always has that in mind.

Can't forget each other.



## DOGMA?

JH: I think that's where we have to be really, really careful often because as the practice matures **you can become the establishment**, really.

AJ: You become dogma.

JH: Yea.

Maturity and dogma? Becoming established?! How do we avoid this trap?

## CRITIQUE-WE'RE NOT STUCK WITH YOU

JH: And that's the thing about keeping that process of being willing to critique ourselves [interrupted]

AJ: And willing to get rid of stuff.

JH: And willing to get rid of stuff.

AJ: The Pallet Pavilion was important, I think.

JH: Yea.

Being willing to critique ourselves (and receive critique?) and operating in the temporary (so able to get rid of stuff). Is this enough flexibility, to balance the agency and opportunity with our responsibilities? It seems to me that this temporary approach has a critique written-in., in its tentative duration. 'We're not stuck with you'.

But that's the projects. What about when it's time for us (as individuals/groups) to move on? Handing over? Succession is often when much human endeavour seems to fuck up isn't it? Do we lose relevance and become dogma?

I guess in many ways, we're temporary enough even in our strategies and organisations?

But temporary can also be a terrible waste of resources...so it is not just that it's temporary that limits responsibility. It seems it's in its use of resources, including time as one of those, we're not using a lot of time.

# LEARNING FROM EXPERIMENTS

- AJ: If this is truly supposed to be an experiment then it's actually / you need to recognise what works and what fails and move forward, and not just get stuck.
- JH: But then I wonder though how often do we build that level of reflection into what we do?
- AJ: Not often, no.
- JH: That's what I [interrupted]
- AJ: Which is part of the idea / of the attraction of sitting down and talking with you in this context. But this is also [interrupted]
- JH: But I don't know if we are using the agency and the opportunities that we've got sufficiently well. The trouble is time is such pressure, money is such pressure and things often / the next project has started and [interrupted]
- AJ: But what is the measure of sufficiently well?

Experimenting?

Testing sufficiently?

Reflection/learning?

Enough?

This is also what discussion and conversation helps with. Digesting. Thinking together.

What are we measuring? More conversation.

## ECONOMICS?

AJ: The other thing is I'm not thinking this talk we're having now is even specifically about the transitional movement.

JH: Oh, OK.

AJ: I'm thinking quite broadly as well in terms of architecture in the city and all sorts of things. I often think of like economics actually, the things that are of massive effect. What architecture is trying to do, what the problems are in a way.

Economics... Issues of our time? It seems such a dominant aspect of today's world, I find it very intriguing.

I have many concerns with it, but economics also impresses me. It's the only human tool I can think of that operates on a truly global level of thinking. I am not convinced that it is actually a values-basis though, which is how it often seems to be thought of.

To me it is a tool. I look forward to discussing this whole topic more with Kyle.

# COMPETITIONS

AJ: This is where I've always been reasonably adverse to competitions but that is something that that stuff has to do and it starts to offer a breadth of thinking relative to one reasonably contained set of constraints or something. If for example we're had competition for the arcades project, how many different ways – in the interim I thought many different ways. If you extrapolate that out to other projects / and that's the other thing with the agency that you're talking about is most people our age in particular might be [interrupted]

JH: Our age, I love that you say out age. 10 years separates us.

AJ: Doesn't mean that much.

Competitions....I think they actually are a good thing for architecture/the public. How to make them work?

In reflection, that's why we made the 'call for ideas' format for 'Ideas for Christchurch'. But this is also based on the hope that people care. Mind, it also hopefully encourages people to care.

# PROPOSITIONAL

- AJ: The other thing is I'm not thinking this talk we're having now is even specifically about the transitional movement.
- JH: Oh, OK.
- AJ: I'm thinking quite broadly as well in terms of architecture in the city and all sorts of things. I often think of like economics actually, the things that are of massive effect. What architecture is trying to do, what the problems are in a way. I guess one I've been thinking of recently is to do with the process stuff but I mean some / You talk about agency and I think it's a really important point because as soon as we are paid servants, which is the service model which is the architectural profession
- JH: Oh, yea.
- AJ: We're bound to, at best, argue, manipulate, try and shape the values of the projects within what the briefs are. A long time ago we've had conversation about the virtue if clients basically and their understanding and their intentions. I gather you have been talking more about that as well but like a more **propositional approach to architecture**.

## PROPOSITION!

I'm very interested in a propositional kind of organisational working model. Rather than being purely service-based. Not to say you can't be propositional within service...it's just sometimes feels like achieving that excellence of response to the issues of our time is a few steps removed.

Also makes me think of that great Henry Ford quotation..."If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses."

What are our horses at the moment?

## PUBLIC-PRIVATE, BROADER-MINDEDNESS?

JH: The question of public architecture is interesting too because oddly enough really every piece of architecture, except maybe / I'm trying to think even homes, even private homes have a certain public responsibility in terms of resources necessary to sustain them

AJ: Absolutely.

JH: Particularly utilities but also the way they lock into a very complex system that is a city. But I think that is something that is so lost right now is the sense of debt to a wider public client, you know.

AJ: I completely agree.

JH: And also / but then how do you create the conditions within a particular architectural project or building to acknowledge that responsibility to a wider public. Who is that public / it becomes / we can talk about it but / and it's a contested landscape regardless.

Not many people get to partake in making architecture. And also, not many people get to make private architecture that is public. But that distinction is a bit of a misnomer.

The city plan? Is not just about regulating....is about how our culture operates, our expectations and values...

Makes me think very much of the civic-mindedness, the citizenship that I find so amazing in many of the people doing the work in the 'transitional movement'.

It is not just civic, that relates to city. It needs to be much broader than that. Where should that even stop? The outer reaches of our atmosphere? And other measures? Time?

# PUBLIC PRIVATE ARCHITECTURE

AJ: To be fair the other reason I've heard of people like doing houses / I'm working on a couple and I really like it as well but the proximity is really lovely, like that intimacy of building with someone and articulating their space and their way of life and their values and their aspirations. It is very direct.

JH: See that's where my question about how do you form that interaction when are dealing with a public that is very intangible. Do you know what I mean?

AJ: Oh, completely.

JH: I mean I guess we've for so long handed over to our political representatives when we're talking about public architecture.

AJ: Yea, and it's funny like none of this is new. Brunelleschi you know that was a big, well, at least that is what they teach you, a big move with that orphanage where he made the patio space public.

JH: He made an arcade, a very beautiful.

I look forward to fleshing this one out more...



## AMENITY PLUS...

AJ: Yea, technical and so much of what I do is technical as well, you know, but that's why I mentioned that Beatbox example, is when you've got to make that do something as well I feel and that's the wonderful potential power of architecture is it involves all of that stuff. You've got something, I don't know, a building shouldn't leak for example.

JH: But it also shouldn't make you depressed.

AJ: Exactly. But it's also that  
[Interruption]

Technical Aspect of Architecture....we need it, but also much more. Amenity plus! We've discussed this phrase quite a lot, and it seems like a nice one that acknowledges need as a basis. A contortion on 'form follows function'?

Springboard off the function and requirements. Again, if you have to have something, use it. Also means, when the 'bottom line' type thinking comes along, if there's the strong sense that something is 'needed' it survives. (or we all go down together?)

## COUNCIL IS RESPONSIBLE FOR POVERTY?

- JH: I know. I mean apparently council is responsible for poverty.
- AJ: Are they?
- JH: Did you not hear Bill English said that this week and it's because of planning regulation.
- AJ: Oh, I see. Actually? Oh, wow.
- JH: So poverty is caused by local council government restricting property and development through regulatory processes [interrupted]
- AJ: And this goes back to your agency [interrupted]
- JH: It creates poverty apparently [interrupted]
- AJ: And it's our responsibility [interrupted]
- JH: Although this is government said that there isn't poverty.
- AJ: Exactly. There isn't poverty but if there is, it's council's fault. But this is what I find in terms of that responsibility like

Financial privilege and architecture eh. As a profession, we're reasonably criticised for being only servants of the elite. What am I doing about poverty? Even if it is the responsibility of Council. The absurdity of the above dialogue also makes me question of course our government thinking around poverty.

It seems difficult sometimes to even create housing in such a manner that even relatively wealthy people can afford it (let alone us getting paid for our work in attempting that).

It makes me question systemically, the processes, expectations and how we are looking at living. I think the growing tiny house popularity is one response.

I often think though, if you look at our impact on the world, with how we live, things should be more expensive. But so often it seems expense doesn't actually correlate to impact on our environment...in fact, it seems at the expense of it instead. Talking of systemic disasters and a terrifying trajectory.

# ORGANISATIONS

JH: ...you know in terms of all the things we talk about, my vision of for that centre has always been that it's a place that is instrumental for making those conversations happen between more people and influence actions and decisions in a city.

AJ: Oh, completely.

JH: You know that's the purpose of it. It's not a neutral place [laughs].

AJ: No, no that's what I was saying ...oh, can it do anything? Of course it can.

AJ: ... it could take many manifestations, it could become a developer of a different notion. It can be about education but it even could be a political party, whatever, as a thing.

JH: Yea.

AJ: I was talking a lot ... about an institution not necessarily being a static structure or meaning or value or anything. ...you know that all the organization that existed felt out of touch. It's kind of like that's why you have to make new ones while you try to build in change and adaptability in them like even for example, Gap Filler's simple we don't want to repeat ourselves.

Organisations flip the tactical into the strategic for me. It's not just about the individual project anymore. This has been very clear to me through my experience in Gap Filler. Avoiding stasis in the organisation as well, through building in change. Always a question of how much?

It's also about creating fertile ground. These things are bigger than an individual. Way more potent. Also an extremely interesting channel for architectural knowledge and skills, way more so than I'd possibly realised years ago.

They also combine skills and outlooks and values and hold common purpose.

CENTRE FOR ARCHITECTURE, or whatever we call it?

## TIME?

AJ: Like I said you look at The Arcades Project you come up / the idea is in a way the meaning side of it that kind of thoughtfulness and so on is just a snippet compared to the exercise that is involved in making things happen.

JH: This is where our conversation started which is this question of the idea or the meaning or the intent is [interrupted]

AJ: But you can't think of that isolated moment either.

JH: Well, no also sometimes it's not very clear, I think.

I critique the above dialogue though, in that it's false and a bit silly to separate out the thoughtfulness, or 'concept' from the process of the project in its entirety. As a concept the Arcades Project is still progressing. It is still dealing with time.

TIME-Architecture takes so long!

The inherent impatience here reminds me of the Billy Connolly quotation I enjoy: "I can't stand when people complain about how short life is.... It's the longest fucking thing you've got." He asks good questions in that statement.

Actually, this raises another issue that I think much recent architecture is terrible at. Dealing with time. Kevin Low uses time beautifully in his architecture. Much Modernist architecture has been criticised for simply denying time and in delusion, trying to be 'forever young'. But then, what of renewal traditions?

As a form of cultural expression Architecture obviously deals with time in quite a different manner to say, performed music. This is Kevin's point though, we inherently have time involved in our project, but it's like we don't actually use it.

I always argue with students, if you have to have something, you have to use it.

# RISKING

AJ: I've always been asked with even starting a business people are like how do you have the confidence to do that? I'm like oh, if I stopped and thought about that too long I probably wouldn't do it.

JH: Yea.

...

JH: We would never have done the Arcades project if we'd knew what the hell it would involve.

AJ: Oh, fuck no [laughs].

...

JH: And it's learning not to be fearful of trying it anyway and that is where motivation and intention / this has got a bigger motivation and intention than me as a little individual in my career trajectory.

AJ: Absolutely, I think we're all too idealistically entrenched for that [laughs].

JH: I think that allows you to get over the fear and also the other thing is that the absence of it. If we didn't get over our fear or if we don't go I don't know quite what to do here but I'll go ask someone.

AJ: Oh, man that's the thing is being able to ask people...

And willing to ask people. And for them to be willing to help.

CONFIDENCE and JUST TRYING THINGS. Knowing to ask for help, and when. It's a question of risk. How much are you risking? I've had the difference between risk aware and risk averse pointed out to me.

Also, is something worth the risk. August Caesar said 'only a fool fishes with a golden hook'. However, when the process is discovering things, one doesn't always know what one might catch...

# DEMONSTRATING

AJ: Well, he feels really disempowered and so on.

JH: By what?

AJ: I don't know, by institutions or something. It feels to me to be quite antagonistic / and this is back to something that we do do and that's back to that propositional thing. I do feel like at least we attempt but whether we actually do it or not, we might be completely misguided of course. It is a positive assertion, if you know what I mean?

...

JH: Yea. Isn't that the power of suddenly having agency and suddenly creating something. You're not just criticising, you're not just responding, you're acting and demonstrating.

Proposition. Agency. Positive assertion? DEMONSTRATING

## AIMS AND TEAMS

AJ: Oh, man that's the thing is being able to ask people and this is back to the generalist thing theme and so on it's like you go to the people who know what they are doing and you share what you are trying to do and ideally they are somehow compelled to help do that whether it's / obviously money is the usual mechanism in the business world. With these kinds of projects, as in the Arcades, look, you know, will you help with this? And they believe in the project for whatever reason.

JH: Yea.

AJ: And what those reasons are not necessarily clear.

JH: The same, or the same.

AJ: Yup, that's very true and this is back to what you were talking about though in terms of the meaning and stuff like that but at the same time I do really feel like this whole movement it has / it feels to me that it's got that drive and purpose and so on, not just wanting to do a cool bunch of shit. Do you know what I mean?

JH: Yea.

AJ: There are agendas, it's not quite the right word but there's genuine kinda belief I think from many of us. What exactly that's around [interrupted]

I'm often heartened by the idealism shared by people and how that gets articulated through projects that teams work on.

Discovering, shaping, asking for, articulating, our aims, our values etc. Not just doing cool shit.

# THINGS COULD BE BETTER

JH: You were asked why do you do this.

AJ: I think one of the things I often think about is things could be better. I critique myself a lot [interrupted]

JH: That reflection becomes important then because did we make it better?

Things could be better. Naieve, simple, but I think a fairly constant situation. Contains so many variables for such a simple sentence.

Hence why we need to always question what 'better' actually means. And how, architecturally we contribute to this question, with our skills and understanding.

I'd probably also say things should be better.



## DOING WHAT YOU LOVE

JH: ...you know my grandfather always said, and it's a blessing and a curse, you'd be happiest if your hobby is your career.

AJ: [Laughs]

JH: And I think actually it can also make you the most depressed as well.

AJ: It also makes you not very easy to live with.

JH: It makes you impossible to live with. Poor Audrey and poor Douglas.

AJ: Yup. There is a danger in loving what you do is you do it the whole time.

JH: **Doing what you love, yea.**

AJ: Yea, I mean with that said it's not a bad thing [laughs] and you're linking purpose, joy, productivity and socializing and all sorts of things which....

Not to be underestimated as a source of power. The motivation that comes with passion is pretty amazing. And also, to try to remember to bypass the shit and do what we love, linking what we love with what we believe matters. We must remember we are immensely privileged, in the tiniest percentile of opportunity. What we do with that privilege is a significant choice.

I often cynically think that our definition of 'happiness' is being pushed into convenience and especially 'entertain me'. Strong forces shape that, reassuring each of us that we should 'get what we deserve.' 'I'm an asshole. What do I deserve?' I often wonder.

# CULTURE CHANGE

JH: It's a pity you're not at this symposium today actually because a lot of it connects with, I think, some of the things we've discussed today around/about bringing together disciplines and disciplines talking to each other and also recognising it's time to compartmentalisation and silo-ing or disciplines has actually created the problem and it's not going to solve it.

AJ: No, and this is the thing [interrupted]

JH: Their whole thesis is unless we start breaking down / and they are using arts and science is the two that are creating change because what we actually need is a cultural shift.

AJ: Oh, absolutely.

JH: And that's where you can't leave it to a scientist [interrupted]

CULTURE CHANGE-we're all needed to do it.

In *Brave New World Revisited*, Aldous Huxley talks of birth control and death control.

Death control needs a slightly benevolent government, a few millions dollars and a room full of technicians and you have penicillin and DDT. WHAM, you save millions of lives. And all the cultural institutions we have applaud it.

Birth control requires the will and intelligence of every single individual on the planet. Add to this that you're up against nearly every cultural institution on the planet. It's more than we can do. Time and again humans have proven ourselves useless at making decisions out of ethical choice not practical necessity.

Brings up population too... The trajectory of our population growth matches our food production capability, unsurprisingly. The question many ask, is where (and how) is the end of what looks like an exponential graph?

Interestingly, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* had the population maintained at 2 billion.

## MISGUIDED?

AJ: Cultural shift to be honest that's really the / when I say things could be better, that's the thing that I aim for in architecture and that's one but towards which direction?  
**We might be as misguided as colonialists** or whatever.

JH: Yea, absolutely.

AJ: But to be honest it's all we can do.

We might be as misguided as the colonialists?

## THE WILDEBEASTS

- AJ: Completely, well this is the thing that I often think of the wildebeests. They're the last great land migration. We've stopped all the rest.
- JH: Wow.
- AJ: And when that goes I'm going to be really depressed.
- JH: You know what we're changing sea migration.
- AJ: Oh, completely.
- JH: Did you see that photograph of the walruses who can't get to the artic? So they went to shore in Alaska [interrupted]
- AJ: And they got fed?
- JH: I don't know, there were 35,000 of them and they reduced me to tears because we've fucked things up so [interrupted].
- AJ: And birds as well.
- JH: You know we've seriously fucked things up so royally this huge complex of cycles of systems [interrupted]
- AJ: And that is often one of the main ones that I look at and go what the fuck am I doing about that?
- JH: Yea, exactly.
- AJ: Because that is very dear to my heart.

The Wildebeasts. What the fuck are we doing about the Wildebeasts?

Reading what we did to the American Bison depresses me so much.

What can we do with our architectural skills and understanding to address such things? Most of the time it seems like those skills are used contrary to the benefits of the wildebeasts or the walruses.

# VETTING

- JH: I just wonder how do we get better at what we are doing/
- AJ: Well, at least we have these conversations, Jess.
- JH: Yea, that's true.
- AJ: That's the thing in terms of confidence and so on I often think of people like you, Kyle and Ryan and so on like I vet my things through you guys in a way. In these conversations we thrash things out. What's the purpose of this? What's the meaning of this and so on. That happens which doesn't necessarily / I don't think we should take that for granted.
- JH: Yea, and part of that is also **being willing to vet...**
- JH: But if you are using all these people in your lives as a sounding board how lovely it is that it's not just in the professional sphere and it's not just built into talking to other architects.

Provides critique, confidence, and varied feedback on ideas/values. Also means we tap into each others strengths and roles fluidly.

Mutual respect. I really believe this to be fundamental to that bandied word, collaboration. But more fundamentally, really to most human inter-relations...especially teaching and learning.

I have no claim to the following, except that I find it very interesting and provocative. And it's discussed above, so I thought a synopsis would be useful. Besides, this exercise started with notions of manifesto...

## **THE EIGHT PRINCIPLES OF UNCIVILISATION <sup>1</sup>**

1. We live in a time of social, economic and ecological unravelling. All around us are signs that our whole way of living is already passing into history. We will face this reality honestly and learn how to live with it.
2. We reject the faith which holds that the converging crises of our times can be reduced to a set of 'problems' in need of technological or political 'solutions'.
3. We believe that the roots of these crises lie in the stories we have been telling ourselves. We intend to challenge the stories which underpin our civilisation: the myth of progress, the myth of human centrality, and the myth of our separation from 'nature'. These myths are more dangerous for the fact that we have forgotten they are myths.
4. We will reassert the role of storytelling as more than mere entertainment. It is through stories that we weave reality.
5. Humans are not the point and purpose of the planet. Our art will begin with the attempt to step outside the human bubble. By careful attention, we will reengage with the non-human world.
6. We will celebrate writing and art which is grounded in a sense of place and of time. Our literature has been dominated for too long by those who inhabit the cosmopolitan citadels.
7. We will not lose ourselves in the elaboration of theories or ideologies. Our words will be elemental. We write with dirt under our fingernails.
8. The end of the world as we know it is not the end of the world full stop. Together, we will find the hope beyond hope, the paths which lead to the unknown world ahead of us.

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<sup>1</sup> *Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto*. Kingsnorth P., and Hine, D. 2009.

# DARK MOUNTAIN-UNCIVILISATION

- AJ: That's the thing that's why I started showing you that 'Dark Mountain Manifesto'. It's like look there are other manifestos than architecture, you know.
- Jo: Did you say un-civilizations? I like that.
- JH: The basic thesis is it's built on the idea that civilization is the cause of the ills which is kind of interesting because civilization also created a lot of wonderful things as well.
- AJ: But wonderful things from a human-centric world.
- JH: Human-centric perspective, that is true. But wonderful things like penicillin, one of my favourite product of civilization [laughs].
- AJ: But the walruses aren't exactly happy are they, Jess?
- JH: Oh, God no, they're quite miserable.

There are other forms of manifesto and cultural questioning that we can and should tap into. The Dark Mountain Manifesto has a pretty amazing call to arms.

They challenge that the values of civilisation as we understand it needs to be questioned. The first page has Ralph Waldo Emerson: "The end of the human race will be that it will eventually die of civilisation."

It points that we have forgotten that the current broadly applied definition of 'progress', and our separation from 'nature', are both myths. They are the stories that are fundamental to our current idea of civilisation and have got us into a lot of trouble. They challenge that these myths need to be rewritten.

Further, the only way these can be rewritten is by artists. We are..."Trapped inside a runaway narrative, headed for the worst kind of encounter with reality.... In such a moment, writers, artists, poets and storytellers of all kinds have a critical role to play."

Focussing on writing, but calling to artists of all types, it asks "what from of writing has emerged to challenge civilisation itself?"

A fascinating challenge for architecture.

# NOSTALGIA? ALTERNATIVE TRAJECTORIES

- AJ: I've been in this again, I fucking love that one.
- Jo: Let's go in there afterwards.
- JH: That's so glorious.
- AJ: Talking of un-civilization [laughs], let's go back nah, it's also....

Nostalgia and/or going backwards is not the only option.

That's what I like about the Dark Mountain call to arms. It's forward according to a different cultural trajectory. It's a positive creation. Learning to love different values to the ones we're being force-fed. What is that doing to our livers?

John Michael Greer has a wonderful essay that explores alternative futures. The Steam Punk Future? He asks. Great consideration, because his point is that the assumption of history being a linear trajectory is a reasonable one to question.

It opens up the idea of a future. Not just the future. Alternative trajectories.

Nostalgia begs a lot of digestion. At Gap Filler we deal quite a lot with nostalgia, but tweaking it. This is one of many things we straddle I feel, and are quite slippery because of that.

I loved in Bulgaria when I saw the hideous hotels developed on the Black Sea coast, often left in partial completion (for money-laundering one doesn't have to actually finish the thing). What I loved was when I heard that the government was actually offering money to have them pulled down. A very different understanding of what progress is.

Just thinking though, maybe the land would just be opened up for new ones to be built on the same plot. I like to think of the ambiguous ending of that movie meaning that the hotels disappeared and nice plants and beasties got their homes back...



# FINISH?<sup>1</sup>

AJ: Do you want me to stop the recording?  
[The rest is impertinent]

This is just one conversation that, as a result of this work's intent, we had, and recorded.

There have been many, and will be many more. I always look forward to them, and sense them to be formative. I want to use this 6-week duration as an excuse to continue and re-explore the ideas in here. Bringing in a waft of discipline maybe...What discipline?

Hmmm...just realised the oral medium link. Our oral traditions have been so important to humanity. Telling and shaping stories.

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<sup>1</sup> Seems a suitable place to thank Jessica, Audrey, Jen, Mel, Amiria and Nick for their time, advice and support. And advanced thanks for those in the conversations to come.