Uncivilising the Anthropocene: Post-Environmentalism and The Dark Mountain Project

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores the post-environmentalist network of writers, artists, and thinkers known as The Dark Mountain Project. It does so by examining Dark Mountain as a literary and cultural phenomenon that has generated a burgeoning literary community and subculture of *uncivilisation* in response to ecocide in the Anthropocene. I implement a method of analysis drawn from the environmental humanities to examine the cultural dynamics of environmental crisis, with particular emphasis on the role of storytellers in shaping perceptions of the future. I utilize a comparative approach to measure the project's emerging philosophy of uncivilisation against more established concepts in radical ecology, including Timothy Morton's dark ecology and Deep Ecology. I introduce the concept of *negative eco-aesthetics* to describe the quality of darkness and negativity that characterizes Dark Mountain's *uncivilised writing*, and demonstrate how such writing can reinvigorate our current inability to imagine possible futures beyond the current forecast of collapse.

For Sean,

and for the ones I lost during this project.

Radical art today is synonymous with dark art; its primary color is black.

—Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*

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Introduction

> Now a familiar human story is being played out. It is the story of an empire corroding from within. It is the story of a people who believed, for a long time, that their actions did not have consequences. It is the story of how that people will cope with the crumbling of their own myth. It is our story.[1]
>
> — *Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto*

It is common knowledge today that the planet is undergoing unprecedented, widespread environmental crisis. No longer dismissed as the maniacal fear mongering of doomsayers, warnings of imminent ecological and civilisational collapse are now issued regularly from research institutes, scientists, and other experts.[2] This news of the threat of collapse has made its way into mainstream media as well. Headline after headline tells of disaster and destruction from every corner of the globe: a changing climate, strange weather, the unmitigated loss of biodiversity, the relentless extraction of natural resources in increasingly taxed and delicate ecosystems—to name a few of the most popular stories.[3]

How did these stories get to be the stuff of everyday news? Quite simply, the pressures of failing systems have become impossible to ignore: the hard truths

[1] *Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto*, 3.
[2] See, for instance, Ahmed's discussion of the recent NASA-funded study on the projected collapse of industrial civilisation.

of climate change and environmental limits are being felt across the world, from complex global issues of food security and national security to more immediate experiences of pollution, climbing fuel prices, resource shortages, and contamination concerns. Human impact on Earth's ecosystems has grown so profound that scholars now categorize our present moment within an entirely new geological epoch: the Anthropocene.[4] In recognizing the magnitude of human civilisation's impact on Earth's ecosystems, environmentalists and scientists alike are quick to point out that the crises we face are of our own doing: that freak weather incidents are symptomatic of a changing climate brought on by the burning of fossil fuels; that the loss of biodiversity is caused by human encroachment on the habitats of other species; and that the scarred, toxic landscapes of extraction littered across the planet are the price paid to fuel the engines of civilisation. These tales of environmental degradation circulate widely, saturating popular media from news outlets to Hollywood films and narrating the increasingly precarious Anthropocene era. The story of environmental crisis has become the story of our age.

Despite the consistent barrage of bad news stories in our newsfeeds, conflicting narratives persist around the current global state of affairs and where our species, and the planet, are headed. Media coverage on environmental issues remains double-sided, on the one hand catastrophizing the future while on the other softening the blow with stories of hope. Anxiety-inducing tales of havoc

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[3] See Latour on the "odd novelty" and "disturbing" nature of news stories of anthropogenic ecocide (1-2).

[4] Crutzen and Stoermer first proposed the term "Anthropocene" in 2000 to define our current geological epoch characterized by humankind's profound impact on ecology and geology.

wrought by climate change are countered with reassuring stories of experts working tirelessly on technologies of climate manipulation straight out of a science-fiction novel. The green energy revolution, also led by technological advancement, is touted as a sustainable alternative to fossil fuels in the quest to appease society's insatiable appetite for energy. These ameliorative stories of experts working to solve the problems of a planet in crisis are complemented by the narrative of the conscious consumer whose green choices are yet another viable solution to environmental issues. Today we can drive to our green-collar jobs in our fuel-efficient hybrid cars, drinking our sustainably grown, ethically harvested, fair-trade, organic coffee from reusable coffee cups made out of recycled materials, all with the aim of minimizing our carbon footprint and leading more eco-friendly lives. In this story, the roadmap we have laid out for ourselves points to a future that is bright green, and we tell ourselves that we are making great strides in the race towards sustainability. The human species is adapting and advancing towards a future that is sustainable and secure for everyone—or so this story goes.

While advancements in green technologies and innovations in sustainability may appear to be steps in the right direction (forward), a growing resistance to this narrative of optimism is being mounted from the margins of contemporary cultural criticism. Former deputy editor of *The Ecologist* Paul Kingsnorth views such efforts to respond to environmental pressures as nothing more than "business-as-usual" ("Confessions" 53), arguing that the ideology of progress underlying such efforts is actually driving our species' destructive

behaviour. He does not place his confidence in this narrative of hope for a sustainable future, instead calling out this enthusiasm for the coming Green Revolution as a superficial optimism that willfully denies the mounting evidence of darker days ahead. In 2009, together with Dougald Hine, he published *Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto* calling for a new approach to the current global ecological crisis, beginning with the premise that we are already living in the midst of collapse.

The manifesto expounds a decidedly darker view of what the future holds, in which there is no comfort to be found in the aspirations of green technologies or the efforts of environmental activists. Rather, the duo view humankind's attempts at managing our damaged planet as inherently flawed, for underpinning all our efforts is a myth: the myth of civilisation. Their premise is that human society is founded on a series of stories that govern our relationships with one another and with the world around us.[5] These stories are at the root of ecocide—the death of the planet—and as such they must be abandoned if we are to realize the radical changes called for to minimize anthropogenic damage to Earth's ecosystems. While many of these stories have been debunked by scholars and exposed for the human-crafted tales that they are, Hine and Kingsnorth argue that the myth of civilisation is the "last taboo" to be broken (*Uncivilisation* 12). This myth rests on many of the foundational stories we tell ourselves which are everyday crumbling at our feet—stories about who we are and how we live on this planet that are at the root of an anthropocentric, or human-centered,

[5] See *Uncivilisation* for an overview of such stories, including Manifest Destiny, the myth of progress, and the dominance of Man over Nature.

worldview. The authors claim that in the face of civilisational collapse it is up to writers, poets, artists, and storytellers to break this final taboo by creating new stories that do away with anthropocentrism in favor of ecocentric, or earth-centred thinking, as a way "to see us through the end of the world as we know it and out the other side" (*Uncivilisation* 17).

The manifesto's spotlighting of artistic response to the pressing realities of ecocide is apt given the dwindling faith in scientific and technological innovation and yet-to-be-realized legislative solutions that is emerging in critical discourse around environmental issues. At a time when scientific, technological, and political efforts have proven inadequate to the task of ameliorating ecological pressures, an alternative—or perhaps complimentary—approach to the challenges we face is surfacing in the humanities. The emerging field of environmental humanities upholds French philosopher Michel Serres' insight that the root of humanity's exploitative relationship with the natural world is *cultural*, and so any potent remediation necessitates a *cultural* intervention (31). Hine and Kingsnorth's manifesto, and their ensuing literary project, operates from this imperative for a cultural response to ecocide.

Their manifesto concludes with a call to arms: the authors solicit *uncivilised writing* that faces the "underlying darkness at the root of everything we have built" (4), working "against the civilising project" to produce new forms of literature that resist the structuring myths of our time (14). They envision this "writing for outsiders" to come from the "wilder fringes" of civilisation, its practitioners those "with soil under their fingernails and wilderness in their heads"

who tell “uncomfortable truths” about the world we have created (13-16). This call has sparked a small but growing movement on the fringes of ecological thinking called The Dark Mountain Project, attracting like-minded people who call themselves Dark Mountaineers. The aim of Dark Mountain is to demystify the myth of civilisation and craft new stories for these troubled times, and the darker days ahead. On their website a summary description of the group reads:

> The Dark Mountain Project is a network of writers, artists and thinkers who have stopped believing the stories our civilisation tells itself. We see that the world is entering an age of ecological collapse, material contraction and social and political unravelling, and we want our cultural responses to reflect this reality rather than denying it. The Project grew out of a feeling that contemporary art and literature were failing to respond honestly or adequately to the scale of our entwined ecological, economic and social crises. We believe that writing and art have a crucial role to play in coming to terms with this reality, and in questioning its foundations. (“FAQS: What is the Dark Mountain Project”).

Much of what sets Dark Mountaineers apart from other environmental activists and thinkers is their perception of the future. Rather than pushing for greener technologies or more sustainable practices or any number of behavioral shifts to save the planet, they acknowledge that collapse is imminent, not necessarily something to be mourned, and that artists and writers have a key role to play in carrying humanity through the decline by creating new narratives for

this transitional time and a post-civilisation future. However, the group's dismissal of sustainable future scenarios and green techno-utopias must not be read as a complete disregard for the future: they do not hail the end of the world, but rather "the end of the world as we know it" (*Uncivilisation* n. pag.). Comfortable, civilised life as a portion of the human population has come to know it will eventually cease to exist. Dark Mountaineers acknowledge this inevitability and, contrary to the techno-optimism espoused by most sustainability spokespeople who assure us everything is going to be fine, they harbour a dark optimism for a post-civilisation future: a "hope beyond hope . . . [for] the unknown world ahead of us" (*Uncivilisation* n. pag.). It is this contrary position I wish to draw out further, as antithetical to other, more popular positions on environmental crisis and green revolution that appear by comparison critically stunted in their adherence to techno-optimism and sustainability narratives.

The Dark Mountain Project is primarily a literary project that publishes anthologies of uncivilised writing, of which there have been six to date. Critical response to the project thus far has largely fixated on the more sensational aspects of the manifesto, namely the fact that the group has "given up on environmentalism" (Kovel, "Ecosocialism"). Several critics have labeled the project fatalistic or nihilistic;[6] however, these heavy-handed critiques are typically directed at the project's premise, put forth in the manifesto, leaving the textual and narrative dimensions of the project dormant and secondary. Criticism of the project mainly circulates in the environmentalist community, and there has been no extensive literary analysis of The Dark Mountain Project to date. My research

addresses this gap by considering the literary output of the project as a whole in an effort to explore and explain Dark Mountain's strange and contrary position on ecological crisis.

The aim of my Masters thesis is to explore The Dark Mountain Project in its entirety both as a literary and cultural phenomenon, to examine the various ways in which Dark Mountain has generated a subculture of uncivilisation set apart from other environmentally-minded groups, and to consider their conviction that artists and storytellers have a central role to play in guiding humanity through the decline of civilisation. My project benefits from, and is in conversation with, the relatively new fields of ecocriticism[7] and ecopoetics, which operate at the intersections of language and ecology to open up productive intellectual space for examining the cultural dynamics of environmental issues. Ecocriticism emerged in the nineties and initially exemplified "bright green" eco-thinking by highlighting celebratory nature writing, aesthetic appreciations of natural beauty, and musings on subjective experience and personal transformation in wild nature (Morton, *Ecological Thought* 16). More recently, this first-wave ecocriticism has fallen out of critical favour as attention shifts to literature that explores ecological anxiety surrounding climate change and its projected disasters, from species extinction to mass die-off to total apocalypse. Ecopoetics, a more recent development in ecologically-oriented thinking, in many ways goes even further than ecocriticism in articulating the implications of a planet in crisis, whether registering the affective experience or philosophical and ethical challenges of life

[6] For early criticism of Dark Mountain, see Kovel; Monbiot; Townsend.
[7] For a comprehensive introduction to ecocriticism, see Glotfelty.

in the Anthropocene. I will examine The Dark Mountain Project as a cultural response to ecocide by creating and implementing a method of analysis drawn from ecocriticism and ecopoetics, attending to both the literary and practical dynamics of the project.

My thesis is situated within the larger interdisciplinary area of research known as environmental humanities, of which ecocriticism and ecopoetics are both language-based sub-disciplines. I take my cue from scholars stressing the important contributions to ecological reparation made possible by this emergent field, which seeks new ways of thinking *ecologically* via alternative epistemologies and revaluations of the human relationship to nature[8]. My thesis carries forward the mandate of environmental humanities to spur such cultural revision by examining The Dark Mountain Project's distinctly cultural response to ecocide. Moreover, I situate my thesis in response to the growing chorus of green thinkers who call upon storytellers and poets to offer up hope for the future.[9] While much has been written about our possible futures in the genre of post-apocalyptic science fiction, my research extends this question(ing) of the future to the expanding area of ecological literature that is "*concerned with the extinction event that human success represents*" [emphasis in the original] (Skinner 111), and which I see exemplified in Dark Mountain's uncivilised writing. I identify Dark Mountain's contrary position on collapse with a bourgeoning subset of environmental literature I call *negative eco-aesthetics*—that is, literature with a particular artistic quality of darkness and negativity. Though counterintuitive, I

[8] On the role of environmental humanities for ecological thinking, see Buell; Chisholm; Morton, *Ecological Thought* 12-14.

argue that we can find productive space to think differently about the future in the face of ecological collapse by attending to the thematic and formal innovations revealed in this dark strand of environmental literature.

My project evolves from a set of central questions: What does one find when facing darkness? What does looking into the darkness contribute to our capacity for hope or propensity for despair? Can we locate sites of hope in darkness, and if so, what/where are they? What, exactly, is hoped for? Does this turn to darkness ultimately decay into an apathetic or fatalistic nihilism that assumes the foreclosure of all possible futures? Or, is facing the darkness, as Timothy Morton suggests, the key to adopting a truly ecological thought?[10] Can something constructive come from what might seem a destructive turn in ecological literature? Does uncivilised writing offer a new approach to dealing with ecological crisis, or is this despairing turn merely the breakdown of all hope in possible futures—a melancholic coping mechanism in the face of imminent collapse? These questions guide my examination of Dark Mountain and prompt my reflections on the project's implications for thinking about the future.

The Dark Mountain anthologies reveal a contemporary body of writing that is explicitly invested in probing the negative experience of ecological crisis and the despair that comes with contemplating the future in the face of collapse. In the tradition of second-wave ecocriticism, my thesis traces how a negative aesthetic and affectivity reverberates across these texts to compose a new subset of ecological literature and thinking that addresses the difficult realities of the

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[9] See Bate; Berardi, *The Uprising*; Felstiner; Solnit 163-74.
[10] On the role of darkness in ecological thought, see Morton, *Ecological Thought* 59-97.

Anthropocene. My thesis also responds to provocative and resonant discourse surrounding life in late capitalism, such as Eric Cazdyn and Imre Szeman's work on the current cultural inability to think beyond globalization, Franco 'Bifo' Berardi's thoughts on exhaustion within the techno-saturated rat race of semiocapitalism, and the debate surrounding the efficacy of nonviolent eco-activism versus direct action taken up by Derrick Jensen. I situate Dark Mountain's uncivilised writing amidst these urgent discussions of the present—and future—conditions of humans and the planet, asking how such writing can reinvigorate our current inability to imagine possible futures that take us beyond our current forecast of collapse.

This thesis serves as both a literary and a cultural study of Dark Mountain by attending to the cultural movement as a whole as well as its literary output. For instance, I will read the Dark Mountain blog as a work of community practice and I will read the anthologies as literary practice. Methodologically, my approach benefits from the broad perspective characteristic of contemporary literary and cultural studies, rather than the myopic focus of something like a New Critical practice of close reading selections from the anthologies in isolation. In an effort to showcase the widespread literary diversity and anarchic spirit of Dark Mountain, and as a nod to my intellectual inclination towards ecological thinking, I adopt a more holistic approach that considers how the various elements of the project intersect to form a dynamic, growing movement.

This thesis is composed in three chapters that focus on different aspects of Dark Mountain: community, philosophy, and practice. In the first chapter I

consider how Dark Mountain fosters community in various forms, from their online networks and digital communications to the diverse community of writers, poets, artists, activists, and other like-minded thinkers united in and by the anthologies. The aim of this chapter is to lay the groundwork for a discussion of what is at stake in Dark Mountain's project of uncivilisation by first exploring the composition of this subculture and its modes of circulation. In the second chapter I flesh out the philosophical tenets of Dark Mountain by unpacking their Eight Principles of Uncivilisation and reviewing Kingsnorth's extensive body of writing on the project. In this chapter I read between Kingsnorth's reflections on his own Dark Mountain-inspired philosophy and the writings of ecological philosopher Timothy Morton, whose concepts of *dark ecology* and *ecological thought* are especially useful for thinking through uncivilisation. I consider also Dark Mountain's ties to the radical environmental movement and philosophy of Deep Ecology. In the third chapter I move from philosophy to action, examining the practice of Dark Mountaineers in light of the ever-pressing question: what should we do? What is being done—what can be done—about environmental destruction, and, specific to my purposes, what might literature contribute to a project of responding to ecocide? In this chapter I consider the manifesto's claim that storytellers must destroy the myth of civilisation as but one iteration of a growing call to artists, writers, and poets to save the earth and ask what it is about their practice that designates them our last hope. To conclude, I argue that Dark Mountain is engaged in radical thinking about the future that is lacking in the environmental rhetoric of today's popular critical thinkers.

I. Community

> Uncivilisation, like civilisation, is not something that can be created alone. Climbing the Dark Mountain cannot be a solitary exercise. We need bearers, sherpas, guides, fellow adventurers. We need to rope ourselves together for safety. At present, our form is loose and nebulous. It will firm itself up as we climb. Like the best writing, we need to be shaped by the ground beneath our feet, and what we become will be shaped, at least in part, by what we find on our journey . . .
>
> Come. Join us. We leave at dawn.[11]
>
> — *Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto*

This thesis begins with a discussion of what Dark Mountain is in a concrete sense—its component parts, methods of communication, modes of circulation, anarchic organization—before turning to a consideration of the project's intellectual implications, the group's philosophical and ethical commitments, and their entanglement in broader eco-philosophical debates about living in a time of ecological and civilisational decline. This chapter serves as the groundwork for my entire examination of Dark Mountain by pursuing such foundational questions as: What exactly is The Dark Mountain Project? Who are the Dark Mountaineers? How does the group articulate its origin and aims, and how do others perceive them? While these questions seem simple, their answers reveal a complexity and strangeness in keeping with the project's radical departure from much contemporary environmentalist thought. From Dark Mountain's earliest beginnings, Kingsnorth and Hine have fielded criticism for the

[11] *Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto,* 18.

project's central claims—criticism that they have often shown to be misguided and inaccurate. In an effort to avoid such charges, this chapter scrutinizes closely the authors' careful articulations of what Dark Mountain is and is not.

In this chapter I take a cultural studies approach to fleshing out the composition of this subculture and its modes of circulation. I examine the various component parts of the project as well as the discourse around defining the project in opposition to other environmentally-minded organizations. Moreover, I explore how the concept of community fundamentally informs the project: from the value of community in our contemporary moment to the project's premise that artists and storytellers must serve as the central cultivators of uncivilised community. Through an analysis of discourse surrounding Dark Mountain the project's commitment to community is made evident, giving us a clearer understanding of what the project is about and helping to frame my discussion of the group's philosophy in the following chapter.

What Dark Mountain is/n't

Kingsnorth and Hine's self-published manifesto—what they thought was just a call in the dark—has, over the past five years, inspired a full-fledged subculture. The Dark Mountain Project's growing membership is a testament to the relevance of their aim to look squarely at the reality of ecocide, but also to the group's online presence and their fostering of a digital community. Based out of the United Kingdom, the project has garnered members from all over the world

through online platforms and crowd-funded book publications. Through their website one can discover various ways to get involved with the project, whether by attending an event (Dark Mountain host talks, workshops, and other gatherings across the United Kingdom), submitting a piece of writing to be considered for a future publication, supporting the project financially through donation or subscription, or connecting online via various social media platforms including their own Uncivilisation Network.[12] Dark Mountain has also maintained an active blog since 2010. At the heart of the project though, are the anthologies of uncivilised writing. Dark Mountain put out four book collections between 2010 and 2013, each roughly 300 pages, but soon the editorial team were receiving more publication-worthy submissions of uncivilised writing and art than they had ever anticipated. As of 2014 they have moved to a bi-annual publication model in an effort to distribute as much of this material as possible. The manifesto's powerful call for uncivilised writing has been heard loud and clear, and has been taken up by writers and artists with equal enthusiasm.

What Kingsnorth and Hine set out to achieve with their 2009 manifesto pales in comparison to what Dark Mountain has become. Originally intended to initiate a small literary journal (Jeppe, "Parameters"), the manifesto's call for a radically honest literature that faces squarely the contemporaneity of collapse and thinks clearly about possible futures has struck a cord with a larger audience than the pair had anticipated. While the manifesto, publications, and online network form the foundation of Dark Mountain, the project has also inspired various

[12] At the time of writing, Dark Mountain's Facebook page had 5,152 Likes, Twitter had 3,755 Followers, and the Uncivilisation Network had 2,150 Members.

offshoots and collaborations including music, blogs, and even an annual festival. The online conversation circulating in the blogosphere is especially relevant to understanding what Dark Mountain is, for many of the participating bloggers—poets, artists, intellectuals, and academics—have been profoundly influenced by their engagement with the project and are actively reflecting on the question: what exactly is Dark Mountain?

A constantly evolving project, Dark Mountain has proven incredibly difficult to define even for those at its centre. Many would agree that the best way to understand the project is by way of clarifying what it is not. What differentiates Dark Mountain from other ecologically-oriented groups? What sets them apart from an activist organization like Greenpeace, for instance? Highly cognizant of critical response to and misinterpretations of the project, Kingsnorth stresses repeatedly in his public talks and interviews that Dark Mountain is fundamentally "not an 'activist' project," nor is it bent on offering solutions for a planet in crisis or "trite 'answers'" to questions of what is to be done ("Journey"). Correcting many of the false assumptions about what Dark Mountain entails, he explains:

> Dark Mountain is not intended as a vehicle for theoretical or abstract arguments about the future, nor a vehicle for apocalyptic fantasies. And, perhaps crucially, this is not an 'activist' project: if you are looking for new ways of 'saving the world', you will be disappointed in us—and some have been. Dark Mountain is not another well-meaning attempt to 'bring together artists concerned about the environment'. It's not an attempt to focus the minds of

> poets on 'the challenges of sustainability', or to get more keen, young writers to 'tackle subjects' like climate change or deforestation. ("Journey").

Dark Mountain is explicitly not an environmentalist organization, despite the fact that one of the movement's central tenets is recognition of anthropogenic ecocide. Dark Mountaineers are not environmental activists though many, including Kingsnorth himself, were heavily involved in activism at one time in their lives. Kingsnorth distances himself from his former environmentalist calling in an essay entitled "Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist" which has become a foundational and oft-cited Dark Mountain text. In this essay, he condemns the current state of environmentalism that has become "a victim of the contemporary cult of utility" (52). No longer a vocation adopted out of a sheer love of the natural world, today's brand of environmentalism simply serves the interests of capital whilst paying lip service to a damaged planet. Today's environmentalist is an ambassador of *sustainability*, a term Kingsnorth exposes for what it is: "an entirely human-centred piece of politicking, disguised as concern for 'the planet'" (52).

Despite his abandonment of his environmentalist past, Kingsnorth does not see Dark Mountain as a "political alternative to environmentalism" ("Lecture"). Instead, he begins from the premise that nothing can be saved, neither civilisation nor the earth, for we are already in the midst of collapse. Dark Mountaineers are neither activists nor campaigners; rather, they are critical of the true motivations underlying campaigns for sustainability which they denounce as

thinly veiled efforts to protect a comfortable, Western, middle-class lifestyle ("Journey"). Kingsnorth does not consider Dark Mountain a "political solution" to ecological and civilisational crisis ("Visions of Disaster"), but rather a "cultural response" to an age of ecocide in a time when such responses seem conspicuously absent from mainstream art and culture ("Journey"). This is the sticking point for many critics and activists intent on uncovering a political program or prescriptive campaign for what is to be done in the manifesto—they cannot find one. In keeping with Kingsnorth's move away from an activist mindset the manifesto is completely devoid of proposals or political demands to save the earth. It is rather, as Kingsnorth sees it, an "artistic manifesto" akin to the radical modernist manifestos of the cubists, imagists, and Dadaists, who lived through a similar period of profound upheaval a century ago (Graugaard "Month One Hundred").

It is at this point that we can begin to flesh out a counter image of what Dark Mountain is, while bearing in mind that the project is still in its infancy and in many ways resists definition. Much of the online discourse aiming to capture what Dark Mountain is has sprung from the four Uncivilisation Festivals held in England since the beginning of the project. The last festival was held in the summer of 2013; organizers have since decided that the energy of the project would be better invested in publishing more anthologies. The festivals, while a discontinued element of Dark Mountain, remain a foundational component of the project. These events have done a great deal to expand interest in Dark Mountain and establish an ethos around the project, serving as a place for like-minded

people to think, create, and be together. It is out of the festival experience that the conversation around defining Dark Mountain has taken shape.

Jeppe Graugaard, a graduate student in the School of Environmental Sciences at the University of East Anglia, is at the heart of the online conversation around defining Dark Mountain. A regular attendee of the festivals, he is incorporating Dark Mountain into his doctoral research on grassroots innovations and sustainability narratives. As part of his writing process Graugaard blogs about his research, creating a public forum for discussing Dark Mountain. For the past few years he has been documenting a series of interviews and conversation with fellow Dark Mountaineers that frequently centre on coming to terms with what Dark Mountain is. Committed to reflecting on what the project means for his own intellectual process, he presses others to think critically about how they understand Dark Mountain, what drew them to it, and what they see as its primary function. His blog is a valuable resource for my own research in understanding Dark Mountain, because the various threads of his online conversations lead to the same general consensus on what the project is about.

In an interview with Hine several foundational conceptions of the project emerge which are continually echoed in discourse around Dark Mountain. Hine understands Dark Mountain primarily as an "unfolding, improvised conversation" that has led to numerous unexpected collaborations and offshoots due to the project's "openness to unexpected opportunities" ("Beyond the Parameters"). This openness is part of the unique "attitude" at the heart of Dark Mountain, "an attitude . . . a way of being in the world, a way of being together" that manifests in

the writing, festivals, and various offshoots the project has inspired ("Beyond the Parameters"). This open, improvisational attitude is expressed through the project's "willing[ness] to sit with incompleteness and puzzlement and brokenness" in the face of collapse without grasping at meta-narratives to make sense of it all ("Beyond the Parameters"). This is an especially difficult challenge given that, as subjects of a Western, post-Enlightenment world, we have been reared in a "culture of certainty" that is distressed by the unknown (Hopkins).

In another of Graugaard's interviews, Kingsnorth echoes this sentiment, musing that the project has been well-received precisely because it "gives [people] that space to be puzzled in" and adding that the strength of the project lies in its refusal to prescribe a course of action, instead leaving people "to work things out as they go along" ("Month One Hundred"). He was surprised to discover that Dark Mountain has come to serve as a sort of "therapy group" for people dealing with the psychological impacts of living in an age of ecocide ("Month One Hundred"). The spirit of the project—this gathering together in uncertainty, this improvised conversation, this refusal to be prescriptive or programmatic—is rooted in a commitment to "embracing dissensus" and, as Graugaard observes, this ethos of Dark Mountain is precisely its strength ("Finding Community"). Writer and photographer Cat Lupton echoes this sentiment in her reflections on the project's ambiguous, anarchic attitude as it was reflected in the diversity of Uncivilisation Festival attendees:

> I remember at the 2011 festival being conscious that there were hackers, geeks, steampunk folk, Transition Town folk,

> permaculture folk, artists/makers, poets, smallholders, people living wild in the woods, different environmental activist groups, and more. All these different tribes that you wouldn't normally expect to see at the same event, all finding some kind of resonance with Dark Mountain. (Graugaard, "Serendipity").

The project exhibits an acceptance of dissensus and fostering of diversity which paves the way for thinking anew, leading Graugaard to praise Dark Mountain's "innovati[ve]" efforts to "build new concepts and new ideas around how we can best adapt and live in a time of collapse" ("Soul-making").

While Dark Mountain is understood as a conversation space for disparate voices, the group is united through a common understanding that not all is well with the world. Philosophical councilor and festival participant Andrew Taggart explains that all Dark Mountaineers acknowledge that:

> . . . something very fundamental to life [is] not working . . . As though it were somehow a communal or mystical vision. There's some kind of intimation, some visionary gleam, and it seems as though we're groping towards each other and we're finding not just consolation but actually a sense of kinship. (Graugaard, "Uncivilisation").

Artist, designer, and writer Antonio Dias shares Taggart's appraisal of Dark Mountain as a sort of empathic community, one that he was drawn to out of a "powerful synchronicity" that took him from "profound isolation, preoccupied with concerns no one seemed to share, to discovering a network of people with

whom [he] shared a common language" (Graugaard, "Finding Community"). Like Dias, Lupton recognized "powerful energies or serendipities" throughout the festivals that served to draw people together and forge connections (Graugaard, "Serendipity"). This mystical, playful notion of building community and connection is characteristic of the atmosphere of the festivals, which served as experimental spaces of literary and artistic creation as well as attempts to practice "new ways of being together" (Graugaard, "Uncivilisation"). Reflecting on the intergenerational connections, collaborations, and conversations of the festivals, Lupton reads Dark Mountain as a sort of "community that is re-finding ritual" (Graugaard, "Serendipity"). These sentiments of serendipitous connections and the powerful sense of kinship and fellow-feeling inspired by the festivals were common refrains in Graugaard's conversations around defining the spirit of the project, giving credence to my claim that Dark Mountain can be understood as a literary community—a group of people united in feelings of fellowship and camaraderie through a shared attitude towards the power of storytelling and literature and, in this instance, their central role in informing our experience of collapse.

Graugaard's interviews with festival participants offer valuable insights into the spirit of Dark Mountain and what draws people to it, fostering dialogue between participants and readers of his blog to keep the conversation going as he carries out his research. The only person to have contributed more to the dialogue around defining Dark Mountain is Kingsnorth himself, who has made every effort to set the record straight about what the project is. Keenly attentive to criticism of

Dark Mountain, he has written and spoke at great length about the impetus for the project and where he sees it heading, deftly navigating the naysayers and offering forth a compelling account of Dark Mountain's relevance as a "cultural response to an age of ecocide" ("Journey").

Kingsnorth envisions Dark Mountain working "to face the converging crises of our century as a cultural challenge—rather than only a technical or political one" ("Journey"). Scholars across the environmental humanities share Dark Mountain's position on the cultural roots of our current ecological crisis and recognize the cultural assumptions, myths, and biases that underpin our troubled relationship with the natural world. At Scotland's Big Tent eco-festival in 2010, Kingsnorth prompted participants to reflect on the role of culture in generating our current global crisis by outlining some of the central questions posed by Dark Mountain:

> In what ways are these crises rooted in our cultural assumptions, the stories we have told for generations and the ways in which we have seen the world? How do we disentangle ourselves from those assumptions? How can we forge cultural responses that undermine the poisonous myths we have inherited, the myths of humanity's centrality, materialism, progress, the separation of 'people' from 'nature'? Where do we find new stories, or old stories whose time has come? What other ways of seeing might alter our understanding of our situation? And how do we help send these stories and ways of seeing out into the world? ("Journey").

These questions underscore the cultural roots of humanity's troubled relationship with the natural world and thus point toward the cultural revision that the project calls for.

Kingsnorth is sensitive to the challenges of such work, for the rewriting of dominant cultural narratives is a monumental task. To achieve this, Dark Mountain calls for "radical honesty" in a time of ecological and civilisational collapse, a willingness to face this reality "without any pill-sugaring fantasy talk of turning it all around with 'sustainability' or UN treaties or ethical shopping or eco-socialism" ("Lecture"). This radical honesty is exhibited in the curatorial choices of Dark Mountain's third anthology, which were governed by a rejection of cautionary tales, aimed to warn readers of impending doom if they fail to act, in favor of post-cautionary tales, "which do not seek to avert crisis or radical change, but which acknowledge that we are already living through those things and that we are going to have to deal with the consequences" (Wu Ming I qtd. in Hine et al., "Editorial" 3). Dark Mountain's post-cautionary tales operate on the premise that we are already living in the midst of catastrophe, and instead prompt reflection on how to live with this realization and how to "find a new sense of community after the world we know has fallen down" (Hine et al., "Editorial" 3). This attitude of facing the hard truth of ecocide, what Kingsnorth calls "green stoicism" ("The Poet and the Machine"), importantly also recognizes the limits to what is possible in response to such crisis. For Dark Mountaineers, this is a situation for which there is no solution, no secret to reversing the course of decline. Instead, the project aims to "create a counter-narrative to the mainstream

diet of junk about progress, growth, development, control and the inevitable forward momentum of an all-triumphant humanity" ("The Poet and the Machine").

But as this counter-narrative is gradually forged out of the residues of long-forgotten ways of thinking and being ecologically, a process that Kingsnorth believes he will not live to see the end of, there remains a persistent questioning by both Dark Mountaineers and their critics alike: how do we live now? As a testament to Kingsnorth's refusal to let Dark Mountain devolve into a prescriptive project, he resists outlining an agenda for change or fabricating his own brand of lifestyle politics. Instead, he offers humble explanations for his own life choices and gentle suggestions about where one might direct their energies, admitting his conservationist bent and his interest in learning and sharing the skills, knowledge, and technologies of times past as a sort of insurance policy for the uncertain future ahead. He explains that once he learned to give up the pretence that the world could be saved, he felt relieved and motivated rather than despondent: "Once you stop saying things you believe to be untrue, the alternative isn't to collapse in despair but rather to think about what I can actually usefully do" (Hopkins). Chapter 3 is dedicated to exploring this question of Dark Mountain's practice further.

Kingsnorth is adamant that he and the rest of the Dark Mountaineers are not apocalyptic millennialists, as some of their early detractors have charged. Despite the decidedly dark overtones of the project, Dark Mountain is surprisingly far from being "depressing," "doom-laden," or "despairing" (Hopkins). Instead,

the project has enabled Kingsnorth and others to find release in abandoning sustainable future scenarios and to instead face honestly the question of how one might make a life in an age of ecocide. As the very notion of green stoicism suggests, looking frankly at ecocide does not imply a reaction of doom and despair. In fact, by refusing to pretend everything is going to be alright, the project dispels the illusion that we have control over the course of the future, while at the same time diffusing the "immense fear of zombie apocalypse" and offering some "reassurance that we will be reverting to a lifestyle that most people in human history have always had to live" ("Lecture"). While Dark Mountain invites the imagination to run wild into the darkness of an uncertain future and an all-but-forgotten past, it does so in this resilient spirit of green stoicism and the sustaining light of community.

Local Solidarity and the New Commons

There is a consistent refrain amongst Dark Mountaineers: the importance of reviving community as a reaction to the rampant precarity and hyper-individualism symptomatic of global capitalism. Writing as cultural critics, many of the contributors to the anthologies offer assessments of life in today's fast-paced, consumer-driven, corporate-sponsored world, calling attention to what is lost when older forms of cultural expression and social interaction are stamped out by bureaucratic control, alienation, mass media, and master narratives. Yet far from wallowing in despair over the state of precarity and disconnect that

characterizes the twenty-first century, and in keeping with the project's pursuit of a "new optimism" (Hine, "Dougald Hine Talks"), contributors like Mexican activist and de-professionalized intellectual Gustavo Esteva and American anarcho-primitivist philosopher John Zerzan have instead chosen to spotlight grassroots efforts of resistance that centre around rebuilding community now. These stories of people reclaiming the commons and working to create autonomous networks that operate outside the mediations of capital are virtually unrepresented in mainstream media; however, it seems that one of the unspoken tasks of Dark Mountaineers is to share these stories of reclamation and the creation of "new commons" (Hine, "Dealing With Our Own Shit" 75).

In an interview with Hine, Esteva reflects on the growing consciousness around "food sovereignty" (79), a term coined by the international peasant movement Via Campesina that inspired indigenous Peruvians to reclaim 1 million hectares of land, enabling them to produce 40% of their own food (75). Taking note of such stories of radical reclaiming of the commons, Esteva asserts that these aims are valuable pursuits in the face of global capitalism:

> But if you want to abandon that feeling of precarity, then it's to rediscover that the only way to have a kind of security is at the grassroots. With your friends. With the kinds of new commons emerging everywhere. Then, together, the people themselves, with their neighbours, we can create the kind of social fabric that can really offer us security, protection and a good life. The possibility of living well. (36).

For Esteva and Hine, both informed by philosopher and social critic Ivan Illich, friendship is viewed as the foundation of the new commons, and community building around issues of food security is everywhere taking hold through the efforts of those who have come together to share in their concerns for the future and how we live today. In the age of the "atomized individual" these stories of the commons, both reclaimed and created anew via the united efforts of communities in solidarity, serve to challenge the status quo and rewrite narratives of what is possible today and what futures are imaginable tomorrow (75). Far from being an engine of despair, Esteva's contribution to the Dark Mountain anthology brims with the inspiration of local communities working towards food sovereignty.

Similarly, in a conversation between Zerzan and fellow Dark Mountaineer Steve Wheeler that is also included in Dark Mountain's fourth anthology, the two discuss how ecological and economic crisis are strengthening community connections worldwide as people are working together creatively at a local level to respond to the challenges that face their communities (Wheeler, "'Why Don't You Go and Live in a Cave?!'"). Zerzan recounts how the people of Sipson, England, facing the looming threat of displacement due to extension plans for the Heathrow airport, united forces with environmental activist group Grow Heathrow to resist development and strengthen their community through growing their own food in abandoned lots—another instance of creating a new commons. Similarly, in Spain, anarchists are teaching locals to squat in their own homes to resist eviction. As Zerzan points out, "the crisis is actually helping to build these new coalitions" (201). Like Esteva, Zerzan identifies these stories of grassroots

community building in crisis-time as indicators of the possibility of resistance and resilience even now. Even the Occupy Movement, which some view as an utterly failed attempt at revolutionary change and proof that there is nothing that can be meaningfully done today to mobilize people, is for Zerzan another example of the value of community. He explains that the establishment of Occupy's "rhizomatic network" *was* its achievement, just as "the revolution *is* a sewing bee, it's a potlatch dinner . . . any gathering of people outside the mediation of capital is the goal" (202). It is precisely this uniting of the people, this coalescing of a community to face collapse together, that is revolutionary. Praising Dark Mountain for creating a space for people to come together to discuss the current state of life on this damaged planet, Zerzan writes:

> So many people discover this stuff for themselves 'by the ghostly lantern-light of a laptop late in the night' as I think I wrote somewhere, and they get scared and they feel alone, and everyone around them seems to just be doing what they're doing and getting on with normal life. So the power of actually connecting to other people—particularly face-to-face, in real life—is just huge, and people suddenly become much more optimistic, even as they're getting support in their view of how screwed we all are in this situation we're in. (203).

For Zerzan, as for other Dark Mountaineers, the value of the project lies not in finding friends with which to commiserate over the destruction of the world, but rather in forging meaningful connections with others who recognize the extent of

the global crisis and its implications for future life on Earth and in finding creative ways to face the challenges of what comes next—at the local, grassroots level.

While Dark Mountain has indeed spurred a global subculture via their publications and online networks, it is primarily the revivification of local communities that the project encourages. Unlike global environmentalist or activist organizations that aim to galvanize a unified, international force for change, the message arising from much of Dark Mountain's uncivilised writing is to focus on building local community connections to tackle small, local issues. By facing honestly the extent of our ecological and economic crisis and recognizing the signs of collapse as they are already manifesting, Kingsnorth has had to shift his own focus from that of a global environmental activist to someone who targets "winnable" battles (Stephenson). Rather than being inhibited by the realization that the scale and momentum of collapse forecloses any possibility of correction he has, along with other Dark Mountaineers, chosen to work on a local level for the kinds of changes necessary to make trying to live through decline more bearable. This means primarily working to rebuild and create new communities and local solidarities that are better able to withstand the challenges of economic and ecological instability than are the tenuous and vulnerable networks of globalization.

The importance of local solidarity today is a recurring theme in Dark Mountain's anthologies, taken up also by Paul O'Connor. As all around us the pillars of our civilisation begin to crack, he has summarized the task of our age thusly: "It is time to come home" ("Coming Home" 174). Like Kingsnorth, he

views returning to the sphere of the local as a valid response to a failing global marketplace. In order to reclaim a sense of home amidst the currents of a world in crisis, he advocates withdrawing from the systems of global capital and finding alternative ways to meet our basic needs through the revival of hands-on skills (185). However, this rediscovery of home is not a solitary endeavour, but rests on finding and supporting others "who are on a similar path . . . join[ing] hands with them so that we may accomplish together what we could not do alone. In this way communities will form which will be a refuge for others who flee the global machine as it judders to a halt" (186). One of the primary aims of Dark Mountain is to tell the stories of local solidarity that are shaping the new commons, and to inspire others to find strength and support through the trials of collapse from within their local communities.

Anthologizing as Literary Community

Zerzan finds the very act of establishing opportunities to build community to be revolutionary, and Dark Mountain's anthologies can be viewed in this light. He praises the project for serving as a stage for people to come together, to converse, to practice ways of being together in and after collapse. While this idea of community building is obvious at the level of the Uncivilisation festivals that quite literally brought people together to commune over the shared experience of collapse, the anthologies themselves materialize Dark Mountain as a literary community. Whereas the conventional anthology form tends towards a

homogenizing effect by collecting the great representatives of a literary style or era, the Dark Mountain anthologies bring in disparate, contemporary voices, often in conversation with each other, to form a diverse collection. In this way, the practice of anthologizing enacts a form of literary community.

In a recent collection of essays entitled *Despatches from the Invisible Revolution*, Hine and others have written about the anthology form as an example of a network in practice. In 2011 he launched an online platform and network, New Public Thinking, dedicated to public conversation around current events. This platform, while separate from Dark Mountain, is clearly informed by the thinking that took place at the festivals. It encourages dialogue between public intellectuals and is a response to BBC Radio 3's New Generation Thinkers project that sought a similar conversation but exclusively amongst academics. *Despatches* was the first publication to issue from this project, an anthology of writing that highlights "'the network' as the defining social and political phenomenon of our time" (1). Though New Public Thinking is a separate project that mainly spotlights digital activist networks, Hine's editorial voice maintains similar inflections to his work with Dark Mountain, and in both instances he considers how people outside the academy might explore creative projects and collaborations, including "new forms of politics and new forms of work," all in the "spirit of improvisation" which characterizes contemporary forms of social interaction like the network (2). I point to Hine's editorial piece for *Despatches* because it explicitly identifies the anthology as an example of a network in practice—the connections, collaborations, and dialogue that a network enables—

and use this point to argue that the Dark Mountain anthologies do something similar. These anthologies are an example of a diverse and evolving literary community in practice—in dialogue.

As I have shown in this chapter, there are many ways to think about Dark Mountain as a community. The project is invested in cultivating a network of Dark Mountaineers and, through the interconnections and dialogues sparked by their various online platforms and print anthologies, a literary community is born. Yet, in our effort to come to terms with what Dark Mountain is, the centrality of community to such a project ultimately yields further questions around the nature of such interpersonal connections. As a group of people united by a common understanding of collapse, might Dark Mountain be illuminated by Jonathan Flatley's concept of the melancholizing community put forth in *Affective Mapping*? He suggests that melancholizing can be a way to build community around shared history and affect, which sheds light on how Dark Mountaineers' shared history and affective experience of ecocide engenders a particular sense of community. Furthermore, how might one reconcile this paradox of creating community through a manifesto of anti-civilisation? How can a literary community be anti-civilisation, particularly when literature itself is held up as one of the crowning achievements of advanced social and cultural (read: civilisational) development? Does it not seem contradictory that the kernel of hope for Dark Mountain is community, when they hail the end of civilisation? Can there be such a thing as community without civilisation?

This paradox of uncivilised community sits at the heart of Dark Mountain and is in many ways at the root of the project's strange and contrary position on collapse. The imaginative challenge the project poses is to try to contemplate, and ultimately create, new forms of community that can exist outside the failing structures of civilisation. One of the ways Dark Mountaineers face this challenge is by turning to earlier ways of living and relating to one another as inspiration for alternative modes of human connection. In addition, they draw inspiration from contemporary radical and fringe movements that operate outside dominant paradigms (e.g. anti-capitalist and anti-globalization movements) as examples of alternative modes of community. Importantly, the project is not advocating a return to earlier ways of living exhibited by 'pre-civilised' peoples. Instead, the very existence of human communities outside the strictures of civilisation demonstrates that a post-civilisation future is possible. So while the notion of uncivilised community seems paradoxical, it is not without precedence. The project is founded on the idea that, although civilisation is coming to an end, this does not necessarily mean the entire human species will cease to exist. And so long as humans exist, there remains an opportunity for community to flourish—regardless of whether or not the advanced stage of human social development and organization we define as civilisation persists. Understanding Dark Mountain's philosophical underpinnings is key to working out how the project moves from recognizing the failings of civilisation in the Anthropocene and welcoming it's collapse, to working to cultivate uncivilised communities via creative artistic expression.

II. Philosophy

> We tried ruling the world; we tried acting as God's steward, then we tried ushering in the human revolution, the age of reason and isolation. We failed in all of it, and our failure destroyed more than we were even aware of. The time for civilisation is past. Uncivilisation, which knows its flaws because it has participated in them; which sees unflinchingly and bites down hard as it records—this is the project we must embark on now. This is the challenge for writing—for art—to meet. This is what we are here for.[13]
>
> —*Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto*

This chapter explores the central philosophical tenets of The Dark Mountain Project by beginning with the concept of uncivilisation as outlined in the manifesto and then working outwards to draw connections to related concepts in eco-philosophy. The paradox of uncivilised community gestured to at the end of Chapter 1 is best explained by establishing a comprehensive understanding of the concept of uncivilisation that underlies the project's entire philosophy. In an effort to gain an understanding of this and other key concepts integral to the project's philosophical underpinnings, I focus my analysis on some of the earliest writings that galvanized Dark Mountain's following, particularly the manifesto that launched the project and remains the touchstone of the movement. While it is no small challenge to define the philosophy of this group whose fundamentally anarchic spirit, diverse following, and evolving platform resist summation, the manifesto offers a firm articulation of the ideas that have informed the project since its inception. To this end, the pronouncements of the slim, red, hand-bound

[13] *Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto*, 16.

pamphlet that are condensed on the final page into "The Eight Principles of Uncivilisation" are worth reviewing at some length.

The Eight Principles of Uncivilisation

The first principle of uncivilisation is a full-fledged acknowledgment of the realities of economic and ecological collapse that we are currently living through: "We live in a time of social, economic and ecological unraveling. 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" (*Uncivilisation* n. pag.). Dark Mountain stems from this first principle of awareness, a cognizance of the tenuous state of global affairs and a commitment to facing the hard truths of a world in upheaval. But rather than such apprehension progressing into total angst over the human condition, this realization of the immediacy of collapse prompts an opportunity for new modes of thinking and new ways of living. This principle recognizes the failing pillars of civilisation, but importantly gestures towards a future beyond civilisation in which people can learn to live together without these guiding forces mediating their interactions. This is what Dark Mountain envisions when they imagine community after civilisation: people relating to one another outside the political, economic, and social constraints that have come to define life in the Anthropocene. Human culture is not synonymous with civilisation, therefore it need not be extinguished alongside fallen civilisation; rather, new

forms of social engagement and organization will develop to take the place of the institutions that are struggling to uphold late-stage global capitalism today.

Part of the new way of thinking that the project gestures towards involves abandoning our old approaches to ecological and economic crises in favour of learning new ways to approach such issues, as the second principle outlines: "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'" (*Uncivilisation*, n. pag.). Though not cited as such, this principle is likely informed by author and prominent Peak Oil theorist John Michael Greer who has contributed much to the discourse around the deindustrialized future and has written for Dark Mountain. In his book on the slow decline of a Peak Oil world, Greer draws a distinction between a problem and a predicament: a problem requires a solution, but a predicament cannot be solved and must simply be lived through (*Long Descent* 20-24). His assertion—that the sheer scale of our current global condition means it is no longer a problem but rather a predicament to be endured—is reflected in this second principle. Moreover, this principle resists blind faith in human agency to solve the problems of a damaged planet, because such an attitude occludes the complexities of this crisis point in history.

The third and forth principles underscore the significance of storytelling for the project: first acknowledging—and challenging—the foundational myths that underlie contemporary civilisation, and subsequently reviving the role of the storyteller as one who has the capacity to shape perceptions and "weave reality" (*Uncivilisation*, n. pag.). Following this reinstatement of storytelling as a central

component of human sociocultural life and cognitive development, the fifth principle immediately qualifies this revival of storytelling with a much-needed caution against the anthropocentric tendencies of today's grand narratives: "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" (*Uncivilisation*, n. pag.). Dark Mountain's revivification of the storytelling tradition brings with it a return to ecocentric, or earth-centred, thinking as a gesture of reparation for the damage humans have done by following narratives of human dominance and centrality.

The sixth principle highlights the project's distinctly place-based philosophy. Dark Mountaineers aim to "celebrate writing and art which is grounded in a sense of place and of time," positioning themselves in marked contrast to the cosmopolitan trend in literature and philosophy: "Our literature has been dominated for too long by those who inhabit the cosmopolitan citadels" (*Uncivilisation*, n. pag.). The project champions writing and art that is explicitly rooted in a place, that reflects a deep and abiding connection to locale, and that explores what knowledge and understanding might be gained from deliberately *placing* one's text in both time and space. This place-based philosophy stands in opposition to another recent trend in eco-philosophy advocated by Timothy Morton, who, in his work on the ecological thought, argues for "a progressive ecology that [is] big, not small; spacious, not place-ist; global, not local (if not universal); not embodied but displaced, spaced, outer spaced" (*Ecological Thought* 27). In Morton's search for a radical new way of thinking ecologically,

he promotes "dislocation" and total abandonment of what he considers the parochialism of place-based ecology (*Ecological Thought* 27). I reference this philosophical opposition to underscore what sets Dark Mountain apart from a related contemporary approach to radical eco-philosophy. Morton's work on the ecological thought serves as an especially interesting point of comparison for Dark Mountain because the two share many philosophical parallels but also important divergences that can tell us a great deal about what makes the project worthy of critical attention in its own right.

To draw out this comparison further, whereas Morton is keen to flesh out a robust philosophy and theory of the ecological thought, the seventh principle of uncivilisation declares: "We will not lose ourselves in the elaboration of theories or ideologies. Our words will be elemental. We write with dirt under our fingernails" (*Uncivilisation*, n. pag.). It follows from their primary acknowledgment of the foundational myths of civilisation that the group aims to eschew the grip of dogma by recognizing the threat of its hold on the writing and art they produce. To strive to write with "elemental" words is to seek linguistic expression that is not mediated by ideology, to expose the influence of civilisational myths on the stories we have told and seek to craft new stories free from such constraints. To "write with dirt under our fingernails" is another jab at the cosmopolitanism of contemporary literature, and elsewhere Kingsnorth has criticized contemporary literature for being "too urban" and "too civilised" ("Myth of Progress"). This principle associates uncivilisation with a down-to-

earth humility, quite literally connecting Dark Mountaineers with soil—humus.[14] In this way, uncivilised writing is imagined as intrinsically connected to the earth, the storyteller's body commingling with the vital components of soil. This image of dirt embedded under the fingernails of the uncivilised writer is an initial blurring of the boundary between human and non-human, and this liminal position is instrumental in creating new stories that blur such boundaries even further.

Finally, the eighth principle of uncivilisation serves as a meditation on the future: "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" (*Uncivilisation*, n. pag.). As the conclusion to the manifesto, this principle orients the project towards what comes next, rather than mourning the loss of an idealized past or bemoaning a foreclosed future. The question of the future is where Dark Mountain's philosophy gets rather complicated, and as such it warrants further investigation. Hine considers Dark Mountain to be a "project to find new optimism" ("Dougald Hine Talks"), a surprising claim given the finality of the project's central tenet: collapse is inevitable, and it has already begun. What sort of relation to optimism can be had by a movement dedicated to nixing false hope in favour of acknowledging the end? What sort of hope can the future bring if one perceives the days ahead as inevitably darker than the present? How can such a project aim to cultivate new optimism in light of the manifesto's bleak pronouncements? These questions surrounding optimism and hope for the future are crucial to understanding what

[14] According to the OED the word *humble* is derived from *humus*, or earth.

sets Dark Mountain apart from other environmentalist and eco-philosophical movements, in the face of much contemporary discourse that paints a grim picture of what is in store for the planet.

The theme of hope has been a strong undercurrent in my research, and its role in the age of ecocide is especially fraught and contested. The question of hope for the future initially drew me to Dark Mountain, a project dedicated to interrogating the very concept of hope and unafraid to question its foundations and call out its false pretenses. And yet, despite the project's criticism of false hope, they refuse to completely abandon the concept. The remainder of this thesis will continue to engage with these questions of hope for the future, culminating in the final chapter that reflects on Dark Mountain's practice and the energy and attitude that guides their action—asking if hope has a role to play in a philosophy of uncivilisation.

These eight principles serve as a useful starting point for fleshing out Dark Mountain's philosophy because they articulate the type of writing and art that the project seeks to create and anthologize. These creative works are to emerge from an artistic connection to the earth, be invested in place and time, and come from outside the urbane, cosmopolitan literary conventions of our time. These principles sparked interest and participation in the project and now act as currents running through the anthologies with varying degrees of intensity. The rest of this chapter aims to expand upon Dark Mountain's philosophy by looking beyond the manifesto to consider how the project relates to other influences in contemporary radical ecology.

Dark Ecology

It is difficult to point to authoritative texts on the philosophy of Dark Mountain because the project is deliberately anarchic and, in striving for diversity and avoiding a political agenda, their body of work embraces dissensus. With this in mind, I have chosen to identify the manifesto as the primary text on the project's philosophy of uncivilisation because it serves as the starting point for what the project has developed into and remains a touchstone for future anthologies. Moreover, I identify Kingsnorth's extensive body of writing about Dark Mountain as complimentary to my research into the group's philosophy because he remains the project's most prolific defender and primary representative. As with my approach in Chapter 1 that first sought to flesh out a profile of this relatively young project by considering what it is not, it is helpful to come at a sense of the Dark Mountain's philosophical underpinnings by drawing comparisons to other, more clearly defined philosophies. This comparative approach uncovers Dark Mountain's philosophy in a roundabout way for, as I aim to show, the project lies somewhere in the crosshairs of two very different schools of thought. The rest of this chapter explores how Dark Mountain departs from other contemporary directions in radical ecology to establish it's own brand of deep, dark eco-philosophy. This section builds upon Kingsnorth's reflections on how the project inspires a personal philosophy of dark ecology by examining the resonances between Morton's more developed conception of dark ecology and Dark Mountain's platform.

In an essay entitled "Dark Ecology" Kingsnorth concludes a lengthy meditation on scything with a brief outline of the steps he has taken to live as well as he can in the world today. He calls this personal philosophy a "dark ecology" inspired by his engagement with Dark Mountain (26). While he does not elaborate much on his conception of dark ecology, his use of this term signals a connection to Morton's own extensive writing on the subject. Morton proposes dark ecology as a new ecological aesthetic that accounts for the "negativity and irony, ugliness, and horror" of ecology (*Ecological Thought* 17), developing the concept in his radical eco-philosophy text *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* and continuing to refine it in his sequel, *The Ecological Thought*. The aim of this section is to parse out how Kingsnorth's musings on a Dark Mountain-inspired philosophy align him with Morton's work, but also how his dark ecology deviates from Morton's. Despite the fact that Kingsnorth's essay is the most affirming link in the chain that unites Dark Mountain to Morton's philosophy, it makes no mention of Morton's work and is fairly removed from his thinking.[15] Though he adopts the same phrase as Morton to describe his alternative philosophy, there is not much else in his essay that can easily be grafted onto Morton's ideas and their thoughts on what a dark ecology might actually look like are worlds apart.

The routes that Kingsnorth and Morton trace to reach their dark ecologies share some similarities but are, in many ways, diametrically opposed. Kingsnorth, who trained as a historian and maintains an abiding interest in English cultural

[15] At the time of the essay's online publication by Orion it seems Kingsnorth and Morton were unfamiliar with one another, suggested by Morton's comment under the essay: "I am writing a

heritage, holds a deep commitment to place that stands in marked contrast to Morton's spaced-out perspective and anti-place philosophy. Moreover, he takes a relatively humbler approach to the question of what is to be done in the face of ecological collapse by positing dark ecology as a "*personal* philosophy for a dark time" rather than a program for large-scale change [emphasis mine] ("Dark Ecology" 23). By contrast, Morton thinks that cultivating a dark ecology is a step towards achieving what he calls the ecological thought, a philosophical project that will prime humanity to tackle the great philosophical dilemmas of the Anthropocene, and which he describes almost like an eco-philosophical nirvana. Whereas Morton is invested in articulating a philosophical program for mobilizing political action on a global level, Kingsnorth retired from this game years ago. The two are clearly working from opposing fields when it comes to tackling questions of what is to be done in response to ecocide.

The difference between Kingsnorth and Morton's approaches to dark ecology is a matter of scale: Kingsnorth's local focus and humble desire to "attend to [his] smallness" in light of his belief that "the problem is bigness itself" is antithetical to Morton's 'think big' mantra of expanding consciousness to contemplate ecological interconnectivity ("Crisis of Bigness"). Kingsnorth has chosen to redirect his former environmentalist mentality with its emphasis on achieving a radical global paradigm-shift towards "small," "local," "winnable" battles (Hopkins), unlike Morton who is highly critical of anything that sounds even remotely like localism. Kingsnorth is not a nihilist who has given up on making positive changes in the world, instead he has measured up the immensity

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book called Dark Ecology, strangely enough . . . ".

of today's crisis and acknowledges the reality of what change is possible. Although he has opted to shift his attention to resistance at a local level, he does so "in the context of a wider, bigger picture: the end of the Holocene, the end of the world we were taught to believe was eternal; and, perhaps, the slow end of our belief that humans are in control of nature" (Stephenson). It is not that Kingsnorth is unable to think as big as Morton, but rather that conceptualizing the scale of ecocide has led him to a realistic assessment of what is possible now, and what sorts of action might bear fruit. Morton's insistence that humans have a responsibility to clean up the mess we have made and care for the rest of life on Earth would fall under Kingsnorth's charge of humans trying to act as gods to save a damaged planet—it rings of the myth of human superiority and centrality that is fundamentally at odds with the rehabilitation of Earth.

Despite the evident differences between Kingsnorth and Morton's approaches to dark ecology, there is something to be gained from drawing a comparison between the two. While Kingsnorth gestures towards dark ecology as the apex of his philosophical journey with Dark Mountain he has yet to significantly develop this concept, whereas Morton has. Where Kingsnorth falls short in articulating this novel philosophy fully, Morton provides a highly developed discourse and point of comparison. Moreover, Morton's work is a recent addition to discourse that aims to dispel the myth of Nature, a discourse Dark Mountain counts as influential for their project. For these reasons, I see fit to draw on Morton's writing as a means of illuminating the concept of dark ecology further.

For Morton, dark ecology involves facing squarely that which you would rather not be connected to and acknowledging the level of intimacy that you share with things that make you uncomfortable. Doing away with an idealized vision of harmonious, balanced Nature, dark ecology "refuses to digest plants and animals and humans into ideal forms" and instead seeks "to love the other precisely in their artificiality, rather than seeking their naturalness and authenticity" ("Dark Ecology" 268). In this way, he posits dark ecology as "the ultimate reverse of deep ecology" steeped in queerness and uncertainty rather than holism and depth ("Dark Ecology" 269). Rather than seeing Nature as a perfect system sullied by humanity's unnatural designs, dark ecology seeks a reformed perspective of the earth that accounts for all its elements, including it's dark parts.

Dark Mountain's primary aim to look down into the darkness involves facing the uncomfortable truths of our implication in ecocide, and is in line with Morton's assertion that the ecological thought ought to contend with the darker side of ecology. To see that we are inextricably linked to ecocide is an unsettling realization, in keeping with Morton's claim that "the form of dark ecology is that of noir film" in which the narrator discovers his or her own implication in the narrative (*Ecological Thought* 16). Dark Mountain's orientation towards darkness, rather than shying away from the painful truths hiding amongst the shadows of environmental collapse, positions the project alongside Morton's efforts to rethink environmental aesthetics. Recognizing our entanglement in environmental degradation is part of the difficult shift in consciousness that takes place when facing ecological darkness. Morton describes the aesthetics of this experience

thusly: “We can’t spit out the disgusting real of ecological enmeshment. It’s just too close and too painful for comfort. So it’s a weird, perverse aesthetics that includes the ugly and the horrifying, embracing the monster” (*Ecological Thought* 124).

Morton’s reimagining of environmental aesthetics can be applied to Dark Mountain’s aesthetic project to clarify the literary and artistic intervention it makes into ecological thinking. In contrast to an aesthetic of beauty that has long been favoured in environmental art and literature (with its emphasis on conformity, symmetry, and homogeneity), [16] Dark Mountain embraces a negative eco-aesthetic that is actually more in tune with organic forms and could therefore be considered a more relevant form of artistic expression in an age of ecocide. Like Morton, the project aims to cultivate this negative eco-aesthetic to better represent the totality of ecological life, doing away with the long-discounted myths of harmonious, balanced Nature in favour of a more honest look at the world we live in. Morton even goes so far as to suggest: “Negativity might even be more ecological than positivity” (*Ecological Thought* 16). In this way, developing a negative eco-aesthetic becomes a way to open up space for the ugly, the deformed, the dead, the asymmetrical—those dark elements of the world that are all equally natural.

In addition to developing a negative eco-aesthetic as part of their literary and philosophical intervention, Dark Mountain identifies a complimentary relevance for acknowledging the negative affective experience of ecocide, as does Morton. In much the same way that a negative aesthetic is touted as the more

ecological aesthetic, so too is negative affect put forth as the most appropriate tone of ecological art by both parties. There is a current of sadness and despair that runs through the Dark Mountain anthologies in keeping with the raw honesty of coming to terms with collapse. Morton's reflections on depression and melancholy are key to understanding why dark ecology is characterized by negative affect. He explains that contemplating the intimacy of ecological interconnectivity is always shrouded in darkness: "Intimacy is never so obvious as when we're depressed. Melancholy is the earth humor, made of black bile, the earth element" (*Ecological Thought* 94). Here he identifies dark ecology with melancholy: while ecology itself is "stuck between melancholy and mourning" for human dissociation from Earth (*Ecological Thought* 94), dark ecology asks us to sit with "the darkness of a dying world" and remain mired in its irresolvable loss ("Dark Ecology" 269). In this way, Morton positions dark ecology at odds with bright green environmentalism, instead positing "Depression [a]s the most accurate way of experiencing the current ecological disaster. It's better than wishful thinking" (*Ecological Thought* 95). He elevates dark ecology that "oozes" with "despair" as refreshingly "realistic" in an age of ecocide, for it's melancholic affective pitch exhibits an "excessive fidelity to the darkness of the present moment" (*Ecological Thought* 95). This statement sounds as though it could have been lifted from Dark Mountain's manifesto, and is yet another instance where Morton shares the project's enthusiasm for a darker brand of ecological criticism and an explicitly negative eco-aesthetic.

[16] For a summary of scholarly discourse on beauty, see Canuel.

Dark Mountaineers counter current conventions of optimistic, bright green environmentalism with darker, more melancholic, and more perceptive approaches to ecological crises, as does Morton. While the project seems closely tied to Morton's work on dark ecology, surprisingly the two have remained largely independent of one another to this day. The similarities between Dark Mountain's platform and Morton's dark ecology are perhaps coincidental, but they do speak to a growing negativity around ecological issues as daily the extent of environmental damage is made clearer. Moreover, their shared sentiments signal a growing critical interest in probing the dark, melancholic underbelly of global capitalism.

In the final analysis, Kingsnorth and his fellow Dark Mountaineers take the implications of a melancholic dark ecology farther than Morton, who maintains a steadfast conviction in the possibility of building a better, brighter future. While both parties hold on to some sense of optimism for the future, Morton's hopes for the future border on utopic fantasy. He ends *The Ecological Thought* with a chapter titled "Forward Thinking," which concludes with this final exuberant claim: "In the future, we will all be thinking the ecological thought. It's irresistible, like true love" (135). He dismisses "individual and local action" as failing to target "the scope of the crisis" (*Ecological Thought* 32), but he envisions the future as a world in which a philosophical shift in consciousness and ecologically-oriented collective action bring about change on a massive scale. Elsewhere he explains: "Reading poetry won't save the planet. Sound science and progressive social policies will do that" (*Ecological Thought* 59). This statement is in bold contrast to Kingsnorth's caution that, despite our best efforts, "None of

it is going to save the world—but then there is no saving the world, and the ones who say there is are the ones you need to save it from" ("Dark Ecology" 26). For Morton, global warming remains a problem to be solved and the planet still stands a chance of being saved by human intervention on a grand scale: "to tackle pollution, climate disruption, and radiation, we must think big and act big, which means thinking and acting collectively. This will take conscious input. We will have to choose to act and think together" (*Ecological Thought* 131). He is after a "radical ecological politics" that requires a complete philosophical overhaul of the political sphere, prompting new collectivities to work towards creating a better future for all life forms. He imagines his work (and the work of fellow humanists) gradually inspiring this radical paradigm shift ("Queer Ecology" 277).

Here is where Kingsnorth's work with Dark Mountain diverges from Morton's eco-philosophy most significantly. Morton clearly identifies as a philosopher and humanities scholar who has made it his mission to puzzle over the philosophical underpinnings of our current crisis rather than busy himself with the "ideological injunction to act 'Now!'" (*Ecological Thought* 117). In contrast, although Kingsnorth is critical of environmentalist rhetoric that spurs people to ultimately futile action, he remains sensitive to questions of how to act now—tangible questions around making a good life in light of increasing ecological and economic pressures and the dark revelations that accompany a critical eco-consciousness. Whereas Morton is developing the philosophical concept of dark ecology as a means to "find a reason to look after all beings on this planet precisely because they're not natural" (*Ecological Thought* 118), Kingsnorth's

personal dark ecology is more invested in actually putting into practice the knowledge of interconnectivity and living a deliberate, thoughtful, place-based life.

While Morton chides "laissez-faire" environmentalism for failing to take responsibility for things like climate change (*Ecological Thought* 128), he does not offer up many ideas about what can be done today other than expanding our philosophical inquiry to engage more fully with the mesh of ecological interconnectivity while eschewing violence and aggression in favour of love. By contrast, Kingsnorth looks at the historical narrative of civilisational decline and acknowledges the cyclic nature of rise and fall that has carried humanity through the ages:

> Everything falls away in the end, or sooner. Collapse comes every autumn. Sooner or later your vanity will go, too, and then you will discover where you are in the cycle and that the cycle cannot be halted. Then you will have to lower your shoulders, not raise them, as the rain gets up. You will have to attend to your smallness, then. ("Crisis of Bigness").

While Morton might object that leaving civilisation to its own destructive devices is the ultimate shirking of responsibility, Kingsnorth is not advocating total apathy and disengagement from the world. Instead, he advocates a spirit of withdrawal that takes seriously the melancholic experience of collapse, pulling away from capitalist modes of circulation and building a life for oneself outside the networks of globalization. His philosophy of dark ecology also encourages "Preserving

nonhuman life," "Getting your hands dirty," "Insisting that nature has a value beyond utility," and "Building refuges" for both the natural and cultural wonders that risk being lost in the crossfires of civilisational decline ("Dark Ecology" 24-5). While he is clearly invested in cultivating a shift in thinking via Dark Mountain, his ambitions do not exist entirely on a philosophical plane: the project operates outside the walls of academia because the conversation about the state of the planet is one that needs to be had by everyone. By taking the discourse of collapse into the realm of public intellectuals and folk art, Dark Mountain's approach seems far more effective at mobilizing the shift in consciousness that Morton's opaque philosophical musings stand to miss.

To conclude this section, I wish to puzzle over one final disconnect between Dark Mountain and Morton's philosophies. As I have aimed to show in Chapter 1, cultivating community is central to the project. However, Dark Mountain does not make a distinction between community and collectivity as does Morton, who argues that the former is faulted whereas the latter is the ideal to be striven for: "We need collectivity, not community" (*Ecological Thought* 127). According to Morton, community is formed out of "necessity" rather than by "choice" (*Ecological Thought* 135). Where community is the natural circumstance of living in close proximity to others, "collectivity results from consciously choosing coexistence" ("Queer Ecology" 277). This distinction is indicative of Morton's dislike for anything that smells even remotely of localism, and in effect he is calling for a deliberate networking that transcends place (*Ecological Thought* 127). Morton's anti-place, anti-local stance would likely

make him receptive to the connections being formed amongst Dark Mountaineers via online networks and the Uncivilisation festivals, but dismissive of their emphasis on local solidarity. Then again, while Dark Mountain advocates fostering community at a local level with one's closest neighbours, their platform also serves as a means for seeking out and choosing to connect with like-minded people across the globe. It seems Morton's distinction between collectivity and community points more to the failure of language to capture the sort of connection both he and Dark Mountain are striving for, because many of the connections fostered within Dark Mountain's networks span continents and geographical regions while at the same time the project underscores the importance of genuinely local solidarities.

A more fruitful way to close this discussion of Dark Mountain's philosophy involves returning to Flatley's aforementioned melancholic community as a way to understand the affective work of Dark Mountain and what is at stake in Kingsnorth's philosophical invocation of dark ecology. Just as Morton acknowledges that his version of dark ecology is inherently melancholic, so too does Dark Mountain recognize the experience and expression of despair in the face of ecological collapse. If melancholic despair is the primary affective register of ecocide, then Flatley's work offers a way to think about how this experience might be mobilized to facilitate community. If "melancholizing is something one *does*" which can "produce its own kind of knowledge" (2), then the melancholy experience of ecocide becomes a practice of creating knowledge. The knowledge produced is twofold: both a recognition of the "historical origins"

of one's melancholias and an understanding that there are others "with whom these melancholias might be shared" (2). In effect, this knowledge of the historical origins and shared experience of ecocide composes an "affective map" that places one's experience within the world and within history, demonstrating "one's relationship to broad historical forces [to show] how one's situation is experienced collectively by a community" (2). Therefore, this knowledge can be mobilized as "a way to be interested in the world" and a way to form connections with others (2).

Flatley's work on affective mapping illuminates how Dark Mountain's melancholic writing reflects a mood shaped by the historical context of life in the age of ecocide. His discussion of the role of aesthetics in prompting affective shifts clarifies how Dark Mountain' aesthetic practice might "produce a counter-mood" by "show[ing] other possible worlds" (90). There is a revolutionary potential to this aesthetics-inspired shift in mood, for "it is through the changing of mood that we are most able to exert agency on our own singular and collective affective lives; and it is by way of mood that we can find or create the opportunity for collective political projects" (20). It is for this reason that uncivilised writing that employs the creative faculties of imagination can function to shift mood, the "*way* in which we are together" (Heidegger qtd. in *Affective Mapping* 22), as a political act. Flatley makes a case for the role of aesthetics in shifting affect in inspiring change, for "collective action is impossible if people are not, so to speak, in the mood" (23). Dark Mountain identifies the negative affective register of ecocide that shapes the dominant mood of our time, and rather than sinking

under the weight of despair they turn to aesthetic expression as a way to combat this phenomenon, in keeping with Flatley's insight that "Because our social formations work through affect, resistance to them must as well" (79). Dark Mountain engages in a practice of affective mapping that seeks to produce counter-moods, and as such it holds a revolutionary potential.

Deep Ecology

Dark Mountain's philosophy also shares affinities with the eco-philosophy movement known as Deep Ecology.[17] However, as with Morton's dark ecology, the project diverges from established discourse around Deep Ecology in important ways. This connection is especially interesting given that Morton saw his version of dark ecology as entirely antithetical to the tenets of Deep Ecology. I propose that Dark Mountain's philosophy lies somewhere between these two modes of thought, sharing some commonalities with each but ultimately moving beyond both to establish a unique eco-philosophy of its own. My aim in working towards a philosophy of Dark Mountain in this section is to read between the project and the more established philosophy of Deep Ecology, tracing their intersections and shedding light on the ways in which Dark Mountain diverges from this radical eco-philosophy.

Dark Mountain's connection to Deep Ecology is made explicit on their website which clearly states that they received an annual, three-year grant of £10,000 from The Foundation for Deep Ecology in 2012. While this funding is

suggestive of shared philosophical commitments, Dark Mountain maintains a staunchly independent status. Their website reads: "Dark Mountain does not have any links with or allegiances to political parties, religious organizations, social movements, business interests or the like" and remains "entirely independent" ("FAQS: How Do You Operate"). This disclaimer stresses that the project was not conceived as an offshoot of a larger movement like Deep Ecology, nor does the project adhere to any pre-established philosophy.

Despite this disclaimer, the project is clearly informed by recent trends in radical ecology and the parallels between Dark Mountain and Deep Ecology attest to this. For instance, Dark Mountain's critique of the Neo-Greens mirrors Arne Næss's critique of the "Shallow Ecology Movement" that seeks to "fight against pollution and resource depletion" for the sake of safe-guarding "the health and affluence of people in the developed countries" (120). Both Dark Mountaineers and Deep Ecologists are positioned against the popular environmentalist movement that they see as waging single-issues battles and essentially working to protect the comfortable middle-class lives of the Western world. Bill Devall has dubbed this the "reformist movement" composed of various groups aiming to "change society for 'better living' without attacking the premises of the dominant social paradigm" (127), as opposed to the "revolutionary" Deep Ecologists that seek "a new metaphysics, epistemology, cosmology, and environmental ethics of person/planet" (125). Dark Mountain's criticism of the contemporary environmentalist movement aligns the project with this revolutionary stream of eco-philosophy.

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[17] "Deep Ecology" was coined by Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss in the early seventies.

Several of Dark Mountain's principles of uncivilisation can also be grafted onto deep ecological tenets. Just as Deep Ecology "questions the fundamental premises of the dominant social paradigm" (Devall 125), the first principle of uncivilisation places Dark Mountain at precisely this critical vantage point. Moreover, the second principle critiques conventional ways of thinking about ecological issues, rejecting "technological or political 'solutions'" to our current crisis in much the same way that Deep Ecology does (*Uncivilisation*, n. pag.). Devall explains: "Deep Ecology understands that some of the 'solutions' of reform environmentalism are counterproductive. Deep Ecology seeks transformation of values and social organization" (128). Similarly, Dark Mountaineers give little credence to the guiding narratives of civilisation and instead uproot stories from the past and from marginalized groups and cultures in an effort to craft new stories for the age of ecocide. Just as Dark Mountain turns to mythology and folklore for inspiration, Deep Ecology extends itself to various alternative knowledges from ecology to Eastern, Aboriginal, and minority spiritual and cultural traditions (Devall 128).

It is evident that Dark Mountain is informed by deep ecological thinking, from their shared critique of anthropocentrism to their preference for "biospheric egaliterianism" (Devall 133). Moreover, the project is greatly influenced by the poet Robinson Jeffers' philosophy of inhumanism, which advances an "objective approach to nature" that is also central to Deep Ecology (Devall 133). Additional themes of Deep Ecology that are picked up by Dark Mountain and exhibited in their anthologies include an appreciation of diversity, both ecological and cultural,

and an impetus to return to the land for enhancing self-sufficiency and leisure. Finally, both movements are fundamentally anti-capitalist and emphasize that "economics must be subordinate to ecological-ethical criteria" (Devall 133). This is one of the strongest threads binding Dark Mountain and Deep Ecology at their radical roots, and functions in tandem with a commitment to "local autonomy and decentralization of power" and a distinctly "anticlass posture," sentiments expressed frequently throughout the anthologies (Devall 133; Næss 120).

Though it is evident that many of the central tenets of Deep Ecology inform Dark Mountain's philosophy, there are important ways in which the project departs from Deep Ecology. The fundamental difference between the two movements circulates around questions of consciousness, action, and resistance. Deep Ecologists view their work as "liberating ecological consciousness" and aim to generate a paradigm shift that will usher in a "new utopian vision of 'right livelihood' and the 'good society'" (Devall 135; 133). They envision a natural progression from developing ecological consciousness to mounting "ecological resistance," and their primary goal is "to have action and consciousness as one" (Devall 135). Here is where the line is drawn between Deep Ecologists who believe that a shift in consciousness can bring about global change, and Dark Mountaineers, who are decidedly less sanguine in their outlook. The notion that promoting ecological consciousness might effect revolutionary change on a scale large enough to combat ecological crisis is precisely what Dark Mountain has given up on, and so their thoughts on things like living a good life and engaging in acts of resistance are rather more conflicted than presuming a change in

consciousness is the necessary first step towards changes in action that effect the world on a global scale.

Of course, the consciousness-to-action theme of Deep Ecology is itself open to debate and refinement, but suffice it to say that this basic theme of the movement, as outlined by Devall, is purposefully resisted by Dark Mountain. Instead, the project serves as a space to puzzle over the question of what is to be done, of what *can* possibly be done—though while Dark Mountaineers are seeking answers to the question of how to live right there is decidedly no right answer, and no program. This question of consciousness and resistance will be taken up in the following chapter, where I will explore Dark Mountain's practice further and tease out the complexities of the project's responses to questions of right action and how to live now.

III. Practice

> These days my desire, overpowering sometimes, is for some land. An acre or two, some bean rows. A pasture, broadleaved trees, a view of a river. A small house, my kids running about. Solidity, hard ground beneath me, something there to stop me sinking. Clean air, food, meat, water. Family, Earth, mud, all the small wonders and irritations of life rising up to meet me as I come home. Having a home.
>
> —Paul Kingsnorth[18]

In this chapter I continue to examine Kingsnorth's many essays and articles on collapse because he frequently addresses the question of what is to be done from the perspective of Dark Mountain. Moreover, his efforts to clearly define the project and what is at stake in its intervention make his body of work especially valuable for mining insights about the practice of uncivilisation. Furthermore, he expresses a strong personal interest in tackling difficult questions of how to live in light of Dark Mountain's philosophical position. His writing is rich with meditations on living through collapse, and rather than being prescriptive he offers his own life as a humble model of one way to put into practice the values and ideals of uncivilisation. This chapter explores his reflections on action in an age of ecocide, in conjunction with other contemporary thinkers pondering the question of what is to be done.

I continue to engage in a comparative method of analysis by situating Dark Mountain within a larger discourse around practice in an age of ecocide. My aim is to demonstrate Dark Mountain's relevance to current debates circulating

[18] "Upon the Mathematics of Falling Away."

around the efficacy of activism and to ultimately make a case for why the project is worthy of critical attention not only for its philosophical contributions to radical ecology but also for the practical intervention it inspires in everyday life. To this end, I have identified three different elements of Dark Mountain's practice and have outlined this chapter accordingly: the first section examines the project's call for engaging in uncivilised writing and art as imaginative, aesthetic practice; the second section considers how Dark Mountaineers find ways to make uncivilisation a daily lived practice as an alternative mode of action to environmental activism; and the third section contends with the notion of withdrawal or disengagement (temporarily, or partially) from the circulations of civilisation as a form of negative practice.

I take this approach to showcase the tension that exists between the different modes of practice Dark Mountain promotes, especially between action and withdrawal—the paradox of acting and not-acting that Kingsnorth is constantly negotiating in his post-environmentalist writing. This tension is also present in much contemporary activist discourse, and so my discussion of Dark Mountain's practice is enriched through a comparative analysis of other recent works of activist theory from Franco 'Bifo' Berardi and Derrick Jensen. Like Kingsnorth, these authors grapple with the same question of worthwhile action at a time when collapse feels close at hand. In this chapter I draw out Kingsnorth's conclusions about the practice of uncivilisation and situate this practice within a broader discourse around action and activism today.

As this chapter aims to show, Dark Mountain's philosophy exists on the margins of civilisation and, as such, calls for a practice that follows. To practice uncivilisation is to try to live outside the framework of civilisation and its attendant mythologies, to inhabit the world shorn of those narratives that make it comfortable, knowable, and seemingly under our control. Furthermore, to practice uncivilisation really is about practicing: rehearsing or repeating new skills and unfamiliar behaviours in preparation for the challenges of a declining civilisation. Kingsnorth's tentative suggestions for how to live now underscore that his ideas are very much a practicing rather than a program, an attempt to perform actions (and inactions) that remain in alignment with his philosophical convictions about what is possible now.

Uncivilised Writing

Dark Mountain is first and foremost a literary community, with the pursuit of uncivilised writing at the helm of their counter-culture project. Given that Dark Mountain is styled as a literary project, its most fundamental element of practice is its aesthetic intervention into the cultural mythology of civilisation through writing. In a talk titled "The Sole Business of Poetry" Kingsnorth spells out his sense of what poetic writing is for, how it functions, and what it has the potential to achieve. He is critical of the idea put forth in some ecopoetic circles that poetry might save the Earth,[19] but he does acknowledge the powerful role it plays in shaping our perspective: "Can poetry save the Earth? No. But it is, perhaps, able

to show us the Earth—and our relationship to it—in a way we are not used to seeing it" ("Sole Business"). According to Kingsnorth, nothing will stop the impending derailment of civilisation and the inevitable ecological ramifications that collapse brings in its wake; neither poetry nor politics can save the Earth. However, the case he makes for pursuing his poetic project of uncivilised writing is that such writing has the capacity to profoundly impact our perception of the world—and since our perception has long been occluded by the troubling mythologies of civilised life it is worthwhile, and even necessary, to lift this perceptual lens as the myths that support it begin to fall away.

To compliment and extend our understanding of what Dark Mountain's uncivilised writing entails I turn to Kingsnorth's commentary on his own writing style, which has ultimately come to inform the project's ambitions for uncivilisation. Well-versed in the Romantic literary tradition from which our contemporary sense of nature writing hails, he has done much to map the literary terrain upon which uncivilised writing is borne. His frequent recourse to the Romantic tradition that informs his own writing maps a poetics of loss: he describes the "poet's condition" as one who is "in love with a world that [is] disappearing" ("Sole Business"). By excavating a lineage of Romantic poets from John Clare to Edward Thomas who have bore witness to an accelerating "process of loss," namely, "the loss of the great web of nature. The loss of life itself" ("Sole Business"), Kingsnorth identifies a shared affective experience that persists in our own time. He explains: "This loss is who we are. This loss is what haunts me, and haunts my writing" ("Sole Business"). His literary historicism reveals the context

[19] Bate has argued that "poetry is the place where we save the earth" (283).

for Dark Mountain's melancholic community, identifying the thread of loss that unites the project's uncivilised writing to the Romantic nature writing of an earlier generation that faced their own share of ecological destruction and the seizure of the commons.

Kingsnorth's Romantic literary influences are significant to our understanding of the practice of uncivilised writing because this tradition exhibits aesthetic and affective qualities that are exemplary of the kind of writing he seeks for Dark Mountain's anthologies. For instance, he expresses an affinity for William Wordsworth's pantheism and animism, an admiration for Ted Hughes' ability to perceive the cruelty of the natural world, and most notably an esteem for Robinson Jeffers' capacity for "seeing nature as it really is" by shedding his human perspective ("Sole Business"). Kingsnorth aligns his own poetry with Jeffers' inhumanism[20]—nature poetry from a not-human perspective—and maintains similar ambitions for uncivilised writing to exhibit a more complex view of the natural world than simply the backdrop for human drama. He equates Jeffers' inhumanism with an "ecocentric" perspective that holds "the whole of nature, rather than simply people" at its centre ("Sole Business"). Dark Mountain's manifesto serves as a call to poets and writers across the globe who also transcend a human-oriented vision of the world in favour of a more ecocentric writing practice. This call is purposefully extended globally and towards the margins of the literary establishment because the tradition of Romantic nature poetry, once thriving in Britain, is now dispersed. According to Kingsnorth, prominent nature poets like Jeffers and Hughes have largely vanished

from Britain and today are concentrated in America because the landscapes of the West inspire a grander sense of the natural world and thus a more powerful tradition of deep ecological thinking has taken root ("Sole Business").

Kingsnorth's tethering of uncivilised writing to the tradition of Romantic nature writing rests upon a shared quality of ecocentrism that is so integral to Dark Mountain's literary project. Taking a page from Deep Ecology, an ecocentric poetic practice recognizes humanity as "neither unimportant nor supremely important," but rather "one animal amongst many" ("Sole Business"). To engage in such a practice is to shift one's poetic focus from "language . . . politics . . . narrow human sensibilities [and] the minutiae of everyday existence" to the "deep nature and deep time" of Earth ("Sole Business"). By practicing an inhuman perspective writers can move beyond the intellectual and affective confines of anthropocentric thinking and towards ecological thinking. One such example of ecocentric poetry is Susan Richardson's "Awen" (Welsh for poetic inspiration), published in the fourth Dark Mountain anthology, which takes on the perspective of a fish concealing itself from a bird of prey. "Awen" is an extreme example of ecocentric writing given that human presence is entirely absent from the poem, which instead depicts the encounter between the two creatures via the interior monologue of the fish. However, Kingsnorth's conception of ecocentric writing does not necessarily exclude the human altogether, instead he asserts that poets need to be able to "write from an ecocentric perspective, but do so while retaining that vital ability to see on a human-scale" to avoid the bleak depression that poets like Jeffers suffered from by renouncing humanity altogether ("Sole Business").

[20] On Jeffers' philosophy of inhumanism, see Kingsnorth, "Sole Business."

There is still a place for the human in Dark Mountain's anthologies, but this place is no longer in the foreground.

But what purpose does this ecocentric writing serve? Kingsnorth envisions poetic practice as a way to contend with the compounding losses of our age, though he recognizes that poetry is no panacea for collapse. Attending to the skepticism such sentiment engenders, he runs through the questions prompted by his turn to poetry:

> But what use can writing possibly be in a world like this? What can words do in response? And what, in particular, can poetry do? This tiny, specialist artform, with far more writers than readers. How can experiments in heightened language possibly have anything to say about this great Vanishing—this gathered storm beginning to break on the shores of our civilisation? ("Sole Business").

Ultimately he challenges the validity of these questions altogether, asserting that poetry remains, alongside the efforts of politics, economics, and science, incapable of saving the Earth from an inevitable course of decline. Instead he directs our attention to the function of poetry itself, which is "to give words to intuitions which, if expressed in prose, would fall apart under their own flimsiness; to see what is coming and try to express it . . ." ("Sole Business"). Poetry has the unique distinction of being capable of divulging the "wild truths behind the tame lies of our civilisation" ("Sole Business"), often revealing insights about our world far in advance of scientific reasoning. Poetic practice bends the limitations of language and holds sway with our perception of reality,

and as such it harbours the imaginative potential to confront the almost unutterable losses of ecocide and weave them into the melancholic stories we need to hear.

Kingsnorth's theorization of the role of the writer in the age of ecocide shares similarities with Berardi's discussion of poetic practice in his book *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*. Like Kingsnorth, Berardi also makes a strong case for the relevance of poetry to our contemporary moment, particularly in light of the economic instability of the twenty-first century. While he does not venture to discuss poetic genre specifically, his thoughts on the power of poetic resistance against the stultifying standardization of everyday life bolsters Kingsnorth's elevation of poetic practice, though according it more revolutionary potential than Kingsnorth does. Berardi condemns today's capitalist-induced emphasis on standardization and homogenization for the degradation of language and affective connection and instead turns to poetry—the excess of language that cannot be financialized—as a way to move beyond this homogenization of life by imagining and creating something new. For him, poetry's imaginative potential lends it revolutionary potential so that it could become the vehicle of the uprising that would launch humanity beyond capitalism. Regardless of whether we follow Berardi to his revolutionary conclusions (even he does not seem convinced of this final outcome), his praise of poetry in an age of collapse compliments Kingsnorth's thoughts on the function of poetic practice.[21] Both authors make a case for why the pursuit of poetic practice is especially worthwhile at a time when

[21] On poetry as a strategy for reinvigorating solidarity, see Berardi, *Uprising* 20-22.

all other aspects of life and work have been financialized, and we are struggling to find the words to explain the crisis we face.

Kingsnorth's insights into the function of poetic practice are compounded also by considering the insights of another Dark Mountaineer: Charlotte Du Cann. Taking on the role of art director for the fifth anthology, Du Cann was uniquely tasked with conceptualizing an aesthetic of uncivilisation. Probing the practice of uncivilised art, she asks: "What do art and aesthetics look like within the frame of collapse?" ("Seeing Through a Glass Darkly"). Her reflections lead her to consider the role of the artist, and she defines their practice thusly:

> The artist is the one who can find the chink in the door and allow us to push it open . . . Their work and their practice break dimensions in time and space, throw wild seeds into monocultures. In a disconnected world they bring connection. And sometimes they bring us back . . . artists are the ones that remember the tracks those ancestors made in the beginning. Those shapes and colours appear in dreams and on canvas, and artists follow them, in the cities and on the seashore, walking across the land, reminding all of us who watch them of the way back. ("Seeing Through a Glass Darkly").

For Du Cann, artistic practice involves walking between histories, reuniting people with forgotten traditions and lost stories, and opening up perceptual and imaginative potentialities. Her reflections on the role of the artist are especially instructive for contemplating the practice of uncivilisation, for she determines that

"the true function of art" is the "practice of the artist themselves: their capacity to live against the grain, the shape they made, the line they took" ("Seeing Through a Glass Darkly"). Her meditation on the practice of the artist directs us towards the blurred engagement between life and art that Dark Mountain is especially invested in pursuing. While writing and art are indeed central to this uncivilising project, questions of action and the daily practice of one's life are equally entwined in Dark Mountain's ecological thinking.

The Spectrum of Action

Dark Mountain does not elevate writing as the only worthwhile practice of uncivilisation. As such, a thorough examination of Dark Mountain's practice involves more than just a consideration of their anthologies, for the project also serves as a call to action. This section turns to questions of daily life and of what might be done outside the literary sphere to respond to the realities of a world in decline. Not surprisingly, many who are drawn to the project's refreshingly realistic and critical take on impending collapse and the limits of environmental activism are seeking alternative modes of practice congruent with a philosophy of uncivilisation.

Kingsnorth notes that the project's literary intervention leaves certain questions unanswered regarding more practical matters of life:

> But what has been gnawing at me is a question that perhaps goes beyond even this: how do we live? I mean, in the everyday. A lot of

> people have asked me this since this project began. How do we live with this, they say, what do we do? What do you do? A counter-narrative is crucial, new stories and old ones that seek to unravel the poisonous mythology of industrial Man. But each day, each day that more is lost—how do we get through it, and what can we do to stop the worst of it? What still makes sense? How to live, through it and with it? ("The Poet and the Machine").

Dark Mountain is a wellspring of literary experimentation and counter-narratives, but the project is also valuable as a site of contemplation, uncertainty, and experimentation in the space it makes for puzzling over this question of what is to be done—on the ground, everyday. Resistant to any sort of agenda or program, the project instead opens up a dialogue around the kinds of action that are worth pursuing if one accepts that the lofty goals of environmentalism are unattainable. Questions of where to devote one's time and energy and what sort of action is valuable and useful today circulate throughout Dark Mountain's networks, with varying responses. The key here is to note that the project is not aiming to formulate a plan of action or practical solution in response to such questioning. Instead, the project exists as a space for contemplation and dialogue around difficult questions of action today. I consider Kingsnorth's thoughts on action to be fairly representative of Dark Mountain's position, but note that the project also leaves room for alternative approaches to action. This section focuses primarily on Kingsnorth's writing about action because he presents his own life as exemplary

of the sort of daily lived practice that aligns with Dark Mountain's philosophy of uncivilisation.

As a self-described former environmentalist no longer convinced that campaigning to save the planet is a viable option for the ecologically-minded, Kingsnorth now voices strong charges against Neo-Greens who he claims engage in "business-friendly" campaigning under the banner of sustainability ("Neo-Greens"). He distinguishes between the kind of direct action and activist work worth pursuing and that which plays directly into the myths of civilisation. Differentiating between large-scale climate change campaigns and a small, targeted action to preserve the waterway of a local community, for instance, he asserts that the former is predicated on the misguided notion that climate change can be halted in its tracks (presumably by some technological innovation or monumental shift in global consciousness) whereas the latter is an example of taking on a "winnable" battle (Stephenson). The sheer scale of our global ecological crisis makes even the most high-tech solutions ultimately impossible, and so environmental activism tends to result in one failed attempt after another to inspire change that simply cannot measure up to the magnitude of the crisis. Kingsnorth experienced this consistent cycle of trial and failure during his years as an environmentalist, and came to realize that the battle against global ecocide and impending collapse cannot be won, and that his drive to effect change would best be put to use in instances where change remains possible: at the local level.

Kingsnorth is a proponent of conscious, place-based living close to the land, favouring a back-to-basics lifestyle that champions self-reliance, simplicity,

re-skilling, engagement with one's local surroundings, and preservation of wild places. These values technically align him with the back-to-the-land movement of the sixties and seventies, which is gaining ground again today, and he is frequently charged with being a nostalgic, naive Romantic who idealizes the past: "You are a nimby, a reactionary, and a Romantic idiot" ("Progress and the Land"). He is fully cognizant of the charges leveled against him and is quick to dismiss such criticism and instead articulate the reasoning behind his choices. His response to his critics: "'Romanticising the past' is a familiar accusation, made mostly by people who think it is more grown-up to romanticise the future" ("Dark Ecology" 21).

There is nothing naive about Kingsnorth's meticulous contemplation of action—in fact, he has deliberated on, and written about, precisely this question for years. Since making his exit from environmentalism he has been actively negotiating the question of what is to be done, and has been trying to implement what he considers worthwhile practices into his daily life. Far from warranting the charges of naivety, he has devoted his recent years to scrutinizing the question of action in the age of ecocide, and his humble conclusions are a testament to his thoughtfulness on the subject. Reflecting on the futility of many of the perceived paths of best action, he stresses the limitations of conventional approaches to ecologically-minded practice:

> If you think you can magic us out of the progress trap with new ideas or new technologies, you are wasting your time. If you think that the usual "campaigning" behavior is going to work today

> where it didn't work yesterday, you will be wasting your time. If you think the machine can be reformed, tamed, or defanged, you will be wasting your time. If you draw up a great big plan for a better world based on science and rational argument, you will be wasting your time. If you try to live in the past, you will be wasting your time. If you romanticize hunting and gathering or send bombs to computer store owners, you will be wasting your time. ("Dark Ecology" 24).

In pursuing his own sense of worthwhile action, Kingsnorth determines that one ought to be "honest about where you are in history's great cycle, and what you have the power to do and what you don't" ("Dark Ecology" 23). If, as history has shown, collapse is the cyclic model of civilisation, then such inevitability cannot be forestalled. Instead, he asks, "what, at this moment in history, would not be a waste of my time?" ("Dark Ecology" 24). As referenced earlier in the thesis, his five "tentative" steps towards practicing a personal dark ecology are the culmination of years of pondering this subject ("Dark Ecology" 24). The brief outline he offers in his "Dark Ecology" essay is enriched by tracing his earlier meditations on practice and drawing out the common threads between these writings. His post-environmentalist approach to action turns "Global campaigning for an abstract 'environment'" on its head and instead aims to "engag[e] with nature on a human scale" ("Neo-Greens"). This scaling back of the lofty ambitions of his former environmentalist mentality enacts what he calls "vernacular environmentalism" in which one engages "not with The Environment,

but with environments as we experience them in lived reality" ("Neo-Greens"). Disillusioned with the path that the environmentalist movement has taken, he asserts: "it's time to go back to basics" ("Neo-Greens").

In the 2010 "Back to the Land" edition of literary and philosophical magazine *The Idler*, he responds to the question of how to challenge the progress machine by stating: "the best course of action is simply to stand your ground" ("Progress and the Land"). Those who serve as the most effective monkey wrenches in the civilised Machine are "grounded people who know their place, in the physical sense, and are prepared to fight for it if they have to" ("Progress and the Land"). In keeping with his place-based mentality, Kingsnorth identifies a worthwhile practice of resistance in working and living closely with the land:

> To get your hands dirty, to grow your own food, to provide for yourself and your family, to stand your ground, know your place, all of this is to commit an open heresy against the ossifying religion of progress. In an increasingly placeless, rootless world, the best way to resist is to dig— and the best way to rebel is to belong. ("Progress and the Land").

This sentiment of belonging to a place is repeated often in his work and his life. Putting his place-based ideals into practice, Kingsnorth and his family moved to the Irish countryside to work the land and cultivate a deeper connection with the place they now call home.

At a time when digging one's heels in against the suicidal march of progress seems almost impossible, Kingsnorth finds ground to stand on quite

literally under his feet. Unlike the detached, corporate-minded Neo-Greens pandering to the interests of big business, he identifies the possibility for real, worthwhile resistance in the sort of intimate stewardship and connection that is fostered by a life lived close to the land. What is more, he posits this familiarity with one's place as an antidote to the toxic hopelessness that the dire narrative of collapse can breed. By shifting focus from the incurable ills of a damaged planet to the tangible relations and extraordinary wonders of the world around him, he aims to cultivate a life worth living in the full realization of impending collapse. Today, he has scaled back his ambitions to halt climate change and dismantle global capitalism—two desirable but ultimately unattainable goals—in favour of a simpler, more realistic assessment of what he might actually achieve in his lifetime.

Kingsnorth's reflections on worthwhile action are not limited to sentimental dreams of a place to call home. He also offers practical suggestions for the types of action that might actually stand to make a difference in the world. He encourages the re-skilling of society in order to foster self-reliance as an alternative to the unstable networks of global capital, from "learn[ing] what grows wild in our local area and whether we can eat it" to "build[ing] up a bank of practical skills" ("Neo-Greens"). His idea of useful direct action includes things like guerrilla gardening, advancing "small-scale engineering projects" to improve local resource usage, and working to preserve particular species or places we are familiar with when development threatens to wipe them out ("Neo-Greens"). At the root of his suggestions for useful practice is a sense that walking and working

the land—getting to know one's place intimately—is at the heart of any effective, worthwhile action. By "get[ting] our hands dirty and our feet wet," we might actually begin to "get a feel for where we are on this Earth and what, at the root of it all, we can still usefully do" ("Neo-Greens").

Kingsnorth models his life as a practice of uncivilisation through actions that bring him closer to the land. He deliberately cultivates a lifestyle that places him at the margins of civilisation, seeking ways to disengage from its mythologies and institutions. While considered extreme by some, comparing his thoughts on action to the work of another Dark Mountaineer helps to clarify his position and underscores the spectrum of opinions on action that the project accommodates. Like Kingsnorth, American author and radical eco-activist Derrick Jensen has also voiced criticism of the mainstream environmentalist movement—but his approach to action is much more aggressive. Jensen, who contributed to Dark Mountain's first anthology with an interview about his two-volume work *Endgame* (McCann), shares Dark Mountain's basic premise that civilisation is unsustainable, destructive, and violent. Yet, where many Dark Mountaineers struggle to come to terms with what to do with this realization, Jensen is steadfast in his call to action. He argues for the active dismantling of civilisation, by violent means if necessary. Such extreme, violent action is a challenge that even a radical thinker like Jensen struggles to put into practice, and ultimately remains at the margins of Dark Mountain's discourse around practice.

Though Jensen's critique of the failures of non-violent action are astute, the kind of direct action he calls for is difficult to put into practice, even for him.

In a Dark Mountain blog post reviewing *Endgame*, Akshay Ahuja succinctly summarizes some of the pressing real-world challenges that arise from trying to put Jensen's violent proposition into action, and confesses that despite agreeing with Jensen on many points, he remains "at a loss for what to do next" ("Endgame"). In the final analysis, *Endgame* serves up a series of lofty ideals about radical action that ultimately cannot constitute a practice for any but the most radical Dark Mountaineer. And yet, Ahuja admits that despite his critical review of *Endgame*, he cannot readily point to an alternative course of action—underscoring the unresolved, and perhaps unresolvable, question of what is to be done: "*Fuck you*, I think Jensen would say, getting ready for an argument, *your caution is just another excuse for doing nothing.* To which, I admit, I have no response" ("Endgame"). This is all to say that alongside Kingsnorth's uncivilised lifestyle the practice of violently dismantling civilisation exists as an extreme position within Dark Mountain's discourse on action. This is a practice championed by the more radical factions of the anti-civilisation and anti-globalization movements at large,[22] which remain influential for Kingsnorth's work.

True to the spirit of his anti-civilisation roots, Kingsnorth's approach to action is fuelled by a rage against the ecological, economic, and social injustices perpetrated in the name of progress. However, unlike Jensen and other anti-civilisation thinkers who channel their indignation into aggressive acts of violence with the explicit aim of taking down civilisation, Kingsnorth conceptualizes a

[22] For an example of a more radical faction of the anti-civilisation movement, see The Invisible Committee.

different application of this rage. Rather than raising one's fist in a futile attempt to strike down the behemoth, he suggests that we might heed Dylan Thomas's "famous injunction to 'Rage, rage against the dying of the light' [which] calls angrily for a last stand even when the battle is clearly lost" ("The Poet and the Machine"). For Kingsnorth, resistance remains a worthy aim despite the impossibility of throwing the Machine entirely off course: "a determination . . . to fight against the encroachments of the Machine even though you know that the Machine does not die, only ever slumbers" ("The Poet and the Machine"). In effect, this means continually mounting resistance against civilisation and its attendant myths without maintaining any illusions that one's actions will avert global catastrophe or dismantle civilisation before it has run its course.

In effect, the task that Kingsnorth has set for himself is one of practicing for the end of the world as we know it. If the decline of civilisation is a historical inevitability, then no amount of campaigning will prevent collapse from occurring. It follows, then, that he identifies worthwhile action as that which preserves elements of the non-human world, as well as skills and technologies of a simpler past, that could potentially persist through the calamitous progression of collapse. What this sense of right action means for Kingsnorth personally is:

> . . . to save as much of the wild world as can be saved, even if that means buying half an acre of English woodland and starting a coppice cycle to get the butterflies and the birds back. And it is to practice and to teach ways of being and doing that worked once, work now and will work tomorrow, when the cars look as

> lumbering as airships and the roads have gone from dirt to asphalt and back again. ("The Poet and the Machine").

His conception of worthwhile action is far removed from the violence of Jensen's call to action, but both exist as viable possibilities for practice that align with Dark Mountain's philosophy of uncivilisation. Whereas Jensen raises an aggressive battle cry, Kingsnorth models his approach after *Papaver rhoeas*—the common poppy that blanketed the battlefields of Flanders in World War I. The seed of this flower, capable of remaining dormant for up to eighty years, "can be paved over, built upon or oversown, and it will wait patiently until the plough or the guns tear up the soil again and breathe life into it" ("The Poet and the Machine"). In the midst of upheaval and disturbance, the patient poppy emerges in bloom. Kingsnorth finds inspiration in this resilient flower:

> Be a poppy then, in the face of the Machine? It seems, to me, a good task to set myself. To wait and learn and save and sow seeds and wait for them to flower, knowing that they may not do so in my lifetime. In an age of loss, our task is surely to keep safe what we can when the Machine passes by, hungry and howling for blood. To be still and stoical and protective, to pass on truths and skills that will always be truths and skills, and never forget to remember what we are losing, every day that we live. ("The Poet and the Machine").

Withdrawal as Negative Action

The discourse around practice that emerges from Dark Mountain falls along a spectrum, from Kingsnorth's place-based action to Jensen's violent dismantling of civilisation. This spectrum can be extended further to include the concept of withdrawal or retreat as a negative action, not exactly inaction but rather the inverse of Jensen's direct action tactics. The practice of withdrawal is central to Kingsnorth's personal dark ecology, and he lists it as the first of his five steps for meaningful action. For him, partaking in this "ancient practical and spiritual tradition" of pulling back or stepping away from the demands and dictates of everyday life—"withdrawing from the fray"—is an opportunity for reflection and contemplation of one's worldview, and for personal growth ("Dark Ecology" 24). This retreat is fuelled not by "cynicism" or disgust with the world but rather by "a questing mind" intent on pondering the ethics of one's choices ("Dark Ecology" 24). He understands the purpose of withdrawal as affording oneself the opportunity for deep thinking and feeling, "intuit[ing]" the right course of action when there exists no program for solving all the world's ills ("Dark Ecology" 24). "Withdraw because action is not always more effective than inaction" ("Dark Ecology" 24), he writes. His approach to a practice of uncivilisation leaves room for both action and withdrawal, each serving a specific purpose: whereas action is taken to resist or combat the advances of development at the local level, withdrawal is a practice that "refus[es] to help the machine

advance" by retracting one's participation from its networks and circulations entirely ("Dark Ecology" 24).

Kingsnorth's efforts to withdraw have been criticized and he warns that such an approach results in "a lot of people [calling] you a 'defeatist' or a 'doomer', or claim[ing] you are 'burnt out.' They will tell you . . . that 'fighting' is always better than 'quitting'" ("Dark Ecology" 24). Having met with his fair share of criticism since cutting ties with his environmentalist past, Kingsnorth mounts a strong case for why mindful retreat can be a worthwhile pursuit of uncivilisation. In both his life and writing, he is charged with being excessively nostalgic, a quality often associated with those who seek to withdraw from the complexities of modern life for a simpler way of living. While he admits being "prone to nostalgia" he also recognizes that the pleasures of a simpler past he longs for are "gone, like so much else is going" ("The Poet and the Machine"). He concedes: "Nostalgia is one of life's pleasures, but it can only, in the end, take you down a dead end" ("The Poet and Machine"). Admitting to his nostalgic tendencies, he is able to define their limits also.

Nostalgia is present in much of the discourse around retreat and withdrawal, "woven like a golden thread through the peak oil and the primitivist movements," but Kingsnorth affirms that such sentimental longing for the past is nothing more than "wishful thinking" ("The Poet and the Machine"). While there are those who maintain that a return to an earlier, simpler way of living is vital to the survival of our species as the machine of civilisation slowly grinds to a halt, he knows that the past he longs for cannot be recovered. Rather than idealizing

earlier times his aim is to “respec[t] the past—its tools and technologies, our connection to it, the fact that it continues to live in us—without collapsing into nostalgia for it” (“The Poet and the Machine”). We cannot return to the past, but we might learn something from it.

In his book *Real England*, Kingsnorth looks to England’s past to discover a lesson in “human-scale, vernacular ways of life” that are slowly being eroded by the march of progress. By looking back on the “independent character, quirkiness, mess and creativity” of England’s traditional industries and cultural institutions, he learns the importance of regaining “ autonomy and control . . . the need for people to be in control of their tools and places rather than to remain cogs in the machine” (“Dark Ecology” 11). He recognizes that looking to the past for examples of autonomy and human-scale living is tinged with nostalgia, but insists that he is not motivated by a “desire to retreat to some imagined ‘golden age’” (“Dark Ecology” 11). Instead, he balances gazing backwards through time by keeping one eye always to the future. Despite his nostalgic reflections on simpler times, he makes a distinction between what is possible for the future and that which has been lost in times past: "I don’t think you can plan for the future until you have really let go of the past" (Stephenson).

He makes a strong case for the value of withdrawal as both an opportunity for personal reflection and a means of disengaging from the circulations of global capital—qualifying this practice of inaction as a form of negative resistance. Retreat is the necessary prerequisite for change, he argues, because “If you don’t go out seeking, if you don’t retreat . . . you will never see what you need to shed

or what you need to gain. You will never change. And if you never change, neither will anything else" ("Forty Days"). In keeping with his small, local ambitions for practicing uncivilisation he identifies the worthiness of pursuing withdrawal in the space it opens up for personal reflection and growth.

Like Kingsnorth, Berardi also identifies withdrawal as a worthwhile pursuit in response to collapse. He conceives of a politics of exhaustion as an insurrectionary practice that deploys "withdrawal," "slowness," and even depression as a means of escaping the spinning top of capitalist accumulation, environmental degradation, and media and information saturation (*The Uprising* 68). Like the Dark Mountaineers, he maintains that "we must forfeit civilization" if we are to have any hope for the future (*The Uprising* 63). He too directs our attention to the underlying mythologies propelling our destructive civilisation to the brink of collapse. Outlining how global capitalism thrives on the myth of energy and youth, he urges: "exhaustion needs to be understood and accepted as a new paradigm for social life" (*The Uprising* 68). He shares Kingsnorth's conviction that most activists today are wasting their time trying to stop the inevitable global economic collapse, and that our future-oriented pursuit of progress is in many ways the foundation of our current crisis. The difference between Kingsnorth's invocation of withdrawal and Berardi's is twofold: first, withdrawal as Kingsnorth conceives it is motivated by questioning and self-reflection rather than simply exhaustion from a culture in hyper-speed; second, Kingsnorth has yet to imagine withdrawal as part of a larger political project of

resistance, whereas Berardi does.[23] Kingsnorth and Berardi both advance a fairly dark vision of what the future holds, and see themselves as realists looking honestly at the situation we face rather than offering naive hope that everything is going to be alright. It is important to note that both thinkers are not positioning withdrawal as the radical solution to the world's problems or the key to bringing about the vital changes needed to prop up civilisation's failing systems. Instead, both acknowledge that the future will be characterized by struggle and decline and that withdrawal seems to be the only sane way to respond to the culminating crises.

As this chapter has aimed to show, a central component of Dark Mountain is the project's emphasis on practice: what is to be done in the age of ecocide. The very nature of the project opens up a space for dialogue around difficult questions of action and the possibilities for change, a dialogue that is ever-evolving and never fully resolved. Instead, puzzlement and uncertainty over what one can usefully do denies the validity of a one-size-fits-all solution or program of action, and instead the dialogue around uncivilised practice outlines a spectrum of possibilities from writing to action to withdrawal. The notion of practice itself takes on further nuances in this light, for not only is Dark Mountain invested in the actual application of their uncivilised philosophy—the cultivation of an uncivilised practice—but they are also essentially practicing for the end of the world: rehearsing, training, preparing for the dark days ahead. Dark Mountain's multifaceted approach to writing, action, and withdrawal underscores the project's

[23] On exhaustion, withdrawal, and radical passivity, see Berardi, *After the Future* 134-39. For a similar insurrectionary vision of withdrawal, see The Invisible Committee.

creative and flexible response to our uncertain future as opposed to a rigid prescription of how to respond to ecocide, which fits with Kingsnorth's view of what is to come: "The future looks more like improvising a way of life as our certainties collapse" ("The Poet and the Machine").

Conclusion

> So we find ourselves, our ways of telling unbalanced, trapped inside a runaway narrative, headed for the worst kind of encounter with reality. In such a moment, writers, artists, poets and storytellers of all kinds have a critical role to play. Creativity remains the most uncontrollable of human forces: without it, the project of civilisation is inconceivable, yet no part of life remains so untamed and undomesticated. Words and images can change minds, hearts, even the course of history. Their makers shape the stories people carry through their lives, unearth old ones and breathe them back to life, add new twists, point to unexpected endings. It is time to pick up the threads and make the stories new, as they must always be made new, starting from where we are.[24]
>
> —*Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto*

The paradoxical nature of Dark Mountain's practice lies in their commitment to interrogating questions of right action even at a time when they agree that there is little, if anything, that can be done to mitigate impending collapse. Yet despite their critique of the naive optimism of sustainability narratives, the project does contribute to a larger discourse around hope for the future that circulates in both academic and activist circles today. This discourse is troubled by difficult questions about what sort of future is desirable, even imaginable, given the realities of economic instability, global unrest, and ecological disturbance today. In contemplating the future of civilisation and the planet, the prognosis looks rather grim. How, in the face of such certain decline, is it possible to carry on, to negotiate worthwhile practice, and to imagine possible futures at all? Dark Mountain invites us to enter into this uncomfortable contemplation.

[24] *Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto,* 11-12.

Hope for the future is a foundational theme running through discourse of ecocide and collapse, whether hope is recognized as a valuable, inspiring, and motivational force or it is dismissed as false, misguided, and naive. Whether one believes the future course of humanity can be righted or it is irrevocably doomed, the concept of hope is one that must be addressed, if only to be abandoned. Kingsnorth wrestles with the concept of hope in his work with Dark Mountain, most notably in a series of correspondences with independent journalist and climate activist Wen Stephenson titled "Hope in the Age of Collapse." Harking back to the key claims of his essay "Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist," Kingsnorth reiterates that climate change cannot be reversed even by the most earnest of activist efforts. For him, "Living with this reality. . . being honest about it and not having to pretend we can 'solve' it . . . seems to me to be a necessary prerequisite for living through it" (Stephenson). Looking squarely at the situation we find ourselves in today is the necessary starting point for thinking about what can actually be done in response, rather than succumbing to "wishful thinking" about solving the world's ills (Stephenson). To this end, he has chosen to give up hope in favour of "look[ing] more honestly at the way the world is" and what he is actually capable of doing about it in his lifetime (Stephenson).

It is not the future that Kingsnorth rejects, but rather the notion of hope. He questions the implications of hoping for the future at all because such an attitude takes matters out of our hands entirely:

> Whenever I hear the word 'hope' these days, I reach for my whisky bottle. It seems to me to be such a futile thing. What does it mean? What are we hoping for? And why are we reduced to something so desperate? Surely we only hope when we are powerless? (Stephenson).

This sentiment is also shared by Berardi and Jensen who conclude that hope is not a useful concept to deploy when thinking about the future. Berardi goes so far as to question whether hope is even possible for today's generation that sees the future not as a promise, but as a threat.[25] Like Kingsnorth, Jensen makes a strong case for why abandoning hope altogether is necessary, because hope denies agency: "Hope is a longing for a future condition over which you have no agency. It means you are essentially powerless." (*Endgame* 1: 330). If one hopes for a particular future scenario to materialize, then one concedes that what they wish for is beyond their control, thereby nullifying their own capacity to act as an agent of change. For Jensen, "when hope dies, action begins," and so he reasons: "I do not hope civilisation comes down sooner rather than later. I will do what it takes to bring that about. When we realize the degree of agency we actually do have, we no longer have to 'hope' at all. We simply do the work" (*Endgame* 1: 330). As Kingsnorth points out, and Jensen agrees, it is the very notion of hope that inhibits our capacity to create a desirable future.

While Kingsnorth has opted to do away with hope altogether, Rebecca Solnit outlines a very different vision of hope in her book *Hope in the Dark.* In it

[25] On the current generation's feelings of powerlessness to effect change for the future, see Berardi *Uprising* 39-43, 124-33; Cazdyn and Szeman 43, 202.

she praises the small victories achieved by grassroots activists and offers a compelling explanation for why the efforts of small, underground, marginal groups are such vital agents for change—particularly via cultural intervention through storytelling and a "literature of hope" (166). She shares Kingsnorth's praise of small-scale action, the only real difference being that she fully embraces the hope that inspires such change. For Solnit, hope and agency are not mutually exclusive. She stresses that hope is not the same as optimism, nor is it premised on a utopic vision of the future. Instead, her idea of hope is largely based on the present, the here and now, making today better and believing that your actions can make a difference for the future, rather than waiting for an alternative future to be handed to you. Her understanding of hope is the inverse of Kingsnorth's, in that it actually inspires agency and spurs action. She explains the process thusly: while most of the world's political action takes place in the limelight of center stage, played out by high-profile political actors, it is off-stage in the shadows that radical change percolates. The inspiration for change tends to originate in radical factions and eventually trickles into public consciousness—this is why the role of the storyteller is key, to disseminate challenging ideas which are, over time, subsumed into public consciousness: "Stories move from the shadows to the limelight. And though the stage too often presents the drama of our powerlessness, the shadows offer the secret of our power" (174). In the shadows and on the sidelines of this center-stage action is where the capacity for true change lies, because this is where hope for a better future is generated. In effect,

her book recuperates hope as a viable concept for change because she identifies hope with the artists and storytellers who are actually inspiring change. By underscoring the importance of direct action and activism while at the same time highlighting the role of artists in prompting change, Solnit narrows the gap between hope and agency. Despite Kingsnorth's rejection of hope, Dark Mountain's uncivilised writing participates in the storytelling tradition Solnit identifies as stimulating radical change, and in so doing the project can be said to answer the call for storytellers to offer hope for the future.

While Solnit presents an inspiring account of small-scale activism today as well as a convincing argument for why artists and storytellers are more relevant than ever as catalysts for change, Kingsnorth's distancing of Dark Mountain from hope is not entirely unfounded and the concept remains contested. Following his departure from environmental activism, he has worked to create a project that would "give people permission to give up hope" in contrast to the increasingly disillusioned ranks of environmental campaigners who "feel pressured to believe . . . that they must continue working to achieve goals which are plainly impossible" (Stephenson). He critiques the empty rhetoric of hope, noting that what is hoped for is "never quite defined" and that the language of hope tends to mask the true anxieties that govern much discourse about the future. Beneath the language of hope lies the desire for control in a world that is crumbling, a desire for maintaining the comforts and lifestyle that much of the Western world has come to expect. To give up hope "means giving up the illusion of control and accepting that the future is going to be improvised, messy, difficult" (Stephenson). He

counters this futile desire for control with the assertion: “I don’t think we need hope. I think we need imagination. We need to imagine a future which can’t be planned for and can’t be controlled” (Stephenson). His astute call for replacing hope with imagination in discourses of the future is, I argue, at the root of why his work with Dark Mountain is particularly relevant for our time.

As an imaginative project, Dark Mountain is especially important at a time when much contemporary thinking about collapse fails to think beyond the limitations of civilising mythologies. That Dark Mountain is explicitly a creative cultural project is significant to understanding how and why this project is timely and relevant to facing collapse. In their important work on the limits of contemporary popular thinking about the future entitled *After Globalization*, Eric Cazdyn and Imre Szeman examine the works of four popular thinkers today (Thomas Friedman, Richard Florida, Paul Krugman, and Naomi Klein) and argue that all four fail to truly contemplate a time after globalization because globalization itself restrains imagination. They argue that the dominant discourses of globalization govern the contemporary global imagination and that “capitalism itself now constitutes a very real limit to thought” (7). As a result of this restrictive ideology both popular thinkers and the globalization generation are imaginatively dulled. The authors call attention to how “imaginative possibilities” for the future are stunted by ideological forces that impede our ability to imagine anything beyond our current system of global capitalism (2), and that this limiting of the global imagination has serious implications for a population facing collapse:

> We want to argue that there is today a shared global common sense that constitutes the frame within which we operate; this frame produces a critical limit to our capacity to address problems new and old, from our impact on the environment to the effects and outcomes of our economic systems. It is a limit that may well not itself be all that new, but it is one whose consequences grow more serious by the day. (35).

Like Dark Mountain's outline of the myths of civilisation, *After Globalization* identifies the story of globalization as a dominant discourse that shapes our experience of reality—it has become "simply the name for the here and now *and* the future" (22). Cazdyn and Szeman's bold claim is that globalization obscures the forces of capitalism and produces an illegibility that is responsible for this dulling of the imagination—thereby naturalizing the effects of capitalism to such an extent that an alternative can no longer be imagined.

The affinities between Dark Mountain's manifesto, Kingsnorth's writings about uncivilisation, and Cazdyn and Szeman's book are numerous, from their shared claims about the state of global capitalism today to their conclusions about where we ought to focus our efforts in response. *After Globalization* begins with a sobering claim that resonates with Dark Mountain's manifesto:

> Nothing can save us. Not the schemes of government planning committees. Not the triumphant spread of liberal democracy to the four corners of the world. Neither sudden scientific breakthroughs, nor technological marvels. Neither quick fixes, nor golden bullets.

> Not the Right turning to the left, the Left turning right, or everyone coming to their senses and occupying an agreed-upon center. Neither vigilantes, nor vanguards. Not the nation. Not NGOs. Not common sense. Not capitalism. Not the future. And certainly not a smart, articulate, young politician able to fuel the hopes of realists and idealists alike. (5).

Dark Mountain begins from the same premises, and reaches many of the same conclusions, that Cazdyn and Szeman do. Both parties identify the meta-narrative of globalization as a mind-numbing ideological limit to imagining possible futures, and both assert that any number of proposed solutions will prove ineffectual in remedying the inevitable decline of a civilisation already crumbling. Just as Dark Mountain rejects the idea that collapse is a problem that can be solved, Cazdyn and Szeman outline seven theses to demonstrate why it is that "nothing will save us" (45), effectively dismantling seven sites of hope for the future in an effort to do away with hope completely as a mode of contemplating the future: neither education, morality, the nation, the future, history, capitalism, nor common sense will save us.

I draw this comparison between Dark Mountain and *After Globalization* to clarify why the project is worthy of critical attention now, in its efforts to address the limits to imagination we face today. One way that the project is reinvigorating imagination is through their contemplation of the end. Dark Mountaineers accepted the idea of the end several years ago, whereas only recently has popular thinking begun to come to terms with it. They have shown themselves to be

prescient cultural critics equal to the imaginative task Cazdyn and Szeman have outlined by looking honestly at the reality of collapse and working to change the way we think about the end. By acknowledging that we live in an age of ecocide and that collapse is inevitable, the project gestures towards an alternative perspective on temporality akin to Cazdyn and Szeman's "palliative model" of care (50). The authors borrow the model of a terminally ill patient who, with the advances of modern medicine, transitions to a chronic diagnosis: death remains the inevitable conclusion but temporality has shifted and the management of this now chronic illness changes one's experience of dying. This scenario, in which the formerly terminal patient now "live[s] on as the 'already dead'," is put forth as a "model for social and ecological challenges" (50). This palliative model for conceptualizing ecological decline is valuable precisely because it shifts our conception of temporality, and "the moment we stop deferring the future or hoping for another one is the moment something shifts in the present" (50). Rather than pining for an alternative future, we begin to focus on what is experienced in the present. If we understand a dying species or dying planet as a dying patient, and shift our focus from the inevitable end (the future) to the present, they wonder, how might our approach to care change? This palliative model asks: "How to care for something, for someone, knowing that it or they will soon end? What does it mean to act in the face of this end?" (51). Through their reckoning of global collapse, Dark Mountaineers exhibit this "alternative attitude to the end" that changes their relationship to the future (51). By deploying imagination to tackle difficult questions of the here and now *and* the future they

are working towards this palliative model of care for a dying world that accepts the prognosis of collapse but continues to pursue questions of care and right action now.

Moreover, Dark Mountain's creative project aligns with Cazdyn and Szeman's final thesis on common sense. The trouble with common sense, understood as "all manner of assumed knowledge, from the banal to the erudite" (55), is that it "always impedes the imagination of limits" (55). As their examination of four contemporary thinkers shows, even ideas that are deemed innovative or radical often exist within the range of what is considered sensible, restricted to the realm of common sense rather than challenging its limits. If the trouble with most radical contemporary thinkers is their confinement to common sense, then Dark Mountain is worth paying attention to precisely because they occupy the margins of popular thought and are fundamentally motivated by a resistance to the myths that govern our perception of reality. Like Kingsnorth, Cazdyn and Szeman envision an imaginative project that would push against the limits of thought, if not circumventing the limits of common sense then at the very least identifying them:

> We are not interested in offering up a specific blueprint of a future system. Rather we want to argue for the necessity of imagining alternative systems. All types of systems: absurd ones and dangerous ones and impossible ones and unthinkable ones. To propose and take seriously other systems is not only about inspiring analyses of these alternatives. It also exercises our

> powers to imagine system as such . . . The "end of history" comes to an end when we can start to imagine the beginning and end of systems. (59-60).

Just as Kingsnorth stresses the importance of imagination in facing the systems that confine us and trying to contemplate alternatives, so too do Cazdyn and Szeman. Rather than simply hoping for a better future, we might exercise our imaginative faculties and identify those perceptual limitations that would have us believe our current systems are without end.

In contrast to the contemporary cultural critics whose so-called radical thinking has been dulled by the very forces they claim to critique, Dark Mountain is poised to tackle the imaginative challenge issued in *After Globalization*. Noting the profound pessimism that characterizes today's globalization generation, Cazdyn and Szeman underscore the vital need for imagination in our age of increasing economic and ecological precarity. As a creative cultural response to collapse the project's marginal, underground status, their anti-globalization and anti-civilisation roots, and their focus on storytelling and imagination resonates profoundly with radical ecological thinking today. Dark Mountain is a project worthy of critical attention precisely because of the shift in temporal perspective it inspires, drawing our attention away from unattainable, utopic future scenarios and towards the realities of the present moment. By doing away with hope in favour of imagination, the project does not promote despair in the face of ecocide, but rather makes a case for why a creative cultural response to collapse is viable and relevant today.

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