



Communicating a **WORLD-IN-CRISIS**

Edited by Simon Cottle



PETER LANG

We live in a world increasingly defined by systemic, deepening and compounding crises. They threaten not only future human existence but also the planetary web-of-life. With the help of academics, creative practitioners and activists, this book explores some of the innovative ways in which different media, communicative fields, and creative practices are seeking to make a difference. From different forms of journalism and participative documentary to climate photography and ecosophical film; from radical theatre, eco-literature and eco-art to green festivals, popular music and immersive museums; and from journalism training in the climate emergency and sustainability education to communicating with 'whole intelligence' and 'integrated intelligence' beyond AI (artificial intelligence).

This panoramic approach enables us to see how diverse communicative fields are engaging with some of the most critical concerns of our times – and what can be learned, shared and developed further in the challenging years ahead.

"We've morphed from local creatures into global beings and we need a new vocabulary to convey this: Symbiocene, Integrated Intelligence, Eco-Communicative Democracy. These are new terms used in discussing a desirable future in this important book. A must for anyone wanting to communicate ways out of a world in crisis."

—Herbert Girardet, author, co-founder World Future Council, member of
the Club of Rome

"Simon Cottle has always encouraged us to think bigger than many of our geo-political, institutional and disciplinary boundaries easily allow. This collection takes us further again, bringing together different ways of thinking and doing into a genuine conversation and crucial engagement on how to move our world beyond crisis."

—Professor Libby Lester, Director, Monash Climate Communication Research Hub,
Monash University

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Communicating a World-in-Crisis



Simon Cottle
General Editor

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PREFACE

Nature of Things, the arresting image on the front cover of this book, was drawn by the artist Guno Park. I am personally grateful to him for granting permission for his exquisite artwork to be reproduced here. The original drawing standing over six feet tall, is an impressive and perfectly executed drawing of the entanglement of human life, and death, with nature. It powerfully symbolises, I think, the interwoven dependence of human life with nature, of how we are ourselves inextricably part of nature and symbiotic with it – and how we forget this at our peril.

Today's world-in-crisis generates multiple and deeply entangled crises where not only human existence but the web-of-life itself has come under assault and is becoming dangerously degraded. Think: biodiversity loss, the sixth mass extinction, climate change, toxic and plastic waste, land, water and air pollution, soil degradation, zoonotic diseases, food and freshwater precarity, nuclear weapons and the ecological impacts of war. And yet, as we are forced to recognise the damage being caused to not only human life but the web-of-life itself, so the way to a sustainable and survivable world begins to come into clearer view, even if through a veil of tears. It is apparent that an 'overshooting' world addicted to incessant growth, materialist ideas of progress and human exceptionalism have – almost – run their course and that a new way of collective

being must be found. A way in which practices of social justice and ecological sustainability and custodianship become foundational and collectively enacted in symbiotic relationship with all life forms and surrounding ecosystems. Ideas and practices that have long been at the heart of indigenous communities, their ways of life, cosmologies and traditional wisdom.

Communicating a World-in-Crisis is not preoccupied with the prospects of mass death or societal collapse, but with the communicative possibilities of helping to ensure life's continuity in the web-of-life and into the future. This demands however that we must all wake up to the all too real existential threats generated by today's world-in-crisis and how they continue to converge and deepen, taking us to a planetary cliff edge preceded by 'endless emergency' and potential-possible-probable extinction. The contributors to this volume expertly and insightfully explore different mediums and creative practices within and across today's communication ecology, broadly conceived, seeking out to what extent and how each can make a positive contribution to wider understanding of not only our current planetary predicament but also the cultural flourishing of new ideas and regenerative practices that variously embody imagined futures and the politics of active hope. Guno Park's beautifully crafted drawing of nature's entanglement in human life, and death, helps remind us all, communicatively and powerfully, of the necessity to recognise and live symbiotically in the web-of-life as the positive antidote to today's otherwise terminating world-in-crisis.

Simon Cottle

MUSIC IN AN ERA OF PLANETARY DISCONTINUITY: WHAT MUSIC CAN AND CAN'T DO IN THIS CRISIS

Simon Kerr

The world is experiencing rapidly increasing damage from climate and ecological disruptions of which scientists have long warned. The new reality has only just begun and even in the best scenarios, it will take decades for this 'long emergency' to stabilise (Wiseman 2021). Because disruptions happen 'in place', the impacts will not be evenly distributed; some places are better positioned to adapt, climatically, financially, politically and socially, than others. The future promises ongoing uncertainty, spiralling disruption and no sign of a safe landing place, possibly for generations. It is now all hands on deck to respond to this predicament. I am a musician and want to state as clearly as I can: Music cannot save us.

If a folk music concert ever has an 'environmental' theme, Joni Mitchell's quintessential environmental song *Big Yellow Taxi*, is inevitably rolled out. It has staying power, not just for its music but for the sentiment: 'They paved paradise and put up a parking lot' (Mitchell, 1970). People care about the 'environment'. It is far less clear whether the song has had any impact on reducing land clearance and urban sprawl in the subsequent 50 years. This of course places an unreasonable burden on what is one of Mitchell's great songs, but the question remains: what use is music in a time of crisis?

It depends on the crisis. I will argue music's strength is emotive and not conceptual. It is not well suited to communicating new and novel conceptual realities such as the profound and ungraspable nature of the planetary crisis, that is, the erasure of one world and the emergence of a new planetary era. Music's super power is different, possessing a unique capacity to emotionally replenish and support people in crisis.

Since Bill McKibben's plea 20 years ago for an outpouring of 'Art, Sweet Art' (2005) to help address the climate challenge, the outpouring has been more of a slow drip. While this is now changing, it is hard to mount an argument that musicians are leading the sorts of climate narratives and actions required in this predicament. After a number of years as a practitioner of climate-focused music, I find myself taking a more critical view of what music can do. This is partly due to the nature of music itself, but also due to the recognition that these are not normal times, that the world many of us grew up in is no longer the world we now inhabit. When it comes to climate, as writer Naomi Klein puts it, everything changes (2015).

Looking to music as a means of communicating the mutation of the climate system is, for the most part, asking too much of music. But this is far from my complete argument, for I also suggest music does have a *particular* role in this crisis. It may not have epistemic power, but it does have a superpower; it can provide the emotional replenishment, courage and joy that we will need in the times ahead. In this chapter, I discuss the relationship between music and communication, some roles it can play and what we ought not expect of it. My focus is mainly on the impact of popular music in communication in a planetary crisis and my broad argument is that music's power is not in educating people about the climate predicament but in helping us cope with it.

A brief restatement of our predicament

How ought we understand this moment we face? It is difficult to provide a definitive account of what are in fact rapidly changing climatic, ecological and social systems, entangled in ways we are only beginning to widely acknowledge. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) provides the most authoritative statement on the current state, impacts and future of the climate, though not without facing criticism that it is too conservative (Anderson, 2023; Brysse et al., 2023). Some trends are clear. We can no longer avoid serious climate disruption and the best we can do is to limit future damage. That requires a couple of things: first, ensuring the planet does not get too hot

and, second, urgent and society-wide preparation for this future that is already present.

The global heat waves of 2023 have broken many records and are likely to produce a new annual planetary temperature record. There is a 66 per cent likelihood the planet will reach 1.5°C for at least one of the next five years (World Meteorological Organization, 2023). The rate of heating is speeding up. Australia, the lucky country, is 1.47°C hotter since national records began in 1910 (Bureau of Meteorology, 2023). It will get hotter still. If *all* Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHG) were to cease today, then recent research suggests it is likely global temperature increase would rapidly slow (Hausfather, 2021). But emissions will not stop tomorrow. The catastrophic reality is they are still rising. Emissions must peak mid-decade and decline by about 10 per cent per year in order to stabilise global temperatures at under 2°C (IPCC, 2022, p. 21). While the renewable energy revolution is accelerating the shift from fossil fuel energy, industrial, land and agricultural emissions are more difficult and slow to abate. Far too slow now for a safe landing into the future.

On current projections, it is almost certain the planet will exceed 2°C (Liu and Raftery, 2021). A herculean global effort could change this. But 'could' is not the same as 'will'. Much more likely is that predatory delay, conflict and inertia will slow emissions reductions from happening as rapidly as is required. This will be catastrophic for some places and hugely challenging for most. If we had seriously started on this even twenty years ago, we could have gradually transitioned to a low-carbon world (Hausfather, 2023). But that can has been kicked down the road. There is no compelling reason to believe such delays will suddenly reverse any time soon, and not in any orderly or managed way.

Many people still live with the illusion that we can tweak our current lifestyles and return to normal. We cannot, because we now live in a discontinuity; the climate crisis is not *going* to cause a break with the past, it already has. This is perhaps the most difficult recognition about the world we now live in. The relatively predictable safe zone of climate humans lived with since the end of the last ice has ended abruptly. In the planetary crisis, the protection provided by a reliable planet is now no longer guaranteed for anyone.

What of the future? For some, it feels apocalyptic, with social collapse now inevitable. I do not find that view convincing, neither empirically nor emotionally. While there are many reasons to feel troubled, there are also many reasons to feel some glimmers that all is not (yet) lost. While we face record climate disruption, remarkable changes are also underway. Renewables, for example, are now set to overtake coal in energy production by 2025, at a rate

much faster than was expected even a year ago (International Energy Agency, 2022). Despite the troubling climate and ecological trends, there has been sufficient progress to ensure we will likely avoid the worse of the IPCC scenarios of a world beyond 3°C (Pielke et al., 2022). Even if this is correct, such a world will be unlike anything humans have ever experienced before. Given the damage and costs we are already experiencing at just over 1°C, our species' capacity to adapt will depend a lot on where we live, a region or city's wealth, available technology, good governance, and a host of other factors (Steffen, 2021a). Some places may cope quite well, but many will struggle and some will collapse. It will be chaotic and messy, with outcomes unevenly distributed and spiky (Steffen, 2021b). An *orderly* transition to a more sustainable or safer future is now much more difficult, if not impossible. What roles can music play in helping us navigate such a future?

What music does

Music is a universal characteristic of all human societies (Mehr et al., 2019). There has been much written about its evolutionary origins and functions (Harvey, 2017). A brief survey of some of the important social functions of music will help highlight the roles it can play. I suggest there are at least five possibilities; telling stories, increasing solidarity, cultivating empathy, providing emotional release and, at times, providing inspiration and replenishment. This is not an exhaustive list but these dimensions are particularly relevant to the question of music and communicating a world-in-crisis.

Storytelling is an important part of many musical forms. An obvious example is traditional folk music that tells culturally specific stories, reflecting memory and identity. Many folk singers of the 1960s sang of social revolution, blues musicians about the lived experience of their communities, and rap musicians of resistance (Martinez, 1997). Other musical forms such as punk and hip-hop culture reflect their own particular stories, and reggae speaks to 'issues of injustice, resistance, love and humanity . . .' (UNESCO, 2018). Opera is a mode of storytelling, as is musical theatre. There is a rich heritage within all cultures where music holds the stories of the past and constitutes important cultural heritage, that is, stories of identity and memory. All these forms employ a narrative approach using semantic structure to storytelling – not necessarily a literal story, but they seek to bring the listener on a journey of ideas or meaning.

Being a holder of cultural identities, traditional heritage, or social ideas does not necessarily mean that music easily grapples with conceptually novel realities or pushes social boundaries. While there are examples, such as the work of John Cage in the early to mid-twentieth century where *intellectual* boundaries are pushed through musical composition and performance, most popular music expresses the *current* shared values of a community. Significant deviation from the social expectations of audiences is a good way to lose an audience (Kerr, 2018). I suggest that when music expresses shared values, it enables a second and potent function, social solidarity.

In *Music, Evolution and the Harmony of Souls* Alan Harvey elevates the significance of music in the evolution of human life by asking the question: ‘Why are we the all-speaking, all-singing, all-dancing creatures of our planet?’ (2017, p. 7). Whatever the aetiology, our species’ musical ability has generated one of the key features of shared musical experience – solidarity with others:

[E]arly in our history, our sense of self and knowledge of our impermanence was intensified and focused through the lens of spoken language. Music’s communal, socialising power acted as an essential counterweight to the individualisation experienced by increasingly intelligent and articulate members of ‘Homo sapientior’. Music was able to maintain ... a harmony of souls during the emergence of a ‘society of selves’. (Harvey, 2017, p. 205)

Solidarity – this harmony of souls – is familiar to anyone who attends a collective musical event where, even if momentarily, the audience is transformed from an assembly of individuals to a community gathered around a shared experience, whether in a house music party, folk festival, operatic performance or stadium rock concert. This is the superpower of music over perhaps all other art forms and becomes deeply significant as we face the planetary crisis. If we are to find liveable pathways into this future, we will not do it alone. The experience of community solidarity, of not being alone, was one of the common reflections our audiences made when experiencing our own climate project, *Music for a Warming World* (Kerr, 2015).

Solidarity does not always solidify around noble or virtuous beliefs. The Third Reich is evidence enough that music can support commitment to dangerous ideas. Nevertheless, solidarity is clearly enhanced by shared emotional experiences such as listening to a musical performance.

It is also enhanced by participation. Singing with others in a choir, at a rock concert, in a religious setting or around the campfire binds us together where ‘momentarily we forget our isolation, our mortality, and we step beyond

the confines of our own individuality' (Harvey, 2017, p. 206). Sharing music enables strangers to create satisfying bonds without having to invest the time normally required to connect personally. Music's role in early cognitive development and, more generally, in therapeutic application is increasingly well-recognised (Reynolds, 2023). Music has much to offer but is still a relatively unexplored opportunity to help provide communities with the resources needed to face the planetary crisis. This could help counter the individualisation of musical experience through digital media and the relentless logic of personalised algorithmic music curation (Webster, 2023) impacting on the maintenance of group solidarity (Andrejevic, 2020, p. 21).

Closely related to solidarity is the development of empathy. Sometimes considered as a theory of mind, empathy can refer to the capacity to adopt the perspective of another (Clarke, et al., 2015). Empathy is a cornerstone for the functioning of social cooperation. There is much research linking the development of empathy with music (Heshmat, 2023). This has significant implications for considering music's role in living in a future defined by uncertainty and change. Importantly, music's capacity to evoke empathy for others does not appear to require 'accessible semantic content', such as lyrics to guide the listener's feelings (Harvey, 2017, p. 76). There are many examples of music supporting empathic listening: The West-East Divan Orchestra which brings together Palestinian and Israeli musicians, UNICEF's engagement of classical musicians as goodwill ambassadors (Harvey, 2017, p. 62) and the NGO Musicians without Borders (Musicians without Borders). The planetary crisis is of course not just a crisis for humans but for many other species. Music can enhance empathy for the other-than-human. Eco-grief from the loss of heritage, nature and particular futures is on the increase and is now of concern to the medical and psychological community (Jarvis, 2023). Music offers an opportunity to increase the empathetic resources communities have available to counter this 'alienation' (Lamond, 2011, p. 99).

Music also does something else, perhaps even, as Harvey suggests, beyond that of all other arts. It can't solve the 'framing' issue of climate change, it cannot analytically investigate in the same way that scholarship, science and quiet reflection can because it does not address conceptual thinking. In the words of scholar and musician Ian Cross, 'it neither ploughs, sows, weaves or feeds' (Cited in Lomond, 2011, p. 99). But it does have an 'extraordinary capacity to stimulate our emotions' (Harvey, 2017, p. 6).

Music is a portal into the affective dimensions of our humanness, allowing us to experience the full gamut of our emotions. An anecdote may help

illustrate this. Composer Mathew Dewey was commissioned to work with PhD students from the Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies, University of Tasmania, to write a symphony reflecting their work and findings. Titled 'ex Oceano' (Lynchpin), it offered a musical interpretation of the impact of global warming on the powerful southern ocean. One of the project's sponsors told us that not all the oceanographers initially thought there was value in the project; how could music add to an understanding of this mighty ocean system? One of these scientists had spent a lifetime in painstaking research, documenting the devastating impacts of warming ocean currents. However, we were told that on hearing the symphony for the first time, the years of silent grief about the profound changes to which this scientist was witness were unlocked. The Oceanographer wept.

Beyond attending to our emotional connectedness, music can, at times, provide new ways of reflection, much in the way some visual art seeks to disrupt our mental categories and conceptual boundaries. Experimental music, whether electronic or symphonic, can use unfamiliar and discordant sounds and rhythms to open our ears to new experiences. Having sat through a number of such experimental experiences, it is not clear how well suited they are for communicating a crisis (except a crisis of musical value, as some audience members sardonically remarked as we collectively shuffled out of one such performance).

It is not just experimental music that can shift perceptions. David Byrne of Talking Heads notes that 'If music can be regarded as an organizing principle – and in this case one that places equal weight on melody, rhythm, texture, and harmony – then we start to see metaphors everywhere we look' (2012, p. 189). Data sonification is one expression of new ways to see the familiar. This translation of data into sound, and at times into 'music', provides a novel way to experience a story embedded in data. The San Francisco-based *Climate Music Project* has sponsored a number of powerful projects including a remarkable performance I witnessed at the San Francisco Exploratorium in 2019. Eight snare drummers stood in a line on stage. The piece they played followed a time series of climate-related events involving fatalities. Each drummer was assigned specific events along a time series. The duration of the snare drummer's playing signified the number of deaths for that particular event. At the beginning, there was mostly silence with an occasional short drum burst. By the middle section, drummers were beginning to play over each other, and by the end it was a cacophony. The auditory story conveyed was entirely a different level of experience and impact from just reading the data set. It burnt a place in my

memory that an academic article would rarely achieve. Similar work has been done with the geography of poverty (using a timeline based on a train trip across New York City), and the translation of annual global temperature data over time (1880–2012) (Crawford, 2013). We extended this time series to 2016 in our own live multimedia music show, and in doing so ran out of available notes on the five-string violin, given the dramatic spike in global temperatures since 2012. I have no idea how we would play the high notes (temperature) in 2023.

All of these outcomes of music, from storytelling, building group solidarity, cultivation of empathy, emotional connection and modes that shift our perspectives, are all significant in helping people connect with a world beyond themselves. Music brings our world to life in ways that other forms of expression cannot. It enables the expression of energy and beauty, rebellion and rage, grief and joy. At its most profound, the shared experience of music means we are not alone. In a time when increasing numbers of people are experiencing climate and ecological grief, when older people are worried for the next generation and young people struggle to see a positive future, music can play a powerful role in providing emotional release, and enabling group solidarity rather than isolation.

These are some of the roles music will play long into the future. Music will continue to evolve and morph, not just with the emergence of new musical forms and cultural expressions, but through technological and social forces. Artificial intelligence and social changes, such as the increasing (and historically novel) individualisation of musical experience, will undoubtedly produce new and perhaps unanticipated outcomes. But it is almost certain our species will continue to be drawn to the sociability of collective musical experience. While social isolation is a deep reality for many today, it is not the only trend we can discern; it is said there are now more community choirs than fish and chip shops in the United Kingdom (Bithell, 2014).

Music and crises

I now return to the focus of this chapter and the theme of this book, communicating a world-in-crisis. Some researchers argue the capacity for music has evolved *alongside* the development of language, providing a necessary counterweight to the domination of propositional communication. Language allows humans to ‘store, catalogue and transmit data and knowledge’ (Harvey, 2017, p. 11). While significantly more complex than I can deal with here, music

does not appear to function at a propositional level, that is, conveying new concepts and knowledge as language does through writing, reading and speaking. Music's power is largely emotive, enabling humans to make emotional and embodied connections with pre-existing propositions or narratives. Drawing on the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, humans necessarily begin any interpretative act with a prejudice, quite literally a 'pre-judgment'. A pre-judgement is modified by encountering dialogical arguments (two-way discussion) that refute, add to, or modify one's existing understanding (Gadamer, 1985). The available interpretive resources vary across individuals, communities and cultures, and how one 'sees' the world is always constrained by the available narratives. This is as true for science as it is for the particular stories, beliefs, identities and values that make people's social lives. Thomas Kuhn, the physicist turned historian of science, coined the term 'paradigm shift' in reference to the way scientific revolutions took place. For Kuhn, ways of seeing (and for that matter, experiencing) the world are always shaped by the dominant paradigms (Kuhn, 1962).

This has clear implications for the limits of propositional communication through music. Music cannot communicate propositional arguments unless those arguments already exist in some form in the minds of the listener. Or, to put it more simply, music helps people engage emotionally with narratives and identities that they are already familiar with. That is its superpower. Music as an evolutionary and neurological phenomenon is blind to ideology, creed, belief. While some musical forms can be broadly associated with particular values and ideas, such as gospel, punk, reggae or folk protest music, these are cultural overlays on particular musical forms, and not intrinsic to musical patterns themselves. In other words, if they are to have particularised meanings, musical performances require a discursive framework by which to communicate an idea, creed or belief.

This is especially evident in music with lyrics, where stories or ideas are conveyed. Even without lyrics, musicians will sometimes provide written or spoken explanations that accompany their music. Whether explaining the origins of a song on a record sleeve, a programme in a classical concert or a preamble by a folk musician (where song introductions often exceed the length of the song itself!), these interpretative mechanisms offer important cues as to how to 'hear' the music.

This might provide a clue to music's role in or capacity to communicate a world-in-crisis. How does an audience connect a piece of music with a *particular* crisis? It is not difficult to create music that soothes or agitates, energises

or relaxes, celebrates or laments. Musicians can be inspired to compose or write music they hope reflects ideas or emotions they wish to communicate. Authorial intention however cannot ensure that audiences will understand the piece as the author intends. This is generally unproblematic in art because the meaning of a piece of art, as Gadamer reminds us, lies in the 'conversation' between the subject and object, the viewer and the piece of art. The art object cannot fully contain its own meaning. Rather, meaning emerges, not out of the object itself, but out of this 'conversation' with the viewer. For Gadamer, understanding emerges from the to-and-fro testing of ideas and interpretations (Gadamer, 1985).

Musical performance, whether orchestral, trip-hop or country, enables creative engagement between the emotions and minds of listeners and the intention of the musicians or composers. Like visual art forms, music historians and critics seek to understand or 'read' music genres by linking them to social contexts. As C. Wright Mills' *Sociological Imagination* reminds us, this ability to see connections between personal lives and the wider society means music always comes from somewhere and that somewhere can be investigated (Mills, 1959). Biographies of musicians and musical movements provide readers with a social context of an artist or movement and what it all might mean. Such investigations are never complete or final. But this also suggests that music, abstracted from its social context, will only have personalised meaning for the individual. Without social context, the individual hears what they wish to hear in a piece of music.

In reality, most music is social, coming to us *within* an interpretive context. Few could attend a Bob Dylan concert today without some prior social conditioning of the Dylan phenomenon as legend, poet laureate and the 1960s protest movement, all which provide clear cues as to how to 'hear' him. Music can do many things, as I describe above, but it cannot formulate some new understanding of our world by itself. Rather, it most often reflects ideas that already exist. The dialogical world of language, critique, narrative and engagement with empirical realities shape the meanings of music, not the other way round. Music can indeed deepen our experience of these realities, but until these experiences become attached to language and narrative, they remain content-free.

Music can reflect and amplify existing narratives. 'Wagner's operas gave voice to Hitler's Romantic identity with an ancient, mystical and eternal Germany' (Riding, 2004); music in service of an idea. But the ideas need to pre-exist

the music for this to happen. Wagner did not create Germanic nationalism, but his music did reflect and empower it.

All this suggests music has a particular, though powerful, role in communication. Musicians can engage in social action through music by protesting against governmental failures to act on the climate and ecological crisis and against corporations engaging in unethical practices. Composer and lawyer Robert McIntyre's 15-minute classical composition, 'Our Duty to Care', encapsulates a significant Australian legal case against the Minister for the Environment (McIntyre, 2023). Ambitious attempts using music to tell a new story only work to the extent they resonate with a narrative the audience is already exposed to. McIntyre's piece is beautiful as a piece of music, but it is unclear the extent to which the music itself increased the understanding of the audience about climate litigation and the climate crisis. Some of the audience no doubt came because of interest in the legal case, while others attended because it was a new musical work. A written explanation of the case was available, and the concert included a brief introductory talk, both which helped locate the music within a particular discourse. It raised the profile of the legal case for an audience who I suspect were already favourably predisposed to the political/legal framing, even if understanding of the climate predicament varied considerably.

So far, I have not said anything particularly controversial, except perhaps at the beginning of the chapter where I stated music cannot save us. I do not mean that dismissively, because, as I have already argued, music has much to offer a world-in-crisis. I was pointing to something else, to a hope or belief that producing crisis-focused music will shift the discursive dial, and through evangelistic fervour, bring many more people 'into the tent' of climate and ecological action. The critique I am suggesting is that music has a limited role in conveying the new reality of emergent and novel crises. This, I will now argue, characterises the unique challenges of the planetary predicament.

If only it was just a crisis

The challenge for musicians lies not with the limits to music, but the nature of this crisis. The late Bruno Latour puts it most eloquently:

Alas, talking about a 'crisis' would be just another way of reassuring ourselves, saying that 'this too will pass,' the crisis 'will soon be behind us.' If only it were just a crisis! If only it had been just a crisis! The experts tell us we should be talking instead about

a 'mutation': we were used to one world; we are now tipping, mutating, into another. (2016, p. 6)

Groups of humans (and many other species) have gone through numerous past catastrophes, sometimes surviving them, sometimes not. But all of these took place within the life support provided by planet Earth. What is now clear is that we are entering an uncharted planetary future (Ripple et al., 2023). Regardless of one's ideological positioning, the evidence that we have left the shores of the predictable and reliable (the Holocene), and are now, not just heading, but actually in the early stages of a future of deep uncertainty and unpredictability, is compelling. The climate predicament ought not be viewed as just an 'Issue', but rather as a new era (Steffen, 2021c), one which humans have never experienced before. All bets are now off. Whatever we make of the future will not be a simple rearrangement of past practices, for those are an ill-fit for the world we are now in. We will have to rethink virtually everything we do if we are to collectively adapt to a world fiercely hotter and more dangerous than anything we have previously experienced.

Central to this new reality is what futurist Alex Steffen calls a discontinuity between the world we thought we were in and the world we are actually in (Steffen, 2021c). While most people now acknowledge the reality of climate change, its full implications are still denied or resisted. This makes responding to our mutating climate such a predicament. There is now no return to the safe shores of a world before this current heating. No place is safe from the impacts of climate disruption; all we now have is relative safety, depending on where we live and how well we prepare.

It is likely global emissions will reduce, and do so increasingly rapidly over the next couple of decades (International Energy Agency, 2023). It is also equally likely we will witness a flood of technical and social innovation as the world struggles to adapt and governments, business and civil society see new opportunities for innovation, reform and revolution. But all of this takes place in the shadow of two inescapable characteristics of the climate predicament; speed and scale.

It is increasingly clear that global heating will exceed the 1.5°C Paris aspiration and likely to exceed 2°C (UNFCCC, 2023). While achieving these goals is still *technically* possible, the speed required for the decline in global emissions is deeply challenging. Speed is everything (Steffen, 2022). This alone sets the current predicament apart. If we win slowly, we lose. The tempo of change is now a characteristic of a 'defiant earth' (Hamilton, 2017). Humans

are not the only actor in this new future. Having grown used to the promises of modernity that took little account of planetary limits, this new era will be less one of ideology (though that will still be very visible) and more of real planetary boundaries and impacts. As author Jeff Goodell notes, heat waves are culling the most vulnerable, but as they become more intense, they become more democratic (Goodell, 2023, p. 16). Everything now is about to speed up, as disasters become more common and the nations, economies and communities try to pivot in rapid response.

It is not just speed though, it is also, as the IPCC states unambiguously, the sheer scale of the transformational change required. We are deeply unprepared for this scale of change. What is critical to understand is that we can no longer avoid large-scale change because it is no longer entirely in our own hands (Naughten et al., 2023). The faster we plan and prepare for a hot earth, the better off we will be. But whatever we now do, change is coming for all of us.

Music in a discontinuity

What does this mean for music communicating a world-in-crisis? In light of the deeply disruptive speed and scale of change, the past becomes less useful as a guide and the discontinuity we experience leaves us in an uncharted, perhaps even an unchartable, future. For this reason, music is unlikely to be a powerful generator of new ideas that will keep pace with this emerging and mutating future. It is hard enough for scientists to keep up with the speed of change (Hawkins, 2023).

The music of the civil rights movement drew on a historical continuity of ideas and beliefs. It was anchored in the 'arc of justice' and so could sing of eternal truths and triumph of freedom. I pose this deliberately as a contrast with the context of the climate and ecological predicament, where current identities, certainties and visions of the future are untethered from the new earth we find ourselves on. Telling stories of a future we are just entering and do not understand is a tall order. Because music draws on people's current beliefs, music is not a great way to communicate a crisis for which there is little precedent. I am not convinced music can produce a paradigmatic shift in understanding into a deeper *knowledge* of a future characterised by tempo and scale.

What then is a realistic expectation of music in crises? I circle back to some things music is really good at; generating solidarity, empathy and community.

It can help us cope with radical discontinuity and with the cognitive and emotional demands of a world where no one can be certain of a safe place to land. While music might not help navigate the conceptual and empirical terrain of a rapidly mutating planetary crisis, it can bring people back into their body, emotions and connection. Profound and moving music might not improve our understanding of the climate predicament and may not be able to save us from heat, but it will, perhaps more than any of the arts, help us cope and find collective courage and joy in the midst of adversity. For that alone, we can be thankful we have music.

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AFTERWORD

CULTURAL RESPONSE AND CREATIVE RESILIENCE: A PERSONAL REFLECTION

Simon Cottle



Figure 20.1 Kintsugi Bowl, @Theo.Cottle

Japanese artisans, going back centuries, have repaired broken pieces of ceramic using lacquer and gold pigments. The art of Kintsugi ('to patch with gold') or Kintsukuroi ('to repair with gold') does not seek to hide the break or the repair but on the contrary throws them into sharp relief. The imperfections and flaws of a mended object are thus granted enhanced beauty and seen as more resilient than the original. The evident marks of breakage and repair speak to the object's unique history and its regenerated utility.

When seen as a metaphor of life, Kintsugi points to how we can become stronger, wiser and more compassionate through the struggles and calamities of life. Building on Buddhist and Wabi-sabi traditions of thought, people are marked by their life experiences, but so too can they heal and better recognise their strengths and weaknesses. In such ways, they may display increased humility and even equanimity in the face of suffering and change. The art of Kintsugi also holds, I suggest, metaphorical insights for our world-in-crisis, and not only in respect of how we must each individually recognise and reorient ourselves to change. To a world that is now visibly cracking and breaking, but a world that simultaneously also gives rise to emergent ideas, cultural flourishing, imagined futures and possible solidary remedies. These regenerative ideas and practices borne from a world-in-crisis help to throw into relief our place in the web-of-life and how an ecologically sustainable and more socially just (and survivable) world could yet be imagined and come about.

All the contributors to this volume are of course deeply concerned about the daunting challenges that now confront humanity and life on Earth, and all have sought, through their reflections on different media and communicative fields, to identify examples of innovation and creative practice that can better intervene into this world. From eco-literature, ecoart and ecocinema to climate emergency photography and participative documentary; from hidden theatre and immersive museums to green festivals and popular music; from sustainability education and journalism training to communicating whole intelligence 'for a world waking up' and to the need for AI (artificial intelligence) to move beyond instrumental rationality to integrative intelligence and ecological relationality – so each of these interventions has identified how these and possibly other forms of communication can help to envision and reorient society to a better world. Studies of First Nation community media, local television programmes reporting on local climate actions, different reporting roles in climate change, and different news platforms and how these delimit or deepen reporting of direct-action protests, have also explored important communicative possibilities within the different forms and practices of journalism.

And so too have we considered journalism's capacity for representing 'future imaginaries', whether cultivated and/or compelled in the years ahead.

Together these chapters and their authors belie simplistic claims of 'doomerism' or 'catastrophism' when directed at those engaging with the cascading crises unfolding at planetary scale. To recognise today's planetary demise and to want to better understand and communicate something of its systemic nature to others need not, of course, cancel out the equally felt imperative to find positive communicative ways of responding and intervening within these structures of risk, destabilisation and breakdown. It is only on the basis of communicative engagement and a realist understanding of today's existential threats, rather than complacency or simplistic optimism, that we can start to create with others collective, innovative and meaningful expressions of active hope (Macy and Johnstone, 2021). And this, as we have heard, encompasses diverse communicative realms of media and creative practices.

When immersed in writing, reflecting and communicating on such matters this can nonetheless be experienced as a deeply unsettling and emotionally upsetting experience. The psychological processes of recognition, response and eventual formation of resilience have often been likened to the processes and stages of bereavement and grief. Given the felt sense of disorientation and loss following the disappearance of traditional expectations about our world, its continuity, the arc of life and imagined futures, whether for ourselves, our loved ones, those yet born, or for humanity and Life in general on planet Earth, this too is understandable. It is an inescapable part, it seems, of the personal experience of communicating a world-in-crisis.

Here, then, I simply share a few thoughts and reflections on some of the difficulties and dilemmas that can be encountered when trying to communicate to others something of today's planetary emergency, as well as possible sources of solace and yes, even hope, when doing so. Possibly some of these experiences and thoughts may resonate with your own communicative engagement with today's meta-crisis, whether in your personal or professional life, or in other ways. If, like me, you sometimes feel dismayed or even overwhelmed by what we now see looming on the horizon and also by what is inexorably pushing it there, by what we see nightly on our TV screens, or algorithmically via social media, and by the evident lack of serious attention and sustained response to this, whether by governments and corporations, colleagues, family or friends and vast swathes of the world's populace, something here may strike a chord.

It's worth saying at the outset, I know of no authors, academics or activists who relish painting hellish scenes like Hieronymus Bosh, imparting bad

news like a late-modern Cassandra, or prophetically predicting calamity like Nostradamus. And even fewer, I suggest, would want to risk being cast in the cloak of early Christian millennialism that drapes talk of the apocalypse. It is also easy to feel overwhelmed not only by the sheer size and complexities of the 'wicked problems' now being played out at planetary level (Chapter 1), but also by the daily sense of cognitive dissonance and isolation when positioned outside of the normative, some say increasingly deranged, continuation of daily life as normal (Ghosh, 2016). The simplistic charge of doomerism or catastrophism levelled at news output is sometimes also muttered in response to those academic and activist whistle-blowers of 'planetary emergency', 'global polycrisis', 'world at risk' and 'civilizational collapse'. And this notwithstanding the rapidly accumulating evidence, reasoned extrapolations and informed theorisations of eco-societal destabilisation and breakdown at world scale (Chapter 1).

Too many of us, it seems, continue to see the world's problems in single-issue terms and not as an integral expression of complex systems and some continue to bury their heads in the (tar)sands of a hubristic faith in last-minute techno-fixes and large-scale geo-engineering projects. Others take solace in piecemeal consumerist agendas on the home front, whether the increased uptake of EVs, recycling of rubbish or healthier lifestyles. But we thereby leave the underlying and systemic nature of today's world-in-crisis, as well as its cast of political and corporate spoilers, relatively untouched. And some of us, academics included, manage to practically disavow in our daily routines and actions that which is quietly recognised but kept out of mind. Such existential aversion becomes banished from thought for a mix of professional, psychological, political and phenomenological reasons (Chapter 2, Cottle, 2023). The relative safety of academic silos, comfort of narrow specialisms and established parameters of disciplinary outlooks and institutional agendas, amongst other factors, can all detract from planetary vision and engagement.

I have personally felt intense feelings of eco-grief and eco-anger, including *solastalgia* (the deep sense of sadness following the degradation and loss of known environments) and *terrafurie* (the feelings of anger at continuing ecological devastation) amongst others (see Albrecht, 2019), and how these can weigh heavily when thinking about and writing on communications and our world-in-crisis. I am not alone. This increased salience of complex emotional responses to a faltering, failing world moreover does not always sit well inside institutional expectations and traditional academic discourse.

Notwithstanding earlier interventions by feminist and ethnography scholars, for example, as well as more recent calls for pluriverse views and differing

epistemological standpoints, academic discourse still tends toward the logocentric, analytic, distanced and impersonal. This communicative register all too often displaces the emotional underpinning of much academic labour as well as first-person reflections on the author's hopes and fears. While there may indeed be a good case sometimes for communicating in and through the impersonal and emotionally evacuated discourse of traditional academia and science, when writing on the plight of the planet, its consequences and the hopes invested in pathways of transition and transformation, it seems that innovative, creative, visual and emotionally evocative forms of communication can and should be deployed when practicable and impactful. The deliberate use of Guno Park's symbolically resonate and arresting image (front cover) is perhaps a good illustration of this.

Some of us may also want to revisit and expand beyond the de-limited academic orientation that confines itself to critique. In a world-in-crisis is it now time to expand upon the *hermeneutics of critique*, (or *hermeneutics of suspicion* to use Paul Ricoeur's earlier literary phrase), to something more akin to a *hermeneutics of engagement and care*? At this perilous juncture on planet Earth, are we not obligated to seek to go beyond detached and siloed academic critique and make our research agendas, words, arguments and concerns intervene within this world, and to do so with compassion and care that extends to all sentient beings and surrounding ecosystems?

A useful parallel is found, surprisingly possibly, in the world of journalism. Here journalists occasionally prove capable of moving beyond a normalised and professionally institutionalised response when reporting humanitarian disasters (Cottle, 2013). The usual 'calculus of death' reporting stance – where human suffering and deaths are portrayed differently according to national geopolitical interests and historical and cultural proximity – is sometimes deepened with a journalistically inscribed 'injunction to care'. In contradistinction to detached and dispassionate 'calculus of death' reporting, an 'injunction to care' is crafted through close-up images, personalised stories and experiential and emotional accounts as well as the incorporation of multiple sensory invocations all designed to 'bring home' something of the human tragedy involved. When done well, such news reporting communicates across informational and imagistic, analytic and affective, expository and expressive, and deliberative and display modes of communication.

And, as we have heard across many of the preceding chapters, these and other communicative forms and appeals are now variously being deployed in different communicative fields and emergent new practices. To be an academic and creative practitioner as well as an activist or advocate for change in a

world-in-crisis is no longer, necessarily, mutually exclusive. Many of the contributors to this volume demonstrate in their respective chapters, I think, how both a *hermeneutics of critique* and a *hermeneutics of engagement and care* are in play – and both are much needed in our communicative responses to today's troubled times.

My personal experience also tells me that when engaging with today's planetary emergency and meta-crisis, we need the support of others, if only by communing with thoughts and feelings shared in print. Many of us will commune with our personal bookshelf of old dust-covered friends and new digitized companions. I recall, for example, the sheer pleasure and excitement of reading Jeremy Lent's (2021) *The Web of Meaning* which encapsulated so clearly and insightfully so much that I had been reading, outside of my own academic discipline, for some years. It is an extraordinary, expansive and wonderful book that integrates the new philosophy of science alongside traditional wisdom and thereby helps to underpin emergent ideas of ecological civilisation as the only viable way forward from today's world-in-crisis.

Ian McGilchrist's (2022) *The Matter With Things*, and Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi's (2014) *The Systems View of Life*, both in their different ways offer a profound reorientation of evolutionary neuroscience and contemporary science that speaks to our current planetary predicament – and in doing so deepen our understanding beyond the historical vortices and political economy of capitalism. Joanna Macy's (2021) *World as Lover, World as Self* and Robin Kimmerer's (2013) *Braiding Sweetgrass* offered deep insights into differing cosmologies and social relations of care and reciprocity, providing seeds of hope, both active and ecological, for sustaining a possible future. Kate Raworth's (2017) *Doughnut Economics*, Kohei Saito's (2021) *Marx in the Anthropocene*, and Jeremy Rifkin's (2022) *The Age of Resilience*, have also proved instructive companions for thinking through the historical determinations of capital, the changing metabolic rifts of human life and ecology, and possibilities for future societal transformation. I have found so many 'great awakenings' in print and often these converge on remarkably similar conclusions, despite their different intellectual and philosophical vantage points (see Chapter 1 references). Each in their different ways unmasking the 'unmaking' of today's world and contributing resources for imagining plausible futures. You, dear reader, will have your own preferred book companions; keep them close and let your long dust coated friends speak to each other as well as to the latest glossy or online newcomers. Together they may coalesce into islands of coherence in the surrounding seas of chaos.

Listening to expert podcasts, such as energy-expert Nate Hagen's interviews in *The Great Simplification* (<https://www.thegreatsimplification.com/>), reading daily contributions to *Resilience*, published by the Post-Carbon Institute (<https://www.resilience.org/>), or participating in virtual spaces with others from around the world, such as the *Deep Transformation Network* (<https://deeptransformation.network/>), or meeting like-minded people face-to-face in local settings and actions, have also proved to be incredibly supportive. You are not alone! All this is good for the soul, of course, as well as engendering a sense of solidarity beyond sociability. And moments of quietude, appreciation and reflection when walking in nature and through different seasons, I can confirm, have also been both restorative and emotionally balancing (Hanh, 2013). This recuperative 'gift' often helping to physically ground and nourish at the same time as sensing oneself inside the web-of-life (Macy, 2021; Macy and Johnstone, 2022, Chapter 13, Wallen).

Each of us finds different ways to better attune to our world, from different philosophical and spiritual standpoints, and sometimes we must do so at the very moment that our attention to it can take us to a place of despondency, of heartache and grief (Albrecht, 2019; Macy, 2021). So, to shift gear, finally and firmly into first-person, and with your indulgence, I here share something of my own personal and cultural responses to communicating a world-in-crisis. Like many, as I say, I have often found meditative peace in remote places 'in nature'. For me, this sometimes includes taking a guitar and finding sympathetic notes and impromptu music in the moment, whether in the presence of seascapes, biodiverse forests, or outback deserts. Over recent years I've also been lucky enough to perform as guitarist in residence at a beautiful sculpture garden set in the ancient woodland of the Wye Valley, playing over the summer months to visitors and accompanied by – and I romanticise not – bird song and the hum of dragon flies. With my singer friend, Louise Armstrong, we also perform our own eco-songs under the name of 'Kahlo-After Frida', playing at green festivals and small venues. We are neither rock stars nor widely known! This is simply part of my way of attending to the world and expressing feelings and commitments towards it, outside of academia. This too it seems is about communicating a world-in-crisis, finding solidarity with others, and, in small imperfect ways, engaging in practices of active hope. Politically insignificant certainly; but important and grounding from a personal standpoint. It helps!

Whilst performing our songs is an emotional outlet for those more than troubling feelings already mentioned (Albrecht, 2019; Macy, 2021), it also provides an opportunity to share, commune and find a sense of solidarity with

others; sometimes opening-up conversations after the performance and/or finding networks of similarly minded people. Sometimes, it must be said, our music can also fall on deaf ears! But this too is a communication of sorts and encourages us to find different musical registers and appeals that may yet resonate with others. As Simon Kerr put it well in Chapter 14, music's superpower is more emotional than conceptual, and it has 'a unique capacity to emotionally replenish and support people in crisis'.

To draw these personal reflections to a close and as one last illustration of how multidimensional, multifaceted and emotionally infused and energising communicating a world-in-crisis can be, here I share the lyrics of a few of our eco-songs. Each was written to address and resonate with audiences differently, and each demonstrates something of the polyvocal ways in which song can be crafted to engage with our world-in-crisis – and may encourage others to do the same. Hopefully, you may agree, that this cultural response is so much more than doomerism!

The first, *Sweet Summers Past*, is a song that attempts to recapture without clichés something of the innocent childhood experience of immersion in nature and the pleasures that many of us will have enjoyed and perhaps taken for granted in our early years. Though the youthful experience of feeling immersed in nature will of course be individually unique as well as demographically distributed, many/most of us will have youthful memories of being enveloped within nature's seasonal embrace. The song is written from the persona of a personal and nostalgic reminiscence and only at the end are we forced to recognise that the reassuring familiarity of seasons is now 'unstitched'. The song purposefully aims to locate nature in local place and personal experience where it often resonates the most (see Chapter 5 by Weissmann and Tyrrell, Chapter 6 by Foxwell-Norton et al.) and not, in this instance, in relation to the global political stage or even in explicit reference to the climate emergency.

Sweet Summers Past

(Sung over gentle, lyrical arpeggio guitar)

I remember sweet summers past,
Innocently held in nature's embrace.
Gentle sea breezes, feet sand baked.
Long-grass frolics to cliff-edge dreams.

Yellow fields swaying, insects' perpetual hum.
Crimson foxgloves standing tall down cow-parsley lanes.
I remember sweet summers past,
Yes, I remember summers past.

Bodies bathed in heat, shimmering in hope.
 Morning honeysuckle dew then green dragonfly lakes.
 I remember sweet summers past,
 Yes, I remember summers past.

Waking to the birds' excitable chatter,
 Evenings lost in swallows gentle soaring.
 I remember sweet summers past,
 Yes, I remember summers past.

Shaded cooling woods, blanketed in moss.
 Wild garlic's pungency, stretching ferns unfurling.
 I remember sweet summers past,
 Yes, I remember summers past.

Chuckling brooks, chilled rivers toe dipped.
 Kingfisher's orange-blue dart, frogspawn life stirring.
 I remember sweet summers past,
 Yes, I remember summers past.

Outro

From the ancients to this day
 Assured in nature's way.
 Life's rhythms in season's time.
 Past and present in nature's palm.
 But now no longer.
 Something's amiss.
 Seasons unstitched.
 Summer's innocence lost.
 Fields scorch and crack.
 Skies drench and howl.
 Nature's betrayed,
 Who's dismayed?
 I miss sweet summers past,
 I grieve for sweet summers past.

The second song, *The Earth Weeps (Will you Sleep?)* in contrast, adopts a historically longer, cross-cultural, and more obvious politically engaged stance. It builds on the prophetic words of Hollow Horn Bear (1850–1913) who witnessed the devastating effects of the imposition of American society and 'progress' on the Lakota indigenous peoples, landscapes and animals, and beyond. He is reputed to have said: 'Someday the earth will weep, she will beg for her life, she will cry with tears of blood. You will make a choice, if you will help her or let her die, and when she dies, you too will die.'

The Earth Weeps, (Will you Sleep?)

(Sung over expressive arpeggio guitar)

Verse One

The Navajo 'Sheltered by the trees', Cheyenne 'Warmed by the sun.'
 Said *Big Thunder* 'The Great Spirit the air we breathe; mother nature
 the plains and streams.'

Mary Brave Bird knew it too: 'The land is sacred, rivers our blood.'
Standing Bear lamented: 'Away from nature, hearts harden' – now clouds darken.
The Cree decreed, 'When the last tree has gone, last river poisoned, then
 money we cannot eat.'

Chorus

And, on the plains of Dakota, Hollow Horn Bear had prophesised:
 'The Earth will cry tears of blood – and she will weep, she will weep.'

Verse Two

Goanna, possum, wallaby; the land is my mother; we are one.
 Identity and Earth connected: Baada . . . Toogee . . . Pitjara.
 From first sunrise to dried creek; dreamtime in the land we meet.
 Walkabout through time and space; ancestors in our embrace.
 Stories of mother earth woven with sun and moon; finger traced in stars and paint.

Chorus

Stolen from the land, a generation cries; The earth defiled so we will die.
 Stolen from the land, a generation cries; The earth defiled so we will die.

Verse Three

Seas choke, smokestacks spew; it's corporate greed for the few.
 Forests cleared, mass extinction rears; politicians stoking fears.
 Racism wrapped in national flags; refugees in body bags.
 Elites parade as ordinary man; ecocide disguised as consumer jam.
 Extinction Rebellion rises, our Joan of Arc, Greta, mobilises. . .

Chorus

And, on the plains of Dakota, Hollow Horn Bear had prophesised:
 'The Earth will cry tears of blood – and she will weep, she will weep.'

Fast verse

Seas surge, Amazon burns.
 Feel the heat; Take to the street.
 Still mistaken, already forsaken?
 Still mistaken, already forsaken?

The earth weeps, will you sleep?
 The earth weeps, will you sleep?
 The earth weeps, will you sleep?

Outro/Chorus

And, on the plains of Dakota, Hollow Horn Bear had prophesised:
 'The Earth will cry tears of blood – and she will weep, she will weep.'
 'The Earth will cry tears of blood – and she will weep, she will weep.'

A third song, *Jagannath*, is different again and this deliberately adopts a dramatic almost theatrical register filled with mythic allusions to different gods and spiritual traditions, as well as alluding to Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* and Anthony Gidden's prescient description of late modernity as an unstoppable 'Juggernaut' and 'runaway world'. The choruses are delivered in tongue-in-cheek humour, and the song overall is underpinned by driving, fast-paced, flamenco-ish guitar (similar to a flamenco Bulerias). The singer's persona playfully chides and goads the audience into reflecting on what they will do when the gods of destruction arrive. In this way, the song deals obliquely through a theatrical veil with our current world-in-crisis, whilst its high-octane delivery aims to register something of the impending urgency of our situation.

Jagannath

(Arabesque guitar introduction followed by fast furious rhythm)

Verse I

Jagannath's resurrected,
 He's coming out to play.
 The Juggernaut's on its way,
 The World's runaway.

Chorus

What you goin to do?
 Where you goin to go?
 Images in the news
 God almighty, what a view.

Verse II

Thanatos is at the helm,
 Underworld bookings now.
 Hypnos, God of sleep,
 A merciful release.

Chorus

Will you stay?
 Or will you run?
 Book a flight maybe?
 Watch TV, sit tight?

Verse III

Leviathan's brutish and mean,
 English fields once sweet and green.
 Kali and Shiva, Gods of destruction,
 Yama's now the King of Ghosts.

Chorus

Will you faint?
 Or will you fuck?
 Will you live?
 Or will you die?

Verse IV

Jagannath's resurrected,
 He's coming out to play.
 The World's runaway.
 The World's runaway.

Chorus

Will you pledge?
 Or will you pine?
 Will you philosophise,
 Or will you cry?

Verse V

Jagannath's resurrected,
 He's coming out to play.
 The World's runaway,
 The World's runaway.

Chorus

Will you pledge,
 Or will you pine?
 Will you philosophise?
 Or will you rise?

Ubuntu, in contrast to *Jaganneth*, is written and performed as an upbeat, uplifting and danceable song, that draws on the cultural flourishing of ideas and practices now coalescing in today's ecological awareness and sensibility as well as possible imagined futures. The term 'ubuntu' is an African communal term signalling that 'I am, because you are', or, in our interdependency, we can both be and thrive.

Ubuntu

(upbeat jazzy guitar)

You, me, nature, intertwined:
 A planetary community of fate.
 Bio-diversity, cultural diversity
 Nature/humanity one.
 The 'human circle' still expanding,
 History's 'moral arc' bending green.

Ubuntu: 'I am, because you are.
 You are, because I am.' x4

Eco-anxiety, consciousness expanding;
 Extinction Rebellion (XR) rising.
 Biosphere the new public sphere;
 Politicians forced to hear.
 Global commons, imagined horizons;
 Eco-battlefields of hope.

Ubuntu: 'I am, because you are.
 You are, because I am.' x4

Indigenous wisdom in nature's embrace:
 Nature's broken, Gaia's spoken.

Circular economies, deep ecology.
 COP28, humanity's apology?
 Precious Life, nature's delight.
 Humanity and Nature one.

Ubuntu: 'I am, because you are.
 You are, because I am.' x4

You, me, nature intertwined.
 A planetary community of fate.
 Global awakening, our common fate.
 Green awakening, never too late.
 Everything's connected, nature's way.
 The universe our sustainable guide.

Ubuntu: 'I am, because you are.
 You are, because I am.' x4

And finally, one of Kahlo-After Frida's most direct and condemnatory songs perhaps, is written and performed through a persona that aims to embody something of the anger and active resistance felt and enacted by groups such as Extinction Rebellion and others in both the radical and growing moderate flanks of the climate and ecological movement.

Earth's Warming Blanket

(performed over pulsing/percussive Soleares, flamenco guitar)

Earth's warming blanket, woven in industrial time.
 ExxonMobil lied and befuddled the public mind.
 Corporate tobacco, big pharma the same.
 Now planet Earth, not just us, is dying – who's to blame?

Still insatiable greed, corporate plunder.
 Complacency and carbon chicanery taking us under.
 Politician's empty words and broken promises.
 'Fairy tales of eternal growth.'

Mass extinction Celsius: one point five (and soaring!);
 Civil disobedience maths: three point five (system stalling?).
 Planetary emergency, it's official, 'humanity's code red.'
 Time to embrace inter-being . . . before we're dead.

The earth heaves, Greta's clarion cry:
 'How dare you – how dare you!'
 The planet shudders, Gaia moans:
 You're killing me; I'll have your bones.

In their very different ways, each of these songs has sought to address today's world-in-crisis and do so in and through diverse music genres, different authorial/singer personas and various expressive registers and emotional appeals. Each is a written act of compression as well as register of semiotic symbolism. As a form they are closer to poetry than academic prose and pedantry. Curiously when writing them, the restrictions of form felt liberating. In their performance and reception, I like to think they have sometimes contributed to building a sense of communality with others, especially when performed at Green festivals (Chapter 7 by Muggeridge), and audience responses suggest that this is so. Though possibly this may also sometimes be helped along by an adjacent festival bar! And yes, sometimes as I say, they will have fallen on deaf ears too. But they have also played their part in rechannelling those daily feelings of despondency borne from the cognitive dissonance of living in a world that seems hell-bent on exponential growth and ecological exhaustion at the expense of human and planetary well-being. They have personally helped me in 'responding to the situation' and have done so through musical 'experimenting', 'inter-relating' with others, 'embodying' different emotional states and 'self-recognising' (Parlett, Chapter 18).

In their performance they have reminded me that amidst the cacophony of communicative voices, one's own internal voice also needs to be listened to and occasionally let loose. If nothing else, I hope these few indulgent personal reflections will have encouraged you to find and/or express your own voice in this world-in-crisis, and in whatever way(s) you feel most compelled and/or comfortable to do so. It is through the widening cracks of a world-in-crisis that our part in the web-of-life, paradoxically, is thrown into sharper relief – as well as the necessity for regenerative planetary responses. This is not only a struggle over perception and imagination, but fundamentally communication.

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Ron Johnston has a PhD in Ecology and Environmental Science. He was Subject Leader for Science and Sustainability Education on graduate and post-graduate teacher training programmes with the University of South Wales (2002–2016). Following this (2016–2018) he was sustainability science consultant with UNESCO supporting teacher research groups in Sikkim in Himalayan India embedding sustainability awareness within state science syllabuses. He has published widely on embedding sustainability issues into teaching and learning practise: <https://www.ronjohnstonsustainablefutures.com/publications>.

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Wilcannia River Radio, established in 2009, is owned and operated by Wilcannia locals. The station provides a voice for the community and is a service

where local information can be disseminated. Wilcannia River Radio broadcasts community news, events and meeting information, job vacancies in the Wilcannia community, requests and cheerios. The station provides a great service in more ways than one; by bringing the community together, creating employment opportunities, building confidence, social inclusion and letting their voices be heard.



Simon Cottle, *General Editor*

The *Global Crises and the Media Series* provides a forum for academics and others engaging with the communication of some of the most pressing global challenges to humanity and the planet today. From the climate emergency to bio-diversity loss and the sixth mass extinction; from global financial meltdowns, forced migrations and zoonotic pandemics to world poverty and food, water and energy insecurity; from major wars and protracted conflicts to weapons of mass destruction, and the denial of human rights, these and other crises represent the dark side of our globalized planet. We live in increasingly turbulent times of overlapping, systemic and deepening crises. Each book in the series, whether a research-based monograph or edited or co-edited collection, provides an authoritative, theoretically informed and empirically engaged understanding of the global crisis in focus. And by this means each book seeks to stimulate wider academic study and public debate about the most pressing global crises that together constitute today's world-in-crisis.

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