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UNDERSTANDING UNCIVILISATION

Analysis of a poetic discourse anticipating the collapse of civilisation

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Abstract:

Environmental discourses generally advocate norms to address the negative environmental consequences that industrialism has entailed. Whether reformist or radical, these discourses present visions of how problems can be solved or at least managed, even for global and complex issues like climate change. In this thesis I analyse the basis of one particular discourse that does not: the Dark Mountain Project. Their central text—their manifesto—foresees the collapse of industrial civilisation as we know it. For this they blame dominant anthropocentric ideas of human exemptionalism and mastery over nature. Their movement also distinguishes itself by being aimed primarily at writers and artists. By exploring the dramaturgy of the manifesto as well as its ontological, ethical and identity creating aspects, I aim at understanding how this discourse is not only different but also relevant. I also compare their discourse to some established categories of environmental discourses. What I find is the rational basis of a counter-discourse that empowers its participants and allows them to distance themselves ideologically from a civilisation that has achieved significant irreversible changes to the non-human world. This thesis examines why and how this movement metaphorically leaves the civilised cities in order to climb up the Dark Mountain.

ABSTRACT

Environmental discourses generally advocate norms to address the negative environmental consequences that industrialism has entailed. Whether reformist or radical, these discourses present visions of how problems can be solved or at least managed, even for global and complex issues like climate change. In this thesis I analyse the basis of one particular discourse that does not: the Dark Mountain Project. Their central text—their manifesto—foresees the collapse of industrial civilisation as we know it. For this they blame dominant anthropocentric ideas of human exemptionalism and mastery over nature. Their movement also distinguishes itself by being aimed primarily at writers and artists. By exploring the dramaturgy of the manifesto as well as its ontological, ethical and identity creating aspects, I aim at understanding how this discourse is not only different but also relevant. I also compare their discourse to some established categories of environmental discourses. What I find is the rational basis of a counter-discourse that empowers its participants and allows them to distance themselves ideologically from a civilisation that has achieved significant irreversible changes to the non-human world. This thesis examines why and how this movement metaphorically leaves the civilised cities in order to climb up the Dark Mountain.

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INTRODUCTION

A global crisis

There exists today a public notion of alarm with regards to long term global environmental issues (see Risbey 2008). This is not just a response to increased scientific knowledge but also to a growing understanding that emergencies can be global and complex. A significant assumption in this thesis is that, regardless whether this alarm is justified or not, both environmental changes and anxiety over them should be considered as real and therefore relevant for scientific study. Discourses about global environmental degradation are the topic my thesis, but let me start off by briefly introducing the complex of passed and predicted physical changes that sustain these discourses.

On top of long-known but still escalating environmental problems, there are two issues that suggest to many a need for urgent global action. These issues are connected. First, there is climate change which poses real, physical and local threats such as heat waves, flooding and natural disasters (van Aalst 2006) but also equally severe diffuse risks, for instance related to regional food production and global food prices (Nelson 2009). The livelihoods of many are both directly and indirectly at risk. Secondly, the prediction of a peak in oil extraction (some say “production”) has recently received increased media attention. Some assert that we are already past the peak (Murray and King 2012). The expected result is not only higher oil prices affecting costs for food production and transportation, but also negative effects on the global economy in general. This threatens the global political commitment to economic growth; a policy that has been criticised for being uneconomic and unsustainable (e.g. Daly 2005).

Coupled with exceeding estimated limits for safe human sustenance regarding biodiversity loss and the global nitrogen cycle, and approaching those of ocean acidification and the phosphorous cycle (Rockström et al. 2009), these issues all combine to form a complex environmental crisis. Both its origin and its consequences can be linked to the global economy and to the capitalist mode of production, not only on a macro-level but also on a consumer level. When people make everyday choices about what to eat, what to buy, how to travel and how to live, they are involved. The crisis is therefore not only political, concerning collective decision-making, and economic, relating to how production is organised and its results distributed, but also cultural, embedded in our ways of life on many individual and collective levels. For some, addressing this crisis requires no less than a green rereading of history and an abandonment of anthropocentric ethics (e.g. Bate 2001). This thesis introduces a new discourse that is based on similar ideas.

Although real, the crisis also exists in the public imaginary; in the symbolic dimensions of our world. Worst-case scenarios projected from this complex crisis and images of dystopian futures have been depicted in the media and popular non-fiction literature (e.g. Lynas 2007; Monbiot 2007; Kunstler 2006). People are confronted with the notion of these threats on a daily basis: when reading books and articles, when watching news broadcasts and documentaries. The future is uncertain, arguably more so now than ever before. Therefore it is warranted to look at expressions of fear, social collapse and even doom in contemporary public discourses. These discourses should not be disregarded as irrational or unscientific but be analysed as expressions of real experiences that merit attention.

One such discourse predicting social collapse is the topic of this thesis. In 2009, two writers/journalists/activists, Paul Kingsnorth and Dougal Hine, initialised a social movement called the Dark Mountain Project; “a network of writers, artists and thinkers in search of new stories for troubled times” (dark-mountain.net 2012a). To initialise this movement they wrote a manifesto that serves as primary data for this thesis. The manifesto is a 20-page self-published pamphlet; it is called *Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto* (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009).

The Dark Mountain Project and its critics

In addition to their manifesto, Dark Mountain now consists of a website¹ with a blog, an annual festival² and two anthologies with essays, poems and stories. Managing this is a project team that includes a steering group and an editorial committee; Paul Kingsnorth is “project director” (dark-mountain.net 2012b). There is also an associated web network³ and in Sweden there is a new affiliation⁴ with its own upcoming festival. Clearly the manifesto and the ideas in it have captured people’s attention.

Kingsnorth and Hine (henceforth “the authors”) seek to address two things that do not resonate in contemporary environmental debate. First, although many are aware of the problems and many strive to find solutions, things are not getting better. In fact they are rapidly getting worse, they say. Secondly, there seems to be a lack of acceptance—a denial—of the implications of that first fact, not only by politicians and economists but also within environmental organisations and among environmental activists. These, they claim, focus more on measuring the consequences and reducing the problems than on illuminating their origin (Kingsnorth 2010). So, they ask of us “what do we do after we stop pretending?” (Kingsnorth and Hine 2010).

¹ <http://dark-mountain.net>

² <http://uncivilisation.co.uk>

³ <http://uncivilisation.ning.com>

⁴ <http://darkmountain.se> (established in April 2012)

In the manifesto, the authors describe Dark Mountain as a social movement with a non-political agenda (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009). Although a major reason for its existence is the proliferation of global environmental problems, they are not primarily an environmental movement in a traditional sense. They are not out to save the world; they propose neither solutions nor visions of a better future. Instead they propose a way of relating to something that they describe as the imminent collapse of our civilisation. At the root of the problem lies humanity's imagined departure from nature. This "myth" is for them the problem that soon enough will lead our civilisation to fall into an uncontrollable chaos. As a counter-measure (but not as solution) they propose "uncivilised writing" that will "stand outside the human bubble" (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009, 13) and put our consumer culture and our ideas of progress into a larger perspective. The manifesto includes eight principles that guide Dark Mountain's writing (see appendix). This writing, they state, is not "political writing", nor is it "environmental writing" or "nature writing" (*ibid.*, 14). This thesis will explore what it is supposed to be.

Critical responses to Dark Mountain, their rejection of civilisation's values and their prediction of collapse, are to be expected. From "a scientist analysing the available data" (Lewis 2010) comes the critique that scientific evidence shows that "humanity is still largely in control of its destiny" (*ibid.*). Our changing environment, Lewis argues, should be managed by "hard science and even harder politics" (*ibid.*). Another critic (Townsend 2010) suggests that Dark Mountain actually want and celebrate collapse and calls one of their festival pamphlets "an orgy in Armageddon" (*ibid.*). Townsend shifts the blame to Dark Mountain, stating that their kind of inaction (with regards to finding solutions) is what actually causes collapse. Instead, human ingenuity is the answer and she urges them to "get down off that gloomy mountain and get to work" (*ibid.*). George Monbiot (2010) takes a more appreciative position towards Dark Mountain but also shifts the blame, stating that promoting inaction is to "conspire in the destruction of everything greens are supposed to value" (*ibid.*).

Common for these three critics is that they see the writing of Dark Mountain as a form of inaction. They thus make a normative distinction between writing that is a purposeful part of a valid debate and writing which is not. Also, blame is assigned to inaction. This suggests to me the notion that environmental degradation somehow can be traced back to people not inventing better cars or not proposing better laws. From the perspective of Dark Mountain this critique could be seen as hegemony exercising power over its dissidents. This makes the movement and their manifesto interesting for human ecological study which focuses on culture and power issues relating to humans societies and their environments.

Research questions

While the Dark Mountain movement is much more than just a manifesto, focus in this thesis is on the text *Uncivilisation*. I aim to understand what it expresses, how it connects to other contemporary environmental discourses and how it relates to science in general and human ecology in particular. This means interpreting and analysing the text, trying to find meanings that are coherent with regards to my understandings of human ecology and global environmental issues.

My research question is thus:

- What is a human ecological understanding of the text *Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto* and the discourse that it proposes to establish?

Underlying that question is another one:

- How is that discourse relevant?

Using a theoretical base regarding environmental discourse and social movements, these research questions are addressed through the concepts of drama, ontology, ethics and identity creation, which are discussed in the next section.

The focus is aimed at an initial understanding that could facilitate further inquiry. Therefore, there are many aspects of *Uncivilisation* that will not be dealt with. This includes analysing literary and religious references. It also includes a linguistic analysis and investigations into ideas of ‘wilderness’ and ‘darkness’. Although these aspects are also interesting to me, I leave them to others better equipped.

METHOD

Reading and understanding

As a social movement Dark Mountain has a discourse, a shared way of connecting to the world. Analysing and comparing this discourse in order to better understand the world that this movement inhabits is the aim of this thesis. Although *Uncivilisation* is text, not a discourse, as a manifesto this particular text sets an initial frame for the discourse of the Dark Mountain Project. With this in mind, I treat the text as if it were indicative of an actual discourse and use critical tools for inquiring into the nature of that discourse. This distinction between text, discourse and discourse participants motivates another clarification. From now on I use ‘Dark

'Mountain' to refer to the views expressed by Kingsnorth and Hine in *Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto* (2009). So, except where otherwise noted, 'Dark Mountain' is the plural and collective voice in *Uncivilisation*. The actual movement and its adherents are referred to as the Dark Mountain movement or the Dark Mountain project.

The method of this thesis is descriptive and analytical. It is also qualitative and comparative. It could be called discourse analysis. This does not mean that it employs a given set of 'methods' since doing so would "end up restricting [an] understanding of the complexity and multiplicity of meaning" (Parker 1999, 2). The methods described below are chosen with intention to illuminate and to be true to this particular text based on a sensitivity to language (*ibid.*). I aim to describe both the text and my critical reading of it. The purpose is to facilitate a reading of the manifesto so that future readers can begin to answer their own questions about its meaning. I will not provide much in form of 'answers' and maybe 'facilitate' is not even an appropriate word here. In some ways, and intentionally, I am rather making a reading more complex. In interpreting the text I both limit it and expand it at the same time; selectively reading meaning into it and connecting it to other discourses.

Brulle (2000) argues that the discourse of a social movement gives them their identity and guides their collective action. In the form of a moral drama it serves to re-socialise its members into a new symbolic reality. Through their discourse, the members of the movement create and maintain common beliefs that define the reality in which they exist (*ibid.*). Consequently, and in order to answer my research questions, I look in the text for expressions of the following:

1. *Ontology*. An idea of a world beyond human symbolic life is essential in all environmental discourses whether you call it 'nature', 'environment' or 'reality'. How do Dark Mountain understand the world? What is their fundamental and systematic understanding of reality?
2. *Ethic*. Environmental discourses are ultimately a matter of ethics; not just speaking *about* nature but also speaking *for* nature (Coupe 2000). What value system, if any, is proposed or indicated in the manifesto? What norms do they apply to others or to themselves?
3. *Identity*. A social movement is not just its discourse; it is also a collective subject, an agent. What is the character of Dark Mountain? How do they distinguish themselves from the rest of society? What is the purpose of this identity?

Ultimately, I explore how these three aspects connect to each other in the text. Exploring this also includes understanding the nature of the problems that Dark Mountain address and of

their opponents. While these aspects could be relevant to any social movement discourse, I see them as especially relevant for the generalising and globalising discourse of Dark Mountain.

Interpretation

Approaching text from a scientific perspective involves both being empathetic, believing that the authors are expressing something that is real or important for them, and being neutral, distanced and critical. These two approaches should however not be mixed. I therefore make a distinction between ‘interpretation’ and ‘analysis’. Although interpretation always involves analysis and vice versa, this distinction is important.

[I]nterpretation is a matter of converging on a particular meaning as having some kind of privileged validity. The point about analysis is that it seeks to reveal those factors which lead to a divergence of possible meanings, each conditionally valid. Whereas analysis recognises its own partiality, interpretation of its nature must suspend that recognition. (Widdowson 1995, 159)

Based on this, my *interpretation* focuses on a privileged understanding that can be shared by a larger audience and especially by the members of Dark Mountain themselves. It is however not possible to completely eliminate the “partiality” of my interpretation since language and text do not function as conduits or containers of meaning (Reddy 1993). Rather, meaning is imperfectly recreated with each reading and depends not only on who is doing the reading but also on the context of the reading. And context is always changing. To make things more complicated, presenting my interpretation involves the writing of this text, which you are in the process of reading (and interpreting). This is why no interpretation of meaning can be completely privileged. It is only privileged in comparison to analysis.

To emphasise that my writing (for your interpretation) is imperfectly connected to my reading and understanding, I will present my interpretation as if the manifesto were a dramatic play. This interpretative reframing of the text introduces protagonists and antagonists and their conflict. This highlights two meanings of the word ‘interpretation’: both finding meaning in reading and presenting meaning in a performance. Interestingly, dramaturgy is also connected to the discourses of social movements in ways discussed below.

Analysis and comparison

While my intention is that the authors of the manifesto should recognise and accept my interpretation, this will be less likely for my analysis. My analysis focuses less on intended meaning and more on my research questions. Analysis thus involves a somewhat forced reading, asking questions that may not have proper answers in the text. This also involves more

assumptions and conclusions on my part. This critical reading is grounded in my understandings of human ecology and of environmental discourses, which are presented below.

My analysis also involves comparison. Based on my findings regarding ontology, ethic and identity, I relate Dark Mountain to other environmental discourses. This is however not a direct comparison since I only examine the discourse proposed in the manifesto and not any other discourses. Instead, I use others' categorisations of environmental discourses (Hannigan 2006; Herndl and Brown 1996; Dryzek 1997), placing Dark Mountain within their categories. While this gives a basic idea of the relationship between this discourse and other ones, it is problematic to categorise and label social movement discourses as an outsider. This is especially true for discourses that criticise scientific rationality and question hegemonic language use. While this should not be considered a reason for avoiding comparing discourses, reflections on this problem are essential to this thesis.

Other considerations

To give my reader a sense of the style and language in the manifesto I frequently quote the text. Since many paragraphs and sentences in the text can be purposefully used as quotes, a subjective selection has to be made. Selecting which quotes to use is part of the iterative process of reading, interpreting and analysing; as is selecting how to interpret metaphors. Metaphors are never precise and are therefore often seen as problematic for scientific purposes. If they are used, it is usually for establishing distinguishing characteristics between discourses or simply for criticism (Mühlhäuser and Peace 2006). They can however also be philosophically emancipating allowing us new ways of looking at complex phenomena (Schön 1993). The manifesto is full of intentionally used metaphors. It also contains apparent contradictions that may seem to a reader as illogical or irrational. These contradictions appear for instance in that their uncivilised writing is a civilised action and that their ideas can be seen as a progression away from the idea of progress. While such contradictions are not merely the result of ambiguous language use, they do not mean that the authors are having contradicting ideas. Instead apparent contradictions, just as metaphors, can be expressions of a complex reality where phenomena are not easily explained. I will not attempt to solve these apparent contradictions. Instead I use them as indications of complex ideas that need investigation. For this reason I consider metaphors and contradictions to try to come closer to the meaning of the Dark Mountain manifesto.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Global connections

Human ecology has been described as “the study of processes involving how people interact with each other and their surroundings” (Steiner 2002, 31). Specifically it involves a focus on language, culture, social processes, institutions and change. All of these can, and often should, be analysed at different scales (*ibid.*). This does not just mean seeing global and local as different but sometimes intersecting scales, but seeing the global as locally engaged and embedded (Gezon and Paulson 2005). Specific attention is given to how global processes affect local communities and local environments. One aim is to situate cultural ideas and practices in an environmental context that is both limiting and empowering. This includes connecting abstract hegemonic discourses to their practical environmental consequences. These consequences often have a political aspect; perhaps positive for some but arguably not for all. Human ecology thus studies *connections*: connections between ‘culture’ and ‘nature’, connections between discourse and practice, connections between power and structure. In this perspective, human ecology studies connections between language and meaning in stories about the world which include ecological and social aspects. *Uncivilisation* is such a story.

Connections are however not easy to make. Global processes such as climate change have complicating characteristics: dispersion of cause and effect, fragmentation of agency and institutional inadequacy, which are all relevant over space and over time (Gardiner 2008). These characteristics work together on individual, collective and institutional levels to limit moral restraints and perceptions of responsibility (*ibid.*). For these reasons, we are not only distanced (in space and time) from environmental consequences but also theoretically distanced from making connections between global human cultural practices and the environment that sustains them. This distance can be seen as a form of alienation. It affects individuals who try to make connections between their moral values and their own consumption. It also affects scientists that want to make connections that contribute to knowledge and understanding.

A theoretical problem thus exists when looking at global environmental processes from a place of alienation. How does human ecology study connections when connections are fragmented and globally dispersed? One way this is approached is using Immanuel Wallerstein’s world system theory. In that perspective a differentiation is made between 1) ‘core’ processes with capital-intensive production and an inflow of raw material and energy, and 2) ‘periphery’ processes with labour- or resource-intensive production and a net outflow of material and energy. These economic processes have a geographic dimension which makes it possible to

describe countries as ‘core’, ‘periphery’ or ‘semi-periphery’ (Wallerstein 2004). Quantitative studies of environmental load in connection to global trade show that, within the world system, there is an unequal exchange profiting the core economies (e.g. Hornborg 2006). In the extractive economies of the periphery some environmental issues (like consequences of resource extraction) are more evident. Also, in frontier economies special rules apply (Wilk 2007) and global ideologies engage local institutions and cultures with “friction” (Tsing 2005). This makes the contrasting of practice in the periphery with ideologies originating from the core a suitable point of study for human ecology.

Sawyer (2004), for instance, recounts how transnational companies in Ecuador deployed neoliberal discourse in order to get control over oil concessions. This involved using, not only political and financial power, but also an “abstract, rational and formalistic language” (*ibid.*, 7) that erased indigenous history and helped to “shape and govern the capacities, choices and wills of subjects to conform to neoliberal reason” (*ibid.*, 9). This language provoked a “proliferation of oppositional identities and counter-dreams” (*ibid.*, 16). In another example of involving counter-discourses, Alf Hornborg (2005) describes the Mi'kMaq Indians' struggle to keep a holy mountain from commercial exploitation. Their discourse of sacredness managed to successfully resist a universal discourse of modernity in which the mountain was merely seen as a natural resource (*ibid.*).

Studies such as these provide us with insights into the local effects and moral implications of how global political and economic power is exercised and how this relates to discourse, narratives and stories about the environment. This thesis shares that global-local view on environmental issues and conflicting discourses but focuses on a counter-narrative that originates from within a core economy; from the United Kingdom, arguably an historical archetype of a core country. While the mentioned studies show global hegemony (i.e. dominant institutionalised practices widely seen as legitimate) meeting opposition when deployed in the periphery, opposition also exists in the core from where hegemony originates. Hegemony is therefore not absolute but has to constantly reassert its privileged position by powerfully showing to its critics and dissidents why it should be considered legitimate (see Gezon 2005). New cultural expressions in the core are, just like traditional ones in the periphery, made to comply with hegemony. Although struggles over natural resources in the periphery may be more obvious, more unequal and more morally questionable, I argue that the understanding of counter-discourses within the core is relevant for, and adds additional value to, the field of human ecology. This is not limited to discourses of the less privileged (in terms of economic power over their own lives).

There are however important differences between counter-discourses in the periphery and those in the core. The privileged in the West who question hegemonic ideas such as liberal democracy and market economy are not (necessarily) doing so at the risk of losing a tradition or a culture. In one way they may be trying to create a new (sub)culture. But in another way they are seen as opposing their own culture, not just fighting the system from within, but actually arguing against the proverbial hand that feeds them and sustains their lifestyles. Another difference may be that privileged people in core economies are more alienated from the effects on the environment that their occupation and consumption choices cause. This alienation means that people in the core are in general confronted by environmental degradation less by direct experiences of nature and more by a proliferation of environmental narratives and statistics (often classified as “facts”) in media.

Some social movements in core countries address this alienation by practical and communal means. The Transition Movement⁵, for instance, seek to establish small resilient and self-reliant communities through practices such as permaculture, local trade and local currencies (Hopkins 2008). Other movements focus primarily on ideas and language. In this thesis I discuss how Dark Mountain provide a counter-narrative that enables its adherents to oppose, or at least cope with, the conflict between hegemonic ideologies and accounts of their practical and negative environmental consequences. Although this is an abstract and textual exercise, not directly rooted in environmental effects or resource struggles, it springs from experiences that correspond with those discussed within the wide field of human ecology.

Before analysing the discourse of the social movement that is the Dark Mountain Project, I explore what is meant by ‘environmental discourse’ and ‘social movement’.

Discourse

When looking at language use, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish concepts such as rhetoric, narrative, storytelling and discursive framing from each other. They overlap but also focus on different aspects of using symbolic language. However, defining the similarities and differences between these concepts is not within the scope of this thesis. I will specifically use ‘rhetoric’ to refer to acts of persuading and influencing an audience through the use of language. To encapsulate the other concepts, the broader term ‘discourse’ will be used. Although discourse can involve all of the above it places emphasis on the structuring and empowering aspects of language use.

⁵ <http://www.transitionnetwork.org>

A discourse is a shared way of apprehending the world. Embedded in language, it enables those who subscribe to it to interpret bits of information and put them together into coherent stories or accounts. (Dryzek 1997, 8)

Discourse is here a way to make sense of the world and to share that through stories. Dryzek indicates that discourses are a social way to address a complex reality and argues that discourse analysis helps us understand “the proliferation of perspectives on [complex] environmental problems” (ibid., 9). Another definition brings out how discourse is embedded within social institutions, politics and social movements.

[D]iscourse is an interrelated set of ‘story-lines’ which interprets the world around us and which becomes deeply embedded in societal institutions, agendas and knowledge claims. These story-lines have a triple mission: to create meaning and validate action, to mobilize action and to define alternatives. (Hannigan 2006, 36)

Again, the idea of purposeful and meaningful stories is central to the concept of discourse. Whether looking at conflicting perspectives or “agendas and knowledge claims” it is clear that discourses have a political aspect. That is not to say that all discourses are based in politics. Chantal Mouffe (2005) distinguishes between “the political”, i.e. issues involving power and value conflicts, and “politics”, the arenas in which political conflict resolving is supposed to happen. From this understanding, Dark Mountain’s writing is inherently political, proposing one value system over another, but it could still be true that they are not concerned with politics, i.e. trying to affect policy through institutions of power.

Michel Foucault saw discourse as constitutive of the social and thus related to issues of power. On one hand power is exercised both in establishing discourse and in its practice in conflict with other discourses. On the other hand, power and politics rely heavily on discursive practices and techniques. Therefore changes in discourse are important for achieving social change (Fairclough 1992). This later point is apparent in *Uncivilisation*, which calls for “new stories”. As I will show, the manifesto also creates meaning, validates and mobilises action and defines alternatives for the followers of the movement.

Based on the definitions above I see ‘discourse’ as a socially constitutive symbolic structure that is continuously reproduced with the purpose of *defining meaning* and *giving agency to* (i.e. empowering) its participants. However, Foucault also argued that discourses are discontinuous and interdependent (Hajer 1995). Discursive structures overlap and are not distinct or well-defined; at times they can even be contradictory. Furthermore, claims of understanding, or “knowing”, a discourse are themselves discursive in that they are inevitably based in some kind

of symbolic structure in which these claims make sense. For this thesis that structure is human ecology.

It is here important to stress that text is not discourse. While discourses are pragmatic processes that create meaning, texts are products of such processes (Widdowson 1995). Therefore, *Uncivilisation*—the text—is not a discourse in itself; neither does it clearly define the on-going discourse of the Dark Mountain project. What makes that particular text suitable as material for discourse analysis is that it expressively states (manifests) the need for and the basis of a new discourse.

Discourse and the environment

‘Environmental discourse’ may at first seem to be a more precise term than ‘discourse’ in general, but it is a diffuse concept in need of clarification. As used here, an environmental discourse does not have to include direct references to a specific nature or a local environment. This is particularly true for non-local or “globalising” discourses that seek to encompass a wide variety of environments (atmosphere, sea, city, etc.). The “abstractification” of environmental discourses is thus related both to alienation from nature and to globalisation. The conflict between abstract environmental discourses can be seen as a “complex and continuous struggle over the definition and the meaning of the environmental problem itself” (Hajer 1995, 14f). John Dryzek (1997) sees industrialism and its environmental consequences as the common denominator for these discourses.

Environmental discourse cannot therefore simply take the terms of industrialism as given, but must depart from these terms. This departure can be reformist or radical.
(*ibid.*, 13)

In this quote (and in this thesis) industrialism is characterised by its commitment to economic growth and material well-being (*ibid.*, 12). Following Dryzek, I see a discourse as ‘environmental’ if it is based on concerns of systematic environmental degradation and misuse. This still leaves us with a very wide concept.

To complicate things further, there is also a wide variety of ways to categorise these discourses. I will use three different categorisations that complement each other. Locating Dark Mountain within these will help clarify the text and contrast it to other discourses and also to the categorisations themselves. It should be noted that all three look mainly at American/European discourses. Also, these discursive categories are neither static nor mutually exclusive but “engage one another in dialectical fashion” (Hannigan 2006, 52).

In a review of categories of environmental discourses, John Hannigan (2006) summarises them in three main groups. These are roughly chronological; gaining public attention in the order presented here.

- An Arcadian discourse rose from “a rising tide of nostalgia among urban middle class for the joys of country life and outdoor living” (ibid., 41). In this discourse nature is external to civilisation and it is iconized using stereotyped images. It is seen as a counterpoint to urban industrial society; it is sublime and wild, beautiful and primitive. It is “a place of priceless aesthetic and spiritual value” (ibid., 38). The Arcadian discourse inspired the Romantic nature writing of Wordsworth, Emerson and Thoreau as well as back-to-nature movements. Critics, however, describe this Arcadia as a socially constructed myth; a dreamt-up nature, not as benevolent or wildly beautiful as imagined.
- The ecosystem discourse is based on the emergence of a scientific understanding with regards to ecosystems and complex dynamics in ecology. Keeping the balance in nature thus became more important. Starting in the 1950's, the balance of ecosystems was connected to normative ideas based on Aldo Leopold's 'land ethic', seeing nature as a community rather than as a commodity. Rachel Carson's iconic *Silent Spring* strengthened this discourse by showing the fatal consequences of pesticide use on animal life. The ecosystem discourse was also central in the rise of environmental movements in the 1970's and was further fuelled with concerns over nuclear energy.
- Environmental justice discourse focuses on claiming the civil rights of citizens. These rights include access to information, receiving (financial) compensation and having democratic participation. This discourse developed in the United States in the 1980's in response to toxic contamination affecting whole communities. One significant achievement of this movement is that it includes social inequality as a factor, something that previous discourses neglected to do. In the 1990's this discourse expand to include people in the Third World.

Hannigan's categories differ most with regards to their normative rationales: nature's intrinsic value, the delicate balance of nature and every human's equal right to a healthy environment. But they also differ as to who uses them. While the ecosystem and justice discourses are strongest within science and civil rights movements, respectively, the Arcadian discourse is associated with back to nature movements.

In another three-part delimitation, Herndl and Brown (1996) draw inspiration from the classical rhetorical trinity—ethos, pathos, logos—in order to identify predominant tendencies in environmental discourses.

- The regulatory discourse category corresponds to the ethos, the character and credibility of the speaker. Typically used by powerful institutions and policy makers, in this discourse nature is seen as a resource to be used in a utilitarian way for the greatest (human) good. Herndl and Brown also label this discourse “ethnocentric”.
- The scientific discourse category is anthropocentric in that it sees nature as an object of knowledge, external to the scientist. (It should be noted that this mainly regards natural sciences.) This discourse is attributed significant cultural power based on our “rationalist faith in science” and its methods (*ibid.*, 11). It corresponds to the logos; the reasoning or the rational logic of what is being said.
- Thirdly, there is the pathos, the appeals to the audience’s emotions and empathy, which corresponds to a poetic discourse. In this eco-centric discourse, nature is regarded as a spiritual and transcendent unity with aesthetic appeals. As in Hannigan’s Arcadian discourse, Herndl and Brown make a connection to Thoreau.

In a more systematic and less schematic approach, Dryzek (1997) locates discourses on two dimensions. One axis distinguishes reformist discourses from radical ones (with regards to industrialism). On the other axis the distinction is between “prosaic” and “imaginary” discourses.

Prosaic departures take the political-economic chessboard set by industrial society as pretty much given. [...] In contrast, imaginative departures seek to redefine the chessboard. Notably environmental problems are seen as opportunities rather than troubles. (*ibid.*, 13)

Within each of the four combinations (see Table 1), Dryzek creates subcategories by focusing on divergent differentiations within each category. The result is what appears to be a complete overview of the most prominent environmental discourses at the time.

Table 1. Categories of environmental discourse according to Dryzek (1997)

	Reformist	Radical
Prosaic	Administrative rationalism Democratic pragmatism Economic rationalism	Survivalism Promethean discourse
Imaginative	Sustainable development Ecological modernisation	Green romanticism Green rationalism

The reformist-prosaic discourses see ecological problems as solvable within the established political economy of industrial society. The subcategories each focus on different aspects: bureaucracy, democracy and market principles, respectively. Discourses within these three categories are in many ways combinable. In the radical-prosaic category however the two main discourses are more clearly in opposition towards one another. The discourse of survivalism is based on the notion of environmental limits and the threat of overshoot and collapse. It is interested in population control and requires political elites to limit human resource use. Social movements within this discourse seek to influence the powerful directly rather than through popular opinion. In this way it is somewhat of an ‘administrative radicalism’. While also prosaic and radical, the Promethean discourse⁶ rejects the notion of imposing limits and asserts human ingenuity as the solution to whatever problems lie ahead. This radicalises the idea of market liberalism and technological solutions and asserts the idea that progress is guided by self-interest and an invisible hand.

On the imaginative side, Dryzek divides reformist discourses into two categories: sustainable development and ecological modernisation. Both of these take capitalism, economic growth and progress for granted and propose development for the public good. However, “ecological modernisation has a much sharper focus than does sustainable development on exactly what needs to be done with the capitalist political economy, especially within the confines of the developed nation state” (*ibid.*, 143). Radical imaginative discourses are divided into two groups. Like survivalism both green romanticism and green rationalism have a fundamental idea of global environmental limits. While the green rationalists have clear political agendas, use appeals to reason and propose a greening of Enlightenment values, the green romantics appeal

⁶ In Greek mythology, Prometheus was the champion of mankind who stole fire from Zeus, thus increasing human capacity to control the world. Therefore, “Prometheans have unlimited confidence in the ability of humans and their technologies to overcome any problems presented to them” (Dryzek 1997, 45)

to emotions and nature values. They focus on changing human consciousness rather than just changing short-term politics. Dryzek labels them romantics for their shared values with the romantic poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for instance Wordsworth and Shelley. For them humanity and nature were in an organic relationship and they rejected modern science, instead favouring aesthetic and artistic values.

One prominent movement within the category of green romanticism is that of Deep Ecology. This emerged as a philosophy during the 1960's and 1970's environmental movements. Its name comes from Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss who made a distinction between "shallow" ecology, which is anthropocentric and only seeks short-term remedies for some environmental problems, and "deep" ecology, which assign strong normative values to the non-human world (Næss 1973). In brief, Deep Ecology is based on two basic principles: self-realisation, which presses for identification with a holistic organic Self, and biocentric equality, which states that no species, including the human, is more valuable than any other (Dryzek 1997). This also calls for a small human population since present human interference with the non-human world is excessive. It also asserts that wilderness and non-industrial human cultures should be protected (Næss 1995). Currently, Deep Ecology is most prevalent in the US where one associated organisation is the Earth First! movement, which engages in radical action, civil disobedience and unlawful sabotage of industrial equipment (Dryzek 1997).

In this section I have schematically illustrated the variety of discourses that can be labelled 'environmental'. Of special interest for this thesis are the categories of Arcadian discourse, poetic discourse and green romanticism. These discourses are both radical towards industrialism and open-minded when it comes to alternatives. They thereby provide a distinctive foundation for counter-discourses against hegemony. These discourses also share literary influences and eco-centric values with Dark Mountain. For its emphasis on collapse the survivalist discourse could also be of some interest. However, that discourse has a prosaic agenda (of setting political limits) that is not shared with Dark Mountain.

I now turn to one aspect that is prominent in many radical or imaginative discourses, including Dark Mountain's, namely unwanted sudden societal change and the notion of fear that often is associated with it.

Apocalypse, fear and the fear of fear

There is a tradition of apocalyptic narratives in environmental discourses. This is not only true in radical oppositions to the ideology of progress, but also as a rhetorical shock tactic aiming at

building public awareness and support of action. Killingsworth and Palmer (1996) take Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* as a prominent example. Her success in engaging the public in matters traditionally left to scientists included depicting the negative effects of pesticides as a great danger to civilisation, making it a matter of "change or die" (*ibid.*, 31). Killingsworth and Palmer argue that these apocalyptic arguments should not be taken literally since their aim is not to predict the future but to change it.

To employ apocalyptic rhetoric is to imply the need for radical change, to mark oneself as an outsider in a progressive culture, to risk alienation, and to urge others out into the open air of political rebellion. The apocalyptic rhetoric is an expansive and offensive rhetorical strategy. (*ibid.*, 41)

An apocalyptic discourse now exists around the issue of climate change. Hulme (2008) situates this historically showing how climate discourses have centred around 'fear' but with changing focus. The pre-modern fear of unknown causes of climatic events ("climate as judgment") was gradually dissolved when naturalistic explanations made weather phenomena more predictable. This was followed by a fear of unknown places ("climate as pathology") where the tropical climates encountered during European imperial expansion posed dangers to both health and morality. Advances in medicine and technology eventually reduced this fear. Today, Hulme argues, we are in an age where climate is seen as potential catastrophe and fear is focused on an unknown future. Both where we place our fear and how fear dissolves are described by Hulme in terms of cultural change. For instance, Rachel Carson played into the apocalyptic imaginary of the Cold War era. When that era ended, and with the last two decades of globalisation, global climate took over as the most viable apocalyptic narrative.

While environmental narratives often refer to apocalyptic scenarios, there exists within the science discourse a fear of scaring off the public. Stories of apocalypse and fear can lead people to reject scientific arguments and therefore also necessary policy changes. Consequently, the presence of fear in the rhetoric related to climate change has failed to promote action. Hulme (2009) states that the language of fear counter-intuitively leads to disempowerment, apathy and scepticism among the audience. Often, promoting fear is thus an "ineffective, even counterproductive way of promoting behavioural change" (*ibid.*, 348). Moser and Dilling make a similar point:

Fear appeals or images of overwhelmingly big problems without effective ways to counter them frequently result in denial, numbing, and apathy, i.e. reactions that control the unpleasant experience of fear rather than the actual threat. (Moser and Dilling 2011, 165)

These fear-reducing reactions have been described as “maladaptations” (O’Neill and Nicholson-Cole 2009, 363) and often result in externalisation of responsibility or even fatalism. This can also be damaging to the public’s sense of trust for the speaker or the organisation that invokes ‘fear’. Although the sensationalist use of fear sometimes reflects general feelings of concern, it generally has a negative effect on active engagement with climate change (*ibid.*, 376).

At the core of this reasoning lies the notion that appeals to fear are “persuasive communication attempt[s] designed to arouse fear in order to promote precautionary motivation and self-protective behavior” (*ibid.*, 360). The underlying assumption is that communication is an essential part of democratic policymaking, linking scientists, politicians and the public. As such “communication for social change *must* consist of efforts to increase motivation to make a change” (Moser and Dilling 2011, 169, emphasis added). Moser and Dilling describe this as a “science-action gap” (*ibid.*, 162) that needs to be bridged. In other words, scientists are knowledgeable and need to motivate policy makers and their constituencies into taking action. Public engagement is described in terms of “influencing policy through elections [and] driving consumption patterns through their purchasing power” (O’Neill and Nicholson-Cole 2009, 356). For this purpose, ‘fear’ narratives are seen as flawed rhetorical tools, not as valid expressions of real insecurity⁷. Others have pointed to the need for some alarm due to the severe implications of climate change and distinguish between overblown “alarmist” discourses and justified “alarming” discourses (Risbey 2008). Loosely connected to the idea of fear appeals being problematic is the more positive idea of ‘opportunity’—even when it is only “a modest window of opportunity” (Lewis 2010). This is prevalent in imaginative-reformist discourses. The message is that we should stay calm, but act now; that there is an emergency, but we can handle it.

Calhoun (2004) problematises what he calls an international emergency imaginary that has evolved in parallel with the last decades of globalisation. This involves both natural disasters and violent political conflicts. While international responses to emergencies are often presented as humanitarian they are also a managerial exercise that reinforces the normality of globalisation. This “discourse of emergencies” (*ibid.*, 376) naturalises products of human action, makes sudden what is gradually developing and localises problems produced in part by global forces. Calhoun does not see interventions into complex emergencies as solutions, since these emergencies are effectively symptoms of other underlying problems.

⁷ This perspective also assumes a collective rhetorical agent; a community of scientists with one message. It fails to see agents (“communicators”) as separate entities with individual motives for using words like ‘fear’ and ‘doom’. Such a motif could quite simple be that “fear sells”.

There is an alliance between attention away from fear and apocalypse and attention towards emergencies. Although the former works in the abstract and global long term and the latter in the concrete and local short term, both assert that problems are manageable and that causes are subordinate to the system that should solve them. In short, these ideas are reformist. This managerial attitude proposes that public engagement needs to be stimulated, voluntary action encouraged and policy acceptance created for preapproved decisions (such as scientifically established boundaries, e.g. for carbon dioxide levels). Important political aspects are thus removed from complex issues. Politics is reduced to a communicative deliberation in order to reach consensus over, or at least acceptance of, norms that have been established in the scientific discourse. This deliberative model of politics has been criticised for not recognising actual normative differences and power issues, especially with regards to global issues (see Flyvbjerg 1998; Mouffe 2005; Fraser 2007). It also fails to address the urgency of the environmental problems in relation to the inertia of political hegemony.

'Apocalypse' thus makes more sense in radical or radicalising discourses which are not just radical towards industrialism but also radical towards science. The Dark Mountain manifesto uses predictions of dystopian futures to dramatise history and to create a sense of purpose outside regulatory and scientific discourses. As I will show, it does so without the use of fear appeals.

Social movements

While this thesis analyses text, and not a movement, it is important to have an idea of what the concept of 'social movements' implies. This allows us to understand issues of agency and identity related to the collective action proposed by the Dark Mountain manifesto.

Reviewing social movements since the 1960's Gerlach (2001) concludes that these often have a structure that differs from other organisations. Instead of being centralised and hierarchical they are segmentary, polycentric and networked. By this Gerlach means that 1) they are composed of "semiautonomous segments [that] overlap and intertwine complexly" (*ibid.*, 290), 2) they have many leaders or centres of leadership and 3) they interact through networks of personal relationships, "evangelist" leaders and large gatherings. This kind of informal organisation should not, he argues, be seen as inefficient, unevolved or temporary. Instead it allows movements to be more resilient, flexible and adaptive with regards to both external pressure and internal change. It also allows for rapid growth, facilitating recruitment in a variety of social segments. Furthermore it serves to improve motivation and facilitate learning.

However this structure also has some risks attached, for instance when leaders or groups disagree (on ideology or tactics) and when struggles for power occur.

What binds the segments of a movement together is having a shared opposition and a shared ideology. Gerlach remarks that one such opposition has (at least within the last two decades) been the opposition towards global corporations and finance.

Oppositions create a sense of solidarity, an “us” against “them”. In many instances, movement participants see their cause as a small and heroic David against the Goliath of the establishment. As “underdogs” they must put aside their differences and work together. (*ibid.*, 299)

Sharing ideology and beliefs helps to “contribute to a sense of participating in a single movement” (*ibid.*, 301). The tenets of the ideology can vary to some extent between segments of the movement. Gerlach argues that it is because of this variation, “because [core beliefs] are ambiguous and flexible” (*ibid.*, 301), that the beliefs can be shared within this kind of organisation.

In another perspective on social movements, Benford and Hunt (1992) propose a dramaturgical framework for illuminating how power is constructed and communicated within social movements. To them movements are “dramas routinely concerned with challenging or sustaining interpretations of power relations” (*ibid.*, 36). They see inspiration and passion as crucial components in mobilising participants and dramaturgy provides a way of understanding the orchestration of these affects. The framework is based on four dramatic techniques. To begin with, ‘scripting’ is the part of the movement dramaturgy that sets up guides and directions for “collective consciousness and action” (*ibid.*, 38). This involves framing what the movement is about, but scripting also involves the ‘how’ of the group: casting roles, establishing discourse and directing action. Roles include antagonists (for instance institutions or ideas), protagonists, victims, supporting cast and an audience. The protagonists embody “the negation of all that the antagonists represent” (*ibid.*, 40). Scripting also involves setting up a discourse, including vocabularies with compelling reasons and justifications, in order to empower the participants. This vocabulary serves both with external actors and within the movement. Another point of scripting is achieving balance between passion and organisation.

Secondly, there is the ‘staging’ which refers to appropriation and management of resources and audiences within different arenas of performance. Promotion and publicity is part of this. While staging is mainly seen as a logistic matter it also involves establishing movement symbols and icons. Thirdly, ‘performing’ involves “the demonstration and enactment of power” (*ibid.*, 45).

This enactment of power is in itself empowering since it allows participants to experience their own agency. It also shows to outsiders that the movement has solidarity and unity. Furthermore, failed or bad performances can help identify participants who move outside the frame established by the group. Finally, ‘interpreting’ is the reflexive aspect of movement dramas. Scripting, staging and performing are all subject to interpretation not only by the audience but also by the group members themselves. Interpretation thus becomes both the result of the drama (affecting the audience) and the foundation for its future performances (affecting the participants). This includes interpreting the audience’s reactions. This illustrates how scripting, staging and performing are recurring processes that change over time.

The framework of Benford and Hunt emphasises how social movement dramas are continuous and empowering processes. In this thesis I don’t look at processes as such but at a specific event in the birth of one movement. My focus is thus on the initial scripting of the drama of Dark Mountain, not on staging, performance or interpretation. Also, Dark Mountain is not necessarily a traditional social movement in the sense of having a message to put across to an external audience (for instance the general public or policy makers). Rather, if they indeed are performing, it may very well be for their own benefit. While such aspects of the on-going Dark Mountain project could prove very interesting to investigate, they are not part of this thesis.

Following these two frameworks, a social movement can be seen as a decentralised network with a common dramaturgy, discourse and identity. In the remainder of this thesis I look at how this applies to the Dark Mountain Project.

INTERPRETATIVE REFRAMING

I now turn to *Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto* (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009). On a superficial level the text has a simple storyline: a threat is introduced (the collapse of civilisation), a cause is established (the myth of human greatness) and a response is proposed (“uncivilised writing”). In this section I present my interpretation of the manifesto in the form of a play, with the intention to put the text in a new perspective without diverting from the authors’ apparent intentions.

The protagonists

Dark Mountain is a project, it’s a journey, it’s a movement and the manifesto is its original spark. Clearly this project is not for everyone. Perhaps the first thing that needs to be done when

starting a social movement is to define whom it is for. So, who are the protagonists of Dark Mountain? How are they described?

First, and perhaps most importantly, they are artistically creative. They are “writers, artists, poets and storytellers of all kinds” (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009, 11) including “painters, musicians, sculptors, poets, designers, creators, makers of things, dreamers of dreams” (*ibid.*, 12). Although artists of all kinds are included, there is an explicit focus on writers. This is also implicitly apparent through the many literary references in the text. These references set the tone for the entire manifesto and provide the main metaphors used, for instance the images of civilisation as a dangerous walk on a “thin crust of barely cooled lava” (*ibid.*, 2) and civilisation as a “severed hand” (*ibid.*, 5ff). Citing authors acts as point of reference not just for ideas and values, but also as artistic role models for Dark Mountain. Our protagonists, the future members of Dark Mountain envisioned in the manifesto, are people who stand on the shoulders of giants such as Joseph Conrad, Bertrand Russell, Wordsworth and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The poet Robinson Jeffers is given particular attention in the text. Described as “one of the twentieth century’s most significant yet most neglected poets” (*ibid.*, 14) he serves as the prototype for a Dark Mountain writer. In fact the name “Dark Mountain” is taken from one of his poems. Jeffers legacy is that he “puncture[d] humanity’s sense of self-importance” (*ibid.*, 14) and argued for “a shifting of emphasis and significance from man to notman” (Robinson Jeffers quoted in *ibid.*, 15). For this he was ostracised and “sent into a lonely literary exile” (*ibid.*, 14). Thus, our protagonists are “heroes” who dare go against hegemonic ideas, ignoring the judgment that may be imposed on them by others.

It is perhaps not surprising that the protagonists of the movement are heroic. This does not mean that they see themselves fearlessly saving the world, quite the contrary. They are after all (like Jeffers) underdogs opposing an immense hegemony. Bringing up heroism here is not only a consequence of their having role models or of my theatrical metaphor. The manifesto establishes a moral need for heroism and employs adventurous metaphors to describe their project. Their movement is a journey into wilderness and up the dark mountain.

Climbing the Dark Mountain cannot be a solitary exercise. We need bearers, sherpas, guides, fellow adventurers. We need to rope ourselves together for safety. (*ibid.*, 18)

Apart from being metaphorical mountaineers, Dark Mountain’s heroes are also cartographers ready to redraw those maps “by which we navigate all areas of life” (*ibid.*, 16). These

cartographer-mountaineers are also “willing to get their hands dirty” (*ibid.*, 16) and write with “soil under their fingernails and wilderness in their heads” (*ibid.*, 16).

Invoking morality and responsibility is common in social movement rhetoric. The moral need for action by Dark Mountain’s followers is best expressed in this quote:

We believe that artists [...] have a responsibility to begin the process of decoupling. We believe that, in the age of ecocide, the last taboo must be broken—and that only artists can do it. (*ibid.*, 12)⁸

One association that could describe our protagonists, being as they are both morally sensitive and adventurous, is that they are Scouts. However, seeing that they also reject the ideas of the civilisation, leaving them behind, they form a vanguard. As they are artists, it is also fair to say that they see themselves as the *avant-garde*.

The stage

In this play metaphor “the stage” denotes that biological and material part of the world that sustains human existence. Upon this stage stands the human-made structure that we know as ‘civilisation’. In the manifesto, this structure has grown too big, ignoring the limits of the stage, and is about to fall part. The change is not gradual; it is an imminent and unavoidable collapse. It is a “massive change in how we live, in how human society itself is constructed, and in how we relate to the rest of the world” (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009, 10).

It is, it seems, our civilisation’s turn to experience the inrush of the savage and the unseen; our turn to be brought up short by contact with untamed reality. There is a fall coming. (*ibid.*, 2)

The evidence of the upcoming collapse is the increasing violence that civilisation exerts on the non-human world. Specifically the rates of species extinction, deforestation and overfishing are listed as symptoms. But the clearest evidence comes from climate change.

Climate change, which threatens to render all human projects irrelevant [...] which highlights in painful colour the head-on crash between civilisation and ‘nature’ [...] which brings home at last our ultimate powerlessness. (*ibid.*, 6)

The geological foundation on which civilisation is built is being neglected and misused.

⁸ Decoupling here signifies breaking the link between human achievement and “ecocide”, i.e. irreversible environmental degradation. The last taboo is “the myth of civilisation” discussed later.

Consider the structures on which [civilisation] has been built. Its foundations are geological: coal, oil, gas—millions upon millions of years of ancient sunlight, dragged from the depths of the planet and burned with abandon. (*ibid.*, 7f)

This abuse is described as violent and absurd. Consider again the phrasing above with the “dragging” and the “burning”. While this description of events may at first seem overblown it is, I argue, quite accurate. It is also very *dramatic*. The envisioned collapse is the theatrical backdrop to the play of *Uncivilisation*. The drama is not about the collapse itself. It is about what we do before, during and after this earth-shaking event. It is also about what (or who) brought us to this point.

The powerful antagonist

If Dark Mountain present a clear yet metaphorical image of who they want to be (uncivilised avant-garde hero-artists) it is much more difficult to get a clear image of any antagonists. This could be an indication of my theatrical metaphor reaching its limits. After all it is not necessary for a social movement to have antagonists; they might just be fighting principles and ideas. However, I prefer to think of this obstacle as a challenge representative of my difficulties with understanding the text. Furthermore, in examining antagonisms we also get closer to the protagonists’ image of themselves; being not-that. Of course, the title of the text, “*Uncivilisation*”, seemingly explains this. Dark Mountain is not-civilisation. ‘Civilisation’ is the antagonist. But, understanding what ‘civilisation’ is in the eyes of the authors is key to understanding the Dark Mountain project. How is civilisation described? And who runs it?

Many metaphors used in the text are material and structural, especially those used for describing the human-made aspects of civilisation. Most notably, the city serves as a structural image for the physical and mental separation of human from nature. The city-walls, “the stockades we have built” (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009, 17), are what keep the “city-dwellers” (*ibid.*, 2) safe and protected from whatever wildness lies outside. But these city-slickers are not Dark Mountain’s antagonists. Nor are the civilised cities themselves. There is another monster.

Beyond the gates, out into the wilderness, is where we [Dark Mountain] are headed. And there we shall make for the higher ground for, as Jeffers wrote, ‘when the cities lie at the monster’s feet / There are left the mountains.’ (*ibid.*, 17)

That monster is described with yet another structural metaphor: ‘the machine’, symbolising the global capitalist economy. It is a machine whose “need for permanent growth will require us to destroy ourselves in its name” (*ibid.*, 6). The dual character of this machine-monster is to both enable the building of the empire and to threaten it. The machine is not autonomous but

requires the support of engineers in the form of politicians and economists. It is also in a state of (financial) crisis.

The machine is stuttering and the engineers are in panic. They are wondering if perhaps they do not understand it as well as they imagined. They are wondering whether they are controlling it at all or whether, perhaps, it is controlling them. (*ibid.*, 3)

As the economic machine stutters, politicians and economists are likened to wizards. These are now starting to “lose their powers of levitation [and] struggle to conjure new explanations” (*ibid.*, 3). But they are not real wizards; they are illusionists concealing the unwanted consequences and fragility of the machine. The machine’s nature is “unchecked industrial exploitation [that] frays the material basis of life” (*ibid.*, 1). Put simply it is an escalating process of “extraction, production, consumption” (*ibid.*, 8). This is the machine-monster that is Dark Mountain’s antagonist.

The ensuing conflict

Dark Mountain is not out to save the world, at least not in the sense of preventing collapse or even remedying the negative consequences of industrialism. They may be metaphorically leaving for the mountains but that does not mean that they ignore their antagonist altogether. Instead, their battle with the machine-monster is played out using words. The weapon with which they meet their opponent is their “uncivilised art” or “uncivilised writing”. It is through stories and story-telling that Dark Mountain both scout the world and oppose the stories that propel the machine. The engine of the machine-monster is in our protagonists’ eyes a specific story: “the myth of progress” (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009, 3). First, it should be noted that the word “myth” is used in the manifesto exclusively to denote powerful false-narratives that keep us from seeing the truth. Their own counter-narratives are simply labelled “stories”. The myth of progress, they claim, is central in the evolution of Western civilisation.

Onto the root stock of Western Christianity, the Enlightenment at its most optimistic grafted a vision of an Earthly paradise, towards which human effort guided by calculative reason could take us. (*ibid.*, 4)

The result of this, they argue, is a linear evolutionary view of history in which “the only way is up” (*ibid.*, 4) so that we get closer and closer to human perfection. The myth is that we humans are “destined for greatness” (*ibid.*, 5) and that “greatness is cost-free” (*ibid.*, 5). The former refers to humanity’s ever increasing superiority over nature and the latter to the notion that nature itself has no values other than those assigned to it by humans. It is this idea of history that they argue drives the economic machine that eventually will lead society as we know it into collapse.

In effect, Dark Mountain challenges the idea of human centrality. They do so in two regards: first, they reject anthropocentrism as a moral standpoint; secondly, they reject the idea that humans are in control of their own destiny. The challenge will however be limited to the fields of writing and art and the question remains whether the antagonist will even notice it.

Interlude

In this story of the story-of-stories that is *Uncivilisation*, I have tried to remain as close as I can to what I have understood to be the authors' intentions. In presenting my interpretation as a play I have also tried to acknowledge the role of the arts in the negotiation of our world. If by doing so I've come out as sympathetic to the ideas of Dark Mountain, then all the better.

I now leave the play metaphor in order to dive deeper into the ontological, ethical and identity-creating meanings of the manifesto.

READING ‘REALITY’

In this section I look at evidence of an ontology (a world-view, a systematic understanding of reality) within the manifesto. Focus here is primarily on the frequently used word ‘reality’ and its different meanings. I connect this to the use of words like ‘story’, ‘myth’ and ‘narrative’ in order to understand why reality plays such an important role for Dark Mountain writers.

Mysterious reality

The essence of ‘reality’ according to the manifesto is that it is real (not socially constructed) but mysterious. We cannot approach it directly but we can relate to it through stories.

Beyond the limits of reason, reality remains mysterious, as incapable of being approached directly as a hunter’s quarry. With stories, with art, with symbols and layers of meaning, we stalk those elusive aspects of reality that go undreamed of in our philosophy. (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009, 10f)

Our view of the world is shaped by stories, they write. “It is through stories that we weave reality” (*ibid.*, 19); stories are “the equipment by which we navigate reality” (*ibid.*, 11). Stories are also metaphorically likened to a specific type of abstraction of the world; stories are maps. Dark Mountain see these story-maps as imperfect and tentative.

Maps can lead, but can also mislead. Our maps must be the kind sketched in the dust with a stick, washed away by the next rain. They can be read only by those who ask to see them, and they cannot be bought. (*ibid.*, 16)

The most misleading maps, that seek “to view the world from above” (*ibid.*, 16), are the myths of civilisation and progress. One misleading aspect is that these myth-maps are absolute, ignoring the mysterious nature of reality and ignoring stories as the way we understand reality. It is up to the artists of Dark Mountain to expose these myths and to “redraw the maps altogether” (*ibid.*, 16).

Physical reality

Despite the important role of stories, it is not proposed that stories *make up* reality or that stories are the only thing that we can know as real. Rather, reality is physical and “virtual reality is, ultimately, no reality at all” (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009, 18). The physical quality of reality is implicit throughout the text in several ways. For one, there is the extensive use of material metaphors. Dangers are physical (burning lava), civilisation is physical (cities and walls), the economy is physical (a machine) and even repetition is physical (pattern as fabric). Another type of metaphor emphasises the temporal aspect of being in a physical world. We encounter reality. Civilisation and nature are in a head-on crash. We are going to fall. And of course: uncivilised writing is a movement, a climb up a mountain.

These metaphors are indicative of the idea that reality is physical or at least that we experience it as physical. But perhaps more interesting is the way that physical and quantitative evidence from the natural sciences are used. It is the declining number of species, fish stocks and resources that are evidence of “the violence to which our myths have driven us” (*ibid.*, 6). There is thus a physical foundation both to our experiences and to the narrative of Dark Mountain.

Discourses within the category of green romanticism often use organic or biological metaphors (Dryzek 1997). However, I did not notice any significant use of such metaphors in Dark Mountain’s manifesto. Sticks and stones play a more important role in their discourse than birds and bees do. Arguably this suits the image of collapse better. Also, there is in the text little evidence of reality or nature having spirit or agency. Although metaphors like “the message which reality is screaming at us” (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009, 9) can be seen to imply agency it could also be just an image. When references are made to “gods” (*ibid.*, 3, 4, 16) it is in connection to myths, not to reality. Rather, Dark Mountain sees creativity as a *human* force, especially for artists. They recognise the part of gods in stories but do not seem to acknowledge any godly influences on reality. I argue that their discourse is an implicitly atheistic one. The lack of spirituality in nature distinguishes Dark Mountain from other discourses within green romanticism.

Human reality

For Dark Mountain being human means being immersed in experiences of a mysterious physical world while creating meaning through story-telling. They are especially interested in our denial of the limits to understanding reality.

Freud wrote of the inability of people to hear things which did not fit with the way they saw themselves and the world. We put ourselves through all kinds of inner contortions, rather than look plainly at those things which challenge our fundamental understanding of the world. (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009, 9)

This denial is cultivated by “those who see themselves as rationalists, even scientists; heirs to the Enlightenment’s legacy” (*ibid.*, 10) and has three major symptoms: 1) humanity wrongfully sees itself as separated from nature, 2) it wrongfully sees itself as master of the world and 3) it denies “the role of stories in making the world” (*ibid.*, 10). This denial is based on myths that are embedded in language.

The very fact that we have a word for ‘nature’ is evidence that we do not regard ourselves as part of it. (*ibid.*, 5f)

For Dark Mountain the word ‘nature’ signifies the false experience of separation, not an actual object or environment. For them, nature cannot be objectified since it is all there is; it is reality, where we are embedded, where all subjects and objects are embedded. This is why they are not engaged in “nature writing” or “environmental writing” (*ibid.*, 14) and this also suggests that theirs is not an environmental discourse but a “reality discourse”. This idea can be seen as an absolute in the ontology of Dark Mountain. Although reality in essence is mysterious, there is to them nothing mysterious about our immersed and embedded place in reality. That is why the idea of human separation from nature and human mastery over it is a myth, part of a “runaway narrative” (*ibid.*, 11) that has us trapped. Dark Mountain see humans as “one strand of a web rather than as the first palanquin in a glorious procession” (*ibid.*, 13). This metaphor can be linked to the Deep Ecology movement which has the similar image of all organisms being “knots in the biospherical net” (Næss 1973, 95).

Another aspect of humanity’s denial of reality is its strong belief in its own constructions, especially that of civilisation. For Dark Mountain this belief is misplaced. For them, the human experience is immersed in the pattern of everyday life which gives a false impression of stability. This pattern is likened to fabric: it has strength in its repetition but when it starts to unravel it is ultimately fragile, especially compared to the forces of reality.

Reality revisited

There is sometimes a fine line between Dark Mountain's reality-stories (what I call the 'ontology' of the movement) and other stories and truth-claims that are more rhetorical or normative in nature. How do we tell these apart? Consider the following quote about "facts" and "the reality of our situation":

[F]acts never tell the whole story. ('Facts', Conrad wrote, in *Lord Jim*, 'as if facts could prove anything.') The facts of environmental crisis we hear so much about often conceal as much as they expose. We hear daily about the impacts of our activities on 'the environment' (like 'nature', this is an expression which distances us from the reality of our situation). (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009, 6f)

Higher truths about reality are not merely captured by facts, they claim. Words and facts can mislead, as can maps, and stories are sometimes myths. But how do Dark Mountain know true stories from false ones? For them, it is not just a matter of rhetorical argument. True stories of reality reflect the following perspectives:

1. Reality is mysterious. We cannot have definite knowledge of it.
2. We have a partial understanding of reality through language and stories.
3. Humanity is in no way separate from the physical world.
4. Humans are not masters or guardians of the world.

Arguably a fifth perspective could be added.

5. There is no higher spirituality guiding reality.

These can be understood as the ontological tenets of Dark Mountain. But the claim that stories about reality should include these ideas can also be seen as normative. This brings me to the ethical aspects in the manifesto.

READING 'BEAUTY' AND 'TRUTH'

Evidently Dark Mountain see good and bad around the world. Things like environmental degradation and social justice matter to them. Why? What is the moral basis for their value judgements? It seems that their ethic has two pillars: beauty and truth.

[Uncivilised writing] will be a thing of beauty for the eye and for the heart and for the mind, for we are unfashionable enough to believe that beauty - like TRUTH - not only exists, but still matters. (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009, 18)

While it is not evident in the manifesto what is meant by beauty and truth, or even that they have an ethic, some things could be said about it. Much of this comes however from quotes of Robinson Jeffers.

Beauty

Beauty can be seen in the manifesto in two variants: beauty in art and beauty in reality. I focus on the latter. To Dark Mountain, there is beauty around us and there should be. Not just aesthetic beauty in ‘nature’ for humans to enjoy, but rather the intricate beauty of reality, in its mysterious complexity and in its dark wildness. Beauty is to them not just an aesthetic but the basis for moral positions; an ethic. Lack of beauty, ugliness, is to Dark Mountain a measure of how bad things are going.

We are already responsible for denuding the world of much of its richness, magnificence, beauty, colour and magic, and we show no sign of slowing down. (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009, 7)

The manifesto quotes the poem *The Answer* by Robinson Jeffers in which beauty and ugliness can be interpreted as metaphors for good and evil, respectively. In the poem, ugliness is found in violence and in deluded dreams whereas beauty is found in honour and in the universe as a whole.

Integrity is wholeness, the greatest beauty is
Organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine beauty
of the universe. Love that, not man
(Robinson Jeffers quoted in ibid., 5)⁹

This is a direct link to the discourses of green romanticism, for instance to Gaia theory in which the Earth is seen as an organism (see Lovelock 1982) and Deep Ecology’s idea of the organic Self. It also clearly distinguishes them from Dryzek’s more prosaic survivalist discourse category.

Truth

The second pillar in Dark Mountain’s ethic, truth, is not limited to our human understanding of truth but connected to a higher cosmic truth.

[Uncivilised writing] sets out to paint a picture of homo sapiens which a being from another world [...] might recognise as something approaching a truth. (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009, 13)

⁹ Cutting up poems into pieces is not a thing of beauty. I recommend reading the full poem (available at <http://poetryfoundation.org>).

They write that stories are a “way to approach the deep truths of the world” (*ibid.*, 11). This suggests to me an analogy with Deep Ecology’s rejection of the limited anthropocentric “shallow” ecology (Næss 1973). Correspondingly, the rationalistic truths of the Enlightenment are seen by Dark Mountain as shallow and lacking insight in the deeper mysterious aspects of reality. Going too far down the path of Enlightenment is not just dangerous but also unethical.

These two ethical pillars are not separate entities but two sides of the same coin. In other words, for Dark Mountain, there is beauty in truth and truth in beauty. But truth as a concept needs something more, it cannot be completely relative, it needs a fixing point. Somewhat contradictory this fixing point is the mysterious reality. As described above ‘truth’ means accepting reality’s mystery and the role of stories.

Preparedness

In the manifesto there are also ideas of morale that connect to their truth ethic. These ideas are not prominent but underpin the ethic of the movement. In Jeffer’s *The Answer*, honour is celebrated, so is being clear-sighted.

Then what is the answer? Not to be deluded by dreams.
To know that great civilisations have broken down into violence,
and their tyrants come, many times before.
When open violence appears, to avoid it with honor or choose
the least ugly faction; these evils are essential.
(Robinson Jeffers quoted in Kingsnorth and Hine 2009, 5)

Interestingly, the artistic “dreamers of dreams” (*ibid.*, 12) are not “deluded by dreams” (*ibid.*, 5). This does not imply contradiction, but is symptomatic of Dark Mountain’s often ambiguous language. The quote suggests that Dark Mountain is preparing to remain honourable when collapse finally comes, staying true to their ideals. This is also echoed in the idea of having “equipment” such as their story-maps. This equipment is needed to face the wild aspects of reality and this equipment is what humanity has lost.

Outside the walls, the wild remained as close to the surface as blood under skin, though the city-dweller was no longer equipped to face it directly. (*ibid.*, 2)

Of course, this morale is also part of the identity of Dark Mountain. Unlike others, they realise what is coming and prepare.

An ontological ethic

In this section I have focused on the ideas of beauty and truth in the manifesto. Although I see these ideas as fundamental to their discourse they are not prevalent in the text. My aim has not been to establish *the* ethic of Dark Mountain, but rather to point out that they do add a normative aspect to their ontology and that these norms are loosely based on unspecified ideas of ‘beauty’ and ‘truth’. This makes possible for the movement to accept a variety of ethical positions as long as they share the basic ontology; positions that include, but are not limited to, normative ideas of animals, plants or rocks having intrinsic value.

Separating ontology from ethic is not evident. By describing Dark Mountain’s ethic as based on their ontology, rather than the other way around, I have made a choice that could be questioned. For instance, seeing humans as “one strand of a web” (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009, 13) implies both ontology and ethic. However, I claim that my choice here reflects the manifesto better. While Deep Ecology’s “significant tenets [...] are clearly and forcefully normative” (Næss 1973, 99), Dark Mountain’s are not. This also raises the question as to whom the ethic of Dark Mountain applies. Like the ethic of Deep Ecology it could be seen as universal, something that should be spread across humanity. However, the agenda in the manifesto is politically limited. At this point they are rather trying to find like-minded followers than improving the consciousness of humanity. In that light, their ethic could be seen as personal and voluntary. Focusing on the manifesto, I lean towards this latter interpretation and see Dark Mountain’s normative values as part of their identity, what distinguishes them from others.

READING ‘UNCIVILISED’

As described earlier the Dark Mountain persona is that of a writer, an artist, influenced by Wordsworth, Conrad and the likes. But how can we get a deeper understanding of what Dark Mountain is in relation to the rest of society? As discussed above, their ontology and ethic are essential parts of their identity. In this section I also analyse the “uncivilised” nature of this movement. This self-assigned attribute is an identity-creating characteristic of Dark Mountain. If they no longer are “uncivilised”—whatever that means—then they no longer are “Dark Mountain”—whatever that is.

Radically (un)civilised

Being uncivilised, Dark Mountain, are undoubtedly radical according to Dryzek’s scale. A radical rejection of the discourse of industrialism and the Enlightenment including ideas of

human exemptionalism is what *Uncivilisation* is about. However, the actions proposed by the manifesto and performed by the movement are far from radical. Writing, painting and attending festivals are not radical actions but work within accepted cultural frames. Other movements with similar discourses have been far more radical. For instance, Deep Ecology asserts an obligation to “implement the necessary changes” (Næss 1995, 68) and affiliates of Earth First! consequently engage in the industrial sabotage known as “monkeywrenching” (Dryzek 1997)¹⁰. The uncivilised writing proposed by Dark Mountain is essentially a civilised action (favouring the pen over the sword) and is also deeply rooted in English literature and culture (and thus civilisation). Is “uncivilised writing” a contradiction in terms?

The manifesto does not spell out what it means by ‘civilisation’ or ‘civilised’. The words generally imply social stability, development, comfort and order. Civilisation is thus connected to the ideas of management and historical progress that Dark Mountain challenge. This does not mean that they oppose civilised life as such but rather the ontological and ethical foundation of one specific civilisation; one which is global and dominant, one which we might as well call ‘hegemony’. Dark Mountain especially oppose the idea that this foundation is stable and trustworthy. They also assert that civilisation is inferior to reality. While the basis of this reality is physical—and open to scientific knowledge about climate change for instance—it is also mysterious, inevitably limiting what we can know and control. “Uncivilised writing” emphasises this mysterious, wild, aspect of reality while at the same time gathering inspiration from scientific less-than-mysterious facts (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009). In a way uncivilisation is more civilised than the civilisation it opposes since its ideals are thought to survive the collapse of industrialism.

A poetic identity

Another way to look at the civilised/uncivilised contradiction is to use the discursive triangle of Herndl and Brown (1996). They distinguish between three categories of environmental discourse and match them to the three classical rhetorical functions. The point with this is that, in rhetorical situations, no one function can be neglected. A successful speech act includes all of ethos, logos and pathos; power and credibility, logic and rationality as well as sentiment and empathy. Dark Mountain put extra emphasis on pathos by using language and imagery that provokes not only thought but also emotion. They are what Herndl and Brown call a poetic discourse.

¹⁰ However, “the organized elements of the Earth First! movement do not engage in monkeywrenching” (earthfirstjournal.org 2012)

However, in order to convince their audience the authors of the manifesto must also establish an ethos (e.g. by referencing well-known writers) and logos (by keeping the text coherent and ontologically grounded). So how can a poetic discourse, with an emphasis on pathos, also have an ethos and logos? An explanation could be that there are actually *two* rhetorical situations to consider here. The first is what we can call the “local” situation. Here ethos, logos and pathos are equally important. The purpose is to convince an audience of potential members that the ideas presented match their own experiences of reality. This serves to establish the movement of Dark Mountain, gathering support for their agenda. For them, their ideas are *more rational* and *more credible* than those proposed by “rationalists”.

The other rhetorical situation we can call “global”. It is not global in a geographic or demographic sense, but global in a discursive sense, involving all possible ideas about environmental degradation anywhere. Here the audience consists of a wider general public, scientists and of policy makers. Seen from this perspective Dark Mountain is not a separate discourse but part of a larger all-inclusive human discourse. It is in this global discourse that Dark Mountain acts as the voice of pathos; rejecting the managerial ethos and the scientific logos. It is also through this rejection that Dark Mountain want to be seen as uncivilised. Still they retain a civilised and balanced attitude within the local discourse of their movement.

A rational identity

I have argued that Dark Mountain’s manifesto proposes a discourse that falls in Dryzek’s (1997) category labelled “green romanticism”. It does so not only by having a “radical” departure from industrialism and an “imaginative” proposal, but also by having relevant values and ideas in common with other discourses in that category, for instance the Deep Ecology movement. The references to “romantic” authors like Wordsworth and Emerson are just one such common factor. Likewise Dark Mountain is best placed in Hannigan’s (2006) category of “Arcadian discourse”.

The differences that exist between Dark Mountain and the general characteristics of these categories could warrant the creation of a new subcategory; something like ‘apocalyptic romanticism’. However, doing so would not necessarily establish a better understanding of Dark Mountain or of environmental discourse in general; and certainly not of environmental problems. I argue that categorisations such as these locate the object of study within a “global” human discourse by giving it labels that are relevant only in relation to other discourses.

For instance, the term ‘radical’ only makes sense if contemporary industrialism is seen as a point of departure. ‘Reformist’ discourses are by that definition closer to business-as-usual than ‘radical’ ones are. If instead a non-human-centric perspective of reality was taken as starting point, ‘radical’ would rather be connected to industrialism and its effects on the environment. Its counter-point would then not be reform but rather conservation or preservation. The manifesto suggests this reversed dialectic by associating industrial processes with violence. From this perspective, industrialism can be seen as a continuous process of un-radicalising environmental degradation.

Furthermore, by labelling Dark Mountain’s discourse as “romantic” or “Arcadian” we make assumptions about what should be considered normal. This also raises questions as to how these labels should be understood. While it may not be a problem for members of Dark Mountain to see themselves as “romantics”, others may have different and less positive perceptions of that word; for instance that it is something emotional and distanced from reality. The critique of Arcadia being a myth is one example of this. In the manifesto words like ‘myth’ are instead used about anthropocentric and rationalistic ideas. ‘Rationalism’ thus becomes in the eyes of Dark Mountain not-so-rational. Their own arguments are to them, based on their ontology, very rational. And, as I have shown, their ontology and their ethic do not involve any radical or irrational ideas.

The discourse of Dark Mountain should not, I argue, just be seen as having a rationale or being able to rationalise their ideas. All discourses have rationales and rationalisations, including far-fetched conspiracy theories. Instead, and in the light of the immense global environmental problems that we face, the discourse of Dark Mountain should be seen as rational; well thought out and with arguments based on reason. Understanding it otherwise would be to ignore both the physical and the epistemological limits that humanity is now struggling to come to grips with. However, this does not automatically mean that their norms or their predictions about the future are more valid than others’.

An empowering identity

The identity of Dark Mountain serves to empower its writers and artist in a time where managerial and scientific discourses hold the power (and responsibility) of policy making. Against this hegemony Dark Mountain offer a position that is rational, yet opposed to dominant conceptions of rationality; poetic, yet opposed to dominant conceptions of romanticism; civilised, yet opposed to the foundation of their own civilisation. They are reclaiming a power that they feel has been denied over the course of the last centuries.

[A]s the myth of civilisation deepened its grip on our thinking, borrowing the guise of science and reason, we began to deny the role of stories, to dismiss their power as something primitive, childish, outgrown. (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009, 11)

By questioning normative conceptions of words like ‘civilisation’, ‘nature’, ‘environment’, ‘myth’, ‘reality’ and ‘mystery’, Dark Mountain also underline the clouding effects of language. This helps to establish their own tools—their equipment—as important and powerful. It also establishes their arguments as a counter-discourse that assigns blame to the anthropocentric and hegemonic discourses of industrialism.

There is little conceptually new or different in the discourse of Dark Mountain except maybe the time in which it is brought forward: “a time of social, economic and ecological unravelling” (*ibid.*, 19). Another distinguishing characteristic is that their ontology and ethics are open and unrestricted without being ambiguous. This allows, in an intentional way, for a great variation of ideas among their ranks.

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. (*ibid.*, 18)

Dark Mountain is not just a prediction of collapse; it is a discourse preparing for deployment when the fabric of our civilisation unravels. Whether, how and when this collapse will happen remains unsure, but maybe we can be sure about one thing: should collapse occur, discourses like Dark Mountain’s will find strength and power. This power won’t be enough to hinder the fall, but it may be enough to change how people live through it.

CONCLUSION

The Dark Mountain manifesto is a very interesting text. Its layers of metaphors and its dramatic language engage its readers. But this can also serve to distance a reader who is not willing to believe in the imminent collapse of civilisation or who is more accustomed to scientific and regulatory discourses. Before writing this thesis, every reading of the manifesto left me with mixed feelings. I experienced refreshing honesty, simplicity and clarity lacking in other discourses but I also experienced the sense of something missing and of contradiction. In short, I did not understand the text well enough and the criticism of Dark Mountain did not help me; it seemed rather to prove their point. I felt that a deeper analysis was needed.

In this thesis I have approached the manifesto from a theoretical standpoint based in human ecology, including dialectic ideas of global/local and hegemony/counter-discourse. More specifically I have looked at environmental discourses and the development of social movements. Based on this, I have showed how *Uncivilisation* can be understood as a drama in which Dark Mountain act out their values and also define themselves as a collective. I have also explored one way to analyse the manifesto in order to understand the foundation of the movement, specifically looking at ontology, ethic and identity. These three aspects together with the dramaturgic approach have proven very useful. However, they should be seen as approaches, not as absolutes. After reaching a much deeper understanding of the Dark Mountain manifesto, I still would not dare to definitely state what it is or what it means.

This does not mean that a summary of what I have found cannot be made. I have found a discourse that is grounded upon a tradition that rejects anthropocentrism in general and industrial society in particular. It is also grounded in English literature. This discourse has been labelled “poetic” and “romantic”. While this may be true for its language and imagery, I have found that its ontology is rational, even practical. To their understanding of reality being mysterious Dark Mountain connect an ethic of truth, a moral of pioneering and an identity that is alternative to reformist, prosaic and rationalistic ideas. What I have not found are aspirations for social change in order to counter the effects of industrialism. Instead, change is proposed on a more individual level in order for people to understand and live through the immense changes that will happen anyway. In this way Dark Mountain is a movement to empower its members that are described as writers and artists. This is not a group of people that so far has had a significant say on environmental issues, at least not regarding global issues. On the global arena of environmental discourses it is politicians, economists, bureaucrats and scientists that rule; poets and painters do not. According to Dark Mountain (and reasonably so, I argue) this does not have to be the case.

My study has aimed at contributing to the scientific understanding of a (so far) marginal counter-discourse that addresses global environmental issues. It originates from a place that can be seen as local but also is conceptually globalising, that can be seen as “core” but also includes narratives resembling “periphery”, that is eco-centric but also alienated from nature. While the causes of these global environmental problems often are diffuse and dispersed, their effects are often local. However, their effects on discourse, rhetoric and public debate are not necessarily connected to local changes. Instead issues such as climate change are often abstractly experienced in the media where a proliferation of conflicting ideas are mixed and mixed up. Finding a foothold within these on-going debates is important for individuals, but it is far from

easy. Discourses such as Dark Mountain's help to do this, empowering its members to up-hold 'truth' and 'beauty' in a time when these values are often seen as mere commodities.

This is what I have found in the manifesto. What the Dark Mountain movement is today or who the participants of that movement are, I have said nothing about. But one thing seems evident: the more reformist and prosaic discourses fail to address the increasing environmental problems of industrial civilisation, the more support movements such as Dark Mountain will find. Therefore, discourses such as these are worth studying further, especially within the field of human ecology. Not only are there deeper investigations into Dark Mountain that could be made (as suggested in the introduction), discourses such as theirs could also be connected to the general public's experiences regarding their role, their power and their responsibility in relation to global industrial civilisation and its environmental consequences. And, in general, there are many interesting scientific questions that could be asked around the not-so-far-fetched premise "What if global industrial civilisation really is about to collapse?"

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APPENDIX

The eight principles of Uncivilisation

The Dark Mountain manifesto ends with the following tenets.

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

(Kingsnorth and Hine 2009, 19)