

INTRODUCTION  
**THE ROAD TO HEAVEN IS PAVED  
WITH EFFECTIVE ACTION**

*It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume, is to do at any time what I think is right.*

Henry David Thoreau



**D**ESPITE WHAT A CURSORY GLANCE of this book may suggest, it is by no means *An Ode to Violence*. Our world is already filled with a quantity and quality of violence its complex web of inhabitants have never before had to endure; it is hardly my longing to encourage others to add to the dark, eerie mist that descends upon and engulfs us.

Counterintuitively, the purpose of what follows is to help us take the difficult first steps towards peace. Not the illusion of peace, that masterpiece of psychological creativity conjured up by those of us who enjoy the privileges and protection our industrial culture offers in return for our allegiance and obedience, and which we fool ourselves into experiencing on a daily basis. What I am searching for is an unrecognizable and long-since forgotten brand of peace. One which is free from the systemic violence that invisibly infiltrates almost every aspect of the ways by which we civilized folk meet our needs and insatiable desires. A type whose essence disrupts our tamed minds and reveals itself as much in the calm tranquillity of an ancient woodland as it conceals itself within the timeless chase between wolf and doe. A peace strangely imbued in a lioness's ferocious defense of her cubs and the trilateral struggles of bear and salmon and stream, all of whose stories and ancestral patterns weave together the majestic fabric of *The Whole* and keep its harmony from unravelling at the seams. The peace I seek in the pages yet unturned is the peace of *The Wild*, one free from civilized, urbane notions of violence, nonviolence and pacifism.

Those of us who live in industrial civilization – which, for reasons I'll elucidate in chapter two, I call *The Machine* – can quite easily spend our days living what we feel are decent lives. We drop the kids off to school in the car, pick up a cheese croissant with the newspaper at the supermarket, a soy latte at the local café, before going to work for a respected firm. We may even pour our daily energy into helping others, or worthy causes. Along the way we might say hello to a neighbor, greet a teacher and thank

the checkout guy. In the moments in between changing nappies and climbing whatever career ladder we've stepped upon, most of us will enjoy much of what we perceive to be industrial society's exciting and liberating benefits – social media, central heating, cheap foreign holidays, washing machines and other seemingly innocent pleasures – free from many of the restrictive familial, social and religious ties that kept our forbears' communities intact for so long. All very civilized, friendly and rarely with any conscious ill-intent.

Scratch below this thin veneer of conviviality, however, and you soon discover that our way of life is imbued with a level of violence so extreme that, if it were not hidden from us by complex mechanisms, most of us could not cope with the psychological and emotional pain it would arouse. I will serve up a thin slice of this violence – towards the Earth, the Great Web of Life we share it with and, ultimately, ourselves – in chapter two. However, if you want to not only intellectually understand it, but feel it, there are unfortunately no end of options to choose from.

Stand in a clear-cut of an old-growth forest and inhale the profound sadness of what you see before you. Visit the greasy waters of the Gulf of Mexico and ask yourself, from the perspective of the marine life there, if our diets of South American soya, vitamin pills, tropical fruits and plasticized convenience foods are nonviolent. Take a short trip to your nearest factory farm, where the vast majority of your meat, eggs and dairy come from, and ponder whether industrialism speaks well of us, or is the apex of our humanity. Such run-of-the-mill violence, masquerading as progress, isn't only targeted at the non-human realm; what we are doing to the world, we do unto ourselves, in more ways than one.

Go undercover to a sweatshop, where the children who produce our everyday branded fashions work long hours, often with their toilet-breaks and productivity levels enforced by armed military, and contemplate what nonviolence means to you. Speak with the parents of any of the 21,000 children who die of starvation every single day,<sup>1</sup> predominantly in the global South, and ask them if commodity markets and international finance have been beneficial to their previously unique culture. Visualize the means by which the 85 richest people in the world have accumulated more wealth than poorest 3.5 billion,<sup>2</sup> and the impacts this has on the latter's daily existence. Talk to traditional craftspeople, whose time-tested skills and holistic approach to life can no longer compete with the brutal

efficiency of The Machine – or to the operatives working on the conveyor belt of homogeneous things who have become as uniform and interchangeable as the cogs of the machine they are committed to – and inquire if automation and button-pressing has imbued their livelihoods with meaning and happiness. If you labor under the impression that phenomena such as these aren't violent, but merely lamentable glitches of modernity waiting to be ironed out by political scientists, by the end of this book I aim to make full-spectrum resistance look decidedly peaceful in comparison.

Either way, all of the above Crimes Against Life are not only legally protected by the police forces and courtrooms of the state, they are fundamental to the functioning of what we call normality. We have created Frankenstein, and made ourselves dependent on his monstrous ways. Juxtaposed to this, the scattered outbursts of “counterviolence”<sup>3</sup> by victims and activists in reaction to this normalized, everyday systemic violence are handled with a severity that suggests holistic resistance is considered to be a genuine threat by The Establishment, that entrenched structure of rich and powerful people who dictate the conditions we live within. While those who plan their actions meticulously almost always live to fight another day; those who get caught are made an example of. In 2001, an Earth Liberation Front (ELF) activist called Jeffrey Luers was sentenced to over 22 years in prison for torching three SUVs – a symbol of hyper-consumerism to some – at a dealership in the U.S., despite the fact that the action was carried out at night to ensure that nobody's life was endangered.<sup>4</sup> To put that in context, the average sentencing for convictions of rape there is eight years, a fact that encapsulates the values of a male-dominated, industrial society.

Such severe sentencing as Luers received was only the beginning. As we will see in chapter five, draconian legislation such as the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act (AETA), which in 2006 was signed into U.S. law by George W. Bush, was introduced in an attempt to crush “extreme” organizations such as the ELF, Earth First! and Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC), all of whom were potently active in the preceding decades. The disproportionate nature of the corporate-state coalition's response to these movements emerged precisely because their tactics – such as “ecotage,” a type of sabotage targeted specifically at destroyers of the natural world – produced tangible results and stymied financial

investment in the targeted industries,<sup>5</sup> despite the tiny fraction of activists willing to risk their liberty. This is hardly surprising. After all, in a world where money dominates the political landscape, the state criminalizes and stigmatizes those who put their necks on the line to protect Life, while those who want to convert its sacred splendour into cash lap up society's platitudes.

On top of that, it has long since been understood by The Machine that if these fledgling movements' unsanctioned ideas and feral means were to catch the imagination of the many who find its ubiquitous, top-down violence increasingly intolerable, this sometimes illicit and wilder form of activism – if one part of a holistic resistance movement – could pose a serious threat to its modus operandi. Industrial civilization, after all, fears anything it cannot control or predict, and its inherent need to pacify the populace has its roots in the same worldview that drives it to want to control, domesticate and pacify The Wild, that naturally anarchistic realm of intimacy, wonder and organized chaos and home to all that live according to their own indomitable will. Along with a sustained campaign of propaganda indoctrinating us with the moral righteousness of nonviolent protest, which continues to warn us that violence can never succeed in effecting change (advice governments seem to themselves ignore when waging wars aimed at achieving their own economic and political agendas), laws such as the AETA were intended to nip any such threat in the bud before its successes inspired a movement too developed for those in power to successfully surveil, infiltrate, control or prosecute.

These propaganda campaigns, which are a prerequisite for such legislation, have themselves become increasingly effective at strait-jacketing the outrage people feel towards the injustices of our time. Whenever anything resembling bottom-up violence occurs during demonstrations – from protests against the Iraq War and the Keystone XL pipeline, to Spain's *indignados* and the Occupy movement – both The Establishment and the protesters' spokespeople (who are filtered for their advocacy of nonviolence) go immediately to the corporate media to condemn it, or issue statements of nonviolence, regardless of the circumstances and whether the actions they decry were entirely appropriate. In doing so, they reinforce the notion in the minds of the public that any violence, even holistic self-defense (an idea I explore

in chapter four), applied to those who routinely inflict it downwards is always unjust, undemocratic and immoral, without any serious critique or historical analysis. All the while the top-down violence of The Establishment, that most undemocratic of social constructs, continues unabated without question or mention.

This hypocrisy in the corporate-state kleptocracy's attitude towards violence would be laughable if it were not so tragic. Because of industrial civilization's need to feed its own limitless appetite for ever-shinier tat, it starts resource wars, commits wholesale ecocide, invades and pillages the lands of indigenous people and abuses both humans and non-humans on every conceivable level. But as Derrick Jensen observes, "violence done by those higher on the hierarchy to those lower is nearly always invisible, that is, unnoticed. When it is noticed, it is *fully rationalized*. Violence done by those lower on the hierarchy to those higher is unthinkable, and when it is done it is regarded with shock, horror, and the fetishization of the victims."<sup>6</sup> I have emphasized "fully rationalized" because I believe this is the key: almost all violence done by the state, and their ideological partners in crime, towards Life is understood to be, and accepted as, legitimate by those who are not the victims of their aggression (with a few extreme exceptions, most notably the Iraq War, which some of the population at least voiced opposition to). Yet those the corporate-state coalition inflict violence upon, or those who want to act in solidarity with its victims, do not have the legal or cultural freedom to respond with an act of physical force, whether lesser or greater. As we'll see in chapter one, by using qualifying terms like "non-state," "clandestine" and "nonmilitary," The Establishment define themselves out of the debate and establish a monopoly on violence and terrorism.<sup>7</sup>

How have we arrived at this, and how is it sustained? One of our key problems is the degree to which industrial peoples are separated from the consequences of their economic habits.<sup>8</sup> Marketing executives, aided by the functionality of global currency, markets and military-backed international contracts and trade agreements, are given multibillion-dollar budgets to effectively keep those who produce things – and the processes by which they do so – hidden from those who consume them. Separating producers from consumers through global marketing is a critical task within any multinational business, for executives know that people, by and large, do not want to intentionally cause harm to anything that falls

within their parameters for moral consideration.

Not only that, they inject their vacuous brands with surrogate meaning – in a similar fashion to how processed food manufacturers inject artificial flavoring into otherwise unpalatable food – that temporarily satisfies their customers’ deep craving for real emotional and physical connection. In doing so, they desensitize those they claim to serve to the pain of their profound loss, and medicate the outrage that would otherwise surge among a psychologically and emotionally healthy population.

Public relations companies have an unexpected ally in their clients’ endeavors to pull the wool over our eyes: ourselves. Because our society, and the violence enmeshed in it, is so complex, so too are the patterns of what psychologists call “cognitive dissonance,” that tension an individual experiences when holding a certain belief and performing a contradictory action. In order to cope with being exposed to the consequences of our actions, we concoct all sorts of philosophies, defenses, self-deceptions and myths about the world and our place within it. We distract ourselves with cheap entertainment, numb ourselves with anti-depressants and addictions, and create elaborate narratives to inconsistently restrict our parameters of moral consideration. Of course, most of this is done subconsciously, which just makes it even more dangerous – and the need to face up to it even more urgent.

In spite of our creativity in manufacturing coping mechanisms that help us deal with the incongruity between our head, heart and hands, many people somehow manage to maintain an honesty with themselves. In defiance of the best efforts of PR gurus at putting a green sheen on operations that are invariably covered in crimson red, people are becoming increasingly aware of what is happening in their name, and funded by their money. Much of it is inescapable: in the Age of the Internet, stories and images depicting the horrors underlying our lifestyles burst through the corporate world’s best attempts to control the situation. Its cumulative effect has propelled people from all walks of life into the role of activist of one sort or another, campaigning on whatever cause they feel most drawn towards, in those spare moments they find between trying to pay the mortgage and feeding a family.

Traumatized by the aggression piercing their subconscious routinely, indoctrinated by culturally controlled notions of nonviolence, guided by an understandable desire to carry the opinions of the mainstream, while



fearful of any radical change to the industrial system whose products help soothe their own deep wounds, the vast majority of these agents of change take nonviolent and reformist approaches.

Reformism, in contrast to revolutionism, is the belief that incremental changes to the institutions that form the foundations of one's society, and its political and economic systems, can lead to an entirely different form of society. Few people would actually recognize this term, or think of themselves as reformists, but it is a category that sums up almost the entirety of political, ecological and social activism in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Many reformist actions and movements – such as clicktivism (see page 101), green consumerism, lobbying, protesting, aboveground campaigning and education, Transition Towns, permaculture and many social enterprises – can be hugely positive forces for dealing with the mess created by industrialism and capitalism, and they can often excel at generating innovative solutions for what could come next. This is their role, and it is a critically important one.

When it comes to getting right to the heart of the matter, in ways that could lead to an authentic and lasting peace, they are not so hot. Rosa Luxemburg, when speaking about reformism as a means to political change, even went as far as to say that capitalism “is not overthrown, but is on the contrary strengthened by the development of social reforms,”<sup>9</sup> By doing so, she was sound-biting a largely forgotten criticism of reformism that points out its paradoxical and counterproductive nature: it seeks to overcome a tyrannical or harmful system, while simultaneously trying to improve the conditions created by that very same system and hence making it more tolerable to the populace. In effect, well-intentioned reformist measures can inadvertently lessen the likelihood of any meaningful change by keeping the people, in the words of Pink Floyd lyricist Roger Waters, “comfortably numb.” After all, systems only change when enough people within them can no longer tolerate them. Of course, if we are serious about creating just and sustainable societies enlivened with new (or perhaps old) values, it is not merely capitalism, which Luxemburg spoke about, that needs to be overthrown, but also the outdated cultural narratives that act as its philosophical foundations and that infiltrate our experience of the world in a hundred thousand toxic ways.

This reformist response to the convergence of crises facing us is, as we shall see, not only tolerated by the powerful institutions and individuals

who have had an enormously disproportionate role in escalating these crises – it is implicitly supported by them. By permitting a carefully chosen range of protest, as a gesture to democracy and liberalism, those who hold political and economic power can control the metanarrative through a corporate media they are in ideological partnership with. Once the public discourse is controlled, these vested interests in business-as-usual can co-create new laws and sentencing guidelines that severely discourage dissent from conscientious people in ways that, when utilized as part of a holistic culture of resistance or towards more revolutionary goals, can be effective in creating deep and tangible change. This is something I will shine a torch on in chapter five.

Despite the admirable dedication that industrialism's inadvertent seamstresses have for trying to sew up that which is nine stitches beyond repair, many I have spoken to (I have engaged a lot in reformist activities myself) in private express deep reservations about its efficacy. More often than not, a reformist's initial passion and enthusiasm for their cause sooner or later turns into either fatigue or cynicism, or both. Held up against the overawing backdrop of personal, social and ecological breakdown, one's efforts can feel futile. Not because they do not make a difference; they always do to some degree, both directly and by laying the practical and psychic groundwork (or if you were to subscribe to Rupert Sheldrake's theories, by creating a morphic field)<sup>10</sup> for others to join them in their endeavors. The reason that our efforts to reform our politico-economic system feel futile is that, on the level of our existence ungoverned by coping mechanisms, we know that we are merely fighting systemic symptoms, and not the root cause of the disease itself. When Henry David Thoreau said that "there are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root,"<sup>11</sup> I am sure he had hoped his words would not ring true so many long years after he penned them by the edge of Walden Pond.

My experiences in life have slowly led me to the conclusion that the institutions of industrialism, capitalism, globalization – and the Enlightenment and Cartesian stories underpinning their foundations – are so rotten as to be beyond reform. To believe that any of these politico-economic forms, especially when combined, can lead to an ecologically diverse world without extreme systemic violence towards both human and non-human life is magical thinking. We know that as

soon as we attempt to put a Band-Aid on any one of the many gaping wounds sliced open by the blades of industry, five more will appear. We find ourselves running up the conveyor belt of industrialism, and no matter how urgently we proceed, we seem to recede ever faster. The relentless grind of the cogs of The Machine leave us despairing, hopeless and, eventually, paralyzed by a feeling of powerlessness. Not only that, but as I'll explore in chapter two, we are starting to display an uncanny resemblance to these cogs ourselves.

Yet still activists and campaigners continue to hack at the branches of industrialism, capitalism and globalization, using methods that experience tells us lack the required depth if we are serious about creating peaceful, healthy, meaningful and sustainable societies. In many respects this is entirely understandable, as striking at the roots of our social and ecological problems is a scary and overwhelming thought for most people, there are often no clear paths forward, certainly no guaranteed outcomes, and as with everything in life, the lines of division between reformist and more revolutionary actions are not always black and white. Though it is unfortunately the exception and not the rule, reformist efforts can sometimes form the foundations for resistance and revolutionary movements whose aim is to topple the entrenched politico-economic structures that lead us down dark alleyways, and which we all know are never going to change voluntarily.

Take one example, from my own Emerald Isle. It is commonly accepted by historians that *Conradh na Gaeilge* (The Gaelic League), which was created to promote a revival in Gaelic language and culture in Ireland, furnished the Irish Volunteers with a lot of their membership that, a few years later, played an important role in the Easter Rising (an armed insurrection in Ireland in 1916). This, in turn, provided the impetus for Ireland's War of Independence that led to the formation of the Irish Free State. Even Rosa Luxemburg, if she were still alive, would admit that reformist measures can, on rare occasions, lead to the more nuts-and-bolts type change that, in times like these, is so desperately needed. Therefore, as I remind readers throughout the following chapters, if they feel a strong urge to positively reform any part of our broken system, in their own way and drawing on their own unique gifts, they would be wise to trust that urge as, in the end, what we are called to do is always the best we can do. The rest, as they say, is up to Fate.

Exceptions aside, in the more general sense it has become painfully apparent that our politico-economic institutions need a profound overhaul if we are to create livelihoods and ways of being worth sustaining, yet it is still taboo to talk about what ought to be common sense: that forces such as the global finance industry – that corporate-state coalition driving our most life-threatening ecological and social ailments – are never going to reform themselves to death. Their *raison d'être* is premised on the conversion of our physical, cultural and spiritual commons into cash. For them to stop the strip-mining of our landscapes and mindscapes would be an act of suicide, and is clearly not going to happen voluntarily. This is a sobering thought for those to whom the wanton destruction of the Great Web of Life is an atrocity no less terrible than genocide. For if our rivers and oceans are to once more run clean and teem with sturgeon, cod and great whales, if our skies are to be filled with migratory birds instead of vapour trails, and our lands revitalized with a diversity of flora, fauna and human culture that our generation of anthropological and ecological illiterates (through little fault of our own) cannot even imagine, then death is exactly what needs to fall upon the global finance industry.

Modern society's obsession with reformism and nonviolence is as complex as the phenomena that give rise to it. Most of us – whom Lenin would have called “the labor aristocracy” – have already made our secret Faustian pact with The Machine. Instead of fighting for more ecologically harmonious and fair models of organizing ourselves socially, we spend most of our efforts trying to claw a little more money from the coffers of paymasters who profit splendidly from our sweat, toil and paper-shuffling. So while The Establishment are busy inheriting the Earth, those they continuously encourage to be meek settle for a nice office, a pension plan and a holiday in Majorca. In doing so, the middle and working classes of the West condemn the majority of the South to lives dominated by economic exploitation and systemic violence.

Our obedience, of course, has been bought. According to economist Arghiri Emmanuel's theory of “unequal exchange,” our rich Western economies profit to the tune of \$6,500bn (and rising) from the global South each year, a complex issue that has regrettably convinced the middle and working classes of the superpowers to align themselves with those who extract that astronomical profit from the poor, instead of acting

in solidarity with the poor from those countries that we are pillaging. As long as we get our “bread and circuses,” translated into the technological age as ready meals and soap operas, it seems that most of us have no desire to rock the boat. That the boat has an irreparable hole in its hull doesn’t seem to matter.

Others among our ranks are already weary of the subconscious and silent hyper-violence of everyday life, and understandably do not want more of it. There are also classic historical examples of non-reformist, violent revolutionaries who became the Orwellian pig they once despised, and who went on to enact the kinds of violent social policy they once vehemently opposed. The reasons behind our fixation with nonviolence and reformism run deeper too. The Wild – that spirit within us that would not dream of constraining itself with moralistic civilized constructs like violence and nonviolence (a perspective I will qualify in the final chapter) – has been beaten out of us to precisely the same degree it has been eradicated from the landscapes that, despite our delusions of human grandeur, we are still reluctantly immersed in. Because of this, our actions in the face of brutality are as tame and timid as our neatly trimmed gardens.

Lurking behind reformist measures is also the feeling that we should not throw out the baby with the bath water, pretending that the vicious, hissing gremlin we mistook for our child is actually what we intended to wash in the first place. While many environmentalists may bemoan bath water such as smart phones, televisions and aeroplanes (all the while rationalizing arguments for using them themselves) for their social and ecological consequences, even they want to retain industrial babies such as dialysis machines, ambulances and the World Wide Web, technologies that industry-induced expectations and conditions have somehow made indispensable.

Fantastical thinking such as this is a product of a widespread dearth of modern economic understanding among the general public. Because of basic modern economic principles such as comparative advantage, economies of scale and specialized division of labor, three central pillars of the industrial economy, you cannot just produce some “good” technologies and not produce the “bad” ones (and who would decide good and bad, other than a global marketplace heavily influenced and distorted by the corporate media, is beyond me). In economic reality, you have

to accept the whole gamut of industrialized products, otherwise many of these technologies would be exorbitantly expensive even for states to buy, let alone individual people. And as we'll see in chapter two, even those products universally accepted as "good" – the dialysis machines and ambulances of this world – are predicated on a scale and depth of systemic violence and destructiveness that our technology-addicted culture would not dare to admit.

Even if we could magically tap into some kind of divine wisdom and work out exactly which of these industrial-scale technologies served Life as a whole, and which didn't, that wouldn't be the end of our problems in this respect. In order for this most recent model of human economy to stay upright, we need to be producing more and more of *all* of these things, regardless of the fact that the physical elements of the Earth that make them up are rapidly running out. Believing that modern economics is reformable, peaceful and potentially sustainable, however, allows us to feel good about ourselves while still harvesting the fermenting fruits of a system whose symptoms we then perform cognitive gymnastics to rail against.

There are other reasons why we cling to reformism despite its obvious incompetence at deeply addressing the challenges before us. In general, genuinely caring people do not want to taint their code of ethics and morals with things that, in the normal course of affairs, are completely abhorrent. But we've also been indoctrinated with banal pseudo-wisdoms such as "the ends can never justify the means," and "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."<sup>12</sup> By believing them, we foolishly limit the array of responses that any social movement, which witnesses injustice or mass destruction and decides to act, has at its disposal to tactics that history constantly reminds us are clearly ineffective by themselves. In my personal experience, the whole thing can feel like washing the floor with a dirty mop – you know it is marginally useful at best, counter-productive at worst, but it still makes you feel good about having at least done some cleaning.

A revulsion to violence is admirable and something we desperately need to foster in our communities; as Ward Churchill, a proponent of a diverse approach to social change, notes, "the desire for a nonviolent and cooperative world is the healthiest of all psychological manifestations."<sup>13</sup> However, a toleration of extreme systemic violence, or a misguided

moralistic commitment to means that experience has taught us are clearly ineffective in resisting and ending it, is far from admirable. If we are serious about peace, we need to start making a clear distinction between mindless, egoist violence and what amounts to an appropriate response to a dire situation. Nelson Mandela, a man constantly held up by pacifists as an example of the efficacy of nonviolent civil disobedience despite many of his actions to the contrary, once said that “for me, nonviolence was not a moral principle but a strategy; there is no moral goodness in using an ineffective weapon.” As Mandela acknowledges, a form of nonviolence that witnesses its own ineffectiveness on a daily basis, yet strives to persist with it out of some individualistic notion of moral purity, isn’t nonviolence at all; it is nothing less than violence concealed, masquerading as ethics when at its core is little more than fear and indoctrination.

Our own feelings about violence are deeply inconsistent. We live in a culture where inexplicably punching someone on the street would provoke outrage, and rightly so, yet where the extirpation of a couple of hundred species every single day – which is between 1,000 and 10,000 times the natural extinction rate<sup>14</sup> – due to human activity alone barely raises an eyebrow. A culture whose spirituality has been so abstracted from the living, breathing planet that it considers attacks against the industrial apparatus that is causing this mass extinction as violent, while the purchase of a foamed plastic yoga mat – one of its many toxic offspring – is almost viewed as a step on the path to enlightenment. In chapter one, I offer up an alternative perspective, one that challenges everything our culture wants us to believe about what violence is, and what it isn’t.

Our inconsistencies don’t stop there either. There are some instances when the actions of all except the most stubborn advocates of nonviolence and pacifism – whose narratives, with the help of The Establishment, have colonized almost all movements for social and ecological justice – would betray their moralistic stance. Take self-defense, for example. Few people would argue with Edward Abbey when he said, in an interview with the author of *Green Rage*, Christopher Manes, “when someone invades your home, you don’t respond objectively and reasonably. You strike back with emotion, with rage.”<sup>15</sup>

The right to self-defense, if attacked by an aggressor, is protected by most jurisdictions. In chapter four, I’ll be taking this right out of what Charles Eisenstein calls “the Age of Separation” – this millennia-long

period within which we've somehow fooled ourselves into thinking that we're separate from the rest of creation – and putting it back where it belongs, in the “Age of Reunion,” a time we are slowly moving into in which we remember that our lives, and our health, are entirely dependent on the Great Web of Life, and where we once again accept our interdependence and deep connection to the world around us.<sup>16</sup> By applying self-defense in this more holistic sense, I argue that it could profoundly change the way we respond to The Machine's War on Nature and, by interdependency, to its War on Humanity.

Most people I have spoken to would be morally content to take this one degree further, into an area where the law of most nations is not so clear. Picture this scene. You're walking home one night from the bar, and on a side road you hear muffled screams mixed with sinister laughter. You quietly tiptoe down, hunch behind a bin, while you witness five men viciously gang-raping a woman. One is holding some sort of weapon, though you can't make out quite what it is. They continue to rape the woman one by one, each time saluting each other with a high five before the next man moves in. At your right, you see a length of two-by-four, discarded by a nearby business and ready and willing to be upcycled. The streets are virtually empty of other passersby, and the odds of taking them on yourself successfully are slim. Yet time is of the essence. What do you do?

Of course, if you could reason with the rapists and convince them to stop their attack on the woman, that is your ideal first port of call. And of course, the more compassionate among us may even want to help the perpetrators (after they have been stopped), along with the victim of such brutality, to find therapy in the months that follow; after all, psychologically and emotionally healthy men do not rape women. Yet in the heat of the moment, when there is no time for niceties, what are you going to do? Do you scream for others to help, before picking up the weapon and using it in an attempt to stop the detestable violence you are witnessing? Or do you walk on by, understandably frightened by the risks of getting involved, coupled with the ethical dilemma of having to fight violence with more violence, and instead go home and sign a petition to end gang-rape?

We all know, that in this example, the last option – walking away – is not a particularly honorable one, and the dignity of resisting injustice



against the most incredible odds is something I will explore in chapter six. Both our hearts and instincts usually implore us to intervene with an appropriate level of force to stop a greater, or more unjust, violence happening. Therefore, why is it that, at demonstrations and the like, protesters (especially their spokespeople) express condemnation, instead of respect and gratitude, when some among them take what they perceive to be violent action against the purveyors of extreme systemic violence?

The rape example may seem like a severe example to prove a point, but I would argue the opposite: that the violence we are currently inflicting on life on Earth and its inhabitants, as a matter of daily course, is as unquantifiable and ineffably horrible as gang-rape. It could even be said that we are collectively raping the personified planet, Mother Earth. But because this has been so culturally normalized, activities such as recycling, filling the kettle halfway and buying “green” products are considered to be ethical responses. In reality, these minutely small changes, which green capitalists have conned us into believing make a big difference, are akin to a rapist taking a moment to put on a fairly traded condom before continuing to sexually assault a woman. They are a marginally more ethical way of committing an utterly brutal act.

In Ursula Le Guin’s *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas*, the story is told of the people of Omelas, a utopian society where happiness and joy abounds among its people. Beneath the festivities and delights of everyday life, however, lies a darker reality, one that is only revealed to its children when they come of age and are taken to a basement room. Here the adolescents of Omelas, for the first time, come into contact with a child who is locked up, in serious physical pain and covered in vomit and excrement. Those coming of age realize that their entire way of life, one that they thought could not get much better, was founded upon this one child’s suffering, and that if they wanted their way of life to continue, they would have to accept this child’s suffering as part of the package. Most of the people, though shocked and disgusted by what they have seen, leave the basement and carry on with their lives, enjoying all that their utopian society had to offer. Yet some – and there were always some – decided to walk away from a world that they had previously loved because they could not accept it, and due to the near total pacification of the general public, almost the entirety of those who read it understand these people to be the honorable ones.

However, one of the more subtle messages hidden within this short story, which is commonly missed, is that those who walk away from Omelas, while admirable to a certain degree, do no more to help the imprisoned child than those who return to, and accept, a way of life that is predicated on the torture of another. Walking away from The Machine is important, whether that be by refusing to buy into its stories, developing a localized and ecologically sound culture, or reminding people of the tortured child in the basement (all important acts of resistance in and of themselves). But it is no longer good enough by itself.

In chapter seven, I make the case that if we are to live lives that are dignified, harmonious, meaningful, joyful and genuinely sustainable, it will involve us embracing both the creative and destructive, which in the way of The Wild are nothing but two words for the same thing. Notions of creation and destruction are illusions. Nothing dies, only transforms, but what it transforms into has important consequences for the world we are a part of.

In The Wild, life is transformed into new life through what sometimes appear to be the violent processes of death, and in doing so adds to the complex diversity and health of the Great Web of Life. In The Machine, life is transformed into pollutants through what appears to be the peaceful processes of progress, and in doing so subtracts from the complex diversity and health of the Great Web of Life.

That said, it is natural that, in facing the challenges ahead of us, some will be called to “create” solutions (which will “destroy” previous solutions) in a gentle and healing way, others to do the dirty but necessary work of clearing a space for these new ideas to germinate and flourish within. This could never be any other way, for everyone’s core nature lends them to fill different niches in the exquisite dramas of life. Regardless of our particular tendencies, what we absolutely cannot do is to continue to walk away and leave the child locked up and tortured in the basement.

To reiterate what I said at the beginning of this introduction, none of this is a mindless and heartless call to arms, nor a romantic salute to violent resistance. The coming chapters are a plea to everyone who wants peace – one that broadens its parameters to include the Great Web of Life – to unite in solidarity, to respect each other’s calling and to appreciate that everyone has a unique role to play in defending animate Life from both the spirit and the apparatus of The Machine. We need those inadvertently

born on the side of the oppressor to come together with those on the other end of the leash; those called to tackle personal violence, such as rape, with those who wish to untie the Gordian knots of capitalism, industrialism and cultural imperialism using all tools at their disposal. We need reformists and revolutionaries, those committed to pacifist or nonviolent means to join forces with those who are willing to engage in a diversity of tactics. We need everyone on the side of Life to unite in its defense against the invasion of The Machine. Contrary to what the propaganda of both the state and advocates of nonviolence would lead you to believe, this sense of solidarity between those fighting injustice in their own way is, as we will see in chapter five, exactly what happened in the African-American Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.

If we are serious about stopping the destruction of all that is meaningful and beautiful about our world, and the injustices inflicted upon Life, we need to refrain from limiting the range of our resistance to means that are ineffective by themselves. In order to do so, we must first develop a more nuanced understanding of violence (which I turn inside out in chapter one), and instead of condemning it outright as some imperfection of Nature, we need to put it back in its appropriate place. For as Slavoj Žižek explains:

*... to chastise violence outright, to condemn it as “bad,” is an ideological operation par excellence, a mystification which collaborates in rendering invisible the fundamental forms of social violence. It is deeply symptomatic that our Western societies which display such sensitivity to different forms of harassment are at the same time able to mobilise a multitude of mechanisms destined to render us insensitive to the most brutal forms of violence.<sup>17</sup>*

Yet condemning violence as bad – regardless of its context, intentions, motivations, triggers or potential long-term results – is exactly what those who attempt to create a more just world persist in doing. Within most popular movements for social and ecological change, it has become increasingly fashionable to shun, shout down or expel anyone who does not totally conform to the domesticated, entirely nonviolent ways that those who control these movements demand. Some nonviolent protesters have even been known to inform the police (a profession who

have absolutely no problem with violence, as long as it is them doling it out) about fellow protesters they believe to be acting illegally, without a moment's thought about whether the laws these people are breaking are unjust, or if their actions are in defense of The Whole. Regurgitating what The Establishment has indoctrinated them with, it is commonplace for nonviolent extremists to forcefully tell their more feral members that nothing meaningful or worthwhile can be achieved through force or violence.

But this is a myth propagated by those who believe that nonviolence is always the only appropriate means by which we should affect change. History, for a start, has taught us that, in the appropriate context, force and violence can break down the institutionalized barriers to a more beautiful world, a perspective that I detail in chapter five. Not only that. More importantly, it seems as if those who condemn people who take a more diverse approach to political change forget that the entire planet, and their own flesh and bones, would perish in a moment if it were not for the very violence (under the commonly held definition of it) they seem so morally outraged by. Advocates of nonviolence do not complain when the antibodies in their own bodies violently attack the antigens that pose a serious threat to the health of their whole being. As I will argue in chapter seven, they would be just as wise to desist from complaining when Gaia's human antibodies – activists of all varieties – defend the health of The Whole against the antigen-esque invasions of The Machine using whatever means their skills, tendencies and qualities are suited to.

Sentiments such as these have been expressed innumerable times, long before Žižek's Hegelian ramblings. Henry David Thoreau, a man whose prose and life inspired Mahatma Gandhi in his struggle against British imperialism, once said, "I do not wish to kill nor to be killed, but I can foresee circumstances in which both these things would be by me unavoidable. We preserve the so-called peace of our community by deeds of petty violence every day."<sup>18</sup> As long as there are laws and economic systems designed to line the pockets of the few to the utter devastation of the rest of Life, there will be a desperate necessity for people to break them both.

We need to start being honest with ourselves about the violence inherent in industrial civilization. We need to start being honest about the scale and depth of the ecological, social and personal crises we are

encountering today. And we need to start being honest about the time scales we are working with. To do so, we must put all the options available to us back on the negotiation table. One of the many arguments this book puts forward is that if the master created his house with hammers and monkey wrenches, then surely those tools can also be used to pull out nails and loosen the screws they tightened. Or as Derrick Jensen, a man clearly more in favor of preserving salmon than industrialism, has said with less subtlety, “you *can* use the master’s high explosives to dismantle the master’s dams.”<sup>19</sup>

There is no shortage of good intentions within all aspects of the aboveground and underground movements to end ecocide (see page 63), exploitation and social injustice. Still, we all know that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. That of course does not mean that the road to heaven is paved with bad intentions. Rather, the road to something more beautiful is paved with effective actions; actions that dissolve institutions so inherently violent that they threaten nothing less than life on Earth. Inspiring initiatives and radical projects are planted like seeds within fertile soil every day by social entrepreneurs, activists and change agents of all varieties, yet few, if any, manage to germinate into the solutions they so often deserve to be. Why? Because large, commercially grown trees, not native to their landscape, are blocking out the sunlight that would allow these seedlings to take hold, grow and flourish. These monocultural trees need to come down to allow light in and fresh life to begin, and they need to come down sooner rather than later.

Considering the severity of what lies before us, humanity would be wise to make use of the entire spectrum of tools it has at hand with skill and wisdom, not with hate in its mind towards those who are driving the destruction, but with love in its heart for all that is worth preserving. We need everyone following their own calling. For those who feel compelled to subvert a structurally violent system, Nietzsche’s advice to “beware that, when fighting monsters, you yourself do not become a monster... for when you gaze long into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you,”<sup>20</sup> ought to be heeded. This struggle against The Machine, that multi-headed monster of our Age, can certainly be both initiated and sustained by a sense of deep love and compassion for all that is beautiful. In an open letter to *Marcha*, Ernesto “Che” Guevara, a man not known (despite his mainstream ubiquity) for an advocacy of reformism and one who sadly didn’t always

heed Nietzsche's advice, once expressed such feelings when he wrote that "at the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality."<sup>21</sup>

If you believe that industrial civilization is the zenith of human endeavor, if the strength of your connection to the World Wide Web is genuinely more important to you than the depth of your connection to the animate world of Life, or if you cherish your belongings over a sense of belonging, then I would recommend you put this book through your paper shredder now. However, if you have a gnawing sense that life can be richer and more playful than working overtime in industrialism's "dark Satanic Mills,"<sup>22</sup> if you do not believe that we can solve our ecological crises by the same sort of techno-fix mentality and culture that has only proven thus far to intensify them, or if beneath the roar of The Machine you can still hear the cries of an old-growth forest as it is razed to the ground, with its stories and its creatures gone forever, then I would suggest you read on.

Over the course of what follows, I do not dare claim to have all, or even any, of the answers to humanity's burgeoning list of crises. After all, I am merely a white male living on a smallholding on the west coast of Ireland, with barely even any idea of what may be best for the place in which I commune; it would be arrogant, and perhaps even racist, to claim to know what may be the appropriate course of action for the peoples of Africa or Latin America, Ohio or Yorkshire, in defense of their own cultures and lands at any given moment in time.

Instead, I simply argue that if humanity wants to reclaim an ecologically and culturally-rich world, and ways of life meaningful enough to be worth sustaining, then the "three Rs" of the climate change generation – reduce, reuse, recycle – need a serious upgrade. Currently they are little more than a convenient mantra that fits neatly into the dominant cultural narrative of our time, one that does not threaten the hegemony of The Machine in the slightest. This mantra must take a rapid evolution and become one that looks the crises of our time straight in the eye, doesn't shirk and resolves to become something altogether more befitting. If we want to emerge from the tragedies engulfing us with both the biosphere and our dignity intact, and to participate fully in the Great Web of Life once again, we must dust the failures of half-hearted reformism (and its

resultant fatigue) off ourselves and repeat a new mantra over and over again, until it overcomes the spirit of The Machine that has taken a firm grip of our minds. So what is this mantra, these three Rs of the Age of Reunion, that the chapters that follow wish to inspire your head, your heart and your hands with?

Resist, revolt, rewild.