

sometimes you got to buck the tide,

when it's washing you up  
and leaving you stranded on the sand  
dead of dreams and hope  
and what you know is right  
and who you are  
is being pulled out to sea  
and drowned  
you gotta buck the tide  
you take a stand  
you gotta choose a side  
when society isn't lifting a finger  
even for its own self-preservation  
no use to run and hide  
you gotta stand up and face the nation  
(a song I'm working on in the vein of  
Woody Guthrie's "All You Fascists Bound to Lose")

After 9/11 Graydon Carter, the editor of Vanity Fair and my boss, famously declared that the age of irony was over. Well now I think its back. What else is going on ? Nothing. Apathy, indifference, ignorance. The new shallowness, the new shittiness, the new clueness. Retrenchment, reaction, reversion to type. The continuing reduction of human beings to numbers making them easier to control, manipulate, and addict.

Obama is dead politically, the colored revolutions have

fizzled out (is this a mixed metaphor ?), the promise and hope and the moment, between Nov. 2008 and a year ago, when it seemed like true and desperately needed change, actual progress on social justice, the environment, universal health care and education (the basic responsibility of any good government), was going to happen-- all are dead. How could we be such idiots to let the very dudes whose mismanagement and greed brought us to the brink be calling the shots again ? What do we call these guys ? The reactionaries, the savage capitalists, the fascists, the oligarchy that is really running the show behind the scenes, the Republicans, the Reds (as opposed to the other persuasion of us, the Blues), the Colorados ? How about the sociopaths ? A sociopath is not somebody lacking in social skills or business acumen. On the contrary he is often extremely charming and cunning. He is someone without a conscience. Who doesn't care about the world and has no empathy for the suffering of others. Or maybe it's modern society itself that has become sociopathic.

The environment is not only dead in terms of the market for books or stories about it, as I and other writers have been discovering of late, the planet itself is dying. You've heard the apocalyptic litany, with wildly differing numbers attached, many times : Icecaps, alpine glaciers are melting like ice cream cones on every continent, coral reefs are being bleached to death, rainforests are being converted to soy plantations, pasture, slash and burn cropland. Individual species are going extinct in many different places and ways due to our multifarious activities,

particularly frogs and salamanders and other amphibians, birds, bees, bats. The freshwater mussels of the northeast coast are getting hit the worst. 30 per cent their species are gone, and 30% of the species left world-wide are supposedly slated for extinction by 2030, which I have no trouble believing after the destruction I've seen in the last forty years.

Our emissions seem to have damaged the climate system. Extreme weather events are becoming more common and intense. While the anti-warmists are trying to persuade us it isn't getting warmer, plants and animals across the board, on land and sea, have been moving steadily north in the last forty years. They know what's happening. They're living it, and their ability to adapt to climatic and ecological change is much more limited than us humans', billions of whom are spending our lives indoors in climate-controlled environment, our only contact with the outdoors coming from when we step out on the balcony or make our way from one building to another or to our car. In the early seventies the first turkey vultures appeared in Westchester County, 40 miles north of New York City. Now they're up in the Laurentians, two hours north of Montreal.

Hate to be a party-pooper, but all the planet's life-support systems, terrestrial, aquatic, and atmospheric, are stressed and unraveling. A third of the people on earth supposedly won't have access to adequate clean water by midcentury. Everything is going down the toilet, including my opinion of humanity. Unless we're attacked and we

have to go to war (which brings out the sociopath in every society), most of us are a bunch of scurvy rotters. As long as we have our modern comforts, most of us not going to lift a finger. Who needs biodiversity or quaint local cultures halfway around the world when most of us spend our waking hours out of touch with the natural world, staring at a computer screen and topping it off with a few hours of t.v. ?

Of course there are millions of us who get it and care about the world and are doing what we can. But on the world political stage, and the national political stage, where the important macro changes, the revolution in the way we do business with the planet that has to happen should be taking place, there is a lot of talk and no action. The political will is not there, because the societal will isn't.

The other camp, however-- the sociopaths, the people who don't get or do get it but don't care-- have been very active, and they are winning the battle for the hearts and minds of modern society, which means that we are losing the battle for the planet. What we have instead at this sorry juncture, this regression of the zeitgeist, is a very organized right that has at its disposal legions of libertarian right-wing bloggers who are trashing the scientists and whistleblowers and putting out all kinds of disinformation, and legions of computer nerds who are combing the Internet for anything compromising that can be used against the enviros and warmists and the rigorous scientists who are just publishing their findings, to paint them as pinko socialist tree-huggers and prophets of doom,

or careerists willing to falsify their data to get ahead. (Although scientists being only human, there are always some who will exaggerate the importance and certainty of their findings, and there is always a dominant orthodoxy that you have to be in sync with field you want to rise in any academic discipline, which has confused the issue, which is that we're going down unless we get our act together fast.)

So what we have to do is organize and unite, and build a massive broad-based movement from every walk of life and endeavor until it has a large enough critical mass that our global and national political leaders will have to do something. We need to have our own bloggers and computer geeks who are monitoring the disinformation and debunking and maybe even (not that I'm suggesting anything) hacking into the sociopaths' emails and exposing their dirty tricks and giving them a taste of their own medicine. We need to have detailed, dispassionate global reporting on what is happening.

Nine years ago, to raise consciousness about the destruction of species and cultures, I started these Dispatches with my oldest son, Andre (who does not necessarily agree with everything in my increasingly radical and apoplectic rants). They are now read by people from 90-some countries a month. In the last few days, to give you an example, I have gotten an email from a middle-schooler in Virginia called Emily who wanted to know who is the author of Dispatch #18, so she can reference it in her paper on the Rwandan genocide, and this from a musician

and photographer in Rome named Manuel Giordani :

Hallo,

what do you think about ART as a vanishing thing in this world? creativity and critical observation of what's happening, which are so strictly linked, are they in danger of extinction?

Bye

This a really interesting and important question, Manuel (whose beautiful music can be heard on [manuelgiordani.it](http://manuelgiordani.it)) and very germane to the dismal state of affairs we now find ourselves in and the reason for this call to action, so I would like to answer it now. Are we collectively losing our critical faculties ? Absolutely. The assault of information our modern television- and computer-fried minds are being bombarded with, and the speeding up of time by all the time and labor-saving devices we cant live without, make it impossible to absorb detailed, lengthy presentations of information, so we aren't getting the full, nuanced picture about anything, except in a few places like this [DispatchesFromTheVanishingWorld,.com](http://DispatchesFromTheVanishingWorld.com). Is this steady ongoing erosion of our critical faculties affecting our creativity ? Absolutely, and not for the good. It is giving rise to what my friend the incomparable old-time Sixties singer-songwriter Simon Finn calls “the new shallowness.” But is creativity dead or threatened with extinction ? I don't

think so. There will always be dissident misfit maverick types who will express themselves in art, music, writing. Even in 1984 and *Brave New World* and the rash of movies about the apocalyptic future where everyone is wandering around in a daze and scavenging in the rubble of what we are living in now, there are a few brave souls who have not become zombies or cannibals and are operating outside the system and still have their critical faculties and ultimately they prevail. This is getting to look more and more like the situation we are already in today.

The heroic narrative of the artist requires that he think he is this unique original creative genius, but it isn't really so. We are all only expressing ourselves in the cultural norms and forms of our moment, even if we are pushing their envelope, and new young artists are constantly appearing who are as good as us, maybe even better. I am a practitioner of the writing and music that was happening forty years ago, a dinosaur of the Sixties. The sad truth, which you usually don't realize until you are older, is that we are replaceable-- transitional characters, as my grandmother reflected on her deathbed. We come and go like Michelangelo and are remembered or forgotten, but there there will always be creativity and art. People's emotional range and intelligence are the same in every culture. The pygmies of the Ituri Forest I ran around with 25 years ago could identify 18 species of bee on the wing. The first artifacts, of voluptuous women, go back 35,000 years. I meet musicians in their teens and twenties who are very creative, even though they can't play an instrument

have never heard Gary Davis or Manha da Carnaval. The musical impulse is universal and will never die.

But how many artists have been able to make a difference politically, to effect real change in the society ? Bob Dylan, Bob Marley, John Lennon. Not a lot even in more receptive times than today. As Lucien Bouchard, the former premier of Quebec, whose Parti Quebecois still trying to separate the province from the rest of Canada, has said, “Political courage isn't something you can swallow with your morning coffee. Courageous political acts are possible when it isn't just the politician who is being courageous.”

So what does this mean ? We have to organize. To that end, the Dispatches can make a useful contribution as a catalyst and synergist and syncretist, being already such a multicultural, multidisciplinary. multi-media cornucopia of offerings, embracing, celebrating, and advocating for all forms of life, for all “sentient beings,” as Buddhists call them. We've been talking for several years about making the site a commercially viable operation, and it has received \$117,000 in grants and commissions over the years. But it's basically been a labor of love by me and Andre, with the inestimable help of over a dozen interns, most of them from the McGill schools of environment and business. Now we're going to get serious.

Step one is to mount a readership drive, which is why I am doing this mass mailing to all my gmail correspondents and

Facebook friends, old and new. Please spend some time in the Dispatches, and if you resonate with their mission, please tell all your correspondents and friends to do the same and to tell their friends. This way the people who dip into the Dispatches could grow quickly and virally. Please get back to me with any thoughts or suggestions or links that you may have, and we can get things rolling. And we're always looking for contributors. Social and environmental Dispatches are currently being reported and written by people in Nicaragua, Paris, Bahia, and Budapest.

I am posting, at the same time as this call to action, as an example of the lengthy, detailed treatment that this site gives its subjects, a hundred-page Dispatch on the dialect and culture of the Adirondack Mountains of upstate New York, which has never been described and is going fast. A lot of lore and local isms have been lost in the last generation.

In a few weeks, we will see if the readership, with your help, has taken the hoped-for quantum leap. Then we can go after ads and start selling books, music, and other products, and hire some staff who can do further social media audience-building and networking, investigative work, and reporting, and take care of the business end.

At this point, we can't offer any salary yet, only internships, but our interns have done very well for themselves. One is running the Web site of Canadian Geographic magazine, another is reviewing projects and landholdings for the Nature Conservancy in Washington, others are interpreting

at the Dinosaur Museum in Drumheller, Alberta, taking care of orphan chimps in Gabon, working with gypsies in Hungary, setting up social entrepreneurial initiatives in poor village in India. I am in touch with most of them, and they all say the Dispatches gave them a way to become involved in a direct way that their university curricula didn't, and how great it was to see how a working writer actually goes about his craft, and to learn a few tricks of the trade. I'm really proud of them. These are the kind of people the world needs.

Right now, we are looking interns, possibly leading to a steady paying job (I know you've heard that before, but if you have the energy and the time, if you were able to dedicate a month or two setting things up, it really could happen), who are preferably in Montreal and going to be around for a while, anybody from the age of 18 to 80, who have one or more of the following skills :

social media promotional, networking, and readership-building skills, who can spread the word and build links and common-cause with the myriad like-minded operations and outfits out there, whether they are involved in biological conservation, cultural survival, social or environmental activism, or are scrappy little ngos fights dams and mining, petrochemical poisoning of the land, water, and air, or social or green entrepreneurs, civil rights, human rights, women's rights, animal rights, or media that

are putting the word out and exposing the bad actors and corruptos. It's all the same battle, it's our world that we have to start taking better care of immediately, and there are thousands of ways to become part of the solution and not the problem.

are fluent in shtml and php, who can help Andre redesign the site, which people keep telling me is antedeluvian (but the retro feel and the understated unflashiness may not be such a bad thing) and could definitely be more user-friendly

people with business skills and entrepreneurial flare, who can go after ads, develop a marketing strategy, who to target, formulate what the message should be, and contact the companies, organizations, and foundations that might want to be associated with us, who can help with incorporating the Dispatches as a company, and setting up the print-on-demand books and cds and serializations and Ipad downloads and membership discounts. My second son, Nick in New York, knows a lot about this and has done a lot of the legwork for the ad campaign, and our former interns has worked up a brilliant detailed business plan that we'll be consulting frequently.

and of course, individuals or foundations who might want to throw some seed money our way.

We are looking for special people, who believe passionately in the cause and can take the ball the run with it. If you are one, please email me at [alexshoumatoff@gmail.com](mailto:alexshoumatoff@gmail.com) and tell me about yourself and why you would like to be part of this quirky indy operation.

To determine if you are one of these people, all you have to do listen to the song “Too Too Much” on my cd “Suitcase on the Loose,” posted on the site. If you are moved, you qualify, or at least make it through the first round. Also if you resonate to this animal fable, which Wangari Maathai, the Nobel-prize winning founder of Kenya's Greenbelt Movement, likes to tell :

*There is a huge fire in the forest, and all the animals are fleeing except the hummingbird, which is zipping back and forth from a spring and scooping up slivers of water with its tiny beak and dumping them on the flames. The other animals, standing on the edge of the forest, taunt the hummingbird. The panther asks derisively, “What do you think you are doing, foolish little bird ?” and the hummingbird answers, “I'm doing what I can.”*

That's what we all have to do, and if enough of us who are doing what we can join together, we can buck this tide. So wadya waitin fuh ?