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A PROPOSAL

“freedom, equality, purpose”



BABY STAGES

It has often been said that we are at the end of an era.
I feel this is true.
I feel we are in the baby stages of a new civilisation –
but that just as the wise old man is already inside the baby boy,
we've already got all we're going to need.

There is every sign the new civilisation will be matriarchal...
our porn-addicted, intimacy-inept teenage boys
are being academically outrun by the girls...
even the heroes of the slickest Hollywood adventure films
are trustworthy, authentic, young warrior-leader women.
There is, of course, an inevitability about this –
but I don't feel it would be good for the Earth.

I feel it would be healthier if Man rose up
from the shudders of his patriarchal past
and stood in his dignity.
She in hers.
He in his.

Babies dream,
and from their dreams they create their personalities.
This is the stage we're at.

This book proposes a way we, as men, can dream together –
a way we can unite in brotherhood
in the cultivation of dignity
for ourselves
for the generations of men to come,
for all people of all genders,
for all creatures,
and for all of existence...
and co-create a new civilisation.

I MET THIS OLD HIPPY

I.

To rise up
is also to return down
to the Earth.

II.

I met this old hippy.
He was in his eighties.
"Was it really such a difficult choice", he asked me,
"between love and war?"
He said he could still feel those times in his bones –
the vitality, the eroticism, the possibility...
"We wanted to make love, not war,
with each other – with life!
We just didn't know how."

He hummed me Neil Young's 'Woodstock' –
"We've got to get ourselves back to the garden."

III.

Perhaps we still don't know how.
Or perhaps we're just not being brave enough
to admit we do.
And do it.

In this book I propose a framework
for uniting in learning together.
And for doing.

ECOVOLUTION

"Players with huge power and global reach are released from democratic restraint. This happens because of a fundamental corruption at the core of politics. In almost every nation, the interests of economic elites tend to weigh more heavily with governments than those of the electorate."

- George Monbiot

Heartfelt ideas move revolutions, not guns. We don't need guns to say 'no'.

Violence would only be more of the same.

'The means are the end'.

So more important than the 'no' is the 'yes'- not what we stand against, but what we stand for...

But as if pricked by some magic needle – drugged, enchanted – it doesn't seem to occur to us that we can stand up.

(Mostly) we go about our daily business smiling stupidly, humming to the sweet, sleepy muzak of faith in our (mostly) emotionally-challenged, intellectually-confined, physically-constricted, existentially-void 'civilisation'.

("What do you think of western civilisation?" Gandhi: "...it would be a good idea!")

There is masses of horrific and heartbreaking evidence that we are destroying the beautiful Earth that feeds us, and gives us water, and gives us air, and that our leaders are not leading – that they are not uniting us and inspiring us to radically protect the Earth we love (as they might do, for example, should they want us to "pull together for the war effort"), but, on the contrary, are lost inside some irrelevant video game with their corporate sponsors, wheeling and dealing treaties and trade agreements – utterly irresponsibly accelerating our global civilisation's suicidal self-consumption.

Despite all of this, we continue, unbelievably, to believe the newspapers are the news, and that the men and women in black suits have things in hand.

We are bemused. We keep ourselves amused.

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And it's not 'their' fault. The leaders and the led – we are one. We are as good and as bad as each other. We are one united, intoxicated, deadly story unfolding.

But you know all this... Like Leonard Cohen sang, "Everybody knows that the boat is leaking / Everybody knows that the captain lied / Everybody got this broken feeling / Like their father or their dog just died / Everybody knows".

You want to say, "no! enough!", but the words come out in a mumble that already expects defeat.

And brother, here, in my opinion, is why: because inside every 'no' is the 'yes' to its opposite – and the latent 'yes' pulsing inside us is a 'yes' to a freedom and love we do not live. In other words: if we were to truly proclaim our opposition to our collective insanity we would be exposed as the hypocrites we are.

How can "no!" echo from millions of rooftops when we don't even know what it means to live, individually, in freedom and love – or even if we understand, intellectually, when we ourselves don't walk in freedom and love through our everyday lives? We can't say "no!" because we know we are not living the "yes!"

This is why it is absolutely crucial we define our 'yes'. And, then, that we embody it, that we get to know it from the inside – that we become it.

We might have a vague conceptual sense of our 'yes' – our 'yes' to ourselves, to our individual autonomy and authority (freedom), our 'yes' to equality (love), and our 'yes' to the beauty and mystery of life on planet Earth – but that is not enough. These ideas will only become passionately heartfelt enough to be 'ecvolutionary' once we know them in our bones – once we are experiencing them. Only then will we really know what we stand for.

To co-create a radically new civilisation we each need to make a radical commitment to ourselves. All of us, so-called leaders and so-called led – whoever is brave enough – now needs to stand in front of the mirror of their own birth-to-death journey and dedicate themselves to learning to live as their 'yes'.

Many people have woken up in a relationship, or a job, or a place and said, "What am I doing here? I don't have to stay. Why didn't it ever occur to me that I could leave?" It's time to wake up. It's time to get up. "Oh, can we have a revolution? I didn't know that was allowed!" Of course it's not allowed!

But who is not allowing it? Our leaders? Or our fear?

What are you afraid of, brother? Death? We will anyway both be gone, you and I, in a fingersnap.

The time has come for 'ecolution'. We need to educate ourselves in living our 'yes', and we need to act. This is a time for legal reform (civil obedience). Definitely. And this is a time for direct action (civil disobedience). Definitely. But above all, it is a time (as Leonard Cohen also sang) "For the innermost decision / That we cannot but obey" – a time for 'innermost obedience'.

Although our leaders have access to power in ways most of us don't, they are also tied in systemic knots in ways that most of us aren't. The task upon us all, therefore, is the creation of a new civilisation - - a civilisation not based on fear and defendedness from the Earth, from each other, and from ourselves, but a civilisation of love for the Earth, of love for each other, and of individuals in love with themselves. But I do not see our leaders sobbing for the land or ocean or sky, so I don't believe they can lead us into a loving relationship with the Earth -. And when I hear their speeches I do not sense psyches that have been psychotherapeutically kneaded into maturity, so I don't believe they can lead us into becoming a balanced, centred, kind, respectful global family.

And 'we', for the most part, are as dried up, and drugged up, as 'they' are. We all need to make the radical, self-educational commitment to becoming the kind of people who could populate a new civilisation. And in this book, I will be proposing an utterly non-dogmatic, non-hierarchical, unifying, mass-educational programme to do just this. It is simple, straightforward, honest, unpretentious – and extremely powerful. What's more, it gives quick results – which is just as well, given the eco-emergency we're in.

And this programme is not a preparation for action. Action is part of it. It is self-education, and united, meaningful, creative action is part of the educational process.

This proposal is addressed to men because (as we will discuss) I believe we as men need it, just as much we are needed. But I can't imagine any woman, or anyone of any gender, who is open minded, open hearted, and open spirited, being anything but hundred per cent supportive of such an Uprising of Man.

It is not an exclusive or inward-looking uprising that I am proposing – 'the men for the men' – no! I am proposing an Uprising of Man in absolute equality and connection with every other person, animal, tree and insect on this Earth.

You know – we are free! We are free to obey or not. We could stop paying our taxes tomorrow. We could become conscientious tax objectors – in our millions! I am saying this to nudge our forgotten freedom awake. We have forgotten that above and before being citizens of the state, each of us stands alone beneath the sky, walking vulnerably towards his own death, a child of the great mystery of existence.

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Imagine such tax objection! What a mass statement! And not just of our personal authority and existential freedom. It would also be a radical, collective, symbolic statement of our equality – that no leader is above us. That we do not have to listen. That no one is above us, or below us – however big and black the limousine – however wealthy, famous or powerful. That everyone, however they might define their gender, is an equal; a sibling. That others only have the right to lead us if we give it to them. And even then we remain equals.

We could set up our own governments! We could pay our taxes to them! I don't even feel that would be particularly radical right now. I feel we could justifiably, and quite moderately, turn our backs on almost every government, since they are not addressing the ecological crisis in a way that shows any love of the Earth, nor offering us any resolute and compassionate guidance as to the sacrifices we all need to make if we want to protect, and even perhaps someday restore, this most beautiful Earth with its crazy variety of amazing creatures, and all of its magic and wonder.

It would only seem radical because we'd be breaking the trance of our disempowerment and disconnection.

We need self-education, and ecovolution. We need the gentlest, most peaceful, respectful, loving revolution the world has ever seen!

It's time to vision anew. Radically anew. Centralised power is held in place by our belief in it. Do we believe in it? Or are we just afraid?

The obviousness of the fact that we are all one family has somehow become obscured. That love should be the guiding force of government sounds ridiculous to us. For us, 'government' and 'love' don't go together. Which is ridiculous. They are two words that should be inseparable. And the fact that they're not just shows how sick our civilisation has become.

The dismissal of such words as idealistic or utopian is black-suited propaganda. It might be dismissal inside your own head, but switch it off. It's time for a mega-redefinition of 'us' and 'them'. I do not say this out of rebelliousness, but out of responsibility.

A MEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

*"You must have a plan. If you don't have a plan, you will become part of somebody else's plan."
- Terrance McKenna*

The First Wave Men's Movement

As I understand it, at the beginning of the twentieth century a first wave women's liberation movement focused primarily on equal rights. Midway through the century, a second wave was going deeper – promoting 'consciousness raising' and protesting sexual and workplace injustices. By the end of the century, aware of its own prejudices, a third wave was going deeper still – addressing the diversity of discrimination against women on every continent by race, religion, sexuality and social class. Today, it seems to me, no area of human enquiry or activity has not been touched by this feminist liberatory impulse.

There was a first wave men's movement towards the end of the last century – but it didn't get very far! How could the men – the patriarchal oppressors, so recently deposed... and not-so deposed (still often resistant to complete equality, and still in so many places so pre-feminist) – how could they dare proclaim a men's liberation movement?! What did they want to liberate themselves from? Themselves? Was it some sort of a joke?

It was not, and is not, a joke for me. I don't care whether you deform a baby's psyche by telling it it is less, or by telling it it is more. It is all violence and systematised indoctrination. I don't care whether you twist the mind of a little girl into believing she should be a sex-object, or contort a little boy's mind into believing real men are shameless studs. It's all child abuse.

But, yes, the men's movement didn't get very far... I was there – a young lad in my thirties and forties :) Many men remain grateful to those times, and I am one. It birthed heartfelt personal enquiries and worthy projects. But in and of itself, as a movement, it seemed to just fizzle out. I wonder if there was too much guilt. Perhaps there was too much attachment to superiority. Perhaps it held out no new vision. Perhaps we were just licking our wounds and sucking on scraps. Whatever the case, its voice was incomparably more muted than that of the women's movement. Its soulful, therapeutic, mythopoetic wing got ridiculed as 'tree-hugging', and the more activist masculinist (men's rights) wing, – while theoretically in accord with the feminist egalitarian agenda (as was the profeminist men's wing) – was too bitter and misogynistic to move the hearts of most men.

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Personally, I believe the lack of a new vision was critical: there was no vision of a manhood of the future to which to aspire, around which to unite. In fact (and here is the crux of this book), I feel it is only now, several decades on, that such a vision is beginning to take shape – as more and more men, like me, have given their years in apprenticeship to woman, to man, to achievement, to life – and got absolutely nowhere! As I write this, I laugh with joy and pain! As well as wonderful, it has been tumultuous and traumatic, bringing me – to quote Joan Manuel Serrat, "verse by verse, blow by blow" – to real honesty, to facing my life, to facing myself, to the unexpected power of humility, to the unexpected freedom of not-knowing, and the unexpected love of equality.

In this book I will be trying to articulate the beauty and implications of this gutting defeat – so that we can enquire together into whether or not we feel there actually is some sort of collective arrival underway and, therefore, whether or not we are called to unite – because, well, that would seem befitting if we are in fact already being carried along on some kind of collective cultural current.

And I don't just mean those men who were moved by that first wave. I mean all of us - – older and younger - – all of us who have been (and are being) tossed about in the questioning of the more ecologically, therapeutically, and socially sophisticated waters of the last three or four decades.

Is it happening? Is a second wave swelling? Is it a potential happening – an encoded pattern waiting to be spotted? Well, my answer will be in your response to this proposal of a book. Clearly, we are needed – the Earth needs en masse, non-governmental (and governmental), immediate, united, global protection and 'healing' – and I sense an enormous vitality available in the unity of honest men, a vitality that could serve the world, and also serve us (validating and empowering us as men).

My own intuition is 'yes': an authentic, stereotype-free, dogma-free manhood of the future is coming into focus, and great numbers of us are already living into it – a manhood to make our ancestors proud, a manhood to feel proud to pass on to our sons.

A Second Wave?

In the 80s and 90s we just weren't ready. But... since then, god knows how many of us have been swimming to shore through a sea of self-reflection, relationship wrestles, questions of life purpose, personal development, addictions, self-sabotage and success, dignity and self-betrayal... and gradually, gradually maturing because of, and despite, ourselves... gradually learning to stand differently in our

bodies: letting the earth take our weight, letting our sexuality vibrate, trusting our tender, fiery hearts and breathing in the freedom that was always ours.

In fact, I would say it is only through such personal transformation that we come to know that, like women, we too have long been dominated and oppressed. We come out the other side (of our patriarchal conditioning). We snap through some sort of invisible, ever-present, never noticed, hypnotic membrane. We come to feel how we haven't been. The mind fog disperses. We look around. We become our own authorities. We stand powerfully, vulnerably free.

We recognise how our spirits have been sterilised by religions – like Christianity and Scientism (the belief in a billiard ball universe), how our minds have been neutralised by education in information rather than in amazement, our hearts twisted up by generation after generation of insistence on a not-vulnerable manhood, our sexuality all but castrated by divine monogamy, and our wild, innocent love of the land torn out from under our feet.

Above all, we realise we have been terrorised into being 'masculine', and that this has bifurcated our being. We have been split. As if told "you can only use one leg", or, "you are only allowed to look out of one eye", as little boys we were prohibited from following the free flow of our inclinations and impulses, and straightjacketed inside a conceptual cluster entitled 'masculinity' that bound us in sensual insensitivity, emotional emptiness, and mental (and physical) rigidity – leaving us stranded in an atheistic-or-theistic flatland. Furthermore, this split 'socialising' has predisposed us to harshness, authoritarianism and violence.

We realise – wearily, angrily, finally – that man, too, has been sacrificed and sucked dry by patriarchal fear and control – sacrificed to the production line, to the economy, to the family, to the army... Masculinised, sterilised, neutralised, twisted-up, all-but-castrated, torn from the land – we realise that, even as babies, even in the womb, our minds and hearts were being trimmed and streamlined towards the worldwide, silent and invisible mass sacrifice of man.

Just as our elders were invisibly sacrificed, they in turn offered us up – placing us, mostly lovingly, into the stream of insanity and suffering with such unconscious efficiency that by adolescence we were already convinced it was our own choice to live with minimal feeling, minimal whole body eroticism and minimal trust in the beauty and wisdom of existence.

Women have been oppressed. Yes. And they have recognised this. I believe feminism was the most important evolutionary phenomenon of the twentieth century. But caught in the crossfire of women's pain and blame, and men's shame, of generalisation (such as this), and clumsy judgement, I believe we have needed

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time to retreat honourably, and ask our bodies and hearts what it is that we, as men, feel and need, and long for – for ourselves.

Of course, the realisation that we, too, have been persecuted by patriarchy in no way excuses the heartlessness of so much male behaviour. I do not want to shield myself, or you, my brother, from our collective shame – or personal guilt. Rather, for me, this realisation is an open door inviting us deeper – deeper than our unconscious behaviour, deeper than our self-judgement and shame – into inspecting the education that has shaped us.

It takes us to the need for re-education. Therefore, I would say that if a second-wave men's liberation movement is in fact arising, it will need to be primarily an educational movement – one that is continuing and consolidating whatever self-enquiry is already underway. Not an academic educational movement, but a movement of self-education through personal honesty, brotherhood and (perhaps above all) the learning that happens in unified purposeful action.

A Unifying Metafocus

It seems most of us are suspicious of flags and one-ways and hierarchies and obedience. And with damn good reason. So if, in this book, I propose an overarching 'metafocus' (collective focus for individual focuses) for a second wave men's movement, it cannot be an imposition. It will have to be an encapsulation of an essence within the many, seemingly disparate, focuses that individual men already hold. And I am going to propose a metafocus. In fact, without one I don't see how a movement could cohere.

The years have sometimes battered my pretensions, sometimes teased them out with tenderness, sometimes with humour. And having watched my brothers similarly reincarnate a thousand times – whether they're into therapy, or creating their own realities, or permaculture, or Ayahuasca, or corporate reform, or eco-architecture, or health foods, or social justice, or whatever – I see us all becoming simpler and simpler, clearer and clearer... I see a metafocus coming into focus.

Informed by this, by decades of coaching men and facilitation of men's groups and workshops and, above all, by the intuitive sense I have already mentioned of a collective male awakening, I want to propose a metafocus for a 'second wave' men's movement... It might seem disappointingly simple, but, as Bruce Lee would say, it comes out of a lot of 'hacking away at the inessentials'. It is this: the valuing of the uniqueness of our individual experience (what we're experiencing, that is – not what we've experienced in the past).

Do not underestimate the weightiness of this focus, nor its social and political implications. My aim in this book will be to show its depth and breadth from all sorts of philosophical and psychological angles; to explain its social, ecological and political consequences, and to shout loud the (r)evolutionary (radical evolutionary) possibility with which I believe it confronts us; to which I believe it invites us.

More elaborately, by ‘metafocus’ I mean: a ‘reality-focus’ with which we can align our lives without any loss of personal authority, or sacrifice of existing individual focus, but through which our individual authority is affirmed and enhanced, and through which we can experience a sense of expansion and empowerment by standing in unity with others who also choose to align with this reality-focus.

Many of us do ‘value the uniqueness of individual experience’. We have felt what it’s like to stand alongside each other in complete equality – each of us, above all else, engaged in honest presence to his own, actual, unique, felt experience. We know, simple as it might sound, how this creates an atmosphere in which each man can encounter himself, his aloneness, his freedom, his belonging, his love and his sense of purpose.

But I believe that although some of us know this, perhaps more and more deeply at a personal level, we have hardly even sniffed its explosive, culturally transformative potential. Why not? Because, we haven’t yet lived it together. We might’ve lived it at a workshop, but we haven’t lived it in our neighbourhoods. And again – why not? Because, by default, we’re running along invisible, rusty tracks laid down by previous generations, by previous mindsets. This is why we need to lay our own.

There are many vital, urgent themes to explore: power and shame, the demise of monogamy and the lack of community, the discarding of masculinity and the honouring of manhood, purpose and social engagement, and so on... And there are a million and one ways to do this. But if, as many of us have already realised, all we have ever had is our own experience, and all we have even now (in this moment), is our own experience – then it doesn’t make sense to explore anything unless we are consciously in touch with our experience, and, therefore, able to evaluate everything in terms of how it’s impacting us. Staying in our own experience, valuing our unique experience, is, I believe, the natural metafocus, the common holding ground for our myriad personal and social journeys.

In fact, in my opinion, the metafocus of ‘experiencing our experience’ is at the heart of every tradition of self-realisation – the prerequisite for successful therapy, the ground of all authentic relating, and the big, fat start button for a new wave of radical social evolution.

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The stumbling apology of so many modern men is not liberation. Guilt is not enough. Can we go beyond our obsession with woman – both our conceited intoxication with her submission, and our sulky bewilderment at her bold, proud vindication? In this end-of-times, beginning-of-times era of planetary devastation and potential species suicide, can we be courageous enough to co-create metafocused, global brotherhood?

Can we be courageous enough to turn towards our actual experience – together – to interest ourselves in ourselves, to face our aloneness/uniqueness, to each be an equal to all, to open to life and death and face our not-knowing? Can we stand in brotherhood and remember dignity?

And from this united self-honouring can we honour the women, the men-women, the women-men, the children, the animals, the birds, the insects, the fish, the earth, the sea, the sky, the land, knowing that – as Terrance McKenna says – ‘all culture is provisional’, that everywhere all-consuming, modern, industrial culture now stands where once stood other cultures; that we are free to create anew?

A NOTE ON SUBJECTIVITY & LANGUAGE

"Is, is, is – the idiocy of the word haunts me. If it were abolished, human thought might begin to make sense. I don't know what anything 'is' – I only know how it seems to me at this moment"

- Robert Anton Wilson

All that follows is The Final Truth. The Truth, finally...

Only kidding!

But surely it can't be 'just' my opinion?! I have worked bloody hard for this opinion! I have sweated blood for this opinion! I have wrestled with dark angels for this opinion!

OK, yes, you're right – whether it's 'just' an opinion, or a hard-won, sweat-soaked opinion – it remains a subjective opinion... every word of it!

Why bother to say this? Because the structure of language itself doesn't promote subjectivity, and therefore equality. Already in the previous pages, there must be hundreds of instances in which my absolutely normal use of language makes unintentionally-pompous pretensions to objectivity, and as such takes a position of power-over. But (I consider) it would be (what I consider to be) tedious, and (what I consider to be) distracting, to try and twist language into (what I would consider to be) subjective shape, even though I want to speak to you as an equal – subject to subject, brother to brother.

And, of course, it is especially important to take note of this if we're exploring the metafocus of staying in our own (that's to say, subjective), experience. So please know that I do genuinely feel everything I have written is my subjective opinion, and that I am intensely interested in finding out whether (if it seems to me) many of us have arrived, or are arriving, at the same subjective opinion. Because if (it does seem to me) many of us have, then (for me) that has (in my opinion, what I consider to be) massive, challenging, and exhilarating implications. And so maybe also for you.

THE VISION

"An idea that is not dangerous is unworthy of being called an idea at all!"

- Oscar Wilde

I want to present a vision, and a way towards it. It is a vision of men standing up. Not standing up in conformity – not even in conformity to nonconformity. It is of men defying the mass-marketed blanket of superficiality, of men asserting the wisdom they withhold; of men, unapologetically and unashamedly powerful and free, standing in solidarity with all that is vulnerable – especially with all that is vulnerable in themselves. It is a vision of each man – as himself... standing naked-of-heart, letting the world be witness to the deep dignity of his being – a dignity, perhaps, unfamiliar to him and, therefore, perhaps that he fears.

Yes, we can be sex-obsessed morons! Yes, we can be emotionally retarded! Yes, we can be brattishly aggressive. We can be disturbingly violent. But, simultaneously, disguised as fathers and plumbers and shopkeepers and dog lovers, in a parallel underground world – to the detriment of the human race – we are also a forgotten, fractured, beleaguered network of philosophers, scientists, music lovers, adventurers, designers, visionaries, builders, mystics, nature lovers, creators, inventors, artists, poets, romantics, idealists and innocent brave cowards – listening out, each in their own way, for a truest note: some half-forgotten, half-remembered note – ‘the voice of the hidden waterfall’ (T. S. Eliot) – a note of soothing beyond securities that would sing things into sense, that would comfort the heart with recognition.

This book is a personal and political, philosophical and poetic invitation to listen together. It is an invitation to come out of secrecy and trepidation – together – carried by honesty. No pretensions. No power trips. No persuading, no enlisting. Rather, an invitation to be utterly honest, together – to stand in honesty, then be honest about that level of honesty, then fall through to a yet more naked honesty – deeper and deeper and deeper into our own experience - loving ideas yet letting ourselves be carried beyond the safety of ideas, loving our emotional patternings yet opening beyond our patterns, and loving our fragile identities while also standing face-to-face with the wondrous mystery of the unknown – the unknown moment, the unknown me, the unknown you, our unknown togetherness, our unknown belonging... To not abandon our actual experience and come, perhaps, to live in the satisfaction of self-acceptance, together – loving ourselves and letting ourselves be loved – re-imagining ourselves and perhaps redeeming the discredited image of man.

A Vision for Men

This honesty-driven, self-educational invitation is a way we, as men, can unite and arise through the dumbing down indoctrination we have inherited into our minds and blood. This stripped-down commitment to deepening honesty takes us straight to ourselves. It takes us to where we already are, it takes us nowhere, and it takes us everywhere. Through steadiness in honesty we meet the unknown. There we meet our aloneness. We meet our uniqueness. And, welcoming our grief and fear, we meet a sense of belonging and a new lightness of being. We meet purpose. Life comes alive again. Meaning reveals itself everywhere: meaning with a capital M.

Then, there, in that re-lit world, having taken myself seriously again – feeling activated, invigorated – I experience my whole life as my private conversation with time, with death, with destiny and mystery and meaning. And I see you, brother – alone in your own life conversation – struggling in your own wombs and tombs, as I do in mine – sometimes surrendering through the pain with grace, sometimes seeking relief – like me. I see you and I see myself, and into the space between us, comes deep, fraternal love.

Why is this adventure of honesty specifically a way for twenty-first century man? Because in aloneness-in-the-unknown we meet freedom, and in freedom there is power – the true power of which macho power was a ridiculous reproduction. And thus the (thankfully) feminist-induced impasse of twentieth-century man reopens. We find a way through to being powerful men without reverting to patriarchal oppressiveness. We open a necessary new chapter on men and power.

And another reason: because in aloneness-in-the-unknown we meet freedom, and in freedom we are also naked and exposed and vulnerable. Thus we come to feel, directly, how our vulnerability is not the opposite of our power, but its texture. Not unmanly weakness, but the very beauty of our power. The proof of our power. And therefore, once again, the feminist-induced impasse of twentieth-century man reopens. We find a way through to becoming vulnerable, receptive, loving men without sacrificing our power and becoming anti-patriarchal, always-gentle men.

We open a necessary new chapter on men and love.

A Viral Proliferation Of Brotherhoods

My vision is of a viral proliferation of brotherhoods. Each brotherhood a brotherhood of men of honesty, of men who feel the most honest thing they can say is that they don't know who they are, or why they are alive, or what it even means to exist. If each brotherhood had a flag it would say 'we don't know'!

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You might say we'd be following 'the path' of not-knowing, except that it wouldn't be a path because to have a path means to have a destination, and to have a destination means to know the meaning of life, which would not be our claim. Our interest would be in living in not-knowing, in the unknown, in the great mystery.

In my vision, some brotherhoods might be more focussed on self-education, some more on a specific purpose, some on both. Again and again I have seen purpose bond and energise groups of men. I have seen men thrive on it. I have seen shared purpose elicit determination, incredible generosity, happiness and self-worth. We need it, and – in these times of disintegrating ice caps, islands of plastic, freak weather, accelerated species extinction, devouring consumerism, manipulated genocides and politicians sold to politics – we are needed.

By purpose I mean 'creative action charged by meaning'. So, in this sense, brotherhoods united in purpose would join, or create, a project or endeavour that had meaning for them. The specific creative action of each brotherhood would depend upon its interests and pool of knowledge. And the sense of meaningful unity would come not only from the worthiness of its 'cause' but from pursuing a course of action together in an atmosphere of closeness, respect and dignity.

Living in not-knowing is not an intellectual exercise. It takes courage to face life full-on – to stand alone, to stand with everyone, to let not-knowing open you to your complete and utter freedom, to be your own one-and-only authority, to stand below no man, to wield the gentlest of power, to laugh and dance and play like a child in a magic garden, to love yourself unconditionally and, therefore, to love everyone: every creature, every tree, fish, insect and blade of grass. It is not easy, and it is not a common commitment to share, but travelling together in this way invigorates us. It is the kiss of life for the withered self-worth of modern man.

Some brotherhoods meeting for structured self-education, others to just hang out, others to plan or implement creative action – meanwhile all supporting each other in living in not-knowing – all of this, I am proposing, could return us to our collective dignity: the dignity of traveling alone, together, and for the benefit of all.

I don't have the slightest intention of trying to structure this proliferation. In my vision it is centreless and leaderless. I imagine it as a spontaneous, co-creative arising, sustained by individual commitment and initiative.

I am constantly astonished by our creativity, even if it is so often prostituted to ego (I know that's a bit harsh, but hey), so I literally mean it when I say I cannot imagine the creative process that a viral proliferation of this nature would instigate. I cannot imagine what would happen on this planet if as men we united our creativity in service of freedom, power and love in service of the Earth.

About this Book

This book visits and revisits its central theme of ‘staying in our own experience’, or ‘living in the unknown’, looking at it from various angles and revealing (I hope) that it is not some random, flimsy, new age proposition, but that it stands on solid, intelligent, philosophical and sociological ground.

In a collage of prose and prose-poetry – sometimes more rationally, sometimes more emotionally, sometimes more existentially – I will be looking at its epistemological, theological, philosophical and psychological foundations, as well as its implications for gender theory, cultural evolution and politics.

I am not an academic, and nor do you need to be one to come on this grand tour with me. My intention is to impart confidence, to inspire, and to show that ‘staying in our own experience’ is not just one among many worthy candidates as a focus for a new men’s movement, but that it is the natural, emergent, kickass choice for an ecovolutionary metafocus!

In the later sections of this book I turn my attention to gender, sexuality and relationships, and to how living in not-knowing could pave a way through today’s post-monogamous landscape.

We cannot live our whole lives alone. In the film *Castaway* I found it fascinating just how heart wrenchingly real Tom Hank’s love for Wilson (the volleyball) was – how primal the need to love and be loved.

At the same time, living in not-knowing takes us to our aloneness. We realise that all we have is our own experience, ever. And that we are alone experiencing our experience. Nobody else is experiencing it with us – not as we are experiencing it.

Another word for alone is unique. I am alone. I am unique. I know this would be corroborated by fingerprints and so on, but I mean it in a more experiential sense, as a felt-sense of one’s own uniqueness – a sense that somehow resonates with one’s aloneness.

In sociological terms we could say that once aware of ourselves as unique individuals, we become aware that we ourselves are the basic building blocks of society. And in the freedom of our not-knowing, each in his unique authority – having reclaimed our right to sexual (as well as emotional, intellectual, etc.) self-expression – we realise we are responsible for who we live with and how we choose to live together. There is no absolute norm. We realise it’s up to us who we want to be our Wilsons! :) In this way, living in not-knowing also leads to the reshaping of society.

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Perhaps the most fundamental way in which living in not-knowing leads to social reformation is that it unfolds as a particular way of relating. One way of putting it would be that it's about being interested in one's own experience of being with another, rather than being dazzled by the other, or the shared situation. This leads, in its fullness, to both people remaining a hundred per cent interested in themselves, while at the same time not resisting in any way the impact of the other. It is, of course, a delight to meet all sorts of people in this way! This way of relating, that I call 'honest relating', takes us beyond the couples culture, beyond the currently fragmenting monogamous ideal, into the shared search for new social structures.

In the end notes on Self-Education I summarise the basic 'maps' that I use to navigate experience – to navigate the unknown. Two of the main maps I find helpful are The Four Modes of Experience and The Contraction/Expansion Axis. The Four Modes of Experience map is a division of our experiencing into four modes – the existential, the rational, the emotional, and the physical. I don't think they are 'the' modes. They are not even a hypothesis (that reality 'has' four modes). They are just an aid to observation of our experience. In reality, I feel they (and perhaps endless other modes) are all constantly interweaving. But I feel that dividing experience up into these four modes is extremely helpful for tracking our experience and for understanding how we experience, and how we don't.

On top of this map of the four modes I then place a second aid – the idea of contraction and expansion. They combine to give us a more 3D map of our experiencing: not only do we fluctuate between, say, more rational and emotional modes of experience, but our thinking and feeling are also happening at different diametres of expansion: sometimes we feel held-in, resentful, closed, and sometimes we feel delight, we are open and available.

For example, in the physical mode the extremes of this would be a tight-muscled, stiff body in pulled-back, thin-eyed, mistrusting resistance to everyone and everything, while – at the other extreme – feeling one's body to be scrumptiously melted, like a milk-drunk baby upon its mother's bosom, with that mother being all of life.

In the same end note, I suggest various activities to develop strong staying-in-our-own-experience muscles, to open up the different modes (to become available to fuller experience), to become more centred in each mode (to not be so constricted by contraction), and to be able to relate to others honouring both our own experience and theirs.

I am not attached to any of these maps or suggestions – as if they were chiselled in holy stone. I invite you to use them as you wish, refine them, evolve them, or discard them, if need be.

Living It, Individually

For me, viral implies immediacy; even urgency. But, simultaneously, my vision is of a multi-generational educational endeavour; of us getting as far as we can, our sons going further, their sons... All of us educating ourselves in honesty, uniqueness, brotherhood, purpose... Another 'definition' of purpose would be: the expression of our uniqueness in service of life. By 'brotherhood' I mean the loving resonance that arises automatically between points of honesty. And by 'honesty' I mean existential honesty, honesty-to-self. I don't mean moral honesty – it would be presumptuous of me, to say the least – as well as rather unworldly – to suggest 'we all need to tell everyone everything'. No – I mean admitting to ourselves what we know and don't know, how we judge, what we sense, how we feel, what we intuit, and how we behave – whether or not the sum total of all this is or isn't the person we might wish to be.

Practically, this means each man opening to his moment-to-moment experience – each of us the experiencer of his experience, while remaining open to others, themselves the experiencers of their experience – with nobody on Earth either better or worse (uniques are incomparable), and, because our experience is all we have (ever have had, and perhaps ever will have) – staying in it!

This requires dedication. Perhaps you're already dedicated, perhaps you've been half-hearted, perhaps you're just beginning to turn towards yourself. Wherever each of us is, the self-management of our flow through the various modes of our experience is never-ending. Through the lens of honesty I admit, for example, that I have become obsessed with another's experience – a puppet, enlivened by their approvals and thrown to the floor by their judgements. I realise I have prioritised their experience of me over my experience of myself. I shift my focus back to looking out from my own eyes.

Slowly, slowly I come to live more and more consistently as the experiencer, and to meet in love, experiencer to experiencer, with my brothers and sisters. I am the brother of everyone. On nobody's side (not partisan). On everybody's side (a well-wisher of everyone). I give myself permission to experience it all – from the black and white, grey life promoted both by consumer obedience and religious obedience, to the wonder of the unknown. I let myself retreat, and I let myself advance. Sometimes I tend inwards, sometimes I come out and offer my talents and skills for the welfare of all.

Rather than squandering our lifetimes in efforts to control, impress or please others (who themselves are squandering their own lifetimes), and wasting our time serving implanted mass-cultural values (certain they're our own), let's co-create a global energy field to sustain us as men in being ourselves. Oscar Wilde quipped "be yourself, everyone else is already taken!" Indeed. But it is more complex than

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that. Until we fall in honesty back to ourselves, we believe we are who our culture has told us we are – and that is a very limited and lopsided self-image! We are being ourselves, we say, as we ‘voluntarily’ slave away our years in conformity to, and in service of, consumerist and/or religious mindsets that are not only superficial and disassociated from the timeless magic of the moment, but which keep the human race locked in fear, division and self-destruction. Be ourselves, yes. But what does that mean?

Feminism blasted macho male identity. A century-or-so later, can we respond unexpectedly – not in honour of woman whom we have dishonoured, but in honour of ourselves? Can we meet woman as she re-gathers her self-worth with our own? Can we honour her not from apology, but from dignity?

And how shall we act, and how shall we speak, as we guide our sons, grandsons and great-grandsons in their quests to discover what it is to be a man?

The unity of such a proliferation of brotherhoods of men of gentle dignity could reform the social, commercial, political, religious and military institutions that, as we speak, grip our balls and keep us out of ourselves – hypnotised by porn and wages and football and messiahs... while shamelessly transforming this mystic planet into a factory backyard. Such a brotherhood could work within and without these institutions to shape a new, unprecedented, post-patriarchal, post-feminist world culture. That would take real balls.

It takes balls to really love.

We need a unifying vision. But it must be one of utter equality, and absolutely no bullshit.