Epilogue

A year has passed since the Chaffinch flew into this text. Although the Chaffinch and the summerhouse now seem distant – the entire thesis and many life changes lie between then and now – those months were a medicine, a salve which I have kept with me as I traveled on (REM, 16.06.13). I am on a train again, traveling from my recent home in Berlin back to my childhood home in Holstebro. We zoom through bright yellow rape fields, pine tree plantations, desolate industrial landscapes and small German towns with their unruly allotments, red brick houses and parking lots. I like trains. They offer a time *in between*, journeying hours that are not structured by the normal rhythms and schemes of the everyday and which allow the mind to wander in backside views of the places we pass through. Crossing the river Eider on the Rensburger Hochbrücke, I get a magnificent view of the surrounding suburban landscape (see Figure Ep. 1). Windy streets and open green spaces are dotted with trees and people which seem almost motionless from my window. Sitting here, squinting my eyes against the afternoon sunlight, I think of the journey with Dark Mountain. Or is it *to* Dark Mountain? Or *across*? It appears to me that the first metaphors I associated with my inquiry into what Dark Mountain is and means – *finding home*, *settling* and *becoming rooted* (O-D, 12.01.12; O-D, 08.02.12) – all took as their premise that I was already away or uprooted. But in the last months the possibility of becoming rooted *in the journey* has revealed itself. And Dark Mountain is, after all, not a place to live one's entire life but a viewpoint or a place of transformation where the boundaries that define the rest of life can be challenged and expanded. Rather than a home, I found a community of fellow journeyers, people who are experimenting with ways of living which can cope with the disappearance of the certainties and expectations of progress.

My journey began with a search for ways of coming to terms with the great sadness of seeing the social and ecological structures that support life as I know it disintegrate and perhaps fail altogether. This prospect undermined everything I had come to take for granted as a child growing up in the 80ies and 90ies. It is – with a term that my friend Tony Dias uses – an *enormity* (Dias 10.01.09): a circumstance which appears so horrific as to incapacitate or paralyse basic aspects of everyday life. As I began to speak with other mountaineers about this, I found not only support in dealing with this rupture of the future but also guidance in building my own practices to help me thrive. "We don't want just to survive, we want also to flourish", as Andrew Taggart put it in one of our conversations (AT P-I, 31.03.21). And the many conversations, inquiries and collaborations I involved

Figure Ep.1: Rensburger Hochbrücke.

myself in became part of my personal practice. My position as a researcher allowed me to cultivate a practice, develop my perceptual skills and work with the ideas presented in this thesis in a fairly consistent and continual manner. While my engagement with Dark Mountain has in this way been unique, there are many parallels between my experience doing this research and those of other mountaineers. At its very broadest this can be described as a process of breaking out of a feeling of isolation and finding community or a place to retrieve a sense of unity within the lifeworld. This is a shift which locates community in the ongoing stream of life itself and which is expressed as a radical shift in the kind of relations one has with the natural world. A re-integration.

Journeying with Dark Mountain has shown me that the shift towards re-imagining and embodying a different relationship with the world requires that many of the rationales which structure modern life are left behind. That changing worldview involves a deeper engagement with the beliefs, habits and assumptions that organise how one experiences the world. And that there are no blueprints or big solutions. This condition has been part of my own struggle in doing this research both because I have been encouraged to look for solutions as an academic and because it has been difficult to overcome my deep-rooted urge put right to wrong and try to fix my great sadness. But grief cannot be fixed like pollution cannot be washed away with dispersants. Accepting what feels like inadequacy and letting go of the hope that the enormity can be reversed has by far been the hardest part of my journey. Surrendering some of my deeply held convictions has been disagreeable and challenged my identity. Nonetheless, the great discovery for me has been the understanding that the feeling of isolation and fragmentation that follows

in the slipstream of the enormity is the result of a worldview which denies the inherent 'relationality' of the world. Although I first sensed this years ago, I believe this is a truth which will keep deepening long into the future as it is a remedy for a lot of the unintended consequences we tend to think of as 'externalities' – whether they are social, psychological or ecological.

When our relations with each other, the places we live and the wider natural world are obscured, frayed or ripped we lose not just a connection to the world but a small part of ourselves. Indigenous research paradigms hold that a researcher is answerable to all her relations (cf. Wilson, 2008) and one could restate this to say that a person *is* all her relations. When relationality is broken we become less than what we were before. This has become clear to me especially through my sister Naja's research and our conversations about our identity as mixed-race Greenlandic-Danes. I was joined by her from time to time last year in the summerhouse when she was writing her Masters thesis on decolonising Inuit politics and identity in Greenland. She writes about the internal dissension that arises when a part of one's identity becomes isolated and framed as conflicting with the rest of one's person: "[t]he experiences within mixed-race lives articulate the destruction when our inherent "relationality" as living beings is suppressed" (Graugaard, 2013, p. 20). It is interesting that she has found many parallels to what I have described as *threshold* or *liminal* states in her process of resolving this fragmentation. Letting go of certain ideas about oneself can seem like 'dissolving into nothingness' but, she finds, "we *become more of who we are* when we, upon dissolving, embrace our relations as a part of the *becoming* our expansive selves, our lineage [...] and our embodied memory" (ibid., p. 20, original emphasis).

This possibility of becoming more of who we are seems to me to be a key to many of the problematics related to the sustainability challenge. For me, it has resolved a personal question which I set out with at the beginning of this research: how can I discontinue the relationships that have produced the enormity and where can I help build new kinds of relations? Many of the conflicts I have experienced surrounding this question faded away once I accepted that they were based on a false division between myself and the world: I do not need to act on behalf of "nature" or to "save the world" when I am answerable to all my relations. We constitute each other and in this way they are part of me as I am of them. While this may seem to make sustainability science and research less ambitious or heroic, it also makes sustainability less abstract and immediately relevant to local contexts because it implies something different depending on the personal and collective circumstances in which one inquires about what it means. As a question of meaning, it will be necessary to inquire about what a true or right relationship means and Dark Mountain has a lot to offer for this kind of inquiry because many participants are actively searching for and creating a new vocabulary which can hold the personal and collective quandaries that arise from living in an age characterised by overconsumption, climate change and species extinction.

The inquiries I have become involved with in my conversations with mountaineers

have generated a compass of evolving perceptual and conceptual tools with which to navigate my own lifeworld[1]. Some have proved invaluable while others in hindsight were less relevant. I think such creative mapping or indexing is invaluable for making sustainability an expression of right relationship – it is necessary for grounding the processes of re-imagining and embodying in the personal lifeworld. It is also required for 'doing the hard work' and avoiding simply generating abstract recipes which can be evangelised to other seekers. These vocabularies "must be the kind sketched in the dust with a stick, washed away by the next rain" (Kingsnorth and Hine MA, p. 16) as the Dark Mountain manifesto puts it. Held lightly and not pressed for answers, the poetics of *inhumanism* presents a space for the imagination where the otherness of all our relations can emerge and re-orient the settings, plots and vocabularies that guide the course of life.

The familiar open, flat landscape of Jutland is now rushing past outside my train window (see Figure Ep. 2). Spring has come later here and the green colours are lighter, almost translucent. I left this country when I was seventeen. Back then I dismissed this domesticated landscape as uninteresting and empty. It took me many years of coming back here to appreciate the finer shades it contains and I am still learning. Much of it is an agricultural wasteland, the ancient forest that once covered this peninsula all but gone. It was cleared for husbandry and used to build the fleet that made Denmark a major seafaring power until it was sacked and stolen by the English in 1807 during the Napoleonic wars. Generations of peasants worked to make the poor soils of Jutland yield, an effort which eventually paid off with the introduction of petrochemicals that made it profitable to grow the wheat, barley, rape and maize that now dominate the landscape. With each generation a small part of the past was forgotten as the changes they lived through became the new normal. It is easy to ignore that the landscape I grew up with is – ecologically speaking – an impoverished version of the past. I sometimes wonder what this country will look like in a hundred years. What will someone like me then see journeying across this land? Will there be trains to journey on? It is a thought which takes me on a tour of some of the things that trains imply: the industrial society that produces them, the places and people they connect, the ways of life they express and the modes of time they embody. Trains are one of the hallmark symbols of modernity. They represent the domestication and harnessing of the wild landscape, the co-ordination and subjugation of local time differences and the drive towards speed and efficiency which characterise industrialised societies. And still I would prefer not to be without them now that they are here.

Over the centuries-long formation of the meta-narrative of time and history as progress, linear storylines have become embedded in our institutions, our technologies and our ways of thinking. In the same way the invention of the steam engine, clockworks and linear schemata ushered in a revolution in means of production and the material world, it altered profoundly the way we think about and see the world. And it gradually led to an extreme

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[1] "Building new perceptual and conceptual tools" became a tagline for the *time culture* project (http://time-culture.net) while "giving voice to clarity in community" describes the collective inquiry *concentric dialogue* (http://concentricdialogue.wordpress.com/).

Figure Ep. 2: Jutlandic landscape.

de-valuing of the past in favour of the future and the forgetting of our connection with all our relations. It is a mistake to treat 'environmental problems' as primarily a material reality: they have deeper roots inside a worldview that leads us to reproduce the social patterns and material circumstances that created pollution, waste and other externalities in the first place. While shifting worldview requires patience and practice to overcome the acculturated blindness to the otherness of the world, my feeling is that in the long run this will be more effective than technical solutions in creating a desirable future. But changing worldview cannot happen in a flash, it is the slow process of working from the margins towards the centre. It is our longest journey and it begins by creating our own maps and tools with whatever we have at hand. I recall Dougie's tongue-in-cheek question from last year when I was living in the summerhouse: *what was it you did there?* What will people say of this time and of Dark Mountain fifty years from now?

Here, approaching my destination, I remember hearing a choir of owls, foxes, whales, howler monkeys and (stinking) kippers in the forest (REM, 10.09.13) – see Figure Ep. 3 – and it appears to me that we have broken open our stories, our ways of telling and interpreting. As a movement in the social imaginary – rather than of people trying to 'change the world' – Dark Mountain has opened a door for wildness and untamed otherness to slip back into the lifeworld, offered a way of being which makes it possible to flourish even in the shadow of the enormity. It allows us to embrace and align with our wider relations without requiring us to blow up civilisation in a battle that can never be won. By retreating to the mountains and reorienting our compass it has become possible to dispel the pull on attention which the enormity exercises on us, to decide to focus our awareness on the

dark spots on our maps, on the absences wherefrom new things can grow. Journeying in this range shows that 'civilisation' is only one name among many for a pervasive logic which divides the world without anchoring complexity in the greater movement of which we all are part. At the edge, hearing the faint voices beneath the clamour of engines, it is possible to perceive the soundscape of a world which does not need us to do anything but to listen and to live our questions now.

Figure Ep.3: Depiction of dream of the genii loci of the Hampshire Downs.