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STATE OF THE WORLD

Transforming Cultures

From Consumerism to Sustainability

**THE
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2010

STATE OF THE WORLD

Transforming Cultures

From Consumerism to Sustainability

Advance Praise for *State of the World 2010*:

“If we continue to think of ourselves mostly as consumers, it’s going to be very hard to bring our environmental troubles under control. But it’s also going to be very hard to live the rounded and joyful lives that could be ours. This is a subversive volume in all the best ways!”

—**Bill McKibben, author of *Deep Economy and The End of Nature***

“Worldwatch has taken on an ambitious agenda in this volume. No generation in history has achieved a cultural transformation as sweeping as the one called for here...it is hard not to be impressed with the book’s boldness.”

—**Muhammad Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank**

“This year’s *State of the World* report is a cultural mindbomb exploding with devastating force. I hope it wakes a few people up.”

—**Kalle Lasn, Editor of *Adbusters* magazine**

Like a tsunami, consumerism has engulfed human cultures and Earth’s ecosystems. Left unaddressed, we risk global disaster. But if we channel this wave, intentionally transforming our cultures to center on sustainability, we will not only prevent catastrophe but may usher in an era of sustainability—one that allows all people to thrive while protecting, even restoring, Earth.

In this year’s *State of the World* report, 50+ renowned researchers and practitioners describe how we can harness the world’s leading institutions—education, the media, business, governments, traditions, and social movements—to reorient cultures toward sustainability.



full image



extreme close-up

Several million pounds of plastic enter the world’s oceans every hour, portrayed on the cover by the 2.4 million bits of plastic that make up *Gyre*, Chris Jordan’s 8- by 11-foot reincarnation of the famous 1820s woodblock print, *The Great Wave Off Kanagawa*, by the Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai.

For discussion questions, additional essays, video presentations, and event calendar, visit blogs.worldwatch.org/transformingcultures.

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Music: Using Education and Entertainment to Motivate Change

Amy Han

Music has traditionally been cherished in society for its artistic beauty and its raw expression of life and spirit, and it continues to be enjoyed today. The songs of birds inspired Mozart and other great classical composers to recreate the elegance of nature's sounds, while folk music, passed down through generations, has served as an influential base for many other forms of storied expression—from country music and gospel to blues and jazz.¹

Along with its emotional and creative elements, music has played a critical role in encouraging social engagement. Historically, the power of music to communicate and create connections has helped unite people around a common identity or purpose. In the Soviet Union, traditional Kazak folk songs celebrating birth, death, and other life stages were adapted into modern operas and literature supporting worker ideals, sovereignty, and nationalism. In the United States, the traditional hymn “I’ll Overcome Someday” was taken up by the black Tobacco Worker’s Union in the 1940s as the collective labor song “We Will Overcome”—and in the 1960s was adapted as the civil rights classic “We Shall Overcome.”²

Music continues to be used as a way to connect with people’s values, heritage, and cultural preferences in order to encourage behavioral change. For example, songs from Marvin Gaye’s 1971 album “What’s Going On”—which catalogued the Vietnam War, pollution, and economic hardship—are being revisited today in light of the current recession, climate change, and environmental decline. In August 2009, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson invoked Gaye’s songs “Inner City Blues” and “Mercy, Mercy Me (the Ecology)” in a speech announcing a Greening the Block initiative to empower climate-vulnerable and economically disadvantaged communities in the United States.³

In the current age of digital media, opportunities for remembering, sharing, and using music for mobilization are expanding. Technology has not only preserved music for future generations, it has facilitated people’s access to it, enabling independent artists to post their work on the Internet, fans to share files and lyrics, and virtual communities to come together through social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Although music has morphed, mixed, diversified, and

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globalized over the centuries, it remains a potent force in society, with a significant part to play in inspiring sustainability through education as well as entertainment. (See Boxes 20 and 21 for the similar roles played by other artists and by movies.)⁴

Music as Education

From conception, humans are exposed to music. Babies in the womb are lulled by the rhythmic beats of the heart, and young children are introduced to music through song and

Box 20. Lights, Camera, Ecological Consciousness

Cinema is a powerful visual and auditory medium that contributes to people's understanding of the world and their role in it. In its most direct form, a documentary film can raise awareness of an issue and generate public dialogue. In recent years, the documentary as a genre has seen a resurgence, and many have been related to sustainability—including *March of the Penguins* (2005), *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), *the 11th Hour* (2007), *Blue Gold* (2008), and *Home* (2009).

Home is an effort to illustrate humanity's impact on the planet using all aerial footage in a feature-length documentary. Within a few weeks of its release on 5 June 2009, which was World Environment Day, some 200 million people had watched it in more than 120 countries, and it was dubbed or subtitled in 33 languages. Despite this success and the success of other eco-documentaries, documentaries tend to attract audiences already sympathetic to the issues, thereby limiting their transformative potential.

Fictional movies, which for many people are easier to watch, are uniquely positioned to stimulate cultural change for sustainability. They can depict challenging future scenarios, such as *WALL-E* (2008) and *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), and give voice to the struggles faced by communities, such as *Erin Brockovich* (2000). As they are less overtly educational or political, they appeal to audiences on a human level by personifying what typically are perceived as abstract global-scale ecological issues. Although dramatic films do not directly prescribe actions as doc-

umentaries often do, they have the power to normalize sustainable lifestyle choices through the actions of characters on-screen and sometimes through the actions of celebrities off-screen.

While a few notable sustainability-themed documentaries have been able to transcend a niche audience and reach across the world—in the case of *An Inconvenient Truth* grossing \$50 million in the process—most eco-conscious filmmakers will have to use creative tools to ensure broad distribution of their films. *Home* could never have reached the audience it did had it needed to make a profit; the PPR group provided a generous grant to enable a broad distribution, and the film can be watched for free at www.youtube.com/homeproject. Other filmmakers are using innovative tools like crowd funding, in which many people invest small amounts to finance a film's production and distribution. This allowed *The Age of Stupid* (2009) to maintain creative control over the film and its distribution and to be launched in over 60 countries.

Both fictional and nonfictional cinema can play an important role in drawing attention to environmental topics and in creating space for sustainability values. If people are to come together to solve the sustainability crisis, they must make and demand films that not only inform audiences and generate public dialogue but also exemplify and project sustainable lifestyles.

—Yann Arthus-Bertrand
Director, *Home*
Source: See endnote 4.

Box 21. Art for Earth's Sake

The dominant thinking in western society is that of separation: the separation of mind from matter, science from spirituality, art from daily life. From the Renaissance onwards, artists worked as individuals, in their studios, separating themselves from their fellow craftsmen and women. They practiced art as a way of self-expression. Their art produced mostly items of luxury and status. Thus art became disconnected from the natural world, from living communities, and from life itself. For centuries, art was practiced only by those with special talent, purchased only by those with great wealth, and seen mostly in churches, museums, and art galleries.

But the exclusive practice of art is now being challenged by people with ecological and social sensibility. Joseph Beuys, one of the founders of the Green Party in Germany, said “Everyone is an artist” and began the process of reclaiming art from galleries and museums. He began to reconnect art with ecology, politics, and everyday life. Similarly, Sri Lankan art historian A. K. Coomaraswamy said “the artist is not a special kind of man, but every man is a special kind of artist.” When artists let go of their egos and their wish for celebrity status and personal glory, then art becomes truly boundless.

Art is a force for transformation and self-realization. As a potter transforms an ordinary lump of clay into a work of beauty, that clay transforms the potter into an artist and craftsperson of his or her community. This transformative power of the arts gives us a sense of belonging and unlocks the doors of optimism and hope.

Unfortunately, at the moment a scenario of environmental doom and gloom is expounded by experts and activists alike. Book after book tells us that we have passed the tipping point and have reached the point of no return. Artists are some of the few peo-

ple who sow the seeds of hope and empower the disempowered.

Of course no one should doubt the severity of the climate crisis. Our present way of life, so dependent on the use of fossil fuels, is hanging on a cliff edge. If we go any further we will fall into the abyss. Yet artists go beyond fear, beyond doom and gloom. Their work is rooted in love of life. The potential of growth and progress in the sphere of arts and crafts is immense, and this can occur with little damage to planet Earth.

To meet the challenge of this environmental, social, and spiritual crisis, we need to change from being consumers to being artists. As the British architect, textile designer, and artist William Morris pointed out long ago, arts and crafts ignite our imagination, stimulate our creativity, and bring us a sense of fulfillment. Poetry, painting, pottery, music, meditation, gardening, sculpting, and many other forms of arts and crafts can produce beautiful objects to use—objects that do not require the use of fossil fuels.

The climate crisis and the economic downturn offer us an opportunity to change our direction from gross to subtle, from glamorous to gracious, from hedonism to healing, from the conquest of Earth to the conservation of nature, from quantities of possessions to quality of life. This will transform us from being mere consumers of goods and services to genuine makers of arts and artifacts. In the present state of the world and under the influence of unsustainable consumerism, human beings are reduced to the condition of passive recipients of factory-made objects. This must change. We need to move toward a state where humans are active participants in the process of life and in the making of things that are beautiful, useful, and durable.

—*Satish Kumar*, *Resurgence*

Source: See endnote 4.

dance. Music and rhythm aid in intellectual development, as research has pointed to the value of music in developing cognitive skills as well as in helping individuals develop a sense of organization, self-awareness, and self-confidence. This educational contribution has been taken so seriously that music has been regarded as its own language and is even believed by some to have a powerful effect on a person's moral character.⁵

Increasingly, children's music contains not only civil themes such as friendship and sharing but also educational messages about the environment and sustainability. For 15 years, the Japanese Ministry of the Environment has supported the television program "Eco-gainger," which features a group of environmental superheroes who serve as role models for children around the country, and strengthened this message with a catchy theme song. In North America, the popular musician Raffi has entertained young people for decades with songs about the environment and respect for the natural world. Raffi positions his music as a call to action and challenges "Beluga grads," or people who grew up listening to his songs such as "Baby Beluga" in the 1970s and 1980s, to both embrace sustainability in their own lives and pass these teachings on to their own children.⁶

The appeal and relevance of music as a tool for environmental education is not limited to youth. Irthlingz, an art-based educational group, uses music to inform both children and adults about issues that affect the planet. In 2007, students performed the organization's musical revue "Penguins on Thin Ice," which includes songs about energy and climate issues, before an audience of civil society leaders at the United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development meetings in New York.⁷

In Mozambique, musical and theater traditions are proving integral to larger efforts to address the challenges of rural sanitation,

waterborne disease, and environmental health. The band Massukos tours the country and combines traditional rhythms with modern lyrics to teach people about handwashing and sanitation, at times drawing an entire village to hear their messages. Often accompanying the band are practical projects that promote community sanitation, sustainable agriculture, and reforestation, and the government has set up related forums to teach about hygiene and environment-related illness. Massukos has signed with a British recording label, and lead band member Feliciano dos Santos has won the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize. The band is now expanding its audience and musical messages through international performances.⁸

Festivals, Activism, and Entertainment

Music is also being used to educate audiences through less explicit means. In the 1980s, as popular music culture continued its global spread, musicians began bringing attention to wider humanitarian causes by organizing large-scale, widely publicized entertainment events. In 1985, Irish singer Bob Geldof and Scottish singer Midge Ure organized "Live Aid," the world's first multi-venue super-concert, which was broadcast live to some 400 million viewers in 60 countries. That same year "We Are the World," written by pop icons Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie, united 45 recording artists from around the world for famine relief, helping to create the charity USA (United Support of Artists) for Africa. As of mid-2009, an estimated 20 million copies of the song had been sold, raising more than \$63 million for humanitarian aid.⁹

More recently, the Internet has enabled such events to have an even broader international reach. In 2007, the concert extravaganza Live Earth, started by producer Kevin Wall and former U.S. Vice President Al Gore,

was broadcast for 24 hours across seven continents, featuring an all-star lineup of artists that included Madonna, The Police, and Snoop Dogg. Live Earth has since become a “multi-year campaign to drive individuals, corporations and governments to take action to solve the climate crisis.” The event is now partnering with other climate protection groups, such as the Together campaign, which offers tips and consumer products online to help people lower their ecological footprints.¹⁰

Some artists have stepped beyond their musical boundaries to become well-known activists in their own right. U2’s lead singer, Bono, known for his efforts to eradicate global poverty, has co-founded several organizing movements and engaged in extensive discussions with public and private leaders ranging from former President Bill Clinton to Pope John Paul II. Bono is also a spokesperson for the ONE campaign, founded in 2004 to rally grassroots support for international aid to fight extreme poverty and preventable disease.¹¹

Concerts have become increasingly important opportunities for musicians and event organizers to demonstrate their commitment to environmental action. Large tours in particular can be resource-consumptive and responsible for high levels of greenhouse gas emissions. According to one estimate, the carbon footprint generated by U2’s 44 international concerts in 2009 is equivalent to the waste produced by 6,500 Britons over a year or “the carbon created by the four band members traveling the 34.125 million miles from Earth to Mars in a passenger plane.”¹²

To minimize their carbon footprint, many music venues now use renewable energy, such as solar power or biodiesel, to run their events, or they purchase third-party certified carbon offsets to ensure that the activities are “carbon-neutral.” Roskilde Festival, which calls itself as the largest North European culture and music festival, has a Green Footsteps campaign that in 2009 completely ran the festival on wind

energy and changed 90 percent of the lighting equipment to low-energy LED equipment. Glastonbury Festival is encouraging public transport use and the planting of tree hedges (over 10,000 since 2000), while incorporating the use of solar power in its festivals. It also plans to use tractors capable of running on 100 percent biodiesel, all steps taken to lower its own carbon emissions.¹³

Waste reduction is another key feature among event organizers who are encouraging fans to tread more lightly. In accordance with its “Love the Farm, Leave No Trace” principles, the Glastonbury festival asks attendees to bring fewer items that would normally become waste, has replaced plastic bags with 100 percent cotton bags, has required wood cutlery and compostable cups and plates at stalls, and in 2008 recycled just over 863 tons of waste. Smaller venues have taken similar greening actions. Seattle’s annual music and arts festival, Bumbershoot, bans vendors from using Styrofoam and also reuses the previous year’s signage. The High Sierra Music Festival’s “Red, White, Blue and Green Campsite Challenge” makes the “Leave No Trace” outdoor ethic into a competition, rewarding participants with the least amount of impact with prizes.¹⁴

At the Ojai Music Festival in Ventura County, California, classical music fans are encouraged to help preserve the natural beauty of the area with a free bike valet area for alternative transport, water stations to refill reusable containers, and Zero Waste Stations to help sort trash. And the U.S.-based Dave Matthews Band, through its So Much to Save program, encourages fans to take actions to reduce their ecological footprint whether at the concert or outside of it, such as recycling or conducting energy efficiency audits in exchange for free downloaded music. During the first two months of the 2009 campaign, participants recycled an estimated 19 tons of waste, diverting more than

84 cubic meters of waste from landfills.¹⁵

Musicians continue to carry on the tradition of delivering important messages through their lyrics. Joni Mitchell's 1970 song "Big Yellow Taxi," which laments the conversion of the natural world to a "paved paradise," has been covered by multiple artists, including Bob Dylan and more recently the Counting Crows. Tracy Chapman's 1995 song "Rape of the World," which observes that Mother Earth "has been clear-cut, she has been dumped on, she has been poisoned and beaten up," is another example of an artist lending her creative talent to raise awareness about environmental devastation. Some musicians point specifically to the importance of activism: in their songs "Up to Us" and "We Must Act Now," the California "eco-rock" band the Depavers encourages listeners to stand up for their beliefs.¹⁶

Some artists are especially concerned about practicing what they preach. Blues musician Bonnie Raitt promoted her "Silver Lining" album with a Green Highway Festival and "an eco-partnership promoting BioDiesel fuel, the environment, and alternative energy solutions at shows and benefits along the way." Along with other artists, she founded Musicians United for Safe Energy, formed after a nuclear accident at Three Mile Island in March 1979; the group organized No Nukes concerts at Madison Square Garden in New York that same year. Her current tour allows concertgoers with VIP packages to choose a cause they want to support—energy, environmental protection, and human rights, among others.¹⁷

Country singer Willie Nelson also expressed his mood and hope for a "Peaceful Solution" by making a song that protests social injustice available to other artists for replay. Outside of his music, Nelson leads Farm Aid, an organization dedicated to stop-

ping the loss of U.S. family farms and advocating change in current U.S. food and agricultural policy. Willie Nelson has even promoted his version of biodiesel, Bio Willie, to help reduce dependence on foreign oil.¹⁸

Conclusion: Engaging through Education and Entertainment

Beyond the individual efforts of artists, some people are working to constructively engage the music and broader artistic community in support of sustainable change. Organizations such as Tipping Point are holding roundtable conversations, discussions, and debates among creative artists to increase their engagement with the complex issue of climate change and to help catalyze societal shifts in thinking and behavior.¹⁹

The Judith Marcuse Projects, a nonprofit arts company, is using an "EARTH=home" stage production to give voice to youth, create connections between different sectors of society, and reach the broader community through "post-show talk-backs, presentations, workshops, community events, web-based resources, and media activities" on the environment. In addition, its International Centre of Art for Social Change is a collaboration with Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia, to "house learning and dialogue programs, networking events and research projects designed to nurture and support the growing global community of arts for social change."²⁰

While music can be a potent tool for mobilization, its power lies within the people who create, promote, and use it within a meaningful, proactive movement for sustainability. As Together campaign founder Steve Howard has observed, "When the music stops, we must all start to act."²¹

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