

INTRODUCING OUR STORY...

TWO worlds ONE planet

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.

– Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*



Like many cities in the world, Cape Town is two cities. A City of Hope and a City of Despair.

In its suburbs, in the shadow of Table Mountain, life is good. Take a stroll down a leafy lane on a sunny afternoon and you are likely to see laughing, healthy and bright-eyed children coming out of beautiful schools, on their way to sport, extra-mural music lessons or just to spend time playing, as children should. Their parents have well-paid work, go on regular vacations, and have time to enjoy life with family and friends. They eat well and drink clean water every day. The best of times for them. Hopeful times.

In the townships of Cape Town, just a few kilometres away, life is bleak. You cannot take a stroll on your own in many places for fear of being mugged. Playing in the streets is a dangerous past-time as stray bullets from gang warfare regularly kill children and bystanders. The people there live in dusty dormitory settlements or shacks where they face the daily anguish of frequently sick children who seldom eat well, whose schools are barely functional and have little hope that life will improve. The dreams of a good life beyond apartheid have long faded and now they can only hope for another meal, a safe journey home or some kind of temporary job to pay off their growing debts. The worst of times for them. A time of despair.



We have never been freer but we have also never been so divided and unequal.

Hope and despair. Separated only by the M5 highway, the townships and the suburbs are as divided as they ever were. There are some black residents now in the suburbs, government officials, businesspeople and professionals, but no whites have moved to the townships and few have ever visited there. Who would they visit? People in the townships, however, know how those in the suburbs live. Many of them work there, invisible people who patiently go about their tasks of tending the houses and gardens of the rich and caring for their children. Others work in their factories and can well see how their bosses dress and what cars they drive. In the suburbs people look hopefully into the future. In the townships people look resentfully into the suburbs.

Cape Town is a city in the most unequal society on earth. But in many ways it is a mirror for what the whole world is fast becoming. Two worlds on one planet.

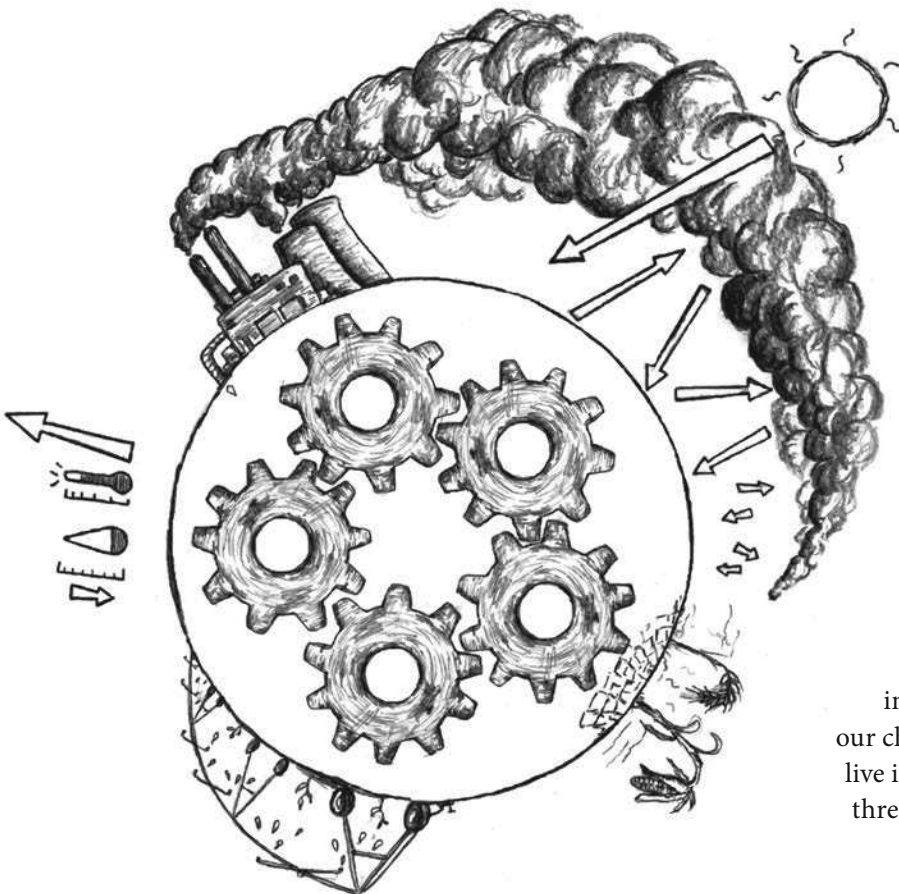
But our planet is divided and paradoxical in many other ways. Huge corporations stand astride the globe, ingeniously organised to invent and deliver dazzling new products to paying customers living in almost any suburb on earth. This while unemployment soars and nations and communities on all continents stagger from one round of debt to another.

More people are now living in free democracies than ever before, but there are more slaves than at any other time in history and whole territories have fallen under the fundamentalist rule of one of the most brutal ideologies of modern times.

And above us all, the richest 1% has amassed 50% of the planet's wealth into their possession.

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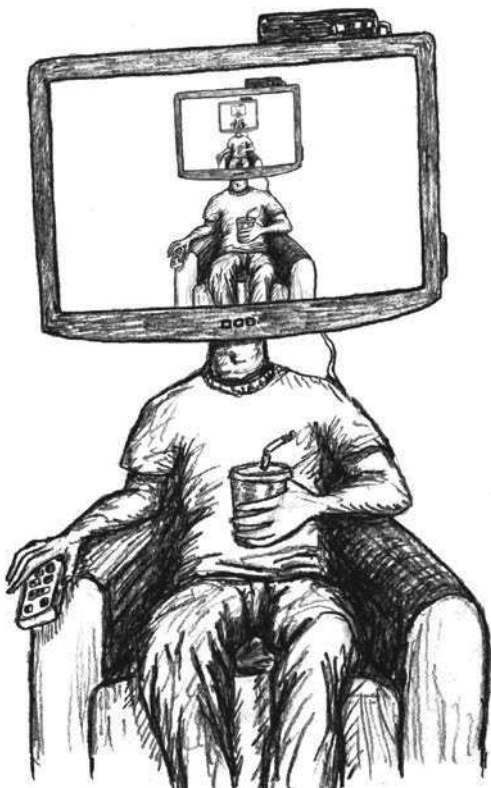
We have developed astonishing technologies, like coal-fired and nuclear power stations, chemical fertilisers, huge dams and irrigation systems, genetically modified seeds and life-saving antibiotics, all of which have enabled us to become independent of the vagaries of nature which we can now manipulate to our advantage and profit. We have "civilised" nature. To do this we must pump more and more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere each year. Yet we know that nature is coming back to bite us, reminding us that all life is interdependent and interconnected. And now the future, of all our children and grand-children, whether they live in the townships or the suburbs, is gravely threatened, as the world gradually heats up to make life unbearable.



Our plant and seed diversity, the very foundation of life on earth, is being stripped from under us by biotech seed companies that have put patents on DNA forcing farmers to rent the seeds that were gifts from our ancestors. New diseases have become rampant, created by resistance to the medicines created by pharmaceutical corporations, forcing us to pay billions to them for the next round of treatments for new diseases caused by their modern medicines.

Yet ecological consciousness has never been so high, and almost everyone agrees that we have no time to lose to save our planet from the calamity of climate change and the loss of life-giving diversity.

Consciousness however is not action, especially when major corporations have all the money to keep things just as they are. Climate-change denial is on the rise, not because the facts can be disputed but because to face the facts is the biggest threat imaginable to corporate profits.



So my mind keeps coming back to the question: what is wrong with us? What is really preventing us from putting out the fire that is threatening to burn down our collective house? I think the answer is far more simple than many have led us to believe: we have not done the things that are necessary to lower emissions because those things fundamentally conflict with deregulated capitalism, the reigning ideology for the entire period we have been struggling to find a way out of this crisis. We are stuck because the actions that would give us the best chance of averting catastrophe – and would benefit the vast majority – are extremely threatening to an elite minority that has a stranglehold over our economy, our political process, and most of our major media outlets.”

– Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*

We have much to distract us from unhappy thoughts. Culturally, we are all becoming the same kind of shiny and new on the outside, imitations of the imitations on the televisions we are glued to. Like our ecological diversity, our cultural diversity is being decimated, as languages and indigenous people disappear, robbed of their lands and cultures and pushed to the margins of cities. Cities of despair.

All the while our souls are withering inside. We have never been so much alike, yet we have never been so polarised, so separate from the best of what we can be.

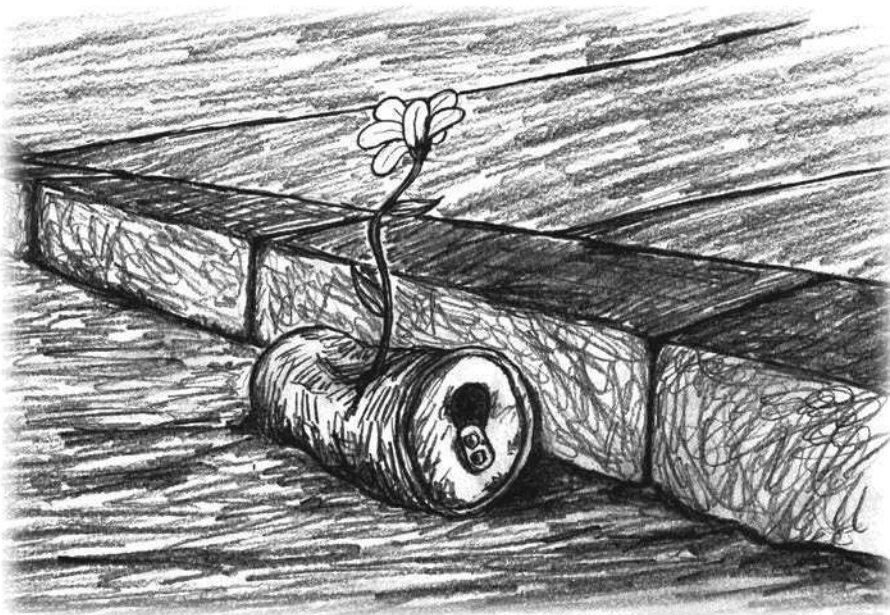
It is as if we have become mad. The world seems to be unravelling.

And yet. And yet. People continue to live, to be generous and loving, creative and courageous and even hopeful, each surviving culture still containing a deep pool of the humanity that connects us all.

This is our world, beautiful and, though terribly ill, still bursting with life and potential. We are not done yet.

But where do we begin? What is the real work?

For many this might seem to be an arrogant question, or terribly naïve. But if the political and economic systems we have constructed to help us make decisions and see to our needs have become useless and corrupt, then where will the stimulus for change come from if not ourselves, from you and I?



'The world is too dangerous to live in – not because of the people who do evil but because of the people who sit and let it happen'.

– Albert Einstein

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Millions of people are already hard at work trying to change things. Every day they dedicate themselves to making life and the planet a better place.

There have been massive protest movements: Occupy, Ghezi Park, Brazil, Arab Spring and the unprecedented service delivery protests in the townships of Cape Town and other South African cities – more than ten thousand a year. Yet most protests have delivered little or nothing, except a hardening of attitudes on both sides. Despite the dramatic headlines, these are just the visible tip of the ice-berg. Protest has a place but only sometimes leads to lasting or beneficial change. And those of us who fight the system often strengthen it, as more taxes are poured into the police, military and intelligence services. We need wiser approaches. Yes, we must oppose the system that hurts us, but change will not dawn until we create something new.

Already people are moving beyond protest to remaking the world in more co-creative ways. Social movements, like Via Campesina and Shack Dwellers International working in rural and urban areas on all continents, and supported by small NGOs and academics, are inventing spaces in which to engage governments in new kinds of co-creative partnerships. These farmer associations and housing federations are drawing in governments to participate in the initiative of citizens, reversing the leadership of social change in historic new ways.

And yes, there are people from the suburbs visiting the townships, offering their professional skills to support local initiatives. They now have someone to visit, someone they know.

Many social change initiatives are isolated and piecemeal, making some difference where they are but having little impact on the deeper causes. Indeed, our attempts to deal with poverty, exclusion or oppression may bring relief but sometimes they also provide an unwitting release valve for the system, or a safety net, even delaying change. Do we fix the system or replace it?

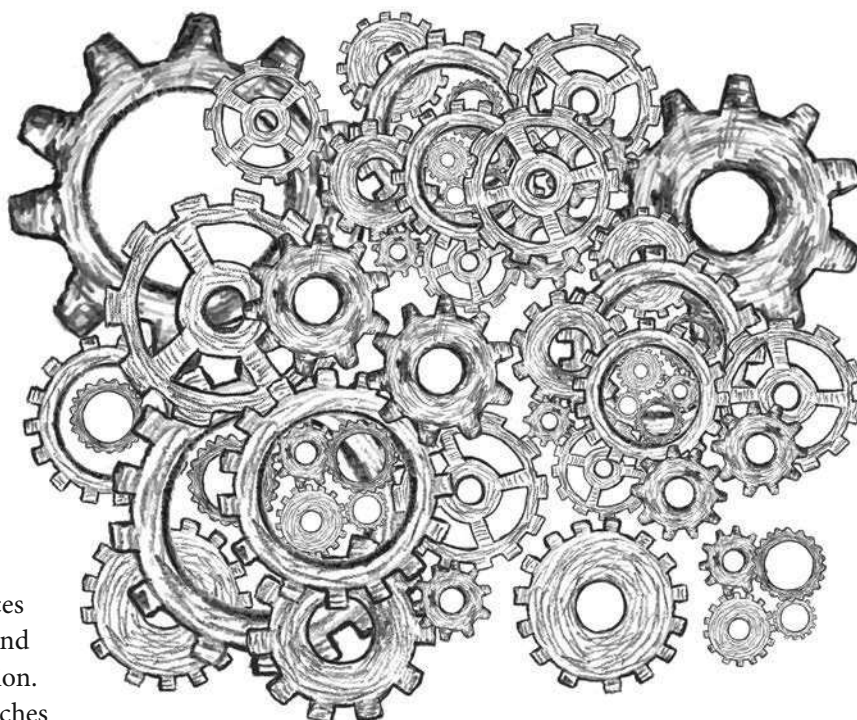
The cycles are complex, the wheels having wheels in wheels. Can we see where things truly turn and where we can do some turning that takes us to a new place? Can we think a bit more about the questions we need to ask?

This Barefoot Guide is not a book of answers, but one of questions, experiences and learnings. “What is the real work of social change?” Inside there are stories of change, of determined and courageous people taking creative initiatives, presented here not as some vain or prideful “best practice model”, but as something to be learned from, to deepen our questions, to be more thoughtful in our practice.

Lasting change must happen at multiple levels. Good policies cannot be implemented in disorganised communities and communities cannot change their lives if they are being thwarted by bad policy. And so we have gathered stories and analyses from change approaches at individual, community, societal and global levels, each level as important as the next and to the next. Change goes in all directions. The future of local community increasingly depends on changes at a global level and likewise global change must be rooted and sustained in authentic community mobilisation and transformation.

This book is a small feast of experiences and ideas, serious and playful, obvious and mysterious. Our own small contribution. You are invited to sample whatever catches your eye, whatever speaks to your circumstances and need.

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There are writings by many people and in many ways. Most of it is the fruit of a week-long “Writershop” facilitated in Johannesburg in November 2013 for over 30 people, from 16 different countries on 5 continents. The Writershop began with people sharing questions, experiences, stories and their personal change journeys. Out of these developed case studies and other pieces which we engaged with in groups, from being individual writers to co-writers.

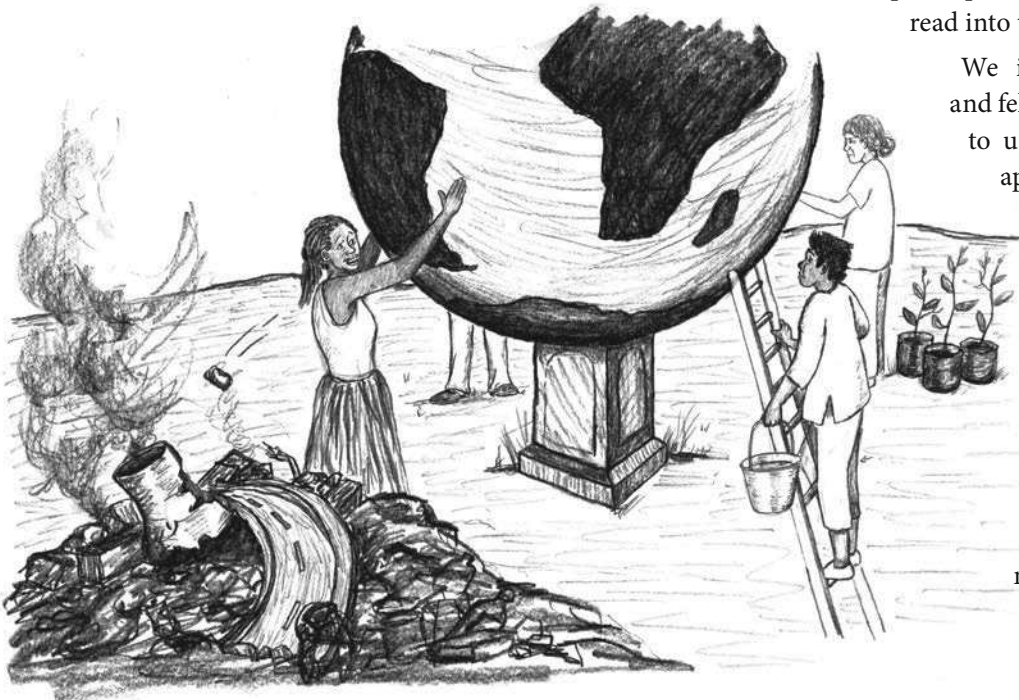


Most participants had never really written a significant piece before and so the Writershop was an opportunity to share some creative writing skills and frameworks, including free-writing, deep listening and questioning, action-learning and surfacing the “inside” or hidden stories. First drafts were developed. After the Writershop people continued to work on their pieces, as part of writing groups, connected by email and Skype.

Other people who could not be at the Writershop submitted pieces for consideration and some have found their way in.

We have a variety of illustrators this time, breaking a few rules of consistent look and layout, but hopefully displaying more of the rich diversity we have access to and from which we draw our creative impulses to meet the diversity out there.

Eventually all the pieces were handed over to the Editorial Team who, with the illustrators and layout people, have brought it to you as finished piece, although in many ways a book is only “finished” when it has been read and hopefully used, as each reader participates in reworking what they read into their own practice.



We invite you, dear readers and fellow practitioners, to write to us and share your stories, approaches and resources through our website and other social media. Most importantly we hope to meet and work with you in many many ways in our collective task as active citizens to reshape the world and the earth into a more humane place for the many generations to come.