

have their costs. George Soros made \$1 billion in 1992 by gaming the Bank of England. Other players made fortunes in 1994 betting against the Mexican peso, and in 1997 and 1998 the same speculative processes nearly collapsed the economies of Russia, Brazil, Thailand, Korea, and Indonesia as first overinvestment then quick withdrawal of capital led to currency crises. In the face of those pressures, Malaysia threw up capital controls and avoided the worst effects (this is a clue), the other countries succumbed and lost badly. Argentina, which went into play in 2002, simply defaulted on its debts, and has recovered rather nicely.

These trade and financial schemes are esoteric and poorly understood by most Americans, who are, I'm sorry to say, relatively illiterate in these realms and disinclined to think that what goes on abroad matters to them. All the more reason why those of us who might want to shed some light on the workings of Empire (since it bears so heavily on the fate of humanity and the planet) should appreciate the work Jackson has done in laying out a clear argument.

Before he gets to his rather daring proposal for a "breakaway strategy," the author presents the elements of a new paradigm, which he calls Gaian. It is, of course, holistic, grounded in natural philosophy, and closely aligns with the ethics permaculture holds central to its work. It should not surprise us to learn that the Gaia Trust, of which Jackson and his wife Hildur were founders, has strongly promoted permaculture education in ecovillage communities around the world, and has drawn on permaculture designers and teachers to create a network for furthering the development of these ideas.

Gaian economics might be recognizable as a flowering of Schumacher's Buddhist economics, emphasizing the local and seeing the essence of development as spiritual at root and respectful of nature's limits. From these precepts Jackson articulates a structure for a new economic and political order. These involve a Gaian Trade Organization, a financial Clearing Union for currency exchanges free of the distorting influence of any one national currency, a Gaian Development Bank to assist low-income countries in the manner that the World Bank was pledged to do but has not, and a series of governing institutions with a strictly limited grant of

authority to uphold ecological and human rights values. Most elements of sovereignty under this plan would remain at the national and regional level.

Jackson does not spend a great deal of time attempting to use the United Nations framework for global governance, though he imagines that the Gaian institutions might interface with and find some centers of value in some of the UN agencies. Rather, he sketches a possible scenario by which perhaps ten or a dozen countries, mostly small, but not all poor, could initiate a Gaian Federation by withdrawing from the WTO, World Bank, and IMF, focusing on trade among themselves, and begin to implement new mechanisms of development, assurance of human rights and restoration and protection of nature. Such a federation, he projects, could become the equivalent of a second-tier economic power within a short time and thus begin to pull influence toward itself. A possible alliance he suggests would draw on one or two major oil producers, a smattering of small African and Asian nations with better than average government and civil society, one or more Nordic and south Pacific industrial democracies, and several of the Bolivarian countries of Latin America, an unlikely grab bag of players, but arguably containing among them the right values, attitudes, and resources for a restart of the world order.

The strongest argument I think that Jackson makes is the one for nations to reclaim control of capital and trade flows across their borders. Without these controls, he asserts, they cannot regulate their economies nor implement any values other than those pursued by the Empire. This is why he has focused on nations which, by reason of their geopolitical circumstances, may have a greater freedom of manoeuvre to slip the bonds of captivity that are slowly tightening around all societies. We are in a time when the veil of deceit that has obscured the workings of the Empire has grown thin. Greek resistance to European austerity, Occupations in the US and elsewhere, and of course, the manifest failure of the international capital system from 2008 onward have awakened millions to the injustice on which global political order rests. The book's title seizes the moment to make its point.

A necessary read but by no means a sufficient effort to make the change that is needed, *Occupy World Street* launches

a new project by the author, who calls for allies and assistance through a website: thebreakawaystrategy.org. Whether or not you see yourself as a player on the international stage, there is plenty of scope in the book for all of us to use the knowledge and understanding Jackson has provided to educate ourselves and our networks about the kinds of change that will be needed to achieve justice and a planetary future. As Milton Friedman has so often been said to have asserted, 'In a crisis, whatever ideas are laying around will be seized upon to implement change.' Make no mistake: the current crisis is as momentous as that of WWII if not yet as belligerent. It behooves those of us who believe that another world is possible to be prepared for the time of its birth, otherwise it may, like the last emperor of China, be snuffed by the people who like things just the way they are. Δ

Not Missing a Beat Review by Peter Bane

DUNCAN CRARY
The KunstlerCast
Conversations

with James Howard Kunstler
New Society Publishers
Gabriola Isl. BC 2011.
300 pp. 6"x6" paper illus. \$16.95.

THIS BOOK IS A REPORT of an unusual project in an unusual format. First, it's small, fitting easily in one hand, and it's illustrated (sparely) with cartoons (haha, get it?). Second and more importantly, it's an edited rendering of a long series of podcast interviews which the author recorded with his subject, the noted social critic and author of *The Geography of Nowhere*, *The Long Emergency*, and *The Witch of Hebron*.

Kunstler made hay in 1990 by saying memorably what few before him had even

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tried to articulate: that America's love affair with the car had turned into a nightmare of dystopian landscapes; highway off-ramps and strip malls had become our national living room. Fifteen years later, he updated the prognosis for a nation still drunk with petroleum excess. In *The Long Emergency* he explained the nature and suggested some of the consequences of a permanent decline in energy availability. Calling it a predicament (to be lived with) rather than a problem (that could be solved), a remarkable insight in itself, Kunstler had the historically stunning good luck to see the book published in the same year that global conventional oil production stopped increasing and started wavering on its way down. You have to give the guy credit—he's called the big lie for what it is and facts have been lining up inarguably on his side. What took us so long to notice the obvious, and why so many are still in denial or confused about it is another conversation.

Kunstler has his adherents, this book's author prominent among them, but the Cassandra-like role into which Kunstler has been cast, along with the acerbic tone of many of his remarks—witty and wicked and refusing to suffer fools lightly—have made him a difficult character to celebrate. Having framed American life as a powerful 'tragi-comic morality play and having himself nailed the villain squarely between the eyes on the first and second shots, he's in the enviably dismaying position of having nearly put himself out of business. He continues to prosper not only because he's quite a good prose stylist, but because the monster he ventilated with his deadly pen has continued to lurch forward zombie-like from its own momentum, providing him with seemingly endless opportunities for target practice. Seeing that truth-telling has had only a limited effect, Kunstler has escalated the arms race to the silver dagger of fiction, a mythic realm where arguably most of his countrymen spend their blinkered days.

Fortunately for the rest of us and for his career, JHK is self-motivated and not especially dependent on the approval of others. More curmudgeonly than cuddly and with a message unwelcome to most, he has soldiered on, parlaying his passion for well-crafted words into an adequate living. Kunstler is a member of that rare species, the public intellectual, a fellow who observes the world, comments on

it, and makes his way by the power of his words. With no long-term relation to academia or the larger organs of the media, he lives—not only by his wit but by choice—in Saratoga Springs, a small tourist town up the Hudson Valley from the Big Apple. Whether author Crary met him because they both live in the same part of the world (Crary in nearby post-industrial Troy, NY), or came to settle where he did because of Kunstler's ideas, this book does not make clear. The answer to that question matters only in framing the irony of the book and the podcast beneath it: these guys are advocates of place-making and place-based living; their words stream out to the world through cyberspace, a



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kind of ubiquitous and intimate nowhere.

Crary, a big handsome galoot pushing 40, and with handlebar mustache and sidebars looking like nothing so much as an 1883 New York City copper without his domed hat, has unapologetically apprenticed himself to Kunstler, whom he appears to dwarf. Of course, on podcast and on the printed page, the relative positions are reversed. The younger collaborator admits to amusing himself—in a very Old World way—by daily and nightly prowling the streets in the business district of his adopted small city, one whose handsome

human-scale architecture has apparently been preserved from the early part of the 20th century, as if in amber. Throughout the book, the two men banter and mostly agree about the precepts of New Urbanism (varied, low-rise, traditionally ornamented, human-scale architecture and streetscapes oriented to the pedestrian), and the horrors and humor of its apotheosis, the suburban wasteland.

I don't disagree with the thrust of their conversation, and I found the running commentary on a society gone mad both insightful and entertaining. But I couldn't help contrasting the critique of these two bachelors with the analysis and activism of the woman who made all of it coherent and even possible, Jane Jacobs. A mother and a householder and perhaps the epitome of the public intellectual, Jacobs, a hardscrabble journalist transplanted from Scranton, PA, rehabilitated an old storefront building into a Greenwich Village home for her family, rode the streets of New York on a bicycle in the 50s, wrote one of the great pieces of 20th century sociology and design literature (*The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, still in print), and then marshalled her community to stop the world-beating highway builder and NYC kingpin Robert Moses in his tracks, saving the Village from destruction...twice. She also fled the US to pre-

serve her teenaged sons from the Vietnam War draft and went on to write another half-dozen good books and to become a much beloved advocate for her adopted second metropolitan home, Toronto, before her death in 2006. The jury is still out on our New York commentators, but of course the last chapter's far from over for either of them.

KunstlerCast is an easy read that you can dip into and out of at will. With no disrespect intended, it would do quite nicely for bathroom reading. The chapters are short, punctuated with numerous side-

bars and text blocks, and peppered with punchy subheads. And, of course, you can hold it with one hand. The cartoon art by Ken Avidor is a bit in the mode of R. Crumb, though more comic than obscene.

Where I depart from this dynamic duo is in the finality of their judgment on suburbia, which I see as rife with opportunity, not for urban redevelopment—which I think they rightly dismiss—but for rural regeneration. The suburbs may have been, to borrow Kunstler's signature line, "the greatest mis-allocation of resources in the history of the world," but they are still a rather rich assembly of wealth that should not be allowed simply to decay. Their location, along with the confluence of water and power infrastructure, housing, and largely unused swaths of once productive farmland (now lawns) all point to the

possibility of a new kind of post-industrial agriculture, what I call *garden farming*, and which I explore extensively in *The Permaculture Handbook*, to be published shortly on the heels of this magazine issue.

answer than to convert the suburbs into a new series of market towns and villages connected by bike trails, rails, and a few roads to urban markets just at the horizon. Scathing critique, like smelling salts

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Our cities need a lot of help, including smart guys willing to pound the pavement and make small talk to build community—a role officer Crary has undertaken with gusto, but one of the things they need most is a productive agriculture growing real food not far away—there is no better

or the antidote to a deadly narcotic, is a necessary part of healing a social body swooning in the embrace of a mad villain, but it can't make a steady diet. Once the patient recovers its wits and gets away from the perp, it'll be time for chicken soup and more nourishing fare. △

Fearless Fruit: Time to De-'cide'

Review by Keith Johnson

MICHAEL PHILLIPS
*The Holistic Orchard:
Tree fruits and berries
the biological way*
Chelsea Green Publishing.
White River Jct. VT. 2012.
414 pp. paper. all color illus. \$39.95

A CONVENTIONAL ORCHARD is a war zone. Terrorizing enemies abound in the forms of insects, viruses, and fungi (oh, my) which threaten to ruin yields and all must be prevented (by killing them) from carrying out their agenda of destruction and economic sabotage. A witch's brew of pesticides, herbicides, rodenticides, nematocides, bactericides, and fungicides are used in most commercial orchards as growers struggle to produce blemish-free (and nearly nutrient- and flavor-free) fruit-like objects for market. The EPA reports that the national total for pesticide use in the US is a billion lbs/year.

Poorly-informed people, trained by corporate-dominated media, assume that if a fruit looks good it must be good. But, in ever greater numbers, smart citizen shoppers are beginning to question the safety of their foods and the environmentally pernicious practices used to beget the deluge

of monocropped commodities once known as food.

Folks who want to grow their own fruit are often told that it's impossible to get a decent crop without poisons and that they'd be better off leaving it to the "experts." Well, the so-called experts are mostly idiots when it comes to ecological



understanding of complex systems, so it's with deep and grateful relief that I opened the pages of Michael Phillips' latest book in which he begs to differ with the assertions of the chem-addicts (his previous book *The Appie Grower* should definitely be included as a must-have addition to your library). Not only is it possible to grow fruit organically but doing so opens

up relationships with a mesmerizing macro- and microcosm of benevolent friends and allies dedicated to our mutual fulfillment.

I tell everyone who wants to garden to grow healthy soil as their first, and perpetual, crop and that by doing so success is inevitable. I say, it's not a 'green thumb' you're looking for but a black thumb, one that mirrors the ever-deepening dark of humic carbon-rich earth, teeming with life in a dazzling array of diversity...and Michael offers a similar message.

He tells us that you'll "discover a core part of your being, that place where humans find happiness and meaning as we embrace our rootedness on this precious planet." That works for me, and it's what I regularly recognize in our home forest-garden-of-Eden where biodiversity is the rule. I don't garden to make a couple people feel contented and well-fed but to satisfy, also, the needs of TRILLIONS of supportive organisms. If they're happy, I'm happy and all the plants and animals share the sentiment.

In the late 80s, I had the delightful opportunity to live for a few years in the "Lost Valley" region of northern New Hampshire as a neighbor and joined Michael in the orchard care, pruning, and finally pressing of the apples into a nectar of juice made all the more ambrosia-like by the inclusion of some wild apples which are ubiquitous in the region. Many communal meals with Michael, his wife Nancy, family, and friends made my time