

Perhaps to know so familiar a place better it must become strange again.
—Ellen Meloy, *The Anthropology of Turquoise*

Reinterpreting Utopia



his project began as an attempt to study the development of William Morris's philosophy of technology, his debt to Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin, and his influence on American thinkers like Henry Adams and Lewis Mumford. But reading Morris's utopian ideas in *News From Nowhere*, as well as his prose romances, and poems like *A Dream of John Ball* and *The Earthly Paradise*, made me realize that Morris's views on technology and art pervade all of his work, and that together these works provide a well-developed view of how the world could be: how we *might* live, as opposed to how we *do* live.

News From Nowhere (first published serially in 1890) envisions England in a future far removed temporally, philosophically, and economically from nineteenth-century London: more than a century after the "revolution" of 1952. As I read and re-read the novel, I began to wonder, as Morris had, what might happen given some kind of revolution or change on the order of what he imagined.

However, although Morris's *Nowhere* emerged from the ashes of a violent revolution, he could not have conceived of the means of total destruction that human beings had developed by 1952: the atomic and hydrogen bombs and the other "weapons of mass destruction" that would come to preoccupy those in power and terrify the world's population as a whole. This realization made me wonder further about what a different "nowhere" would look like in light of what we now know about how things really turned out, and how very far Morris's vision was from present-day reality.

Long after I had begun to re-imagine Morris's ou-topia, and after having convinced myself that what I was trying to envision was essentially unimaginable in the context of this world, I came upon David Orr's thoughtful collection of essays, *The Nature of Design: Ecology, Culture, and Human Intention*. Reading this book made me realize that those of us who construct utopias do not do so in a vacuum. The urge for change that prompts thought experiments like *News From Nowhere* emerges from conversation and speculation within an intellectual community. Although I had thought of my own work as occurring in isolation, I began to realize that not

only my reading over the past few years, but also discussions with my husband, my son, my students, and with colleagues had contributed to the economy of the valley in which my own utopia develops. And so Orr's book reassured me that others have been participating in similar conversations; even better, it indicated that others were far more sanguine about the possibilities for change than I had been—even though the process Orr and others envision may turn out, in the end, to require more human will than we can muster. More recently, I have come upon another collection of essays called *Nature's Operating Instructions: The True Biotechnologies*, edited by Kenny Ausubel, which has raised my level of optimism about the possibility of an alternative future considerably.

The particular conversations that led to my desire to revisit Morris's *Nowhere* began in 1994 when I taught a course at UTD called "Utopia and Technology," and continued in two subsequent courses, "Philosophy and/of Technology" and "The Arts and Crafts Movement." In all three, from different perspectives, my students and I discussed the utopian impulse, ways to imagine appropriate technologies, and various attempts made throughout history to forge solutions to technological dilemmas. Since then, research into the sources of Morris's utopian ideas, and efforts to examine his influence on twentieth-century thinkers such as Mumford have led to further conversations and considerable thought about how best to make use of what I have learned over the intervening years. During this period, my then ninety eight year-old grandmother revealed an interesting coincidence that impressed on me the power inherent in utopian visions.

My great grandmother, Esther Tate, was known for starting schools wherever she went. After helping her husband Tom run a stagecoach station near Manhattan, Nevada, the couple moved to Big Pine, California, where she immediately helped to set up an elementary school. The importance of education had been impressed on her in part by exposure to Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, which she must have read soon after its publication in 1887.

In Bellamy's utopia, children were compulsorily educated until the age of twenty one, after which citizens served in an "industrial army" for twenty four more years, before being allowed to pursue their own inclinations. This program certainly must have appealed to a large number of Americans, since groups of "Bellamyites" began to spring up all over the country—including the remote little town of Big Pine. However, although Bellamy was a fellow socialist, William Morris found his utopian vision repellent, and *News From Nowhere* represents his alternative view.

My own effort, *More News From Nowhere*, draws upon an academic background that spans over forty years, during which I studied archaeology, ancient history and languages, anthropology, geology, literature, ecology, astronomy, the history and philosophy of science and technology, and the history of art and design. My education was further augmented by having spent a significant portion of my childhood in Asia, and especially in Taiwan, where visits to aboriginal villages provided first-hand experience of a subsistence economy and a small-scale, technologically simple culture.

In the rural outskirts of Taipei, I roamed freely on Yang Ming Shan, exploring the mountain and its terraced, centuries-old rice paddies, and acquiring an appreciation both for wilderness and minimally developed ways of life. As a family, we also frequently “made the mission rounds,” visiting a priest whose flock consisted of aboriginal Taiwanese mountain people (and where I learned to appreciate the delights of home-grown vegetables, home-made salami and home-distilled brandy). The contrast between life on the mountain and life in Taipei thus significantly shaped my philosophical views on human environments. But my sense of history and place, my regard for nature, and my recognition of nature’s fragility, stem primarily from my family’s long association with the Owens River Valley in California.

Before most of the water from the Owens River was diverted through an aqueduct system to feed the growing needs of Los Angeles, the valley could be described as somewhat idyllic: abundant water and resources; mild, almost Mediterranean climate; magnificent scenery. A subsistence economy could have fared well in such a place, and had done so long before the coming of the Europeans. Ranching became the valley’s primary way of life, but the Depression hit hard, and the city of Los Angeles promised much-needed jobs and economic development. A few ranchers held out, but eventually the city won, the Owens River dwindled to a small stream, and Owens Lake, once deep enough to accommodate steamboats, dried up.

The towns in the valley never did see much in the way of development, and now the land is too dry for anything but heavy irrigation farming—with water bought from the city. Tourism, the major source of valley income, consists largely of people simply passing through from Los Angeles to visit Death Valley or on ski trips to resorts in the north, or gambling trips to Reno. The film and advertising industries make frequent use of a variety of local landscapes (primarily for westerns, space operas, and SUV commercials), but every time I visit, one of the old businesses has shut down, one of the old motels has closed, and these have been replaced by fast-food franchises and gas station mini-marts. Occasionally a new tourist-related enterprise will pop up, but it’s gone by the next time I visit. Only Bishop, at the northern end of the valley, seems to be truly flourishing, but it serves as a gateway to ski resorts, gambling

facilities, and a national park; it's also a logical stopping place after a long drive from Los Angeles.

Toward the southern end of the valley, near Lone Pine (my home town; population somewhere around 1200), lies the nearly-dry bed of Owens Lake. As the largest and last major segment of a long drainage system left over from the Pleistocene, the lake abounds in minerals and heavy metals. After the aqueduct system was built, and most of the water from the Owens River diverted from its natural drainage, the lake began to evaporate. Several companies subsequently mined its resources for a variety of purposes. Gradually, however, these companies also closed their operations, and little industrial activity endures. The railway stopped shipping through the valley, and the only visible industry along the lake today is a plant that extracts spring water from the Sierras to help fill the bottled water needs of the West's health-conscious minions (and insure the survival of the plastics industry).

When the inevitable winds blow down from the north, the dry remains of the minerals and metals that had once been diluted in several feet of water get stirred up, lifted into the air, and suspended, leading scientists to call this end of the valley one of the most polluted places in the United States. Because of the threat to already heavily-polluted Los Angeles, however, measures are finally being developed to allow more water into the river, and to re-establish a wetlands in the area to mitigate the dust problem. On a recent visit to the valley, I witnessed the successful beginnings of [a program to allow just enough water into the Owens River](#) to keep the pollution down and to facilitate the propagation of several native bird species.

I have often wondered what would have happened if Los Angeles had not succeeded in buying the valley's water rights, or if early efforts to build a dam in Long Valley (thus supplying water to both the Owens Valley and to Los Angeles) had been realized. In some ways, the water issue may have been a blessing, because the valley's resources might have attracted a much larger population, and what I knew as a child—as hot and dry as it was—might never have existed. One of the places I associate most with my childhood, in fact, is a small group of houses nestled around one of the power plants operated by the City of Los Angeles next to the aqueduct, and which my grandfather once managed. For most of my early life, “Cottonwood” was “home.” After my grandfather died, my grandmother moved to town, where she lived until shortly before her death at 104. I considered her little house in Lone Pine, with its views of Mt. Whitney to the west, and the Inyos to the east, to be “home” long after I had grown up, married, moved to Texas, and had children and a house of my own.

Over the years, my frequent visits have never failed to reveal changes in the valley. The cottonwoods in front of my grandmother's house died, and were eventually cut down. The Lombardy poplars that had been planted by early settlers in the valley as windbreaks also died, except along creeks where there was still enough water to sustain them. Diminished snow melt in the Sierras may still kill them, as the creeks themselves dry up. Driving north on highway 395 from Los Angeles, one can see the desert-loving Joshua trees gradually taking advantage of an expanding habitat. During one visit, I noticed that they had entered the valley and were marching further north, a slow-moving but inexorable army of change. The film *Bagdad Café*, which depicts life in a relict byway of a town (actually located further south, along old Route 66 in Southern California; it no longer exists), could have been filmed along this route, or any of a hundred others along similar roads in eastern California or western Nevada, where travelers speed past on their way to somewhere else. But I always thought of the Owens Valley as being fundamentally different, because its lack of water was caused by human greed and error, and its decline was therefore not really inevitable.

William Morris set *News From Nowhere* in a place he loved, along a seriously polluted Thames, in a London that would soon be unrecognizable. He wanted to imagine what life would be like in that place, if the Revolution should come. In Morris's imagined twenty-first century, London after the Change is pastoral, peaceful, and clean, supported by an egalitarian, sustainable economy. As I read and reread Morris's vision, my own began to take shape: a similar account of an equally significant change, set in a place that held as much of a claim to my affections as London had to his. And since the question, "What would happen if . . . ?" lies at the heart of any thought experiment, I knew that I needed to take into account the changes that had occurred in the century since *News From Nowhere* was written if anything like Morris's economy were to make sense in our modern world.

Morris felt strongly that violent revolution was not only inevitable, but necessary in order to bring about the Change. But violent revolution in the modern world, after the invention of nuclear weapons and mechanized biological and chemical warfare, might well be terminal rather than simply cleansing. The post-apocalyptic novels I read growing up, such as Pat Frank's *Alas Babylon*, Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Liebowitz*, and Kate Wilhelm's *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang*, suggested that modern weaponry and biotechnology unleashed might well mean not only the reduction of human populations and devastation of landscapes, but the very real possibility that the survivors might not represent the best of all possible human worlds.

More recently, Stephen Baxter's prophetic 1997 novel *Titan* (which imagines the breakup of the space shuttle Columbia on re-entry in 2004 and the election by 2008 of a theocratic president of the United States) employs a manipulated asteroid as the mechanism for the destruction of life on earth. In fact, at the turn of the twenty first century, so many ways of doing ourselves in have presented themselves, that I decided to leave the mechanism of change open, and to suggest the altogether too promising likelihood that not one but many factors—most of our own manufacture—may doom us.

Morris appropriates a device similar to Edward Bellamy's hypnotic trance in *Looking Backward* (despite the fact that his antipathy toward Bellamy's imagined future is what inspired him to write *News From Nowhere* in the first place) to propel his protagonist forward in time. "Guest," Morris's stand-in, simply falls asleep and awakens in the twenty-first century. But utopian science fiction today demands at least a nod toward hard science. Enter the technological escape tool and staple of twentieth-century science fiction: the wormhole. In this case, a "trigger" (some sort of insertion device) placed by some unknown somebody from some undetermined time (a mystery I plan to explore later) opens a localized wormhole that allows a group of people to escape the present day in order to develop an alternative economy in a pristine, probably post-apocalyptic, post-neo-glacial Owens River Valley. No bloody revolution occurs, but a carefully self-selected group escapes, in order to avoid one or more of the increasingly possible ends to life as we now know it, into a very distant future.

The temporal distance (at least 100,000 years, possibly more) was chosen for two reasons. In teaching about archaeology in my humanities classes, I have often posed questions about what kinds of objects would survive over long periods of time (1). Human "civilizations" are fairly recent phenomena, and evidence of all but the most ambitious buildings and tombs from the Neolithic era (when human beings began building monumental structures) has disappeared. The oldest extant artifacts of any kind—bone and stone tools and time-keeping devices—number few and are difficult to interpret. If we were to speculate about what might survive after a large-scale disaster, and what might survive over an almost unimaginable period of time, we would have to consider not only cultural but geological conditions as well. Having studied Pleistocene geology, I'm well aware of the recurring nature of "ice ages" and the "cleansing" potential of glacial processes, and have frequently wondered what of our own culture(s) would survive after another glacial period. In addition, the likelihood of global warming's having something significant to do with our future contributes another factor, and the location of my story on a significant fault line adds the probability of seismic change.

Combining the two questions—what would be left after a major catastrophe, and what of that would remain after the next glaciation—led me to place my reconsideration of Morris’s utopia after a geological, rather than political, “revolution.” When I began to wonder, after reading a number of books on the Owens Valley water controversy, what the valley would be like if the water were to return, the final ingredient entered the mix. *More News From Nowhere* would take place in a valley I knew as well as Morris knew the Thames Valley, under the only circumstances that seem likely to produce radical change in my “nowhere”: geological time and process.

Fictional thought experiments offer the writer a clean palette: a surface on which to mix a variety of colors and media. If we could start over, what would we change? How would we live? This book attempts to answer both of these questions, filtered through Morris’s own philosophy and colored by twenty-first century issues: economics, education, gender, race, technology, religion. Of course, truly being able to “start over” in a pristine space, unencumbered by present-day social and economic concerns, will never be possible. What we do to ourselves in the next few decades could well make it impossible for anyone *ever* to begin again, because major extinctions take millions of years to recover—not merely thousands.

But thought experiments are by nature conceived of out of time and place, like Plato’s Atlantis, nine thousand years ago, beyond the gates of Herakles, or “once upon a time,” or even “long ago, in a galaxy far, far away.” This story, therefore, takes place far in the future, in a valley cleansed by geological processes into an environment both strange and familiar at the same time. Among the utopians, its protagonist experiences an odyssey both physical and philosophical, along a river different from Morris’s, but through a landscape as well loved by the author as rural London was by Morris.

The *More News From Nowhere* project originally consisted of four parts: this preamble, the story, and an annotated bibliography of those works that led directly to its construction, followed by an additional bibliography of sources on utopian studies, Morris, and other aspects of the project. I have recently added a fifth component, a blog begun in the summer of 2007, called [Owl’s Farm, or Reflections on Nowhere](#), in which I have been musing about related topics as they occur in the “real” world, here and now.

Fiction, by nature, does not lend itself particularly well to acknowledgment, and the sheer length of time involved in the development of this story (about fifteen years) makes traditional documentation difficult; but it *is* possible to discuss the seminal sources and their connections, and the range of works consulted can at least be acknowledged.

I take some comfort in reminding myself of Clifford Geertz's introduction to *Islam Observed*, in which he notes (in agreement with T. S. Eliot) that "Bad poets borrow . . . good poets steal," and admits that he tries in his book to be a good poet—"to take what I have needed from certain others and make it shamelessly my own." He goes on to qualify the nature of his "thievery" as "an almost unconscious process of selection, absorption, and reworking, so that after awhile one no longer quite knows where one's argument comes from, how much of it is his and how much is others" (2). I hope, therefore, that the inclusion of those influences of which I am aware will compensate for the lack of direct attribution. Beyond this, I should also note that the project was not conceived of as a dissertation, but rather as an exploration of ideas that I have been considering during my entire adult life.

My academic odyssey, which began in 1966, has, like Odysseus's wanderings, meandered widely, from California, to Pennsylvania, to New York, to Texas. It is probably fortunate that I never set foot on the island of the Lotus Eaters, because most of what I have encountered along the way has lodged in memory to serve as a repository of ideas for this story. I never cease to marvel at the serendipity of knowledge: the chance events that foster intellectual development and curiosity. In my case, my early reading of potboiler novels about young adventurous women in Greece led to a desire to study Greek. I withdrew my initial application to the University of California at Santa Cruz (which opened the year I graduated from high school; and where I would inevitably have studied with Gregory Bateson, whose work later influenced my studies at UTD) because Greek was not offered, and I enrolled at the Riverside campus instead, where after one quarter I became the school's only Greek major. An early marriage led me to the University of Pennsylvania, with too many credits to transfer into traditional programs, and ultimately to an independent, interdisciplinary major that included graduate courses in anthropology and geology in addition to classical archaeology and ancient history. A brief stint at the State University of New York at Stony Brook introduced me to environmental and planetary sciences and deepened my interest in Pleistocene geology.

Upon moving to Dallas in 1979, where I had planned to enter SMU's graduate program in archaeology, I spontaneously enrolled in what sounded like a fascinating course at UTD: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Humanities (at last, permission to do what I had been doing all along!). This introductory graduate seminar was taught that semester by Prof. Rainer Schulte, who immersed me in the theory and practice of translation. At about that time, I encountered—again by chance—Mary Catherine Bateson's account of a conference sponsored by her father, Gregory Bateson, on "the effects of conscious purpose on human adaptation" in a book called *Our Own Metaphor*. The connections between translation and metaphor (aside from the linguistic—they both come from roots meaning "to carry over or beyond") became

foundational to my studies from then on, and I was at last introduced to the work of Gregory Bateson, especially on what he called an “ecology of mind.”

Drawing on my background in anthropology, geology, and ecology, I then began to explore the connections—rather than the divisions—between the humanities and the sciences. I mulled over the works of interdisciplinary writers (like Yi-Fu Tuan and Stephen Jay Gould) who attempt to reintegrate ways of knowing otherwise been seen as disparate (and to be codified as such in C. P. Snow’s *The Two Cultures*). The annotated bibliography connected to this project thus represents an attempt to acknowledge the debt I owe to the Batesons and others encountered during the intellectual peregrinations that led to this book, and to offer some rationale for its long and glacial progress.

The various, and probably all too obvious, nods to Homer exist as a small tribute to my ongoing study of Bronze Age and Archaic Greek history and literature. I still translate *The Odyssey* in my spare time, and am particularly fond of the segments among the Phaeacians—Homer’s own essay into utopian literature—where Odysseus tells his story. Translations of passages included in this book, therefore, are my own. Morris also translated Homer (*The Odyssey* in particular), and both *News From Nowhere* and some of his prose romances describe the journeys of their heroes not only on mythical quests, but also on voyages of discovery or explorations of ideas.

Although Morris was clearly aware of myth, having translated the Icelandic *Eddas* and written versions of Arthurian and Greek tales, his romances were always grounded in the practical: in the recovery of something lost, or the attainment of a token of achievement. His earliest stories, *The House of the Wolfings* and *The Roots of the Mountains*, are based on the history of European tribes on the cusp of conquest. Like Carlyle and Ruskin, Morris often imagined the Middle Ages as a prelapsarian utopia where men could be manly and women could be beautiful—but could also wield a sword or a bow. One of the most engaging and prophetic aspects of *News From Nowhere*, in fact, is the liberty afforded Morris’s heroines to escape many of the strictures of Victorian womanhood.

The enduring and compelling nature of these romances can be seen both in the work of J. R. R. Tolkien, who drew on Morris’s prose romances in his creation of the utopian landscape of Middle Earth (especially the Shire and the realms of the Elves), and in the continuing popularity of Tolkien’s stories (and their many poor imitations). I was lately amused by the similarity between the New Zealand locations used by Peter Jackson in his film version of *The Lord Of The Rings* and my re-imagined Owens Valley: high, snow-capped peaks (in my case, the

aply named Sierra Nevada), surrounding a long, sparsely-populated, river-watered plain. It is difficult for Americans, who sing paeans to “purple mountains’ majesty,” to imagine that Europeans once thought mountain landscapes forbidding, although this was the case for many, even during Morris’s own day. And despite Morris’s travels to Iceland and his experience with its volcanic terrain, his own utopian vision is tied to the River Thames and the possibility he saw for its rehabilitation. For him, mountains were the denizens of the dead or representations of primal power, while well-managed forests and carefully-tended fields were the proper habitation for human beings.

I should also acknowledge what I owe the writers and artists who, over the years, have helped to deepen my appreciation for my own native landscape. Foremost among these is Mary Austin, whose *Land of Little Rain* amounts to a prose poem dedicated to the valley in which she lived for many years, and whose novels (such as *The Flock*) provide insight into the lives of early settlers in the valley—among whom were my ancestors. John McPhee’s series of books about western geology, particularly *Basin and Range* and *Assembling California*, provided me with good models for how to write about natural spaces, as well as many entertaining hours on automobile trips when one or more passengers would read aloud from his descriptions of the land through which we were passing. John Muir’s descriptions of the Sierras in *The Mountains of California*, coupled with Ansel Adams’s photographs of the Owens Valley and its surroundings have sustained me during the many years I have spent in distant, alien landscapes.

More recently, the late Ellen Meloy’s melodic prose descriptions of familiar mountains and deserts in *An Anthropology of Turquoise* and *Eating Stone* moved me more than once to go on writing—and I am especially grateful to her evocative accounts in light of the almost inevitable loss of these beloved landscapes, and because her death in 2004 means that the desert has lost one of its most eloquent advocates.

Early on in my education at UTD I discovered Joseph Wood Krutch, whose work almost inspired me to write my master’s thesis on early modern nature writers; instead, I chose American literary naturalism—the dystopian side of writing about human beings and human nature. But I never forgot Krutch, or his impact. Along with Edward Abbey and Wendell Berry, Krutch gave me some hope that our species could learn to respect the natural world—to behave as a part of it, rather than apart from it.

On the subject of utopias there is no better source than Ursula K. LeGuin, whose fiction I have read and admired for over thirty years. She not only writes within the utopian genre, but about

it, and two of her essays have made me particularly conscious of how good speculative fiction works. I assigned the first, “A Non-Euclidian View of California As a Cold Place to Be” (written in 1982) to my students in my utopia class at UTD in the Spring of 1994.

Written shortly after the death of her teacher/friend, Robert C. Elliot, author of an important book on the subject called *The Shape of Utopia*, LeGuin muses on Elliott’s distinction between the “non-Euclidian,” mythical idea of utopia, and the “rational or Jovian utopia.” The latter “is made by the reaction of will and reason against, away from, the here-and-now, and it is, as More said in naming it, nowhere. It is pure structure without content; pure model; goal.” Such a utopia is, therefore, purely theoretical and uninhabitable (3). In the second, published more recently and called “A War Without End,” she discusses speculative literature as a path toward attaining freedom from the status quo. Here LeGuin notes that many of her own stories can be classed as utopian because they offer “a glimpse of some imagined alternative to the way we live now.” She goes on to say that to her “the important thing is not to offer any specific hope of betterment but, by offering an imagined but persuasive alternative reality, to dislodge my mind, and so the reader’s mind, from the lazy, timorous habit of thinking that the way we live now is the only way people can live” (4).

I am not sure how persuasive my own alternative to present-day conditions will seem. I have thought, in fact, of many potential criticisms—some of which have already been voiced by people with whom I have discussed the project. “Nobody could live like that for very long.” “Wouldn’t these people get bored?” “We’ve come too far technologically to be able to give up what we’ve developed.” “This is just a Luddite fantasy; no one really wants to give up technology and live some primitive lifestyle.”

To many modern urban dwellers, the kind of life I describe would be considered “savage.” I have tried within the text of the novel to pose these and similar positions and to allow the inhabitants of my future valley to answer the questions they raise. I doubt that many will be persuaded that this way of life would be possible, because in many ways we have already become too deeply enmeshed in our own worship of technological progress to pursue radical change. Some will argue that we are by nature a technological people, that we will always strive to develop more and more efficient ways of living, and that we are doomed by our own nature to inhabit a more and more technologically determined world.

But I am not convinced. The conversations that prepare my utopians for their journey begin with a central moral question which is also immensely practical. They ask themselves what they really *need*—not just what they merely *want*. They work within another moral premise: the

identity of ends and means. They are acutely aware that the means by which they choose to realize their future will be intimately tied to the ends they desire to achieve, so that using highly-developed technologies to build a minimally technological world will present problems that could potentially doom their effort. So they choose their tools carefully, and compromise only where they absolutely must. Of course, these are imaginary people, and this is an imaginary possibility. Were I able to choose a way to live, however, my choice would be very close to theirs; I can, in fact, imagine living happily in the world I have invented.

Morris is probably right, that those of us who are of this world are too closely tied to it to break away completely; but, as he posits in the last line of *News From Nowhere*, “if others can see it as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream” (5). Utopian thought experiments are by nature visionary rather than simply fantastical. People who write them try to understand the impulse toward alternative worlds, but they do not fill them with lemonade springs and big rock candy mountains. The experiment, while not conducted with test tubes and sophisticated machinery, nonetheless takes place in a laboratory, under controlled conditions. A good utopian vision holds as long as its structure stays consistent, but it is never complete precisely because we can only control so much. In real life the experimental monkeys are always unlatching their cages and getting loose; a piece of Limburger always ends up in the maze. So we do what we can. We try to construct the laboratory soundly and to account for as many variables as possible. And then we throw our ideas into the structure and see how long it takes them to beat each other up, or for the maze to fall apart. If we’re lucky, we can get the story told before anything irreparable happens. I hope I’ve managed to do that here.

Notes

(1) Alan Weisman’s recent book, *The World Without Us*, has clarified this question better than I could have imagined when I began to write this introduction. [[back](#)]

(2) *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*, University of Chicago Press, 1971, p. v. [[back](#)]

(3) In *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, Harper Perennial, 1989, p. 81. [[back](#)]

(4) In *The Wave in the Mind*, Shambala, 2004, p. 218. [[back](#)]

(5) *News From Nowhere*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970, p. 182. [[back](#)]

