

## **DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABILITY CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH ENGAGEMENT WITH ART**

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This chapter adopts an artistic view of the issue of sustainability. We identify war as the most significant global barrier to sustainable development. We argue that art offers a means of unmasking the underlying heroic myths of war, a necessary antecedent to developing sustainable business practices. To do so we begin by examining the current literature on sustainability and adopt a critical position of the ideology that seeks a balance between exploitation and preservation. In this light we discuss the role of the artist as social commentator and explore the aesthetic of dissonance using the metaphor of the catalytic jolt. We then examine contemporary art, and in particular an analysis of a work by Australasian artist Tom Mutch, the *Carbon Footprint* and note how this kind of approach can be used as an educational tool in the business studies classroom. Our discussion ends by looking at how our relationship with the planet may be nurtured and, the need to institute sustainable practices that ensure a thriving future.

*Progress is not determined then by economic conditions, by physical conditions, nor by biological factors solely, but more especially by our capacity for genuine cooperation.*

Mary Parker Follett

The need for sustainable business practice and concerns about the effect of overuse of the earth's resources is of global importance. However, this is not a new phenomenon. Writing at the end of World War I, the political commentator and management theorist Mary Parker Follett mirrors some of our contemporary anxieties. Within the context of embittered industrial relations and international conflict that the Great War was unable to solve, Follett bluntly declares that:

Our political life is stagnating, capital and labor are virtually at war, the nations of Europe are at one another's throats – because we have not yet learned how to live together. The twentieth century must find a new principle of association. Crowd philosophy, crowd government, crowd patriotism must go. The herd is no longer sufficient to enfold us (Follett, 1926, p. 1).

Follett could have been addressing us, for, almost a century later we are still grappling with similar kinds of chauvinistic attitudes. The question is still just as provocative: how do we work together productively and creatively so that we can live sustainably?

The global rise of the business school that sees students seeking generic skills that will enable them to run successful businesses within trans-national contexts has yet to succeed in embedding a sustainability consciousness in graduates. Students enrol in courses with a desire to learn marketing techniques, leadership strategies, and the financial skills that will ensure success of their future enterprises. Until very recently, the focus on efficiency and instrumentality has lacked sensitivity to the impact of business on the environment. Now, however, awareness of sustainability and efforts to mitigate impacts on the environment are becoming business imperatives. Public

interest and governance pressures for a sustainable future are high with global warming being featured almost daily in the news media.

However, a change in thinking from growth and efficiency to sustainability is difficult to embed. In this chapter we inquire into the nature of sustainability by taking a macro view. We argue that international conflict is a root problem and that eliminating war is a necessary precursor to achieving sustainability. On this basis, we maintain that localized efforts at achieving sustainable business practice stem from and are directly related to this larger context. We explore the role of the artist as provocateur and demonstrate how art, especially painting, can offer new ways of looking at the issue of sustainability.

War's indiscriminate destruction strikes at the heart of social and economic development. The propensity to take up arms to solve conflict is endemic and, as Winter (1981) notes, human history is littered with evidences of this nihilism.

Human beings have been pushing and shoving each other so much that they have destroyed well over 90 percent of their own handiwork. Their libraries, their literature, their cities, their works of art are mostly gone. Even what remains from the distant past is riddled with evidences of a strange and pervasive evil that has grotesquely distorted man's potential. This is strange because apparently no other species of life treats its own with such deadly malignant hatred. The oldest skulls bear mute witness that they were bashed in and roasted to deliver their contents as food for still other human beings (Winter, 1981, p. 137).

As our destructive abilities have grown in sophistication more of the earth's resources are extracted for harmful purposes. For, as Cooper and Vargas (2008) declare, "war, violent civil disorder, and terrorism are the *antithesis* of sustainable development" (p. 1, emphasis added).

And yet we are seemingly powerless to address our predisposition toward annihilation. War correspondent Christopher Hedges addresses this strange paradox that on the one hand war acts like an intoxicating drug that strangely “give us a purpose, meaning, a reason for living” (Hedges, 2002, p. 3), while on the other takes the very life that we seek.

War exposes a side of human nature that is usually masked by the unacknowledged coercion and social constraints that glue us together. Our cultivated conventions and little lies of civility lull us into a refined and idealistic view of ourselves. But modern industrial warfare may well be leading us, with each technological advance, a step closer to our own annihilation. We too are strapping explosives around our waists. Do we also have a suicide pact? (Hedges, 2002, pp. 12–13).

In order to provide a language that critiques the effects of war on the sustainability project we turn to art and painting in particular. We argue in this chapter that art offers a means of unmasking the underlying heroic myths of war, a necessary antecedent to developing sustainable business practices. To do so we begin by examining the literature on sustainability and adopt a critical position of current ideology that seeks a balance between exploitation and preservation. We then turn to a discussion on the role of the artist as social commentator and explore the aesthetic of dissonance using the metaphor of the catalytic jolt. We then turn to a discussion of contemporary art, and in particular an analysis of a work by Australasian artist Tom Mutch, the *Carbon Footprint*. Our discussion ends back where we began by looking at how our relationship with the planet and the need to institute sustainable practices that ensure a successful future may be nurtured.

## **Sustainability**

Discussing the pros and cons of adopting a particular position and offering comprehensive information is a vexed issue when it comes to studying global

sustainability. Kellstedt, Zahran, and Vedlitz (2008) present a fascinating study on attitudes people show toward global warming and climate change after being exposed to scientific ideas about the disastrous consequences of failing to take remedial action. They offer the paradoxical finding that “the more information a person has about global warming, the less responsible he or she feels for it” (p. 122). How can this passivity be explained? We think that it is the way in which information is presented that can account for this disconnect between knowledge and action.

The problem begins with the ways in which the issues of global sustainability have been described. Definitions of sustainability necessarily incorporate the rubric of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Classically CSR “is about seriously considering the impact of the company’s actions on society” (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2003, p. 30). The definition and scope of the term “society”, though, is somewhat fluid among organizational leaders trying to balance the needs of their growing businesses, the demands of shareholders, and ultimately the requirements of stakeholders. Hence Dyllick and Hockerts’ (2002) definition of corporate sustainability as

meeting the needs of a firm’s direct and indirect stakeholders (such as shareholders, employees, clients, pressure groups, communities etc.), without compromising its ability to meet the needs of future stakeholders as well (p. 131)

presents a rationale which enables a business to proceed to exploit available resources so long as sufficient assets are left for upcoming generations. A popular method of accounting for this kind of sustainable approach is by the so-called “triple bottom line” (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002) where economic, environmental, and social dimensions are kept in a healthy balance.

A simplified and often clichéd approach such as the triple bottom line concept inevitably leads to parsimonious attempts at creating sustainable practices. In their provocative exploration of the metaphor of *journey* that is deployed to assuage fears of living unsustainably, Milne, Kearins, and Walton (2006) note that business leaders who proclaim they are “on the way to being sustainable” are using the metaphor to mask their continuing exploitation of the Earth’s resources. They argue that

by portraying themselves as “on the path to” or “moving toward” sustainable development, businesses can avoid the stigma of being seen to be doing nothing and wedded to the old-fashioned paradigm of economic exploitation, while at the same time deflecting attention away from debating about what kind of (radically different) performance is needed to provide a sustainable future (Milne et al., 2006, p. 822).

The views that Milne et al. espouse are important because they critique a concept that sees the planet as a resource to be exploited rather than being a core part of our life-support system and therefore a necessary element in our continuing future. It is important that we interrogate our beliefs about the nature of our relationship with the planet and examine the perfunctory attitude toward sustainability that Milne et al. expose. Perhaps it is the notion of the earth is a resource *for*, rather than a partner *in* our existence that underpins the underlying reluctance of contemporary business leaders to become proactive in creating a sustainable future.

Therefore, in order to take the radical steps necessary to become sustainable we need an entirely different approach: one that wakes us out of our slumbering complacency and challenges us to transform dramatically the ways in which we conceive of, and practice, business in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We argue that it is the artist who offers the social critique and impetus needed to courageously confront realities we would sometimes rather ignore.

## ARTISTS IN SOCIETY

Artists provide ways of looking at the world that challenge social mores and accepted practices. Following Henri Bergson, we argue that art strips away “everything that veils reality from us, in order to bring us face to face with reality itself” (Bergson, 1935, p. 157). Therefore, rather than mollifying and comforting us, the artistic agenda exposes us to issues that disturb and challenge.

Because of its symbolic form, art moves us beyond mere intellectual engagement, enabling us to *feel* at a deeper level the issues that a work might provoke (Dean, Ottensmeyer, & Ramirez, 1997, p. 422). It is as if the work of art talks back to us challenging our world view and requiring a response. For, “when we look hard enough [at a painting], it can feel as though *we’re* the ones being scrutinised” (Paton, 2006, p. 21, emphasis added), as the unspeakable becomes spoken.

According to Susanne Langer, this heightened emotional response is generated by an interplay of “tensions and resolutions” (Langer, 1942/1960, p. 227) that move us emotionally. Therefore, when engaging with works of art, a process of transformation occurs. Some may describe this as an epiphany or a moment of realization that captivates the imagination. Warren (2008) uses the term “trigger” (p. 560) to describe this moment in which the viewer’s awareness is provoked, often turning into conversations with others where new insights are gained. Schama (2006) thinks of it as a “puncturing of routine” (p. 395) which challenges us to take action.

We adopt the term *catalytic jolt* to describe this heightened emotional response that provides the motivation for radical change. The jolt is more than a trigger event because it implies a dramatic change in perceptions and behavior. We argue that

without this shock, the kinds of changes in consciousness and the social action necessary for creating a sustainable future will not occur.

Our use of this term is derived from our experience of the science laboratory where by adding certain chemicals reduces reaction times. The *Oxford English Dictionary* describes a catalyst as “a substance which when present in small amounts increases the rate of a chemical reaction or process but which is chemically unchanged by the reaction” (“Catalyst,” 1989, n.p.). Typically, catalysts in chemical reactions are always material rather than existing just in the forms of light or heat. Of the three kinds of catalysts (homogeneous, heterogeneous and enzyme), those involving enzymes are the closest to our metaphoric use. Where enzymes act as catalysts, there is a “transformation of matter in living organisms [which] occur as an elaborate sequence of reactions” (Burwell & Haller, 1992, p. 557). In the case of aesthetic engagement, it is the work of art that causes a heightened reaction within the viewer setting off a chain of responses. Although the art work itself remains unchanged, the viewer is transformed, leading him or her to take further action. It should be noted here, however, that not all reactions will be positive. Some may respond to an art work by doggedly maintaining their beliefs thereby causing the effect of the catalytic agent to dissipate.

At a micro level, the use of the catalyst metaphor is familiar to organizational scholars who see it as a way of describing the change process. In this regard, conflict (Lehman & Linsky, 2008) and culturally diverse staff (Stevens, Plaut, & Sanchez-Burks, 2008) are seen as catalytic agents within organizations. However, these illustrations do not adequately describe the ways in which catalysts offer change at a systemic level.

Our use takes this concept even further by adding the word *jolt* to the frame.

Paradoxically, although the original agent remains unchanged, sufficient impetus is



generated by the catalyst to bring sustained change. The art work itself does not change; the catalyst has acted on the viewer, and in this instance it is the artist in creating the work who sets in motion the reflective processes that guide thinking about sustainable practices and subsequent action. The jolt provides a moment of shock that lets the work “look right back at [us]” (Paton, 2006, p. 21) with a questioning gaze. It asks us what *we* are going to do about *this* situation. Artists recognize that it takes something extraordinary, a fresh and totally original perspective, to push the viewer to feel and think about the need for something new to occur.

However, we are tempted to deal with these uncomfortable senses of dissonance, and sometimes dislocation, by dismissing the work of art itself, deeming it to be at fault by being poorly executed or just plain ugly.

In her *New York Times* commentary on why works of art are sometimes attacked, mutilated and destroyed by those unwilling to let the piece peel back our protective ideologies, Roberta Smith argues that there is often a

simple refusal to entertain paradox, to see art as a coalescence of gray areas, ambiguities and multiple interpretations. Art’s job is to provoke thought in ways that are difficult to resolve and uncomfortable; it’s a relatively neutral place to experience the unresolvable issues that dominate real life, to practice a kind of abstract flexibility that might move us toward resolution in real life (Smith, 2004, n.p.).

Thus, we are challenged more than we are entertained, and in that confrontation we are disturbed from our complacency and forced to deal with our discomfort by actively engaging with the work. It is not surprising, then, that totalitarian regimes find ways of silencing those voices either by forcing artists into exile or by imprisonment or even execution.

## War Themes

We demonstrate how this catalytic jolt may occur by exploring two paintings: Dali's *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans: Premonitions of Civil War* (1936) and Picasso's *Guernica* (1937). We offer these as seminal exemplars that provoke political consciousness and set the scene for our examination of a contemporary work that offers a similar critique.

Although representing opposing ends of the political spectrum, both Dali and Picasso ruminate on the disastrous results of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and challenge our complacency about accepting war as the ordinary outcome of political machinations.

Notwithstanding his estrangement from the surrealist community for his support of Franco in the Spanish Civil War, in his 1936 work *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans* with the explanatory subtitle *Premonitions of Civil War*, Dali is clearly deeply troubled about the effects of the war on Spain. Almost as a visual lament to the destruction of humanity, the central image of the painting is a body dismembering itself while at the same time screaming in agony. In concert with this planned destruction, the clouds darken and their turbulence suggests nature's protestations at the merciless "deconstruction of the human" by the human (O'Donovan, 2007, p. 17).

Although we might be caught up in these dramatic depictions, all the while the tiny figure of a man looks over the left hand of the mutilated body as if in dazed reflection of the destruction. Who is this man? Is it Dali himself or are we the viewers invited by the artist to be that man and to become more than just casual passing observers? We gain a sense of Dali's visceral impotence, the soft beans conveying a sense of flaccid response to the events that seem to overtake this small figure almost against his will.

But at the same time we are challenged with our own emasculation as we become bystanders of events that appear too big and difficult for us to resist.

### **Figure 1 *Soft Beans* Student Discussion**

We encourage you to take a look at this painting and to consider your responses. The work hangs in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. You can also see it online at a number of different sites. Visit <http://www.virtualdali.com/36SoftConstructionWithCookedBeans.html> Enter into dialogue with the work by discussing it with friends and by making your own responses to current events that threaten global sustainability.

Like Dali, Picasso was also troubled by the Spanish Civil War. Courted by both sides of Spain's political divide, he remained aloof and politically agnostic in his early years by establishing his reputation as an artist of choice for wealthy elites. Schama notes that Picasso

shrugged off any suggestion that painting might be polemical. "I'll continue to be aesthetic," he said. "I'll continue to make art without preoccupying myself with the question of whether it humanizes life" (Schama, 2006, p. 355).

Events in the Spring of 1937 soon compromised Picasso's neutrality. In a bid to tame the Basque region that had fiercely resisted his advancing army, Franco recruited the favours of Hitler's Luffwaffe. On April 26<sup>th</sup> German planes crossed into Spain and firebombed the quiet country town of Guernica. Although it had no strategic significance, the obliteration of Guernica provided the German Airforce with a dress rehearsal in readiness for future bombing raids on other European cities.

This atrocity galvanized Picasso and he immediately began working on a large mural which was to be exhibited in the Spanish Pavilion at the Paris International Exhibition July 1937. No longer sitting on the fence as a quietist aesthete, he produced a work that

has been called the twentieth century's "most iconic antiwar protest" (O'Donovan, 2007, p. 17).

Living in Paris at the time, Picasso had read accounts of the Guernica massacre in newspaper reports. He translates the discursive accounts into a matching monochromatic black and white work that underpins the stark reality of war's total destruction. We are confronted with screaming figures in their death throes: men, women and babies encapsulated in the horse's dying screech as it reaches up in resistance to the dominating light of technology whose omnipresence snuffs out all life. The open palm of the fallen man at the bottom left of the mural showing signs of the crucified Christ's stigmata, is reminiscent of Goya's (1814) sacrificial victim *The Third of May, 1808*. The only hope of redemption that Picasso offers is the single candle light being held toward the ubiquitous evil eye as it casts its curse on Spain.

### Figure 2 *Guernica* Student Discussion

As with Dali's painting we encourage you to linger over Picasso's *Gernica* considering your responses. The work hangs in Madrid at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia. You can see it online at URL [http://www.artquotes.net/masters/picasso/picasso\\_guernica1937.jpg](http://www.artquotes.net/masters/picasso/picasso_guernica1937.jpg) Enter into dialogue with the work by discussing it with friends and by making your own responses to current events that threaten global sustainability. There is also a full sized tapestry reproduction in the United Nations building New York.

Compare *Gernica* with Goya's *Third of May, 1808*. A reproduction of this painting can be seen at [http://www.artchive.com/artchive/G/goya/may\\_3rd.jpg.html](http://www.artchive.com/artchive/G/goya/may_3rd.jpg.html)

How do contemporary artists engage with the disastrous effects of war and advocate for forms of international diplomatic relations that consider non-destructive alternatives?

We argue that this is achieved as artists peel back layers of rhetoric that seek to justify destructive practices evidenced in the Spain of the 1930s.

Franco's declaration that "to save Spain from socialism and atheism he would, if necessary, shoot half the country" (Schama, 2006, p. 371) was an ominous prophecy repeated some 36 years later by an American major to Vietnam War correspondent Peter Arnett that "it became necessary to destroy the town to save it". Now known with the more formal title Ben Tre Logic this notion is applied "whenever a 'logical' conclusion is to destroy something out of the perceived best interests of everyone involved" ("Ben Tre," 2008). Today, another 40 years later, we are confronted with a similar *non sequitur*: "How much of our planet must we destroy in order to become economically sustainable?"

How, though, does this confrontation with reality occur and what responses can we make once the artist has stripped back the veils and revealed a world less familiar? In order to address these questions we inquire into the life and work of a contemporary Australasian artist, Tom Mutch. Tom has worked as a professional artist since 1983 and although he is most celebrated as a painter, with over 40 solo and 70 group shows, he also creates silkscreen prints and sculptures, writes novels and produces short films (see Tom's website for reproductions of his works <http://www.tommutch.com/>). His production, *The Birth of Superbird*, won the New York Independent Film Festival Grand Jury Award for Best Animation in 2005. Tom's paintings demonstrate his highly developed skills and utilize strikingly colourful symbolic and allegorical imagery to explore his neo-realistic messages. Furthermore, Tom is a successful entrepreneur, having founded Bird's Nest Studio in 1996 and, in rejecting the more typical artist-gallery relationships, has developed a critical perspective toward the art-

business nexus. It is our belief that Tom's entrepreneurial talents, in combination with his commitment to environmental sustainability, provide valuable and challenging perspectives for business students.

Tom's painting philosophy reflects his affinity to nature – he believes that once the seed of an idea is planted in his mind, it grows if he nurtures it, keeps it warm and feeds it with his fertile mind (Webster, 2004). Early in his career, Tom was simply inspired to paint images of the natural world to record what he saw before him; but as his career matured he became more interested in the darker underbelly of the landscape and in exposing serious abuses of the environment in the name of social prosperity. For example in his *Highway Series*, Tom was concerned with the juxtaposition of commercial greed and sustainability and strove to highlight the “importance of our symbiotic relationship with all living things” (Webster, 2004, p. 106). Tom's environmental crusade rose to a new height in 2002 when he began work on his *Superbird Series* – a large body of works that focuses on issues of sustainability and the relationship between humans and natural ecology. Superbird was invented by Tom as an ecological super-hero designed to protect the world from the negative effects of rampant consumerism. Similarly, Tom's most recent works are interwoven with symbolic messages that connect global warming with the arms race. He critiques political and religious institutional forms and their links to contemporary business culture, depicting them in an unholy alliance.

Tom's work provides a “visionary, poetic and metaphorical treatment” of his subjects (Klingsöhr-Leroy, 2004, p. 14), mirroring the surrealist philosophy that arose between the World Wars of 1915 and 1939, and made popular during the Great Depression. Mutch's paintings display many of the techniques described as *veristic surrealism*.

Rather than being works with images cobbled together from unrelated sources, veristic surrealism eschews self-indulgent expression in favor of a much more provocative social critique that directly engages with audiences. Veristic surrealism is distinguished from all other forms of art in its “symbolic, prismatic colour, disparate juxtapositions of representational imagery, concern for the audience, personal content, and classical technique and modelling” (Bell, 1984, p. 251). The call-to-action implied in this artistic form is evident in Bell’s assertion that “it matters less how the work came to be created than what we see and what it means to us” (p. 248). Hence the latitude of interpretation available to the reader is important, more so even than the artist’s or instructor’s opinions. Significantly, in the interpretation of veristic surrealism, particularly that which is sub-categorized as *social surrealism* by Fort (1982), there exists considerable opportunities for emotional debates because the subject matter elevates the suffering and hypocrisy inherent in culturally created socio-political issues. Through his paintings, Mutch reveals a deep concern with sustainability. However, as his works depict, sustainability needs to occur at the macro level. Mutch’s paintings critique the alliances between global organizations and nation-states that resist and impair any move toward achieving sustainable practice on a local scale.

### **ENGAGING WITH *THE CARBON FOOTPRINT***

Having scoped Tom Mutch’s life and focused on his motivation as an artist, we now turn to an examination of his 2007 painting the *Carbon Footprint of War and the Pollution of Religion*. Although Mutch has a well-articulated ideology, some of which we have explored above, he holds no influence over us, the viewers of his work. In this instance the author (the painter) is no longer in control of the text (the painting), and, quoting Roland Barthes, he is “dead” (Barthes, 1977). We are left to locate the clues

that Mutch has left behind in his work and try to make sense of these ideas for ourselves.

To this end Mitchell (1987) argues that as perceivers become cognisant of structural elements within a painting by the “artful planting of certain clues” (p. 41) placed there by the artist, the viewer makes coherent meaning of the *evident*, as well as the *implied*, elements within the work. Furthermore, Mitchell claims paradoxically that “we can never understand a picture unless we grasp the ways in which it shows what *cannot* be seen” (p. 39, emphasis added).

Issues that could be considered when viewing a painting include how the artist has constructed perspective and depth of field. Further, how the colors interact and the interplay between background and foreground shapes and figures are all reading strategies open to us as we critically examine works. These elements help in our analysis of the overt symbols and assist us to narrate our own meanings. Before reading any further we encourage you to spend a few minutes looking at Figure 3 the *Carbon Footprint* examining it in its entirety. Take note of the images that disturb you, analyzing what it is about them that is provocative.



**Figure 3 *The Carbon Footprint of War and the Pollution of Religion***



In the *Carbon Footprint* we are immediately confronted with starkly contrasting images. A black and white stylized image of the Madonna and Child on the left sits alongside a man in a suit and a skeletal head. These two dominant images present an immediate dissonance as we ask, “Why is the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment placed alongside brute images of business and war?” It appears on first reading that these polar opposites present two alternative visions of the world.

The left half of the painting is rich in biblical symbolism. The mountain in the top left background and the trees at its base are reminiscent of both the spiritual journey (Moses receiving the Decalogue from God on Mt Sinai) and innocence (the Tree of Life at the centre of the Garden of Eden in its pre-fall state), while in the foreground we are invited

to celebrate the Eucharistic Feast. For an example of a Medieval painting that contains this kind of symbolism see Sassetta's *Meeting of St Anthony and St Paul* (1440).

#### **Figure 4 An Example of a Medieval Religious Painting**

The Sassetta painting can be viewed on-line at <http://www.oceansbridge.com/artist-lists/sassetta/The-Meeting-Of-St-Anthony-And-St-Paul-1440.php> Notice the hills, trees and cave that are images Tom Mutch appropriates in the *Carbon Footprint*.

We are comforted, redeemed, safe in our lifestyles and assured in this optimistic and perpetual state of green and blue. And yet there is something that disturbs our ease. As we look further at the prominent image of the Madonna and Child we are shaken out of our self-satisfied slumber. The child is muscular and challenging. Rather than pointing across to the book as in traditional icons, here he glares with an arrogance that springs from his prosperity. Rather than prefiguring his sacrificial crucifixion, this child is intimidating, daring us to challenge his precocious dominance. Rather than being the source of good news, the book is held well out of sight, away from the critique of those who would dare contradict his control. He is firmly in the embrace of his mother, enfolded in her voluptuous robe and is reassured as his right hand fits snugly into hers. Here is a partnership of ominous proportions as the mother, with eyes turned to the right, seeks integration with the machineries of war and destruction.

To compare Mutch's appropriation of iconography with works of that religious genre see the icon *Our Lady of Perpetual Help*.

## Figure 5 Traditional Iconography

The icon *Our Lady of Perpetual Help* can be viewed at [http://www.ewtnreligiouscatalogue.com/OUR+LADY+OF+PERPETUAL+HELP+ICON/cid=5/page\\_no=1/edp\\_no=2576/shop.axd/ProductDetails](http://www.ewtnreligiouscatalogue.com/OUR+LADY+OF+PERPETUAL+HELP+ICON/cid=5/page_no=1/edp_no=2576/shop.axd/ProductDetails). Notice the sorrowful Madonna compared with Mutch's self-satisfied mother. Also observe how the child's eyes are diverted to the Gospel text delivered by the Archangel Gabriel in contrast to Mutch's self-satisfied child.

On the right half of the *Carbon Footprint* the image of a death figure dressed in a business suit dominates the foreground. Shrapnel from exploding bombs emanate as darkened bolts from his body. There is no offer of redeeming light here; just the darkness of war's destructive force. Dr Death, as we might label him, is being fed with matériel, not by a terrorist but rather by another man in a suit in the right background. Here is the corporation in cahoots with the instruments of war and death. War planes swoop, fuelled by the oil which in turn explodes in our faces as the aftershocks reach out of the painting pulling us, the viewers, into the action. The all-encompassing effect of war's nihilism gathers us into its embrace with the blood red curved sky. No one escapes from the effects of war: our destruction is assured.

As our eyes toggle between the two large images we are gradually drawn to the two small symbols in the centre of the painting. Although smaller in proportion a crown of thorns and a starving child take front of stage. How can these two images be interpreted?

The starving child staggers under the weight of the aggression, his left hand begging for us to stop. We feel his sadness and his suffering is ours. We are emaciated, lacking the resources to reverse the madness of war.

The crown of thorns is ambiguous. Does it represent the connecting point between the two embraces: stylized Madonna and red sky? Or does it imply that there is a way forward beyond mutually assured destruction as war engulfs and squanders all the earth's resources?

The crown of thorns links unsustainable systemic practices with each individual. We are invited to wear this crown, to suffer the ignominy of sacrifice in order to save the planet for future generations. This dialectic is not displayed in the two halves of the painting; rather, the two sides are features of the *same* stories of domination and exploitation. The antithesis of the dialectic is found in the begging child and crown of thorns. Here is the true Christ Child set in opposition to the hegemonic relationship forged between religion and business and their collaborative exploitation of the earth's resources.

But here the painting turns and interrogates us the viewers, compelling us to make a response. We are not entirely powerless but the solutions will involve each individual in a sacrificial response. By offering an individual challenge, the painting strikes at the heart of the problem of sustainability. We need to make both systemic and individual changes and we need to think and act *glocally* if business is going to offer the planet sustainable practice. The painting asks us to set aside our quietist responses and encourages us to challenge prevailing ideologies and theologies that have in the past both salved our guilt and stymied action.

For us as scholars, the ability to make significant change begins in the classroom because it is here that a creative dialogue can begin.

## **SUSTAINABILITY IN THE CLASSROOM**

The classroom is a place where the beginnings of a dialogue of possibilities for the planet's future can be mapped. Furthermore, the academic environment where students learn to test their theories is an ideal venue to practice the kind of cooperation necessary to institute business sustainability. Therefore, rather than pitting one against the other, we need the kind of discussion that contains the seeds of revisionary practice. For, as Follett argues:

We must learn to think of discussion not as a struggle but as experiment in cooperation. We must learn cooperative thinking, intellectual team-work. There is a secret here which is going to revolutionize the world (Follett, 1926, p. 97).

Hence the complexities illustrated in Mutch's painting closely reflect the multifaceted challenges facing business leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is a growing body of literature dedicated to strategic sustainability and the application of management systems designed to create a better global future that can be used as classroom resources. For example, Sroufe and Sarkis (2007) provide a range of interesting case studies based on companies that strive for environmentally responsible products and services as demanded by many customers. And, although such cases present important examples for use in education for sustainable development (ESD), we think equal importance should be given to the choice of pedagogic strategies most appropriate to optimal learning opportunities (Wheeler, 2007).

The problem faced by business schools, therefore, is how to find the best fit between the imperative goal of teaching sustainability and the most effective pedagogical approach.

In the first years of some business programs, students are taught, in a conventional manner, the basic tenets of sustainable development, which is meeting the needs of the present without compromising those of the future (UNCED, 2004; UNESCO, 2002). However, there is some uncertainty about the depth of this learning and the consequent application of such information at a later stage. It appears that “deep learning” (Wheeler, 2007) is best achieved when several criteria are met. These criteria are summarised as: exchanging or cross-fertilizing across specialist areas of knowledge (change management, knowledge management and learning management); identifying and challenging deeply ingrained assumptions about business practices and approaches; expending energy to build social capital and collaborative networks; and fostering learning individuals and organizations.

There is always the concern, when dealing with such lofty goals, that the classroom setting may prove inadequate for such grand intentions. However, because the ultimate aim of ESD involves learning transferred from individuals to organizations and ultimately to wider society, it is our belief that interactive pedagogies will make a difference. We agree with Wheeler’s assertion that “organizations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning: but without it, no organizational learning can take place” (Wheeler, 2007, p. 49).

Therefore, in terms of the classroom experience, deep learning for sustainable solutions is an essential goal.

As new generations of managers graduate, they need to be equipped with thinking tools to locate unsustainable practices and the insights into how to chart ways forward that offer alternatives to unbridled consumption and growth. Given the power of its highly colored allegorical images in the *Carbon Footprint*, we suggest that students are drawn

to the image with a willingness that contrasts sharply to their response to more typical non-interactive learning processes. The value of participatory engagement is highlighted by O'Donoghue and Russo's (2004) review of materials and methods used in environmental education. They argue that the presentation of "abstracting ideals" in combination with a situation which creates "axes of tension and reflexive processes" can increase sustainability consciousness (O'Donoghue & Russo, 2004, p. 348).

Thus, it is not our interpretation of the painting that matters; it is the process of "meaning-making interactions" (O'Donoghue & Russo, 2004, p. 336), the struggle to engage with and to interpret the image, and the emotional connectedness to that process (Heimlich, 2007) that cracks the foundations prior to the catalytic jolt. Our interpretation, and indeed that of the artist, is therefore secondary to each individual's struggle for meaning and comprehension.

The key pedagogical approach is therefore, *facilitation*, rather than lecturing (Wheeler, 2007). Such an incorporation of learning through experience is in concert with the approach discussed by Svoboda and Whalen (2007) who use an "ecological" learning model which "treats the person as a complex living system" (p. 172) and see this way of learning involving action, reflection, reframing and application. As commonly seen in experiential activities, feedback between action and reflection is the crucial element as students get to explore the results and consequences of their actions. The reframing stage allows students to weigh the impact of their actions and this weighing of the impact enables them to challenge and/or change their underlying assumptions. The application stage, then, offers students the tools to make linkages between the artificial classroom activity and the societal issues under investigation. The opportunity for group discussion is also an important element in the process because students can have

opportunities to learn with colleagues from different backgrounds – a skill which has immediate application in the business environment with its multiple and often conflicting stakeholder interests (Svoboda & Whalen, 2007).

### **Figure 6 Lesson Plan for Optional Classroom Learning Activity**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>LESSON PLAN FOR OPTIONAL CLASSROOM LEARNING ACTIVITY</b></p> <p><b>Preparation:</b> The instructor chooses an appropriate artist and painting for the activity. Alternatively this responsibility can be given to a group of students. A short biography of the artist, a digital copy of the artwork and an interpretation of the artwork are required.</p> <p><b>Phase One: INTRODUCTION (20 minutes)</b></p> <p>The artist is introduced.</p> <p>The chosen image is presented on a large screen.</p> <p>Students write a 100–200 word paragraph about the image to answer the question: ‘What do you think the artist is communicating?’</p> <p><b>Phase Two: IDENTIFICATION OF THEMES (20 MINUTES)</b></p> <p>Students share their written reflections with each other in groups of 4–5 people.</p> <p>Findings from each group are collated into broad themes and recorded on large paper charts on a side wall of the room. (It is best if each group gives one theme, in turn, until no new ones emerge.)</p> <p>The instructor records students’ emotions and attitudes. They also note any counter arguments that emerge. These will be of use in the final phase.</p> <p><b>Phase Three: REFLECTIONS (20 MINUTES)</b></p> <p>An open class discussion about the key issues is facilitated by the instructor. Groups are re-formed and asked to prioritise the themes/issues arising from Phase Two.</p> <p><b>Phase Four: CATALYTIC JOLT (20–30 minutes)</b></p> <p>Counter arguments noted in Phase Two are discussed. Alternative evidence can be provided by the instructor or the students.</p> <p>The groups are asked to re-form and re-prioritise the major themes and issues based on their consideration of the counter arguments.</p> <p>An open class discussion is held to discuss beliefs and attitudes evident from earlier phases. These may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hopes and fears for the future</li><li>• Optimism and pessimism and the consequences of both positions.</li></ul> <p>The activity closes with a facilitated discussion on future strategies and action plans.</p>
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It is important that the interpretation of the art work is a collaborative multileveled process, involving the instructor, the learners and, on some occasions, the artist. While it has never been our intention to underestimate the artist's contribution, we believe that providing answers to the puzzle defeats the challenge and reduces the participatory aspect of the learning process. For example, Mutch cites history in his representation of the men in suits in the *Carbon Footprint* and identifies figures not necessarily recognizable to many students who have grown up in a different generation. Tom Mutch claims Mr Bomb, the small suited figure in the right background, can be identified as

Edward Teller, a former colleague of Robert Oppenheimer (who was the father of the atomic bomb). There was a fall-out (pardon the pun) between them – Teller testified against Oppenheimer and accused him of being a communist. One version of the story is that Oppenheimer knew the bomb was not stable. He argued that it couldn't just be magnified in strength, as Teller advocated. So Teller and his colleagues set about discrediting Oppenheimer (personal communication, May 27, 2008).

Furthermore, Dr Death can be identified as any political leader who uses war as a tool to reinforce dominance on the international stage.

An important phase of the managed learning activity is the introduction of the counterargument – an exploration of “contradictions inherent in sustainable living” (Vare & Scott, 2007, p. 194). Skepticism is accomplished through the presentation of Lomborg's (2001) alternative view on the state of the world which attacks cultural pessimists and insists that “if we are to make the best decisions for our future, we should base our prioritizations not on fear but on facts” (p. 327). For example, much of the global warming evidence is largely derived from “computer-aided storytelling” and many experts believe more accurate models will not be available for some time (de Vries et al., 2000). The problematic nature of such modelling was highlighted over a

decade ago by Yohe and Neumann (1997) who argued that the prediction of rising sea levels required the immediate revisions of business strategies, something market-based economies would be reluctant to consider. Thus, facilitating counterarguments provides an opportunity for students to consider their attitudes toward “traditional scientific” knowledge, and the meanings of fact, truth, logic and evidence, while at the same time recognizing the importance of values in adding to this understanding (Maxwell, 1992).

If values, along with prior understandings and assumptions are explored, we are likely to get closer to attaining the type of wisdom defined by Maxwell (1992, p. 219) as “the desire, the active endeavour, and the capacity to discover and achieve what is desirable and of value in life, both for oneself and for others.” This development of wisdom involves critically assessing possible solutions and nurturing the motivation to execute that action.

The portrayal of a large number of global issues in Mutch’s work is fundamental because the need to prioritize actions and produce a united plan for change is of primary importance. Our choice of painting, the *Carbon Footprint*, along with a range of sustainability issues, has avoided the temptation to focus on just one issue at the expense of others as, for example, placing the impending threat of global warming over the inequitable production and supply of the world’s food resources. Mutch’s inclusion of the starving child places the spotlight clearly on poverty as one of the key issues for global redress (Lomborg, 2001; Maxwell, 1992), and the process of prioritization uncovers students’ underlying assumptions about socio-political issues. The difficulties uncovered by the process of prioritization also highlight attitudinal differences centring on a continuum of optimism to pessimism. Lomborg (2001) emphasizes the danger

that pessimism can be linked to apathy and indifference and argues that creating an optimistic view of the future (eliminating indifference) helps students to develop a sustainability consciousness that can then pervade decision-making in all contexts.

## **FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

As we, the authors, have worked with you the readers, we together arrive at a pause in our narratives. While our discussion of Tom Mutch and his contribution has jolted us into a sustainability consciousness, we now have to turn to face the future. For, although this chapter will soon end, the business sustainability project still continues. We are all provoked by our own individual and collective need to work together for a sustainable future.

These closing reflections offer a way forward in our own separate quests for business practices that consider the planet we occupy. Adding his voice to this quest, cosmologist and theologian Thomas Berry seeks a new kind of peace on earth. He argues that:

What we look for is no longer the Pax Romana, the peace of imperial Rome, nor is it simply the Pax Humana, the peace among humans, but the Pax Gaia, the peace of Earth and every being on the Earth (Berry, 2000, para. 10).

Such a peace, though, is to be found in our sense of interconnectedness. For, Berry suggests, it is the earth that sustains us and that, “as humans we are born of the Earth, nourished by the Earth, healed by the Earth” (Berry, 2000, para. 11). Berry’s polemic causes us to reflect on and question our exploitation of the earth’s provisions for the sake of spurious notions of growth and profit in the business sector.

Our exposé of Tom Mutch’s artwork is motivated from a belief that it is important to engage with and be challenged by the insights that he offers in the *Carbon Footprint*,

regardless of how uncomfortable and disturbed we feel. Artists will continue to fulfill their prophetic role and the art of one generation will have continuing currency in the next. In this regard we explored two particularly important works which critique and challenge the propensity of human beings to take up arms against each other in the illogical defense that it is necessary to destroy in order to preserve.

Picasso's *Guernica* is a landmark work that speaks to each generation. So powerful is it that we are still challenged by its powerful message. A reproduction of this work today hangs in the Security Council Chamber at the United Nations headquarters in New York. On February 5, 2003, then Secretary of State for the United States of America, Colin Powell, delivered a speech justifying military action in Iraq. But his presentation was to be conducted in front of Picasso's reproduction. Officials recognizing the potency of Picasso's work quickly covered the reproduction lest the images of a screaming horse and dying women and children somehow tainted Powell's message.

This act of denial – denying the horrors of war, denying the destructive influences of armed international conflict and denying the abuse of the earth's resources – flies in the face of concerted action to reverse the destruction and to allow for the kind of reconciliation between earth and human kind that Thomas Berry advocates.

Berry's views are based on a notion that our relationship with the planet is forever bound to our interpersonal relationships. The intimate human contact we crave with each other is predicated, he argues, by our care of the earth and on our ability to see the self and the earth in a mutually sustaining relationship.

We are just discovering that the human project is itself a component of the Earth project; that our intimacy with the Earth is our way to intimacy with

each other. Such are the foundations of our journey into the future (Berry, 2000, para. 20).

Tom Mutch's art is a reflection of this kind of relationship that Berry foreshadows.

While the *Carbon Footprint* presents a critique of existing power arrangements between religion and business, he also offers a way forward through our mutual compassion for the starving child. This child's hand is open inviting us into the kind of relationship that recognizes the immorality of rampant consumerism (Taylor, 1977) and the insanity of war's destructive power.

To this end we agree with Wheeler's (2007) assertion that the ultimate goal of education for sustainable development is that it snowballs as it "begins within ourselves and extends to our relationship with others, our communities, and all of our social networks" (2007, p. 49).

Thus art offers sustainability the "attention-catching and emotionally-engaging informational interventions" (Weber, 2006, p. 116) believed to activate individual or collective responses to global sustainability. This move away from computer modeling and objective scientific analysis toward aesthetic engagement offers the kind of catalytic jolt required to make significant lifestyle changes necessary to live at peace with the earth and each other.

To end where we began, Mary Parker Follett, called by some a "prophet of management" (Graham, 1996), deems war to be a sign of weakness and an inability to creatively explore the many alternatives to violence that are present in any disagreement. She declares that:

War is the easy way: we take to war because we have not enough vitality for the far more difficult job of agreeing (Follett, 1926, p. 103).

Our assent of Follett's pronouncement in this chapter summarizes this view and proposes that the artful approach allows for both intellectual and emotional involvement with the problems of business sustainability, and in so doing offers us the chance to preserve the earth's resources for the generations to come.

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