

CRISIS? WHAT CRISIS?

No one has the full picture of the damage we're doing to our planet, says Debora MacKenzie. But we've never needed it more.

Everyone knows about the three blind men who investigated an elephant. Each came back sure the entire beast must be like the bit he had felt: the tail, the trunk, the leg. No one had the whole picture.

Humanity is now faced with an elephantine crisis of its own making made of bits that aren't always obviously related. Our physical domination of this planet is altering all our fundamental life-support systems. These are the processes that give us our food and water and air, our social stability, and ultimately our health. It's happening so fast and on such a scale that comprehending the whole process is almost impossible.

Scientists deal with this elephant in their methodical, piecemeal way, feeling their way around a collapsing fishery here, an emerging disease there, epidemics of obesity and starvation, climate change and population growth. And with each discovery comes yet another warning that something else that we do threatens us all, from driving cars to eating meat.

It's become fashionable to mock all this doom¹ and destruction. If you don't realise that most of the problems are bits of the same enormous, onrushing elephant, it can seem as though the doomsayers are merely competing for attention and grant money.

But they aren't, as Tony McMichael's book tries to show us. There is enough in *Human Frontiers, Environments and Disease* to show that all these diverse warnings are not merely a trick to upset the optimists. They all stem from the same, huge fact: that having taken over the planet, we aren't running it in our collective best interests.

Perhaps we don't know what our best interests are. McMichael says we need to understand human ecology —our relationships with nature and the way we evolved— before we can know what makes for a healthy population.

To reach this comprehension, McMichael attempts to bring into focus a vast range of subjects, from hunter and gatherer² diets to the history of germ theory. He even includes topics such as workplace safety and income³ distribution, social factors that can be crucial to health and to a global economy.

This brings into welcome perspective our obsession with free trade. Under current trade agreements, industries can compete by spending so little on wages and infrastructure, such as decent sewerage,⁴ that their labourers end up in very poor health. The result: Guatemalan farm workers inadvertently contaminate New Yorkers' strawberries with a nasty intestinal pathogen. This should turn the battle for minimum work conditions in trade agreements into intelligent self-interest. But this is a fact even epidemiologists usually forget.

Sometimes McMichael manages to pull things together —how trade, migration, poverty and dirty water spread cholera, for instance. And he knows a lot. The book is worth reading if only to learn more about these important, yet little taught subjects.

(From the press. Adapted)

¹ *doom*: desgràcia, desastre / desgracia, desastre

² *gatherer*: recol·lector (el que cull) / recolector (el que cosecha)

³ *income*: ingressos, guanys / ingresos, ganancias

⁴ *sewerage*: clavegueram / alcantarillado

4. One of these three sentences is true. Which one?

- People have created the environmental crisis we are dealing with.
- Elephantine population is decreasing due to bits that aren't always obviously related.
- Germ theory and diet description alone can explain natural disasters.

5. One of these three sentences is true. Which one?

- According to the book, linking factors from different fields may help understand human ecology better.
- Comprehending the whole process is impossible and McMichael, as a good scientist, deals with it in a methodical, piecemeal way.
- Our obsession with free trade is a big concern constantly voiced by epidemiologists.

PART TWO: WRITING

Choose **one** topic. Write about either 1 or 2. Write between 75 and 100 words.

[0-5 points]

1. Write about present-day natural disasters. Describe them and / or suggest causes, effects and possible solutions.
2. Describe a piece of news you have read or heard on the media that has to do with damage to our planet.

PROVA AUDITIVA

CATALAN COMPOSERS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

In this radio programme you are going to listen to the following words. Read and listen to them. Make sure you know what they mean.

homage: homenatge / homenaje

moving: commovedor / conmovedor

ethnic: ètnic / étnico

root: arrel / raíz

genre: gènere literari o musical / género literario o musical

Now read the questions on the next page. Read them carefully before listening to the radio programme.

CATALAN COMPOSERS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

An interview with Jim Preston and Mary Kovacs

PRESENTER(JULIA): You are listening to Radio 6 International in Barcelona. And this is Music Today, a programme that not only listens to but also talks about music. Well. In Spain we tend to associate contemporary symphonic music with foreign names. When talking about contemporary composers, we think of Penderecki, Copland, Cage, Shostakovitch, or Glass, to name just a few of them. All of them great names, but ... foreign. Except for Rodrigo, Halffter, and maybe Mompou, many of us would have problems remembering any contemporary Spanish composers at all. And recognising their music would be even a harder task.

So, it's a pleasant surprise to discover that students from other countries come here to study Catalan contemporary music. They mention with admiration names like Homs, Quadrenys, Brotons, which for many Catalans are still a mystery.

Today we welcome two of these students, Jim Preston from the USA and Mary Kovacs, from Hungary. Mary speaks excellent English. Jim, Mary, welcome to our program.

PRESENTER: Do many students come to Catalonia to study music?

JIM: Yes.

MARY: No.

PRESENTER: Is it yes or no?

ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS

1. Who was Robert Gerhardt?
 - A Catalan composer who taught in England.
 - A Danish musician who wrote symphonic music.
 - A Catalan composer who lives in the USA.

2. Jim and Mary are in Barcelona because they
 - want to be interpreters of Spanish music.
 - are interested in Catalan composers.
 - are preparing a new opera.

3. Balada says that he has been influenced by
 - South American ethnic music.
 - other contemporary composers.
 - artists from other fields, like painting.

4. Why did some of these composers go to other countries?
 - Those from the older generation emigrated for political reasons.
 - All of them wanted to improve their musical education.
 - To study symphonic music.

5. Balada's music is a _____ sounds, rhythm and drama.
 - child's conclusion of mixed
 - mild expression of fixed
 - wild explosion of rich sounds

6. The operas *Dalí* and *Gaudí*
 - are well known to Julia.
 - will be first performed in the same year.
 - are written in a popular style.

7. Salom is the author of many
 - drama plays.
 - world-famous songs.
 - well-known operas.

8. The generation born in the 30s was
 - practically playful.
 - particularly fruitful.
 - perfectly helpful.

9. For Mary, it is shocking to discover that these composers are _____ in their own country.
 - so little known
 - so well known
 - totally unknown

10. Most of these composers write for
 - many different genres.
 - essentially the same genre.
 - the kind of genre that, like operas, is not always popular.